

Perspectives:

Miami Through a Different Lens

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Perspectives: Miami Through a Different Lens*, where we, the students at the University of Miami, combined our stories with those of marginalized groups within the country to learn more about ourselves and the world we live in. We spoke to women from the Homestead Correctional Institution by taking part in the Exchange for Change program and communicated with undocumented farm workers in the area through WeCount.

The journal features submissions from students and their exchange partners in the form of excerpts from our exchange letters, as well as several collaborative stories that students wrote with the women of HCI. Students wrote reflections on their dinner with farm workers and bridged language and cultural barriers to learn more about a misunderstood group of people. This journal also includes work from the Audley Webster winners of the current year and submissions from English students in the upper-level Composition classes on a variety of subjects, showing yet another angle of the University of Miami student body.

It is our hope as editors and curators that this journal will spark a passion for change in those who read it and those who contribute to it in the future, as these experiences have truly changed all of us; both us as students and our partners in both exchanges. We can all look around differently, with new eyes and new perspectives. We hope that, for you, it will do the same.

Looking forward,
ENG231/SOC291 Fall 2017

Letters to Homestead Correctional Institution: Exchange for Change

The University of Miami and the Homestead Correctional Institution collaborated together in a program called Exchange for Change, where inmates and students partnered together in a letter-writing exchange over the semester. The following excerpts are taken from these letters and signify important moments and thoughts for each set of partners. The women inmates in the Homestead Correctional Institution in Homestead, Florida and the students at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida communicated using pseudonyms relevant to each of them.

These exchanges act as a bridge between the students at the correctional institution and the outside world, while also facilitating learning about a marginalized group in society for the students at the University. The voiceless are given a creative outlet where they can voice their thoughts and be heard. The exchanges are valuable learning and bonding experiences for all participants in the program, creating an understanding of each other and the world they each live in.

Snow White and Jolly Roger

For this exchange, I chose the name Snow White as a way to connect with my childhood nickname and give a hint as to what I looked liked to my partner. Jolly Roger, on the other hand, picked her name to pay homage to the romanticized freedom felt by pirates in old stories. Throughout our exchange, we spoke of freedom, peace, growth, and making amends with the past. With talk of our past experiences, we learned more about each other, ourselves, and the similarities we share, despite our different circumstances.

Jolly Roger: This is where freedom comes in. The freedom to make a choice. To destroy or to build. People scoff at humanitarian missions as a waste but I don't think they see the long lasting effects of love... Maybe if we try to make a positive impact on everyone's lives, none of this would be happening. Maybe there wouldn't be hate or killings. That's a little far fetched but what's the harm? It feels good to help people. It feels good to love. I don't know why people don't do it more.

In the end, love is a better option. No one has ever been killed from too much love. No one has been slaughtered by kindness. Send them food and not bombs, send doctors and not soldiers. We are all that we have. In the dorm we have a moment at the end of the day where we say a prayer together. At the end of the day after our final count we all say it together. No matter how many of us hate each other, how many have argued, how many have had bad phone calls, no phone calls, anything at all, we say these words together. We then say good-night to each other, all 64 of us, and we go to sleep in peace. In this world, we will not always get along, but we should be glad for each other's existences because in each other is how we see ourselves.

Snow White: *You're right to say that we have the freedom to choose. Humanity as a whole, however, is relatively near-sighted and self-indulgent. If people don't see immediate effects of their actions, they're quick to ignore it and move along or deem it a failure without realizing those long-term effects. No one does harm to someone they admire or, at the very least, like to have around. Otherwise it could be considered against their own wishes. Everyone sees themselves as the main character of their own story, so it would make sense for them to keep things and people they like around them as much as possible. However, if we had all made an effort to try to understand other people's perspectives, at the very least we would be more aware of why stuff is happening and what we could do to help. We need this sort of understanding and love for our fellow humans to be able to bring about a positive change in the world. Otherwise, people would only be looking out for themselves, leaving everyone in a constant war to be on top.*

Luna and Jolly Roger

My name is Luna, which translates from Spanish to the word “moon.” I have always related more with the nighttime rather than the daytime. You will usually find me wide awake at the latest hours of the night because it’s when my creativity flows without boundaries and I become inspired to read and write on my own terms.

In one of our letter exchanges, Jolly Roger told me a story about a group of geese. Everyday they walked to hear a guy talking about how geese should be free and fly. Though they heard the same speech everyday, they still walked to hear the speech and back to their homes at the end of the day. When I read Jolly’s story, I remembered the popular saying, “life begins at the end of your comfort zone.” I was a walking goose until I started pushing past my comfort zone, by engaging in this meaningful exchange. Jolly has done the same by opening up about her experience as an incarcerated woman.

Jolly Roger: As I said earlier one of the toughest things about being in prison is the feeling of absolute uselessness. We work for nothing and nothing that we do is worth anything! At this prison and many others we have the ability to give back through a service dog training program. I’ve trained four dogs thus far for the company that sponsors the program at this prison. The recipients of these dogs will never know me. They’ll never know my name or my story. But they will have a dog that I poured all of my efforts into. Through this ability to do this service I gain satisfaction in knowing that my life isn’t being wasted . . . At the core, I think there lies a need in humans to be a part of something greater. I think it’s a part of our fear of mortality. We fear being forgotten, discarded. We fear being irrelevant. I believe it drives a lot of the things that we do. Sometimes, we can’t cope with how dismal it all seems. I know that’s why I used drugs. Because I couldn’t cope with how immense it all was. We all grow up with these visions of grandeur.

Once we realize that it is not within our abilities to be an astronaut or the president, how do we reset our respective viewpoints of ourselves? Maybe its not so complex as this for everyone, it simply is the realization that life can be cut into bite sized pieces. That it's ok to not be emperor of the world. I guess it was another thing for people that truly believed the lies their parents told them; for people that could not factor in failure. But its not so black and white. Now I live in the gray. Yes, I'm in prison, but I can't live my life feeling like a villain. I want to believe that we are all good at heart, including myself. I am grateful for the opportunities everyday to be a better person.

Luna: *From what you have told me in just your last two letters alone, I've learned that you paint murals, train puppies to become service dogs, and write stories. I'm sure there's so much more that you do that we didn't have the chance to talk about. You also said you take this class because it renews your vigor to try and change things for incarcerated women. I've never heard of a villain that tries to change things for the better or acts out of selflessness to help others. Can someone who does all this be considered useless? Similar to you, I am also very grateful for the opportunities I have everyday to become a better person. There's always something new to learn, and there's always going to be someone out there who needs our help. Thankfully, we have the willingness to act upon that desire to help. Of course, I am so thankful that my life circumstances brought me to UM and to this particular class, where I was not only able to learn about the causes and effects of mass incarceration, but also have such amazing conversations with you about anything. In your final letter, you asked: Once we realize that it is not within our abilities to be an astronaut or the president, how do we reset our respective viewpoints of ourselves? My perspective has changed on so many things, including myself. You've helped me realize that I don't have to be an astronaut or a president to accomplish something monumental and life-changing, and that's something I will keep in mind as life goes on.*

Don Juan and Bawssy B

Every last one of the exchanges between Bawssy B and I always delve into a discussion about life and all the grit it entails. Meaning, Purpose, Suffering, Transformation, Renewal, Truth, Surrender – these themes are central to the areas Bawssy B and I want to improve on in our lives. After weeks of asking for a poem, she sent me one! This is where the excerpt of the exchange begins.

I selected the name Young Juan because he is one of the characters from my favorite novel, The Power and the Glory by Graham Greene. The author sets the story in 1930s Mexico, during the prosecution of the Catholic Church. The book mainly contains themes of redemption, forgiveness, and perseverance; traits I hope my own life will mirror. The legend of his life is read at bedtime to families as he is revered as a pious priest who faced death with great courage.

Bawssy B stated, “I picked the name Bawssy B for one reason. Since I can remember I’ve been called Bossy, because I’m quick to give the exterior to voice what I want. I’m very proud of my Hispanic roots which calls me to be Bawssy B at times. However, growing into a mature woman I’ve learned that there’s a time and a place.”

Young Juan: *Your words carry so much power, they truly made me feel a level of empathy I don’t typically experience. You write with such redemption and conviction. I think what I love most about your writing is your level of responsibility. It’s like, in your poem, you’re not trying to stray away from the fact that life is suffering. Being alive means you must suffer, we must suffer. But your poem takes that and makes it liberating. It’s like there’s good news and bad news. The bad news is we’re all suffering, and even worse, it’s probably our own fault. But the good news is that because the suffering is our fault, we can do something about it! Only we can do something about it. That’s scary. That level of responsibility is terrifying, and I think that’s why so many people live life as if nothing matters. This adventure of life becomes that much more rewarding once we inherit our suffering and truly take it upon ourselves to make it mean something.*

Bawssy B: I can tell you're a factual person. You like to see things clear, and have something to back it up with... I would love to read what you have written about "Always doing your best," because I feel like you do try, you're a scholar you know, that takes dedication, and that's amazing quality to have. So keep up the good work! :) My favorite Bible verse is "For what is seen is temporary and what is unseen is eternal." A lot of these material stuff is replaceable, can be taken or destroyed. I just want to learn a soulful meaning of my surroundings in my evolution as a person. I'm reading about spiritual partners right now it says, "The duration of partnership is determined by how long it is appropriate for their evolution to be together, only if they grow together, do they stay together." You know how your with someone, and your loyal, dedicated to them and you guys split up, and you can't seem to walk away because time and work is invested in that relationship, well that's because we want to think forever & ever but it's only by the evolution of growing together. Once you serve a purpose together, and learn whatever it is you were supposed to learn it's time to move on. I love that. Moving forward is possible to be easy but I complicate it at times. The change begins with the intention to change. I don't crave happiness a majority of the time, because I myself can't be happy 100% of the time, just being realistic, but I can be willing, I can be open to the numerous amounts of small gifts of life, sometimes it's the little things that matter.

Dale Finn and Aqua Girl

My name is Dale Finn. The reason I chose this name is because my middle name is Dale and my cat's name is Finn. My exchange partner, Aqua Girl, chose her pseudonym because in her "current state of being [she] feels like [she's] breathing underwater." Our letters focused on escaping depression and how to live a fuller more rewarding life, just by adjusting your perception.

Aqua Girl: My awakening? I got arrested and ended up in the "slammer" with no way out. I had asked long ago to find God. If I had known what it was going to take for me, I am sure I wouldn't have asked. I had to be broken like a wild horse. I had to fall hard. This is just what it took for me. I was very stubborn. I fell from an ivory tower I'd falsely built for myself. I was forced to let go of everything. It was so sudden and shocking that I find it hard to explain. I was completely humbled and brought to my knees. I had a lot of shame and guilt. I gave up and asked God for mercy. So who or what is this I am communicating with? It's not an old man in the sky with a beard hurling thunderbolts when I'm bad or a santa claus character showering me with gifts when I'm good. No, it feels more like a deep calm place inside that connects with a sense of consciousness that is pure truth. Instead of judgment I feel an overwhelming sense of mercy, forgiveness and love. It is all encompassing and expansive. What I experienced in the county jail I now know is what we humans call grace. To me this is what it means to be "saved."

Dale Finn: *My depression was there. There was a poem I once read about how depression is like a black dog. We are born with that black dog and it grows with us, almost like a shoe size. Sometimes the black dog gets along with others and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes the dog sits on our chest and we can't get out of bed. It changed the way I viewed my depression, it made me feel less alone. I hid my suicidal thoughts and self-deprecating actions from everyone around me till it was almost like that fungus that grows throughout your nerves taking control of you until you become a zombie. I was a zombie living in the husk of a teenage girl. It wasn't until I was going to take my own life that my mom and school found out about my innermost thoughts. I felt embarrassed. I didn't want anyone to know about me being different, a defective model. Part of my issue was being unable to cope. When slight problems would happen like a bad grade I would break down internally. When my mom found out, I was immediately put on meds and forced to go to an adult therapist who truly could not understand my thoughts. The prozac would make me angry and nauseous. I fucking dreaded taking that pill. It got to the point where I outright refused to take it. It wasn't until this year that I went back on medication, one that works for me. As years went by, I learned how to wear a more believable smile. It wasn't until I found Finn that I actually had a little love for myself. I believed that I had to learn to be somewhat ok because something needed me. My cynical view on the world is almost a defense mechanism at this point. I always expect the worst so I can't be disappointed and if I am proven wrong I'll be pleasantly surprised. That applies to my views of religion too. I don't believe in a singular God, but maybe i'll be pleasantly surprised, who knows.*

John and Caymen

When I was brainstorming which pseudonym I wanted to choose for the letter exchange I kept in mind a few things that were important to me. I chose John for a few reasons. I had a cousin named Jonathan who I used to call John when I was a little kid. I was really close with him and his family growing up. He was always kind to all of my other cousins and family and had a lot of joy in him. Unfortunately, a brain tumor developed in his cerebrum. It was a shock to everyone in the family. It was difficult to deal with his passing for a long time. I came to understand that I wanted to live life for him.

The second person who I kept in mind was my grandfather. He was a second-generation American who served the Navy during World War II. He was a family man and a hard worker. He taught me a lot of important lessons as a kid and although he with was strict with me at times he had a great love for me and my family. He serves as a role model and as a personal hero to me. His passing also significantly impacted my family and myself.

Both of these individuals impacted my life. I loved both of them and still think of them to this day. The pseudonym "John" resembles the love they bestowed upon me and giving back that love to others.

Caymen: It's possible even when you're in pain, don't have much help, are in a new area, you can create a great life. We struggled, but made the best out of a difficult situation. I believe our dialogue will be meaningful and powerful. We are expanding our minds, learning about and from each other. It's been nothing but a positive experience so far. I can only hope that you're getting as much from this exchange as I am.

John: *It took a great deal of experience to understand the importance of human courtesy. At times I recall having pessimistic attitudes about myself and about others. Learning from my experience in high school taught me a lot but I was still naive. I learned a lot through my family and through sports but I learned the most through interaction with others. The more people I met the easier it was to understand different experiences.*

Rose Quartz and Train

My partner was Train and I was Rose Quartz. Train is, "a steam engine, slow and steady, climbing up a mountain," she is endurance, she is headstrong and stubborn, pushing past all the obstacles she has experienced in her life through sheer will and the strength of her emotional fortitude. She told me once that she loves the outdoors and to travel, and that she is the memories of all the places she's been and all the people she's met. She is a Train that touches the lives of those around her as she passes by, pushing forward and never stopping, no matter how hard life tries to derail her tracks.

I chose Rose Quartz because of a show I watch, where their leader was an alien warrior woman by the same name. She rebels against an unjust government and spends her life fighting for what is right and embodying the traits of the stone of her namesake. Rose quartz stones are symbolic of unconditional love, healing, peace, and compassion. I am not perfect, but above all else, daily I try to become a better person. I want to be a person who embodies these traits, who loves life and all its elements with a pure heart, embracing empathy and compassion, while remaining strong and fighting for what is right.

Train and I bonded over so many similarities, while embracing our differences. We talked about the unjust nature of incarceration, freedom, the importance of appreciating what or who you have, dealing with pain, and the effects of addiction in our lives. I was lucky enough to experience her writing-- Train is truly one of the most talented writers whose work I have read. Her voice is clear and unique, full of contemplative and poetic thoughts. She has opened my eyes to the pure lack of communication the outside world has with these humans that have been locked away and made voiceless. I hope to one day help with creating a dialogue between them and the outside world, working towards a future where they will not be disenfranchised if/when they get out and where society will fight for their rights too.

Train: It is in my nature to want to help, so I hope that my words do something for you because there's little else I can do. Words have become so much more important to me because I am reduced to nothing but them. When anyone needs me, there's not much I can ever give but words anymore. Think about it. I cannot reach out and hug anyone outside of here, I can go to confinement for hugging someone in here, I can't send flowers, go to any type of social event or be there for any of my friends and family in any way at all except with my words... We were talking about rehabilitation and the lack thereof in the Department of Corrections and how the whole general public is snowed into thinking that mass incarceration is a viable fight on crime when in actuality it is not. It's people (that have an effect)... that take an interest in us, that take the time to come here and see our programs. So, while you may be so proud of me because I've managed to rehabilitate myself, it does nothing for any of us until someone with a bigger voice recognized the potential in programs and the wasted lives that lie beyond these walls.

Rose Quartz: *I am way too emotional to keep thinking about every single person I want to help in the world, but honestly I want to help them all. I know everyone says that, but I get the crushing feeling in my chest. It feels like the world is yelling at me, "Why aren't you doing more?! How is your time or your life more valuable than others' that need help?", and once in awhile that gets me off my chair and I get up and help someone. But I have never been strong enough to do the things that make me the most uncomfortable. I don't go to political rallies and scream about the injustices of the world, I stand there and nod my head vehemently. I do confront people that I feel are wrong, but in the end, I give them the verbal equivalent of, a pat on the back . . . Your voice is unique and strong, and your experiences have made you into the kind person you seem to be. Who cares if it has any selfish element to it? Girl, you deserve to be known and have your voice heard.*

Queen B and Boudicca

Boudicca is a fascinating woman. She is a law clerk at the HCI law library and helps her fellow inmates in their court cases. Filled with fire and humor, there is no lack of character when it comes to Boudicca. She has experienced her fair share of battles since going to prison. The main one being that she spent 480 days in solitary confinement. From this torturous experience, the mental damage she has endured cannot be overstated. Yet, she remains an unwavering figure of strength and perseverance. Her code name, "Boudicca" is inspired by the Icenic Queen (Celtic) who led a revolt against the Romans. Her main tactic being the element of surprise, which Boudicca often alluded would be her tactic one day to bring down the "Administration". Not only has Boudicca served as a wise mentor and a disprover of my biases, she has also become a friend. She has introduced me to countless new things: music suggestions (Enya), mantras, recipes, etc. I could not ask for a wiser, more insightful partner than the one and only Boudicca.

Boudicca: On to some unasked questions. Why don't I lend my voice to others? I tried that. I was assaulted almost two decades ago at another prison. And I started the grievance process. Anytime the staff violates the rules with an inmate, that inmate has recourse to file a written grievance citing the rules and asking for a remedy. But, you face reprisals once you do that. You can be labeled a problem inmate and marked out for special attention. After that happened to me, and I grieved it, I was put into Solitary Confinement for 480 days. After the first 180 days I started talking to myself. You might think that being in solitary would be like being on one long Yoga retreat, but it isn't. Being alone is torture. On the 450th day I finally broke and signed the paperwork retracting my grievances. So I only lasted 450 days in Solitary. It took 30 days to process the paperwork. I was not well mentally after that for a long time. Several years. You have to understand, in the world of prison, 450 days is nothing. Some people last decades. To talk about this to other prisoners would make me seem weak.

So I don't talk about it. It's a badge of shame rather than pride amongst the institutionalized. I've only started talking about it in the last few years. . . Sometimes I wonder if I ever left there and all this is just a realistic hallucinogenic dream like the ones I had in there and I will wake up back there again. So I'm broken inside of my head in that I still doubt whether what is happening now is reality. It's not that I don't stand up for people. It's that I don't stand up outright. . . I much prefer lying in the grass, silently and snake like, then biting the Administration (from the warden down to the lowest officer) in the calf muscle with a venomous grievance. Beat them with the rules and the law. That's my motto.

Queen B: *After your last letter, I, very clearly, understand why you wouldn't lend your voice. If I experienced the things you mentioned, I would be forever traumatized and would be fearful to ever open my mouth again. Wouldn't you like to think that the grievance forms are there for a good purpose? It infuriates me that instead of using it to make things right, they instead used it against you and to target you. Our prison system is so messed up and lacks any sort of rehabilitative quality. For example, if someone is acting out, why is isolating them the solution? In that moment, more than any other, one needs the support of friends, family, and loved ones. It seems to me that prison emotionally and mentally diminishes people more than anything. Through my eyes, you are the bravest person I know, seriously! 480 days, to anyone, would seem like forever. . . I admire you because obviously you've been through quite a few injustices in your life, yet here you are, being a badass version of Boudicca in Homestead, FL! What gets thrown at us in life is out of our control, but it is how we choose to face and react to those things that determine who we are as people; those are the moments that define us.*

Camila and Marrica

Both mine and Marrica's pseudonyms were drawn from the names of people we admire. Camila, my pseudonym, came from the name of a close friend of mine who was an excellent, honest, and mature writer. I wanted to be all of those things when writing to Marrica. She created her pseudonym by combining the names of the two women she admired most. In the excerpts that I have chosen Marrica and I reflect on what religion means to us. I thought her view of religion was refreshing. Instead of being close-minded and tied to one religion. She allows herself not only to appreciate other religions, but to delve into them and use the best parts of them to better herself.

Marrica: I also enjoy reading the philosophy of Toa and Buddhism. What I like so much about these philosophies is that it doesn't matter what your religion is or even if you have a religion, these philosophies teach basic kindness and caring for fellow man. Toaist believe we are part of everything in nature, like a molecule in the ocean. The Toa meditations I read are very soothing and calming. I get a sense of peace even though I am often surrounded by chaos here.

Camila: *I don't know much about Buddhism and am hearing about Taoism for the first time from your letter! However, based on what I do know I think I would agree with your analysis that they are more about just treating people with kindness and respect. I think that once you strip away the worship aspect of any religion you are often left with instructions on how to be a good person. In the Christian religion, you have the idea of "The Good Samaritan" and "loving your neighbor as yourself" and in the Jewish religion, you have the idea of a daily "mitzvah" or good deed. I think these things are the best parts of any religion, because they teach kindness not judgement. I also think that if people are content in their beliefs and that it brings them happiness, then religion is doing its job.*

Dany and Kaspar

When I chose my name to use for the exchange, I chose Dany, like Daenerys Targaryen from Game of Thrones, because she's brave and chooses to fight for what's right, regardless of whether it is popular or not. It took awhile for Kaspar to open up to me because she was in solitary confinement right before she sent her first letter. Her readjustment period was tough, to say the least. She told me she chose the name Kaspar because, like a ghost, she isn't always all there, and it was also because she had just emerged into the class and another inmate chose it for her. The excerpt I chose from our exchange was from our last letters to each other. She was responding to my question, which was what solitary and prison were like, and I was responding to her question about whether or not I felt I could separate myself from others.

Kaspar: To me you have to separate yourself. My day to day is very real. I work, take classes, do laundry, have hobbies, build relationships, contemplate, and examine myself and my environment. In many ways, daily life inside isn't wildly different than life outside. If I didn't think of this place at least a little like "home" I don't think I could think of grander things like art literature, the universe. . . or you. You need a huge amount of security to withdraw from survival mode.

Dany: *I mean that I'm not going to put all my energy, my heart and soul, into those who won't do the same for me. Conversation is always worth it to me, I think being able to communicate share laugh everything is such a gift that we waste. People need to talk more, people need to be uncomfortable more. Being uncomfortable is great, you don't learn unless you're uncomfortable. I was so uncomfortable in our first couple exchanges, but I kept going away, I didn't drop the class or anything like that, because I've learned so much, about life, myself, and you, and I'd be devoid of that had I just quit because I was uncomfortable.*

Black Sky and Cloud

Cloud is currently a prisoner who's been in jail for quite some time. She chose the name Cloud for a few reasons. She said that sometimes "[she] has her head in the clouds. It seems like to best place to be sometimes." Also, she named her service dog she is training Cloud. Cloud is a very intelligent young woman, who has discovered who she is and wants to be and the meaning of freedom in life itself.

I chose to name myself Black Sky for a few reasons; the name Black Sky sounded mysterious and interesting and I felt that I embodied those two attributes. I also watched a lot of Daredevil and after pondering for a while about a name I looked up to the sky and that was the first name I came up with. She's fierce in a deadly way and I am fierce in other ways.

Cloud: I know I have done wrong to be where I am, but I am human and I still want to be heard. I have not always been able to stand up and speak, so now that I can I want to use my voice for good. There are people in here for many different reasons, but I see them for the person who they are, not why they are here. There is a story behind everything and every situation. I enjoy learning and meeting new people. Talking to them and getting to know them, you never know how much a person needs you in their life.

Black Sky: *We judge others for what they have done and began labeling them as monsters or bad people. Yes, everyone isn't perfect, we all make mistakes and people shouldn't be ridiculed their whole lives for making a decision that impacted their lives so drastically. Society has a tendency to use people's faults against them and that's where society falls short. I can honestly say that I have done some things that would make people look at me as a bad person and all sorts of negative labels. However, like you mentioned they do not know my story or what I've been through and how I'm still dealing with things in my life. Life itself is about growing up, making mistakes, and learning from those mistakes, which helps us grow in knowledge.*

Angelika Pickles and Red Devil

I am Angelika Pickles and my HCI partner is Red Devil. I chose my pseudonym because Angelika is my middle name and I wanted to draw from the show Rugrats and the specific character Angelica Pickles because my brothers use to call me Angelica Pickles when I was younger due to my bad attitude. Red Devil picked her nickname as her pseudonym, she was given this name because of her bad temper. The exchange I selected to highlight was based on the response to my introductory letter and a specific sentence Red Devil wrote that really touched me and helped the exchange to change for the better.

Red Devil: Maybe I could help you stop bullying and you could help me get people out of any kind of prison.

Angelika Pickles: *We should understand everyone's experiences and stories to truly care about other people that is the moment of freedom. The freedom connected to attention and awareness for realizing that you are not better than anyone else. Freedom is to be open to everyone and everything there is no scale of wrong/right or better/worse. Something our society needs to stop and think about.*

Homestead Correctional Institution Stories: Piece by Piece

The following stories were made through collaboration between three members of the UM exchange class and several female prisoners at Homestead Correctional Institute. The process was carried out without any direct communication between the two groups; rather, the only communication was through the stories themselves. One of the groups wrote a section of the stories each week before submitting it to the other group who then built off of it and sent in their own section. This led to the challenge of attempting to anticipate where the story would be taken next and the need to adapt when what was sent over didn't meet with these predictions. This resulted in three stories, each fully unique in their themes and writing style.

Ace of Clubs

Dale Finn and HCI Members

I woke up before the sun had risen over the mountain. In the early darkness I could hear the birds to the east as they began to utter their first chirps. In a few moments the sun's first rays would peak over the ridge and my whole world would awaken. Although the nights are cool, it would soon be warm enough to shed most of the clothes I lay bundled in. I would have to get to work on my little hut, as i will need substantial shelter to make it thru the upcoming winter here in the Yukon territory. Some would think it absurd to try and live here, but for me it is freedom. Having been locked away for so many years, I'd rather die trying to survive than survive wishing to die. After my fortunate escape from prison, I traveled by train across the country to Washington state. From there I stowed away on a boat to Vancouver Island catching the ferry back to Vancouver, Canada. An elderly couple I met in Nantucket kindly offered to let me stay with them. I declined, knowing that if I stayed with them it would mean serious trouble if I were apprehended. They left me at Hell's Gate and I worked my way past Whistler, deep enough into the forest to never be found.

The forest at first was hard to navigate but after learning the land it became my home, my sanctuary. It took me a little over a week to find a spot that was close enough to water and far enough from the trails. The adjustment to living off the grid wasn't exceedingly difficult as I was fortunate enough to have some basic survival skills. When I was young my dad would take me camping every year on a November weekend in the Rockies. I could still hear the soft crackles and pungent smell of smoke from the fire we would build together. He taught me how to hunt, how to fish, he. . . well he taught me everything. We were all each other had. I never knew my mom, she passed away giving birth to me, my dad never talked about her much. Now I have nothing but the trees that surround me. The trees are a welcomed guest compared to the bars that would seal me in my cage.

Yellow and red leaves tumble out the sides of my satchel as I bent over to check my traps. Luckily, today I caught a rabbit, it has been harder and harder to catch food as the stinging chill of the winter air draws near. I begin the trek back to my camp, through the thick forestry, following the barely noticeable marks I carved into the trees. At my camp I start to layer the leaves in between the logs of my shelter. When I finally finished, the sky was vibrant filled with reds, oranges, and subtle pinks meaning my day was almost coming to an end. Picking up one of the sticks, I unsheathe my knife, slowly gliding my fingers against the engraved KS, Kenneth Shaw, my father's name. He was a great scientist who saved many lives. The one life he couldn't save was his own. I remember the potent hospital smell and the assaulting noise of the ekg flatlining. He passed away of heart failure a week before my 25th birthday. A sigh slips past my lips as I start sharpening my spear.

I'm quite proud of my hut. It has taken me most of the last month working diligently everyday to get this far. It is a lean-to against a solid rock that juts out the side of the incline forming an overhang. This keeps the rainwater from seeping down as it runs off the edge of the cliff and the hut is under its protection. As I've said, I layered leaves through the sapling beams for insulation. The forest is dense with Douglas fir and several tall ones butt up to the end of my lean to, I've wedged the sapling beams there against the trunks on one side and against the rock on the other. The boughs of the full trees give me added protection although I had to remove some of the lower branches hacking away at them with my Father's knife. I am thankful that the sheath has an added pocket that contains a small whetstone. My Father always said a "a dull knife is worse than no knife." On the inside of the hut, I have a hammock tucked away in the corner. I made this by stretching rabbit pelts across a frame of crossed branches. I fashioned an awl from a large salmon bone and stitched the skins together. Come winter, I will have enough fur from my traps to make a blanket and a flap door for the entrance way. Right now, I have several drying by the fire pit outside.

Today I also found an old, stainless steel, 5 gallon pail with a lid. I'm not sure what was in it, or how it got up here, but it was probably left by a hunter. I'm going to use it to make a small wood burning stove for inside. I've just got to figure out how to make a chimney for it. I already stacked up plenty of wood to burn.

Stepping outside, I gaze up through the trees to judge how much daylight I have left to work. I catch the faint droning sound toward the west and as I'm listening, it's just stops. Then a moment later as I strain to listen, I begin to hear a deep whooshing sound and it's getting closer. I run around to the side of the rock ledge and scramble up the side through layers of decayed leaves and pine needles, grabbing onto saplings as I pull my way through to try to get a glimpse of what the noise is. When I realize it's a plane, I flatten myself against the almost vertical ridge I'm on. In a flash it brushes the tops of the upper most trees snapping the tops like matchsticks and shreds of limbs come cascading down around me. Lumbering by like a silent locomotive in the sky, I could almost reach up and touch it. Hands over my head, I strain to see as it moves out of view with a deep crumbling cracking sound that ends shortly after by a long thrumming thud that shakes the ground all around.

"Son-of-a-bitch! A plane just went down and almost took my head off!" I think it was like a piper cub: a small, single engine, 4 propeller plane. One like my dad used to take me up in when I was little. I climb to the top of the ridge, but all I can see is progressively worse broken tree tops starting a few yards off and running the length of a football field to the north west.

I climb down, stopping by camp to grab my father's knife. Momentarily, I glance at the initials again and say to myself, "what would you do now Dad?" Then, tucking the sheath into my belt I head off in a trot toward the plane. I hope there is enough daylight for me to get there. A nagging fear develops in my stomach as I consider that I could be giving myself away. What else can I do? There may be someone who desperately needs help. I cannot turn away despite the possible consequence. "First things first," my dad would say. I continue making my way as fast as possible, occasionally looking up to follow the broken tree tops. Fortunately, I don't think I heard an explosion and I don't smell smoke. Whoever was flying that thing did a good job of coming down gradually. There's an open field somewhere in this direction, I've seen deer grazing there. Maybe that's what they were aiming for. It must have been engine trouble.

I follow the trail of destruction until I finally find the wreckage. I keep my hand on the sheath where my knife is concealed and slowly approach. As I come closer I scan the windows of the plane looking for how many people may be there.

About 10 feet away I start to hear a very feeble groan. When I finally get to the plane I take a deep breathe, "Don't worry Paige it may just be an innocent." I take the glance I've been dreading and to my surprise it's Steven. Steven was my old partner in the FBI. He was the only one who trusted me when I was framed, the only one who vouched for my innocence. I pull my old friend from the wreckage and check for wounds. He seems to have a couple of broken ribs, a sprained ankle, and most likely a concussion. Once I dragged him a safe distance away, I scour the wreckage for supplies. I found a first aid kit, 3 protein bars, and some wiring for traps. Once I emerge a thought occurs to me "the black box," this is the GPS tracking system implemented in planes. I grabbed the closest blunt object I could and proceeded to destroy the box that could jeopardize everything.

"What if they already tracked Steven here? What if they are coming?" Behind me, I hear more groaning. Whipping my head around, "Steven! Steven!" "Paige?" he whispers as his eyes flutter open. Once his eyes fully opened I unsheathed my knife and press it against his throat. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? WHO SENT YOU?" "PAIGE YOU DID! YOU DID!" What did he mean? Did I send a signal? How did he find me? Then it dawns on me, the day I disappeared I broke into Steven's house and left a seed by his coffee maker. It was a sequoia seed, the trees that Yosemite is famous for. I knew that if something were to happen about my case he would find me.

I remove the knife from his neck and plopped down. "So, what happened?" I ask, reluctant to find the answer. "The director died of an overdose and Marx is getting promoted," he says almost in a whisper, fearing my reaction.

Marx, Joel Marx, the man that ruined my life, the man that betrayed my country, the man that framed me. Before all of this I was a Special Agent at the Federal Bureau of Investigation working in counterintelligence. Our main concern was fighting the secret war with the USSR. We were aware some of them had infiltrated the bureau but couldn't find the mole. Joel was my boss, he ran our unit, maybe that's why no one ever found the mole, he was right under our nose.

I remember the day that ruined me like it was yesterday. I was tailing a KGB agent, Vladimir Kempertoff, into a bar. No one knew I was following him, not even the Bureau. He entered a bar called "The Ace of Clubs." I followed 5 minutes later and ordered myself an extra-dirty martini with olives. I was hidden towards the back so I could get a full view of my target. I almost spit out the olive I was munching on as I saw my boss, Joel Marx, sit down next to the KGB agent.

My face was expressionless, but my head was running a mile a minute. What is my boss doing with a KGB agent? As thoughts race through my head my eyes never leave the happy pair. It looked like they knew each other, like they were familiar. I tried to think of the best, maybe this KGB agent is defecting and giving himself up. But after weeks of following that man there was no indication he was defecting from the USSR and if he was defecting wouldn't we know about it. This led me to the conclusion that Joel Marx was the mole. I gulped down my martini and as my head tilted forward I made eye contact with Marx as he was slipping a manilla envelope to the agent. My eyes went wide. I got up from my chair slowly and walked towards the bathroom. I escaped via the window and ran back to my car. I glanced over my shoulder one last time and saw Marx staring at me through the window. All I could think was "Oh fuck".

The next day, I went to work, completely unprepared for what was about to happen. I entered the headquarters, swiped in, and entered the elevator. As the door slide open all I hear are bustling papers and overlapping voices. There were agents all around my desk, those papers were my papers. I was so confused, but at the same time felt the oozing sensation of betrayal bubble over in my gut. As soon as my foot touched the cheap carpet my hands were thrust into cuffs. "Are you kidding me?!?! I am Agent Shaw, what is the meaning of this?" I screamed as my eyebrows furrowed with anger. Marx coyly approached me with the slightest turn of his lip. "Agent Shaw, you are being arrested for treason," Marx reveals. I felt the world crash, my heart plummeted, but my face was nothing but stoic. "Sorry, but I think you have the wrong person," I say in an annoyed tone. "Well darling, we found these papers on your desk detailing FBI surveillance schedules for KGB agents. We all know YOU shouldn't have those and, there's a mole, so tag you're it," Marx said in an "I told you so" kind of way. The agents holding my arms escorted me away as my miranda rights were read to me. He would pay for this, was the only thought in my head, he would pay.

As we sat around the campfire later that evening, I took comfort in the presence of another person, even if we had fallen into a comfortable silence. Steven and I were always able to be around each other with ease. In fact, it seemed as though we often knew each other's thoughts. I suppose that's how he found me. When I left the seed in his kitchen it was more of a sentiment than a clue, but I guess subconsciously I knew he'd know my intent if I needed him to.

Steven broke the silence with, "So, Paige did you really have to put the knife to my throat?" I could see his wry smile through the flickering fire light. "I'm sorry Steven, I was just so on edge. God knows I don't ever want to go back to that prison. I'd die first," I mutter through clenched teeth. "I know Paige. You just caught me off guard a little." I softened at his vulnerability and said "You know I'd never hurt you Steven." Steven and I had a brief romantic encounter once. We definitely had an immediate connection when we met the day I was assigned as his partner in D.C.. However, Steven confiding in me about his homosexuality was a definite indication that we were best being only friends and partners.

"So, Steven are you sure Trent's death was not an accident?"

"Absolutely Paige! I mean they really tried to cover it up, but you and I both know Trent never drank, much less did drugs. So the whole overdose thing just doesn't fit. Never mind how the hooker conveniently disappeared too."

"So, what do we do now?"

"Well, I know one thing, they'll never find me."

"Steven, you need medical attention."

"Not really Paige, we've both had worse. Remember that time in Ukraine when you were shot in the side and we were holed up in the basement of that sausage factory run by the underground?"

"Yeah, and I still haven't eaten Kielbasa again," I said as my lips curled into a smile. "We will be OKAY Paige, there are more supplies in the tail of the plane. Tomorrow you can go back. Besides, I never filed a flight plan and I took off from Alberto's private airstrip in Seattle. No one even knows I am out here. Oh, I imagine one day Alberto will miss the piper cub, but it's not likely to happen anytime soon. He's got way more planes to worry about." I'm slightly dumbfounded as I reply, "So, what? You're just going to camp out in the woods with me?"

Steven shrugs and smiles that crooked boyish grin of his that has always warmed my heart, "Of course Paige. I figured Joel would kill me next, anyways. I have no one else I care about more than you. Peter, that guy I was dating, turned out to be a loser. I caught him looking up weird clown porn and cut it off 6 months ago. Oh! Did I mention I've got 750,000 dollars in a Swiss account?"

My eyes widen with surprise as I accidentally burn myself with the stick I was poking around in the fire.

"Ow! What?" I ask, demanding an explanation.

"Yeah, well it's a long story, but basically that Ambassador from Cairo gave it to me for saving his daughter. I had to track her down when she came up missing. Turns out, she wasn't missing, but ran away."

"Oh wow, that was you? I saw it briefly on the news and then the story just disappeared."

"He didn't want the publicity," he responds, confirming my beliefs.

We briefly return into our silence for a while before I break in again,

"Are you in pain Steven?"

"No Paige, I'm alright. Mostly just my ribs hurt, but you've got them taped as best as can be. I'm just tired."

I get up and cross over to Steven, pulling the blanket up around his shoulders, thankful that I pulled it from the plane too. I slide down next to him and say, "Try to get some rest, buddy. There's nothing we can do till tomorrow."

I pull my blanket up to my chin and listen to crickets chirp as my eyes slowly begin to shut. The next morning comes with a start. I jump up and look around. Steven isn't there, Where did he go? I listen intently, a faint crackling of dried leaves hits my ears, was the thing that jolted me awake? I decide to get up quietly and head towards the wooded area where I heard the noise. All these questions are coursing through my head. Who found us? Where is Steven? Is he hurt? My nerves are overworked. "Ugh!" I scream as I feel arms grab my waist.

When I catch my footing, I realize it's Steven.

I slapped him in the arm as I ask, "What were you doing? Where did you go?"

"I went back to the plane to get something I left behind," Steven answered.

"It couldn't wait till I woke up?! You left me all alone and scared the hell out of me!" I respond with a scowl.

"Sorry Paige, I wanted to surprise you. I found something and needed you to see it."

“Is this why you came to find me?” I ask, hoping my curiosity will finally be satiated.

“Yes! You won’t believe what I found, so like I said Marx got promoted and I actually ended up getting his position. I got moved to his desk and started organizing all my stuff. I turned on the computer and took a peek at all the old files. Nothing too interesting. But, something told me to check the cookies, so I did. You will never guess what I found! It’s the proof you need to clear your name!”

“What is it?” I questioned. Steven replied with a smirk, “See for yourself.”

He hands me a file folder thicker than a dictionary. My arms cave a bit under the unexpected weight. I sit down on the nearest surface and begin to skim what could be my ticket to freedom. Some of these are emails from Trent, he was catching onto Marx’s treachery. There are pictures of Marx in Russia with the KGB agent I saw him with. The schedules of FBI surveillance that was planted in my desk. As I keep flipping a smile can’t help but grace my face. For the first time in a long time, I have hope. I can finally see my family again. I can finally taste freedom again. Before my train of thought goes on a free for all I stop and think. How do I get this to the right man? How do I get to civilization without being caught? Steven almost senses my thoughts and says, “I am in a position now where I can get these to the right man, and by that I mean, to the President.”

I turn to look at Steven, his face tired and lean. I think to myself, thank God this is finally ending. Suddenly, the huge oak double doors swing open with a slight creak in the hinge. A dark haired man in a gray Armani suit summons us. We enter the conference room where I see Allen Therisault, our attorney, stands, pulling out two chairs for us beside him. I reflect back on all that we’ve been through, all of us arriving back in the states, after much negotiation from Canada. Allen spent several months commuting back and forth until he finally deemed it safe for us to return with him. The deal is that we testify against Marx and I am acquitted of all charges. Negotiations with the KGB were simple, they leave Marx to us and they can keep Kempertoff. The FBI is in the process of a complete overhaul. Neither Steven or I will get our jobs back, but I don’t really care about that. I am so ready to live a much simpler life. We’ve bought a place in Costa Rica to renovate. It was an old hospital building.

Steven and I are going to turn it into an upscale resort and grow medical grade marijuana on the adjoining property. We've funded the building of a brand new hospital further inland. It's going to be called the Kenneth Shaw Medical Center, after my father.

In order to save face with the U.S., the Russian government is prosecuting Kempertoff, but even Marx is aware that he himself will take the brunt of this mess. Maybe one day I'll go visit Joel, but for right now I'm glad to not see his face in the room . I am brought back to the present moment by a soft clearing of someone's throat. I look up directly into the eyes of the President of the United States, who says "Good afternoon Ms. Shaw, I am pleased to finally meet you. I knew your father, he was an outstanding medical researcher. His breakthroughs saved many lives including that of my niece. Steven squeezed my hand as I struggled to say "Thank you, Sir," through tear filled eyes. He proceeded, "Now for the matter at hand. Mr. Therisault if you have the documents drawn up, I will sign them." With the audible CLICK of a pen, my new life begins.

The Fall of Paris

John and HCI Members

It was the “The Fall of Paris”, not to be confused with the fall in Paris; although cold winds did whip through the streets and dead leaves chased over the cobblestones. The Seine glimmered but with a yellowish brown and sluggish flow. Jeanne hurried forward clutching her coat and trying not to look up at the drones flying overhead photographing the movements of the people on the street. She paused next to an automated newsstand and fingered the few coins in her pocket. Quickly she scanned the front pages of Le Figaro and other publications hoping for news better than war propaganda. All the headlines were the same.

A rancorous group of soldiers crossed the street in front of her. Jeanne pulled her head scarf close to her face to hide the sores on her mouth and cheek. No use being picked up this late in the day. Besides Leman and Papa were waiting on the loaf of bread and small cheese Jeanne had hidden deep inside the pocket of her coat. She waited for the soldiers to pass before heading home.

As Jeanne made her way to the housing section she couldn't help to notice the sounds of commotion in the distance. On a typical day you wouldn't notice the booming sounds of rockets bursting into the air or the constant rumbling of vehicles being deployed, but today they were more frequent. It was as if something had changed and a new conflict were to emerge. In fear of this situation, Jeanne reminded herself that this was a time of war, and war can be unpredictable.

Finally she made her way to the front gate of the housing section where she would have to crawl through the small sliver of cut fence to reach her flat. She knew that they would not bother looking in this area because patrols were less common, now that more soldiers were needed at the front and the surveillance cameras did not focus heavily on people who lived in the outskirts. Most of the attention was drawn towards the inner sections. At times the fence clings to her like sharp razors sliding along her back but she had become accustomed to maneuvering through the fence.

Jeanne had to avoid interactions with the French authorities. Reason being is that random searches were more frequent and less random. Most of the French public security officers did not follow old laws but instead created their own system of order over the common citizens. If Jeanne had been found with her bread and cheese, she, Leman, and Papa would go to sleep on empty stomachs, not knowing when they would find more food.

She had made it to her flat. It was worn down from the unpleasant environment they now lived in. Her flat was built along the outskirts, away from most of the population. Only those who knew how to survive lived this far out. Inside they had made a small fire below the hole in the roof. Above the fire hung a pot of water for the tea they had saved. Leman and Papa were overjoyed to see Jeanne as they rushed to help her in and prepare for their meal before bed, only to start this life of survival again tomorrow.

Jeanne's eyes deepened, flinching at her own at her own reflection. Surrounded by an acrid smell of decay and stagnation, she paused. Her stained scarf now clung momentarily tearing at each seeping wound on her flesh. Contaminants in the air had become denser since the troops has grown roots in the depths of suburbia. Substations for militia uprising from school yards and REC centers while hope began to die. Hope was becoming the noose for many of the survivors a false light in the grotesque mass of putrid fog, over oiled enflamed with electrical feed. Holding his emotions chaste Papa restrained the pull of his voice as the meat peeling from the young girls face appeared to developed more of an infectious crawl each passing day. "Jeanne" he spoke softly "my dear, is it any word of the streets of...". She was lost, if only into herself over the thoughts of the drones small focused orbs. What is their sight distance and why, why here, to test bio chemical gases.

We're so rich with culture history... what are they hiding to leave us now caged to be watched by these incredulously programmed militant bastards in a secret game of hide and seek... the voice raging in her mind. A city left starving and the madness is the lack of reason and knowing. Psychologically were their prey, their puppets. Each word in print stifles our minds, captive in the wake of desolation. She's startled with an audible gasp.

His touch, the soft touch of a child had a way of dragging her from those unnecessary thoughts. A half broken heart held piecemeal by the love of her young brother Leman. He made life a bit simpler, and often, a bit more stressful worried about survival and living. Long forgotten were those gashes along Jeannie's spine her skin beginning to weaken. Leman was young yet far from naïve. Jeannie was turning he could see the glow of the micro bots beneath her decaying flesh. Human food meant nothing, it had become useless to her. The tea would hold the mechanical virus at bay for weeks, at best. There was nothing available, nothing to extinguish these intrusive spider like robots that the government created to permeate our bodies, engage our minds.

No one really knew when the virus began to spread or when and where it originated. The only knowledge the public had of the virus was that it was non-organic and was designed to program us. The virus had trouble successfully passing the blood-brain barrier but it was designed to adapt once inside the human body. For many, once the virus makes an attempt in seizing the nervous system it kills the host but for some the virus successfully makes its way into our brains. There is little that can be done at that point. Rumors about the UHE, Unified Humans of Earth, being able to reverse the effects of the virus and having found a "cure" have been discussed among those in the underground, but there was no sign of evidence to support this claim.

The UNE was a coalition of politicians, doctors, scientist, generals, and many other influential figures that arose after the creation of the National Government. The UHE started as a group of people who saw the creation of this government for what it really was; a system to control the population of Humans. Those who were the so-called leaders of this government rapidly gained control of the vast majority of these armies, but those who opposed them soon joined forces with the UHE. In less than a year war broke out, devastation reaching every populated city on earth.

In an attempt to dismantle the National Government, the UHE sent spies into the capitol to seek out any sign of vulnerability but what they found was much worse. The plans for the initial launch of the virus were found, but soon it was learned they had designed another, more powerful virus. Soon after the initial discovery there was an outbreak.

The loss of life was devastating resulting in a pandemic with little hope. Now everyone was vulnerable, being monitored unwillingly, while the NG plans its next attack.

The virus swam through us, appearing almost electric like. Chrome tiny microbes that were able to dismantle their body's lengthwise swimming rampantly throughout the ventricle system with housing stations within most major organs. While these bots did not create immediate damage the human body rejects foreign material, naturally. In essence, a war begins within itself. Lesions erupt over the body in an attempt to expel these micro devices.

These glitches in the system were many, while the program was successfully controlling the population and creating a tracking tool on the remainder of society, they were also beginning to learn. The National Government was pleased, however, that was before the change. Jeannie was becoming more aggressive, knowing the fight for Leman and Papa, she'd still not realize the NG had injected her with the virus.

Leman noticed the form in his sisters beautiful green eyes, she was dying and to save himself and Papa, she would have to burn. Leman sat to himself conserving his meager meal, taking one bite at a time chewing slowly as he watched the spider's web to her flesh. It would be so beautiful, the whole process, if it weren't smothered in death. He began to sob knowing what was next for Jeannie, his pretty sister, who smelled of magnolia and jasmine even through the rot and decay.

She began to smile for the warmth of her brother's stare. The banging! "Who's here?" Papa questioned his children. As the door squealed open Jeannie gasped.

There was a great feeling of uncertainty in the room. Almost nobody lives in the same vicinity as them and most certainly no one comes out this far for no reason. To have people knocking on the door was very unusual. Standing at the door were two individuals, a man and a woman, who were dressed in a fashion that seemed as if they were ready for a skirmish. The one woman looked particularly familiar to Jeannie but she was uncertain about who she was. They both seemed to be in a rush as if trying to avoid any unwanted attention, but had a demeanor that gave no sign of a threat to their safety.

“May we enter” the woman asked Papa, breaking the silence that had caused great anticipation. Even more unusual for someone to ask permission to enter their home, or what was left of it. Jeannie and her family were defenseless, nobody knew they were living out this far and the closest station for help was miles away. They obviously knew about where the family had been hiding but what seemed to be even more obvious was that they had no intention of harming this vulnerable family.

Papa replied “who are you” in a slightly timid tone. All of the sudden the focus shifted from the strangers back to Jeannie. She began to scream. The virus was attacking her nervous system. Forgetting the formalities that were briefly established, the two individuals dashed towards Jeannie. “We need to leave” the man said, his accent was not French nor was it anything Leman or Papa have ever heard. She replied in a foreign language which was even more unfamiliar. It seemed as if she was being stern with the man but he did not take offense to what she said, but instead he began to assist Jeannie. Leman began to cry, so much commotion began to develop, he was overcome with grief and started to panic.

As the man began to inject Jeannie with a syringe, which was filled with a dark red substance that seemed to be glowing in some odd way. It was as if the injection made Jeannie’s pain worse. She turned white. The man began to apply an ointment on the sores that surrounded her body. “We need to begin invasive treatment, it has spread too far”. The woman had an expression of uncertainty and then looked away to Leman. She hurtled towards him, “Leman, don’t be frightened, we are here to help” her voice was soothing enough to calm Leman. She looked at Papa, who was in a state of distress, and said “we must leave now or she will not make it”. Papa knew what this meant and for better or worse he saw no other choice. He grabbed the few valuables they had, made sure Leman was dressed for the cold and helped the man in carrying Jeannie out of the house. Leman was with the woman. He went to grab a piece of bread that had begun to stale. “We’ll provide you with provisions” the woman explained, “we must leave now” and then she grabbed Leman by the hand and left the house, Leman looked back with uncertainty, wondering whether or not he would see his house again.

They stood outside for a brief moment until a vehicle turned the corner a few blocks down and bolted towards the group. The woman told the driver to help place Jeannie in the back compartment. She then told Papa and Leman in an assertive tone to “get in”.

Who are these people and why does she care if I live.... This was her last thought before the convulsions began. The wrenching threw Leman back, he knew it had been a mistake. It was them, the National Government, only here to test more of the virus. The car slammed to a stop with the heat of an explosion and Jeannie’s skin quite literally began to crawl. They were coming but who were they, the UHE? Her world went black.

Leman never left Jeannie’s side. She was frail, connected by life support. Days passed as they sat by her bedside watching her suffer through endless treatment. On the twelfth day she finally woke up. Jeannie was weary and disoriented about many things. They had flushed out a majority of the virus, the rest her body would be able to dispose and excrete the remaining toxins. The process created a lot of stress in her body. She had lost a lot of weight and blood. She looked around the room. She had noticed Leman and Papa at first, and they were overjoyed to see her awake. She then glanced to her right side where a man in a white robe was staring at a monitor. In front of her were the two individuals that arrived before her episodes began.

They were dressed in more formal clothes now, and smelled a lot better than before. She had looked at Leman. He looked healthy as if he had been well fed and rested, Papa looking as if he hadn’t slept in days. The man in the white robe broke the silence by asking her a multitude of questions. Some as simple as her name and the current year. When he was finished the woman asked how Jeannie felt, if she was ready to talk. She was ready, she had many questions. Who were these people, why were they helping her, what did they want with them? They had no money or resources, except an old rundown house.

The woman began to explain herself. “We are a group of people like yourself who have been battling to survive. We are enemies to no person who seeks survival. The National Government wants nothing but to control you and exploit you for everything you are worth. They violate every rule of humanity, a system led by corruption. We are the last ones who are willing to fight them.

I have been watching you Jeannie, you are a survivor. You are unnoticeable, adaptable. Many people in your position would be dead from the virus, you survived. We want you to join us. We could use your skills to help others. We could educate Lemman and house them away from all the chaos". Jeannie was slow to take this all in. A few minutes ago she had been in in a coma. She couldn't keep her eyes off of Lemman, even as this stranger talked to her about the future. She didn't care; all she cared about was Papa and Lemman. Finally she had remembered where she had seen this woman. Her face was on one the stories when she was looking through all the propaganda. She was the leader of the UHE...

Her name was Marta Kellisman. She approached the bed and gently took Jeanne's hand in hers. "How are you my dear? Are you feeling better at all? Jeanne could only acknowledge the great woman with a nod. Tears began to leak down Jeanne's cheeks. "What.....How?" "All your questions will be answered, just lie back and let the medication work."

Lemman raced over to Jeanne's bed. "Jeanne, Madame Kellisman says things will be different now. There is a safe place for us to go and live where I'll be able to go to school and Papa will have work." Marta smiled over Jeanne's head. Patting Lemman on the shoulder Marta said "Wouldn't you like to go out to see what else Jaques and I brought in the transport?" Lemman raced out of the room.

Marta's face settled into a much sterner look. "Now, Jeanne, Let's have a little chat shall we? Are you the same Jeanne Pasternak who is the daughter of Liselotte Pasternak, the famed geneticist and cloning specialist. You trained with your mother at the Max Planck Institute?" Jeanne shut her eyes and nodded. "I think we have a place for you in the UHE. How do you feel about South America?" Jeanne opened her eyes. She stared at Marta. "You want me to work at your stronghold in Brazil? But your scientists are much more accomplished and knowledgeable than our own."

Marta smiled and patted Jeanne's hand once again. "Yes, but your mother insists that you and your father be brought in".

Jeanne swallowed. "Maman? I thought....."

You thought she was dead. It was a necessary ruse. However, your contracting the disease has become a game changer.

You aren't healed you know. This retrovirus you've been injected with has merely distracted the disease from its primary course. You have an opportunity, Jeanne. A real opportunity to both study and defeat this disease. I've been able to give you five more years. Will you agree to come to Brazil and use them wisely? Use them against this menace which threatens the world"

Jeanne wearily closed her eyes for a moment. Then nodded an emphatic yes. She'd entered the battle.

But that is part of another story.

New Horizons

Snow White and HCI Members

Growing up and spending my whole 35 years of my life in one state, doing the same things, around the same people has put me in a rut. Yeah, sure, Florida is great, but what else is out there? Life has passed me by and nothing has changed. I've worked as a nurse, for a family practice, the same one for 15 years. Lived at the same house and had the same friends for a little longer. I never found my true love, never had a family of my own. Now I have this itch to do something different. I don't mean travel around or do something off the wall. I mean a total change. Cut my hair, buy new clothes, and move out of Florida. Where should I go? I don't want something too quiet or too busy. Do I want to stay in the states or go to another country?

If I stay nearby, I'll have the security of knowing I can go back. If something goes wrong I could return to my old life, the patterns I grew used to, and the people I knew. But if I go farther, I'll have freedom. A new start to an old life filled with never-ending what-ifs. In the end, I still don't know. I don't know if I want to linger close to home or go the distance. I don't know if I would be able to leave here with no repercussions. Will they worry for me? Will I be able to make it in a new place on my own? Will I end up okay? I don't know. All I know for sure is that I want out. I need this change. Waiting any longer would just let my indecisiveness creep back into my mind like a poison, rooting me in place and keeping me here until I rot away. I'll never know my true possibilities if I stay in the same hole for the rest of my life.

So, I start my preparations. I've made up my mind and I'll be moving out as soon as I can. People always used to tell me that the first step is the hardest, but I have to start somewhere. The long, flowing curls that I was once proud of were now trimmed down to a short, modern cut. I receive a few compliments from my coworkers on the new style, but their happy smiles soon turn into confused frowns when I give them my two weeks notice. I sell the old car I barely used, buy new clothes, and start packing up all of my essentials.

The journal where I held all my dreams never realized, the money I saved after all this time, and a camera to document new memories are all buried in the bags I plan to take with me. With everything ready, I call a taxi to take me to the nearest bus station, the means to my escape.

Soon after I arrive I buy a ticket for the farthest city north of here that the bus will be willing to take me. It's not the best mode of travel for what I'm about to do, but it will get me out of here regardless. It's not very long before I board the bus and sit down in the most comfortable of the seats that I could find. It will be a long journey and as I lean my head against the window and watch as the city slowly bleeds away into plains of swamp grass and gnarled trees, I think of all the time that has passed me by and the new beginnings sure to await me.

As the bus I am on continues to wind its way to the north I settle in and watch the scenery pass by. We move at a fast pace and it is not long till we get into the central part of the state.

At one particular stop, I watch as people get on and off. A young mother with two small children board and I watch as they settle near the front of the bus. I wonder if she is going to visit family nearby, or if she is returning home from such a visit, or if she is going to join her husband somewhere or even leaving a bad relationship.

Then I see two older gentlemen board and make their way to the back of the bus. Once more my mind wanders and I think about whether or not these two men whose heads are close together are life partners or just simply good friends who don't wish to be overheard. Better still, are they plotting some kind of revenge or illegal action? I continue to add more and more thoughts to my journal.

At several stops along the way I take my camera and document the journey with pictures of buildings and people going about their business. I add snacks to my growing pile of belongings and once settled in my seat I simply let the sounds of conversation around me lull me to sleep.

It is some time later that I am awakened by the sound of the driver calling out "Last stop: Atlanta, Georgia." As I gather my things and ensure that everything is secure I can see out the window that night has fallen.

As I move down the aisle with all the other passengers and exit the bus I find myself in a maelstrom of bodies going in all directions. I make my way to the lounge and find a directory that lists all the routes leaving the depot. My choice made I purchase a ticket for the next leg of my journey wondering what tomorrow will bring.

I repeat this process for the next few days, going as far as each bus ride can carry me. We make stops in Nashville, Louisville, Cincinnati, and as far from my small Florida town as possible. Every landmark I see takes up a bit more room in the limited space of my camera, and every fleeting thought I have I mark down in my slowly filling journal. For the moment, I live my life as an active onlooker, witnessing the country as it passes me by, much in the same way my own life has done before. Whereas before I felt trapped within the confines of my own circumstances, now I feel free. I still keep my family in friends in my heart, but each pause in the journey so far has brought with it new sights, new experiences, and new opportunities for me. I've seen more in this short time than I ever have previously and I am able to relish in the feeling of starting anew.

It isn't long before I start to take some initiative and stay for a while in the nicer-looking cities I pass. I buy my tickets in advance and book relatively cheap hotel rooms. Despite their quality, they become my temporary sanctuaries while I take in my current surroundings. Not only do I get a chance to think, but I also get some time away from the hustle and bustle of constant movement. They become places of stillness where I can reflect and relax. Without other distractions, I am able to see each city for what they are, with no city feeling the same as the last. I'm able to fully appreciate where I am and how far I've come.

Soon, I begin to explore these cities. On some nights I stay within the comfort of my room, but on others I move about, drifting along the streets in search of something interesting and new. It is on these nights that I go to bars, see the people, and make mistakes. On one dusky evening, I meet a new face and I feel a connection to them, one I haven't felt for years. I wake up hours later with my face in a pillow that isn't my own and a slip of paper in my purse. I manage to slip away with my dignity intact but I can't help but question myself further. What do I want to do with my life?

Do I want to continue this journey? Go on city by city, sleeping in beds I can never call my own but with the freedom to know I can do as I please? Or do I go back to my old life? I miss the get-togethers with my friends and the help of my parents, but do I really want to feel trapped again? Do I want to settle down and try to start a family? I think of the mother on the bus and the number in my possession. If I so desired, I could call them and give myself a chance to start a relationship with them. But should I? I start to think, just what do I want to do next?

I sit on the corner of my temporary bed debating my next move within my mind. Holding the small slip of paper in my hand, butterflies stir in my stomach as I consider the options before me. Romance? Should I give it a try? There really was a connection that night, wasn't there? With a hopeful heart and a tentative finger, I dial the number, and set my course in this new direction. I listen anxiously as the other line rings, silently rehearsing what to say.

On the third ring, I hear a warm voice say hello. My rehearsed lines quickly fall away and we settle into easy conversation. Time slips away as we learn more about each other. Minutes tick by unnoticed, our laughter and conversation effortless, as though we were meant to know each other. We set a time and a place to meet and I hurry to get ready, wanting to look my best. I walk into the restaurant later, wondering again if I am the only one who feels nervousness over the possibilities. Did we both feel the same connection when we met that night in the bar? I walk through the restaurant to the bar and sit on an available bar stool. As I swivel to take in my surroundings, our eyes meet. It feels as though we are the only two people in the room. I feel a spark of hope that I may no longer be alone.

Like on the day we met, we spend the rest of the night together. Our surroundings start to blur simultaneously as the rest of the world seems to lose focus around us. It soon becomes another flurry of tipsy laughter, hushed tones, and frenzied hands as we explore parts of ourselves that slowly start to become more familiar. Eventually I wake up in their bed again with the usual stickiness of dried sweat hanging over me along with the new scent of breakfast slowly wafting into the room. Making my way out of the room I see them standing in the kitchen preparing two plates of bacon, eggs, and pancakes on the table.

I hadn't been expecting it, but seeing it before me feels domestic and simple. The sort of intimacy that I sense I have been lacking for most of my adult life. As I walk over to the table and greet them, I can't help but get the impression that I should make this more commonplace. It feels right.

We sit down together and eat over stories of our interests, our past, and our futures. I tell them of my journey so far, and they listen with rapt attention. Never once did I use to think that my life would become interesting enough to warrant this kind of treatment, and yet here I am now, having them regard me as if I were the most travelled and experienced person they know. At some point I mention my photography and they tell me about a gallery nearby willing to host new work. I regret not bringing my camera along for our date, but they assure me that there will be more dates and more opportunities to practice my skills. We spend some more time together before it is time for me to gather my things and leave, but our conversation continues to ring in my head, almost leading me on the path to my future goals.

I get back to my room and immediately start to look through my camera for decent angles and well-formatted shots. With the encouragement I received from my friend, my lover, I feel invigorated to make new leaps. The thought of my hobby turning into profit had never occurred to me before, but the idea of it was beginning to look more and more appealing as I search through each snapshot I had captured. I could turn in any one of these photos and hope to make myself known, or at the very least learn to make improvements on my efforts. After a while, I compile a list of all the most engaging photos I had available. Though I did not have the most professional equipment, I want to have a chance to try and put my work and myself out into the world for all to see. Who knows where my endeavors could lead me.

In the morning, I phone the gallery to set an appointment. I carry my leather portfolio, plump with my photos, and board the bus in plenty of time to make my meeting. The excitement of another new adventure tingles in my toes. I arrive and reach for the door with nervous anticipation. I open the door, stepping into the sleek interior, and I am greeted by the elegant woman I am here to see. She invites me into a private viewing room. As we walk towards the room I notice the framed photos lining the walls. I am beginning to realize the quality of my own work.

This gives me a boost of confidence and I consider that my passion for photography may lead to something more than a hobby.

We enter the room where I see long, wide viewing tables. In the well-lit room, I eagerly spread my wares for her viewing pleasure. Spread before us, these photos speak of my travels from my past and into my future. City streets and towering buildings, honky tonk bars and endless corn fields, country landscapes and urban decay; the voices of many American cultures are shouting their existence in rich vibrant colors and shades of black and white.

I feel exhilarated as my gracious host accepts most of my photographs for display in the gallery. She recommends a framer for my work. She explains her commission and we discuss the prices we will set for each piece.

As I leave the gallery, my head is held high and my hopes are even higher. Not wanting today's magic to end, I dial the number to reach my new lover. Today is a day for celebrating life!

I tell my lover all about the news when they pick up the phone, and they're just as ecstatic as I am that I'm taking such a major step. We decide to celebrate and make reservations at one of the fanciest restaurants around for later that night. As I prepare for the date and step into the best looking dress I have, I am hopeful that I'll have a good time. We soon arrive to the restaurant and are greeted by some of the new friends I've made during my time here, whom my lover had called over to join us. Over laughter, drinks, and talk of each other's days, we commemorate our accomplishments. I take this chance, surrounded by the people I've met, thinking of the photos I've taken, and remembering the places I've been, to reflect on my new life. Here I stand, far from Florida, far from my old nursing job, and far from the life I once felt I was stuck in. I have never felt more fulfilled than I do at this moment.

Despite this, I can't help the small pang in my heart as I reminisce on my past life. Gatherings like this are familiar to me and remind me of the modest get-togethers I had with the close friends I left back home. I remember the content smiles of family members as I talked about my hobby and the work I was doing to help others.

I remember warm nights by the lake and sunny days at the beach surrounded by the people I love. A small part of me wishes to go back to that, but I can't tell if that's what I really want. I left for a reason, didn't I?

Even with my apparent homesickness, however, I try my best to keep my elated mood as to not spoil the rest of the night. It isn't long before we finish our meals and part ways with happy goodbyes and hopes to see each other again soon. My lover accompanies me back to my room, making small chatter and flirting occasionally, but we both ultimately agree that we're too tired to stay the night. They depart with a chaste kiss and a promise to call me when they get back home, leaving me alone with my own thoughts for company.

I relive the day in my mind, recalling every wonderful moment before my thoughts are interrupted by a shrill sound. I look down at my phone curiously, sure that it can't be my lover so soon, only to find that it is one of my older friends from back home. I greet them happily and I go on to tell them everything about my adventures, but they don't seem very amused. Instead of the excitement and cheer that I was expecting, I get cautionary words and pleads to come back. They ask me to reconsider everything I know. They beg me to move back to Florida, to stop making rash decisions, and return to the balanced, safe life I used to live.

In the end, I don't know how to respond to them. How do you respond to someone telling you to give up everything you've worked for? Is the life I am living now really that risky and unstable? I miss my family and friends, but I don't know if it would really be worth it to turn back now.

I toss and turn in bed before finally grabbing a pen and my journal. I write my list of pros and cons about my new life. I know that to live my new life I must reveal to my friends and family a secret I've been keeping. My reason for starting a new life so far from home was the need to explore a new life where I could be myself completely. I decide to decide in the morning.

The morning brings a glorious day where I feel surprisingly well rested despite a night of sketchy sleep. I make up my mind to call my family later, when I return from a brunch date with my lover. I can't help but notice the butterflies and excitement I feel inside knowing who I'm going to see. This relationship makes me feel like smiling all the time!

I arrive at the crowded restaurant and enter. The hostess says my party is waiting and I follow her towards another room of the restaurant. As we enter the room there is a flurry of activity; a crowd of people are gathered around someone on the floor who seems to be having a medical issue. I crane my neck to see and realize with a start that the woman on the floor is my lover! I race to her side where I cradle her head in my arms. She seems to be having a seizure. The ambulance driver tells me to meet them at the emergency room.

When I locate her in the E.R., we hold hands and I wipe the tears from her eyes. She tells me of her seizure disorder and that she meant to tell me about it. She has been keeping it a secret thinking I might not want a relationship with someone who has medical problems. I tell her I love her, medical issues and all.

I realize that just as I accept all the things that go along with the woman I love, my parents will probably accept me for who I really am too.

When I bring her home from the hospital and settle her in, I pick up the phone to call my parents. After getting caught up on what's been happening lately, I tell them I have important news. I tell them I have met a special person with whom I want to spend my life. My parents say this is music to their ears! I take a deep breath before revealing the secret I've held close for so long. I tell my parents I am in love with another woman. They ask me what she's like, what she does, what she looks like. I tell them how she encouraged me to submit my photographs to the gallery. In the end, my parents tell me that all the choices I've ever made or will ever make, make me who I am. They say they love me completely for exactly who I am.

We end our call by making plans for my girlfriend and I to travel to Florida so they can meet each other. I think back to before I began my adventure and I am thankful for the courage I found to take the chance. Sometimes, we do get to live happily ever after.

WeCount Reflections: A Dinner and a Conversation

WeCount! was initiated as a program of a social service coalition of South Dade in 2002, then in 2006 became an independent organization. WeCount! has worked to build the power of the immigrant community in the Homestead area and have developed a clear defense for immigrants and their rights, working in the United States. Through leadership development, campaigns for social change, and community education, WeCount! strives to ensure equal rights and opportunities for immigrants to live a safe and healthy life in society.

Four members of the UM exchange class met with several members of WeCount! for dinner and reflected on the experience.

Contact WeCount: www.we-count.org/index.php?page=contact-us.

An Evening of Pupusas and Powerful Voices

Luiza Kinzerska-Martinez

Necessity, triumph, moving forward, and a better future. These words may symbolize a great sense of meaning to any one of us, but they hold a greater sense of promise for ten hard-working immigrants with whom I had the pleasure of conversing with on a warm evening in December. These terms only scratch the surface of the magnanimity of their experience immigrating to the United States.

These ten very special members of the immigrant community are students of English at the nonprofit organization, WeCount. Along with my Publishing and Social Justice classmates and professor, I went to Homestead to hear about their personal hardships face to face. We met and sat together as old friends would at Jenni's Panaderia Salvadoreña. Over an informal dinner session, my classmates and I indulged in a traditional Salvadoran dish called pupusas and conversed with people from other walks of life.

Throughout our conversation, the WeCount students set straight the erroneous misunderstandings that surround the immigrant community. The most important lesson to be learned: no human being is illegal. The United States is a country that has been molded by generations of immigrants. Despite this well-known fact, there is a common generalization that thrives when it comes to the immigrant community: they bring trouble and do not contribute to the well-being of the United States. Several of the WeCount students expressed concern at the idea that immigrants don't contribute to society because of their immigration status. They want others to recognize that they do contribute back to the community through labor, culture and economics.

Regardless of their hardships and the fear of deportation, these perseverant and dedicated individuals continue moving forward in any way they can. Despite long and arduous days of work, exploitation, and constant fear, they stay positive. Their undying positivity speaks about their strength and capacity. This is what they came for: necessity, triumph, moving forward and a better future.

Push Forward

Ashley Nettles

Driving to our meeting on Friday night to interview students from WeCount was nerve-racking. I didn't know what to expect. All communication had stopped after receiving our first letters. As days, then weeks went by, I gave up on the thought of hearing from them any time soon. I thought the worst. I thought that maybe their program got raided and they were busy dealing with Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE). However, I never thought the reason we weren't hearing back from them was that they felt too intimidated by our questions to respond back.

As my group and I arrived with our teacher to Homestead, we were greeted with the scene of a group of people walking down the stairs. They all were huddled on one side of the parking lot, while we were huddled over by the car. Staring at each other, we didn't know whether to greet them or wait for them to greet us. We eventually said our awkward hellos and began walking toward a Hispanic restaurant at the corner where we would begin our interview. Grabbing the menu, I recognized a meal I used to eat at all my school functions, but couldn't remember the name. I took that as an opportunity to start talking to the person beside me, whose name was Miguel. Miguel told me that picture of food I was looking at was called pupusas. He was shocked when I told him that I loved eating pupusas. I began telling him, that I loved Spanish food and knew what most of the food on the menu tasted like, but just couldn't remember their names. I began getting comfortable talking to Miguel after a while and began asking him a few questions. This led me to wonder how the others are feeling.

Throughout the night questions got personal and our conversations got deep. One question that was asked was "With Trump in office, do you feel like living in America has gotten harder?" Many responses were of fear. They all were scared of Trump's promises of deportation, but even with fear, they chose to stay. They chose to stay because in Mexico and Guatemala it's too dangerous to raise a family and give their kids a "good" education.

However, Miguel's response was different from the rest. Even with deportation hanging over his head, he says he "Tries to stay positive, and keep working to have money for his family and his family back in Guatemala."

We asked them to each share how they wanted society to see them and most of their answers were the same. They wanted people to see them as hardworking people, who want to create a better life and future for themselves and their kids, just like any other American citizen would. Many WeCount students stated that one big misconception of immigrants is that they don't contribute to society. They wanted people to realize that they contribute their culture and labor services to America. Another misconception several WeCount students wanted to settle that not all immigrants are criminal. Yes, they may drive without a license and have no identification or visa, but does that make them more criminal than the next person who drives without a license. They feel they should not be considered criminals just because they want to make a better life for themselves. Doesn't every human being have the right to create a better life for themselves? The most important lesson they wanted us to realize is that they are not illegal. No human being can ever be considered illegal, so how can immigrants be illegal? Didn't we all migrate to America? Do Americans consider themselves illegal? No.

The strength these WeCount students show is amazing. Even with the fear of deportation they continue to work hard, stay positive, and persevere. Despite all the negativity that comes their way, the constant fear, and the people telling them to "go back to their country", they continue to push forward and stay positive about their future. I am glad to have met these wonderful people and be a voice that shares to the world who they truly are. They are a silenced group of people striving to be heard and hopefully in the near future they will not be considered a burden on society.

The Wisdom of a 2nd Grader

Isabella Campbell

No denying it, I was somewhat unsure of what to expect from the interviews we planned to conduct in Homestead with the students of WeCount. I was still confused as to why the initial letter exchange with them hadn't worked out. If the questions we asked on paper were too intimidating to answer, how were they going to take those same questions when asked in person? Nevertheless, I went along with 3 other students to see what material we could scavenge up from the trip. Our main goal was the same as our original one - being to simply project their voices and thoughts to the wider community.

Upon arrival, everyone seemed anxious. The idea of getting information from anticipated conversations seemed daunting. Together, all the students walked across the parking lot of an El Salvadorian restaurant. Someone recommended I try the pupusas. "Okay", I thought, "why not". So a pupusa I ordered with beans and cheese. We began the dinner by introducing ourselves and telling the group where we were from. I sat in between Mateo and Dena. Mateo worked in a nursery and was from Guatemala – on top of that, I remembered he had been one of the students whose letters I had read! Yet, he seemed very intimidated to talk to me. His confidence in his English appeared to be very low. On my right, sat a girl who was quite the opposite of all the other students at the table.

7-year-old, 3 foot tall, Dena became the clear highlight of my night. After 15 minutes of sitting next to her, I began to talk to her, asking her about the toys she brought. Her mom, Rosa, is a student in the class. The teacher, Guadalupe, explained to me that Dena frequently helps her mother with English in and outside of the classroom.

From talking to the spunky Dena, I learned all about her life and the things most important to her. A girl named Cake is her best friend and Cake has a dog that is having a puppy and she PROMISED it to Dena once it's born - clearly a big, big deal. Dena is in 2nd grade and she told me that she is, indeed, the smartest girl in her class.

She knows how to spell and write. Her mom drives her to school every morning. She drinks water at school because milk is gross and chocolate milk makes her feel icky. Lastly and most importantly, her favorite food is a pupusa. All aside, there was one very obvious quality about Dena that made her stand out from the rest of the group, besides her age: her confidence.

In a community that seems to be plagued by fear, anxiety, and silence, Dena refuses to fall into any of those categories. She is outspoken, opinionated, and most importantly, confident. She has a lot to say and wants you to listen closely. Wild, funny, and sarcastic thoughts flowed out of her mouth the entire night. She's clever and she knows it. She possesses a sense of wisdom and humor far beyond her years.

When I initially arrived, I felt anxious by how scared and unsure of themselves all the WeCount students were. Many of them did not feel confident enough to use English with us and often relied on Guadalupe for assistance. It became clear to me that the students couldn't respond to our letters because they did not have the confidence to write us back in English, let alone give us insight into their personal struggles.

Yet, amongst all this tension, anticipation, and anxiety, Dena sat tall at the head of the dinner table and continued to talk my ear off the entire night. My main question after saying goodbye to the WeCount students was "Why is this little girl, Dena, so confident and proud, when everyone around her isn't?" I came to the conclusion that Dena does not yet realize the label that society has given her, she is unaware of the struggles she will face in the future and ignorant to the stereotypes that will be applied to her. She is an example of how her mother, and all other WeCount students would be had our society not labeled them as "wrong". I can vouch for all the students I met at WeCount; every. single. one. has a story about why they are the way they are.

Most have faced traumas we cannot imagine, racial slurs we wouldn't be able to tolerate, and injustices that would make us lose our minds...

As a society, we have knowingly and willingly encouraged, if not participated in, the degradation of immigrants in the United States. Regardless of their "legal status" we have dehumanized them to the point of zero self worth and esteem. We have isolated them and depleted them of resources; therefore they are unaware of some of the injustices and violations they have experienced. Many Americans do not realize how immigrants benefit our country: economically, educationally, culturally, etc. Take my friend Dena for example – she is a: student (in the 2nd grade and at WeCount), a daughter, a best friend to Cake, a future puppy mom, a My Little Pony enthusiast, a pupusa connoisseur, a comedian, and lastly an inspiration. This country would greatly benefit if we began to judge people by their values rather than their legal immigration status. If you're lucky, you could make a friend like Dena.

Constructing a Change

Morgan Henry

How would a mass legalization proposal (permission to stay and work in the US) affect your life?

Person A: "It would be a dream. But I'm skeptical. Is this for everyone, certain people, are there specific requirements? If it was for everyone, I would immediately fill out documents."

Person B: "This does not change the life, this does not change my life when I— 13 years I haven't seen my father... this is past. I came to see my father, my grandfather, so this does not change my life [from the past]." [Interviewee suggests that even if this policy was implemented, it would not change what had happened to him in the past. It could not change his life].

Person C: "It would be ideal. I'd feel more secure working, more comfortable driving."

Person D: "It'd be a great opportunity. Especially to travel. I haven't seen my family in years [...] My family in another country."

There are currently 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States. This is too big a number to ignore; the issue needs to be faced head on. For practical and moral reasons, the United States should not take it upon themselves to expel 11 million individuals. People have built their lives here, often to escape the rampant crime permeating the streets of their home countries. No one should be punished for seeking a better life for their posterity. So many times policy makers and media personnel have suggested a propositions similar to the 1986 Simpson-Mazzoli Act. Granting 11 million this peace of mind to stay and work here would radically revolutionize the country. And, in time, the children of these immigrants would be American and could one day shape the United States' political future.

Audley Webster: Scholarly Compositions

The Audley Webster Memorial Essay Contest was established twenty-three years ago by the Webster family to honor the memory of Professor Audley W. Webster, a dedicated and well-respected faculty member in the English Composition Program. Students enrolled in a first-year writing course at the University of Miami (ENG 105, 106, 107, or 208) can submit their essays or multimodal assignments, produced in response to an assignment prompt in one of these English Composition courses, to the contest. After two rounds of judging, the essays presented here received the highest scores; the students received certificates as well as monetary awards in recognition of their achievement, and their essays are being featured in this inaugural issue of *Perspectives: Miami Through a Different Lens*.

Shellshock

Zac Goodwin

It is Iraq, circa 2004. The ground, wet and brown with mud, lies stagnant in an open bog and connects the abandoned houses on either side of it, as smoke billows from the war-torn soil. Slowly and cautiously patrolling, a platoon of United States Marines equipped with Kevlar bulletproof vests and assault rifles inch their way across the barren lot, beside a tan and hulking A1 Abrams tank. The squad moves at the rate of molasses, for they are at war, and willingly tread into a danger zone to seek out the enemy. The abandoned houses, dusty and decimated, sit adjacent to the path the marines continue along. Out of a doorway walks an Iraqi mother and her elementary school-aged son. Not close enough to detect whether the two civilians pose a threat, the squad leader calls in over his radio for assistance. The man charged with the responsibility of gauging—and if need be, eliminating—the potential threats, lies prone on a rooftop roughly 100 yards away. Stationed at the back end of an M24 sniper rifle, he gazes down the scope, like a huntsman stalking his pray. The mother takes a grenade out of her long, black chador and hands it to her son. The sniper hesitates at the idea of shooting a child, “who barely [has] any hair on his balls.” However, he pulls the trigger anyway. The bullet whizzes out of the chamber, cutting through the child, spraying blood on the walls of the abandoned houses. The mother motions to pick up the grenade and throw it. The sniper hesitates again at the idea of killing a woman, but then fires his weapon, striking the woman down and neutralizing the threat. After the encounter, the sniper remains motionless, staring at his targets and digesting the fact that he had just murdered a mother and her child.

The sniper is none other than Chris “The Legend” Kyle, an elite Navy SEAL sniper credited with 160 confirmed kills, and writer of the New York Times bestseller *American Sniper*. Warner Brothers Pictures created a film of the same name, based on real occurrences in the book, which depicts Kyle’s life both in the military and stateside with his family. During the hostile situation, Kyle expressed in an interview with *Time Magazine* that he admittedly was “double-thinking [himself],” questioning whether or not he could actually kill the mother and her child.

His moral predicament in eliminating his targets prompt a curious question. What in Kyle's character compelled him to kill a woman and a child? Which brings about a chain of questions. What is "character"? Is it something people are born with that remains static throughout their lives? Is it dependent on their upbringing and long-term social environment? Is it susceptible to change? If it is, what compels it to change? Journalist Malcolm Gladwell radically defines character not as stable or consistent, but as "a bundle of habits and tendencies and interests, loosely bound together and dependent, at certain times, on circumstance and context" in his essay "The Power of Context" (163). The Power of Context Theory can offer an explanation for Chris Kyle's actions, but can it explain the emotional backlash he endured as a victim of war-related trauma?

In "The Power of Context," Gladwell details the theory known by the same name. The theory suggests that the aspects of people's direct environment, no matter how minute, have a forceful effect on their actions. In order to explain the theory in greater detail, Gladwell presents an experiment conducted by scientists at the esteemed Stanford University in the 1970s as an example. The scientists, led by Philip Zimbardo, built "a mock prison in the basement of [Stanford's] psychology building" (160). In order to create the aura of an actual prison, the basement was outfitted with "small, six-by-nine-foot cells" with "steel-barred, black painted doors" (160). 75 people applied to be a part of the experiment. The scientists accepted 21 of the applicants, all of whom seemed "normal and healthy on psychological tests" (160). The scientists gave half of them "uniforms and dark glasses" and burdened them with keeping order in the prison. The scientist had the other half arrested by Palo Alto police, blindfolded, and brought into the mock prison (160). After distributing uniforms to the all the prisoners, the scientists asserted that the incarcerated could only go by their prisoner number and not their given names.

In a post-experiment interview, one guard admits to having created a "whole atmosphere of terror" for the inmates (161). After only four days of the 14-day experiment, five prisoners had to be released due to "extreme emotional depression, crying, rage, and acute anxiety" (160). The harsh contextual environment of the prison caused a substantial change in every participant's character, which bolsters the validity of the "Power of Context".

The Zimbardo experiment may have been a trauma-inducing experience for the prisoners. Comparatively, in assessing Chris Kyle's actions, it is necessary to look at the power of context as it pertains to war specifically.

Tim O'Brien, an author and former soldier in the Vietnam War, provides stories about war that enable one to apply the Power of Context theory in a case similar to that of Chris Kyle's. In his short story "How to Tell a True War Story," O'Brien details the process of getting at the truth in delivering an account of War. Having served in the military and fought in the Vietnam war himself, he presents several stories about the war, some that he accrued over time and others that he created. All the stories have one thing in common: they detail the mental transformation of young soldiers during the war. O'Brien utilizes one fellow soldier, in particular, named Rat Kiley, to journal such mental alteration.

Rat Kiley's story begins as he and the rest of his squad, including O'Brien, patrol through the Vietnamese jungle. At some point, the squad "took a break along a trail junction in deep jungle" (270). Rat and his proclaimed "number one pal and comrade," Curt Lemon, "went off into the shade of some giant trees—quadruple canopy, no sunlight at all," and "played some silly game they invented" (269, 270). While playing the game, Curt "stepped on a booby-trapped 105 round," blowing him "high into a tree," and killing him instantly (274, 270). Shortly after Curt Lemon's death, the squad continued into the mountains where they found and captured a wild water buffalo. They led the buffalo to a vacant village. After eating dinner, Rat Kiley approached the water buffalo and offered it some food rations. After the buffalo displayed its disinterest in the food, Rat Kiley "stepped back and shot it through the front knee" (274). The buffalo, severely injured and struggling, got back on its feet as Rat "shot off an ear" (274). "He shot it in the hindquarters and in the little hump at its back" and "shot it twice in the flanks," as well as "shooting its mouth away" (274).

He "shot off the tail," "shot away chunks of meat below the ribs," and Rat Kiley "randomly, almost casually" butchered the innocent water buffalo with his rifle (274). O'Brien, astonished, described the intent "wasn't to kill; it was to hurt" (274).

Rat, originally playfully and unaware of the danger, had converted to a “casual” killer who could nonchalantly and unemotionally slaughter a benign animal in an extensively brutal manner. The effects of war clearly had an effect on Rat, transforming him into a cold-blooded killer without sympathy for living animals. After his rampage, Rat reverts to his emotional self, as he decides to sit “down and [write] a letter to [Curt Lemon’s] sister” (269). War’s circumstantial effects on Rat Kiley serves as an example in which war shapes soldiers as a product of their violent circumstances, which correlates with Gladwell’s theory and its implications concerning character.

Much like the water buffalo in Rat Kiley’s story, the mother and her child connote innocence. Most wars exclude women and children, as generally, only the men fight. This practice is the reason the United States government only requires men to register for selective services, or “the draft.” Although in Kyle’s case, the “innocents” were actively attempting to kill his fellow soldiers, his hesitation to shoot displays his knowledge of the stigma around killing women and children at war. Regardless of his morals, Kyle decides to dispatch the threat, as the circumstances of war appeared to have determined his character in that moment. Kyle’s moral predicament supports Gladwell’s theory, as his immediate context overrides his character, much like in Rat Kiley’s case.

A scene similar to the killing of the mother and child brings the “Power of Context” theory into question, as it provides evidence contrary to the theory. During his fourth tour in Iraq, Chris Kyle lies prone atop another roof, scanning the landscape for any danger to American soldiers. He spots a man emerging from an alleyway, wielding a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, or RPG. The man then aims it at an American military Humvee. Kyle shoots the man before the rocket launches, negating the threat. A small child that had just witnessed the killing then decided to pick up the RPG. Struggling to lift the weapon, the child eventually lifts the RPG and aims it at the Humvee. During his first tour, Kyle had paused upon encountering the decision to kill a woman and child, yet he still took the shot to save American lives. In this instance, Kyle took another hesitation and the shot never came. He never pulled the trigger.

Fortunately, the child brandishing the RPG decided to drop it, but Kyle still gave the minor ample time to have shot the rocket. In his interview with Time Magazine, Kyle recalled “that day [he] just couldn’t kill the kid,” despite the military’s Rules of Engagement, which held that snipers could “kill...on sight...anyone with an RPG”. Had Kyle’s character acted in concurrence with Gladwell’s theory, the context of war would have forced his finger down on the trigger, much like it did the first time he experienced a similar situation. He instead capitulated to his morals, which clearly displayed someone willing to risk American soldiers in order to preserve “innocent” life. In a similar situation, where he faced the decision of killing a mother and her child, war overrode his moral compass, compelling him to take the shot. When faced with an identical situation, Kyle does not take the shot. This suggests that the Power of Context does not apply to Chris Kyle’s situation.

Another example that contradicts the Power of Context comes after Kyle’s fourth and last tour of duty in Iraq. In the scene, Kyle, along with his wife and his two kids, host a barbeque at which there are friends, neighbors, children, and dogs all enjoying the beautiful sunny day. While talking to his wife, Kyle sees a dog playing with his son on the grass, and almost instinctively hurries over to the dog and grabs it by the neck, winding up to hit it. His wife finally yells his name and gets across to him. He promptly looks up, embarrassed at his aggressive actions. The “Power of Context” theory, applied to the barbeque situation, would suggest that Kyle’s surroundings should overwhelm his genetic traits and upbringing and cause him to relax. Music flows through the air of a sunny day, while Kyle converses with his loved ones. Such a scene would not logically provoke abusive actions. However, due to the extensive amount of time he spent at war, Kyle perceives the peaceful scene differently. Instead of music, he hears gunshots and explosions. Also, the dogs at the barbeque seem to have brought about memories of the feral attack dogs he encountered while on tour. Kyle’s violent actions at the barbeque may have come as a result of his traumatic memories. This suggests that something other than Kyle’s long-term social environment or instantaneous context influenced his actions, which does not support either side of Gladwell’s Power of Context Theory.

The only possible explanation for such a discord in evidence is that an outside variable is affecting Kyle’s character.

The variable could be a mental disorder, as Kyle showed signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, also called PTSD. Malcolm Gladwell, in “The Power of Context,” briefly, yet insufficiently, acknowledges the effect mental illness has on the theory. This leaves Chris Kyle as an example for mental illness’ effect on the “Power of Context”—and more specifically, PTSD’s effect on the theory in cases relating to war. According to the state of Virginia’s government website, PTSD has four main symptoms. The disorder causes its victims to relive the traumatic event, which happened to Kyle while at the barbeque, as he falsely heard gunshots and other noises that reminded him of his time at war. Certain sounds have the possibility to set off PTSD sufferers reliving of the moment, the government scientists call these noises “triggers”. During a nightmare or flashback, the victim “[feels] the same fear and horror [they] did when the [traumatic] event took place”. PTSD victims also tend to “avoid situations that remind [them] of the event”. Kyle’s wife asks him constantly to seek help after noticing some symptoms of PTSD. Yet, he evades talking about the event and originally denies seeking help, which falls under the symptom of avoiding situations that remind him of the event. He also experiences “hyperarousal,” which is when the victim is “jittery, or always alert and on the lookout for danger”. One scene displays his hyper-awareness and hyperactivity most clearly. After coming home from tour, he sat beside his wife while a doctor performed an ultrasound to check on the health of their unborn child. The doctor noticed Kyle’s strange, paranoid actions and insisted he put on a pulse counter. His heart raced. His blood pressure was alarmingly higher than that of an average human’s resting heart rate. His high blood pressure, racing heart, and jittery actions display the hyperarousal symptoms of PTSD. Kyle’s fit with all the symptoms suggests that PTSD had a strong effect on his actions while at home, attempting to function as a part of normal civilian life.

Gladwell’s theory has legitimate, experimental backing from esteemed scientific institutions. However, it does not seem to hold true in Chris Kyle’s case. At first glance, it seems as though the “Power of Context” theory would hold true in traumatic situations. In the Stanford prison experiment, a simulated jail temporarily altered the participants as a result of their immediate context. The theory has also shown to apply to more specific types of traumatic situations, such as war, since the fighting in Vietnam temporarily turned someone like Rat Kiley into a killer of innocence.

Analyzing Chris Kyle's case, however, leads to peculiar discoveries. His actions do not align with Gladwell's theory, as he kills a woman and child during war—remaining consistent with the Power of Context—and yet, does not shoot a child in a similar situation. Even more strange, Kyle's character does not parallel the power of context's antithesis either: the assertion that genetic makeup and upbringing have the strongest influence on how people conduct themselves. Kyle's actions at the barbeque indicate that his traumatic memories influenced his outburst—something other than his genetic traits, upbringing, or his immediate circumstance.

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Sin Título

Elle Knowlton

I have walked past the Lowe Art Museum every day for the past three months, yet I was unaware that it even existed until one week ago. When I was told my next English essay would involve a trip to the art museum on campus, I had to look up directions to get to my destination. After seeing the building I wondered how I had never noticed it before. The exterior of the museum has a spherical look to it. It is composed of white, rectangular pillars that shoot through the roof; they seemingly serve no purpose yet are extremely beautiful—an art museum with art beginning before you step inside. Yet as soon as I did, the roof paled in comparison to the brilliant pieces I laid my eyes on. After showing my ID, setting down my bags, and receiving a little circular sticker to put on my shirt, I set off with newfound excitement to explore this little gem.

The first room I walked through set my expectations for the rest of the museum unnaturally high. It was a massive, extremely spacious, white-walled area that held giant colorful canvases on each wall including ten color screen prints from Andy Warhol's Mao series, Robert Mangold's Attic Series XI, Henry Moore's Reclining Figure, and six untitled screen prints from a portfolio by Jackson Pollock. I was expecting to walk into a pathetic little museum with works by small local artists not legends like these. The bright walls, contrasted the colorful art pieces, and warm honey-colored hardwood floors creating a comfortable ambience for this contemporary gallery. Being in such an aesthetically pleasing environment brought a smile to my face.

The remainder of the rooms I travelled through did not evoke the same overwhelming happiness the first room gifted me and this genuinely affected the rest of my museum experience. I am a person who is especially influenced by my surroundings; the dark rooms, overly decorated hallways, odd architecture, looming security, and the echoing silence throughout the remainder of the museum brought up a desire to return to the first room. Yet I pushed away this inclination and continued to roam throughout the museum.

I journeyed through two “special exhibitions” including works of Titus Kaphar’s *The Vesper Project* (these pieces defied the norm with mixed mediums such as newspaper on oil paintings and drooping canvases) and Donald Sultan’s pieces labeled *The Disaster Paintings* (which are just as dreadful and dark as the artist suggests). I found these paintings intriguing, but they did not resonate with me.

I continued through the Native American, Ancient American, African, Asian, Pacific Islander, and even the Renaissance and Baroque exhibits without being lured by a single piece to spend time with it. Granted, I enjoyed many of the pieces and greatly respected the hard work and dedication each of the artists featured in the museum—but I was not particularly drawn to any. I was reminded of John Berger’s interpretation of modern day museum-goers,

“Before the *Virgin of the Rocks* the visitor to the National Gallery would be encouraged by nearly everything he might have heard and read about the painting to feel something like this: “I am in front of it. I can see it. This painting by Leonardo is unlike any other in the world. The National Gallery has the real one. If I look at this painting hard enough, I should somehow be able to feel its authenticity. The *Virgin of the Rocks* by Leonardo da Vinci: it is authentic and therefore it is beautiful” (108).

I was forcing an interest into the artwork I saw, not actually feeling it.

Then I walked into the 17th-20th century American and European exhibit. Although the room itself was not particularly attractive to me (it was long and rectangular, with one red wall, two white walls, and one deep navy wall) the paintings and photographs pulled me in. The security guard who was assigned this sector of the museum began to pay specific attention to me, as I passed her by a fifth time. “Aren’t they fabulous?” she inquired. Startled, I made sure it was me she was talking to before responding, “They really are!” She nodded and smiled, and I smiled back. “It’s interesting because out of everybody that passes through [the museum] on the daily...women seem to linger the longest in here.” Suddenly very interested, I nudged her on, “Really?” “Yeah,” she responded, “I guess it’s because all the pieces featured display women.” My face flushed as I looked around once more. “I hadn’t even noticed that. Wow!” I was stunned.

She chuckled and watched me roam the rectangular room a few more times before I moved on to check up on the rest of the museum. Without her eyes on me, I felt a new sense of freedom. I examined the paintings much closer than I had before, my nose inches away from the glass that kept the paintings in their world and me in mine.



Rocio Garcia's *Sin Titulo*, de la serie *Museos*.

I had an entire museum to choose from with works of incredibly well-known artists, yet I was drawn to this. Maybe it's that yellow is my favorite color, or the puzzling story the picture depicts, it might have even been that my feet were aching and I was ready to pick a painting—regardless, Rocio Garcia's *Sin Titulo*, de la serie *Museos* was the painting I selected to study. I was initially drawn to the painting because of the calming effect it had on me. The warm mustard yellow parchment paper-like background brought out the comfort I had initially found in the museum's contemporary gallery. The specific yellow Garcia used is an earthy tone that is combined with a white that tones down the severity of the color and makes it appear muted to the eye. The painting depicts a very familiar architectural structure in its use of the classic roman arches and columns. A repetitive pattern is used on the ground and although it isn't perfectly symmetrical, there is implied symmetry. It almost looks as though the artist was in a rush to get her idea out, and she didn't dwell on the perfection of her floor tiles and granite columns. It encourages a sense of serenity in its grandeur. The bed is extremely out of place, causing the eyes to stop and focus on the figure laying there.

The wrought iron backboard feels dangerous, almost like prison bars, and looks as though it is topped with barbed wire, which suggests that the woman on the bed might feel trapped. Often times we associate order and symmetry with the ideal, but here it's illustrating that social and aesthetic "perfection" isn't suitable to everyone. The woman's pillow and head are at the "wrong side" of the bed, while her feet are at the headboard. Personally, when I can't sleep, I'll flip over like this. The bottom of the bed is often much cooler and it assists in lulling me to sleep. As a kid, I'd occasionally go to sleep positioned correctly and wake up in the morning with my head at the opposite end of the bed. Maybe García intended for this positioning to indicate restlessness, delirium, childishness, or maybe even that the woman pictured is rebellious in every way.

Perhaps the artist is echoing the refrain that this woman doesn't belong, even in the way in which she is supposed to lay on her bed. She defies all social norms. The fact that the bed has no blankets makes me feel uncomfortable. I cannot sleep without something covering me, be it a sheet or a heavy down quilt; the fact that she is not only unclothed, but also uncovered in her resting place, makes me sympathize with the incredibly uncomfortable woman. The nudity in this painting is another powerful point. An aura of confidence and security emulates most pieces I have seen that contain a nude subject, yet this piece seems to do the opposite. The woman hides her face, lies on her front, keeps her legs locked together, and is fully elongated. This isn't necessarily what I might think of when envisioning a lack of confidence, but it could definitely be a metaphor for insecurity. If García had placed her subject in a fetal position I think the painting would have taken on a new sense of urgency. . If García had placed her subject in a fetal position I think the painting would have taken on a new sense of urgency. I perceive the woman as out of place, insecure, melancholic, and fed up, yet if she was in a fetal position, I would perceive her as lost, suicidal, scared, and seeking comfort. The positioning of this woman was vital to the perception of this painting. Although I respect Garcia's choice, I think her piece had the potential to be even more powerful. The woman portrayed is obviously out of place in the midst of the background, and seems to understand this, but is not able to do anything about it. She is in a perfect world, or at least inhabits a space that is sort of the outline of perfection, but she is real. She is flawed and human. She is mortal—unlike the everlasting granite sculptures by which she's surrounded.

Her sallow skin also contrasts her statue counterparts as sort of the epitome of illness. She is sick. Whether it be sick of her life, sick of not fitting in, or genuinely ill, I can't say. The juxtaposition of these elements is apparent and somewhat shocking to its viewers. Comfort is often found in one's surroundings, yet while this woman is surrounded by beauty, she seems to be in mourning, or even in an unhealthy mental state.

I then turned to the little square "cheat sheet" on the wall beside the art piece for answers. It read:

"ROCÍO GARCÍA

(b. 1955, Las Villas, Cuba)

Sin Titulo, de la serie Museos (Untitled, from the series Museums), 1989
Tempera, ink, and colored pencil on paper.

Known for their bright, aggressive coloring and the stylized craftsmanship, Rocío García's paintings operate on a theatrical level; each canvas in a specific series works as a frame in a storyboard for an overarching narrative. Often, her work expresses societal or cultural taboos, such as homosexuality, combined with an element of mystery, as if the key to the entire narrative is just out of view. By highlighting culturally charged subjects, García conveys the larger trends of frustration on the island, be they social, psychological, or political."

The key card largely altered my perception of the painting. "It is hard to define exactly how the words have changed the image but undoubtedly they have" (113). After reading the key card I effortlessly labeled the woman as homosexual, a thought I never would have organically assigned her. But suddenly it made perfect sense. I began picturing potentially missing narratives just beyond view. I started imagining people that loomed just outside the vanishing point of the painting. Although my original reactions to the painting stayed the same, I adopted a new storyline.

The helpful little key card went on to explain a bit of García's personal background. The qualified artist graduated from the San Alejandro School of Fine Arts before moving across the world and receiving her BFA from the Repin Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg in 1983. "Many of her works were influenced by the rise of prostitution during Cuba's "Special Period." Though caused by economic necessity, this increase in sex trafficking caused widespread misogyny and sexism...

García uses the concepts of mental illness or incapacitation as metaphors for the consequences of repression and projections of a false self-image, which can be understood as a commentary on the Cuban government."

When I couldn't analyze the painting any further, I turned to Berger: "...Often dialogue is an attempt to verbalize this—an attempt to explain how, either metaphorically or literally, "you see things," and an attempt to discover how "he sees things" (98).

I ate up this wisdom from Berger and so, in attempting to understand this complex painting further I immersed myself in it, playing the role of the massive, white, granite bust in the lower left-hand corner. I, as the grandiose sculpture, am one of the largest objects in the room. This is partly because the painting's focal point is aimed back at the center of the room. The perspective Garcia enforced sways viewer's eyes away from me and instead to the distant doorway without a door. No one ever walks through it; at least, I can't remember people walking through it. Although I may be seemingly irrelevant to an onlooker, I have a looming and authoritative presence over my human visitor.

"You haven't always been here have you?" I aimed at the limp, frazzled woman. Silence. Well, a fuzzy silence: a silence that involved snuffles and squeaking and lamentations. I didn't know if I wanted to repeat myself or stay quiet—leaving the woman to bathe in her misery. I settled on repeating myself, for few thoughts enter my solid head on a daily basis, and I needed new content to stay sane—unlike the woman sprawled before me. I repeated, "YOU HAVEN'T ALWAYS BEEN HERE HAVE YOU?" And much to my surprise her bloodshot eyes shot up to meet mine. "I've been here for as long as I can remember." Ten words. She only said ten words. But it seemed as though she had spoken for hours. She spoke lethargically. Her tone was hoarse and deep, so much deeper than I expected. I don't know why I had expectations for her voice to be higher pitched, but I did. It felt as though she was casting a spell. It was eerie and haunting. If I had legs I'd run away in this moment. We were both silent for a long time—silence with a backdrop of snuffles and sobbing. While the sobbing echoed through the granite halls her response echoed through me: she'd been there for as long as she could remember. About two minutes later I mustered the confidence to speak once more. "I feel the same way." Her answer was instantaneous, and twenty times more aggressive.

“The same way?! Are you kidding me?” She paused, it seemed as though she’d lost her breath. “You’re the king of the world. A white male. You can do no wrong. How DARE you try to demean my problems!” Confusion paralyzed me. “What are you talking about?” I begged. She glared at me behind her head of frizzy black hair. “You know exactly what I’m talking about.” But I didn’t and I was horrified to push her further. Although I had nothing to gauge the time it felt like we were silent for ten minutes or so. I couldn’t leave it that way. I cleared my throat. “I want to understand. I’m at a loss for what you’re implying.” My tone was gentle, yet firm. She lay there tugging at her hair and shaking her head seemingly trying to get her thoughts together before it exploded out of her:

“And that’s the problem. Nobody realizes the harm their doing until they’re confronted. It’s sickening. It’s driven me to shambles. You completely ignored me, thought nothing of me, until I became vocal about my distress. Only then did you begin to question why I was distressed, if it was you that had impacted my mood, and why I was as I was. People are selfish now. Not just you. Everyone is selfish now. We only think about issues that affect us and that doesn’t work for people like me. The way the masses think about me effects who I can love. Who I can be. How I portray myself in public. It’s driving me mad. I love women and that’s that. That’s how I live my life. It’s what I am and it should be absolutely NOBODY’S job to tell me that what I’m doing is right or wrong or good or bad OR THAT GOD DOESN’T LOVE ME AND I’M GOING TO FUCKING HELL! FUCK YOUR HELL!!...I BELIEVE I AM...AND THAT’S ALL THAT SHOULD MATTER.”

She screamed this at the top of her lungs. Her hands were shaking and the blue veins in her neck bulged as if they were ready to bust. All I could do was stare at her. She stared back. I didn’t notice the heavy footsteps and anxious breathing until it busted through the doorway without a door. Four cops bolted into our room with guns out—pointed at her. A woman with a clipboard was a few steps behind. She had a compassionate face plastered on—plastered with inauthenticity. She glided over to my conversation partner with a hesitant flicker in her eyes. “Attica, who are you talking to?” A blood-curdling scream resonated throughout my friend’s frizzy black hair and into our granite room.

The policemen squinted their eyes in visible pain as the sound pierced our eardrums. The woman with the clipboard dropped her things and covered Attica's mouth with two hands. Her eyes were white and her tone was harsh. "WHO were you talking to?" Attica's eyes lethargically drifted up to meet mine before she raised a finger and pointed it to me. The clipboard woman dropped her hands to scribble on her clipboard. "You're delusional," she mumbled under her breath before charging out of the room. The policemen stayed, armed and ready, until a small man in a white coat strolled in with a smile on his face and a needle in his hand. Without warning, he stabbed and injected a clear solution into Attica's arm. She screamed once more before going limp on her prison bed.

"When we "see" a landscape, we situate ourselves in it" (98). And although I wouldn't declare the masterpiece I stumbled upon as a landscape, I found myself easily situating into this twisted depiction.

"We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (98). This Berger quote stuck with me as I bounced between exhibits. I couldn't find a point of relation in any of the paintings up until García's, when suddenly, it became obvious. It instantly transported me to a tough time in my life. During my junior year of high school, I really began exploring what I wanted to do with my life. SATs and ACTs began, as did college visits and auditions. I felt as though I was following a system that had been set in place in order for me to succeed financially and in the eye of society, not for my own enjoyment or self-exploration. I struggled deeply with it. I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression and began taking medication, which helped immensely, but before I met with my doctor I spent many days locked away in my room, sprawled on my bed crying. I feel connected to this piece in a certain regard. And I sympathize with it. There are many times in life when cultural and societal pressures are paralyzing and intimidating. I think that is the overarching message of this piece. Regardless of what social, cultural and/or political pressures or expectations one feels, we must remember that at the end of the day it's our lives, and we're here to be our best and most authentic selves. Not to please someone else, or live up to anybody's expectations. Once we let this go, we can do anything. "An image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or set of appearances, which have been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved—

for a few moments or a few centuries. Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph...yet, although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing" (95). I sat on the ground of the Lowe Art Museum in front of Rocío García's Sin Título for an hour and a half. I sat, as a middle class, eighteen-year-old, Caucasian, female, musician, who struggles with anxiety and depression, and I resonated with a painting that was the manifestation of how I sometimes felt. I was genuinely moved by an image on a piece of paper. That is why we need to uplift and support the expression of everyone's truest form.

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Alien Intelligence: A Commentary on the Earth's Most Intelligent Invertebrate

Isabella Antonini

I sit enthralled as I watch a documentary, about an animal unlike any I have ever seen. The narrator's voice fades to background noise as I edge closer to the screen, inspecting this strange creature that apparently shares the planet with me. The creature is bizarre, its body gelatinous, able to move in ways that I cannot even fathom. It seems to be curious about its surroundings, (see Fig. 1.) purposely exploring them for the sake of learning; but does it truly have the capacity to be curious? It looks like a giant mutated snail that lost its shell and grew eight, long arms. The narrator's voice returns to my ears and I hear him say that this slimy creature has nine brains—one for each arm, meaning that each arm has a mind of its own. I wonder, "How is that even possible?"



Fig. 1. Oliver the Giant Pacific Octopus of Chicago's Shedd Aquarium. Personal photograph by the author.

The narrator claims this creature is, in fact, intelligent, it is able to take a problem and solve it all on its own. Its eight arms, each equipped with its own brain, allows for the animal to come up with creative solutions to solve complex puzzles. As if the narrator read the skepticism and confusion that crossed my face, the documentary grants me a demonstration.

They place a screw-top jar containing a crab near the animal. I watch as the creature inspects this strange, new object, much like I am inspecting it. It tentatively reaches out to explore the jar with its arms that contain thousands upon thousands of sensory receptors that help it see (yes, see), taste, and touch. In a matter of minutes, the creature has enveloped the jar with its entire body. It begins to twist and I can't believe my eyes- It has actually opened it (See Fig. 2.). How could this animal who, in its entire life, has never encountered such an object, figure out how to correctly open and reap the reward hidden inside? Without any prior information or guidance, this creature who resides in the depths of the sea mastered a skill that even dupes some human beings.

Intelligence is one of those words that everyone seems to have a definition for but can never clearly describe. You can probably rattle off a few names of people you consider to be intelligent, but take a moment to reflect why. Think about which qualities they possess that you deem intelligent. Frankly, your definition of intelligence will most likely be the same as those who share your culture and practices. Your definition is fundamentally different from those who, for example, need people who know how to hunt or forage to survive. As a species with many distinct cultures, we have multiple interpretations of what it means to be intelligent.

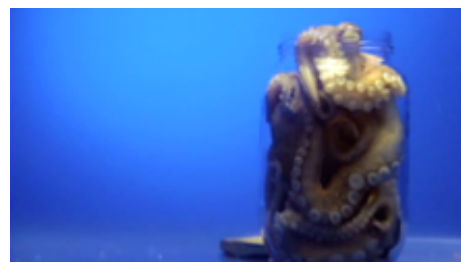


Fig. 2. An octopus opening a screw top jar. Source: Aliens of the Deep Sea.

Robert Sternberg, an American psychologist, presented the theory of successful intelligence after studying the subject for over 35 years. Sternberg defines successful intelligence as “using one’s abilities skillfully to achieve one’s personal goals” (Kail 237). The abilities in question include: analytic ability, which involves analyzing problems and generating solutions; creative ability, which involves dealing flexibly with novel situations and problems; and practical ability, which involves knowing what solution or plan will actually work (Kail 237). This theory of intelligence overcomes the barriers of culture and grants us a comprehensive framework which we can use to evaluate intelligence across the span of cultures— and maybe even species.

Historically, intelligence has only been studied in vertebrates, with human intelligence being the apex and ultimate success in the evolutionary line. However, this egocentric view—that humans possess the greatest brain power on the earth—is essentially misguided. For most people, there is no other definition of intelligence than the one that we have created for ourselves, but this too is wrong. Just as “each culture defines what it means to be intelligent” (Kail 238), so do different species. Although they don’t spend their days evaluating each other’s brain power, they have certain necessities that can only be met using their intelligence. Different species have to learn how to survive in the different environments in which they live. Some do so ingeniously, while others just clear the basics. It is difficult for us, as humans, to understand the possible differences in intelligence that other species possess because we are so accustomed to our own definition. In fact, it is only recently that scientists have accepted that chimpanzees, a species “so closely related to humans we can share blood transfusions,” indeed possess intelligence (“Deep Intellect”), which makes proving intelligence in other types of animals even more difficult—especially those without a backbone.

On the other side of the “great vertebral divide that separates the backboned creatures... from everything else” (Soul of an Octopus 2) is the octopus. The octopus is classified as a mollusk, sharing that title with the likes of clams, snails, and slugs—some of which do not even possess a brain. So how is it that this gelatinous creature with eight arms, three hearts, and nine brains (Aliens of the Deep Sea) came to possess this incredible brain power that its relatives lack? And even more intriguing, after a 1.2-billion-year evolutionary split from humans, how did they develop a mind that is similar to our own— and, dare I say, intelligent?

Is it possible that studying this alien intelligence can help us understand how our own thinking evolved? Does the octopus truly hold the key to unlocking this age-old question in its eight, slimy arms?

Nevertheless, it isn't only intelligence that the octopus seems to have developed. Intelligence is just one facet of an advanced mind. For example, a computer can be intelligent but it lacks the "life" that living things are blessed with. You cannot connect with a computer the way you can connect with a dog, or an octopus in this case. This life that I describe is the essence of consciousness. Consciousness, like intelligence, "has emerged during the course of evolution because its advent gave great survival advantage. It has been honed on the anvil of natural selection" (Denton 4). Consciousness is the ability to be aware of who you are, where you are, what you can do, and what you have done before. It is the ability that may "make the difference between surviving or being killed" (Denton 5).

The combination of intelligence and consciousness produce beings who feel and are capable of many different things. What makes the octopus so interesting is how physically dissimilar it is to humans and the thousands of other species of vertebrates, but how similar it is when it comes to matters of the mind. Researchers have been able to study and observe their intelligence using the framework of Sternberg's theory of successful intelligence. Like humans and their vertebrate counterparts, they are able to analyze and solve new problems, learn from one another, and even have different personalities.

The study of human personality is based on theories that "begin with assumptions of internal motivation and cognitive processing" ("Personalities..." 336). The theory that personality is affected by both genetics and the environment in which one grows up is generally accepted in most areas of psychology. Personality is an important aspect of human life because it distinguishes you from everyone else— your personality is your own. We are also aware that animals, like dogs and cats, have different personalities as well. Just like dogs and cats, octopuses also have different personalities, as discovered by Dr. Mather and Dr. Roland Anderson. They say, "When a species like the octopus has a big brain and is highly dependent on learning, different members of the species are going to behave differently, especially when faced with challenges related to survival" (Mather, Anderson, and Wood).

To test this, they observed the octopus's behavior in three situations, alerting, threat, and feeding ("Personalities..." 336). Each octopus was consistent in each task: "those that were passive were almost always passive, those that came out to explore did so nearly every time." (Winerman) Meaning that these actions and behaviors were not just flukes, but embedded in the octopus—just as personality is embedded in us. A follow-up study was conducted and it was discovered that the octopuses pass down certain aspects of their personalities to their offspring, just as humans do. Furthermore, the study found that their personalities also matured as they aged and were affected by the environment they reside in (Winerman).

Naming animals in aquariums is an honor usually reserved for those with very distinctive personalities. Animals like seals, sea otters, and octopuses. In Sy Montgomery's book, *The Soul of an Octopus*, she takes us through the lives of four unique octopuses, Athena, Octavia, Kali, and Karma. The names given to the octopuses reflected either the behaviors they demonstrated when interacting with the aquarium staff, or the circumstances in which they arrived at the aquarium. Athena, "serene, all-knowing, heavy with wisdom stretching back beyond time" (4); Octavia, named by a little girl who had visited the aquarium (30); Kali, named after the Hindu goddess of creative destruction due to her outgoing nature and "astonishing octopus powers and potentially destructive bent" (64); and Karma, named when devastating circumstances caused the aquarium to make a hard choice (190).

Other octopuses at different aquariums were given less elegant names for those same reasons. Dolores Umbridge, an octopus at the Seattle Aquarium, was named after a Harry Potter villain due to the fact that she would deliberately soak anyone who came to her tank with frigid water from her siphon (Winerman). Lucretia McEvil is another who would also blow water at her caretakers and would rip up the inside of her tank (Winerman). A shyer, more passive octopus was given the name Emily Dickinson, seeing as she would "squeeze her 25-pound body into a 3-inch space behind the backdrop of her tank" (Winerman). Finally, Leisure Suit Larry, an octopus named after "a video game character who would be cited daily for sexual harassment on the job for excessive touching" (Mather). These human-like behaviors continue to fascinate researchers and supplement the idea that these creatures are in fact intelligent.

For most humans, it is easy to classify people based on their personalities. Another category we use to distinguish one another is through our physical differences— especially ones who share their ethnicity or race (Kail 143). Yet when it comes to distinguishing differences in other species, it becomes a little more difficult. This fact makes an octopus's ability to recognize individual humans so much more astonishing. Dr. Mather and Dr. Anderson conducted a study in which they separately exposed eight octopuses to two strangers to observe their behaviors and gauge their recognition. Both strangers wore the same clothing in order to lessen the differences between the two. One of the strangers would feed the octopus and the other would prod it with a bristly stick. After the two-week study, it was clear that these octopuses both recognized the individuals and remembered exactly who they were. They reacted with kindness and friendliness towards the stranger who fed them and reacted aggressively and defensively toward the stranger who harmed them. This recognition of individual humans, "adds another capacity to their already substantial repertoire of cognitive abilities" (Anderson et al. 269).

The human brain, along with the brains of other primates and vertebrates, evolved due to the complexity of our social situations. We are able to learn from the generations before us and lead the generations after us—we learn from each other. What makes the octopus so alien is that they learn everything on their own.

Octopuses are solitary creatures who never live longer than a few years. Thus they are unable to learn from their parents like most vertebrates do. The male octopus dies shortly after mating and the female octopus gives up her life tending and protecting her eggs. The infant octopuses are basically left alone to learn how to fend for themselves in the vastly populated waters of the world. They have to teach themselves new methods for hunting and killing different types of prey and new methods for evading and defending themselves from different types of predators.

This type of intelligence evolved when they lost their ancestral shell that served to protect them from the predators that wished to consume them (Ultimate Guide: Octopus). Nevertheless, due to the loss of their shells, octopuses must choose a home or den that will protect them while they rest.

According to Dr. Mather, octopuses usually choose a den that is big enough to contain them but with a small enough hole that they can fit through. However, when Dr. Mather was observing an octopus on one of her expeditions, an octopus took her by surprise and made her question her prior knowledge. She watched as an octopus chose a den with a large opening instead of a small one. What the creature did next astound her further, she watched as the octopus suddenly crawled out of his den and scanned the area. The octopus explored until he found a rock that pleased him and then returned to his den and placed the rock at its opening. The octopus then proceeded to repeat this action until he had enough rocks to cover up his opening. While the octopus slept, she thought to herself,

To do this, [the octopus] must have had some idea of what it wanted—known in some way that a pile of rocks would make the den entrance smaller—and then looked out across the sand to see suitable rock candidates and gone out and picked up the right number. In describing what the octopus had done, no matter how I tried, I found myself needing to include words like wanted, planned, evaluated, chose, and constructed—words that animal behaviorists of the time (and even now) were not likely to use regarding invertebrates. The words moved the animal out of the category of reactive plodder to that of thinking and anticipating being. (Mather, Anderson, and Wood)

This demonstration of tool use and planning is what solidified Dr. Mather's belief in octopus intelligence and caused her to continue to attempt to reveal the different facets of the octopus.

Besides the use of dens as protection, the octopus evolved an incredible defensive trait: the ability to camouflage. The octopus is a master of disguise, changing their appearance in less than a second (Mather, Anderson, and Wood). Octopuses use their eyesight to blend into their surroundings, but the peculiar thing is that octopuses are actually color-blind. Researchers have conducted experiments and have tentatively concluded that they can distinguish between light and dark colors better than humans can. Their ability to change color is due to thousands of color-changing cells called chromatophores that speckle their skin.

The chromatophores contain black, brown, orange, red, and yellow pigments that the octopuses use interchangeably to blend in with their surroundings. Furthermore, the octopus can even control the texture of their skin to create bumps, ridges, and spikes to better blend in with its surroundings or to scare off potential predators (Ultimate Guide: Octopus). Dr. Mather comments on the octopus's spectacular ability to camouflage in the book she co-wrote, stating:

A predator logically expects an animal to keep looking the same. The color-based evasion technique makes the prey not just hard to find but, by changing appearance unpredictably, impossible to follow. (Ultimate Guide: Octopus)

The octopus has multiple evasion techniques that can be used in succession if one happens to backfire. First, the octopus will try its hand at camouflage (See Fig. 3.): transforming its body into seaweed or blending its body perfectly into a rock formation—practically invisible to the untrained



Fig. 3. An octopus camouflaging.
Source: *Ultimate Guide: Octopus*.



Fig. 4. An octopus turning white.
Source: *Ultimate Guide: Octopus*.

eye. If the predator spots it, it will turn as white as a sheet (See Fig. 4.) to terrify and then vanish using its siphon, to jet through the water. If the predator gives chase, it will let loose its ink in order to mask the octopus's smell which allows the octopus to escape. The ink also

serves as a deterrent to the predator. When the ink is released, the predator may confuse it with the octopus and take a big bite, only to swim away in disgust. If all else fails, the octopus can expand its tentacles to feign a larger size and grow horns to scare the predator off (See Fig. 5.)



Fig. 5. An octopus using its final scare tactic. Source: *Ultimate Guide: Octopus*.

Interestingly, the octopus also seems to use its color changing skills to demonstrate emotion. However, it is possible that we are just trying to attribute human feelings to an alien creature in order to better understand it. Nevertheless, when Sy Montgomery met the octopus Athena for the first time, Athena “[turned] her whole body red with excitement, [as she reached] for the surface” (Soul of an Octopus 3). Afterwards, Montgomery decided to extend her arm and explore the octopus as the octopus explored her, reflecting:

As I hold her glittering gaze, I instinctively reach to touch her head. “As supple as leather, as tough as steel, as cold as night,” [Victor] Hugo wrote of the octopus’s flesh; but to my surprise, her head is silky and softer than custard. Her skin is flecked with ruby and silver, a night sky reflected on the wine-dark sea. As I stroke her with my fingertips, her skin goes white beneath my touch. (Soul of an Octopus 5)

Although researchers have yet to figure out what all the colors signify, most agree that red conveys excitement and white reflects a sense of relaxation in a giant Pacific octopus. Another fascinating aspect of the octopus is that when it is confronted with a difficult puzzle it will undergo a myriad of color changes, “like a person who frowns, bites his lip, and furrows his brow when trying to solve a problem” (Soul of an Octopus 63).

The loss of the octopus’s ancestral shell forced the animal to discover and learn new methods in which to protect itself, but it also allowed the creature to go on the offensive. Without the heavy shell weighing it down, the octopus could hunt like a lion in the water. To move about, the octopus either uses its arms to crawl about the ocean floor, or uses its siphon as a kind of jet propulsion mechanism to surge through the water. This exponential increase in speed and mobility opened the possibilities of a wide array of prey. Nevertheless, the octopus has to learn through trial-and-error all the different methods in which to catch and subdue all kinds of prey because of its isolated way of life.

Although the octopus is a solitary creature, a study conducted by Dr. Graziano Fiorito and Dr. Pietro Scotto revealed that octopuses are actually able to learn from one another. In the study, two octopuses were separated in a tank by a glass division, allowing the learner octopus to observe the teacher octopus (See Fig. 6.).

The teacher was given a glass box that contained a crab, an octopus's favorite meal. The glass box was fashioned with three different methods to open it, a screw top, a top like a jar, and a latch. After watching the teacher octopus open the box, the learner octopus was presented with the same box. The learner octopus then proceeded to use the exact same method the teacher octopus had used to open the box (See Fig. 7.). Multiple trials were conducted in which the box was placed in different ways, and each time the learner octopus opened it using the same method as the teacher. These results prove that the octopus was not just imitating the other, but actually learned. This behavior is interesting considering the traditional way the octopus lives and learns—alone and through trial-and-error (Aliens of the Deep Sea).



Fig. 6. The learner octopus watching as the teacher octopus open the box.

Source: Aliens of the Deep Sea.



Fig. 7. The learner octopus using the same method as the teacher octopus to open the box.

Source: Aliens of the Deep Sea.

Trial-and-error learning is also practiced across species and especially present when an animal is presented with a novel stimulus. All animals respond to an unfamiliar or unusual stimulus by investigating it. After multiple trials with said object, the animals' responses change or interaction with it decreases. Some lose interest and some engage in the action of "play". Play is a familiar activity in humans that takes place rather frequently. Play-like behavior is also attributed to intelligent vertebrates, such as dogs, birds, and cats. It was first discovered in octopuses by Dr. Mather and Dr. Anderson in the 1990's. They observed how different octopuses reacted to plastic pill bottles. In one situation, Anderson observed an octopus essentially "bouncing the ball": the octopus would jet water from its siphon sending the bottle towards the water intake in the tank which returned it to the octopus. The octopus repeated this action multiple times, solidifying the statement that octopuses do, in fact, play (Mather).

" After figuring that out, they move on to their second question, "what can I do with this object?" In other words, the octopus moves from investigation to exploratory play, like most human children do when exposed to novel stimuli ("Exploration..." 336). Discovering play-like behavior in octopuses was a breakthrough in the study of their intelligence. In this situation, the octopuses are clearly using their analytical and practical abilities. It also demonstrates their insatiable curiosity and massive capacity to learn (Kuba 188).

The octopus is commonly referred to as the alien of the deep, partly because of its strange and slimy anatomy, but largely due to its intelligence. It perplexes people how a species so far divided from our own was able to acquire intelligence so much like our own. To solve the puzzle of our own brains and to answer the question of how we evolved to seemingly be the world's most dominant species, we must look towards the depths of the oceans. First, we must discover how and why an animal so far removed from our evolutionary line came to attain such a high level of thinking, and whether or not this opens the possibility of more intelligent creatures as evolution runs its course.

The study of intelligence is controversial. In our darker days, our simple-minded view of intelligence justified most of the atrocities we committed towards each other. Europeans and Americans alike called the Native Americans and Africans "savages," and treated them as such, only because the intelligence that these people possessed did not fit into the European-American mold. This egocentrism validated the genocide, enslavement, and inconceivable wrongdoings towards beings of our same species. It is only after we realized that these differences between one another did not mean supremacy over each other—different cultures gave rise to different forms of intelligence.

There are a people in the depths of the Amazon whose language is made up of only eight consonants and three vowels—making their language the simplest sound system known to man. Additionally, these people had no word for any number greater than two and are unable to learn how to count in any other language. . This detail caused non-natives to regard them as primitive and simple; but to them, it was those who did not speak their language that were unintelligent. Their word for any other language that is not Pirahã is "crooked-head" (Colapinto).

In fact, their language is so perplexing to non-natives that, since their discovery in the seventeen-hundreds by Brazilians, “no outsider had succeeded in mastering it” until over two centuries later (Colapinto). This is just one example of the different types of intelligence that exist in our world today, and to reiterate, differences between one another does not equate to supremacy over each other.

It is time for us to dismount our metaphorical high horse and extend this understanding to different species, which will lead us to a greater appreciation for and integration to the beautiful, diverse, and incredible world we live in. It will lessen our egocentrism, allowing us to work collectively as a species to clean up the massive mess we have created in the only place we can call home.

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Upper Level Composition Papers: An Exploration

The following are four papers submitted by students at the University of Miami who are currently taking upper level Composition classes. Their work shows their ability to think critically and explain their thought processes. They write with a purpose and explore different ways to think about the world around us. Some students' work focused on more on research while others drew more from their own experiences.

The Acceptance of Mutual Awkwardness

Kim Dargan

Situations involving guilt that have unpredictable outcomes lead to emotional awkwardness. When we are unwilling to accept the products of our actions, an internalization of these possible consequences leads to emotional awkwardness. Instances like this arise in our daily lives constantly without notice. Something as simple as my blinds breaking led to an interaction with a stranger that triggered a cascade of micro-events with a variety of emotional responses on both his end and mine. My distracted gaze falling out of the never-closing shades was a simple, innocent act in my mind. Yet as my eyes regained focus, I realized I was in fact staring into the eyes of another, and had become a voyeur of sorts. He caught me staring, yet did I not also catch him staring? My window overlooks the walkway from the parking garage to the apartment building, so why was he looking this way and not forward towards his destination; should I keep questioning his gaze? Is he guilty of looking where he shouldn't be as well? Are either of us guilty at all? These questions that must be running through his head, that certainly are running through mine, are producing a mutual sense of vulnerability. Awkwardness is a state rooted from vulnerability, this vulnerability being experienced when we are quickly met by emotional isolation during social situations.

Our instinctive response upon entering situations containing unknown variables is to fill in those gaps with assumed facts and judgements. Upon seeing this unknown face in my window, I immediately assumed he was a creep and that my next move should be making a call to UMPD. This instantaneous judgement on my part was based on the minute knowledge I was presented with upon being thrown into this new social situation. With no personal connection to this individual, there was no basis for me to justify his reasoning behind looking at me. Herein lies the irony of this encounter, for my initial judgement was performed in a completely hypocritical manner. I, too, was a complete stranger to him; there was no reason for him to think of me as any more than a strange recluse who sits staring outside her bedroom window all day.

Although unintentional, this judgement is unavoidable on both sides, for it is only natural to attempt to uncover someone's motives in situations containing uncertainties.

Awkwardness and vulnerability stem from the uncertainty of future events that may occur from social settings. People appreciate and thrive in circumstances of predictability. In times where the outcome is unclear, it is easy to assume the worst in order to protect oneself from a worse possible outcome. When thinking you are in the wrong, in my case being the creepy staring girl, guilt arises. Guilt in this sense is fairly ambiguous; some may feel guilty to the point where they know they did wrong and they feel they need to correct their actions, while others may experience guilt as the realization that society may or may not have noticed a flaw in their behavior. Regardless of this, the guilt that is felt forces you to do one of two things; you either must accept what has happened, or refuse to acknowledge your actions. This unwillingness to accept certain events leads to awkwardness. Guilt and vulnerability go hand in hand, for they both deal with emotions being dealt with on a deep, internal level. As the guilt of the moment dissipates and its triggers are not accepted, awkwardness is then formed, as you continue to let the situation weigh down upon you and let it impact your life outside the moment it occurred in.

Awkwardness fades away when we realize that our justifications behind it are deemed irrational. When our actions are mimicked by others, it becomes apparent that what we are doing couldn't be wrong on the account of the other person doing it as well, making the awkwardness not warranted. As I found my expression reflected on the guy that I was looking at, it became clear to me that we had the same thoughts in mind. This mirroring of characteristics emerges in groups when opinions aren't fully formed, influencing the opinions of others; however, when only two people compose the group, the only impact that emerges as a result of the emotional expression of one party is the biased interpretation of the other. When emotions are mirrored, biases are nonexistent, for both parties are on the same page in the situation. Both the man on the other side of the window and I are equal in what we were doing and how we reacted to the discovery of the other, as we both looked at each other with a near-emotionless expression. If he had made a look of disgust or fear, I'm sure my response to the entire situation would've gone differently;

the look of his terrified face would be permanently seared in my mind, with the awkwardness of my actions remaining as a burden upon me forever, keeping me hesitant from ever glancing out another window. However, due to this mirroring of expression, we were both able to receive validation from one another that the situation was perceived in a mutual light.

Acceptance is achieved by making assumptions of the thoughts of the opposite party based upon what you would be thinking their situation. By having experienced something similar before due to the commonality of the human experience, the best we can do is conclude that they are thinking similarly to the way we did when we filled their shoes. In this particular example, the prior experience is in fact the current situation, where you are experiencing the same thing that they are. Following the mutual perception of the situation, the next step is to then accept what has happened. This acceptance is based upon the assumption that others will act in the way that we will; despite this heavy assumption, in cases where the assumption is based upon direct emotional evaluation, it does appear warranted. No matter how much people insist they are capable of hiding their true emotions, facial features do not lie; in the situation of my man in the window, all I had to play off of were his facial features. His expressions were portraying exactly what I was feeling at the time, making me realize that everything I was thinking and feeling was being reciprocated by him. This realization led to the understanding that I should overcome my initial awkwardness and just accept my initial feeling of feeling 'caught' looking out my window at him.

Vulnerability provides an opportunity for our inner self to become exposed to the harsh criticisms of the world. When coming into contact with more than just our own minds, we tend to take negativity as an excuse to emotionally invert to avoid any more possible damage to our reputation. As a result of the refusal to accept less than ideal results from social situations, we resort to emotional awkwardness, giving us an aspect of our personality to place blame on when committing a social faux pas. However, through observation of our surroundings, we can justify and rectify the situations we find ourselves in; in a society where the approval by those around us is a driving force of our behavior, it makes sense that we finally accept the results of own actions when we notice that those nearby apparently agree with this acceptance as well.

Externalizers and Internalizers: A Self-Destructive Dance for Mutual Preservation.

Alejandra Jimenez

In 1983, psychologist Dan Kiley wrote a book called *The Peter Pan Syndrome*. The book, which became an instant worldwide success, took after the beloved character to talk about men who refused to grow up and accept responsibilities. His following book, *The Wendy Dilemma*, continued developing on the syndrome, this time focusing on the women who marry this kind of man and inappropriately mother him. After Dr. Kiley's death, his agent Howard Morehaim explained why the second book, although successful, had failed to match the best-selling status of its predecessor, suggesting it was "because women resisted Dr. Kiley's suggestion that while the men in their lives might be jerks, the women who mothered them were responsible for their own problems." (Thomas) These women had trouble recognizing their part on the dysfunction, and rejected the idea of having a choice in the matter. Their helplessness defined them, it gave them a dignifying identity, and made them feel morally good. Fun and charming, Peter Pan has been a cherished hero to many generations. From a clinical point of view however, Peter Pan's behavior is also selfish, immature, and manipulative. He lies, steals, takes advantage of others, and bullies his enemies, all the while feeling like the true victim. It's no wonder why so many psychologists have been inspired to study immaturity and entitlement after reflecting on his behavior: entertaining yet harmful, Peter Pan is an Externalizer.

A closer look may point out certain behaviors that may become warning signs for any healthy-minded adult, but not for children or lonely people. Externalizers possess theatricality, which is difficult to ignore, and the drama that surrounds their lives can be quite seducing. Just like Peter Pan, these people are terrified of taking care of themselves. One could say they are the victims of a fear of failure gone overboard, or simply lack normal self-efficacy. For this reason, they desperately look for other people to care for them and attend to their every whim, and since this is certainly not an easy thing to find, they develop the skills necessary to get what they want and survive in this world; this usually translates in the form of an Internalizer person, who will gain self-value from the task of care-taking and assuming the Externalizer's responsibilities,

and more importantly, a distraction from their own sense of worthlessness—in the case of Peter Pan, a Wendy. Whether this happens with or without their conscious knowledge is irrelevant, especially for Externalizers, for they only care about the end results and their own benefit.

On the beloved TV series *Friends*, no scene was more emblematic than the first scene where Rachel Green enters on the pilot episode: she had just left her fiancé at the altar, and ran away looking for a childhood friend (whom she had ignored for years) to comfort her in the midst of chaos—a chaos she herself had created by agreeing to marry a man she never loved. Of course, it would be difficult for anyone to reject helping a frantic woman in a wedding dress, but for Monica Geller, that would be impossible. As the series develop the characters' lives, viewers get glimpses at the beginnings of the Rachel-Monica friendship. It is interesting to note that Rachel's parents are nowhere to be seen in her early life. We know they exist, but they are not doing such a great job at parenting. Rachel's parents seem to be much more interested in money and status, so their daughters don't get that much supervision or guidance. That becomes obvious with Rachel's promiscuous behavior, her lack of goals, and depth of thought. Her areas of expertise seem to be those of shopping and seducing men, and she often uses her looks to get people to do what she wants. Monica on the other hand, is insecure and lonely. Caring and sensitive, she yearns for connection and intimacy in her relationships. Her mother is constantly criticizing her, which triggers her need to please. Besides her overweight physical appearance, which we later find out is a way of coping with her inner struggles, Monica feels she is not good enough and needs to earn the love of her mother with good behavior. This pattern, along with her natural tendency to self-blame, transforms into a structure of codependency that will give form to all her future relationships, clearly seen in her friendship with Rachel.

Deborah Tannen, author and professor at Georgetown University, states, "Friendship and Romance are not as mutually exclusive as American culture has portrayed them to be... The language of Romance can mirror the language of Friendship—and vice versa." The same dynamics that go on in most of our relationships, particularly with friends, say a lot about our inner mechanics and future choices of romantic partners. In the case of Monica, she repeats her choices by choosing unavailable men, until finally marrying Chandler, a man she had to teach how to be a boyfriend and help grow into the relationship.

Monica was constantly overlooked by her parents due to the academic success of her brother Ross, and she went through high school without many friends, except for Rachel, who was the opposite of her in looks and popularity. In scenes from the past, Monica is usually shown being humiliated and uncomfortable, and she is used by Rachel for company and support, although Rachel finds her too naïve—and annoying—at times. Her difficult childhood leads to feelings of inferiority in her adult life. She is self-conscious about her physical appearance as well as the cleanliness that surrounds her. As seen from her anxious aim for perfection in different aspects of her life, it's clear that Monica has internalized her mother's evaluations of her. Rachel, who has been spoiled her whole life, fits into Monica's need to prove herself worthy and valuable. By mothering Rachel, Monica gains an identity other than being (and feeling) like 'a constant disappointment.' Monica, an Internalizer, could be viewed as the opposite extreme of Rachel in terms of reactivity.

As explained by Dr. Robert A. Berezin, author of *Psychotherapy of Character, the Play of Consciousness in the Theater of the Brain*, an Internalizer person views himself as the problem in the face of chaos; these people are often oriented to seek a solution by changing themselves, rather than blaming others. In the face of abuse for instance, they retain the abuse on the inside, which will become an inner voice. The scenario of this play will be that the abuser (the other person, now internalized) on the inside attacks the abused self who is also on the inside. This means that the location of the attacks between the self and the other person take place internally. Since the source of attack is coming from inside of them, they experience the attacks as self-hate: "I'm bad; I'm inadequate, I'm stupid, I'm ugly." In the context of being shamed, they feel ashamed. An Externalizer, though, projects the abuse back onto other people. They are predisposed and oriented to feel attacked or criticized by others. They locate the source of attack, hatred, or criticism as coming from a person outside of them. For example, when feeling ashamed themselves, an Externalizer experiences being "shamed" by a person outside him, as opposed to feeling ashamed. His orientation is as a blamer. As such, he would be inclined to blame, and fight with others, believing other people are out to get them. By the time she has her first child, Rachel has no concern for politeness or even appropriateness with her doctor. When panicked by her newborn's every movement, she feels entitled to call him in the middle of the night and several times during the day for unimportant matters, to the point of breaking her relationship with

her doctor after he and his wife get enough of her irrational demands. When confronted by Ross, she blames the doctor and his unavailability. Rachel is unable and unwilling to see her annoying behavior as intrusive and unnecessary for the doctor, and moreover, she does not take responsibility for her actions.

To be an Externalizer or an Internalizer is to fall into a specific point of a spectrum, which can go from childish and less dangerous to far worse and hostile. Dr. Robert A. Berezin further explains, "Each element of temperament is really on an axis, on which there is a predominant, prevailing position. But we all have both elements inside us." In psychology, temperament refers to those aspects of an individual's personality regarded as innate instead of learned; therefore, it can be shaped but not changed. In the terms of the famous nature-nurture system, temperament would fall into the nature field (biologically based). To understand how nature operates, one must understand how it acts on the formation of human consciousness as a whole. The role of temperament is to deal with the impacts of nurture (our environment) and process them into the cortex. Related to temperament is also how a person reacts to the world, including their activity level, starting when they are very young, and their beliefs about the power they have over their lives. In that sense, an external locus of control is the belief that our outcomes are outside of our control; an internal locus of control is the belief that we control our own outcomes. Externalizers and Internalizers fall into each of these categories, respectively.

On the hit HBO series *Game of Thrones*, Cersei and Jamie Lannister both suffer abuse at the hands of their ambitious and narcissistic father Tywin. With no room to develop and grow into authentic selves and no source of compassionate affection to encourage it, Cersei and Jamie confide on each other, eventually becoming incestuous lovers. Cersei, however, reacts to her helpless position with hostility towards others. She feels the world hates her and so she hurts people. Her anger is translated into hostile behavior towards those subordinate to her. Jamie, who has a different temperament, is not so sinister in his ways, however his dependency on Cersei and his blind faith in her turns him into a darker version of himself. His need to please Cersei and gain her approval makes him capable of dishonorable acts, however, he is still restrained by his empathy for others, which is ridiculed by both Cersei and their father.

Jamie, who lacks the ambition of his sister, takes action in his pursuit of what he wants: he loves his sister, a woman he can't have for himself freely, so he becomes a king's guard to remain unmarried and close to her. Cersei, who has an external locus of control, looks for powerful allies and underground schemes to get her way. Jamie, with a much more internal locus of control, chooses among the doors from a scenario he feels capable of managing.

Externalizers can indulge in critical thinking and reasoning, but as much as they demand others to respect their boundaries, the same does not apply to them. Like Peter Pan, they may break social norms or even the law to serve their own purposes in the most extreme cases, with little regard for the feelings and rights of others. They have little integrity, often using a sense of entitlement to justify their behaviors. In the movie *Sideways*, Paul Giamatti and Thomas Haden Church play friends Miles and Jack, a classic Externalizer-Internalizer duet. Jack, who is about to get married, tricks his friend Miles into a wine-tasting trip through the vineyards of Santa Ynez Valley, California; a trip supposed to be Jack's Bachelor Party week-long getaway among the two best friends. Jack later states that he wants to have as much sex as he can before getting married, and that this was his real purpose for the trip. His friend Miles, a depressed, struggling writer who often acts as his conscience, constantly tries to prevent this, but to no avail. As things get more and more chaotic on Jack's affairs with different women, Jack collapses into a crying mess that begs Miles to lie for him and to take him home, never acknowledging the damages he has caused in the lives of the women he slept with, nor his cheating to his fiancé as being wrong.

When things go wrong, Externalizers are the first to blame others and to seek help by appealing to feelings of self-pity. Having an external locus of control leads them to avoid responsibility and accountability. Thus, they are quick to manipulate facts and people, saying that the world has done them wrong. However, they are never truly at peace with themselves. Deep down, they may feel as being pushed into their actions by fate. Professor of the University of London, Sarah Churchwell, shares her view of the *Game of Thrones*' character on *The Guardian*, "Take Cersei Lannister: her actions are often wicked, but she has become one of the most sympathetic and fascinating of *Game of Thrones*' characters, giving voice to many of its most feminist utterances.

In season one, she tells Sansa Stark that when her brother “was taught to fight, I was taught to smile. He was heir to Casterly Rock, I was sold like a horse.”” As viewers, we may sympathize with Cersei’s anger at the gender inequality of her time, and the dysfunctions of her social network. Her actions, most of the time extreme, speak of her own fear of being suppressed and losing the little control she feels she has. Unlike Rachel, whose main problem is lack of self-efficacy due to never being taught how to do things on her own, Cersei perceives her situation as doomed by her position in society as a woman in a diplomatic, ambitious family. Feeling cornered and lacking the self-regulation of a character like Margaery Tyrell, who often outsmarts her way into emancipation, she snaps.

A remarkable quality of Externalizers on different places of the spectrum though, is their ability to advance in competitive settings. Sharing some traits seen in psychopathic people, like lack of empathy (in different degrees), dominance, manipulateness, difficulty feeling guilt, and impulsivity, Externalizers may succeed in the corporate world and even in politics for their fearlessness. (Dunton) Since they can be charming and gallant, they quickly know how to win people over to their advantage. Their looks are often flawless since their lack of self-knowledge usually brings a degree of superficiality. However, there is always an element of selfishness to their behaviors. They always seek some sort of reward, such as societal status, power, or recognition. This element may not always be sinister but more self-indulgent. Just take for instance the example of Rachel Green pretending to be altruistic in front of her boss by attending a dinner auction beneficial to children in need. To gain favor and recognition from her boss, she pretends to be concerned for children’s charity. In the case of Cersei Lannister, she is capable of murdering entire families to gain power, while feeling no remorse for her actions. In her view, anyone in her position would do the same thing, and those who wouldn’t are only fools. This mindset, brilliant for achieving her goals of political power, proves detrimental for her personal relationships. She ends up losing her children, alone, and even Jaime, her most loyal companion, reaches his limit regarding his own sense of morality and leaves. Although he holds a morally low reputation among the realm, Jamie does not rejoice in the suffering of others.

In his 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence: why it can matter more than IQ*, psychologist Daniel Goleman described emotional intelligence as

“knowing how one is feeling and being able to handle those feelings without becoming swamped; being able to motivate oneself to get jobs done; being creative and performing at one’s peak; sensing what others are feeling; and handling relationships effectively... The first step in development [of emotional intelligence] is to know yourself – to become more self-aware and understand your strengths and weaknesses. Becoming self-aware means recognizing our flaws and understanding how we can improve.” To Externalizers, this can be a Herculean task. Projection and blaming others often sabotages their ability to understand their own emotions and feelings. Their own confusion turns them defensive to imaginary attacks, and their rejection of responsibility impedes their self-awareness. Their weaknesses are never acknowledged and therefore never conquered. Without awareness of their own flaws, self-control is then called off, since there is nothing in their conscious minds to be regulated. This, of course, turns relationships sour. A new study by Alexander Soutschek at the University of Zurich suggests that self-control, besides being linked to impulsiveness, is also influenced by empathy. “Empathy depends on your ability to overcome your own perspective, appreciate someone else’s, and step into their shoes. Self-control is essentially the same skill, except that those other shoes belong to your future self—a removed and hypothetical entity who might as well be a different person. So think of self-control as a kind of temporal selflessness. It’s Present You taking a hit to help out Future You.” Internalizers, highly empathetic in nature, perhaps need to improve their ability to self-control, that is, stop handing control over to Externalizers. The fear Internalizers feel of the possibility of being rejected gets in the way of their own autonomy and capacity to choose what is best for them in the future, even after having an immense capacity for empathy and ability to visualize future scenarios. Externalizers, impulsively driven by selfishness and desperation to get their way now, gladly take control and rejoice in the process, but this also prevents them from developing the emotional and psychological skills needed to self-regulate and mature.

Impulsivity and selfishness can work together simultaneously in one extreme of a spectrum, as do their opposites restraint and empathy, on the other. A broken Miles can reach redemption and go after what he wants, perhaps through the help of his friend Jack and his view of everyone deserving to be happy, no matter what their past mistakes have been. Jack can get in touch with his true feelings and acknowledge his fear of losing the woman he loves, thanks to Miles’ sensitivity.

Externalizers and Internalizers are drawn to each other because they each mirror back onto one another the things they lack in themselves. Both show different extremes that prove limiting and unsatisfactory, therefore they need each other to survive, although miserably. Managing their emotions in more constructive ways may serve as the path to the light among the two. The Internalizer who bottles them up, the Externalizer who ignores them, may both benefit from learning how to express their emotions more positively. Integrating some aspects of one another into their consciousness can increase fluid communication and active listening, reducing hostility, both towards others and the self.

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The Attention-Seeking Chaos Creator: Obtaining Sympathy through Claimed Victimization

Jacqueline Way

Stability, differing degrees, is one of the most valued traits in society. This does not mean individuals prefer repetition and reject change, as that is an inevitable part of life. This kind of stability is, instead, a sort of steadiness in the way individuals make their way through their lives. There may be unpredictability but, generally, people welcome an easiness in their day to day operations. People reject resistance out of comfort. However, there are some individuals in society who act in ways that appear to be self-destructive. Their comfort is not found in stability but in their ability to create disturbance and then reap the benefits of doing so. They make a problem for themselves, and those around them, in order to obtain a seemingly insignificant benefit to the average person. This kind of individual can be called the “attention-seeking chaos creator.” They create chaos, not for the sake of chaos, but for an extremely specific power which is held at a higher value than it would normally be to those around them. This self-manifestation of unfortunate events enacted by an attention-seeking chaos creator, despite having the appearance of weakness or desperation, is actually their biggest asset.

In *When People Seem to Want to Be Sick*, Richard Gunderman describes a man with Münchhausen syndrome, a psychological disorder which leads an individual to repeatedly go to hospitals and create fictitious symptoms without having anything physically wrong them. He concludes, “We usually suppose that no one would ever want to be sick, but this is clearly not the case... Ironically, some people are so starved for attention and sympathy that they would rather make themselves sick than carry on feeling so ignored and underappreciated” (Gunderman). Gunderman examines how sickness is capable of being equally undesirable and willingly endured. The sickness is used as a channel to get what they need for survival, their desired attention and sympathy. This is the same for the attention-seeking chaos creator. The sickness, or the chaos, is not the thing they want. It is merely the intermediate step in order to obtain the benefit, whatever it might be. It is true that most people do not ever want to be sick, but if the end result of sickness is what keeps that individual going, then they will accept it.

It is this constant state of irony the chaos creator exists in. However, because they are willing to not only exist, but create the chaos, it re-emphasizes how starved for attention and sympathy they really are. Though falsifying a sickness may seem like a choice, the byproduct or value of doing so is not, which makes the sickness itself desired. This sickness is a role the individual is willing to play and the willingness to play is higher due to the value they place on the attention and sympathy. Even though they are extremely self-aware in their actions there is a paradox between this awareness and comprehension. They are capable of seeking the situation and participating in it but they do it from a different perspective: one with far lower risks than seen by those around them. They are self-aware in their actions but not in its extremeness.

Many chaos creators are drawn to this kind of attention and sympathy because they are incapable of obtaining it without the help of their chaos. On *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, Yolanda Foster claims to have Lyme disease. Foster would often post Instagram pictures of herself with needles in her arm and her in hospitals with sympathy-inducing captions. However, instead of the women giving her this sympathy they question the validity of her diagnosis and even begin to inquire about the possibility of Münchausen syndrome. Foster acknowledges these women on her blog by saying she does not blame them. She writes, "I understand it and feel sorry to see my battle be such a point of weakness for them". Foster's comments pinpoint the basis of the chaos creator. On her own, living her day to day life, she did not obtain the sympathy she thought she deserved and so she decided to constantly put her unfortunate circumstances in the face of the other women. This plan ultimately sparked the women to constantly be discussing and analyzing Foster's disease and motives. Thus, the chaos she creates is not her sickness, but pushing her sickness onto the people around her. Eventually, the other women are so absorbed in this chaos, Foster is almost pushed to the side of the chaos, the women are at the center, and she gets the attention and sympathy she wanted in the first place. The chaos creators, then, are not at the center of the chaos but ignite the spark for those around them to be sucked into their own creations. These women, and those around the attention-seeking chaos creator, are able to be drawn in because they want to be a part of it. They are brought into the inside of the chaos because of fear of being on the outskirts. They are weak without the individual creating the chaos, but because the chaos creator's position in the chaos is a choice, they believe themselves to be above the fray.

In *Sabotaging Success, But to What End?*, Dr. Richard A. Friedman describes a woman who complains about her life and all those who had done her wrong. She fully claims and embodies the role of the victim. He writes, "Her status as an injured party afforded her a psychological advantage: she felt morally superior to everyone she felt had mistreated her. This was a role she had no intention of giving up". The woman enjoys the role of the injured party because it allows her to disregard what caused the mistreatment in the first place. The woman makes herself powerless to her circumstances. This mistreatment was placed on the injured party and so the injured party is free from responsibility, allowing her to not be in the wrong and in turn giving her moral superiority. The chaos creator is the same way. Despite the fact the chaos creator was the one who generated the chaos, they do not necessarily participate in it. As the chaos, is exploding around them, they are able to take on the role of the injured party granting them moral superiority. The chaos creator causes a chain reaction. They set up the chaos or mistreatment, those around them participate in the chaos and mistreatment, and then they reap the psychological advantages from it. This the same chain reaction of an individual with Münchausen syndrome. They claim symptoms of sickness, those around them act as if this person is actually sick, and then they are granted attention and sympathy. The chaos creator sets the scene for them to eventually obtain whatever psychological advantage the set up those around them for.

Meredith Grey in *Grey's Anatomy* is another example of how her appearance of powerlessness gives her the attention she craves. She has endured bombs, drowning, shootings, and even labels herself to be "dark and twisty". Her life can only be described as a series of unfortunate events in which she has no control over, or at least this is what those around her believe. Meredith was the one who put her hand in a man's body, knowing fully well there was a bomb in there. When she fell into Puget Sound, she choose to stop swimming. When there was a shooting on the loose, she tells the attacker to shoot her. The attention-seeking chaos creators are often times placed into unfortunate situations, like Meredith with her traumas. However, instead of fighting it she capitalizes it, embraces it, and then feeds into it. They make the situation far worse than it needs to be, and then hide behind the situation that is out of their control. The chaos is their control, because with it, they are able to manipulate the individuals around giving them attention and sympathy.

This manipulation is achieved simply through the straightforwardness of their situations. It is delivered so directly to those around them, that they are unable to question the validity of the attention and sympathy. It is made so obvious, those around them are incapable of questioning it. The perceived weakness is actually their true power. As they create the chaos, they give themselves the power to do it. When Meredith accepts her misfortunes instead of fighting them, she does not give the power to the situation, she takes it.

The reason why the chaos creator is capable of being successful in obtaining this psychological advantage through their own creation is because they hide behind their role of the victim. In the television show *Gossip Girl*, Dan Humphrey creates the online gossip persona in order to push himself towards the elitists society he craves. Dan exposes secrets about his friends, family, and even himself. Without *Gossip Girl* being a catalyst for those around him to participate in the chaos he creates, he would never be able to enter into the society he wants that gives him the feeling of belonging, and the psychological advantage he aspires to achieve. Cady Heron, in the movie *Mean Girls*, plays the persona of one of the plastics to also have a sense of belonging. Cady's position within the plastics leads to complete chaos when Regina George seeks revenge on Cady because of Cady's new social standings. Dan and Cady both share a kind of weakness that forces them to create the chaos in the first place. They are incapable of obtaining their psychological desires without the chaos. The chaos is their personal strategy to gain what they want.

Society is incapable of recognizing the chaos creator because it is overwhelmed by its appearance of weakness based on their outsider status and their innocence. In fact, society tends to be even more so drawn to the chaos creator because of this victim status. In the article, *The Underdog Effect*, Daniel Engber acknowledges the global phenomenon with the label of "underdog." He discusses how, by simply labeling sports teams or political race candidates as such, they become associated with a number of positive aspects. He states, "Economists have shown that people are willing to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of restoring balance". The idea of the underdog is all about perception and so when an individual perceives that an innocent individual has been wronged, they will come forward and attempt to right this wrong due to the imbalance.

The chaos creator is so good at playing this role, society takes their side due to a sense of duty. Just as the chaos creator views themselves as morally superior, the people who insist on helping them also view themselves as morally superior. However, because the perceived underdog label is falsified as a means to obtain sympathy, attention, and belonging- there is no real sacrifice in the restoration of balance. The chaos creator is a falsified underdog so the relationship between and society a form of mutualism. Society obtains the satisfaction by rallying behind the chaos creator and society also gives them what they created chaos for in the first place. The each feed into each other through this illusion. The chaos creator exists because society enjoys the feeling of accomplishment.

Chaos creators are all inherently outsiders because if they were not then they would have no purpose for the chaos in the first place. It is this outsidership that furthers their belief in their personal moral superiority. In 2010, Nancy Jo Sales wrote a piece for Vanity Fair about a group of teenagers, now known as the "Bling Ring", would stalk celebrity locations and homes in order to break into them and "go shopping". At the center of the story is Nick Prugo, an average high school boy who had suffered from A.D.H.D. and depression. Prugo was the one who confessed to each of the crimes, and even some crimes the police did not even know he had committed. This set in motion a chaotic swirl of trials and arrests amongst all of the members in the Bling Ring. Despite being the person who led to the chaotic downfall of the bling ring, he was able to maintain his innocence due to his outsider status. When Prugo explains, why he participated in the Bling Ring, he states "I was just following Rachel...I loved her almost like a sister". Rachel on the other hand was fashionable and forward and even though it was Prugo who created the chaos, he put it all on Rachel, a stronger much more obvious villain. In the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*, Andy acts in a similar way. Andy like Prugo is a bit of an outsider. Andy is not as skinny and does not dress as nicely and so when Andy, the second assistant, is asked by her boss Miranda to go to Paris fashion week before the first assistant Emily, Andy accepts and then claims she had no choice in the matter. Both Prugo and Andy act as if they are at the mercy of these stronger figures. The chaos creator, because they are an outsider, monopolizes on this idea as them being weak, freeing them once again from blame, yet allowing them to preserve their innocence which is what they really want.

The attention-seeking chaos creators have such an extreme sense of self awareness and drive that is unlike others in society. They are willing to endure their own traumas and hardships simply for their goals. This makes them far stronger than most, because they do not just test themselves but embrace the challenges. In *How People Learn to be Resilient*, Maria Konnikova analyzes the idea of both environment and psychological effects on an individual's ability to be resilient. She states, "Resilience presents a challenge for psychologists...If you are lucky enough to never experience any sort of adversity, we won't know how resilient you are. It's only when you're faced with obstacles, stress, and other environmental threats that resilience, or the lack of it, emerges". It is the attention-seeking chaos creators who force themselves into an environment where their resilience is tested. The resilience is not just a personal trait, but what they pride themselves on completely. As a result of their chaos, they do not tend to be very close to those around them and so the resilience becomes their personal point of distinction. The resilience becomes the motivation just as much as it is the outcome. This resilience is the ability for one to not just survive pain, but accept it. Many people shy away from this kind of hardship because they do not see the value in facing a challenge that does not need to be faced. However, as they create their own environmental threats, they are forced to face them more than the average citizen. This resilience allows them to create even greater chaos and obtain more sympathy. It is what allows them to have this extreme sense of awareness but a lower value of costs in the chaos. Thus, it does not matter how one becomes in a situation of misfortunes, all that matters is how they react.

The attention-seeking chaos creator is based in irony and contradictions. They make themselves weak to obtain power. They play the victim despite the fact that they were the wrong doers. However, even though they are some of the most frustrating individuals, we continue to give them the benefits they want because it makes society feel better. Even though when broken down the attention-seeking chaos creators appear to be unsatisfactory and one dimensional, there is a mutual understanding between society and this individuals where everyone ends up feeling like they were in the right. The attention-seeking chaos creator is willing to endure all the unfavorable for the sake of everyone.

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Meaning in the Mundane

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Every single day we interact with other people as we go about our lives. We do so through conversations and other unspoken forms of communication like our body language and actions. The way we interact with strangers is different from the way we do with people that we know or already have some sort of pre-established notion of in our heads. When we interact with people that we don't know, they receive a sort of "clean slate" in our heads because we aren't consciously thinking about these seemingly insignificant moments. The interactions in these moments and feelings they invoke provide a window into the basics of human nature.

Now imagine that as you're walking down a hallway you look up to see a stranger approaching you, directly in your path. As the two of you near each other, you both politely move to avoid the other. In doing so, you both move in a way that you're still going to walk into each other and you start to feel a sense of panic as the two of you get closer. You both keep trying to move out of the other's path, reciprocating each other's movements each time and staying on a direct collision course. When you do finally reach each other, you both stare with the same red-faced look of embarrassment. You both shuffle about to try and make it past each other in a sort of convoluted dance, embarrassed as you think about how incompetent you are to be impeding this poor person as he or she goes about the day. This feeling you have manifests itself because by walking into this person you feel as though you are violating some sort of unwritten social contract to avoid them. After finally making it past each other you keep walking and chuckle to yourself thinking about the look the other person had on his or her face of a deer caught in the headlights and smile realizing you probably looked the same way.

In moments like this I often find myself thinking about the other person involved and how they were able to witness me make a fool of myself. I find myself feeling a strange unwarranted fondness for this complete stranger that I know nothing about and I wonder to myself: why is this?

In the moment, I felt nothing but embarrassment and frustration at my own actions, but as I am able to fully process what happened, I am able to see the humor in it. The emotions evoked by these small passing moments are the key to my feeling of attachment. In this particular instance, the stranger acted as a sort of mirror to my own emotions. Seeing the clear embarrassment on the stranger's face while simultaneously feeling embarrassed myself makes me feel as if we are sharing the burden of this embarrassment together. This takes some of the weight of the embarrassment off my shoulders while simultaneously binding me to this stranger through this act of sharing. This feeling of sharing is also what enables me to see humor in my own embarrassment, where I previously only felt bad about it. In this case humor is the ability to laugh at myself through the lens of another person reciprocating my own emotions. The combination of these feelings working in tandem is what causes this unfounded feeling of friendliness I have for this stranger. The mechanism that allows for this comes back to the fact that in this moment I am not consciously evaluating this person in respect to myself. Meaning that in the moment I was not consciously thinking of myself. Rather I was in a sort of auto-pilot mode enabling this person to have a "clean slate". As a result, the association of a positive emotion with a complete stranger allows him or her to transcend the usual conscious process we all have of choosing friends and have me view them in a friendlier manner than I should considering we are both still strangers.

Similarly, passing moments that invoke negative emotions operate with almost the same mechanism. The main difference in these interactions is they do the opposite of bind strangers together and the feelings they manifest are often more extreme. Think about this for a moment. As you are walking down a busy street somebody walks directly into you knocking you off your balance. Caught off guard, a feeling of shock comes over you as the stranger keeps walking, he or she turns back to look at you with a frowning face and then continues on his or her way. Your momentary shock turns to fury at this stranger's unapologetic rudeness. The negativity you feel in the moment about this person becomes attached to every single aspect of the person's identity. This is due to this idea of the "blank slate" even though you don't actually know this person he or she becomes entirely associated with this negativity. You imagine this stranger as being a terrible person and the anger you feel in the moment consumes you, leaving you fuming.

Why is it that we can experience such an extreme swing of emotion from an almost catatonic state to a hyper-excited one? This is because we do not consciously think about the way we react in these moments. When we do, it is in an instinctual manner. So, while this reaction of intense anger may seem extreme, it is, in fact, very human to respond in this manner. The key difference between this interaction and the one that I previously described is the manner in which the people interacted. In my first example, two strangers shared a moment together and were left with a good feeling about each other. It is this mutuality of the moment that binds these two people together. In the second example, two people interacted in a very different way; they shared the same moment, but it was experienced by each party differently which is what leaves this divisive tension between the two.

An interesting aspect about both these moments is that the only thing left behind is the emotion they invoke. The people you interact with and the individual moments start to lose their identity and context and therefore become entirely associated with the resulting emotions. As you continue your day, re-enter auto pilot mode, and think back on the person that you almost ran into in the hallway or the stranger that walked into you, you won't remember their faces, what they were wearing, or how their voice sounded, but you will remember the feelings each interaction induced. As time goes on and these moments leave your conscious thought, the specifics of each individual moment are lost. Multiple instances become a collective memory associated with a certain emotion or a set of them. Thinking back to individual instances becomes impossible because the individual memories are all blocked out by the emotion they are associated with, which becomes the only thing you remember.

The reason for this comes down to basic human nature. As the memories of individual moments dissipate from our conscious thought nothing but the pure emotion of the moment remains. We naturally forget the details of fleeting moments, but it is impossible to wipe their associated emotions from our memory because they are so engrained in our very being. Whether we want to admit it or not, we are ruled by our basic emotions, and they can only be overcome by consciously combatting them. When we interact with strangers in this auto-pilot mode, we are not deliberately thinking and as a result, these moments have a direct line to trigger our emotions.

This is what accounts for the extreme emotions experienced and our quick reactionary responses to these situations. The importance of these moments is that they reveal that the core of human interaction is based on emotion. The natural simplicity of these moments makes it easy to identify and assign a single emotion as the mechanism for that particular interaction. Being able to interpret these seemingly unimportant moments therefore provides a window into our emotions and as a result leads to better understanding of people and human nature as a whole.