

# SOCIALEYES

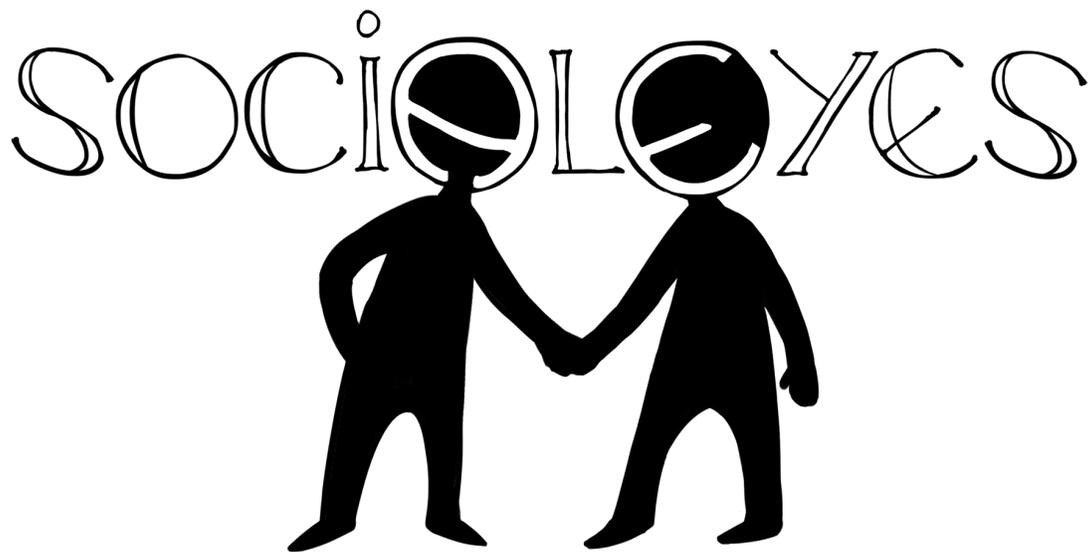
The Undergraduate  
Sociological Journal  
of Boston College

Issue 7  
Spring 2016



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*SocialEyes*  
The Undergraduate Sociological  
Journal of Boston College

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Spring 2016

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## Acknowledgements

The journal before you embodies the collective efforts of many dedicated individuals to whom we, the *SocialEyes* staff, would like to extend a great many thanks.

We would first like to thank Dr. Michael Malec of the Sociology Department, whose encouragement and expertise were invaluable throughout the school year. As our faculty advisor, Dr. Malec continually advocated for and supported our work.

We are grateful for our graduate student advisor, Julia Bates, and for her energy, insightful input, and commitment to the successful launch of this journal. We would also like to thank her for encouraging her students to submit their work for publication.

We are truly indebted to our devoted authors, artists, and editing staff for their time and commitment to SocialEyes. Their hard work, intellect, and sociological insights were crucial to the publication of this issue.

Finally, we would like to thank our readers as well as the students who have taken the time to submit their wonderful works to our journal. Without you, the journal would not be what it is today.

Thank you!

## Editors' Introduction

We are pleased to present to you the seventh issue of Boston College's Undergraduate Sociological Journal: *SocialEyes*. *SocialEyes* was first published in 2009 under Boston College's Sociology Department in order to showcase scholarly talent within the undergraduate community, as well as to promote a dialogue concerning the many sociological issues that we face today as citizens of a dynamic society.

Sociology is the study of human relationships, institutions, and structures of society. But this definition is not sufficient; the matters covered in sociology are diverse. From family to government, from crime to religion, from race to economics—sociology covers it all. Sociology forces us to think critically about aspects of social life that we usually take for granted. In this way, it investigates the causes and consequences of fundamental human interactions and social structures that organize our lives. By better understanding the social processes that exist in every segment of our lives, we are then able to challenge those that are harmful. Sociology engages in careful research and analysis in order to develop theories and cultivate solutions.

This issue of *SocialEyes* is a collection of works on a variety of sociological topics, including body image and identity, higher-level education, race, and the criminal justice system. From the scholarly works of authors of a variety of disciplines, to poetry and artwork, *SocialEyes* is certainly a cross-disciplinary conversation from which substantial change can emerge.

As you page through this journal do not shy away from the anger, fear, confusion, and disillusionment that arise within you, but embrace it. Let these emotions fuel your passion and join the dialogue! Only through discussion and wading through the murky waters of inequality and estrangement can new ideas arise.

Read. Think. *SocialEyes*.

Onward,

Alienna L. Arnold  
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# The Looking Glass

*Sarah Ramsey* is a member of the class of 2018, co-concentrating in Marketing and Entrepreneurship with a minor in Medical Humanities, Health, and Culture. Sarah is an Editor for the Medical Humanities Journal at Boston College, is a Council Member of the Appalachia Volunteer Program, is a Member of Ignition, has a food blog titled Sweet Olympia, and loves to run, do yoga, and zumba. She is originally from Belmont, MA. Sarah would like to say thank you to her parents for loving her unconditionally and teaching her how important it is to love yourself in order to truly love those around you.

It was clear, cool to the touch, smooth.

The light shined off, erasing the abundance of colors produced by the springtide.

She came slowly, draped in black garments.

Her sharp body allowed the fabric to cling at its corners, slightly obscuring the skeleton protruding through the cloth.

Reaching the end of the pathway, she approached the looking glass.

Distorting the truth, it turned reflection into imagination.

She hunched inwards, her back turning into a cat's spine.

A delicate curve that attempted to hide her remaining flesh.

She was blind and too weak to see the culprit of her desires.

It was addictive, powerful, a drug.

Her eyes bore into its surface.

It gave her the lies she craved.

She needed freedom. It told her to control every last minute.

She needed sustenance. It told her to starve.

She needed inner peace. It told her to watch others.

Weak, reliant, obsessed, broken.

She would return tomorrow.

It would never go away.

## A Note from the Author

My inspiration for “The Looking Glass” came from personal and friends’ struggles with disordered eating. Particularly in modern Westernized countries, the media, fad diets, and the fashion industry encourage girls to be as thin as possible. The ideal beautiful woman is underweight, which convinces people this attribute will make them happy, powerful, admired, etc. I wanted to demonstrate how this subjective definition of beauty is irrational and addictive, and causes people to have distorted views of themselves. When they look in the mirror they don’t see reality, they see a reflection twisted by their own lens. Similarly, I wanted to portray that disordered eating is not just about maintaining a certain physical appearance, but having control and order. By limiting food intake, one is able to have control over what goes into their bodies, but this need for control doesn’t end there, and starts to seep into their lives, harming relationships, jobs, school, etc.

# Fat Girls

*Sianay Chase* is a member of the Class 2017. Originally from Burlington, Vermont, Sianay is majoring in Political Science and Sociology. She is a member of the cheerleading team, a BC Big, and she really loves cookies. She would like to thank all the wonderfully bold women in her life that have taught her what a pleasure it is to speak my mind.

From arguments on the Congressional floor about the appropriate circumstances for an abortion or fashion designers and magazine editors declaring what women should be wearing and saying, women are routinely disenfranchised from an opinion on their own lives. The authoritative nature of mass media, the government, and scientific experts means that the social constructions they endorse are deemed objective in Americans' social psyche and therefore little is questioned about why there are such narrow definitions of womanhood. Within this social context the control women exert over their own lives and choices becomes highly contested. The one mechanism of agency available for women to regain this control is her appearance. Men have so many more opportunities to acquire social capital, the non-financial social assets that promote social mobility, than woman that physical appearance is significantly less important. Attractiveness is linked to womanhood to an extent that it is perceived to be definitive of the female experience. Beauty, a term that is itself gendered for women, is extraneous for men but socially required for women. The privileging of those considered attractive is an essential fact of women's social existence. And although there is a nominal range in what is considered attractive, there is one characteristic of beauty that is unquestionable: weight. There are numerous factors that contribute to a person's likelihood of becoming obese, some controllable and others inescapable, the latter often ignored. Personal responsibility is most commonly cited as the cause of this public health issue not only because obesity is difficult to conceptualize otherwise, but also because this logic veils the gendered explanations of the social preference toward "behavior-change-oriented solutions (i.e., diet and exercise change) rather than system-level or policy changes" (Gollust, Eboh, and Barry 2012: 1545). This shift in focus makes it possible to hide how women are taught to understand themselves in a social setting unforgiving to their being.

Diseases attacking internal organs are generally considered to be independent from lifestyle choices and conditions that are symptomatic of personal decisions like smoking or unprotected sex are not typically visibly stigmatizing. On the other hand, those suffering from obesity are instantly recognizable and therefore are more subject to public criticism, regardless of race, class, gender, or any other social identification. However, there is a lurking sentiment that obesity targets the deviant and quite literally, the physically ‘unfit’, and this thought process works to pathologize obesity, especially for women. By citing the body as a place where a person can and should exert control, society generates the axiom that identity and perception of self is shaped through physical appearance. The immediate consequences of embedding health with moral significance are negative body image, unrealistic body expectations, extreme dieting, and eating disorders; consequences that target women at rates much higher than males. The long term, coercive, structurally hidden consequences are a set of social norms that only benefit the fit and healthy and work to police and punish non-dominant, stigmatized groups like women into a singular definition of attractive, healthy, and normal.

The framing of obesity as a problem characteristic of the lazy, the undesirable, and the degenerate creates an environment of fat-hatred that advocates for a very narrow definition of what a healthy self-image for women should be. Men certainly deal with adverse effects of the social construction of the body and suffer from eating disorders and negative body image but weight and size consciousness are distinctly regulated for women. For men, fatness is seen as “irrelevant” or “peripheral” to masculinity, particularly because a concern for physical appearance or the emotional aspects of self-care are socially codified for women only (Newhook et al. 2015). Men are taught to not agonize over weight, and are not nearly as strictly penalized

for transgressing social norms of attractiveness as women are. The framing of obesity as a personal problem with self-control, conflated with expectations of beauty puts women, especially overweight women, in double jeopardy. In her 1981 publication, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*, Kim Chernin recapitulates where the titular obsession originates and how women's bodies are sites of social control and reproduction:

The body holds meaning. A woman obsessed with the size of her body, wishing to make her breasts and thighs and hips and belly smaller and less apparent, may be expressing the fact that she feels uncomfortable being female in this culture. A woman obsessed with the size of her appetite, wishing to control her hungers and urges, may be expressing the fact that she has been taught to regard her emotional life, her passions and 'appetites' as dangerous, requiring control, and careful monitoring. A woman obsessed with the reduction of her flesh may be revealing the fact that she is alienated from a natural source of female power and has not been allowed to develop a reverential feeling for her body (2).

When a woman, the true owner of her body, must struggle with society over ownership of that body, a dangerous paradox is created. The slender body can be maintained if the owner exerts self-control over their life. But that slenderness has been socially determined to be the female ideal of attractiveness, attractiveness being a concept thoroughly gendered and constructed externally from the body. A woman must rigorously manage her own weight in order to be eligible for a definition of beauty she had no part in creating. Meanwhile the fat female body that is consistently associated with "moral failure, inability to delay gratification, poor impulse control, greed, and self-indulgence," (Backstrom 2012: 692) is cast as socially deviant for failing

to exert control on a body society dictates they cannot have control over. Consequently females are taught that there is only one acceptable place through which she can exert control: her body. Yet simultaneously, it is not socially appropriate for women to have control over anything, especially that body. To actively acknowledge this paradox or any of its manifestations like eating disorders or fatness is socially inappropriate, thus rendering “the regulation of desire ... an ongoing problem, as we find ourselves continually besieged by temptation, while socially condemned for overindulgence” (Bordo 1993: 199). For a contemporary example of how truly inconsistent and baffling these expectations of self-control and womanhood are, we should look to an entire clan of women, the Kardashians.

The Kardashian women are idolized for various reasons, among them being their notoriously curvaceous bodies: bodies with large breasts and thick bottoms, paired with impossibly skinny waists and, most importantly, wealth – bodies that within the past decade have fallen into society’s ideal of beautiful. In a recent *People Magazine* article the eldest and most often attacked about her weight, Khloé, discussed her relationship with her body and her motivations to lose weight. She credited her newfound fitness ambitions to her recent divorce from basketball player Lamar Odom. On her own self-image and lengths she would go to get her body in the best shape yet, Kardashian disclosed to *People*, “I’m not against plastic surgery ... but you have to love yourself first because no surgery is going to change your heart ... I’ve always felt, ‘wouldn’t it be great to accomplish that on your own?’” (2015: 1). There is quite a bit going on in her remark. First, in order to feel better about herself after the failure of her marriage, Kardashian felt that she needed to seize control of her life through weight loss instead of addressing psychological distress likely caused by her divorce. Losing weight and becoming

skinny would make her feel better after her divorce because she could control something during a time in her life when all else was chaotic. By framing this thought process as empowered, *People* is encouraging its large constituency of female readers to associate happiness and high self-esteem with physical fitness. Coincidentally, linked at the end of this article is another article titled, “RELATED: The One Workout Move You Have to Do to Get Kim Kardashian’s Second Most Famous Asset.” It is safe to assume that the first asset is her wealth, but readers can do little on their own accord to attain such wealth. What readers can do is have a body like hers, which *People* advertises as the next best thing. By associating physical fitness with wealth and a high quality of life, the publication is inherently associating the opposite, obesity and lack of physical fitness, with a poor quality of life while simultaneously suggesting a woman’s worth is equivalent to her body.

Khloe also brings up extreme weight loss procedures like surgery as an option. Weight loss surgery too is gendered, with a disproportionate number of women undergoing procedures (Newhook et al. 2015) but because she inhabits such a healthy mental state, because she ‘loves herself,’ she decided becoming physically active would be a better alternative. Although she seems to be promoting a healthy body image here, she is actually perpetuating established social conventions surrounding women and weight. She is insinuating that if a woman did not like the way she looked then she should start to love herself first. This is a common ideology that women become fat because they hate themselves and in order to alter their situations they should start to like themselves. However that line of thinking is fundamentally backwards. Overweight women are taught to hate themselves because they deviate from strictly enforced social norms of beauty. Again another contradiction is set up for women. In order to like your body, you should be

skinny. If you are not skinny you need to like yourself before you can become skinny because only women that like themselves can be skinny. Therefore, being fat and liking your body or general existence as a human being become mutually exclusive. Happiness is reserved for skinny girls only.

Fat women are allowed no social identity or social space to inhabit. Fat women cannot participate in the same social world as those who are physically fit. A fat woman must be in transition. She cannot just exist as a fat girl, but she has not earned skinniness as a state of being either. Those who are not in that transitional stage can attempt to carve out some social space among the skinny by behaving in a certain way. However, these accepted behaviors force that fat girl to keep attempting to reconcile contradictory social expectations. She cannot be happy in her current state, because that would defy forces of normalization, which elicits hostility from those deemed normal. Susan Bordo (1993) explains that, “if the rest of us are struggling to be acceptable and ‘normal,’ we cannot allow [fat people] to get away with [happiness].” (203) But the fat girl cannot be entirely self-loathing either because fatness is her own problem to fix; she needs to compensate for the situation she put herself into by “putting extra effort into her personal character” (Newhook et al. 2015: 657). These are the rules that fat girls need to play by. By being conscious of her unattractiveness and admitting her self-hate, the fat girl can win sympathy. By being happy and dressing well, the fat girl can distract people from her fatness; however, other people may perceive the fat girl’s happiness and dress as fake because those are attributes not designated for fat women. Once again, an entire population of women becomes stuck with social expectations that they cannot possibly be expected to fulfill.

Encouraging women to adhere to the idea that a whole, stable identity can be based on self-change is an epidemic far worse than obesity.

So what does the fat girl do? She should not have to do anything. Perhaps if obese women were taught to strive for healthy rather than skinny, they would have better chances of living healthy lives and losing weight in responsible ways. Perhaps if overweight women were encouraged to adopt more self-accepting models of behavior, attainment of happiness could lie in other social realities women had a hand in creating. If being an overweight female could be included in the social definition of femininity or personhood then millions of women would have the opportunity to feel less stigmatized about their weight, less pressured into eating disorders, and encouraged to stop attaching happiness, health, and fulfillment to weight loss and their physical appearance.

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# It's Hard for a Mixed Girl

*Angela Arzu* is a freshman majoring in Sociology with an African Diaspora Studies minor. Her extracurricular activities include BC Bigs and the FACES forum. She enjoys baking, listening to music, and playing tennis. She is originally from Wappingers Falls, NY. Angela would like to thank her parents; her dad, for instilling in her a love for social justice and an ever-growing passion for racial equality, and her mom for teaching her to conquer all in love.

## It's Hard for a Mixed Girl

everyday I feel the pull from  
one side to another  
6th grade  
prep school  
they tell me, "you're not black,  
you're more white than me"  
and it stings deep inside  
because I can't figure out where  
I identify-  
with my mom's fair complexion  
or my dad's darker side

Freshmen year  
University  
I'm here and yet there's a part of me  
that's unsure where to stand-  
with the white kids I grew up with  
or the black family pulling my hand  
saying, "come over here,  
this is where you belong"  
but sometimes I feel  
like they're all singing a song and  
I'm off key  
Don't know the lyrics or the tune but  
I try to blend my voice in because  
that's what I've been taught to do  
You look like me, you act like them  
What are you?

Sociology class and my professor  
Tells me race is unifocal  
It's either one or the other.  
Girl raises her hand, asks  
"What about the mixed kids?"  
He's never seen any  
of those where he lives  
Answers, "they can have multiple  
ethnicities but only one race  
I can taste the anger in my mouth  
like a poison I need to spit out

Don't define me to a group or color  
because I refuse to choose I  
refuse to lose a part of my  
identity simply because you can't see  
me as anything more than a black  
girl pretending to be white.  
It's a fight everyday to assimilate  
with what society sees me to be  
True freedom comes when I accept  
the Afro-Italian- biracial me.

You see because I'm looking but  
I can't find a happy medium  
It's either them or us  
White or Black  
privilege or discrimination  
wealth or mass incarceration

I don't feel worthy to claim the  
history of ridicule and bigotry  
as my own but then again I  
can't deny what lies on my  
daddy's side

I come from prep school  
SAT tutors, birthday parties  
fast cars  
I don't carry the weight or sting  
of any scars  
except the ones I got 6th grade  
"you're more white than me"  
choose which race you want to be  
because you can't be both-  
that's what hurts the most

its hard for a mixed girl  
I said it's hard for a mixed girl

## A Note from the Author

This piece expresses some of the pressures I face as a biracial woman, and my struggle to find a secure sense of my racial identity. Since race is a social construct, it seems that society doesn't know what to do when two races mix together. I feel a pressure to conform to one race or the other; its difficult to be seen as the unique mix that I am, and even harder to accept this myself. This piece was originally written as a slam poem, and my inspiration came from a slam poetry showcase I attended during the fall semester on campus.

# Generation S for Stress

*Lauren Sokal* is a member of the graduating Class of 2016 and a student in the College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College. Originally from Winnetka, Illinois, Lauren is majoring in International Studies and minoring in Hispanic Studies. She is a member of 4Boston. During her free time, she enjoys baking and reading. After graduation, she will be an Executive Recruiting Specialist in New York City with Andiamo Partners.

If I had to pick a statement that is most commonly heard among my peers, “I’m so stressed out!” would definitely make the short list. Everyday life for the contemporary college student requires more from an individual than any generation before. Not only do students have their grades to worry about, but additionally, there are so many other new pressures that take a toll on students’ mental health. There is pressure to choose the right major – you don’t want to be out of a job come graduation. There is pressure to participate in the right clubs in order to be able to network with the right people in the future. There is pressure to get a proper internship in order to pad one’s (most likely) already impressive résumé, at least impressive by the past’s standards. The list goes on and on. In addition to these academic pressures, students of Generation Y are pressured by social media sites to “prove” to all of their online friends that they have an active and thrilling social life on the side. These compounded factors lead to millennial students putting immense pressure on themselves, which ultimately creates an unsustainable generation of stressed out young adults.

Regardless of the era, college students have undoubtedly always faced certain pressures. However, today’s generation of college students has been cultivated to ensure that every individual is exceptional in their own right. It is no longer enough to have good grades and test scores to get into college. Potential college students begin building an immaculate image of themselves starting as early as middle school. Nowadays, one even hears about parents trying to get their children into the “right” preschools; they believe that without these schools to kick-start their education, their children will have less of a chance to get into a good college. In contrast to how their parents’ generation was raised, millennials were raised to be structured. In his article “The Organization Kid,” journalist David Brooks states,

They are the most honed and supervised generation in human history. If they are group-oriented, deferential to authority, and achievement-obsessed, it is because we achievement-besotted adults have trained them to be. We have devoted our prodigious energies to imposing a sort of order and responsibility on our kids' lives that we never experienced ourselves (Brooks 1999).

The pressures that millennials face are unique to our generation due to the fact that expectations for every aspect of this generation's life are higher than previous generations. As a high school student who plans to apply to college, days are filled with sundry sports, clubs, volunteer and research programs, and more in order to help differentiate a student from the overwhelmingly large applicant pool. Top colleges get more competitive to get into every year; this last year, seven of the eight Ivy League schools lowered their acceptance rates (Abrams 2013). This only serves to add to the inherent fear that college applicants experience that they won't get into any of the schools that they apply to – a fear that would have been unheard of in their parents' generation, also known as the Baby Boomers.

Once a millennial reaches college, their work is by no means done. The struggle to differentiate oneself from the crowd is still overwhelmingly prevalent. On top of their schoolwork, students feel pressure to continue their high school ways and pack their daily schedule with clubs and activities. College is incredibly competitive, and many students are threatened by their other classmates getting good grades, even if they do equally as well. In the documentary *The Race to Nowhere* (Abeles and Cogdon 2009), we are shown how students are pressured to perform rather than learn. The emphasis on getting good grades hinders students' creativity and creates an environment of intense competition. Howe and Strauss assert,

Pressure is what keeps them constantly in motion – moving, busy, purposeful, without nearly enough hours in the day to get it all done...The Gen-X credo – that you can always rebound from failure – no longer seems plausible (Howe and Strauss 2000: 184).

It used to be that if one had a college degree, they could get a job when they graduated, no question. That is by no means the case for Generation Y students. Today's job market is abysmal, and there is an excess of qualified candidates who are willing to take any job that they can get – even something that their education has more than prepared them to do. Approximately four in ten recent college graduates are working at jobs that don't require a degree (Kimball 2013). Therefore, the common fear that college students have of being unable to use their skills and college degree to get a successful job is by no means an unwarranted one.

Due to the effects it carries on the job market, the current post- "Great Recession" state of the economy is another one of the causes of stress for millennials. Although it has improved markedly, the global economy is at the worst point that it has been at since the Great Depression in the 1930's. The state of the economy inherently took a toll on the job market, as unemployment rose when people were let go or simply unable to find work after graduation. The unemployment rate of millennials has risen as well, as there are not nearly enough jobs, yet plenty of recent post-college graduates looking for work. This creates immense competition for job positions, which college students are well aware of. Although the economy is on the upswing, finding a job is still far more difficult than it was before the recession. Lack of job positions instills fear in college students, as many took on debt in order to attend school in the first place and then find themselves unable to get a job to pay back those loans. Two thirds of college students graduate with some level of college loan debt, with an average of owing

\$26,600 (Denhart 2013). In contrast, the economy of the Boomers was the strongest that the United States had ever seen. America was a powerhouse in production, and the economy was expanding at an unprecedented rate. Therefore, Boomers had no issues finding a job once they obtained the proper credentials – a college degree.

It is no surprise that immense stress accompanies the downturn in the economy for Generation Y. Millennials can't rely on the formulaic process of going to school, acquiring a degree, and getting a job. This ideal that was essentially the reality for their parents is no longer easily mirrored. College students have it hammered into their minds that we are to enter into a poor economy, and there just aren't enough jobs to go around. The pressure to achieve, which is something that has been a constant in millennials' upbringing, creates an environment with excessive competition. The desire to be the most successful that one can be is difficult to fulfill when one feels as though they would be lucky to get a job at all, let alone one that they love and are completely qualified for. Boomers never had to worry about what they majored in; a college degree was more than enough to get them a decent position. In the current generation of college students, the threat of being unable to find a job has lead numerous college students to choose a major due to its supposed sensibility in the job market rather than a reflection of their own interests. A recent study shows that of the current freshman college class, about one third (32%) of the class chose a major that doesn't align with their interests (Dame 2013). Not only are students studying things that they aren't passionate about in attempts to make themselves "employable", but also they find themselves graduating college and still struggling to find a job.

The pressures that millennials are facing are not entirely on an academic and occupational level. There are new social pressures that were brought on by the invention of

social media sites, and the ways in which young adults use them. Social media is more than prevalent in the lives of millennials. It is extremely uncommon to meet a Generation Y student without at least one social media site that they regularly spend time on. While social media and the new technologies that make it so accessible, such as smartphones, help connect our generation in a way that was previously impossible, it also adds certain societal pressures to the lives of college students. Not only are college students expected to get stellar grades, find a job, and participate in numerous non-academic activities, but they are also expected to find time on the side to have fun. The connectedness that goes along with social media brings about a certain sense of competition in that students can see their friends' lives through pictures, and no one wants to look like they're the one that is having the least fun in college. A study at Stanford University found,

...the way people tend to conceal their negative emotions while broadcasting their happy ones makes the rest of us feel somehow 'less than'...Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter seem to have made these comparisons even more harmful by providing the perfect venue through which people can perpetually present a perfect version of themselves (Szalvavitz 2011).

Frequent exposure to other people's "perfect" lives leads to stress over whether one's own life is up to standards. There is now an added pressure to prove to one's friends list that one has an active and thrilling social life on top of all the academic responsibilities that one is attending to.

This sense of connectedness is a defining characteristic of social media sites and the new technology that goes along with them. In previous generations, once college students left their hometowns behind, they all but completely lost touch with their high school friends. The only

way that they could speak to them was through writing letters or expensive long distance phone calls. Now, college students see their home friends' lives splashed all over their newsfeeds on a daily basis, and it leads many to wonder if their college lives measure up to those of their peers. There is an unspoken necessity to put up "party pictures" and artificially mold one's social media life to make it look as appealing, wild, and quintessentially "college" as possible. This is a stressor in that students are facing yet another field for competition amongst their peers: this time, a social one. The desire to portray oneself as a well-rounded student often causes students to make a choice between their academics and their social life; sacrificing an evening for one or the other. The stress that accompanies this choice is something that previous generations didn't have to deal with, as technologies didn't allow this to be a possibility at the time. Cell phones allow for constant access to other people's lives. In addition to accessing social media sites via mobile, the ability to text people and see what they're up to at all times makes it impossible to escape news of parties or social events that are occurring on a given day. It also makes it impossible to stay in without having people know about it, which would ruin one's image as a well-rounded, party-going student.

Low acceptance rates among top universities makes the college process extremely competitive for potential college students, which leads to high levels of stress for those hoping to attend them. Gaining access to a quality university education has increased in difficulty immensely since the Boomer generation. Universities have never had lower acceptance rates than the current ones. This makes getting into college an even more difficult feat. Because colleges are now so selective, there is a newfound emphasis on making every high school student into a unique package to offer to universities. High school students have to essentially market

themselves to universities in order to be considered a strong applicant. Getting perfect grades and high test scores simply doesn't cut it anymore. Students have to prove how well rounded they are by being a jack-of-all-trades, or at least presenting themselves as one in their college applications. The only option besides this is to be an extremely talented, nationally celebrated musician, athlete, or entrepreneur. It is not uncommon to see that a student has claimed to be in ten different clubs and volunteer programs, not to mention sports and pep band. The pressure to differentiate oneself leads one to be somewhat insincere, as many students find themselves participating in activities that they have no real interest in just so they can appeal to what they think colleges want to see.

This increase in the difficulty of getting into a college is a definite cause of stress that college-bound millennials face. A large part of the reason that colleges are more selective is that far more students graduate high school in this generation than any before, but most selective colleges only allow for a certain number of students to enter a class each year. Therefore, there is a mismatch between the number of high school students vying for a spot in a university and the availability of said spots. In earlier generations, admittance to a top-ranked university was still difficult, but for many, it was far less out of reach than it would be comparatively today. The Boomer process was essentially as follows:

College choices were most often based on location, program offerings, cost, and difficulty of admission, with a parental alma mater sometimes thrown in for good measure. For the most part, the whole process was fairly low-key. If students did their homework carefully before deciding where to apply, the outcome was usually predictable. Of course there were surprises—some pleasant and some disappointing—

but nothing that would raise the issue of college admissions to the level of a national obsession (Springer, Franck, and Reider, 2010).

Admissions at every college, but especially top-ranked ones, have become increasingly more difficult. Wanting to live up to or surpass one's parents' education, but having to face more demanding standards is a stressor for a sizable portion of Generation Y students.

The excessive pressure and stress that characterizes the millennial generation has obvious negative repercussions in my life and the life of my peers. Attending college sometimes feels like an uphill battle. There is so much expected of students nowadays that I am confident previous generations would be shocked that we are capable of accomplishing it all. Interestingly enough, laziness is often considered a defining characteristic of our generation by elder generations, but leisure time amongst adolescents and young adults has actually declined considerably within the last few decades. (Howe and Strauss 2000: 171) From an increasingly young age, students have it drilled into their minds that there is only one way that one can be successful in life, and that is to study hard, to get into a good university, and then to either further one's education or to get a job. There is no other path presented in a positive light, so most students, especially those from middle class families or any class above, don't even realize that they can choose to go about life in a different manner. School is given importance above all else, including one's well-being. Studies have shown that the average teenager in Generation Y has stress levels as high as that of mental patients from the 1950's (Clark 2011). This is obviously unsustainable, as a generation raised with such high levels of anxiety is a generation in danger.

All of these pressures have created a high-achieving generation, but they have also created a generation that is incredibly stressed out. The pressure to achieve is everywhere in the

life of a college student. Students cry about getting B's and forfeit their Saturday nights to an all-nighter in the library. The fear of failure weighs on all students constantly. Additionally, it is difficult to enter into an environment where everyone around you is stressed out. Oftentimes, students feel even more stressed when they realize how stressed out their peers are. Millennials are significantly more stressed out than other age groups in the United States, with a score of 5.4 versus the national average of 4.9 on a measure of 1-10 for how stressed out they are (Reinberg 2013). Constant exposure to an environment of stressed out peers leads to pressure to work even harder, as students see fellow classmates doing copious amounts of work for the same assignment and begin to fear that they aren't doing enough.

The vast amounts of stress that accompany the college selection process, college itself, and finding a job are often made even worse by the pressure that students put on themselves. The aforementioned outside pressures that students have are more than enough to deal with, and they have also lead to increased expectations for oneself. Undeniably, one should put at least some pressure on oneself in order to achieve goals and try to do the best one possibly can. However, students are putting such massive pressure on themselves that it is taking an extremely unhealthy toll on their mental well-being. If one is to live their whole lives expecting impossible things from themselves in every aspect of their lives – academic, social, work, love, etc. – it will only lead to one being far more down on oneself than is healthy. The millennial generation is one of the most stressed generations mankind has witnessed thus far, and the effect that this could have on the mental health of the generation is likely to lead to many unforeseen problems in the future, in addition to those problems which have already arose from the situation.

The increased stress levels that the millennial generation exhibits is undoubtedly a source of social conflict. Expectations of young people have changed drastically over the last century. For most of human history, young men were expected to help out their family and continue doing whatever trade their father had done, while young women were expected to get married above their station and be homemakers. As the twentieth century progressed, more and more young adults began to go to college and continue their education. The current generation of students is the largest ever to go to college, and while it is great that so many people now have the chance to further their education, it has led to a number of problems. Although the number of colleges themselves has increased in accordance with the trend of attending college, top-ranked universities have done little to expand their classes (Springer, Franck, and Reiner 2011). The competition to get into a good college has led to a strain on student's well-being. The seemingly never ending cycle of high expectations, a heavy workload, and a consistent sense of competitiveness is a far cry from the sorts of stress that previous generations experienced. The Boomer generation's college process was far simpler and far less taxing on one's mental health.

The burden that the high-pressure environment of college and the job seeking process has brought upon the current generation of students most definitely could not be contributing to any sort of social equilibrium. In no ways does raising a generation of stressed out students and employees add any sort of stability to the social state of things. However, it does lead to conflict. A rising sense of bitter competition is accompanying the fall in community that modern societies have been experiencing for generations. Students are far more likely to want their peers to fail than to desire to work together with them in order to succeed. The competitive environment that this breeds is unsustainable. Although it may be a generalization that our generation prefers to

work together in groups, in my experience, it has been every man for him or herself. The rivalry that the always-present competition breeds amongst millennials is something that will undoubtedly be carried with the generation as they graduate from college and move on to their careers. An individualistic generation is not always a problem, but in the case of Generation Y, it is likely to become one, as many in the generation could potentially have issues working together, and could continue the trend of putting high amounts of pressure on oneself and one's coworkers.

As previously mentioned, the prevalence of social media in all aspects of life is another condition that leads to conflict. This is not to say that social media doesn't have its benefits. It allows old friends to reconnect, high school friends to stay in touch at far away universities, and an easy, accessible way to check up on people that you know. However, it primarily leads to conflict for college students, as there is an added social stressor when your life is no longer private, as it is on social media. The desire to look like one is extremely social in addition to being a high-achieving student puts a lot of pressure on college students. In addition, more and more employers are using social media as a tool when checking out potential employees. Oftentimes for college students, this is more harmful than helpful. The message of keeping one's internet profile clean has been hammered into millennials' minds since the invention of social media sites, but the added desire to look cool in front of one's peers often clouds one's judgment. This could potentially lead to an employer passing over an applicant due to how they portray themselves online. In previous generations, one's personal life outside of the workplace remained private, and unless an employee had some sort of evident problem, their employers would never really need to know what they did in their free time. Although the activities they participated in

were likely not too different than today's generation, they were not splayed all over the Internet for the whole world (and office) to see.

The fact that stress levels are at an all-time high creates an incredibly unstable situation for young people, making their current situation one of social conflict. At the current rate, it is predicted that by 2020, stress-related deaths will be the second highest cause of death, only after cardiovascular disease (Manocha 2012). Additionally, as the current generation of young people are growing up in the most high-pressure environment of all time, the frequency of people with stress-related disorders is climbing (Manocha 2012). An entire generation that is raised with such high levels of stress doesn't only impact those who are in that generation itself. The disorders that potentially grow from constant exposure to stress in one's environment impacts every living generation, and those to come. As millennials are going to be the next generation in control of the governments and businesses of the future, it is highly unsustainable for an entire generation to have such high levels of stress when such dangerous circumstances can come of it. The mental well being of the generation that will soon be prominent in worldly affairs is incredibly important, and if it continues as it is in its current state, it will be harmful for all people living and the generations to come.

As time has progressed, there have been many wonderful changes in technology and certain aspects of culture that have eased the stress of many. However, along with these changes has come an increase in the expectations of young adults. Far more young people are expected go to a decent college, graduate, and get a job that will make them as much money as is possible. The added stresses of more difficult college admissions, a tough economy and job market, and the lure of proving one's worth via social media give a bigger boost to creating an environment

that already was well on its way to being the most stressful of all time for a generation to blossom in. The untenable setting that this is creating for young adults is creating an epidemic of stress that is proving to be just as deadly as any real disease. Already, stress has become a \$1 trillion health epidemic (Robinson 2013). Campaigns are beginning to take on this problem; notably, a campaign known as Smash Stress is working to raise awareness of the dangers of stress as a public health emergency. The pressure that young adults are under is harming their mental well-being and hatching a generation of competitive and highly stressed individuals. The problems that this could lead to for millennials in the future, in addition to the generations that could come after them, are unfeasible but extremely alarming. Generation Y needs help in lowering levels of stress in order to make for an easier, happier, and healthier future for all.

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# Student Debt in America: Differences in Media and Theory

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Over the past forty years, the cost of higher education in the United States has increased dramatically, outpacing inflation and the consumer price index. State and private universities have seen tuition triple since 1980. Despite a marked increase in tuition, students continue to flock to America's best, most expensive schools. In hopes of better careers and opportunities, students finance their education with large loans. This increase in student debt has been covered by the media as the natural cost of gaining an employment advantage. Instead of suggesting systematic change, the media suggests gradual tuition decreases, repayment plans, and lobbying. Current media coverage focuses on patchwork, legislative solutions that do not address systematic issues inherent in capitalistic, profitable education financing. In contrast, a Marxist approach to student indebtedness exposes capitalist competition and inequality as the root of rising tuition rates and student debt.

For the past three decades, the cost and importance of a college education has increased dramatically. While Americans have always viewed education as a source of prestige, a college education has become a requirement for most high paying jobs. During the 1970s and 1980s corporations sent manufacturing jobs overseas where they could obtain cheaper labor. As companies have cut production in the United States, jobs only requiring a high school diploma have become scarce. The resulting scarcity of manufacturing jobs has been compounded by the depressed wages of many working class Americans. Since the 1970's, middle and lower class wages have remained stagnant. From 1976 to 2006, Americans saw "inflation-adjusted per capita income increased by 64 percent, [yet] for the bottom 90 percent of households it increased only by 10 percent" (Wisman 2013: 923). When relatively unchanging wages combined with both higher tuition prices and labor outsourcing, students financed their education with loans. As

Avery and Tucker explain, “wage declines in entry-level jobs and increases in college tuition have placed many high school graduates in a no-win position, pressuring them to take on unmanageable levels of financial risk in the form of student loans” (2012: 165). A college education increases the earnings potential of young Americans, with studies reporting substantial wage premiums for college graduates (2012: 173). These premiums result in large differences in lifetime earnings, which increase students “willingness to borrow to achieve these higher returns” (2012: 176). Once they exhaust financial aid from their universities, students are spurred on by the possibility to earn more and turn toward numerous funding options. With eighty percent of loans issued by public sources, the federal government’s Stafford, PLUS, and Perkins loan programs are the largest source of educational funding (2012: 169). Once students reach the loan limits from the federal government, they opt for private loans with higher interest rates. Locking students into decades of lucrative payments, banks have secured legislation that assures profits. It is estimated that “twenty percent of student debtors default” on loans that, due to federal laws, “do not discharge in bankruptcy and carry nonnegotiable late fees” (Williams 2014: 48). Despite the drastic costs of educational financing, students continue to believe in the educational system. In a national survey of college students, only 11% of borrowers “expressed doubts that the benefits of education were worth the disadvantages of borrowing” (Baum and O’Malley 2003: 12). This research proves that students are generally pleased with the education they received as a result of their loans. Thus, social frustration lies in the amount of student debt necessary to afford the cost of a college education today, not the loan system as a whole.

While the rising cost of education has been a topic of discussion for decades, the financial crisis of 2008 intensified public scrutiny. Prior to the crisis, the public assumed that students with

large amounts of debt were financially burdened but able to secure jobs that facilitated long-term payment. Once the economy faltered, recent graduates lost their jobs or could not find work. It is the juxtaposition of the lack of employment opportunities with the goal of college students—namely to find work in a given field—that has caused the rising cost of education to be scrutinized. While a wage premium still exists for jobs requiring a college degree, the underemployment of graduates equalizes the pay between graduates and non-graduates. As Avery and Tucker explain, the Great Recession heightened concerns about the viability of a college degree (2012: 166). Media coverage of the “student loan bubble” stemmed from public distrust of the banking systems and resulted in blanket claims that student debt is too high (Avery and Tucker 2012: 189). Williams further explains, “with all the attention it has received from [the] Occupy [Wall Street protests] and in the news, it sometimes seems as if student debt is a new phenomenon or a result of the financial crisis of 2008” (2014: 47). In the articles of Williams and Avery and Tucker, the authors explain that the debt crisis had existed for decades prior to the recession. Moreover, they insist that college education remains a secure investment for students today. The wage premium for graduates far outweighs the cost of a college education, even one financed with \$100,000 in debt or undertaken in a poor economy (Avery and Tucker 2012: 189). Scholars insist that, despite recent economic conditions shedding light to the problem of student debt, educational financing is neither a new issue nor a substantial detractor from the benefits of education.

Following the financial crisis of 2008, media sources began to liken student debt to the collapsed housing market, derivatives, and mortgaged backed securities. Explaining that student debt was rapidly inflating and would not be sustainable, news outlets framed their analyses in

terms of the housing bubble. Media reports on the supposed “student debt bubble”, although explicitly denied by scholars like Avery and Tucker, placed blame on three specific incidents: the growth of for-profit colleges, the failure of the economy to properly employ graduates, and the rising cost of education. In the Washington Examiner’s article, the inadequate education offered by for-profit institutions leads many students to default on their loans. Schools like Strayer University and the University of Phoenix do little to prepare students for the careers they hope to attain (Lawler 2015). While graduates of these schools often find themselves struggling, their classmates that did not graduate face dire circumstances. With large loan balances and no college degree, these students are abnormally likely to default. To lessen the potential for loan defaults and steer students away from for-profit schools, the Washington Examiner implies a systemic solution. By emphasizing the importance of high school to students who wish to receive a higher education degree, the number of atypical college students will decrease. It is these atypical students, often without traditional high school credentials, that have to opt for private, capitalized universities. If students are encouraged and supported in high school, they are more likely to graduate with the credentials needed to attend non-profit colleges. With graduation rates far higher than for-profit schools, non-profit schools more adequately prepare students to pay off loans with accredited programs and higher job placement. Once students avoid for-profit schools, which produce four-fifths of student loan defaulters, the student debt crisis can be managed. It is the reduction in for-profit enrollment that will make the student loan process means to attain a job that facilitates loan repayment.

The economic conditions within the United States are most often blamed for the inability of students to pay off their loans. Media outlets that use this argument fundamentally believe that

the financing system is beneficial to the student, but stipulate that the economy forces students into underemployment and makes student loans burdensome. In *The New York Times*' "Graduating Into Debt" (McDonald and Orr 2012), filmmakers highlight the economic struggles of recent SUNY New Paltz graduates. Despite attending an affordable, public college, these students struggle to pay off the loans they took out. These students, unqualified for federal loan assistance while in college, are saddled with high interest private loans while working service jobs. A far cry from the opportunities promised them when they attended SUNY New Paltz, these jobs not only pay barely enough to afford interest payments, but could be done by someone without a college degree. *The New York Times* makes direct links between the depressed job market for recent graduates and the financial crisis of 2008, describing how the expectations students had for the use of their degree was shaped by the booming mid-2000s economy (McDonald and Orr 2012). Once the market collapsed, the value of their education diminished and graduates were stuck in an endless cycle of debt. The inability of these students to find high paying work prohibits them from paying off the principle of their loans and directly contradicts the research of Avery and Tucker. Thus, they only pay off accrued interest and cannot escape indebtedness. Similarly, *Forbes* cites the economy's inability to offer proper employment to all graduates as the root of the crisis. Arguing that American culture is "selling people indiscriminately on a level of education that employers don't seem to be asking for", *Forbes* states that the relative benefit of a college degree diminishes as more people have them (Bowyer 2014). Instead of offering graduates the high paying jobs they were expecting, students struggle to pay off loans or, as the *Times* video suggests, pursue a graduate degree to defer loan payments and gain credentials that employers supposedly value. Yet, *Forbes* explains that 59% of master's

program graduates are underemployed (Bowyer 2014). This, a clear indication of the economy's inability to handle droves of graduates, demands a solution unique to these media outlets.

While media outlets clearly define the economic shortcomings of the student loan system, their solutions are limited and operate within the traditional educational system. An economic source of blame for the debt crisis leads media outlets to suggest that rising college students consider alternative educational paths. For some students, particularly in fine arts, it may be financially responsible to skip college altogether. Rather than attending college and graduating into an unfavorable job market, indebted high school graduates can work in their field of choice without the need for a very high paying job. Gaining experience in low paying jobs or through vocational high schools may not be a negative experience for some potential college students to have, especially if they are unencumbered by debt. Forbes and the Times also imply that indebted graduates facing underemployment should work in underserved economies. In countries with a shortage of highly educated laborers, their skills will be valued and reflected in their pay. With graduates working in other countries, there will be less underemployment and competition for jobs amongst graduates unwilling to relocate. These solutions, although not addressing the underlying economic issues of the United States, give agency to students. With little hope to change the placement of graduates in the current economy, a shift in how Americans view college and graduate life is needed.

Although agency may resolve employment issues for graduates, the cost of attendance of American universities forces students into deep debt with few possibilities for repayment. The dramatic increase in college tuition is often cited by the media as the cause for the massive increase in student debt. Despite the growth of federal education funding, tuition has outpaced

nearly every other expense Americans incur. As the price of colleges, especially privately funded universities, increased, the media placed blame on private banks. Students that exhausted their federal loan options were profiled to see how private loans had affected them. These private loans, offered by Discover, Sallie Mae, and others, decentralized educational funding and spurred large increases in borrowing for laptops, books, and other college related expenses in addition to tuition. The need for students to both maximize federal loans and take out high interest private loans has led to numerous media outlets recommending payment solutions. Exemplified by the Christian Science Monitor's article on loan repayment plans, many media outlets believe in the value of a college education. Suggesting forgiveness plans and programs, the article implies that excessive tuitions are the cause of the debt crisis. By not suggesting that Americans explore protests or other atypical answers, the Christian Science Monitor encourages graduates to submit to the accepted path to repayment, even referring to the hope of loan forgiveness as "winning the lottery" (McGurran 2015). Similarly, The Washington Post published an editorial by Martin O'Malley that blames student debt on tuition prices. Contrasting the financing of college today with his university experience, O'Malley laments that the "average tuition at a public college has more than tripled over the past 30 years" (2015). He further distances his argument from that of the New York Times and Forbes by calling for more college graduates. Believing that high costs are prohibiting potential students from attending, O'Malley challenges Washington to allow loan refinancing and cap loan repayments. Exemplified by O'Malley and the Christian Science Monitor's article, recommendations of payment plans operate on the belief that the educational system needs to be maintained. Media outlets that suggest improving repayment options hope to continue the importance of education in American culture. However, these solutions imply that

the cost of tuition is far too high. The Christian Science Monitor and Martin O'Malley realize that these plans are temporary fixes for excessively high tuition prices. O'Malley, campaigning with the goal of universal debt-free education, knows that forgiveness programs will not solve the debt crisis, only give students more options once they are already in debt (2015). Reducing tuition prices by cutting programs or legally limiting increases is the viable long-term solution to which loan forgiveness alludes.

A Marxist perspective on the student debt crisis focuses on the fundamental function of the student within American society as a worker. For Marx, students are driven to take out loans because they are essentially productive. Unable to access the means of production, these students must turn to the wage system for livelihood. In America, the superstructure, created by the teachers, authors, parents, and the media espousing the importance of college makes young Americans see college as the easiest way to a comfortable life. Aiming to fully replenish the labor they expend during a workday, college students want to avoid the supposed struggle to survive that the uneducated endure. To limit this possibility, students take out loans from the government and private banks, the very organizations that helped create the superstructure. Fundamentally the educational process offers students a means to increase their labor power—the capacity to work. This higher labor power increases the exchange and use value of both the physical and intangible products they produce for their employer. This increased exchange value yields more profit for the capitalist, driven by the customer's perception of a product's value. The profit that employers gain from selling these products or services leads them to have more influence over the media, which reinforces the idea that loan forgiveness and politics will save student debtors.

To understand the student debt crisis from a Marxist perspective one has to condemn the exploitation of students by banks and universities. Just as the wage system hides exploitation, the education system and the building of endowments forces students to pay far more than necessary for a college education. Students do not know what percent of their money goes to funding athletics, the endowment, or other auxiliary functions of their university. In such a system, students do not know the necessary amount of money their college would need to educate them without attempting to provide other services. This is indicative of Marx's theory of deception in the wage system that produces profits for the capitalist. Marx believed that the "uncompensated labor of wage-laborers" was the "most powerful expression of appearances distorting reality" (Morrison 2006: 111). This distortion, creating profits for the capitalist, works in favor of colleges in the financing system. Colleges raise tuition to cover extraneous expenses through students' academic careers, insisting that it is used for an educational product that never dramatically changes. For colleges, these profits are used to grow the endowment or facilitate athletics, which typically provide even more revenue for the school. While colleges profit from the high cost of tuition, the federal government and private banks profit from the loans taken out to pay this tuition. In each fiscal year, the government makes tens of billions of dollars from interest payments, incentivizing lawmakers to keep the system in place and encourage schools to raise tuition. Similarly, the interest paid to private banks is a constant source of income for bankers. The elite therefore are profiting from the financing situation, allowing them to send their children to college debt free. This creates a cycle in which students unencumbered by debt come from bourgeois families who are further benefited from the debt of other Americans. As long as debt is kept at a level where the majority of students do not default, the current financing

system is beneficial to banks, the bourgeoisie, and Washington. As long as both the federal government and banks are profiting, the bourgeoisie's power over legislation will not be used to structurally change the college financing process. To do so would violate the capitalist principles that banks and Washington were built upon.

Additionally, Marx would argue that the structural issues of the education system are very similar to the contradictions of the capitalist system. As the economy falters, there are less high paying jobs for recent graduates. The failure of these students to find jobs and pay off their loans will create continually larger economic crises as the cycle continues. In fact, the expectation of Americans to get a degree yet work in low-paying jobs is a direct contradiction to the educational system. Just as laborers realize that "the more he works the less wages he receives", students are experiencing a labor market that, as Forbes and the New York Times explain, increasingly undervalues education (Tucker 1978: 225). The economy and wage system of the United States fails to adequately pay students who have been promised increased economic opportunity by the superstructure. Despite these promises, the capitalist system is not willing to pay workers more. Since debt can be paid off over time, capitalists are able to pay graduates just enough to facilitate minimum payments and afford to live. Since students are in a fully exploitable position upon graduation, capitalists can leverage the market's general undervaluation of education to pay graduates lower and lower wages.

Marx's theory of agency in social revolution is the only active answer to the student debt crisis. While banks and schools profit from student loans, students will continue to get frustrated. Eventually the changes in people's access to education and the American dream will inspire students to demand change. Since students will not be able to pay their loans, they will not have

anything to lose by revolting. In a similar position to laborers in a capitalistic society, who Marx sees as the agents of change, students will revolt to overthrow an inequitable distribution of student debt. These revolts, combined with the contradictions between educational expectations and graduate wages, will overthrow the loan system. This change will manifest itself not in the form of loan repayment plans, but in the form of structural changes. Universities will start using endowment money to cover tuition expenses rather than constructing buildings. Banks will be forced to erase student debt as people refuse to pay. The federal government will be forced to make education accessible to all without a typical loan program. This can be accomplished through free tuition or by teaching desired skills in high school, a solution that most media outlets would agree with. Most notably, Marx's solutions would never be supported by the media because they operate within the existing loan system. Since the superstructure validates the educational system, the media is most comfortable with closing for-profit universities and creating payment plans. In response, Marx would state that loan forgiveness and repayment plans simply enable the student debt crisis to continue. By billing these programs as steps to a permanent solution, the media fails to propose reasonable ideas to stop students from getting in debt in the first place. Despite the value of an education, the stresses of indebtedness will push students to seek change at an earlier stage in the process. Complete overhaul of college financing would allow students to make effective change and realign the superstructure.

Structural change will also result from the inability of students to adhere to the requests of the current education system. If students continue to accept the superstructure's insistence on a college education, loan balances will continue to rise. Since a student loan is not a physical asset that can be sold to pay off remaining debt, the financial viability of the investment in a student

relies solely on the ability of students to honor their commitments. As the number of delinquent loans increases, the economy will be strained by the failure of students to pay off loan balances. If debt rises to a point where payment in a single lifetime becomes impossible, banks and the federal government will be unable to recover the money they lent to students. If this debt level is reached as the economy is in the midst of an economic crisis, the banking system may fail. While the 2008 financial crisis was lessened with bailouts from the federal government, the government's extremely large position in loans will make a bailout impossible. Once both the federal government and the banks falter because of student loan debt, many of the structural elements of the United States will no longer exist. Just as Marx believed that workers will create a more equal society when agency is combined with the economic demise of capitalism, graduates will create a more equitable financing solution for college. This new social structure would allow all students to attend college and create an equal employment threshold for all graduates. Thereby, through agency and structural pressure, a solution to the student debt crisis will be forced on the United States.

The student debt crisis in America has created a system in which the media continue to support the superstructure that keeps graduates indebted, underemployed, and prime for revolution. While scholars agree that the debt crisis is a fairly natural extension of the financing system, media outlets condemn for-profit schools, America's pressure on students to go to college, and underemployment. A Marxist perspective on the crisis condemns the loan system due to the inherent contradictions of low graduate wages, the unyielding capitalist profits of the government and banks, and the potential for complete economic failure as repayment rates decline. While these varying opinions and interpretations offer solutions that range from

repayment plans to structural upheaval, the answer to the debt crisis involves changes from students, graduates, capitalists, and the government. Without these changes, the United States faces severe economic and educational stagnation.

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# Applying Marxist Theory of Human Society: Illegal Stimulant Use in U.S. Education Systems

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The use of stimulant drugs in academic environments in the U.S. is becoming normalized, particularly at elite universities and increasingly at high school level. The main motivation of students in using these stimulant drugs is to enhance academic performance. In the last 10-20 years there has been a rise in the illegal use of stimulants, such as Adderall, Ritalin and Dexedrine, for nonmedical purposes (DeSantis & Hane 2008). These types of drugs are usually prescribed to patients with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The use of these without ADHD diagnosis is illegal (DeSantis, Webb & Noar 2008).

These amphetamines are being used by college students at a rate of 20-30%, but increasingly are beginning to be used by upperclassmen in high schools that have the added stressors of SAT examinations and college applications (DeSantis & Hane 2008). A study conducted by DeSantis, Webb & Noar (2008) found that the primary motivator for illegal stimulant use was to “get good grades”, with a further 72% of students claiming to use the drugs to “stay awake” and 66% for concentration (317). The use of amphetamines for academic purposes is reflective of the culture of capitalism and I will argue that it is just an extension of capitalist values into the sphere of education.

The population of students within the U.S. education system is not fully representative of the two-class system Karl Marx theorized as the “bourgeoisie” and the “proletariat.” Defining social class is much more complicated in contemporary society than it was when Marxist political thought evolved. Marx defines the “bourgeoisie” as the class of people who have always owned or monopolized the “means of production” (Morrison 2006). The “means of production” refers to anything in the “outside world” that is used to produce the means of survival (44). The bourgeoisie’s ownership of the means of production gives them the ability to provide people with

employment, which is needed for the production process (Morrison 2006). Within the education system the bourgeoisie class provides jobs both directly (within the institution) and indirectly, by providing students with a set of skills, to make them desirable in the labor market upon graduation. The “proletariat” class does not own the means of production and therefore have to sell their labor for a living wage. Marx argues that the proletariat is completely subordinate to the owners of the means of production (Morrison 2006). While college students in the U.S. are typically privileged, especially “study drug” users in elite colleges (Yanes 2014), it can be argued that these students are the contemporary proletariat in the context of the education system. While some students may have access to economic capital through their familial ties or otherwise, they themselves do not own the means of production. Due to their lack of economic capital, students are completely dependent upon the education system to provide them with the qualifications and skills demanded in the labor market.

### **Ideology born out of economic relations:**

The culture of capitalism within the education system influences and changes students’ behavior and promotes the adoption of capitalist values such as competition, good quantitative outcomes (in the form of a high GPA), high productivity, efficiency and so on. The dominant group is made up of the bourgeoisie of the education system but in the context of “study drugs,” also owners of the pharmaceutical industry. In order to survive students must obtain qualifications that will allow them to gain employment within the job market. The higher the qualifications the more valued the student will be as a future laborer in the market economy. Ideology within the academic culture comes from the performance of the economy. Currently

students are held to high standards in the labor market, due to limited employment opportunities. As Marx states ideology is always tied to our material relations with the economy (Morrison 2006). Therefore survival within the market system requires students to adopt capitalist ideology that individualizes workers and makes them compete against one another.

### **Normalizing illegal drugs for the sake of “good grades”:**

Through Marxist political thought the first action of society is always economic (Morrison 2006). This is the lens we must view the education system under. Marx contends that the “economic base” is the foundation of society, from which capitalist values arise. Economic production shapes all social relations, including those within the academic environment of colleges and high schools. The economic base informs the values of the “superstructure,” which is the set of “social institutions which arise on top of the economic base” (Morrison 2006: 394). In the context of education as a social institution, the value of individualism is enforced and reinforced by the relations between the economic base and superstructure (Morrison 2006). Workers in a capitalist economy are paid an individual wage that allows them to survive, but not accumulate capital. The norm of individualism translates into the education economy where “study drugs” are normalized and seen as a tool to achieve high scores in a competitive academic environment. Marx explains how shifts in the superstructure (such as the support of stimulant use) come from changes in what is seen as normative (Tucker 1978). While newly held values of capitalism may be questioned at first, they soon become ritualized, accepted as normative and majorly *invisible*.

Marxist political thought comes from a “structuralist” perspective. From this viewpoint power is seen as residing within social structures (Tucker 1978). “Study drug” culture can be analyzed from this perspective in relation to the larger structures influencing students’ behavior. The bourgeoisie of the education/”study drug” culture have the power to perpetuate certain norms through the superstructure. This is not to say that the contemporary proletariat (students) have no choice in how they behave. Students do not have to accept the normative practice of stimulant use and can resist it, but they face the risk of being sanctioned by the bourgeoisie if they do not meet cultural expectations of high achievement. This may mean being closed out of the job market if they do not meet the high standards of the job market put in place by the economic base. Utilizing study drugs to meet work demands is increasingly becoming a supposed “solution” for college and high school students. Undoing the normalization of study drugs could be an effective solution to this social issue.

### **Undermining “study drugs” from a structuralist perspective:**

According to Ford & Schroeder (2009) using these “homework drugs” as a study aide is socially acceptable in high schools and colleges (29). From a structuralist perspective, the way to end the culture of study drug usage is to dismantle the power hierarchies within social structures (Tucker 1978). Ending the existing class hierarchies and the subordination of students under capitalist values, could end the normalization of this ritual. While dismantling capitalism may seem like a drastic measure to end the use of stimulants, Marx contends that the proletariat has agency to challenge normative behavior through revolt (Tucker 1978). Marx discusses how the

culture of capitalism can undermine itself through contradiction this could also be true with “study drugs.”

Firstly, the long-term health of the student population will be negatively impacted from the abuse of ADHD drugs. According to DeSantis & Hane (2008) students can build up a tolerance to these drugs and this could potentially undermine the capitalistic values of the education system. Secondly stimulants have a high potential for addiction and are categorized as Schedule II drugs by the Drug Enforcement Administration (Yanes 2014). This means that “study drugs” are considered on par with cocaine, meth and morphine, and are categorized for this reason (Yanes 2014). If students’ tolerance to these drugs builds up the continuity of the supposed beneficial results may diminish (reference). Furthermore persistence of use and reliance on these drugs into the workforce is not sustainable and could lead to high levels of addiction on said drugs. This shows that there is still potential for social change, even if the issue persists.

### **Ending the normativity of illegal stimulant use:**

The normativity of illegal stimulant use by students within the U.S. education system is reflective of the culture of capitalism. While the long-term effect of this trend is not yet certain within the medical literature, the continuation of this norm is inevitable if the education system maintains its capitalist class-system. Under the guise of Marxist political thought the structuralist solution to this social issue is to dismantle the hierarchies within the institution of education. The students will continue to be subordinated by the bourgeoisie class and expected to meet the high standards of capitalism, which has created the culture of “study drug” use.

This analysis of the education system is limited to a sub-culture made up of mainly economically privileged students. To analyze the complexity of this issue in the future more attention would have to be paid to less affluent students and those who are completely locked out of the education system. Future research on this social issue could provide alternative and more realistic approaches to dismantling the ideological influence of capitalism over education. Similarly, more research could be done to analyze how capitalism pervades student culture in other ways, such as the “work-hard, play-hard” ideology common at university level.

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# Shooter/Killer

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### A Note from the Artist

We learned, in studies of media and news, White men who use guns are often called "shooters," while Black men who use guns are called "killers." How the same action could be translated into different words, calls attention to the power of linguistics and how words can reflect and reinforce prejudice. The intention of this piece was to present the two wings of one angel of death.

# The Social Construction of a New Panopticon: Criminalization of People of Color

*Jessica Barnes* is originally from Stafford Springs, Connecticut. She is currently pursuing majors in Applied Psychology and Human Development, and minors in Faith, Peace, & Justice, Management and Leadership, and Special Education. In her spare time, Jessica enjoys her positions as a Campus School volunteer and chair, a research assistant, and a 4Boston tutor at ACEDONE (African Community Economic Development of New England).

The criminalization of black bodies has created a new panopticon, where people of color are constantly being watched and policed through discipline of their bodies. A panopticon is an architectural design with a single circular watchtower looking over a larger space that allows for visible, yet unverifiable surveillance of those being watched (Foucault 2003). This practice of systematic ordering and controlling of people began to be used on communities of color in America at the onset of the War on Drugs in 1971. The media has increased this panoptic effect for communities of color, locking minorities into a place of social inferiority and solidifying the idea of the black criminal further into social consciousness. Not only has the young, black body become associated with criminality, but the white body accused of similar crimes is associated with victimization. This phenomenon was created by the War on Drugs, where the introduction of “crack” cocaine and the media portrayals that ensued allowed the government to create and implement policies that were inherently more strict on people of color.

The United States government historically has used selective policing of specific drugs that are linked to racial minority groups to protect white Americans from the perceived harmful effects of these drugs (Cobbina 2008). As public concern about illicit drug use increased sharply due to the over-extensive media coverage on “crack” cocaine, President Nixon declared the War on Drugs in 1971 (“A Brief History of the War on Drugs”). In the forty years since the declaration of the War on Drugs the prison population in the United States has gone from 300,000 to 2.4 million—the highest incarceration rate in the world. Most striking about this phenomenon is the racial makeup of those incarcerated. Seventy-five percent of those in prison for drug offenses are people of color. Because no other country incarcerates such a large percentage of their minority population, we must analyze not only the legal policies but also the

social and cultural perceptions created through media behind the mass incarceration of black and brown bodies (Alexander 2010).

Although the people of color do not account for a disproportionate majority of crime arrests or drug use, they are disproportionately convicted and incarcerated in this War on Drugs (Welch 2007; Alexander 2010). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has consistently found a mere one-percentage-point difference between illicit drug use among whites and blacks (SAMSA 2014). Furthermore, whites accounted for about 68.9 percent of arrests for drug use violations, yet only account about 20 percent of those incarcerated in federal prison for drug offenses (FBI 2015; DPA 2016). The disproportionate incarceration rate, which cannot be explained by either higher rates of drug use or arrests in communities of color, may be due to the increased presence of “crack” cocaine in inner cities. While the black community represent only 10.5 percent of the country’s drug users and 29.1 percent of those arrested for drug use violations, almost 40 percent of those incarcerated in state and federal prison for drug law violations are black (SAMSA 2014; FBI 2015; DPA 2016). The black community has become a target of opportunities for extensive policing and surveillance made easier due to the high population concentration of people of color within inner cities (Alexander 2010). In addition, the disproportionate sentencing between the possessions for “crack” cocaine versus powder cocaine was at a disparity of 100 to 1 until 2010 (Alexander 2010; FAMM 2014). Under the 100 to 1 regime, people of color served 58.7 months in prison for non-violent drug offenses, while white offenders served almost the same time in prison for violent offenses at 61.7 months (Vagins & McCurdy 2006). In the War on Drugs, it seems the criminal became defined by color, not by

action. This criminalization of people of color is still evident in today's media coverage and police practices.

In a study drawn from a content analysis of *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* from 1985-1987, Jennifer Cobinna, a criminal justice professor at Michigan State University, found that indirect and direct references were made to people of color 76 percent of the time when the article was speaking on the use or presence of "crack" cocaine. In addition, whereas black and Latino offenders were depicted as criminals and thugs for their addiction, white offenders were portrayed as victims (Cobinna 2008). This portrayal of white victimhood can be seen in the story of former NBA basketball player, Chris Herren. Herren, a white man, while simultaneously celebrated for his athletic talent and character, is depicted as a struggling heroin addict, who became empowered through rehabilitation (Conlon 2012). Herren himself explains the "pity" that people looked upon him with and how this pity fueled his recovery. Herren's addiction is largely accredited to his upbringing in working-class Fall River, where one could "find syringes littered in the street" and whose temptations followed him throughout his career (Barboza 2011). This portrayal of a white drug user makes invisible the criminality of the white man, focusing on his individual upbringing and demons rather than his criminal activity. The high-profile experience of Lamar Odom is in sharp contrast. Rather than depicting Odom as a successful athlete who struggles with addiction, the tabloid buzz that surrounds his name emphasizes that "Odom's rock bottom has been a long time coming" through both his drug abuse and his failed marriage to a reality TV star (Hensley 2015). Many articles mention Odom's previous "run-ins with law enforcement" at young ages, largely ignoring his positive contributions to basketball (ibid). Odom's "rags-to-riches"

upbringing and familial history of drug abuse, while mentioned in many articles, is not depicted as the reason for his addiction; rather Odom is personally blamed for making a series of decisions that led to his own downfall (Jones 2015). These decisions parallel those of the struggling white man, yet are portrayed as inherently criminal in the black man.

Today, as white perpetrators continue to be seen as victims of their circumstances, their criminalization becomes invisible. Just a few months ago, a headline read “Texas cops arrest adorable drug kingpin” and described a white female perpetrator as having an “entrepreneurial spirit” for selling drugs at such a high volume to get through college (Serota 2015). In the picture chosen to appear on the article, she is smiling and looks approachable. Similarly, in a story of a white college professor who eventually plead guilty to killing three colleagues and injuring three others, the headline read, “Ala. suspect brilliant, but social misfit” (Lindsay 2010). The article went on to emphasize not only the woman’s many accomplishments in spite of her mental health struggles but also the disbelief of the woman’s family and peers at “how a brilliant woman with a violent past and uncertain future may have snapped” (ibid). These media outlets seem to justify the offenses of the white perpetrators by emphasizing the individual’s positive characteristics and sympathizing with him or her for undeserved social and emotional hardships.

In stark contrast to white victimhood stands the shaming and criminalization of black perpetrators and victims alike. In 2014, a headline reading “Montgomery's latest homicide victim had history of narcotics abuse, tangles with the law” portrayed a black victim as deserving of his murder. Throughout the article, the overtly violent shooting was passed over largely due to the fact that “violence is nothing new to them” (Edgemon 2014). The death of Derrick Varner was portrayed as part of a larger problem within his community, rather than as loss of an individual.

This article omits details about Varner's personal life, focusing only on drugs and violence, further perpetuating the narrative of black criminality. In addition, on February 10, 2012, a headline read "Deputy killed Marine out of fear for children's safety, officials say," followed by an article describing the shooting of an unarmed black Marine sergeant. Although the incident was neither alcohol- nor drug-related, the deputy justified his actions by stating that the Marine was "acting oddly" (Cruz 2012). Five days later on February 15, 2012, however, another headline in the same paper read, "Union blames Marine killed by deputy for fatal shooting." This article blames the Marine himself "creating 'a situation that put his children in danger and ultimately cost him his life,'" rather than the deputy for shooting without obvious or justifiable reasons beyond "acting oddly" (Goffard 2012). These black victims, both losing their life at the hands of white men, were blamed for their own deaths.

Social media portrayals have become mirrored by police forces across the nation, whose presence and practices are used to disproportionately watch and discipline black and brown bodies. Police presence in middle schools and high schools has changed the meaning of "pushing and shoving in hallways [from] mischievous to criminal acts" (Fantz 2015). Recently, the new phenomenon began to be questioned after a video surfaced from Spring Valley High School in South Carolina of a black student violently ripped out of her seat by a white officer, after refusing to leave the classroom. When faced with this unjustifiable act of violence, however, some, including County Sheriff Leon Lott, have supported the officer stating, "If she had not disrupted the school and that class, we would not be standing here today" (Ford et al. 2015). The student, charged with "disturbing schools," becomes criminalized through actions that may have been better handled by teachers or school personnel (ibid). The justification of the policeman's

actions not only put blame on the victim, but also normalizes such acts of police brutality against black bodies.

In addition to increased police presence in schools, the use of “stop-and-frisk,” particularly used in large cities, is a new way for police to criminalize people of color. In a recent interview with former New York City Police Department commissioner Ray Kelly, he justified the fact that “the number of stops of young black men exceeded the number of all young black men in the city” by stating that any reduction of these stops will lead to an increase in crime (Sanburn 2015). Kelly, like other supporters of increased police presence, pleads that society must not avoid the reality that there is a disproportionate crime rate in communities of color that leads to more arrests. Because the victims of violent crimes describe their perpetrators as African Americans 69 percent of the time, Kelly justifies such racial profiling. Bill O’Reilly, concerned with the safety of citizens in these “violent” communities, further emphasizes the sentiments of Kelly, stating, “The police by necessity, to protect the poor people there who are being kill by the hundreds in Chicago for example, have to flood the zone... It is not 'Let's hunt down the black people today’” (O’Reilly 2014). According to John Ehrlichman, President Nixon’s domestic-policy advisor, however, the War on Drugs was exactly this “political tool” formed against communities of color, which allowed for Nixon to “arrest their leaders, raid their homes...and vilify them night and after night on the evening news” under the guise of a drug problem (Baum 2016). Although they “couldn’t make it illegal to be...black,” the government could create policies in the war on drugs that “could disrupt those communities” of color in order to subdue their voices and influence in society (Baum 2016). By homogenizing the entire population within

inner-city communities, people of color, regardless of individual differences, become the face of crime.

Some media outlets point to the legalization of drugs as the solution to the mass incarceration of people of color (Stossel 2011). Academic John McWhorter argues that ending the war on drugs and actively mending the stressed relationship between police and communities of color will not only allow poor, minority cities to thrive. McWhorter argues that due to the War on Drugs, “it has become a norm for black children to grow up in single-parent homes, their fathers away in prison for long spells and barely knowing them” (ibid). Children of color growing up in these single-parent homes, with small incomes, often perceive drug selling as their only opportunity for income. The illegality of drugs generates a high income, which can seem to be a better and easier alternative to legal employment. Legalization of drugs, which are regularly sold on the streets of inner cities, would de-incentivize this illegal conduct by lowering the price of drugs and therefore, the incomes from selling drugs (ibid). The War on Drugs has disenfranchised about 13 percent of all black men because of criminal convictions and has left every one in 14 black children in a single parent home, further perpetuating the cycle of poverty in communities of color (Vagins & McCurdy 2006). An end to the War on Drugs would lessen the detrimental effects of police practices, whose aggressive nature homogenizes and criminalizes the entire black and brown population.

Opponents to this approach blame black and brown communities themselves for the strict policing practices used against them and their high incarceration rates, ignoring the discriminative bias behind police practices. Those in a place of power feel that they know a better solution to the problem of mass incarceration than the people of color who are

experiencing this prejudice themselves everyday. On *America Live* (2011), host Meghan Kelly, a strong opponent to drug legalization, points to unnamed studies that have found that legalization has actually increased crime and addiction. John Stossel, an American libertarian, counters Kelly, citing the decreased rates of crime and addiction in Holland and Portugal after legalization. In Portugal, for example, habitual drug use not only declined from 7.6 to 6.8 per 1000 people after decriminalization, but the number of incarcerated for drug offenses fell by more than half (Baum 2016). Kelly emphasizes the violent nature of those who use “crack” cocaine and opposes legalization on the grounds that criminalization of drug use protects American citizens from these users, yet it has been found that most violence associated with crack is due to involvement in the illegal market and trafficking (Vagins & McCurdy 2006). Kelly’s justification of these discriminatory tactics parallels the perspectives of pro-slavery intellectuals, who argued that “black villainy justified white oppression” (Coates 2015). During the slave era, activities as simple as learning to read and making loud noises in public and activities as natural as fighting for one’s own liberties were grounds for punishment (Coates 2015). Today, rationale as ambiguous as “individualized, reasonable suspicion” is constitutional grounds for policemen to stop and search one’s body for guns and drugs (NYPD 2015).

Kelly and other opponents to legalization believe that the end to mass incarceration must come from people of color themselves through respectful interaction with the police and an increase in leadership within these communities (Yahoo News Special Report 2014). Kelly and other supporters see this solution as desired in light of the “American doctrine of individual responsibility,” which calls for each American citizen to help himself or herself to become successful (Strauss 2013). However, this solution is based upon the widely held belief that “it is

the duty of the oppressed to struggle against oppression,” without taking into account the social and historical context within which this oppression occurs (ibid). Believers in the power of individual responsibility may themselves be self-made men and women, who cannot truly understand how some of the opportunities that they have been given were inherently due to their privilege rather than their own accomplishments or goals. For example, the high rates of incarceration in communities of color lead to higher rates of concentrated poverty within these communities, in which underfunded, ineffective schools only further increase the rates of violent offenses, incarceration, and poverty (ibid). In the black community, where one out of every 14 children have a parent locked up in prison and where more men are under the jurisdiction of the penal system than in college, it is not a question of how to increase leadership and communication with police, but where this leadership will logistically come from (Vagins & McCurdy 2006). Many who support communities of color helping themselves share the privilege of simply not being born into this cycle of institutional poverty and racism. These supporters cannot imagine being targeted in such a way that political action is taken to actively associate their community with violence, drugs, and criminality. This privilege allows them to see mass incarceration as a problem within the individuals of color, rather than as a larger institutional issue.

The juxtaposition in this portrayal of criminals depicts Foucault’s idea that our knowledge allows us to only see the world as boxed, binary categories on a grid—each box is a strictly defined linguistic category that we have socially and culturally created (Allan 1951). In each binary, there exists a normative category that become invisible and less scrutinized, while the “other” becomes highly policed and highly visible. In the United States, the “other” has

become people of color, whose population concentration in inner cities have made them extremely visible and easier to police in the emergence of the War on Drugs (Alexander 2010). The prejudice, which has created this strict barrier, has been fed by our tendency to homogenize those of the “out group,” and, therefore, criminalize the entire populations of color (Welch 2007). The “othering” of black and brown populations in America has created a new panopticon, in which people of color are overtly watched and profiled on the basis of their skin color. The panopticon, according to Foucault (2003), is both a type of surveillance where power is visible but unverifiable and an architectural type in which there is a single circular watch tower that overlooks a space. This type of surveillance has the effect that the victim “inscribes in himself the power relation,” internalizing the stereotypes of his or her out-group and actively disciplining oneself in order to bypass criticism from the “normal” in-group (Foucault 2003). In Baltimore and Washington, D.C., for example, 56 and 52 percent of young black men are under correctional supervision on any given day, respectively (Welch 2007). This extreme supervision creates paranoia within the minds of those of color, who constantly live in fear of being watched or stopped by the police. The threat of being incarcerated has become an almost expected part of life for black men, for whom the odds of incarceration at some point in their lives are 1 in 3 (Welch 2007).

This control over the populations of color becomes an “exercise of power...by a society as a whole” through the use of media, political practices, and policing policies, which make society as a whole internalize these discriminating images and practices (Foucault 2003). The panopticon reduces the number of people who have to exercise power over people of color while increasing those whom it is exercised upon by making people of color discipline themselves and

begin to think of themselves as what those in power have made them out to be. In this way, those in power, “who do not experience disorder as much as imagine it,” create the social construction of black criminality through the perpetuation of legal policies and media portrayals that incriminate the black body (Margulies 2015). The rates and ethnic majority of incarceration in the War on Drugs has solidified the idea of the black criminal deeper into social consciousness, which lock these minorities into social inferiority, creating social punishments out of prisons themselves (Alexander 2010).

Between these categories and barriers of knowledge, however, exist “blank spaces” of possibility, which are “waiting in silence for the moment of expression” (Allan 1951). According to Foucault, the way to challenge power within the War on Drugs is not to overthrow these drug policies and replace them with other policies, but to think beyond the social categories of criminalization that have been created. Because those in power have created our definition and knowledge of “justice,” creating a new set of drug policies would only reproduce the racial and social stigma of criminality that we currently have (Foucault 2003). Within the space between these categories of criminality lies the possibility of freedom from their dangerous, powerful barriers (Allan 1951). Only by making white criminality less invisible and individualizing people of color can society create a space in which it allows the discovery “that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones” (Allan 1951).

Media portrayals of people of color as perpetrators of crime and drug addicts, which have been reinforced by political agendas and police brutality, lock people of color into a state of criminalization and social inferiority. The War on Drugs, which disproportionately convicts and incarcerates people of color, has further cemented this idea of the population of people of color

as a homogenous unit of deviance into the minds of America. By becoming a modern day panopticon, people of color now live in constant fear of unheeded police brutality and suspicion by white American as a whole. While white criminality has become increasingly invisible to the American society, the very definition of criminality has become attached to the image of a black or brown body.

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# Tonight, It Rains

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Where do you lay your head to rest,  
when the sun has died and the moon  
howls back at the bloodthirsty wolf?  
“Beneath the stars,” you say, just like me.  
You imagine us to be the same yet  
it is you who has scraped his porcelain  
finger through the muck, the sod,  
to separate your half of the world from mine.  
You trust me with your fork, your food, your four-  
month-old baby whose cry you never calm.  
I cry, too, when I look at her, she is only a  
replica of your pink lips, supple skin,  
Thin hair -  
“We are one nation,” you say. You trust me  
with your army, your ambulance, your American pie.  
It seems as though we are well-adjusted to this  
Utopia you formed with our founding fathers, with  
Jim Crow. You sent us to eat in the  
kitchen when company came, when the air was  
smooth and the horses roamed. You think now  
that you trust me with your cars, your Colgate, your cancer,  
we are equals here. Close your eyes for a moment.  
I see us fighting, relentlessly, to escape the  
scorching heat from the stainless-steel stove top.  
Do you see that?  
I don’t think you can.  
Day after day we beat against the current of your world  
While policemen strike down the innocent to keep their city washed white.  
The air is thick.  
Tonight, it rains in Ferguson.

## A Note from the Author

This poem addresses the wildly held notion that we live in a post-racial America. The idea that because we have a black president, racial equality has been achieved and white supremacy lost. It is clear that institutionalized racism continues to run rampant in this country, especially in the criminal justice system. This poem was inspired by the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, during the summer of 2015, as well as the countless other unarmed black men and women that were killed by police shootings. Until we, as a country, acknowledge the continued presence of racial inequality, we will not see a post-racial America.

# Abolishing the Death Penalty in the United States

*Meaghan Kelliher* is originally from Salt Lake City, Utah, and is a member of the class of 2016, majoring in History and Political Science. At Boston College, Meaghan has spent four years working with the West End House Boys and Girls Club through 4Boston and now serves on the 4Boston Council. She has also been an Orientation Leader, a 48 Hours Retreat leader, and participated in the Ecuador study abroad program her junior year. Meaghan would like to thank her family and friends for their constant support, encouragement, and laughter. After graduation, Meaghan is excited to be a part of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, working in California as a Family Support Counselor with San Diego Youth Services.

In the middle of the night on August 11th, 1967, William Henry Furman, an African American man from Georgia, broke into and attempted to burglarize the home of William Joseph Micke Jr.. Micke awoke to “strange noises” coming from the kitchen, and decided to investigate only to find Furman there, armed with a gun. After shooting Micke in the chest and killing him instantly, Furman fled the scene. A year after the crime, Furman, a man who psychologists deemed “mentally deficient” and who had been given a court appointed lawyer, was found guilty and sentenced to death in a trial lasting less than a day. Years later, in the landmark *Furman v. Georgia* 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court overturned his sentence (*Furman v. Georgia* 1972). The concurring opinions argued that, within the status quo, the death penalty was too arbitrary to constitute justice. As a result, there was a *de facto* moratorium on the use of the death penalty in the United States. Thus, *Furman v. Georgia* results from a centuries-long debate over the death penalty in America, one that continues even after the *de facto* moratorium ended with *Gregg v. Georgia*. In *Gregg v. Georgia*, the Supreme Court found that reforms to the Georgia justice system, like a bifurcated trial in which the trial and sentencing occurred separately, represented a more “judicious” use of the death penalty, simultaneously ending the moratorium and reigniting the debate (*Gregg v. Georgia* 1976). Presently, at a fundamental level, both supporters and opponents of the death penalty agree that punishment is a necessary response to crime. The nature of the capital punishment debate, however, disallows middle ground beyond that point. The finality of death leaves no room for compromise, but rather warrants a straightforward answer in the question of “to kill or not to kill.” The position of death penalty opponents would be jeopardized if it conceded that even one criminal should be killed. This would open the arbitrary door to further “justified” death penalties. Therefore, an absolute decision must be

made. The death penalty should be abolished because in practice the institutional failures of capital punishment preclude justice and, even in the absence of these failures, the institution itself is inconsistent with the purpose of government.

The institutional failures of the death penalty are rooted in the arbitrary and unfair administration of capital punishment. More specifically, the outcome of a death penalty trial hinges partly on extraneous, subjective factors like the racial prejudices of the jurors, the wealth of the defendant and victim, and the location of the crime. In his article “Reflections On Race,” Bryan Stevenson gives an in depth account of the “conscious and unconscious racial bias in the administration of the death penalty” (2004:78). Stevenson sheds light on racial disparities, citing numerous statistics that reveal “patterns of racial bias,” especially in cases in which the accused minority killed a white victim (2004:87). In his article, “Why the United States Will Join the Rest of the World in Abandoning Capital Punishment,” Stephen Bright gave one of the most disconcerting illustrations of racial bias in his article. He highlighted the fact that African Americans are significantly more likely to be sentenced to death when the victim is white, versus when the victim is African American. In fact, 80 percent of African Americans face the death penalty because of crimes committed against white victims and, as a result, the United States has not escaped its dark past of “legal lynchings” (2004:166). In response to these statistics, death penalty supporter Paul Cassell argued in his article “In Defense of the Death Penalty” that the statistics on “inter-racial homicides” should not be considered because there are too few of them to draw conclusions (2004:204). However, the preponderance of evidence about race and the death penalty should clear up any objections Cassell has about the inconclusiveness of those statistics. Even fellow supporter Louis Pojman, writer of “Why the Death Penalty Is Morally

Permissible,” acknowledges the racial problems that plague the justice system but argues that unequal justice is still justice (2004:70). This idea in and of itself should strike the reader as contradictory. Justice is achieved when the system is fair and equal: the death penalty system clearly misses the mark.

Race intersects with poverty, Stevenson argues, to heighten racial injustices as racial minorities are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, and thus less likely to afford competent legal counsel (2004:94). Those unable to pay are assigned a public defender by the state. In fact, in states with widespread use of the death penalty like Alabama, Georgia, and Texas, there is no central public defender system and funding is left to the even less capable counties (Bright 2004:168). In some southern states, a paralegal working on an inconsequential federal bankruptcy case is paid more than a public defender assigned to death penalty case (Bright 2004:168). By this standard, life is functionally devalued by the criminal justice system, as those on death row are left with a significantly underpaid and overworked legal council. Furthermore, Bright highlights noteworthy evidence “that a fourth to a third of those sentenced to death were represented at their trials by lawyers who were later disbarred, suspended, or convicted of crimes” (2004:169). Joshua Marquis, writer of “Truth and Consequences: The Penalty of Death,” and supporter Paul Cassell argue that the public defender system works well. However, they base their conclusions on the systems in their home states, Oregon and Utah respectively, which have high standards for public defenders (Marquis 2004:141). The problem with their argument is that although Utah and Oregon have effective public defender systems, 89% of executions take place in Southern states, where the public defender systems are far less effective or nonexistent (Stevenson 2004:82). Without the ability to afford adequate legal counsel

outside the public defender system, Stevenson's muse that the term "capital punishment" implies that those without capital get punished--- becomes an unfortunate reality for many on death row (2004:95).

Furthermore, the reality of inadequate legal council and the imperfect nature of the justice system in general lead to an even more egregious reality, which is the possibility that innocent people have been or could be executed. Bright notes that in the past 30 years, even after "reforms" had been instituted as a result of the temporary *Furman v. Georgia* death penalty moratorium, 100 people have been exonerated from death row, some just minutes before execution (2004:158). These exonerations resulted from post-trial discoveries of problems like prosecutorial misconduct, unreliable evidence, and even evidence of outright innocence. For example, in 1994, the governor of Virginia commuted the death sentence of Earl Washington to life in prison. Washington was an intellectually disabled man who had been convicted of rape and murder on the basis of an inconsistent confession that he had given to police. Six years after the commutation of his death sentence, new DNA evidence unavailable at the time of Washington's trial showed his innocence and he was released (Bright 2004:159). Without the governor's commutation of Washington's sentence, he likely would not have lived long enough to have been exonerated by the new evidence. The finality of death means that mistakes cannot be corrected once a sentence is carried out.

One of the most arbitrary characteristics of the death penalty is the inconsistency of its use. In his speech "I Must Act," former Illinois governor George Ryan, who issued a moratorium on the death penalty in Illinois during his governorship, lamented that "a defendant is five times more likely to get the death penalty in a rural area of Illinois than if they committed the same

crime in Cook County,” the urban center of Illinois (2004:221). There have even been cases in which a person was wrongly sentenced to death for a crime they did not commit, but upon discovering and prosecuting the actual culprit, prosecutors did not similarly pursue the death penalty. In these cases of mistaken identity, the facts of the crime remain the same, yet, prosecutors seek a different sentence (Bright 2004:165). If the choice to pursue a death sentence cannot be consistent in these cases, where the crime is entirely the same, it should not be expected that prosecutors will apply the death penalty consistently elsewhere. “Where is the justice and fairness in that? Where is the proportionality?” pleads Ryan (2004:221). Death penalty supporters are well aware of these inconsistencies, including figureheads Joshua Marquis and Alex Kozinski, writer of “Tinkering with Death” (2004). However, their only response to arbitrary conviction is to work toward better discretion so that only “the worst of the worst” are given the death penalty, and to reform the system to address institutional failures like racial biases, inadequate legal representation, and the possibility of convicting innocents (Marquis 2004:150). However, these “simple” solutions to reform the death penalty turn out to be not so simple after all. Even after post-*Furman* reforms--which were aimed at addressing problems of inconsistency--the inconsistencies persist. Without millions of dollars and large institutional adjustments, these problems cannot be solved. Even before expenditures and institutional adjustments, just passing reform legislation would be difficult. Former Governor Ryan experienced the depth of such a challenge while in office, citing his inability to persuade the Illinois assembly to pass even one death penalty reform (2004:229). Marquis, who supports capital punishment, writes that death penalty moratoriums are ineffective, because the system will never be entirely perfect, no matter how long the wait (2004:147). However, as Bright points

out in quoting the Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, half justice is still not justice at all (2004:174). Moreover, even if all reforms were instituted and successful, the death penalty would still be inconsistent with the purpose of government.

Hugo Bedau, author of “An Abolitionist’s Survey of the Death Penalty in America Today,” argues against the death penalty, and champions a theoretical argument that he terms “Minimal Invasion” (2004:32). This is the principle that a constitutional democracy should use the “least restrictive means sufficient” in order to attain some goal or purpose (Bedau 2004:32). Therefore, punishment should be “a means to some socially valid end,” which in the case of the death penalty would be deterrence of further crime (Bedau 2004:33). Bedau argues that the death penalty would only be justified if it were a much greater deterrent than imprisonment, but as he points out there is little evidence to support such a claim (2004:39). Cassell refutes Bedau’s argument, saying that logic, firsthand reports, and statistics support the claim that the death penalty is a greater deterrent than prison (2004:187). This claim is problematic because of the very few studies that actually do find a correlation between the death penalty and deterrence, such evidence shows that it is at best only show a slight correlation--- to which Bedau responds that even if death were a slightly better deterrent, it “is obtained at an unacceptable cost” (2004:39). Bedau refers, here, not to the cost involved in the appeals process of those on death row, but to the far more fundamental moral and human cost of the institution of death. Firstly, the cost includes those killed when a less restrictive means was available to reach the same end. This end, effective deterrence, is met by life imprisonment. Moreover, it includes the cost of those arbitrarily sentenced to death because their income or race precluded justice and, finally, it includes the very real cost that innocent people who are wrongly convicted could be

put to death. With both the highly disputed nature of the deterrence argument and the human cost of the death penalty, it is illogical to err on the side of the death penalty when an equally effective option, imprisonment, is available in the United States.

Finally, death penalty supporters like Cassell see capital punishment as both just and necessary punishment on the basis of retribution. For Cassell, punishment is the way in which “civilized society expresses its sense of revulsion” and can channel its emotions (2004:198). However, this emotional basis for the death penalty is a thinly veiled cover for vengeance rather than justice. Vengeance, an act of retaliation in the pursuit of emotional satisfaction, has no place in a system of justice, which is meant to fairly uphold peace. In the same way that one person might cringe at a movie scene while another laughs, emotions are capricious and inconsistent, which proves problematic for a system that functionally creates an emotional outlet for rage in the institution of the death penalty. Bright views the death penalty as stooping to the level of criminal retaliation, which “undermines the standing and moral authority of the United States” (2004:198).

The death penalty is, as Stevenson writes, “a punishment that leaves no room for error” and similarly, is a debate that leaves no room for compromise (2004:99). In practice, the institution of the death penalty is fundamentally flawed because extraneous factors like race and socioeconomic status heavily influence the likelihood that the defendant will be put to death and create an arbitrary system of justice. Further, even without the arbitrary nature of the death penalty, its existence has no place in United State’s justice system, because it is inconsistent with the fundamental function of government, which is to create stability using the least restrictive means possible to uphold justice. The United States cannot claim to be a leader in human rights

and morality if its system of punishment still allows for arbitrary, emotionally driven convictions that ultimately lead to death at the hands of the state. If we are to preserve justice, life, and the fundamental purpose of government, we, as citizens, have a duty to demand that the death penalty be summarily abolished in the United States.

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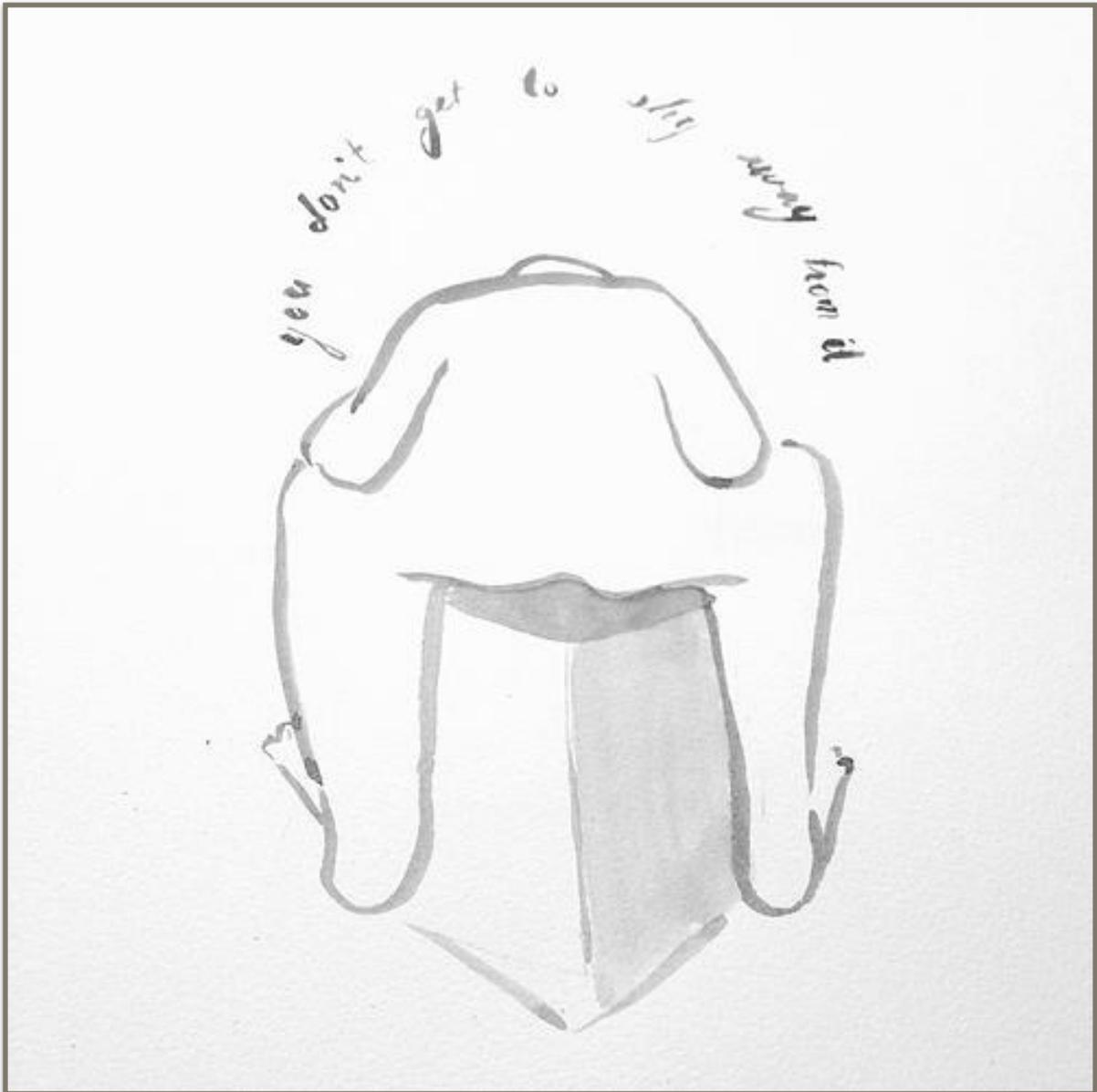
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# You Don't Get to Shy Away from It

*Ariel Shapiro* is a first year Social Work Graduate School Candidate, 2017. She spends the (little) free time she has walking a dog that is not hers, going to concerts, and writing in a little journal she almost always carries with her. She is originally from Brooklyn, NY. Ariel would like to thank Ximena Soto for providing space to pause and all of the other professors she has had who are full of inspiration, passion, wisdom, and fight.



### A Note from the Artist

As educated individuals, learning about the ways and woes of the world--we do not have the luxury to "shy away" from human injustice. It is human nature to want to do so. It is human nature to turn away from travesty--just as it is human nature to wince upon the sight of blood. However, as informed citizens and learners, our duty, responsibility, and careers require us to face the pain--hopefully, in order to then be able to do something about it.

## *SocialEyes* Staff

*Alienna L. Arnold* is a Senior Editor-in-Chief of *SocialEyes* and a member of the Class of 2016. She is pursuing majors in Secondary Education and English, a minor in Special Education, and a certificate in Teaching English Language Learners (TELL) as a student in Boston College's Lynch School of Education. Alienna enjoys planning lessons that revolve around sociological issues, particularly those dealing with social justice and gender roles. She works for Boston College's Office of Residential Life as a Resident Assistant (RA). She is also a member of Creative Kids Music Therapy at the Campus School, the Boston College Art Club, and the campus stand-up club Ready. Set. Punchline! She enjoys spending time with her friends and family in her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio.

*Isabel Ramos* is a Senior Editor-in-Chief and Secretary Chair of *SocialEyes*. She is a member of the class of 2016 and a student in the College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College. Originally from Puerto Rico, Isabel is majoring in Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies. She is a student leader at the Outdoor Adventure Program and loves spending time the backcountry. Isabel often participates in international volunteer programs serving as a woman for others. After graduation she will be volunteering abroad in Ghana and Bolivia working with local NGOs to empower young girls and victims of sexual violence. During her free time she enjoys baking and rock climbing.

*Brittany Duncan* is a Senior Managing Editor and author liaison of *SocialEyes*. A member of the class of 2016, she is pursuing a major in Sociology with a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. She recently completed a senior honors thesis entitled "Navigating Sex in College: A qualitative exploration of college students' views on hookup culture and sexual assault." Originally from Savage, Minnesota, she enjoys scrapbooking and shopping exclusively at the Mall of America. Brittany is also the President of the Historical Society of Boston College and spends whatever free time she has in college, reading, baking, and watching too much TV.

*Jihyun Lee* is a Junior Managing Editor and treasurer supervisor of *SocialEyes*. She is a member of the class of 2017 and an international student in the College of Arts and Sciences, majoring in Sociology. She is also a graduate student in the School of Social Work, studying older adults and families. Her study is concentrated in Gerontology and is currently working as an undergraduate research fellow, researching issues related to ageism. As an international student from South Korea, she always wait for Winter and Summer breaks as she can fly back to her country and meet her family.

*Jonathan Leuthner* is an Editor of *SocialEyes* and a member of the Class of 2017. He is a student in the College of Arts and Sciences pursuing a Sociology major and an American Studies minor with a focus in journalism. He heads the local outreach committee of Boston College's branch of Timmy Global Health. In his free time at Boston College Jonathan enjoys playing basketball, listening to music, writing, and volunteering at Boys and Girls Club in Chelsea. He will return home to Milwaukee, Wisconsin this summer to work at the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission.

*Brianna Dobiesz* is an editor for *SocialEyes*. A member of the class of 2017, she is majoring in English and Sociology with a minor in Business Management. Originally from Buffalo, NY, Bri appreciates a good snowfall and extremely mild chicken wings. She is in the beginning stages of writing a thesis and spends her free time as a DJ for the student radio station.

*Byung-Hun Kim* is an editor for *SocialEyes* and a member of the class of 2018. He is majoring in English with minors in Managing for Social Impact and International Studies. Originally from South Korea and living in New Jersey, Byung-Hun actively performs through the campus music clubs Jammin' Toast and Music Guild. He is also a member of Asian Christian Fellowship (ACF) and Korean Student Association (KSA). Byung-Hun is a big sports fan and has had a sad year with Aston Villa surely about to get relegated, the NY Mets losing in the World Series, and Jordan Spieth blowing his lead in the Masters.

*Melissa Lei* is an editor for *SocialEyes*. A member of Class of 2018, she is a student in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, double majoring in Sociology and Economics. In the journal, she edited "Student Debt." Originally from Queens, New York, she loves the city lights and enjoys trying out new cafes during her free time. She is excited to go home this summer and even more excited to study abroad in Copenhagen next semester!

*Julia Bates* is a fifth year Ph.D. candidate in the Boston College Sociology Department and graduate student editor of *SocialEyes*. She currently teaches "Race in the Criminal Justice System" and recently taught "Social Theory" and "Introduction to Sociology." She is a 2016 recipient of the Donald White Teaching Award and 2015 Dean of Summer Session Teaching Fellow. Her research interests include race and ethnicity, transnational sociology and historical methods. Her masters thesis "The Role of Race in Legitimizing Institutionalization: A Comparative Analysis of Early Child Welfare Initiatives in the United States" was recently published in the Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth and received the 2015 Severyn T. Bruyn Award for Outstanding Scholarship. She is currently working on her dissertation, "The Colonial Roots of Color Blind Racism: Cultural Racism in U.S. Foreign Policy."

## Call for Submissions

We are now accepting submissions to *SocialEyes* for Issue 8. All submissions and inquiries should be sent to [socialeyesbc@gmail.com](mailto:socialeyesbc@gmail.com).

Submission requirements:

- Your name and contact information
- A title of the work
- All text should be sent in .doc or .docx format
- Submissions should not exceed 6,000 words

All submissions are anonymously reviewed by our editorial board. Our submissions coordinator will contact you once your submission has been reviewed.

For more information, go to [bc.edu/sociology](http://bc.edu/sociology) and follow the link to *SocialEyes*. You may also visit our Facebook page at [facebook.com/socialeyesbostoncollege](https://facebook.com/socialeyesbostoncollege).

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