

# The Noisy Water Review 2011-2012

## Anthology of Student Writing & Art

### Whatcom Community College



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# Becoming the Animal at the Dog Park

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 [noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/01-01essay.html](https://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/01-01essay.html)

## Dylan Forest

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The word civilized carries two distinct meanings that are commonly conflated with each other. One is simply of or related to a civilization, which, anthropologically defined, is a largely populated city that is socially stratified, has a central authority, and where labor is diversified. The other meaning, the one that most Americans would probably think of first, is polite, refined, and well-bred. Most people in the Western world make a connection between living in cities and being tamer, less savage, less “wild”, and they hold this up as ideal. Our culture is full of messages that instill in us the savage/civilized binary, and it is the supposed moral and intellectual superiority of “civilized man” over “savage” that has justified innumerable cultures being eradicated, by being either wiped out completely or forced to conform to Western ideals. This hierarchy of man over nature also has a driving force in our compulsive need to master wildness in our environment – to pave roads, cut down trees, define boundaries, and otherwise translate the natural world into man-made terms.

This way of thinking of man as conqueror of the primitive, as tamer of the untamed, allows for unimaginable destruction of the earth to continue every day and creates a mindset that is far from healthy. In “Aerobic Sisyphus and the Suburbanized Psyche,” Rebecca Solnit outlines some of the changes that have occurred in our society in relation to this mindset of separation from the Earth. She focuses on walking as a metaphorical “indicator species”, with its diminishment as a warning sign as to the condition of our “various kinds of freedoms and pleasures: free time, free and alluring space, and unhindered bodies” (Solnit 215). Solnit demonstrates the various reasons walking has disappeared as a culturally acceptable and accessible practice, including city layouts catering more to vehicles and less to pedestrians, and argues that “walking as a cultural activity, as a pleasure, as travel, as a way of getting around, is fading, and with it goes an ancient and profound relationship between body, world, and imagination” (214). This relationship comes with engagement with and connection to the environment and the physical self, and has been a central part of many human cultures throughout history and across the globe.

Along with the analogy of walking as an indicator species, Solnit then develops this further, with the gym as a “wildlife preserve for bodily exertion” (228). She argues that these spaces exist because our daily lives no longer include using our bodies to perform tasks, but in all of us exists a need to engage physically with the world around us. When I read this analogy, I started thinking of other recreational places people go and the missing pieces in our culture that they replace. One that immediately came to mind was the dog park, especially because it is one of the rare places where people still walk for pleasure. It struck me that because it is

such a unique space that many people frequent, the dog park might be a “wildlife preserve” as well, a place that arose out of the need to preserve a vanishing part of the human experience. As I spent time there, this became more obvious to me.

While the dog park is thought of as a place for dogs, it is notably presented in human terms. It consists of gravel trails that wind through a wooded area and are centered around a mowed grass field. Signs signify the boundaries of the area, and the path is fully fenced in from the surrounding trees. This illustrates a common theme in Western ideals: the impulse to control, master, and possess everything around, to re-form things into defined, “civilized” terms. This impulse is evident in many aspects of our history and current day culture, from the forceful colonization of the Americas to the continued development into all corners of the earth. It is an integral part of the ways we are taught to act and the personality traits we are told to cultivate in ourselves, for the process of turning a child into a rule-abiding adult is much like the process from wild creature to pet. This way of seeing the world is even evident in the dog itself, which is a wild animal re-formed through domestication to fit human ideals. Far from Solnit’s mourned past connection to the environment, this ideology is one of domination and suppression of it instead.

One of the first things I noticed while spending time in the dog park was that almost everyone was doing the same thing as their dog. People whose dogs were running and playing together in the field were circled around the outside, talking casually and smiling easily with each other. Dogs that walked straight through the area sniffing the ground or otherwise absorbed in their surroundings would be followed by a person looking at the trees, engaged completely in the environment in the same way. A man whose dog wanted nothing more than to chase a tennis ball was just as enthusiastic to throw it repeatedly. What this led me to conclude was that far from being just for dogs, the dog park is an excuse for people to carry out the sorely missed activities that are missing in modern civilization. Some would see this trend and assume that people were just following their dogs leads, and there certainly was an element of the space being dog-centered, but to assume the dogs had no thought of what actions would be acceptable is to not give them enough credit, both as pack animals who are instinctively conscious of social hierarchy, and as the products of thousands of years of domestication. Rather than being the leaders of the dog park, the dogs were actually acting as extensions of their corresponding people, allowing those people to enjoy activities they normally wouldn’t be comfortable participating in.

Having acknowledged the strong hold that a culture-wide aversion towards the untamed and “wild” aspects of our surroundings and personalities has on America, it is not surprising that these activities require an animal to be present in order to be appropriate. Nowhere in our culture would we see the same space minus the dogs, and even imagining it made me laugh. Normal, functioning members of society would not be seen engaging with nature and each other in such an unstructured and unrestrained way. In the presence of the dog, who we allow to be wild (for the wild is only the domain of the non-human), people are permitted to

behave in a way that most Americans would consider animalistic. The popularity of the dog park and the consistence I saw in people's behavior proves that there is a strong desire to disobey our culture's rules of conduct and reconnect with the animal within.

This reconnection seemed to take three different forms, first of which being employed by those who congregated and socialized while their dogs played. These people were enjoying an easy and casual social mixing and sense of community that Rebecca Solnit argues has all but disappeared in the modern city. She writes, "Cars have encouraged a privatization of space, as shopping malls replace shopping streets, public buildings become islands in a sea of asphalt, civic design lapses into traffic engineering, and people mingle far less freely and frequently" (Solnit 221). This type of mingling is exactly what I saw at the dog park. People smiled and greeted me much more often than they would have elsewhere in the city, and I saw people mixing across age and class lines and between subcultures in ways I didn't expect. Everyone seemed much less confined by social rules, but most social interactions were initiated through the dogs, using the animal as an appropriate vessel through which to enjoy such an uncivilized act as unrestrained socialization.

While some people seemed to be seeking connection with other people, some were clearly seeking a connection with nature. Several people walked through the area following their dogs and gazing into the trees, much more engaged with and interested in the space around them than you would see on the street. In fact, in my entire time at the dog park I didn't see one person checking a cell phone or listening to headphones, certainly unusual today when most people I see walking seem to be actively distracting themselves from paying attention to their surroundings. One woman I saw sat and looked at the view for 15 minutes while her dogs whined beside her, which at first was in stark contrast to the trend I had observed of people following their dogs lead, but I then realized it fit firmly into my hypothesis that the dog park was a place for people to act out desires, not solely a place for dogs.

People's desires also led them one other place: to a connection with their physical bodies. Several runners and the aforementioned man playing fetch both seemed fully absorbed in the moment, caught up in the feeling of making their heart beat faster. Far from the type of mindless, unengaged exercise one might experience in a gym, everyone who was exercising at the dog park looked not only stimulated, but fulfilled. I could not imagine that any of them were counting down until the end of their "work out". This is a type of use of the body that we rarely see today, when most of the people who exercise do so in a way that is far removed from a natural, unhindered use of the body as both a tool and a part of the self. When explaining the state of our connections to our bodies today, Solnit writes, "The industrial revolution institutionalized and fragmented labor; the gym is now doing the same thing...for leisure" (230). When the full experience of being a living, breathing, sweating entity, acting and reacting to all that is around you, is isolated and broken down into mindless repetitive tasks, the part is separated from the whole, and one loses touch with the continuity between mind, body, and surroundings.

In “Nature and Madness,” Paul Shepard warns of the ways that this loss of connection with the physical world interferes with the way our minds evolved to function, and he even argues that it has led to a sort of culture-wide insanity. Shepard writes, “From the epoch of Judeo-Christian emergence is an abiding hostility to the natural world, characteristically fearful and paranoid. The sixteenth-century fixation on the impurity of the body and the comparative tidiness of the machine are strongly obsessive-compulsive” (Shepard). Here Shepard illustrates two delusions that have heavily contributed to a culture of chronic disengagement from one’s environment, body, and community: the hierarchy of man over nature, and that of the machine over the body. The two concepts are not as separate as they may seem, for in what way is the human body not a part of the natural world? Replacing the body with machines through industrialization was just one more step towards trying to suppress nature; it devalued the organic in favor of the man-made.

But devaluing the natural world leads to neglect of a critical part of what it means to be human. We did not become who we are today by dominating nature through most of history - in fact, it is a relatively new phenomenon. Most of the course of our evolution occurred in hunting and gathering groups, small populations that thrive by learning to cooperate with each other and the environment. When technological ability to manipulate the environment is scarce, survival means learning to interpret the signs of the Earth, to follow animal migrations or ripening fruit, anticipate the changes of the seasons, or otherwise become invested in paying attention to and understanding the natural order of things. Such a lifestyle encourages a sense of the self as a part of nature, rather than master of it, as we see ourselves today, and it was this subsistence pattern that carried us through a majority of our evolution as a species. In fact, while our closest humanoid ancestor, the species *Homo erectus*, began appearing about 2 million years ago, humans didn’t even begin to start domesticating plants and animals until around 10,000 years ago. That means that even when not counting the millions of years of humanoid evolution that occurred before *Homo erectus*, we’ve still only been altering our environment as a way of life for 0.5% of our history. In evolutionary terms, 10,000 years is the blink of an eye.

All organisms are a product of the environment they evolved to thrive in, and humans are no exception. The human brain evolved in adaptation to the environment it existed in and for millions of years that environment was in small groups that lived off the unaltered land. Thus, we became a species that was proficient in navigating interactions with other people and with nature. When withdrawal from both of these things is glorified, we are being urged to fight a war against that which we come from, to cut down the forests we were designed to inhabit. Shepard explains that “Biological evolution cannot meet the demands of these new societies. It works much too slowly to make adjustments in our species in these ten millennia since the archaic foraging cultures began to be destroyed by their hostile, aggressive, better-organized, civilized neighbors. Programmed for the slow development toward a special kind of sagacity, we live in a world where that humility and tender sense of human limitation is no longer rewarded. Yet we suffer for the want of that vanished world, a deep grief we learn to

misconstrue” (Shepard). This sense of longing is what leads us to seek out our best approximation of what’s missing in our lives, to create “wildlife preserves” for disappearing but critical aspects of human nature.

The grief that Shepard references is obvious with one glance at American culture and its discontents. Along with the earlier mentioned worldwide implications of our disengagement from nature, there are painful personal implications for the people coming of age in this society. I know that I am not alone in feeling that something important and meaningful is missing in my experience of the world, and that becomes evident in the large amount of people heard wondering what the “meaning of life” is, in the droves of people seeking meaning in religion, or the ever-growing number of people being medicated for anxiety or depression. When you never develop a sense of your place in a community or the earth, you are deprived of a sense of being a part of a greater whole. Isolated within yourself, separate from the sense of being connected to everything else, separate even from your body and the sensual world, how could one feel anything but alone and without purpose? When your mindset includes acknowledging the self as just one component of a greater ecosystem, your existence cannot be meaningless. When that same mindset also includes freely and regularly connecting with other people, it’s hard to develop the complete social isolation and feeling of being inherently different and misunderstood that I struggled with so much as a teenager and still continue to work through. But, like Shepard notes, most of us are so far from functioning the way our species is geared towards that even when we know something is amiss, we still misconstrue that. In the instance of the dog park, we do that by putting limitations on the space and by experiencing it through an animal. We clearly have a long way to go before we are able to authentically live out our engrained desires without feeling like we are behaving in culturally unacceptable ways.

To me the dog park seems to illustrate clearly several things. In its mere existence, it affirms that there is a need to preserve aspects of the human experience that are missing in modern American life. The way we must experience the space both through a man-made environment that is separated completely from the rest of civilization, and then through the presence of the animal, shows how strongly our culture emphasizes separation of humanity and wildness, and how far most of us are from overcoming that, even when we want to. But wildness as a stunted and inferior characteristic and the concept of humanity as separate from all that is natural are relatively new ideas that sprung from the concept, as Solnit says, that “progress consists of the transcendence of time, space, and nature” (223). Not only does this concept deprive us as humans, it has countless detrimental effects on other peoples and environments. It says a lot of our instinctive desire to be connected to nature (whether that is through connection with the environment, other humans, or our bodies - they are all a part of nature) that even in a culture so completely inundated with the idea of man as conqueror of the wild, people have created a place like the dog park, which does everything it can to sidestep all of society’s rules about proper interaction with the world to create one of the last

places that exist in a city where people can try to get close again to nature. Even though a hamster wheel is no run through the woods, the animal utilizes it because the need is so overwhelming and because within its cage it has no better choice. We are not so different.

#### Works Cited

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/02-01art.html](https://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/02-01art.html)



Thao Nguyen

*Untitled*

Charcoal/chalk, 14" x 17"



# hwy 57

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 [noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/03-01creativewr.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/03-01creativewr.html)

## Austin Giles

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summer in the woods  
without a bed of my own  
summer with a slow brain  
summer in isolation  
in exclusion  
in exile  
surrounded by strangers  
employed by friends  
with pressed in soft spots  
on their skulls  
summer on my knees  
in jeans and long sleeves  
pulling up weeds  
summer walking by dogs  
with a hairless gene  
on all fours  
wet and smiling under their schnozes  
about sex  
dogs with a hairless gene  
but I beg  
and I beg  
and I beg  
summer without a beard  
without a motorcycle  
without a rat  
electrocuted on pills  
and filled with syrup  
summer with screw guns  
and black denim  
with gold buttons  
and no mirror  
and absolutely no money  
but sweat in my eyes  
from working  
and every other moment in between  
filled with music

summer in blue houses  
with flooding refrigerators  
and microwaves  
that cannot be washed out  
summer in brothels  
with wooden walls and ceilings  
summer in strangers lakeside bungalows  
and mansions  
summer electrocuted on pills  
with two hours until you peak  
and two hours until you crash  
summer with dog piss on my back  
summer circling a girl

that mixes her own perfume  
and smells like everything  
from my childhood that i didn't believe  
would ever last  
but my summer  
with throw up  
dried to most of the clothes  
in my dirty pile  
summer with disease  
that cannot be explained  
summer briefly in love with California  
with machines that shake the earth  
and art galleries in San Francisco  
summer in love with cartons of cigarettes  
in the trunk of my car  
summer waiting on one girl  
far away to save me  
from everything  
summer at a table  
with dentures  
and pregnancy  
and me in black denim  
and tank tops  
covered in saw dust, dirt and garbage  
and plenty of time to sneak away  
and smoke cigarettes on eight dollars an hour  
summer reading two pages of the same summer book  
summer slipping away from the same summer girls  
summer with all the ones that want me

holding me down to put lip-stick on my face  
summer as the devil  
summer as the weird one  
summer as the unmatched  
unreachable broken hearted fool  
summer running home  
summer in parking lots  
wasted and starving  
and filled with smoke  
summer burning out my eyes  
summer burning out my lungs  
summer burning out my heart

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/04-02art.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/04-02art.html)



Michelle Edmondson

*Out of the Frying Pan...*

Mixed media, 8" x 8"

# Choked With Emotion: The Depreciation of Fact-Based Discourse in American Politics

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/05-02essay.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/05-02essay.html)

## Matthias Hofer

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Since my exchange year at Sehome High School in 2007, I have been interested in U.S. politics as well as the related occurrences and achievements. Having grown dear to my heart, the fate of America and her people have become important to me – and because the elected representatives in Washington, D.C. play a pivotal role in this respect – so has the political system. Even after I had graduated from Lynden Christian High School in 2009 and had returned to my native country of Switzerland, my fascination and my concerns didn't abate. Thousands of miles away, I tried to stay informed about the trends and decisions in my "second home." As I looked at the political processes from afar and started to compare them to their Swiss equivalents, I began to believe that something in American politics is currently going fundamentally wrong. Whereas the political landscape in Switzerland features at least seven noteworthy parties which have to hold bipartisan discussions and form alliances on a daily basis, the fronts in the United States between the Republicans and the Democrats are so hardened that the current situation resembles a football game. The two political interest groups constantly crash head-on at the line of scrimmage. Whoever has a majority in the two chambers of Congress, and/or has a member of the party sitting in the Oval Office, tries to run the ball as far as possible before a shift in the public opinion and a loss at the ballot box make them turn it over. This tendency reveals that the political climate in America has experienced a grave change. Instead of getting to hear fact-based arguments, the 313 million citizens are nowadays the subjects of a bombardment of advertisements and speeches which aim at their hearts and not their brains. Emotions have been elevated over reason.

A paradigm that exemplifies this creeping change in a masterly fashion is the campaign ad "Rick Perry – Proven Leadership" which was launched in September 2011 to support Rick Perry, the current governor of Texas, in his endeavors to become the Republican nominee for the 2012 presidential election. Having a running time of one minute and forty-five seconds, this powerful commercial may overshadow even official trailers of Hollywood movies. In the first forty-two seconds, a hail of criticism pours down on the incumbent president, Barack Obama. The advertisement starts off by painting a dark and depressing present and exposing its viewers to a flood of disquieting shots. Deserted Times Square, crumbling billboards, a decommissioned, dilapidated factory, rainy streets, abandoned swings on a children's playground, an empty restaurant and an anonymous, homeless beggar somewhere in this vast nation convey the impression of a pre-apocalyptic world. This feeling is juxtaposed with excerpts from speeches by the president, in which he maintains that "[d]espite all the naysayers, who were predicting failure, our economy is growing again." Moreover, he

reassures his compatriots that the government has taken the perfect path into the future, by saying “We are headed in the right direction.” Confronted with the overwhelming visual sensations, however, these statements seem overly ludicrous.

The precariousness of the situation is accentuated by the sound of sirens, dramatic music and the voices of news anchors that smother the viewers with negative statistics about the economy. They indirectly accuse the current commander-in-chief of having fallen short of his goals and excitedly recapitulate their points by yelling “No jobs created!” or declaring that “[p]eople are demoralized.” The signs of the Obama campaign which are intricately interwoven with the remaining visual material get rid of the viewers’ last doubts and reveal who the culprit is. The message is clear: Barack Obama has disappointed his people. Analogously to his former popularity which has faded away, the audience is shown a poster of him which is moldering on a wall.

Suddenly, the music stops and the screen turns black for a second. Afterwards the headline “IN 2012” announces the beginning of the advertisement’s second segment. Music which is commonly associated with trailers of Hollywood blockbusters like Independence Day or Transformers resounds. The previously dark-toned footage is superseded and contrasted by bright and colorful takes of galloping wild horses, the Statue of Liberty and almost omnipresent Star-Spangled Banners. The resolute voice of Rick Perry can be heard. He distances himself from Obama’s opinion and indicates his intention by enunciating, “A great country requires a better direction. A renewed nation needs a new president.” A flurry of camera flashes can be seen, when Rick Perry stands in a statesmanlike manner behind a lectern and addresses the crowd in front of him. The listeners admiringly look up. They cheer and clap their hands in support of the orator who goes on to make statements which are soaked with patriotism. Perry postulates that “[t]he United States of America really is the last, great hope of mankind.” As the incumbent governor of Texas can be seen traveling through the nation – shaking hands with workers, giving a high-five to an employee and being saluted by a soldier – he confirms his faith that there will be better days ahead. He proudly proclaims, “I believe in America. I believe in her purpose, in her promise. I believe her best days have not yet been reached. I believe her greatest deeds are reserved for the generations to come” (RPerry2012).

By the end of the ad, when a “Perry President” logo shines out, the situation seems to be crystal clear. Similar to Hercules in Greek mythology, America is standing once more at the crossroads. This year, her citizens have the choice between the disastrous status quo and a new beginning personified by the determined, down-to-earth and optimistic Texan Rick Perry. This conception, however, is highly hyperreal because it is based on a biased and misleading campaign ad. Even though Perry was competing with more than half a dozen contestants for the official Republican nomination at the time of the advertisement’s release, not a single rival is mentioned. Instead the televised video already predicts a battle between its two main characters – the incumbent president and the aspiring Texas governor. In addition, the featured utterances of the news anchors and the president were taken out of

context. When Obama declares “I’m just getting started!” at the climax of the commercial’s first segment (after a forty second-collage of depressing audiovisual fragments), his statement sounds like a threat and the spectators start to wonder if America would survive another four years with this guy as the head of state. If one takes the time to search for the original footage online, the contrasts are amazing. As it turns out, the excerpt was derived from the CNN live transmission of a town hall meeting in New Orleans on October 15, 2009 – almost two years before the release of Rick Perry’s campaign ad. Nine months after having taken office, the obviously cheerful, nonchalant and optimistic president talks about the accomplished progress and reminds his audience that bringing about lasting change is not going to be easy. Fired up by the ecstatic crowd, he doesn’t adhere to the prepared remarks and – speaking freely – promulgates, “Those folks who are trying to stand in the way of progress... They’re... They’re all... Let me tell you: I’m just getting started! I don’t quit! I’m not tired. I’m just getting started” (joegerarden). In this context, the assumed threat unexpectedly becomes a promise by Obama, an assurance that he will gradually put all his campaign pledges into effect.

This distortion of reality caused by political advertising is reminiscent of an idea of Susan Sontag. In her essay “In Plato’s Cave,” the American writer elucidates the impact of photographs on the public mind and their influence on the perception of reality. She writes, “Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks” (Sontag 270). Similar to the photographic medium, Rick Perry’s commercial is very deceptive because it combines incoherent takes and quotes to make a point. Still focusing on photographs, Sontag talks about this issue when she declares that in a photograph “anything can be separated, can be made discontinuous, from anything else: all that is necessary is to frame the subject differently” (Sontag 270). Creators of partisan propaganda and speechwriters make use of the same technique. In order to achieve a certain effect and trigger the desired reaction from the audience, they can employ even opposing comments for their benefit – simply by transplanting them into a new context.

No matter if one shares Rick Perry’s worldview and his political approaches, one is likely to admit that the video “Rick Perry – Proven Leadership” is an impressive creation. It is so powerful and can be very persuasive because it makes use of the AIDA formula, a concept every marketing student is taught in the first semester. In less than two minutes, the television ad manages to arouse the viewer’s attention and interest, awakens the desire for political change and encourages all registered voters to take action and back Rick Perry. But what are the commercial’s ingredients that make the AIDA formula work?

When examining the ad closely, one is amazed by the lack of facts. Perry’s campaign doesn’t underline its claims with solid evidence, but tries to impose a negative picture of the current situation upon the voters’ minds and offers an almost paradisiacal alternative. The advertisement plays with our emotions. It conveys the stereotypical spirit of American optimism and interlinks it with the possibility of an emergence into a more glorious era – a

combination that is reminiscent of the frontier mentality. To put it another way: how does the footage of galloping wild horses prove Rick Perry's qualifications and abilities to be the 45th president of the United States? The only message in this ad that the spectators can take for granted is the fact that there's a public figure by the name of Rick Perry who would love to move into the White House.

It is important to realize that the advertisement of the governor of Texas is just an example picked from a vast pool of political commercials which circulate on the Internet and air on TV channels these days. Even though they may feature different parties and candidates, address miscellaneous topics, and denounce various shortcomings, their style and their lack of fact-based content are alarmingly alike. Whereas the ad of a corporation which is launching a marketing campaign for a new product is regulated by law to protect the customers, political promotions aren't controlled ("The Persuaders"). Hence politicians, interest groups and entire parties are given a free hand to hoax the public into believing whatever they want. This, in turn, is pure poison for the political discussions among citizens.

The public discourse is also an important topic in the book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* by Neil Postman. The American author and critic describes in this literary work how the rise of new technologies over time has changed the way we attain knowledge and thus perceive reality. He claims, that in past time periods – when the “printed word had a monopoly on both attention and intellect” (Postman 60) – the masses usually didn't know their famous contemporaries' appearance and rhetoric. As a result, they based their judgments about the public figures solely on the information which they had derived from reading books. Postman illustrates his point by writing, “It is quite likely that most of the first fifteen presidents of the United States would not have been recognized had they passed the average citizen in the streets” (Postman 60).

Today, on the other hand, we don't live in a “word-centered” (Postman 61), but in an “image-centered culture” (Postman 61). Photographs and television shape our everyday lives – and inevitably our minds. Thus, Postman notes, not the bare facts, but pictures of the people concerned appear in our mind. Names are automatically accompanied by pictures. Apart from these photos, however, “almost nothing will come to mind” (Postman 61).

From my point of view, political commercials promote this new lifestyle. Thanks to the innumerable shots of Rick Perry in his campaign ad, for instance, we know his looks, but his accomplishments and the details of his plans to bring America back on track are cloaked in ambiguity. After watching the advertisement, people have an opinion nevertheless. They either see themselves confirmed in their worldviews or they are convinced that Perry doesn't deserve their vote. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman points out, that as our ways of acquiring knowledge have changed, the significance of our opinions has diminished. He clarifies, “It is probably more accurate to call them emotions rather than opinions, which would account for the fact that they change from week to week, as the pollsters tell us. What is happening here is that television is altering the meaning of ‘being informed’ by creating a species of information that might properly be called *disinformation*” (Postman 107).



According to Postman, the result of this lack of coherent facts brought about by the emergence of television is that “the content of much of our public discourse has become dangerous nonsense” (Postman 16).

Since I don't intend to make a case for a specific political party, but for the resuscitation of a democracy based on fact-based discourse, I am going to elucidate my next point using an example which focuses on a Democrat. In Rick Perry's advertisement, headlines such as “ZERO ‘HOPE’” and “ZERO ‘CHANGE’” (RPerry2012) target the rhetorical terminology that Barack Obama used during the campaign leading up to the 2008 presidential elections. Back then, the senator for the state of Illinois advertised *change*, philosophized about *dignity* and *respect*, promised a time of *prosperity* and more *opportunities* for the *middle class* and thus managed to embody a sense of *hope*. To many he seemed to be the herald who was proclaiming the advent of brighter days – those which Rick Perry, according to his ad, can bring about as well. With catchy slogans like “Change We Can Believe In” and “Yes We Can,” Obama managed to convert a majority of the voters to his columns and defeated his Republican opponent, John McCain.

It is not up to me to judge if President Obama has been able to keep his promises because this call heavily depends on one's personal opinion. What I'm interested in are the cores of the different terms. Let me ask you: where in the social pyramid does the middle class start and where does it end? How much money do you have to earn annually to call yourself prosperous? Isn't the perception of opportunity and dignity rather individual? Does hope fill an empty, rumbling stomach or offer you a new job? And how do you define change? I am convinced that when Barack Obama spoke of “change,” it meant something else to the gay couple in Dallas than it did to the laid-off worker from Detroit who used to assemble cars at a factory. The hopes of a single mom in the suburbs of Los Angeles were (and still are) not necessarily the same as the ones of the university graduate from Florida who was facing a crushing mountain of debts or the soldier from rural New York who had served three tours in the Middle East.

Words like “hope” and “opportunity” sound as promising as the names of mars exploration rovers or of the former NASA space shuttles (Atlantis, Columbia, Challenger, Discovery and Endeavour). They are an effective weapon in the rhetorical arsenal of a politician because they are broad, can be furnished by every individual with meaning, and arouse emotions. On the other hand, these terms that Germans refer to as *Worthülse* (This word, literally meaning “word husks,” has no English equivalent, but its sense can be conveyed by the expression “hollow words.”) have helped to dilute and shroud the current political issues in American politics. They are not tangible and thus impede the development of concrete discussions.

Besides the utilization of inspiring language that is intended to evoke positive connotations, hostile and even defamatory rhetoric is a part of the daily political bickering as well – and its impact on arguments as well as the resulting progress is even more devastating. In Rick Perry's commercial, Obama denigrates the skeptics of his policies by referring to them as

“naysayers” (RPerry2012). Since he is gunning for contemporaries who most likely politicize on the other end of the political spectrum, he is undoubtedly speaking about members of the Republican Party as well as the Tea Party movement. In turn, some legislators affiliated with those parties have in the last few years coined phrases like the derogatory term “Obamacare,” have repeatedly called the president a “socialist” and a “Muslim,” and have accused their counterparts of fostering “class warfare.” Not taking that insult, the Democrats have returned the verbal fire again and tried to project the image that the Republicans are not interested in taking part in a bipartisan government. In an interview with the Swiss current affairs show *10vor10*, Robert Lichter, a professor of Communication at George Mason University and a well-respected media expert, tried to explain the current situation to the European audience. Talking about the results of his studies, he reported, “The use of language has become a new social technology that is applied to the political arena (...). The result is the words that you hear people say on the news are not spontaneous, they are the results of carefully calculated campaigns” (*10vor10*). As an essential and nearly indispensable part of those campaigns, verbal attacks have to perform a simple, inglorious task: staining an opponent’s name or political venture. Truth is in the best case secondary. To make it even worse, the media – always eager for more news and emotions they can fill the slots in their twenty-four hour news cycles with – have jumped on the bandwagon and have adopted the same rhetoric.

The increasing importance of terminology in campaigns has fathered the existence of a new market sector. Nowadays, some political consultants’ sole specialty is the power of words. They work meticulously on rhetorical constructions and tailor them so that they convey a certain party’s perception on an issue and bring about the desired reaction from the addressees. An influential icon in this rather young branch of political science is Frank Luntz, an American opinion pollster and – according to his website – “one of the most honored communication professionals in America today” (Luntz Global). His field of expertise being the testing of language and its impact on the audience, Luntz pockets huge sums of money from corporations and political organizations for which he conducts studies to find the best wording to approach a subject. In a 2004 edition of the television program *FRONTLINE*, Luntz summed up his philosophy by stating, “Eighty percent of our life is emotion and only twenty percent is intellect” (“The Persuaders”). Similar to Indiana Jones who is out for precious, antique relics, Frank Luntz is therefore on a constant quest for more suitable words which sell an issue to the people in the most effective way and make them act on an emotional level. On the homepage of his company Luntz Global, he touts for customers with a political background by implying that carefully picked expressions can decide whether a bill passes. He maintains, “If you need to create the language to build support for legislation, we’ll find the right words. If you need to kill a bad bill, we’ll show you how” (Luntz Global). Additionally, he presents a few samples of his creations and accomplishments. He praises his company and boasts, “We changed the ‘estate tax’ to the ‘death tax’ and that changed the course of legislative history” (Luntz Global). As a consultant of the Republican Party, he further suggested to substitute the term “climate change” by “global warming” and “drilling for oil” was suddenly referred to as “exploring for energy” – simply because it sounded more appealing (Luntz Global). Let me ask you: which term sounds more pleasant to you – “tax

cuts” or “tax relief”? Are you rather in favor of a “War in Iraq” or a “War on Terror”? If you have chosen the second term in both cases, you have just succumbed to expressions created by Frank Luntz (“The Persuaders”).

Even though Luntz claims that he serves the public good by clarifying with his word combinations the otherwise complex political issues, his creations seem to bring about the opposite effect. With their subconscious, emotional impact, they obscure the items on the agenda. Analogous to the footage employed in partisan propaganda, the usage of language has become another subject of the Sontagian reframing. Depending on the choice of words, the course of a political discussion can be controlled and dramatically altered.

As previously mentioned, I don’t intend to scapegoat a particular party. As a matter of fact, the Democrats are just as responsible for the depreciation of public discourse as the Republicans. What I am essentially criticizing is the occurring political arms race, a war fought with everything the visual and audible world has to offer. Both the GOP and the DNC have drafted numerous consultants to join in the battle for their cause and since in today’s fast moving and distractive world the parties would lose their target groups by conducting an extensive line of argument, they put forth an effort to mobilize people and get them on their side through an emotional appeal. Just like fast food, this method is simple, requires less time and has proven to be effective in the short term. But as my comparison gives away, there are also downsides to it. Robert Lichter touched upon the same topic in the interview with the Swiss news broadcast *10vor10*. He had recognized that if the public is bombarded with emotions, the people struggle to understand the issue. He cut right to the chase of the matter, when he said, “...this whole process of trying to use language itself as a political tool is debasing public discourse” (*10vor10*).

Having perused my essay up to this point, some readers may think of me as a grouching pessimist. “An average citizen,” they may argue, “has simply other priorities than the boring political skirmish on Capitol Hill. Especially during these tough economic times, most middle class families’ focus is on the kids and the job.” Others may add that politics isn’t a matter of concern for many Americans because an unprecedented range of choices and possibilities concerning their leisure time and technological advances like cell phones, television and Internet distract them. Therefore, they might suggest that candidates and legislators have to appeal to our emotions to arouse attention and be heard. Otherwise, a serious political conversation couldn’t even get started.

I agree that this explanation may be true to a certain extent. From my point of view, however, the strategies that are used to get the public’s attention have reached unsettling proportions. Was it really necessary to show a grotesque portrayal of George W. Bush as the devil incarnate during his presidency? And how do photo-shopped and distorted pictures which depict Barack Obama as Adolf Hitler or the Joker help spark a fact-based argument? Such creations are out of touch with reality. They simply serve as the spearhead of blasphemous smear campaigns. Similarly, terms like “class warfare” and “naysayers” don’t contribute to the talks about the health care system, the economy, civil rights and foreign relations, but

distract and leave a negative impression on the blamed party. The result is a political landscape flooded with emotions in which arguments can go off course very quickly. In 2008, for instance, when a heated debate about abortions was stirring up citizens across the country, Barack Obama justified his opinion during a televised interview with Pastor Rick Warren in the evangelical Christian Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA (“Saddleback Church”). On that day (and actually in several other situations while running for president), he had to remind his compatriots that pro-choice doesn’t mean pro-abortion (BarackObamaFan123).

So why does all this matter? Throughout this paper I argued that a rise in emotionality has occurred in political advertisements and in American politics as whole and that this tendency has been accompanied by a neglect of facts and circumstances. This calamitous combination has led to an obstruction of productive discussions and it has influenced the population’s view on the political hustle and bustle. A lot of people seem to be demotivated or they are simply overwhelmed and want to save themselves further trouble by abstaining from taking part in the conversation. In the *NBC Nightly News* edition of February 14, 2012, Brian Williams reported that, according to a new study, a quarter of all eligible voters isn’t registered (*NBC*). And as we know, not even all registered voters regularly make use of their right to cast their ballot. I’m afraid that this trend will continue as so-called “social media” create a novel battlefield for political interest groups and as a technique called “narrowcasting” lets campaigns contact and address people more individually. In my opinion, an oversaturation of emotional politics may lead to a standstill in the democratic dialogue.

Since the Founding Fathers composed the U.S. Constitution more than 224 years ago, America has had to get through several challenging periods and has overcome numerous obstacles. However, if the politicians don’t find the way back to a rational way of talking politics, the “land of the free” may soon be heading towards another, unexpected one – and it won’t have anything to do with outside threats such as terrorists or the ominous “axis of evil.” If the public discourse continues to be shaped by emotions and not by facts, I fear that the United States will reach a deadlock and start to resemble a disabled and adrift luxury steamer on a giant ocean. Due to her size as well as her history she may still seem to be impressive and mighty. In reality, however, the cruise ship “America” would fail to bring its passengers forward and drift along without a destination, her fate being solely at the mercy of the random political waves, winds and currents. Consider the 2011 debt-ceiling crisis, for example. Last year, when the Congressional representatives publicly fought about the modalities of a bill to increase the nation’s debt ceiling and childishly exchanged verbal blows, the world’s biggest economic power suddenly found itself at the verge of a financial disaster. If the Senators and Representatives hadn’t come to a last-minute compromise, the United States could have fallen into insolvency, millions of pay checks wouldn’t have been sent out and the U.S. dollar’s supremacy as the leading global currency would have been threatened. Events like this may just be the harbingers of an impending, sinister future: a country that is not able to take a step forward and struggles to keep pace in international

affairs; a nation whose lawmakers don't manage to comply with the interests of the people they are supposed to represent and thus a government which isn't really a "government of the people, by the people, for the people" ("Gettysburg Address") anymore. However, such a worst-case scenario can still be averted. The American public simply has to become aware of this trend and take action. Every citizen can do his share by bracketing the ubiquitous emotions out. Not taking heed of political advertisements and thus fighting the metastasis of their messages may be one of the first and most important steps. In addition, all citizens should inject themselves into the debate again. Through talks conducted in a constructive spirit and by getting to know other perspectives and opinions, more positive and sustainable solutions will be achieved. The United States of America is a wonderful and amazing land and if the politicians manage to return from the trenches to the round-table, I am sure she will stay like this for many generations to come.

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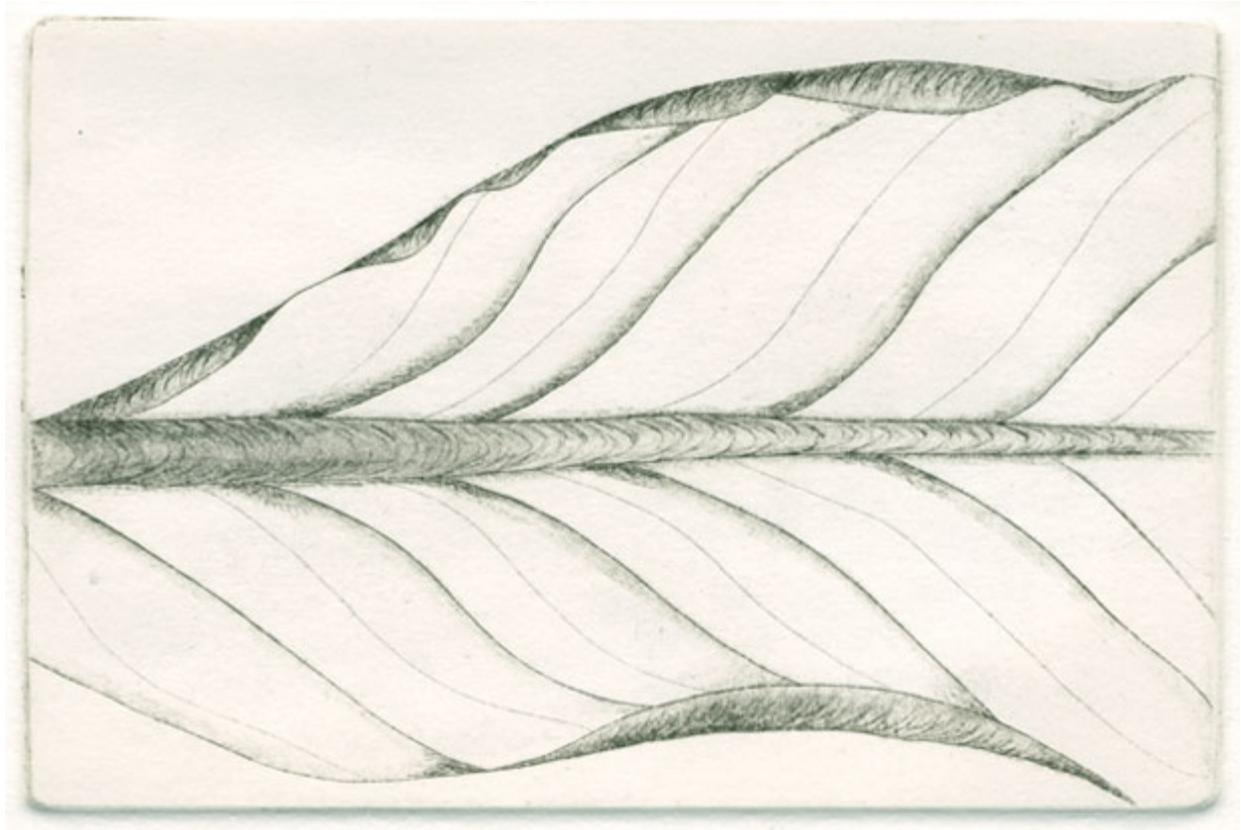
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# The Noisy Water Review | Student Anthology of Writing & Art, Whatcom Community College

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/06-03art.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/06-03art.html)



Mary Do

*Untitled (Leaves series)*

Etching, 4" x 6"

# Living the New American Nightmare: What it's Really Like to be BIG when You're Little

[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/07-03essay.html](https://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/07-03essay.html)

**Susan Youngman**

Laughlin, Nevada, home of the Colorado Belle Casino. Dad loves to gamble. Mom likes to get out of the house. Being 10 years old I'm crazy for casinos too. Bells and whistles constantly harangue the ears like sirens while spinning lights dazzle the senses. The fat metal clang of silver dollar sized tokens dropping out of slot machines fills the air all around. It's a little dark, a little dangerous, and terribly exciting. At 10 years of age, my favorite part of the hotel/casino is the arcade. It's 1985 and I am loose on the scene.

Late in the evening while my parents play the slots, craps, and 21, I am left to my own devices. I have chosen to haunt the arcade. Here, a small group of kids have gathered and we have formed a loose band, laughing and enjoying our time. I am happy to be with these other kids, I get lonely when I'm all by myself. As time wears away, I notice an old man with keys hanging from his belt standing silent by the doors of the arcade. He's lean and mean with a wrinkled wily glint in his pale eyes. He's wearing blue maintenance coveralls with his name sewn into a white oval with red letters; it's probably something like Earl, Otis, or Ot. Realizing that he is there to close the arcade for the night, I hurriedly attempt to play one last coin.

He puts his key into a lock by the large entrance of the arcade and turns it. A metal gate closure begins to lower down over the entrance. All the kids are still playing and don't know the door is closing. He stares right at me as he continues to lower the gate. Finally he stops and announces that the arcade is about to close. Everyone looks around and sees that the door is already 90% shut. They all rush to the exit hitting their bellies to scoot under. They're calling to me and saying, "Lets go! Lets go!" But I already see that I cannot fit under the gate. Not knowing what else to do, I get down on the ground and try to wiggle under. I can feel the cold metal against my back, I press into the floor as deeply as I can, and the carpet burns my cheek. I can hear the other children laughing along with the old man. I'm stuck. I can't move either way. Finally, when the old man has had his fill, he backs up the gate just enough for me to get through. I squeeze out utterly mortified and run to my hotel room filled with shame, never to return to the arcade again.

The singularly most significant defining aspect of my childhood was obesity. I was the fat kid. The really, really fat kid. I remember my mom taking me to a Weight Watchers meeting when I was in fourth grade; during the weigh in session I tipped the scales at 182 pounds. I was 9 years old. The average 9-year-old girl weighs between 64 to 70 pounds. Unfortunately my three or four visits to weight watchers had no measurable affect, other than to deepen within



me a sense of failure, helplessness, and confusion. By the age of twelve I weighed in at 209 pounds. Looking back now, I can see that the consequences of childhood obesity were devastating to my self-image, ego, and psyche, and have had lifelong ramifications.

This year, one Saturday night in May, it all came rushing back to me: the humiliation of clothes shopping in middle school. Standing behind my 13-year-old daughter in a Macy's dressing room I am struggling helplessly at the zipper on the back of her dress. Luckily though, Katelyn does not suffer from the afflictions of my past, just the inexperience of dress buying. Katelyn has chosen to go shopping for her 8th grade graduation dress with her two best friends. Along with Natalie and Megan, she has been bolting about the expansive Alderwood mall for hours. Katelyn is the only one left 15 minutes before closing without having found a dress. She has placed two dresses on hold for me to preview. Unfortunately, they're the wrong size. I can see in the mirror angry mascara tears streaming hot and fierce down her inflamed cheeks. I can feel the heat coming off of her in waves and understand her frustration. She is frantically attempting to squeeze into a dress that is too small for her. I try to calm her, but she is not really hearing me. I laugh nervously and she thinks I'm laughing at her. I say to her, "Katelyn, you're absolutely gorgeous; this stupid thing is just the wrong size. Let me go out there and find you the right one." I scramble through the ransacked junior's section searching for anything in a size 9, unfortunately prom season has left the selection here rather picked through. I go back to the fitting room, as the store is about to close to find Katelyn already dressed and ready to leave. She looks devastated. Her shoulders slump and her lips tremble as she forcibly tries to compose herself before having to face her friends.

Natalie and Megan have the prototypical stick figure bodies of most middle school girls, a little lanky and rail thin, easy to shop for. But Katelyn is no Twiggy; she's full-blown Marilyn Monroe, with hips and curves light years beyond that of Meg and Nat. So while her friends were trying on size 1's, Kate was nervously working with 5's, embarrassed for her friends to think she might be larger. But she's really a 9. I tell you now, I would have killed to be a 9 when I was her age, a beautiful vivacious 9. And I can tell you with equal qualification that my beautiful, skinny daughter would kill to be a 1.

At age 13, instead of junior's sizes, I had to shop in the plus size women's section for a size 18 or 20. Now at age 35, I still cringe to see the vastly different fashions offered in these sharply contrasting sections of the department store. Any preteen would prefer to skimp about in a tiny mini skirt, or to pour themselves into skintight jeans, rather than have to settle for sensible, comfortable, full coverage.

In my family photo albums I have omitted photos from my elementary school years. It is difficult for me to look at these images. The years between third and eighth grades have been completely removed. And I haven't shared them with my children yet. The memory is too painful.

Cruelty by way of affliction could be blamed upon my parents I suppose. But I certainly didn't give that any thought as a kid. The cruelty that bothered me most as a child was that which was most apparent to me. The teasing from my schoolmates, the dirty disdainful looks from adults, even the physical jeering, kids trying to "pinch and inch", or make me squeeze through tight spaces. These were all things I came to expect from my peers as much as from the world at large. Let's face it; we live in a pretty sadistic society, where prejudice and instant judgment is the rule of the land. Pile on top of that the cruelty of children, and the classist pressures of middle and high school, and you have a veritable fat hell.

So the question is what did childhood obesity teach me? Here are the positives: humility, kindness, and understanding. It taught me the qualities necessary to overcome adversity, regardless of the difficulty of a situation. It also has made me a shrewd judge of character. I have learned a lot about nutrition, and with the experience of the societal and personal severities of obesity, I have worked hard to raise my children in a healthy and happy food environment. I also encourage them to be very active outdoors. Neither of them have weight issues; my daughter just happens to have the feminine endowments of both her grandmothers.

Of course there have been negative consequences as well. Around the ages of 8, 9, and 10, a child is learning how to interact with and fit into the world they live in. According to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, "Children at this age are becoming more aware of themselves as individuals." It is a time of relational learning, a time when a person defines how they relate to not only the world, but also to their friends, their family, and most importantly how they relate to themselves. In self-identity I learned that I was unacceptable because of my appearance. Essentially, I formed an inferiority complex. I found the world to be a judgmental and unforgiving place. This has been a lasting scar, which has colored my interactions with most everyone for most of my life. This taught me to raise the defenses high, to wall people out and to wall myself in. I have a very vivid sense of insecurity. I don't function well in public, especially where I do not know anyone. The urban landscape often feels like a hostile and foreign environment.

When I see children today who are overweight like I was, my heart goes out to them. I know what it's like to be in their shoes. And yet, I am as disgusted as the next person (if not more) by the predicament that the child is in. As children we don't know what correct eating habits look like, we learn from our parents, and take what is available to us. We are greedy if you let us be. We will take as much Coke and candy as you'll let us, and we'll eat a whole bag of chips if you don't stop us. Give us the cravings for salt and sugar and we'll never love a fruit or vegetable. Offer us McDonald's three times a week, and we'll turn our noses up at a well-balanced home cooked meal. We will become difficult and hungry children.

However, some would object that rather than parents being solely to blame, that there are outside influences responsible as well. The economy that we live in today has moved many stay at home moms into the work force. With precious little time at home, fewer parents are cooking traditional meals. Advertising campaigns are aimed at seducing children into

begging parents for Cocoa-Puffs, Lucky Charms, and Hamburger Helper. And many television programs vie for children's attentions over outdoor activities. Still others would interject that there are internal mechanisms at play here as well, such as metabolism and emotional trauma. To all these I give credit; this is all well and true. I believe in my own situation early childhood trauma was to blame; I turned to food for comfort and my parents allowed it. But it is my belief that parents need to step forward and do their part to assume some authority over these external and internal factors. It is their job as parents to protect and nurture their children, anything less is irresponsible.

My mother was neither a regular grocery shopper nor a cook. She loved Bon-Bon's and Oprah. Maybe she wasn't the most emotionally stable gal either, she was never truly happy. She was ill a lot of the time. She had MS. The MS gave her blinding headaches that often made her stay in bed, and occasionally sent her to the hospital. Dad was always at work; he would leave at dawn and return after dusk.

I remember drinking two Cokes a day in elementary school. I didn't kick the carbonated habit until I was 18 and had to live on my own. Now I won't touch the stuff. I literally went through withdrawals from the sugar and caffeine. As a kid, there was never any quality food in the house, but treats were always available so I would binge on cookies and salty snacks. There were no regularly scheduled meals. I went to school without eating breakfast most days. In high school I always skipped lunch. And dinner was whatever I could scrounge up, or whatever fast food or delivery was convenient. In my household there was never any significance placed on exercise. Television was king. If I wasn't reading a book, I was watching TV. When I moved out of the house, I left my TV behind. Between kicking the Coca-cola habit, not owning a car, and living without television, I lost 30 pounds. Of course now I own both a television and a car.

Though I have never attained the ideal charted weight for my height, over the years I have spent a lot of time and money trying to loose weight, all with varying success. The sad fact is that obese children have an 80 percent chance of becoming obese adults. Aside from Weight Watchers, I've also been to Nutri-System and the Diet Center. I've read Dr. Atkin's controversial weight loss book, and the tamer, though similarly veined, South Beach Diet book as well. In my mid-twenties I began a more spiritual path in my life, and turned towards vegetarianism, and have continued to read multiple books in this direction, including many books that focus on a raw vegan lifestyle. I have purchased two treadmills and three exercise bikes over the years, at one point I even hired a personal trainer. Then there were the fitness dvd's for aerobics, yoga, and pilates. And yes, I've done drugs.

Implementing as well as sticking to a new regime (except for the drugs) is always a monumental undertaking. The preparation that goes into any lifestyle change is intense. There are new rules to follow at home and in the supermarket, and of course, new recipes to learn. I have come to understand that I do not do well with complex systems. It has to be

simple or it won't work for very long. My favorite tool now, is my Vita-Mix. This commercial grade blender basically allows me to throw any number of whole foods together, blend, and run out the door in short order. I don't know how I ever lived without it!

Weight is on an ongoing struggle for me and for many Americans today. I know that I am not alone. With some effort I hope to one day reach an agreeable weight, and come to accept myself as a well functioning, well-adjusted adult. The experiences I went through as a child have left their indelible mark, but I go on, all the stronger and the wiser for having had them.

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# The Dimly-Lit Road

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 [noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/09-02creativewr.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/09-02creativewr.html)

## Mark Lawrence

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At Sunday school we received little wooden coins called shekels after reciting memorized bible verses. I had no idea what the verses meant, I doubt any of the kids did. We just wanted those shekels. We had to have them. As soon as class was over we would all run to the bible store and drool all over the glass cases which contained all the greatest of material possessions every nine year old desired. The motive was to teach children the Christian values found in the bible, but the shekel system only taught children of the importance of money and material possessions.

I was raised by a fanatically religious single mother. The foursquare Baptist Christian morals were imbued into my childhood, and I am grateful for them. They have molded me into the person I am today. However, looking back I can see the twisted hypocrisy that eventually led me away from my Christian faith. As I lived and breathed as a scrawny young freckled boy I learned more and more of how highly regarded Christians held the value of money and material possessions. Although they wouldn't dare teach these lessons at Sunday School. All I truly remember from those days was how much I enjoyed watching the cartoon VeggieTales and hearing Larry the Cucumber sing silly songs.

My next lessons on Christian values would be taught in history class when I first learned about the Crusades. At that time I understood very little about Christianity and the Christian values. Like many other kids I used to wear a "W.W.J.D" bracelet on my wrist. The acronym stood for What Would Jesus Do? Slaughtering thousands of women and children in the name of god just didn't seem like something Jesus would do. But who was I to question the will of God? Who was I to question anything at all?

I began learn what it really meant to be a Christian, and I was surprised at what I learned. It turns out some of the important Christian values aren't really valued by most Christians. "Love thy neighbor as yourself," only applied if your neighbors were Christians too. I was skeptical about the fire and brimstone of hell as well. I'd ask my pastor what would happen to the good people in India and China when they died without ever knowing Jesus? Would they suffer eternal torment because they lived in a different part of the world and believed in a different God? The poor guy didn't know what to tell me. It was honest question, but he couldn't give me an honest answer because he had no idea.

That was the problem. I had honest questions but I couldn't ask them because I never got an honest answer. My questions weren't about the curriculum, they were about my life. As I grew older and older I began to care less and less about whatever it was they were trying to teach me. I remember I used to have this plan when I was in middle school. I was going to

college and I was going to be a computer scientist. I had no idea what a computer scientist even does, I just heard they made good money. I was taught life was about security and success. Money was the measuring stick that determined at the end of my life what I was truly worth. I began to honestly question that notion as well. There was no one willing to give me an honest answer. So I set it upon myself to find the answer myself.

Like any rebellious teenager I began to separate myself from any and all authority, and I began to resent anything and everything that ever controlled me. I didn't trust teachers, pastors, or even my own mother. Everyone had lied to me my whole entire life and now I had this false ideal of what life was about. I was lost, but I wasn't the only one. It was my whole generation. So we all made our tight-knit close group of friends, and put our faith in each other. Like a herd of sheep without a shepherd we wandered through life with no direction or purpose. Until life became so bland and worthless I abandoned the herd. My only goal was to find the truth. To discover my purpose for life. Thus my journey down the dimly-lit road to enlightenment began.

I have always believed in fate. Countless times in life situations and circumstances came to be in a particularly eerie way. Any moment the words luck, chance, or my personal favorite, "coincidence" were applied; I was skeptical. Something peculiar was going on. The exact song I was thinking of just moments ago would start playing on the radio. People I had recently thought about but haven't seen in months would appear before my very eyes at the most inconspicuous locations. It was as if the universe was reading my mind and delivering to me the very manifestation of my thoughts. Was I the only one? It seemed to be that I had some hidden power to control my own destiny, to dictate my own fate, but this kind of power was God's and God's alone.

I moved to Bellingham one year ago. No longer the scrawny young freckled boy, my reflection had evolved into the image I see today. I abandoned my Christian faith, my friends, and even my mother in search of the truth. I had to deconstruct the boy in order to become the man. The first step was to learn. I have learned more useful information in the past year than I have in my entire life. I say this without a doubt because of the significance of this knowledge. To know and understand what I now know and am still trying to understand and apply to my own life gives me infinite potential. The kind of potential our second grade teachers said we could have. "You can be whatever you want to be if you put your mind to it." How right they were.

But potential without action is as useless as a camera with no film. I was starting to figure it out, but I found myself in another herd of lost sheep with no shepherd 30. I was always looking for a way out, for any sort of adventure or anything to make my life spectacular and amazing. I was fascinated with music, but mostly with musicians. I read biography after biography searching for what made their lives so inspiring and adventurous. I was beginning to see the world differently. It used to be a place where I was always trying to fit in, or to be a part of. But the things that mattered so much two years ago didn't matter anymore. I began to care less and less about the trivial pursuits of life. All I was concerned with was my own

life. What is the truth? What is my purpose? I was searching and I found an overwhelming amount of answers. I was collecting ideas, but I was not applying them because I didn't trust them. I was lost.

I found myself at the hospital. It had been a long day, a long week, and a long month. I was struggling. Day by day my life was becoming more and more bland and worthless. My reflection showed me who I truly was. A sad, confused, sorry sack of shit. Six months of searching for the truth, and I had absorbed so many different conflicting perspectives I didn't know what the hell to believe. I was giving up. There was no purpose to my life. No truth to be found. As I looked around the hospital waiting room I could see the rest of world had given up too. It was on this particularly woeful and bloody day I found the truth. The lantern that would shine ever-lasting light on my dimly-lit road to enlightenment was lying in the form of a slender book in front of me. "As a Man Thinketh by James Allen" I thought to myself as goose bumps rippled own my skin. I proceeded to chapter one and read the words that would transform my life.

"The Book of Proverbs proclaims, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." This adage reaches out every condition and circumstance of the human endeavor. Each of us is literally what we think... As the plant springs from and could not be without the seed, so everyone one of our acts springs from the hidden seeds of thought and could have not appeared without them."

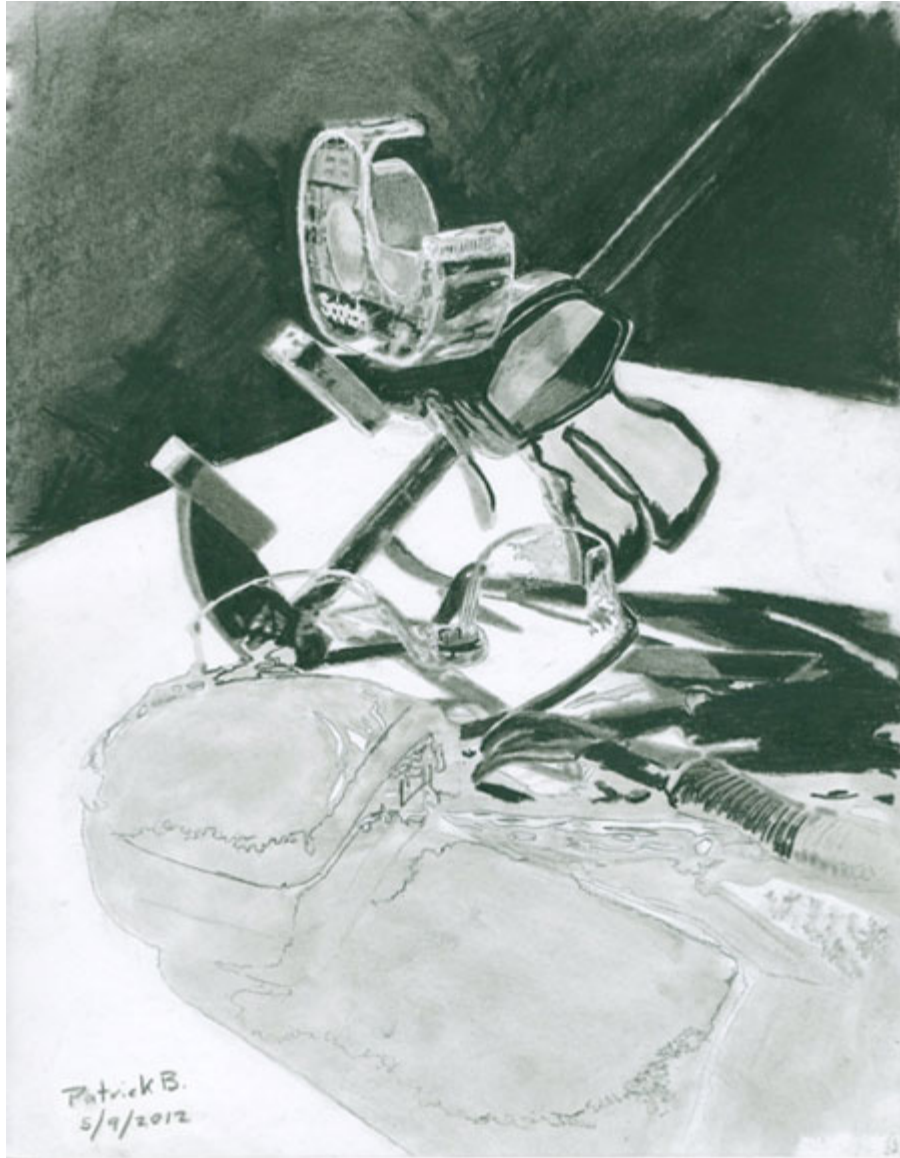
It then all made sense. Without a doubt this was the truth I had been seeking. My previous thoughts had brought me to that moment, bleeding, lost, and desperate. My present thoughts will dictate my future. I continued to read the next two chapters before I finally got medical attention. I went back to take the book with me, but I decided to buy my own copy in hopes the truth would reveal itself to another lost soul.

The wisdom of James Allen now belongs to me. *As a Man Thinketh* led me to another of his works *From Poverty to Power*. There is no equivalent to the value of the this knowledge. I only seek to reflect upon my thoughts, to understand the present moments. What some people may call chance, luck, and coincidence I know is truly fate.

Because the universe is truly reading our minds, and delivering us the manifestations of our thoughts. Now through practice and patience I try to limit my mind to only pure, productive, and positive thoughts. My reflection shows me my image, which is the sum of all my thoughts up until that point. I reflect inward, determined to have peace of mind and self-control. Now I aspire to become the lantern to shine everlasting light to your dimly lit-road to enlightenment.

# The Noisy Water Review | Student Anthology of Writing & Art, Whatcom Community College

[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/10-05art.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/10-05art.html)



Patrick Bartroff

*Tools Still Life*

Charcoal, 11" x 8.5"



# I Do...Or Do I?

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 [noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/11-04essay.html](https://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/11-04essay.html)

## Carmen Green

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The pure aroma of honeysuckle and pale yellow rose petals mingles with the warm California air, and the love inspired ambiance becomes infused with a sweet perfume. While the canvas canopy oscillates gently in the breeze, distant stars blur lazily with the string of twinkling white lights encompassing the grounds, and it appears that they have become one with the heavens; expanding indefinitely, forever. I sway to the music with a tingling champagne buzz that only a 13 year old can acquire with the tiniest taste during a wedding toast, and hand in hand with my aunt, I twirl about the dance floor. All inhibitions are cast aside as I am caught in these precious moments of bondage between two people. There is no negativity. Vibes of joy and togetherness envelope the vineyard setting entirely, and all I can think of is how I wish the night would never end.

The bride, my cousin, is radiant; an absolute vision in white. While she laughs animatedly and blushes with a happy glow, a photographer scrambles to capture each priceless moment, but I can't imagine how this is possible. Everything is flawless. This new beginning is perfect. It is an exact vision of what most all of us are taught to believe from a very young age, for in almost all cases, the idea of marriage is one that is strongly supported throughout families. The idea of longevity and 'forever' is imprinted in our minds. It is one of life's milestones that is so commonly practiced in our modern world, that for most of us, it is what we expect to achieve in our futures. I've been a flower girl six times, and a bridesmaid three times, and when I was young, had all the materials necessary to fuel my imaginative mind into generating the images of my big day.

As usual, the dreams and aspirations of a child fade. As I have aged, witnessing broken marriages and distanced couples, I begin to question the validity of a practice that can bring about such heartache and loss. I wonder about the sanity of those who enter into such an agreement; yet they must know that marriage fails nearly as often as it succeeds. Although I am still far too young to consider the idea of marriage personally, I find myself maturing into a skeptic. The clean, easy, romanticized, perception of marriage is one that I have always emulated, and there are religious groups that would argue that there is nothing more honorable. However, I cannot bring myself to fully come to terms with the concept of 'always and forever'. What is it about the human nature that drives us to seek a life partner? Is it in fact natural at all to commit one's life to another? Is it realistic to believe that love is designed to last until death do us part, or does that ideology conflict with our biological make up as human beings?

The desire to enter a state of complete commitment to a significant other gives me hope in humanity, in the way that there is something valuable and worthwhile about the concept of two people sharing their lives together. I do not dispute the views of many who would argue that marriage is a covetable act of love; especially the numerous religious groups. On CBN, the Christian Broadcasting Network, J. S. Lang writes, "The Bible has a high view of marriage. It is to be a lifetime plan, not a convenience that can be disposed of in a lawyer's office. The love of husband and wife is...a hint of the deeper love between a human being and God." Based on the extensive teachings of the bible, I cannot disagree with these statements. Christians believe that it is divine to love within marriage, and a sin to love outside of its bounds. They frown upon divorce, and enforce the idea that most any problem within a hurting marriage can be mended through dedication and hard work. They cherish strong family values, and I cannot by any means undermine the importance of being surrounded by loved ones. For people who go through life hoping to abide by religious standards, it makes perfect sense to find a mate with which to be faithful until the end of their lives.

While I do hold the views of the Christian thinker in high esteem, I still find myself questioning the realistic value of their expectations. What happens when the picturesque vision of marriage is shattered by infidelity, financial instability, or plain lack of passion?

Furthermore, what if the interpretation of the bible today is skewed from its original teachings? From a webpage dedicated to clearing up misconceptions about religious beliefs, author Brian Kelson states, "The Bible contains many accounts of Christian polygamy marriages...God does not condemn polygamy, never calls polygamy adultery, wickedness or a fleshly perversion." He is referring to the numerous biblical characters who are known to have many wives. To name a few, there was Abraham, Jacob, and King Solomon, all prominent characters within the bible, all with multiple wives and concubines as well. As time progresses, the majority of people in America especially, have taken a strong distaste to such lifestyles. But a modern Christian with even the most firm of morals, would be in denial if they were of the understanding that monogamy is more in favor of God than polygamy; this is simply not consistent with the bible. Kelson later writes, "Forced monogamy is a failure for many and has brought about divorce deceit and hypocrisy in the Christian community." On these grounds, I can say that the institution of monogamous marriage is one that is not directly extracted from the bible.

As has been the case for marriages in all eras, large percentages encounter tension and then failure. In the united states, 45% of first time marriages end in divorce. Second time marriages increase in failure to 60%, and by the third time, the percentage of divorce rises to a startling 73%. (3) These statistics are evidence of the ruin in which many marriages end in our modern day society. It is preferable to view marriage as the correct thing to do, a normality of life, or the calling of a higher being, but when facts point to its tendency to fail, I think it is important to question why. There are undeniably a plethora of factors that could

determine the fate of a longstanding relationship, but there is one that may give explanation to them all. A heavily overlooked contributing factor to separation may be the biological make up of human beings.

Three years ago, at my cousin's wedding, a pair of swans had been inhabiting the pond on the edge of the scenic vineyard. They preened majestically, floating across the pond's glassy surface one beside the other; arching their feathered necks to form a heart-like shape between them. Because the property was often rented out as a wedding facility, the swans were brought there on purpose, I was told. Swans mate for life, and are the perfect romantic symbol to accompany the marriage of a man and a woman. In reality, the comparison of water fowl and human beings makes no logical correlation in the least.

In 2005, The National Geographic was one of many organizations to spur an investigation concerning the similarities between apes and human beings; a much closer match than humans and swans. What was reported by Stefan Lovgren is that through extensive research of both creatures' genetical makeup, it was found that humans are 96% similar to the great ape species. (1) He went on to write, "We are apes in every way, from our long arms and tailless bodies to our habits and temperament." (2) Not mentioned in the same article, but a valid fact all the same, is that great apes, chimpanzees, and all manners of monkey-like creatures do not mate for life. Rather, they are said to mate purely for reproductive purposes, and have no emotional or long lasting attachments to their partners. A pair of great apes will surely never have the pleasure of attending a wedding, despite the fact that they may be biologically more fitting to represent human nature than a couple of swans.

This is not to be taken as an excuse for adultery, or a way of glamorizing divorce. What it does cause me to think, is that perhaps marriage should have never been so strongly established in the first place. If such a form of dedication had never been put in place, I believe that people would form more natural connections with one another that ended peacefully in due time rather than in shambles. In a popular online relationship journal, author Patrick Kole wrote, "the divorce rate alone in our society indicates people regularly fail at love." I was captivated by this statement. To define love is absurd to me, because I believe each case of love is unique from the next. Further more, how can one 'fail' at love? If an individual's feelings change toward their partner, why should that person attend counseling or adjust their own free will to accommodate the other? We have been conditioned to believe that it is as equally essential to live for our partner as it is to live for ourselves, but this concept may be bending the rules of nature.

In analyzing the inner workings of marriage, it is vital to look at how they were structured in our past; how our most raw and natural human forms took on relationships. Taking a look at a primitive form of society, the hunter-gatherers dynamic, author Christopher Ryan explores how they function in relationships in comparison to how people commonly do today. In fact, these types of societies do still exist in plenty, just not prominently in our country. He writes, "Hunter gatherers shared everything --food, child rearing, sexual partners." Living in the

most basic way possible, people in these groups do not practice fidelity, or closed relationships. They are practicing what is most natural at the root of human psyche. It may be the popular design of monogamous marriage that is in fact the strange; the unrealistic.

In even the most seemingly successful marriages, couples often reach a point where they must make decisions that could determine the outcome of their relationships. A couple with whom I am acquainted came to this dilemma recently. The man ran into the love of his past; a girl who he had planned to marry in his college years but geographical and financial issues had come between them. He ended up breaking faith with his current wife, but went through the process of couple's counseling to return to the marriage and continue on its path. Today, he is still married, has a comfortable home, and a growing family. He is also distant and unhappy. It is blatantly wrong to lie to someone close to you, and having numerous partners is not exactly ideal. However, is it not also wrong to formulate all of one's decisions based on how they might affect someone else? The amount of time and tradition that backs up marriage may give my view a negative or even ludicrous ring to it, but if you imagine society without marriage to begin with, you may see a world where people's choices are made purely for their happiness rather than to satisfy regulations of the law. Marriage is an institution that places control over the feelings and choices of people, in way that I find unnatural.

In the world of today, marriage offers many benefits. Incomes combine to create comfortable living, joint bank accounts give security, and insurance policies and lease agreements are gracious. Not to mention, two people who care deeply about one another are able to share everything, including family.

Marriage also is a vehicle for arguments, estranged family members, abuse, and broken hearts. What if everything positive about a marriage could be achieved without the drawbacks? What if human relationships were simplified into a more natural basis, where individuals stayed when the feelings were right, and continued on with their lives when those emotions faded?

Christopher McCandless, a free spirited man known for his travels and wild adventures, once wrote, "Happiness is only real when shared." He came to this realization moments before his death, after living a life greatly of solitude. I believe in this revelation completely. I believe that there are few instances in this life where company would not enhance an experience; create a whole new level of appreciation and joy. I think that to learn about somebody and to learn from them, is a gift that each of us should take advantage of, and that loneliness can cause unhealthy discontent. It would be a mistake to not involve loved ones in the journey of one's life. But perhaps, it is vital to understand that this 'happiness' should be achieved moment by moment, and not be expected of each other from the beginning of a relationship. Perhaps human beings should accomplish contentment as individuals; not as one half of a marriage depending on one another for happiness.

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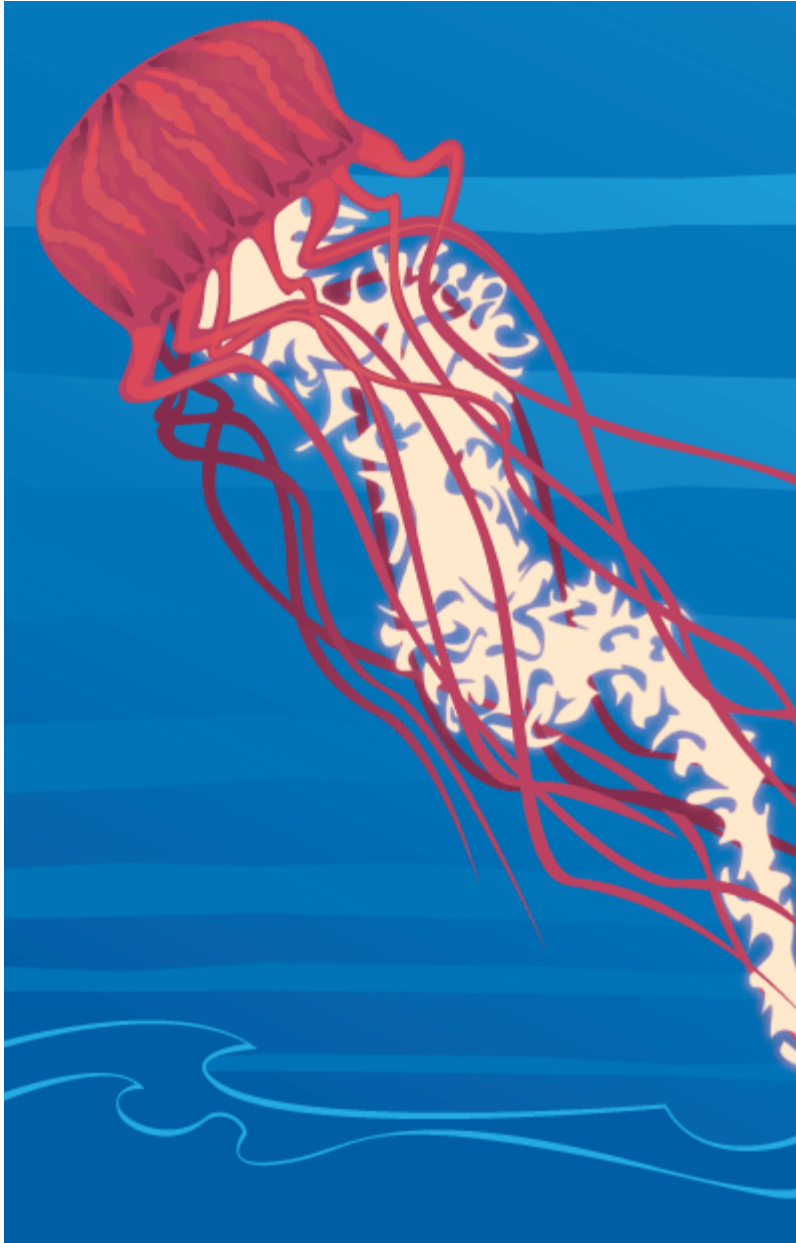
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Habiba Sial

*Jellyfish*

Digital art, 7" x 4"

# The New Faces of Feminism: A Rhetorical Analysis of Lady Gaga's "Telephone" Video

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/13-05essay.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/13-05essay.html)

**Melisa Nelson, Ashley Gorter, Tiffany Peterson,  
Casey Cassinelli, and Yuki Wang**

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## **Acknowledgements**

Very special thanks to Nick Potter for his thoughtful insights into the video and the idea to use Foucault and the concept of the panopticon.

## **Abstract**

This is an analysis of the Lady Gaga and Beyoncé video for the song "Telephone." Included is a brief introduction; a history of the artists and the director, Jonas Åkerlund; the demographics and psycho-demographics of both Gaga and Beyoncé; descriptions of the theories used to analyze the video and the actual analyses. Theories used include standpoint theory and a Foucauldian analysis.

*Keywords:* Åkerlund, Beyoncé, Foucault, Lady Gaga, panopticon, Standpoint.

## **Introduction**

On March 11th, 2010, through Vevo and the E! Network, Lady Gaga released the music video for her single "Telephone," from her 2009 E.P. "The Fame Monster." The video, shot in short film format, took over three days to film, more than a month and a half to edit and was directed by Jonas Åkerlund. Along with Gaga, the video and single features Columbia recording artist Beyoncé Knowles.

The video received a great amount of attention due to the publicity surrounding its release, as well as Lady GaGa and Beyoncé Knowles' international star-power; breaking all of Vevo's single day viewing records; generating close to 4 million Youtube views in 24 hours; and to date has been viewed on Gaga's official Youtube channel over 126 million times. One noted aspect of "Telephone" was the amount of paid and unpaid product placements featured throughout the video. Brands ranging from Virgin Mobile to the dating site Plenty of Fish, as well as food brands like Miracle Whip and Wonder Bread were all represented in "Telephone" (Hampp, 2010). The importance of these placements is worthy of further inquiry and analysis; because of this, that research will not be included in this paper. The video's imagery, themes, and strong use of symbolism have left it open to in-depth analysis using communication theories such as standpoint theory and Foucauldian analysis. This is what this paper attempts to do.

## History

### Lady Gaga

Lady Gaga, given name Stephani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, was born on March 28, 1986, in Yonkers, New York (Lady Gaga, 2011). As a young student, Lady Gaga attended the private Catholic school Covent of the Sacred Heart. Her father encouraged her to enroll in the Clive Davis program at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. Lady Gaga was one of twenty students accepted at the young age of 17. She dropped out of college one year after enrolling to work full-time on her music career (Lady Gaga, 2011).

At the age of 20 she was hired by Interscope Records as a song writer. She wrote music for Britney Spears, New Kids on the Block, and The Pussycat Dolls. Within a year she wrote, directed, and headlined a burlesque show called “Lady Gaga and the Starlight Revue”. R&B artist Akon discovered her singing and dancing abilities while at her show and immediately signed her to his label under the Interscope umbrella. Throughout 2007 and 2008 she wrote and recorded her debut album, *The Fame*. Lady Gaga’s commercial breakthrough came with her hit single “Just Dance”. Following the success of “Just Dance” was a more popular dance hit, “Poker Face,” which topped charts around the world (Lady Gaga Biography, 2011).

Following her immediate success with *The Fame*, Gaga wrote and released an extended play album, *The Fame Monster*. The second album brought her more recognition with the hit singles “Bad Romance”, “Telephone”, and “Alejandro” all scoring in at the top of charts worldwide.

### Beyoncé Knowles

Beyoncé Giselle Knowles was born on September 4, 1981, in Houston, Texas. At the age of nine, Beyoncé auditioned for, and was accepted to join the group, Girls Tyme, which performed at local venues. At this time her parent enrolled her into Parker Elementary School, a performing arts school that specializes in music and dance. A few years later, she changed schools, yet again, to attend Alief Elsik High School (articlesbase.com, 2009).

In the following years the group changed the name and the members of the group several times before agreeing upon Destiny’s Child—consisting of Knowles, Kelly Rowland, La Toya Luckett and La Tavia Roberson (Beyoncé Knowles Biography, 2011).

Destiny’s Child was signed to Columbia Records in 1997. The following year they recorded *The Writing’s on the Wall* which produced two hit singles, “Bills Bills Bills” and “Say My Name”. With these hit singles, Destiny’s Child brought home two Grammy awards in the year 2000 (Beyoncé Knowles Biography, 2011).

Between touring and recording with Destiny’s Child, Beyoncé began her acting career. She appeared in MTV’s 2001 musical production *Carmen*. Following *Carmen*, Beyoncé played the character Foxy Cleopatra in *Austin Powers in Goldmember*. In 2003 she played a more



substantial role in *The Fighting Temptations*. Although she was busy acting, she released her debut solo recording, *Dangerously in Love*, in 2003, which went on to sell close to three million copies in the United States in its first six months (Beyoncé Knowles Biography, 2011).

## **Jonas Åkerlund**

Jonas Åkerlund was born on November 16, 1966 in Bromma, Sweden (Jonas Åkerlund , 2004-2011). At the age of nineteen he joined the Swedish army and served in the First Cavalry regiment in Stockholm. Straight out of the Army, Åkerlund joined the Swedish metal band called Bathory as the drummer. Bathory is known as the pioneers of black metal and Viking metal.

Bathory gained attention in the early 1980's with their satanic lyrics, inhuman vocal style, and lo-fi production. Åkerlund left the band to explore film in the 1980's and Bathory came to an official end in 2004 after the death of Thomas Forsberg (Encyclopaedia Metallum, 2011).

Åkerlund started film editing and directing music videos in the mid-1980's and he became famous for his work with Madonna on "Ray of Light", "American Life" and the documentary *I'm Going to Tell You a Secret*. He earned the reputation of being highly controversial with his "Smack My Bitch Up" video for the Prodigy when it was banned from MTV (Jonas Åkerlund, 2006).

From the mid 1980's through today he has directed over four hundred and fifty music videos and commercials as well as high-profile campaigns for Adidas, Puma and Virgin. After his short films "The Hidden" (2000) and "Try" (1997) became hits, Åkerlund started shifted his career into movies. Åkerlund's popular film list includes *I'm Going to Tell You a Secret* (2005) and *Spun* (2002) (Jonas Åkerlund , 2006).

## **Collaboration**

Stephani Germanotta (Gaga) and Rodney "DarkChild" Jerkins originally wrote "Telephone" for Britney Spears. The song was originally titled "Underground" and changed to "Telephone" when they registered it with the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers and found that another registered song had the "Underground" name (Lady Gaga, 2011).

## **Fashion**

Various designers and design houses are featured throughout "Telephone," with Gaga's personal creative team Haus of Gaga responsible for many of the clothes the stars wore in the video. Other designers and fashion houses used were Chanel, Thierry Mugler, Viktor & Rolf, Search and Destroy, and Jean Charles de Caslbanc (Lady Gaga and Beyoncé's "Telephone" Style, 2010).

## **Demographics and Psycho-demographics**

According to the website Marketingcharts.com, Lady Gaga's demographics are not what some might think they are. Her audience is almost evenly split between the sexes at 52% female and 48% male. The average audience that buys Gaga's albums and concert tickets is mainly between the ages of 25-54, with the slight majority coming in at 35-44. According to research compiled by the site, 8 out of every 10 Gaga listener has some college education (Lady Gaga Provokes Mixed Brand Reaction, 2011).

Gaga has gained a reputation for her outrageous outfits, quotes, and antics.

In an essay entitled "Is Lady Gaga a Feminist Icon?" (Cochrane, 2010), the author explains that Gaga is explicitly against portraying herself as a "typical" sex symbol. As Gaga said in an interview with *Elle* magazine:

But you know, I can be whoever the fuck I want to be...the last thing a young woman needs is another picture of a sexy pop star writhing in the sand, covered in grease, touching herself.  
(Lady Gaga, 2010)

Yet, as Cochrane explained later in her essay, Gaga has done just that. Describing the scene in the video where Beyonce and Gaga are dancing in a diner full of just-poisoned customers, she states, "In her Telephone...she danced in stilettos and a stars and stripes bikini, aping exploitation films such as *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*" Even as Cochrane complains of this imagery, she continues on to imply that because Gaga's often drag queen-style costumes point out the absurdity of traditional femininity, that Gaga is indeed a feminist.

Beyoncé, on the other hand, is much harder to find information on. On a Yahoo!Canada Answers webpage, the average target age was thought to be women from 18-24 and men of all ages. Beyoncé herself has tried to broaden her fan base and has publicly embraced feminism, as in this quote from an interview with *The Daily UK*,

"I think I am a feminist in a way. It's not something I consciously decided I was going to be (Gordon, 2010). Along with her stated connection to feminists worldwide, Beyoncé has also spoken out about her LGBT fans. In her first interview in five years with the gay press, as stated by the wording under the headline of the article, Beyoncé told an interviewer for *Pride Source* magazine that, "I've always had a connection. Most of my audience is actually women and my gay fans, and I've seen a lot of the younger boys kind of grow up to my music." (Azzopardi, 2011)

Beyoncé is an admired artist that reaches out to a large demographic. Lady Gaga is an artist that also appeals to a wide audience, while simultaneously turning others off. The collaboration of Gaga and Beyoncé may have garnered them both new fans.

## Theories

### Foucauldian Analysis

Foucault (1926-1984) was a twentieth century philosopher that was often compared to Frederick Nietzsche. The transformation of madness into mental illness, the organization of knowledge systems, the attributes of sexuality, and the development of contemporary forms of punishment are some of the subjects that Foucault examined (World of Criminal Justice, 2002).

Born in Poitiers, France, Foucault studied under Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser at the Normale Supérieure in Paris, which is interesting to note as Foucault maintained a disdain for Marxist ideals for much of his career. He began teaching in 1960 and published his first major work, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), shortly thereafter. Subsequent volumes such as *The Order of Things* (1966), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *History of Sexuality* (1976) followed. Foucault was heavily involved in politics and campaigning for such issues as prison reform and gay rights. He died on June 25, 1984, in Paris.

Bentham's (1748-1832) concept for a prison built in the round, with a guard station in the middle, known as a panopticon (from the Greek words *optikon*, "of sight", and *pan*, "universal or total") (Panopticon, 2011), is the basis of Foucault's architectural model of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975; History of the Prison, 2011).

A panopticon would be set up so that the prisoners would always be under the impression that their activities could be viewed at any time yet they would not know if they were under direct observation at any given moment. This feeling of the "all-seeing eye" would then cause the prisoner to self-regulate their behavior. Foucault believed that control over people could be had by merely observing them. This type of surveillance can be seen in the structural composition of places such as stadiums, casinos (with their numerous cameras, or "eyes in the sky"), and some modern penitentiaries.

## **Standpoint Theory**

Griffin (2006) describes standpoint as a place from which to observe the world around us. Whatever our viewpoint, the location lends us to focus our attention on some features of the social landscape while neglecting others. The study of standpoint theory first arose when German philosopher Georg Hegel studied the relationship of what people know about their peers, society, themselves and others. He first researched the master-slave relationship in 1807. His conclusion was that masters are established and respected in society; therefore, they have the power to shape the world and be heard. The slaves, on the other hand, are silenced and are subjected to the lifestyle that the masters make available (Griffin, 2009).

Hegel's findings were later studied by Sandra Harding and Julia Wood who developed standpoint theory. Harding is a philosopher of science who studies women studies, education, and philosophy at the University of California. She teamed up with Wood, a University of North Carolina communication professor. The two claim that the best way to discover how the world operates is from the standpoint of women and groups such as the impoverished and racial minority (Griffin, 2006).

The standpoint theory goes beyond the typical analysis and description of the roles played by women and seeks a deeper understanding of the oppressor and the oppressed and how they interact with each other within a social class structure. Baldwin, Perry, and Moffit describe standpoint theory as, "...women and men's experiences in life are influenced by their position in the class structure (with men having more economic power and privilege in that structure)" (2004). They propose the predominant anatomy of standpoint theory includes: "(a) the standpoint of the more powerful typically structures the way both groups live; (b) the standpoint of the more powerful group is harmful for the weaker group; and (c) the less powerful group usually has a better understanding of the more powerful group than the latter has of the former" (2004). Standpoint theory entails that people are situated in social standpoints within a social hierarchy. Those that are oppressed have a deeper understanding of the oppressor because they have to understand the oppressor who dictates how their life is to be played out. On the contrary, the dominant group has very little understanding of the oppressed.

## **Application of Theories**

### **Foucauldian Analysis**

In the Lady Gaga video for "Telephone" we see the modern vision of the panopticon. The beginning scenes, many of them shot to resemble security camera views of the prison's common areas, are shown with a black and white color scheme that brings to mind a dull and oppressed reality. The outfits of Gaga, the inmates, and the surroundings are all black, white, and shades of gray. The chains worn by Gaga in the exercise yard are indicative that she is chained down by society and society's rules. The surveillance video-like shots are to indicate that someone is always watching, whether that someone is a prison guard, the government, or an average citizen. This is enhanced by the beginning montage of razor-wire fences, closed in spaces, and the helicopter "keeping watch" over the prison. This is in direct relation to the fact that we have become a voyeuristic culture where amateur video of police brutality, celebrity mishaps, and political peccadilloes make it onto the nightly news and the internet. According to the entry on Foucault in *Great Thinkers A-Z* (2004):

For Foucault, the panopticon brings together power, knowledge, the control of the body and the control of space into an integrated disciplinary technology. The parallels with wider society are clear. Society exerts its greatest power to the extent that it produces individual human subjects who police themselves in terms of the discourses and practices of sexual, moral, physical and psychological normality.

In the prison scenes of the video, Gaga's behavior is constrained by the guards, the chain accessory she is wearing, surveillance cameras, and the walls and fences of the prison. Her aggravation at the phone ringing, and therefore at the person on the other line, begins to show itself when she answers the pay phone. This is in direct relation to her aggravation at society's rules and "chains" constricting her freedom. As the black and white-based scenes progress, Gaga shows more and more aggression in her movements, her lip-syncing, and less

restraint. Gaga's assertion of her desires and the shrugging off of the "shackles of society" exhibit themselves fully when the story line changes to the "outside" world as Beyoncé picks Gaga up after bailing her out. The storyline inside the truck is an important transitional moment in the evolution of the story. Gaga is asking Beyoncé if she is sure she wants to throw away societies rules of discipline and behavior. The flip side to this analysis is that through the use of these images of perceived and actual behavioral control, Gaga is showing us that she is the one that is in control of what we see of her, and therefore controls our impressions of her persona and what she stands for. As Rifai states in her essay "Gaga in Oz":

As Gaga unabashedly demonstrates, she is like the prison guard, watching us watching her. Fame is the alpha and the omega for her, and when we fail to give her our attention, her persona will cease to exist. Therein lies the key to the meta-pop star Lady Gaga, whose Foucauldian reflexivity is part and parcel of her "whole package. (Rifai, 2010)

Gaga shocks and surprises her audience to keep us interested. When we stop paying attention, Gaga will be irrelevant, and therefore have no reason to exist. In order to keep her fame, Gaga must play her role as far as it will take her.

Once Beyoncé retrieves Gaga from the prison, the remaining portions of the video are in vivid color. This color palette helps to emphasize how they have thrown off the constraints of society, a dull and boring downtrodden life with no possibility of parole (creative freedom), and give in to their baser desires, such as the destruction of "white bread" America and those that subscribe to modern methods of behavioral control. This is emphasized when Gaga and Beyoncé are dancing in the middle of a diner filled with poisoned and lifeless average citizens. The American flag motif of their costumes portray the idea that Americans have been poisoned and become lifeless, even down to our dogs, by the control exerted over us by our government. This control has been perpetuated by surveillance cameras, 24-hour sensationalist news stories, even our telephones. We have become prisoners of our own behavior and can only break free by murdering our pre-conceived notions of what is right and what is wrong.

### **Standpoint Theory**

Throughout Lady Gaga's interviews she makes consistent statements about being a strong woman, focusing on her career and being in control. In a 2009 interview with Barbara Walters, Gaga said, "I want to free [my fans] of their fears and make them feel they can create their own place in the world" (abcnews.com, 2009). Although she claims that she wants to empower women, the video "Telephone" portrays a completely different story—one that shows she is suppressed by law enforcement, prison guards, police officers and constant surveillance. Beyoncé's role in the video displays her as a woman who is suppressed by her boyfriend's verbal abuse and chauvinistic behaviors.

The music video starts out with Gaga being incarcerated for the murder of her boyfriend that took place in the prequel, "Paparazzi". The opening scene is Gaga walking through the prison halls with two seemingly hyper-masculine female prison guards. The first principle of standpoint theory is, "the standpoint of the more powerful typically structures the way both groups live" (Baldwin, Perry, Moffitt, 2004). The first example that the "more powerful" is structuring the way that Gaga lives is in the opening scene where she is incarcerated, deposited in her cell, and stripped of her dress revealing skimpy underwear and pasties. In the following scene, Gaga is chaperoned to the courtyard wearing heavy, restraining chains. After a brief girl-on-girl kiss, the camera quickly switches focus to the helicopters and surveillance cameras watching her, reminding the audience that they are observing her every move. These scenes display the slave-master qualities that Hegel first studied in 1807. They also depict clear evidence that Gaga is the less powerful person and the prison guards, government, police officers and laws are the more powerful groups that structure the way she will live.

The second factor in the standpoint theory is: "the standpoint of the more powerful group is harmful to the weaker group" (Baldwin, Perry, Moffitt, 2004). This principle is consistent throughout the video. When Gaga is stripped and thrown into the prison cell she is not only harmed physically, but emotionally as well. Her dignity and independence is subjected to the control of the more powerful group. In a later scene, Beyoncé is emotionally harmed by her verbally abusive, chauvinistic boyfriend played by Tyrese Gibson. When Beyoncé greets Tyrese, the written narrative has Beyoncé saying, "HI HONEY". Tyrese's response is "WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, B\$#\$@?" Tyrese proceeds to start a fight with a fellow diner and hit another girl on her buttocks. The narrative between the two and Tyrese's actions support that Beyoncé is the "weaker group" who is harmed by Tyrese, the "more powerful group".

The third claim of the standpoint theory is "the less powerful group usually has a better understanding of the more powerful group than the latter has of the former" (Baldwin, Perry, Moffitt, 2004). From Gaga and Beyoncé's standpoint (being the less powerful group) they have been subjected to physical and emotional harm and their lives are being structured by the more powerful group. Through the remaining scenes of the video, Gaga and Beyoncé use their knowledge of the powerful group to seek revenge. Beyoncé has observed Tyrese's actions throughout their relationship. She understands him so well that she has Gaga poison the syrup because she knows he will steal it from her. The plan goes as predicted and leads to Tyrese's death. Gaga and Beyoncé do not stop their revenge at this point, though. The women poison every person (and a dog) in the diner and celebrate their victory by dancing around the dead bodies. In the end they drive away from the diner and make a promise to never go back. Sirens and helicopters are in the background reminding the viewer that the more powerful group will inevitably remain in control.

## **Conclusion**

There are many avenues of analysis that could be applied to the video for “Telephone.” In particular the theory of semiotics should be used to examine the many layers of signs and symbols present in the video. As there is such an abundance of important semiological texts to examine there was a consensus that a semiotic analysis, among other possible theoretical applications, deserved its own paper.

In analyzing this video through the lenses of standpoint theory and the Foucauldian theory of the panopticon, we have come to the determination that one of the main themes that Gaga and Beyoncé wish to highlight is of masculine power over (and control of) femininity. Both artists use the video to draw attention to the fact that as women they are constantly under the watchful eye and control of a dominant masculine figure and a patriarchal society, and this is reflected in several of the characters of the video. The hyper-masculine female guards in the prison, the sexually dominant hyper-masculine female inmate in the yard who kisses Gaga, Tyrese’s abusive and chauvinistic boyfriend character; all of these figures in some way degrade or belittle both women. All of these character examples in some way have power that has been given to them by society over the feminine protagonists and therefore keep a watchful, controlling eye on them at all times. In the end all of the masculine or domineering figures are punished by the forces of femininity, as portrayed by Gaga and Beyoncé. One example is of the hyper-masculine guard at the prison who is shown logging on as “Miss Officer” on the Plenty of Fish dating website. One possible stereotype about online dating is that the individual is deficient in some way. “Miss Officer” doesn’t meet the American cultural and societal norms of what is attractive and feminine and therefore feels compelled to hide behind a feminine-sounding moniker. In this way “Miss Officer” is policing herself in terms of what society would consider acceptable in terms of feminine standards of beauty. The androgynous inmate who sexually dominated Gaga is kept imprisoned, while the femininely dressed Gaga is set free.

Tyrese is the most direct example of the feminine punishing the masculine when he sips from his poisoned cup, paying the ultimate price for his mistreatment of the women around him. Despite the overt power that the masculine influences have they are ultimately defeated and destroyed from within by the feminine protagonists.

In creating a video using prison images and murder as revenge/breaking the shackles of oppression, Åkerlund, Gaga, and Beyoncé have tried to portray the world as they see it; a rigidly controlled and denigrating experience for females who are always under public scrutiny. The only way for these two women to extricate themselves from a world where everything is controlled by the “all-seeing eye” and where people and behaviors are viewed in a monotonous black and white spectrum is to perpetrate the most heinous crime towards humanity; the taking of lives. The one thing that the artists and director are forgetting is that they have voluntarily placed themselves in the camera’s viewfinder. They have allowed the chains of stardom to shackle them to the public’s rabid appetite for anything and everything that has to do with their lives. They chose to feed this appetite with their actions, statements, and professional accomplishments in their quest for fame and fortune.

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/14-07art.html](https://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/14-07art.html)



Kyle Thompson

*Relaxed Nude*

Charcoal, 18" x 24"

# Under The Madrones

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 [noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/15-03creativewr.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/15-03creativewr.html)

## Katrina Kappelé

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We sit under the madrone trees,  
Watching,  
As a pair of children bound up the beach,  
The sand shifting under their feet as they run,  
Laughing,  
Into the spray.

The twisted arms of the red madrones  
Reach high above us into the cool blue sky,  
Painted with the wisps of clouds and  
The white diving birds of the shore.  
They are tangled, contorted in the exquisite agony of life's dance,  
Reaching gleefully into the sky,  
The dark and haggard bark covering peeling off,  
Exposing to the sun and the salt air and the craggy rocks of the shore  
The delicate red and white of their flesh.

It was not so long ago that we were those children,  
Little scudding crabs that ran,  
Laughing,  
Out of the loving embrace of the mother sea.  
We were, not so long ago,  
Those children, who, as monkeys,  
Laughing,  
Climbed into the welcoming arms of the father madrones  
And cavorted in the joyful throwing open  
And the sincerity of the age.  
Not long ago at all,  
We were children, and,  
Laughing,  
We ran to the shore to scramble among the spray-cool rocks  
And the sun-warm red arms of the trees.

There is a God,  
But he does not need us to cut down the trees  
And build him churches,  
Worshiping in stilted speeches once a week,

Or sit inside when the sun is out and there is no rain.  
He is here as we sit against the rough and smooth bodies of the madrones  
And laugh as children laugh,  
And are open,  
Searching the sea before us for the little white triangles  
Of boats.

# McFarming: The McDonaldization of Dairies

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 [noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/16-06essay.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/16-06essay.html)

## Jan Wolfisberg

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Imagine that you are hiking through a remote area of Colorado. The area is beautiful, a mostly dry grassland with mountains far off in the distance. You notice large swaths of green land to your right, all well-irrigated by ditches and pipelines. Nearing the watered area, the unmistakable smell of animal manure permeates your nostrils. As you crest a rise, five huge barns constructed of sheet metal, each a half mile long, lay before you. Outside in the sun, thousands of young cows live in dirt pens. Several tanker trucks, their sides emblazoned with the catchy phrase “Drink A Mug O’ Milk A Meal!” rumble back and forth to the main barn, and you realize this must be a dairy farm, yet on a size and scale you have never seen or even imagined before. This is definitely not the picturesque dairy with the big red barn and cows grazing on green pastures that you hold in your mind’s eye. This is a factory farm.

Since the 1950’s, many dairy farms have become bigger, more efficient, and more centered around technology. Cows have become machines for milk production, and farmhands have become part of this mechanized milk manufacturing line. I like to call this new method “McFarming,” a reference to George Ritzer’s book *The McDonaldization of Society*, in which the author describes the efficiency, calculability, and control through technology in industry today. Ritzer claims that this move towards speed in production was started by McDonalds’ and their production of fast food, and that many other businesses have begun using themselves. Many dairy farmers looked to the model of speed and mass production set by McDonald’s and have applied it to their own industry. It is my purpose in this essay to illustrate how farming has become massively “McDonaldized” creating many dairies with upwards of 5000 cows, and how these developments have negative effects on the animals, employees, and even the farmers themselves. However, I am not claiming that all dairies have become factories: on the contrary, many small farms still thrive throughout the United States.

My interest in dairy farming has developed through the years I have lived on an operating dairy of 160 cows. I have spent countless hours helping on the family farm, feeding calves, cleaning pens, and helping milk. Being involved in the 4-H program and showing cows several times a year at local fairs has taught me more about dairy cows than most football fans know about their favorite NFL team. I have toured a number of factory farms in Eastern Washington, Idaho, and Northern Oregon. Witnessing the massive scale of these dairies, with up to 10,000 cows, is an incredible experience for anyone, especially a farm kid who grew up on a dairy one fiftieth of that size. The magnitude of these factory farms is shocking, and even depressing.

From birth until death, the life of a dairy cow is incredibly controlled and ordered by the farmer, down to the smallest details, in order to achieve maximum efficiency. When a cow is in the last few days of her pregnancy, she kept in a special maternity “hospital” and monitored at all times. As soon as she goes into labor, a farmhand grabs the emerging feet of the calf and pulls the baby out of its mother as quickly as possible. The newborn is immediately washed and then checked for sex; the males will oftentimes be sold to a raising house where they are butchered after several months for veal, while the females are kept on the dairy. The calves are removed within minutes from their mothers, who are pushed out of the maternity area to join the rest of the herd in the main barns. The female calves, commonly referred to as “heifers,” are moved to a large indoor nursery, where they are raised with many other calves in groups and fed twice a day with milk. Those that get common diseases such as “scours” (diarrhea) or pneumonia are injected with large amounts of antibiotics and hormones in an attempt to keep them alive. Heifers that never totally get well are usually put down, as they will grow into skinny and unhealthy cows.

When the heifers reach the age of two months, they are switched from a milk diet to one based on hay and corn grain. They no longer live in nurseries, but outside in large “dry lots.” These lots are not pastures, but fenced in dirt areas several acres in size where a group of up to 20 young animals are kept. These dry lots are completely exposed to the elements. In the summer, the heifers roast in the sun; in winter they freeze in wind and snow, and in spring and fall, they must bear the rain and mud. It is not uncommon for factory farms to have several dozen young stock die each winter from the cold. These losses, however, do not come close to dealing the farm a major blow: losing 50 animals out of 2000 is not considered too bad. When the heifers reach a year old, they are bred, usually through artificial insemination, and at two years, they are ready to give birth to their own calves. Once the young cow has calved, she begins lactating and is placed with the rest of the adult herd. The cow’s life now revolves around eating, sleeping, and being milked.

Milking cows are fed a mixed diet of alfalfa, corn grain, grass hay, cotton seed, and silage (slightly fermented cut crops such as grass or corn). Modern cow barns are typically built around a central alley, through which a large tractor can drive. The tractor pulls a feeder wagon along, containing a mixture of silages, corn, and cotton seed. The mix is poured along either side of the alley, which is lined with “stanchions” through which the cows can reach their heads to eat. Cows no longer graze, as it is too inefficient to have the animals go gather their own food from the field. Tractors can chop and gather crops much faster. This food is always available to the animals, to ensure that they will consume enough energy and protein to keep milk production high. This intensive feeding is hard on cows; their bodies produce so much milk that they begin to encounter various health issues due to stress at only five or six years old. Since they spend their lives indoors on cement, cows also develop problems in their feet and legs, leaving some crippled and on their way to the slaughterhouse. This is a large contrast to cows on a small farm, where animals are usually allowed at least some time outside on pasture in the summer, and lead healthier, more natural lives, often living eight years or more.

The diet fed to modern cows on large dairies is mostly unnatural. Corn is a staple food, yet the animals' stomachs were not designed for this plant. When a ruminant, such as dairy cow, is fed too much corn, their stomach PH levels can easily become unbalanced, causing bloating, intense stomachaches, and, if not treated properly, death. Most farmers, however, do not want to give the cows any less corn, as it is high in energy and nutrients. Their solution is to treat the cows with large amounts of antibiotics, sometimes even mixing it in with food. These antibiotics keep stomachs under control, but their aftereffects can cut years off a cow's life.

*Below, cows on a large dairy feed on corn silage.*

The milking "parlor" design and operating procedures on factory farms are an excellent example of McDonaldization in farming. They are built to ensure massive numbers of cows can move through the building in the shortest amount of time. Gates funnel cows from the main barns into the milking parlor, and there is always a farmhand herding them in. The cows walk onto a moving carousel, which can hold up to 90 cows at one time. As a cow



enters a slot in the rotating machine, a sensor is triggered and sprays her udder in iodine to kill bacteria. As she stands calmly on the machine, a farmhand wipes the disinfectant off her udder with a rag, and several seconds later another worker quickly puts on a vacuum milking machine. The carousel slowly moves around the circle as she lets down her milk, and when she reaches the end of the circle, the milking machine automatically removes itself. The cow's udder is mostly empty of milk, and she is pushed off the structure by a third farmhand. This milk "assembly line" normally takes less than 8 minutes. Though the process is not painful for the cows, there are a variety of other negative effects that this efficient mechanized process causes.

*Below, a carousel milking parlor on a factory farm in the Midwest.*





For farm employees working in the parlor, the job is extremely menial and tedious. Shifts often last 10 hours, and involve the same procedures over and over again. In the same way that a worker on a car assembly line does one specific task, “milkers” always do the same job. One man wipes cows’ udders, another puts machines on, day in and day out, typically six days a week. The monotony of the job easily begins to wear on one’s mind. The mass production milking system requires that all cows be uniform, especially in udder shape and size. A cow that has a sagging udder or wide teats (a result of age or poor pedigree) is a major inconvenience, as it will cause the process to slow down as the milker takes the extra time to put on the machine. Also, cows that milk slowly are a nuisance, as they make the farmhands stop the rotating carousel and wait for their udders to empty out. On farms extremely obsessed with speed and efficiency in the milking process, cows that are misshaped or slow are simply sent to the slaughterhouse, despite the fact that they may be good producers.

Technology plays a large part in modern dairy operations. Some farmers are actually beginning to use robotic milking machines, which require absolutely no human labor and can milk hundreds of cows per hour. In order to spend less time driving around farms, farm managers have frequently installed surveillance cameras throughout barns to monitor cows straight from their offices. Driving tractors through barn alleys to clean manure is often considered too inefficient, as the waste from 10,000 cows can often amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds per day and could take a whole day to collect. Instead, fresh water is swept from one side of the alley to the other, washing away all the manure in its path, and taking only several minutes.

By no means have all dairy farms converted to this mechanized model set by McDonalds’. In fact, many small family farms still exist throughout the United States. From the rolling hills of Vermont to the wet coast of Washington state, it is not uncommon to see dairy cows

grazing on green pastures. Most of these small 50 to 300 cow farms carry on the principles of love of the land, animals, and family that so many people associate with agriculture.

Some developments aiming for efficiency in dairy farming over the past 50 years have actually had positive effects. A century ago, an average Holstein cow milked around 40 pounds a day, around five gallons. Holsteins today easily produce two and a half times that amount, around 100 pounds, or 12.5 gallons a day. This is largely a result of successful pedigree development. Modern dairies breed their cows through artificial insemination, using semen from top bulls from around the world. These bulls pass on positive genetic traits to their female offspring: healthier, stronger bodies, better shaped udders, and higher milk production. These advancements in pedigrees have changed dairy cows, and they are bigger, stronger, and more robust than cows were a hundred years ago. In their drive towards increased efficiency, dairy farmers have created an admittedly more productive and economical dairy cow.

Large factory farms have also lowered labor costs. In dairy farming, labor is the second greatest expenditure besides feed for cows. The amount of labor needed for a fixed number of cows drops dramatically as the number of animals increases. For example, on a small farm of 200 cows, a farmer usually employs two workers, that is to say, one employee per 100 cows. 10,000 cow dairies frequently operate with only 50 farmhands, or roughly one employee per 200 cows. Proportionally, factory farms have only half as many hired hands as do smaller operations. When dairies are huge and so much is mechanized (milking parlors, feeding systems, etc.) fewer workers are needed to keep everything running. By creating massive dairies, farmers have sliced the amount they spend on labor in half and saved themselves hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

However, are these dairies, which can each easily produce five million pounds of milk a day, worth the cost they inflict on the animals and their employees? Cows turn into machines. Farmhands do one specific, tedious job, as if they are working on an assembly line. Cows lead short lives, and workers labor in poor conditions that can subtract from their humanity. While owners of huge farms may rake in millions of dollars a year, does this monetary gain make the negative aspects alright? Many dairy farmers looked to the model of speed and mass production set by McDonald's and have applied it to their own industry.

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/17-08art.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/17-08art.html)



Fallon Parker-McKinney

*Rondo and Sonata*

Digital art, 7.5" x 10"

# Blueprints of the Moon

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 [noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/18-07essay.html](https://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/18-07essay.html)

## Lydia Taron

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They looked at us like it was obvious. All of them. As if how we appeared on the outside truly dug into the root of our intentions, playing out in our nervous language. They could see our indecision, read our anxiety through our shaking hands stuffed deep in our dusty jean pockets. They watched us, all of them. We were the main attraction of the fair that blue August night. We won grand prize for awkwardest non-couple. We claimed the glory of the fairground with our uneasy smiles and butterfly stomachs.

I pulled some cash from the depths of the cave my hand had been sheltered in. Miles quickly reached out and handed the watchful cashier his card. "It's on me," he said, and I studied his profile carefully as he feigned nonchalance. He knew he didn't have to spend money on me that. Miles took the plate of miniature pancakes generously lathered in butter, dusted with sugar snow, and together we slid into our place on the splintered park bench.

A bright eyed young man lounged in the crowd of engineers at the architect-hosted banquet of 1891. The room roared with brimming ideas and theories, wise men exchanging algorithms and prospective equations that represented sky-arching masterpieces. Daniel H. Burnham, a prestigious architect of the day, spoke of his frustration towards the high expectations held for his field. He smoothed his greased hair, eyes distant, threading through the prospective plans and sketches pushed beneath his nose by well-tailored, hopeful engineers. Burnham had been placed head architect for the project of selecting the next engineering phenomenon to be displayed at Chicago World's Fair. The goal of the project was to dwarf the latest engineering marvel, 1889's Eiffel Tower, an iron glory stretching one thousand and sixty three feet into the Paris sky. Left unnoticed by the crowd, George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. sat quietly at a table, sketching blooming ideas of a giant spinning wheel across a wrinkled napkin.

Our minds geared and whirred and rocketed with worry, reading into each other's every motion, every blink of the eye. We blueprinted movements and moments, hoping to make sense of each other and the ruckus surrounding us. But all I could graph was a spindly, wild-eyed eye boy across from me, with his flushed cheeks, ripped jeans, and lips dusted with powdered sugar. We were simple on the outside, the two of us. Too young for our desires, our skin so fresh and untouched. I appreciated the comfortable distance between the two of us, the splintered table and platter of pancakes bridging the nervous gap between our bodies. It was safer this way, leaving the guts of the matter--which were so vibrant to our observant crowd--uncovered. I was afraid to dig through to the unsure, because, after all, no one can

take something apart and make sense of it without getting some grease on their hands. Frankly, it was a scary, fleeting thought, which I quickly discarded in exchange for a powdered pancake.

I let him eat the last pancake even though I craved it. If I didn't have the guts to dig into the gears and thoughts brewing below that pretty boy smile, I couldn't let him know how much I loved to eat--a well guarded secret. I gobbled that truth up and politely wiped the edges of my powdered sugar lips.

"You eat like a bird!" he said, as I kept up the faced.

The night strolled the boy with the dirt-stained jeans closer to my side, blue eyes beaming and crooked smile widening in tune with his summer stride. There was a gap between us still; we both felt it. Heavy. It was like our ride had stalled suddenly, midair, catching our breath in our throats and the ground was close, reachable. But we'd be stupid to take the plunge, right? We'd break something.

Eleven o'clock found its way to the trailing Ferris wheel line, snaking through the dry August brush. Miles fumbled with his last ride ticket, biting at his bottom lip. "It's not enough, is it?" he asked me, nodding about the stationary wheel. It stood, timeless, against the black sky. A small-town girl in dusty shoes could close her eyes and it might as well have been the Eiffel Tower casting a glowing shadow across her cool skin. The Ferris wheel--a symbol of timeless love for the patient crowd of couples, proudly hugging their teddy bears, leaning into each other's warmth.

I thought briefly about the two of us alone at the top of the wheel, stationary. I swallowed. "Yeah, I think it's like, four tickets." It was the truth. Ferris wheels come with history, and memories have a weight.

George W. Ferris, at the young age of thirty two, had already founded his own firm, G.W.G. Ferris & Co., a company which tested and inspected metals for railroads and bridge builders. Despite Ferris' credentials, Burnham and the collective group of fair directors laughed away his ideas of giant spinning wheels which carry passengers through the air. The men did not believe that the visionary could erect such a contraption. Eventually, the directors caved, giving the ambitious young designer a chance to construct his bright-eyed dream. Ferris assured the men that he would build a wheel that would astonish the world, dwarfing constructions which had come before.

Ferris went above and beyond any expectations. His invention soared with a circumference of 825 feet and a diameter of 250 feet, stretching 30 feet broad and weighing more than 4,000 tons. Two 140-foot steel towers supported the giant wheel, connected by a 45-foot axle, the largest single piece of forged steel ever made until that time. Thirty-six wooden cars rose into the air, holding up to sixty riders within each cage.



I barely noticed Kat, waving anxiously at me from the front of the line. She hesitated at the gate, beckoning for me to join her. My eyes fleetingly found Miles' face. He nodded towards my impatient, harried friend. His eyes were curious, laughing.

"Are you sure?" I asked him, as if he'd given me permission. "I feel bad..."

"I'll be fine, I'll see you after," Miles shrugged.

I rushed to meet my friend in line, knowing I wouldn't get a chance on the classic wheel that night unless I snuck in beside her. The carnie gave me a wink as he lazily closed the door on our little cab, locking us in for the duration of the ride. I tried not to notice that Miles' eyes followed our car as it geared into action and swayed through the air. Dried dirt and sweat coated my tanned skin, cold in the shock of summer chill. I ran my hands over the goosebumps, relaxing into the cold plastic seat. It was calmer here, and I felt more comfortable suspended fifty feet above empty space than on the dusty ground. Up here, the moon painted us, and we were colorless.

June 11th, 1893 dawned in the crisp of fresh summer. The time came for the trial run of the great wheel. George Washington Gale Ferris Jr.'s wife, Margaret Ferris, eagerly volunteered to ride the high-rising wheel, to be one of the first to touch the sky from the top of the Ferris Wheel. Margaret had observed the entire construction, giving words of encouragement to the workers on the wheel throughout the trying process.

Rising to the top, we could see it all. Everything glowed below the moon's silver reflection. Everything was illuminated with clarity, all electric hum of eleven o' clock rides and small town lights. Yet the closer we rose to the summit, the quieter it became, the rush of the fairgrounds now swallowed by the darkness the August night. We found ourselves drawing closer to the silent stars which glimmered in the cloudless dim. I couldn't see him anymore, or his dirty Romeo's kicking dirt below us. All I saw was the world beneath my curled toes, and I listened to my own steady breathing, in time with the creak of the Ferris car. I could feel the weight of the heavy steel contraption, closing us in, protecting us and yet fighting gravity's hunger to pull us down. The iron-bellied beast of a design, an engineering masterpiece, suspended us above a world of decisions, giving us the momentary freedom of silence and emptiness.

My heart yearned for the silver moon, for the unreachable. But at the summit, closest to what I what I wanted--I could reach out and steal the moonlight, if I wanted--I was furthest away from what I was expected to desire. He could have been any of the lights glowing below me, glimmering wistfully in the landscape of fireflies. I shivered at the drop below me, finally observing the distance between our minds, further than splintered tables topped with powdered pancakes. Why would you force two gears together, edges beveled to different shapes, manufactured for different purposes? It was wishful thinking, pushing for an

unrivalled product with messy designs. Without the work, without the passion. The moon watched me knowingly. It glowed bigger and brighter than any of the hopeful stars, but some wishes are too farfetched for all the magic of silver reflection.

When the Ferris wheel touched us softly to the ground, it left us with only a couple Kodak snapshots and some well used ride-bracelets. Our feet met the dry, chewed summer grass, and for a moment I pretended that we'd stepped off at the top, our shoelaces scratching the pocketed surface of the silver moon. My eyes traced over the patient Romeo boots and met the boy's summer sky eyes.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked, hands stuffed in his jean pockets.

Despite the intricate inner workings of the giant iron wheel, with its forty-five foot axle and complex engine dynamics, the Ferris wheel is really quite simple. The engineering genius all boils down to one science: who you choose to sit by. The person who clambers into the close-quarter cab with you should be someone who knows every creak and sway of the metal beast, yet fully relies on and trusts the engineering to take the two of you safely to the moon and back.

"Someday, maybe," I replied, glancing back at the Ferris wheel, hollow of passengers, but glowing calmly in the dim.

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/19-09art.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/19-09art.html)



Amy Dalton

*Clayton*

Charcoal, 18" x 24"



# ORANGE CAPSULE/ PEPPERMINT DELUSION/ THE COMEDIAN

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/20-04creativewr.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/20-04creativewr.html)

## Austin Giles

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To the endless cigarette, to coffee, to apples and bananas and cans of sliced pears  
to Loudon, to Billy, to James, to Richie, to Loaf, to Bob, to Mckuen and the Sebastian strings  
to the dry garden and the empty fruit, to gambling genes, to innocence and loss  
to Pontiac, to the village, to the will, to the heart, to the coming of age folk miracle  
through fiber flickered walls on top glass floors over bottomless oven fire inside planet earth,  
the Egyptian brain in print, on screen, under Christmas alter  
too soft, too dumb, too slow, too quick, too weak, too concerned  
to aging into paradise, the sun blanket bandanna fitted over skeletal finger gouged eyes of the  
accused, naked hides pinned in tile grout, the final female buttocks communion of the porn  
eroded mind's forked teeth  
to hypothermia, to niacin, to the sweat of feet, palm, forehead, thermal covered, suffocated,  
meaty, drawn crotches  
to shades of Moana passing on cross country backseats, soaking blood-rings on pleather  
aphrodisiac, melting snowflakes from the sunroof in between black thighs  
re-born in the mid-west, dust-tornado twisted spine, reed breathing outlaws under the docks  
and boots of lizard police  
to waking up in the afternoon, to the dirt grown temptress, to rolled away lip exposed donkey  
teeth and tail  
to the newsroom and the editor's fan club, to collapsing the throat of the house fire serpent,  
the invincible, robotic, paid-off revenant  
to ceramic bulls, to the black synthetic rose in the mirror, to red lamp shade, to blue pine  
desk, to the thrift store organ and the country guitar  
to the snout busted skull, alive in the black-hole, spitting yellow molars behind rat-cage  
window bars

to the karaoke machine, to the day dreaming fox, to the antique bolt action toy rifle on the wall

to the possessed wanderer whose demons escaped from their pop-corn kernel cage where he kept them in his chest

to radiance and radiation, to bleach stirred into the backyard swimming pool cocktail

to shame, to regret, to indecision, to certainty, to neglect, to divine right, praise and purpose

to the god void and the great divide, time and father's reality

my surrender (enclosed).

Sincerely,

Pig

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/21-10art.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/21-10art.html)

























Lydia Taron

*The Star*

Watercolor and marker



# Not-That: The Need for a New Beginning

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/22-08essay.html](https://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/22-08essay.html)

## Anjolie York

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“In the beginning...” the story goes. From here the tone is set and the pieces of the tale fall into place. Our early stories, what we now call myths, told us of our place in the world and gave us meaning for our existence. Through myths, our cultural values and ways of life have been transmitted from one generation to the next. Taken literally, “In the beginning” begins with our creation stories. These are the stories that lay down the very foundation of a culture - they are the base design for the fabric of a history to be lived. Nearly all cultures have such stories. These stories and how they are interpreted have a huge impact on how a culture relates to the natural world. Herein I explore the weave of a culture based upon a separation from nature with one that lived in tandem with the natural world and offer an idea of how we might find our way back to nature ourselves.

While it would be inaccurate and possibly demeaning to say that all Native Americans have a stronger connection to the natural world than does the general Judeo-Christian population, it has been shown through “extensive ethnographic work with tribes across North America” that many tribes do have strong “conservation ethics that guide their actions towards the natural world” (Aftandilian 79). These ethics come from the stories that they have been handing down from generation to generation in a primarily oral tradition. This traditional way of telling stories allows the “stories to change and adapt” as the world and its environment changes. In contrast, our Judeo-Christian culture refers back to the first chapter of the Bible and stories of Genesis as told therein. The meaning of these stories is starting to be challenged by today’s Christians but the past interpretations have generated a large chasm between man and the natural world that has yet to be traversed. This separation from nature can most clearly be seen in our most commonly held relationship views of human vs animals.

In Genesis 1, God made the animals first and then humans. He made humans “in His own image” and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and *subdue* it; and *rule over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (italics added) (Genesis 87). This idea of ruling over or having dominion over the animal kingdom (and by association, the natural world) has colored generations’ view of their relationship with the earth. It has been interpreted as meaning that we can take from nature and mold it to our own desires and supposed benefit, without regard for the consequences of our actions. But if we look at this aspect of “dominion” and its original meaning we see a different dynamic in play.

The Hebrew understanding of dominion portrays a responsibility towards a king’s subjects, more so than any sort of power being exercised over them. “Taken from the background of the Hebrew king who was to rule on behalf of Yahweh, the ruler granted with dominion must

“watch carefully over the rights of his subjects, and so ensure, in particular that the weaker members of society may enjoy his protection and thus have justice done to them according to their need” (Moritz 138). Thusly, the original idea of dominion had much more to do with the responsibility of caring for, rather than ruling over. Today, many Christians “are reinterpreting this story to mean [that] instead [of ruling over the earth] that we are meant to act as God’s stewards [...], with a responsibility to care for all of creation” rather than having dominion in the traditional sense of the word (Aftandilian 88). While “dominion” of any sort still implies separateness, it does not necessarily imply that those who are entrusted with it are superior in nature to those whose care they are entrusted with.

In the second Genesis story, man isn’t explicitly told to “rule over” the animals but he is given the task of naming them. Man [Adam] is created first and is placed in the Garden of Eden. Upon seeing Adam lonely, God creates the animals for him as companions. The act of Adam’s naming of the animals is often interpreted as an expression of his being given power over the animals; however “it is crucial to understand that this ‘naming’ in itself does not establish a *relationship of dominion* as has often been argued, but rather a *personal relationship* between” man and animals (Moritz 135-136). Rather than this naming being an act of exercising dominion or ownership, “the act of naming the animals according to *their* own identities transitions them from an ‘I-it’ relationship to an ‘I-thou’ relationship” (Moritz 136).

In Hebrew Scriptures naming was intended “to capture in some way the essence of an individual” rather than an arbitrary assignment of a word to a being (Moritz 136). The act of naming was a way of defining that creature’s very being-ness. In this way, naming moves beyond merely identifying a some-thing but is done with the intention of expressing the true nature and character of the actual identity. This also strongly suggests an intimate relationship between the name and the named. As defined in the Encyclopedia of Religion the “name and named exist in a mutual relationship in which the power of the former is shared with the being of the latter”(EOR 300-301). The sharing of power still implies that one has power while the other has not. This “has” and “has-not” thinking is unavoidable however, as this is how humankind relates to the world around them.

“In the Hebrew Testament, to be ‘inconsequential’ and ‘senseless’ is to literally be ‘without a name’” (Moritz 136). In our human reality namelessness is akin to not-beingness. To name things is what we as humans do. We compare, separate, and label. This and that. One or the other. It is the very essence of our dualistic existence - not dualistic as in the body vs soul debate but in the sense that “I” does not exist without “that which I am not”. As the Encyclopedia of Religions states: “To be human is to name, and be named, and thereby to possess full being and the ability to relate to the world in meaningful ways” (300). The correlation between name and being-ness isn’t restricted to Hebrew origin only; it is a relationship that is recognized throughout cultures. Just as One and the Other cannot exist without one another...the namer and the named also are intimately connected.

Of course, the act of naming is not limited to only Christian based cultures. The Native Americans also have stories about the significance of the act. In their tale, “How Coyote Got His Name,” the animals are named by the Great Spirit in relation to their new duties in preparation for the coming of people in the New World. In this account, as told by the gifted Native American storyteller Gene Tagaban, we understand that each animal’s name was to reflect his true nature. In fact, each animal had the opportunity to ask for their name and what it is they wanted to do/be. “Bear” represented a powerful and strong leader and “Eagle” represented far-sightedness and wisdom. Salmon was given the most prized name of them all because he wanted to feed the people. The very name, “Salmon,” embodied this selfless giving nature. These names were more than merely arbitrary assignments -- the names themselves held meaning and the animals asked for them. Through this story we also come to better understand the true nature of Coyote and his purpose in the Native American tales as a teacher of the people, rather than just being a source of random amusement.

In other Native American stories, we are shown a direct kinship between animals and humans. The Northern Plain tribes told tales of animal-human intermarriage. These stories talk of the animals’ willingness [and perhaps desire?] to give of themselves to humans to be “hunted, or [to] gift us with spiritual power [...], coming to the aid of their relatives, just as any good family member would” (Aftandilian 82). This kinship was also found in the story of the holy “White Buffalo Calf Woman” of the Sioux people, who turned herself into a great buffalo so that the buffalo herd would always freely give of themselves to insure the people’s survival (132-137).

The differences in how these two cultures (at least originally) related to the natural world can be obviously seen through the creation stories that each culture has told. If our creation stories do in fact lay the foundation for all the other stories within a given culture, then how do these stories relate to the current ecological crisis that we face? And if we find that this separation from nature in our Judeo-Christian society does indeed stem from “In the beginning...”, can we perhaps look to the Native American culture for the answers in how to cross the gap? It is unlikely. As Aftandilian explains: “Native Americans did not create our current environment crisis; Euro-Americans did. Therefore, many [Native Americans...] think that Euro-Americans will not find answers to their ecological problems in Native American traditions, but instead must search within their own cultural and religious traditions for answers” (84). These answers can better be found by questioning the stories told in our Judeo-Christian society and reinterpreting them, as many are now doing. It can also be accomplished by writing new stories. “Humans are hard-wired to learn through stories” (Aftandilian 86). This is why so many (if not all) cultures share the common history of story-telling. Stories get through to us and sink into our memories unlike any other form of learning. They are not the perfect way to convey a message but they are a way of “planting a seed, which will take root” (Aftandilian 87). We may not see the result of this planting right away, but once lain the ground is forever altered.

In the film “The Great Story,” Thomas Berry proposes that the Universe itself is “fundamentally a story”. He speaks of the Earth as being a sacred reality and the center of everything - not as in the center of the Universe, but as the center of our consciousness. He proposes the idea that the Divine created diversity because any one manifestation wasn’t enough. This diversity includes all of creation, beyond just us humans and animals but to every plant, rock, ocean - every star in the night sky. “In the beginning” the stars exploded and out of this stardust, everything in this reality was formed. In this story, we are all connected at “the deepest molecular level” (Aftandilian 90).

Barry also states that, “Matter without form is nothing...and form is always spiritual.” Just for a moment, let’s consider that the “spiritual” in form could also be the same as the “intelligence” that physicists say exist in the minutest of forms. For example: All life as we know it is governed by DNA (or RNA) - strands of biological data which encode every living cell with the duties required to sustain life. Scientists can explain the process of DNA but they still can’t explain what causes DNA to ‘know’ what it needs to do. Take this beyond even the cellular level, all the way to the inside of the not-so-empty space of nothing in which photons appear and disappear, and we see the potential for a new kind of story; a story “more attuned to contemporary scientific worldviews” (Aftandilian 90); a story that our post-modern generation may be able to find some faith and direction in.

### *Epilogue*

*“In the Universe of Man, we have the thoughts of men. We see the rabbit in the grass. We see the rabbit as not us. We see the rabbit eating the grass. Some of us see ourselves eating the rabbit...but even then, we are not the rabbit. If we were the rabbit, then we would not be men. It is in our very nature to not be rabbit. Man is perfectly, not-that-which-is-not-man.*

*In the Universe of Rabbit, there is rabbit. Rabbit thoughts are most likely “rabbit”. Rabbit does what rabbits do but in all likelihood rabbit goes about his day just being rabbit. Rabbit probably does not even consider the fact that he is rabbit. All is rabbit. Rabbit is perfectly rabbit.*

*In the ‘real’ Universe there is no man or rabbit. What we call man and rabbit exist without name. There is no sense of not-man or not-rabbit. All is man. All is rabbit. Perfection cannot exist anymore than Not-perfection. All Is.”*

*~Anjolie York*

*(inspired by one Mathew Thomas Williamson)*

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[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/23-11art.html](https://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/23-11art.html)



Amanda Holmes

*Untitled*

Charcoal, 18" x 24"

# Mexican American Youth and the Rising Incidence of Obesity

[noisywater.whatcom.edu/site\\_1112/pages\\_1112/24-09essay.html](http://noisywater.whatcom.edu/site_1112/pages_1112/24-09essay.html)

**Michael Cahill**

## **Abstract**

The incidence of childhood obesity is rapidly increasing in the US, with the highest rate of growth in the Mexican American population. Ten peer-reviewed nursing and health care journals addressing pediatric obesity in Mexican Americans were selected and analyzed for this study. This qualitative study addresses the growing trend in overweight and obese children in the Mexican American culture based on the findings presented in the chosen nursing and health journals. Factors, such as acculturation, socioeconomic, perception, and depression are examined as possible causes for the high incidence of obesity in Mexican American youth. After identifying some of the possible reasons for the high prevalence of obesity in Mexican Americans, culturally-minded health care interventions are then explored that may help effectively prevent or possibly reverse the growing trend of obesity.

## **Introduction**

In recent months the United States (US) media and government have concentrated its efforts on educating the public about H1N1 and its deleterious effects on young children; however a greater threat to the health of children continues to loom over the US: pediatric obesity. Currently 34% of US children and adolescents, ages 6 to 19 years of age, are classified as overweight and 17% are categorized as obese (Centrella-Nigro, 2009). Excess body weight and obesity predisposes children to chronic adult health conditions, such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, and asthma (Small, Melnyk, Anderson-Gifford, & Hampl, 2009). When this US pediatric population is examined by ethnicity, Mexican American children have the highest rates of childhood obesity (Centrella-Nigro, 2009).

Mexican Americans are a sub-culture of Latino Americans, which consists of American citizens with any background from Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South America, Central America, or Spain (Centrella-Nigro, 2009). Currently Latino Americans make up 14% of the US population and are expected to rise to 24% by 2050 (May & Rew, 2009) with Mexican Americans accounting for almost two-thirds of the population (Centrella-Nigro, 2009). Research has shown that the prevalence of obesity in Mexican American adolescents from 1998 - 2006 has increased from 9.2% to 19.9% in females and from 14.1% to 22.1% in males (May & Rew, 2009). This rising incidence of obesity calls for immediate action to address ways to improve the health of Mexican Americans. It is the purpose of this paper is to explore

the culture and the factors leading to the growing prevalence of obesity in Mexican American youth. The paper will then focus on suggesting ways to help reduce the growing incidence of obesity through culturally-minded interventions.

## **Method**

Online databases hosted by EBSCO, such as Academic Search Premier, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition, and CINAHL, were accessed to locate nursing and health journals published between 2005 and 2010, which addressed obesity in Mexican American youth. Phrases, such as Mexican Americans, pediatric obesity, overweight youth, and nursing interventions were used as key word searches. A total of 424 peer-reviewed articles were found using these key word phrases. Abstracts were reviewed and articles relevant to Mexican American youth and obesity were selected for further review. Journal articles were selected for this qualitative review based on their content addressing culturally-specific factors leading to obesity and research studies of successful interventions to prevent and treat obesity in Mexican American youth.

## **Discussion: Knowledge**

Children in the US are considered overweight if their body mass index (BMI) is greater than the 85th percentile (Small et al., 2009) and obese if their BMI is greater than or equal to the 95th percentile (Howell Adams, Carter, Barnett Lammon, Hicks Judd, Leeper, & Wheat, 2008). Several factors have been linked to the high rates of obesity in Mexican American children. Understanding the Mexican American culture is an important first step to make in order to explore ways to reduce their high incidence of obesity. According to Centrella-Nigro (2009), socioeconomic, perception, and acculturation are factors that may lead to excess body weight in Mexican American children. High incidences of depression may also play a role in the rising trend of obesity in Mexican American children as well (Melnik, Jacobson, Kelly, O'Haver, Small, & Mays, 2009). By exploring these proposed reasons for the rising trend in Mexican American obesity, US health care workers may begin to develop effective interventions to correct this problem.

Low socioeconomic status has been linked to the high levels of overweight and obese Mexican American children. According to Hancock (2005), over the past two decades, the majority of Mexican immigrants have been settling in the southeastern rural regions of the US. Mexicans settling in the rural US typically earn lower wages and lack suitable education. Families with low income typically live in areas that lack access to healthy foods and have been found to spend less on fruits and vegetables when compared to families with higher income (Centrella-Nigro, 2009). A study conducted by Howell Adams et al. (2008) cited that parents with less than a high school degree have children who are 1.65 times more likely to be obese when compared to children of parents with an education beyond high school. The high incidence of low income and education levels among Mexican settlers in the US may be a reason for the rise of excessive body weight in Mexican American children.

According to Small et al. (2009), Mexican American families with higher income still have children at risk for being overweight. Mexican American parents find that they both need to work in order to provide the commodities that their children expect in order to be part of American society, such as fast food, video games, and television. The increased work hours allow children to have more independence in choosing their own foods and spending their leisure time as they see fit. As the parents struggle to provide their children all the American conveniences, they do not have as much time to properly monitor their child's health habits.

The growing trend of overweight children may also be linked to Mexican Americans' unique perception of an ideal body weight. Mexican Americans and their Latino American counterparts hold a cultural belief that a healthy baby is an overweight baby (Centrella-Nigro, 2009). A qualitative study by Small et al. (2009), consisting of eleven Mexican American parents, found that parents perceived a *solid* body, which is a large body weight consisting of muscle, to be healthier than a *thick* body, which is a body weight consisting of excess body fat. When the examiners asked the parents how they distinguished between a *solid* and *thick* body, they almost all answered that *they just knew*. The parents then shared details of how they assessed their child's body weight; however almost all parents wanted confirmation from the examiners of whether their methods were efficient. The findings from this study suggest that Mexican American parents feel that a child with a large body weight is healthy; however they lack confidence in their methods to properly distinguish between a muscular and a chubby build.

Acculturation is the process of an immigrant group adapting a new dominant culture's customs, values, and beliefs to their own culture (Harrington, 2008). Obesity has also been observed to increase in prevalence with each new successive Mexican American generation. Second and third generation Mexican Americans have a higher incidence of obesity when compared to first generation-born family members in the US (Centrella-Nigro, 2009). These findings suggest that as Mexican immigrants become more ingrained in American life, the incidence of Mexican American obesity increases. Several of the eleven parents studied by Small et al., (2009), revealed that they gained over fourteen pounds within the first three weeks of arriving to the US. Some of the reasons for this rapid weight gain, described by the participants, were attributed to longer work days leaving little time for healthy home cooked meals and decreased physical activity due to increased use of cars. The participants also reported that it was unsafe for their children to play outside due to increased traffic; therefore physical activity was limited.

The combination of cultural perception of ideal body weight, low socioeconomic status, and acculturation also showed a strong correlation among Mexican American obesity. Centrella-Nigro (2009) highlighted a study, consisting mostly of immigrant Mexican American mothers from areas of low socioeconomic status and education, which showed that they were accurate in assessing their own BMI. When shown images of various bodies, they chose bodies with thinner figures as most desirable for themselves. When these same mothers were asked to assess their children, most identified those children who were in the 50th to 75th

percentile BMI as being too thin, whereas children in 97th percentile BMI were identified as being just a little overweight. Mothers in the same study who were more acculturated picked slimmer figures as a more ideal body weight for their daughters.

Depression and excessive body weight also seem to have a strong correlation amongst Mexican Americans. A study conducted by Jaser, Holl, Jefferson, and Grey (2009) found that Latino American adolescents had a higher incidence of depression when compared to non-Latino adolescents. Results of the study also showed that adolescents with high levels of depression were more likely to make poor dietary decisions and less likely to participate in physical activity. These findings indicate that depression can lead to obesity amongst Mexican American adolescents since Mexican Americans make up such a large percentage of Latino Americans. It can also be inferred that early treatment of depressive symptoms can have a profound impact on the prevention of obesity in Mexican Americans.

The experience of the migratory and adaptation process of Mexicans to the US may play a role in the high incidence of Mexican American depression. According to Hancock (2005), the migratory process imposes high levels of stress and can lead to a high incidence of depression among Mexican immigrant families. Some of these stresses include: language disparities, transition from a male dominant family to a more equalitarian family as wives enter the workforce, and increased pressure on older children to take care of their younger siblings. Rapid acculturation to the US lifestyle has also been shown to have deleterious effects on Mexican immigrants predisposing them to a higher incidence of drug use and psychological problems.

### **Discussion: Application**

Socioeconomics, perception, acculturation, and depression have been identified as factors related to the rising incidence of overweight Mexican American children, so how can health care providers work to prevent and decrease this trend? The answer may be to use knowledge of Mexican culture as a guide when developing interventions that encourage physical activity, education of healthy behaviors, and methods to prevent and treat depression. Mexican cultural concepts of *familism* and *personalismo* are significant variables that need to be included in health care in order for the interventions to be effective (Vincent, 2008).

Familism or family cohesiveness is considered very important in Mexican American culture and has a strong influence on a family member's decisions. In traditional Mexican culture, family is thought of as a survival net, which holds a strong sense of duty to one another reaching to extended-family members. Personalismo involves establishing and maintaining trusting relationships, which helps encourage people to share their concerns (Hancock, 2005). These concepts suggest that the inclusion of strong family involvement and social relationships may help increase the effectiveness of weight loss and prevention interventions.

In a qualitative study by May and Rew (2009), twenty-one Mexican American mothers and their children were interviewed for their opinions of how healthy eating and physical activity habits could be best promoted. The results of the study showed that the participants felt that

nurses and schools could best educate parents and their children about health promotion. These findings suggest that interventions to promote weight loss and weight prevention in Mexican American youth may be best promoted by schools and school nurses. Evidence of a successful obesity intervention using schools to promote health habits was found in a three year study conducted by Jiang, Xia, Greiner, Wu, Lian, and Rosenqvist (2007). Five schools in Beijing participated in this experiment with two schools selected as the focus group who received weight loss interventions. All schools were similar in size and socioeconomic status based on parental educational level, occupation, and income. The results of the study showed that the prevalence of obesity and excess body weight decreased by 26.3% and 32.5% in the two schools who received interventions, where obesity and body weight increased in the control schools, which did not receive the interventions.

The experiment conducted by Jiang et al. (2007) included families in their school-based weight loss prevention by inviting parents to school assemblies. Parents were then distributed educational pamphlets outlining information about childhood obesity prevention, which included weight and height references by age and gender. There was also an extra meeting at the beginning of each semester where parents of already overweight and obese children were given information about healthy foods using a traffic light food list. Traffic food lists categorized unhealthy foods to avoid, high in fat and calories, as *red light* foods and healthy foods to be encouraged, low in fat and calories, as *green light* foods. Parents were also given calorie intake tables with traditional Chinese food items that allowed parents to easily calculate the number of calories that their children ate with each meal and compare them to the recommended requirements. Other interventions included the encouragement of increased physical activity, such as taking walks with their children after dinner and allowing their children to stay 20-minutes later after school to participate in a running program.

In the design of a successful and culturally-sensitive weight loss intervention program for Mexican American youth, concepts of familism and personalismo need to be included. In the school-based intervention designed by Jiang et al. (2007), family involvement was pivotal to the success of the program. Parental education in the experiment's intervention program was designed based on the participants' socioeconomic status consisting of educational level, occupation, and family income. Designing education materials for Mexican American parents based on a region's socioeconomic level may involve translating pamphlets into Spanish and using literature that correlates with the region's parental education level. In addressing the subject of Mexican American perception of obesity and the uncertainty of assessing healthy body weight, parents may find it helpful to receive similar, Spanish-written information pamphlets on weight and height references that the Beijing intervention group received in the experiment.

The Mexican American concepts of familism and personalismo have also proven to be effective when included in body weight control interventions. In an 8-week study by Vincent (2009), weekly 2-hour group sessions were held where Mexican American adults were educated on making low-fat modifications to traditional foods and promoting culturally

acceptable exercise programs, such as walking and dance. The control group of the experiment also consisted of Mexican American adults; however they were not involved in group sessions and only received standard health care education from a brief meeting with a physician.

The theme of familism was included in Vincent's (2009) experiment, by encouraging the participants to bring a family member as a support person to each session. Personalismo was incorporated by using a certified diabetes educator, who was bilingual and knowledgeable of Mexican culture, to conduct the group meetings and establish a relationship with the participants. The certified diabetes educator, known as a *promotora*, also made weekly phone calls to the intervention participants of the study to answer questions and to remind them of the next session. The results of the study showed a mean weight loss of five pounds and a decrease in BMI in all participants of the intervention group, where members of the control group reported an increase in BMI. These findings suggest that Mexican American families, seeking health promotion interventions, may benefit from follow-up phone calls made by a health care worker familiar with Mexican culture.

The strong correlation between the high prevalence of depression in Mexican American adolescents and obesity is another matter for health care workers to intervene. The study by Jaser et al. (2009) suggests that the higher rate of depression among Latino American youth when compared to African American and Caucasian youth may be related to the stress of acculturation. American culture promotes adolescents to become more autonomous, whereas Mexican American culture emphasizes adolescents to be more involved with their families. The difference between these two cultural expectations may cause Mexican American adolescents to struggle in their mental development. School-sponsored programs to address acculturation issues and other issues specific to Mexican American psychosocial development may be helpful in treating and preventing depression.

Melnyk, Jacobson, Kelly, O'Haver, Small, and Mays (2009) conducted a study on the effectiveness of a mental health promotion program, which educated Latino adolescents on living a healthy lifestyle. Participants in the intervention group were involved in a 9-week program, which included strategies and information on stress management, self-esteem promotion, goal setting, nutrition, and physical activity. The participants in the control group were not involved in the 9-week program. Before the study began, blood samples were drawn from each participant involved in the study. At the end of the study, participants in the program reported less depression, less anxiety, and a stronger commitment to health when compared to the control group. Participants in the intervention program also demonstrated improved physiologic results, such as a decrease in BMI, a decrease in LDL, and an increase in HDL levels. The results of this study indicate that school-supported mental health programs may improve both mental and physical health in Mexican American youth.

## **Conclusion**



A strong familiarity of cultural background is important for nurses and other health care workers to possess before they can offer treatment. The population of Mexican Americans is continuing to grow along with the rising trend of pediatric obesity, indicating a need to address this issue at a young age. Socioeconomics, perception, acculturation, and depression are factors that may be related to the high incidence of obesity in Mexican American youth. By becoming familiar with these factors and how they affect the health of the Mexican American culture, interventions can be designed in order to effectively decrease and eventually prevent the high rate of pediatric obesity in America.

The inclusion of Mexican concepts of familism and personalismo in the promotion of health behaviors directed towards weight loss and prevention has been shown to highly increase the effectiveness of the interventions. If nurses and health care workers have an understanding of these two concepts when working with Mexican Americans, then their interventions may be more efficient. School involvement has also been shown to be a valuable tool in educating Mexican American families and may prove to become a mandatory resource that nurses and health care workers will utilize as further study of treating Mexican American obesity is continued. For future treatment of obesity in Mexican Americans, nurses and health care workers may need to work closely with local schools and begin educating children at an early age about adequate health behaviors in order to prevent excess body weight and eventually reverse the rising incidence of obesity.

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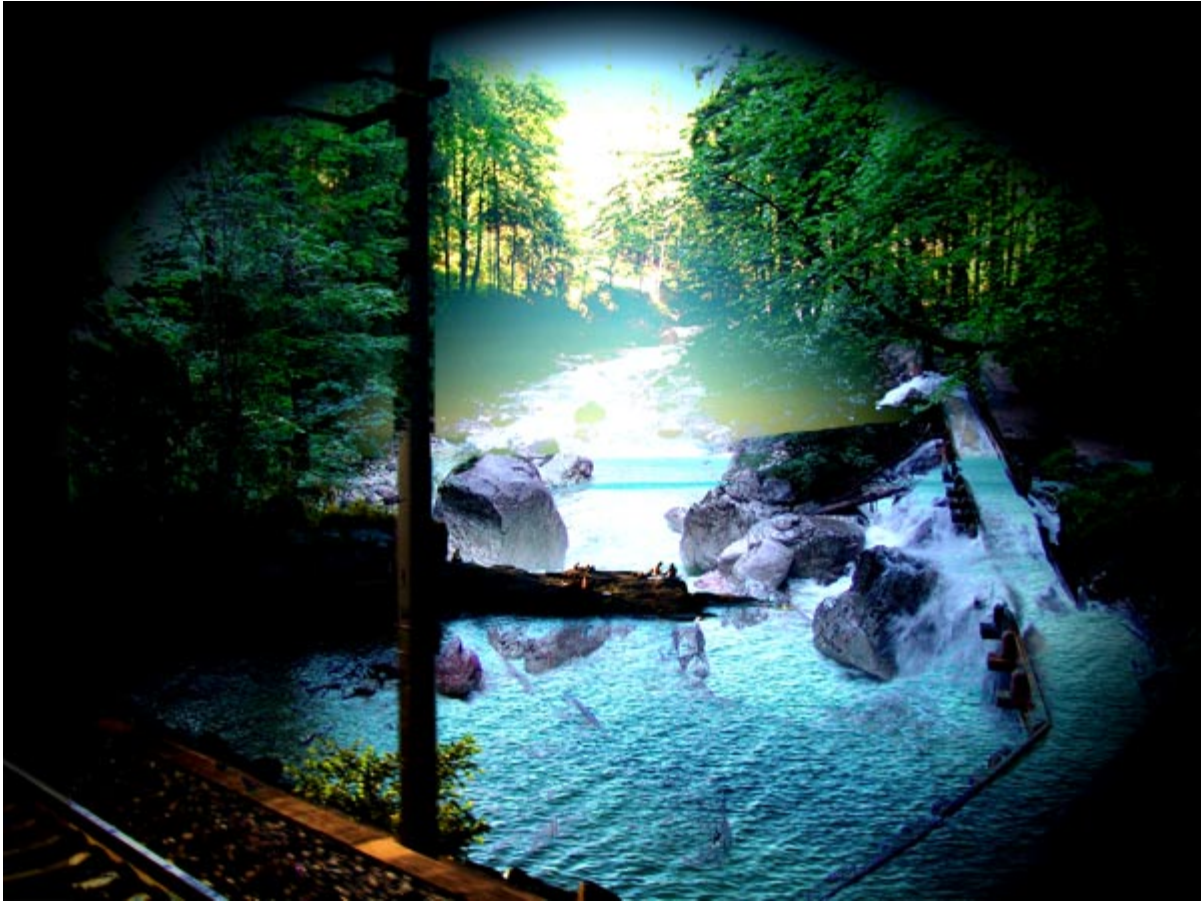
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