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Acknowledgements

The editors extend their appreciation to the following for their support:

Kathleen Blee, PhD,
Bettye J. and Ralph E. Bailey Dean
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Dear reader,

One of life’s most asked—and rarely answered—questions challenges, “Who are we?”. This question can be as hard as ever to answer in the modern climate. Digital cultures pose this question to us but ultimately leave us with a box of pre-selected options from which to choose. Not only is this digital personality then taken as “who we are”, but the pre-selected options neglect the vast diversity that makes the question so essential and so difficult. The heightened and bifurcated political climate further attempts to pre-select our answer for us to create a sole defining feature of ourselves with which we are told that we should accept as the essence of ourselves.

However, this volume of Forbes & Fifth interacts with this question in a unique and more enlightening way: exploring without trying to find an answer. Some pieces interact with the aforementioned political ascription of people into categories based on language, nationality, gender, etc. John Starr asks in “Like a Lion” if language is what defines us; as the amazing concluding page of his piece suggests, language is beautiful but also wonderfully complex in terms of identity. Sarah Fling explores the paradoxical obsession of the United States with Queen Victoria and examines whether or not the countries’ troubled past constitutes who those two countries and their citizens are for the rest of their existence. Mei (Seung Wong) Baek also looks back to the past to explore this question and finds a hauntingly beautiful paradigm of the simultaneous static and transforming characteristics of what you thought the answer to the question of who you are was. Meera Patel courageously confronts the battling worlds of your inside and outside selves in one of the most powerful pieces I have read as a member of this journal. Even Tanner Smida jovially reveals the care, dedication, and artistry of (housing) an insect whose answer to the question has long been negative. This was among my favorite personal growths from the volume as a self-diagnosed melissophobic.

While there is certainly more writing and art to explore in this volume then what I have annotated here, each piece takes on the daunting task of the question of “who we are”. The reason that their work is so successful in this is undeniably due to their unparalleled talent as writers and artists, but it is also because they all display the complexity of the question when the common path is to simplify it. This is the ultimate goal of Forbes & Fifth: to bring together work from all disciplines to establish a diverse array of ideas that aim to examine the beautiful complexity of ourselves.

For the last time as Editor-in-Chief of Forbes & Fifth, I thank you for joining me on this journey, and please enjoy the selection of pieces ahead that just left me amazed and delightfully speechless at every turn.

With my gratitude and best wishes,

Lucas Zenobi

P.S. Thank you to all of the editors, designers, and contributors that I have worked with as a member of Forbes & Fifth. You are what made this one of the most fulfilling and amazing experiences of my life, and you are what make this journal what it is.
Dear Reader,

You are in for a treat upon opening up this latest edition of *Forbes & Fifth*. Alongside Tanner’s informative and irresistible bee narrative, we have ruminations of identity from Patel and embroidery from Hart that might just push you over the edge if you sit with it for too long. And this is just scratching the surface.

Although each piece ahead of you is more than sturdy enough to stand alone, I invite you to consider the sequence of the volume as a whole. This sequence is chosen at my favorite Friday afternoon *Forbes & Fifth* meeting. Although this meeting happens to be our last each semester, I can assure you that is not why I love it so. Within the meeting we embark on the surprisingly complicated task of sequencing the latest volume. Here our Editor-in-Chief, Lucas Zenobi, furiously scribbles numbers and arrows alongside the names of contributors listed on the white board while team members ponder aloud the meaning created by placing Kidd’s “Rainy Day Best” next to Kier’s “302”. In this chaos created to ensure each piece shines brightly, an overt pride is shared by the editors reminding me just how special *Forbes & Fifth* is.

Through my designs I hope not only to contribute to the measures our editors take to unify this diverse body of work, but also to reflect well on the behind-the-pages dedication from each member of the team. A glimpse into the underpinnings of this dedication includes meetings met with unwavering enthusiasm, social media that puts my own Instagram to shame, seamless website operations, inexplicable submission canvassing that manages to reach students worldwide, all mixed in with resolute and thoughtful leadership.

In addition to my gratitude for *Forbes & Fifth* as a whole, I think two special thank-you’s are in order for Sydney Brooks and Jade Rouse. Without Sydney’s steadfast guidance last semester, which brought me into the tumultuous and tedious world of InDesign, I undoubtably would have been scared off by the task of constructing a journal cover to cover. As for Jade, I cannot thank you enough for all your hard work and ability to share a hearty laugh when senior year gets to be a bit too much for the both of us.

Read, reflect, and enjoy,

Maria Heines
Meera Patel is a senior at the University of Pittsburgh pursuing an Environmental Science major with a certificate in Sustainability. Additionally, she has a minor in Persian. The inspiration for this piece is, of course, her own experiences.
Walking down the street, you don’t know whether to say hello or not. You don’t know their name, have never met them, have never even seen their face before. Something in you still tells you to smile. You had a similar childhood. You brought rice cakes to school and have been made fun of for this. You have been asked what you are eating and been treated to pursed lips and furrowed eyebrows. You have been told you smell like curry, you have been told you’re too white, you have been told you’re exotic. You have been asked if you know ___ Patel. You do not. You nearly never do. You smile when you’re by yourself. You don’t when you’re with your white friends.

Meet the Fockers
Meet the Parents
Meet the Robinsons
Meet the Mormons
Meet the Patels?

“I mean, we were together for two years, and it definitely felt like ‘Okay, it’s time to tell Mom and Dad that she exists.’” – Ravi Patel

Sitting on the couch in your townhouse, your boyfriend’s head on your lap, you hear the lock click. *Fuck, she’s home.* Your boyfriend looks at you and runs out the back door, just as the door slams and you hear your mother yell your name. *I probably should’ve told her earlier.*

Two years before, you were on a cruise with your cousin and his friend. As you and his friend started getting closer, your parents nudged you together. Why wasn’t this the same? For a year you have been hiding him from your parents. Maybe if his skin was darker you wouldn’t have felt the need to.

“Is there a term for it? **The Indian Problem?**” – Audrey

The Indian Problem: Growing up Indian. Growing up American. Growing up confused, isolated. Parents wonder how you can keep things from them, like dating a white guy from school for a year without telling them. Parents don’t know that the person that you are outside the house and the person you are at home have split very long ago and are no longer on speaking terms.

*Desi Girl11*
Outside me wears crop tops, curses like a sailor, and makes bawdy jokes.

House me speaks Gujarati, watches Bollywood movies, and has completed 10 years of Bharatanatyam.

Outside me flew across the country without telling her parents to meet a white guy her parents had never heard of.

House me is a virgin.

American me is only just repairing her relationship with Indian me.

There is always this divide. Any second-generation Indian immigrant will tell you that the culture shock and the divide between home and outside is psychologically unsettling. The various levels of Indianism and Americanism that the child chooses to follow as a result of this disparity vary. I speak Gujarati, never listened to American music until eighth grade, dance both bharatanatyam and garba, am well versed in Hindu rites and rituals, and consistently wear my nose stud and long winged eyeliner. Others from my father’s village who came over did not fare the same with their children. They understand Gujarati but cannot speak it, don’t dance, know only few of the rituals, but only have Indian friends. They don’t know Bollywood songs or reference the movies. Then there are the ones who are so steeped in Indian culture that they come here and don’t assimilate at all.

ABCD: American Born Confused Desi

“Why are kids so stressed out by school?” Your dad is in the kitchen, a glass of wine in hand, casually asking you this. You become a deer in headlights. Things start to blur in your brain, things you want him to understand but know he won’t. Asian American children are, across the board, under extreme pressure to perform academically. This pressure comes from cultures that highly value academics over everything else. I’m not sure why it changes so much when the culture comes to America. Maybe you begin to resent when you’re being yelled at for a B+ in a hard class, because you know your friend was rewarded for a C. Maybe when your dad comes home to realize you were on Facebook the night before your Geometry test and screams so loud the neighbors can
hear it, you break a little. Each time you add a brick, until your wall is finished. You can still hear his sounds, but it doesn’t mean anything anymore. Your apathetic shell is complete, your need to succeed is vanquished.

You don’t look at your sister when he asks this. You know she still remembers when she came home with a less than desirable SAT score (her first time taking it, in junior year) and he locked her in the bathroom for four hours. She remembers being kicked out of the house for her grades. She doesn’t look at you either. She silently counts the times she has been made to feel worthless because of her failure to reach the high standards they put out for her.

She rebelled and decided not to finish the pre-med requisite courses. I decided that I could postpone the discussion of not wanting to be a doctor.

“Patel’s too cool and badass to be Indian.” – second generation Indian immigrant

Jhansi ki Rani.¹ Company Quartermaster Havildar Abdul Hamid.² Force One.³ Ghataks.⁴ Gulabi gangs.⁵ Who taught you we couldn’t be?

She’s waving her hands as she tells this story in front of your incredulous brown eyes. She’s talking about when she was going through TSA and was randomly selected to be screened. They found explosive residue on the soles of her shoes, and they simply let her go. She has no idea how she got that there, she explains. As her flame red hair dances in the wind, you just hope you’re never in the same situation. You’re not sure it’ll go the same way.

Two months later, you drag your finals-drained ass through the TSA check line to go home on your flight out of college. As you take off your heavy boots and drop them in the tray, you remember the older days when you went through metal detectors with your ancient grandparents, generally repeating this process several times. A nose ring, a bracelet, a necklace, all setting off this one contraption meant to keep people safe. Every time they made them go back through until they were clean.

1 Lead charges against the British several different times.
2 Destroyed four tanks in the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War.
3 Specialised counter terrorism commandos of the Mumbai Police.
4 Special Operations infantry platoon.
5 “Pink” gangs, vigilante women fighting against domestic violence and humanitarian issues.
You don’t wear jewelry in airports anymore. You’re very careful, taking out any liquid over the standards, discarding any useless items, taking only what’s needed so there’s nothing suspicious. “Ma’am, is this your bag?” the officer looks stern and is holding your Swiss Army backpack. As you follow him to the table, you know there’s nothing that could’ve set off alarms. You always check. He scans the bag, then pulls out your Leatherman multitool, engraved with your name and given to you this past Christmas by your sister. Suddenly you’re very warm, and very very sweaty. The Leatherman has opened and punctured you with its knife, bottle opener, screwdriver, pliers, scissors, and file, all in a convenient four inch fold up. Your blood is pooling on the floor for everyone to see, their eyes fixated on your brown skin.

Your mom checks your bag three times before she lets you get on the plane back to college.

In junior year your best friend is sunshine. She radiates warmth and you can’t help but want to spend all your time with her. Her mother (and occasionally her - it hurts you when she’s caught in the middle of nature and nurture) is cloaked in conservative white thinking most of the time. She likes you, or so you think. You spend a lot of time at her house and with her kids so you’d hope so. “My mom called you a terrorist the other day.” You laugh, but something inside you hurts. The terrorist joke never really ends.

Two years later, your best friend is white and middle class, and you love that she asks you about your culture in non-intrusive ways. She asks about your language, how it differs from Hindi, how Hinduism works, what the bindi means. One day she tells you that she used to work in a Dunkin Donuts owned by Patels. She tells you they were the cheapest, that they wouldn’t buy new bags to brew coffee in. Dark roast was simply regular coffee left out for longer. They made her work even as they kept their own daughter home to study. My mom comments, “I’m glad she didn’t extrapolate that to all Patels.” Later, when you tell her you’ll be working at Dunkin this summer, she says you’ll hate it and it’s the worst. You’re not sure if she means working at Dunkin or working for Patels.

“…[you’re] unconditionally part of the biggest family in the world.”

Sitting in a bus station exactly 509 miles away from where my parents think I am, I hear a familiar language. “Tu aaye re, hoo bag ne check in karuchoo.” You stay here, I’ll check in the bag.

14 Patel
My head immediately turns, and House Me comes out and begins a conversation without checking with American Me. I talk to the nice Gujarati couple until the bus comes, when it turns out we are on the same bus. After helping to get their various bags on the bus, I sit down next to a stranger. The Indian man comes and says to the stranger, “Could you move so my wife can sit next to my daughter?” Hours later, we’re in Richmond, VA. We are both going to DC next, but I am going past to Pittsburgh. Our bus tickets are different. He asks me to go and change it so we can sit together. I go to the counter, ask for a different bus ticket. He comes up next to me. “Sir, please step back, I’m speaking to her now.” “She’s my daughter.” She looks at me, back at him, the obvious facial differences registering in her eyes. “He’s not my father. We’re from the same place in India. It’s an Indian thing.” She smiles tentatively, says she can’t change the ticket, and hands it back to me. As I walk away, I hear him tell her, “She’s my niece.”

It’s nice, sometimes. Being able to start up a friendship based on the one thing that jumps out at you. Even in biology lab, when your partner is Egyptian, or when your friend is half black, there’s a sense of kinship there. For white people, we are the Other. For us, we are still the Other. We make white people jokes, laugh about how they think onions are spicy. For a moment none of the past matters, and we are kids again.

I want to shake my American friends. I want to scream that I didn’t grow up like you did and I don’t know what you’re referencing.

Facial expressions I see nearly on a daily basis:

1. The You-Never-Watched-Spongebob
3. The Coleslaw-Tastes-So-Good-Though
4. The You-Don’t-Know-This-Band

And every time, it is accompanied by a look in their eyes.

You’re different.

Forgive me father, for I have sinned. Forgive me father, for I have sinned. Forgive me father, for I have sinned. Forgive me father, for I have sinned. Forgive me father, for I have sinned.

Desi Girl 15
Forgive me father, for I have sinned. Forgive me father, for I have sinned.

Seven deadly sins. Seven chakras, seas, steps around the fire. Gloria Anzaldua talks about how white religion seeks to cast pagan feminist deities into the ground. Tries to make it “exotic and mystical.” Tries to make it unbelievable. She mentions Kali, my Kali, the one who destroys evil. She says my Kali has been darkened and disempowered.

“You do hear the negative connotations of Kali, and it’s painful.” – Mom

For anything that happens in the world, you need three things – free thought, free will, and free action. All three are represented by female deities, as “characters” of the Creator, or Brahma. Each male deity has a female consort, and Shiva’s happens to be Shakti, or power. Shakti takes different forms, including Durga and Kali.

“These pseudointellectuals…there was a poster that said ‘Kali was nothing but a whore’ because she seduced Shiva. They don’t understand. They’re empowered by the Christians and people who are just out to get our religion. The liberties that people take – they take our history and mix it with fiction. It offends us, because you mix tradition with fiction and their own opinions. Abrahamic religions are trying to change people’s views on our ancient culture.” We get up in arms about our religion very quickly. Why wouldn’t you, when the only things white people think of when they hear Hinduism is “elephants, Kali, the red forehead dots…and are saris Hindu?”

In third grade, you can’t remember how to draw a swastik. You keep trying over and over on different scraps of paper until someone comes up behind you and loudly asks if you’re drawing the Nazi symbol. You completely forgot that this wasn’t your emblem anymore. You meekly explain to the teacher and students surrounding you that it’s Nazi if it’s slanted. It means power, you say. It means peace. The peace of mind you never got, the piece of your life taking away the pieces of you.

Indians have not been here forever. We have not been enslaved in America. We are the contemporary immigrants, those who came in the 80s and onward. We came when a recession was starting. My parents remember being welcome as foreigners but with different overall experiences.

Dad: “It was difficult for me to know what to eat, because, you know, I had never eaten pizza before. Oh my god, that was heaven for me. We didn’t have much cheese in India, it was for the
higher middle class over there.”

“What do you remember about coming here?”

“Something was different, and it kept bugging me, it kept bugging me, and then I realized there was no one walking on the streets.”

~~~

Mom: “It just depended on where you were. He [my dad] was in Columbus, and only professionals went there. Perceptions of Indians were better there - you were either an engineer or a doctor, so all Indians were respected. In New Jersey, they’re not professionals. You don’t get respected in New Jersey.

I never felt not welcome. I never felt welcome. You’re always different. Kmart was the worst as an immigrant, as soon as people see [gestures towards face and skin]. We had just walked into a shoe aisle that was already messed up and one of you [kids] picked up a shoe. This lady came and said ‘Oh Jesus,’ implying that we had messed up the entire aisle. I had to explain that it was like that before we got there.

People assume that we return things after wearing it. So you start making sure you put every shoe where it was. You start making sure all the tags are on the clothes you’re returning. You try not to fall into stereotypes, but you fall into a box. The Indian box, the immigrant box.”

The video starts out with things you know: rickshaws driven by men in the standard tan uniform with billowing short sleeves, the crack of a good bowl on a cricket bat, the motorcycle driving in the dusty road, the small dark children with eyes that don’t leave yours.

There’s a weird rumbling in your head when you watch a pale ghost dancing in a stark red sari with her almost translucent abdomen showing and her ghagra far too low on her hips. Light skinned desi girls dance behind her while the video erratically cuts to match the (god awful, in your mind) beat. Her awkward attempts at dancing remind you of how people dance to Cotton Eyed Joe. The overt sexualization and Westernization of a dress that you have seen adorning some of your favourite people in the world hurts. You’ve never been very against cultural appropriation – it doesn’t seem to matter so much. You know Desis that get up in arms about white women wearing a bindi, and it doesn’t hit you until you hear Jaya Bedi’s comments on it.

Desi Girl 17
“What makes the non-South Asian person’s use of the bindi problematic is the fact that a pop star like Selena Gomez wearing one is guaranteed to be better received than I would if I were to step out of the house rocking a dot on my forehead. On her, it’s a bold new look; on me, it’s a symbol of my failure to assimilate. On her, it’s unquestionably cool; on me, it’s yet another marker of my Otherness, another thing that makes me different from other American girls. If the use of the bindi by mainstream pop stars made it easier for South Asian women to wear it, I’d be all for its proliferation — but it doesn’t. They lend the bindi an aura of cool that a desi woman simply can’t compete with, often with the privilege of automatic acceptance in a society when many non-white women must fight for it.”

It doesn’t help that you’ve never liked Iggy Azalea. It doesn’t help that there are ways to celebrate others’ cultures without destroying it. Justin Trudeau managed to celebrate Vaisakhi with Sikhs to show his appreciation of Canadian Sikhs.

“But you know magazines are acting like they’ve just been done for the first time because it’s on a white woman’s head or it’s on a white woman’s body and you have to get used to living in a world that doesn’t even acknowledge that you did certain things.” – Onika Tanya Maraj, better known as Nicki Minaj

“The culture is fading. Your kids wont even know Gujarati! Your generation is the last to understand it. How will you keep it alive?”

I don’t know, Mom. I’ll teach them Gujarati, even if they’re half white. I’ll find another Indian association. I’ll take them to India. But deep down I know that while I am giving them their culture and passing on your legacy I am taking something away. I am taking away their opportunity to feel at home in the country you ensured they would be in. I am taking away their peace of mind. I am giving them a future of laddoos and uttapa, dhokla and gulab jamun. I am giving them a tongue

that craves spice when it is homesick, eyebrows that need threading every week, hips that know how to move. I am giving them a family that spans the world. I am giving them a deeper sense of self. I am giving them the option of reincarnation, the knowledge that Saraswati and Lakshmi will help them in times of need. I am giving them red saris and gold kurtas, adorned as they have been for thousands of years. Culture. Religion. Perspective. A world-centered view. A way to connect to others, because that simple flicker of recognition in the eyes tells you more than someone on the outside could ever know.

I am ensuring they will always, always ask themselves if they are too Indian or not Indian enough. I am ensuring that they will feel a distance between themselves and their friends.

I don’t know if I want kids. If I do, I know how I will bring them up. I want kids, to instill in someone of the next generation the values and ideas I grew up with, and maybe I can understand a little more of the hardships they are going through. I don’t want kids, because it’s hard enough figuring out who you are without the insurmountable gap of your skin color between you and everyone else. It’s hard being an immigrant. It’s hard being the child of immigrants. Maybe it won’t be so hard for my children.

A lot of people (generally, white) tell you that your experiences aren’t racially based. They tell you that it’s a part of childhood. They tell you that if it wasn’t that it would’ve been something else and that you’re being oversensitive. It wasn’t racist, it was just kids being kids. The part of you that wants to be strong agrees. The part of you that wants to show your parents that you’ve assimilated after they worked so hard to give their children a better life. The other part of you knows that those kids have been taught from birth by the same systemic racism that pushes down others of colour. The same parents that look sideways at your mother when she never volunteers for a class holiday party (because she knows all she can offer is store bought cookies dropped off between grading papers and meeting with students) pull their kids away from you, bit by bit.

At some point, you have to let go of something. You try not responding when your friends call you a terrorist. You don’t tell them when they are culturally insensitive anymore. You don’t argue with them that they are inherently racist, that the things they are saying are not harmless, and can you please stop referring to me as your Indian friend? You let go. And bit by bit the gap between outside you and inside you widens, a yawning chasm with one foot on each side and darkness between.

They always say they’re not racist. They always justify it to you, tell you they’re joking,
laugh it off. They always say that after they make terrorist jokes, 7/11 jokes, gas station jokes, motel jokes. They always say that after they say something biting. If you take it personally, scream that you’ve been subjected to this for too long and you are tired of being the Indian friend, you are just so very tired of your beautiful culture being reduced to trashy jokes, they will say you are too sensitive. It was just a joke. Their answers cover up the question, “Are your friends racist?”

You have never, never had a friend who does not make Indian jokes. You never will. They will always assume it is the part of you that matters the most.

You are lying on a bed with a girl (white). You are in fits of laughter, some stupid internet joke, when another friend comes in Facetiming her old friend. “This is my Indian friend,” she says. Shifting the camera to the other girl, she says “this is my friend.”

The other girl does not need a qualifier. The other girl is not a diversity quota. She will not, after hooking up with a white guy, be told that she was a checkmark on his list of races. She will not be called “exotic.” She will not hide the fact that she did Indian classical dance for 10 years, because she is tired of being asked if it is belly dancing, tired of a thousand year old tradition being sexualized. She will never ask herself if she is tired of her culture. She will never ask if she needs friends who do not do that to her. She will never ask herself why she stopped standing up for her culture. The answer is always the same: it was a joke. I’m not racist.

Racists don’t have Indian friends, right?
References


Sarah Fling is a senior History major, with minors in Theatre Arts and French, as well as three certificates from the European Studies Center. She is attending graduate school this fall to receive a master’s degree in History and Museum Studies and hopes to be a museum curator someday. Sarah has presented her research on Queen Victoria at Harvard University’s National Collegiate Conference, the University of Kentucky’s ACC Meeting of the Minds, and Pitt’s Undergraduate Research Symposium on Europe and Eurasia. She finds inspiration from awesome lady historians, especially Helen Rappaport and Lucy Worsley.
“They say no sovereign was more loved than I am (I am bold enough to say), and that, from our happy domestic home—which gives such good example”.
- Queen Victoria, October 1844

“It is true, we owe her no political allegiance; but the virtues of the Queen of England, while they secure to her the love and loyalty of her subjects, entitle her to the willing fealty of every honorable man in Republican America”.
- Cornelius Conway Felton, 1854

I. Introduction

Perhaps the most evident aspect of the Anglo-American relationship in popular culture today is the peculiar way in which Americans marvel at the British royal family. Interest in royal weddings and births has become equally as ingrained into American society as in British society, and popular movies, television shows, books, etc. across the United States similarly reflect interest in this topic. Today, this attention is paid to the royals as a result of the perceived glamour, class, and fairytale of the family, but American obsession with the British monarchy spans almost two centuries—beginning with the young Queen Victoria in 1838. Unlike this present-day perception that is reliant on the novelty of a different culture and system, the foundation of American interest in and romanticizing of the British monarchy began as a reflection of similarities between America and Britain: most notably, the transatlantic appeal of a morally upright female in the highest station imaginable.

Queen Victoria’s popularity among Brits is undeniable and for good reason. She was the longest reigning British sovereign up to that point, as well as the head of the largest empire in the history of the world; at its height, her dominion extended into six continents, and Victoria became the namesake of an entire era. What is not so evident, however, is the impetus behind her vast popularity in the United States. This admiration took many forms: for example, popularization of the white wedding dress in American society following the Queen’s marriage to Prince Albert in 1840, or the United States’ somber response to her death in 1901. The headline of The New York Times on the day after Victoria’s death, January 23, 1901, proclaimed, “Washington Flags Lowered: Such a Mark of Respect Had Never Been Before Paid

on the Death of a Monarch”. Why was this grief so sharply felt across America—a country which only a century before had rejected the British monarchy through violence?

The relationship between America and Britain is one without definition; ever-changing and subjective between time periods, groups, and areas, it is a rapport marked by fluidity. Today, they are two distinct cultures with unique customs, dialects, and mores that are a result of decades of separation across a vast ocean. In the early periods of the American state, however, this divide was much less significant. Following the American Revolution, the two polities still shared many characteristics, despite the American denunciation of all things British—a necessary part of independence. From the establishment of British colonies in America to roughly the turn of the 19th century, areas including American judicial systems, popular culture, and sports were highly influenced by the “mother country”. In J. H. Plumb’s article, Britain and America: The Cultural Tradition, he


claims that “so long as we maintain a common language we shall always be tied together as siblings are by a common parentage”.

Moreover, he claims that “in religion…the influence of England is paramount—Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, all descend directly from either the Church of England or its dissenting sects”. In this paper, I will argue that Queen Victoria’s popularity in America throughout the 19th century was a result of this sense of commonality—most especially, the Queen’s personification of shared Anglo-American ideals of femininity, faith, and domesticity.

II. The Industrial Revolution and Femininity

The Industrial Revolution in Britain arguably started the domino effect from which American interest in the monarchy stemmed. As steam power, textiles, and factory systems boomed in Britain, these advances in production and industry trickled over to the United States, creating two nations with industrial revolutions which completely altered the fabric of society in each. For the purpose of comparing the cultural and societal dynamics of both Britain and America in this period, one of the most striking similarities is their kindred view of femininity in the 19th century, which was a result of the Industrial Revolution and religious values shared by the two.

It was this climate of transformation in the workforce that resulted in a change in domestic life. As opportunity in industry increased, the explosion of a new middle-class permanently and drastically transformed the structure of society. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, citizens largely fell into one of only two categories: the lower-class or the aristocracy. Following this change in industry, land and titles were no longer the only means of making a modest living; jobs in factories, shops, and offices made the new middle-class an increasingly influential force in countries touched by the Industrial Revolution.

As scores of middle-class men entered the workforce, women’s roles were increasingly set in the home. Thus, the era of “separate spheres” was born, wherein the realms of men and women rarely overlapped; a man’s focus was in work, economics, and politics, while women were “sequestered from the so-called evils of commerce and production in homes, where they were to be the guardians of morality and cultivation”.


“woman’s place” took root, and ideas of female responsibility for education, child-rearing, domesticity, and morality came into being.

From this, popular tropes emerged which emphasized the gender norms of the 19th century in both Britain and America. One, the “Cult of Domesticity”, divided “true womanhood” into four characteristics: “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity”. Another more exclusively British trope of the century was the “Angel in the House”, a sweeping illustration of separate spheres based upon its namesake, a poem by Coventry Patmore. The poem speaks to Victorian views of femininity and its inherent inferiority and piousness as compared to masculinity. The characteristics of the ideal woman—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity—found true personification in Queen Victoria, leading to her immense popularity among American citizens and British subjects alike.

It is important to note that this new ideology did not extend to all spheres of life. Class systems and hierarchies ruled in the 19th century, and the “Cult of Domesticity” was largely a middle and upper-class phenomenon. Lower class families often had to rely on women for financial support in whatever way they could, and immigrants, slaves, and other underprivileged or persecuted groups did not have the luxury of a sheltered life within the home. Moreover, the ideology of “separate spheres” remained limited to white Christians. As these middle-class groups made up a significant part of society at the time, their preferences and behavior proved formative for society in the Victorian era.

**III. Victoria, Independent**

Queen Victoria, sovereign of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and later, Empress of India, seems the antithesis of domesticity as the most powerful woman—if not person—in the world for the better part of a century, being almost universally beloved with a legacy which outshone her contemporaries. Her legacy was not one born of feminism, however. Following her marriage to Prince Albert, Victoria was the absolute personification of the “Cult of Domesticity” in every sense of the phrase.

Prior to her marriage to Prince Albert in 1840, Victoria’s popularity among Brits and Americans was tepid at best. Upon her coronation in 1838, she was widely celebrated, likely due to her immense popularity among American citizens and British subjects alike.

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the novelty of a young female taking the British throne, but in the years before her coronation and up to her wedding, this popularity waned both at home and abroad. The Queen was embroiled in a variety of scandals, and Americans had little reason to engage with royal goings-on across the Atlantic. Additionally, the elements which often captivate Americans today—the beauty and glamour of British royalty—were decidedly absent in the new Queen; barely five feet tall, American Fanny Appleton, wife of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, posited, “[A]las! for England’s future queen, whatever else, beauty is not her dower—a short, thick commonplace, stupid-looking girl, dressed simply in white with a wreath of roses, without even a good complexion!”.

Many Americans would also disparage her small stature and plump figure, reflecting their disinterest in the small, plain woman who sat on the British throne. American indifference continued as Victoria remained a powerful, single woman—the converse of the ideal, domestic wife. Until her marriage, Victoria was relatively independent and held more power than any other woman in her kingdom. Incongruous with popular sentiment of the period, she was terrified to have children, and sometimes critical of marriage. She is quoted as saying:

All marriage is such a lottery — the happiness is always an exchange — though it may be a very happy one — still the poor woman is bodily and morally the husband’s slave. That always sticks in my throat. When I think of a merry, happy, and free young girl — and look at the ailing aching state a young wife is generally doomed to — which you can’t deny is the penalty of marriage.

Moreover, many of her contemporaries made the comparison to another single British Queen: Elizabeth I. American correspondence in London under Colonel Joseph White declared that “the little Queen is playing Elizabeth already…she manifests an astonishing aplomb.” This headstrong, independent sovereign held no interest for a nation who put submissive, domestic women on a pedestal, and the British felt the same. Victoria’s popularity would not flourish until she marked herself as the quintessence of femininity to American and British audiences: a wife.

IV. “We Women Are Not Made for Governing”: Victoria and Domesticity

14 Weintraub, 16.
All of these sentiments changed when Victoria married Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, her first cousin. Their marriage has become famed for its genuine passion and devotion, and it was their unity that truly launched Victoria’s image as the archetypal 19th century woman. The wedding itself prompted much of this image. The Queen’s vows brought to the forefront her status as a submissive wife, rather than powerful sovereign; “when the archbishop asked the Queen if she would like to remove the word ‘obey’ from the marriage service, she insisted it remain”.15 In just one statement, Victoria delineated what would become her legacy, stating that she wished “to be married as a woman and not as a Queen”.16 This resonated across the Atlantic; an American news report in the Morning Herald specifically took care to include that the Queen “repeated the words love, honor, and obey in a very audible manner”.17

Victoria’s dress, too, has become a renowned part of her legacy. She popularized the white wedding gown, which remains a staple in Western culture today. Historically, there was no precedent or obligation to wear a white wedding gown, and “more often than not, a woman got married in the best dress she already owned”.18 Of course, some did wear white. However, “white dresses did not symbolize virginity or even purity, but rather were costlier and harder to keep clean, and thus communicated the status and wealth of the wearer”.19 After the royal wedding in 1840, however, the connection between white wedding dresses and purity was forged—a result of Victoria’s newly revered image of piousness. Godey’s Lady’s Book, a popular magazine in 19th century America, published an article in 1849 claiming that “custom has decided, from the earliest ages, that white is the most fitting hue” for the wedding gown, as it is “an emblem of the purity and innocence of girlhood”.20 Within only a few years, Victoria herself had created a new norm in the realm of femininity, thanks to a change in public perception of the Queen; she had quickly transformed from a threat towards

19 Ibid.
female submission into its very personification.

In the years after 1840, Victoria further plunged herself into the woman’s sphere by becoming a mother *nine times*. She was steadily pregnant from 1840-1857, and though Victoria was dispassionate about babies and motherhood, her image relied on wearing a domestic face. After marriage, motherhood was the most important part of a woman’s life in the 19th century; it “anchored her more firmly to the home”, and society “depended upon mothers to raise up a whole generation of Christian statesmen”.

Mothers were the backbone of Western Christian society and were meant to instill piety and morals in their sons and daughters—and the Queen of England was no stranger to this expectation. Although she privately claimed that it made her “absolutely miserable… to have the first two years of [her] married life utterly spoilt” by childbirth and childrearing, Victoria outwardly advertised the joy of domesticity in the highest station. Author Margaret Homans posits that “Victoria is at once an exemplary construct of Victorian ideology and its fantasized author”. While Victoria may not have been an enthusiastic mother, she perpetuated domestic values. Even more so, she did what so many could not do in the Victorian Era, a time of poor sanitation and dubious medical practice—she survived childbirth numerous times and produced multiple healthy babies. In this way, she was the picture of motherhood and life in the “woman’s sphere”.

As their family continued to grow, so too did their domestic image. Victoria became increasingly devoted to Albert as their marriage matured, and her once fiery spirit gave way to deference, as she “molded herself around him, like ivy round an oak”. Although the most powerful woman in the world, the Queen sank further and further into the societal place consigned to her because of her gender. Victoria came to relish domestic life rather than fear it, and her subjects—as well as foreign onlookers—noticed. The *Christian Parlor Magazine*, an American publication dedicated to piety and morality in the United States, devoted an entire section to the young Queen, heaping adulation upon her moral and religious righteousness. The article states unequivocally:

The example of the Queen is a beautiful and forcible recommendation of the superior character of domestic enjoyment to any other of a temporal nature. With the whole range of worldly

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21 Welter, 171.
23 Homans, 6.
pleasures before her, she enters the little circle of home, and finds her happiness there. Her children and her husband are worth more to her than crown and kingdom and regal pomp.  

The royal family perpetuated this image of happiness in the home both through outward action, as well as through popular imagery. For example, royal portraiture puts Victoria’s “ordinary”, wifely role on display; frequently, she and Albert “assume[d]… the guise of the middle classes, their clothes and most importantly, their rigid gender hierarchy”. In Figure 1, titled “To the Queen’s Private Apartments: The Queen and Prince Albert at Home”, the pair cultivate this image as they happily play with their children, and no crowns or symbols of royalty are extant. Margaret Homans claims that “the more [the Queen] appears as a bending, yielding wifely figure, the more her subjects grant her the power to model their lives”. Based upon the evidence of Victoria’s popularity in America, it became clear that this “model” was not just for her subjects, but for the larger Western Christian world. Without the television programs or social media which connect Americans to the monarchy today, these portraits acted as the best piece of propaganda to show non-Brits the

26 Homans, 181.
28 Homans, 177.
values of the Queen.

Important to note, Victoria was a wife who not only obeyed her husband, but by all accounts, she loved him truly and deeply. More than anything, her tangible devotion to him solidified her popular image among Brits and Americans as the perfect wife. His influence on her completely altered her reign and personality, changing the single queen with reported “aplomb” into a woman who was helpless and dependent. After losing Albert, Victoria was quoted as saying: “when I hear you say I am good or wise or a great Queen, I long to tell you that what I am he has made me, and that without him I should have been unworthy in every way”.

She was female subordination incarnate, and Christians within and outside of her realm exulted in it—none more than Americans.

So too did the Queen boost her image in America and Britain through her support of certain social and political movements. Causes which she heartily supported included “education when allied to religion” and the “sorrows of widows and children”. An advocate for women in the home, she was concurrently a “vehement opponent of every movement that had for its ultimate object the higher education and development of women.”

A contradiction in every sense of the word, Victoria was a highly-educated woman with great power who disavowed the pursuit of similar status amongst her fellow women. In perhaps the most obvious example of her incongruous place in society, she despised the growing suffragist movement in Britain, positing:

I am most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of “Women’s Rights,” with all its attendant horrors. … Were women to “unsex” themselves by claiming equality with men, they would become the most hateful, heathen, and disgusting of beings and would surely perish without male protection.

In accordance to her own status as sovereign, Victoria believed that she was an exception to the rule, stating that, “I am every day more convinced that we women, if we are to be good women, feminine and amiable and domestic, are not fitted to reign” and that “we women are not made for governing, and if we are good women,

31 Jeune, 333.
32 Queen Victoria’s letter (1870) in “Gender Ideology and Separate Spheres in the 19th Century”, Victoria and Albert Museum, http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/g/gender-ideology-and-separate-spheres-19th-century/.

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we must dislike these masculine occupations.”

This sentiment of female disinterest in politics and power was equally popular in America as well, and women’s publications, such as the *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, went so far as to include a petition against women’s suffrage in the United States, claiming that “Holy Scripture inculcates a different, and for us higher, sphere apart from public life.” Queen Victoria thus promulgated an image of domesticity both through her actions within the house and through her behavior in the public sphere. This was an image which reflected the ideals of the time, both in Britain and America.

V. Grief, War, and the Creation of a Legacy

By 1860, the Queen had come to fully rely on Albert in all things. The Prince Consort had moved from the Queen’s confidant to her master—“king in all but name”. At the same time, their popularity among Americans was at an all-time high. George Templeton Strong commented in 1858: “there is a deep and almost universal feeling of respect and regard for

Great Britain and for Her Britannic Majesty. The old anti-British patriotism of twenty years ago is nearly extinct”. However, the dawn of the 1860s was to bring two life-altering events which Brits and Americans could not have predicted: the American Civil War and the untimely death of the Prince Consort.

Conflict in America that had been brewing for years naturally drew attention from across the Atlantic. The Queen and Prince Consort were desirable allies for both the United and Confederate States of America, and the United Kingdom relied heavily on American commerce—particularly the cotton production of the South. At the same time, many Brits were strong abolitionists, including the royal family. This interesting dichotomy led to questions about with whom the United Kingdom would side; in the end, it was diplomatic intervention by Queen Victoria and Albert that kept Britain out of the conflict in its earliest stages.

Known as the Trent Affair, a watershed moment occurred in the diplomatic relations between Britain and the United States in 1861, as the United States seized a ship carrying Confederate envoys, though Britain

35 Rappaport, 8.
36 Weintraub, 83.
had declared neutrality. Stories say that Prince Albert happened upon a letter ready to be sent to America regarding the incident but reformed the incendiary language and thus avoided a conflict which might have spiraled into a British entrance into the American Civil War.

On December 14, 1861, Victoria’s attention turned elsewhere as she faced the greatest loss imaginable—the death of Prince Albert. The grief felt by Victoria is renowned today: “All the world is sad and dark and empty—mourning is the only thing that gives me satisfaction”, lamented the Queen on December 25, 1861. Naturally, this was an emotional—rather than factual—statement, but it perfectly illustrates Victoria’s devastation, which characterized the latter half of her life and earned her the nickname, “Widow of Windsor”. Victoria’s grief led her to stray from the usual behavior of a wife in mourning; her devotion to Albert’s memory was ceaseless. She chose to dress only in black, laid out her husband’s clothes each day, and slept with Albert’s coat each night for the rest of her life.

Around the world, sympathy for her epic loss arrived. Even in a divided America, “ship’s flags flew at half-mast; British societies held commemorative events; clergymen delivered sermons on the significance of his family life; and church bells tolled”. The world was very aware of Victoria’s reliance on her husband, and the Queen’s desolation at his death was both evident and woeful. She mourned:

But oh! To be cut off in the prime of life—to see our pure, happy, quiet, domestic life, which alone enabled me to bear my much disliked position CUT OFF at forty-two—

41 Rappaport, 122.
42 Rappaport, 122.
43 Paula Bartley, Queen Victoria (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), accessed November 4, 2018, ProQuest EBook Central, 159.
44 Prochaska, 84.

Figure 2

**“Our Happy Domestic Home”**
when I *had* hoped with such instinctive certainty that God never *would* part us, and would let us grown old together... is too *awful*, too cruel.  

Suddenly, Victoria was faced with a life she had no familiarity with—one without her “happy, quiet, domestic life” and husband to guide her.  

As Victoria surrendered herself to a lifetime of grief, she lost significant popularity among her countrymen and around the world, as many found the longevity of her seclusion and depression to be gaudy, dramatic, and self-serving. In Figure 2, a British cartoon depicts Victoria as Queen Hermione from Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale*, the virtuous Queen who died of grief and became a statue. The cartoon’s caption reads: “Tis Time! Descend: Be Stone No More!”  

Desire for her reentrance into public life is manifested in this piece, but she would not do so for decades. 

It was not until the end of her remarkably extensive reign that she came out of seclusion and became a semi-mythical figure: Americans and Brits alike came to appreciate the steadfastness of the Queen in an era of constant change, where globalization and industrialization ruled. The image that Victoria spent a life cultivating—of motherhood, devotion to her husband, and virtue—was celebrated across the world at her Golden and Diamond Jubilees, commemorating fifty and sixty years on the throne, respectively. In 1896, she became the longest-reigning monarch in the history of Great Britain, and her loyal admirers in the United States rejoiced in her long lifetime of personifying the ideals which they held so dearly; according to historian, Frank Prochaska, “the jubilee was widely seen as a triumph of womanhood” in America, and American religious figures were some of her most enthusiastic spectators. 

One jubilee sermon given in New York City proclaimed that “Victoria enjoyed universal respect and love not alone because she has been a good Queen, but because she has been a womanly Queen and Christian”.  

Her spotless record of piety, womanhood, and submission continued to nurture her popularity in the United States up to her death on January 22, 1901. At the impressive age of eighty-one, having reigned for sixty-three years, she brought with her the end of an era. Eighteen American presidents and the American Civil War had come and gone, while she had remained firmly positioned on the throne. When news of her death reached

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45 Rappaport, 103. 
47 Prochaska, 102. 
48 Ibid, 102.
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American shores, President McKinley is said to have exclaimed, “Why, gentlemen, she began to reign before we were born!”

The American reaction to her death was tremendously indicative of her popularity there, as well as her influence upon the values and morals of U.S. citizens. Although she was elderly and her death came as no great surprise, grief was universal and many tears were shed for the monarch of America’s one-time adversary. Ceremonies in Victoria’s honor emerged across the United States: Congress adjourned, the flag was lowered to half-mast, the Union Jack flew in store windows, and Trinity Church in New York City turned away over six-thousand mourners “for lack of room” at their Sunday service devoted to the late Queen.

Her eminence as mother, wife, and woman stirred grief from abroad and domesticity was the fulcrum of the boundless sermons and epitaphs which accompanied her death. Henry C. Potter, Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States, commented that “people who had never been to England and never expect to go felt the same personal devotion to her”.

Author of the 1901 book The Beautiful Life and Illustrious Reign of Queen Victoria, John Ruskin, was a citizen of the U.K. living in America. He stated that:

These tributes show that the world esteems lofty womanhood more than regal power, and personal virtue more than political influence. And no Queen in modern or in ancient days better deserved such a tribute. In her influence upon manners and morals she held world-wide sway over the hearts of men and women. Her purity and integrity of character commended her to her subjects and they acknowledged the force of these traits and manifested their appreciation by such an outpouring of sympathy as no other English sovereign ever received. In devotion to her domestic duties, in the bringing up of her family, in the enforcement of morality without prudery, in devotion to religion without bigotry, in personal courtesy to every-one, in simplicity of tastes, habits and dress, in all gentle dignity and sweet graciousness, the influence of her character was greater than the influence of her position. She set an example to all women of exalted, useful, Christian womanhood which is a grander record than that of queenly

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49 Weintraub, 172.
power or royal state. \(^{52}\)

On January 23, 1901, Arthur Balfour declared before the House of Commons, “She passed away, I believe, without a single enemy in the world, for even those who love not England love her”. \(^{53}\) The affection felt towards the long-time Queen was genuine and profound; American Secretary of State William M. Evarts once firmly asserted: “Had Queen Victoria been on the throne, instead of George III, or if we had postponed our rebellion until Queen Victoria reigned, it would not have been necessary”. \(^{54}\)

Victoria’s reign remains the stuff of legend; her legacy, one of epic proportions; and her personality, the epitome of femininity—a true “Angel in the House”. It was through her public image that she solidified her popularity amongst the citizens of a nation who needed not submit to her rule; the American people found in the British Queen the very personification of the ideals that they held in highest esteem. Queen Victoria was the most powerful woman in the world for the better part of a century, but she “preferred always to be queenly among women rather than queenly among queens”. \(^{55}\) Queen Victoria was the spark which lit the flame for American obsession with the British monarchy, not through shock and awe, but through the embodiment of the social and religious ideals most closely held by her spectators across the Atlantic. This bond between Americans and the monarchy, borne of similarity, has morphed into one of difference in the present day, but remains one of fervent curiosity—and it all began with a young British queen who preferred the familial hearth to the world’s most powerful throne.

52 Rusk, 393
53 Ibid, 384
54 Prochaska, 82.
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Images


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Sarah Hart

Hypomanic Hangover
Sarah Hart is a junior Environmental Studies major at the University of Pittsburgh. Being a part of the Fossil Free Pitt Coalition as well as working with her five member team to bring solitary bee homes to Pitt’s campus, she has been able to form a sense of community and deep commitment to the environment. This is something she never really experienced before. In these groups, she is able to keep in touch with her love for art when making logos, posters, etc.

I really challenged myself with this piece because I had never actually worked much with embroidery. I created this large scale piece in one go through plenty of trial and error, and I found patience I never thought I had. My pieces are unintentionally personal. I usually start off with one or two objects I really want to create; this one specifically was the clawfoot bathtub, and everything else is just randomly added as I go with no thought out meaning. Only after I completely finished this did I realize I had created a scene representing how I felt after my freshman year when I experienced my first full blown manic episode. It was the lowest time of my life, and instead of thinking about that feeling when I see it, I think about how far I have come since then, and I feel like many people will be able to relate to this.

“It was the lowest time of my life, and instead of thinking about that feeling when I see it, I think about how far I have come”
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You are not just a student. I am not just a student. I spent a lot of time out of school learning that. These are not the threads that string us together.

All you need to know about me is that everything that happened to me, happened exactly as I present it to you. Know that these things do happen, and that people do come out of them. That’s the kind of thing that inspires me.

46 Kier
The door through which you enter matters. It is one of those benign things that can change the cadence of your life. It is like the chair you sit in next to your future spouse. The door is like that. But not at all like that.

If you carry yourself up that concrete mountain and walk through the front door—that is, if you willingly admit yourself—then you are, by definition—admitting to your crazy and are thinking, at least right now, that you'd like to do something about it.

This will work with you and against you.

If you are dragged through the back doors—which can be accessed only by EMTs and the fuzz—someone else has brought you in. Which is an entirely different ballgame altogether. You haven’t quite recognized, let alone admitted to, your own state of being.

This will work with you and against you.

You are pulled, fast-pass, into a smaller, more volatile subset of people that are the very definition of acute. You are, statistically, more likely to be taken upstairs to be hospitalized for, at the very least, seventy two hours. It is a kind of disappearance—you have been picked up off the street and have suddenly vanished.

There is a door separating the front and back room. It locks automatically—the only sound you start to pay attention to is the jangling of keys. The keys are an indication of movement. The sound is a promise—you may not die in Western Psychiatrics’ diagnostic evaluation center after all.

First they’ll bring you a clipboard with a piece of paper on it, the white contrasting bleakly with the fine black print. Somewhere within the jumble of words that you can’t quite read at this point because the place is so damn sedating, is the confirmation that you will not be falsifying your identity or your insurance information. Just sign whatever they hand you.

They will leave you alone for an honest to God indefinite amount of time. This is natural. You are supposed to turn your head and watch Cars 3 or HGTV (it’s always Cars 3, or HGTV).

But first survey the area. It’s always good to know where you are. I mean, they’ll ask you if you know where you are a lot, so have a good answer. Or at the very least, a fun one.

The floor, a speckled blue-green and the wall, a different shade of blue. A shade that—while intended to be calming—will irritate you into a slowly revolving madness, the scope of which will increase every time you notice the difference. The bathrooms are locked. So if someone has to go, expect to hear a sheepish request or a screaming declaration of the need to pee. The chairs are nailed down so that no one can throw them at anyone.

You will think, wow, they’ve thought of everything.

But then they will call your name, like a question, like they didn’t take your picture just moments before and brand you with a plastic band that literally has your name on it. Like a question. Like, “Do you remember your own name?” They will lead you into an interview room, except someone has scratched or ripped the v off the sign, so now it’s just an “inter iew room”. You will think this quite impressive, considering they have already taken away anything sharp you could use to kill yourself with, the entire place soft then, by nature. You will
realize that if you were more creative, and more up to it, you could probably find a way to end it all.

It’s always the same person. I mean, it’s always a different person, but they all amount to the same tired face, leaning in, clipboard in hand. So many clipboards. Everyone wears scrubs, everyone you meet, which is odd because they’re not reaching inside you.

Well.

They’ll take your vitals, to make sure you’re not actively dying. Just passively. Which is much more terrifying.

It slipped my mind—bring a book. Paperback, so that it won’t disappear into some back office because you could “bash someone’s head in with it.” You usually get it back when you leave. Usually. Guards are forgetful.

If you’ve been cornered by the police or rushed there in an ambulance, you have obviously been blindsided by timing, as we often are. There are two options at this point—make friends or avoid eye contact entirely.

Again, read the room.

They will bring another clipboard, and—this is what separates the temporarily and chronically ill—they will ask for your information, or they will ask for an update. The second implies that you are fucked, again. That you are already on their radar, that there is probably no moving off of it, that you frequent here about as often as your primary doctor’s office. You are crackerjack, my friend, and you already know what it’s like.

After you’ve watched the clock spin around like some intricate ballet that you couldn’t find your way out of, after you can’t even recall why you’re there in the first place, they will ask your name, a philosophical question at this point, *Am I myself? Will I ever be again?* You will be brought back into the interviewing room and asked to tell your story. Which is unfair because you won’t actually say what you mean to. Stories are in the details anyway.

There are three (consistently cold) chairs to a room, which is odd because they have only ever asked you in by yourself, there is only one person who interviews you. This is a big decision—sit closer to the small window that isn’t really a window because you can’t see out of it; or sit closer to the therapist, which implies a trust that has in no way been established yet.

I don’t have an answer for this.

And, almost as naturally as saying their own name (is it a question?) they will say ask, ridiculously, like you’re in a department store:

“What brings you in today?”

....

I dig my fingers into my kneecaps and smash my kneecaps into each other and this chair just sits under me hearing me think my whole thoughts and then I take a big breath and then I let it go.

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“Well, my psychiatrist decided I was manic and she called the cops which I think is unfair because all I did was dance on her desk and then run out screaming and then I hid two floors underground from the cops which I think is impressive because I made it four hours and they went to my house and my work and everything but then they cornered me and handcuffed me and now I guess I’m here.”

“Why do you think they brought you here?”

“Oh I don’t know. What I do know is that they handcuffed me, the cheeky bastards! It’s a cop kink, I’m sure of it. They locked the handcuffs onto the back seat of the van—a whole van, just for me!—but they didn’t know that I’m a magician so I just said, ‘And for my next trick!’ and pulled on the cuffs. It didn’t work. Magic is weird like that.”

“If you could just stop pacing…”

“It’s absolutely freezing in here its March this is bullshit and I have a thermodynamics final in two days but really all I want to do is dance until I literally die which isn’t even a problem because the ending is inevitable. I’m just writing the script. I’m like God in that sense. Do you remember the story of Abraham when he was just going to set Isaac on fire and then God was like, ‘Woah, bro, I was just kidding,’ and then Abraham was fucking wrecked. Kierkegaard was wild about this story, one of the pioneers of existentialism, it’s my philosophy, it’s my religion. You’re standing at the edge. Jump. Don’t. But tell me about you, what brings you in today!”

…. He’s popped his collar because he thinks it makes him look cool. He thinks he’s cool because he’s not wearing scrubs. He’s got shit red shoes that have no arch support and he won’t understand this at all. Still.

“Have you ever had that moment—it’s fleeting, but it’s there—where you just think, ‘I really want to kill myself!’ And then you do and everyone is like, ‘Wow, we never saw it coming,’ but of course they saw it coming, they just already let go and they realize it all at once. While they’re walking. It just hits them all at once. They already said goodbye. They fucking knew. In every word they ever said to you—it was laced like the wedding dress on a cheating bride. ‘Goodbye.’”

And then I just smile and wave. And he just picks up his hand from his fucking clipboard and waves back with the oddest look in the world in his eyes. Just past his hipster glasses. The glare won’t hide it. It’s fleeting. But it’s there.

…. “It’s sort of a fantastic story, actually.”

And then I sigh, the weight of these past three weeks releasing itself in this arbitrary fashion. She is the same person—well, not literally, but functionally, and essentially, she is the same as all the others. She is sitting with her legs crossed, her flower scrubs wrinkling, her clipboard on her lap. It’s the same as last time, except this time the weather’s better.

With the last shred of energy I have I gather myself for a momentous performance, as this has been, and will be, the most extraordinary thing to happen to me in my entire life.
I am twenty one years old.

“I’m a physics major, which implies that I’m already mental. I was accepted into an international research program, and I was shipped off, alone, to France. It was supposed to be for ten weeks. I thought I was going to be living with other people from the program—we had been accepted from colleges all over the world—but I was the only one to choose the project that was being carried out in Toulouse.

“Everyone else went to Grenoble. I think this would have turned out much differently if I had gone there too. But I digress.

“So I’m in Toulouse living in a shoebox all by myself. There is not a whisper of a soul in this apartment complex. And everyone in the lab, although perfectly capable of speaking English, decided to speak French around me. I want to say that I’d like to think that they just hadn’t realized I was there, but that’s even more depressing. So I am sold on the idea that they were assholes.

“The point of this is that I was lonely and I missed my family. My depression was gaining momentum and the only thing I knew to turn to was running. So I ran. I listened to Foster the People and Marianas Trench and I ran. And then I stopped eating. And I had already smuggled some diet pills on the flight—I’m an anorexic, I was just here for treatment in May, but it says that on the form, you know that.

“I thought, ‘If nothing else, I will use these ten unsupervised weeks to lose all the weight and come back a specter, a wisp of a whisper of a girl that nobody actually knew. And then everyone will see.’”

“See what?” she asks.

I’m quiet, for a while. The room fills up with all those forgotten sounds. The radiator, her foot tapping on the floor, my own unerring breath. A song of silence. Pervading vibrations.

“I don’t know.”

This question doesn’t quite floor me. It almost does. It does not. It’s the sort of thing a stranger would ask. It’s something so obvious about me it’s painful that someone else notices it first.

“But then I start stockpiling my depression meds and my diet pills and one night I just laid them all out next to a jank knife that I bought at the French version of Walmart and I think, ‘I’m going to do it. I’m really going to do it.’

“I had developed a super close relationship with one of my customers—I work at a grocery store—and she was begging me to come home. She was this tiny voice in my bones. Not my head. But my bones. ‘Could you even imagine life without you?’

“So I came home. It was a painfully impressive feat. My girlfriend booked me a flight for four in the morning and I had to pack up my entire apartment in six hours. I just threw an entire apartment away—the pots and pans, the food, the clothes that shrank in the wash. French laundry is different than American laundry, I swear to God. I looked like I was covering up a crime scene.

“The fun part was that I was supposed to be getting on a plane with my—I guess he’s the French equivalent to a research professor, at six a.m. that very same day. We were supposed to go to Grenoble.”
A pause.

“I was going to give a presentation. I was going to be different than I am.”

And here, for a moment, a devastation like a natural disaster, a waiting for a response, a heartless president in a neighboring country. Except the president is me and the disaster zone is me and there’s such a dissonance that the two seem far, far away.

“And the flight was just wild, I’m telling you. I hid in the airport afraid that my boss would see me. I wore a white shirt and crazy leggings and a black pair of short overalls tied it all together. I looked like a child. I always look like a child.”

I am wearing a pretty striped dress and black strappy sandals and a ribbon in my hair that I know will be taken away upstairs. Noose hazard. But it’s weird because no matter what they take away I will still look like a child.

“I had to go from Toulouse to Frankfurt to Canada to Pittsburgh and let me tell you, Frankfurters—Frankfurtians?—are insane. Well.”

And I gesture around the interview room.

“Maybe not this insane. But they were eating hot dogs, in the airport, at nine in the morning! There was a fucking line for the hot dog stand! I had a cappuccino. Like, a real one, an Italian one. I’m never doing that again. And the plane from Frankfurt to Canada was eight hours long—I hate planes. You have to decide whether to sit clenched into a ball so as not to touch your neighbors the whole time or just play uncomfortable footsies with them until you land but then not exchange numbers, like a one foot stand, you know? The steward brought white wine and I said, ‘Leave the bottle,’ because I honestly didn’t expect to make it this far.”

I want someone to clap.

“I really didn’t. Also I don’t have a drinking problem, don’t send me to the drugs and alcohol unit. Which floor is that again?”

“Ten,” she says, frantically writing things down. What things? I’m just telling a fun story at this point. What have I said that could possibly be entered as notes?

“So I came home yesterday and there was a giant inflatable duck taking up the entire living room. I don’t know what goes on there anymore. But my therapist here, Erin Thompson, maybe you know her? She made me promise to come here as soon as possible. I just needed to get my bearings, pack a bag. She said she’d call down here to try and expedite the process, getting me upstairs. Eighth floor. But I had to come through here first.”

She blinks wildly.

“I’ll check to see if there’s a bed upstairs for you.”

I get the feeling—it settles down into me like a chilly Sunday morning—that all the therapists in the evaluation center think eating disorders are disgusting.

Someone comes to draw blood and take an echocardiogram to make sure my heart hasn’t shrunken irreversibly. I want to tell them that it has, that everything has shrunken inside, but I don’t know how.
The girl doing my echo is a student. She’s not exactly sure where the wires go. I stick them on for her.

“I don’t think it’s really that bad. I had a momentary lapse of judgment, but I’m fine as a fiddle now.”

He peers up and out of his glasses. It’s the same guy. Literally the same one. I recognize his shoes. They’re red. They have no arch support. It’s something that I feel like he should know? But he doesn’t. Now I’m wondering if he’s even qualified to be a doctor.

“You took seven diet pills. Tell me again why.”

I can feel myself resisting. I also cannot help it.

“I just wanted to see.”

I’m a proper idiot.

“To see what?”

I haven’t eaten in hours. I’m still shaking. The cacophony in my heart won’t stop. I think it’s going to explode. I just learned how to pronounce cacophony.

“Exactly how many it would take.”

“To what?”

“To die.”

Really it was a panic response to my entire family going out to a Chinese restaurant last night. Oil. The oil settling in on my face. The grease sticking to my thighs. The caloric waste in the sauce. But what I’m telling him is also true. I don’t realize it until I’m saying it.

“But that was just a fantasy. It wouldn’t play out well.”

“And what do you want to do now?”

This is the critical part: the convincing. Because God do I not want to be tucked away in here for weeks again. I don’t think I can do this again. It was a fucking nightmare. He strokes his little goatee. Is this guy seriously a psychiatrist? He looks about twelve.

“I want to go home. I don’t feel suicidal. I will be safe. I have a safety plan made, and I’ll be with my girlfriend all night. The urge has passed. I promise.”

A smile. My eyes climbing from the sinkhole of death and into an ethereal light, if only for the moment. But it will only take this moment.

“I think you need to stay here, just for a little while. You landed yourself in the emergency room. I would just feel better if you were here.”

He’s speaking softly. Like I’m a fire that he’s trying to talk into putting itself out.

“So, eighth floor?” I say.

My eyes slip back into the sinkhole. Some part of me has already gone to sleep upstairs, in my tiny room on the threadbare hospital sheets. Some part of me has, after all this time, given up.

“I think it’s important to focus on your suicidality first. Then you can focus on eating again. There’s
space on the thirteenth floor. It’s the VIP floor. They just renovated.”

He sounds like the real estate agent talking on the TV. I just stare at the screen.

“I won’t eat if I’m not forced to.”

He gives me some semblance of a pep talk and walks away.

Words will bubble at your lips. You will reach out gasping for brevity like you are drowning in an ocean of hyperbole. Ground yourself—the things which you are about to say matter. You have never so thoroughly understood that language is all that we have on hand for our desperate attempts to transmit reality. Or whatever version of it you’re living in when admitted.

“What meds have you been on?”

“Lithium. But I was paranoid about it making me fat so I flushed them.”

“A Prozac-Zyprexa cocktail, crowd favorite. But the Zyprexa made me into a zombie and the Prozac made me cry, violently. So I started hiding them in the vents in the air conditioner at the residential facility I was at.”

“Lamitcal—no weird rash.”

“Abilify, Visteral, Traxidone.”

“Seroquel, Xanax, Adderall on the weekends but I’m not supposed to tell you my party tricks, am I?”

At first people wear their crazy like badges of honor, their logo being whatever’s in the bottle that they open every morning, if they are of the diligent sort. This will get tiring as the exact number of medications you’ve been on begins to blur, and then you wear nothing but the side effects like memories you’d rather leave at home. You will tick them off on your fingers—until you run out of fingers. The unused pills will lie in your nightstand drawer like corpses, only to be recalled in moments of desperation. Only when out of the side of your eye you catch yourself like a specter. You’ve been absentmindedly stockpiling them for an overdose someday. Just in case.

“What do you think you need right now?”

“To get the fuck out of here.”
“To stay.”

“To be understood. But the essence of connection is one of misunderstanding. We recognize our realities glaringly, we see it so clearly as to describe it exactly as it is, and yet—such a sensation cannot be relayed. When, at last, inevitably, we begin to understand that such a thing is impossible, we become vacant, our mouths closing—like skies with stars that begin to burn out in the blare of the street lamps. We’ll never know each other. Not really.”

You will come to a point at which you realize that no one is going to save you.
Andri Kidd

Rainy Day Best & Yupo Pierrot
Andri Kidd is currently a senior at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, set to graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art this spring. Her areas of focus have been fashion illustration, garment history, figure drawing, painting, needle felting, and ceramic sculpture. When not making art, Andri can be found sleeping, listening to 80’s pop music, and looking at Capricorn memes.

“Yupo Pierrot” is a feeling of reserved judgement. Of held back thoughts. We observe and make unfounded assumptions and accusations whether we mean to or not, and we can either express them or hold them in the back of our minds and wait for them to be disproved. Sometimes to others’ benefit and sometimes to our own detriment.

This piece is heavily process based, and I had to reserve my own judgement on it at first – as I initially was not satisfied with how it was turning out.

Noodler’s ink on translucent YUPO paper, layered with gouache and water-soluble wax crayon (on both sides of the paper).

“Rainy Day Best” is a feeling of waiting. Can you be alone in a room with someone when neither of you are there in the first place? You like being dressed for the occasion, but you wait and you wait to go outside again. This piece draws its imagery from early pen and ink children’s book illustrations, its color palette from kidcore fashion, and its process from the intuitive joy of pencil sketching mixed with the capabilities of digital coloring.
Rainy Day Best & Yupo Pierrot 59
Eion Plenn is a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh studying English Writing (Fiction Track) with a minor in Chemistry. His goal is to attend medical school and then get his master’s degree in Narrative Medicine. In this way, he can utilize his love for writing and medicine within his clinical practice in order to promote healing. Currently, he is an undergraduate teaching assistant for Dr. Roberts’s Foundations of Biology class, a writer for Spoon University, and a mentor for Keep It Real, a club which tutors elementary and middle school children of refugee families from Somalia. Outside of the classroom, he works as a care attendant at UPMC Mercy, where he sits with patients in need of physical and emotional support. In his free time, he likes to run (a lot!), eat Thai food, and write short stories.
Introduction

In 2050, it is estimated that more than 70% of the world’s population will live in an urban environment (Gruebner et al., 2017). By that time, health specialists predict more than a quarter of Americans will have some relationship with mental illness (Galea, Uddin, & Koenen, 2011; NAMI, 2018). While many social and technological developments have increased mental illness diagnoses, such as improved screening and counseling techniques, underlying causes are apparent (Weissman et al., 2017). Past and current research has questioned how environment may link to mental illness. This has brought attention to how one’s level of urbanization—from living in the city to a suburban or rural area—not only impacts one’s health, but also their mental state.

Since the twentieth century, most research focused on how urban environments correlated to mental disorders, failing to study other areas or individual factors such as race and gender. It was classic urban sociologists, such as George Simmel, who proposed living in highly populated areas results in an overall breakdown of social order, claiming that individuals in urban climates begin to quantify, discriminate, and detach themselves from society (Adams, 2005; Simmel, 1903). As a result, city life had been seen as an “economic hub”, suppressing emotional behaviors and individuality. When one’s individuality, creativity, and free-thought is limited, they are consequently more likely to exhibit ruts of depression and overall loss of interest in their lives.

This archaic theory sparked early studies which found concrete data linking urbanization to cognitive distress. For example, in the 1930s, sociologists, Robert E. Lee Faris and H. Warren Dunham, found high rates of schizophrenia among children born in inner-city Chicago (Schmidt, 2007). After similar studies were replicated in other countries, results showed that urban birth raises the baseline risk of schizophrenia by roughly 50% (Schmidt, 2007). Yet, these findings are problematic in that they only measured how one’s space contributed to mental illness, failing to recognize how socioeconomic or external factors, such as crime rate and poverty, may also play a role.

Since Lee and Duham’s study on schizophrenia, more thoughtful studies have been conducted in order to find a link between urbanization and mental illness. Researchers have theorized that the increase in mental illness in cities may be due to underlying socioeconomic disparities and higher crime rates. For example, the urban environment may not be as safe or familiar as the suburban or rural neighborhood, making relationships with neighbors or shop owners less valuable (Schmidt, 2007). As a result, some individuals lose critical social support. Crime and fear of crime, while not mutually exclusive, have been possible factors that link a neighborhood to an individual’s mental health (Schmidt, 2007).

Another argument for why one’s risk for mental illness may be higher in urban areas is because the physical aspects of cities generally contain higher rates of pollution, traffic, and tall buildings which may be perceived as oppressive (Gruebner et al., 2017). Science has shown through animal models that these environmental conditions can impact individual-level experiences, shaping their brain activity and consequent mental states (Galea et al., 2011). In one cognitive study, the psychologist would show the participant images from both rural and urban settings (Galea et al., 2011). Results found that each image
activated different regions of the brain, with urban images stimulating the emotional areas of the brain, including the hippocampus and amygdala. From this, further research suggests that brain abnormalities in these regions can even be associated with mental disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Galea et al., 2011).

Nonetheless, when comparing these findings to studies linking rural climates to mental illness, the results contradict. Research on how rural environments influences one’s risk of mental illness has been underrepresented throughout the past century. In American folklore, the rural environment is seen as a place of tranquility, contrasting the stereotypical “rat-race” city environment. These biases skew mental illness research towards urban environments over rural ones. In actuality, many studies have found mental illness to be extremely prevalent in rural communities. For instance, researchers who studied the population of male farmers found that rates of suicide within farmers are on average higher than the rates for urban individuals (Eberhardt and Pamuk, 2004). Many factors may influence this, such as the physical stresses and hazards of agricultural work (Fraser et al., 2005). Also, many farmers live in close proximity to their workplace, merging their economic stresses with their home lives (Fraser et al., 2005).

A more concerning study linked the children of seasonal farm workers to above average proportions of mental illness. More so, less than half of those with a psychiatric diagnosis had seen a health professional about their mental state (Fraser et al., 2005). This may be because many rural environments lack psychiatric clinics and hospitals, leading to a decrease in mental health diagnosis. Furthermore, the infrastructure in rural climates may not be as developed as its urban and suburban counterparts, often times comprised of dirt roads, cornfields, and heavily forested trails which make transportation for treatment difficult. (Fraser et al., 2005). Moreover, rural populations often exhibit a stoic, hyper-masculine mentality, which creates a stigma behind receiving psychiatric treatment for mental illness (Fraser et al., 2005). Thus, due to cultural differences in many of these communities, resources may not be utilized to their greatest extent even if they are available (Fischer et al., 2005).

Yet, these studies are flawed in that they all lack a comprehensive and holistic view of mental illness in America. In solely studying which environment—rural or urban—poses greater risk of mental illness, past research has failed to consider how intrinsic factors, such as one’s race, ethnicity, and gender, may intersect with one’s level of urbanization and risk of mental illness. When accounting for these variables, the trends become murky. For instance, a study found that African American women who live in urban areas are more likely to develop mood disorders than those in rural areas (Weaver et al., 2015). Yet, in rural areas, non-Hispanic white women were at a higher probability of acquiring mood disorders (Weaver et al., 2015). Similar abnormalities have been presented in Mexican American populations. A team of researchers from California found that Mexican Americans had lower rates of lifetime psychiatric disorders than rates comparable to United States (Ethel et al.,
However, there was a higher prevalence of psychiatric disorders reported in Mexican Americans residing in urban environments when compared to small-town and rural areas. While these studies may seem to contradict each other, they introduce us to the idea that environment has a complex relationship with the individual.

Thus, it is crucial to understand America’s mental health dilemma in the context of more nuanced risk factors when examining mental illness in terms of environment. While substantial research has found that urban environments have greater risk for mental disorders, this is an outdated and myopic view of the issue. As stated previously, rural environments also have similar mental health issues, yet due to a lack of research and perpetual stigmas, they are less likely to be diagnosed or understand their illness. More so, few studies have taken into account how individual factors, such as race and gender, influence one’s mental state in both rural environments.

In my study, I will take a holistic approach to examine if there is a link between one’s level of urbanization and mental health. While many sociologists focus solely on how urbanization or rural environments impact the mental health of certain subcultures, I will be researching mental illness nationwide, not just within certain populations or regions. This is imperative in that I will be taking a nationwide approach to the nationwide phenomenon of mental illness. In contrast to previous literature, my study will answer questions concerning how individual factors, including race, age, and gender, influence one’s risk of mental illness. With this, I hypothesize that urbanization has less of an effect on mental health than was previously thought. Instead, race, gender, and how both pertain to different social environments may be more plausible factors for mental illness.

Data and Methods

The data on mental illness in youth (12-17) and adult (18+) populations was part of the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The sample design was based on the state, where each state was proportioned based on its population size. In other words, states with higher populations were given a larger sample size than states with smaller populations. Individuals in each sample segment were then mailed screening letters to which they would answer preliminary questions. If accepted, these individuals would then be considered as respondents for the NSDUH interview. In-person interviews were the primary way the NSDUH collected their data, incorporating procedures to increase respondents’ willingness to report honestly about their mental health. For sensitive topics, audio computer-assisted self-interviewing (ACASI) was used. This way, the participant was able to read questions on the computer and then input their response in a private setting.

Participants in the survey were chosen at random. The only requirements were that the participants must be citizens of the United States, over 12 years of age, and residents of a household or homeless shelter. Individuals within military bases, hospitals, jails, as well as the homeless individuals not in shelters were not eligible for the study.

Operationalization of SMI and How Urbanization, Race, and Gender
**Urbanization**

My dependent variable will be Serious Mental Illness (SMI) present in individuals. According to SAMHSA, a SMI is defined as “having a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder, other than a developmental or substance use disorder” (2017).

Operationalization for SMI varied based on the instruments used. When screening participants, the NSDUH used instruments from the Mental Health Surveillance Study (MHSS) and MHSS-SCID¹. It is important to note that the results from these screenings do not necessarily conclude diagnosable mental illnesses within individuals.

The independent variable for my study is level of urbanization. In order to operationalize urbanization, both “rural” and “urban” environments must first be defined by their population differences. An urbanized area is classified as any location with a population cluster of 50,000 or more (Irwin, 2016). Next, there are “Urban Clusters”, or metropolitan areas, with populations of at least 2,500 people but less than 50,000 people (Irwin, 2016). Thus, whatever was not urban was generally considered rural. Rural areas consisted of low populations, small communities, and high concentrations of farmland (Irwin, 2016).

With this, I will be using large metro, small metro, and non-metro counties as parameters for my study. Large metropolitan areas have a population of 1 million or more. Small metropolitan areas have a population of fewer than 1 million. Non-metropolitan areas include counties that are outside these parameters (SAMHSA, 2017). I will control for age, gender, and race, as these are all factors which may contribute to one’s mental state.

**Results**

Table 1 (see Table 1, Appendix A) represents descriptive statistics for the individuals in the study. These statistics were broken down into these subgroups: level of urbanization (small, large, non-metro), age (18-25, 26-34, 35+), race (White, Black, Latinx, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, Multiracial), gender (male, female), and presence of Serious Mental Illness (SMI).

Of the 41,643 individuals surveyed, 44% were from large metro areas, while 35% were from small metro areas and 24% were from non-metro areas. Thus, it is apparent the largest group of the individuals surveyed were from large metro areas, while non-metro individuals were the smallest group. A similar trend was shown with age groups, where the majority of the participants were in the age range of 35+ (31%) or 18-25 (29%), while only 20% of participants were in the 26-34 range.

The racial-breakdown of the data matched the demographic of the United States, with about 62% of individuals identifying as Caucasian or White, 16% Latinx, 12% Black, and 4% Asian. With regard to gender, there were more females surveyed (53%) than males (47%), yet the disparity between these numbers is not drastic.

More so, only 5% of all participants in the study exhibited a Serious Mental Illness (SMI) in the past year. Of this 5%, Table 2 (see Table 2, Appendix A) examines correlations between various subgroups.

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¹ Structured Clinical Interview for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders–Fourth Edition–Research Version–Axis I Disorders (MHSS-SCID), which is based on the 4th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV).
and SMI frequency. Based on the data, the proportion of individuals exhibiting an SMI in large metro, small metro, and non-metro areas was relatively equal, around 5%. This is equivalent to the national proportion and gives reason to believe there is no correlation between one’s level of urbanization and presence of SMI.

To further this analysis, a linear regression test was conducted. In Model 1 (see Table 3, Model 1, Appendix A), the frequency of Serious Mental Illness (SMI) was compared with the level of urbanization, either large metro, small metro, and non-metro areas. The regression data showed small metro areas exhibited little to no deviation in slope from the constant. Put differently, this confirmed that one’s level of urbanization does not seem to impact their risk of developing a SMI. While non-metro areas also showed no deviation from the slope constant, given the high P value and low sample size, there is not enough data to conclude the latter.

Although there was no conclusive relationship between level of urbanization and SMIs, there was evidence to suggest other factors, such as race and gender, may contribute to risk of mental illness. In Model 2 (see Table 3, Model 2, Appendix A), when controlling for age and gender, interesting results occurred. For example, the data showed that 6% of females in the study exhibited a SMI, whereas only 3% of males did. From this, we understand that females may be twice as likely to develop a SMI when compared to males. This raises questions as to what influence gender may have on mental health. While there are certain external factors at stake that may contribute to this mental health disparity, the difference may also be due to females being more likely to report a SMI than males. Taking into account societal expectations, the man is generally expected to suppress emotion in order to maintain his masculinity. Thus, reporting mental illness within certain male populations may be highly stigmatized, contributing to this SMI gap.

Like gender, race also had an impact on SMI. As shown in Model 2, Black, Latinx, and Asian individuals overall had a lower percentage of SMIs in the past year than White individuals. For Latinx participants, 4% exhibited SMI, while 3% of Black and Asian participants exhibited SMI. Again, these differences may be cultural, which could make some racial/ethnic groups less likely to report SMI than others. A contradiction to this would be the results from the multiracial population, which exhibited the greatest proportion of SMI in study at around 7%. While little research is done surrounding multiracial individuals and mental health, it may be worth looking into given these findings.

**Conclusion**

Unlike studies showing dramatic mental health disparities between rural and urban environments, I did not find any striking differences between urbanization and risk of mental illness. My results went against historic literature that attributed “urban life” as a risk factor for psychological illness (Adams, 2005). My results also went against modern arguments which center on the rural and urban environment and its impact on mental illness. While some sociologists claim rural individuals are more prone to mental illness due to social isolation and lack of resources, my study found no differences in SMI between individuals from rural and urban areas (Adams, 2005; Simmel, 1903). While past literature found trends in city-living and
mental disorders and attributed this to high rates of pollution and/or lack of greenery, my results did not support this relationship either (Weaver et al., 2015).

Instead, my study found that race, ethnicity, and gender are more plausible risk factors for mental illness. This relates to past literature which has taken a more nuanced approach to how environment and mental health influence each other. For instance, researchers in California found that individuals in Mexican American populations had a lower risk of lifetime illness than other individuals in the United States, despite living in urban or rural areas. In my research, I also found that Latinx, Black, Asian, and other minority populations were less likely to report an SMI compared to the white majority (Ethel et al., 2000).

My study also paralleled past literature which controlled for race and gender. In a study on mood disorders, it was found that African American women in urban environments were more likely to exhibit symptoms compared to white women in these environments (Weaver et al., 2015). Yet, the opposite trend was found for white women in rural environments in comparison to black women in rural environments (Weaver et al., 2015). My research supported these contradicting results since it showed that environmentally independent factors, such as race and gender, impact one’s risk of mental illness.

Like all research, my study had many limitations. For one, the population sampled for non-metro individuals was significantly smaller than for large and small metro individuals (see Table 2b). More data on non-metro individuals is necessary to give a comprehensive view of the “rural” population. Another limitation was the time of the study. While the study was completed in 2016, participants were surveyed in 2014. Since 2014, America’s political and economic climate has drastically changed, along with the increasing presence of technology and social media. These all serve as risk factors for SMIs, and since they are not reflected in the 2016 study, the results do not accurately represent present-day America. Also, confounding variables were rampant in the study. In contrast to a longitudinal study, which involves multiple measures over an extended period of time, my study was cross-sectional and only measured the population at one specific point in time. Because of this, certain subgroups studied may have been affected by cohort differences that arise from the particular experiences unique to that group. For instance, some older participants studied may have experienced a traumatic historical event in their upbringing, such as the Vietnam War, influencing their risk of developing a SMI. More broadly, some confounding variables, such as gender and cultural differences, as well as religious and other internal factors, may also influence one’s likelihood to report an SMI.

Although no relationship was shown between level of urbanization and serious mental illness, this research did raise questions as to how one’s race and gender affects their mental health. While my study only touched on some of the variables that affect one’s risk of serious mental illness, more research concerning these variables is crucial in order to present a valid relationship between race, gender, and mental health. Perhaps analyzing how different socio-economic aspects of one’s environment, such as how poverty and crime rate relate to race, gender, and mental illness, would be beneficial for future studies. Also, incorporating other intrinsic factors, such as sexuality,
may also link to environment and mental illness.

Going forward, it is important for healthcare providers, school districts, and mental health organizations to recognize mental illness as a fluid matter caused by a multitude of factors. When screening for mental illness in children, it would be beneficial to take into account race, gender, and the environment in which they grow up. In taking a more holistic stance on the puzzle of mental illness, we can continue to eliminate the stigma. More so, we can seek new, individualized ways to treat mental illness in different social environments.
## Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Descriptive Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Mental Illness in Past Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variable</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Large Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-34 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 years old and up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islanders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Racial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Observations</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

**Binary Comparisons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Had a Serious Mental Illness</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urbanicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Metro</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Metro</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years old</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years old</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 years old and up</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islanders</td>
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Table 3

**Coefficients Predicting Serious Mental Illness in Past Year**

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<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
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<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Urbanicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Metro</td>
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<td>-0.00 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Metro</td>
<td>0.01 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.03 (0.00)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-34 years old</td>
<td>0.00 (0.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 years old and up</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.00)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.00)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.01)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islanders</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Racial</td>
<td>0.02 (0.01)*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>0.05 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p< 0.05 = representative of overall population

How Urbanization, Race, and Gender
References


Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2017). 2017


Tanner Smida is a first-year student at the University of Pittsburgh majoring in Biological Sciences on the pre-medicine track. When not in the lab or studying, he can typically be found reading on a Port Authority bus or trolley during his commute to and from campus. From beekeeping to tumor immunology, he makes sure to get through at least one new book per week. If you are interested in photographs of local wildlife and periodic updates on the bees, follow him on Instagram @tannermida.
The Pittsburgh summer was buzzing along steadily. Every day was warm and sunny, and the forests had exploded with the familiar menagerie of wildlife, lush vegetation, and floral fragrances that never fail to make my head spin. But pollen wasn’t the only thing floating on the breeze. Love was in the air, too. This newly minted beekeeper had a date.

After a late breakfast at a charming little bakery, my companion asked me the one question every man wants to hear: “Can I see your bees?” The answer, of course, was a resounding ‘yes.’ For some unknown reason, at this point I decided that I would not need to wear the bulky beekeeping suit and veil in order to give a small presentation and short glimpse into the inner workings of the colony. After all, I would only be opening the smaller of my two hives. And what would impress a lady more than stalwart bravery in the face of tens of thousands of stinging insects? Nothing, that’s what. So I took a deep breath and removed the lid, fully committed to the task before me. I pointed out a bulky drone and the queen with her dot of green nail polish and listed a few facts, emboldened by her interest. Everything was going much better than I ever could have hoped. But just as I was about to close everything up and leave the bees to their business, a lone worker on the top of the bar I was holding stopped what it was doing and angled its head toward me. I stared right back, and I could see the cold gleam of maniacal purpose in its many faceted compound eye.

No, I pleaded inside my head. I’ve given you a nice, safe, secure home. I’ve donated as much sugar water as you wanted. All I’m asking is to be able to impress one girl with my semi-domestic insects. Just this once.

Did the bee receive my silent, impassioned plea? I’m going to have to go with ‘no,’ because in that moment the worker sped directly into my face like an arrow launched from a bow. I felt the six legs alight delicately on my eyelid, ticklish for the ghost of a moment. It was as if time itself had slowed to a thick, syrupy consistency. I vividly felt the muscles around the eye begin to contract, and as the lid started to scrunch, a single thought burst with clarity onto the blank screen of my mind.

This is going to hurt. A lot.

And it did. Oh, it really, truly did. But, as I am proud to report, I put on a brave face.
Hastily, I wrapped up what I was saying, reassembled the hive, pressed on the lid, and began to walk the girl back to her car. Halfway there, I think she may have figured out what had happened. As I attempted to make small talk with her, searching for interesting conversation starters through pulses of burning pain, the left side of my face was swelling up pretty considerably. Unfortunately, this was a fact that I did not realize until after she was gone and I looked in the mirror. Oh well. Another one bites the proverbial dust. It could have been a lot worse, I suppose. Before getting the hive, I had never been stung before, so I could have just flat out gone into anaphylactic shock. Dying might be the only thing more embarrassing that could have happened in that situation. Although after death I wouldn’t really care about impressing anyone, so it does have that upside. In the end, my heart was left hurting much more than my eye, as I never heard from her again.

Ah, the honeybee. This incredible insect never ceases to amaze, defying entomological conventions and driving us to romantic self-destruction at every turn (at least in my own personal experience). But sometimes, it seems as if every time *Apis mellifera* comes to our attention, it is all bad news. Stories crying out about how colony collapse disorder and our mistreatment of the environment are leading to troubled times for these beloved pollinators abound.

The honeybee has shared a long and storied history with the human species, starting with our appearance as honey-robbing primates and culminating in the bees’ semi-domestication, a symbiotic feat unmatched by any invertebrate other than the silkworm (and perhaps the medicinal leech). The histories of such great civilizations as the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman are littered with references to apiculture. And this wasn’t just a classical fad either - when Europeans came to the “New World,” they brought honeybees with them across the Atlantic and promptly introduced the species to the continent. In fact, Native Americans knew them by a name that roughly translates to “white man’s fly.” But regardless of any initial disdain they may have harbored, soon even the Native Americans had come around to embrace the species. There are few things more powerful than the allure of sweet, sweet sugar - in this case, honey. Before long, everyone was in agreement about what a fine fly it is.¹

As the centuries passed, the humble bee has risen from a mere source of sweetener to become of utmost importance to our global food security. A full one third of the crops that we

¹ Honeybees are not flies at all, and are actually a member of the Order Hymenoptera as opposed to Diptera, but as an ode to history, I’ll let it slide.
consume are pollinated by these busy colonies of organisms. Without them, we wouldn’t have the relatively inexpensive quantities of broccoli, almonds, apples, and hundreds of other fresh fruits and vegetables that grace our grocery stores.

This impossible to understate importance has not gone overlooked. In the twenty-first century, bees adorn everything from children’s books and hospital waiting rooms to clothing brands and tubes of lip balm. Why has this insect generated such cosmopolitan appeal? A few possible reasons come to mind. For one, bees are not ugly insects by any stretch of the imagination. They are fuzzy and pleasantly colored and perform a vital service to all of us. Furthermore, this valuable service is very visible - you can walk outside anywhere and see a honeybee buzzing a bit clumsily from flower to flower and say, “There goes a busy little bee, feeding the world and making some delicious honey! What a wonderful creature!” They are easy to love. Much more so than, for instance, bristly haired, eight eyed spiders that hunt in the dead of night, even though these are also very valuable to the ecosystems they inhabit. Because of this visibility and cultural portrayal, bees are viewed as a creature inherently tied to the integrated function of the natural world. An almost holy air has been imparted to the honeybee, also feeding into the idea that the ‘naturalness’ associated with them is tied to health. This positive perception is undoubtedly real, evidenced by the wild commercial success of companies like Burt’s Bees\(^2\) and a growing market for pollen and royal jelly as pseudoscientific health supplements.

My own history with the humble honeybee began quite unremarkably two years ago on an otherwise undistinguished blustery November’s evening. I happened to stumble upon an article about colony collapse disorder that contained a brief interview with a dejected beekeeper from the great state of California. “A beekeeper!” I thought to myself. “Now there’s a self-explanatory job title if I’ve ever seen one!” Then, I finished the article, moved on to read something else and mostly forgot about the piece. But the next day, as I was suffering through a particularly awful chemistry class, I found myself thinking about that unfortunate California beekeeper again. So I opened my laptop and began to surf around to see what I could learn about the profession.

I’ve always been something of an entomology geek, so it is obvious, in hindsight, that I would disappear down the rabbit hole that is our impressive body of knowledge of the honeybee. Did you know that as many as 60,000 individuals make up a single hive at the height of summer?\(^2\)

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2 In 2007, the company was sold to Clorox for 925 million US dollars. Estimates of their lip balm sale frequency range as high as one unit per second, globally.
Workers live for about six weeks and are only able to make about one-twelfth of a teaspoon of honey in their entire lifetime. To make one pound of the syrupy confection, the bees must visit over two million flowers and fly a total of 50,000 miles, the equivalent of making a little over two complete circumnavigations of the globe. That familiar buzz? It comes from wings that can beat up to two hundred times a second. Further, people had been keeping these phenomenally astounding insects for millennia to exploit the honey they produce by dehydrating nectar gathered from flowers into a saturated solution of sugar. Within the hour, I realized that beekeeping was something at which I could at least make a reasonable attempt.

Eager for a challenge, I snapped up all the apiculture books I could find at my local library. My father is a phenomenal carpenter, so I enlisted his help to construct, after some deliberation, what is known as a top-bar hive. I found a great blueprint online for a top bar using materials already languishing in my garage. So instead of dishing out three hundred or so dollars for a commercially available Langstroth, we spent nothing but a little quality father-son time (and a few nails) on the experiment.

And that was a good thing, too, because I almost passed out on my desk when I found out how much it was to actually buy the little creatures! Bees are typically measured in pounds, for the simple reason that nobody has the time to count them all individually. So, in mid-January I dished out one hundred and twenty dollars to a friendly local apiarist in exchange for three pounds of the buzzing beauties complete with one queen. When late April rolled around, I went to pick them up with my friend in her Volkswagen ‘Bug’ (the irony of the situation was not lost on either of us). When we arrived, they were housed in a small screened-in box with wood framing. The mass of displaced insects were milling about impatiently inside, steadily humming in a mildly irritated tone. Their queen was at the center of this cluster, hanging inside the box in an even smaller box of her own. The air around the pickup zone was full of bees as well - workers who had been accidentally and unavoidably left out of the packages.

When the poundage of bees gets scooped by the beekeepers from their old hives and into the holding containers, a few furry little ladies get excluded by pure chance. But not to be discouraged, they still hang around their hive mates and cling tenaciously onto the outside of the mesh, gravitating to a set of pheromones emitted by the queen and transmitted outward through the workers as they exchange food and rub against one another. This makes it a bit tricky to carry the thing without dropping it in unadulterated terror as bees crawl over your hands and get

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stuck in your hair (remember, I was still a rank amateur at this point, being ignorant of the lack of aggression bees exhibit when their hive is not being threatened). But we made it eventually, and after buckling the bulk of them into the backseat, we headed for home. Have you ever bumped up onto an asphalt road from a dirt driveway? Have you ever done it with three pounds of marginally upset bees? Well, no need to try it out on your own. Spoiler: It sounds like there’s an angry chainsaw starting up in the backseat.

So, after sipping a little bit of sugar water, the colony set about making their new home inside the top bar hive with the communist gusto that can only be seen in Red Army propaganda pieces and eusocial insect colonies. Once the period of running down to my little bee yard every fifteen minutes to assure myself that my precious bugs hadn’t flown the coop had passed, I was able to relax. They seemed content to stay. As the spring wore on, the number of bees flooding in and out of the hive grew in volume until dozens upon dozens were using the entrance slot at all hours of the day, bumping into each other recklessly and crashing onto the landing board with what seemed to be giddy, nectar-fueled abandon. Small, colorful beads of protein-rich pollen adorned the legs of returning workers like jewelry, ready to be fed to the ravenous larvae that were growing in the brood comb. Their population boomed, and as the weeks slipped by, it seemed as if the exploding numbers had no intention of slowing down. I couldn’t wait until the end of the week when I finally got to zip into my big white suit, light my smoker, and finally get a look at their elegant handiwork.

Their architectural prowess is unmatched by any other insect. The creamy white of young wax being drawn into new hexagonal cells with paper thin walls, the deep brown of old brood comb, darkened with the cocoons of dozens of generations, the buttery yellow wax cappings that hide a treasure of sugar beneath, delicious enough to tempt prehistoric man and the biggest grizzly bears of today even in the face of a thousand stings. Eyes squinted against the summer sun, I would hunt for the queen, looking for the spot of green nail polish on her thorax against the backdrop of yellows and oranges and browns. In the end, I always found her, surrounded by an attentive royal court that tended to her every need as she pumped out the next generational wave of bees from her long, cylindrical abdomen. Occasionally, I would spot a drone, its big compound eyes and thick body particularly conspicuous among the more petite workers. Even the faint smell of a hive is

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3 The prevailing theory is that the smoke simulates a forest fire, leading the colony to jump into action stuffing as much honey as they can into their crops for storage. This act of instinctual salvage keeps the bees busy while the beekeeper carries out the inspection.
soothing, like the forest floor on a hot dry day in August with an extra little note of sweetness. As a side note, this attests to the fact that bees are particularly clean animals. They coat the inside of their hive with propolis, a substance made from resin that they collect from trees. It discourages the growth of microorganisms, and when coupled with their prompt removal of all refuse from the hive as it accumulates and their habit of never defecating inside (what polite invertebrates!) makes a beehive one of the cleanest (by our standards, anyway) places in nature.

There is nothing, and I do mean nothing, more relaxing than sitting next to a beehive on a warm June afternoon with a good book. There is something about the soothing hum that they emit as they circulate air through their hive with a steady vanguard of wing-beaters at the entrance that just relaxes you instantly. With the warm wind in your face, the soft grass beneath you and the occasional sound of a page turning punctuating the soft melody of bee climate control, the world is your oyster. On particularly hot, humid evenings, a bunch of them would head outside and hang together in a lumpy mass on the front of the hive, sometimes even drooping like a noisily humming fruit from the bottom of the landing board. Life was good. The bees seemed happy, and by extension, I was happy as well. But then a vexing problem became apparent. The number of those bulky drones I was seeing spiked pretty dramatically, corresponding with the amount of “drone comb” (so named because the larger cells of this type of brood comb allow the drone pupae enough room to grow) within the hive. Doing my best to channel my inner apiarist version of Sherlock Holmes, I deduced that the hive was getting ready to swarm.

Honeybees are unique in almost every facet of their natural history due to their status as eusocial creatures. The great entomologist, ecologist, and writer, E.O. Wilson, classifies them as a superorganism - imagining the entire colony as one organism rather than each individual bee. In terms of reproduction, this makes a lot of sense. If you were to take some workers and seal them off from the rest of the colony, they would not be able to survive independently, much like individual cells in our body. They certainly wouldn’t be able to reproduce and spawn their own colony of successors. This job falls to the queen and the queen alone, who pumps out over two thousand eggs a day, as reliable as clockwork. So, in order to make another superorganism, the currently reigning queen grabs more than half of the worker bees from the hive and takes off in a massive flying swarm. The chunk of workers that are left behind do exactly what their name suggests and

4 This is called bearding, an easily observable method of thermoregulation.
get right to work on creating a replacement queen. How? The key is contained within the diet they feed the young bees. If a larva is fed a special blend of proteins, sugars, and minerals secreted from glands on the head of nurse bees throughout their development, gene expression shifts, and it turns into a queen. If the feeding of this awesome substance (known colloquially as royal jelly) stops a few days after hatching, they remain destined to become workers. In the end, both groups of bees end up with a functioning set of ovaries in the form of a queen and a support system to take care of those ovaries and make sure that they are producing well. In essence, you end up with two (super) organisms at the tail end of the process. My deduction was predicated on the fact that the new queen would need drones with which to breed - an infertile queen isn’t much use to anyone. One mating episode is all that she needs, and she will have enough sperm stored to last a lifetime. Soon after I made this informed prediction, queen cups appeared and proved me right. These roughly peanut-shaped cells are unmistakable to the eye, and always contain a growing queen bee.

So, the next step was to try to do something about either containing or averting the situation. There are a few options, like trimming the queen’s wings so that she will not be able to take the swarm very far away from the entrance so that you can recapture it right away or rearranging frames within the original hive to fool the bees into “thinking” that their population is not as large as it actually is, postponing the event. But I found another method is used by beekeepers time and time again that seemed to be recommended no matter where I turned - splitting the colony. Swiftly, my dad and I began work on a makeshift hive, designing a kind of cross between a Langstroth-style super and a top bar. When it was finished, we took the old queen along with roughly half of the frames of brood and honey and neatly transplanted them into the new box. To our great joy, it seemed that everything went wonderfully, and both colonies began to build up again. It was at this point in late June when that first excruciating romantic calamity detailed at the beginning of this piece befell me.

At the end of fall, both colonies headed into the winter looking fairly healthy, with the old queen in a newly built and well insulated hive and the new queen in the old (but also well insulated) one. Both had plenty of honey reserves to keep them supplied with enough calories to

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5 Often, multiple queens are reared as an insurance policy in this situation. The first to emerge takes care of the others via assassination as soon as it emerges from its cocoon. As freshly hatched royalty, their first monarchical act is often murder.

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warm the hive during the blustery, frigid Pittsburgh months. I thought they were ready. And so we closed them up for the final time on a mellow October afternoon and let them finish getting ready to weather the snow.

On a cold December Saturday I headed down to the hives after lunch, armed with a genuine stethoscope that I had used as part of a Halloween costume when I was in sixth grade. Heart beating anxiously, I pressed the steel diaphragm against the wall of the original top bar, moving it slowly down the side while straining to hear the buzz of the winter cluster. They were alive and humming gently. My pulse slowly returned to normal as I pulled the cold rubber nodules out of my ears. As I crunched through a freshly fallen crust of snow on the way back to the house, I was sure that they would pull through. But in the end, things took an abrupt and wholly unexpected turn.

By the spring, both superorganisms were dead.

Upon a bit of forensic investigation, I discovered an alarming truth. They had been defeated by a dirty, no good, rotten, invasive species. Intermingled with their bodies, some still clinging tenaciously to the abdomens of their hosts, I found hundreds of varroa mites. Their Latin name surfaced through a fog of grief. It is particularly apt. *Varroa destructor.*

The varroa mite is a well-known, and thus widely despised, parasite of honeybees that feeds on their hemolymph (and, as recent research suggests, fat reserves) while slowly but surely infesting entire apiaries. And while not themselves deadly, an infection of these sneaky arachnids can weaken a hive to the point of collapse by both direct individual attrition and by acting as vectors of disease, as observed within my own precious colonies. In the end, they simply couldn’t stay warm after an undetected buildup of parasite load in the late fall. They had plenty of honey stored, but the cluster must have been too small. It was a sad fate, undeserving of such a (mostly) loyal bunch. Undeterred, I did some more research and formulated a treatment plan based upon the high toxicity of oxalic acid to the mites relative to the harm it does to the honeybee. Amazon swiftly delivered three pounds of the crystallized stuff to my door, and I was ready to wage chemical warfare against any mite dumb enough to show its arachnoid face in my bee yard ever again.

The next spring came, and with it another chance. I ordered more bees from another apiary and installed them carefully, determined to get it right this time. Within a week they had
all disappeared. I was pretty upset, understandably. But at least they weren’t dead. They simply “absconded,” which is a technical way of saying that they didn’t like the digs I had provided for them and were off to find a much nicer tree hollow (or a hole in someone’s siding). It’s a risk you have to take with beekeeping. I guess it was just one of those things that you never think will happen to you. Wherever they find themselves now, I wish them all the best and hope that they have more honey than they know what to do with.

The depressing end of my first hives are indicative of just one of the many problems bees face out there in the world of today. Pesticides and herbicides interfere with their microbiomes and affect their fertility, parasites like Varroa destructor and Nosema drain their resources, and the increasing practice of planting massive monocultures of one crop homogenizes their diet, impairing their nutritional uptake. I’ve experienced first hand just how tough they have it. However, being a “newbee” to the practice, I’m cannot blame potential mistakes that I made on an impending ecological disaster.

But during the course of my research, I came across some very old books, some of them written as far back as the 1800s. From what I could glean from the writings, it seems as if back then beekeeping was relatively easy. Not only did hives survive winter after winter without significant intervention, they prospered, producing enough honey to easily make their owners a little extra dough. The same cannot be said with as much certainty today. The aforementioned invasive parasites, overuse of pesticides, and agricultural practices have combined to create a perfect storm of damage to the apiculture industry, giving rise to rashes of incompletely understood colony collapses. You would be hard pressed in the spring to find any apiarist who has not lost at least one colony over the course of the preceding winter.

I do not want to be overly pessimistic about the situation, as it is still entirely possible to be a successful beekeeper, but you certainly have to jump through a few more hoops. This trend over time (corroborated by additional sources - I’m not going to base an argument on one beekeeper’s 19th century boasts) contains an important message that we all should listen to very closely. Because bees have attained their global distribution only with our help and encouragement and have become of paramount importance to our food supply because of their function as efficient pollinators, they have become one of the most well studied insects in terms of ecology. So although we played a role in shaping bees into what they are today, they still can serve as a “canary in the coal mine,” so to speak, warning us of increasing ecological problems. The constant struggles that
they experience even when provided with our assistance can go a long way to show how much the rate at which we are blindly altering our environment can affect the organisms that make up the ecosystems we depend on. One can only imagine the toll that invasive parasites and pesticides and ecologically unsustainable farming practices have on species that do not produce anything as sweet as honey.

The question now becomes one of moving forward. Will we pay attention to the warning billboards and take action to mitigate our impact? Or will we ride it out until something really terrible happens? I’d put my money on the latter - stop signs never get added to intersections until a car accident occurs. What we are doing to our planet is akin to firing bullets through the hood of an idling car. At first, nothing might happen. But eventually you’ll get spraying steam, gouts of black smoke, and puddles of motor oil and brake fluid. Eventually, the car simply won’t be able to ever start again. Will we listen to the drop of antifreeze that is the predicament of the honeybee?

As far as my own situation, I am not inclined to give up quite so easily. Just as gold fever strikes prospectors, honeybee fever has stung me with its alluring venom. This coming spring, I’m going to give it another try. The good ol’ college try, now, I suppose, as it is my freshman year at the University of Pittsburgh. Armed with oxalic acid, sugar water, and a great deal of hope for the future, I’m going to do my best to make it a good one.
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Quinby, Moses. *Mysteries of Bee-keeping Explained: Containing the Result of Thirty-five Years’ Experience, and Directions for Using the Movable Comb and Box-hive, Together with the Most Approved Methods of Propagating the Italian Bee*. 1853.
Sitting on a park bench or at a local coffee shop, I often find myself sketching the daily lives of those around me and the small comical moments that many may overlook. This past year, I have found that my pen-to-paper method has produced a number of drawings of people with body proportions that are considered “abnormal” by today’s beauty standards. Sometimes in the most exaggerated of ways, I strive to represent those who are underrepresented, and I feel that my miniature sculpture, “Sweater Weather,” achieves this. It is difficult to grow up in a world where your body is not shown in movies or print media. With my small, but mighty, sculpture, I hope to represent not only myself, but everyone out there who feels unseen. Standing at only a few inches tall and formed of paper clay, India ink, gouache, and a little wire for the shoelaces, my chunky sweater lady demands attention, while also shying from the crowds. When I began sculpting her, I did not know that I had all of this in mind. But subconsciously, these inner thoughts are always brought into my work, and when I set out to create a three-dimensional version of my many sketchbook doodles, a statement, although it may be subtle, is bound to be made.
Carly Blumenthal

Sweater Weather

Carly Blumenthal is a junior at Parsons School of Design in New York City. Majoring in illustration and minoring in film production, she is often in search of a way to meld her two fields of study together as one, and pulls from film, visual arts, life experiences, and daily observations for her work. With a varied portfolio that spans from pen and ink drawings to animation, film, and clay sculptures, an undertone of whimsy and subtle humor is evident and connects each of her pieces to the next.
Mei (Seung Won) Baek is a first-year Pre-Pharmacy student at the University of Pittsburgh and is from Fairfax, Virginia. In addition to pursuing a future in STEM, she has a deep passion for art and writing. She enjoys writing short stories as well as longer works of fiction, in a range of genres and often with illustrations and concept sketches for inspiration. Her long-term dream is to publish a full-length novel. This is her first Forbes & Fifth submission, and she is thankful to contribute to the journal.
She noticed it on the first day. The gilded grandfather clock in the guest room was lovely, but it startled Sujin out of her wits, at 10:30 in the morning, when the porcelain bird sprang out to chirp its twelve metallic notes. She quickly realized that it was not only the grandfather clock, but all the clocks in her parents’ apartment that were wrong: the metalwork clock with the ornate chimes in the entranceway, the heavy wooden one on the mantelpiece, and even the digital one by her parents’ bed.

“How do you know when to eat or sleep?” she teased her mother, while chopping cabbage for dinner. Her mother had hissed and clicked her tongue when she offered to help cook – she was a guest, it was her first day, she must be tired from the plane – but Sujin had taken up the knife anyway. Now, they cut vegetables in synchronized rhythm.

After a minute, her mother understood and laughed.

“I suppose they slowed down over time,” she admitted. “They’re all so old, and we would forget to set them right.” Her stout hands moved expertly, chopping and dicing with a speed and delicacy that Sujin couldn’t match, and they quickly fell out of sync.

Dinner was a soybean cabbage broth, with rice and a baked fish.

“It’s not much for your first day,” said her mother apologetically. “I’ll go to the market tomorrow, so we can have meat for dinner.” Sujin shook her head.

“This is exactly what I needed,” she insisted. She never made this soup back in Boston; it was difficult to find Napa cabbage in the American grocery closest to her home. When she did drive out to the Asian market, a good forty minutes away, it was for special occasions, ones that called for rice cakes, seaweed soup, or meat dishes, and not for such a plain and everyday recipe.

Sitting cross-legged on the same floor, at the same painted folding table, with the familiar food, was more disorienting than jetlag – it was as though the years in between had never been. The next few minutes were quiet but for the sound of clicking plates and chopsticks, their first meal together in nine years.

Seeing her parents at the airport, it had seemed that the years had escaped them; they’d looked the same, down to the clothing they were wearing. Her father had been in a suit she recognized from before his retirement, his tiger eyebrows as thick and fierce as she remembered,
his hair not exactly black, but an even and handsome gunmetal grey. Her mother had worn an ivory wool jacket paired with strings of creamy pearls, as dainty and delicate as a soft wrinkled doll with a small painted red mouth. They’d looked like they were newly emerged from one of their old photos, posing at a company dinner or a presidential event.

Then her mother had come forward to embrace Sujin, her tiny frame barely reaching her daughter’s shoulders. As Sujin returned the embrace she’d seen the white roots, patches of soft pink scalp under the dyed black hair. She’d smelled flowery perfume, and under it the scent of mothballs and clotted dust.

In that split second a buried memory of her great aunt, the last time she had seen her, had come to mind. Sujin had only been a young girl, unsettled by the stuffiness and the cloying smell of death, and when her great aunt took her little clenched hand in her dry wrinkled one, she had pulled away crying, and been reprimanded sharply by her aunts as a result.

iii.

A few hours before dinner on the first day, her father disappeared into his room. She asked her mother and was told that he was napping, something she found uncharacteristic of her aggressively work-oriented father.

Of course, he no longer worked. When he emerged for dinner later, his suit replaced by a thin white undershirt, she noticed his sagging, liver-spotted skin.

iv.

*It was no easy thing, to live life without clocks,* she thought, alone in her old bedroom that night. It came with implications. To live untethered to the pull of time, in the heart of a city that was always moving. It seemed impossible, but perhaps that was what her parents had done, surrounded by artifacts of another time in a house of aimless clocks. They’d become anachronisms.

She sent her husband a message, before she went to bed. *It’s good to be back. I miss you.* She fell asleep counting cracks in the old plaster ceiling, listening to the ticking of the faulty clock.

v.

On the second day, she went through the cabinets of her old room, and was surprised by

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how many things were in their old places; clothing and toys had been portioned off for cousins and nieces, but the stacks of yellowed diaries, the books and video tapes from her childhood, were preserved like precious artifacts. What was missing were some of the actual artifacts, the ones of real value. After every overseas business trip, every occasion that kept him away for weeks or months, her father had brought back memorabilia from all the different countries he’d visited. Her favorite had been the dolls – all handmade, all unique, all beautiful. Yellow-haired, blue-eyed twins from Germany, with soft plastic smiles and traditional outfits of real wool and wooden shoes. A painted woman from Japan, swallowed up in the folds of her embroidered kimono. A Singaporean girl with a straw hat and mischievous smile, carrying baskets on her shoulders. A jaunty Arabian magician with a dark, scheming look that labelled him as the villain in all of her games. At that time, she had never known how expensive they were to just be a child’s playthings.

Now, the dolls were nowhere to be found. She combed through the house, checking glass cabinets and ornate shelves displaying jade elephants and burnished teaspoons and gilded frames. Between the trinkets there were empty spots, negative spaces left in the dust.

She asked about it over breakfast, but her mother didn’t blink an eye.

“We gave them away,” she said. “It was too much clutter. I gifted the Wallace silverware and some other old things to some women at church. Mr. Byung Woo from 101B, his wife likes embroidery and doilies and pretty little things, so they got the dolls.” The idea of her mother finding their old keepsakes to be “too much clutter” was suspicious, but Sujin accepted it.

The dolls didn’t come back up in conversation until Kwon Byung Woo and his wife came upstairs to visit. Her mother was in the kitchen peeling fruit to serve and her father was napping in his room, so Sujin sat with them in the living space. After some small talk, she brought up the dolls.

“Really, they’re beautiful,” gushed Mrs. Kwon. “I would have paid far more for that kind of craftsmanship. But your mother insisted, what with our history.”

The confusion only showed on Sujin’s face for a second, before she rearranged it into a smile. The Kwons didn’t seem to notice, and a few moments later her mother came into the room with a tray of fruit.

The dolls – her artifacts – had been sold. Later that night, she lay awake in the room from her childhood, staring up at the same ceiling and listening to the ticking clock, feeling detached from time and space: not back to being a child, not entirely an adult, drifting in the vacuum of half-dark and the white noise of wailing cicadas.

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vi.

One day while her mother and father slept, she found herself standing in the dining room of the grand apartment, feeling restless, feeling that it was uncomfortably empty. It was a large apartment, twice as big as most in Seoul and twice as old. Too big for a small couple, too big for so many empty spots on the shelves and hollows in the dust.

In the days that followed, she spent most of her time outside.

vii.

The city itself was a return to home. She went out at night after the rain, picked crowded streets and walked, walked for hours until they became empty and quiet, and she was alone with the neon signs and the oil-slicked puddles of reflected color. She chose little street vendors draped in blue plastic sheets and sat there to eat spicy rice cakes from styrofoam cups, remembering the long-lost feeling of being invisible, dissociating into the static on the radio and the roar of the electric fan, into the large but familiar city. Her city.

There were hundreds of little details she had been longing for without realizing her own thirst. She drank them in now. The cry of cicadas. The rows of earthen pots under clay rooftops. A plastic sheet piled with peppers laid to dry in a backyard, guarded by a sleeping dog on a chain. The musical notes of a jingle that her ears recognized but her mind couldn’t place. A ginko tree with butter-yellow leaves.

There was more, much more that she had forgotten to not miss. Motorcycles roared past her on the sidewalk and old people, drunks, shoved callously past her at night. The people on the street, whom she remembered with a warm anonymity as kindly old aunts and paternal uncles, were only strangers, cold and distant as any in the US. When she did speak to them, she struggled to keep up – there was a native jargon that had developed over the years. Sometimes she felt out-of-place, sometimes even alien. Even when walking she lost her way several times – her own foolish mistake, expecting the paths to have been left unchanged.

viii.

The thoughts came to her, slowly, melancholically, before she could recognize them and brush them away. Home was not entirely home, or, not entirely her memory of it. Strangers were
strangers, no matter the country. Time went on, and streets didn’t stay the same.

And in her parent’s house, there were hollows where there used to be mementos.

ix.

On the second to last night of her visit, she called her husband and went out on the balcony to talk to him quietly. The next morning, as her father napped and she helped her mother do laundry, Sujin put a yellow envelope on her lap.

Her mother opened it, then put it down as quickly as if it had burned her.

“No.” Her tone was flat.

“Changmin wanted to do it. Just as a gift,” Sujin said. As her mother sullenly returned to folding clothing, Sujin changed her tone. “As compensation then, for my stay.” She realized, too late, that was even worse.

“What mother would charge her child for every visit?” her mother asked shortly. “We don’t need this. Don’t patronize your father like this.”

“That’s not what I--!”

“Quiet now,” her mother said, and Sujin closed her mouth, only now realizing how loud she had gotten. The two paused, listening for her father’s rumbling snores from the next room.

“Mom,” Sujin continued, trying to keep her voice level, though there was an uncontrollable tremor that betrayed her. “I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

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“We are.”

“What did you sell the dolls?”

“We gifted them.” Her mother’s voice was so resolute that Sujin almost wondered if she believed it, if she had selectively removed the memory of money from her mind.

“Will you sell the apartment?” Sujin asked.

“Never,” her mother said, in the same flat tone. “Sujin, we’ve lived here for fifty years.” Whether the answer was reassuring or worrying, Sujin couldn’t tell.

From the other room, she heard the sudden call of the cuckoo clock, twelve artificial chirps. Wrong, all wrong.

“Are you sure you and Dad are alright?” she asked when they returned to silence.

“We’re fine.”

“Then it shouldn’t matter,” she said, begging. “Just take it. Please, take it.” She pushed it forward a second time, and this time her mother let it stay. They continued folding clothing, feeling more strongly than ever that they were two adult women, not just mother and child.

When they were finished, Sujin stood first. She took her clothing and left, knowing that would make it easier.

x.

The next morning, she sat down with her parents for rice and sweet beans and brown eggs, and washed dishes with her mother for the last time. Her bags were packed, three times heavier than before. Her mother had insisted that she take back all the things she couldn’t get in the US – an assortment of bitter black teas and dried medicinal roots in a handsome painted box, vacuum sealed packages of dried anchovies and sweet potato, bagfuls of ginger, cracked beans and salted seaweed. She realized that her mother didn’t believe her when she said that there were Asian groceries in the US – or if she did believe her, she didn’t trust them. How separated, how alienated her mother must think she was. She accepted the stockpile.

xi.

At the airport, her parents accompanied her to the departure gate. She embraced her father, careful of his shoulders, which were thin and angular beneath the pads of his suit. She embraced
her mother, breathing in the now-familiar scent that, in its inexplicable strangeness, had terrified her as a child.

As she left them behind she checked her purse for her travel documents and found the yellow envelope tucked into her passport.

She only hesitated for a moment. Then she swallowed back the pain in her throat and handed her ticket to the attendee. Only when she was past the gate did she look back, just once, to their tiny forms – her father in his ancient suit, her mother in her ancient pearls, twin dolls, as tranquil and solid as if they could stand there forever, unbowed by the pressure of time.
Ingrid Tai is a first-year student at Parsons School of Design. She is currently an Illustration major hoping to pursue a career in illustration or publishing. She is often inspired by illustrators online such as Chan, Haowei Chung, and Antonio Aiello. She is also quite into film and animation. She gets inspiration from various directors and animators, including works directed and made by Wes Anderson, A. F. Schepperd, and Satoshi Kon. Besides digital illustration works, Tai also designs t-shirts and is currently working on a personal project, wherein she paints her illustrations onto second-hand clothing.
“Most of my friends started dating, so I felt like drawing something about love and affection.”

My piece “Let’s Fall in Love” is influenced by my friends who are in relationships and the romantic movies I watched at the time. I try to portray the sweet atmosphere and the beauty of love through my artwork. I like to use different textures in my illustration work: in this piece, I use soft color and patterns in the background to support the dreamy feels of the figures.
Beach Story

Zev Woskoff

This is an poetic, surreal play I wrote last semester. Weird theatre and absurdist plays in particular have always fascinated me, so this is my stab at absurdism. While the piece is surreal, there is meaning, but I’d rather let the writing and illustrations speak for themselves than continue pontificating here.
FAITH: A woman, visibly expecting.

LESTER: A man.

PAIGE: A woman.

(Lights up slowly. A beach. The sea crashes. FAITH and LESTER are seated at a picnic table. FAITH rubs her stomach. FAITH and LESTER look out.)

The sand. FAITH
It’s rough. LESTER
And the light. FAITH
It’s dim. LESTER
And the sea. LESTER
It’s wide. FAITH
I love it. Scarborough Beach. LESTER
We should have waited for summer. FAITH
But we’re here now. (A moment of stillness.) So you two look identical? LESTER
Nearly. FAITH
Nearly identical. (FAITH touches LESTER.) Are her hands- LESTER
Rougher, I’m sure. FAITH
Still? LESTER
I’d guess. FAITH
And her eyes? LESTER
Dimmer, I’m sure. FAITH
Dimmer than yours? LESTER
I’d guess. FAITH
And her lips? LESTER
Wider. FAITH
You’re sure?

I’d guess.

So, you two don’t look identical?

Nearly. Not anymore though, I’m sure.

But before?

When we were little, Mom used to mix us up.

She’d lift you up and call you Paige?

FAITH

She’d lift Paige up and call her Lester. *(A moment of stillness.)* Did I ever tell you the story of the fireworks?

Maybe. But I forget. Tell it again.

(He looks out.) When we were little, Mom used to bring us here in the summer for fireworks, and one time, when no one was looking, Paige snuck off. So, the show’s over, and we can’t seem to find her. And Mom takes my hand in hers. But then we hear a shout and see her little arms waving over the next dune. And we rescue her from a pile of sand, my mother cursing and crying. And she lifts Paige up and calls her Lester. And she is still. But I remember her face.

FAITH

She resented your mother?

She resented me. She asked why Mom loved me more. So much stillness. She kept telling the story. It was her one story.

FAITH

Her one story?

LESTER

Paige says that everyone has one story, just one. And she’ll poke and prod until all the sand is just loose enough to find it.

FAITH

You think I should be more worried.

LESTER

I think you should be careful. We both should.

FAITH

We don’t have to you know. We could just leave.

LESTER

You wanted to meet her.

FAITH

I still do.

LESTER

And come up to the sea. *(They look out.)*

FAITH

And go down to the beach.

LESTER

Sandpiper.

100 Workoff
And bury ourselves in the sand.

And look up.

Until the stars shift and fall down and hit the sea with a sizzle.

And just as the dimmest orange light hits the horizon we lift up and over the beach.

And never return.

And never return.

(Turning back) I love you to pieces.

I just worry is all.

You said that the whole way over.

It’s been so long-

Which is why we need to meet now. (She rubs her stomach.)

She’s a snake. A sidewinder. When we were little, she would bury herself in the sand-

You said.

Every time. She’d refuse to come out. Always said I buried her there.

Did you?

No. But a part of me always wished I had.

(Making her way onstage and over to the picnic table) Always wished you had what Lester? Yapped? Choked it? Broken?
Lovely to see you too Paige.
PAIGE
Is it?
LESTER
It’s been so long.
PAIGE
So long. Oh, I see you brought- *(She sees FAITH’s stomach.)*
FAITH
Faith. I’ve heard so much.
PAIGE
Wish I could say the same. *(To LESTER)* She’s lovely. *(To FAITH)* You’re lovely.
LESTER
We should have waited for summer.
FAITH
*(She rubs her stomach.)* That’s what Lester always says.
PAIGE
Does he?
LESTER
But we’re here now.
PAIGE
That’s the thing about a puppy dog isn’t it, he yaps.
LESTER
I say we’re here now, Paige.
FAITH
I’ve never had a puppy dog.
PAIGE
Of course, not.
LESTER
Here now.
FAITH
They must love the sand to pieces!
LESTER
Leaving soon.
FAITH
And the light.
PAIGE
To pieces.
LESTER
I say we’re leaving soon, Paige.
PAIGE
And the beach. To pieces. They do love the beach.
LESTER
Getting our things.
FAITH
Lester loves the beach.
PAIGE
To pieces. Say, did Lester ever tell you the story of the puppy dog?
LESTER
Faith.

*102 Woskoff*
Maybe. But I forget. Tell it again.

FAITH

Say it.

LESTER

PAIGE

When we were little, Mom had this yappy puppy dog. I forget his name. And Lester and I used to take him for walks down by the sea. He would always chase the sandpipers. And then he runs away. And he’s missing for days. And one night, just as the dimmest orange hits the horizon, Mom and Lester and I find him here, at Scarborough Beach. He’d been buried.

FAITH

Buried?

PAIGE

A hole in the sand. From a snake, a sidewinder. And he was still. Did you lift him up? I remember his face.

LESTER

There were no sandpipers that morning.

FAITH

So much stillness.

PAIGE

And the rough sand. And the dim light.

FAITH

And the wide sea… I liked that story.

PAIGE

Poetic, isn’t it?

FAITH

Lovely. How about another story?

LESTER

Another? Faith!

PAIGE

Another! It has been so long. You have some good stories, don’t you Lester?

FAITH

Oh, the story of the fireworks! Tell her that one Lester!

LESTER

She knows.

PAIGE

Maybe. But I forget.

FAITH

Tell it again!

LESTER

We’re leaving.

FAITH

No. First, the fireworks.

LESTER

Get your things.

FAITH

No, and the little arms waving.

LESTER

Faith.

FAITH

No, and a hole full of sand.
I’m warning you.  

(To PAIGE) No, and I lift you up and call you Lester. No no no.  

PAIGE  

(A moment of stillness.) That was my story.  

LESTER  

We should have waited for summer.  

But we’re here now.  

It wasn’t yours.  

To pieces.  

That was my one story.  

PAIGE  

Poking and prodding.  

PAIGE  

And you buried it in her.  

LESTER  

Until all the sand around is just loose enough.  

PAIGE  

Poetic, isn’t it? (To FAITH) Did Lester ever tell you the story of the joke?  

FAITH  

Maybe. But I forget. Tell it again.  

LESTER  

No, Paige.  

PAIGE  

Mom used to tell this joke. This lovely joke. This incredibly funny joke. And our lovely mother loved this lovely joke. And Lester hated this lovely incredibly funny joke. Say, I’m sure he still knows it.  

LESTER  

Don’t remember.
“Isn’t it incredibly funny…”

We’re leaving. Get your things.

“Isn’t it incredibly funny…” Come on, Lester.

Faith. I’m warning you.

Tell us the joke, Lester.

“Isn’t it incredibly funny how Lester thinks he’s actually mine.”

Lester hated that joke so much that he resented our mother for it. We were nearly identical. And he asked if Mom loved me more. So much stillness. And then he runs away. And he’s missing for days. And one night, just as the dimmest orange hits the horizon, Mom and I find him here, at the beach. We hear a shout and see his little arms waving over the next dune. And we rescue him from a pile of sand, my mother cursing and crying. And he is still. But I remember his face. He said she buried him there.

(She rubs her stomach.) She buried him?

I was hers.

That’s right, Sandpiper, you buried him up to his neck in the sand. Our own mother.

Own mother?

Choking him.

No, I was.

But she returns. She comes back for him.

Back for him.

Comes back to rescue him. And she lifted him up and called him Lester.

Calls him Lester.

She loved him. To pieces. But he wasn’t hers. He wasn’t hers and that was the joke. Broken?

(Screaming over her) Did I ever tell you the story of the two holes?

(A moment of stillness.) Maybe. But I forget. Say it.

Tell it again.

(He looks to PAIGE. She looks back.) There were two holes. One hole was empty and one full. But these were very special holes. They were the holes where Mom buried us in the sand. Here.
I buried Paige. And she buried me. But Mom buried us both. Nearly identical. And there were fireworks in her dim eyes.

FAITH

(She rubs her stomach.) I don’t like this story.

PAIGE

We weren’t hers, you see.

LESTER

Yes. Yes, we were. And then she returned. One night. Just as the dimmest orange hits the horizon, we hear a shout and see her little arms waving over the next dune. She has come back for me. She has come to rescue me.

FAITH

Please stop.

PAIGE

She has come to finish the job. To choke me in the sand. To pieces.

LESTER

And she lifts me up cursing and crying.

PAIGE

And she leaves one hole empty in the sand.

LESTER

And she leaves one hole full in the sand.

FAITH

Don’t say it.

LESTER

And Mom takes my hand in hers.

PAIGE

And I am still.

LESTER AND PAIGE

And she lifts me up and calls me Lester.

PAIGE

Poetic, isn’t it?

LESTER

Poetic. And Mom is gone.

PAIGE

And Mom is gone.

FAITH

We’re leaving.

PAIGE

Rough hands poking and prodding.

LESTER

Fireworks in her dim eyes.

PAIGE

Wide lips choking in sand. Choking to pieces.

FAITH

Get your things.

LESTER

But the sand is never just loose enough, is it?

PAIGE

And I turn away.

LESTER

And leave the beach.

106 Workoff
Lester.

And run until I can’t hear a shout or see your little arms waving.

And there are no sandpipers that morning.

So much stillness.

Lester!

And rough sand.

And dim light.

And wide sea.

(FAITH lifts up LESTER and PAIGE. Screaming over them) Lester!! (LESTER and PAIGE are still. FAITH looks out. She rubs her stomach. A moment of stillness. Sadly, to no one in particular) Broken. Did I ever tell you the story of the children? Maybe. But you forget. Tell it again. I loved them. Nearly identical. I loved them and they asked which I loved more. To pieces. I loved them to pieces. But they are broken. So easily. So, I bury them. At Scarborough Beach one summer after the fireworks. And I take their hands in mine. And I scour the beach for hours. And I dig two holes, poking and prodding until all the sand around is just loose enough. And I grab them by their little waving arms and push them down cursing and crying. And there are fireworks in my eyes as I leave them, two holes full in the sand. And they are still. And I lift no one up and call no one Lester. And I run and I see no yappy puppy dog. And no sidewinder. And no sandpipers. And I never return, until the stars shift and fall down and hit the sea with a sizzle. But I remember their faces. Those eyes. And every night, just as the dimmest orange hits the horizon, I think about them. Rough hands. Dim eyes. Wide lips. So much stillness. And the sand. And the light. And the sea.

(FAITH looks at LESTER. She touches him. He is still. She rubs her stomach. She looks to PAIGE. She touches her. She is still. FAITH rises and makes her way offstage, not looking back. The sea crashes. Lights fade to black slowly, ending just as the dimmest orange hits the horizon.)
Rachel Lee

A Big Delight in Every Bite
Rachel Lee is a graphic artist, printmaker, and user experience designer from Los Angeles, California. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Electronic Time-Based Media with minors in Human-Computer Interaction and Animation at Carnegie Mellon University. Her works revolve around the experiences of marginalized communities and racial politics in an increasingly divided America. Her main artistic mediums consist of interactive coding, 3D modeling, digital illustrations, and printmaking. She is constantly searching for new ways to combine 2D and 3D applications to create immersive artworks.

This ten-layer screen print represents the accumulation of my own childhood traumas over the past two decades of my life. Growing up as a first-generation Asian-American in an immigrant household, I never believed that I truly belonged anywhere. I was either regarded as an alien in my own hometown suburbs or as a foreigner in my parents’ native country. A slew of identity crises ensued whenever I tried to conform to these two clashing cultures that didn’t know what to make of me. “A Big Delight in Every Bite” is a part of an ongoing printed series that analyzes this cultural dilemma through iconic childhood snacks and their associated nostalgia. The depicted magpie, the national bird of South Korea, is suffocated and overshadowed by the bright Twinkies wrapper, a classic American snack; despite the obvious health violations and confusing situation, the bird and sweets are sealed together and presented for our consumption.
A Big Delight in Every Bite
John Starr

Like A Lion
I wanted to write a story about language because someone said so but that would put to rest too many elephants so I sat my shield down and napped and then tried again. The first time, I stopped, because I was afraid. This second time around, I am still.

Trembling, many writers talk about how their bodies are shimmering paradoxes, attempting to express something that cannot be expressed. For them, this is why language is a faker (and a lazy one at that). How will they ever convey what they want to convey when the words they love are too confining?

More about that. A Chinese baby’s first interaction with their soon-to-be native tongue comes from their parents. But they are not truly Chinese until they have lived one-hundred warm, sparkling days. On this special day the baby is named, now integrated with the other Chinese. For those one-hundred nameless sunrises and sunsets, you exist as all those writers dream about – you carry the burden of expressing while being unexpressed.

But when you are named you are still not really defined. Chinese names are not created like most languages in the world. Some examples. English: John Starr. Chinese: Star Kind King. In Chinese I am both continuous and asymptotic, approaching the lineage but never making contact. A wildfire of nature. My mother: Happy Leaf. My grandmother: Raging Storm. Common characteristic amongst us: our loud and glistening voices, our heritage.

Me. I was the booming one, the one with a large gap between his incisors like he was waiting to crack open a nut. Human squirrel, ride on. I did not cry as a baby. The sign reads: VOICE FOR WORDS ONLY. Eventually the sign cracks and dangles by its screws in the deep wind. Maybe this is why my Chinese family members were going to name me Lion. Because I wanted to roar but didn’t.

From time to time, I volunteer as a conversation partner for international students, where we go to a local mom-and-pop coffee shop or see a movie or try out a new restaurant or something else. The point is to keep the student speaking English language until it fully roots itself from their stems.
Let me tell you about Bee. That is not his first name, nor is it the phonetic spelling of his first initial. His actual name begins with an M. He gave himself this title because bees are his favorite bug, since, according to him, they look like Waldo, from books in stores.

I did not follow the tradition of my family. I did not receive my Chinese name until I was buttery with pubescence, my foreign aunts and uncles visiting my Grandma right before my Poppop passed away. What do you mean he does not have Chinese name stuck to the floorboards and began to vibrate. The first night of their visit, they talked – I found a name.

If I haven’t been clear yet here you go: I am in limbo with my languages. There are three (four) and they have pulled my threads into the fog, swarming me with linguistic fireflies. My thoughts are a clog of inconsistent phonology and morphosyntactic structures.

The one thing I am sure about: my favorite English word is puff. It is one of the few where form matches function. Each phonemic segment, p /p/, u /ʌ/, f /f/, is exactly the word’s definition – a short release of air.

Walking through nature like an autumn breeze. This is how Bee would describe his favorite pastime when we would meet on cold Wednesdays in November, usually at the park. His beard grew wild like the mane of a lion. He showed me the beauty of his culture in its chocolate richness.

My first language, English, terrifies me. There is so much that we cannot control, especially in the syntax. All words are automatically inflected for case, tense, mood, aspect, without us ever knowing. These features are glued to what we say. Try constructing a sentence that has no sense of time, or building one that plants the subject and the object right next to each other. I feel infected, even if I let my native-speaker ignorance steer for a while. It shakes me.

The only truly beautiful thing about English is its inconsistencies. These fundamental annoyances are also the pieces people hate about the language. To cite a popular example found in most introductory lessons on phonetics – what does the word ghoti sound like? Think about it for a bit.
It’s not goatee, or gaudy; it’s fish. Tough. Ff. Women. Ih. Celebration. Sh. Ghoti. Wonderful. Someone backstage yells English needs a phonetic alphabet! But these oddities contribute to the larger linguistic hodge-podge, and that’s why I’m glad to speak English. We have made our language make no sense to learn. The spiteful man in me grins with a spark in his teeth. In this language, you get many others in the form of its deep snake tunnels of European, African, and Asian loanwords. I love this feeling of connection, even though it is mostly just a feeling.

Also in English: your language is your identity, or at least claims your identity for others. Proof: Korean or Chinese refers to either the people or the language. This is quite the assumption. What if you are like me, a Chinese-American, who can speak neither Chinese nor American?

Through interacting with the customers at his father’s shop, Bee picked up quite a few languages. His first language, Arabic (is Bee Arabic, then…?), sharpened itself against the majority of the clientele, but he also began to acquire Urdu and Tagalog as the years went on. Many work in Saudi speak Urdu and Tagalog very good, so I learned these at that time. And now, English must shine through, dear John. Our first meeting, he told me all of this. I was amazed. Maybe even upset, but barely.

One aspect of English that bothers me: Truth and truism exist, the nouns formed from the same adjectival base true (arguably). Yet we only have one word for love? Not to be dramatic, but this munches on oddity with large teeth and strong gums.

Moving on. I am ashamed of my second language – Spanish. It remains a stunted growth of vocabulary and grammar, an amorphous gel of disgrace. I stick to podcasts and local taquerías but venture out no more than that. Espero entenderme un día. But until that day comes, I don’t feel ready to take it on.

Persian, my third language, roars. Producing it is done with your throat after it has been dipped in acrylic paint and splattered across a vaulted canvas. This is not a stereotype. This is not a racism of many colors. Truth.
Many constructions in Persian, whether they be at the sentence or word-level, are metaphorical and leave the interpreter to fill in the holes. For example, *library*, خانه کتاب. *Home of the book.* Or perhaps, *hurricane*, گردباد. *Round wind.* English can sometimes be like this, though as native speakers the poetics are often lost to our tongues. *Eat shit.*

I worry that I am only all the holes of my languages. In English, I am alone. In Spanish, I am something, I think. In Persian, I am finally beautiful.

*Yes, my dear John. It was beautiful,* Bee began. *In my country, I work with my father in boots store as the child,* where Bee packed shelves with souls and soles and engaged with customers. *It was in the small alley.* He was very good at his job. *The best in all of Saudi. Also, the best beard according to the female customer.* We both laughed.

But still I am empty, at least a little. There is no Chinese in me. Let me rephrase – there is no usable Chinese in me. Besides doing funny accents my only connection to the language of my ancestors are the phrases, “They are reading newspapers” and “I am a woman.”, along with a very select set of food-related vocabulary involving *dim sum* items. These are not very useful unless you are a hungry woman in the morning, and I am not that. So Chinese is my black hole, manipulating my pulse with its gravity. I am losing time.

Yes, in all ways, Chinese loses the clock. By this I mean Chinese does not have tense on the verb in the traditional (a.k.a. European) sense, choosing instead to indicate order of events through adverbs. Chinese lofts itself above time’s linearity. This feature of Chinese is also why all English translations of the language are forced to a dirt path instead of being allowed to reach up to the low, damp branches of trees, hoping to climb high enough to see the sun shimmer. Imagine writing about a river flowing, but not having to describe it now or what it was in the past. The river was and is always an entity fully coursing against soil and rock. There is no time for the river. Can you see how in moments like these English appears especially ugly?

But, unlike Chinese, we organisms do not transcend time. We must roll along with the tide of linearity.

116 Starr
Yes. Families form unidirectionally as well, and it seems that Chinese wants to escape my bloodline. Growing up, only English and Chinese were spoken in my household. My grandma always shouts the latter to my mother because she has no one else to talk to in her native tongue. It is wisping away from her. Worse, my mother can only understand Chinese. She always responds to my grandma in English. Then, there’s me at the table, open-mouth boy. I sit there hungry and unable to fully grasp my culture, my identity, my ancestors. I am disappointed in myself. There are no roots in my body worth settling.

Perhaps the only way to understand myself while floating through this limbo is not through words, but through language’s movement to others.

I asked Bee to teach me some Arabic, and he gratefully obliged – this is the norm for most of meetings I lead. Both parties should feel like we’ve dipped our toes in multiple languages. Arabic has a complicated grammar that we both knew I wouldn’t understand in such a short time, so we stuck with something simple.

ا‌نا فی صحة جي‌دة. I am well. In return, I gave him a phrase in Persian. خدا نگهدار. Goodbye (lit. May God hold you dearly). He nodded, then repeated the phrase. We both knew that we had given away our gaps for others to fill, that we had become not holed but whole.

That was two years ago. Yes. It has been lifetimes. Yes. How the languages we don’t speak are the ones which form metal bridges. Even though I don’t feel honest with language. Yes. It moves elsewhere.

Yes. I am not against language or its frequent infidelity.

No,
to be completely honest,

Estoy rugiendo

I am roaring

من دارم می خروشم

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I am roaring

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Estoy rugien
I am roaring with longing.
Want to be Published?

Call for Submissions

Forbes & Fifth, the undergraduate journal of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, is seeking submissions for its 15th issue, Fall 2019. Submissions will be accepted from all schools and disciplines and from any accredited undergraduate university in the world.

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Work may orginate from a prompt, but it must be unique and original.

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