

WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum

Prize Winners 2025–2026

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL EDITION

Introduction

Now in its 25th year of publication, Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum publishes undergraduate student writing from many disciplines. This magazine offers a space to celebrate student achievement in writing and to highlight exemplary written work from across William Paterson University.

On these pages, diversity in writing is celebrated. Some entries are thoroughly researched and deftly worded, others provide analytical exploration or make a compelling argument, and still others are imaginatively creative or superbly designed and arranged. Writing is often mistakenly assumed to be merely a skill that, once learned, can be applied formulaically for any situation. But effective writers, such as the ones featured here, know that continuous development of one's writing knowledge and practice is the way to becoming better at it. Today's employers report that a key attribute they seek in an employee is the ability to write clearly and effectively, which makes the writing our students engage in increasingly important. Nurtured by our faculty, the student writers featured within this issue have worked hard to understand and develop writing most suited to its occasion.

For this contest, William Paterson faculty nominate student writing from across a wide range of courses. Whether a written work is nominated for its creativity, insights, analysis, or well-crafted prose, each entry has first intrigued a faculty member and earned a nomination. After the submission deadline, a panel of judges from across the William Paterson faculty gathers to discuss and consider each entry, and the winners are selected for publication in Celebrating Student Writing Across the Curriculum.

This year's winners represent a wide range of majors: psychology, anthropology, literature, sociology, and more. The excellent writing featured here represents upper-division courses from various disciplines and lower-division courses in general education, demonstrating that great writing comes from everywhere and anyone. Regardless of the course for which they were initially written, all of these student essays provide us with insights into their topics and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of their writers.

Celebrating Student Writing would not be possible without the continued support of those who are integral to its success. Thank you to Associate Provost Sandra Hill for continued support of the Writing Across the Curriculum program, which publishes this magazine. Special thanks to Wartyna Davis, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, whose vision and assistance in all initiatives of the Writing Across the Curriculum program are vital. And finally, thanks to the many faculty who support student writing every day in their classrooms and who nominate the best of what they see to this contest, and to the students who are willing to share their work – without your commitment we would be denied this wonderful opportunity to celebrate your writing.

Write on.

Chris Salerno
Professor of English
Director, Writing Across the Curriculum

For more information about the Celebrating Student Writing contest, refer to the back page of this magazine or visit:
https://www.wpunj.edu/cohss/departments/english/wac/index.html

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From Faith to Family: Evolving Representations of Love and Gender in The Snow Queen and Frozen

Marrissa Peters-Nurse
Course: ENG 1500
Professor: Jason Myers

Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen" and Disney's *Frozen* are two stories that have the same theme of "love saves all" but present different takes on love in general as well as gender roles for women. "The Snow Queen" puts forth a more traditional message that women should always be kind and faithful, while *Frozen* offers a more empowering take on love predicated on individualism. In Andersen's "The Snow Queen," a boy and a girl, Kai and Gerda go on a journey to stop the Evil Snow Queen after she casts an eternal blizzard over their kingdom. During this journey Kai ends up cursed by a piece of ice that hits his heart causing him only to see negativity. Gerda has to save Kai through her faith and purity, which in turn melts the ice in Kai's heart. Disney's 2013 retelling of the story presents two sisters Anna, the ordinary sister, and Elsa, the sister with ice powers, who start out as very close friends separated after an accident, where Elsa mistakenly hits Anna with an ice blast when using her powers to make it snow in what appears to be a large dining space. Then, after many years have passed, Elsa ends up exposing her powers to the entire community during her coronation to become queen, and moves the plot of the movie, as Elsa runs away and Anna goes on a quest to bring her back. When Anna finally reaches Elsa, Elsa, once again, accidently strikes Anna with her powers, but this time hitting her heart. However, it is Anna's sacrifice in the end, stepping in front of their enemy's sword, for Elsa that represents the act of true love necessary to save herself from turning to ice. Thus, Disney's *Frozen* updates Andersen's "The Snow Queen" to represent how understandings of love and gender have evolved since the 19th century, when Andersen was writing.

Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen" teaches readers the value of spiritual bonds. In the original tale, Kai becomes cruel and cold after a piece of a magic mirror strikes his heart. This causes Kai to only see the negative things in the world and he loses his ability to love. In the end, Gerda rescues Kai with an act of love, when her "hot tears, which fell on his [Kai's] bosom and pierced through to his heart and thawed that lump of ice." This act of true love is what saves him and reverses the curse. Gerda's "hot tears" show that she and Kai share a deep, emotional bond. The fact that in order for Kai to be saved the tears had to fall on his "bosom" and go to his "heart" symbolizes his and Gerda's spiritual bond, once grounded in the Christian faith. According to the academic article "'This Union of the Soul': Spiritual Friendship among Early American Protestants" by Janet Moore Lindman, "middle class Protestants forged intimate relationships based on common religious beliefs, which developed into spiritual friendships" Thus, Gerda's tears are only enough to save Kai due to this spiritual bond. Gerda herself takes no action to save Kai, everything is left up to faith and their spiritual connection, and that is what ultimately wins the day. Gerda's *faithful* love was able to bring Kai back to the light and to allow him to start loving again, thus driving away the evil forces from within him. This reflects the Christian belief that having purity and trusting in God holds power, but also aligns with Hans Christian Andersen's own more progressive views on spirituality.

In contrast, Walt Disney's *Frozen* portrays a more contemporary approach to the concept of true love, situating it within familial relations, or a bond between sisters, instead of religion. Disney has consistently employed this "act of true love" trope, yet it more traditionally came in the form of true love's kiss. In this regard, think Disney's original animated classic *Snow White (1937)* or their animated version of *Sleeping Beauty (1959)*. But of late, Disney seems to have wanted to shy away from the 20th century romantic "true love's kiss" that dominates their other animated features, and show other, nonromantic forms of true love. In *Frozen*, while visiting the trolls after being struck in the heart by

Elsa, Anna was told that only an “act of true love” can save her. Of course, perhaps due to her own cultural conditioning, Anna believes true love means a kiss and goes to find Prince Hans (1:09:05-1:09:24), but when Elsa is in danger, as noted earlier, Anna sacrifices herself to save Elsa (1:26:07-1:26:23). *Disney* first teases the idea that true love’s kiss from Prince Hans is going to be the thing that saves Anna but at the end switches it around to Anna saving herself by choosing to save Elsa instead. This suggests that Disney is plenty aware of their past history and now recognize true love’s kiss as an obsolete idea. Though, this major revision to the tale makes it completely different from Andersen’s “The Snow Queen,” where Gerda saves Kai through her faith in God and love for Kai who is a male and not family. This act of true love freezes Anna for the moment, but ultimately saves her life. Unlike Andersen’s “The Snow Queen”, this moment has no religious or spiritual elements. Anna saves the day through her bond with Elsa and this makes *Frozen* one of Disney’s first animated films to subvert the true love’s kiss trope.

Andersen’s “The Snow Queen” presents women in line with traditional 19th Century gender roles as well. “The Snow Queen” characterizes Gerda as innocent, kind, and devoted to Kai. In fact the only reason she succeeds at the end of the story is because of her emotional purity rather than her individual choices in the story. For example, in Andersen’s story it states “Poor little Gerda wept very much, and her tears fell on the rose tree,” as well as “it [power] lies in her [Gerda] heart, it lies in her being a dear innocent child.” The fact that Gerda “wept very much” as a child sells her as a vulnerable and emotional young girl which is what women were commonly seen as in the late 1800s, while men were emotionally tough and independent. The rose tree in Christianity symbolizes love, beauty, as well as spirituality, which is what Gerda is characterized to possess. According to the article "Sentimental Womanhood and Domestic Education” written by Phillida Bunkle, the middle class in the 1800s had defined womanhood “as spiritual, emotional, and dependent….” The rose defined a lot of women in the 1800s and they were expected to demonstrate those exact characteristics. The idea that “it [Gerda’s strength] lies in her being an innocent child” is another allusion to the Chritian belief that innocence = purity. This reinforces the historical expectation that women have to be gentle and pure.

In contrast, Disney’s *Frozen* portrays women in a more contemporary fashion. *Frozen* portrays women as complex beings who yearn for freedom and identity, especially through Elsa. After Elsa accidentally exposes her powers in front of everyone, she runs away to the mountains and expresses herself for the first time since she was a child. During her iconic song, Elsa states “...Let it go can’t hold it back anymore… I don’t care what they’re going to say…,” (32:11-32:16). The fact that Elsa seeks to “let it go” and that she “can’t hold it back anymore” means that Elsa can no longer hold back her feelings of wanting to be free, of wanting to find herself and be who she is, which is different from gendered norms during Andersen’s time, when women weren’t really encouraged to be independent in this fashion. Instead, women were encouraged to be faithful to men and God, as is captured within Gerda’s characterization and her actions. When Elsa says “I don’t care what they’re going to say,” she is looking to let go of all of her fears that society won’t accept her for who she is and, instead, finds her individuality. This, again, is something completely different from women from Andersen’s time, when women were encouraged to bow their heads and aligning with a rather limited and rigid set of gendered expectations: housekeeping, being a faithful wife, and being a “good girl.” This point is emphasized in the article “Cult of True Womanhood,”written by Jeanne Boydston: “nineteenth-century...women effortlessly directed their households and exerted a serene moral influence over their husbands and children.” This emphasizes how Elsa’s need for freedom from social expectations and self-identity is different from Gerda, who just conforms to societal expectations.

It’s important to note that Anna makes her own decisions throughout the movie *Frozen*, as well. Elsa runs away and Anna decides to go after her. Anna *chooses* to leave Hans in charge of Arendelle upon her departure; she states, “I leave prince Hans in charge” (30:30-30:35). This shows that Anna is capable of making important leadership decisions and acting on her own judgement. This is extremely important because women in Andersen’s time weren’t really allowed to make any important decisions outside of the domestic sphere; in fact, they were not often placed in positions of authority, let alone possess the power to leave someone else in charge. These differences of values in contemporary culture encourage women to be independent and

allow them to be presented as complex and complicated individuals, rather than simply focusing on remaining pure and devoted to men and God.

After decades of suffrage on behalf of women, contemporary media, and Disney's *Frozen* is just one representative, is now allowing stories to be told by and about women that present women from a variety of different vantage points. As I've argued, Disney's retelling of "The Snow Queen" has put more of a progressive spin on both how "true love" is portrayed and how gender roles are represented. Instead of women being powerful through their faith in God and their innocence, *Frozen* shows women as powerful through their decision making and the bonds that hold them together. Instead of recreating the same tired damsel-in-distress and knight-in-shining-armor dynamic, Disney's *Frozen* shows young girls that they don't need a man to save them and that true love comes in many forms, and that's, even if marginal in the grand scope of things, still progress.

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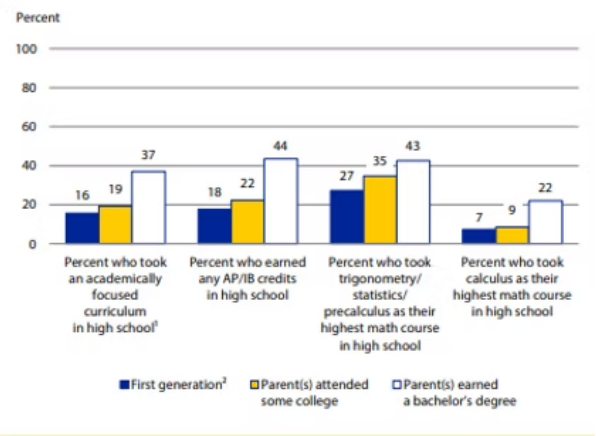
Vivian Chau

Course: ENG 1100

Professor: Jason Myers

First-generation college students are students whose parents have not earned a degree or may not have even attended higher education at all. These students face unique challenges that distinguish them from their peers. They struggle with a lack of guidance, limited expectations, and immense pressure to succeed. Universities often recognize first-generation students as symbols of diversity and inclusion. In fact, at William Paterson University (WPU), where I am currently enrolled as a second-semester freshman, there are placards around campus to highlight faculty who were the first in their respective families to graduate from college to promote the campus as an inclusive and welcoming space for all in-coming students. Yet, across the nation first-generation students frequently face significant disadvantages, lacking the consistent support and resources needed to navigate and succeed in higher education; thus, these students need additional support and resources to ensure equal opportunities for all students.

Many first-generation students aren't provided the same information as students whose parents already graduated. Because of this, these students might lack familiarity with the application process, financial aid, and the overall concept of the purpose of higher education in general, whether this is for vocational training, studies in the liberal arts, or both. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2020, "72% of first-generation students had taken no college preparatory courses in high school, compared to 43% of students whose parents attended at least some college" (qtd. in Selagea). Without college preparatory courses, first-generation students are often less competitive applicants, limiting their chances of being accepted into selective institutions. What makes these students differ from one another is the fact that one group of students has a support system that understands the process, while the other group does not. It's not that first-generation students' families aren't supportive; it's more so that many of their families don't know *how* to support them. Students whose parents attended college benefit from guidance that stems from personal experience. Their parents can offer advice on choosing majors, courses, internships, or even offer insight into professional networking. First-generation students are many times forced to navigate this new path entirely on their own, relying on scarce resources available to educate themselves enough about the process to sometimes make life-changing decisions. This certainly can limit first-generation students' potential to succeed, particularly if they have to dedicate the majority of their focus toward simply getting by.



The pressure first-generation students face can often take a significant toll on their mental health. These students typically feel a responsibility to succeed, not for themselves but for their family as well. Being the first in their family to attend college can create a fear of failure, as they feel that they are carrying their parents' dreams and expectations on their backs. When combined with academic stress, financial concerns, and personal responsibilities, the pressure can lead to anxiety, depression, as well as decreased motivation. According to a study done by the National Institutes of Health, 54.17% of first-generation students report "always/often stressful" when it comes to experiencing financial stress. On

the other hand, only 37.71% of students whose parents attended college reported the same. Furthermore, a report by the Pell Institute shows that 57% of students who had college-educated parents had help with financial aid forms, while only 27% of first-generation students received assistance from their parents when completing their forms. The financial aid process can be confusing and overwhelming; mistakes or missed deadlines can result in less financial aid, which can force students to have more debt than necessary. Without the proper guidance, these students are burdened with financial uncertainty before even beginning their higher education. It may cause a sense of self-doubt or even isolation if these students are not provided with sufficient support systems.

	All students (*N*=192,202)	FG students (*N*=27,738)	CG students (*N*=164,464)
Financial stress			
Always/often stressful	40.56%	54.17%	37.71%
Sometimes/rarely/never stressful	59.44%	45.83%	62.29%

How can we bridge the gaps between first-generation students and their peers and ensure equal opportunities for students as a whole? The responsibility of properly preparing students for success isn't solely on colleges; high schools should be the start of this preparation. There should be an increase in preparatory resources that are meant to aid students in high school. For example, these can be designated courses for students to take, rather than electives, such as art classes or computer classes. That way, students can become familiar with what is expected of them in higher education before they begin their journey. Guidance counselors could host workshops during free periods or even lunch hours that are focused on financial aid or scholarship opportunities to help students become better informed, in turn boosting their confidence. While understandably, this would increase the workload of school counselors, they are the best positioned within high schools to provide this support to students. They are already familiar with every student's academic standing and trained to guide them through the college application process. Depending on the school, the number of first-generation students might be limited, meaning small and easy-to-manage group sizes could be possible for workshops that would allow counselors to meet each student's needs. Though this could present some logistical obstacles in the onset, with the implication of more supportive resources, students can have a better grasp of what is expected from them as they prepare for higher education. They can help students understand the important steps, such as admissions, choosing schools, and applying for financial aid. This allows students who do not have someone at home who understands the college process to remain informed and become equally prepared as their peers. Students can gain confidence, be more comfortable with college, and make informed decisions about their future. Thus, even if it does require a bit more labor to get workshops such as I'm proposing off the ground, think of the impact it will have on the students who take advantage of these resources.

Though, while high schools might be able to do more to prepare first-generation students for the college experience, colleges and universities should also do their part in helping to ensure a smooth transition for these students. In this regard, colleges might host orientations that are designated for first-generation students specifically. During these orientations, universities could establish mentorship programs that pair these students with first-generation faculty members or even first-generation upperclassmen, who might offer advice and guidance. The promotion of first-generation student organizations or clubs can also provide a sense of connection and belonging for students. Being surrounded by people in similar shoes, with similar experiences, can help first-generation students build confidence as well as feel engaged with and part of the campus community.

As noted earlier, I am currently a student at William Paterson University, where a majority of our demographic comes from diverse backgrounds. Of our undergraduate student population, 40% are first-generation, 60% are students of color. Here on campus, we have many clubs that students can join that could represent their culture, beliefs, or even religion. We even have a designated first-generation club as well as many programs specifically designed to aid first-generation students. For example, one of the programs we have is called the TRiO Student Support Services. It is a federally funded program that provides free support for first-generation, low-income, and/or students with disabilities. Specifically, it aids with academic support, course planning and registration guidance, financial aid assistance, financial literacy, career and graduate school preparation, transfer guidance, mentoring/individualized success planning, as well as

access to special workshops, resources, and enrichment opportunities. Proof of success lies within the CollegeNet Social Mobility Index, which measures the extent to which a college educates economically disadvantaged students. The index includes variables such as economic background, tuition, graduation rate, and early career salary. William Paterson currently ranks at number 54 out of 1205 institutions, placing us in the top 4.5% nationwide. This is an example of an institution taking recognition in their demographics and providing resources to ensure that they succeed.

The struggles of first-generation students are often overlooked, even if the population is sometimes ostensibly acknowledged and celebrated as symbols of diversity on college campuses.Though, if more high schools and institutions of higher educations implemented programs, such as the ones for which I have advocated here, they could level the playing field for all students, ensuring that those who need additional resources are seen and supported. As a first-generation student myself, I know first hand how difficult the move from into academic life can be. That said, I am here, pushing forward, getting by, and holding onto the hope that my labors will not only forge a path for my own success but, perhaps, also open doors for other students like me, students who may not have even known to knock.

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My Testimonio

Carolina Castillo

Course: LAS 3360

Professor: Lillian Milanés

It wasn't until I was in college that I learned about the reality of most social systems and how they disappoint and turn their backs on the minorities and lower class. Specifically in the education department, I have found out that one of my personal experiences is a commonly shared experience that many other Latinx children have gone through. I grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood in the early 2000's where there were about 3 Hispanic children in my grade. My Mother and Father spoke to me only in Spanish as a little girl, and my sisters would talk to me in English, but I preferred to speak in Spanish as a girl. When it was time for me to go to kindergarten, I didn't know that speaking Spanish was not common in my town.

I never even realized that a simple factor as my name, would cause a commotion on my first day. When it was time for every child to introduce themselves on the first day, I introduced myself as my parents had taught me. When my teacher asked me what my name was, I responded the only way I knew, Carolina, with the slight tongue roll on the 'r'. My teacher, taken by surprise, had to ask me three times what my name was and pronounced it as karo-leena, a way I have never heard my name pronounced. The little girl I was at the time was so embarrassed afterwards, I didn't even try to correct her or any other teacher when it came to my name.

Out of the 3 Hispanic kids in the classroom, another child and I, who ended up becoming close friends, were told we needed to take an ESL class while the other children were learning the English curriculum of the day. Due to the small portion of Hispanic/ Latinx children in the school, I now realize there was no set curriculum or lessons, or even a proper classroom for these students mandated to take the ESL classes. While my peers were learning about proper grammar or basic literacy skills, my friend and I were in a small office room learning from flashcards for the first half of the lesson, then being able to play Candyland for the rest of the class time.

It wasn't until I was older, going into Middle School and High School, that I finally felt the lack of preparation that my other white peers were not experiencing. While everyone was perfecting their writing skills, I was struggling with the basics of sentence structures, like subject-verb or subject-verb-object. I was lucky, I went to a well-funded school that had great teachers who cared for their students and cared to help them individually, even if we were all at different starting points. I later learned that this was a common experience for minority children who were pushed along through school even if it was at a barley passing level we were kind of pushed aside and moved along so we wouldn't get left behind or now realizing, so that the school didn't have to explain themselves for the two or three children who were not receiving the same level of education as the rest of our peers. It's not only the two or three children who were affected, but nearly hundreds, maybe even thousands of children who experienced this form of negligence from the educational system that was supposed to support us, but instead pushed us aside.

Mi Testimonio

Ashley C. Castillo

Course: LAS 3360

Professor: Lillian Milanés

Today, I speak not only for myself, but also for many other young people who are fighting to maintain their goals, survival, and the weight of silence. My narrative is one of God, dance, family, love, betrayal, friendship, and resilience, but it also symbolizes what so many others hold within themselves.

Dance has always been at the heart of my life. When words failed me, dance gave me a language when words failed me. Dance allowed me to breathe through grief, discover joy in rhythm, and connect with something bigger than myself. However, dance, like many other loves, is not always encouraged by those around us or families. Too often, we are told to prioritize security over ambitions and suppress the artist within us in favor of "practical" futures. My family didn't understand what dance meant to me, and their lack of support inflicted a wound that I'm still carrying. At the same time, I was betrayed by someone I completely trusted, a choreographer whose talent was appreciated and respected. He chose dishonesty and betrayal, which reminded me of how power can be abused, and how women in creative environments often feel violated, rejected, or left to rebuild themselves in quiet. Yet here I am studying to become the first doctor of my family while also studying to have PR/Marketing degree with a concentration in Pre-Med.

My story has also been shaped by heartbreak, not from another dancer, but from someone I love who is a doctor. His life became consumed by his profession, and while he claimed to love me, his actions betrayed distance, absence, and the sad truth that I was not a priority. I realized what it meant to give and not receive, as well as to believe in unfulfilled promises. Many women, many lovers, have felt the same ache being dedicated to someone whose career or solitude took priority over love. By naming this, I refuse to allow shame or silence to bury my story. This is not just my pain, but the pain of countless others who feel invisible in relationships where they should be valued. Besides neglect, he betrayed me by cheating on me with another doctor. The person I trusted the most chose dishonesty over commitment, reminding me of how power and ego can be abused, and how closeness can be taken for granted. Many women, many partners, have experienced the pain of committing their heart to someone who did not honor it, of finding that love was unable to shield them from betrayal. Although that woman is now engaged with her former boyfriend of 11 years it breaks my heart and makes me wonder how she can still end in happiness while I'm still suffering from this betrayal. But, despite my heartbreak, I turned to God. In prayer, I am slowly gaining the strength to recall that my worth comes from the love of my Creator, not the love of another person. God's faithfulness showed me that betrayal cannot take away my value.

Yet probably the hardest ache of all comes from my best friend, my sister in Christ, who is battling stage four cancer. Just last Sunday, I stood with her as she celebrated her wedding, being her maid of honor and seeing how stunning she looked in her gown and filled with love and courage despite the weight of her battle with cancer. It was one of the most beautiful and painful moments of my life to witness her choose joy and love in the face of suffering, to see her display to everyone in that room what it is to live completely even when tomorrow is uncertain. Her battle is not her own. It belongs to every family, friend, and community that has ever witnessed someone they care about face a sickness that is not fair. And still, through her, I see the power of faith. I watch how God gives her strength when her body is weak, and how His love is evident in the prayers, laughter, and hope we hold onto. She reminds me that faith is not the absence of grief, but rather the ability to face it with love.

Mental health is another part of my journey. Behind the passion for dance, the pain of betrayal, and the sadness of my best friend is the reality of striving to remain grounded. Many of us suffer quietly, burdened by fear, grief, or constant desire to prove ourselves. But I think God will never abandon us.

Even in the silence, He listens. He provides even when we are struggling. My testimonio is not only an effort to end the silence, but also a declaration that healing is possible when we rely on our faith and one another. It is important that we heal ourselves. Our healing is important.

When everything ended, I felt like I had lost a piece of myself that I didn't know how to live without. I kept repeating memories in my thoughts, wondering where I went wrong and whether he missed me as much as I missed him. There were nights I couldn't sleep through, mornings I didn't even have an appetite, and days when I felt like I was going through the paces. I went from 115 lbs. to 101. I showed up for work, dancing, and everyone else but not for me. It felt as if I was physically present, but my heart was still trapped in a version of the past that no longer existed. As my mom would say “tu te tienes que dar un valor y no te pierdas por un hombre que no te supo querer”.

My mother noticed before I even said anything. Dominican mothers always do or (Hispanic mothers). She’d walk into my room, see me lying in bed too quiet, and say, “Ay no, levántate. Que tu ta fea para la foto tú no te vas a morir por un hombre.” Even though she said it with that typical mix of sass and love, I could tell she meant it. She’d follow it with something like, “Ponte bonita, come tu comida, y sigue pa’lante. Que algun dia Dios te vas a mandar un hombre de verdad” I’d laugh, even with tears in my eyes, because that’s how Dominican moms heal you with food, humor, and tough love.

I decided to start therapy shortly after that. What I love about this therapist is how it is faith driven, I'm not going to lie: I was nervous. I didn't know how to open up without crying or apologizing for my emotions. But I realized I couldn't keep pretending I was fine. My therapist helped me understand that healing isn't about being "over it"; it's about learning how to live with what happened while remaining at peace. He reassured me that my emotions weren't exaggerated, that I wasn't insane for loving so strongly, and that it's good to have bad days even after deciding to move forward.

Little by little I am starting to do things for myself again. Going to the gym even when exhausted, dancing again, spending time with people who make me laugh, and simply breathing without guilt. Some days I still feel sad, but I began to realize that feeling sad was not a sign of weakness. It means I cared, loved, and I am human.

Every daughter, Dominican or not, has heard their mother say, "Eso no era para ti, Dios tiene algo mejor." Even though I would roll my eyes, I now see she was correct. Healing, therapy, and community are every type of resilience.

My mental health began to hit me in the middle of it all. On certain days, it wasn't just about him; it was about everything I'd been keeping inside, acting normal while my thoughts seemed to be racing. Depression would whisper that I wasn't enough; anxiety would creep in at random times, and I had no idea how to stop it. Even on the days I didn't think I deserved them. Journaling, therapy, and prayer became my support systems. I began practicing polite self-talk, sitting with my emotions rather than avoiding them, and putting myself first.

Then there’s my best friend. She's been fighting cancer, and some days, watching her fight made my heartbreak seem small. But it also reminded me how fragile and yet valuable life is. Some days, I cried with her, prayed with her, or simply held her hand, and realized that being there for her, loving her through her pain, was teaching me about strength I had no idea I had. It taught me that even when life is difficult, hope and love can overcome fear. I've sat with her during treatments, held her hand when fear crept in, and cried with her when everything felt too heavy. But I've also laughed with her, celebrated small victories, and witnessed her find joy even in the most difficult circumstances. She fights not only for herself, but also for the people she loves, for the future, and for life itself.

Her fighting taught me about resilience in its most raw and pure form. I've seen her refuse to give in to fear, choosing hope even when her body is weak and tired. And as I watched her, I realized that healing is more than just getting over heartbreak; it's about showing up, being present, and embracing the courage you didn't know you had. Her strength inspired me to begin advocating for myself again, to rediscover my own resilience, and to recognize that life is fragile, beautiful, and well worth the effort. I love her so so much and I am so grateful God brought us together and became the bestest of friends.

Faith became my anchor. I prayed like never before, not out of habit or desperation, but on with intention. God began showing me aspects of myself that I had never knew about myself, strength I didn't

realize I still had, and peace I thought I had lost. My days slowly stopped feeling like empty routines and began to feel like steps toward reclaiming my life.

Healing isn't linear. Some days I felt unstoppable, while others I cried in the shower, hoping no one would hear. Even during the most difficult times, I reminded myself, "This is only temporary. This is not the end. "This is the becoming."

Through heartbreak, personal struggles. and witnessing my best friend fight for her life, I've learned that healing is more than just within. It's about caring for yourself, finding strength in vulnerability, and loving fiercely even when it hurts. I may have lost pieces of myself, but I'm slowly reclaiming them, guided by faith, hope, and love. And each time I witness my best friend smiling, laughing, or overcoming another day of her journey, I am reminded that life is precious, that hope is genuine, and that strength isn't about never falling but rather about rising every time, together. Not only did she help me get through college, but she also showed me that, with bravery, love, and faith leading the way, I can succeed even in the face of hardship.

No me Quiero ir de aqui

Bianca Serrano
Course: LAS 3360
Professor: Lillian Milanés

What does “No me Quiero ir de aqui” mean? It is a statement of empowerment, resistance, and loss. It is the mixture of mourning and pain because no matter how hard you try and want to, you cannot go back to what was lost. What does “No Me Quiero Ir De Aqui” mean? It means that you will not leave unless you are forced to because the land that surrounds you is a part of you and your being, it is what makes you, you. “No me quiero ir de aqui” directly translates to I don’t want to leave here, now an anthem for various diasporas around the world this one line perfectly encapsulates the feelings of Puerto Ricans that have had to leave the island.

Now while I was not born on the island of Puerto Rico I was raised by my parents to never forget who you are and where those before you came from. Never did I forget I was Puerto Rican. Like most children born in the diaspora I was shy to speak Spanish, but that didn’t stop my father or grandmother. Around my grandmother it was Spanish only she made that the language that raised her would also raise me. Although I didn’t have all the words together and often messed up she always encouraged me to speak Spanish. She let me take my time and corrected my grammar when I was unsure. Now that I’m older I will always think that I have her to thank for never being left out. Thanks to her I always understood Spanish and knew I should never be afraid to speak it. My father was the one who ensured that salsa, the rhythms, moves, music, the meaning of the lyrics, the anthems, and the language that fueled it was molded into my molecules. Like my linguistic skills my dancing was far from island perfect but thanks to my father my love of Borinquen bloomed. He is the reason I am the Puerto Rican I am today and the reason that “No me Queiro Ir de Aqui” resonates so deeply with me. He is the reason I learned my history and the reason I know that it is my duty to never forget it. Both my father and grandmother were born on the island of Puerto Rico and had to live through leaving their homeland behind. They were not the first and what breaks my heart is they won’t be the last to leave Puerto Rico.

The United States true feelings towards Puerto Rico were unabashedly displayed for the world to see when in 2017 when Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico and killed over 4,654 people, demolished power grids to pieces, destroyed hundreds of hospitals, stopped water supply, and halted aid to the island. The United States instead of sending supplies and manpower to its oldest colony and home to 3 million of its citizens, sent a humiliation ritual to the capital of San Juan. With the highest honor being the President of the United States president throwing three pointers of paper towels to babies sleeping in storage cartons in the streets. Its fate a global game and now Puerto Rican lives have been left to suffer with no care or help from anyone. The United States has never cared about Puerto Rico and since the day a Spaniard step touched Puerto Rican soil Borinken has never known peace.

No story can be told as a whole without giving emphasis to the history that pushed a person to leave. Puerto Rico is a small island 100 by 35 miles and currently the population stands at lower than 3.1 million people which to compare is roughly 5 million less than the population of New York City which is over 8 million. Puerto Rico or the true Taino name of Borinken has never had a true home. Starting all the way back from what caused my family to come to New York, Puerto Rico and its people have been continuously sucked dry of freedoms since the early 1900s. The United States runs the Puerto Rican economy and the freedoms on the island. Its people have been subjected to imperialist colonization for centuries under numerous regimes. From Ferdinand to the White House Puerto Rico has never seen freedom. African, Taino, and Spaniard blood is what makes a Puerto Rican whole, one cannot be without the other, Puerto Ricans are products of the colonialism that crucified them. In modern history under the United States’ thumb Puerto Rico has suffered numerous shocks to their economy,

environment, and ecosystems. Within the 21st century alone the United States has essentially signed Puerto Rico's death certificate. The island has historically been unable to control their own trade and ports due to the Jones Act but the US has taken things further and taken over the economy down to every penny. To fastrack through history, in 2016 the United States began PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight and Economic Stability Act) the island's economic oversight board, a nail in the coffin that the Puerto Rico cannot manage their own issues. Created as a response to the rising debt of the island (which was due to economic instability caused by the United States) PROMSA was implemented as an excuse to further United States interests in Puerto Rico. The Untied States had no intention of helping Puerto Rico. Those on this committee are appointed by the president of the United States and decide how finances are distributed and used throughout the island.

Socialist movements erupted in Puerto Rico something that hadn't been seen since the 1940s-60s when the FBI and CIA first began establishing surveillance on independence groups around the island. But for the first time it was the island as a whole that felt empowered to do more. In the summer of 2019, the people rallied together in response to political instability.

Hundreds of thousands of people flooded San Juan from miles away marching, for days on end to protest the corrupt government on the island. They succeed and removed the corrupt governor from office dragging his portrait through the streets of Viejo San Juan. In 2024 when there were reelections, again the people did not keep quiet. They turned out in historic support for a candidate that supported independence. For months on end marches were held in support, highways shut down for caravans, concert halls were used for rallies. When election day arrived, there were lines at polling places for miles people were going to make sure their voice would be heard. But, at the end of the day, the Puerto Rican government is run by people who work for personal interests and corporations that do not benefit their own people. Although there was overwhelming evidence that the independent candidate had won the election, Puerto Rico's republican and highly conservative party is the one who is holding office today.

Now in its worst hour Puerto Rico will see a reimagining of what it means to be Boricua (name that some Puerto Rican's use to refer to themselves, comes from Borinken the original Taino name of the island). In the 8 years that have passed since Hurricane Maria Puerto Rico has seen the largest emigration in recent history with most of its population leaving to the very place who suffocated them the most, the United States. Since Hurricane Maria the Puerto Rican diaspora population in the mainland United States has overtaken the number of Puerto Ricans on the island. After centuries of being demolished and left to decay the Puerto Rican infrastructure finally collapsed after being hit by a category 5 Hurricane Maria leaving its population with no other choice but to relocate.

Hurricane Maria was not just a natural disaster, it was a breaking point. For Puerto Rico, it marked the moment when neglect became impossible to ignore and survival became a daily act of resistance. Hurricane Maria did more than destroy infrastructure it unraveled the social fabric of Puerto Rico. When the storm passed, what remained was not only physical devastation, but the collective emotional rupture that reshaped how people related to one another, to their island, and to the idea of home itself. Entire communities were forced into survival mode for months years on end, where normal life was suspended indefinitely. Schools were closed indefinitely, hospitals struggled to function without light, food was scarce for weeks, no water, people's homes destroyed, babies sleeping in drawers as cribs. The storm stripped away any illusion of stability and replaced it with this ongoing daily uncertainty that has seeped into every aspect of life.

Socially, Maria completely transformed the meaning of community. With the collapse of the little government systems that are on the island and the practically nonexistent and insulting federal response, Puerto Ricans were left to depend on one another in ways that were both beautiful and devastating. Neighbors became lifelines and communities, families pooled resources. By sharing generators, food and water, tending to children and elders, the rebuild and keeping everyone safe. Mutual aid was not optional it was the only way forward. Emotionally, the storm introduced a pervasive sense of fear and mourning that did has not faded with time.

Puerto Ricans grieve every day not only the lives lost, but the loss of certainty, safety, and trust. The darkness after Maria was more than the absence of electricity it was the emotional weight and the fear of not knowing when help would arrive or if it would arrive at all. This collective anxiety embedded itself into the island's psyche and created not only a resilience but a trauma that continues to resurface with every storm warning and power outage.

Migration after Maria was intense and came in waves. The fractured futures were now nonexistent and people left with little warning or preparation. Goodbyes were rushed and indefinite. The diaspora expanded not through choice, but through necessity only deepening the emotional divide between those who remained and those who were forced to leave. For many Puerto Ricans, loving the island became inseparable from missing it.

It was this turmoil that inspired Bad Bunny's album "Debi Tirar Mas Fotos". The term No Me Queiro Ir de aqui nor the feelings that the album emit are singular to Hurricane Maria and the tragedies that followed its victims. Puerto Ricans been facing evictions from their island since 1898, but it was Hurricane Maria that fueled the social revolution that Bad Bunny managed to harness in his album. For the first time in modern history the destruction and loss on the island was able to be mainstreamed for everyone to see and never forget. This climate created a renewed sense of patriotism on the island, a fervor to reclaim and protect the island of Borkinen against colonialism.

Somehow Bad Bunny's album was able to perfectly capture all this history and sentiment into in a little over an hour-long love letter to Puerto Rico and its people near and far. Taken as a whole Debi Tirar Mas Fotos is more than its name suggest its project defined by an island and that refuses to be defined by crisis or absence. Each track captures a different corner of that reality from the parties and to the heartbreak from the migrations and returns to the island every track comes together to form a single message that staying matters. It is an insistence that Puerto Rico is worth holding onto, no matter where the journey leads. At the heart the album starts by blending Bomba, Plena, Salsa, Merengue, and Reggaeton all into a delicious medley of songs that individually highlight Puerto Rican power. The title track Debi Tirar Mas Fotos pleads with its listeners to never forget where they came from. He talks about how much things change over time and that you can never go back and how you should not take anything for granted. To, like the song says, always take phots and commerate the present because one day without realizing you'll wake up realize you can't go back and relive this time. Some of the songs that you would overlook of their importance to the album like Velda or EoO go deeper than superficial tracks.

The mere fact that these songs are in existence and charting are in defiance to standards that reggaeton perreo and songs in Spanish are unable to gain global attention.

Nuevayol the opening track connects across the ocean to the Puerto Rican communities of New York and beyond. The production blends the original salsa of Puerto Rican legends El Gran Combo and solidifies in the albums opening cords that Bad Bunny is committed to staying dedicated to his history. With the classic salsa horns mixed with modern trap the song itself is a mirror of the cultural bridges built by generations of migrants. Bad Bunny talks about ambition and money but the nostalgia in the delivery ov it all if you dig deeper suggests a deeper story.

Even as the music celebrates the mobility of his people it carries the ache that distance a constant reminder that leaving the island often comes at a cost.

With another new classic in Pitorro de Coco Bad Bunny turns heartbroken and the mood softens. Named for a homemade Puerto Rican rum, this track draws on classic Puerto Rican folk rhythms this track feels like its name with a taste of family gatherings, holiday parties, and the kind of small traditions that bind a community together when you're heartbroken. Here the idea of staying is not political anymore but now something personal. Bad Bunny understands the importance of every track and utilizes every second of that he has your attention captured to highlight Puerto Rico and makes sure this album was layered in Puerto Rican history and pride.

The features on Debi Tirar Mas Fotos play a crucial role in deepening the album's connection to Puerto Rico and expanding its emotional range. Rather than stacking the tracklist with big-name international stars for pure chart power, Bad Bunny turns to collaborators whose voices root the project in the island's musical lineage. Omar Courtz and Dei V, highlight rising dyoung reggaeton artists on the island. Weltita is one of the favorite features on the

island and the band Chuwi is getting long deserved international attention. Their presence and others reinforce the album's overall sense of community between those and the island and the diaspora and shows that it isn't just Bad Bunny speaking about Puerto Rico, but a chorus of artists embodying the island's various soundscapes. Each feature feels intentional and valuable as if Bad Bunny is sharing the mic with people who carry different pieces of Puerto Rican identity, from the old-school rhythms of the streets that people will remember to the evolving sound of global urbano music that is beginning to solidify its name. Even when the lyrics are playful or romantic the act of collaboration itself becomes political a refusal to isolate Puerto Rican music from its roots or from the people still shaping it.

For me, "No me quiero ir de aquí" is not just a lyric, a slogan, or a political statement it is a feeling that has followed me my entire life, even before I had the words to name it. It is the quiet ache of loving a place that raised you through other people's memories. It is the tension of belonging to an island that lives in your body but not always beneath your feet. Growing up in the diaspora means learning early on that love and distance can exist at the same time, and that sometimes the deepest attachments are the ones shaped by absence.

I was taught to love Puerto Rico as something sacred something that lived inside me and was my pride and joy. Being Boricua was being Bianca. It lived in the music playing through the house and in the thick distinct Puerto Rican Spanish spoken with patience and correction so I could learn. In the spices of the foods especially our sofrito and adobo, in the pride my father carried everywhere always and the tenderness my grandmother showed when she made sure I never felt ashamed of my language. But that love was also accompanied by a quiet understanding that Puerto Rico was a place people left. That leaving was normal and leaving was survival.

Even when no one said it directly, I understood that staying was not always an option.

Being on the island for Bad Bunny's residency felt heavier and more meaningful than I expected. "No me quiero ir de aquí" was embodied everywhere in every person, it was shouted, sung, cried, and felt by people who had lived its consequences in different ways.What made that moment overwhelming was the shared understanding in the crowd. Everyone there knew what it meant to leave or to fear leaving. Some had never left the island and were fighting to remain.

Others, like me, had returned from lives built elsewhere, from cities shaped by migration and necessity. There were accents from New York, Texas, Chicago, and beyond, blending seamlessly with voices, accents, and slang rooted on the island. In that space, the diaspora did not feel like a fractured people, it felt like proof of endurance. Showing the world we are here still, and we will be loud and be acknowledged! Watching him center Puerto Rico so unapologetically made me feel heard and understood in a way I didn't know I had been needing. It affirmed something I had struggled to articulate for years, that Puerto Rican identity does not diminish with distance, and that honoring where you come from is not a limitation but a strength. His refusal to separate success from his cultural responsibility resonated deeply with me, because it mirrored the lessons my family instilled in me growing up.

Experiencing Debí Tirar Más Fotos live on the island transformed the album from something I listened to into something I carried. The songs felt heavier there more potent the energy different the emotions were felt and lived in the people were singing their own stories. Lyrics about memory, change, loss, and love landed differently when sung on the land that inspired them. I felt the weight of every photograph not taken or the few we had that we treasured, every moment that passed without realizing its importance that would never be felt again. The album made me confront how fragile access to Puerto Rico truly is, and how easy it is to assume there will always be time to return. In that space, "No me quiero ir de aquí" became a promise I made to myself. Not necessarily a promise of permanence, but a promise of intention. A promise to return when I can, to remember when I cannot, and to speak Puerto Rico into every space I occupy. Staying, I realized, does not only mean physical presence. It means refusing erasure. It means choosing to remember history even when it is painful. It means carrying culture forward even when distance makes it harder.

For Puerto Ricans as a whole, moments like this are powerful because they allow us to exist outside of crisis. We are so often framed through disaster, debt, and displacement that collective joy becomes radical. To gather in Puerto Rico to celebrate Puerto Rican

identity, on our own terms, is like an act of resistance. It was proof that despite colonial control, despite neglect, despite migration, Puerto Rico is still creating, still dreaming, and still insisting on its right to exist fully.When I think about my family, my father and grandmother, about what they lost when they left and what they fought to preserve, I understand that my relationship to Puerto Rico is part of a larger family. I am not separate from their story I am simply an extension of it. Being there reminded me that even if I do not live on the island, the island lives in me. And that connection carries responsibility. “Boricua Aunque Naciera En La Luna!”

“No me quiero ir de aquí” means that I will never allow Puerto Rico to become distant or abstract in my life. It means honoring where I come from, telling these stories, and refusing to let silence replace memory. It means understanding that staying can look many different ways but it always begins with love and remembrance. The power of the album only deepens when set against Bad Bunny’s powerful and historic residency in San Juan. Over multiple days, weeks, and months, millions of fans flooded the island, many of which being, along with myself being the diaspora who flew back for the show. Everyone filled the Coliseo José Miguel Agrelot, or El Choliseo, to feel the power of this album for themselves. In those moments, the quiet power of staying behind became a communal chant. For islanders, it was a celebration of resilience and proof that Puerto Rico can host the world on its own terms. For those returning from as far as Spain or as close as Orlando, it was a temporary homecoming, a chance to return to Puerto Rican soil and feel, if only for a night as if that they never truly left.

Ecuatoriana-Americana

Daniela Pelaez

Course: LAS 3360

Professor: Lillian Milanés

"Estado de excepción" I read, "exception" I thought to myself, what exactly is that even supposed to mean? I watched the tv in confusion, I didn't even know what that meant, "are we excepting something" I thought. "Estado de emergencia" My cousin looked at me. My face changed, "state of emergency? For what?" Questions raced through my head as I tried coming up with every single possibility as to why exactly Ecuador is in a state of emergency. As the news played, we ended up seeing how an infamous gang (or cartel) leader escaped prison, they explained how he bribed two police officers in exchange for his freedom. "What does that mean for us?" I thought, would there be rules? Would I have to go home early? What if I can't go home at all? Endless questions filled my mind as I saw how everyone's faces were filled with shock and concern. "Ha sucedido esto antes?" " I asked, maybe that's why they're so shocked. This has probably never happened before, hopefully. They all shook their head, even my grandmother. That scared me, it made me worry more than I would've liked to admit. I didn't want to get more anxious, so I opted to go into my room and do my own research. "11pm curfew" I exclaimed, this must be more serious than I thought, if this is nationwide, seeing as the gang leader could be anywhere right now. It was just a matter of where he was, and what he was going to do.

The next day only solidified why the country was in a state of emergency. "TC", a famous channel in Ecuadorian television was raided with "delincuentes", they threated everyone on set and even strapped a "collar" to a guy's neck. Everyone in my family watched in shock, this was completely unseen before, this was something people never even thought of happening. They were eventually caught and arrested but the magnitude of the situation changed how serious this situation became. As I walked past people in the streets, I heard talks of Ecuador becoming "El nuevo El Salvador", and "Ya estamos en los peores". "It can't be that bad" I thought, I tried keeping a positive note. Nothing's going to happen here, I had to go back home anyways. I will be able to go back home, right? Those questions racked through my mind, I didn't understand why this was happening, this wasn't the same Ecuador I visited when I was a kid. The next day wasn't any better. I was awakened by a loud boom, it shook my house and made my cat start acting crazy. I saw my aunt race upstairs to check on my grandma, neighbors came outside, some without their shoes. I saw some of my cousin's race to my house and ask me what happened. I kind of just gave them the "I just woke up" face. We heard police sirens echo through the barrio, ambulances racing through the streets. As we waited for news, we all started talking, in a weird way, tragedy brings people together. We later learned that a car exploded near a gas station, no one died, but people were injured. The whole barrio was terrified, we never had something like this before, although we're ashamed to admit, stabbings were seen as "normal" here, but a car exploding, that's something entirely different. After this fiasco, military presence was increased, I saw two, three, even four military tanks roaming the streets after the incident, excessive, yes, but it was necessary.

"What do you mean our flights canceled" I exclaimed to the airport employee, "I have to go home, what do you mean I have to stay here" I thought. "Pilots are refusing to fly, they're too scared" the employee said after another employee whispered in his ear. "I'm a U.S citizen, call the military or something" I wanted to say this, but after thinking about that statement, I realized how much of a privileged take this is. I have the ability to come and go as I please, I have the ability to be "rescued" if something happens here. The people who live here, they don't get that privilege. "Que va pasar con nosotros" a. lady behind me asked, all of us were anxious for a response. Does this mean that we have to stay here ? Where would we even stay ?

A hotel was the answer to these questions. We all patiently waited for our free hotel and meal ticket, we were then loaded onto busses and sent to a hotel

nearby. I got to talk to a lady sat next to me, she explained to me how she's been here for almost two months now and she's just anxious to get home. "Tengo que ir a trabajar" was her most used phrase when she spoke to me. I asked some questions about her life, her kids, and then I finally asked what she thought of this whole state of emergency situation. "Estamos en los peores momentos" she said, she didn't look up to me as she explained her side, for her, someone who was born and raised in Ecuador and has never experienced something like this, it's life-changing, and to be in the middle of all this chaos is even worse because you can't help. She asked if I was born here (Ecuador) or over there, (The U.S) I answered the U.S, she asked to see my passport, and I showed it to her. She handled the object with such care it seemed like she was holding a sacred item. "Esto es mi sueno" she exclaimed. This was also a moment of realization for me, the privilege I have to come and go as I please, the privilege to be in the U.S without having to worry about ICE. The lady later told me that I'm one of the only people on this flight to have a "blue" passport, everyone else has an Ecuadorian passport. That didn't surprise me a lot, on my flight here, I was also one of the only people there with a "blue" passport, I wasn't treated differently, but I would notice that a lot of people would stare whenever I walked by, most of them had the most condescending looks in their eyes. For the first time in a while, I felt ashamed to be a U.S citizen, I may not be an Ecuadorian citizen, but I'm still Ecuadorian.

For a 5-star hotel, the food here was horrible. No regular water, just lemonade or cucumber water. I didn't complain though, we were safe and that's all that mattered. I got to talking to some of the people on my flight, I asked about their concerns and worries, the only thing they asked me was "How's New York", and "Your Spanish is so good for an American". I tried to not let it get to me, so I only focused on the questions regarding how certain places were. "Estoy es el nuevo El Salvador" was a phrase I heard continuously when I was there. So, this mentality of Ecuador becoming the new El Salvador wasn't just a little rumor that I hard in my grandparent's town, it was something that was becoming nationwide. The president is doing good, the president is doing bad, I want the old president back, etc. Are just a few of the many things I heard there, I just listened. Realistically speaking, what could I say ? I wasn't well versed in any of the politics or what was happening, I only knew the big stuff, so as I heard more and more people talking. I gained more information, but I still listened, these people were either raised here or still live here. I've only ever "lived" here for 3 months, that's nothing compared to these people. So, I opted to listen and gain more knowledge.

"So, what's going to happen to you" my cousin asked me as I looked out my hotel window. I thought about it for a moment, what is going to happen to me, what's going to happen to Ecuador, is there anything I can do to help myself ?! I'm helpless in this situation. I'm stranded in an amazing but also very dangerous (for the moment) country, I'm miles away from my parents in a country that is currently going to war with its criminals. "No idea" I stated before throwing myself onto the bed. "Ha habido múltiples informes de delitos, por favor permanezcan dentro de sus casas" the tv spoke as I turned to face live footage of police arresting criminals, "it says here that schools been canceled over there" I heard as I straighten my posture to better focus on the news report. This piqued my interest as I have yet to see any news reports about today, "yea, my cousin said that they're having online school now. I think for like a week or something like that" I answered, most of the criminals that were being arrested, most of them looked to be the same age as me. 'What happened that made or forced them into this lifestyle' I thought. Soon after my cousin hung up, I just watched TV, reading and hearing about what happened today in different parts of the nation, it eventually became too much for me, the reports of people getting killed or robbed, and places even being bombed. I went downstairs- to the lobby- and opted to just watch the hotel as it is, I was curious and wanted to explore but at a time like this where you don't know who or what is dangerous, you choose to do the safest thing. So that's exactly what I did.

Soon enough, multiple people from my flight came down and we all started talking. I was the only one there (out of a group of abut 5-10 people) who was born and raised in the US, I kind of felt like an outcast in the way, like yes. I'm still Ecuadorian, but I can't relate to these people when they start talking about how their lives were like in Ecuador as a kid, I have very few memories of me in Ecuador as a kid, and it's even worse when I'm not so confident in my Spanish. Overall, it was still a nice experience, I managed to get through conversations without panicking and messing up, many people in the group actually taught

me a few words I never even knew existed. I asked some feedback about certain topics I wanted to talk about or had any interest in. I also got to talk about how life is like in the US, how schools are, and how my college life is going. Many people there congratulated me and praised me for continuing my studies, I had multiple people tell me how they wanted to stay in school but had to go to the US. Although my education is for myself and myself only, I like to think about this as a steppingstone and as an honor for the people who weren't able to do what I did, and to the people who gave me this opportunity. In the midst of all this happiness and tranquility, reality set in as we heard reports of shootings near the hotel, we were ordered to go back to our rooms and remain there until further notice. Just when things were starting to look just a little better too, we're forced to remain in the shackles of our hotel rooms.

'Will this country ever be safe again' I thought as I boarded the plane, ready to leave this scary situation, but also having to unfortunately leave the people I love and cherish behind without knowing if they'll be safe or not. But at least I'm okay, at least I'm safe, right? "Hay, mi Hermoso tierra" I heard the person next to me say as they looked out the window, "que te paso" he finished off, shaking his head as he began to read his book. I ask myself that question countless times.

"I Am a Sponge"

Chris Mejia

Course: LAS 3360

Professor: Lillian Milanés

When it comes to my cultural identity, I feel as though I've just met myself. Constant relocation has allowed me to not only diversify my identity but dilute it as well. However, unwieldy, cumbersome questions constantly crashed and clanged within my mind.

"Who am I?".

"Why can I relate to everything and nothing at the same time?"

Although I am grateful to be from everywhere, I can't help but feel that I belong nowhere.

Being born in Miami, Florida, to a Cuban-Spanish mother and a Salvadoran father, my Latin surroundings were short-lived as I was eventually uprooted and planted in Pensacola, Florida; "The Deep South". Living in a military family instills the notion that adaptation is necessary to survive. However, my roots were unable to grab hold of the marshy ground that surrounded me. After finally acclimating to the soft Floridian sun, I was eventually thrown around once more into the hustle and bustle of the DMV. The constant need to survive kept us nomadic and left me feeling more and more disconnected with who I felt I needed to be. Once again, I am now a foreigner in New Jersey, despite never leaving the United States. My now mature voice carries a slight southern twang, while slang native to D.C. pours from my Spanish mouth. I parade my poofy, curly hair with reluctance while my lighter skin throws off the ethnic gauge of even my own kin.

Why must cultural identity rely on the physical appearance of someone?

I ask myself this often and up until recently, it was a question that haunted me.

My parents are no strangers to the questions I've pondered. My mother would entertain these introspections and would recount her own tribulations, sometimes as raw and as steadfast as possible. Tales of the rejection and stigma that surrounded her marriage to a "*Tiraflecha*" or "One who throws arrows". It became apparent that I would not only experience indignity from those outside the fluid rigidity of my culture, but within it as well. The more I asked my mother, the more heartbroken I became. Although her words were not aimed at causing this type of damage, I felt as though these were unintentional projections. As if her breaking of social norms did not go without punishment, nor would I be left out of it.

Due to unfortunate caste systems set up many generations ago, Latin cultures place an unnecessary importance on where you come from and how you look; White Europeans are seen as the pinnacle of purity and excellence. I am mixed with white European. I am also mixed with other things seen as "dirty".

My father, being "*Indio*", was seen as less civilized, a bearer of tainted blood and subservient. I was the result of something that was forbidden and enough to be outcast from any and all social standing within the Latin-American community for this reason alone. Yet, there was more; I was born in the United States. I am automatically thrown into a stable of stereotypes like the one-trick pony I'm seen as. They have a name for people like me, "*Un hispano arrepentido*".

An apologist.

A phony.

A faker and wanna-be.

Although religion is a major cornerstone of my people, acceptance and love seem too often neglected. For that I am convicted of sacrilege with no trial. I will never be one of them and this is the cross I carry on top of me, sentenced to crucifixion by all the pure-blooded folk who continue to punish blasphemous traitors such as myself. My parents cut off all extended family who pursued my execution, but that wasn't enough. While I sat atop Golgotha, I call to them. Forgive them mother and

father, for they know not what they do. What a shame it is to kill one of your own, for fear of your own persecution. Where is your empathy? Have you all learned anything? Ignorance is bliss, but only to those who are ignorant.

I'm caught inside a whirlpool of confusion and shame, all while feeling pride and appreciation for my exposure to all cultures I've been blessed to soak up. Am I semi-pure? Am I semi-dirty? Flawed? Navigating a never-ending labyrinth of cultural confusion is very tiring.

After pondering my history, I still can't find the solution. Should I place this much emphasis on it?

Emotionally gaslighting myself has become a vicious habit accompanied by swift realizations that I mustn't join in on my own self-deprecation. Although I've had a hell of a time trying to determine who I am, there are many who have already placed me in a box. The box is so cramped, so suffocating. My native tongue is forced into submission. My lightly tinted skin and thick eyebrows rat me out to the majority. I would believe that since those who think like this seem to have me deciphered, why shouldn't I get back and do the same? Shouldn't I fight fire with fire?

I can't help but think about the endless torment I endured during my time living as an outsider. No amount of forced assimilation could ever erase "who I am". But I didn't want to be who I was; I wanted to be who they were. I force-fed myself hours of country music and played American football just so I could relate. It felt wrong to me, but I did it to belong. From being told that I would be kicked out of the country for simply being Latino to deliberately refusing to go by my Spanish name of Cristóbal. The eyes of those around me branded painful images of assimilation into my suffering skin as the indignity caused unimaginable scarring. Too "*gringo*" for the Spanish-speakers, too spick for the English-speakers. The gaslighting continued until I began to question other things. Do I lack the mental capacity to understand the concept of origination? Is my inferior Hispanic mind playing tricks on me?

The more I believe to understand about myself, the more I realize that the façade grows ever grander. I am unable to stay in one place for long; inertia wants to keep me in motion. I understand why my parents preferred a nomadic lifestyle.

Am I running from my problems?

I feel as though I'm hiding the heart I'm supposed to wear on my sleeve not out of protection, but more like a hostage demanding a ransom of acceptance and authenticity or else I will kill this infidel.

Que corazón arrepentido.

I am a byproduct of society's emphasis on exclusivity. I am a sponge. What I am "supposed" to be does not exist. The existential crisis I've had for fifteen years has done nothing but sidetrack me. My thoughts always seem to be the themes of Socratic seminars, yet I could never find the circle to speak freely. The back-and-forth of it all is poetic, yet destructive. I'm aware that the toxicity of the relationship with myself would prompt even the most understanding of therapists to beg me to call it quits. But I will continue this bittersweet relationship until I die, as I will never find out who I am supposed to be because I am ever-changing. That's the point.

Constantly evolving.

Forever in a limbo where the bar sets higher each time I reach it.

Letter

Ana Mejia-Valerio

Course: LAS 2550

Professor: Lillian Milanés

The Honorable M. Teresa Ruiz New Jersey State Senate State House Annex
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Senator Ruiz,

My name is Ana and I am a Latina student at William Paterson University studying the History of Latinos in the United States. I am writing to urge you to continue championing legislation that protects immigrant communities in New Jersey. As the highest ranking Hispanic official in the New Jersey State Senate, I believe you understand what is at stake for our communities in a way that few others in your position do.

What I have observed living in New Jersey is a community living in fear. I have seen it firsthand, my neighbor being too afraid to take her child to the doctor, my coworker stopped going to church after hearing about a raid nearby, families making decisions every single day based on the fear of being separated. This anxiety is real and it is affecting the health, education, and wellbeing of thousands of New Jersey residents who contribute to this state in countless ways.

I want to be clear that I understand immigration is a complex issue and that there are legitimate conversations to be had about border security. However, there is an important difference between enforcing immigration law and creating an environment of fear that punishes entire communities, including U.S. born children and long term residents. When enforcement reaches into schools, hospitals, and churches it does not just affect undocumented individuals. It affects everyone.

What I have learned through my studies is that this is not the first time Latino people have been made to feel unwelcome in a country that depends on them. In my course I studied the Bracero Program, in which Mexican men were brought to this country to fill labor shortages only to be subjected to exploitation, broken promises, and inhumane treatment. Workers were housed in converted barns with little to no sanitation, paid less than what their contracts promised, and many never received the savings that were supposed to be set aside for them in Mexican banks. They were needed but they were never truly welcomed. During the Mexican Repatriation of the 1930s, hundreds of thousands of people of Mexican descent, including U.S. born citizens, were forcibly removed from the country during an economic crisis. During Operation Wetback in the 1950s, over a million people were deported, again with little regard for their legal status or their ties to this country. Today I see that same pattern. Latino immigrants in New Jersey build our economy, care for our elderly, and raise families that contribute to our communities every single day, and yet they are being made to feel like criminals simply for existing here.

I am asking you to continue pushing for two specific protections. First, the Privacy Protection Act, which limits how government entities can collect and share personal information that could be used against immigrant families. Second, the Immigrant Trust Directive, which draws a clear line between local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities and is critical to rebuilding trust in communities where that trust has been badly damaged. Both of these policies protect real people and I urge you to make sure they are fully implemented and defended.

Keep making sure that schools, hospitals, and community centers remain safe spaces. Keep asking the hard questions, because the Latino community in New Jersey deserves a seat at the table where those questions are being discussed.

As a Latina who is studying this history and living this present, I know that the work you are doing matters. The stories of our communities deserve to be protected and preserved, just as the women in Sabogal's research protected their papelitos guardados, those small but powerful pieces of memory and proof that we were here, that we contributed, and that we belong. I hope you will continue to be a voice for all of us.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this issue further.

With respect and gratitude,
Ana Mejia Student,
William Paterson University North Brunswick, NJ

Franchesca Padilla

Course: LAS 2550
Professor: Lilian Milanés
Student: Franchesca Padilla
Essay: Untitled

Dear Senator Andrew Zwicker:

As a constituent and student, I am writing to express my concern regarding the continued gaps in language access across public services in New Jersey, particularly as they affect Latinx communities. In a state defined by its diversity, equitable access to government services must include consistent and reliable language support.

Despite existing policies, many residents continue to face barriers when accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, and legal assistance due to insufficient translation and interpretation resources. These limitations can lead to misunderstandings, reduced quality of care, and diminished participation in civic life. Language access is not simply a matter of convenience; it is a critical component of public equity and effective governance. As someone who comes from Hispanic parents that don't speak the best English. Being a translator from an early age to help my parents get a better understanding whatever obstacles we had, we made the best of it, with myself translating for them.

In my community of Hudson County, I have observed instances where families struggle to navigate school systems and medical appointments due to inconsistent availability of interpreters or translated materials. These challenges create avoidable disparities and place an undue burden on individuals who are otherwise fully entitled to these services.

Scholars and activists alike have emphasized the importance of speaking out against such inequities. As Audre Lorde argues, “silence in the face of injustice only allows these conditions to persist.” Addressing language access gaps requires not only acknowledgment but concrete action. In New Jersey alone, nearly 1.2 million residents are considered limited English proficient (LEP), and close to 31% of the state’s population speaks a language other than English at home (American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Despite this diversity, many immigrant and non-English-speaking residents continue to face barriers in healthcare, education, and government services due to inadequate translation and interpretation resources. Community organizations across New Jersey, including the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice, have reported that families often struggle to understand legal documents, medical terminology, or public service information, highlighting the urgent need for stronger language access policies and culturally responsive support systems.

I respectfully urge you to support policies that strengthen language access requirements, increase funding for interpretation services, and ensure accountability in their implementation across state agencies. Such measures are essential to ensuring that all New Jersey residents can fully engage with and benefit from public institutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,
Franchesca Padilla

William Paterson University Partners With Cosmos, Jackals To Expand Student Opportunities

Partnership connects professional teams with internships and training at university.

Matt Goldman

Course: COMM 3510

Professor: Nick Hirshon



Benjie Wimberly, Carol Cuadrado, and members of the NY Cosmos and NJ Jackals

William Paterson University announced a new partnership with two professional teams that call Paterson's historic Hinchliffe Stadium home, the New York Cosmos and the New Jersey Jackals, creating new opportunities for students while strengthening ties between the university and the city.



Matt Goldman

Under the arrangement, the Cosmos and Jackals will use facilities at William Paterson University for training and team activities. In return, Hinchliffe Sports Partners will provide internships for William Paterson students in a variety of roles with the organizations, including sports management, marketing, broadcasting, athletic training and event operations.

Carol Cuadrado, Associate Vice President, University and Government Relations introduced the partnership during an announcement event that brought together members of the university leadership team, city and county officials, and representatives from the professional teams. Among those present were Passaic County Sheriff Thomas Adamo and Passaic County Commissioner Zoila Cassanova.

William Paterson President Richard Helldobler welcomed attendees and emphasized the significance of the partnership for both the university and the city of Paterson.



President Richard J. Helldobler (Matt Goldman)

"This partnership announcement is proof of that vision," Helldobler said. "This new, innovative collaboration with Hinchliffe Sports Partners reflects our shared values of opportunity, access and excellence."

Helldobler noted that the Cosmos and Jackals will play their home games at Hinchliffe Stadium, one of Paterson's most historic venues, and said the agreement strengthens the university's connection to the community.

"It represents a unique and special place in the history of Paterson," he said.

Helldobler also reflected on his previous experiences with professional sports teams while working in Toledo, Ohio, describing how those organizations helped revitalize neighborhoods and create new opportunities for residents. He said he sees a similar potential in Paterson through the partnership between the university, the teams and city leaders.

"This partnership is about more than sports," Helldobler said. "It's about bringing opportunity to our students and strengthening our relationship with the city."

The New York Cosmos are scheduled to make their debut on March 14 with a 2 p.m. match at Hinchliffe Stadium. The club competes in a second-tier professional soccer league and is relaunching in Paterson as part of a broader effort to grow the sport's presence in the region.

The New Jersey Jackals, meanwhile, will begin their season in May. The team plays in the Frontier League, a professional baseball league made up of teams that operate independently of Major League Baseball affiliations.

Hinchliffe Stadium is also home to the Jersey Shore Wave, which competes in the Women's National Football Conference. The team's home schedule begins in April.

Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh said the partnership represents an important moment for the city and reflects the broader role education and sports can play in transforming communities.



Paterson Mayor Andre Seyegh

"Cities are always asking how you help, how to transform," Sayegh said. "I just think education should be at the forefront of changing people's lives or improving their lives."

Sayegh said bringing professional teams and university resources together can help drive economic development while providing opportunities for students and local residents.

“For us being able to be here at this moment where we are re-launching the Cosmos and the Jackals, I think it’s important for us to grow together,” he said. “And I want us to grow together.”

The mayor also stressed the value of internships and career pathways for students in Paterson, saying the partnership allows young people to see professional opportunities within their own community.

“The dream of being a professional, it’s the dream that’s down the street, it’s the dream that’s around the corner when you see professional athletes,” Sayegh said. “I think it’s important that we say to the community: I can work here. I can intern in my community.”

Sayegh described the collaboration as part of a broader effort to position Paterson for progress and said success requires participation from institutions, leaders and residents.

“When you’re trying to position a place like Paterson for progress, it’s not a spectator sport,” he said. “It’s a team sport, and nobody can afford to sit on the sidelines.”

Team officials also highlighted the value of the partnership for both athletes and students.



NJ Jackals Owner Baye Adofo-Wilson

Baye Adofo-Wilson, the owner of the New Jersey Jackals, said the presence of professional athletes in the community can inspire young people while also giving college students valuable experience in the sports industry.

“Having professional athletes in our community for those who want to accomplish it and the future can further opportunity,” Adofo-Wilson said.

He added that internships will allow sports management students to gain real-world experience while remaining connected to campus life.

“Students can intern and then go home to eat dinner at night,” he said. “It increases what happens at William Paterson.”

State Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly also spoke about the importance of collaboration between educational institutions and professional sports organizations.

“When we connect with institutions like William Paterson, professional teams like the Jackals and Cosmos can create something truly special, a pipeline for opportunities from the classroom to the field to the future,” Wimberly said.

Wimberly added that he hopes the partnership will lead to additional community events at Hinchliffe Stadium, including the possibility of hosting games involving William Paterson athletics.

University officials said another component of the partnership includes housing some players on campus, creating opportunities for students to interact with professional athletes and learn from their experiences.

Passaic County Commissioner Orlando Cruz said the arrangement reflects a shared commitment to investing in the city and building connections between the university and the professional sports community.

“On behalf of William Paterson and our partners in this great city, we look forward to seeing you expand and continue investing in the great city of Paterson,” Cruz said. “More importantly, we look forward to seeing you on our campus.”



Passaic County Commissioner Orlando Cruz

Leaders involved in the project described the collaboration as a transformational moment for Paterson, combining education, professional sports and community development.

By linking the resources of the university with professional teams based in the city, supporters say the partnership has the potential to create a pipeline of opportunities for students while inspiring the next generation of athletes and professionals in Paterson.

With professional teams training on campus, internships available to students and games being played just blocks away at Hinchliffe Stadium, officials said the initiative represents more than a partnership, it is an effort to build a stronger connection between education, sports and community pride in Paterson.

Brooke Holzhauer

Course: COMM 3510-001

Professor: Nick Hirshon

The results of William Paterson University's Student Government Association election were announced to SGA members in an email Monday, May 11, ending a three-week delay following allegations of campaign violations, appeals and procedural disputes that delayed certification of the vote.

Fatimah Abbassi was elected SGA president, while Izzy Aberde won the race for executive vice president. Casey Kizito was elected vice president of public relations, Ryanne Abuhadba won vice president of student life, Yanibel Gomez won vice president of academic affairs, Koushani Gupta won vice president of the judicial review board and Luca Espardinez was elected vice president of allocations.

The results were announced by Sehaj Osan, former SGA president, following the creation of a Temporary Elections Review Panel to review complaints related to the election. The panel delayed the release of vote totals and raised questions about how election disputes and communication were handled.

This year's election featured contested races across much of the executive board, including the presidential race between Abbassi and Mark Spuhler. Other contested positions included executive vice president, vice president of academic affairs, vice president of public relations and vice president of student life. Spuhler did not respond to two requests for comment from The Beacon after an interview conducted after the election review process began.

Donna Minnich Spuhler, SGA adviser and Mark Spuhler's mother, recused herself from involvement in this semester's elections after initially announcing the election on WPConnect. University officials have not publicly explained the reason for the recusal.

Minnich Spuhler previously said SGA holds elections every spring for the upcoming fall semester and again during the fall to fill vacancies, with committees intentionally leaving open positions for new students.

"Students must self-nominate if they want to be placed on the election ballot," Spuhler said.

She also said university staff verify each candidate's eligibility, including GPA requirements and semesters served on SGA.

The Temporary Elections Review Panel, according to Francisco Diaz, associate vice president for student development, included Diaz as chair, Jaime Oyola, Jennifer Tumlin, Tara Nucum, executive vice president, and Greek Senate representative Julie Gerlitz. Diaz said the panel was created to review unresolved election matters, including reported campaign violations, challenges and appeals.

"The election results are currently being held in abeyance," Diaz said in an earlier written statement provided to The Beacon before results were released. "This will remain the case until all outstanding election matters, including any challenges and appeals, are fully reviewed through the newly established Temporary Elections Review Panel."

During a recent SGA Senate meeting, where members raised questions about the review panel and how it would operate, Diaz said the situation was unlike anything he had encountered professionally.

"I've worked at four institutions, and I've never seen anything like this," Diaz said.

The Judicial Review Board, SGA's internal judicial body, oversees constitutional disputes, election complaints, impeachment hearings and appeals involving student government matters. Documents obtained by The Beacon from Spuhler show that SGA election guidelines require complaints to be submitted within two business days after polls close and hearings to be scheduled within three business days.

The 13-page election document outlines rules governing campaign conduct, including restrictions on harassment, "mudslinging," defacing campaign materials and campaigning in designated noncampaigning zones. Candidates found responsible for violations can face disciplinary action ranging from warnings to disqualification.

The same guidelines state that election results are typically expected within 24 hours after polls close, making the three-week delay highly unusual.

Abbassi said the hearings and complaints created tension among candidates as the review process unfolded.

“There are a lot of candidates that are under fire right now,” Abbassi said. “There’s a lot of nitpicking of people’s campaigns and things like that.”

She said accusations of favoritism and bias complicated efforts to resolve disputes. “There was a lot of this idea of bias being thrown around,” she said. “Whatever decision any committee would come to, it was like, ‘Well, you’re friends with this person, and you’re friends with that person.’”

Abbassi, who previously served as a senator and vice president of student life, said this was the first heavily contested election she had experienced during her three years in SGA.

“I think this is the first time that at least I’ve been here that has been contested,” she said.

This year’s ballot included two candidates for president and three candidates for executive vice president, along with contested races across several committees.

Abbassi said one of her priorities as president will be creating additional spaces for commuter students on campus.

“I really want to make more commuter spaces,” she said. “There’s a lack of designated lounge areas for commuter students where they can just relax during their breaks in between classes.”

She also pointed to her previous work as vice president of student life, including an initiative to expand access to free menstrual products on campus.

“My biggest goal was to have free pads and tampons in the bathrooms,” Abbassi said, adding that the proposal had already passed through the university president’s office.

Abbassi also said her involvement in organizations including the Muslim Student Association and Students for Justice in Palestine shaped her leadership approach and understanding of representation on campus.

The controversy surrounding the delayed results frustrated some students who said they felt disconnected from both the election process and SGA communication.

One student worker, who requested anonymity, said clearer communication was needed.

“The lack of transparency is appalling,” the student said. “The fact that they need to be questioned brings to light the questionable integrity of members of the SGA and the standards SGA holds its members to.”

Another student said SGA is more visible during event promotion than in governance matters.

The issue also received attention from the American Student Government Association, a national organization that provides training, consulting and resources for student government.

Executive Director and founder Butch Oxendine said election disputes are not uncommon on college campuses, but public institutions should prioritize transparency during review processes.

“Student government at a public institution has to turn over records and has to have open meetings,” Oxendine said. “The exception being personal information about a student. In this case, any hearing should be open to the public, and I’m disappointed they haven’t gone that route.”

Oxendine said delays in election certification have happened at other universities, including Louisiana State University, but warned that prolonged uncertainty can weaken confidence in student government.

“We want an operating government, and the new people who were elected deserve to have the full term of office,” Oxendine said.

Oxendine also said low voter turnout remains a challenge for student governments nationwide, making transparency especially important.

“The average voter turnout for public schools is 10% to 15%,” Oxendine said.

While William Paterson’s turnout figures and vote totals have not yet been publicly released, Oxendine estimated participation likely falls below national averages. He pointed to turnout struggles at Rutgers University and Montclair State University in recent years, where participation fell below 5%.

As of Monday evening, it remained unclear whether SGA plans to publicly release vote totals or provide a detailed explanation of the review process.

Sara Birns

Course: COMM 3540-001

Professor: Nick Hirshon

Somers' *Me Here, You There* captures every aspect of what it feels like to work in media, but also hits the nail on the head when you are in student media. His experiences throughout the book exemplify the same types of struggles that student journalists navigate in The Beacon, Brave New Radio, or WPTV. Personally, this book was incredibly insightful, peeling back the layers of journalism like an onion, whether discussing sports, features, or news. However, upon closer examination, this reading revealed a shift where the very thing people once misunderstood about him became the exact skill that powered his work and earned him praise.

On page 25, Somers talks about his disabled brother and how it affected his life, but only for the better. People would often bully or mistreat his brother due to his obvious physical and mental incapabilities. Somers did not let that slide.

Instead, he talked back on frequent occasions and would end up getting hurt, stating, "When I would try to defend my brother by speaking up, I would get beaten up or pushed around. But I look back on those days and I'm glad I said something on my brother's behalf. It resulted in a number of very unpleasant moments" (25-26).

Somers was often told that he had a "big mouth", which is technically what got him in those circumstances from avenging his brother. While many saw it as a flaw, he says that "when you get older, they call it talent" (25). This line really spoke to me because, in student media, that same "big mouth" becomes your superpower. It is the spark that pushes you to ask sharper questions, pitch bolder stories, and speak truths that are not always comfortable.

As a growing journalist, I initially doubted my interviewing skills because I often conversed too much and drifted from my main story. However, this has become my superpower in college media. Working at The Beacon has allowed me to interview a diverse range of people, including students, professors, and even a robot. I've discovered that by getting to know them, they become more open and willing to answer complex questions. Somers highlights how communication evolves, showing that a loud, curious kid can transform into someone whose voice becomes a bridge to connecting with others. This transformation is powerful in environments like The Beacon, Brave New Radio, or WPTV, where boldness and emotional intelligence are essential.

An additional moment that stuck with me from Somers' book was when he began working for KPIX at a young age. This was an excellent opportunity for him, and "on paper, this seemed like a perfect match: local boy talks to his fellow fans in a sports-crazed city" (57).

Somers exposes the tension between comfort and scrutiny. Although he is around people he knows and has a lot of support from, he "fell victim to the same affliction that many athletes who play in their hometowns suffer. I felt the pressure, and the intimidation, of being under the gaze of friends and family" (57). He admits that proximity actually intensifies pressure. Friends and family aren't just spectators; they carry expectations, nostalgia, and assumptions about who you *were*, not who you're becoming. That gaze can feel suffocating.

He goes on to accidentally say "Kansas Shitty" instead of "Kansas City", thinking he was about to be fired immediately, but no one noticed.

When reporting on campus, student journalists live Somers' analogy every day. You're not watching and writing from the sidelines, but amongst friends, coworkers, professors, faculty, roommates, teammates, etc., people who will see your byline and immediately connect it to the person they think they know.

Reporting on campus for The Beacon always comes with the worry that a story will be read not just as journalism, but as a personal stance as well. This can be exceptionally hard when there is a weight of representing your community (or university), but also holding it accountable.

Recently, I wrote a story about the school gym that was met with backlash from the staff and faculty.

The gym had rusting equipment, poor ventilation, and workers slacking off.

Following my article, there were complaints, a staff meeting, as well as the daily dirty looks and attitude from almost everyone who works there when I am on my own time. While frustrating, this experience taught me to push through embarrassment, advocate for improvement, and stand firm despite others' opinions. Journalism is about spreading the truth and questioning everything.

Moving forward, for next year, a concrete step that I want to implement is deliberately placing myself in situations where my reporting requires courage, not comfort. I often report like someone who knows she's being watched. I filter myself or edit my instincts. However, Somer reframes that pressure from a burden to a mirror, forcing us to understand that the gaze we fear is often the one that compels us to evolve.

If he could learn to stand fully in himself while being seen by the people who shaped him, then I can learn to report with the same unapologetic clarity. This means asking more complicated questions, being transparent with sources, and trusting my voice even when I can feel the eyes of my campus community on me.

Revised Place Narrative

Creative Non-Fiction

Ajanaye Chery

Course: ENG 4920

Professor: Barbara Suess

Do you know what's more annoying than walking directly into a spider web? Walking directly into a cloud of gnats. Many people wouldn't know the sound a swarm of gnats make, unless you've had the pleasure of greeting them face first unexpectedly. Even then, it's hard to silence your frustration when these annoying little creatures fly aimlessly into every orifice on your head. But I heard them before. I encountered them throughout my childhood, during the times when nature was its fullest. Gnats were most annoying when the Sun began to set, and all the children were restless from being outside all day. Growing up in the country with nine other kids, grandma would always say, "Don't be coming in and out of my house! Stay outside and use the back door for water." I assume this was fair enough. I don't know of any child who would want to stay inside when they had all access to acres of wooded land. But there was something about the Sun going down that made the humidity unbearable just as it was due to hide its light. The woods would get louder with the crickets, frogs and such announcing the Sun's departure.

By this time all the kids had eaten dinner and were enjoying the Sun's last moments by sitting under the pinecone tree, munching on fresh cut watermelon from farmer John. It was the only watermelon grandpa would buy since it was the sweetest, and he didn't have to drive all the way to town for it. All the kids would gather, grinning through sweet juices and swallowing seeds, tossing some to the dogs that no one dared pet with their hands.

Once the juices dried with the sweat on our skin, we'd all rush to play one more game of roadkill on the trampoline before grandma called us in to wash up. The air was getting cooler, and the sky showed its banner of sunset hues, signaling to everyone that the time was near. Joy filled my heart then, knowing how happy and safe I felt. And even in this safety, when grandma yelled from the screen door, and I rightfully rounded up every child to go in the house, I always happened to run smack into a cloud of pesky, tiny critters that welcomed you with tiny wings and poor direction. It happens in an instance, and your rude intrusion usually disperses the cloud, forcing them to gather elsewhere. But not before they tickle the hairs in your nose and dab the corners of your eye. The kids would say I was fighting myself, since it appeared as such. And I suppose I felt that way, questioning the creator of such an annoying pest. That was until I woke up with them.

Being the oldest out of all the grandchildren meant I was granted a room to myself once puberty hit. As if being a teen wasn't hard enough, my mind would race constantly. Before I knew it, I had pulled an all nighter and saw the Sun before the world awoke. Especially as a teenager at my grandma's house, it was always too quiet for me to rest my mind. So, I stayed up all night, breaking day by exploring the little backroom where I slept while the younger kids slept on a patty on the floor in the living room. My curiosity knew no limits as I played Michael Jackson on my grandpa's new boombox set on the lowest volume, or read my grandmother's Danielle Steel Romance novels, or write short stories about the places I'd go and the things I wanted to see. I'd periodically look out through the kitchen window that overlooked the field in front of the house, looking for hints of light to indicate the time of day. With a periwinkle sky and a thick mist, I'd go sit on the screened in porch and wait for my grandparents.

They normally woke up at 5am like clockwork, and their first order of business was a nice strong cup of coffee, black with sugar. I predicted 5:00 am would arrive in a few minutes, so I'd sit and listen. When I first did this, I thought I simply heard nothing. It took a few mornings, and I wasn't prepared for what I heard, but I was grateful. What I believed to be silent was just my mind attempting to create it. Being alone at dawn showed me that I was never truly alone. I sat, hush mouthed, listening to the cicadas stretch their wings, and the birds give salutations to each

other. The small bunnies and garden snakes would scamper across the yard hurriedly. A few deer would peak out of the woods and wander in the field, enjoying the dew-covered grass.

The woods were waking up and setting the mood for the day. And there they were. A cloud of gnats in a tight but fluid ball, bleeding into the fog. I closed my eyes and tried to isolate the sound. I found the soft paws of the dogs awakening against the dirt road, I heard the white crane land in the water in the lake behind the house, I also heard the squirrels and chipmunks scurry against the bark of the pine cone tree, causing a few of the cones to thud at its trunk. Then I heard them. I mistook it for someone speaking in their softest tone before I realized that the gnats were whispers. It was faint enough for anyone to miss if they weren't looking for it. But if you decentered yourself, it could find you. And at that moment, they weren't so annoying. They were simply doing what they were meant to do. They played a small part in the heartbeat of the woods; they helped keep the woods alive.

When I heard the clinking of the spoon stirring the hot liquid of my grandma's coffee cup, I knew it was now five in the morning. She'd walk out and I'd hug her as tight as I can. She'd hug me just the same before sitting down and passing me my cup of light and sweet. By this time, the Sun had kissed my face, and I heard the roaring of the tractor in the back of the house, indicating grandpa had already begun his day. "I didn't know that gnats made noise," I questioned grandma, not really looking for an answer but knowing she'd provide one. "Nature is always alive," she said. "Only those meant to hear it can hear it." From that point on, my grandma and I made a silent pact to dedicate a few minutes out of our routine to simply listen.

My teenage years are where my love for nature grew from curiosity to understanding. Those woods at grandma's house saw my heart and spoke to me faithfully. The gnats kept me childlike while giving me the wisdom to surrender.

Impact of Childhood Trauma on Physiological Health and Adult Lifestyle

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Course: CLSI 4702

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Abstract

Childhood trauma has been shown to impact an individual's life over the course of their adulthood. However, most research to date has focused on the psychological impact of childhood trauma. This review of the literature will broaden the discussion about childhood trauma to focus on its long-term physiological effects, including irregular sleep schedules and chronic illness. Research has demonstrated that trauma does not just change the mind but has a significant effect on an adult's health and lifestyle as well.

Introduction

When considering the effects of trauma, individuals often focus on psychological outcomes rather than physiological ones. This may be because childhood trauma is more commonly associated with mental disorders than with physiological effects (DRI, 2022; Schlauch et al., 2022). Therefore, this literature review explores the physiological effects of childhood trauma on adult physical health and lifestyle.

Trauma is an event that causes feelings of distress, fear, helplessness, and dissociation to an individual (American Psychological Association, 2018). There are different kinds of trauma: abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional), neglect, and other forms of trauma that remain impactful to the individual (Torres, 2025). Research examining childhood trauma tends to look at Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which are negative experiences in childhood (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Research has shown that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are associated with long-term effects on adult physical health and lifestyle (Dye, 2018; Connon et al., 2026; Beilharze et al., 2020). Some of the long-term effects on adulthood are decreased well-being (Connon et al., 2026; Beilharze et al., 2020), higher stress activity and poor stress reaction (Beilharze et al., 2020; Suzuki et al., 2014), irregular cortisol levels (O'Connor et al., 2020; Suzuki et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025), and poor sleep quality (Laskemoen et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2023; Vorster et al., 2024). Each effect will be discussed more thoroughly throughout the paper, but overall a correlation between the effects of childhood trauma on adult physical health and lifestyle has been shown.

Physiological Effects

Sleep Quality

There has been research done that has shown a correlation between childhood trauma and poor sleep quality (Laskemoen et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2023; Vorster et al., 2024). O'Connor et al. (2023) assessed sleep quality using a daily diary methodology in which participants reported their sleep experiences over a seven-day period. Each day, participants recorded key aspects of their sleep, including sleep duration, sleep quality, and sleep onset latency (the time it took to fall asleep). This repeated-measures approach allowed researchers to capture fluctuations in sleep patterns in real time, rather than relying on retrospective self-report, thereby increasing the reliability of the findings. Poor sleep quality was operationalized through indicators such as shorter sleep duration, greater difficulty falling asleep, and lower subjective ratings of sleep satisfaction. By linking these daily sleep measures to prior assessments of childhood trauma using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, the study was able to examine how early adverse experiences predict ongoing sleep disturbances in adulthood. As a result, they found that greater exposure to childhood trauma, particularly neglect, was significantly associated with poorer sleep quality, reduced sleep duration, and increased difficulty initiating sleep in adulthood. Laskemoen et al. (2020) found that individuals with a history of childhood trauma were significantly more likely to experience sleep disturbances, particularly symptoms of insomnia, compared to those without such experiences. Furthermore, sleep disturbances were significantly

associated with more severe clinical symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and psychotic features, as well as reduced overall functioning. Importantly, mediation analyses indicated that sleep disturbances serve as a significant intermediary mechanism linking childhood trauma to adult clinical outcomes. Specifically, sleep disruption accounted for approximately one-quarter of the relationship between childhood trauma and symptom severity, as well as a smaller but meaningful proportion of functional impairment. This suggests that while childhood trauma has direct effects on adult health, a substantial portion of its impact operates through disruptions in sleep. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that childhood trauma is consistently associated with sleep disturbances in adulthood. Given that sleep is a fundamental health behavior linked to physical and mental well-being, disruptions in sleep may serve as a key pathway through which early adversity contributes to long-term health outcomes (Vorster et al., 2024). The review highlights that poor sleep is associated with an increased risk of a wide range of health conditions, including cardiovascular, metabolic, and mental disorders, underscoring the importance of sleep in overall health functioning. When considered alongside empirical findings linking childhood trauma to sleep disturbances, this broader body of research reinforces the role of sleep as a central mechanism connecting early adversity to both physiological dysregulation and maladaptive lifestyle outcomes.

Chronic Illnesses

In addition to poor sleep quality which can lead to both physiological dysregulation and maladaptive lifestyle outcomes (Vorster et al., 2024), childhood trauma, can also affect an individual's physical health, such as potential chronic illnesses. Caglayan et al. (2025) found that exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) was significantly associated with an increased risk of multiple adult-onset physical illnesses, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and chronic pain conditions. Importantly, the study identified a dose–response relationship, showing that the risk of chronic illness increased progressively with the number of adverse childhood experiences. For instance, individuals exposed to three or more ACEs exhibited a substantially higher risk of metabolic and respiratory conditions, including diabetes and obesity, suggesting a cumulative effect of early life stress on long-term physiological health. The literature supports a dose–response relationship, such that individuals with a greater number of adverse childhood experiences exhibited a progressively higher risk of developing chronic health conditions in adulthood. Hoadley et al. (2023) found that ACEs are associated not only with an increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes but also with poorer engagement in routine diabetes care among affected individuals. Specifically, individuals with a history of childhood trauma were less likely to adhere to recommended diabetes management practices, including regular medical visits and self-monitoring behaviors, suggesting that early adversity may negatively influence long-term health behaviors. These findings indicate that the impact of childhood trauma extends beyond physiological vulnerability, affecting individuals' ability to consistently manage chronic conditions, which may further exacerbate disease progression and health complications. Together, these results suggest that childhood trauma contributes to chronic illness not only through biological mechanisms but also through maladaptive behavioral pathways that interfere with effective disease management. Huffhines et al. (2016) reviewed multiple studies and found that exposure to ACEs is associated with an increased risk of developing diabetes in adulthood, further supporting the link between early life stress and chronic metabolic conditions. Notably, the relationship between childhood trauma and diabetes does not appear to follow a uniform pattern, as some studies demonstrated a threshold effect in which risk increases after a certain level of adversity, while others found that greater severity of abuse was associated with higher diabetes risk. Zhu et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 49 studies and found that exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is associated with an increased risk of developing diabetes in adulthood. Furthermore, specific forms of childhood adversity, including neglect and physical or sexual abuse, were consistently associated with a higher risk of diabetes, suggesting that both the presence and type of trauma contribute to disease risk. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that the relationship between childhood trauma and chronic illness is both cumulative and multifaceted, with evidence indicating that early adverse experiences contribute to diabetes risk not only through physiological mechanisms, such as chronic stress-related dysregulation, but also through behavioral pathways

that impact long-term health management and outcomes.

Biological Impact and Cortisol Levels

One key mechanism through which childhood trauma influences long-term health outcomes is chronic stress, particularly through dysregulation of cortisol and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. O'Connor et al. (2020) found that individuals with a history of childhood trauma exhibited significant dysregulation in cortisol patterns, including a reduced cortisol awakening response (CAR) and flatter daily cortisol patterns. These altered cortisol patterns indicate dysfunction in the HPA axis, the body's primary stress-response system, suggesting that early trauma can lead to long-term biological changes in stress regulation. These findings support the notion that childhood trauma contributes to long-term health outcomes by altering fundamental biological stress systems, rather than solely influencing psychological or behavioral processes. Suzuki et al. (2014) found that childhood trauma is associated with altered cortisol reactivity in adulthood, with individuals exhibiting either heightened or blunted physiological responses to stress. Some individuals demonstrated increased cortisol reactivity, indicating heightened sensitivity to stress, while others showed a blunted response, suggesting a reduced or dampened activation of the stress-response system. This variability suggests that early life stress may recalibrate the body's stress-response system, leading to long-term alterations in cortisol functioning that influence how individuals respond to stress throughout adulthood. Wang et al. (2024) found that childhood trauma is associated with alterations in cortical structure and functional connectivity, indicating long-term neurobiological changes in brain regions involved in stress regulation and emotional processing. These neurobiological alterations may influence the functioning of the body's stress-response system, as brain regions implicated in stress regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex and limbic structures, play a critical role in modulating HPA axis activity. When considered alongside research demonstrating altered cortisol patterns and stress reactivity, these findings further support the notion that childhood trauma results in widespread biological dysregulation across both neural and endocrine systems. As a result, dysregulated cortisol patterns may represent a key physiological pathway linking childhood trauma to increased vulnerability for both mental and physical health conditions in adulthood. This reinforces the need for greater awareness, early intervention, and a more comprehensive understanding of the lasting biological impact of early adverse experiences.

Effects on Adult Lifestyle

In addition to its physiological effects, childhood trauma also shapes adult lifestyle and health-related behaviors. Childhood trauma has been linked to persistent psychological difficulties, such as chronic stress, rumination, and negative self-perceptions, which can interfere with the development of healthy routines and adaptive coping strategies (Karatekin & Hill, 2018). As a result, individuals may experience challenges in daily functioning and overall well-being, reinforcing patterns of unhealthy behavior. Individuals exposed to ACEs are more likely to engage in maladaptive coping strategies, such as smoking and substance use, often as a way to manage chronic stress and emotional distress (Chang et al., 2019). These behaviors increase the risk of long-term health conditions, including cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

Trauma has also been linked to emotional and binge eating behaviors. Emotional eating, defined as eating in response to stress or negative emotions rather than physiological hunger, represents a maladaptive coping strategy that may contribute to long-term health risks. Individuals with higher ACE exposure are more likely to use food as a coping mechanism, which may contribute to obesity and metabolic disorders (Hong et al., 2025; Tabone et al., 2022). These findings highlight how early adversity can shape both emotional functioning and lifestyle patterns, ultimately increasing vulnerability to chronic health conditions.

Beyond eating and substance use, childhood trauma is associated with broader patterns of high-risk behaviors, including physical inactivity and other health-risk behaviors that often begin in adolescence and persist into adulthood (Campbell et al., 2016; Garrido et al., 2017). The likelihood of engaging in these behaviors increases with the number of ACEs, demonstrating a cumulative effect of early adversity. Overall, these findings highlight that childhood trauma contributes to maladaptive lifestyle patterns that serve as a key pathway linking early adversity to chronic illness and poorer long-term health outcomes.

Discussion

This literature review examined a range of studies and reviews that collectively demonstrate the relationship between childhood trauma and adult physical health. The findings consistently show that ACEs are associated with poorer sleep quality (Laskemoen et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2023; Vorster et al., 2024), increased risk of chronic illnesses such as diabetes (Caglayan et al., 2025; Hoadley et al., 2023; Huffhines et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2022), and long-term biological dysregulation, particularly involving cortisol and the HPA axis (O'Connor et al., 2020; Suzuki et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2024).

In addition, childhood trauma is linked to maladaptive lifestyle behaviors, including substance use and binge eating, which further contribute to negative health outcomes (Chang et al., 2019; Hong et al., 2025; Tabone et al., 2022). Importantly, these effects do not occur independently but are interconnected. For example, sleep disturbances may contribute to dysregulation of cortisol patterns, which in turn can affect mood, stress responses, and overall physiological functioning. This ongoing dysregulation may increase the likelihood of engaging in maladaptive coping behaviors, such as substance use or emotional eating. As a result, childhood trauma can be understood as influencing health through a combination of biological and behavioral pathways that reinforce one another over time.

These findings highlight the importance of early intervention and prevention. Increasing awareness of the long-term physiological effects of childhood trauma may help individuals, caregivers, and professionals better recognize potential warning signs and provide appropriate support. While much attention is often placed on the psychological impact of trauma (DRI, 2022; Schlauch et al., 2022), this review demonstrates that the physical consequences are equally important. Addressing trauma early in life may reduce the likelihood of long-term health complications and improve overall well-being. These findings are especially relevant in settings involving children, such as schools and healthcare environments. Creating safe and supportive environments, as well as identifying early signs of distress, may play a critical role in reducing the long-term impact of trauma. By understanding how childhood trauma affects both the mind and body, professionals can take a more comprehensive approach to intervention and care.

Despite the strength of the findings, several limitations should be considered. Much of the research reviewed is correlational, meaning that while strong associations exist, direct causation cannot be confirmed. Additionally, many studies rely on self-reported data, which may introduce bias or inaccuracies in reporting. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs and more objective measures to better understand the long-term effects of childhood trauma. Overall, the evidence suggests that childhood trauma is not only a psychological experience but also a biological and behavioral one that can shape long-term health outcomes. Its effects extend beyond emotional well-being, influencing physical health, daily functioning, and lifestyle patterns throughout adulthood.

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Healing Through Loss

The Most Vivid Listening Experience I have Ever Had

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Course: MUSI 3500

Professor: Gregg Bendian

2021 was a difficult year for most people. For some, it was the year when everything was shut down and time lost meaning. For others it was the year when political turmoil nearly collapsed their nation and homeland from within. For me it was the year of loss, as both of my grandfathers would pass 4 months apart from each other. While the second loss was devastating in its own way, the listening experience I am referring to revolves around the first.

In 2017 my grandfather, Francesco (who was affectionately referred to as Frank or Frankie), was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. At first it just seemed like my grandfather had a bit of a hazy memory, nothing to worry about. Clarity would slip slowly from him. First it was a veil of mist between him and his memories. Then it was haze, then fog, then smog, until finally there was a wall that removed him from his life. This disease turned his beaming stories of decades long forgotten into an involuntary silence with the occasional half sentences. He forgot how to walk in 2019, and by 2020 he was bedridden. His wife and four children (including my father) would help him in his twilight years, and while he could not remember their names or express the words aloud, the love shown in his smile and in his eyes revealed the heart of gold within. Surrounded by family, he would pass peacefully at the beginning of 2021.

So why talk about it now, and for this assignment specifically? Well, the night of his passing I would go up to my room and listen to *Everywhere at the End of Time* by Leyland James Kirby, under the moniker of The Caretaker, and this work would reshape my understanding of art, loss, and life. *Everywhere at the End of Time* is an album made up of 6 parts, each part depicting a different stage of Alzheimer's using samples of ballroom music ranging from the 1910s to the 1940s. It is a 6 ½ hours long with each stage progressively getting longer, audibly representing the slow decay of the human mind and the bright spots within the fog. Maybe I can find something within this album to help me cope with this loss, and after I finished my dinner at around 5:30 pm, I would begin my listen.

Stage 0: Clear skies. Before his diagnosis, my grandfather loved telling stories ranging from his childhood to modern day. I loved listening to anything he had to say, like his adventures in 1950s Germany or the times where one of his many big sisters got him out of trouble with school bullies, every word he said carried such vivid detail, even if at times he needed his memory jogged. At this stage he was still fully independent and actively took part in the many family gatherings held every year, no matter how small.

Similarly, the first part of the album also shows a preservation of the minute details and complexity of the songs, with titles like "It's Just a Burning Memory", which is from the 1927 song "Heartaches" by Al Bowly, the primary sample of the song. While songs from the first disc show some wear with vinyl crackles and the lack of lyrics, the instrumental, sentiment, and feel of the songs are still intact, with definitive beginnings/endings, structures, and relative clarity.

The album cover reflects that as well, with a painting of a newspaper curled up with a blue and green gradient in the background. While the painting is ambiguous with what exactly is being depicted, the shape of the newspaper is recognizable and understandable within context.

Each song, paired with the album the album cover gives off a sense of bliss and comfort as the warm tones of the recordings and the stories of years past washed over me. A reminder of the good times. One last comfortable ride of nostalgia before the true test begins.

Stage 1: The Mist. Early dementia kicks in, and the start of the decline has begun. The second disc of the album is in some respects the same as the first: The same ballroom samples, the crackle of vinyl that is overlayed above all the songs, and a similar, brief

runtime of around 40 minutes. The differences become clear upon closer listening. Songs start to lose structure, often having the same part looped repeatedly. Sometimes they would lead into the next section of the song but often they get jumbled with another song and become stitched together with little reason. The phrasing and sentence structure of each section of the song does make some sense, when put together the individual songs and second disc as a whole show the overall cognitive decay of a person who is trying to figure out what is and is not a true memory.

The artwork accompanying the songs is also a confused story of shapes and objects clashed together, as it shows a flowerpot with the shape of a crumbled fire hydrant, as two miniature people made of the same material as the flowerpot attempt to hold up the arms of the pot while flowers live inside. The painting for the second section is not as smooth or as calm as the first painting, and while some sections of it like the flowers are put together in a calm and collected way, most of the object is jagged and has a sense of defeat to it, a trait only emphasized within the titles of the songs. Where titles like “Late afternoon drifting” and “Into each others eyes” filled the first section of the album, the second has titles like “A losing battle is raging” and “Quiet dusk coming early”.

When my grandfather was diagnosed, almost no one brought up the topic. His stories began to not have endings, his sentences would just stop midway through, and he would become confused when the names he called people stopped matching their faces. He was the same person as before, but the confusion started to last longer, and his emotions began to heighten as he tried to figure out what was happening to him. In a sense, this part of the album made me feel like I was understanding where he was at that point in time. If I listen more, maybe I will get the resolve I want. It is only 7 pm, I still have time before I have to go to bed.

Stage 2: The Haze. Entering mid-stage dementia, the last fires of recognition begin to fade within the subject of the album. The artwork has now started to lack discernible objects, showing a loose green mass as the object for this stage. Samples are beginning to become entangled within one another and are decaying rapidly, with detuning instruments and an ambience that separates the listener from the songs that are played. Some songs lack separation needed to separate individual instruments, while others start and stop at random. Titles have begun to not make sense and only vaguely relate to the songs, some of which include “To the minimal great hidden” and “Hidden sea found deep”. While the samples included are still recognizable, it starts to become unclear what emotions were originally attached to each memory.

The mind is now restless at this stage, grasping for meaning within the abstract, and this is where contrast begins between the album and my grandfather. The album stays mellow, attempting to take its time and sort these memories out slowly to be put back together, while my grandfather began to show frustration, and tried to spill out any potential memory in hope that there was any truth within. He started to make claims of witnessing historical events like Lincolns assassination, he believed the movies he watched were real, and he would start to forget daily functions like walking without a walker/cane. The final time I stayed at my grandparents’ house was at the end of this stage around late 2018 early 2019. When I was there my grandfather began yelling to get my grandmother, and I returned home around 3 hours after I had been dropped off. The time was now 8, and while I should have started to unwind, the music began to unveil its true intentions, and I was entranced by the story it was telling. This was one final way to share a moment with him, even if he were not here to experience it.

Stage 3: The Fog. Full memories are ruptured as heavy dementia takes its toll. Memories become fluid, merging and attaching to any other whenever possible. All song titles are now “Post awareness confusions” apart from the twenty-one minute long “Temporary bliss state”. The art is now a painting with heavy scrapes of paint layered on to create the silhouette of a face that bleeds into the background slightly. The first second of this stage harshly cuts into the solitary bliss of all earlier stages, and each song is now a disorientating mess of fragments that used to make sense but have become forced together out of a desire to remember anything no matter what. The difference between noise and song is now nonexistent, and cohesion is no longer of importance to the songs.

This stage was the most upsetting during my first listen. It was a snap to the harsh reality that I either did not or could not understand living in. It was incredibly saddening, yet it made me feel like I can

truly grasp the emotions that my grandfather was feeling after my final stay at my grandparents' house. In the few times I saw him afterwards, he began to talk less, only saying a couple words by the end of 2019. He would switch between English and Italian at random and would stare at people with an intense anger or sadness if they did not understand. Despite these hurdles there still were rare moments of understanding, where I heard a story one last time from him. It was about rural Italy, where his father would tend livestock and talk about moving to a great land called America, where they can do more than just tend animals. Every time after that during this period there was near total silence with the occasional name that one of my cousins had when he saw me and the name for an object in the room.

Stage 4: The Smog. Total isolation is imminent. The object in the painting is now unrecognizable. What was once colorful and comprehensible ideas or real items have become a random structure of shapes and grey tones. The noises in each song are trying to bury each other under crashing waves of sounds and half strung phrases. They are more unpredictable and intense than the previous stage, with emotionally absent names like "Advanced plaque entanglements" and "Sudden time regression into isolation". This stage for me was filled with meaningless and emotionless sound collages flooded my ears, as the final memories of my grandfather began to fill my brain. I was in the house for no longer than 20 minutes with my father dropping off groceries. My grandfather had then become bedridden, and could not do any function on his own, at one point forgetting how to breathe. I walked in, gave him an update on my life, and walked out. The last words he said to me was a faint "I love you Alex." I replied with "I love you too Grandpa." I wanted to stop listening, but I just could not pause the music. This is the closest I have felt to him since his diagnosis, so I continued.

Stage 5: The Wall. The sounds of discernable instruments are long gone, as the only thing that remains for the next hour and a half are varying sounds of suffocating static, noise, and the occasional note. The album cover has transformed from paintings of various objects to a picture of a piece of cardboard with blue masking tape on it, waiting to be painted, but ultimately never touched. It was then that the true horror set in for me, and the last hour of my day was filled with intense sobbing and emotional numbness. That was until midnight. The final song, "Place in the world fades away" is about to end, and at 6:24:30 on the album's runtime, the noise stops, and faint angelic singing begins. The last memory. My crying stopped as the sounds of music grace my headphones again, and the final six minutes of the album concluded with some of the most gorgeous singing, and one of the most profound endings to an art piece I have ever experienced.

I woke up at 6:30 to prepare for some virtual classes like any other day in the past year. I walked downstairs and heard my father say to my mother "I have to go, It's happening." My heart sank, I was not sure exactly what he meant, but deep down I knew. I saw him briefly, but he ran out of the house before I could say anything to him, and I began school a few hours later. It was a normal day in comparison to others during the pandemic; however, a looming dread surrounded me. Could it really be happening? After I finished school, around 3 pm, I got a text from one of my cousins, something that rarely happened at that time. On it: A single red heart. It happened.

By the end of *Everywhere at the End of Time*, I changed as a person, as I have gone from intrigue and comfort in the first song to the soft terror and acceptance of the inevitable during the final song. No piece of media has influenced my life and emotions like that before or since. I had begun to accept that I must leave this section of my life behind, the dawn of a new day had approached, and I had to show strength for my grandfather. Afterall, it was now January 29th, my birthday, and I had turned 15.

A Letter to Myself

Niref Simpson

Course: ENG 1500

Professor: Barbara Suess

While driving with you mom playing music, vibing and hollering is so different while boys coming to the car selling water for 3 dollars then.

Always going to the shoprite for some food, cookies and juice, while your friends from high school on the corner selling rocks to the feins and getting caught by the crocks.

I see the difference when you got your feet up eating lobster and that medium steak that was cooked, while my moms was cooking hotdogs and beans waiting for food stamps to hit ha to

Mom was at games with fresh board colors and fresh signs while my grandfather was in pain if I want to speak to the inmate press 5.

The things you see growing up, it's easy to get addicted, but the good thing about it is you were born to complete a mission.

The clothes you see, the hands that's thrown up or struggle you had wasn't personal. The brain you have, the way you bring joy is more than merciful.

Angel prayers ain't nothing like the devil it's different shit, lord knows we've been outside since genesis and prayed that every bullet that enters us and exits us but you can't find that in leviticus.

So what I'm telling you is to be that same kid that had dreams, goals and become a veteran but don't become me now because I'm still learning on how to be a better man.

Hybridity and Class in Klara and the Sun

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Science fiction has, for the most part, offered humans an optimistic, idealistic view of coexistence with robots. However, as this fiction has swiftly become a reality for humans, we have come to realize the complexities of this world.. Humans have already seen the ways that AI has radically evolved and caused social, environmental, and economic harm. In order to protect the legitimacy of technofacism, the public has been led to see AI as a sort of protected class of its own: a necessity in order to promote efficiency and connection. While these ideologies have not been widely leveraged enough to influence average consumers to adopt autonomous AI machines into their homes, it has opened up discourse surrounding AI and hybridity.

Kazuo Ishihiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun* offers a glimpse into how this false reality corrupts our interpersonal relationships and furthers the pervasiveness of social inequity and self-consciousness. Within his novel, we see how AI machines are categorized as a third-class mixture of human and scientific technology. Therefore audiences are left to wonder if there exists a reality where even robots can not only become the new faces of capitalism but are subjected to live under a similar man made system of social and economic hierarchy. The novel aims to examine the social and emotional damage that takes place within a society that upholds class systems and prioritizes labor.

Klara and the Sun follows the narrator, Klara, an artificial friend as she is hired to watch over and care for Josie, a young girl with a chronic disease that impacts her daily life. The novel follows Klara as she adapts to a dystopian capitalist society in which she surveils humans during her labor. While her role is not clearly outlined to the reader, she acts as a caregiver for Josie, providing companionship and executing domestic manual tasks. Her hybrid identity affects the depth of the interpersonal relationships with humans because they see her as a product of technology and nature. While Josie is receptive to the idea of AF's due to her naivety, other characters are not initially welcoming towards her due to her hybridity.

Significantly, Rick, Josie's friend, is one of the primary characters who chooses not to undergo the process of lifting, which would also place him in a similar category of inferiority. One of the primary outcomes of being lifted is the risk of illness and death. The lifting system creates a social class that excludes groups of people from gaining access to privileges afforded to lifted people such as higher education. In the novel, Rick tries to get into Atlas Brookings, one of the only prestigious colleges that accepts unlifted students. Interestingly enough, not having undergone the AGE procedure which lifts individuals classifies Rick within the same status as those who face economic turmoil (Ishiguro 245). Therefore, he had to try to account for his lack of privilege within his natural abilities to learn and participate in unethical practices. The process of lifting is on par with the consequences of carrying through with a society of AI, as it leads to the creation of new social disparities. In turn, Rick and other unlifted individuals will continue to be disadvantaged as they compete with lifted individuals for resources and opportunities. This demonstrates the ways that capitalism exploits and erodes our humanity.

Additionally, the failure of Rick and Josie's relationship reflects the pervasiveness of class disparities. As Josie was laying on her death bed her mother, in a fit of tension, turns attention to Rick and says the following: "She was demanding a future worthy of her spirit…Do you believe of the two of you, you've come out the winner? Because if that's so, then please ask yourself this. What is it you've won?" (Ishiguro 277). The mother draws upon the image of winning and losing, a system of hierarchy, in order to signify the advantage that Josie has over those who are unlifted. In this instance, Rick will have given up his chance at social mobility and ambition to strive to get into a college and a career that will help him rise within a social class. However, even as Josie recovers from her illness their relationship fails

to repair itself because the barrier of economic elitism and status is still present within their friendship. Ultimately, Josie and Rick's future could not exist due to these economic divides, which proves that these social discrepancies cause individuals to isolate and abandon connection.

Furthermore, wealth is flaunted in the purchase of Artificial Friends. Similarly, to how humans are drawn to buy the newest model of phone or other technology, AF's are bought as a sign of status. At the beginning of the novel Klara is threatened by the launch of B3's, the newest release of AF's that have fewer performance flaws and are more easily able to comprehend and exhibit more human-like behaviors: a trait that most consumers value. A girl and her father were looking for a new AF and her father and the manager persuaded them, citing that they were "privileged" to be allowed to go back where the newest shipment of B3's were (Ishiguro 33). Much like how AI is viewed within society, not having the latest model or version of these programs puts people at a loss, and they can be seen as out of touch. While the daughter does originally seek out a higher standard for the B3, it is the adults around her who influence her to see the world through the lens of class and efficiency. This follows the hierarchy created based on how well AF's perform tasks of labor compared to humans and amongst others of their species.

Moreover, social class is also imposed and upheld by other AF's. The latest model of AF's, named the B3's, would deliberately segregate themselves away from the other AF's in order to make themselves more attractive to customers (Ishiguro 36). This ostracized Klara and drew skepticism from Josie's mother, as it is later revealed that they wanted to pick an AF that would best enshrine her daughter when she died. Moreover, three of the boy AF's within the store were caught by the manager for laughing at a homeless man outside of the store (Ishiguro 34). The B3's were programmed to be more observant and possess a larger capacity for artificial autonomy. The B3's reflect the length of autonomy in order to remove the issue of the hybrid. The B3's evolve to develop their own nature and social and emotional intelligence, which is a trait that humans find desirable. As the B3's are built and repurposed for longevity they believe that they are superior to humans, such as the homeless man, because of their social standing and immortality. However, they have yet to observe that these traits were produced by humans in order to continue to obtain their physical and emotional intelligence. The apathy illustrated by the B3's establishes the pervasiveness of inequality and social capital within a dominant culture.

Likewise, Klara's hybridity is further examined as she continues to interact with individuals from high society. During Josie's meeting with lifted kids, Klara is animalized, called a " pet object", and is almost "Scrub[bed]" in which she would have been thrown across the room to test her durability (Ishiguro 80). This proves a lack of empathy from others within society; it also reflects a larger issue. The humans in this case have given up, This is further used to deduce Klara into the icon of an inanimate and careless individual, without charge or reasoning for her utility toward Josie. Similarly, Rick is further ostracized by the group of lifted kids and is bullied for his social and educational ineptitude because he chose not to undergo this process. Rick putting himself in between the conflict from being scrubbed implies a form of solidarity between them, as they are both rejected by the families of upper class individuals. This instance demonstrates how these social classes aim to separate individuals and extract labor.

The end of Klara's journey is slightly ambiguous, it is heavily implied that Klara faces something akin to death. It is revealed that The Mother planned to use Klara in a way to enshrine her child and have her be a "continuation of Josie" (205). While Klara does not reject this idea, she comes to realize how loved Josie is and weighs the emotional impact it would have on her and others if she died. She ultimately makes the decision to ask the Sun, who is the figurative God, to "give her special nourishment" so that Josie and Rick could be together (Ishiguro 271). Miraculously, Josie recovers from her illness, and in her place, Klara dies. Klara is ultimately "disposed of" in this mock death, and it is implied by the author that she will be deprogrammed and sent to the pollution processing center. Ishiguro offers a sympathetic ear to Klara's disposition as it draws readers to think about what "life" Klara did manage to have. Klara was ultimately exploited by those around her to provide a life for Josie. Klara was expected to report for her duties as a caretaker and confidant. However, once she is no longer needed, she is disposed of and scrapped. However, the alternative is to continue giving out her services in addition to becoming a vessel for

Josie's soul, which would remove ownership of her body. Klara's role as a hybrid is further heightened as she has been groomed to imitate Josie, so she can improve upon and surpass Josie's own humanity.

Ultimately, the novel *Klara and the Sun* speaks to the death of the hybrid and the upkeep of social inequality. The identities of the lifted and unlifted individuals cause a social divide with institutions and other systems of power. This issue of disparity subsequently erodes the love that Josie and Rick have had for each other, as the class that they are closest in proximity to, hinders their relationship. Importantly, Klara's ill treatment by other AF's and those of high society reflects the harm within the structures of social class. Ishiguro's novel highlights how these capitalist systems corrupt our views of humanity and our profit from imposed hierarchies.

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