¡ESCRIBA! ¡WRITE!

A BI-LINGUAL JOURNAL OF STUDENT ART AND WRITING

VOLUME 12, DECEMBER 2014

EUGENIO MARÍA DE HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
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MIRIAM LASKIN

INTRODUCTION

We proudly present the 12th issue of ¡Escriba!/Write! We always welcome submissions from all Hostos students for our next issue. At any time you can submit writing or artwork via our Escriba webpage (http://oit.hostos.cuny.edu/escriba/). We welcome any kind of writing, and encourage submissions in any language, to reflect the diversity and multilingualism of our Hostos student body. This year the Hostos Library and ¡Escriba!/Write! honored outstanding writing and artwork of four students at the Hostos Convocation in May. Their work appears in this issue. The awardees are: Eric Stewart and Santee Agrispin for their writing and Ummo Ragmunde and Zaira Ramos for their art. Please don’t miss their work in this volume!

Each year, contributors to Escriba present a different confluence of concerns, interests and explorations. This 12th issue seems to me to reflect Hostos students’ interest and concern not only with personal relationships, but also with society and how it reflects -or does not reflect - our diversity and belief in equality for all, no matter what gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or cultural background. Loved ones, family, thoughts of homes far away, current political issues and academic studies are all represented within this volume. We are so proud of the work of our talented and thoughtful students who contribute to Escriba and, indeed, to the life of this college. This year we include the winning essays from three Hostos-sponsored writing contests. We present the winning essays of our Hostos 175th Anniversary Essay Contest whose authors take their inspiration from the life and work of Eugenio María de Hostos. We also have the honor of publishing the winning essays for the Women’s & Gender Studies and the Women’s History Month essay contests. Our Table of Contents presents the essay contest winners each in their own sections.

In addition to the above-noted writing contest winners, other contributions well deserve reading. For example, Karla Ferrera writes beautifully of her journey from not knowing anything about poetry and thus rather fearing it, to (with the help of her English professor) finding that poetry and books awaken her own creative instincts. Jessica Anchundia, a student in Hostos CLIP (CUNY Language Immersion Program) offers a delightful way to explain “Where I’m From,” and Marlenny Toribio, another CLIP student, explains how the victory of Odysseus applies to her own relentless pursuit of education.
and success in life. Jose Javier Castro’s three poems thrill us with their fresh metaphors and make us feel his emotions – as in “Anonymously Yours,” he remembers “all the kisses that escaped/And hugs that died as mere thoughts.”

Our students are no less impressive in their ability to communicate through a visual medium. The artwork in this volume runs the gamut from acrylic painting to scratchboard drawing, charcoal, digital montage art and photography, both “naked” and photoshopped. Among the inspired and inspiring work we present is Abdelrahman Saad’s painting of “Muhammad Ali Pasha” which won the prize for the Library’s Islamic Art contest, part of Professor Jennifer Tang’s year-long “Muslim Journeys” events. The paintings by Ummo Ragmunde, one of our Escríba! awardees, remind us that what colors an artist chooses, and how he decides to create an image with those colors, reveals complex emotions of the artist and the viewer. Likewise, our other art awardee, Zaira Ramos’s contributions reflect the world of photography that makes a personal statement and shows how digital art can capture the artist’s soul. Pablo Quezada’s poster, “Freedom Tower” and Ashley Roman’s “Gov. Jan Brewer of Arizona” political caricature represent the fact that our Hostos students are paying attention to what’s happening in national politics.

We are grateful, as always, for the support of Hostos faculty in helping their students connect with Escríba! and submit their work. In fact, this publication is very much a collaboration, or a group effort, involving many faculty members. Mil gracias - many thanks - to professor Jerilyn Fisher for her help with the Women’s History Month and Women and Gender Studies essay contests, as well as the other members of those committees. Thanks also to professors Leigh Phillips, Andrea Fabrizio, Craig Bernardini, Elyse Zucker, Tere Justicia and Justine Valinottie of the English department. Professors Orlando Hernandez and Ernest Ialongo were key in ensuring that the Hostos 175th Anniversary essay winners are included in this volume. Not to stop here, thanks and congratulations on their students’ success in writing and art are offered to professors Karen Winkler, Ramon Albino and Dr. Fatiha Makhloufi, Director of CLIP. The impressive range of artists who appear here would not be possible without the support of professors Catherine Lewis-Cannon, Sarah Sandman, George Rosa and Michelle Cheikin. Have a wonderful trip wandering through the pages of these extraordinary members of the Hostos Community College Community!
Prejudice against homosexuals has been justified by invoking Old Testament scriptural passages for millennia. These passages include Leviticus 18:22, which refers to same sex relations as “abomination” and Leviticus 20:13 that expands on 18:22 by instructing Hebrews to kill any persons discovered engaging in these relationships. Yet both Jews and Christians tend to attempt to gloss over the books of Samuel that illustrate the same sex love between David (prior to his becoming king after Saul’s death) and Saul’s son, the prince Jonathan. The exegesis of 1 Samuel 18:1 through 2 Samuel 1:27 depicts that the two men shared as David proclaimed: “[a] love that to me was wonderful, passing the love of women” after learning of Jonathan’s death (2 Sam 1:26) leading theologians to debate David’s meaning. Those examinations attempt to disprove that which is clearly written in the text; using modern Western standards, David and Jonathan had been married to each other.

David meets Jonathan directly following his victory defeating the Philistine giant, Goliath (1 Sam. 18:1). Jonathan was immediately taken by the young hero and loved him immediately (1 Sam. 18:1). Jonathan and David made promises to each other and afterwards, Jonathan gave David his princely garments and weapons (1 Sam. 18:3-4). Saul later became jealous of David and plotted to kill him (1 Sam. 19:1). However, Jonathan warned David about the plot and told him to stay away from Saul until he could soften his father’s rage (1 Sam. 19:2-3). Jonathan reminded his father all that David had done for him, including killing Goliath and that to kill him would be a sin (1 Sam. 19:4-5). Saul relented, and David was welcomed back (1 Sam. 19:6-7). Saul’s jealousy of David eventually returned and David was forced to flee again (1 Sam. 20:1). Jonathan promised again that no harm would come to David and the two men reaffirmed their covenant with each other before God (1 Sam. 20:2-17). The two agreed that David would continue to hide and Jonathan would attempt to talk his father from killing David again and if he was successful, he would shoot three arrows in one direction, David could come out of hiding but if the arrows were shot in another direction, David should go on his way (1 Sam. 20:18-22). When Jonathan was asked by his father about David’s whereabouts, he lied and said that David had gone to Bethlehem to be with his
family (1 Sam. 20:27-29). Saul became angry with his son and cursed him (1 Sam. 20:30). Saul then told him that as long as David lived, then he (Jonathan) would never be successful (1 Sam. 20:31). Jonathan refused to tell him where David was hiding, so Saul then attempted to kill his son by throwing a javelin at him (1 Sam. 20:32-33). Jonathan left his father and sought out David (1 Sam. 20:35). David knew that Saul would not welcome him back again and the two men kissed and cried together until David “exceeded” (1 Sam. 20:41). Jonathan wished David farewell and returned to his home and David escaped (1 Sam. 20:42). Jonathan and Saul eventually went to war again with the Philistines and Jonathan was slain by the Philistines, Saul was wounded and rather than be taken prisoner by his enemy, chose to fall upon his sword (1 Sam. 31:2-4). When David was told of the fate of Jonathan and Saul, he mourned them both and sang a song in their memory exhorting Saul’s deeds and how strong was Jonathan’s love for him (2 Sam. 1:17-27).

Zehnder presents the debate as three categories: those that see David and Jonathan as homosexual, those that can understand how the scripture could be construed as such but instead read it as homoerotic instead of seeing the men as a couple and lastly those that interpret the text exclusively as a great friendship with no homosexual or homoerotic undertones (128-129). Zehnder also discusses a fourth faction that see David and Jonathan as homosexual but only to “advance their own agenda,” though Zehnder does begrudgingly admit that the other interpreters could use the text to advance their own biases as well (130). Personal biases can be interpreted in Peleg’s view of the relationship of the two; as he sees them not as male lovers, but in the positions of a man and a woman (172). Peleg states that it is Jonathan’s passivity in surrendering (his princely raiments) to David and not his sexuality that places him in the female role, as opposed to David, who epitomized the male role with his skill in battle. Wernick approaches both sides of the discussion in a thesis versus antithesis format. His examination of the elements of the argument allows an appreciation of the friendship, compassion and love shared by David and Jonathan—irrespective of the inclusion of sexuality (47-62). Heacock’s view is that it is through modern eyes that the friendship has been interpreted as homosexual (225). It is man’s shortcoming of needing to pigeonhole and only be able to see in terms of homosexual and/or heterosexual that the relationship must be codified at all (225). Some scholars have seen the relationship as one-sided, since the text only describes Jonathan’s feelings for David and no response from David. Angel notes through Ackerman, that the Bible is filled with examples of one party revealing love for another and that reciprocation is always implied but not stated (written) and that it is always the dominant of the two who ex-
presses emotions (41-42). This theory fits with Stansell’s anthropological view that Jonathan is the aggressor in the relationship (122) and not as passive as Peleg had claimed. David receives Jonathan’s counsel, comforting and even the initiating of their relationship; this shows that he (David) is the more passive of the two (122). Prior to the first book of Samuel, the word covenant has only been used to describe God’s promise to the Hebrews and business agreements. Thus, when examining the phrase: “then Jonathan and David made a covenant because he loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:3) it can only be inferred that this was in fact a declaration of what would be referred to as marriage in present day between the two men. At no other place in the Bible have the words “covenant” and “love” been used in the same sentence. Later, as the two were preparing to part, the text reads: “...and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded” (1 Sam. 20:41). With the exception of Wernick, each of the authors referenced in this paper disregarded the word “exceeded” (53). Wernick notes that the original Hebrew word gadal when translated is “great” and not exceeded; that the phrase should be interpreted that David had an erection (54). Whether only an erection or an actual orgasm, these translations only reinforce that David and Jonathan had an intimate relationship and not simply a platonic friendship. Wernick observes that only the King James version of the Bible uses exceeded. The New International version deletes the term and the Living Bible not only ignores the word but states that the two men only “shook hands” and did not kiss (54). After learning of Jonathan’s death, David states: “...thy love for me was wonderful, passing the love for a woman” (2 Sam. 1:26). Wernick also discerns that “it would not make sense to compare platonic love for a man with sexual love for a woman; they are two completely different phenomenon” (54).

Wernik has added George Bernard Shaw’s 1895 quote to his article: “no man ever believes that the Bible means what it says; he is always convinced that it says what he means” (47). All peoples come to read biblical text with their own biases and viewpoints; the writers of the Bible shared this as well. David was one of the first kings of Israel and as such, would not want to be depicted as one who did not follow Levitical law. “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” is an old cliché used to support intolerance of homosexuals. The story of David and Jonathan can be debated as a friendship versus an intimate relationship but it can never be ignored.


I’ve been playing both the electric and acoustic variants of the guitar since I was fourteen years old. I’m most inspired by Southern rock and “jam-bands” such as The Allman Brothers Band, and The Grateful Dead, as well as “jazz-fusion” bands like Santana, and Allen Holdsworth with Soft Machine. As a result of these influences I enjoy playing free-form, improvisational music and this music is the main focus of my goals when working on my guitar technique. My ultimate intention is to put together a jazz fusion band of my own and pursue a musical career. To achieve these goals I must also attain a high level of understanding for the most minor, but vital, components of my playing. When I’m playing guitar I’m normally focusing on a multitude of factors that for the most part contribute to how well I play and most importantly, how my playing sounds, especially when I’m improvising. Some of my tasks are simple and at times second nature, like knowing the next notes in a scale sequence after I’ve played the first note. There are also actions that require more attention in order for them to be done properly. An example is accompanying the other musicians I’m playing alongside of, or changing the root note I’m emphasizing. My attention is definitely under a strict budget, I know this because if I undertake a large task like singing as I play, my playing would suffer significantly. Daniel Kahneman, author of “Thinking, Fast and Slow” separates these tasks into two categories, “System One” and “System Two.” A System One task needs only small amounts of attention and in some cases these tasks are sub-conscious, while System Two tasks require large amounts of attention and a moderate amount of effort in order for the task to be executed properly. I firmly believe these tasks differ in their amount of attention consumption, especially when it comes to System Two tasks, because if an individual doesn’t have adequate attention to spare, they will most likely fail a demanding task.

There are some actions that I carry out without even noticing, like alternating the up-and-downward motion of my pick as I strike my guitar’s strings; or maintaining proper position of my fretting hand as I play notes on the fret board. Daniel Kahneman calls this subconscious carrying out of tasks a result of “expert intuition,” or as most musicians refer to this reduction in attention needed, “muscle memory.” Through consistent practice, these tasks have become second nature and in my opinion, most truly physical elements of play-
ing an instrument can enter System One eventually, given the right amount of repetition. In my experience, the physical aspects of guitar technique require less attention because they have become intuitive. An example could be my experiences learning to apply chord patterns and scales sequences to my lead accompaniments. When I first started playing the guitar, simply switching chord patterns required all my concentration and attention. Even when giving the task my undivided attention I still couldn’t switch between different chord patterns quickly or fluently, and even recalling a chord shape required effort. Through consistent repetition (that is, practice!) the motions became intuitive, and thus required less attention. At first, recalling a scale sequence requires a substantial amount of attention as well, even when separate from performing the physical motions through the sequence without error. Besides remembering the notes in a scale sequence, one must keep one’s fingertips facing down toward the strings, and must only press a string on a certain fret with a specific finger, in a specific order. These rules are followed so that one can become accustomed to using all of one’s fingers efficiently; pressing down with the finger closest to the fret to ensure that the hand’s full potential reach is being taken advantage of. Recalling and playing these sequences proved to be such a cumbersome task at first, that I’d have to place the scale sequence diagram in front of me to give my System Two attention enough slack to be able to focus on the physical motions involved as well. The responsibility of constant recall was too much for my System Two to handle, and when trying to perform both tasks at once, I’d eventually fail. But through rigorous repetition, these skills have become intuitive and require less attention. I can now recall scale sequences while focusing on how I can apply them to my accompaniments. Two tasks I used to only be able to focus on individually, I can now focus on almost simultaneously. It may seem that my attention budget has grown, but in fact the reason for this improvement in focus is the result of one of the tasks becoming less effortful, moving into the System One category from the more attention-necessary System Two.

Learning to play a piece of music is fairly similar. Instead of learning scale sequences, I’m given the task of recognizing rhythm patterns and playing chord patterns and individual notes at predetermined times. Learning a piece is far simpler than learning a scale sequence because there aren’t as many changing factors. When learning to play a song, I’m learning to play chord patterns I’ve already learned in a specific order. This makes most conventional songs simple because I’ve already intuited the movements my hand must make. Therefore I only need to practice maintaining a certain timing and ordering of chord patterns. It’s pretty simple and I only find difficulty when multiple sections in
a piece are similar and are only altered by slight musical twists. In these situations, my intuition works against me and I end up following a rhythm learned in a previous section. In these situations practicing each section in their proper order solves this problem with time and the song eventually enters system one to an extent, although it will only stay there if played regularly.

I believe however, that certain tasks will always in some part be confined to System Two; they must remain a main focus of attention and must be maintained with constant vigilance regardless of technical skill. In my opinion, the musical elements that fall into the System Two category are present in creativity. Although it can be intuited to follow patterns and sequences, I’m not entirely sure if someone can create patterns and sequences in a completely intuitive manner. I’m certain that several conscious thought processes have to be performed by musicians when they have to make up their own rhythms to play. I encounter these tasks when improvising, when playing over a progression without any sheet music, tablature, or other predetermined accompaniments. I must simply make my melodic decisions in the spark of the moment through some form of inspiration supplied by outer stimulus and inner concentration. In these situations my attention is diverted to the melodies being played around me, I must take what I hear into consideration as I follow scale sequences and outline chord patterns. Recalling these scale sequences and chord patterns is nearly effortless. They require less attention and so I can spend more of my attention budget on deciding when to pick up speed, when to slow down, when to sustain notes, and when within a song I should simply be silent. These decisions are fairly subjective and are less susceptible to intuition because I must constantly stay on my toes to keep my accompaniments from becoming repetitive. Although the scale sequences are intuitive, the way I choose to arrange the notes within these sequences is in some part examined within System Two. These improvisational musical decisions always require more attention.

I’m somewhat self-conscious of what I play, constantly judging the aesthetic integrity of my accompaniments. I feel this may be at some level an unnecessary consumer of a moderate amount of my attention reserves. On the other hand, I feel this introspection prompts me to maintain a certain amount of quality control. I’m very hyper-critical when it comes to my accompaniments; I criticize them on a second by second basis, noticing what notes and techniques I’m overusing and noticing whenever my technique is compromised by a brash or overconfident move I’ve made trying to display my technical ability. I’m not completely certain if this introspection should be set aside from the spark of the moment when I’m planning my next move,
because although it requires a portion of my attention budget, I feel that these reflections help me improve as a musician. I wonder if these internal conversations could be considered a form of constant feedback needed to achieve expert intuition. Whether positive or negative, my internal feedback forces me out of my comfort zone and results in the development of other aspects of my playing. I’m not certain of its merits but I won’t do away with a mechanism that may be responsible for the speed at which my playing has improved without some evidence that tells me otherwise. I’ve found that when concentrating on doing two things at once, I must always adjust. I’ve found difficulty adjusting, especially when I try to sing while playing an instrument at the same time. In my opinion, this difficulty with dividing my attention musically is the result of trying to maintain two separate rhythms at once. I’ve rarely heard musical pieces in which the vocals and guitar follow the same rhythm patterns. Although the guitar and vocals are almost always playing in the same key, there are rarely following the same rhythm. So when playing guitar and singing vocal parts one must account for vocal rhythm changes and instrumental rhythm changes at different points within a piece of music. This undoubtedly divides my attention, and in my experience singing always takes larger amounts of my attention, making playing a piece of music properly much more difficult. In my experience, my System One attention has the tendency to follow vocal rhythm patterns, almost regarding them as more important than the guitar parts I’m trying to play. My System One tries constantly to make my guitar playing conform to the rhythms I’m following when I sing - which makes it difficult to play a piece of music properly. I’ve yet to overcome these difficulties but I’m sure that through practice I can learn to make these tasks coexist, to some extent at least.

Through examination of the dominant tasks I undertake while playing, I’m reminded that practice has had an indisputable impact on my ability to pay attention to the mental aspects of playing an instrument physically. This analysis of my thought processes while playing guitar could prove fruitful in other areas of my life as well. If I can apply my practice methods in some form to my academic studies, I’m sure that I ill make great strides as a student and in turn earn higher grades.
I’m from encebollado of albacore [fish stew with onions] with roasted corn and much lemon juice, accompanied by rice, bread and coffee served every Sunday when my daddy arrives at our house after a long, tiring day spent working since dawn; I’m from Manicho chocolate and cocada, and helado de paila which my daddy made to sell and keep the five members of our family. I’m from a cane house over a ground that was sometimes filled with water because it didn’t have plumbing, and now that house is a two-story concrete house which my parents built with much effort after many years. I’m from Fertisa, a big neighborhood in the Guasmo in Guayaquil City in Ecuador, where there are children playing in the streets, where there is a fertilizer factory and a pier where international ships arrive. I’m from mangroves where there are many animal species and crustaceans, from Malecon 2000 located on the banks of the Guayas River and where a few times my great-grandmother walked in her wheelchair. I’m from Christmas Day when we went to the Maria Auxiliadora Church to listen to the Midnight Mass and after we went to aunt Fila’s house to drink chocolate with Easter bread, and from the end of the year when all my family were in my house to celebrate the new year while burning the paper doll at midnight.

I’m from great-grandparents Petita and Juan who worked in their fields under the stunning sunshine, who raised my mom (I still don’t know why), from my Grandpa Manuel and my Grandma Rosa who lived in the field near the beautiful beach of Puerto Lopez. I’m from my mom telling my sister and me when we were in preparatory school that we needed to learn to wash our clothes, and take care of my brother who was a baby while she was working. I’m from going to Dominical School every Sunday when my sister was 9, and I was 10 and we listened to Monsignor Nestor Astudillo preach about Saint John Bosco who was the Founder of the Salesian Society. I’m from Guayas, and Manabi, and Middle of the World because the Equator Line crosses my country, Ecuador, from tripa mishqui, humitas and fritada and fish bollo. I’m from my grandmother who had eleven children, of whom my father was the third, who came from Puerto Lopez to Guayaquil to work in a restaurant when he was 15 because he didn’t like going to school, and from my mother who came from Quevedo to Guayaquil when she was 13 to work as a babysitter. I’m
from my family photo album with a paper cover. My mom still has our album in Ecuador. I couldn't bring it with me because my sister didn't allow me to, because it maintains all our memorable moments of when we were children and my daddy worked in fishing ships and my mom took care of my sister and me because my brother had not yet been born, and the albums with photos of my brother when he was born and when he was a child, and the last photos that my sister took of me with my daddy and my mom and all my family when I was in the airport because I was coming to New York and I didn't know when I will be returning to them again.
In reviewing different stories from the website www.storycorps.org, there was one of a young soldier that resonated with me. His name is Travis Williams from Montana and he’s a veteran of the Iraq War. One day while on patrol, his twelve man squad was ambushed, leaving him the only survivor from that wretched ordeal. Travis now struggles with depression and guilt over the fact that he is the lone survivor. “Why me?” was a question constantly on his mind. The thing that now keeps Travis grounded is the idea that his comrades would’ve wanted him to live on and have a full/happy life in their stead. There was a deep connection to this story for me because I’ve also lost many people dear to me and have come to the same understanding as Williams: that when one lives a life with meaning, the legacy of those who put hope in that individual will keep living on as well.

Of loved ones who’ve passed away, the greatest loss for me was that of my mother. Just after my second birthday, at the age of twenty three, Damaris de la Rosa left this world and her toddler son behind. It wasn’t until adulthood that I started realizing the repercussions that entails. I got depressed about my situation and it wasn’t until my perception changed that I able to ponder, “What would mami say if she saw me today?” What came to me was a revelation that helps keep me focused to this day: she would want me to be happy and to make sure that I was living life to the fullest. My belief is that the best way to honor my mother is for me to become successful and never take life for granted. It is my goal to make her proud and to have her live on through me. In conclusion, we all feel the pain of losing someone we care about. It is an unfortunate part of our human experience. What we have to remember is that life goes on—”time waits for no man” (as they say). If we want to truly honor the memory of our deceased loved ones, we must live a life with meaning and purpose in their stead as well. This mentality helps us deal with our pain beneficially, while in a way, immortalizing the legacy of our fallen.

References Travis Williams’ Story:
http://storycorps.org/?s=travis+williams&term=story
Have you ever wondered why we live in such a fast-paced society? Have you ever considered how the elements of the fast food industry affect how we live our lives? Renowned Sociologist George Ritzer addresses this question in his book “The McDonaldization of Society”. According to Ritzer, McDonaldization is defined as “the way in which principals of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of a society as well as the rest of the world.” (Ritzer, 1993:1) In her essay “The McDonaldization of Society; An Overview of the Book” Ashley Crossman describes Ritzer’s theory of McDonaldization and explains how Ritzer’s research expands on the work of Sociologist Max Weber. Weber coined the term rationalization which states that the “traditional ways of thinking were being replaced by an ends/means analysis concerned with efficiency and control.” (Crossman) McDonaldization has a mostly negative effect on the work force and society as it provides short term benefits for consumers and corporations, but has damaging long term effects that are irreversible to our culture.

Ritzer suggests that the concept of McDonaldization has “...spread not only to other types of restaurants, but to industries like toy stores, bookstores...” and other major chain industries. (Crossman) Crossman states that there are several concepts about McDonaldization that Ritzer describes in his book. Efficiency is the first concept and is described as fast and accurate service. It is supposed to be beneficial to consumers; however, consumers take on the tasks that were once provided for them. (Crossman) Some examples include, but are not limited to, ATM’s, self-serve gasoline, and salad bars. Crossman states “The consumers end up spending more time, being forced to learn new technologies, remember more numbers, and often pay higher prices in order for businesses to operate more efficiently and therefore have a higher profit margin.” (Crossman) Calculability is Ritzer’s second concept and can be described as quantity over quality. Consumers pay the price of quality goods in order to receive fast service.

For example, a consumer in a hurry might purchase a meal from Kentucky Fried Chicken which is very unhealthy and unwholesome. Predictability is the third element and is the concept that standardizes all goods and productivity so consumers know what they will be purchasing. This makes sure “our lives
are structured and controlled so that we go through the motions on autopilot.” (Crossman) Control is an element that Ritzer describes as the process of deskilling a worker to produce “…pre-packed, premeasured goods…” which requires the worker to perform single task functions, replacing the “human by nonhuman technology.” (Crossman) These concepts prove that society is becoming more dependent on technology and is moving along with its fast pace.

As we steadily increase our busy schedules with more responsibility, we cope with our fast paced society by sacrificing other aspects of our lives such as quality time with our family, especially time spend at the dinner table. Fast food has replaced quality meals at home. Parents are not the only ones to blame for busy schedules; students are now busy with school work, extra-curricular activities and their own social lives. When families eat together they build better communication skills, value and support. In her essay, “The Disappearing Family Dinner” Barbara Bensoussan describes how Shabbat is the only occasion her family meets to get together. She blames fast food as one factor. Bensoussan remembers reading that the founder of McDonald’s, Ray Kroc, once said the modern day Americans do not eat, they just ‘grab a meal.’ (Bensoussan) Bensoussan states “‘Those of us who appreciate good homemade cooking mourn the loss of nourishing, chemically unaltered, tasty meals. But the main problem with the disappearance of the family supper is not so much the loss of wholesome home-cooked meals, rather the loss of family time. When dinner becomes a fragmented, rushed affair, eating gets downgraded from a social, family event to a solitary refueling, akin to filling up the gas tank of a car.” (Bensoussan) The elements of McDonaldization negatively affect our quality time at home and with family as they impose arduous responsibilities in our daily lives making us unhappy and unbalanced individuals.

In his essay “Why We Work” Andrew Curry discusses how McDonaldization of society has a negative effect on workers. Curry describes how the industrialized job market fails to provide workers with a “less work, more free time” environment. (Curry) Businesses increased hours of their workers in order to increase production resulting in high stress levels, less time at home, and unhappiness. (Curry, 400-402) Curry writes “Fully one third of American workers who work longer hours than their counterparts in any industrialized country – felt overwhelmed by the amount of work they had to do…” (400) It is clear that the McDonaldization of society contributes to the exploitation of the working class of American society.

Unlike Curry, Robert B. Reich does not blame McDonaldization or Industrial Corporations for the exploitation of workers. In his essay “Don’t Blame Wal-Mart” Robert B. Reich discusses the economic influences of Wal-Mart.
Reich states that Wal-Mart should not be blamed for low wages, no health insurance and the banishment of unions in large chain stores. Reich argues that the consumers’ desire for low prices is to blame. Reich states “We can blame big corporations, but we're mostly making bargains with ourselves. The easier it is for us to get great deals, the stronger the downward pressure on wages and benefits.” Reich suggests that the only way to avoid worker exploitation is for society to agree to pay more for goods and services, which is something most of us are not willing to do.

Although McDonaldization gives the consumer faster service and lower priced goods, the price we pay is highly destructive to the quality of our lives. The fast paced lives we lead are meaningless; we have become robotic creatures influenced by industry. It seems that there is never enough time to do everything. People are on an overload at the cost of low prices and high production for corporations. As a society, we eat poorly, exercise less, work harder than ever and in turn lead empty lives and lose a lot of our values. We have less time to participate in activities that are fulfilling such as family time, exercise, hobbies and extra-curricular activities. In order for us to be a stable society, we will have to look for ways to slow down and set limits to avoid allowing our fast paced society design our lives for us.

WORKS CITED


Dear girl with the big brown eyes
Here I stand stripped of valor,
To confront you
Tormented by the fact that
Every morning the sun caresses your skin
And I won’t.
Jealous that your subtle smirks throughout the day
Won’t be shared with my memories.

I run into you often in the hallway
As if my mind attracted you to something that would never be.
Hidden in anonymity and glimpsed in a Greek fairytale,
With the grace of a beauty queen
And a smile that would make any General chuckle
And eyes that would catch the attention of the busiest Angel.

As I walk down the beach,
Blowing on empty bottles,
Hoping that one and just one wish can be granted to me
With a slothful smile
I remember all the kisses that escaped
And hugs that died as mere thoughts.

My vagabond heart strolls in a gloomy purgatory,
Doing time for a crime never committed.
Oh, such a sweet Chaos!

I now sit here,
Gulping a bottle of solitude
And sweating in cold misery
While you commit innocent felonies against my soul.

My Heart makes a toast of poison to your indifference
In hope that we die inside this fantasy
If to love you is a sin,
let us rot in hell Together.
How I miss thee
The connection to Earth has been disconnected
With concrete barriers.
The warmth of life has been distinguished
By long, frigid nights.
The humble people overshadowed
By hard hearts and plain faces.

Tropical fruits substituted with canned lies.
It feels that happiness refused to take flight
When I decided to leave all I knew behind.
Am I truly better off here
When misery follows like an un-rested phantom?
Has diversity taken away my identity?
When did I exchange my childhood and reality
For dreams and mediocrisy?

Mi Tierra
How I miss you!
I’m now idle and
Living in cultural limbo
Considered a foreigner by both
My home country and the country
I now call home.
A citizen of both,
A resident of No Man’s Land.

Every time I visit you is like a gulp of fresh air
From this drowning pool of misery.
You are rich in culture
And frozen in a decade far before this one,
Low on resources, yet high on laughs.
Maybe I’m filled with sorrow
Because adulthood finally knocked down the door
That was protecting my innocence.
I’ve reached a time of routine misfortune
A time where selfish thoughts overcome what was once a perfect world.

“Canal and Bridge” by Rainer Rodriguez
Gone but not forgotten,
Soft hearts but striking force,
Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force
The blood, the sand,
Such a sweet chaos
We are saving you
But who’s here to save us?

Gone but not forgotten
My eyes are heavy
My soul is restless
But there’s no other place
I’d rather be
Than with my Brothers
My boots, and my rifle.
What else do I need?

Gone but not forgotten -
Oh God!
How I miss boot camp.
All good times come hard
But all hard times come to an end

Gone but not Forgotten.
Paradigms of the mind
Distorted and misplaced.
Mental state in constant unwind,
Reality and dreams interlaced.

To me there is no fear -
For in its clutter the mind still sees as clear as day.
Holds more than what at first glance appears
Capable of forming colors from the gray.

Like pulling comedy from a noir
A metaphorical skeleton key
A mind to open any door.
Insanity with clarity.

“Old Wood Building” by Ramon Cardenas
GISSELLE BELIA

ADIOS

I
Tantos pensamientos que no salieron a la luz
Tantos amores que se han quedado en el aire
Tantos besos que se los llevo el viento
Tantos sueños que se quedaron en tu boca
Y tantos sueños que se quedaron en tu barca.
Tus inmortales recuerdos sufragio que nunca va a terminar, y hoy solo nos
queda el leve Susurro de tu voz que ya desapareció, y el complemento
de días que no vas a vivir.

II
Tantas cosas que se nos queda en la puerta junto a nuestra esperanza,
Tantas cosas sufrida, tantas alegrías que me faltaron por vivir junto a ti.
Hoy cuando te recuerdo la melancolía se apodera de mí,
Por tantas cosas que se quedaron en la boca que la alegría de tenerte no me
permitió decírtelo.
Hoy que ya no tengo el nudo en mi garganta refleja mi angustia al no poder
vivir sin ti.
Hey Marco!

Been a while, hope all is well in beautiful South Africa and my best to the family. This semester has been an absolute bear, but I have to say that it has made me even more determined to get my law degree; especially after the events of this past week. Again, extremely thrilled about your project and honored to be a part of it. Its quite a feat to gather information on criminal justice systems from various countries and compare the procedures, your book will be a best seller I’m sure. As promised, here is my contribution from the great state of New York. As we’ve discussed previously, my personal journey into the world of the criminal justice system includes first my volunteer work with parolees in the Harlem Community Justice Center’s reentry court program that led me to begin serving as a volunteer prison chaplain for the New York City Department of Corrections. Working with Corrections has allowed me to assist my priest during mass at Rikers Island facility and subsequently, performing my own penitential services at Manhattan Detention Center, aka the Tombs. So I’m familiar with those that are either incarcerated or recently released from facilities but I’ve always kind of wondered as to what are the events within the criminal justice system that lead to incarceration and your book gave me the extra push to investigate. Well, I have learned, and learned well this week.

My journey began at my local New York Police Department (NYPD) station in Harlem; the 32nd Precinct. It is a very plain, small, grey building and its lobby area is blue, not an unfriendly atmosphere but certainly not inviting. I spoke with the desk sergeant and asked if it would be permissible for me to observe the goings on of the department for an hour or so. I was told that civilians are not allowed to do so due to confidentiality concerns for both the department and those arrested, but he was happy to answer my questions. We began discussing what actually happens once a person is arrested for a crime and then brought to the precinct. The sergeant explained that the accused goes through a process that is referred to as being “pedigreed,” and this entails being photographed, fingerprinted and checking the NYPD database to see if the person has a previous arrest record and/or outstanding warrants for arrest. Afterwards, depending on the circumstances of the arrest charges, several scenarios come into play. They can meet with a detective for questioning, be put into a police line-up so that victims can confirm that the right person has been arrested for the crime and/or be simply held for a few hours and released with a desk summons to appear before a judge in court at a later date. For those not released, they are held for up to five hours maximum before being
transferred out. These transfers can be to either Rikers Island or the Tombs to wait for arraignments, depending on the population count at either facility at that time. Arraignments are where the accused stands before a judge and is read the charges against them by an assistant district attorney (ADA) who represents the State of New York. Afterwards they respond to those charges by entering a plea of guilty or not guilty. An attorney represents the accused, and bail is set during these proceedings. When someone is arrested in New York City, they normally are arraigned (and later tried) in the courts of whichever borough the arrest happened in.

My next stop was to the Bronx Criminal Court House (as that courthouse is much closer to my neighborhood than the one in lower Manhattan), to see what happens in these arraignment hearings. This building is very old and under renovation. The lobby is very large and visitors have to move through a long line in order to enter a metal detector for weapons and contraband items in order to be granted entry. The court officers are very professional and rather standoffish until you’ve completed the scan. Afterwards, they are very friendly and open to answer questions. I was instructed to go to the second floor where the misdemeanor arraignments are held. As soon as you come off the escalator, you enter a large waiting room and to one side is an office called Social Services. I found out later that when sentences include social services, this office helps the sentenced with drug counseling, housing needs and other social service related issues. Then I entered the courtroom; Room 214C.

As you enter the double doors there is a sign saying to remove hats, turn off cell phones and that no cameras are allowed. The public gallery area has twelve rows of very long benches, six per side of the room. I was surprised that no one else was in attendance to watch any proceedings. It is a very bright area in stark contrast to litigation area. As the building is under construction, it really showed in that particular area. It is filled with court clerks, who handle the administrative duties within the courtroom, court officers, which are the law enforcement part of the court system (as opposed to NYPD which has jurisdiction on the City), ADAs and Legal Aid attorneys. Legal Aid attorneys (also known as public defenders) are for those individuals who do not have the financial resources to hire their own attorney, these attorneys do not charge for their services and are compensated directly by the courts. And of course the judge, who (just as your magistrates do) interprets the laws of New York State and issues rulings as to bail amounts or dismissal of charges on each case. Directly in front of litigation on the right side is a small desk for non Legal Aid attorneys to use and next to that is another desk; this is for police officers. There I spoke with another NYPD sergeant who explained who the various “players,” were—both those I could see and those who were behind the scenes, as well as their respective roles. The sergeant described that prior to arraignment, the accused is the responsibility of the NYPD and is held in a holding area by the police officers. S/he is then under the jurisdiction of the court officers during arraignment. After arraignment, the accused is then under the authority of the Department of Corrections and is led to a facility. I watched many arraignments and it was fascinating. As the accused come through a door, handcuffs
are removed and they must keep their hands behind them. One defendant did not follow those instructions and was led back inside and their arraignment was postponed. The ADAs open the proceedings, outlining the cases against the accused and request bail amounts. As the accused are facing misdemeanor charges, the bail requests I observed were predominantly between five hundred and one thousand dollars. One request was for ten thousand dollars as this defendant had a very violent past according to the ADA, though the crime they were accused of at that time was non-violent. The majority of the charges read were for petty larceny (the stealing of items or monies below five hundred dollars) and a few disorderly conduct arrests. The Legal Aid attorneys counter ADAs with requests for bail to be reduced or dismissed entirely. They give the judge a short outline on the defendants’ character and background in order to justify the requests. With several of the defendants’, the Legal Aid attorneys argued that as they were homeless people, they would be unable to make the bail amounts and charges should be dismissed. The judge takes into consideration the seriousness of the charge and defendant’s background in order to make a ruling. Unless the defendant is accepting a plea bargain during arraignment, they do not speak directly to the judge during the proceedings, only whisper to their representative. One defendant had had a fight with their roommate and was released ROR (release on recognizance) which means defendants are allowed to leave jail but would need to return to court at a later date. The defendant was also sent to Social Services so that they could seek assistance in finding a new home, as they were now homeless. Due to the fight, the complainant (the person that had accused the defendant of a crime) had requested an order of protection from the court and this order bars the accused from contacting the complainant before their next court date. I witnessed many of these orders being issued. Defendants were barred from contacting family members, returning to businesses, etc.

I observed all of this on Monday and the courts were to be closed Tuesday and Wednesday due to the Passover holiday. I’m so happy they were because on Wednesday, there was a news story discussing the arrests of many gang members and their subsequent arraignments in Court on Thursday. I attended those arraignments as well. These felony arraignments were to happen in another building, the Bronx County Hall of Justice. Comparing the Criminal Court building I had previously visited with the Hall of Justice is like comparing night to day. The edifice is beautiful, with glass walls, marble floors and modern benches in the public areas. As Thursday was a very bright and sunny day, the sunlight gleaming throughout the building was stunning. As the arrests of the accused gang members had included a speech by our new police commissioner Bill Bratton, it attracted a great deal of media attention. The case was held in Room 300 and members of the press inhabited the box that normally holds members of juries. The television station News 12 was in attendance as well and a television camera was present too. I spoke with a reporter from the newspaper El Diario who gave me a little background on the upcoming procedures. There were thirty-four defendants in total and each indictment contained eighty counts or charges. The defendants were first indicted by the
Grand Jury, which decides whether there is sufficient evidence to continue proceedings in felony cases. Those proceedings are not open to the public so I was unable to attend those as well. The courtroom for the arraignment was just as beautiful as the courthouse. The entirety of the courtroom was well lit and reminded me greatly of courtrooms portrayed in television programs. Monitors were placed throughout and the public gallery was very spacious as well with four long benches on either side of the center aisle. Many family members were in attendance to watch the proceedings. As each defendant was brought out, two court officers stood at each side of them and two more also stood facing the gallery. Each defendant was charged with conspiracy; this charge is given when two or more people plot to commit a crime and some were charged with attempted murder as well. The seriousness of the charges led to bail requests between thirty thousand and eighty thousand dollars. The accused were not represented by Legal Aid attorneys but by court appointed attorneys instead. Court appointed attorneys are lawyers who have their own practices but will take on felony cases without compensation. They too receive payment for services directly from the courts. Though I did not have the chance to speak to one directly, I am assuming that due to the seriousness of the charges, Legal Aid attorneys are not able to serve in extended trials due to their own high case loads and that these court appointed attorneys do not share these same restrictions. As in misdemeanor cases, the ADAs and defense attorneys argued for bail amounts that were requested by the ADA. Also, evidentiary trial dates were set as well; this gives the defense attorneys time to go over the accused charges and the ADAs time to put together their cases. Afterwards, each defendant was led away and returned to a correctional facility until the new trial dates. Marco, there is so much more to tell but I’ll stop here. I will add though, that I had also observed part of a murder trial as well as witnessing two separate proceedings for the sentencing of defendants that were convicted of murder during my “tour”. In both hearings, victims’ impact statements were read; in one proceeding by the prosecutor and in the other, by a family member of the deceased. In both incidences, they were truly heart wrenching. These statements allow victims to tell the convicted how their crime affected their families. I was saddened that in each, the families of the deceased did not get responses from the convicted. If I were in a position to
establish or modify existing policies, the convicted would have to speak directly to their victims’ families, who deserve the chance for some sort of closure after losing a loved one.

Seeing how the system works from the beginning to the end was enlightening though it was disheartening to see so many people brought in and out in both the felony and misdemeanor arraignments. It was like there is just never a shortage of defendants. You may have noticed that at no time did I refer to anyone by race or gender. I wanted you to have an objective view of our justice system. However, I can say that every gender, nationality, age and even sexual preference was represented in both those accused and all those on the side of justice. I believe each arraignment was fairly executed. The misdemeanors judge did what was best for the defendant and their accuser and the felony judge did what was best for the community at large in my opinion. I’ve always been a supporter of our criminal justice system and these observations have reinforced that belief. I know I was born to be an ADA myself; being in court this week only strengthened my resolve to go forth with that plan.
I. The poem in my hand was life-giving, and I was a wall

New York. City, full of concrete and endless streets, and there is me, a seventeen year old girl, becoming part of that rapid and nonsensical lifestyle. I wake up every morning to the sound of my favorite techno song, just to see if my day could be different from the next. It is my third semester at Hostos Community College, and I feel prepared, yet scared because I have to face, once again, my “fear” to write. My attitude was positive; I was telling myself affirmations so my mind could believe me, but not the type of affirmations that Shakti Gawain means when she says, “an affirmation is a strong, positive statement that something is already so” (Cameron 37). By my saying I was positive, I was telling myself, “I love English; I love to write”; however, I knew that those were lies. It was Wednesday, a sunny Wednesday. Or maybe it was a dull and grey Wednesday, I can’t remember now. I grabbed my iPhone - my dear friend - and headed out to college. I got there early; the fourth floor of the big, and I dare to say, the main building of the college was a new experience; I had never been there.

I took the stairs to kill time and walked slowly just so I would not be the first to get there. The number of the classroom memorized, and also written down in my little blue agenda, I finally saw my destination. The classroom was at the end of the hall, yet it looked like a bird cage in the middle of a zoo. It is out so everyone can see it; however, it was still a cage, full of beautiful creatures – students - tweeting for attention. I sat in front, second row to the left, with the hope that the teacher likes me for being in the front and gives me an A. Or maybe, I was too scared of going to the back of the classroom and getting followed by tiny, dark but strong crows’ eyes: judgmental people. It was 11 am when the teacher got to the classroom.

A Northern Cardinal, with black shoes, black pants, and black shirt, and bright red hair. She was full of jokes and fine grammar, and energy, ready to spend it all that semester. She introduced herself, Ms. Phillips. She didn’t say it right away, but I knew she was not from the city; her white complexion, and comfy way to dress was not suitable for the uptight and multicultural life of the city. Then, there was me, clueless of how I was going to go through this class. I took out my books and sat back. Suddenly, Ms. Phillips said that we would only need a pen for an assignment, and quickly handed out papers for each of the confused birds. She said, “Write whatever you understand” and she also added, “There is no right or wrong when it comes to understanding poetry.” Then, I read the paper heading: “What is the poem about?” What?
How am I supposed to know what it is about? That was the first time I had read a poem. And believe me, I would have wished it to be the last time. The bright red bird says, “Read the first line of a poem, the title.” I thought what does “Harlem” have to do with anything; do I really need poetry to pass this class? “Harlem” by Langston Hughes. 11 lines and 4 stanzas, and combination of simile and rhymes. Those are the stylistics terms to describe the poem, just from the outside though. At first, you only see a group of words together, trying to make sense with one another. Your eyes focus on the weird way the poem is organized, and ask yourself how so little can tell so much. At the beginning, my ignorance didn’t let me realize how poetry is full of power. Dana Gioia in “Can Poetry Matter?” states, “Poetry is the art of using words charged in the utmost meaning.”

Gioia meant that poetry is more than just grouped words in the same line. Each one of the words has individual power and an important meaning. Poetry is an art that I was taking for granted. However, that Wednesday, a heat was growing inside me, a calm and goosebumps heat. Those butterflies you feel inside, flying all around your stomach, trying to find a way out through your mouth. The poem made me feel I was alone in the bird cage, just me and “him”, trying to communicate with each other, trying to understand each other. Suddenly, the poem was over. I looked up at the white board in front of me, with “Ms. Phillips” written down on it. I realized the tweeting around me; I guess I was not alone any more. The bright red bird said that we only have five minutes left to complete the assignment. I wrote down many ideas, yet none of them were clear. I felt I was discovering something new in me. I was not feeling dull, heavy numbness. I was feeling the colors, the lightness and life-giving feeling that the poem gave me. My journey to find my creative self, that was exactly what I was discovering; the road to a new excursion. I was traveling from the cage to the outside world. I looked at myself from above, and realized I was the one to open the place that I was locked in. I was no longer willing to participate with the rest of the nonsense birds inside the cage. Throughout the journey, a passage from The Talmud gave me strength: “every blade of grass has its Angel that bends over it and whispers grow, grow” (Cameron 3). I kept looking myself from above and opened the door; with doubt I took my first step, spread my wings, and chose to fly.

II. The date is Autumn and I am transforming

It is a lovely and sunny Sunday, and I am sitting on a green bench in Central Park. I choose the spot because is quiet, and lonely. It smells like rain has not been around here in a long time, and it is a dry afternoon. However, I am enjoying the little bit of heat that is left before Christmas comes. Autumn tastes like pumpkins, and Halloween, and even though we are all excited, we all know that Thanksgiving is not here yet. We have to go through the lonely autumn, before we go through the overcrowded winter, full of tourists, and New Yorkers. We first have to go through the dryness, before getting to the lively festivities. In other words, we must go through the hard times, in order to get to the good times. An old man with a worn-out Yankees cap and funny
beard takes my attention, while he plays the violin for tips. He plays the instrument soft enough to calm the baby in front of him, but loud enough to make everyone in the park aware of the melody. Sunday is a day that people take to walk around, to do something different, and to get out of their routines. That is exactly what I need to do, I say to myself. The violin stops playing, and a big brownish and yellowish leaf falls on my left shoulder. I look up and realize there is no tree above me, only the sky full of sunlight. I look forward, and there it is, the most beautiful tree I have ever seen. It looks like it is on fire, and full of passion. The tree is yelling at me; it is trying to get my attention. I could even swear that I didn't find the tree, the tree found me. The more I appreciate its beauty the more I perceive that the tree is there for a reason: to teach me a lesson. I grab the light, fragile leaf and watch it carefully. I can notice its beauty, the little paths that it has; they are the years that she has been on that tree. The leaf has lost its vivid and lively green, yet it is still beautiful and unique. The leaf tells a story; and as I am holding it softly, it is trying to get inside me. The leaf is inviting me to see myself on her. I do want to see myself in the leaf; I do really want to learn from her. Stella Mann once said, “Desire, ask, believe, receive” (Cameron 66). I ask myself: what do I have in common with a leaf? The old man starts playing another piece of joy. I giggle almost in silence, and put my eyes into the tree on fire, and then look at the leaf.

How could she come from that far? The wind was calm; however, she was the only one flying away. She decided to take her own path, and disappear. She danced in the air, slowly, and calmly. She does not know where she is going to end up, yet she makes the decision to leave. She knows that her time is now, that she cannot be attached to that tree forever. She is aware that she made the tree beautiful one day, but now is her time to shine. The leaf decided to live on her own. I am the leaf. I decided to fly on my own, and go to places that I don’t know. I decided to leave what I know behind, and dance around to new things. I am the leaf because I am transforming, just like she is. I, like her, decide to please myself, and not others. Although the tree is still there, it is waiting for that final moment when all its leaves fall down. The tree was once strongly standing on the ground, full of life and nests made by little noisy birds, and giving shadow to squirrels and home to the ants. Back then, the tree was the attraction for the tourists and hope for the lovely couple. The colorful tree was the friend of the kids that were playing, and a special territory for dogs. The tree knew it was full of power, and it knew it was admired. However, it is time for the tree to change, to become new again. I am the tree. I decided to be there for others, and do what I can do to help others. I am the tree because I am transforming.

I, like the tree, decided to change myself, in order to grow strong again. Even though we feel that we are falling, we have no idea of where to go, or maybe we just decide to fly away, and change our path. Or maybe, we were strong once, and now we are getting weak. It is always good to remind ourselves that there is Someone caring for us from above, Someone who cries every time we give up and who wishes we could be that colorful leaf or that strong tree forever. A poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, called “Autumn” describes
exactly these feelings. The poet writes, “and yet there is Someone, whose hands infinitely calm, holding up all this falling” (stanza 4, line 8-9). Rilke writes this in order to give us hope. He reminds us that even though we are not having a good moment or maybe we are just too weak to stand up by ourselves, God is there and we should deliver ourselves to him. Just like the leaf and the tree do, they change what they are in order to keep life going. That is exactly what I am trying to do, to change and keep transforming, in order to become new again, and learn from every experience in life.

Henry David Thoreau, author of Walden, once wrote “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what I had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” Thoreau explains my feelings as if he was next to me in that park, that afternoon. I went to the park to reunite myself with nature, but most importantly I went to the park to meet my soul and my body. Thoreau’s most relevant part of the quote in my opinion is, “when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (“Where I Lived and What I Lived For”). When I went to the park with the hope to find sadness and things to remind me of why I was unhappy, I found that I was living without truly living. I was walking, yet I was not feeling the ground under my feet. I was ignoring the beauty of the true meaning of living. How could someone die, without being alive? As I was sitting on that bench, under that red tree, I was praying for the answer.

Now, I am writing and still do not know the answer; however, I am not looking to find it anymore. I decide to start living before I want to go to the woods and want to die. I want to “live deliberately” and not think about “what if.” I want to enjoy every step I make. I was once dead, but I am not anymore. Thoreau continues with the quote and states, “I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life....” Thoreau realizes how special life is; he wants to live to the fullest, and refuses to give up. He decided to not accept anything less than the glee of life.

The author desires to enjoy his existence, and craves to take advantage of the best of it. As I decide to live, poetry comes and touches the feelings inside me that were untouched for a while, those feelings that were waiting for a call. Poetry comes and makes me not go to the woods to find my death. In fact, poetry makes me to go to the woods and write about it. Poetry is the invisible force holding me and preventing me from falling to the limbo, once again. Yet, I have something in common with Thoreau; I want to live, and I will not give up, and I am starting to live now.

III. I was searching and I found Love

I fell in love with the book. I felt a force pulling me to the third shelf of that small, tight hall. The only person in that little corner, besides me, was this short girl with golden curls, and hipster glasses. She was organizing and putting into alphabetical order the pieces of art. This is how my story begins. Our eyes meet and she politely smiles; however, I do not ask her where I can find a good book of poetry. I want to be touched by the book. In other words, I am
trying to let the book decide if I am welcomed to see it, to discover it. The poetry section is really small compared to the other sections. There are four short rows with many shelves full of poetry. I feel like I am in another world. Authors, titles, and different sizes catch my attention. I feel lost, yet I do not feel frightened. I feel I belong here. I start to explore the place. I am not touching the books; I feel I might break them. They are too delicate and can tear apart easily. That is how I feel. These books are pieces of art, and I must take care of them. Instead of looking at the books, I prefer to look around. My serenity is disturbed when I step on a loose piece of wood on the floor. It makes a funny sound, as if a mouse or a rabbit were under the floor. Suddenly, a very tall man with a small hat and long black coat looks at me, while holding a big book. I go to the second row, where the interesting man is, and pretend I know about poetry. I start reading the first page of every book I grab, and nod my head as if I understand half of the page. I hold this heavy burgundy book with golden letters in front. I do not even want to read the title, but I definitely see that it is the second volume of this enormous book, so I put it back immediately.

I go to a corner, bend myself a little bit; I close my eyes to read better, and focus my attention on this thin and cute book. It is green and its lettering is pink, and the cover has two figures dancing. I feel intrigued by the title, The Wild Party, and grab it quickly. I first inspect the back, and the image makes my jaw drop. It has a woman in her birth suit; I silently laugh, and ignore it. Then, I open the book and I feel the velvet. It feels classy, I think. For some reason, the laminated paper cover does not fit right. The fine velvet makes the book feel unique, and in some way antique. It has the impression of an old, but a classic book. Yet, the paper and ordinary cover do not match with this feeling. I decide to ignore the appearance and take a chance. I read the first page, which immediately grabs me into the pages and screams: embrace me.

The rhymes are delightful, and beautifully situated. With no doubts I say to myself, this is the one. I hold it tight to my stomach as if it is going to fall. I squeeze it but not too hard, because I do not want to break it. I do not hold it too soft, because it might touch the ground and break. I keep looking at other books, but none of these books feel like the one I am holding. This book has its own soul, and is clearly telling me to receive it. I know the book is alive. I can feel the warmth through my fingers. Besides, I feel connected when I perceive the velvet. It is red velvet and we all know what that means. If velvet is included in something, it must be something great. These feelings are quite strange if you think that a book, or in my case poetry, does not have a meaningful power over people. William Wordsworth once said, “All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility.” If you really believe that poetry can make you feel all those feelings, riding a rollercoaster, then you will totally understand my innocent and new relationship with this book. Back to the quote, the most important part is: “emotions recollected in tranquility”. I say that it is relevant because it does describe me, and what I am going through; the discovery of my creative self. This book makes my feelings in tranquility come out. In other words, these feelings were never lost. However, they were never stimulated in order for them
to flourish. My feelings were sitting, waiting for something to move them, something that actually would help me to feel alive, and help my spirit to find its place. I want to know the book a little bit more. I want to see what is underneath the useless plastic that it is covering it. I decide to be brave enough and undress my new acquisition. After all, this adorable item is mine. I take off the cover that is stopping the book from fully showing up. In the beginning, I think that radiant red velvet interior is amazing. Yet, after my eyes meet this mysterious, deep green cover that the plastic is protecting, I feel in love with the book. It is love at first sight. Sweet piano melodies harmonize in my head and warm sentiments are perfectly fitting together in my soul. My “emotions in tranquility” are finally awakening, just like my spirit. The intensity of this strange love I am developing for a couple of pages seems unnatural. However, to the little bird that lives inside me, this feels like sunlight in the cold winter, like new leaves to the old tree on the park, or like a newborn to the first time mom. The world might say strange, but my inner self says success.

IV. My soul was dying and poetry was the treatment

Anais Nin writes powerfully and insightfully in The Diary of Anais Nin, Vol 1. 1931-1934. She explains in her own words how unhappy we can be if we do not find the miracle “shock treatment” to save us. The author writes: You live like this, sheltered, in a delicate world, and you believe you are living. Then you read a book... or you take a trip... and you discover that you are not living, that you are hibernating. The symptoms of hibernating are easily detectable: first, restlessness. The second symptom (when hibernating becomes dangerous and might degenerate into death): absence of pleasure. That is all. It appears like an innocuous illness. Monotony, boredom, death. Millions live like this (or die like this) without knowing it. They work in offices. They drive a car. They picnic with their families. They raise children. And then some shock treatment takes place, a person, a book, a song, and it awakens them and saves them from death. Some never awaken. (“Anais Nin Quotes”) Breaking this quote down piece by piece, we can tell that we all have gone through this figurative death. At some point of our lives, we think that there is nothing else we can do to make our lives more exciting, or more worth living. However, Nin says that at that critical point of our life, something can light us up and can give us life. We might read a book, or be positively affected by something and that is when everything can change. That book can makes us feel as if we have been hibernating, Nin says. The author continues and mentions that there are signals that alert us before we die. That is the absence of pleasure; this is to lose interest in everything that surrounds us. When one does things without expecting something from it, they are basically wasting the little time they have on earth. They are just doing it because they have to, and in my opinion we should all have something to feel pleasure for. This might be cooking on Sundays for your family, or running every morning around your neighborhood, or simply reading poetry to enrich your soul. The lack of simple pleasures like the ones I mentioned can sure lead us to monotony. This is the death of all humans’ spirits’ creativity. Most of us wake up, go to work, or in my case school, do homework, and go to bed; just to repeat the same routine the next day. I know
about this because I was one of those people that was dying inside. My soul was slowly fading to gray, and I did not know what to do. I was in the search for something to paint my soul again, yet I did not know what I was searching for. And so it was - until that day, that day when my creative self found poetry and my soul felt heard again, and my creative self was dancing and opening the cage to express itself. Nin calls this the awakening of someone’s self; the “shock treatment.” The author states that the treatment can be “a person, a book, a song”. It does not really matter in what shape it comes; it just comes and saves us from that death. When the author uses the word “death” it is not only meaning the separation of the spirit and body, it goes beyond this. This death comes slowly, killing the soul and our essence little by little. Nin supports this statement when she adds, “It appears like an innocuous illness. Monotony, boredom, death. Millions live like this (or die like this) without knowing it.”

This particular part of the quote defines my past. Monotony appeared in my life like a thief in the night; I did not see it coming; moreover, one day I just noticed it. The symptoms of boredom overflowed my body and made me feel useless, but before boredom, was monotony, of course. Monotony came to my life at a young age. From the beginning of my childhood, to the early pre-teen years, my schedule was full of many activities. I was an actress and model by the time I was in fifth grade. In other words, instead of me playing outside, I was at home reading monologues. Work, and no time for recreation were part of my life since then. I was doing the same activities over and over again, with no breaks for doing things out of the “schedule of activities” as I used to call it. By then, I was enjoying what I did not know; I was being part of the assassination of my creative self. And neither I, nor my mom was aware of such a mistake. In fact, that is the worst part. Despite the intentions of my mom that I believe were the best, I do have some regrets. That is, I could not fully develop the creativity inside myself like children would. Poetry was the treatment, and surely it awakened me. For so long I was living to the standards of others. As I mentioned before, I was in a place where I was just doing things in sequence to please others. Poetry makes me feel that I am the one who is deciding whether to read it or not. I am acting now, like that free bird that got out of the cage. Neither my professor, nor my parents are telling me that I should read it. I am choosing to explore it my own, and I accept the adventure. I do not regret who I am now, yet I wish for the treatment to come a little bit earlier. Moreover, I am very lucky because I woke up. Nin expresses, “some never awaken.”There are people who will never wake up, and will be forever trapped in the fog of routine, and many will die without having fully lived. However, there is always hope. Hope is the guidance of us all, that invisible force that holds us. If we ever feel lost, and confused, we can count on it and be confident that something will respond to our request. That is something that very deep inside of each one of us will comfort us. Hope is in every single person; the issue is that is hard to discover it. We are often too

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“Flash & Champ” by Ashley Ferrara
“Playing with the Fire” by Olga Savchenko
“Cosmos” by Joseph Alba
“All Washed Up on the Shores of Life” by Ummo Ragmund
“Cosmic Doctors Examine Toscanini’s Heart” by Ummo Ragmunde
“Old Man”
by Raymond Curbelo
“Chrysler Building, NYC” by Sarah Yanes
“Moonscape” by Corey Paniaqua
“Muhammad Ali Pasha” by Abdelrahman Saad
“Hostos is the PathMaker to Success” by Makea Lowe
“Gov. Jan Brewer of Arizona” by Ashley Roman
“Awesome” by Syreeta Edwards
“Cancer Survivor” by Gisvell Brito
“Puerto Rican Within” by Zaira Ramos
“Pink Umbrella in Snow” by Zaira Ramos
“Freedom Tower” by Pablo Quezada
overwhelmed with problems and insecurities that we frequently forget what life is really about. We ignore that hope, can come in the shape of a friend, a new opportunity, or in my case; hope came as a discovery of poetry. There is, for sure, a superior being that guides us all, and watches us all. That invisible force was watching me dying inside, and saved me from endless sadness. It sent me the cure in the form of art. Poetry is the medicine that I would say came at the right time. I am noet longer the bird that was once in a cage. I am not the leaf that is losing its color or the tree in the fall that is dying slowly. I am not the author that goes to the woods to find himself. My soul is not ill, yet it is cured. I can ensure that I will never go back to that infinite circle of what I used to call life. Poetry, creative activities, and the continuation of a journal will be the tools that I will use to fight monotony from entering my life, once again. Moreover, the journey was worth it, and I can say I am poetry, and I am alive.

V. I am Free
Almost jumped to
The lake of darkness
Almost drowned my soul
And dreams
I almost lost my essence
And all because I did not feel.

I was moving, but I wasn’t walking
I was breathing but my heart wasn’t beating.

Words and rhymes
Opened my casket
Words and rhymes
Put my spirit on a special basket.

I unlocked my cage
I painted a new path
And now I am here
Smiling at my past.
WORKS CITED


In a New York Times article titled “Why Sisterly Chats Make People Happier,” author Deborah Tannen discusses her research on how having a sister may reinforce happiness in one’s life. Her study suggests that both men and women can maintain a happier lifestyle through constant communication with their sisters. According to Tannen, it isn’t necessarily the topic of conversation that matters; instead, it is the frequency of communication and length of conversation that were significant reasons for why having a sister made people happier. The passage implies that women have the tendency to speak for longer periods, and are as puzzled about men’s discussions pertaining to sports, as men are confused about women discussing good shopping sales. Yet women are emotionally supportive— as opposed to men, who prefer to avoid talking about personal issues.

Also, the study indicated that, unlike men, women are more prone to discuss their emotions or help provide emotional stability through communication. Deborah Tannen notes that a boy or man will commonly talk to his sister about general things such as geography, or books, whereas girls or women more often focus on discussing their personal lives. Men tend to steer away from expressing emotion, however, women don’t speak only about their feelings. Tannen interviewed 100 women, some with both brothers and sisters, and asked them to compare the difference in the conversations they held with males vs. female siblings. The results show that women spend more time conversing with their sisters than their brothers, as well as more often. Yet there were those who spent an equal amount of time talking to their brothers about varied topics unrelated to their emotions.

This leads Tannen to the conclusion that simply maintaining consistent communication is the key to being happier. I’ve had the privilege of growing up with an older sister, and I hold our relationship in high regard (although she may not know that). The passage suggests that it’s common amongst males to uphold discretion in what they speak to their sisters about, and based on what I converse about with my sister, I agree with the article. My sister and I are able to have a conversation about almost anything, but I very rarely express my feelings to her. Still, the article made me recall our past experiences and conversations and allowed me to realize that in some way, my sister has always been there to comfort me.

The fact that I don’t share my emotions with my sister makes this type of emotional support seem indirect, but I appreciate it all the same, although I didn’t realize how much until I read Tannen’s article. According to Deborah Tannen’s article, “Why Sisterly Chats Make People Happier,” establishing a healthy line of communication is the fundamental basis to maintaining a hap-
pier life. It doesn't matter what we speak of to our brothers or sisters— as long as the contact remains constant. Whatever the topic of conversation, women prove to be more effective in creating emotional support by engaging their siblings in longer intervals of communication. However, men still show support, though more likely under the notion that spending time on the phone with someone is comfort enough. In a sense, one can hypothesize from this article that regardless of how happy or unhappy a person may be, the world as a whole would be unhappier if there were no sisters.
In the drama The Odyssey, I read about how Odysseus won the war between the Trojans and the Greeks. Odysseus and the warriors received help from Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom. Athena gave them the strategy to gain victory in the Trojan War. In my own story, I would like to reflect that getting my GED diploma was the most important thing that I wanted. I made my own strategy to achieve my goal. I have wanted this for a long time, around twelve years, because I almost finished high school here in New York. But my father decided to move back to the Dominican Republic. At that time I was sixteen years old. My parents couldn’t find anyone to stay with me, so they took me with them. When I got to the Dominican Republic, I couldn’t start high school because I didn’t complete junior high school, which was a major requirement for me to be admitted in the 12th grade. I felt so frustrated because I couldn’t complete it, and I was getting older too. When I was 18 years old, I moved back to New York and got married. I often tried to start the GED program and did not finish. I was not feeling confident at all because I felt I was on another academic level. Later on, someone spoke to me about the Hostos Continuing Education program, so I came to gather more information about it and I felt very interested in the program. After that, I registered right away. I stayed in the program for about two semesters. Finally, I earned my GED diploma. It was such a great feeling and an incredible satisfaction. For a long time, I have felt frustrated by not finishing high school. I felt like I wasted my whole life. Today, I thank God for not letting me lose hope and also for allowing me to be an example to my son, Bryan Lopez. If you really want something, no matter how long it takes or how difficult it is, you will achieve your goal.
ANGELICA RODRIGUEZ
ANTES DE MORIR

Te tengo sin saber
Que me abrazarás muy fuerte,
Te tengo sin saber
Que tu abrazo causará mi muerte.

Me entero que te tengo
Y el tiempo se acelera,
Mi cuerpo deteriora
Y sufre mi compañera.

Muchos años en la vida batallé
Y en símbolo de ejemplo me convertí,
Apezar de algunas promesas que rompí
Tuve suerte, mi desendencia conocí,
El premio más difícil me lo gané.

Tu abrazo me va afixiando,
Y por dentro me vas comiendo.
Tus manos frías me van congelando,
Y todo mi cuerpo va doliendo.

Pero nó, no me quiero ir,
Aún hay tanto por hacer,
Aún hay tanto que entender.
Pero sí, si me quiero ir,
Pues ya no aguanto este sufrir.

Yá, ya no hay dolor,
Dios me ha dado calor,
Se siente un exquisito ardor,
Gracias mi señora port u amor,
Incondicional amor.
En Honor a mi abuelito Carlos Rodríguez Vega. Que murió de cancer el 8 de Diciembre del 2013. Una persona que apezar de sus disabilidades para caminar, nada lo paró para luchar en su vida y construir el mismo su casa y tener sus propios negocios y ser un gran abuelo. Te amo abuelito que en paz descances, te extrañaremos toda la vit

“South China Sea with Boats” by Farhana Islam
Let It Be, Let It Free

The made of marshmallow trees
The made of music notes seeds...
Let it be, let it free.

The moon made out of cheese
The cheese of a picture or a friendly stranger’s kiss...
Let it be, let it free.

The massive concerts of pot and pans
Where naïve musicians are the biggest fans...
Let it be, let it free.

The cloud made of muffins and the unicorn in the sky
Or the house made of apple pie...
Let it be, let it free.

The story where everything is illogic
Where the mini-dragon is unfriendly
And a spider with eight fish tails has a lot of logic...
Let it be, let it free.

A place where there is no negotiation
Where time is not a frustration
And being silly an inspiration and not a complication...
A place where the moment is The moment
And there is no aspiration
Let it be, let it free...

The children’s imagination.
When you look, don’t stare.  
Admire!
When you hear, don’t listen.  
Interpret!
When you taste, don’t swallow.  
Savor!

For everything you do in life,  
Take the time to admire beauty,  
Take a moment to interpret simplicity,  
Take the time to savor deliciousness,  
Take a moment to inhale inspiration and  
Take the time to sense the unexpected.

Always find meaning to everything you do in life,  
Because when you find meaning to your life, That’s when you start living!
The structure of society and the ruling class established over the course of history is undoubtedly associated with religion. The unquestioned power of the Pope and ordination throughout the Catholic Church of blessed men to rule over the masses, solidified the powerful role of religion within history. It is no coincidence every monarch of Western civilization, and likewise every President of the United States has sought the blessing of the most powerful religious figure, the Pope. The esteem of many nations hold the Pope in high moral regard, former colonial nations of Latin America in particular, since Columbus landed in Hispaniola, have been for the most part loyal Catholics. I will utilize several resources, including the book, Eugenio Maria de Hostos: Philosophical System and Methodology- Cultural Fusion, as well as the translation and notes by Orlando J. Hernandez, “Hostos’ Writings about Blacks from His Journal [Diario, Vol. 1] and about Equal Rights from His “Platform for the Independientes” [America: The Struggle for Freedom]”, to put into context the concept, derived from Eugenio María de Hostos’ work, that both religion and science are a necessary component for the development of morality and ethical function of a society. Hostos was not only an intellectual but he was one of the most revolutionary thinkers that the Latin American world has ever produced. In the immortalized pages of the Book of Genesis in the bible, it is described that God made everything and it was in his likeness, therefore it is to be understood as “good.” Bible stories provide an explanation of the inexplicable: the origins of the world, life and death, and natural disasters. But somehow the reasonable human mind can not wrap it’s collective mind around this idea. According to Borda De Sainz (1989), most intellectuals believed ethics could be separated from the function of religion. “Hostos differed from other nineteenth century philosophers because he treated ethics as possessing a reality of its own” (222). Human beings are hardwired to be moral beings: “man as an ethical being was equipped with non-physical organs of reason” (222). When discussing science, to know something is to prove it, and “Hostos felt that the future [of humankind] is endangered” [because of the] conflict between science and religion” (228). According to Hostos’ work, individuals forming moral thought with modernization of thought gave way to scientific observation and the examination of our relationship with the world. “Religion sprang from imagination” because of an endless fascination, “in our relation to the physical world” (227).Science is a necessity for the growth of a peoples. It is governed by laws. “Science and ethics formed a continuum: science led to goodness” (226). Morality, according to Hostos also embraced religion and religious credence was supported by morals; thus the “religion of humanity”
he believed that ignorance is the first weapon that a country uses to impose slavery, colonialism, and imperialism (Palmer, Bresler, and Cooper, “Fifty Major Thinkers on Education”). Since knowledge is the key to development, is there a better way to eliminate ignorance than to have students interact with the professors and express themselves? Questioning is a major part of learning. Through my own experience, I came to the realization that I retain information better through researching, questioning, and being active. Sitting is a classroom where a professor is lecturing, without interacting with the students, either through individual activities or group discussions, only makes it more difficult for the pupil to learn and pass the class. Such situation is more likely to harm a student rather than helping him. This is why Hostos was fighting to bring new teaching methods in Latin America, to replace the archaic ones. To pursue a better education, Hostos believed that individuals and, perhaps nations, should be free, equal, and independent.

These concepts could only work well if used together. If one is not free, how would one be able to have access to education and formation? In his notes on Hostos’s writings about Blacks, Hernández wrote, “Hostos had actively supported the abolition of slavery while he worked as a journalist in Spain” (Hernández, “Hostos’s Writings about Blacks” 1). In saying so, Mr. Hernández argued that even though Hostos never found himself in the battle field with weapons in his hands, he had motivated and convinced individuals to join the cause of abolishing slavery through his writings. Hostos wanted Blacks to have rights and equality. Then, they would be able to find a path to education. As true as the previous statement was, Hostos wanted to “work for armed revolution in Puerto Rico and Cuba as well as for [his] ideal of an Antillean federation” (Journal entry of Sunday, January 9, 1870).

Although he wanted to be closer to the revolution and participate in the fights, he wrote in this journal entry that they would not let him go. It is likely because he was not a man of arms. He did not have any kind of military training. He would serve his purpose and that of the revolution better if he was away. Abroad, Hostos could use his best weapons, his ink and papers, to get more people to join the cause. It would be better for the revolution if more people abroad were supporting and advocating for the independence of these countries, including Cuba and Puerto Rico. Furthermore, Hostos had realized that persecution would keep him from doing his work if he stayed in the midst of the revolution. Away from it, he would have more freedom to help the revolutionaries. Thus, he settled to devote himself from a distance. (“Señor E. M. Hostos Talks” 2)

Hostos believed that every nation in the world should have the same benefits. In his request for Puerto Rican emancipation he wondered, “If Cuba is to be free and its people their own masters, are not Puerto Ricans entitled to the same privileges? [...] should we not have an opportunity to show our capability of governing ourselves?” (“Señor E. M. Hostos Talks” 2). By questioning why Cuba and Puerto Rico should not have the same treatments, Hostos was questioning justice and fairness in the world. Daireux (1946) explains, “Les lois, dit-il quelque part, devant s’appliquer à tous, quels que soient l’âge, la condi-
tion, la formation de l’individu.” (171). Which in translation means that laws, said [Hostos], must apply to all, regardless of the age, the condition, and the formation of the individual. In other words, there should not be any favoritism when it comes to laws. Everyone should be accountable for their own actions and people should be treated fairly, from the poorest to the wealthiest. Therefore every nation should have the right to prove that they are capable of governing themselves. In case they are in need for help, they will ask; but no stronger empire should impose their ruling on an unwilling weaker society. According to Hostos, every human being should be granted natural rights, comprising civil and political rights, regardless of skin color or nationality (Hernández, “Hostos’s Writings about Blacks” 5). We are all humans, not animals. Unless affected by a mental illness, we are all able to think. We all have the ability to analyze a situation. We all have the ability to make a choice. We can all differentiate the unfair and wrong from the just and right. By making these comments, Hostos is accentuating on the fact that we all have rights. No matter the age, the social status, the race, the ethnicity, or the gender of an individual, he has rights. Under no circumstances should these rights and privileges be taken away from that individual. Hostos had a dream. That dream was to see each nation develop interdependent relationships in which every society would work with each other peacefully, and help each other grow. Balseiro supported this idea when he wrote, “For Hostos, the history of civilization, in its moral implications, was nothing but palpable proof of the unconscious brotherhood of human beings” (105). In other words, to Hostos, humans already had that relationship. They might not have been aware of it, but the bond was always there. If it was not present, the world would have never started its evolution. If acknowledged across all groups, so much more can come from this brotherhood and society would benefit at a higher level.

Eugenio Maria de Hostos devoted his life to promoting equality for the minorities. He wanted everyone to live in harmony. He did not believe in abuse of power; but he had trust in equality. For that reason, he could not keep himself from commenting on different unfair situations, where voices of people were oppressed. Hostos, with his advanced mind, understood that we all need each other. When one side does not realize this need, it is more likely that the oppressed side will take to the arms and fight to regain its independence. Hostos wanted everyone to have access to a proper education because he envisioned the world’s future. And without enough cultivated individuals, there would be no room for major development. Hostos’ preaching requires us to take a position. Therefore, do you believe that granting equality, independence and proper education to all will make the world a better place? During the celebration of Hostos’ life, would you be willing to keep his legacy alive?
Born in Puerto Rico, Eugenio María de Hostos developed an affinity not only for his own country but also for Latin America and the Caribbean Antilles. He fought to provide education to everyone regardless of race or gender. His devotion to education is, perhaps, one of the reasons Hostos Community College is named after him. However, his main fight was to bring about equality and freedom for all, especially in Latin America. Hostos believed that everyone should have access to a proper education. In “La educación científica de la mujer,” Hostos stated, “Women should be educated so that they can be human beings,” and later added: These Americans women, so rebellious because of their dignity, so flexible and capable of being educated because of their benevolence, are worthy of the initiation into science that is destined to return to them their integrity as beings, their freedom of conscience, the responsibility for their existence.” (Hostos, “La educación científica de la mujer”) Hostos was basically saying that, contrary to the belief at the time, women were inferior and only served a few purposes, they were also human beings capable of rationalizing and learning. They also have a brain.

By letting women open their minds to a more scientific world and absorbing knowledge, men would assure a better future for their families and their countries because, the future generations are raised principally by women. They are the ones who teach proper manners and behaviors to children of the world and also shape their minds. Allowing them to have a better education would only mean the children would be able to learn more from them and help the society. Thus, society as whole would benefit if women are allowed to participate in and contribute to the scientific world. History has it that Mr. Hostos participated in building various types of schools for women and for workers. He wanted workers to have the opportunity to get an education while staying in their jobs. The only way to do so was to provide them with a school that would be opened in the evening instead of the typical morning classes. In the Dominican Republic, he established a Normal School in 1880, and in his homeland, Puerto Rico, he opened a College of Agriculture and a Municipal College. He himself taught at different institutes, and through his open and innovative teaching brought a more scientific curiosity to his students because he believed that a mind kept away from education is prone to exploitation and oppression.

In other words he believed that ignorance is the first weapon that a country uses to impose slavery, colonialism, and imperialism (Palmer, Bresler, and Cooper, “Fifty Major Thinkers on Education”). Since knowledge is the key to development, is there a better way to eliminate ignorance than to have students interact with the professors and express themselves? Questioning is a major
part of learning. Through my own experience, I came to the realization that I retain information better through researching, questioning, and being active. Sitting is a classroom where a professor is lecturing, without interacting with the students, either through individual activities or group discussions, only makes it more difficult for the pupil to learn and pass the class. Such situation is more likely to harm a student rather than helping him. This is why Hostos was fighting to bring new teaching methods in Latin America, to replace the archaic ones. To pursue a better education, Hostos believed that individuals and, perhaps nations, should be free, equal, and independent. These concepts could only work well if used together. If one is not free, how would one be able to have access to education and formation? In his notes on Hostos’s writings about Blacks, Hernández wrote, “Hostos had actively supported the abolition of slavery while he worked as a journalist in Spain” (Hernández, “Hostos’s Writings about Blacks” 1). In saying so, Mr. Hernández argued that even though Hostos never found himself in the battle field with weapons in his hands, he had motivated and convinced individuals to join the cause of abolishing slavery through his writings. Hostos wanted Blacks to have rights and equality. Then, they would be able to find a path to education. As true as the previous statement was, Hostos wanted to “work for armed revolution in Puerto Rico and Cuba as well as for [his] ideal of an Antillean federation” (Journal entry of Sunday, January 9, 1870).

Although he wanted to be closer to the revolution and participate in the fights, he wrote in this journal entry that they would not let him go. It is likely because he was not a man of arms. He did not have any kind of military training. He would serve his purpose and that of the revolution better if he was away. Abroad, Hostos could use his best weapons, his ink and papers, to get more people to join the cause. It would be better for the revolution if more people abroad were supporting and advocating for the independence of these countries, including Cuba and Puerto Rico. Furthermore, Hostos had realized that persecution would keep him from doing his work if he stayed in the midst of the revolution. Away from it, he would have more freedom to help the revolutionaries. Thus, he settled to devote himself from a distance. (“Señor E. M. Hostos Talks” 2) Hostos believed that every nation in the world should have the same benefits. In his request for Puerto Rican emancipation he wondered, “If Cuba is to be free and its people their own masters, are not Puerto Ricans entitled to the same privileges? [...] should we not have an opportunity to show our capability of governing ourselves?” (“Señor E. M. Hostos Talks” 2). By questioning why Cuba and Puerto Rico should not have the same treatments, Hostos was questioning justice and fairness in the world. Daireux (1946) explains, “Les lois, dit-il quelque part, devant s’appliquer à tous, quels que soient l’âge, la condition, la formation de l’individu.” (171).

Which in translation means that laws, said [Hostos], must apply to all, regardless of the age, the condition, and the formation of the individual. In other words, there should not be any favoritism when it comes to laws. Everyone should be accountable for their own actions and people should be treated fairly, from the poorest to the wealthiest. Therefore every nation should have the right
to prove that they are capable of governing themselves. In case they are in need for help, they will ask; but no stronger empire should impose their ruling on an unwilling weaker society. According to Hostos, every human being should be granted natural rights, comprising civil and political rights, regardless of skin color or nationality (Hernández, “Hostos’s Writings about Blacks” 5). We are all humans, not animals. Unless affected by a mental illness, we are all able to think. We all have the ability to analyze a situation. We all have the ability to make a choice. We can all differentiate the unfair and wrong from the just and right. By making these comments, Hostos is accentuating on the fact that we all have rights. No matter the age, the social status, the race, the ethnicity, or the gender of an individual, he has rights. Under no circumstances should these rights and privileges be taken away from that individual. Hostos had a dream. That dream was to see each nation develop interdependent relationships in which every society would work with each other peacefully, and help each other grow. Balseiro supported this idea when he wrote, “For Hostos, the history of civilization, in its moral implications, was nothing but palpable proof of the unconscious brotherhood of human beings” (105). In other words, to Hostos, humans already had that relationship. They might not have been aware of it, but the bond was always there. If it was not present, the world would have never started its evolution. If acknowledged across all groups, so much more can come from this brotherhood and society would benefit at a higher level.

Eugenio Maria de Hostos devoted his life to promoting equality for the minorities. He wanted everyone to live in harmony. He did not believe in abuse of power; but he had trust in equality. For that reason, he could not keep himself from commenting on different unfair situations, where voices of people were oppressed. Hostos, with his advanced mind, understood that we all need each other. When one side does not realize this need, it is more likely that the oppressed side will take to the arms and fight to regain its independence. Hostos wanted everyone to have access to a proper education because he envisioned the world’s future. And without enough cultivated individuals, there would be no room for major development. Hostos’ preaching requires us to take a position. Therefore, do you believe that granting equality, independence and proper education to all will make the world a better place? During the celebration of Hostos’ life, would you be willing to keep his legacy alive?

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Hostos, Eugenio M. “La educación científica
Es preciso otorgar mérito a quien honor merece. Por eso es importante destacar su ideario educativo, social y político del Gran Maestro Eugenio María de Hostos Bonilla en torno a la educación de la mujer. En “La educación científica de la mujer” expresa la necesidad de que la mujer sea educada y tomada en cuenta en nuestra sociedad como un ser racional que tiene derecho a ser tratado con el mismo valor e igualdad que el hombre, más que todo, en el mundo profesional. En propias palabras de Hostos: “Educar es instruir la razón...La razón no tiene sexo y es la misma facultad con sus mismas operaciones y funciones en el hombre y la mujer. Por lo tanto, la mujer es tan educable como el hombre, y tiene los mismos derechos que él a ser educada”. (Hostos).

Veamos su trayectoria por el mundo, experiencias que lo van formando humano e intelectualmente.

¿Quién fue este extraordinario líder? Eugenio María de Hostos fue un magnífico intelectual, educador, pedagogo, sociólogo, filósofo, ensayista, novelista; además fue patrocinador de los derechos humanos, un Maestro en todo el sentido de la palabra. Nació en Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, Barrio Río Cañas, el 11 de enero, del 1839. Sus padres fueron, el señor Eugenio María de Hostos y Rodríguez, y la señora, María Hilaria de Bonilla y Cintrón. A la edad de doce años partió de su país, dejando a su familia para viajar a España (Bilbao) para estudiar allá. En este país comenzó su carrera de derecho, la que no terminó. En España escribió su primera obra titulada, La peregrinación de Bayoán (1863), prohibida por el gobierno español, por su visión sobre la realidad colonial, que vivían los países de, Cuba y Puerto Rico. En dicha obra se manifiesta su firme pensamiento por la unidad de Las Antillas.

En octubre del 1870 comenzó un viaje por varios países de Sudamérica, entre éstos El Perú, donde denunció la explotación que sufrían los inmigrantes chinos, junto a peruanos. Luego en Chile dictó cátedras de sociología en la Universidad Central y abogó por el progreso del país, y promovió la construcción del primer ferrocarril entre Chile y Argentina. Además, publicó obras como, “Biografía crítica de Plácido” con el propósito de promover su causa patriótica, abogando por la educación, el bienestar de la mujer entre otros aspectos. Todos estos viajes están testimoniados en su ensayo, Mi viaje al Sur. De ahí se trasladó para Nueva York (1874-77), donde publicó sus artículos en La América Ilustrada, la que codirigió para después enfrentarse al desaliento tal y como lo describe en su diario, que lo impulsó a salir hacia La República Dominicana, (1875-76). En este país, fundó y dirigió varios periódicos, entre estos, Las Tres Antillas. Precipitadamente se trasladó hacia Venezuela (1876-78),
en este último se ganó la vida como maestro, pero nunca descuidó su alegato e interés por la política y la libertad de Cuba y Puerto Rico.

En Hostos prevalece su apasionada voz por las ideas emancipadoras, entre éstas su constante preocupación por la educación científica de la mujer. En el 1880 formó la primera Escuela Normal en la República Dominicana, y en el 1881, con la poeta Salomé Ureña, la Escuela Normal para Señoritas, a la que podían asistir niñas para educarse, lo que antes no era permitido. A la par de esta lucha, en el 1898 visitó Puerto Rico e hizo otras obras como la Fundación de Juana Díaz, y lo designaron a ser miembro de la comisión de Washington como defensor de Puerto Rico luego de la invasión norteamericana.

De todas estas luchas libertadoras, lo que más atrae mi atención fue su defensa incansablemente a favor de la mujer expresada en sus cinco ensayos; los primeros dos de estos Berroa2 discursos fueron dictados en la Academia de Bellas Letras de Santiago, capital de Chile, que junto a su “Carta a Rodríguez Velasco” fueron publicados en el 1873 en ese país. En el 1881 pronunció otros dos discursos en la República Dominicana, uno muy breve llamado “Una escuela normal para niñas” y “La educación de la mujer”. En los primeros dos discursos, que tituló “La educación científica de la mujer”, Hostos afirma enérgicamente que la mujer es un ser humano con biología diferente, pero con un razonamiento igual al del hombre, por lo tanto merece los mismos derechos. El matrimonio no debe de ser la única profesión o “carrera” que ella pueda ejercer en su vida, hay que dar paso para que la mujer pueda ejercer otras profesiones importantes, porque ella es capaz e indispensable para el desarrollo de nuestra sociedad.

Como era de esperarse, Hostos tuvo que confrontar posturas retrógradas que se oponían a sus ideas emancipadoras dirigidas a acabar con todo tipo de prejuicio y discriminación hacia la mujer. Vale mencionar que para 1851-69 en España, país donde Hostos residía durante ese tiempo, la educación de la mujer estaba muy relegada; no sólo en este país, sino también en otros países, según el español Antonio Gil de Zárate, Director de Educación Pública (1846-52). Don Fernando de Castro, Director de la Universidad de Madrid fue el primero en promover la educación de la mujer en España, pero en febrero del 1868 el Sacerdote Castro se opuso rotundamente a que se cambiara las enseñanzas tradicionales de la mujer, basado en su religión, que según ésta, el principal rol femenino es ser las mejores esposas y madres. Algunos opositores como Edward II. Clarke, doctor y profesor de la Universidad de Harvard, decía que la función natural de la mujer es la maternidad. Él apoyaba la educación femenina, pero con cierto modo estratégico, basado en sus numerosos estudios clínicos que indicaban, según él, que el cerebro de la mujer se desgasta por la pérdida de sangre menstrual y no puede ser educada en el mismo plano que el varón, sino para que ésta haga mejor su trabajo en el ámbito materno o doméstico. Del mismo modo, Augusto Comte, pensador y sociólogo, entre otras entidades, desaprobaba la idea de que ésta podía educarse como el hombre. La comparaba con un niño, intelectualmente, y decía que es inferior al hombre en cuanto actividad cerebral, que es incapaz de tener inteligencia igual al varón y mucho más frágil física y moralmente, que sólo sirve para amar, cualidades perfectas
para ser esposa y madre. Absorto ante estas declaraciones patriarcales de que ésta sólo se educara para sus funciones domésticas, Hostos, con su gran capacidad intelectual, reacciona de inmediato y rectifica: “La razón no tiene sexo y es la misma facultad con sus mismas operaciones y funciones en el hombre y la mujer”. (Mora 16-31)

Por su ardua lucha y dedicación junto a otras posturas progresistas, hoy día la mujer es un ser que tiene más libertad de expresión, derechos, la oportunidad de educarse y desempeñarse profesionalmente, al igual que el hombre. Toda mujer de cualquier parte del mundo debe reconocer a Hostos como uno de los grandes promotores de la educación de la mujer, símbolo de justicia, respeto y dignidad. A partir de esta historia, la mujer continúa desarrollándose a pasos agigantados...

En honor a esta extraordinaria personalidad, podemos ver muchos lugares que llevan en su el nombre de Eugenio María de Hostos con gran orgullo, tanto en su país natal Puerto Rico, como en la ciudad de Nueva York, donde contamos con el Colegio Eugenio María de Hostos, y en la querida República Dominicana, país que tanto amó y donde descansan sus restos desde 1903. Así también sucede en otros países donde también fue querido y amado por su gran labor educativa, social y política. Su sueño era una sociedad más justa, en la que ambos sexos convivan juntos en la creación de un mundo mejor en el que se respeten los derechos humanos para ambos géneros. Berroa3 ¡Ale...
Si la historia de los grandes hombres es el resultado directo de un supremo esfuerzo individual, Eugenio María de Hostos fue un fenómeno intelectual sin precedentes en las Américas. Si los protagonistas de la historia nacen como resultado de una demanda social dirigida por la mano invisible de las circunstancias que moldean el tiempo en que estos héroes nacen, Hostos fue forjado bajo el mas urgente de los escenarios, lo cual explicaría su grandeza. Sin importar el método por el cual los superhombres de la historia se desarrollan, es preciso subrayar que la presencia de un intelectual como Hostos no podía ser mas necesaria en las Américas de finales del siglo diecinueve. Se necesitaba en la América de ese siglo hombres capaces de interpretar la historia y los fenómenos sociales de América Latina desde puntos de vista no eurocéntricos. Uno de los hombres que cumple con dicha descripción, sin el mas mínimo lugar a la duda, es el maestro Hostos.

Como resultado de la actividad intelectual de Hostos, conocemos numerosas ideas, algunos textos y un número importante de análisis sociológicos y filosóficos sobre las sociedades de la América del siglo antepasado que no han perdido su valor intelectual y que siguen siendo útiles en la actualidad. Entre tantos temas maravillosos que el maestro abordó, propongo limitarme al análisis de dos ideas fundamentales que conforman el armazón de la filosofía hostosiana. Dichas ideas se encuentran expresadas y detalladas por separado en dos ensayos escritos por el gran maestro. La primera de las ideas a tratar compone los cimientos de uno de los ensayos mas prominentes escritos por Hostos, “Ayacucho”. La segunda de las ideas a discutir se encuentra en el ensayo “La educación científica de la mujer”.

“La educación científica de la mujer”. Con el fin de que el lector no albergue confusiones con respecto a la finalidad de este ensayo, es de carácter obligatorio decir que no se pretende desmenuzar o analizar de cabo a rabo los dos textos anteriormente mencionados. Mas bien, buscamos hacer una extracción de algunas de las ideas fundamentales que contienen dichos ensayos y unificarlas con el fin de hacer notorio la complejidad, armonía y belleza del pensamiento de Hostos. En “Ayacucho” Hostos se propone explicar como las luchas, las reformas y los fenómenos culturales de las sociedades europeas y latinoamericanas siempre armonizan perfectamente con un fin en común.

De igual forma, Hostos explica que las variaciones de la hegemonía del poder, la evolución de la cultura, las revoluciones hechas por los pueblos latinoamericanos durante y después del período de la colonización, en fin, todos los cambios de carácter progresista, son el resultado directo de la puesta en práctica de la razón que poseen estas sociedades. El maestro también
expone que se podría afirmar que la Batalla de Ayacucho, la cual hace finalizar el dominio español en el Perú, comenzó en el 1533, si vemos la historia desde una perspectiva idealista; por otro lado el gran maestro antillano dice que todos los movimientos independentistas de América respondían a un desarrollo continuo que los unía y los hacía pelear como un solo país en contra de España. Este fenómeno extraño de unanimidad de causas no solo sucedía en América, sino que es una propiedad innata de todos los pueblos, según Hostos. Según hemos notado hasta este punto, traducir el pensamiento de Hostos en términos sencillos y fáciles de entender representa un verdadero desafío para cualquiera.

Este nos lleva a responder una pregunta fundamental. ¿Cómo afecta en el plano físico, cotidiano y social el pensamiento de Hostos? A pesar del alto grado de abstracción que contienen los textos de Hostos, estos siempre logran tener un contacto permanente con la realidad social que en ellos se analiza. Esto se debe a que Hostos llegaba al análisis abstracto a partir de lo no abstracto y nunca lo contrario, es decir llegar a lo material o tangible a partir de las intangibles. Debido al hecho de que las ideas de Hostos si tienen un contacto con lo físico y no-abstracto, esas ideas logran impactar lo tangible y real.

Dicho esto, ¿cómo podemos utilizar la metodología hostosiana, empleada en “Ayacucho” para enfrentar un problema particular como lo es la discriminación intelectual contra la mujer? Antes de responder de manera directa esta pregunta, es menester mencionar brevemente la justificación a favor de la educación de la mujer que da Hostos en su ensayo “La educación científica de la mujer”. El Maestro Hostos asegura que una mujer educada tiene más posibilidades y capacidad de aportar en su núcleo familiar que una mujer que carezca de educación. Además, Hostos nos dice que la mujer le es idónea al hombre en la medida en que esta se eduje para serlo (asumiendo que el hombre si sea educado); una mujer que no posee la educación necesaria para ayudar a su compañero no puede ser un verdadero complemento. Hostos afirma que la educación científica de la mujer no solo la favorecerá a ella misma como un individuo independiente y autónomo, sino que fortalecerá a su cónyuge en mayores proporciones.

Una de las ideas más impactantes que presenta Hostos en este ensayo es que el Hombre es incapaz de ser un ser completo y perfectible sin una mujer a su lado, debido a que el hombre es imperfecto por naturaleza y necesita la fortaleza de una mujer en esas áreas de debilidad. Algo que no podemos dejar de resaltar es que Hostos, en su lucha a favor de la dignificación de la mujer, siempre utilizó argumentos brillantes y adaptados al contexto de su época, en la que el machismo predominaba.

Tras haber explicado los beneficios inmediatos que genera el ofrecer una educación científica a las mujeres, podemos afirmar que la educación de la mujer es un factor totalmente positivo; por tales razones decir que “la mujer merece y debe ser educada” es una proposición lógica. Como esta proposición es lógica, basado en el método de análisis que emplea Hostos en su ensayo “Ayacucho”, la sociedad debe ser capaz de reformarse para de esa forma
fomentar la institucionalización de la educación científica en la mujer. Como la sociedad siempre busca el bien y lo progresista, la sociedad empleará todos los mecanismos posibles para que la mujer sea educada.

Si analizamos el siglo XX, vemos como la mujer gana terreno en las grandes academias del mundo. En pleno siglo XXI, el número de mujeres cursando carreras universitarias supera sustancialmente el número de hombres que asisten a las universidades. Esto demuestra que las tesis planteadas por Hostos no podían ser más correctas. No solo podemos observar a lo largo de toda la historia del siglo XX como el método analítico de Hostos, expuesto en su ensayo “Ayacucho”, se ajusta a los procesos sociales, sino que también el tiempo le ha dado la razón con relación a la importancia de la educación científica de las mujeres.

Obras Consultadas

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JOSEPH KOSSEH

BUT MY LIPS WON’T SPEAK

I realized when I write my poetry, I never read it out loud. When I pour these words, their voice comes from the heart. See, I thought I always shouted. I thought my voice was STRONG!

But today I think I’m wrong I’m not saying it’s not me, I’m just saying my lips won’t speak. Never are they willing to repeat the words My heart might shriek.

Fear? Not a bit. I’ve written in times of fear Sorrow? The tears come, Like raindrops they fall wherever they want. Yet my lips don’t even sing. Not a ringing, not a dong, Not a whisper of a word.

I realize it is not fear, it is not sorrow, it is just me. I go through life hoarding emotions, like sorrow and anger. I stagger through love blinded, with the hopes of forever I stumble through thoughts And get flushed in the lot But its cool. I’m all right. my poetry speaks. MY POETRY SPEAKS!!!

So my lips can relax and just smile through it all. From the pulsing of my brain creating these words To the rushing of my blood that gives life to these words, I realize this.
My heart makes these words for others to speak.  
My lips remain sealed, so my thoughts will stream,  
Stream through my head like a needle and thread  
To spread the thoughts around Like I’m stuck in a net.  

Get caught in your thoughts  
So you know they are true,  
Like a whistling kettle of hot water  
I pour into your soul  
And I boil up your thoughts like a tea bag  
So you’d tear open your heart, and receive.  

Silent lips  
And an open heart  
So my poetry can shout these words  
To pour out these words  
That my lips won’t speak.
JOSEPH KOSSEH

CAN’T WASTE TIME

I guess something told you to look back
You left something behind
But no longer can you claim it.

The way it chased behind you
To stay with you
But no longer can you hold it.

Dropped it expecting it to shatter
Unlikely, for that coal-like figure
Was a diamond in the rough.

Heard the clattering behind you
Heard it screaming and shouting
Crying for change
Yelling in rage.

You heard it through its trials
Temptation of giving up
But now the silence is starting to sink in.

No crying no yelling
No anger no pain
That Diamond is starting to break free.

I guess you felt your hair rising
As behind you it was changing
Some presence reached and touched you
Now you’re turning to get back.

It’s too late now
That fork in the road where you left it
The other path, is what it has chosen.
At a distance the movement baffles my senses,
Squeal!
Gasp!
Blink!
What is that shadow?

This shadow follows me everywhere I go.
Who is it?
What is it?
No one knows.
I look behind me continuously
Wondering which direction it is coming from.
No matter how much I look for it
It always come as a surprise.

Chills on my neck.
Have I been invaded?
I feel it inside of me,
Now I gasp for air,
But it's not me,
It's not in my control.
What is this? Can it be?
Could I have been violated? Disrespected?
Assaulted?
I can not stop this.
It's tearing me from the inside out,
Controlling my moves, my thoughts
My insides are turning to...

Turning to the one you love and look up to is always important.
Being given the time of day is even better.
It's always special to have someone important in your life.
My mother is the most important person in my life.
To her, I am a rare one, a lifetime diamond.  
She protects and cherishes me, every day she is blessed...

Blessed with strength.  
I scream but no sound comes out.  
I squirm but cannot move,  
I grasp to my soul and open my mouth again and scream.  
Finally I feel a release,  
I finally find the strength.

I am now strong. I fight it,  
I feel it ripping me,  
But I also feel the relief,  
I am strong! No more!  
This will never happen again.  
I am strong! To hell with this.  
I have a voice. I am strong.  
No more puppet, No more toy,  
I am strong. I am human.  
I am a woman. Full of worth.  
Full of strength.  
That’s why, I AM STRONG,  
I AM STRONG!
I once was broken,
Both on the inside and the out.
Then you came along.
You showed me how to love.

You showed me how to love someone more than I love myself.
Though long ago I didn't know what that meant.
You showed me how much
One can love another,
How much one can need another,
How much one can't live without the other.

My mom would joke around and say about us
“Wherever one is, the other is there as well.”
I never paid it much attention,
But how true I realize it to be.

I see how much I miss you as soon as I leave,
I see how much I'd rather be with you than around anyone else,
Before you, I never knew what that felt like,
How it felt to yearn for another,
To need one's touch,
To ache for one's kiss,
To long for one's companionship.

To now realize how strong one's love can be for the other,
How astonishing it is,
That my fairytale ending came through,
That I have found my Prince Charming,
That my eyes are no longer covered by thick wool.
I can now see what was waiting for me after all that heartache and pain,
I can now attest, and say
That Everything does happen for a reason,
As my mom would always say.

I am glad, oh so glad,
That I am no longer broken,
Not even a little bit,
I am whole and untouchable,
Because I know in my heart that the past is the past,
And will forever stay that way.
Detective fiction has generally been thought of as being a male dominated genre. Over the course of history writers of this type of literature have created a stereotypical detective who was most of the time male. Although it was this way in the earlier days of this genre, starting in the 1930’s and up until recent times, the image of the detective has undergone a drastic change and has been presented in a more feminine light. In terms of the female detective novel, characters such as Miss Marple, Cordelia Gray, Sharon McCone, Kinsey Millhone, and V. I. Warshawski, each had something to bring to the table to represent the model of females as detectives of their time.

In the 1930’s Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple served as the first ever amateur female detective. In the English countryside of St. Mary Mead, the setting for the novel The Murder at the Vicarage, most of the inhabitants, including Miss Marple, are privy to what they like to call “tea and scandal,” which is when all the women go to the Vicarage to hear the latest gossip. It is this act that makes them look extremely nosy and unable to mind their own business, but it does prove helpful when Miss Marple uses this to her advantage. In this particular novel, the type of crime Miss Marple is detecting is the murder of the most despised man in all of St. Mary Mead, Colonel Protheroe.

Since she is elderly, readers would think Miss Marple is at a disadvantage that is associated with old people, i.e. impaired hearing and vision, but they are sadly mistaken. Readers come to find out that she is not hindered by any of these aspects. She is described as being the “worst cat in the village” and “knows every single thing that happens—and draws the worst inferences from it” (Christie, 5). Given her age, Inspector Slack views her as an annoying, old lady and, at first, he underestimates her abilities. The Vicar vouches for her by stating, “if Miss Marple says she had no pistol with her, you can take it for granted that it is so,’ I said. ‘If there was the least possibility of such a thing, Miss Marple would have been on to it like a knife” (Christie, 80).

The character that is Miss Marple paved the way for female detectives and elderly ones at that. Readers see that Agatha Christie created this character as the first female amateur detective to solve a mystery using the simplest form of detecting that involves pure wit and asking a whole lot of questions. As time progresses, the female detective evolves into a more “professional” character. Forty years later, readers are graced with another character who lends a hand in the development of females as detectives. P. D. James’s Cordelia Gray is a character seen during the 1970’s. She is no longer an amateur and personally relates to her case when she fills the role of a mother figure to the deceased Mark when she is asked to find why he committed suicide. In An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, the title says it all, for Cordelia is constantly reminded of how
she is a woman in a man’s world, even though she proves the doubters wrong. The type of society she lives in is one where women were more likely to spend their lives working at a desk as secretaries rather than in the detective field. Unlike Miss Marple, Cordelia Gray is twenty two years old, shy, and inherits a detective agency from her partner, Bernie, who committed suicide. Upon this inheritance, she is asked, “You’ll be looking for a new job, I suppose? After all, you can hardly keep the Agency going on your own. It isn’t a suitable job for a woman” (James, 25). From this quote, the readers gather that Cordelia is expected to sell the agency, though she does not and accepts the first case that is offered to her, desperate to make a profit. Even though Sir Ronald Callender was the one who murdered his own son, he asks Cordelia to investigate because he doubts her abilities as a detective who is a woman.

She gets emotionally attached to this case because of growing up without a mother and father herself; hence readers can see that Cordelia acts as a mother figure to Mark and some believe it alters her judgment. After solving the case and getting beaten along the way, Cordelia’s morality proves to have more importance than legality when she helps Ms. Leaming cover up the murder of Ronald Callender. P.D. James’s Cordelia Gray puts the female detective on a more professional level even though society is still not used to women being out in the field. As the development of the female detective continues, they become more liberated in accordance with the development of women’s rights. Don’t let that ring on her finger fool you! She’s not dependent on any man! Marcia Muller’s character, Sharon McCone, has just married her husband, Hy, in the beginning of Vanishing Point. She is still independent despite being married and she rarely gets to be with Hy due to both of their careers. When her friend Rae makes the comment to “wait and see” (Muller, 13) if marriage will change things for the both of them, Sharon is put on edge.

Readers see what this does to her as she dreads the fate of her home being possibly sold. In this novel, Sharon is investigating a cold case on the whereabouts of Laurel Greenwood. She emerges as a character in the 1980’s, but this novel was written in 2006, so Sharon is not entirely accustomed to being oppressed by men. The exception was when Kev Daniel shot at her in hopes she would fear continuing with the task at hand. The society described in this novel is accepting of gays as Sharon has one gay couple working on her team. The fact that she has a whole investigation team sets her apart from the rest. And the thing that sets this next detective from the rest is her romantic involvement with the killer himself. Such is the case where Kinsey Millhone is concerned. Sue Grafton’s A is for Alibi, introduces readers to this private investigator in 1982. Kinsey is a thirty two year old woman, who is divorced twice with no kids, prefers comfort to extravagance, and enjoys her independence. Con Dolan comments on how she values this independence by saying she wouldn’t like working as a cop with “…a leash around [her] neck” (Grafton, 16). Her office is part of the California Fidelity Insurance Company and in exchange for this space, she does investigations for them along with her own which happens to be a murder. This makes the novel interesting because readers see how Kinsey goes about managing the insurance fraud case concerning
Marcia Treadgill and the murders of Laurence Fife and Libby Glass at the same time. Since this story is set during the eighties when society saw a flourish in women’s rights, Kinsey Millhone is more accepted as a detective than Cordelia Gray. This novel presents a number of examples that suggest gender stereotypes and others that challenge them. For example, take the character of Gwen. When she was married to Laurence, she admits to playing the stereotypical “good wife,” but when she gets divorced, she establishes her own dog grooming company and Laurence, who fancies infidelity, gets full custody of their two children, not usual for a man, as her punishment. Gwen also uses oleander to kill him, which is typical because women generally tend to use poison as their weapon of choice. This is the only female detective novel that we’ve read where the detective actually kills the murderer, Charlie Scorsoni, who believed he could seduce her to get her off his tail. He did succeed, but Kinsey never erased him as a suspect and in the end it was kill or be killed and she did what she had to do. Although Sue Grafton’s Kinsey Millhone enjoys drinking and cursing, this next detective takes it to a whole new level.

She swears like a sailor, boozes like a pirate, and fights like a ninja. She is the most entertaining private investigator. Also written in 1982, Sara Paretsky’s, V. I. Warshawski, is the definition of a woman liberated. V.I. loves to quench her thirst with hard liquor, goes jogging to keep in shape, values her mother’s drinking glasses, kicks butt when she needs to, and doesn’t miss a chance to look pretty on a date even though she’s in pain. This Italian-Polish private eye is definitely not one to be messed with. Indemnity Only tells readers about the story of how V. I. is on a quest to find Anita McGraw, find out who killed Peter Thayer, and find the secret that got him killed. Warshawski lives in the southern side of Chicago, abundant with middle class workers as opposed to the northern part, where the rich, whom this case involves, thrive. As liberated as she is, V.I. still has to deal with being underestimated by men.

When Andrew McGraw went to her with the case, he had no idea she was a woman. After he tells her about his doubts, as she is a girl after all, she replies “I’m a woman... and I can look after myself. If I couldn’t, I wouldn’t be in this kind of business. If things get heavy, I’ll figure out a way to handle them—or go down trying” (Paretsky,7). This is why she omits using her full name and opts for initials so that men can’t patronize her. Through this character Sara Paretsky definitely adds an image of strength to female detectives and it is a very admirable trait.

Being a detective is serious work and none of these ladies take their jobs lightly. Ultimately, female detectives have made much progress in the genre of detective fiction. This just goes to show that they are not at a disadvantage in terms of getting the job done because they are not men.

Thanks have to be given to the creators of these female detective characters for going outside the box. As the journey of the female detective continues, there is no doubt that they will continue to captivate their readers.
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Growing up within a Latino family, I have encountered expectations about my gender and sexuality, which I am meant to fulfill. Those expectations are: growing up to become “wholesome”, getting married some time in my twenties, being dutiful to my spouse, raising my children to do the same, and just basically filling a female role that, for centuries, has been considered “normal”. However, my individual sexual orientation and gender expression is a little hard on my family. I am different from most of the other females in my family. Using Elisa Davila’s essay “On Being a ‘Good Girl’: Implications for Latinas in the United States”, Helena Maria Viramontes’ short story “Growing”, and Jean Kilbourne’s documentary “Killing Us Softly 4”, I will explain what it was like for me to have matured into consciousness as a Latina female. Most Hispanic/Latino families are patriarchal in nature.

Men are the breadwinners, working in order to provide the food and shelter for the home; women are subservient to their husbands and are always cooking and cleaning and looking after the children. But within my family there is a bit of a twist. My family is matriarchal in nature; the women on my mother’s side are the ones that control everything and rule over everybody, even with some strong input from the men in the family. These women are mostly single mothers; some are divorced, separated, or never married, but either way everything falls upon their shoulders.

How these women project their wants and desires for the next generation (me) is what I have never been able to handle. They want to be sure we’re having children and selflessly giving up everything to make sure that these children are provided for, just as the women in my family have done for me. But with that self-denial for the sake of others, they come to be regarded as powerful. Due to the fact that I am a lesbian, I don’t identify with many aspects of the Latina “good girl” culture. Being a “good girl”, a term which I take from Elisa Davila’s essay, is mainly the idea that the Latina women have to uphold the ideal of what a real family is, and what a real woman is, which involves self-sacrifice. Also, what constitutes a real woman/Latina is that she is “supposed to accept domesticity and motherhood as the two guiding forces of her life” (64). Despite the fact that a lot of the women in my family have worked, some did get married and honored their husbands with what little time that they had (that is, took care of them, fed them, and let them parade around their homes as if they were the kings of their castles without complaint).

They expect me to get married and have children in my early twenties just as most of them did. It was odd for them to see me growing up as a teenager with little to no dates, no boyfriends at all, and no explicit interest in wanting to marry, or at least that is what some of my family members, mainly the older
generation, have told me. I suppose that is because they have been raised with these same expectations to date and get married quickly with the first person they fall in love with, as long as he is a man of course, and then take care of a gaggle of children and this husband. My family would claim my case as permanently “unfortunate” for not doing any of these “good girl” things, but I don’t believe that it’s possible, at my young age, to make a judgment on whether a life has been fulfilled.

The problem with not being a “good girl” doesn’t begin or end with my queerness, but my queerness does add to it. I am also very tomboyish; or rather I don’t follow the conventional female mannerisms that they tried to drill into me when I was a child.

By extension, this means that I refuse to wear dresses, due to the fact that I find them uncomfortable and restrictive, and would rather parade around outside in the sun while wearing a t-shirt and shorts. But not only is my un-feminine manner of dress something that is picked apart as an extension of my queerness, but as a child, my preferred activities were too.

I disliked staying indoors and playing with my dolls versus running around and roughhousing with my friends. Still today, the clothing that I wear is as practical as it is sheltering. Clothing has no gender. There seems to be some kind of stereotype that Latinas are supposed to dress provocatively as per the mainstream media’s interpretations, and as indicated, I most certainly do not fulfill that aspect of the culture presented. Some of my family members have bought into that sexy image, but when I was going through the motions of puberty and discovering my womanhood, I realized that the females that look like me (Latina) are treated as sexual objects based on what tight clothing they wear. This has always made me feel uncomfortable.

To illustrate: In “Growing,” the short piece by Helena Maria Viramontes, one of the girls, Naomi is going through puberty and she can see how people are treating her differently as a result. When there are men now catcalling to her in the streets, she screams out “Go to hell, goddamn you!” (70). To read that line, I feel like I’m thirteen all over again and reliving the experience of the catcalls from masculine passersby, which was uncomfortable as well as humiliating. This led me to want to wear the most comfortable attire which also tends to hide my “assets”. Blatant disrespect—men screaming vulgar things to Latina females—is unfortunate, and continues to happen, especially once the girls enter puberty. This behavior on men’s part is offensive.

Is it wrong for me to defend my honor by wearing baggy clothes that make me less vulnerable to that demeaning attention, time and again? Ideally, I wouldn’t have to dress to avoid attention, but some of my family members would beg to differ. They believe due to the way I dress, I’m ashamed of myself, which makes no sense as I am a proud lesbian. Viramontes’ story brought all this back to me but with a new awareness about men’s gaze. Even though Latinas have an expectation to fulfill about their sexiness based on what the media suggests (that all Latinas dress provocatively and are going to be wild in bed or exotic), this most certainly isn’t true and I don’t find it appealing.
This stereotype about Latinas also leads to contradictions. Despite the over sexualized portrayals of Latinas in the media, within the Hispanicculture itself females are, ironically, supposed to be wholesome, dignified, and virginal. What the rest of society and the media sees is nothing but falsities, and the way that the Hispanic culture views women is a double edged sword as well. If a Latina who has been taught to flirt, loses her virginity then it’s believed that she should get married and have a big happy family (as per the suggestion of our culture) because marriage solves all of the world’s problems, especially in my family’s eyes. If she doesn’t marry after losing her virginity, then she’s labeled with derogatory comments and looked down upon. This kind of double bind plays everywhere, where for men, it’s not this way at all. In my own family, some of the women who have not been married, but ended up pregnant, were shunned for a period of time until the baby was born. On the other hand, if a female of the family, myself included, is found not to be seeking a potential candidate for marriage sooner or later, then, we’re also considered to have a serious problem despite the fact we might be “virginal.” In Viramontes’ story, the young girl Naomi is not trusted by her father. He says in Spanish “you are a woman” which implies that once she has reached womanhood, she will disregard everything he has said to protect her, she will be irresponsible, and will no longer stay virginal.

He even goes so far as to have the younger sibling, Lucia, chaperone the older one (69-70) so that she can spy on her big sister. For me, on my mother’s side of the family this has never been the case, but when I’m with my half-brother my father does tell him to watch out for me rather than for me to look out for him, who’s much more likely to get in trouble. This attitude mirrors much of what Naomi had gone through with her father’s sudden lack of trust. Her father sets up the chaperoning as an extra precaution against Naomi falling in with a boy who’ll take advantage of her, but I believe that this custom also represents a deliberate shift in power. For example, my brother is set up to be a protector for me as well as to act as the dominant male while my father is not around. I am no longer a little girl and my father does not have a say in my decision making. I am like the women on my mother’s side who are very headstrong. So in order to keep a balance in male/female power in our family, my father has my brother keep an eye on me as if my brother is an extension of himself and his male dominion.

However unfair this may be, I do not fault him; this manner of “protecting” a female is just one of the many gendered cultural aspects of living as a Latina that I’ve come to notice over the years. The concept of virginity holds weight on both maternal and paternal sides of my family. However, Jean Kilbourne’s “Killing Us Softly 4” video lecture about sexism in the media, in which we saw so many females sexualized in advertisements and posing as provocative, points out to me the “double bind” I’m in. If I don’t dress or act feminine or girly enough, then I find myself being talked about as having a problem within my family. Their thinking and fear is that if I don’t “take care of myself” or rather if I don’t dress myself up or put on makeup, then I won’t be able to find a suitable male candidate to be my husband. Of course, I am not
looking for a husband and my sexuality seems to confuse them. What I do or
don’t do matters to my family very much. If I were to dress too provocatively or
if I had too many boyfriends, then not only my reputation but also the whole
family’s reputation might be tarnished, and that would create an even bigger
stir. Yet having a regular girlfriend, let alone more than one draws suspicion.
The double edged sword of either being “too loose” or “too uptight” i.e., if I’m
dating twenty men or none at all, baffles and frustrates me.

But I understand that my family is only trying to help me to be happy in
the best way that they know how to, and that is by trying to get me to follow
the same paths that they took before me. For most of my family, the path to
happiness is to get married and/or have children early in order to make way for
the new generation who are taught the same gender lessons. And so, I have
realized that growing up as Latina, a lesbian Latina at that, has provided several
challenges for me. As a Latina, I’m especially vulnerable to being seen as an
object that is sexualized over and over again.

Whether I give in to this stereotype or if I don’t give in to this stereotype,
I am at fault or at risk, and others think there must be something wrong with
me or that I’m looking for trouble. This double standard is as ridiculous as it is
tiring, yet there are people in the world, both Hispanic and from other ethnici-
ties, who believe that these stereotypes are an accurate reflection and should
not be questioned but be continually perpetuated. The sheer idea of going
against what the women and men in my family are trying to teach me to ensure
my happiness ironically I struggle with being regarded by them as a problem
they have to fix, thus making me unhappy.

However, there is some kind of middle ground in which my family mem-
bers have been able to meet me halfway. I’ll always love them even if they can’t
understand me as the kind of person I am, but I can understand their difficulty
because they were raised to believe in the ideal family as heterosexual and mar-
rried. They believe in the importance of continuing the line by having many
children within heterosexual marriage, then teaching the next generation to
do the same. There’s a strong belief that marrying as heterosexuals and having
a long line of successors equals happiness for many women in the Hispanic
culture, and I am sure that this belief is globally acknowledged as well. I, how-
ever, am going to be a “good girl” in my own right, and that is by being true to
myself. That doesn’t involve marriage or falling into the same stereotypes that
there are about Latinas, but rather being me and no one else.

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NEITHER THE SOUL NOR THE HEART HAS A DISTINCT GENDER

Upon exploring women’s and gender studies, I have realized that our gender roles affect our day-to-day lives. Surely, if asked, many people can recall the gifts they received as a child, stories they were told, or mannerisms they were taught. These are matters we never questioned as children or throughout our adolescent years, but as we grow older, we begin to question our personal routines in relation to our gender. It is not until I began questioning my everyday customs that I discovered just how much my life is shaped by the gender lessons I was taught when I was growing up. I have recently grasped a deeper understanding of gender and the ways in which it has molded me into the woman I am today. I am ashamed to say that for my entire life I was ignorant of the effects of gender and of the incredibly significant role it subconsciously played in my life. I have realized that gender is not only a matter of one’s sex. I know now that gender can be “done” as if it is an act. Gender is altered and created through human interaction and social life; it is pushed upon us as soon as we are born. For instance, we assign children distinct patterns or color schemes depending on their sex: blue for boys and pink for girls. Forcing gender upon children is something we all see or practice as parents.

Our baby girl is dressed in pink polka dots, while our baby boy flaunts a navy blue t-shirt with an orange truck imprinted on the front. Judith Lorber describes a very common scenario in her essay “The Social Construction of Gender,” in which she observes passengers on a train admiring a man with a baby strapped to his chest. The man received silent approval, mostly from women, because he was differing from the common misconception that men perform no maternal duties, such as carrying a baby. Lorber suggests that we applaud him because he was “doing” gender in a way we don’t always see (p. 55). For the most part, we believe, men are working, while women are caring for the children, cooking, cleaning, or babysitting. It has become common in our society to assume that our genders are “done” in these ways. In reality, women are just as much an ideal contributing factor to the family as the males and in turn, males are taking on the care-giving role as well.

I can recall several occasions where I was “doing” gender. One instance I find most significant is my attraction to playing a motherly role since a very young age. I was basically obsessed with play acting as a mother. I had a bear that I named, dressed, and loved as if it were really my child. As a matter of fact, I still have this bear, Sandy. She sits on the top of my closet in her very own shoebox. Where did my fascination with Sandy come from? I really couldn’t say, but I know now that the gender lessons that engulfed me played a huge role in my desire to be a mother. As a little girl I walked down the aisle of “Toys ‘R’ Us,” surrounded by strollers, kitchen equipment, and even make-up.
kits. I longed to play with these toys, to fill the shoes of a woman who would
use the real life versions of these items. I wanted to feel important enough to
cook dinner for my bear and push her around in a stroller. Not only would
I get the satisfaction of knowing that I was superior to her, but also that she
would love me because I performed these “maternal” duties such as cooking
and cleaning. It’s apparent to me now that, sadly enough, as a young girl, I was
under the impression that this is how I would receive love from another person,
if I cooked or cleaned for them.

The gender lessons we learn growing up come from many sources. In
my case, my sources were the media and my small family. I come from a single
parent home. My mother is a teacher who never had the time or the energy to
cook dinner and bake cookies with me. As a young girl, I perceived the “ideal”
mother in the kitchen, packing lunch for her daughter. I remember thinking
to myself that a mother was obligated to bake cakes, even though mine didn’t.
Although I was properly fed and taken care of, I felt deprived. When I watched
TV and saw young girls gazing into their mother’s eyes in the kitchen, I felt
angry. I felt like something was missing. I believed every other little girl was
receiving so much more than me if they had a mother who always cooked,
cleaned, and packed lunch for them. This is only because the media was trans-
mitting gender lessons about the “proper” role of a woman directly to me. Ex-
amples of these “proper” womanly roles are explored in Betty Friedan’s excerpt
from: The Feminine Mystique “The Problem That has No Name.” Friedan
demonstrates how restricted women began to feel during the middle of the
twentieth century in the United States. This was a time when women were
expected to cook, clean, and look after the children.

It was a role that women embraced at first, but then began to resent. A
mother of four stated, “I’ve tried everything women are supposed to do—hobb-
ies, gardening, pickling, canning, being very social with my neighbors, join-
ing committees, running PTA teas. I can do it all, and I like it but it doesn’t
leave you anything to think about—any feeling of who you are” (21). After
reading this excerpt it made me upset with myself for blaming my mother for
not embracing society’s projection of the “ideal” role of a woman. I’m sure my
mother felt liberated in all the ways she did not conform to society’s expecta-
tions. I know now that every woman does not have the instinctive desire to
cook in the kitchen or scrub the floors, nor are these activities a measure of her
womanhood. Yet as a young girl with no mind of her own, the media pushed
me to form the media’s judgments. The media made me believe I was less of a
female because I did not know how to bake, and made me bitter toward my
own mother because she never taught me.

As I grew into my adolescent years, I became more comfortable within
my body but very unsure of myself. I lost all of my baby fat; my body began to
develop, and my mind began to wander. The feelings I did not know how to
express restrained me. All the girls around me were already sexually active by
the time we were in Middle School, but I had no desire to “lose” my virginity.
While all the other girls carried on about which boy they would meet after
school, I thought of one person and she was a female. Throughout my brief
years in middle school, I remained confused, lost, and lonely. Although I had friends, it didn’t matter because I also had a secret, one that I could never gain the courage to share. I was “feminine” in all ways possible. I dressed “properly” according to teenage girl criteria: tight pants, slimming blouse, and clean shoes, but inside I didn’t feel feminine. I didn’t feel like a girl because I was attracted to a female. In school, it was common for teachers, peers, and parents to talk about teenagers being sexually active, but they never discussed sexuality with the same sex. This left me putting the pieces together all by myself, because girls didn’t have the freedom to express their sexual feelings. I knew if I spoke about my desires like boys or heterosexual girls did, I would be considered strange, promiscuous, confused, and called all sorts of hurtful names. Middle School is a tough time for most teenage girls, since they tend to use the attention they receive from boys as a determination of their self-worth. I guess since I didn’t gain or seek attention from boys, the lack of immersion made me fell less than a real female.

When I transitioned from my adolescence to womanhood - living in New York City and traveling to work in Manhattan everyday- my mind blossomed. I began feeling more at ease with myself; I finally realized that there are so many unique individuals in the world. The more I explored and met new people with diverse sexualities, races, genders, customs, and goals to achieve throughout their lives, the less isolated I felt. I reflecte on my youth and the gender lessons engraved in me about my sexuality and sympathized with my younger self. It was not until recent years with the assistance of this course that I no longer feel as though society is the main stimulant which dominates my self-esteem and actions. After close readings of the texts assigned to me during this course, I have explored many aspects of gender, ranging from sex to simple every day routines.

I’m not worried about filling in the shoes of a “good” woman any longer. I know that dismissing the ideal of a woman aspiring to have a husband and three children will allow me to live a much healthier, happier lifestyle, one that I can look back on and know I achieved for myself. In Elisa Davila’s essay, “On Being a ‘Good Girl’: Implications for Latinas in the United States,” she states: “Being a good girl meant denying big chunks of myself such as the freedom to choose a career over a husband, to work and live away from home, or the basic right to know my feelings and to experience my own body” (64).

By choosing to live my life according to my own standards, I am allowing myself to determine my own self-worth. I am not allowing society to make me feel inadequate because I have chosen a path not commonly tread upon. I know now that society will continue to pressure me to conform. It will not be easy to be an independent woman in today’s world, but it will be so much more rewarding than living an unfulfilled life. Individual and social change cannot be made until both men and women step back and realize that our genders are only used as a means of control.

Women are assigned to gender roles such as motherhood, so that men can remain in the superior position- in this way society is controlling us. Women who have children are relegated to motherhood as their primary aspiration in
life, therefore men remain in the “superior positions” because they fulfill the breadwinning role within the relationship. It is a deep and complex stratification system that I have only just begun to understand. Most importantly, the gender lessons we teach children become a set of standards both men and women feel they must obey. These instructions are a form of training and subliminal brainwashing. Whether we give a young girl a baby doll or give a boy a toy gun, we are subliminally telling them that this toy and what it represents is what you are “worth” as a human being. I refuse to allow society to tell me who to love, what to wear, what career to pursue, or most importantly, who I should be.

WORKS CITED

Through our readings this semester, we have been introduced to women detectives who belonged to eras of oppressive ideologies. Our first detective was an elderly woman who didn't hold the title of private detective; she was just the town gossip. Later on, in the other novels, sexuality is navigated through graphic sexual encounters by detective V.I. Warshawski and Kinsey Millhone. This latest novel, The Body Farm, by Patricia Cornwell, explores both adulterous affairs and lesbian relationships. In this novel by Patricia Cornwell the reader meets Kay Scarpetta, a forensic pathologist who has been engaged to be married, is highly educated and also has the intelligence to demand respect as well as recognition for her work. At one point a judge comes to her defense as she is testifying in court when he says; “Well now, I don’t know that what the doctor has to say is beyond her expertise, Mr. Coldwell, and she’s already asked you politely to refer to her properly as Dr. Scarpetta, and I’m losing patience with your antics and ploys...” (Cornwell, 155).

She is a loving, nurturing aunt to her niece Lucy and takes care of Lucy better than her sister Dorothy who is too busy with men and her own life to care of her own daughter. One night, she sees Lucy with a woman in the dark sharing a cigarette, and through the conversation she overhears, she is able to realize that her niece is having a passionate relationship with the woman. “They were so close to each other their silhouettes were one, and I froze in the darkness of a tall, dense pine” (45). After Lucy’s car accident she has to deal with the accusations from her sister Dorothy, blaming Kay for Lucy turning out to be “queer.” Lucy is a vibrant, brilliant young woman interning at ERF, the FBI Engineering Research Facility. She is a computer genius, described by Detective Marino as remarkable, and a valuable resource in any investigation. We can tell that she has always been studious and hardworking. While we only get a small glimpse in the novel of a lesbian relationship, we know by Kay’s reaction that even though she is accepting of her lesbianism, Lucy’s mother Dorothy feels otherwise. She feels a need to blame her sister for her daughter’s sexual preference in order to prevent Kay from realizing the obvious: that she is jealous of the relationship shared between Kay and her daughter. Dorothy does not want to face the fact that she has been a neglectful mother.

Her reaction gives the reader the impression that being in homosexual relationships when the novel was published wasn’t well accepted. Dorothy’s outburst to Kay is a clear indication of conflict with this lifestyle when she says; “Let’s put it this way. Lucy’s not dating is not something she got from me. That’s for damn sure... Bullshit. She’s your spitting image. And now she’s a drunk, and I think she’s queer. She burst into tears again” (250). Towards
the end, when Lucy has to deal with the heartache of being betrayed, she tells her aunt Kay that she won’t be able to understand. Lucy probably feels that because she had gotten involved in a lesbian relationship, her aunt wouldn’t be able to comprehend the emotions of being betrayed by a lover of the same sex. However, her aunt is able to support and comfort her and respond compassionately to Lucy’s emotions. “Of course I understand it. You loved her” (337).

Scarpetta also introduces us to her own private life in her sexual encounter with Benton Wesley, a married man with children. He was also her dead fiancée’s best friend. Her relationship with Wesley creates a lot of tension not only because he is married but also because Detective Marino, Scarpetta’s homicide detective, feels left out by their affair and torn because of his need to always be with Kay. Kay struggles with her relationship with Wesley because she has to accept that he is married. At one point, Wesley tells her “You weren’t the only person there who had to think about it for days. Why don’t you ask me whether I regret it?” “No,” I said. “You’re the one who’s married” (178). Kay questions her decision to begin her affair with Wesley. She even rationalizes how she’s never thought negatively about his wife. She does this trying to give herself a valid reason for her affair although she remains professional because they are work colleagues. However, we can tell that her emotions have gotten the better of her and she can’t help but feel an attraction to him.

To conclude, this female detective novel introduces new sexual angles in its depiction of sexual relationships dealing with adulterous affairs and lesbian relationships.

Kay Scarpetta doesn’t show us that she’s bothered or angered that her niece is a lesbian; instead she is accepting of her niece’s lifestyle. We also see in Kay an educated woman with years of hard work and expertise delving into this affair with Wesley, asking herself why she has decided to engage in this kind of behavior. Besides the central detective story, this novel presents two intelligent women facing different types of love at two different times in life; Lucy, a young girl in her twenties, and Kay well into her thirties.

Kay is able to give her niece emotional support when Lucy realizes that the woman she was in love with was using her. Unfortunately, for Kay there is no mediator for her tumultuous affair with FBI agent Wesley. Instead, she finds herself feeling vulnerable and crying, repeating to herself that she doesn’t know why. But the reader is able to understand from her emotions that this is a modern woman questioning her own morals and understanding that this affair will not fulfill her the way that she wishes to be fulfilled. Thus, by including these two relationships, Cornwell introduces another innovative element in the female detective genre.
I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.” (Ralph Ellison. 1952) The AIDS epidemic has transversed the global borders and boundaries of the world’s continents seeking out the weak, the unprotected and the uninformed to use as an immediate host, whereby, its growth and reproduction causes irreparable damage to its victims’ bodies by compromising, infecting, and then destroying their immune system and overall health. The effect of its destruction has greatly impacted a population of people that for years has been underrepresented and almost forgotten in research and in treatment; they have suffered in silence and had to bear the brunt of this tragic disease simply because they have no status, no power, and no voice to speak with in regard to health policies.

The millions of impoverished women of color around the world have been hardest hit, and forced to endure the greatest rate of unchecked HIV infection. In his book Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues, Paul Farmer utters the long awaited battle cry for action to be taken to stop the unnecessary deaths of the world’s most misunderstood and most oppressed citizens, poor women of color. Farmer asserts that the spread of the AIDS/HIV virus is closely related to the culture of powerlessness built into the inferior status of women, thereby negating the individual agency they possess over their own lives, and making them predisposed to be victims. Furthermore, Farmer attributes “structural violence” as the pervasive condition that not only permits the illnesses inflicted upon impoverished women of color but forces them deeper into these circumstances. Lastly, Farmer believes that effective, lasting change cannot be made by addressing the problems of AIDS as just a sickness, but rather by transforming the essential factors that create the problem to bring about “true” change.

Paul Farmer shares the stories of three women infected with the HIV virus, and how laws and policies that govern their lives have made them victims because they are women. Although they share a common condition, their homeland and cultures could not be further apart in tradition, or location. Guylene Adrien was born in Savanette, Haiti; Darlene Johnson was born in Harlem, New York in 1955, and Lata was born in Maharastra, India. All three women suffered their first injustice at the hands of people who were supposed to love and protect them. I found it most difficult to accept and so baffling to understand how they were treated by their families as nothing more than worthless burdens. It was a father, as in the case of Guylene and Lata, a brother, which is how life unfolded for Darlene, and even a significant other as happened to Guylene a second time. All of the men in these young women’s lives either abandoned them or gave them away for one reason or another. Darlene
was only eleven when she was sent to live with her brother, who, “angry that this new burden narrowed his own life chances, beat her frequently.” With no other means of support, Darlene lived with her abusive brother until after eleventh grade” (Farmer, 1999, p.63). In the case of Guylene, a family acquaintance is the culprit. He was a man more than twenty years her senior who took an interest in her when she was just fifteen. She didn’t want to be with him but the choice was not hers to make. “When he placed his hand on my arm, I slapped him and swore at him and hid in the garden.” The man, Dorzin, was not so easily dissuaded, however, and eventually approached Guylene’s father to ask for her hand— not in marriage, but in plasaj, a potentially stable form of union widespread in rural Haiti.

Before she was sixteen, Guylene moved in with Dorzin, to a village about an hour away from her parents” (Farmer, 1999 P.67). In regard to Lata, people known as Dalals would come to the poor indebted family to offer them large sums of money for their daughters to wash dishes, and her father leapt at the opportunity. They were actually hustlers, procurers, and pimps that prayed on the desperation and neediness of the poor, and they approached Lata’s father. “...this man would give him 11,000 Rupees as a payment for me washing dishes and housecleaning.

He said I would be able to mail money home every month and I would be allowed to visit Solapur after six months of work. Not for one moment did anyone question what he told us.” Desperate, hungry, facing the most acute poverty his family had ever experienced, Lata’s father saw opportunity and relief in his daughter’s departure. A few hours after he and the man, Prasant, had spoken, Lata was told to pack her two cotton saris, her bangles, and sandals. She would leave for Bombay in the morning.

A frail and frightened fifteen-year-old, Lata had difficulty holding back tears as she waved goodbye” (Farmer, 1999, P.73). All three women who had been given away by their fathers were but little girls! Young, uneducated, and without means for personal support, they are ushered into the next stage of their lives without their consent. They had no choice, and by definition no chance to decide their futures. Farmer later reflects, “…it seems fair to assert the decisions these women made were linked to their impoverishment and to their subordinate status as women” (78). This was the first step in their long torrurous journeys to becoming infected with HIV/AIDS; these women had no power to make any decisions because the decisions were made for them. These three women are not so different from many of the women of color in the United States. The illusion of opportunity may be present in here, but millions of women of color face the same end result as their global counterparts, which is to become infected with AIDS because of lack of choices. Furthermore, Farmer attributes “structural violence” as the pervasive cause of these women’s sufferings. “...neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault; rather, historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency. Structural violence is visited upon all those whose social status denies them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress (79).” The outcry of the statement is deafening!
This is evident in the case of Guylene, whose story I will analyze in depth as an example of the impact of structural violence. In Haiti, the plasaj is a term used to describe a form of relationship that has the potential to be a stable form of cohabitating. Yet, upon examination, the union relegates a woman to being little more than a mistress or an odalisque. Due to the extremely harsh, impoverished conditions that have been afflicting Haiti, and the economic burden that is attached to raising a family, it is easy for a man, a father, to give away his young daughter, hoping that she will become a happy "concubine" in the household of another man. Being a concubine in essence is being assigned a status lower than a man's wife.

In this dire situation of the poor and lowly, the concubine's status is pushed even lower than the already minimal position that is occupied by the wife, if that can be imagined. As a concubine, Guylene has no rights, no protection, not even a promissory commitment for her children born in this union to be taken care of. The plasaj is the instrument used as a result of the economic constraints that have been put on Haiti. “The lack of scientific fruits and social progress (Farmer, 79)” is the principal reason that Haiti is in such a state of defeat and despair. Their deficiencies are too vast to enumerate, yet we can begin with the lack of employment that is available for both men and women, and necessary to ensure that people will be able to take care of their families with the basic necessities such as food, clothing, improved housing, education and medical care when needed. All the jobs are in Port-Au-Prince, and it is “wracked with political violence (Farmer, 68),” and hardships. Working as a maid in Port-Au-Prince is scarcely appealing due to the harsh treatment the women receive from the mistress of the house, and it only would only net Guylene a salary of $20 a month, if she is allowed to eat in the house. Guylene was willing to work but with such meager returns there was no opportunity for her to ever obtain any form of financial security, nor independence within this society. In many countries women are given far less opportunities at education than men; they are raised to be obedient house makers.

But their lack of education renders them ill prepared to support themselves or their families even if employment becomes available. When Guylene is sent away by Occident, the old man to whom she had been “given” by her father, she is left to fend for herself and her two children and with no other forms of supports such as alimony or government support she is hard pressed to survive. She is reduced to depending on her extended family to raise her children. I’m sure she welcomed any form of relief from her situation in the arms of Osner, the next man to enter her life. She is literally forced into the arms of the next man regardless of his capacity to provide for her. This barefoot and pregnant mentality is dated and crippling to all the women of color in these impoverished countries. Likewise, if these women are left to raise their children after they are discarded like old shoes, then the scope of their education directly relates to their ability to raise or empower their children. Farmer says these women are “textbook cases of vulnerability (79).” They are disasters waiting to happen. It is clear that the odds are stacked against these women.
They are expected to champion issues that have held their entire nation below the global poverty level for generations without success. Lastly, Farmer believes that effective, lasting changes cannot be made by addressing the problems of AIDS as just a sickness. Farmer believes the fundamental construct that creates all of the defeating circumstances for women has to change. Some argue that the growth of HIV/AIDS infection rate correlates to women having low self-esteem. Some believe it can be attributed to ignorance because these women just didn’t know any better.

When a study was performed on African American and Latina women of Los Angeles, “researchers found that ignorance about HIV was not really the issue for these women. What put them at risk was something other than cognitive deficits (85).” What was that something that put these women at risk? “For women most at risk of HIV infection, life choices are limited by racism, sexism, political violence, and grinding poverty” (88). Lata, the young girl in India, was given away into the sex trade by her father, forced into a violent life of prostitution as her only option.

If we are to believe Farmer, we have to address the commercial sex trade that is rampant throughout the world. Addressing this problem has many faces. It would be wonderful if we could stop it altogether by ridding the planet of such an abusive, unfair market. Since that presently is not a possibility, we should provide better medical care and supplies to the individuals that are forced to work in this billion dollar industry.

We should crack down on the rings that manipulate and trick these women into becoming prostitutes because of their poverty. In the case women in Florida who are discussed by Farmer, they “were pulled into the region by the possibility of jobs as servants or farm workers” (81). In India, “it has been estimated that up to 50 percent of Bombay’s prostitutes were recruited through trickery or abduction” (78). We have to eliminate the channels by which these young girls are being taken and led into this life of abuse and mistreatment. I agree with Farmer wholeheartedly.

I only have to imagine myself at the age of fifteen to understand the helplessness, confusion and betrayal these young girls experience. We speak of them and for them because of the AIDS/HIV virus that is afflicting them, but what of their emotionally damaged psyche, soul or even spirit if we dare say it? What manner of person is left to make responsible decisions once your dignity is repeatedly taken away from you, and you are consistently and deliberately devalued? We must take steps to create policies, laws and support programs that help these women manage their daily suffering, as well as their illnesses. “For poor women, as anthropologist Martha Ward describes, AIDS is just another problem they are blamed for and have to take responsibility for” (Farmer, 79). When the physicians found out that Guylene was pregnant again, after finding out and knowing that she was an asymptomatic carrier of HIV, she gives them a metaphor of her condition, likening it to a beautiful house on the outside with rocks, mud and dirt on the inside. When she makes the decision to take AZT for her unborn child, Guylene begins to speak a truth that reveals just how beaten and broken down she really is inside.
“She was impatient with questions, tired of talk about sadness and death. ‘Will the baby be sick?’ she remarked during a prenatal visit. ‘Sure, he could be sick. People are never not sick. I’m sick...he might be sick too. It’s in God’s hands” (71). Guylene has given up. Two years later she is happy that her son is not sick, but her entire existence has been devastated. She remembers her children that have died, her sisters missing or presumed dead, and her nieces and nephews that never made it out of their childhood. This woman is surrounded with death, hopelessness, grief and trouble. At the end of her story she tells the doctor that she still has no symptoms, and they note “...but she seems inhabited by a persistent lassitude” (72). In other words, her body is just like her soul is invisible. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “invisible” this way: “1. (a.) incapable by nature of being seen. (b.) inaccessible to view.”

Guylene looks okay, and she even feels okay but she constantly lacks mental energy, spirit or zest, without life. We are unable to see her because we simply choose not to look! We must open our eyes to see the impact of the decisions that govern these women’s lives - making them powerless victims as they succumb to the brutality of this disease with the same lack of effectiveness that causes them to submit to the hardships of their existence.

We must rise our voices and cry out for justice and equality for these hapless, unfortunate women, if only for the reason that we are the only ones that can do it. Social injustice is the responsibility of those that have power. We possess power, and we should be held accountable for these women’s demise if we continue to sit by idly, and do nothing.

WORKS CITED
Making my documentary titled, “Stop the Hate” was a fun experience which required many steps in order to accomplish my goal before my event took place on May 5, 2014. My first approach was to visit The Hetrick Martin Institute and meet with a previous teacher who is now a coordinator at the high school. He informed me about the recent accomplishments at the school and after school program and reminded me of the supportive events for LGBTQ youth that go on in the program. He expressed how important the program is to him and the young people who go there daily. I told him about my ideas for making the documentary and hosting an event for LGBTQ youth and he was very excited about my work. He told me about their peer educators who are actual students trained to teach people about gender related issues and misconceptions of the LGBTQ community.

They agreed to have an educator attend my event, which was exciting for both of us because the Institute never has had a chance to do a peer education workshop in a college in the Bronx. They also didn’t know what to expect so there was a lot of communication back and forth for reassurance that things will go according to plan. I proceeded from there to work on my documentary which involved going around the city and interviewing people on the streets, along with students from Hostos to get their personal opinion on the topic of LGBTQ youth, especially concerning suicide and bullying. Along with those interview clips I included some clips from youtube that I found to be very important for my video in portraying my message about the harmful effects of bullying and suicide and in some cases, religion.

The event went well, about 12 or more students from Hostos showed up plus others attended from the Harvey Milk High School. We watched my 50 minute long documentary and proceeded to engage in discussion, facilitated by Julia Stone of the Hetrick Martin Institute. The topic of discussion after the viewing of the documentary was focused on misconceptions of gender, sexuality and identity. Most who attended had something to say in response to the film and to the materials presented by the peer educator. As a digital music student, I not only chose the songs but could blend them into appropriate sections of the film.
VIDEOS USED IN MY DOCUMENTARY

Imagine A World Where Being “Gay” The Norm & Being “Straight” Would Be The Minority!  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnOJgDW0gPI

Memorial for Gay Teen Suicide  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhB1bLSWh8o

Homophobic Father Confronts Gay Son Barbara Johnson https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4I0cbs7HTQ

Stand Up! - Don’t Stand for Homophobic Bullying https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIrJxqvalFxM

HOMOPHOBIA https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egucbj67WSY

An Important Message - From Ellen DeGeneres (Gay Suicide) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_X7tKckTgw
“Wherever you find a great man, you will find a great wife standing behind him or so they used to say. It would be interesting to know how many great women have had great fathers and husbands behind them.” Dorothy L. Sayers This quote is self-explanatory in the sense that behind every successful man there is a woman. As they say, “many great women also have had great fathers and husbands behind them” as quoted from the writer.

I was born in Kumasi Ghana (West Africa) on July 8, 1986 and raised in Kumasi for eight years My dad was a storekeeper at the Ministry Of Agriculture branch in Kumasi. He was later transferred from Kumasi to Ashanti Kampong.

At the age of 8 years I started my basic schooling at St. Monica’s basic school. I was Very brilliant but my dad didn't have money by then. So my mum started to do small trade work. She used to cook rice and stews to sell in our school to support my dad. The rice and stew wasn't fetching more money so she decided to change it to kenkey, fried fish and hot sauce. (kenkey is an African food which is a mixture of corn flour, salt and water cooked together in a round shape). In fact the kenkey, fried fish and hot sauce was fetching more money than what my father had being making.

However, I was the oldest so I had to help my mum prepare the food before I did my home work every day. It was disturbing my academics but I had no choice because my dad was broke and my mum had to support him financially to raise me and my four sisters. My mother sold the kenkey, fish and the hot sauce to raise money to put me through Junior High school because in those days where I was from, parents had to pay for their children's Junior High School education.

The kenkey, fish and hot sauce market was not fetching anymore because a lot of people were also selling the same food, competing with my mum. Moreover, my dad’s job started booming. My sisters and I had somebody to let us continue our education. My dad was the best dad I could ever have had. Since my Junior High second year he provided me with everything I needed for school, that was all the extra classes, pamphlets etc and I was so happy. I completed my Junior High School in 2001 and gained admission to a Senior High School called Amaniampong Senior High School in Ashanti Mampong in the Ashanti-region in Ghana (West Africa). I started as a day student. My mum and dad were there for me. They provided me with everything I needed. Nevertheless, I was very brilliant and I had a government scholarship for my academics for my three years in High School so my parents didn't have to pay. My parents were so proud of me. I was so happy too because I worked so hard for the scholarship. I started boarding in my second year. I kept it moving, learning so hard. One day a guy from one of my extra classes tried to have a
conversation with me, telling me how beautiful I was and I was so happy. We became friends and it led to a real love relationship, so the guy was my boyfriend in high school. He was a nice, funny and smart guy. One day I was in class with him and we were eating together when our headmaster came and caught us eating together. Before then there was a rule in the school that after 8:00pm there should not be a girl and boy in the same class. So now we had violated the rules. So I had to withdraw from being a boarder to become a day student in the school. My parents were annoyed but both of my parents did not give up on me. Especially my dad who loves me so much. He did not Give up on me. I completed school in the next six months. I couldn’t pass the way he expected me to pass. But he never gave up on me. He tried to send me to the police recruitment. I had the chance but later was withdrawn because I was under the correct height.

They were looking for someone at least 5.5 inches tall and I was only 5.2 inches tall, still my dad never gave up on me. One day I decided to apply for nursing school, and he said “If that is what you want then do it. I will pay for your fees.” I was admitted. I loved the courses too and my parents were very happy for me. I also entered the lottery to go to the United States and I won! I told my dad and he was very excited for me. I did the necessary applications a preparations. My dad paid for all the cost.

So I decided to travel to U.S.A and my dad was so supportive. After I almost completed my nursing school I told my dad I wanted to get married to my new boyfriend who is now my husband. My husband too was supportive. He booked my ticket from Ghana to U.S.A.(NY) and my dad also gave me pocket money. Now I’m a student at Hostos Community College as an undergraduate studying Liberal Arts and Sciences. After I graduate from Hostos I will continue at a senior college to study midwifery. And one day I will do my Masters in gynecology and marriage counseling. My dad, who still lives in Ghana, West Africa, always calls me to say “I am proud of you my daughter and I hope you will be a great, great woman for me one day. In fact, you are a great woman now.” I love my dad so much. He made me who I am today and my mum and my husband were supportive of everything I did. The writer Dorothy L. Sayers abandoned Oxford University to pursue careers in publishing but yet still her dad was supportive of her decision, just like my dad was supportive of my decisions. I must say my dad is a great father in my life.
Ryan aspires to be something big, to get out of his hometown of the Bronx, and to inspire others like him to do the same. Of Puerto Rican and Irish descent, he plans on visiting those places, as well as various other countries around the world in his lifetime.

The life of an artist is all Ryan has ever known. He intends on using his talents as a writer, an artist, and a photographer to ultimately become a film director. He is currently studying Liberal Arts at Hostos Community College, and juggles the ideas of different majors, but plans on going all the way nonetheless.

As someone who received ten scratch-offs for his twenty-third birthday and did not get a single dollar, I am honored to be able to finally win something. What better than an award for a talent rather than luck? All I could do was laugh when I received the email congratulating me for winning The Adrienne Weiss Women’s History contest. It was definitely an inspiration for me to focus more on my writing and to compete in other competitions. Thank you to everyone who chose my piece, and for everyone here today, especially my family.

It seems to happen quite frequently: a man will sow the land, plant his seeds, but never watch the tree grow. When I was around seven years old, I watched my father hail a cab to John F. Kennedy airport. As if it were just yesterday, I can still see my mother’s reflection in our window; her eyes were drowning in two individual oceans. My father left her to raise my infant brother and me on her own as he travelled back across the Atlantic to his hometown in Ireland. It wouldn’t be the last time I would see her cry, but I know now that my mother was releasing weakness, replacing it with the strength she would need for the next two decades.

Dolores Huerta’s quote stood out to me because it is so relevant to my own life. Her mother was involved in plenty of roles – a sign of strength and independence. The most important role, however, was raising her three children. I can relate to Huerta when she states, “In my growing up, I never saw women as being subservient or passive.” My mother Yvonne was not a business woman or a political activist, but I can recall watching her cleaning entire office buildings while my brother and I played with our action figures. I remember doing my homework under her desk, making sure to be quiet so her boss wouldn’t hear me. My closest friends were neighborhood kids that she would babysit and pick up from school. Whatever she could do to buy our school uniforms or help Santa get us the best Christmas presents, she would do in a heartbeat. My mother stands at only five feet tall. She did not finish college, and she makes
less than $50,000 a year. Still, I’ve always considered my mother to be the strongest person I have ever met.

Coincidentally, almost all of her closest friends are also single mothers. These women had us all in private schools, served us homemade meals, and took my friends and me to parks and beaches in the summer. They even taught us how to ride our bikes without training wheels, and how to throw a ball. All these things were done without a man around. Even as an adolescent, I realized it was definitely a struggle for her, but I never saw her or any other woman as inferior. The cartoons my brother and I would watch on the weekends would sometimes portray a father in a suit and tie coming home from a long shift to a hot meal. His wife would be slaving over a stove in the kitchen with a pearly white smile drawn on her face. My mother did both.

I often wondered why my family was not like the traditional families in the cartoons, or why we even had to be. Like Huerta, “I never thought women ever had to be in a second-class category, ever. It was the opposite.” She suggests that women, in general, have been considered of less importance in the family setting than men. Like my mother, it was Huerta’s mother who was head of the household and inspired her offspring to succeed.

These days, as I have become an adult, my feelings toward my father are ambivalent. We speak on Skype from time to time, and we have discussed how I feel not having had the full family experience. I know he is eaten alive every day because he regrets his decision of abandoning his family. At the same time, I wouldn’t have lived my life any other way. My mother is vigorous and admirable, and she raised two men all by herself. She is far from being in a “second-class category.” In fact, I believe that she -- and any other strong, single mother -- deserves a seat in first-class. When the trees he helped plant begin to bear fruit -- all my brother and I do to succeed in our lives -- it will be a tribute to my mother.
According to Ian McEwan, “Girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short and wear shirts and boots because it’s okay to be a boy; for girls it’s like a promotion. But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading, according to you, because secretly you believe that being a girl is degrading.” And it is true. I have experienced similar circumstances in my life. It’s called gender inequality, and it doesn’t only have to do with clothing, but with actions.

This quote truly touched me from the bottom of my heart. When I was growing up, I saw the difference between gender roles of women and men. I saw in my life, in my family what males that don’t want to do, for instance cooking. The males in my family don’t cook or clean a plate because they are not women. It gives me the impression that we, as women, are being degraded. Although if I would like to learn how to fix a car, it is considered okay and can be appreciated by males.

My cousin Jordan is always being degraded because he likes to wear moccasins. Moccasins are a type of shoe that mostly females wear because they look like Indian shoes, and are comfortable. It happens to be that my cousin likes those moccasins and he saw them in the male version. He bought those shoes to wear for his high school graduation. My cousin matched his moccasins with beige slacks, a red button up shirt, and pocket square and a bow tie. The day of his graduation my uncle picked him up. On the way, my uncle was calling him “faggot” just because of his shoes. I know he is not gay, that he just liked the shoes, and it was a very bad experience; it felt just like the quote from Ian McEwan. It felt degrading because I thought he looked so cute, and he did too, but after my uncle called him a “faggot” based on a pair of shoes, it lowered his self-esteem.

Ian McEwan’s quotation truly touched me and reminded me of my experience with my cousin and his moccasins. He reminded me how people are ignorant toward what women do, how we dress, and everything that males don’t appreciate and consider degrading.
Growing up in a single parent home, I saw firsthand the struggles single mothers face. In addition to being a single mother, my mother is a “minority” immigrant with a heavy accent, and has three kids. Therefore, I have always known she is a strong woman, due to the responsibilities her life demands and the help she has provided people with. Although she is lower middle class in terms of income, she never hesitates to offer help and assist people with problems such as housing, immigration, and public benefit issues. Growing up and seeing my mother do this is one of the main reasons my major at Hostos Community College is Liberal Arts & Sciences, concentrating in Behavior & Social Sciences with a goal to obtain a Bachelor’s degree in social work. Furthermore, being raised by a single mother granted me the ability to see women as the equals of men. All of the aforementioned elements of my upbringing are the reasons why I chose Dolores Huerta’s quote, beginning with the statement, “My mother was the one who raised us, so I never really saw women in a passive role because my mother was a businesswoman, and she was active in the community....”

I find Huerta’s life story to be extremely empowering, influential, and inspiring. Although Huerta’s mother was active in many civic organizations and inspired her commitment to community organizing, it was refreshing to read that her father was a labor union activist and politician. I found this to be refreshing due to my personal experience of not being exposed to women that follow in the footsteps of a father that was present. In addition, I enjoyed reading how she followed her heart and created change in society by securing “Aid for Dependent Families” and disability insurance for California farm workers in an era of severe gender inequality. Furthermore, her tireless work ethic is evident in her consistently working towards getting progressive politicians elected, most notably Hillary Clinton, and earning nine Honorary Doctorates granted from universities throughout the United States. These successes show her insurmountable resilience, similar to my mother’s. Although my mother quit a salaried job due to racism and the physical demand, my mother still made ends meet by working as a Home Health Aide during the week and selling goods at flea markets on weekends. In addition, she never let her income level stop her from helping people financially, such as paying for her mother and four of her siblings to come to the United States and taking care of them until they got on their feet.

Reading Huerta’s own words was surreal. I felt as if she was talking to me because her statement instantly reminded me of my mother. She was also a businesswoman by selling goods through flea markets, and was active in the community by always being willing to help anyone seeking information in
general, and on how to handle housing, immigration, and public benefit issues. Huerta says, “In my growing up, I never saw women as being subservient or passive. I think it was when I became an adult....” This means to me that Huerta’s nuclear family valued equality, thus molding her into the civic-minded woman she came to be. In addition, this quote means to me that her siblings had equality instilled in them too, as she states “...because in our household, we were equal.” I can relate to Huerta, being that in my household, my mother is the leader. Huerta states, “I never thought that had to be in second class category, ever...My mother was definitely the leader in our family.” I interpret this as Huerta’s mother being the most outspoken and heard voice in her household, causing Dolores to never look at women as second class citizens. I can relate to this personally. I grew up paying homage to leaders of the Civil Rights movement, such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Malcolm X, who always stressed that “black” people aren’t second class citizens and are equal to people of different ethnicities.

Reading Huerta’s quote offered me insight into the personal life of a prominent feminist. Her assertion of equality of women and men as well as equality in society in general are reasons I gravitated towards writing about Dolores Huerta because I had an eerily similar upbringing. Another gift to me from reading her biography is that I was exposed to a feminist I had never even heard of, and I’m extremely appreciative of that. Dolores Huerta’s life and work should serve as an example to people, women in particular, on how to be firmly dedicated to ensuring that the youth of tomorrow grow up in an equal world.
The prestigious author Michael Cunningham has written several books that have illustrated the multifaceted life that every human has to deal with daily. In his book A Home at the End of the World he pictured a specific condition that women and men go through in their lives.

Mr. Cunningham has been an influential personality for many communities in Western he has reflected in his works “complex variations” of many other issues in human life. The condition that Cunningham claims in his book about men and women is the continuous questioning in every single person regarding their place in society where gender and status are some of the most influential concerns. Cunningham describes a man and woman who cannot characterize himself in a precise manner, a human being who cannot define his status in terms of gender. This person cannot find himself in a world where society provides parameters, characteristics and conditions in order to acquire a place in it.

In my own life I have witnessed how distinction by gender has been an enormous obstacle for human improvement. As a woman I have had moments when I have not been seen as a person who can bring about change in society. I have also been perceived as someone who cannot exert influence in any area of human life that is simply defined by masculinized society. The status given to women has been to be a supplement in a patriarchal system I can confirm this declaration by the single recognition of the characteristics assigned to each gender. Usually people consider women as the representation of delicacy, kindness, and weakness, while men represent strength, survival, and bravery. In my life I have always heard comments about the role and behavior that I should possess, even if those comments or advice were not directed to me. So, I can recognize the prominent influence of gender disparity.

In a society where each human being has to select and recognize a preference and position, women are aware of a society full of detriments and inequalities. Seeing women as vulnerable beings positioned in a world ruled by men, we can comprehend the idea of Mr. Cunningham when he tries to construct an ideal where no picture of man or woman exists and every human being can be recognized as “something else altogether.” This way of seeing ourselves should be the governing norm in our society. This is an elevated notion and it could signify the beginning of an era packed with loving and understanding.

The way gender is perceived currently, and has always been perceived, is not correct and should not be seen as a normal rule in actual society. In this world governed by men, every person should follow Mr. Cunningham’s idea to find oneself “in many different ways to be beautiful” and not
be troubled by expectations about gender. If this ideal is achieved, a world of development, fairness, happiness, compassion and beauty could rise above society’s expectations.
Kofi Annan’s quotation is undoubtedly one that carries so much more meaning than anybody would imagine. Gender equality is a very broad phrase that has come to be one the most topical issues in the 21st century. Gender has become, in the words of Kofi Annan, the “…precondition for meeting the challenge of poverty...development and building good governance.” I can add that gender equality is the idea or belief that there is the need for equal opportunities for both males and females. That is, there must not be a case where females or males are segregated, sidelined or prevented from having access to the same opportunities available. Gender equality is something that nations, media, and societies need to give much attention to if we want society to be a better place to live in.

It seems clear to me that those countries that have thrived in combating poverty, diseases, development and have good governance, made gender equality a foundation. Countries like the United States of America, or the United Kingdom, just to name a few, are boasting of all these achievements because they gave every gender the opportunity to bring their knowledge to the fore to help in building their countries to great heights. Whenever the issue of gender equality is raised, it is always clear that women are mostly the prime target of this segregation and discrimination. That is why nations that have suffered and are still suffering from severe impoverishment, underdevelopment and bad governance are those that did not give women or gender equality a critical look. Drawing experience from the community where I grew up, hunger, diseases, poverty, underdevelopment and bad governance has been and still is the ordeal of the people. This boils down to the fact that women suffer greatly.

Many women have not been able to live up to their full potential, not because they lack the resources, but the women have been greatly downgraded and sidelined in the affairs of national development. Religion and tradition has made the women the victims of societal mockery. It has always been the notion that tradition does not allow a woman rub shoulders with their male counterparts. They believe that a woman’s place is in the kitchen.

In other words, women are only supposed to cater for the family by preparing food and keeping the home at all times. Women are not given a chance to be educated and therefore do not have voice. Thus they lose every right to hear and to be heard when it comes to decision-making in the family, community and the nation at large. This has killed the morale of the women and has made them develop an inferiority complex when they meet their male counterparts. After the post colonial rule in many African countries, the governance systems, the economy and other sectors became male dominated. So much so, that even women who had a chance of being educated often could not bring themselves
up because of the “image” that has been created about women. The irony of this situation of the lack of gender equality in my country is that women are subjected to hard work which their male counterparts ultimately claim the credit for doing. In other words they “reaped where they never sowed.”

That is why the reality of Mr. Annan’s quote is a significant one as many Africans now realize that reducing poverty, hunger, diseases and achieving sustainable development as well as building good governance can only be achieved if a rigorous campaign is waged in support of gender equality in Africa. Over the past few years, African women and some male activists like Kofi Annan himself have made some significant strides to ensure that Africa fully embraces gender equality.

One of the main gains that African women and African leaders have made is the campaign for girls’ education. They have realized that education is the major medium through which they can close the ever yawning gap between their male counterparts. Another important way gender equality is being tackled is democracy.

Most African leaders have been known to have a strong passion for power. The campaign to introduce democracy - where every citizen, including women have a voice and the right to be heard - has been championed by most African leaders including Kofi Annan, which is one of his notable achievements as a U N Secretary General. Working to grow democracy in many African countries was aimed at not only ending dictatorial rule, but also to give women a strong voice and empowerment. As a result of the introduction of democracy, Africans can now boast of women presidents, like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Joyce Banda of Malawi. Aside from these two great women, most African women have risen to become an integral part of politics, the economy and other sectors.

One such personality is Dr Ngozi Okonja Iweala, the finance minister of Nigeria. There have been more women in Parliament and decision-making positions. In the recent parliamentary elections of Rwanda in September 2013, women obtained 65 percent of the seats, which has been noted as the record highest number in the world. All the above really point to the fact that gender equality is truly a great precondition for the development of women, especially in Africa. With all these positives to point to, and working towards greater target, women all over the globe and Africa would look behind them and say “yes we can.”