WAKE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

2025

English Showcase Winners and Honorable Mentions

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Winners and Honorable Mentions selected by the English Showcase Committee.
Co-Leads: Nicklaus Denning and Gabrielle Volstad
Members: Ela Browder, David Phillips, and Steven Byrd

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Individual Student Award Winners

1. *Ace ACES Award*: **Charlie Cox**, nominated by mentor Susie Potter. Ms. Potter notes that "Charlie deserves this award because of his hard work and his commitment this semester." He met with her frequently and was able to excel in the classroom and develop a passion for reading and writing. As Susie wrote, Charlie, "is an example of what can happen when a student really commits, starts to believe in himself, and values learning for the sake of learning."
2. *TLC Superstar Award*: **Liberty Sylvia**. Liberty's nominator notes that she was a frequent presence to the TLC in the morning on Tuesdays and Thursdays during the Spring Semester, working with a number of tutors to improve her papers. Liberty truly sought to make her papers the best they could be and respectfully listened to all suggestions and edits brought to her attention.
3. *Invested Student Award*: **Zoie Rumph**. Zoie is awarded due to her dedication to learning and involvement within the classroom and outside of it. Zoie regularly attended office hours and used them productively to ask questions about lessons and her major Projects. In class, she actively participated and engaged with her classmates, and overall, she showed genuine interest in learning and improving as a writer, reader, and thinker. Overall, Zoie is a dedicated student who is invested in both her own academics and in the college itself.
4. *Invested Student Award*: **Leslie Cole**. Leslie's nominating instructor noted that she did her best to excel in the classroom by completing assignments at a high level. She brought a positive attitude, and her collaboration benefited all students who worked with her.



In My Experience ENG 111 Winner- Freshta Rahimi

"My Journey from Kabul to the USA"

It is 7 a.m. (AFGHANISTAN time) on August 15, 2022. I am 16 years old, in 11th grade, and my mom is calling me from the window. "Freshta, wake up, wake up, wake up! It is 7 a.m., and your bus will be here. You will be late!" "Okay, Mom," I reply, and go back to sleep. When I closed my eyes, I remembered, "Oh my God, I have a test today! We are at the end of the first semester." I stood up directly, getting ready to go to school. My bus arrived, and I got to school; everything seemed normal. We had a big test, and all of my classmates were stressed about it. As we were about to start the test, the teacher came into the class. When she began talking about the test, everyone was quiet, listening to her. At that time, our principal came to our class and told everyone we had to go home; the test had been canceled. All of us were wondering why.

She didn't say anything. No one knew what was going on. We were so upset because we had never had a test canceled before. Then one of my best friends, whose aunt was a teacher at our school, came to me and said, "You guys have to go home." My friend asked her why and begged her to tell us what was happening. Her eyes were watering as she said, "All of the girls' dreams are about to go underground." My friend asked again, "Please, tell me what happened." She cried and told us, "The Taliban is here in Kabul. They are about to arrive in the city. The president and all the people in power have left Afghanistan. We have no one to protect us. That is why everyone decided to close all of the schools, especially for girls." She said we had to go together because nowhere was safe. My friend and I hugged each other and couldn't stop crying.

We did not have our phones because all schools in Afghanistan do not allow students to have them. We thought, of course, our families had heard the news and were worried. We needed to go home. When we went outside, there was no bus. We waited for about an hour, but no bus came. We had to walk home, which was about 45 minutes away, and we had no choice! As I walked with my friend, we were quiet, not talking, just thinking about what we should do. No more school, no more dreams. I wondered how this could be real or if I was dreaming. My eyes started watering. I couldn't cry, and I couldn't think. I don't know how I arrived home, but when I arrived near my home, I saw my mom outside, waiting for me.

I knew what had happened without asking. My mom is a very strong woman. Even though she is illiterate, she understands everything very well. She told me not to worry; everything would be fine. I started crying, wondering how everything could be fine in this situation. She told me, "I am here. I will not let anyone do anything." I was worried because the Taliban is not good with girls and women. They are horrible; they hate girls and abuse young girls to marry them. I was scared. One thing I worried about a lot was my dreams. I had always wanted to be a manager. I loved working and had a dream to finish high school and get a good career, but they hate girls. How could I do that? They would never let me do what I wanted.

I was also a mountain climber, part of a small American team called Ascend. All were Afghan girls, and it was just for girls. I thought that meant I could never climb again, really, because Afghanistan has beautiful, amazing mountains. Everyone loves them. Oh my God, everything is about to go underground. Weeks passed, and everywhere was closed: schools for girls were closed. I was very depressed. In our group, everyone was messaging each other to tell Marina, an American woman, to take all 50 girls out of Afghanistan. Marina told everyone, "I will try my best to take care of all of you girls. I will never leave you alone. You are all Ascend girls. We will never leave you alone."

One month passed, and I received a message that I would have a flight on October 22. She didn't say where. I asked her, "Just me, or one of my family too?" She said, "No, just you for now. We can only take the girls out of the country, not their families." I was excited but worried about my family. I didn't have a choice; I had to leave for my life and my dreams. My family was okay with it because they wanted me to be safe. They told me, "That's okay. Just go. Your life is important to us, nothing else." My mom told me, "I love you, and I want you to be safe." Which mom has that much confidence to send her youngest child, who is just 16 years old? She told me, "I know you are strong and smart. That's why I am letting you go." She hugged me and cried, saying, "I know you will make me proud." At that moment, I was just crying and thinking.

Finally, the date came, and I had to go to the Mazari-Sharif bus stop because Kabul Airport was closed due to the Taliban. My mom and older brother came with me to say goodbye to their

younger sister and youngest daughter. I hugged my mom because I knew I might not see her again for at least 10 years. I hugged my brother, who was like a father to me. Then I got on the bus and looked out the window at them. My mom couldn't stop crying because of me, and she came inside the bus to hug me again. I was praying the bus would start driving because I couldn't bear to see them like that. Finally, the bus started moving, and I looked out the window as it went farther and farther away. At that point, I couldn't see them anymore, and I couldn't stop crying.

After 9 hours, we arrived in Mazari-Sharif. We stayed in a hotel for the night, and the next day we had a flight to Abu Dhabi. We arrived in Abu Dhabi at night. I was there for 11 months before coming to the United States, to North Carolina, where I started my two years of high school. Now I am at Wake Tech. As I write this essay, my hands are literally shaking because I am remembering everything again. I am so thankful for this opportunity that I can do anything I want. When I get a good career, I promise I will help other girls too.

In My Evaluation ENG 111 Award Winner- Jute Melich

"Analyzing Feminist Themes in *Silence of the Lambs*"

In a time when most films didn't dare to cover feminist themes, one psychological thriller, of all genres, dared to break the mold. *Silence of the Lambs*, a film from 1991 directed by Jonathon Demme and adapted from a novel of the same name by Thomas Harris, tells the story of FBI Agent Clarice Starling in her chase of violent serial killer "Buffalo Bill." During her pursuit, she acquires the assistance of famed cannibal and Psychologist Hannibal Lecter through her work studying criminal behavior. In the 1990s in a field such as the FBI, there was a miniscule amount of women, causing Clarice to face many difficulties in her professional life. In the film adaptation of *Silence of the Lambs,* these difficulties are shown through themes of objectification, patriarchal power dynamics, and Starling's attempts to rid herself of her feminine qualities. *Silence of the Lambs* successfully demonstrates themes of feminism and the struggles of working women in the 90s that still apply to working women today.

Examples of objectification that women in the workplace might face are abundant in Starling's experiences in *The Silence of the Lambs*. For instance, Agent Starling is often outcast and belittled by her male colleagues. One scene that demonstrates this is when Agent Starling is jogging with her fellow female colleague as a part of their training regimen. When they pass by their male colleagues, who are also jogging, the men do a doubletake to ogle at their coworkers. Greg Garrett, a professor of creative writing at Baylor University analyzes that "the film shows how Clarice is often the unwilling object of the male gaze; she is appraised by male trainees on several occasions, most noticeably when a group of jogging trainees turn for a doubletake as Starling and her roommate Ardelia Map jog past" (5). Another scene that demonstrates this objectification is when she is training with her mostly male classmates in boxing at the FBI academy. Even though it is necessary for her to train in the same way as the rest of her class, she

is the one made to hold the strike pad for her classmates to punch. This is a very literal form of objectification as she is being made into an object, a punching bag, by her classmates. Yafei Ying, a PhD at Zhejiang University, summarizes "In the film, the image Starling hoped herself to achieve was 'strong,' 'reliable,' 'professional,' and 'tough,' all the words are all relatively masculine words in patriarchal discourse, so Starling . . . objectified herself by acting as a battering ram in class" (265). Through the probable self-objectification of becoming an object for use by her male classmates, Starling demonstrates one struggle in her professional life. Both of these examples of objectification in the film are representative of a greater patriarchal struggle still faced by women today, to be seen as more than just a sexual or useable object.

Another struggle made very evident by the film is the patriarchal power dynamics existing between Agent Starling and her male colleagues, particularly her boss. Namely, in interactions with her boss, Dr. Chilton, Agent Starling struggles to be seen as an equal and not sexualized. When she is sent to consult with Dr. Chilton, this sexualization in the workplace is made extremely evident by his advances onto her. He says, "You know, we get a lot of detectives here, but I must say, I can't ever remember one so attractive…Will you be in Baltimore overnight…? Because this can be quite a fun town, if you have the right guide" (*Silence of the Lambs*). This dynamic is furthered by his later comment that Crawford must have sent her as an object to turn Lecter on. Greg Garrett suggests, "Chilton remains her nemesis because she not only rejected him sexually but has achieved results with Lecter that he has not" (3). This evidently demonstrates the power dynamics that exist between Starling and her boss as due to her refusal to reciprocate Chilton's advances Chilton aims to ruin Starling's career, as shown by his later attempts to blame unfortunate happenings on her actions when there was no possible way she could have been involved. Another example of a power dynamic demonstrated in the

film is that between Starling and her male colleagues. Although Starling is their equivalent, having the same job title, training, and education, they gaze her upon as an inferior. Ying Yafei analyzes that "under their gaze, to avoid the discriminatory, she had to refuse her female identity, and on the contrary [sic], emphasizing herself in a man's way, as well as making an exceptional effort to reach the same status as the men" (265). Agent Starling must make an exceptional effort to prove herself, which in contrast is much more than the effort any of her male colleagues need to make. Obviously, this is a patriarchal power dynamic as shown by the large difference in the amount of power held by Starling and her colleagues, with Starling holding significantly less even with the same, or even more, qualifications. Power dynamics between Starling and her coworkers and boss within the film impact Agent Starling's ability to advance professionally very much and illustrate a struggle that all women face in the workplace.

To try to advance herself professionally at the same rate as her male counterparts, Starling goes through a process through the course of the film that many other women do in real life, succumbing to self-masculinization and letting go of parts of her femininity. However, she only really excels in her career when she utilizes her feminine qualities. One example wherein this self-masculinization to gain even ground with her male colleagues is prominent is in her responses when being harassed. When Dr. Chilton accuses Dr. Crawford of using Agent Starling to turn Dr. Hannibal Lecter on, Clarice responds by saying, "I graduated magna from UVA, Doctor. It's not a charm school"(*Silence of the Lambs*). Yafei Ying analyzes that "Starling repeatedly stripped [sic] her femininity consciously or unconsciously, and masculinized . . . herself by . . . emphasizing her commonalities with men while being harassed." (265). To gain respect and be taken seriously by Chilton, Clarice must list her scholarly achievements, thereby emphasizing her commonalities with her male colleagues and that she is no different from them

in her credibility. The fact in itself that Agent Starling needs to tell Chilton her academic achievements to be taken seriously is a demonstration of a power imbalance between her and her male coworkers, as they do not need to do so. However, when Starling does use her feminine qualities she is able to make significant progress in her pursuit of Buffalo Bill. When investigating her first victim, her male colleagues are unable to deduce details of the victim's personal life. On the contrary, Agent Starling can recognize the vital clues of her origins by seeing her three ear piercings, deducing that she is not from the small town in which her body was found. After further examining the victim's nails, Starling further concludes that her chipped, broken polish and the grime existing underneath her nails suggest she was attempting to escape from somewhere, a vital clue for the investigation. Yafei Ying concludes "These victories prove that in the process of gaining power and recognition, women should not rush to imitate male power, losing their own characteristics, and being assimilated by male power. The 'negative' vocabularies given to women in the past are also female's advantages" (266). Earlier in the film, Starling's femininity and the fact that she is a woman causes her boss, Chilton, to assume her incapability and lack of intelligence. Yet, her analysis of the victim from a woman's perspective is what leads to this discovery that in turn leads the team to capture Bill. Her previous disadvantages (as perceived by Chilton) are of great advantage and help the FBI greatly in their progress. This self-masculinization demonstrated by Starling and later utilization of the same rejected feminine qualities demonstrates a struggle, and further action to dispel said struggle, that many women of the time and still today face in the workplace.

The Silence of the Lambs effectively shows themes of feminism and the struggles of women in the workplace that apply to both women when the movie is set and still today. The themes of objectification, patriarchal power dynamics, and self-masculinization present in the

film all convey various struggles that women under the patriarchy face within their professional lives. The way that Starling responds to these struggles, her verbal retaliations and changing of her own identity, is expressive of responses that many women have in similar situations. These issues are still prominent today, as women still struggle to climb the professional ladder at the same rate as men, due to preconceived notions by their male colleagues and higher-ups. *Silence of the Lambs* is not just a film, but also a telling of experiences that all working women can relate to, providing a feeling of being seen. This was especially important in the 90s, when the movie was released, as these types of struggles were not discussed as openly. Not only was this film important in the past, but today as well. Women still lag behind men professionally and face workplace discrimination that still needs to be discussed and stopped.

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In My Informed Opinion ENG 111 Award Winner- George Poliachik

"'What more do you want?': Workplace Crunch and its Detrimental Consequences on Video Game Developers"

The high quality and critical appraisal of *Halo 2* is reflected in its status as best-selling game on Xbox, but its troubled development remains unknown to most people. Robert McLees, who worked on weapon design and story writing, took hundred-hour work weeks, and witnessed many other coworkers quit completely. Crunch, as it is called, is the practice of "burning the candle at both ends," stretching a development team to its limits in order to publish a game sooner. Stories of crunch can be found everywhere in the industry, proving that video games are very difficult to make, and it is a miracle that any games get made at all. Because of the difficulty in making a game, it is easy to justify unreasonable working conditions, but crunch most of all. In the video game industry, the practice of crunch is damaging because it negatively impacts the mental health of developers, makes the quality of games worse, and risks the physical health of developers.

When discussing crunch in the development of games, the most apparent consequence is the negative influence on the mental health of developers. Crunch mainly involves pushing developers to do more work than was initially intended, most often to reach an unchanging deadline. But if crunch is so poor for developers, then why does it happen at all? Most forced overtime in game development comes from a form of manipulation on the part of development onto passionate creatives who want to make the best game they can (Morely 16:53). Stretching the drive of artists, programmers, and all other developers so thin that they spend eighty hours a week in the office is horrible, and poor for mental health. The mental impact will never be positive when developers are forced to work more time than is healthy, whether it's paid overtime or not. In fact, most developers are contracted in to work on games, meaning that

they'll be paid a fixed amount and never more for the extra time spent at their desk. Motivation for developers to work on a game goes down significantly if their pay is low and overtime is high, both pushed to unreasonable extremes.

Some arguments in support of crunch point to the increased speed of development, but people who are tired and overworked do not put out their best work. Most crunch-related workplace incidents result from an unreasonable amount of work pushed immediately before a deadline, leaving developers to do the amount of work that should have weeks of consideration in a few days. As Jason Schreier, video game journalist and writer, puts it, "…you don't need to know C++ to imagine a bleary-eyed, sleep-deprived programmer making mental mistakes that lead to game-breaking bugs and cause even more work for the rest of the team." Programmers, artists, and any other developers working on any project would not have the mental capacity left to put out their best work after working twelve-hour work days, six days a week (Schreier). Obviously, developers do not want this outcome for both themselves and the consumers that trust in the quality of the game, these incidental cases do not risk the raw quality in favor of anything else, it is just left to self-preservation of the exhausted developers to get a product out the door. This specific issue seems to be most apparent when preparing demos of games for press conference demonstrations, most often E3. "As most engineers know, demo code is almost always garbage, throwaway code…. So we got to crunch to write code we knew was not actually feasible long-term, but looked good enough for showing it off" (Schreier). The time crunched to produce a demo for a game is effectively wasted, since the code is not built for longevity, the demo is only for showmanship at conferences, and it was created solely for the deadline. It seems ironic then, that a demo is meant to present the vision and future of a game, when it actually demonstrates the workmanship that makes its way into the game as well. Developers who are

pushed to a deadline will not produce their best work, and sometimes it is damaging to the future of development as well.

Crunch in the production of games has the largest impact on the physical state of health for developers. The physical consequences of forced crunch upon developers might be the most traumatic in the long-term for them, as it can be anywhere from major schedule changes to life-altering medical problems. On the lighter end of the spectrum (if that even exists), Jason Schreier interviewed a particular developer on schedule changes, who said that "I would get in at about 8am, work until 11pm, sleep until 7am so I could shower and be at my desk again by 7:30am. Then I would leave at 5pm to get home in time to see my wife and kids for a couple of hours before bedtime, then I'd do it again. That sounds far worse than I remember it. The fact that the game is awesome, sold well and reviewed well softens the sting a lot." This developer and the game they worked on remained anonymous, in an effort to protect them from risked job security in the industry; an issue that is difficult enough in of itself. The point is, game developers that experience a culture of crunch are heavily motivated to maximize the amount of hours they have in work on a game, even to the point of self-destruction with personal relationships. This is not even mentioning the developers that sleep under their desks, cook food in the office, or have relationships end because of the amount of time they spend away from home (Morely 8:35). The real-world effects of crunch on developers, whether immediate or long-term, is a detriment to their health and extremely dangerous.

A popular counterargument is the idea that workplace crunch would be a teambuilding experience for developers, bringing them closer together. Specifically, the mentality of "being in the trenches" could potentially bring a team of workers closer together through a shared experience ("Video Game Crunch: What Is It and Is It a Problem?"). Not only is this idea flawed,

but it is also insulting to people who came out of a crunched development cycle in a worse mental state than they went in. Jason Hall – a developer who previously worked for Blizzard – spoke about his job experiences after quitting the studio, detailing his first month at Amazon Game Studio after working at Blizzard and adjusting to healthier working hours. He was unsatisfied with his output of work and personal achievement, but when he told his new boss – who also used to work at Blizzard – he got the response: "We were overworked there. This is a normal job. This is the normal amount of hours you work every day and what you're feeling right now is the fact that you don't know how to deal with that. You were overworked for so long that moving at a normal pace feels like you're standing still" ("Overworked," 0:11). Hall had gotten used to the stress and perfectionistic output expected at game studios like Blizzard, after he quit, he had to refamiliarize himself with a healthy work environment. Crunch in the workplace is unhealthy and dangerous, not even close to a team building exercise.

Some critics will point to the lack of financial motivation to work overtime as evidence that crunch is good, and it provides developers to spend more time working on their games. This perspective is incorrect, especially considering that the motivation keeping these developers in the office is industry-related more than it is financial. Developers who refuse to crunch will leave work undone, which significantly lowers their chances to get rehired by the company or have future chances in other companies (Morely 4:45). Leaving the office with a void of work undone also requires other developers fill in for that missing work, worsening crunch for the rest of the team. There are multiple serious consequences for not participating in a workplace culture of crunch, both in job security and social relations.

It is extremely difficult to make a video game. The small details, massive bug testing, feature implementation, and other qualities take a long time to produce, tempting some game

studios to crunch their developers to finish quicker. Even if workplace crunch finishes a game sooner, it risks employee mental health, sacrifices overall game quality, and extremely detriments employee mental health. Those in support of crunch might point to the potential teambuilding opportunities or proposed creative motivations in the workplace, but neither bring enough to the table to justify the negative effects crunch has on developers. Denying the suffering of passionate creatives is an insult to them and their work. Generally, crunch has no place in the video game industry due to the inhumane effects it has on the valuable people who make those games a reality.

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In My Initial Findings ENG 112 Award Winner- Leslie Cole

"Disorder, Genius, or Both?"

1. What I Knew, Assumed, or Imagined

The intersection of mental illness and creativity has been an ongoing topic of interest for psychologists for decades. As a student intending to study psychology, as well as a hobbyist writer, I became interested in the idea that there may be a demonstrable link between creativity and mental illness. Historically creative genius has often been linked to mental illness. On the other hand, because therapists have been using creative outlets as a vehicle of therapeutic care, finding a link may inform researchers as to what, if any, mechanism exists that links creativity, or acts of creating, and mental illness or the treatment of it. New avenues of thought about the potential neurological differences in those who are considered "creative" could lead to a change in perspectives in the study and treatment of mental illness.

At the start of my research, I thought that learning about this topic would yield some historical observations, some biographical cases, and some data on neurological differences found in previously conducted studies. I expected that current data on contemporary creatives with mental illness would be readily available, as mental health topics have become less taboo in recent years. In hopes of finding more than anecdotes about famous creatives I set out to find the answer to two main questions. First, is there a biological link between creativity and mental illness, and second, do creative acts improve mental health?

2. The Search

An article by Dean Simonton, "The Mad-Genius Paradox: Can Creative People be More Mentally Healthy but Highly Creative People More Mentally Ill?" accomplishes several key goals of the research questions laid out earlier in the essay. In his article, the author gives readers historical context for the "mad-genius paradox" or the idea that creativity and mental illness are

correlated. Simonton reports that the paradox, considered for centuries in the psychology field exists because "as a group, creative people can be more mentally healthy than noncreative people. Yet among all creative people, those who ascend to the status of creative genius can exhibit more proclivities toward mental illness than creative colleagues who do not attain that high status" (Simonton 470-471). Despite complicated mathematical calculations and theoretics, Simonton concludes that more empirical research is required before any real inference can be made.

While I see the merit in his data, I find that Simonton's definition of the "creative genius" is suspect. Simonton's article presupposes a link between creativity and mental illness. The author does not speculate about the physiological link itself but calculates based on collected data and his own equations. For his calculations, those who produce 10 or more creative works are considered "genius," linking "creative genius" with "creative productivity." Overall, this article was difficult to understand from the lay perspective, but, providentially, I am taking a statistics class this semester, which helped me get through the mathematical portions of the article. Crucially, I learned that there may be a sophisticated distribution in the relationship between creativity and mental illness; some creativity may be good for one's mental health, but too much creativity has diminishing returns in the mental health department.

Unlike Simonton, an article by Matthew C. Keller and Peter M. Visscher, "Genetic Variation Links Creativity to Psychiatric Disorders" addresses genetic variances that link creativity and psychological disorders like schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, and bipolar disorder. Specifically, the article declares that there is indeed a link. According to Keller and Visscher, their study "confirms the polygenicity of human traits…and confirms widespread pleiotropy" (Keller and Visscher 929). This means that there exist traits and characteristics

caused by two or more genes (polygenicity) and a single gene can cause two or more unrelated effects (pleiotropy). Not only can one gene affect both creativity and mental illness, but multiple genes may be involved in the link between the two. Unfortunately, the study does not provide information on the specifics of the link, or the genes involved.

However, Keller and Visscher came close to a direct answer to my main research question. I wanted to know if a biological link exists between creativity and mental illness, and this article reports that there is proof of a genetic relationship. While the genetic link is currently amorphous in my understanding, and their study suggests there is a link, it does not explain where, physiologically, that link occurs. This means I have not uncovered the correct research yet. Likewise, the research on this issue may be ongoing and the physiological component has yet to be pinpointed. Keller and Visscher reinforce the idea that a link between creativity and mental illness is a complicated subject worthy of deeper exploration.

Lastly, in "Choir Singing and Creative Writing Enhance Emotion regulation in Adults with Chronic Mental Health Conditions" by Genevieve Dingle, et al. the authors aim to correlate creative activities and improved mental wellness. Participants completed a creative activity in a group setting, such as singing in a choir or creative writing, then reported their ensuing mental wellbeing according to a scale set out by the researchers. The authors found that participation in creative groups increased positive emotions and decreased negative emotions for respondents (Dingle, et al. 454). On the other hand, small sample size and several confounding variables should be more carefully considered.

While I found that Dingle's study provides some foundational information on the benefit of creative acts for increasing mental wellness, I also found that the sample size was quite small (62 participants), and the researchers did not address the potential for the social aspect to muddy

the waters of the results. The social aspect of the creative groupings could be a mitigating factor in the emotions of the respondents. Furthermore, in comparing experiment groups, one group of adults with mental health issues and another group of adults without mental health issues, the authors conclude that creative acts are beneficial for both groups. Again, the activities of the two groups are different, yet are being compared directly in this study, which makes it unreliable in my estimation, prompting more questions.

3. What I Discovered

The search for information on this topic was truly an exercise in trial and error. The search terms “creativity and mental health” produced results that were aimed at reporting the mental health benefits of creative activities. On the other hand, “creativity and mental illness” worked to better provide information on the potential links between the two keywords. This told me that I was on the right track, but many of the articles stopped short of specifics and proposed only that there may be a link. Additionally, my search did not yield much current observational data and studies involving contemporary creatives but, as I expected, I did find many mentions of historic creatives. Surprisingly, I found that most studies discussed the difficulty of defining or measuring creativity, which was a topic I had not considered going into the research process. Most importantly, several articles hinted at but did not detail a specific biological link. My search for information will prompt me to reexamine sources and find more research connected to them. In the discussion of creativity and mental health, illness and wellness, I think I can safely summarize with a reiteration of the common thread of all of my sources—more research is needed.

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In My Community/Discipline ENG 112 Award Winner- Leslie Cole

"Creative Potential: An Interview with Lucas Bellaiche"

One sunny afternoon, the light slanted brightly through my kitchen window, I clicked the "join call" button on a Zoom window, and spent an hour enmeshed in an enlightening conversation on curiosity, creativity, and possibility. On Friday, October 4, 2024, I had the fortunate experience of interviewing Lucas Bellaiche, a fourth-year Ph.D. student at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina about his background, experience, and knowledge of creativity and how it intersects with mental health. He is no stranger to the topics at hand; his academic journey began at the University of Arkansas where he earned his dual bachelor's degrees in psychology and statistics. Additionally, Mr. Bellaiche holds a master's degree in Psychology and Neuroscience from Duke University. As a fourth year Ph.D. candidate at Duke University, Lucas completes research alongside faculty in various research labs in the Psychology and Neuroscience department. His current focus is the intersection of emotion, neuroscience, and creativity.

My subject of interest for the semester is the intersection of creativity and mental health, and whether the two are linked physiologically. The topic is seated firmly in the academic sphere of psychology and neuroscience, and while searching for a potential interviewee I came across the faculty research laboratories at Duke University. Specifically, I found the research lab of Dr. Paul Seli. The research focus of Dr. Seli's laboratory includes creativity, mind-wandering, and psychedelics. A further look into the Ph.D. researchers at the Seli laboratory led me to Lucas Bellaiche. I was initially drawn to Mr. Bellaiche as his research focus is the intersection of creativity and emotion. In our interview, Lucas Bellaiche and I discussed the measurement of

creativity, current research on creativity, and the changing perceptions on creativity and psychology from the past to the present.

Discussion

On Measuring Creativity

One of the main challenges of researching a potential link between creativity and mental health is the reported difficulty of defining creativity. Furthermore, once creativity is defined, researchers must also decide how to measure creativity, which is also a complicated topic to navigate. In search of clarity, I asked Mr. Bellaiche for his definition of creativity and how it is measured. On defining creativity, Mr. Bellaiche suggests that the most common way to identify if something is creative is to evaluate if it is both novel and useful. He explains that something can be just novel, or new, but if it serves no useful purpose, it would not be considered creative. He humorously gave the example of speaking gibberish in response to my questions; it would be novel and strange, but it would not help me with my research. On the other hand, he contends that art is a sort of grey area in this line of thinking, as the usefulness of art is often subjective.

After explaining the definition of creativity, Mr. Bellaiche spoke about psychologist J.P. Guilford, who was the president of the American Psychological Association and proposed the existence of a special kind of intelligence, divergent thinking. Divergent thinking is a form of creativity, and Guilford developed a method of testing creative potential through what he named the “alternative uses task,” or AUT. In the alternative uses task, participants are asked to come up with as many uses as they can for an object. Mr. Bellaiche provides the example of a brick, expanding on potential uses, such as building a house, sanding it down and mixing it with water to make ink, or using it as a doorstop. Next, researchers will rate responses based on how novel the uses were or how many uses the participant listed.

In addition to the AUT, Bellaiche provides some alternative methods of measuring creativity. He informed me that the AUT is somewhat controversial for some, as it does not resemble creativity as humans may expect, such as in artistic or musical creativity. Another method is a recent trend of asking people to rate things for creativity in general and rely on the internal definition of each respondent. He says that people generally agree on what is creative and what is not, even if the researcher does not define the word for the participant outright. On the other hand, there are cultural differences to consider that can alter the results using this method. A third method of measuring creativity is to use artificial intelligence to measure it. Mr. Bellaiche described how A.I. models are being used to evaluate respondent input by having the human type in word combinations, then the A.I. evaluates the novelty of those combinations occurring together. He states that, while interesting, this method is still being built upon. Overall, the definition and measurement of creativity remains a fluctuating and changing challenge for psychologists.

Current Research in Creativity

In preparation for our interview, I had the opportunity to read several of Lucas Bellaiche's published studies, including his August 2023 article "Back to the basics: Abstract painting as an index of creativity," and his forthcoming study "Selective emotion regulation in creative art therapy: Psychophysiological engagement during painting reduces anxiety." Reading these ahead of our meeting allowed me to gain helpful clarity on the methods and results of the studies. In particular, I was interested in the upcoming article, as it explores the link between anxiety and the creative activity of abstract painting (Bellaiche et al., 2024). In this study, Bellaiche supplied participants with Fitbit watches to track their heart rates and asked the participants to report their mood while completing abstract painting. Additionally, the researchers

utilized a control group who solved a maze instead of painting so the researchers could evaluate the heart rate changes comparatively between activities. In this study, Bellaiche found that painting reduced anxiety and resulted in lowered heart rates in the participants, leading him to believe there may be something special about the link between creativity and anxiety, though more study is required.

In addition to his own research, Mr. Bellaiche also spoke about a current project of Dr. Paul Seli's at Duke University, in which Dr. Seli examines art created by A.I. and the human response to it. This research can help clarify what people think creativity means. With the rise of A.I., humans are reevaluating humanity. As a result, people are redefining creativity as a solely human expression. He continues that, in general, people do not respond the same way to art created by artificial intelligence as they do to art created by other humans. Mr. Bellaiche reflects, "I think creativity is a way for us to not just explore novel opportunities, but, I think, a way to make meaning out of our lives as well, particularly through art." While art is no longer strictly within the human realm of creation, there is a human movement to define creativity as a necessary human asset and activity that cannot extend to non-humans.

Changing Perspectives

In addition to our discussion about the measurement and current study of creativity in psychology, Lucas Bellaiche and I spoke about historical psychological and cultural perspectives on creativity, psychology, and the way perspectives are changing. We briefly discussed the "mad-genius effect" that I have frequently encountered in my research. I asked Mr. Bellaiche to explain the phenomenon in his understanding. He responded that the "mad-genius effect" is the idea that people that have certain psychopathologies, like bipolar disorder or personality disorders, tend to also exhibit more creative ability. While there are many famous anecdotal stories that seem to

point to this as truth, such as Van Gogh's bipolar disorder, Lincoln's depression, or Beethoven's narcissism, empirical evidence is mixed on the correlation. Bellaiche himself completed his master's thesis on a similar topic. In his research he found that the correlation between creativity and the risk of bipolar disorder was 0.224, and that other research suggests a correlative rate of 0.6 to 0.85, which is a strong link. Additionally, Bellaiche points to the issue of measuring creativity once more and, joking, states "I think there is a disconnect between what Van Gogh is doing and what I asked my participant to do with a brick."

We also discussed the "Sylvia Plath effect," or the idea that female poets are more susceptible to psychopathologies. On this topic, he asserts that this effect is likely not an issue of genetics, but one of socio-cultural perspectives. He expresses that the challenges and limitations to freedom experienced by women, both historically and today, can exacerbate any underlying vulnerability to psychological distress. As an example, he describes the musical genius and psychological struggle of Mozart's sister, who was more talented than her famous brother, but was never given the spotlight because she was female in an age when there were severely limited options and opportunities for women. He empathizes, saying that this would likely be psychologically debilitating for anyone.

I then asked Lucas what he would like to change about the field of psychology. In response, he remarked on the historical exclusivity in academia—for decades the researchers and participants of psychological research were white, educated, usually American males. While the field is still largely dominated by white males, Bellaiche has high hopes and an active interest in creating a more inclusive field and reducing barriers to enter academia. He includes that we will not know what needs to be changed about our understanding of psychology until we expand our academic perspectives and sample globally.

Conclusion

My interview with Lucas Bellaiche on October 4, 2024, yielded information on the measurement of creativity, current research on creativity, and changing perceptions on creativity and psychology from the past to the present. I had the unique opportunity to speak to someone completing research on my topic and in my intended field of study, which was extremely valuable to me. I appreciated the ability to ask clarifying questions about Mr. Bellaiche's publications, especially. Additionally, the information provided by Mr. Bellaiche during our interview will be extremely helpful in shaping the direction of both the primary and secondary research for my next essay, as I can narrow down the exact disorders I can look into for the creativity link, like bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. In addition to my interview with Mr. Bellaiche, I conducted a second interview with Wake Technical Community College psychology professor, Dr. McElvaney. I think, in concert, these primary sources will give me a rich repository of data to pull from in the final essay.

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In My Seat at the Table ENG 112 Award Winner- Leslie Cole

"Brick By Brick: The Need for Clarity in the Study of Creativity"

A brick is not always just a brick. It could be a doorstop. It could be a paperweight. A brick could be sanded down and mixed with water to create paint. For every mundane object, there are a myriad of potential uses, and for every person asked about the potential uses, every response could vary drastically. The brick, in this case, is not as important as the thought process behind it. The ability to think of unique, new uses for objects requires a specific kind of thinking called "divergent thinking," which is more commonly referred to as creativity. In the psychology field, divergent thinking has been studied for decades, with researchers seeking the source of human creativity. Despite its relatively recent entrance into research, creativity has been a source of interest and speculation for centuries. Well-known examples of highly creative people, such as Vincent Van Gogh, Sylvia Plath, Ernest Hemingway, and Nikola Tesla, to name only a few, indicate an intriguing link between creative genius and another, darker process taking place in the human brain. Researchers seek a link between creativity and mental illness as a way to understand these historic case studies. In turn, this research can help psychologists grasp a deeper understanding of the human brain. As of today, a potential link between creativity and mental illness is a controversial topic in the psychological field. Differing opinions among researchers stem from varying methods of defining, testing, and measuring creativity, which generates a wide array of study data with unclear results. Before a definitive link between creativity and mental illness can be found, there are some factors that must be addressed. The psychology field is currently hampered by a lack of clarity around the concept of creativity and should develop a standardized definition and method of testing and measuring creativity.

Background

The psychological field lacks clarity in its definition of creativity. In part, this is due to the recency of the concept of creativity in science. While creativity itself is a concept that reaches back to pre-history, the specific study of it has only come to the realm of scientific research relatively recently. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity*, James Kaufman and Vlad Glăveanu (2009) provide a roadmap of the history of creativity, detailing that the study of creativity officially began with an address given by J.P. Guilford to the American Psychological Association in 1950 when he was the president of the APA (p. 12). This is a much more recent area of study when compared to other aspects of psychology, such as mental illness. Many of the intervening decades, therefore, have been spent refining the definition. To that end, the authors define creativity as the production of something new and useful, while other researchers include additional factors like significance, quality, or the creation of a product (Kaufman & Glăveanu, 2019). These differences can make a significant difference in the testing and results obtained in studies. Research into creativity has been expanding since 1950. In fact, in another article, "Dopamine and the creative mind: Individual differences in creativity are predicted by interactions between dopamine genes DAT and COMT," authors Zabelina et al. (2015) offer that "creative thinking has recently emerged as an important topic in cognitive neuroscience, as witnessed by the sharp increase in publications on the subject in traditionally cognitive and neuroscience journals" (pp.1-2). The study of creativity is moving increasingly into mainstream scientific research. As the number of studies in the subject increases, the lack of consensus on a scientific definition of creativity leads to a confused and complex landscape to navigate.

Furthermore, research in this area faces challenges in the measurement of creativity. Specifically, the measurement of creativity will depend on the operational definition. In his article "The neuronal basis of human creativity," author Rafael Malach (2024) states, "not

surprisingly, one may consider numerous different definitions, and these definitions impact how we treat the topic [of creativity]" (p. 2). Again, as researchers choose the method of measuring creativity once it is defined, this leads to variances and confusion in results. Because of these inconsistencies in results, researchers hold differing opinions on the existence of a link between creativity and mental health, with some suggesting there is no link and others insisting that, while it has not been proven, a link is sure to be found through further research. A consensus may be reached in the future, but it may be imperative that researchers perform studies based on a central idea of what exactly, is being measured.

Methods

In search of clarity regarding the link between creativity and mental illness, I continuously encountered conflicting and confusing differences in the methods and results in research stemming from the lack of a standard definition of creativity. As a result of my interest in the topic, I had the opportunity to speak with Lucas Bellaiche, a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, who conducts research in the Duke University Psychology and Neuroscience department. While I intended to focus on his perspective of a potential link between creativity and mental illness, it became clear to me in the space of that conversation that the underlying issues of definition and measurement of creativity I was finding in research also exists in current psychological research. First, Mr. Bellaiche explained the various definitions of creativity. He traced the origin of the study back to J.P. Guilford's development of divergent thinking, then provided the working definition of creativity within the greater scientific community. He stated that "the definition [of creativity] is typically novelty and usefulness, so if you have something that's new, and it serves some sort of purpose, then it's creative." The word "typically" here brought up additional questions, as it clearly suggests that

there are other definitions within the field. Additionally, there is an argument to be made that "usefulness" is also subjective and requires further consideration and refining. For example, people hold varying views on the "usefulness" of artwork. Again, the interview mirrored much of the lack of a standard definition for creativity that I had encountered in reading on the topic.

Additionally, the interview with Lucas Bellaiche veered into a discussion on some different methods of measuring creativity. Most interestingly, Mr. Bellaiche suggested that researchers, at times, allow participants to define creativity for themselves, stating "lately there's this kind of trend to just ask people to rate things for creativity generally and rely on people's internal definitions, and, actually, that works because people generally agree on what is creative and what's not creative, even if you don't define the word creative." This, again, brought up the complexity of the issue, as creativity seems to be a subjective concept that would vary greatly based on a respondent's culture, background, and even preferences. While this 'self-determined" method of defining creativity seems potentially unreliable, researchers do also utilize some tested and accepted tools in the field, including Guilford's Alternative Uses Test (AUT). This test was created to measure "divergent thinking," and it asks participants to come up with as many different uses for a mundane object (like a brick) as they are able. The uses are then scored by researchers for "relative creativity." Once more, this prompts further scrutiny based on the subjectivity involved. Certainly, the main challenges within the study of psychology and creativity are rooted in the study of creativity itself, including the defining and measuring of it.

In search of more insight into the public perception of creativity, I opted to look into this concept further. The explanation that people generally agree on what is or is not creative struck me as unlikely, based on my, admittedly limited, experience of society at large. The assertion of agreement led me to create an 18-question survey that asks participants to rate activities for

creativity. The activities included painting, novel writing, poetry, and art created by artificial intelligence programs, to name a few. Upon receiving the results, I calculated the relative frequency of the responses for each question, then calculated the mean rating and standard deviation of each. This allowed me to gain some information on the opinions of the public. In short, opinions range widely, even within such a small sample, which calls into question the method of allowing study participants to define creativity on their own without an operational definition set by researchers. The survey results helped confirm the need for further refinement of the concept of creativity for scientific research purposes.

Results

Many studies in the psychology field explore the link between mental illness and creativity, but the definition of creativity varies from study to study. In a 2024 study, researchers studied a potential link between creativity and borderline personality disorder, or BPD. While the authors were searching for genetic overlap, they concluded, "it could be, for example, that genes which are influencing the creative process are the same that are connected to mental problems…or it could be because these genes make people more likely to… gravitate towards a creative profession…" (Azcona-Granada, et al., 2024, p. 3). The authors here suggest a link between BPD and creative professions, but the research is dependent on what the authors consider "creative professions." In the study, Azcona-Granada et al. (2024) list professions in the fields of dance, film, music, theater, visual arts, and writing as creative (p.3). While these professions do seem objectively creative, public perception may be in question. For example, in the recently conducted self-created survey on this topic, 52.17% of respondents rated musicians as creative or extremely creative, 60.87% rated visual artists as creative or extremely creative, and 56.52% of respondents rated writers as creative or extremely creative. While these rates

represent a technical majority, they are far from a comfortable consensus. The lack of clarity and agreement points back to the root of the issue—defining what is or is not creative.

When considering the question of creativity, there is also a seldom addressed area of creativity as it relates to science and scientific discovery. In an article by Roger Beaty et al (2013), the authors state, "compared to artistic creativity, scientific creativity has been substantially understudied, potentially due in part to popular associations of science with technical modes of thinking rather than with creativity, which is more commonly associated with arts" (p. 2). They suggest that, taking into account the general definition of creativity as the creation of something new and useful, scientific creativity should be treated similarly to artistic creativity. Recent self-created survey results disagree, however, with only 34.78% of respondents rating scientific discovery as creative or extremely creative with a mean rating of 2.87 ± 1.3 points out of 5. Touching on the reasoning for this, Lucas Bellaiche suggests there may be a consideration for the role of expertise. Specifically, the more specialized a type of creativity, the more expertise is required, and the less likely it is perceived as creative to the general public. The underrepresentation of scientific creativity in research and literature suggests a need to define what, if anything, makes this type of creativity different from others.

Conclusion

Clearly, psychological research on creativity is a developing subject which is hampered by the lack of a standard definition and method of measuring creativity. In order to successfully conduct, replicate, and authenticate research on creativity and its potential link with mental illness or other cognitive processes it is imperative that a standard operative definition and procedure emerges amongst researchers. As creativity is a fluid, subjective concept, standardizing will allow researchers to clearly define what it is they are measuring and how they

are measuring it. Then, in turn, researchers will be able to better understand the more complex issues involved, such as the possibility of a link between creativity and psychiatric disorders, but all research should start from a strong base foundation of knowledge upon which new information builds brick by brick.

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I Have an Idea ENG 110/114 Award Winner- Imaan Memon

"PROPOSAL TO REVISE WAKE TECH'S EMERGENCY EXIT PROCEDURES"

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ABSTRACT

This report examines the current emergency exit procedures at Wake Technical Community College and proposes strategies to improve safety and preparedness across campus. The existing procedures place a heavy reliance on students' familiarity with evacuation routes but lack clear communication, regular drills, and adequate preparation for staff to guide students in an emergency. Research into the current protocols, alongside a review of best practices from other institutions, identified several gaps that could pose risks in critical situations. This report recommends enhancing the visibility of evacuation routes through better signage, implementing regular evacuation drills, and providing training for staff to ensure they can efficiently guide students during an emergency. These improvements would better prepare both students and staff, fostering a safer and more informed campus environment. The report concludes that these measures are practical, necessary, and will significantly strengthen Wake Tech's overall emergency preparedness.

PROPOSAL TO REVISE WAKE TECH'S EMERGENCY EXIT PROCEDURES

Introduction

Overview: Wake Tech's Current Emergency Exit Procedures

The current emergency exit procedures at Wake Tech are outlined in the college's policies, available on the college website under the "Emergency Exit Procedure" section (Wake Technical Community College, n.d.). However, these procedures largely depend on students' ability to recall evacuation routes, which can be problematic, especially for new students and visitors. There is minimal guidance on how these routes are communicated within the buildings, and evacuation signage is not prominently displayed. Currently, the only information available about evacuation procedures is on the college website, requiring students to manually check during an emergency. Given the urgency of these situations, this lack of readily accessible information puts the college community at risk, as it relies on individuals to recall routes under stress without clear visual aids or practice.

Issues and Problems with the Current Policy

The main concern with Wake Tech's emergency exit procedures is their insufficient visibility and communication (Carvalhais & Lopes, 2024). The reliance on students to remember evacuation routes and access emergency information online during a crisis creates potential confusion and delays. Without clearly marked exits and regular evacuation drills, there is a risk that students and faculty may be unprepared or unsure of how to act in an emergency. This gap in preparedness poses significant safety risks and could have legal ramifications should an emergency arise. There is an urgent need for improved communication and training to ensure that everyone on campus is equipped to respond quickly and effectively.

Recommendation to Revise the Policy

To address these issues, this report recommends revising Wake Tech's emergency exit procedures by implementing clearer signage for evacuation routes and scheduling periodic drills for both students and staff. In addition, faculty should receive training on how to guide students during an evacuation, ensuring a coordinated and efficient response. While these improvements will require an initial investment—such as purchasing signage and allocating time for drills—the benefits of increased safety, reduced risk of injury, and better preparedness will far outweigh the costs. These steps will significantly enhance the college's emergency procedures and ensure a safer environment for the entire community (Carvalhais & Lopes, 2024).

Study: Methodology

The research process aimed to identify gaps in Wake Tech's current emergency exit procedures, focusing on areas such as the awareness of evacuation routes, the clarity of alarm systems, and the consistency of communication about emergency protocols. By assessing these key aspects, the goal was to evaluate whether students and staff are adequately prepared for emergency situations.

This research was undertaken with the objective of improving the college's preparedness and response to emergencies. By identifying the gaps in the current system, the research seeks to contribute to a safer campus environment and ensure a more effective response during an emergency.

To collect the necessary data, I began by reviewing the existing emergency exit procedures available on Wake Tech's website. This provided insight into the current communication methods and guidelines that are already in place. I also conducted a review of academic articles related to emergency preparedness in higher education institutions, looking for best practices and case studies from other schools. To gain firsthand perspectives, I surveyed both students and faculty, asking them about their experiences with the existing procedures and their level of preparedness. This combination of research methods allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of emergency procedures at Wake Tech and to identify areas for improvement.

Main Findings

The following sections outline the key findings related to Wake Tech's current emergency exit procedures and how they compare to common alternative practices at other institutions. These findings highlight the gaps and shortcomings in the existing system, such as reliance on memory and lack of communication tools, and provide a framework for understanding areas that need improvement.

Current Wake Tech Policy

Wake Tech's emergency exit procedures are currently outlined in the college's Emergency Exit Procedure document, accessible on the official college website (Wake Technical Community College, n.d.). However, these procedures primarily depend on students' ability to recall evacuation routes and procedures from memory. This approach assumes a level of familiarity that can be problematic for new students, faculty, and visitors who may not know the layout of the campus well. Additionally, evacuation routes are not consistently posted throughout the campus buildings, which could result in confusion during an emergency situation. The only source of emergency procedure communication is the website, which requires students to manually check evacuation plans—a task that is impractical and potentially dangerous during a time-sensitive emergency. As a result, there is a significant gap in the current procedures, as they

do not provide clear, accessible, or timely guidance to all members of the college community when quick action is needed.

Furthermore, there is minimal emphasis on regular evacuation drills or training sessions for either students or faculty, which would otherwise help familiarize everyone with the emergency exit routes and evacuation protocols. This lack of practical, hands-on experience could hinder individuals' ability to act confidently and efficiently in the event of an actual emergency.

Common Alternative Policies

By contrast, other institutions, such as the University of Houston, have implemented more robust emergency preparedness procedures that address many of the gaps seen at Wake Tech (University of Houston, n.d.). The University of Houston provides emergency preparedness posters throughout campus and includes specific guidance for students with disabilities. They also ensure faculty are well-prepared by including emergency procedures in syllabi and posting emergency preparedness materials in classrooms. These actions make emergency protocols more visible and accessible to everyone on campus.

Furthermore, the University of Houston conducts regular emergency drills and follows up with After Action Reports (AARs) to evaluate the effectiveness of each drill (University of Houston, n.d.). These reports help identify strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring that preparedness efforts are always evolving. The university also utilizes a Ride-Out Team, a group of staff members who remain on campus during emergencies to maintain critical operations. While Wake Tech likely has campus police or other personnel designated for this role, the specifics of their responsibilities and coordination are not as clearly defined, leaving room for improvement.

Additionally, the University of Houston uses the UN ALERT notification system to send timely alerts to the campus community during emergencies (University of Houston, n.d.). This system helps ensure that students and faculty are informed and able to act quickly. Wake Tech could benefit from adopting similar communication tools, along with better signage and more frequent drills, to help improve overall preparedness and response during emergencies.

Recommendation

Proposed Revised Policy

To ensure a more effective emergency preparedness system, Wake Tech should implement several key improvements to its current procedures. These include posting evacuation routes and emergency exit signage prominently throughout campus buildings, ensuring that all students and faculty are familiar with these routes. Additionally, regular evacuation drills should be scheduled

each semester, with designated instructors leading practice sessions. Faculty should also be trained to guide students effectively during an emergency, ensuring that everyone is familiar with both the procedures and their roles. To support these changes, Wake Tech could utilize technology such as apps or QR codes to provide real-time updates and easy access to emergency protocols. By taking these steps, the college can create a more proactive, well-prepared environment that enhances safety and ensures a quicker, more organized response in the event of an emergency.

Costs of Implementing Proposed Revised Policy

Implementing the recommended changes will involve several costs, including the purchase of clear signage to mark evacuation routes throughout campus buildings. Additionally, funds will be needed to develop and distribute training materials for students and faculty, and for the coordination of regular evacuation drills. Training sessions for instructors will also be necessary to ensure they are prepared to guide students during emergencies. Furthermore, some resources may need to be allocated for communication technology, such as apps or QR codes, that could help disseminate real-time alerts. The costs will likely also include staff time to organize and run these drills and training sessions. While these investments are necessary, they are small compared to the value of improving campus safety.

Benefits of Implementing Proposed Revised Policy

The benefits of these improvements are significant. By providing clear evacuation routes, regular drills, and proper training, the college will ensure that all students and faculty are better prepared in case of an emergency (Carvalhais & Lopes, 2024). This preparedness could significantly reduce the risk of injury or confusion during an actual event. With the added awareness and confidence in their ability to act quickly, everyone will be more equipped to make sound decisions under pressure. Beyond safety, these changes also provide legal protection for the college by demonstrating a proactive approach to risk management. This reduces the likelihood of legal consequences in the event of an emergency.

Feasibility of Implementing Proposed Revised Policy

Implementing these changes is feasible, though it will require institutional commitment and adequate resources. Wake Tech already has a basic emergency exit procedure in place, so the foundation for improvement is there. The next step will be integrating these improvements into the existing procedures, which may take time but is manageable. The college will need to allocate funds for signage, technology, and training resources, and staff will need to be scheduled for training sessions and drills. Given the college's existing infrastructure and the importance of campus safety, these investments are achievable and necessary. Additionally, integrating these changes can be done gradually, starting with key areas and expanding as resources allow.

Conclusion

Improving Wake Tech's emergency exit procedures is not just a matter of efficiency—it's a matter of life and death. The safety of our students, staff, and faculty depends on how well-prepared we are when an emergency strikes. These proposed improvements are essential for ensuring that everyone on campus is equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to respond swiftly and confidently in a crisis. Without immediate action, we risk unnecessary injuries, confusion, and potentially devastating outcomes. Moreover, failing to address these gaps could expose the college to legal liabilities in the event of an emergency. Wake Tech must prioritize implementing these changes—not only to safeguard our community but to demonstrate a genuine commitment to our collective well-being. We cannot afford to wait any longer; the time to act is now.

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In My Professional Research ENG 110/114 Award Winner- Estefani Garcia

"Leveraging TikTok for Nonprofit Growth"

Executive Summary

Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) is a nonprofit organization in Raleigh, North Carolina, providing important services to low-income families, including education, housing, and transportation assistance. Despite its impact, N2N faces challenges such as transportation barriers, a shortage of volunteers, and the effects of gentrification. To address these issues and expand its reach, the organization plans to enhance its digital presence, particularly through social media platforms like TikTok. The initiative launches in January, with the first three months dedicated to building awareness and engaging the community. By March, efforts will prioritize volunteer recruitment. Regular evaluations will ensure the campaign adapts to trends and maximizes its impact, strengthening N2N's ability to serve its community.

Introduction

Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N), established in 1994, is a nonprofit organization based in Raleigh, North Carolina, with the mission of supporting low-income families through education, housing, and transportation assistance. Opportunities such as 1-to-1 mentorship enable mentors to focus fully on students and address their academic gaps. N2N also has created jobs such as Neighbor Moving, Neighbor Lawn, and Neighbor Cleaning that pay significantly higher than the average local wage in these industries. However, the organization faces significant challenges, including transportation barriers, limited volunteer availability, and the adverse effects of gentrification, which have displaced many families and disrupted access to essential services.

To address these challenges and ensure its continued impact, N2N must adopt a strategic initiative to expand its digital presence. N2N possesses an Instagram account but posts inconsistently, only a few times a month. By leveraging more widely used platforms, like TikTok, the organization will reach a broader audience, particularly younger demographics, to raise awareness about its programs and recruit new volunteers and donors. This approach will enable N2N to strengthen its resource base and foster greater community engagement.

Market Analysis Summary

The current market for Neighbor to Neighbor primarily serves students in the community who face educational challenges, as well as individuals and families who depend on its housing and transportation services. The organization's target market is often limited by geographic and socioeconomic factors, particularly the effects of gentrification. As new apartment complexes are built, families are displaced, limiting their access to N2N's services. Currently, the organization has a housing initiative, which provides families with a reduced rent model that contributes to a down payment savings account, is an innovative solution to affordable housing and financial literacy. However, despite this innovative approach, N2N continues to face difficulties in reaching students to support their education. Transportation barriers and a limited volunteer base are major contributors to this issue. N2N has not actively addressed its volunteer shortage, as it lacks a clear strategy to advertise its need for volunteers. This shortage significantly impacts the effectiveness of its one-to-one tutoring program. While the model is effective, a lack of sufficient volunteers means that only a limited number of students can benefit. Overburdened volunteers may struggle to form strong bonds with the students, and the imbalance between students and available mentors can leave students feeling underserved. Neighbor to Neighbor must focus on

integrating social media strategies to address these challenges and increase its visibility. By expanding its outreach on platforms like TikTok, N2N can engage a broader audience, particularly younger individuals interested in volunteering or donating. This strategy not only increases community awareness but also helps N2N remain competitive against other local nonprofits that are looking for similar resources.

Execution

To effectively execute the expansion plan, Neighbor to Neighbor needs to focus on social media marketing and volunteering. Neighbor to Neighbor must leverage social media platforms to increase its visibility and engagement with the community. According to Zhang et al (2023) "Recent statistics show that more than half of those who engaged with NPOs on social media ended up supporting the organizations in some way, and 18% of donors worldwide used Facebook fundraising tools to make donations" (p. 551). This highlights how social media can play a crucial role in driving support for nonprofit organizations. The proposed strategy focuses on TikTok, an app widely used by various demographics, including the younger generation who may be more willing to volunteer and donate. By posting informative and engaging videos on TikTok, Neighbor to Neighbor can introduce its mission to a wider audience, creating awareness of its services and drawing in volunteers who are interested in helping with transportation and tutoring. In terms of mentorship, Neighbor to Neighbor must focus on recruiting additional volunteers to meet the growing demand for one-on-one support. With over 175 students needing mentors, N2N faces a challenge in recruiting enough volunteers. Expanding the volunteer base can be achieved by raising awareness of the organization's work through social media campaigns.

In addition to expanding social media presence, Neighbor to Neighbor needs to continue to build partnerships with local organizations and businesses. Currently, the nonprofit works with schools, churches, and businesses. To expand on this, it is proposed that N2N launches targeted fundraising campaigns via TikTok, boosting donations and resources available to the nonprofit. As Cacija (2013) states “fundraising can do much more than simply provide funds for the organization, as the fundraising objectives may include growth (creating a donor base), involvement (making donors active), visibility (raising organization's public profile), efficiency (reducing the cost of fundraising), stability, etc” (p.60). Neighbor to Neighbor’s funding comes from a variety of sources 40% from grants, 40% from private donations, and 20% from event fundraising. N2N raises 20% of its funds through events like the annual breakfast fundraiser and partnerships with businesses like Drive Shack. TikTok is where users can post videos or photos which also offers an option to attach a link to a post, displayed in the top corner of the caption. Users can click on the square with the link directing them to the specified webpage. This feature will be handy for fundraising, such as uploading promotional materials about the fundraising events, such as posters, and uploading them in the photo option, linking the website to the account. Users will click the link to learn more about the event and share it with others. This approach will boost this by keeping the community informed and engaged, attracting more attendees, and expanding reach through daily updates and event promotions.



Provided above are how the photo/video link process works

Another way people can connect with the organization is by offering virtual or hybrid programs increasing engagement, especially for those unable to attend in person due to transportation issues. Rogelberg (2022) mentions “Other nonprofits had similar experiences getting creative with engaging donors. Jewish Family and Children’s Service used Zoom events to its advantage, booking big names it wouldn’t otherwise be able to for in-person events” (p.4). During COVID-19, many nonprofit organizations faced challenges when traditional fundraising or meeting formats were unavailable. A solution to this was hosting fundraisers and meetings over Zoom, which enabled continued engagement despite these barriers. Virtual programs can help overcome challenges such as relocations or transportation barriers, providing students with online tutoring options. By providing links and schedules on Tiktok, N2N will reach a broader audience and enable more people to get involved.

The nonprofit must ensure that it has the necessary staff and resources to manage these new initiatives. As Jones et al (2015) states “Maintaining a web and social media presence takes both time and knowledge. All of these managers have limited resources in terms of staff and money, and their own time is scarce” (p. 615). Since staffing is an issue for Neighbor to Neighbor, a potential solution would involve forming a youth-driven media team, composed of local high school students who are in the program. Neighbor to Neighbor will launch its TikTok marketing initiative in early January of 2025. This team will manage content creation, social media engagement, and digital marketing efforts. This will require no additional costs, as the students will handle content creation and engagement, with staff supervision. By involving teens, N2N ensures that the content will be in line with TikTok’s popular trends, resonating with its primary audience. The content strategy will focus on creating engaging videos that highlight N2N's impact, such as success stories, behind-the-scenes footage, and volunteer testimonials.

Popular hashtags and trends will be incorporated to maximize reach and visibility. For example, N2N can participate in viral challenges or create educational videos about mentoring to increase engagement on the "For You" page. During the first few months the focus will be on building followers and encouraging interaction. Likes, shares, and comments will be tracked to assess the effectiveness of the campaign. Teens in the program will be encouraged to respond to comments, creating a sense of community and motivating others to volunteer or donate. By March, TikTok campaigns will focus on volunteer recruitment, highlighting opportunities to address transportation and mentoring needs. At the end of each month, an evaluation will be conducted to assess the account's performance, identify emerging trends, and determine which types of videos receive the most engagement this way strategies can be adjusted accordingly.

Conclusion

Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) plays an important role in addressing families who need help providing important services in education, housing, and transportation. The organization has consistently demonstrated its commitment to empowering the community, particularly through its innovative programs like affordable housing and mentorship allowing students to go above and beyond. However, issues like volunteer shortages, transportation barriers, and the effects of gentrification threaten to limit its impact. To overcome these obstacles, the proposed expansion plan focuses on leveraging social media, particularly TikTok, to raise awareness and increase engagement. Through a well-executed strategy that combines digital outreach, community partnerships, and volunteer recruitment, N2N will further solidify its role as a leading resource for families in need, ensuring that its impact continues to thrive and evolve for years to come.

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Multimodal Award Winner (ENG 112)- Miao Gu

"ADHD"

Scan below to view Miao's Multimodal Video or click this link: https://youtu.be/-5X7HeoJr6g

In Cinema HUM 160 Award Winner- Sage Gaska

"*The Third Man*: A Grand Technical Achievement"

One of the most striking and innovative films of the 1940s is Carol Reed's *The Third Man*. Initially released in 1949, the film tells the story of Holly Martins, an American who arrives in post-war Vienna to take a job with his longtime friend Harry Lime. Martins quickly learns Lime has passed and sets out to investigate his death. What ensues is a story full of unexpected twists and turns. While the screenplay is fantastic, the cinematography by Robert Krasker is some of the best of the era and of all time. The cinematography found in *The Third Man* serves to enhance the mood and tone of the film to great effect.

The entire film demonstrates Reed and Krasker's distinctive visions. Out of the entire film, the most striking scenes is that of when the character of Martins wanders through the dark, secluded streets of a bombed-out Vienna. He notices a cat belonging to Anna Schmidt, Lime's girlfriend, rubbing against a man in the darkness. The audience previously learned that Schmidt's feline was only friendly to Lime. This is an incredibly smart visual clue given to the audience that the man in the darkness is indeed Lime, who is supposedly dead. It rewards the audience for paying attention. The reveal of Lime is also brilliant; it only comes after Martins is shouting into the darkness and wakes up a woman in an apartment. She turns on her light and the face of Harry Lime is instantly illuminated in sharp white light. The light only lasts a few seconds before being shut off, and Lime is missing once again. A chase ensues, and the cinematography and lighting techniques show themselves off here. Martins is shown to be disoriented and confused by all of the conflicting information that has been revealed to him after the last few days. The film frequently uses a technique called a Dutch angle, where the camera is tilted to the side so the horizon is not parallel with the top and bottom of the frame. Not only do they make the shots

visually interesting, but they also help convey the chaos in this confusing world where things aren't exactly as they seem. As Martins chases after Lime, we are treated to shots of outsized shadows. Lime is, literally, hiding under the cover of shadow. Most everything here is draped in darkness. This all plays into the idea of the grand mystery of the film and the mysterious case of Harry Lime.

The lighting techniques are also a strongpoint. The entire film, and especially this scene, feature harsh lighting and sharp contrasts with shadows and darkness. The harsh lighting represents the harsh realities that Holly Martins has had to confront in this rough world of post-war Vienna. He is informed that Lime, previously thought to be a friend, has been stealing penicillin from military hospitals, diluting it, and selling it on the black market. This business venture has resulted in the deaths of multitudes of people. Everything that Martins believed to be true upon arriving in Vienna has been revealed to be false. The city of Vienna also plays an important role in the film. The chase scene features a large amount of wide shots. The buildings of Vienna, at least those that are left standing after the war, tower over the characters. This gives the feeling that Lime, as well as Major Calloway and Sargeant Paine are just small players in a game that is much larger than any of them.

There is a reason that, in 1998, the British Film Institute ranked *The Third Man* as the greatest British film of all time. While the performances and screenplay deserve high praise, the cinematography is what truly sets this film apart from the rest of the noir films of the era. The use of lighting, shadows, wide shots, close-ups and, camera angles do a marvelous job of enhancing the mood, tone, and audience's enjoyment of the film. There is so much that can be communicated simply though what the director and cinematographer decide to show and how

they show it. The great filmmakers understand this, and that is why *The Third Man* is one of the greatest films of all time.

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In My Analysis Literature (ENG 231) Award Winner- Karis Woods

"A New American Voice: Emerson's Ideal Poet and Its Evolution from Whitman to Swift"

In his essay "The Poet," Ralph Waldo Emerson calls for a distinctly American poet who captures America's democratic and diverse spirit, using intuition and insight to create works that speak to the human experience in a way that resonates with readers. He challenged poets to go beyond conventional boundaries, believing poetry should be alive with genuine expression. In response to Emerson's call for a distinctly American poet who would transcend mere observation to embody the nation's soul, Walt Whitman pioneered a poetic identity rooted in self-expression, democratic values, and innovation in form—an identity that Taylor Swift has reinterpreted for a modern audience. Spanning nearly two centuries, both poets answer Emerson's vision as architects of collective experience, each capturing the struggles, triumphs, and evolving spirit of their eras.

Emerson passionately called for a new, distinctly American poet who would be a voice for the people. He wrote of the urgent need for a poet who was not separated from or above the nation but one who would articulate what the collective experienced in a way no one else could. Specifically, Emerson calls for a poet who is a "Knower, Doer, and Sayer" (Emerson "The Poet" B-236). The Knower represents a lover of truth and the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. The Doer represents the lover of good and action, committed to creating positive change in the world. The Sayer represents the lover of beauty who articulates the inexpressible, transforming collective experience into art (Emerson "The Poet"). Emerson envisioned the poet as the perfect balance of the Knower, the Doer, and the Sayer. The poet must love truth and wisdom, seek to enact goodness, and transform these ideals into art that can be collectively understood. Amongst these, the Sayer stands out as the most significant because it is the Sayer

who gives a voice to the truths of the Knower and the actions of the Doer. Emerson wrote, “The poet does not wait for the hero or the sage, but, as they act and think primarily, so he writes primarily what will and must be spoken, reckoning the others, though primaries also, yet, in respect to him, secondaries and servants; as sitters or models in the studio of a painter, or as assistants who bring building materials to an architect.” (Emerson “The Poet” B-237). The poet stands apart from the “secondaries” that Emerson writes about, though they are essential to the poet who acts as an architect, utilizing the materials of the secondaries to create a work of art. Yet, for Emerson, the poet’s role was not simply to turn these experiences into art but to ensure they were indicative of America’s identity and democratic ideals– free from European influence.

Emerson dismisses poets who mimic European style and influence, instead emphasizing a poet who writes with a deeply rooted sense of America's unique character (Emerson “The Poet”). In his article “Emerson as American Scripture,” Charles Howell Foster argues, as the title suggests, that Emerson’s writings function as American scripture. Foster discusses how Emerson sought to free the American mind and literature from European thought by rejecting the imitation of European art and literary forms, urging Americans to draw inspiration from their culture and landscape (Foster). In his essay “Self-Reliance,” Emerson wrote, “Insist on yourself; never imitate.” (Emerson “Self-Reliance B-232), which underscores the notion that every person has the capacity to express universal truths through their unique perspectives. This sense of independence and individuality is a defining feature of America’s ethos. Through this, Emerson was not only calling for a poet to emerge but also creating the philosophical and cultural foundations for such a poet to arise.

Emerson’s call for a uniquely American voice– one who broke free from European influence to embody America’s spirit of democracy and independence– found its response in the

poet Walt Whitman. Through his life, poetic innovations, and democratic spirit, Whitman answered the call, exemplifying the Knower, Doer, and Sayer while crafting a revolutionary poetic identity that resonated with the collective voice of America. Whitman pioneered free verse, a form that rejected traditional meter and rhyme, allowing his poetry to find meaning through rhythm rather than structure ("Walt Whitman"). In “The Poet,” Emerson emphasizes that poetry should be convincing through its meaning rather than form, a concept embodied in Whitman’s free verse (Emerson B-237). It was not only innovative in form but also in substance. He celebrated the body and the sensual self in a way that was unconventional for his time, challenging the morally rigid traditions of 19th-century poetry ("Walt Whitman"). In “Song of Myself,” Whitman introduces the concept of celebration of self as something deeply connected to others, not an isolated ideal. As he writes, “I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."(Whitman B-1169). This quote reflects Whitman’s belief in his connection to his readers, which exemplifies Emerson’s ideal that the poet would be a voice for the people. Through his celebration of self and the body, Whitman answers Emerson’s call for a new poet and begins to forge a new path for American poetry.

It is essential to discuss how Whitman’s free verse and celebration of the body and self contribute to his broader democratic ideals. His vision of democracy goes beyond politics and government; it permeates his understanding of the self, the collective, and the poet's role in society. In “Song of Myself,” Whitman positions himself as a representative of the collective. This universal autobiography aligns with Emerson’s ideal poet, who serves as a voice for the collective truth, transcending individuality in favor of the nation's shared experience. He rejects the Platonic sense of harmony and stillness in the individual, opting to represent individuality as

interconnectedness amongst the nation (Kateb). Whitman believed the self was inherently connected to others, a philosophy that closely aligns with the democratic ethos that each individual is equally valuable and infinitely complex. He famously wrote, “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” (Whitman B-1212), which captures the paradoxical nature of the human spirit. Whitman asserts that each individual is a blend of impulses, complexities, and contradictions, yet these qualities connect the nation in shared humanity. This notion of inclusivity and interconnectedness is the foundation for Whitman’s democracy, which extends beyond his poetry, as he actively participated in democratic causes to embody these ideals.

Whitman exemplifies Emerson’s ideal that the poet would be a societal voice intertwined with democratic ideals and a connection to the nation. The poet would uphold, express, and even shape societal values through their uniquely American voice (Emerson “The Poet”). Whitman’s life and actions reflect this ideal. Whitman created a career for himself, writing in newspapers as a journalist and eventually becoming editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle* ("Walt Whitman"). Yet his convictions and desire for equality surpassed his desire for a strong career. In 1848, Whitman was fired from the newspaper because of his beliefs as a free-soiler. In response, he helped establish the Brooklyn Freeman, a free-soiler newspaper ("Walt Whitman"). Whitman’s support of the free soil movement, opposition to slavery, and attendance at democratic rallies showcase him as a Doer in Emerson’s ideals.

Whitman also represents himself as a Knower in *Leaves of Grass,* where he writes empathetically with insight and inclusion that celebrates the full spectrum of the human spirit in his work. In “Song of Myself,” he draws upon all kinds of voices essential to the American spirit: lovers, workers, children, and soldiers (Whitman). This work serves as a blueprint for Emerson’s

ideal poet. Every voice has a purpose and a story worth listening to that contributes to America. As Leypoldt notes, Whitman's success in responding to Emerson's call was not rooted simply in his poetic innovations but in his ability to channel the cultural and democratic currents of his era, blending the individual and collective into a unified poetic voice (Leypoldt)

However, just as Whitman answered Emerson's call for his time, America's ever-evolving cultural and political landscape necessitates a new voice to address and articulate the current America. Leypoldt argues that the success and influence of cultural figures like Whitman are tied to their specific historical moments, with their work paving the way for future poets to reshape and reinterpret these ideals in response to new challenges (Leypoldt). While Whitman encapsulates Emerson's ideal of the American poet for the 19th century, his legacy underscores the ongoing need for an artist who can capture the spirit of their era. Today, in an age defined by unprecedented connectivity, political polarization, and shifting cultural norms, Taylor Swift emerges as a modern embodiment of Emerson's vision– using her platform and poetry to articulate the complexities of contemporary life.

In an era where mass media often prioritizes image over substance, Taylor Swift stands out as a poet who utilizes self-expression and authenticity to resonate with her listeners, embodying Emerson's vision of the poet as a universal and personal voice. Authenticity is a defining trait of her lyricism, enabling her to articulate emotions that many struggle to express, showcasing her as a Sayer in Emerson's ideal. With over 243 released songs in her discography, Swift has created a vast catalog that encapsulates the full spectrum of human emotion– joy, heartbreak, anger, hope, and everything in between– establishing herself as a master of expression and authenticity. Swift has long been aware of the balance between remaining true to herself and growing as an artist. In a 2010 bio on her website, Swift wrote," I think it's important

that you know that I will never change. But I'll never stay the same either."(Taylor Swift My Life). This philosophy mirrors Whitman's assertion, "I am large/ I contain multitudes" (Whitman B-1212), in that both artists embrace the contradictions and complexities of being human. Swift's ability to capture the evolving facets of her identity while remaining authentic to her core reflects an Emersonian ideal: the poet as both a product of their era and a voice transcending time (Emerson "The Poet").

For example, her ten-minute ballad "All Too Well" exemplifies her ability to translate personal experience into universally resonant art. Through vivid imagery and raw emotion, she narrates a journey from love and excitement to despair and self-reflection, writing, " You told me 'bout your past thinking your future was me" and later, " Time won't fly, it's like I'm paralyzed by it/ I'd like to be my old self again/ but I'm still trying to find it." (Swift). This emotional honesty creates a connection between Swift and her audience, drawing them into a shared experience that goes beyond her individual story.

Swift's lyricism extends beyond emotional resonance as she uses her voice as a platform for change to inspire inclusivity and action, connecting her authenticity to her democratic ideals. Her songwriting reflects her concern for equality in America. In her song "You Need to Calm Down," Swift challenges prejudice towards the LGBTQ+ community with lyrics like "Why are you mad when you could be GLAAD?" directly referencing the LGBTQ+ advocacy group (Swift). Swift amplifies marginalized voices with this song that celebrates individuality, love, and acceptance– demonstrating her commitment to the democratic ideal of equality. Similarly, in "Only the Young," Swift addresses the disillusionment of the younger generations with the current political landscape with a call to action. The lyrics, "And the big bad man and his big bad clan/ Their hands are stained with red," underscores her criticism of political corruption, while

the refrain, “Only the young can run,” emphasizes the importance of the youth as agents of change (Swift). These lyrics represent Swift’s mastery of turning personal authenticity into a larger social narrative, making her work representative of the collective struggle.

Swift has not always been vocal about her political stance, but her democratic ideals have consistently surfaced in her work. In 2018, Swift made a powerful statement against GOP candidate Marsha Blackburn in an Instagram post, marking her public political debut. She wrote, “I always have and always will cast my vote based on which candidate will protect and fight for the human rights I believe we all deserve in this country” (Swift). This declaration exemplifies Emerson’s ideal of the poet as a doer who acts as a societal voice, not only speaking for the people but also taking tangible steps to influence change. According to a CNBC article, over 65,000 Americans aged 18-29 registered to vote within twenty-four hours after Swift’s post, marking a tangible change (Breuninger). Swift’s stance, paired with her advocacy for LGBTQ+, women, and racial equality, reflects a commitment to shaping societal values that aligns with Emerson’s vision that the poet would be a uniquely American voice for societal change. Her engagement with her audience extends beyond her lyricism as she uses her platform to amplify underrepresented voices and encourage civic action.

Swift and Whitman reflect the lasting vision of Emerson’s ideal for a new, uniquely American poet who shapes society through democratic ideals, authentic self-expression, and action. Whitman, through his expansive poetic style and democratic action, created a framework for the poet Emerson envisioned. Swift, in the modern era, picks up where Whitman left off, using her platform to speak for societal change and human rights and to connect deeply with her audience. Like Whitman, she blends personal experience with societal impact, exemplifying that the poet’s role is to capture the complexities of the human spirit and to create a positive change

in society. As America continues to evolve, it is clear that Taylor Swift answers Emerson's call for her era just as Whitman did for his own.

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In Verse! ENG 125 Award Winner- Lovat Pennington

“I'm Alive”

My earliest memory:
A swing, a tree, the hilltop in Canton,
And a simple declaration:
"My name is Doris Rollins,
And I'm alive."

I fall for a uniform and bright blue eyes,
And I'm swept across the sea.
Italy, Germany, the states again,
My name is Doris Cannon
And I'm

A wife.
And then those blue eyes close forever
Too soon.
Three children to raise on my own.
My name is Mama
And I'm

Home in Carolina.
I don't know how to move forward
But I have no choice.
My name is Doris Cannon
And I'm

Afraid. Life is just too fleeting
So I laugh and cry and write.
My soul speaks through a typewriter
And speaks of lives beyond my own.
Local heroes, married bliss, Ava Gardner.
Births and deaths alike.
Plays, articles, novels never finished.
My name is Doris Rollins Cannon
And I'm

A writer. The three children grow,

Two become mothers.
The first calls me 'Granny',
But the next is the name that sticks.
My name is Doris Cannon,
And I'm

A 'Gangy'. It suits me. I'm no Granny,
No family recipes or knitted scarves.
No, I take my grandchildren on adventures
With Happy Meals and place-and-bakes
(A little burnt)
And piano tunes and ghost stories.
My name is Gangy
And I'm

Has it been eighty years?
The pain has numbed.
I can't see the faces around me,
But I feel their sadness.
I hear their murmurs.
"Not much longer," they say.
My name is Doris Rollins
Doris Cannon
Mama
Gangy
And I'm

Dying. But have I really died?
No, there's no getting rid of me that easily.
I'm in the written tale of Ava Gardner's life,
I'm in the 'margin release' key of a typewriter.
I'm in a theater's foundation
And an old purple piano's withering keys.
My name is Doris
And I'm still alive.

Future Bestseller! ENG 125 Award Winner- May Golla

"Your Paralysis"

"Schizophrenia. Accompanied by visual hallucinations, bipolar disorder and minor OCD. She *believes* she has sleep paralysis. Could be caused by narcolepsy or sleep apnea." My doctor read straight off the page. "However we haven't seen anything to prove the latter." Schizophrenia. I couldn't believe it. I'd been here for months and they still hadn't changed my diagnosis. They still didn't believe me. It wasn't hallucinations.

"So then when can she be released? We know her diagnosis, but is she getting any better?" My mother, a medical doctor in her own right, sat next to me in the glowing yellow office. Her hand was hot on my skin and I could feel beads of sweat pooling under her slowly aging palm. Dr. Jacobs, an unfortunately tall but hunched man, shuffled my papers into a neat little stack and sighed.

"Well, the medications we have her on currently only seem to heighten her disorder. Her claims of having sleep paralysis and her manic reactions seem to dissipate but her hallucinations only seem to worsen." Groaning, he twisted in his seat to file my papers in the cabinet behind him. Code 3149. His beer belly got in his way when he moved and he struggled to lean over even when standing. Squishing his stomach back under the table he continued to croak. "I think it would be best if we held her a little longer, just until we get everything sorted out with her meds."

"I'm not a schizo." It was mumbled, I didn't want them to hear me, I just wanted to be able to say it. But my mother gripped me harder, her heat burning my skin.

Pursing his thin lips, he shook his head, getting up and opening the door for my mother to leave, "We never said you were Dana. But until we get your meds sorted, we just want to keep

you somewhere safe for observation. Mrs. Edwin.” He gestured to the door, aggressively as if he was beginning to get upset by my mothers presence, her questions.

She gave me a tight hug before letting go, pushing blonde curls out of my eyes and then walked out with my doctor, leaving me alone in the jaundiced room. I could sometimes hear their whispers outside the room but I could never make out any of the words. Just a bunch of mumbles and my name and then more mumbling. The visit was short, but my mother seemed healthier since I’ve been gone which was a good sign. My father was always busy so I never got to see him. It’s been months since I’ve even heard his voice. But he was probably just waiting in the car.

~

Tripping every now and then on my oversized scrubs, Dr. Jacobs walked me back to my room. He ignored me mainly, opening my bedroom door and slamming it behind me without saying a word. Sad beige walls surrounded me, encompassing me in my disbelief. I lay back in my bed closing my eyes, images of my dreams, the monster with eyeless sockets and a long wide grin flashed through my brain until the screech of the door interrupted them. No knock meant that it was Mandi, and looking towards the door, I found I was right. She was a short girl, probably only hitting five foot two and her hip length brown hair and piercing blue eyes only made her look more childlike. Mandi was eighteen so only a year younger than me and she had been my roommate until my nightmares began to ruin any chances of curing her insomnia. Then she was moved. There were still two beds in my room even though I was the only one who slept here but her old bed was stripped of sheets and pillows. We sat in silence for a second, me staring at the ceiling and her staring at the bag she brought with her on her bare mattress until she broke the silence.

"So… your mom. Didn't know she was coming today." Her voice was sweet, childish and she fiddled with her fingers, peeling the skin around her nails until she bled. Something she was known for doing since she was the one with OCD. Not me.

"I didn't either." I pushed myself up and dangled my feet over the edge of the bed and she stopped picking, leaning towards me with her hands gripping the steel bar under the mattress.

"Well how'd it go?" Mandi was always curious, her parents never came to visit so she wanted to hear what it was like. It wasn't as good as she would like to think.

"It was okay. They still won't let me out even though-"

"Even though you've been faking?"

"Yeah, and they're still gaslighting my mother. For some reason they *think* I have all these disorders I know I don't have." They'd been mediating me for as long as I've been here and all of my symptoms, my hallucinations, my dreams. They've only gotten worse. From simply seeing my paralysis demon in the corner of my room while feeling pinned to my bed or watch him walk out of my mirror at home, now he comes straight for me, shaking me until I scream or taunting me with his awful smile from the ceiling.

"I know," She chuckled just barely, "we're not like the crazies. But are we still… you know?" She nodded toward the barred window. I could never open it, never feel the breeze.

"Yes."

For the past couple of weeks, we've been planning our escape. I had come to the realization one of the many nights after seeing my mother that I might not ever get out of here and after sharing my thoughts with my friends Mandi and Jim, they agreed and shared that they'd been plagued by the same unfortunate thoughts. Together, we hatched a plan to escape, an almost seamless plan and tonight was the night. October 31. Halloween.

~

As the festivities began in the Great Hall, painting pumpkins and watching Halloween cartoons, Mandi and I sat alone in the face painting corner on the east wall and watched the so-called crazies watch movies as I painted her face. She wanted to be a cracked doll, I tried my best to paint the black of the cracks and the overlaying white to make it pop realistically. When I was finished she did in fact look like a little cracked doll. She was wearing the matching costume since this was one of the only nights of the year we had the freedom to wear whatever we liked. Halloween, Christmas and our birthdays. That was it. Her white lacy dress looked like she had taken it right off of an obviously realistically sized but little girls porcelain doll. The pink trims matched the flush of her cheeks perfectly but clashed with the purple armchair she was sitting in and I had just finished painting her wrists and knees to look like ball joints when Jim walked up behind us.

“Hello Jim,” Mandi cooed. Getting up from her seat and spinning in a quick circle she asked, “How do you like my dress?”

“It's quite nice. Your makeup looks marvelous.” He gave her a hug and sat down beside me on the floor. I could feel his eyes scan my costume as he sat down but I paid him no mind.

“Why thank you, Dana did it. And she found my dress too.” She sat back down in her chair across from and smirked. I could feel my cheeks turn pink as I felt his attention turn towards me. Something she definitely meant to do. She had known for quite some time that Jim liked me. And similarly that I had liked him. Some late night conversation the two of them had around the same time Mandi and I shared a room and she had been trying to get us together since then. My nerves and focus on getting out of this place was more concerning to me than a relationship in this asylum, but it's not like he had made a move either.

“Well could you paint my face then? I was trying to be scary but all I ended up with was dark clothes.” His voice was softer than you’d imagine, still deep but kinder. He looked like he would be a horribly mean person but I guess his depression has made him more laid back. Mandi and Jim switched seats and she gave me a quick kiss on the cheek before skipping off towards the pumpkin painting area.

I nodded, still blushing, and scooted closer to the twenty year old boy. After painting his tan face white, slowly I began to outline the dark parts of his face. The cavity of his eyes, nose, cheeks. Filling them in to make him look like a skeleton. I scribbled some black on his ears to make them look interesting and then tried to paint his mouth and jowls to give him those skeleton teeth.

I was unaffected by the proximity, I was crushing on him sure and my hand was trembling definitely but other than that my face showed no concern. He on the other hand was fidgeting constantly. Pulling on his sleeves, his pants. I’d never seen him this anxious before. Maybe nervous. I couldn't tell anymore, any movement in this place, any sigh could be diagnosed as something.

“Dana-”

“Hush. You’re gonna ruin your makeup.” Jim closed his lips and looked towards the ceiling for a second before looking back down at me. I only held eye contact for a second but I could feel him staring. I finished the final touches of his mouth and neck and leaned back in my chair. “What's up?”

He looked at himself in the small mirror on the table beside us while I rummaged around with the paints. “Nice job, I look great.” He looks basically exactly as I had envisioned it.

“You always look great.” It slipped out but it was true. He was tall and strong and just always looked so put together even in our stupid gray scrubs.

“Thanks.” He pulled on his sleeves and smirked, obviously enjoying my compliment before looking back up at me. “Can I try to do yours? It won't be as good as mine or Mandi’s but I can try.” His voice was almost hushed by the end of his sentence, his brown eyes searching my face for an answer. And he found one. Smiling, he asked what I wanted to be.

“I want to be a clown. Try to match my costume.” I said pulling at my colorful ruffles.

“I’ll match it perfectly.” His dimples showed when he spoke and rolling my eyes, I let him try. Holding my chin with two fingers he swiped paint onto my cheeks and around my eyes and lips. He finished quickly, I mean he took his time but I guess he didn't do much because by the time Mandi made it back he was handing me the mirror. Blue shadow surrounded one eye and red surrounded the other. A red triangle pointed towards my smeared red lips under the blue eye and a blue swirl spun around my red eye. I was actually impressed by his work, one of my eye brows was now thin and bright white and my nose had a bright red circle on it. It was very clownish but it was still somehow pretty at the same time.

“Like it?” He had a serious look on his face but Mandi interrupted me before I could even get out an answer.

“She looks absolutely marvelous. Right Dana?”

Smiling, I agreed and we huddled back in our circle, Mandi sitting on the arm of his chair while I put the paints back in their box.

“So,” his voice was hushed as he leaned closer to me, his skull makeup creasing as his brows pressed together, “how exactly are we doing this?”

The only reason we chose today to escape was because security would be at an absolute minimum. Mandi has been here for years so she's seen the seasons come and go. According to her, security was low during holidays and one of these many hallways led to the basement. The basement had no cameras and the rooms had barless windows. The only thing we weren't sure of was whether or not those windows had alarms attached. Jim had found after one of our many scouting nights, that there was a door that led straight out of the hospital. An alarm wouldn't matter for that door, it's a straight shot to the grounds right by the weakest part of the fence. Something we forced one day during gardening. I managed to cut a hole near the bottom of the wire fence with my shears when one of the patients started throwing a fit. Something Mandi had created when she bribed one of the younger girls with some old dresses. The closest town besides Norristown, the town our hospital was in, was either West Norriton or Bridgeport. After some deep discussion a couple days ago, we decided to go with Bridgeport even though we had to cross the Schuylkill River to get there. They would never think we would try to go that way, cross a river. We'd be stupid to try that. That's what they'd think. And that was the plan.

"The North Wing leads to the basement." Mandi spoke quietly, almost too quiet to hear.

"How do you know this?"

"Well Jim, what did you think I was doing when I left the two of you love birds alone? I didn't run off to twiddle my thumbs, that's for sure."

"Guys hush. You need to be quieter than this." I hushed them and their expressions matched in distaste but they listened to me anyways. "At eleven fifty-five they're going to switch guards. We have a five minute gap before the next guard takes his spot so we have to move when the time hits. Okay?"

They nodded and looked left towards the big clock on the south wall. Eleven fifty-two. Three minutes. That's all we had. Luckily for Mandi and I, our rooms were in the North Wing so all we had to do was grab our packed bags. The North Wing and the East Wing were the female halls. North was for calmer disorders like insomnia, depression, anxiety, etc. They figured I was an insomniac at first so that's where they placed me. East was for disruptive disorders like schizophrenia, bipolar, tourettes and conduct disorders. The same was for the males so South was calmer disorders and West was disruptive disorders. This made it easier for patients with calmer personalities to stay calm. Keeps patients from triggering each other. Unfortunately, this meant that Jim was stuck in the South Wing.

"Jim, did you bring all that you needed or do you need to grab your stuff?" We never talked about what needed to be packed, that should've been something we discussed. I guess I just figured we'd all grab exactly what we needed. Now I was worried, I know I packed. I know Mandi packed, she dropped her bag on her old bed in my room. But did he?

"Yeah well I mean no. I brought everything I needed."

Mandi stared at him for a second before protesting. "What? Where'd you put it? All you're wearing is a leather jacket, an old band tee and some cargo pants. That's all you need?"

"Don't forget the boots."

"Yeah okay and some old work boots." She scoffed at me.

"I'm wearing everything I brought. I've got a good couple hundred bucks and my journal in my jacket. That's all I need."

"Ooookay. If you say so." Mandi was throwing a little bit more sass around than usual, but I'm just gonna blame nerves.

The clock was ticking and right as the clock hands hit eleven fifty-five, the guard in the North Wing entrance walked towards the West Wing doors. And right as he slipped through the doors, we left the Great Hall. We were quiet, Jim led the way. The only sound we made was the swishing of our ruffles and the soft thudding of his boots. Like mice. We were getting out tonight. My room was the thirteenth room on the left and slipping through my peeling green door, we locked ourselves inside.

“Are we changing?” Mandi was ruffling through her bag already and turned back to me holding her school track hoodie. I froze and turned to Jim who was standing by my bed.

“I’ll turn around.”

“Thank you.” My messenger bag was in the closet by Mandi’s bed and something I hadn’t packed were my chunky brown ankle boots. My mom had brought them for me a couple visits ago when she realized I probably wasn't coming home before the snow season. Good thing we came back first. I needed those. Stripping from my colored ruffles and leaving them on the floor, I pulled on an old pair of jeans that were two sizes too big for me and my dads vintage Penn State crew neck. It still smelled like him. I hadn’t worn it since I’ve been here.

Turning around I made eye contact with Jim's reflection in my window. His eyes turned back towards the wall as it clicked in my head what that meant. I wasn’t really sure how to feel. I liked him, sure, I was confused. If Mandi wasn’t here- but she was. My cheeks flushed with embarrassment but I went back to finish packing my bag and brought my stuff over to Mandi who had been ready longer than me. She was in baby blue leggings and her hoodie with the number five on the back in a deep blue. It matched her eyes beautifully. I’m surprised Jim wasn’t staring at her.

"Are we ready now?" I pulled my strap over my head, adjusting the bag behind my body. Mandi pulled her backpack on and nodded adjusting her hood, both of us turning to Jim. "Are we ready?"

He stared at me, through me. Seeing something besides what was in front of him. "Yeah I'm ready. Umm, yeah." He shook his head, snapping himself out of whatever trance he put himself under.

"Jim, are you good?" Mandi reached for him but he shook her off, heading for the door behind me.

"I'm fine. We need to go." As he passed me to unlock the door, he leaned into my hair and whispered, "I need to talk to you," then opened the door and led the way out.

I was thinking of what he might need to say to me. He was staring at me while I was changing. Or he just happened to look right as I turned around. But he was staring into me just a couple seconds later. What was he thinking? What did he see? The thought of it just made me more embarrassed. I couldn't even look up to see the back of his head, I just stared at his shoes.

Left. Right. Left. Right.

His black construction boots hit the ground with a thud every time. Mandi's ballet flats made no sound and my ankle boots squeaked slightly as the heel moved on my foot.

Right. Left. Right.

He stopped in his tracks right before we made it to the connecting passageway, leaving me with a face full of his jacket as I bumped into him. Mandi almost bumped into me, I could feel her little shoes gently bump the back of my heel but she was so delicate on her feet. She barely touched me.

I could hear the jingling of keys coming towards us, I guess Jim heard it first. Mandi grunted and began to mumble something under her breath but Jim shushed her and pushed us into the nearest room. He turned the lock behind us and flipped off the lights, pressing his ear against the door, listening for following steps. I pulled Mandi towards the back, there was a closet right beside the big desk we could hide in. A filing cabinet caught my eye in the back right corner and looking at the desk, I could see family pictures of what looked like Dr. Jacobs and his kids. Looking around, I realized what color the walls were and I shuffled over and pulled Jim away from the door.

"This is The Office!" I tried to stay hushed but I could hear the jingling get closer and the realization that this might be the end of our escape came crashing in. He shook his head and scrunched his shoulders as if to say *what do you mean?* Then the realization seemed to hit him, his eyes widened and he pulled me towards the back wall. Mandi was already hiding in the closet, the doors closed just as we slid under the desk. Just as the door knob rattled behind us. We could hear a muffled exchange and the door rattled again, a light passing through the window before the jingling and footsteps left back towards where we came.

My eyes focused on the filing cabinet and as soon as Jim released his hold on my arm, I raced over and tried my code. 3149. It clicked and slid open and rifling through the letter organizers, I found my name. Edwin. And not much more flipping later I found Jim's. Gaine.

"What are you doing?" Mandi's doll face peered over my shoulder as I handed her the files in my hands. "Where's mine?"

"I don't know. I'm looking." I rifled through the entire alphabet in the cabinet and couldn't find anything that resembled Mandi Owens. Not anything close. "You try. Mandi, I can't find anything."

“I need to talk to you real quick.” Jim whispered as he pulled me aside to let Mandi rifle through the files. He had gotten our files back from her somehow and was holding them loosely. I shoved them into my bag quickly before we could do anything to lose them. I needed to know what they said.

“What? What is it?” I paused and waited for him but he seemed to be searching for the words. “I saw you. Staring at me. Why?” I could feel heat coming from his palm onto my waist. Just holding it there, unmoving. Protectively almost.

“I saw something in the reflection. You-you have night terrors?” I nodded and he copied my nod, staring behind me. “Sleep paralysis. Dana.. what does it look like?”

“What does what look like? My demon?” Now he nodded, still staring behind me. I could hear Mandi muttering before us, cursing her nonexistent file. “It's just gray. Long. Holes for eyes. A wide smile all the way to where his ears should be.” I traced my face where the demon's smile would be. “Why?”

“I could see its reflection in the mirror. He was standing behind you, well beside you. You were in between it and me. And it was just smiling, staring at me. His head cocked to the side just a little.”

I stared at him for a second. He was looking at me now, his eyes full of worry. I was confused. It was my demon. My demon. No one else can see it. That would mean I’m not crazy. That would mean I was right. It’s not hallucinations. But he's lying. He has to be. I shoved his chest pushing him away from me, his fingers tightening on my waist before slipping as he backed away. “I don’t believe you.”

“You don’t have to.” He turned to Mandi, pulling her away from the cabinet and started for the door. “Are you coming?” It was directed towards me but I didn’t respond. I just followed

them out the door. Mandi continued muttering as we made it through the last hallway and to the basement stairs. The darkness swallowed the staircase and it made me dizzy just looking at it.

"Well," Jim held open the squeaky door, "here goes." We stepped into the darkness, our footsteps slowly echoing on the steps. Mandi stopped behind us, searching herself for something as she cursed again. We were only a few steps ahead of her, but we could only see her silhouette from the light given by the door. She felt so far away.

"Mandi, what is it?" I asked.

"My bag. I forgot my bag in the room." I froze in place, we were halfway there, we couldn't go back now. Jim's hand felt for my bag, found it and held on tight. He might've had the same thought as me. "I'm going back. You guys wait here, everyones going to be in the Great Hall now. I'll be quick." Jim tried to dissuade her, but she stuck to it. I was in a daze. The room felt cold, the hairs on the back of my neck prickled. Just standing. That's all I could do. She wouldn't let him come, she wouldn't stay. I heard the door creak open and shut behind her and we were stuck back in the darkness.

"If she's not back in five minutes, we need to keep going."

"What?" I couldn't believe he just said that.

"We can't wait here forever. We'll get caught."

I didn't respond. I knelt down to the floor and sat there for a while. My hair was still standing on edge and lowering myself to the floor only made me more dizzy. I swayed, back and forth, right and left trying to soothe myself in some way other than screaming or running away. Mandi was my best friend. I couldn't leave without her. My head bumped Jim's knee as I swayed and I left it there. He leaned down next to me, ruffling my hair with his hand. The closeness was nice. He was nice. The proximity, the warmth. It was dark so he couldn't see my face but from

the burn in my cheeks, I swore I was beet red under my makeup. He pulled me closer into him, his leather jacket cool on my cheek and I could feel his hand reach for mine as we heard a shriek coming from below us.

~

We were running now. Running towards the cries. Praying it wasn't Mandi. But I knew it was. Jim was pulling me along, his ringed fingers crushing my hand That's all I could pay attention to. The thudding of my bag on my hip, the echo of our steps, the sting of my squished fingers. The screams got louder as we reached the basement. There were two rooms down here and a hallway. The hallway led to our freedom. One of the rooms had a window that led to our freedom. And one of the rooms was a storage space. Her screams were coming from storage.

Jim turned to me, kissed my forehead before pulling us closer to the cries. The door was open wide, red flames lit up the entrance and we could hear chants coming from inside. There were five people huddling in a circle around a star, cloaked in red and black. Leading the chants, twisting in place was an unfortunately tall but hunched over man with a beer belly too big for him to carry. Inside the star lay Mandi, red soiling her blue jacket. A knife in her chest, she was limp. No cries escaped her anymore. A lifeless porcelain doll.

I gasped, covering my mouth with my sleeve and bit down to cover my cries. Jim pulled me close to him as Dr. Jacobs looked in our direction. Squeezing my arm he pointed up. Gray and dark covered the ceiling, but it was fluid. Moving, like a portal. I stared at it, mesmerized by the movement. I could feel it staring back at me. Holes for eyes, and a cheshire smile. He was staring back at me. The gray, the fluid darkness were our demons. The ceiling was covered in them, hundreds of fiends littering the top of the room.

Dr. Jacobs pointed to us, a file in his hand, and muttered something I couldn't understand. Jim was pulling on me now, trying to get us to the door that led outside but I couldn't move. Mandi was dead. He was holding her file. The man who ran this place, who medicated us. He killed her. The other four cloaked figures turned towards us, the demons slinking down the walls to stand behind them. Slime dripped from the ceiling where they hung before, landing in thick black puddles on the floor beside them.

They were moving closer, slowly. One step at a time and Jim was pulling on me again. Tugging me forward with him, he was saying something I couldn't hear but it was urgent. I knew that. My steps felt slow, I couldn't scream, my legs moved like I was running in water. Slowly, sluggish. The hallway felt long, the door was right there and still so far away. The demons switched paces and slammed into the hallway wall behind us. Moving almost in slow motion, I could see almost every drop of slime fall as I turned around. And then we were through the door. He pulled me through and shut it behind us, slamming the outside lock shut and then pushed us to the fence. It scratched at my face and clothes as I slipped through, Jim following behind me almost getting stuck in the chain links. And then he was through, and he was standing before me flushed, makeup smeared, his arms outstretched to me. We made it. Freedom.

~

I don't know how long we ran for, and when we popped out of the woods we had no idea where we were. But there was a bus stop, a place to sit, and so we did. My head was in my hands, elbows to knees and the air was so cold in my lungs it almost burned.

"Hey, Dana." Jim was rubbing my back, trying to soothe my breathing. "We're okay now. It's okay." I wanted to push him away. It was in fact not fine, but I knew he was trying to comfort me so I left it alone.

“We need to get to Schuylkill River. Where are we?” Tires squealed to a stop in front of us as Jim’s hand moved to my shoulder and looking up I saw my moms blue honda. Standing up to get a closer look, the window rolled down and I could see my father in the driver's seat. He was alone in the car. “Dana, do you know him?”

“Dad?”

“Hey cutie. Nice sweater.”

“Dad!” Smiling, he popped open the passenger door and I ran over. “Tell your friend to hop in the back.”

“Jim,” I walked over and pulled on his sleeve, “Jim, it's my dad. We’re safe. He’ll take us home.” He was staring at the car, staring through the car.

“I don’t trust this, Dana. I don’t like it.” But he grabbed my hand anyway and I pulled him to the car.

“It’ll be okay. We’re safe now.” I got in the car as Jim’s door closed behind him and my dad gave me a tight hug as soon as I sat down. His beard had grown long since I last saw him along with his hair. His dark brown curls began to compete with mine for length. “Dad, what are you doing here?” I asked as he pulled away.

“I just went for a drive. I always go for a drive on Sundays.” Sunday? Halloween was on Friday. That would mean that two days passed. That wasn’t right. It was just beginning to get light out, a soft blue glow in the sky as we drove.

“Are we going back to mom?” He turned on his signal and didn’t respond. “Dad, where are we going?”

“We’re going home, cutie.” He looked at Jim in the rearview mirror. I bet we looked like a mess with our Halloween makeup still on. He opened the glove compartment as he turned and handed me a little container. “Wipes.” That's all he said.

I handed a wipe back to Jim and used one on myself. I flipped the mirror down to see if I missed anything and scrubbed the rest of the colors of my face. Jim held his hand out next to my head for another one and I handed the rest of the wipes to him. I didn’t need any more, I’m sure he needed tons. I analyzed my face in the mirror, I had scratches all along my cheeks and jaw from the chain fence, my eyes were a little bloodshot and the bags under my eyes were as big as ever. But I still had my gap tooth. So that was great.

Jim had similar scratches on his face but his scratches stretched along his neck as well. I turned around to see him and held out my hand for him to squeeze. He did and I turned around still holding his hand. The road twisted and turned through northern woods. Similar woods that we would take to get to my house.

“So you my girls boyfriend or something?” He gave Jim a quick glance in the mirror and kept on down the road.

“No sir. No, I’m- I’m just a friend.” He was blushing, which made his words less believable.

“Sure, kid. Sure.” He kept driving, twisting and turning down the lane when Jim kicked my seat. I turned back and he let go of my hand, pulling something out from under my chair.

“What's that?” I whispered, my dad seemed disinterested but a little smile crept onto his face.

“I’m not sure. It’s stuck on my boot.” He tugged on it some more and it let loose of whatever it was stuck on under my chair. He held a deep red fabric in his hands. It looked familiar. It was familiar. Jim looked up at me horrified. The same expression I was wearing.

“Dad? What is that?” He shook his head smiling. Like we found presents early before our birthday.

“Well cutie, I was in a bit of a rush earlier. Couldn’t fold it up nice.”

“I told you. Dana, I said it didn’t feel right.” His soft voice was hushed now, terrified. His brown eyes searched me for an answer before darting to the door knob. I didn’t have one and the door was locked. We were trapped again.

“Dad, I don’t understand.” We turned onto a gravel path leading us deeper into the woods. I could see the hospital in the distance, getting closer and closer. And I froze. I couldn’t move, couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t think. I was stuck, again, paralyzed. Without my demon. I could hear Jim yelling behind me, trying to get answers out of my father but he wasn’t giving any. As we pulled up to the asylum, I realized I spoke too soon.

“Everything will make sense soon enough. Don’t worry.” He parked and opened his door, giving me a little wink. Jim started shaking when he left, trying to wake me from my immobility. But it was no use. I couldn’t move a finger let alone get up from my seat. Dr. Jacobs opened my door and pulled me out, carrying me in his arms as my father yanked Jim out from the back. The other three people were standing in front of the building and I recognized them as other nurses that had dealt with me and Mandi. Dr. Jacobs readjusted me in his arms and I got a view of the hospital windows, I could see my barred window. Mandi’s little flower origami hanging on the bars and inside my room, staring out at me was gray. Jim forced his way to my arm and gasped

when he saw my window. Eyeless sockets and a long smile, head cocked just a little to the side. Then it waved, and we were back inside.

Honorable Mentions

In My Experience ENG 111 Honorable Mention- Fatou Diallo

"Should I Go Back to College in my 30s or Did I Miss the Boat?"

I had a lot of doubts about quitting my job to go to college and obtain my degree, a long overdue goal of mine, especially as an older student. The internal dialogue included questions like: am I smart enough for college? Is it worth quitting a job that pays a decent paycheck in a tough economy and has a lot of flexibility? Is a college degree even worth much anymore in this advanced technological world we are in? What if I fail? Despite all these doubts, I decided to register and try it out, and on August 15th at 10 am, I was sitting in my very first college class after more than a decade of having graduated high school. It was both exhilarating and nerve-racking. I not only survived the first day, but these three weeks have been the most impactful experience of my life. I have gained insights I could not imagine were possible with only three weeks, and I look forward to the rest of the semester and journey ahead. Going back to college has improved my time management, enhanced my self-advocacy, and helped me to conquer my fear of failure.

One of the main ways going back to college impacted me was being forced to improve my time management skills. One of the requirements as a student who wants to transfer to a four-year university is to take the College Transfer Success course. One of the skills we are learning in this class is time management. This class highlights the importance of a teacher in learning time management skills. I have read a ton of books and watched YouTube videos on time management, and none of those were able to help me understand the concept in a way that would make them practical. I was merely consuming the information. Having the teacher there to answer questions and clarify how to set and execute goals utilizing the SMART goal

planning model has helped me recognize areas where I was going wrong, such as differentiating outcome from process goals. Specifically, this ensures I not only create outcomes goals, but I also create a separate list of at least three to five objectives of how I plan to achieve my goals also known as the process goals. Another way my time management has improved is by utilizing a physical calendar to keep track of not only school assignments but also all appointments. This method has been useful in identifying any scheduling conflicts that need to be addressed with my teachers. The examples above illustrate how my time management has improved because of going back to college.

Going back to college also taught me to advocate for myself. When I started struggling with my precalculus class, I decided to go to the tutoring center. At first, I decided I would go two days a week, Monday and Wednesday. It was fine initially, and then, I realized I had more success with some tutors than others. On the days I would go, I started getting paired up with a tutor I did not find a lot of success with. I did not want to "complain," so I kept going despite little to no improvement. After the second week and being on the verge of failing my upcoming math test, I decided enough was enough. I spoke to the tutor I had the most success with and explained my concern, and to my surprise, it was well received. Another way going to college helped me learn to prioritize my needs is when I had to address an issue with the financial aid office. After being denied financial aid, I realized the application did not take certain factors into consideration; specifically, I realized the application was considering past finances and not my current financial situation. After I explained my situation to the financial aid office, I was provided with documentation that would allow me to modify the original application to take my current financial situation into consideration. Instead of delaying this process, I insisted on completing the required documentation in the financial aid office so if questions arose, I could

ask them. After a week, I followed up to check the status. This situation made me realize the importance of speaking up as a critical step towards success in college. The points above illustrate how going back to college helped me in being more vocal about my needs.

In addition to improving my time management skills and advocating for myself, I also had to overcome my fear of failure, which going back to college enabled me to do. I did not realize how my fear of failure was preventing me from learning. One of the skills I had a lot of doubt about was my writing. I came to this country when I was 11 years old. I took ESL but really struggled in school, taking both regular and English classes and always feeling behind. I had the most challenges with grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. When I would say a word and a native speaker could not understand me, I would be mortified, and it intensified my smallness. These insecurities delayed me from taking on the challenge of going back to college. I kept reminding myself how I barely survived high school and that college would be much worse. I was good with other languages and math and leaned on that to boost my confidence. I am currently taking English 111 and the support course English 011, and we have a lot of assignments geared towards improving our writing skills. I am not only passing these classes but am excelling with an A in both. Experiencing success in these classes and applying these skills in my other courses where a high level of writing is required is really shifting my mindset. Experiencing success in this way has improved my confidence and empowered me to look at challenges as opportunities for learning.

Before taking on the challenge of going back to college, I still struggled with time management, self-advocacy, and fear of failure, but after only three weeks of being in college, all these areas of my life have improved tremendously. Sooner or later, we will be faced with having to manage multiple conflicting priorities and will need the magic that time management has to

reduce being overwhelmed. Similarly, challenges in life will require us to advocate for ourselves in order to improve our circumstances. If we do not learn the two previous skills, we will be faced with failure repeatedly until we learn. Finally, we encounter obstacles that require us to look failure in the face and decide if we have the resilience to try again and again until we succeed. Learning these skills under the guidance of experts is imperative not only to succeed in college but beyond.

In My Experience ENG 111 Honorable Mention- Brandon Fender

"The Evolution of My Family"

"Family" can often be described as "complicated" even when formed in a typical, loving, nurturing environment. "Hardship," "isolation," "relief," and "belonging" are among many descriptors I would personally assign to the word "family" as I reflect on what it came to represent in my life. As I changed and evolved through different stages of my life, so did the meaning of family and those I consider a part of it. It originated from a cold definition of blood ties and somewhat begrudging tolerance to a bulwark against despair and a foundation for forming new bonds. I am far from being unique in this mindset, but hopefully, I can illuminate how this came to be true for me. "Family," in my eyes, gradually evolved and shifted focus from the "traditional family" to the "found family" and, finally, to the "partnership."

The traditional family, mainly consisting of the immediate members I grew up with, had been a source of hardship and isolation for much of my time with them. My biological father was a child predator whom almost everyone gladly all but forgot. In his place came my stepfather, although not nearly as abhorrent, who had been a point of contention through much of my developmental years. His methods of discipline on two occasions left me unconscious, but generally consisted of a near-constant belittling of anything he saw to be outside the norm of a heterosexual, masculine male. This harassment occurred despite bringing home girlfriends and included his referring to one named "Lauren" as "Warren" to her face repeatedly whenever he saw her. This relationship at the time had also tainted my connection with my mother and brother, as I perceived one as an enabler and the other as "getting it easy," not understanding the problematic but different treatment he also received. My primary coping strategy in dealing with this had been to isolate myself in my room or walk miles through the woods until I eventually

left for the military. I left this traditional view of family in pursuit of a community of friends who could better understand me.

My time in the Air Force was instrumental in finding those I would include in my found family once I left my childhood home. Many of the friends I made are still very present in my life 11 years later and helped mold me into a much better person. Several of the behaviors I exhibited in high school were self-destructive and bigoted, stemming from the dogmatic teaching a small mountain town instilled in me. Exposure to a much larger pool of people with different beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences helped me develop an open mind and deprogrammed some of my worst traits. I spent so much time with these friends that they soon became my family. I would work alongside them every day and then spend the nights playing games with them and their kids, drinking and talking about life, and going on long-distance trips across the desert. Later, these friends would also stand beside me at my wedding; one went on to be my best man, another was the officiant, and both invited my wife and I to live with their families when we faced near financial disaster. The trust and compassion I gained through this found family served me in eventually building a healthy and supportive partnership with my wife.

I found partnership when I met the one person I knew I could relate to more than any other, far beyond a simply romantic relationship. My partner is my wife, whom I met in high school, and we developed together as people as I went through my enlistment and she pursued her education. We married after six years of a mostly long-distance relationship where we talked daily to encourage and support each other. My wife is the one person I can genuinely say knows everything about me and accepts me without question or judgment. I take pride in every success she accomplishes and am willing to sacrifice to ensure she meets her goals, as she does for me in return. I left the military to be close to her, and she moved away from the coast so I could pursue

more employment opportunities in the city. This decision was difficult at the time because my wife just graduated with a bachelor's degree in marine biology, and leaving could potentially limit her job prospects. I see her as my partner not only because of the societal norms that bind us, but because I see her as an extension of myself as we weather life together.

Family is a strange admixture of individuals coalesced by genetics, shared experiences, and feelings of interdependence. I learned over many years that family, like the symbolic tree that organizes it, requires careful pruning to maintain the health of the whole. I realized I am not beholden to anyone who would denigrate or impede me from obtaining happiness. Instead, I am only responsible to those who show me the same compassion and commitment I provide them. It is often conventional wisdom that family trees should grow as tall and wide as possible, with innumerable branches pointing in every direction. However, I believe a family should evolve into something like a bonsai: compact, well-cultivated, hardy, and surrounded only by that which helps keep it upright. After being plucked out of the harsh environment of my childhood, I found myself being tended to by those who took the time to understand me. I can only hope that those who also struggle to define "family" receive the same kindness and fortune.

In My Evaluation ENG 111 Award Winner- Gregory Spencer

"Rolling for Influence: Dungeon & Dragon's Journey to Mainstream Success"

Once considered a niche pastime, Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) has experienced a significant revival, capturing the attention of a much wider audience. Small cultural moments have brought D&D to mainstream audiences. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, explores how small actions can lead to massive shifts in cultural trends. Gladwell's theory underscores how niche ideas transform into mainstream movements when the right combination of factors occurs. This transformation is reflected in the rise of *Critical Role*, a web series that has captivated millions, turning D&D from a cult favorite to a prominent form of entertainment. In "How Critical Role Helped Spark a Dungeons & Dragons renaissance," Sarah Whitten, a *CNBC* writer, explains how *Critical Role* helped D&D become a "pop culture zeitgeist." The resurgence of Dungeons & Dragons into mainstream culture exemplifies Malcolm Gladwell's theory of the tipping point, where contagiousness, small causes like media endorsements, and the COVID-19 pandemic functioned as the tipping point that transformed the game into a cultural phenomenon.

Dungeons & Dragons' contagious rise to mainstream popularity was fueled by ease of access and the sense of community fostered through online platforms. Gladwell asserts that contagiousness occurs when small actions lead to significant cultural shifts, much like a virus (10). Online communities built around platforms like Twitch and YouTube made D&D more accessible by simplifying the learning curve and creating shared spaces for engagement. Online platforms also provided a space for continuous interaction between content creators and fans, making the experience more personal and dynamic. The *LA Times* article "Turning to Dungeons & Dragons to Escape a Real-Life Monster — COVID-19," written by Sarah Parvini, explains

that D&D's appearance on *Stranger Things* and its growing presence on online platforms lowered barriers to entry, allowing audiences to immerse themselves more easily in the game. Online series like *Critical Role* further strengthened this sense of community, bringing millions of fans together (Whitten). The ongoing engagement between viewers and streamers created a feedback loop, where fans could influence the content, fostering an even deeper connection with the game. As D&D became more accessible through these online platforms, it also became a social event that people could share, fostering deeper connections among prospective players. This shared sense of community played a crucial role in spreading D&D's contagion, priming a large audience to be receptive to small causes like celebrity endorsements and media attention.

The accumulation of small, seemingly insignificant moments — celebrity endorsements and viral content — set off a domino effect that ultimately led to D&D's explosive growth. Celebrity endorsements, such as Stephen Colbert, Deborah Ann Woll, and Vin Diesel openly sharing their love for the game, helped dismantle the perception of D&D as a niche or "geek" pastime (Whitten). By simply sharing their passion, these public figures broadened D&D's appeal, signaling to new audiences that it was accessible and enjoyable for all. Furthermore, online platforms like Twitch and YouTube became hubs for "actual play" content, where shows like Critical Role gained massive followings beginning in 2015, transforming casual interest into widespread enthusiasm. Marisha Ray, a member of *Critical Role*, recalls realizing the show's broader fanbase when a signing at a comic-book store in New York drew a line around the block, instead of the expected twenty or thirty people (Whitten). As Gladwell explains, these small causes combine to have massive impact, each action or event contributing to a cultural tipping point. The accumulation of endorsements, media appearances, and viral moments illustrates how D&D's resurgence is a clear case of small actions having outsized effects, propelling the game

into mainstream culture. Each minor moment contributed to the broader cultural shift, aligning with Gladwell's theory that small causes have outsized impacts. *Critical Role's* growing popularity, especially during the second campaign, set the stage for D&D's tipping point. As these influences built momentum, D&D was primed for a breakthrough. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, *Critical Role's* popularity surged even further, pushing D&D into the spotlight. This moment, driven by cultural shifts during the lockdown, marked the true tipping point that catapulted D&D into mainstream culture.

The tipping point for Dungeons & Dragons can be pinpointed to the unprecedented popularity of *Critical Role's* second campaign, which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and marked a significant shift in public interest. Gladwell describes a tipping point as the moment when a trend suddenly explodes into mainstream awareness (4-5), and this moment for D&D occurred as people turned to long-form digital content during lockdowns. With over 213 episodes of content available, each three to four hours long, *Critical Role* became a major source of entertainment during the pandemic, attracting both long-time fans and newcomers seeking community during isolation (Whitten; Parvini). The vast availability of content online amplified D&D's reach, while also providing fresh players with cultural permission to explore the game. As reported by the Centers for Disease Control, states like New York and Ohio began announcing lockdowns on March 15 to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the day after a Google trend analysis showed that D&D experienced its highest search volume to date (Whitten). Parvini explains that as lockdowns rolled out globally, platforms like Roll20 were inundated with new account requests—mistakenly believed to be denial-of-service attacks—reflecting the tidal wave of mainstream awareness. D&D offered a creative outlet for people with newfound free time, while also facilitating social connection during a time of distancing. This surge of public

engagement illustrates how small causes, such as viral campaigns and accessible media, culminated in a tipping point, as defined by Gladwell. As the combination of *Critical Role's* expansive content and the cultural shifts driven by the pandemic pushed D&D into the spotlight, it became clear that these small influences—celebrity endorsements, media coverage, and accessible platforms—converged to trigger a lasting cultural transformation. This rise to mainstream status illustrates not only D&D's resurgence but also the enduring impact of social phenomena on cultural trends.

Dungeons & Dragons' journey from a niche hobby to a mainstream cultural phenomenon showcases the power of small, seemingly insignificant actions converging into transformative change. The rise of *Critical Role*, media exposure, and celebrity endorsements each played a vital role in spreading interest, while the COVID-19 pandemic functioned as the tipping point, catapulting D&D to new heights. Gladwell's theory of the tipping point perfectly captures this moment, as the right combination of influences turned D&D into a global trend. Moreover, D&D became a source of community and connection during a time of global isolation. Lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic separated people from physical gatherings, but platforms like Roll20 and Twitch allowed D&D to transcend that isolation. Dungeons & Dragons, like most other games, is determined by rules and calculated interactions, but these limits do not tell the story. The creativity and exploration allowed between the lines are key ingredients for contagious excitement that spreads the love for the game. As players craft their own adventures, characters, and worlds, D&D becomes more than just a game – it is collective storytelling experiences that foster personal growth and meaningful connections. This freedom to create, coupled with the shared bond of community, has kept the game thriving for decades, transcending the tabletop and entering the digital and cultural mainstream. D&D's journey from obscurity to cultural

phenomenon is a testament to the power of imagination, collaboration, and the unique ability of games to bring people together in ways that extend far beyond entertainment. In a world that continues to evolve, D&D remains a reminder that stories, whether shared around table or streamed across the globe, have the power to unite, inspire, and transform.

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In My Evaluation ENG 111 Award Winner- Brynn Munro

A Comparison of KFC and Pampers Commercials

What could Kentucky Fried Chicken's "Finger Licking" commercial and Pampers' "Pooface" commercial possibly have in common? KFC is a fast food restaurant famous for its fried chicken, whereas Pampers is a popular brand of baby diapers. These commercials depict completely different subject matters and are advertising totally unrelated products. At first glance, these two commercials seem to have little to nothing in common with each other. However, there are actually several subtle similarities between the two. The overarching theme that can be identified is how both commercials depict a seemingly crude and unsophisticated subject matter in a humorous way. This sense of humor is achieved through the use of contrasts between what is shown in the commercials and the common subject matter that they both center on. Even though the KFC and Pampers commercials are advertising completely different products, they both invoke humor through contrasts in the music played, the serious slow-motion shots, and the dramatic close-ups of faces.

One of the ways in which these two commercials invoke humor is through the sharp contrast between their subject matter and choice of music. In the KFC commercial, the music playing in the background is Fredrick Chopin's "Nocturne in E-Flat Major" ("Finger Licking"). Chopin is famous for his nocturnes, and this is probably one of his most famous. However, even if someone has never heard this piece before, it immediately conveys a sense of peace and beauty. The way the melody rises and falls and the laid-back tempo of the piece fills someone with calmness. It is a very elegant piece, played on a very beautiful instrument, the piano. As a result, one would expect this piece to accompany a very beautiful and elegant scene, perhaps of the beach or of mountains. Instead, it is used as the background music for a KFC commercial

that shows people eating fried chicken and licking their fingers (“Finger Licking”). Licking fingers is something that is traditionally viewed as crude and uncultured, and certainly far from elegant or beautiful. This creates a noticeable contrast between the music and the subject matter in the commercial; a contrast that is so extreme that it is humorous and makes the viewer smile. This sense of humor through contrast is unbroken throughout the whole commercial. No one speaks at all during the commercial, and the final words “It’s good” appear just as the music is coming to a resolution, where the music feels complete and satisfied (“Finger Licking”). The elegant music contrasted with the crude behavior of licking fingers creates a sense of humor that is meant to move the viewer to want to buy their food.

The humorous contrast between the music and the subject matter is also present in the Pampers commercial. The piece featured in this commercial is “Also Sprach Zarathustra” by Richard Strauss, which was also featured in *A Space Odyssey* (“Pampers”). This piece is not as calm and elegant as Chopin’s nocturne; rather, it is exciting and dramatic. The changing pace of the melody and the amount of sound the piece creates invokes a feeling of suspense and drama. It seems like a good choice for an action movie, like *A Space Odyssey*, or a scene with a lot of suspense and action. However, in this commercial, it is used to accompany a video of babies pooping (“Pampers”). This is absolutely not something that would be considered suspenseful or dramatic; instead, it is viewed as crude and even gross. Just like in the KFC commercial, the dynamic contrast between the exciting, dramatic music and the common, gross action of pooping creates a strong sense of humor that causes the viewer to laugh. In the Pampers commercial, this sense of humor is also unbroken; no one speaks, and the message at the end is conveyed through on-screen text at a resolution point in the music. Again, the Pampers commercial achieves a

sense of humor through the contrast between the dramatic music and the gross behavior of pooping.

Another contrast used to create humor in these commercials is the way that they are filmed in slow motion. In the KFC commercial, the viewer watches in slow-motion as someone slowly licks their fingers after eating their fried chicken ("Finger Licking"). Traditionally, slow-motion shots are used to emphasize an important action or event, and they often look slow and serious. The seriousness that slow-motion shots create is a great element to contrast with the trivial, unimportant action of licking fingers. Because the KFC commercial is filmed in slow motion, it connects a sense of seriousness to a subject that is not serious, creating a contrast that gives the commercial a sense of humor.

The Pampers commercial uses this way of contrast as well. It is also filmed in slow motion, even more than the KFC commercial. The video slowly pans from one pooping baby to another, lingering on each of them as they make weird faces and expressions ("Pampers"). The clever utilization of slow motion to film one of the most unserious daily occurrences is another way that contrasts are used to create a sense of humor. Even the extent of the slow-motion filming contributes to this humor; the significant amount of time spent showing each face makes it seem even more serious, but the trivialness of the subject quickly transforms this feeling into humor.

A final way that contrasts are used to create humor in these two commercials is how each commercial is simply a serial repetition of close-up shots of faces. The KFC commercial is a series of adult faces, all engaged in the same activity ("Finger Licking"). If the video had simply featured the whole person rather than just their face, the message would still have been clear; everyone is enjoying this fried chicken and licking their fingers. However, this commercial takes

it a step further and focuses only on each person's face. A person's face is probably the biggest indicator of how that person is feeling, so filming different people's faces in succession gives the idea of the common sense of enjoyment that they are experiencing. This series of close-up shots of faces combined with the slow-motion filming creates a dramatic atmosphere, which contrasts with the crude, boring act of licking fingers to further the humorous nature of the commercial. The Pampers commercial expands the technique of repetition of close-ups of faces even further. Babies are known to make interesting faces while pooping, and they are often very funny. The Pampers commercial includes close-up shots of ten different pooping babies' faces in succession ("Pampers"). This fills the commercial with a wide variety of funny faces and expressions that make the viewer smile. Like the KFC commercial, the slow-motion filming of each of these babies' faces makes each face look overly dramatic, when in reality, there is nothing dramatic about the babies at all. This contrast between the dramatic atmosphere and the unimportant action of babies pooping is yet another technique that is used to create a sense of humor in the commercial.

Although there may not be any obvious similarities between KFC's "Finger Licking" commercial and Pampers' "Pooface" commercial, a deeper examination reveals hidden similarities that connect them in a unique way. A common theme of humor through contrasts connects them to each other, even if it is not apparent at first. The different elements in the commercials, namely the music, slow-motion filming, and close-ups of faces, all contrast with the crude or insignificant subject matters of each. Perhaps an analysis of how other commercials or videos are subtly connected will help connections of other elements in daily life. Or maybe, at the end of the day, the common end goal of the commercials, to sell their products, is sufficient to connect these two seemingly unrelated items together.

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In My Informed Opinion ENG 111 Award Honorable Mention- Brynn Munro

"Gone for Good? The Importance of the Endangered Species Act in Today's Society"

Tigers, aye-ayes, whales, butterflies, condors — what do these invertebrates and vertebrates, mammals, and birds, have in common? They are all classified as endangered species, which means that they are at a high risk of becoming extinct, of being wiped out from the earth forever. Because of the increasing importance of the preservation of endangered species, several legislations have been created to help protect them. One of these legislations, the Endangered Species Act, "is arguably the world's strongest biodiversity protection law" (Mothes et al.). The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is a piece of legislation that aims to protect endangered species of both plants and animals and help them recover. It was enacted by President Nixon on December 28, 1973, acting as "the stronger [environmental protection] law he sought" (Bean), and it has been in place ever since. Although it does face opposition from critics who say that it hinders economic growth and is not effective in its efforts to protect endangered species, the good results of the ESA outweigh its potential disadvantages, and changes to some ESA policy and funding could overcome these problems. Despite the opposition the ESA faces and the changes that could improve it, the ESA has numerous benefits, as it protects endangered species from becoming extinct, helps endangered species recover, and promotes public awareness.

One of the main jobs of the ESA is to enact legislation to protect endangered species from becoming extinct and helping to preserve essential species and biodiversity. This is an essential task, because once a species goes extinct, it cannot be brought back. To help prevent the extinction of species, the ESA created a list that includes endangered species that run a risk of extinction. These "listed" species receive special attention and protection under the ESA to prevent them from becoming extinct. Species can be delisted, or removed from the list, for

several reasons, including extinction and recovery. If they are removed because of extinction, that means that they are no longer existing and therefore cannot benefit from the ESA's protection. In its efforts to prevent species extinction, "the ESA has been successful" (Greenwald et al.) As of 2008, 35 years after the ESA was enacted, it "was estimated to have prevented the extinction of at least 227 species." In 2019, 45 years after its enactment, it "ha[d] prevented the extinction of roughly 291 species." Since the ESA's protection of endangered species began, only five species have been confirmed as extinct (Greenwald et al.). In fact, numerous organizations, including the World Wildlife Fund, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), all agree on the fact that the ESA has saved 99% of listed species from extinction.

Some notable examples of species that would likely have gone extinct without the ESA's protection include the bald eagle and American alligators. Before the ESA, in the mid-1900s, the bald eagle was in danger of extinction due to habitat destruction, illegal shooting, and pesticides like DDT in their food source. However, partly because of "habitat protection afforded by the ESA, … they were removed from the list of endangered species in 2007" ("Celebrating"). American alligators were "listed as endangered in 1967 (under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966, a predecessor to the ESA)." With the help of ESA protections, the American alligator "was removed from the list … in 1987" ("Celebrating"). The bald eagle and the American alligator are just two of the many endangered species that have recovered with the help of the ESA's protection.

As can be seen from the examples of species that have been saved from extinction, the ESA not only protects species from becoming extinct, but it also helps endangered species recover, ensuring both the species's safety and the safety of the species that rely on it. In 2008,

"the number of species delisted due to recovery outnumbered the number of species delisted for extinction by 14 to 7." In other words, of the species delisted, or removed from the ESA's endangered species list, the ratio of the number of species removed because of recovery to those removed because of extinction was 14 to 7, a significantly greater amount of recovery than extinction. In fact, "a total of 39 species have been fully recovered, including 23 in the last 10 years" (Greenwald et al.). The recovery of endangered species is essential to keep them from the verge of extinction. While the effort to prevent species from extinction is a very important job of the ESA, those species might still be endangered, just not to the extent of impending extinction. On the other hand, the effort to help endangered species recover could be said to have even more significant impacts on the health and survival of the species in the future. If a species has recovered enough to the point where it is no longer considered endangered, it is delisted from the ESA's endangered species list.

There are several ways in which the ESA helps endangered species recover. One of the main ways it does this is by its requirement that "critical habitat be designated for all listed species, encompassing all lands and waters 'essential to the conservation of the species.'" This involves taking "all actions necessary to fully recover and delist species" (Taylor et al.) Agencies and others are not allowed to carry out or approve anything that might damage or destroy endangered species' habitats (Taylor et al.). It was found that species with "critical habitat" protected by the ESA "for two or more years were less than half as likely to be declining … in the early period, and more than twice as likely to be improving in the late period, as species without such critical habitat" (Taylor et al.). Clearly, the legislations and protections of the ESA have proved to be very effective in the recovery of endangered species.

In addition to working specifically to protect endangered species, the ESA also promotes public awareness, which helps to increase support for the ESA and the species it is protecting. As time goes on, the issue of endangered species becomes ever more pressing, and it is essential that the import be made obvious to the public. Increased public awareness of the predicament that endangered species are facing will encourage more people to take actions to protect them and help educate others about the cause. The NOAA says that "the ESA can benefit the conservation of [endangered] species by increasing global awareness of the threats they face [and] promoting research efforts to address conservation needs" ("Recovery"). Having endangered species listed out can help draw attention to the increasing danger of endangerment and extinction.

Despite all of its benefits and successes, some claim that the ESA negatively affects landowners and hinders economic growth. One of the requirements under the ESA is that designated critical habitats be set aside for endangered species, which prohibits any actions that could destroy or change the habitat. Many of the species on the ESA's endangered list are found on private property, which makes landowners more inclined to get rid of the species on their land so that they can keep their property (Jacoby). Others say the ESA hinders economic growth by prohibiting the development of factories or other industries on endangered species' habitats. However, the benefits of the ESA outweigh the potential economic downsides. Putting restrictions on the development of new industrial departments does not necessarily create economic decline or harm the economy in any major way. In addition, protecting endangered species now could help the economy and landowners in the future to have a more stable environment that is not continually under scrutiny to make sure it does not fall apart. The actions we take now will create a better future for both the endangered species and humans.

Another argument that some people make is that the ESA has not been effective at protecting endangered species or helping them recover. They argue "that the law is a failure because only two percent of listed species have been fully recovered and delisted" (Greenwald et al.). However, Greenwald says that "the number of delistings … is a poor measure of the success of the ESA because most species have not been protected for sufficient time such that they would be expected to have recovered." In addition, the ESA has been successful at "stabilizing or improving the status of species" (Greenwald et al.). This does not mean that the ESA is perfect. There are some changes that could be made to improve it, including increased protection for endangered species and their habitats and increased federal funding for the continual progress of the ESA. This said, eliminating or overhauling the ESA would practically remove all protection from endangered species, creating an even risker and more dangerous environment for them than its current legislations.

The ESA has done much to protect and conserve endangered species and increase public awareness. The ESA is extremely important in society today because of the focus it puts on protecting endangered species and helping them recover. The continuance of the ESA, along with some changes to its policies and funding, will continue to ensure protection for endangered species and help lower the number of extinctions. Ironically, however, the ESA may be endangered itself because it is not receiving the amount of support and funding that it requires to continue to be successful in protecting these endangered species. This means it is now more important than ever to continue to support the Endangered Species Act and what it is doing to make the world a better place.

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In My Initial Findings ENG 112 Honorable Mention- Audrey Prose

"Stages of Development in the Womb"

Part 1: What I know, Assume, or Imagine

The topic chosen related to Sonography is the stages of prenatal development. This profession is crucial, as ultrasounds monitor the progression of the baby throughout the nine months of pregnancy. What prompted me to research this topic beyond professional interests is my goal of becoming a mother. Gaining knowledge on pregnancy and its different stages will benefit both my future profession and my personal life. A desire to provide women and their babies the best care during such a vulnerable time drives my passion for this field. Motherhood is a journey no woman can fully prepare for, even with significant knowledge, so my mission is to support women and mitigate their uncertainties.

The stages of prenatal development encompass the zygotic, embryonic, and fetal stages. According to science, life begins at the moment of conception, yielding a brand-new genetic code that has never existed before. During the zygote stage, the egg is fertilized and contains the genetic information necessary to create human life. Sonographers use technology with elevated frequency soundwaves to create images of the body. This technology is vital for concluding what is occurring in different regions of the organs, blood vessels, and muscles. If there are any concerns about fetal development, identifying them early through an ultrasound allows doctors to make medical diagnoses and potentially explore different treatment options if they are available.

As a future Sonographer, it is assumed that since I will not be a doctor, I will not be making any medical diagnoses; my role will revolve around charting data and expressing findings to a doctor. I imagine that determining the gender of the baby will be a difficult skill, as it depends on the baby's position and cooperation. One research question that will be explored in

this essay is what parts of the body are developing throughout the first, second, and third trimesters, as well as the size of the baby throughout these stages. Additionally, I will investigate how the parts of the brain develop and what challenges, as well as solutions, can arise from the use of ultrasounds in identifying abnormalities. I am curious if there are any limitations to Sonography in being able to assess fetal activity, movement, and behaviors.

Part 2: The Search

The first research question searched in the Wake Tech library was what parts of the fetus develop during the first, second, and third trimesters. The first important source was discovered in the database STAT!Ref. An online book created by the American Academy of Family Physicians, titled *AAFP Conditions A-Z*, was found. This book has been written and reviewed by medical physicians and patient education professionals. It contained chapters on the first, second, and third trimesters of fetal development. The content of these chapters provided the basics of the stages of life, along with details on the growth of the organ systems, muscles, and many more external aspects of the human body (AAFP).

The source *AAFP Conditions A-Z* explains that during the first trimester of pregnancy, the baby is in the embryonic stage and is undergoing the process of stem cell division to multiply the many different cells required to create a functional human baby. *AAFP Conditions A-Z* factually emphasizes, “The placenta forms during the embryonic stage. The placenta takes nutrients, oxygen, and water from your blood and passes these along to your baby through the umbilical cord […] The placenta will filter out most of the harmful substances that may be present in your body.” The placenta plays a fundamental role in sustaining pregnancy. During the first trimester, many organ systems are beginning to form, and by the end of the first trimester, the baby is about three inches long (AAFP). The information presented from this source about the second trimester

of pregnancy indicates that the baby's cranium is the biggest part of the body, and the organ systems become almost completely developed at this time. The sex of the baby will be identifiable at the end of this trimester and the size of the baby could be about nine inches or longer (AAFP). The third trimester of pregnancy, according to this source, reveals that the baby begins to grow bigger and develops more fat tissues to fill out its body. The organ systems are entirely developed during this time, and the baby has many sensory receptors. The size of the baby can range from one to almost two feet long, and the weight will vary depending on the baby's body length (AAFP). I found this source to be very helpful in answering all my questions regarding the first, second, and third stages of prenatal development.

The second research question investigated in the Wake Tech library was which parts of the brain are developing, along with how ultrasounds can play a role in discovering abnormalities throughout pregnancy. The Wake Tech database STAT!Ref included an online book by Howard M. Reisner and Emily G. Reisner called *Crowley's an Introduction to Human Disease: Pathology and Pathophysiology Correlations - 11th Ed.* Chapter 25 of the online book, titled "The Nervous System," contained information on the developmental process of the brain and spinal cord, as well as how the brain functions with the entire nervous system (H. Reisner and E. Reisner). After skimming through some of the chapters in the online book, it led to further discoveries on how ultrasounds play a part in revealing distortions of the organ systems. Chapter 4, titled "Congenital and Hereditary Diseases," presented information on how ultrasounds performed during the second trimester can detect many anomalies in the composition of the organ systems (H. Reisner and E. Reisner).

I learned from chapter 25 of the book, *Crowley's an Introduction to Human Disease: Pathology and Pathophysiology Correlations - 11th Ed,* that during the embryonic stage, the

nervous system starts off as a bundle of cells called the neural plate. The neural plate folds, eventually fusing together to form the neural tube. As more margins of the brain fuse together, the forebrain, midbrain, and hindbrain develop. The spinal cord will begin to form, along with the cerebellum and medulla (H. Reisner and E. Reisner). Chapter 4 of the book explains that in the early weeks of the embryonic stage, an ultrasound performed on the brain can detect when there is a neural tube defect and incomplete spinal cord development. The ultrasounds can also present limbs that were not formed successfully and stunted kidney growth (H. Reisner and E. Reisner). I found this source to be vital in answering my questions on how accurate ultrasounds can be in revealing malformations in the brain, as well as learning how the brain develops during pregnancy.

The third research question that was searched in the Wake Tech libraries was whether there are any limitations in ultrasounds assessing fetal activity and behaviors. The Wake Tech database STAT!Ref presented a book by authors Anne M. Van Leeuwen and Mickey Lynn Bladh called *Davis's Comprehensive Manual of Laboratory and Diagnostic Tests with Nursing Implications - 10th Ed.* The content presented in this book under "U" studies features information regarding the normal and abnormal findings after the biophysical profile procedure. The biophysical profile, or BPP, is used to monitor fetal movements of the muscles, heart, and respiratory system. This section lists the different tests done during the BPP and what is deemed to be healthy amounts of activity in the uterus, as opposed to what is considered a lack of activity (Leeuwen and Bladh).

The "U" studies section of the book *Davis's Comprehensive Manual of Laboratory and Diagnostic Tests with Nursing Implications - 10th Ed* encompasses a procedure called the BPP, which I was not aware of until reading this book. The BPP is a compendium of assessments in

which the fetus can either score a two or zero on each diagnostic. Anne M. Van Leeuwen and Mickey Lynn Bladh explicitly declare that "The BPP considers five antepartum parameters measured to predict fetal wellness […] It includes fetal heart rate (FHR) measurement, fetal breathing movements, fetal body movements, fetal muscle tone, and amniotic fluid." During the BPP test, the baby can score up to ten, indicating that the baby's activity is robust. This procedure allows medical professionals to assess potential problems with the baby's organ systems, along with the amniotic fluid volume (Leeuwen and Bladh). I found this source to be very beneficial in helping me learn more processes used by Sonographers to accurately assess fetal movement and activity.

Part 3: What I Discovered

Throughout the research for this paper, many questions were sought out for answers. While browsing through an online book called *AAFP Conditions A-Z* about the first, second, and third trimesters, I concluded that I was familiar with many of the body parts developing during pregnancy. Taking Anatomy and Physiology revealed many parts of the body, how they function, and how those parts develop. After gathering facts about the first trimester of pregnancy through the source *AAFP Conditions A-Z,* it occurred to me that I was already educated on how the fingers and toes take their shape though a process called intentional cell death, or apoptosis. Apoptosis occurs to remove the tissue between our fingers and toes during development in the womb. I made the connection that during the first trimester, this process has not yet occurred but will begin in the early stages of the second trimester. I determined that there are not many limitations to ultrasounds being able to assess fetal activity, contrary to what I had originally inquired. The use of the BPP procedure is something I was not knowledgeable about before

researching this topic, and I now understand that the proper steps are being followed to ensure the baby is in good health.

The searches for the research questions resulted in many trials and errors. The search began in the NC Live database using key words related to the question, which were later used to search for textbooks within the Wake Tech campus libraries. Those searches were unsuccessful. After numerus unsuccessful attempts, it was time to seek help from the Wake Tech writing and research tutors. The tutor I met with was able to reveal several valuable health science databases, where the first vital source was discovered in the STAT!Ref database under the health, medical, and nursing section. Once the first source was uncovered, all the other sources necessary to answer my questions became much easier to find during the process. The significance of the research I identified from my topic choice is undeniably crucial to my future career in Obstetric Sonography. There were answers to all my inquiries, including valuable knowledge on how humans come to be, and it is certain that this research with benefit every aspect of my future. I intend to continue studying the topic of the stages of development in the womb when I get accepted into the Sonography program at Wake Tech.

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In My Community/Discipline ENG 112 Honorable Mention- Ashley Haag

"Exploring the Nursing Discourse Community"

The nursing discourse community is made of nurses from all over the world and from many different specialties. Being a part of this community allows nurses to support one another and continue to broaden their knowledge and understanding of their discipline, and ultimately become better nurses. For many, becoming a nurse is not simply about obtaining a degree, but has a deeper motivation of serving and helping others in need. This profession requires hard work, sacrifice, and dedication, and is often seen as a selfless (and sometimes thankless) job. Many have responded to this calling and have impacted people's lives for the better. Nursing professionals strive to support one another and their patients by combating workforce burnout, educating themselves through various communication methods, and utilizing essential medical language and terminology in their care.

An area of concern among the discourse community is the serious problem of burnout among nursing staff. Nurses often work long, demanding shifts that drain them emotionally and physically, and this has caused many to leave the nursing industry altogether. Far-reaching staff shortages have given employers no choice but to urgently address this concern in an effort to curb burnout and support nurses through various methods. Health reporter Brooks Sutherland highlights this crisis by stating: "A third of nurses in the United States plan to leave their jobs by the end of the year…The reasons are largely due to the incessant burnout, stress, and fatigue that nurses have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic." Some hospitals, like Mercy Health in Cincinnati, are creating programs to allow nurses flexibility in their schedules and assigned work units. Not only can nurses choose to work at different units within their hospital, but they also have the option to take shifts at multiple regional hospitals in their area. This diversity allows

nurses “the opportunity to bust through day-to-day monotony as a tool to curb burnout” (Sutherland). Other benefits of the program include “competitive incentive pay, career growth opportunities, career coaching, and travel expense coverage” (Sutherland). However, while incentive programs such as these can be beneficial, they are not available to all nurses, and employers need to consider offering other practical options to help employees manage their mental and physical health. Journalist Donna Gray from the Calgary Herald discusses other “programs that include meditation, sleep and peace rooms, nutritional training, fatigue management, and buddy-inspired exercise programs.” The more options that are available to nurses, the more likely employers will be successful at managing workplace burnout.

Nurses use numerous methods of communication to stay informed about pertinent medical issues, to deepen their knowledge, and to sharpen their skills. It is essential for nurses to have a wide variety of platforms to collaborate with and learn from their colleagues. Many professional organizations use online avenues to exchange ideas and communicate within their discipline, and nursing is no exception. Social media, scholarly journals, newsletters, meetings, and websites all provide valuable opportunities for nurses to connect with other professionals. Describing the importance of peer-reviewed journals, medical scholars Richardson and Carrick-Sen stated:

> Writing for publication is an important nursing role as it is a means of communicating knowledge, skills and experiences to improve patient outcomes… The context of nursing publications are varied and include research, case studies, reports, literature reviews, clinical audits, [and] reflections on practice…All are important and contribute to nursing knowledge (756).

Additionally, scholarly journals like the American Nurse Journal, published by the American Nurses Association, is one example of how organizations are dedicated to supporting nurses by keeping them up to date on medical trends and developments, as well as discussing other practical nursing topics. These modes of communication are essential and invaluable in attaining effective collaboration between nurses that leads to the highest standard of care for patients.

Nurses use technical terminology, language, and abbreviations on a regular basis to document care and communicate with other medical staff. The complexity of medical terminology is vast, so it is critical for nurses to be able to understand and interpret these words and their meaning. According to Elena Museanu, "medical terminology evolves continuously to accommodate advances in medical science, technology, and clinical practice. New discoveries, treatments, and diseases necessitate the creation of novel terms and the adaptation of existing terminology to reflect current knowledge and practices" (60). Abbreviations are especially helpful when nurses need to quickly and efficiently document pertinent patient information. Some common abbreviations that are widely used are "A&O" (alert and oriented), "C/O" (complaint of), and "BID" (two times a day). Abbreviations such as these allow nurses and other healthcare workers to accurately document care, interpret doctors' orders, and communicate any medical changes that are relevant to the patient. The language of medical terminology is fascinating and can be overwhelming to those who are unfamiliar with it. Thus, it is crucial for nurses to spend time studying and acquiring this knowledge so that they can easily recall it in times of routine care and emergencies.

The benefits of having a discourse community are clear when we consider the scope and impact of the nursing profession. Nurses' primary concern is the patient, and many of them will "just about kill themselves to give care to others without taking care of themselves" (Gray). The

need for support, understanding, and rest cannot be overemphasized for nurses. Many nurses receive this support through the discourse community, whether that is their co-workers, an online discussion forum, or a newsletter from a professional organization. When nurses' feelings are validated and valued, they are better able to cope with the pressures and demands from their work. It is also critical that nurses have access to new advances in the medical field, as well as changes or trends that are taking place. Nurses are constantly learning and adapting to their discipline all while taking care of patients and working long, exhausting hours. Most shifts at hospitals are 12 hours which require nurses to get up early and plan their meals well in advance. At times, they are not able to take breaks due to the demands of their unit. Clearly, there is an ongoing need to offer nurses flexibility and support throughout their careers.

The nursing discourse community is a meaningful and essential structure that supports nurses and continuously strives for excellence in its discipline. It discusses challenges such as workplace burnout, communicates through various mechanisms, and uses specific medical terminology to enhance patient care. Not only does the discourse community provide continuing education and enlightenment for nurses, but at the same time, it benefits the residents in the community who may one day be cared for by those nurses. Nurses understand that their patients may be having the worst day (or days) of their lives while in their care, and it is their goal to be a positive and supportive resource to help these patients get through it. Even though nurses are often overworked and burnt out, they are dedicated to their patients and will do anything they can to take care of them, even at the expense of themselves. Whether by routine care or during unfathomable tragedy, nurses greatly impact people's lives and deserve our respect and commendation.

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In My Seat at the Table ENG 112 Honorable Mention- Marissa Agag

"The Mental Health Benefits of Physical Activity in Alleviating Depression"

Introduction

When the topic of physical activity (PA) arises, its benefits on one's bodily health are widely known. By participating in PA, an individual can expect to experience an abundance of health benefits such as a healthy heart, lower risks of diseases, lower blood pressure, etc. One's physical health is usually the focus when PA is discussed. However, the benefits of PA on one's mental health are not widely known or are discussed as often. It is important to look at both physical and mental health as both factors play a role in one's overall well-being; however, this discussion will focus on the benefits of PA on mental health, specifically for those suffering from depression. While depression in both younger and older adults remains a growing mental health concern, participating in PA serves as an alternative solution from therapy and medication to alleviating depression as it has psychological benefits, improves social mechanisms, and increases long-term psychological resiliency.

Background

As stated, depression remains a growing mental health concern within the world today, affecting both younger and older adults. According to Perez-Lassiera et al. (2022), "Depression is estimated to be the second leading cause of disability in the United States and is associated with a 52% increased risk of death" (p.1). This illustrates how depression not only reduces the quality of one's life but also how it shortens life expectancy. Although one can attend therapy and take medication to alleviate their symptoms, those options are not always available to everyone as it is costly. The price of those treatments is one of the few factors why people with depression do not get the help they need. In addition, it must be considered that an individual

suffering from depression most likely lacks the energy levels and the motivation to partake in PA, which in turn makes it difficult for them to start engaging. Though they may find it hard to participate, it is best to begin before it worsens. According to Pereira-Payo et al. (2024), "Physical inactivity has been shown to increase the likelihood of depression" (p.2). If individuals with depression do not start, their symptoms will only worsen as it creates a dangerous cycle. The absence of PA increases depressive symptoms by furthermore lowering their energy levels and worsening their moods. As suggested by Crichton et al. (2024), "Once habits of physical activity participation are developed, it can then become a more automatic process" (p. 2). Depression is a major problem affecting society, and if there are no easily accessible solutions, one's symptoms will become worse and affect one's overall well-being.

Methods

Depression is a mental illness that must not be taken lightly. It affects the daily lives of millions worldwide, and if left untreated, it may result in death. In a survey I created, I asked adults aged 18 and older questions ranging from participation in PA to how it has affected their depressive symptoms, and 27 anonymous individuals took it. According to the survey, when asked if they have been diagnosed with clinical or non-clinical depression, 63% of the group answered yes. Considering that most of the group has depression, the question "What can be done to alleviate their symptoms?" arises. To better understand the deterioration of the human mind without PA, I interviewed a physical education teacher, Tracy Morton, who also runs a girls' weightlifting club at Knightdale High School of Collaborate Design. Morton notes that if individuals fail to take care of themselves, whether it be physically or mentally, they cannot be expected to excel in areas of their lives as they have become sedentary. When one becomes too comfortable in their inactivity, it limits their opportunity to improve their life, leaving them to drown in their sorrows.

I did not ask Morton directly about the psychological benefits or the long-term effects, but the topic was brought up. When asked if certain types of exercises were more effective in improving one's symptoms, she elaborated on how weightlifting has benefited the self-esteem of many students in her club. The girls did not believe in themselves as the weight was intimidating, but as time passed, they proved themselves wrong and ultimately found a way to release their emotions healthily. Morton stated, "It literally is self-esteem. It comes down to I can now walk into a gym and take care of my health, take care of me, and feel strong about it." Participating in PA has made them more confident in their abilities to step into a gym while learning how to cope with life's challenges. In my survey, I asked the participants, "After engaging in physical activity, how do you feel mentally afterward?" with the options worse, the same, or better. None of the participants answered worse, and 70% of the group felt better, while 30% felt the same. At the end, participants with depression were asked to explain how PA has helped with their symptoms, and one individual said, "It helped me boost my confidence and gives me something to take my inner anger out." Another individual stated, "I struggled with self-image after I was injured, but physical activity has made me feel like me again." Using PA as an outlet to help alleviate their depression has given these individuals a boost in how they feel and how to redirect their emotions. Though I did not ask Morton how PA improves social mechanisms, again, the topic was brought up. Depression can lead to a lack of routine or purpose, and physical activity offers structure to daily life, which provides a sense of accomplishment and control. In addition, participating can lead to more social interaction and support from those around as everyone works toward the same goal: to be healthy however that may look. As someone who is still active at 52 years old, this is what Morton had to say about what PA has done for her, "It saved my life. If I didn't have fitness incorporated throughout my life, I'm not quite sure where I'd be." The

routine she has built has given her a sense of control over what she can do, especially at an older age when one's body starts to slow down. Though her body is slowing down, she recognizes what PA has done for her and continues to participate as it gives her something to do and contributes to her overall well-being. She recalled the time I took her weightlifting class in 2021 before it turned into a club and stated, "Your personality just started to come out. You became more talkative. You were more of an advocate for yourself, but you were also very focused." As someone who was depressed during that time, taking her class aided my depression. I was not social, but taking her class allowed me to connect to people and not feel alone. I was able to redirect my negative emotions and reap the benefits of PA, not only physically but mentally as well. I was more confident in myself, and in turn, it helped me become more social and focused on what I could do to be better and find a healthy way to cope when life gets hard.

Results

Though participating in PA does not guarantee that one's depression will be cured, it certainly can help in alleviating one's symptoms as it enhances one's psychological well-being and provides long-term psychological resilience. In addition, it provides a structured life and allows an individual to become social by building meaningful relationships with others going through the same thing or those working towards the same goal.

Morton notes that people should be participating in PA as endorphin release is healthy for the brain. It is healthy because these hormones alleviate pain, lower stress levels, and improve mood when released. By participating in PA, the body undergoes physical stress, and in response, the body releases endorphins, also known as the "feel-good" hormones because of their mood-boosting effects. As an individual continues to participate, they can expect to feel better instantly and the effects of PA over their lifetime as their brain is chemically changed for the better.

Pereira-Payo et al. (2024) state that “mood is strongly influenced by the secretion of endorphins” (p.2). Given that one’s mood is heavily influenced by the secretion of endorphins, it can be assumed that the more an individual partakes in PA, the more likely they will feel better physically and mentally. In the survey stated previously, 70% of the group felt better after participating in PA mentally, and that is because it “not only provides short-term feelings of pleasure but also generates longer-term psychological effects” (Li et al., 2024). One step in alleviating depression is finding an activity that will release endorphins, and PA is the best option as it affects one’s overall well-being. For those who responded to how PA has helped with their symptoms, one thing was common: they were more confident in themselves. Though they feel short-term pleasure physically and mentally after exercise, the long-term benefits are present as they have a stronger sense of self and carry themselves differently.

Regarding psychological resiliency, an individual’s emotional resilience is increased, and they acquire improved coping mechanisms. PA increases emotional resilience as exercise promotes mental toughness, which, in turn, helps the individual get better in the long run. Exercise is not easy, but as an individual continues to push through the challenges and stay consistent, they have wired their brain into believing they can achieve their goals as long as they put in the work. Furthermore, this same mindset can be carried on into their daily lives as they navigate through their depression. If an individual continues to push through the bad thoughts and the bad days, they will eventually see the greener side. According to Hovland et al. (2023), “Physical activity gives one a sense of actively doing something of importance to gain better health and simultaneously being able to influence one’s own life and manage stressors” (p.9). For a depressed individual, PA gives them something to do to better themselves physically and mentally, but along the way, they learn how to healthily cope with their emotions instead of

harming themselves. Getting up and doing the work is hard, but the results will show if one stays disciplined and motivated. Morton suggests that an athlete returning from an injury must have a strong and positive mindset to come back stronger than before. In support, Glavaš & Pavela Banai (2024) suggest that if individuals believe PA helps and benefits their mental health, it may result in positive emotional states, less stress, and greater well-being (p.8). If a depressed athlete can come back stronger after staying consistent, so can people suffering from depression if they believe they will get better.

According to Morton, participation in PA can provide one's life with structure as it gives the individual a sense of control and order over their life. As individuals partake in PA, they build up healthy habits physically and mentally that help bring structure to their lives. Individuals dedicate time to plan and execute a routine, which allows them to have a sense of accomplishment once finished. However, it does not end there. As one implements PA into their daily life, they must make sure other factors in their life are not being neglected, such as work or school. So, as an individual implements PA into their life, they are actively building structure and routine. In addition, PA gives individuals the opportunity to not be isolated and create relationships with those around them. Those who suffer from depression may feel or be isolated, but PA can change that as it can bring people together. In closing, it has been shown that participation in PA has many mental health benefits that have a profound effect on an individual who suffers from depression.

Conclusion

As depression continues to be a growing disability in the world that leads people to feel stuck and live unhappy lives, based on the research, it can be assumed that PA helps in alleviating one's depressive symptoms. Those who are suffering may not be able to afford

therapy or medication, and this research unleashed a free and alternative solution: participating in PA. It allows them to break free from their feelings and build habits that affect not only their bodily health but, most importantly, their mental health. In the future, one may take this information and research what types of exercise are best for alleviating depression and how PA affects the depressed elderly population as they tend to be forgotten about. If anyone is struggling with depression and/or cannot afford the treatments, get up and start with just ten minutes of PA today. Take a walk, find something in the community fitness-related, or find a workout that works best. It is not easy to start, but the journey will be worth it in the end.

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In My Professional Research ENG 110/114 Honorable Mention- Marina Dejnozka

"Marketing Project"

Executive Summary

Saving Grace is a nonprofit dog shelter center in North Carolina that has the potential to benefit from an expansion of business through a revamped branding and design analysis from a brand strategist. Some of Saving Grace's strengths include strong community relations and a unique, nontraditional animal shelter experience that would be difficult to find elsewhere. Saving Grace also benefits from an open layout on the founder's family farm, giving Saving Grace an intimate atmosphere. Saving Grace's target market are North Carolina residents, dog owners and animal lovers. Saving Grace's main competitors are other animal shelters and local dog breeders. After a careful market analysis, it is recommended that a brand strategist is hired to rework Saving Grace's design elements on its webpage and social media accounts. Design elements in the company's logo, YouTube banner, design templates for social media posts, and the organization of Saving Grace's online store are suggested to take center stage to be redeveloped.

The costs for such an endeavor can range from $1,000 to $7,000. If hiring a freelancer, the cost will fall in the more economic range, $1,000 to $2,600. If a branding firm is fired, the cost will be elevated to $5,000 to $7,000. The timeline for this recommended project will take approximately 4 to 6 months to complete. The procedure of this initiative will be comprised of four phases. In the first phase, a strategist must be hired. In the second phase, the strategist will be analyzing Saving Grace's brand. The third phase will be where the strategist develops their brand and design strategy. In the fourth phases, the final strategy will be implemented across all online platforms and ready for the market. With these changes put in place, this initiative will improve customer engagement, market prominence, and profitability.

Introduction

Saving Grace is a nonprofit organization that largely functions as a dog refuge base that offers a second chance at life for less adoptable dogs. This nonprofit's target audience are residents that reside within the Triangle area, and possess a love for animals. Founded in 2004 by Molly Goldston, this organization features a number of programs in its business organization that keeps its operations afloat, and ensures the safety and welfare of the dogs trusted in their care. Saving Grace boasts a strong volunteering program that averages approximately 500 volunteers in constant rotation. With the addition of an adoption program and a foster program, in all, over the course of 20 years, Saving Grace has built a thriving community of people in the Triangle area who all share a passion for securing the welfare of unhomed dogs. Saving Grace's main competitors in the North Carolina area are other local shelters, and private dog breeders such as the Lakebound Golden Retrievers and the Montgomery Frenchies. In this market analysis of Saving Grace, through analyzing the opportunities and threats to this organization's business plan, a new execution approach will be suggested with the vision of expanding on the already founded framework of the company, and will account for recommended costs, a calendar timeline, and a specific delivery strategy.

Market Analysis Summary

One of Saving Grace's major successes is the fact that its business has thrived for over two decades. Many nonprofits close operations after 10 years. Much to Saving Grace's credit, stability has been maintained due to its online marketization, mission-oriented fundraising events, and its publicity on CBS 17's popular segment "Animal Adoption Journeys," (CBS 17, 2024). The fact that Saving Grace has become a major animal refuge center in the Triangle area aligns with the growing body of business studies indicating that the organizational infrastructure

of nonprofits cannot thrive without a thorough understanding and application of comprehensive planning and inclusive marketization, (Sandberg, Elliott & Petchel, 2020). Additionally, a strong appeal that differentiates Saving Grace from other animal refuges is its location on Molly Golston's family farm, which leverages large areas of natural space of open grass that allow sizable room for dogs to exercise, take hosed baths, and interact with potential adopters. In light of these points, Saving Grace has succeeded in promoting a nontraditional environment that fosters a unique community experience from the very first step on the property.

Conversely, as apparent in any business, there are opportunities for growth and expansion. With over 37,000 followers on Instagram, Saving Grace has already demonstrated a strong online presence. Additionally, due to top-paged sponsored ads on online search engines, such as Google, Saving Grace is easily accessible. The website itself is content rich with detailed information and visual aids. Largely, the organization of these online platforms serves its audience base well, and their design efforts invoke a warm and inviting digital atmosphere.

There are many aspects of Saving Grace's online designs that do not require artistic or technical adjustment, but there are some sections that do. The company's logo as seen on its webpage and social media sites, elicits an unprofessional appearance due to its lower than ideal quality of pixelation and its visually immature and underdeveloped composition. The same deficits can be attributed to Saving Grace's YouTube banner, the elementary design approach of their online shop, and the design templates for their dog introduction posts as displayed on their social media accounts. The lack of design discipline poses a market risk that can explain Saving Grace's lower engagement rates as seen in their online comment sections. A common determining factor of how much profit businesses can make, and how much appeal their services and products have on their consumers, tends to come down to their aesthetic value, (Heitmann et

al., 2020, p. 257). As such, one of the first things I would suggest for Saving Grace to change are their design and brand elements in the mentioned aspects of their online presence.

Execution

To implement this initiative, the first step in this execution would require the hiring of a brand strategist to remodel Saving Grace's visual appeal into a more professional aesthetic. The strategist or designer's role would be to reimagine Saving Grace's logo, YouTube Banner, revamp Saving Grace's online shop, and refine their social media post templates for application on Instagram. To accomplish this, Saving Grace must undergo a search process to hire the most suitable brand strategist for their purposes. A strategist, as such, can be discovered on freelance platforms such as Upwork and Fiverr, or established design agencies that have portfolios in delivering similar work. Hiring a brand strategist is key to ensuring Saving Grace's long-term market future. Without a proper understanding of Saving Grace's verbal and visual identity, the organization can lose its footing with its core audience, and lose out on valuable capital gain, (Sharp, 2016, p. 18).

The cost of such services is dependent on the amount of services required for the project, and the quality of the services. Since Saving Grace already has a brand and a strong foundation on multiple online platforms, a brand strategist would not have to work from scratch. Therefore, the price point will be lower than the average branding project than it would be for a business operating at a similar scale. As stated by Kimberley Rice, the president of KLA Marketing Associates, an average price range for the services of branding strategy may cost between $5,000 to $7,000, (Sharp, 2016, p. 19). Conversely, if a freelancing branding strategist were hired instead, the cost could be a few grand lower and range between $1,000 to $2,600.

The timeline for this business plan would be organized into four phases. The first phase would be locating the right freelancer, or negotiating a contract with a branding firm. Finding the right fit for Saving Grace can take from one week to a month. This phase would require Saving Grace's leadership to research different firms or independent contractors and interview potential strategists to bring onboard. The second phase of this initiative will involve the chosen brand strategist analyzing Saving Grace's brand, their marketing opportunities, as well as analyzing their target audience and their competitors. This phase may take from two weeks to a full month to complete.

The third phase of this initiative will have the strategist developing their brand strategy. It is in this phase where the new visual elements for Saving Grace will be created. The fourth and final phase of this plan will center around implementation. This can range from one to two months. In this please, the strategist will be rolling out the new design changes to align with their branding strategy for Saving Grace. Since Saving Grace is a local nonprofit and not a regional or national business, a strategist would consider rebranding Saving Grace as a short-term project, and so the total time required for this project could take as long as 4 or 6 months.

Conclusion

As a nonprofit organization located in North Carolina, Saving Grace is a business with over two decades of history in rescuing dogs and giving them a second chance at life. It has a strong volunteer program and deep ties within the Triangle community. Two of the biggest risks that can threaten Saving Grace is its amount of funding through donations and how much space they have available to house new rescues. My plan to expand Saving Grace's business ventures include hiring a branding strategist to implement elevated visual designs, including Saving Grace's logo, YouTube Banner, the visual representation and organization of their online shop,

and the design templates for their social media posts. Hiring such a professional may cost approximately between $5,000 to $7,000 if opting for contracting with a branding firm. However, if a freelancer is hired instead, the cost may range between $1,000 to $2,600. Regardless of which professionals may be hired for this business plan, the projected timeline for this endeavor will average between 4 and 6 months. With these changes implemented, Saving Grace stands to gain higher rates of customer engagement and will lead to boosted numbers of business profitability.

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Multimodal Honorable Mention (ENG 112)- Alyssa Dubiel

"America is Uninformed about Violence"

Scan below to view Allie's Multimodal Video or click this link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3i9WmiMENbg

In Verse! ENG 125 Honorable Mention- Kay Moore

“A. Bird”

I wasn't sure at first,
I thought maybe I was too young to feel it, to know,
That is what the adults said,
With their amused smiles and cooing reassurances,
The girls in my class claimed different,
Always tittering and whispering that dreaded question to one another,
Poking fun at whoever caved to shyly answer their interrogations,
I never understood it,
When they turned their eager eyes on me,
When I answered their probing questions as honest as I knew,
Why they teased me, claiming that I lied,
"Who do you have a crush on?" they'd chirp with sing-songy voices,
It felt like they were mocking me,
"No one." I'd peep quietly each time,
Stomach turning as I braced for their words
It was a truth that would sour their expressions,
pecking at me, flocking to me to glean the "truth"
It was always her, swooping in to save me,
Fending off the circling hawks to bring me to her "nest'
Squeezing my hands under the gap beneath the slide and the monkey bars,
Grounding me, with dirty blond hair and shining brown eyes,
Contrasting with my deep brown locks and hazel green stare,
She was my friend, she understood me, believed me, stood by me,
She had taken me under her wing, we were birds of a feather,
We'd run off to play tag once the flock had dispersed,
I'd chase after her, trilling laughter, feeling at home,
We'd head inside the classroom together, preening, arm in arm,
My cheeks as pink as the cast of hers on which I’d scratched my name,
I think I knew then, but thought I was mistaken,
Diluted by the image of mommies and daddies,
Of the girls who crushed on Adam even though he still ate boogers,
What I had wasn't the same, it couldn't be,
It was scary, exciting, fleeting,
I loved A. Bird.

Future Bestseller! ENG 125 Honorable Mention- Finn Bowman

"Bird Watching"

January 13th, 1998

My therapist said that journaling would be "beneficial" for me, that documenting everything would help me cope with my "circumstances". My mother even bought me this journal to do it in. It's a nice journal too, an oiled leather cover with acid free paper and it even came with this beautiful pen. I almost feel bad, knowing that I'm not going to be writing anything fun or interesting here. I suppose I should get on with the actual journaling part of this, huh? Today, my mother moved the two of us into a neighborhood for the disabled and their caretakers. The entire community is built around being accessible to people who are broken wrong sick like me. Everything about this place feels sugary plastic fake. The nurses that come to visit me every other day or so are too friendly, and the neighbors are too friendly. The nurses go on and on about all the "fun" and "exciting" events and activities coming up in the community. They won't shut up about the nice indoor pool that's open all year, regardless of the weather, or the community center that offers all sorts of arts and crafts classes. The neighbors bring over all sorts of gross looking casseroles and overly sweet pastries and each and every one of them comments on how young I am. About how "strong" I am for going through what I have at such a young age. I feel like they aren't even talking to me when they speak, it's like they're talking AT me.

The new house is nice at least. Everything is where I can reach it, the floors are covered in carpets and rugs so I don't slip and fall, and there's even a chair in the bathtub so I don't have to stand with I'm taking a shower. It's smaller than our old house, though, and I miss our backyard. I think that's what I miss the most. I miss getting to look out the back window and watch the

birds at the birdfeeders while I ate. Everything here is so compact tiny close together, there isn't a backyard because the houses are back to back, and there's barely a front yard at all. All there is is one pathetic little tree and two holly bushes. I don't think I'll like living here, but if living here makes me less of a burden on my mom, then I'll get used to it.

January 20, 1998

I've tried my best to get used to living here, but it just isn't Home to me. Maybe I still haven't gotten used to things, but everything still feels wrong. It's like a timeshare I can't escape or something out of a B-movie.

I'm trying a new medication. The doctor says this one should help with the muscle pain and spasms better than the last few medications I've been on. I haven't noticed a difference yet. I hope it starts working soon, I don't know how many more all nighters I can do. I asked my doctor about some sort of sleep medication, but he said that they'll affect my other meds too much. I'm not entirely sure if I care, I would rather sleep.

January 31st, 1998

The new medication is working, I think. My muscles don't hurt as much anymore, but the spasming still happens a lot. I've been sleeping better lately, but I still wake up tired. I think it's because of the stupid nightlights the nurses put in. The damn nurses treat me like a child, do they treat the other residents this way?

Mom rearranged the house so that the dinner table faces the front window, so I can watch the birds outside. She told me that she's going to get some bird feeders this weekend so it feels more like our old house. I can't help but feel mad angry furious a little upset about that. This place will **NEVER** be our home. It'll never be **MY** home.

February 7th, 1998

I've been sitting at the dinner table a lot lately. The new bird feeders are nice, I guess. I like watching the birds outside, but the neighbors pesky cat keeps scaring them away. Mom's been staying late at work again, which means I've been eating waaaay too many frozen dinners lately. If I eat another salisbury steak with a side of peas, I think I'll lose my mind. I still haven't gone to any of the activities the nurses keep blabbing about, my psychiatrist keeps bugging me about getting human interaction, but I think between my mom and the nurses, I've had more than enough.

February 12, 1998

I'm still doing a lot of bird watching, one of the crows that stops by has come up to the windowsill a few times. It's probably just curious about the suncatchers mom put up, but I'd like to think it wants to be friends with me. They're smart birds, surely a bird can be smart enough to know about loneliness, right? It seems to like the shelled peanuts mom puts out, I wonder if I can get it to eat one out of my hand?

February 19?, 1998

My brain has been kind of foggy lately, I think it's a side effect of the new medication or something. I asked mom to get me a bunch of puzzles and sudoku books, I remember one of the little old ladies in the neighborhood saying that they help keep her mind sharp. Hopefully that works for me, but I've never been a fan of puzzles.

My little crow has been visiting me almost every day now. It loves the peanuts I leave out on the porch for it, but that damn cat keeps trying to catch it. I had one of the nurses bring a note to the cat's owner about keeping that thing inside. If that cat hurts one of my birds, especially my crow, I think I'll really start to go insane.

February 25, 1998

My bird is still visiting me, even though that cat is still prowling around our house. I hope my bird is smart enough to understand the risks that it puts itself in every time it visits me. I haven't gotten it to eat out of my hands yet, but it seems to like watching me do puzzles and stuff.

My memory is still getting worse. The doctor can't figure out if it's from the medication or not. They're going to bring in a specialist next week to help them figure it out. What good is a doctor who can't make me better?

February 29, 1998

It's not the medication, the connective tissue in my brain is breaking up. There's no fixing it either. I heard mom cry herself to sleep last night, but I didn't sleep at all. How am I supposed to sleep knowing that I'm going to lose my mind I'm going to forget everything soon I won't even be able to feed myself I'm going to be even more of a burden on my mom.

March 3,1998

My birdie brought some friends today, a whole flock of crows came to visit today. Mom and the nurses treat them like they're pests, but they're the only things that visit me that aren't condescending. They're the only ones who treat me like I still have my memories. I really appreciate that. It's the only thing in my routine that makes me happy. The nurses visit every day now. Everybody is constantly checking in on me, as if I'm a baby again. I just want to be treated like a person

March 17, 1998

I've been really sick lately. My memory has gotten worse. But my birdies still visit me. Every single day my birdies come to visit and I feed them as many peanuts as they want. I miss my home, I hate that I'm here. I hate that I'm a burden. But my birds keep me happy.

March 24, 1998

The cat ate my bird. I found him on our doorstep this morning. That damn cat tore my sweet bird to shreds and left him right in front of our door. I tried to convince mom to give my little friend a burial in the yard, but she said that it was probably full of diseases, so she used the snow shovel to pick him up and she dumped him in the trash can. I think I'm going to spend the rest of the day in bed. I wonder if she realizes the irony of calling my little bird a diseased animal and treating him like that right in front of me. I wonder if she'll treat me like that one day too.

April 1998

The neighbor's cat keeps looking at me through the windows, like it's expecting me to do something. No matter where I go in the house, the cat seems to follow me from window to window. I've tried scaring it off, but it just comes back. I've tried closing the blinds and shutting the curtains, but then it starts yowling at me until it can see me again. I hate that cat more than I hate being sick.

April 1998

My legs don't work well anymore. I have to use a walker like the little old ladies in the neighborhood. The little old ladies have been visiting me, too. I think mom asked them to check in on me while she's at work so now I'm forced to interact with others. They're nice enough, I guess. One of the old ladies, Cheryl I think her name is, made me a reuben on rye bread. It was the best sandwich I can remember eating. The cat still watches me all the time though.

May 1998

I keep having nightmares about the cat. Its big yellow eyes won't stop watching me, even in my sleep. I wish the nurses would leave me alone, but I don't mind the old ladies anymore. They brought me books and food and one made me a blanket for my wheelchair. Mom took down the

bird feeders, she says she doesn't want to encourage the cat's bad behavior. I hope that cat leaves me alone soon.

June 1998

It won't leave me alone. Its big yellow eyes are hunting something. I think it's hunting me. I'm getting worse too. My legs don't work at all anymore, I spend most of the day on the couch, trying to ignore that awful cat. My memory is getting worse too. I don't remember what day it is, I forget to take my meds, I forget to eat. The nurses are here almost all the time now. I hate it. I hate this. I hope one day my mom can rest. She cries a lot now. I'm tired.

June 1998

It's not hunting me, it's TAUNTING me. It won't shut up. It's always yowling at me. Mom says she doesn't hear it, but I do. Every time I close my eyes to sleep it meows at the top of its lungs like some kind of demented alarm clock. I'm so tired. I want to sleep. I hate cats.

July 1998

The nurses told me that I'm going to be moving somewhere else soon. Mom won't be there with me, but I'll be somewhere safer, where I can't get hurt. I'll miss the little old ladies, especially Carol. She's my favorite. I hope the cat doesn't follow me there. Maybe I'll have a window with a bird feeder again.

July 1998

I moved into the Home earlier last week. As soon as I got here, I got really sick again. My legs don't work anymore and the nurses here treat me even worse. They're so clinical, I'm a room number to them. I wish my overly sweet nurses were here, I wish Cathy was here, I wish Mom was here. My room has nice big windows, but I'm not allowed to open them.

July 1998

The cat is here,too. Nobody believes me when I tell them that there is a cat outside my window. It screams and screams and screams all night long. I can't sleep anymore. I spend all night looking at the little orange button on my bed that brings the nurses. If I press it, the nurses come and the cat runs away, but they never believe me when I tell them there's a cat.

1998

I found a crow feather in one of my books. I don't remember putting it there. I think the cat did it to remind me. What did I ever do to that damn cat? Why is it taunting me like this? Why can't it let me rot in peace?

1998

Even when I'm awake it yells at me. It's loud and constant. The doctor said that it isn't real, that my brain is making it up because it's sick. I'm tired of being sick. I KNOW that the cat is real. It's real and it killed my bird. My memory is bad but I remember what it did. It killed my bird. I won't forgive it.

August 26, 1998

Mom is writing this for me, because I'm too sick right now. The doctors said that my disease is progressing faster than they thought it would. I still think that the cat is outside my window, I can still hear it meowing at me. I hate being at this new place, because Mom isn't here, but I'm glad she doesn't have to worry about me anymore.

1998

The cat is in my room now. It sits at the end of the bed, just staring at me. I don't know how it got in, but at least it's quiet now. I still have dreams about it. It's chasing something, I think it's my bird. I miss my bird.

1998

The nurse said it’s my birthday today, but all I can focus on is how the cat won’t stop staring at me. All day and all night it watches me. I think it’s stalking me, like I’m one of the birds. I hope it doesn’t eat me too. Mom visited today and said that the doctors are going to try something new tomorrow. They want to take a better look at my brain, they want to try and get rid of the cat. I don’t know how looking at my brain will get rid of the cat, but mom seems excited about it, so I'll pretend I understand.

December 18th, 1998

It’s been two months since my baby left me. The nurse said she passed peacefully during the surgery. They thought her body could handle it, but once they put her under, her vitals just dropped. The doctors asked me if I wanted to donate her body to science, they said that because her case was one of a kind, that getting to study her could help other people like her. I couldn’t stand to look at her, my little chickadee, I’m so sorry. They told me when they’re done with her, they’ll cremate her and give me her ashes to keep. My poor little chickadee, I’m so sorry I couldn’t fix you. I’m so sorry that I couldn’t protect you. I regret not being there for you more, but I hope you can finally rest. I hope that cat never bothers you again, and I hope you’re finally resting.