

# *Social Eyes*

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Finally, a special thank you to our readers. We hope you enjoy this issue. If you are a current student, we hope that you will consider submitting your own work with us for next year's issue.





# Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the ninth issue of SocialEyes, Boston College's Undergraduate Sociology journal. The journal was first established in 2009 to not only highlight scholarly talent within the undergraduate Sociology Department, but also to create a forum for sociological discussion among the BC community overall.

This issue, like those before it, highlights a wide variety of social justice issues, such as the treatment of prisoners and individuals with disabilities and the widening achievement gap between high-income and low-income families.

The world we live in today is fraught with problems. Some may be plastered all over the news every day, but others may be hidden from our sight and from major public discourse. It is important to keep our eyes open to all issues of injustice, no matter how big or small. After all:

*"In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same."*

*- Albert Einstein*

Shining a light on these issues is only the first step, but it is important one. We cannot let ourselves be silent about the things that matter, just as we cannot remain idle in the face of injustice. We must engage with the world that we live in and fight to make the world a better place, as leading men and women for others.

With love,

Kara Murdock  
*Editor-in-Chief*



# The Effect of Organized Sport for Prisoners and Individuals with Disabilities

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**Bridgette Merriman**

Bridgette is a sophomore from Rochester, NY, studying Sociology and Biology in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences on a pre-med track. She is both an editor and writer for SocialEyes, in addition to being a violist in a chamber group, a Tour Guide, a swim instructor for children with special needs, and the President of Boston College Dance Marathon. Bridgette has a passion for helping others, which drives her deep interest in sociology, and she aspires to be a pediatric oncologist. She loves spending time with her friends, staying active at the Plex, FaceTiming her family, and relaxes by watching comedy specials on Netflix.

## Introduction

Physical activity and exercise are pivotal for disease prevention and health maintenance for all people with and without a disability (Sahlin & Lexell, 2015; Wilhite & Shank, 2009). However, the effects of exercise in the form of sport, defined as “all forms of physical activity through organized participation that aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships, or obtaining results in competition at all levels,” are more complex (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014, p.127). The dynamic of organized sport, which encompasses the impact of sport on the individual participant as well as the impact of social interactions between teammates and the community, lead to a variety of effects in addition to purely physical benefits. Research suggests that organized sports can be used as a means of decreasing stigma and fostering social inclusion for certain populations, a stepping stone towards higher achievements, and a way of promoting biological and psychosocial health overall.

## Background Information

In the context of disability, sport was first used as a form of therapy when Dr. Ludwig Guttmann, founder of the Paralympic Movement, recognized the physiological and psychological value of sport in the rehabilitation of paraplegic hospital inpatients post WWII (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). He observed sport’s potential to provide hope and a sense of self-worth to the individual, change society’s attitude towards those with spinal cord injuries (SCI), and demonstrate that people with a SCI could fully integrate into society and excel in chosen fields (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). Today, however, most clinical interventions focus primarily on the psychological impact of war on military personnel, neglecting Guttmann’s findings that sport positively influences society’s view of disability. Furthermore, participation in sport does more than alleviate problems such as difficulty integrating into society; it can bring favorable additions, such as valuable relationships and feelings of achievement, providing direction towards meaningful and valued activities and occupations, helping construct a confident identity, and offering a new environment around which to re-center life post trauma (Meek & Lewis, 2014; Carless, Sparkes, Douglas, & Cooke, 2014). This goes to show that sport could have a powerful impact on men shaping their lives after prison and those with disabilities. This is especially important because these populations are victims of stigma. The

negative attitudes surrounding these individuals lead to less opportunities for achievement, and the individuals themselves often have psychological implications as a result of their life experiences.

For example, many ex-offenders find themselves so unable to re-integrate back into their communities after prison that they end up committing more crimes. In fact, more than half of all crimes in the United Kingdom are committed by those who have already been through the justice system, and in the United States, more than three quarters of released prisoners are rearrested within five years (Meek & Lewis, 2014; National Institute of Justice, 2014). These high rates of recidivism lead to mistrust within communities, restricting the formation of networks that are essential to leading a successful life (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014). The men have to work harder than the average citizen to impress employers in order to overcome preconceived notions about felons to prove themselves worthy. Many ex-offenders are unable to overcome this prejudice, leading to a downward spiral that often ends in re-incarceration, drinking and drug problems, and mental health disorders that could be prevented with the proper rehabilitative and inclusive measures.

On the other hand, individuals with disabilities are victim to hegemonic ableism that dominates the entire global community. Ableism suggests that there is a “tendency to adopt generally recognized notions of able-bodiedness as the frame of reference against which to assess ability,” and according to Wolbring, “describes prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors towards persons with a disability... [and] hinges on one’s understanding of normal ability and the rights and benefits afforded to persons deemed ‘normal’” (as cited in Brittain & Beacom, 2016, p.501, 502). Thomas Hehir further defines ableism as:

The devaluation of disability . . . that results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with non-disabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids (as cited in Brittain & Beacom, 2016, p. 502).

Ableist ideology devalues individuals with disabilities, which further reinforces stigma, discrimination, and social isolation in society.

Veterans face similar social exclusion, as a subset population within the disabled community. Serious injury, disability, and mental health problems are common among military personnel who served in

Iraq and Afghanistan, causing challenges when assimilating back into everyday society (Carless et al., 2014). For instance, up to 31% of returning American military personnel experience PTSD, and more than 19,141 American troops are listed as “wounded in action” in Afghanistan (Caddick & Smith, 2013; Carless et al., 2014). Military personnel who sustain handicaps while deployed are subject to culture shock when reentering society because they must adapt to their new identity as disabled. Some have a hard time developing coping strategies, leading to mental health problems. Veterans with mental health disorders and physical handicaps experience the same social isolation and negative attitudes as other individuals with disabilities, warranting the same necessity for rehabilitative initiatives.

### **Diminishing Stigma and Inciting Integration into Society**

Sport programs help dispel stigma and end prejudice surrounding prisoners and people with disabilities, thereby facilitating their integration into a society that works so hard to keep them isolated. For instance, the football and rugby programs established in a young offender institution in South England helped participants develop positive self-definitions and self-presentations, consequently challenging preconceived stereotypes and stigma associated with ex-offenders (Meek & Lewis, 2014). Over the course of two years, 79 males ages 18-21 participated in the study. Participants reported that the acquisition and development of skills such as effective communication, anger management, and conflict resolution, played a significant role in securing employment post-release (Meek & Lewis, 2014). Participants accredited their occupations in part to sport programs because employers viewed them as more than just ex-cons since they played in a sport league; employers saw the young men as individuals capable of working in a team atmosphere who were dedicated to something larger than themselves, who had effective communication skills, and who possessed important qualities such as reliability, discipline, loyalty, integrity, and respect. The action of hiring ex-offenders reduces the employer’s own prejudice against prisoners as well as the stigma that surrounds prisoners (Meek & Lewis, 2014).

In these scenarios, ex-offenders benefit from the phenomena Anderson describes that occurs in the business world (Anderson & White, 2017). Anderson explains that male-dominated occupation “gate-keepers” inherently favor job candidates with whom they can relate, most often through sport (Anderson & White, 2017). While putting women at a severe disadvantage, this manifestation of hegemonic masculinity benefits male

ex-offenders in their search for employment post-release. Sports programs help incarcerated men cultivate skills and values that employers hold in high regards, often leading to meaningful employment and playing an effective role in reducing stigma about and prejudice against male offenders. Another study based on nine in-depth interviews with young male adult offenders ages 18-26 attending two urban community projects in Ireland showed similar results. All participants reported feelings of empowerment, autonomy, skill acquisition, and higher personal self-efficacy and self-esteem (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014). Many commented that the values taught and internalized through sport, such as how to communicate with others, helped with community integration post-release. Participants reported that confidence gained through sport could be applied to real-life situations such as job interviews, and the “emergence of new, positive identities as sports men was observed as assisting in overall community reintegration” (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014, p.135). Organized sport programs mediated skill acquisition that was vital to success in the job market, dispelling negative stereotypes about ex-offenders and aiding community integration.

Sport initiatives also reduce stigma and promote community integration for individuals with disabilities. One woman who became an internationally competitive runner said that sports were critical in facilitating social acceptance:

I think that being a person with albinism, you sort of stand out, look a little different... I think having performed so well athletically I was able to gain respect from my peers and probably more importantly, feel good about myself. (Wilhite & Shank, 2009, p.123)

When individuals with disabilities participate and succeed in something valued by the community such as sport, society accepts the individuals as equals, dispelling negative attitudes of “otherness,” (Wilhite & Shank, 2009; Shapiro, 2014). One man noted that, “The nondisabled population is becoming more exposed to these sports... and they have an appreciation for it,” (Wilhite & Shank, 2009, p.124). Sport provides a site in which people with disabilities and their communities gather together, leading to the development of positive partnerships between individuals with disabilities and sponsors, health care professionals, and community organizations. These partnerships are opportunities for advocacy, and raise awareness about the abilities of persons who have a disability, dispelling negative stereotypes (Wilhite & Shank, 2009). Research by Sahlin and Lexell (2015) about the impact of organized sports on people with neurological disabilities supports the claim that sport breaks down prejudice

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and promotes social inclusion. People with a spinal cord injury (SCI) who participated in sports had significantly higher integration in the community compared to non-athletes with disabilities (Sahlin & Lexell, 2015). Athletes with an SCI were 4.75 and 7.00 times more likely to have high scores on the Community Integration Questionnaire and Reintegration into Normal Living Index, respectively, indicating persons participating in sports were more fully integrated into the community (Sahlin & Lexell, 2015).

One must also consider the effect of elite sport, the Paralympic Games, on reducing stigma associated with the disabled population. The Paralympic Games and their predecessor, the Stoke Mandeville Games, were founded on the hopes of positively impacting the lives of those with disabilities by changing able-bodied attitudes towards disability (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). However, society's focus on an elite "Olympic" sports model of competition undermines the foundation of the Paralympic Games because of the predominance of an "ableist" perspective (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). The ableist perspective lends itself to judging Paralympians on the basis of how closely they can approximate able-bodied sport, instead of finding excellence within the Paralympic sphere. When viewed through the ableist lens, Paralympic athletes, and all individuals with disabilities, are perpetually marginalized and devalued, segregated, and socially isolated, victim to the hegemony of normalism (Brittain & Beacom, 2016).

In 2012, London hosted the largest Paralympic Games to date, a factor that had great leverage on London beating Paris in the bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). This appeared to be setting the stage for the Paralympic Games to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities, and Brittain and Beacom (2016) studied the validity of this legacy as the 2016 Rio Games approached. The International Paralympic Committee issued a new commitment in 2013 stating that its new focus had shifted away from rehabilitation and explicitly towards acceptance of elite athletes, irrespective of any handicaps. However, this focus on sport achievements and not the challenges the athletes face with their disability "continually reproduces the figure of the tragic disabled," Danielle Peers (Wheelchair Basketball) explains (Brittain & Beacom, 2016 p.506). By focusing on how well the athletes approximate able-bodied athletes in spite of their condition, the Paralympics elicit a type of pity for the athlete, as well as reinforce hegemonic ableism by permanently limiting Paralympians to a status lower than Olympians. Female sport teams with male counterparts face the same hardship. As Therberge describes, female hockey players experience difficulties in advancing their sport because they perform in the shadow of men's hockey, and never reach the same level (Therberge, 1999). The systematic prohibition of checking in women's



hockey limits the women's game and, for some, eliminates the spectacle (Therberge, 1999).

Furthermore, making Paralympians the norm to which all people with disabilities are compared further isolates those who are unable/do not wish to take part in sport, reinforcing the ableist perspectives of their capabilities. As one individual described, the Games were a "source of deep frustration because the Paralympics represented something distant from everyday reality" (Brittain & Beacom, 2016, p.506). Sport as a mega-event does not help the plight of those with disabilities because the Games only changed spectators attitudes towards Paralympians, not towards the disabled population as a whole. Even though society accepts Paralympians into a "high rung" on the hegemonic ableism ladder, increasing taxes for welfare programs makes the general public disdainful towards those with disabilities. In a survey Scope published after interviewing 1,000 people with disabilities, 81% of individuals said attitudes towards them hadn't improved in the last 12 months, 22% said that things had actually gotten worse, and one in five people reported they had experienced hostile, threatening behavior, or even been attacked (as cited in Brittain & Beacom, 2016). Social Darwinism ideology pervades the public, suggesting that those who cannot financially support themselves (those on welfare) are social parasites and do not merit equal treatment in realms such as education and employment (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). These prejudicial thoughts describe a disturbing reality; while roughly 15% of the American population lives below the poverty line, 60% of individuals with disabilities live below the poverty line (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). This large discrepancy indicates a systematic failure, stemming from discrimination and segregation against those with disabilities, which prevents these individuals from leading a financially secure life.

The economic and political landscape adds a layer of complexity to the mission of integration because while politicians speak one thing, their actions show another. For instance, during the London 2012 period, Parliament cut welfare programs, while at the same time preaching about the great legacy the Paralympics would have for those with disabilities (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). The British government also contracted a private company, Atos, to run "fitness for work assessments," (Work Capacity Assessments) in order to lower the number of people qualified for disability welfare. Interestingly, Atos had been a sponsor of the Paralympic games since 2002 (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). The company, as well as the British government, came under criticism as both were clearly driven by economic interests; Atos for wanting to make a profit by performing a job that directly harms the population served through the organization they

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sponsor, and the British government for wanting to save money by cutting welfare. Even when politicians present arguments in favor of protecting disability programs, “the language of dependency which permeates their statements [has] the potential to reinforce the otherness that predicates ableist thinking” (Brittain & Beacom, 2016, p.515).

Ultimately, the Paralympics should be viewed critically because the Games support an ableist ideology that does little to improve the lives of those with disabilities. Despite promoting social acceptance, albeit not equality, of Paralympians, individuals with disabilities do not feel connected to athletes in terms of the issues faced in everyday life. A silver lining must be noted; people with disabilities say that greater visibility and discussion of their lives in lieu of the Paralympics does make a difference, depending on the way matters are presented, the language and rhetoric used to describe issues, and the political biases and economic interests at stake. While the Paralympic Games do not have the intended effect in the population of individuals with disabilities, sport programs for individuals themselves, not just elite athletes, help to eliminate negative attitudes and create an inclusive society.

### **Road to Further Possibilities**

Sport also is a vehicle through which participants can achieve goals beyond the athletic sphere. The social capital gained by making connections with coaches, caseworkers, and peer athletes, as well as skills developed that are beneficial in the work environment and wider community, equip participants with the tools to create better lives for themselves. Participants in Meek and Lewis’ prison study (2014) report that fostering connections with other inmates through sport helped motivate them to continue with the program, as well as to continue healthy habits post-release. Building bonds with other prisoners provided the individuals with a support system, because they were surrounded by those with similar goals and life experiences. “It was always just good to get to know people who had been through the same things as you who can relate to what you’re doing. There is always someone to talk to,” one inmate explained (Meek & Lewis, 2014, p.103). Participants in Van Hout and Phelan’s study (2014) described the benefits of peer support networks when attending programs after prison. Some individuals reported that they attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings with their network of sport friends, something they would not have done with old friends (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014). Called

“change agents” for encouraging desistance, the network of peers and caseworkers provided the individuals with people to whom they could reach out in times of difficulty, a change from the isolated lives many men led before incarceration (Meek & Lewis, 2014; Van Hout & Phelan, 2014). These change agents are vital in helping reform inmates’ identities and seeking greater opportunities.

Caseworkers assisted individuals in looking for employment and networking with community contacts, setting goals, reflecting, and creating plans of action for life after prison (Meek & Lewis, 2014). They also suggested possible careers such as coaching, and motivated the individuals to act for themselves instead of doing what other people want them to do (Meek & Lewis, 2014). Per the caseworker’s suggestions, some individuals pursued coaching certifications, seeing the qualifications as a critical step towards making positive life changes. Participants in Meek and Lewis’ study (2014) expressed that they planned to use their sport qualification and skills “not only for personal development but for the wider benefit of their communities and families” (Meek & Lewis, 2014, p.108). One participant said, “I want to use this coaching badge I got out of this to help communities and organize tournaments for young kids. And not just about football, about life skills and that” (Meek & Lewis, 2014, p.108). This in turn created enthusiasm for future training and qualifications, as well as opened their eyes to explore other occupational opportunities. Participants in Van Hout and Phelan’s study (2014) reported a similar effect in that sport participation improved overall confidence in real-life situations such as job interviews. One young man reported:

[Triathlons] gave me the confidence to go back and look for jobs and that. As soon as I done the races, I was applying for jobs, and I obviously looked a lot healthier, [my] mind was a bit more confident as well. If I can do that, I can surely work anywhere else you know... you have a better chance of getting a job. You are more outgoing. You have more things to talk about as well that you have on your resume... (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014, p.136)

In addition to enthusiasm for job acquisition post-release, sport programs also reduced recidivism. Individuals in Meek and Lewis’ study (2014) reported the development of critical thinking skills, anger

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management, and coping strategies, which helped avert impulsive behaviors that contribute to re-offending. Specifically, inmates explained how they learned to respond to frustrations through communication instead of aggression. One participant said:

I'm more of a type of person to let things build up and then explode, but what helped me, like when things are getting to me I'll speak up on it rather than wait later and snap about it... helped me a lot with my temper. (Meek & Lewis, 2014, p.113)

Self-perception of improved communication and conflict resolution is integral for leading a crime-free life post-incarceration because habitual reoffending is thought to be influenced by negative responses to common problems (Meek & Lewis, 2014). Restructuring of time that occurred as a result of participation in sport programs also played a role in desistance because the time commitment was a diversion from risky behavior. One participant in Meek and Lewis' study (2014) explained that "When I get out, I'm not just hanging around. I'm doing something and then not messing about" (p.105). Participants in Van Hout and Phelan's study (2014) described similar results. "If there was no gym or training, I would have nothing else to do, only to drink and take drugs. The gym and sport is definitely a big thing like 'cause it passes hours during the days" (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014, p.134). Sports distracted participants from thinking about drugs and alcohol, and some participants even reported switching addictions from drugs to fitness. One young man explained, "I nearly swapped addictions... it just went from being obsessed about [drugs and alcohol] to just being obsessed with ... health and fitness," and another said, "It is addictive... knowing that you can be better than someone else, it's the competitive edge to it," (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014, p.134, 135). Literature suggests that young adult decision making to use drugs and engage in criminal activity is linked to an inherent drive for sensation seeking, status, and self-efficacy, all of which are relevant to sports participation (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014). Thus, sport programs are appropriate interventions specifically for incarcerated young men because its rewards mimic the detrimental behavior that ex-offenders are drawn to. The relationships ex-offenders create through sport and the new habits they form can contribute to a life of success and achievement after prison.

Success in sport also helps increase the sense of efficacy for individuals with disabilities in other life domains. Similar to ex-offenders, individuals with disabilities reported that sport programs helped them realize their capacity for achievement. One woman said:

Getting out there and seeing people with disabilities actively involved with sport as well as employment and so forth – I guess it was possible... as a blind person, going back to school was definitely challenging, but it was somethings that was like, ‘Why not?’ If I could row – I never thought that I would be rowing in my life. I always saw that and was like, ‘That seems interesting,’ but I never thought I’d be out there myself. Why couldn’t I go back to school? (Wilhite & Shank, 2009, p.123)

Stuart, a veteran who suffered limb-loss due to an IED explosion, gained inspiration from seeing other men with prosthetic legs. When Stuart woke up from his amputation surgery, he met a man who had lost both legs. After several minutes of conversation, Stuart learned about wheelchair basketball, “so that was an inspiration in a way,” he said. “It helped me realize there were things I could do” (Carless et al., 2014, p.127). After participating in a program consisting of various activities, Stuart explained that one of the benefits is “giving guys a chance to meet other guys who’ve been through something like they have... I’ll always remember how seeing someone else... made me feel, realizing that things were possible” (Carless et al., 2014, p.127). Sam, another veteran, shared a similar story. Through participating in rock climbing and wheelchair basketball, Sam shattered his own negative attitudes. “My own mental thoughts were limiting what I was doing physically. But having climbed that wall, I know now that I can do it – that thing I thought I couldn’t do... and that spreads...” he said (Carless et al., 2014, p.127). Sam described that after conquering his own limitations, he wondered what else he could do, which led to motivation for further achievement. Like ex-offenders, a peer support system of people with similar life experiences also contributes to feelings of self-worth. One woman said, “By being disabled athletes, we’re all part of a team. We’re supportive of one another, regardless of disability. We are able to assist others,” and another athlete explained, “We try to show [newly disabled individuals] that there’s more to life than just being stuck in a wheelchair”

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(Wilhite & Shank, 2009, p.122). Individuals with disabilities derive benefits from exposure to the world of adaptive sport because the experiences show individuals that their handicaps do not need to limit their life.

In terms of employment, Sahlin and Lexell (2015) found a significant positive association between participation in organized sport and the rate of employment for adults with an SCI. This suggests that, similar to ex-offenders, the skills developed in the world of sport are applicable and helpful in the broader context of life. Sport helps individuals with disabilities reform their identity into one of ability, encouraging them to pursue higher accomplishments.

### **Psychosocial and Physiological Health**

Improvements in mental and physical health are perhaps the most well-known benefits of sport because individuals tend to feel these effects more immediately. Both prisoners and staff reported that behavior, attitudes, and thinking styles, changed for the better after implementation of a sporting program (Meek & Lewis, 2014). Programs encouraged communication and conflict resolution skills, especially in the presence of frustration, and developing the ability to see things from other perspectives. Creation of friendly bonds between prisoners developed with these skills, leading to a sense of camaraderie and support, belonging, empowerment, autonomy, self-efficacy, and an increase in self-esteem (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014). Moreover, in order to keep up with training and to perform at a high level, many participants adopted healthy practices such as establishing a regular sleep pattern and sustaining a clean diet, and gave up unhealthy habits such as smoking and drinking (Meek & Lewis, 2014; Van Hout & Phelan, 2014).

Individuals with disabilities also experienced increases in physiological and psychosocial health following participation in adaptive sport programs. Research by Wilhite and Shank (2009) found that sport activity led to enhanced functional capacity and increased optimism. One man described his excitement over finding an activity that boosted his self-confidence:

When I stepped on the back of a tandem [bicycle], I was just tickled pink... I was doing something that I had assumed I would

never do again... it was just nice to be able to gain an ability back. You know, dis-ability... now I could take the dis away, ability was right there. I was very happy about that... the new me is someone who is aware of health and takes care of himself and bicycling fits with that. (Wilhite & Shank, 2009, p.121-122)

Interviewees also explained that a major reason they partake in sport is to maintain a physically fit life in order to prevent dependence in old age. Mark, a man with paraplegia, explained that he was initially motivated to do sports for mental benefits of increased optimism, but when he saw other persons his age with the same disability in wheelchairs, he “did not want to get to that point,” (Wilhite & Shank, 2009, p.120). Another man described a positive health cycle he attributed to sport:

The more active I became, the less depressed I got. The less depressed I got, the better I felt about myself, the more I wanted to do. Now, I’m doing [sports] because they’re fun, and I don’t even realize all of the other things that I’m getting out of it, like that I’m not depressed. I still have bad days, but nowhere near the days I had back when I was depressed and I was trying to kill myself and all those other things. (Wilhite & Shank, 2009, p.121)

Sahlin and Lexell (2015) had similar findings. After surveying children and adolescents, they concluded that young athletes had self-concepts close to able-bodied athletes and heightened self-esteem, quality of life, perceived physical appearance, and global self-worth (Sahlin & Lexell, 2015). Adults in the same study reported decreased depression and anxiety, increased life satisfaction, and improved self-confidence and self-esteem (Sahlin & Lexell, 2015). Statistical tests also showed that athletes with an SCI had significantly lower depression and anxiety scores than nonathletes with an SCI, as well as higher scores of extraversion (Sahlin & Lexell, 2015). In a similar fashion, veterans who incurred disabilities during deployment reported PTSD symptom reduction along with an increase in determination and confidence, greater sense of self-efficacy, coping ability, self-determination, and enhanced motivation for life (Caddick & Smith, 2014; Carless et al., 2014). Individuals with disabilities derive physical and mental benefits as a result of sport programs, contributing to a healthier life.

### Conclusion and Considerations

Organized sport is the avenue through which stigma is decreased, individuals unlock their inner potential, and physical and mental health is both achieved and maintained. Ex-offenders and individuals with disabilities are great beneficiaries of sport because they are often in need of these outcomes. But even though research gives validity to these suggestions, there are considerations and areas for further study. For instance, Sahlin and Lexell (2015), Van Hout & Phelan (2014), and Meek & Lewis (2014), conducted research in countries other than America, thus the same research in America might yield different results due to cultural perceptions of ex-offenders and disability. Also, Van Hout & Phelan (2014) remark that highly structured sport programs are likely to be ineffective because the programs are designed to regulate and control. Some individuals found these programs difficult because they were forced to conform to rules and seek externally dictated goals – exactly what the individuals rejected in life before prison (Van Hout & Phelan, 2014). Further research on the effect of sport programs for female offenders would be advantageous in order to observe what effect, if any, sport has on female offenders, as well as to compare which type of programs are most influential. Studies would also benefit from more standardized testing. Sahlin and Lexell (2015) advocate for further studies with sociological tests to supplement qualitative interviews.

One of the biggest obstacles for adaptive sport participation is accessibility. Using critical theory, sport is examined under the lens of who has power, access, and control, and who does not. Caddick and Smith (2014), Brittain and Beacom (2016), and Sahlin and Lexell (2015), explain that adaptive sport for those with disabilities requires time and money, two assets a majority of the population does not have access to. Activities requiring expensive equipment and time and money to travel are restricted to those who are financially stable, however as stated, 60% of Americans with disabilities live below the poverty line. Despite the challenges that lie ahead for sport's use in decreasing negative attitudes, realization of potential, and increasing psychological and physiological health for ex-offenders and individuals with disabilities, positive changes have already occurred and will hopefully persist as society learns to receive these individuals with acceptance.



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# Bisexuality: Finding Legitimacy in an Erased Identity

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Aine is a senior from New York, with a double major in Sociology and Linguistics. She is fascinated by the intersection of these two fields, believing that how language affects society – and society in turn affects language – is deeply relevant to how human beings relate to one another. In addition to writing for SocialEyes, she explores these issues as an editor and writer for *Lingua Frankly*, Boston College Working Papers in Linguistics. She is also a lover of music, having been heavily involved in WZBC, BC's on-campus radio station, for four years. After graduating, she plans to work in the non-profit sector before applying to graduate school next year. She is also a vegetarian who loves to cook.

### Introduction

In androcentric society, there are numerous ways in which male bodies are deemed more important than all others. The perception of sexuality in society is no exception to this dominant ideology. Inequality in sexual discourse exists in both heteronormative and queer environments (despite that this undermines much of the basis of queerness). Bisexuality serves as a quintessential example of this phenomenon: common conceptions of bisexuality presuppose patriarchal ideals, which not only highlight an inherently phallogocentric perspective, but also threaten the role of bisexuality as a legitimate identity as a whole. A prime demonstration of this discourse is in the gendered expectations of bisexual people. Bisexual individuals are perceived differently in society based on gender: bisexual men are often seen as “actually gay,” while bisexual women are considered “actually straight” – meanwhile, individuals outside of the binary remain unintelligible to society. These popular ideas reinforce the gender binary, as well as both heteronormativity and homonormativity, and they invalidate bisexuality by not allowing it to exist as a unique and authentic identity. Forcing bisexuality into an inherently sexist framework leads to an overall erasure of the bisexual community in society, in both dominant culture and queer subculture.

### Theoretical Framework

Many sociological theories provide grounding for this argument. Firstly, the classic Mills text *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) suggests that personal troubles faced by bisexual individuals – such as being misunderstood by their peers – merely reflect the public issues of society – in this case, the lack of cultural understanding about bisexuality. Also relevant is Simon and Gagnon’s (1973) theory of sexual scripts: if different people follow different sexual scripts, perhaps there are unique sexual scripts for every sexual subculture. Specifically, do bisexual women and men follow different sorts of scripts from gay and straight men and women? If that is the case, this would follow Brickell (2015), who noted the role of symbolic interactionism in sexuality; that is, meanings of sexuality are socially constructed and vary from person to person. Based on this idea, the fact that bisexuality is interpreted in manifold ways is rather logical.

Beyond sociological theory, feminist theory is deeply relevant to this issue. Beginning with Rich’s (1980) idea of “compulsory heterosexuality,” which argued that heterosexuality is an institution that women are obliged to engage in, feminist scholars have continued to focus on how

heteronormativity affects women's lives. Rich believed that women could fight against this norm by being "woman-identified-women," allowing lesbians and non-lesbians alike to politically identify with the "lesbian continuum" in solidarity; this allows for bisexual women to fit in too. Yet she saw that many woman-identified-women still live a double life, struggling between their inner selves and the outward image they must portray under patriarchy. Ingraham (1996) also felt the pressures of heteronormativity, which she described as the "heterosexual imaginary," stating that heterosexuality actually provides the structural support for the gender binary. It is worth considering where bisexuality and queerness fit into this framework – are bisexual people somehow exempt from the pressure, or are they perhaps actively rejecting it? Can queer people still uphold the gender binary even if their lives are not dictated by heterosexual desire? Ingraham leaves such questions unanswered. Other feminist theorists have focused on the inevitability of male domination in women's lives. Dworkin (1987) famously claimed that all male-female intercourse is male possession. This might explain the societal understanding that when women engage in intercourse with men, it is seen as somehow life-changing – leading to the belief that lesbians can be "changed" by a male partner. Rubin (1984) calls this the "fallacy of misplaced scale" – that sexual acts are often given more significance than they deserve. This and the "Charmed Circle" – which refers to society's privileging certain sexual acts over others – are two aspects of sexuality that keep women, and especially queer women, oppressed. Still, Lorde (1984) found a positive aspect of sexuality: the erotic that women share amongst themselves can be a source of power. However, when men are brought into the equation, this power might be lost, providing yet another confusing outcome for bisexual women.

Foucault's queer theory is also useful for understanding the legitimacy, or lack thereof, of bisexual identity. Specifically, we can apply Foucault's forms of power from *The History of Sexuality* (1978) to bisexuality erasure. First, lines of penetration are brought forth: bisexuality is framed as a crisis that must be stopped or contained. Next comes the incorporation of perversions and specification of individuals: stereotypical ideas of character are imposed on any person who engages in bisexual behavior. Third, perpetual spirals of power and pleasure are formed: the bisexual person is under constant scrutiny of both straight and LGBTQ+ communities. Lastly, we encounter devices of sexual saturation: spaces of sexuality reserved for heterosexuality and others reserved for homosexuality, but rarely any for bisexuality alone.

## Literature Review

Due to the very issue that this paper addresses, namely, bisexuality erasure, one will not find nearly as much literature on bisexuality as on other sexualities. Still, certain recent works exist that are fundamental to understanding this topic. Shiri Eisner's *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* (2013) is crucial, as it addresses many of the problems underlying current conceptions of bisexuality. By giving varied, broad definitions of bisexuality and debunking many myths, Eisner provides a look at bisexuality liberated from its typical complications, allowing for a radical bi revolution. Specifically, she points out the stereotype upon which my argument is built: that "bisexuals are actually gay or actually straight," with a gendered component built into the discourse, a sentiment also found in an analysis by Yost (2012) of straight men's and women's attitudes toward bi men and women. The role of other stereotypes has been explored in works such as Klesse (2011), who focuses in on the effects of bi-negativity in bisexual people's relationships. Furthermore, biphobia in both gay and straight populations is the focus of much of the current research on bisexuality (Armstrong, 1995; Eliason, 1997; Mulick, 2002; Welzer-Lang, 2008; Zivony, 2014; Anselmi, 2015; Hertlein et al., 2016). In line with such popular negative attitudes, bisexuality is actively erased by society at large. Yoshino (2000) identified a number of reasons for an "epistemic contract" of erasure shared by both straight and queer communities, which will be outlined below. Together, these works all successfully demonstrate the points that I argue with empirical evidence.

## Methodology

The primary methodology I am using for this research is discourse analysis, while also incorporating textual analysis. Because I am focusing on the greater macro-level perception of bisexuality in society rather than specific micro-level interactions, discourse analysis is an appropriate choice. My aim is to look at the boundaries of how bisexuality is talked about in both academic and popular settings, through considering ideas about visibility, erasure, heteronormativity, homonormativity, and intelligibility. Textual analysis will be used when appropriate, such as in close analyses of specific writings.

### Analysis

Bisexuality is not seen as a legitimate identity in dominant discourse. There are a number of factors that contribute to this, most prevalent being the negative stereotypes that surround bisexuality. Because it has many definitions, and due to the symbolic interactionist nature of sexual

matters (that they are defined by their actors), it is important to clarify what is meant by bisexuality in this paper. Eisner gave a succinct and inclusive definition, taken from the bisexual activist Robyn Ochs, who said that she identifies as bisexual because:

... I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex, and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree. (p. 21)

Using this definition, bisexuality becomes a queer identity that is not restrictive or bound by rules. Although some might see this openness as leading to further confusion, its importance according to Eisner is that “it enables anyone who wants to identify as bisexual to do so” (p. 21-22), which is important given that bisexual identities are often invalidated by outsiders.

The primary delegitimizing factor for bisexuality is the phallogocentric frame through which it is typically seen. Bisexual men and women are judged according to male-centered sexual expectations. Like Dworkin who believed that for a woman to have sex with a man is not only a violation, but also possession of her body, many people seem to think that anyone who has sex with a man is “possessed” in the sense that they are fundamentally changed: men who have sex with men must be gay, and women who have sex with men must be straight. This is because “as a society, we tend to see sexuality as residing in the male, particularly in his penis” (Armstrong, 1995, p. 204). Yost (2012) studied how straight men and women viewed bisexual men and women differently, finding that regarding men, “any sexual desire or contact with another man was enough to indicate homosexuality,” while “responses about women focused on the probability that female bisexuals were heterosexual” (p. 42), confirming the existence of this belief.

There may be deeper societal reasons explaining these perceptions based on gendered norms and chosen identities. Because sexual behavior and sexual identity do not always align predictably (Ross, March 2, 2017, Lecture), there is room for flexibility in self-identification. It is thus that we see examples of men having sex with men and still identifying as straight, often more invested in protecting their racial identities. This occurs with white men looking to reinforce their whiteness and masculinity (Ward, 2015); it also occurs with black men who already lack the racial superiority demanded of hegemonic masculinity and fear further emasculation (McCune, 2014). The choice among men not to disclose same-sex sexual behavior often comes down to the idea of privacy (Scrimshaw et al., 2014),

but internalized homophobia (and implied biphobia) plays a role as well (Scrimshaw et al., 2013). It is no wonder that men have these fears when the sexual scripts (Gagnon and Simon, 1973) they have been following dictate that masculinity and heterosexuality go hand in hand; further, the social world we all live in enforces the relationship between heterosexuality and correct gender performance (Ingraham, 1996). Thus, for many men, it is clear that a bi identity is not seen as a plausible option without forgoing a masculine identity.

Women, on the other hand, are expected to be able to be intimate with other women without it affecting their heterosexuality. This is because in our society the confines of feminine expression are much less restrictive than those of masculine expression. Images of eroticized “lesbian” activity are now normalized in popular culture, which is not necessarily good for societal perceptions of queerness: “these images typically take pains to clarify that the participants are not, in fact, lesbians... in order not to spoil the ‘interloper fantasy’ of the heterosexual male viewer” (Diamond, 2005, p. 105). Men are used to seeing otherwise-straight women engage in same-sex activity for their viewing pleasure, rather than for the erotic enjoyment of the women – which might give them too much power (Lorde, 1984) – so women’s ability to move outside of their heterosexuality in certain contexts is considered normal. Galupo (2006) noted, “Traditionally, women’s identities have been tied to the way they are integrated within the family structure specifically via their connection to husbands and/or children” (p. 42). Women are generally seen as heterosexual as long as they have some connection to men. Hence the lesbian community has the term “gold star lesbian” to refer to those who count as true lesbians, because they have not been made impure by men (Ross, Feb. 21, 2017, Lecture). Because of cultural standards, “if both a self-identified gay man and a self-identified lesbian have sex with a member of the opposite gender, the general culture is more likely to point to his gay encounter and her straight encounter as most salient” (Armstrong, 1995, p. 209). These problematic double standards of sexual expression lead to the gendered differences in perceptions of bisexuality.

The phallogocentric assumption is just one of many negative stereotypes. Foucault’s forms of power start with lines of penetration and incorporation of perversions. Bisexuality is framed as a crisis in society, wherein bi individuals are accused of being “just confused, indecisive... promiscuous... superficial, narcissistic, morally bankrupt... traitors” (Klesse, 2011, p. 234). Negative stereotypes make it difficult for bisexual people to freely exist in the world. Bi individuals are prevented from gaining both kinds of sexual freedom: the freedom from regulation of activity and



the freedom to express oneself sexually (Ross, March 16, 2017, Lecture). Bisexuals are also more likely to develop mental health issues than gay or straight people (Barker, 2015). Worse yet, bi-negative views are held not only by straight people: Armstrong (1995) found similar opinions held by gay men and lesbians. When so many members of society see bisexuals in a negative light, it is unsurprising that their identity is largely invalidated.

## Implications

A plethora of negative stereotypes surround bisexuality, but what allows bisexuality to be consistently erased is this combined with the fact that the identity fits neither a heteronormative nor a homonormative frame. Yoshino (2000) found that both gay and straight people are invested in erasing bisexuality through a shared “epistemic contract,” due to interests in: “(1) the stabilization of exclusive sexual orientation categories; (2) the retention of sex as an important diacritical axis; and (3) the protection of norms of monogamy” (p. 353). These ideas are imbued with stereotypes of the inherent instability and promiscuity of bi people. The fact that both gay and straight people actively fight bisexuality is indicative of the last two of Foucault’s forms of power: perpetual spirals of pleasure and power, in which the bi person is under constant scrutiny, and devices of sexual saturation, which exist for gay and straight people but not for bisexuals.

All of this implies that in our hierarchical valuation of acts (Rubin, 1984), bisexual acts are seen as lesser than either heterosexual or homosexual acts. It is no wonder, then, that many bisexually-behaving people choose to identify with one of these more accepted identity categories. Many bisexual people have tried to become intelligible to the world by giving themselves identities that outsiders will understand (through the process of subjectification), which often means having to reduce themselves to simpler terms (Ross, April 4, 2017, Lecture). In a social world where categorization and social interaction go hand in hand, it is unlikely that this is going to change anytime soon.

## Further Research

Further research is indeed needed on this topic, if bisexuality is ever going to become more visible. First, we need more qualitative research on why people who behave “bisexually” choose to reject the label, in order to determine whether it is in fact due to internalized biphobia or some other factor. Second, it is worth considering whether greater bi visibility

could actually create a more bi-inclusive society. It is known that not only does the state control sexuality, but sexuality produces the state, through biopolitical, economic, political, legal, spatial, social, and cultural ways (Ross, March 18, 2017, Lecture). Thus, perhaps there are ways in which bisexual people could change the way the society sees bisexuality. By all means, this might be the exact sort of “bi revolution” Shiri Eisner had in mind.

Conclusion

Sexuality is in many ways a subjective experience, with varying meanings from person to person and no overpowering absolute truths, but in other ways, such as how the social world perceives sexuality, opinions held by the masses have a powerful impact and are understood as objective truths. Stereotypes tend to function in this way, which is why so much negativity surrounds bisexuality. It will be difficult to reverse the commonly-held phallogocentric assumptions about bisexuality until the forces upholding them are no longer so deeply entrenched in our institutions, communities, and ourselves. Regardless, anything we can do to give bisexuality more visibility could go a long way towards changing society’s perceptions. After all, the bisexual community is as diverse and heterogeneous as any other population, but when it is reduced to these few archetypes, the queer beauty of the community is largely lost.

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# What's a Farm Worth? New England Small Farmers Account the Value of Community

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Allison is a senior majoring in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Food and Water Systems and minoring in Management and Leadership. Originally from Charlotte, North Carolina, Allison became fascinated by small farming systems after working on a local farm in high school. Since arriving at Boston College, Allison has focused her energy on the engaging the food system on campus. She is president of Real Food BC, helps to run their student garden, and serves on Dining Services' Student Action Committee. Allison is passionate about food justice and is particularly interested in farmers. She can most often be found in the kitchen, on a farm, or at food-system related events.

## Introduction

Since colonization, the New England landscape has been dotted with small communities, of which all entities were integrated together for survival. Naturally, each household and community was dependent on itself to produce sustenance for survival. Small gardens, herds of grazing animals, and producer markets were central to community activities. Lyson (2004) writes, "in this social and economic context, the household, the community, and the economy were tightly bound up with one another" (p. 50).

At the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the migration to cities began, undermining the rural economy. However, it was not until the after 1910 that the industrial trends hit the New England agricultural landscape "with the rise of oil-driven agriculture and long-distance transportation which undermined regional specialities such as fruits and vegetables" (Donahue et al. 2014, p. 6). The increasingly globalized market for food encouraged an export-oriented style of farming. This economic trend coupled with the machinery and synthetic inputs to increase the amount of land under production simultaneously decreased the number of farms necessary for adequate production (see Figure 1).

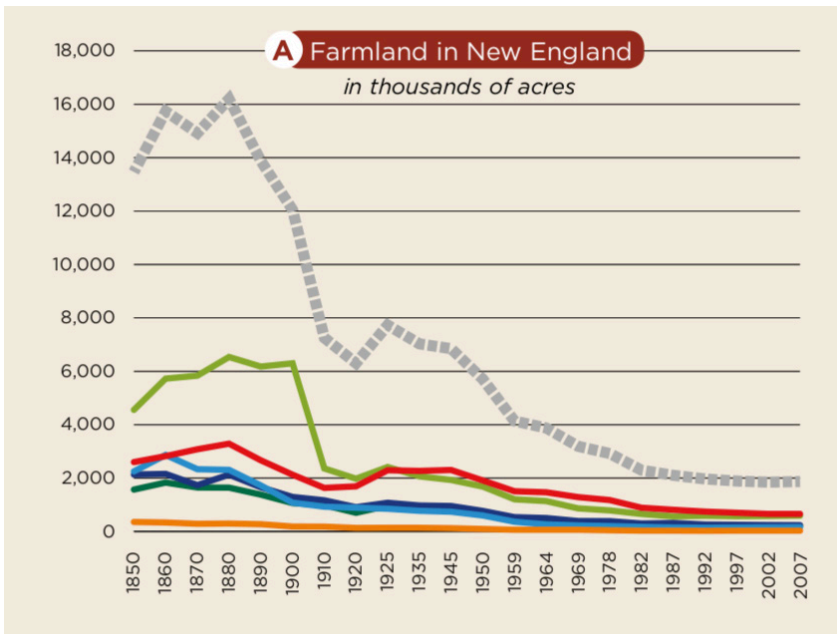


Figure 1. Farmland in New England in thousands of acres (Donahue et al., 2014)

Therefore, many farmers were forced to “get big or get out,”<sup>1</sup> in order to compete in the larger market (Philpott, 2008). This seismic shift in occupations has undoubtedly had an impact on the social fabric of the country. The function of a farm goes far beyond economic exchanges, consequently, it is important to consider the role of a farm in society, not only to better understand what the loss of farms and farmers means, but also to comprehend the forces that hinder the success of these operations.

With the demise of small farms in light of consolidation and corporatization, came the deterioration of rural communities. Lyson (2004) writes that this shift to a purely economic approach to agriculture, focusing on “land, labor, capital, and management/entrepreneurship,” created the need “to decontextualize the farm enterprise from the community and household settings in which it was embedded” (p.17). This need fueled the decoupling of the farm and the community.

However, currently, the number of small farmers in New England is slowly rising in conjunction with more intentional efforts to stabilize and expand New England products to New England residents (USDA NASS, 2017). States have drafted plans to increase local consumption and organizations have been formed to close the gaps in food imports. [2] In the midst of this trend, the question arises: what are farms without their traditional agricultural communities? In the back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s, New England’s first wave of post-industrialization farmers re-occupied decaying farm houses in an attempt to reconnect with the Earth. However, the surge towards agricultural industrialization was not slowed, and many become quickly disillusioned by the romanticized agrarian life they had envisioned (Silber, 1998).

In the face of an increasingly international agricultural market contrasted with the trend towards local food, how can small farms remain viable? Throughout history, it is clear that communities play a large role in the operation of small farms (Lyson, 2004). Despite the popularization of “local foods” in the United States, it is important to inquire if local food is good for local farming. Although there is increased awareness around food systems, farmers and communities may still not be reaping the benefits from the local food movement due to the larger international, political, and industrial context of these systems. Therefore, this study explores the relationship between the community and the small farm in the 21st century in light of the food movement through the stories and experiences of six small New England farmers.

1. *A phrase utilized by USDA Secretary Earl Butz (Philpott, 2008).*

### Methods

This paper draws from a larger study conducted with 15 small farmers in New England, representing 12 different farms. The data reflected in this study was collected from the first four of those interviews with six farmers that were conducted in Massachusetts. [1] The criteria upon which farms were chosen included any farm that is small by means of the USDA definition<sup>2</sup> and participates in direct marketing to consumers. Farms were not categorized by farming system or geographical locations due to the exploratory nature of the study. Non-probability sampling methods included snowball and purposive sampling to reach this population (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Farms were identified through community outreach, public farm listings, and farmers' markets. Self-selecting bias was largely avoided in the snowball samples. Farmers recommended other farmers that practiced very different agricultural philosophies and networks.

The study uses inductive methodology through an in-depth interview approach which collects both quantitative and qualitative data. To inductively approach this topic, the majority of the interview questions are open-ended and follow a loose guide to allow the farmer to take the interview and information where they feel it is most important. For statistical purposes, farmers were asked to rank their level of perceived support of six different entities, for which I attempted to allow them to define for themselves: community, federal government, state government, local government, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions. Utilizing a Likert scale of one to five, participants were asked to rank their perception of support with each of the different entities.

The tone of the interviews was conversational, taking a constructivist approach to data collection. Rather than imposing my own predetermined understanding of the terms, I hoped to allow farmers to elaborate on their experiences to grasp a greater understanding of what small farmers perceive as most important. I found that the majority of my interviews were at least one hour and often much longer. The open-ended format and self-defining terms lent themselves to an often broader and larger conversation about many different aspects of the farmer's lifestyle, which offered invaluable information (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Farms were identified through community outreach, public farm listings, and farmers' markets. Self-selecting bias was largely avoided in the snowball

*2. Small scale farms in this study are considered under or around the USDA definition, which is farms with \$250,000 or less in sales of agricultural commodities (USDA NASS, 2007)*



samples. Farmers recommended other farmers that practiced very different agricultural philosophies and networks.

After collecting the interviews, I transcribed them and performed a thematic analysis. Following the transcription, each interview was micro-coded in a manner modeled out of Grounded theory to reflect the themes emerging from the data (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The codes were then organized into macro-codes across interviews, then arranged into themes, and finally, interpreted into findings. The ultimate purpose of these interviews is to increase awareness of New England small farmers' identification of important issues that hinder their production and the struggle to determine if there are systems, networks, and communities that can facilitate increased support for small farmers.

## Findings

### *Community disconnect with the reality of local farming*

From the study, it appears that some small farmers are operating in a community dependent lifestyle in individualistic societies. A handful have been able to recreate pockets of collectivist ideology, but can the small farm really survive in fragmented and diversified communities operating in the global economy? One of the study participants, a small cattle and vegetable farmer, Ron, does not seem to think so. He made the comment that, today, “communities now are too big and too diverse” (Hood, 2017). Without an understanding of the reality of local farming, the amount of support a community can offer their local farmer is limited.

One example of such an impact on small farmers is the community's concern for personal economic benefits and physical well-being over the economic health of the farm and the farmer. For instance, Ron shared his frustration with his inability to feed his cattle grain in the winter when the hay is not high quality because his customers want 100% grassfed. Even though the cows graze the rest of the year, he has “had some people say, well there's residual” (Hood, 2017). Therefore, although it would make more sense for the Ron, and also take care of the waste from the brewery down the street, he is afraid he will lose customers if he switches to grain. The decision may be better for the farmer and even a local business, but, regardless, customers are more concerned with the effects this decision will have on their own physical health. The customers are likely unaware of the challenge Ron must undergo to meet their desires. It is a difficult trade-off for the farmer to make considering the customer often does not understand the production process, and therefore, is not able to offer the support of

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flexibility within that process. It can make a farmer feel trapped between economics and community.

Similarly, farmers receive complaints about their prices, despite the fact that customers are looking to buy local food because of its added value. They just do not necessarily want to take on the economic cost for that added value. Many customers want the prices to be low, but do not recognize the time, difficulty, and inputs that go into producing local food. Ron explains,

Sometimes people come in the store and sometimes we sell tomatoes for four dollars a pound, or our quarter ounces are 18 dollars a lb, and their like, woah why is it so expensive?! And they have no idea on a small scale, they don't want to go and get factory beef or factory vegetables. However, we charge the prices we do because it's just me. There's an immense amount of hours involved There's quite a bit of equipment involved that's very expensive and doesn't do, um, the equipment doesn't generate the income” (Hood, 2017).

Yet, if the customer does not take on the price, then the farmer has to.

The subjective interpretation of the law by local officials further exemplifies society's inability to understand the perspective of farmers. In one circumstance, Daniel, a dairy farmer, and his wife raised around \$130,000 from community members and beyond to renovate their 100-year-old barn for events. This decision follows a trend of many small farmers to bring in additional revenue to their farm operation through agro-tourism.<sup>3</sup> Despite the ups and downs of the product market, event spaces provide the farmer with a stable, supplemental income. However, after hosting a free, monthly concert series for the community, the local inspector shut the barn down, stating that they were zoned “rural residential” and they “couldn't do that.” Daniel explained that the inspector “could have interpreted the right to farm to say that those are economic activities to support the farm and therefore they're allowed” (Lesnik, 2017). [3] Then, after the town voted to change the bylaws, the same official told the farmer they would need to install a \$350,000 sprinkler system to meet the code. “He could have given us like a variant, but he didn't” (Lesnik, 2017). Daniel attributes this to the fire chief's concern for his own liability. He said, “so the fire chief is like I'm just gonna, I'm not going to be reasonable, I just want to make sure

*3. Agro-tourism is an operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm as an additional source of income besides food production.*

I don't personally am culpable” (Lesnik, 2017). This goes to show how one community member making a decision from a more individualistic standpoint undermines more collective goals, inhibiting the farmer’s ability to provide a community center and to generate additional revenue that would benefit not only the farm, but also the local economy.

A disconnect can also be seen from some restaurants’ approach to buying local food. The economic opportunity for small farmers to benefit from restaurants hoping to entice customers with fresh, local food, is exciting. However, when the restaurant is more concerned with its own bottom line and aesthetics than the farmers it is buying from, it can cause challenges for the farmer. Matthew explains:

they [a local restaurant] want like a certain salad green, but they only want like this big (shows a size), and if it's this big (showing another size), no good, if it's this big (showing another size), no good... So like it will rain one day and then you can't pick it because they'll just like turn to mush in the packaging, so you pick it a day after, too big... So it's a lot of like headache like that (Falter, 2017).

Farmers seek new market opportunities through local restaurants, but can easily find themselves at a loss if the restaurant decides the product is not up to their standard, or chooses another vendor. The short-term nature of these sales can be unreliable and cause the farmer economic loss and frustration.

If the farm is viewed as a communal entity in itself, then there is an opportunity for a community to benefit socially and economically along with the farmer. Rather than weighing the benefits of the farm in an individual manner, community members, including customers, local officials, and restaurants, should see the larger benefit to the community, and themselves, that the farm services are capable of bringing. Without an understanding of these larger benefits, or the sacrifices inherent in farming on a small scale, consumers are not able to provide the community level support necessary for small farms to succeed. It appears that farmers often seek to provide community benefits, but are stifled and discouraged by the disconnect that their community has with the reality of local farming.

### ***Differing values? Unrequited reciprocity***

The lack of recognition of the communal services a farm can offer, beyond just selling local produce, leads to an important question: are

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consumers misunderstanding the value of the farm? In the sense that, the farm itself and its products are worth far more than economic and health benefits for an individual. If so, it can lead farmers to feel misunderstood and unsupported by the mismatched values the community and the farmer place on the farm. Many of the farmers share that, to them, the farm is much more than a place of production. For Daniel, “community involvement” is even part of the farm’s mission (Lesnik, 2017). Nevertheless, if these farmers feel like they are investing in the community, but the community does not reciprocate, how can they continue to want to offer community benefits?

For example, Ron questions if he is making the right decisions because the farm “run[s] really close as far as money goes” and “there isn’t a lot of people that connect the local land to the local feed for local beef and those kind of stuff. A lot of people don’t make, that I see, don’t make that connection” (Hood, 2017). If customers are not connecting the value of the services behind the products, then the farmer questions whether it is even worth offering them, which could have detrimental impacts for everyone.

Similarly, Daniel explains that “I really try hard to support local businesses whenever possible” (Lesnik, 2017). Nonetheless, he has neighbors down the street and close friends who choose not to shop at the farm store. He says there are community members that “won’t drive the 4.5 miles here, but they’ll drive the three miles to Stop and Shop” (Lesnik, 2017). He states that, “some people just really don’t care about that stuff and they care more about the smells, you know if the animals get out, things like that” (Lesnik, 2017). Therefore, missing what the farmer perceives to be the true purpose of the farm’s existence: being a good steward of environment, honoring living beings, and offering a source of sustainable community food production.

In a different experience, the farmers who do feel like their community is engaged with their farm, beyond just buying their products, and has built relationships with the farmers have expressed the sense of support these acts elicit. For example, Henry shared that:

It really does feel like more than an economic exchange. They're kind of our investors, but also I've had people like in the drought, you know we had a family come by, um, and you know, the they have small kids and they baked us cookies and came by and as they were leaving the dad turned to me and was like you know if you need to charge more money for your CSA share, then you should

do that. And these are, you know, the one guy, the guy is a wood worker, the woman is a teacher, they're not making tons of money, but they, I feel like most of our customer base sort of understands what we're trying to do and I get the sense that they want us to succeed. So it feels really symbiotic (Bauer, 2017).

Through his experience, Henry emphasizes the benefits of having communities that are understanding of the uncontrollable factors, like the weather, that put extra economic pressures on small farmers. Offering the support of an understanding of the farmers' experiences and the willingness to be flexible makes a significant impact on Henry's perception of community support. Olivia also shared how the support of the community constitutes some of the most enjoyable parts of the experience (Whitely, 2017). So what makes certain communities more supportive and understanding than others? One factor that might play an important answer in that question is trust.

### ***Does the community trust the farmer?***

As evident from the literature, trust plays an important role in reciprocity and social capital (Hegney et al., 2007; Kumlin and Rothsetin, 2005). Examining the level of trust that is exerted by the community towards the farm affects the farmer's ability to build social capital and to feel supported. Although trust and reciprocity are not linear and are complicatedly intertwined, it is important to note that they are linked and can increase social capital within a community (Kumlin and Rothsetin, 2005). Ron recognizes this and explains, "You have to trust. If people don't trust you, then they're just, they're done. I mean people will turn their backs on you in a hurry. And so I try to do very open, you know, be very open about what I'm doing and um, (pause) and honest about how we do things" (Hood, 2017).

A few interesting examples of different communities' levels of trust in the farmer are highlighted in both positive and negative experiences. To begin, Ron was verbally attacked by a community member who publicly accused him of using a harmful herbicide on his vegetables. Although Ron wrote back to explain how this was not the truth, the community member warned the whole town not to buy from this farmer through a post on Facebook. Ron says, "he'll never go to the farm. He'll never buy vegetables from us and you know and he says, nobody else should eat it" (Hood, 2017). After that post, the Ron mentions that they "noticed the difference

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in sales” (Hood, 2017). It is clear through this exchange that the community member has little to no trust in the farmer, and does not care to build a relationship or have a conversation with him about his operation or his practices. The lack of trust evidenced here manifests itself in negative community relations, a decline in sales, and a difficult social experience for the farmer.

Another example of customers lack of trust is when a different customer questioned Ron about feeding the cattle grain in the winter. The farmer elaborates, “and so um it's difficult in that people are I'm going to say, really, and I mean this loosely, they're really weird about food out here. Really weird. They have just enough information to be dangerous” (Hood, 2017). They want to know exactly what the cows are fed with the insinuation that they hold a fear or suspicion that the farmer is not going to do what is best for the customer and the cow. When in fact, Ron wants to feed the cattle grain in the winter because “it's a good supplement, especially in the really cold weather...they do a little bit better and they love it” (Hood, 2017). It is interesting to note the nuance that some consumers buying from local farmers feel the need to challenge the farmer on their practices. Although this is one of the beneficial aspects of local farming and direct to market sales, without an interpersonal relationship where trust exists, consumers may exert their buying power to oppress farmers with whom they do not trust in their farming practices.

Some consumers seem to question farmers' knowledge of their own livelihood, which is again reflected in a negative reaction to Adams' desire to conduct on-farm animal slaughter. Henry shares that after Adam applied for a license to slaughter chickens on his farm, a move which really simplifies the process for farmers and also decreases the stress of the animals, “there was a total slander campaign among a couple of neighbors” (Bauer, 2017). In fact, the front page of the local newspaper was plastered with the news of an incoming slaughterhouse, which was a manipulation of the truth. In fact, the “slaughterhouse” was a mobile processing unit that would come to the farm only for the day. Henry adds, “people are so like, driven by emotions when it comes to anything with animals and humane treatment that if like if anyone heard that we were going to slaughter a cow here on the farm, there would be protests all along [the road] I imagine” (Bauer, 2017). However, contrastingly to the community concerns for animal rights, farmers seek on farm slaughter for the purpose that it is easier, but also “so much better for the animals” than being trucked to a large foreign facility with unfamiliar smells and noises (Whitely, 2017). These small farmers are trying to do what is best for their operations, the

environment, and the life that they tend, however, it becomes far more difficult to do so when the community does not trust their ability to do perform their own craft.

On the other hand, some farmers have garnered trust within the community, which manifests in the farmer feeling supported. The significance of the influence community trust can have on a farmer is exemplified in Olivia's experience. She especially notes the importance of community trust in her business when she says, "so I mean I'm just thankful that our CSA [Community Supported Agriculture] knows us so well and they come to the farm and they all see the wash station and they trust us and there's that, like I said it's a 5, that community support I feel like really bolsters us" (Whitely, 2017). As illustrated here, trust from the community can play a large supportive role of farmers that experience financial stress, the never-ending practical challenges of farming, and regulatory government pressure.

The breakdown of trust in communities may also be a result of the breakdown of the interconnectedness of rural communities and the rural economies. If communities do not trust and build relationships with the local farmer, they will defer to spending their food dollars outside of the local economy. The lack of trust truly undermines the farmers desire and ability to offer sustainable products and build relationships in a local community. If community members do not make the effort to build a relationship with the farmer they buy their food from, then they will continue to fail to offer the support and understanding that small farmers need to continue to operate well in the New England landscape.

### ***The rewards of a supportive community: the importance of social exchange***

Due to the low economic profits generated on small farms across New England, the rewards of farming must come in different forms to sustain small farmers. Particularly through relationships and strong community support do farmers experience the benefits of their lifestyle. Daniel describes the significance of the "face to face" interactions with his customers and how he enjoyed farmers' markets because it facilitated those experiences and conversations with customers (Lesnik, 2017). Ron noted that "the rewards have to be the fresh air and the smell of the grass and seeing the vegetables grow and having people buying your beef...And not necessarily a pocket full of cash" (Hood, 2017). It's not the money itself that is the reward, but just "having people buying your beef." The act of

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social exchange wrapped up in that economic transaction offer far more than money to the farmer. Again, Daniel explains:

Coming to the farm, saying thank you. Like that actually is really nice. You know you can be having a bad day and things feel overwhelming and someone just comes up and says thanks so much for doing this. Your like, oh yeah, and that's why, again it's like nice. (Lesnik, 2017).

Receiving that recognition from community members reminds the farmer of why they do what they do in the first place. Daniel says, “this feels like meaningful on a somewhat bigger level and that really matters to me. Like trying to make a difference in the community and with like food systems” (Lesnik, 2017). To these farmers, the community is integral to the farm.

For Olivia, the diversity of relationships and richness of community that the farm has brought is a great reward in itself. “And so that's a really rewarding part of the job is that you, our community isn't just our immediate like-minded friend group, it's pretty broad, broad group of people” (Whitely, 2017). The ability of the farm to join people together who would not normally interact is often the product that farmers find most rewarding. The fact that the farm is actively bringing people together and building community around it is a manifestation of the positive impact small farms can have in communities.

## Discussion

In findings above, it is clear that the relationships of trust that are mutually benefitting and built on social, not just economic, exchange are key to the farmer's sense of purpose, fulfillment, and, ultimately, their quality of life. Reasons to build trust and repair community relationships are demonstrated in the literature. Woodhouse (2006) found that “extensive association among community members, either formally or through voluntary groups and societies, a strong degree of pride and cohesion within the community, and generalized reciprocity and associated sanctions will encourage local people to use local goods” (p. 90). Furthermore, Vera-Toscano (2013) found that “bridging social capital relations had a significant positive effect on the diffusion of trust and reciprocity” (p. 1349). The article also states that “it is expected that as the relational dimension of social capital is nurtured, it will encourage local people to utilise trusting local resources (private or public), affecting the development of the region”



(p. 1351).

Consequently, it may be implied that increasing community cohesion may help increase trust in local resources, which may in turn increase local investment and engagement in the community. These studies reinforce the findings in my research that trust is positively associated with social capital. Therefore, a suggestion from this study would be to increase services or opportunities within the community that bring people together and allow them to associate with one another, building relationships that facilitate trust.

The rewards farmers reap from positive community interaction and support become more integral in the face of economic downturns. The ability for farmers to generate resilience is intertwined with a farmers' participation within supportive networks. Hegney et al. (2007) demonstrate that that being a valued member of the community "allowed people to build supportive networks and provide individual care to other less resilient people" (p. 8). Furthermore, the study states that, "in a community where reciprocity is strong, people care about each other's interests" (p. 1335). This finding is significant because it may help inform situations where farmers do not feel like their community has an understanding of their work. There could be low community reciprocity.

McLaren and Challis (2009) found that "sense of belonging" in a community was a protective factor against male farmers relating depression to suicide in Australia. They also reported findings that "suggest that increasing social support and sense of belonging may benefit the mental health of men farmers" (p. 262). In response to their findings, McLaren and Challis (2009) underlined a significant concern of the changing rural landscape and how it may threaten a farmer's access to social resources and sense of belonging. This point is very relevant to the New England farming landscape considering the significant land pressure and rapidly developing landscape. Additionally, many of the farmers interviewed were "neo-farmers" or new to their community, not born into it (Mailfert 2007). The authors also make the point that it may be difficult for farmers to feel connected and valued while struggling, economically and productively.

Therefore, despite the resilience that social support and sense of belonging can offer to small farmers, they are also influenced by their ability to "perform" within its socio-economic environment. Feelings of isolation may be a product of perceived performance. This is an important point to understand, considering the extreme challenge faced by most small farmers to succeed economically in New England. The authors made the suggestion that "facilitating farmers to congregate may enhance social support and

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belonging” (p. 273).

Not only does this provide important care to small farmers, but the ability to build these networks also facilitate community trust and understanding between one another, offering a larger benefit to the community. The significance of being understood as a valued member of the community, as evidenced in the farmers’ description of the rewards of a supportive community, may have a positive effect on building resilience and social capital throughout the community as a whole. Therefore, an individual’s investment in the farm can set off a series of reactions and network building as a center for community. Consequently, a collectivist understanding of the services a farm provides is an important framework to facilitate these inherently social interactions.

### **Limitations**

This study samples a very small number of New England’s small farmers and does not reflect the larger farmer population. To better generalize about the relationships between the community and the farmer, the community should also be interviewed and sampled to test the findings of this study. This study raises possible concerns that a few farmers have faced, but could fail to address the more pressing financial limitations that small farmers face. Lastly, due to my own experiences in Washington D.C. with farm policy and working on small farms, I bring a bias opinion of my own experiences into the interviews and the analysis that could affect the findings. More research should be done by talking to more farmers and community members about their experience with community trust and cohesion, in addition to their perception of the role of a farm in a community.

### **Conclusion: The community as part of the farm**

Disconnect with the reality of local farming, unrequited reciprocity, community trust in the farmer, and the rewards of supportive communities all evidenced throughout the interviews highlight the significance of the role of community in small farms. A farm has the ability to generate a community in itself. It constitutes part of the reason that farmers find their craft rewarding. Farmers recognize the significance of the social capital generated on the farm because it brings them fulfillment. However, the lack of understanding of this component by community members can be costly, as evidenced above, to farmers. It is important that those

participating in the local food movement understand that, to be sustainable, the local food movement cannot just be about the food alone. It must also involve relationships built between farmers and individuals in their communities to build trust, understanding, and mutual support for one another. Without the foundations supportive community relationships, the actuality of making a living off of local farming becomes far more difficult. Farmers need to have a sense of support and the ability to ask for flexibility from their communities due to the unpredictability inherent in small-scale farming and direct to market sales. To build a more sustainable food systems, the significance of trust, reciprocity, and supportive community members must be at the forefront of the conversation.

### End Notes

[1] Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants in this study.

[2] Examples include: New England Food Solutions; Henry P. Kendall Foundation; MA Food Systems Plan; Farm to Plate Strategic Plan (VT), Rhode Island Food Strategy; New Hampshire Food Strategy; The Maine Food Strategy; Grow Connecticut Farms/Connecticut Grown

[3] Right to Farm legislation differs based on the state, however, in general it protects farmers from nuisance lawsuits filed against their operation, especially in increasingly developed areas.

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# *Orange is the New Black*: Issues of Representation and Representability

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## Introduction

Following World War II, 1950s television sets became extremely popular as both a source of entertainment and as an outlet for efficiently spreading information. Television programs aimed to cater to their target demographic: middle- to upper-class individuals with spending power. While the primary goal for viewers was entertainment, the images shown on-screen have been shown to impact and shape the way audiences thought of themselves and others (hooks, 2015). Television programs intentionally worked to maintain the status quo by reinforcing societal norms and labeling those who diverged from these norms as “deviant” or “Other.” In order to reinforce the United States’ patriarchal, heteronormative structure, “television rarely presented sexual themes, and throughout the early decades of television, topics such as pregnancy, contraception, and other aspects of characters’ sexuality were considered too sensitive to be portrayed or discussed” (Fisher, Hill, Grube, & Gruber, 2007). Deeming such topics taboo while refusing to acknowledge women’s sexual agency reinforced the oppressed status of women in society. Over the next few decades, women’s issues slowly became more prevalent, with the exception of those pertaining to gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. In fact, “before 1970, almost no gay characters could be found on television, and their relative absence from the screen continued until the 1990s” (Fisher et al., 2007). Once the 1997 episode of *Ellen* “The Puppy Episode” aired on television, during which Ellen DeGeneres revealed to America that she identified as a lesbian, television producers began including queer characters in television series at a higher rate (Fisher et al., 2007). However, these characters were still often portrayed as single-faceted, lacking any significant character development, as stereotypes of deviant butch/femme lesbians, and effeminate/hyper-masculine gay men. In recent years, television shows such as *Glee* (FOX, 2009-2015), *Shameless* (Showtime, 2011-), and *The Fosters* (Freeform, 2013-), have worked to challenge stereotypes and tropes relating to gender and sexuality by representing LGBTQ individuals as multi-dimensional, fleshed-out characters with aspirations, careers, educational experience, families, and romantic relationships, rather than portraying them merely as characters existing within the confines of common tropes or stereotypes. One television show in particular, *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-), has revolutionized the portrayal of LGBTQ women on television through its nuanced representation of numerous alternative sexual and gender identities.



## Here Comes Orange: Significance for Queer Media Writ Large

On July 11th, 2013, Netflix released the first season of Jenji Kohan's *Orange Is the New Black*, a television adaptation of the memoir written by Piper Kerman, "Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison." The television series revolves around the main character, Piper Chapman, after she is sentenced to 15 months in a women's minimum-security federal prison for charges of money laundering and drug trafficking. While the plot is told from the perspective of Piper, a young, white, able-bodied, cis-gendered, upper middle-class, college-graduate, each of the supporting characters experiences a significant amount of character development over the course of the series. In an interview with NPR (2013), Kohan described Piper as her "Trojan Horse," claiming:

You're not going to go into a network and sell a show on really fascinating tales of black women, and Latina women, and old women and criminals. But if you take this white girl, this sort of fish out of water, and you follow her in, you can then expand your world and tell all of those other stories. But it's a hard sell to just go in and try to sell those stories initially. The girl next door, the cool blonde, is a very easy access point, and it's relatable for a lot of audiences and a lot of networks looking for a certain demographic.

The character of Piper acts as a bridge, connecting viewers who might lack exposure to social ills such as poverty, drug abuse, sexual assault, and domestic abuse, to the women at Litchfield.

The series has received numerous awards, including the 2014 Emmy award for outstanding casting for a comedy series. The extremely diverse cast of the series includes a large group of women and a small group of men with intersecting identities in terms of age, able-ness, religion, socioeconomic status, education, gender identity, sexuality, immigration status, racial identity, ethnicity, and language. Black feminist author Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to describe the experiences of individuals who simultaneously embody multiple marginalized identities. For example, a black woman simultaneously experiences oppression due her race and her gender identity, and when these forms of oppression intersect with one another, the impact of the oppression is significantly larger than oppression she would face due to either identity on its own.

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According to Iris Marion Young, oppression can be defined as “structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a group,” including: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 2011, p. 42). The stories of the inmates at Litchfield highlight their experiences with oppression both inside and outside of the prison walls. Within the walls of Litchfield, multiple inmates continue to struggle with issues such as drug addiction, violence, sexual coercion, and second-class treatment. Though Piper’s character comes from an extremely privileged background that enables her to continue to occupy a privileged position within Litchfield due to her high class status and Whiteness, her shared experience as a prisoner at Litchfield allows her to develop intimate relationships with the other inmates. In some ways Piper’s character, like many White, middle and upper-class viewers, fills the position of the outsider looking in.

In addition to including an extremely relatable main character, Kohan effectively employs crude humor, intimacy, and nudity in order to keep the audience on their toes eagerly anticipating what is to come (cum) next. This eagerness on the part of viewers to witness women engaging sexually with women, and less frequently with men, allows them to take pleasure in looking, which “involves both sexual drives and ego identification – we take others as objects of the sexual gaze and also identify with screen surrogates in a (mis) recognition of the self” (Joyrich, 1996, p. 37). *Orange Is the New Black* provides a way for viewers to witness a wide range of gender identities and sexualities onscreen in an up-close and personal manner.

*Orange Is the New Black*’s depiction of a diverse range of sexual encounters in conjunction with the show’s exploration of intersectional identities of incarcerated women creates a space to challenge widespread misconceptions surrounding the topics of gender and sexuality, and dismantle dominant ideologies of deviance. What follows is an in-depth analysis of a few of the show’s main characters to examine how they contribute to the discourse on the portrayal of gender and sexuality in media.

### Piper

Piper is the “girl-next-door.” She seems to meet all the criteria of the ideal standard of beauty for women in American culture: she is young, White, and very feminine, she is of an average height, and she has blonde hair, blue eyes, a Crest smile, perky breasts, and a thin waistline. She also comes from a background of wealth, and has received a college

degree. Furthermore, despite her past relationship with a woman named Alex (played by Laura Prepon), Piper is able to “pass” as heterosexual as she claims she is “not a lesbian anymore” (Friedman, Kohan, & Trim, 2013). Piper’s ability to pass as heterosexual in the eyes of her extremely homophobic supervisor Mr. Healy provides her with a free pass from his scrutiny of the women who do identify as lesbians at Litchfield. In her first conversation with Mr. Healey, he warns her “there are lesbians. They’re not going to bother you. They’ll try to be your friend; just stay away from them. I want you to understand, you do not have to have lesbian sex” (Friedman et al., 2013.). Mr. Healy’s warning seems ironic to the viewer who has already watched flashbacks to Piper’s steamy and passionate relationship with Alex. Healy’s resentment towards lesbians might be due to the fact that “lesbianism threatens male supremacy at its core” by “threatening heterosexual males with the possibility that they will be rendered sexually superfluous” (Schur, 1983, p. 118-120). Piper responds to Mr. Healy saying she has a fiancé named Larry, and Mr. Healy’s demeanor instantly changes from one of seriousness and callousness to one of genuine care and interest. Piper’s apparent heterosexuality prevents Healy from viewing her as a direct threat to the power granted to him due to his maleness and masculinity.

Piper’s claim to heterosexuality and statement that she is “not a lesbian anymore” enable heterosexual viewers to identify with Piper’s heterosexuality while engaging in voyeurism, deriving pleasure from watching Piper and Alex pleasure one another. A study conducted by Kinsey found that “13% of females had at least some overt homosexual experience to orgasm” (Marinucci, 2016). This study indicates that though many women might not identify with an alternative sexuality, they might be eager to further explore the concept of sexuality and work towards breaking down the barrier of heteronormativity. Thus, Piper’s character enables women to explore their sexuality’s within the socially acceptable context of television viewing.

## Big Boo

Big Boo (played by Lea DeLaria) unapologetically identifies as a butch lesbian. A combination of her faux hawk hairstyle, the “BUTCH” tattoo on her forearm, her deep voice, her crude sense of humor, her dominant role in sexual activity, and her assertive body language result in her stereotypically butch image. Traditionally, the media has portrayed the trope of the incarcerated butch lesbian as masculine women who are “predatory in their search for sex behind bars” (Cecil, 2015, p. 145).

Butch lesbians have often been portrayed as hyper-aggressive women who treat other women in a derogatory manner (Alexander, 2014). Big Boo's character directly combats these harmful stereotypes that often prevent butch lesbians from being embraced by mainstream society. Speaking about her character, DeLaria says Big Boo "puts a 'human face on butch;'" furthermore, "Boo loves women. She's not a sexist pig" (Alexander, 2014 ).

Despite the adversity Big Boo faces from family, other inmates, and society writ large, she continues to freely express herself in a completely authentic manner. Society tries to label Big Boo as deviant due to her rejection of patriarchal beauty, gender, and sexuality norms; however, Big Boo remains resilient and continues to practice self-love. Big Boo's huge heart, hilarious one-liners, and love of women allow viewers to connect with and appreciate her character, opening up their hearts to the struggles butch lesbians commonly face while navigating mainstream society.

### **Sophia**

Sophia (played by Laverne Cox) is a black trans-woman. During her time at Litchfield, Sophia struggles with ideals of femininity, inadequate medical attention, family issues, frequent bullying and harassment, and inhumane solitary confinement. Sophia's character highlights some of the issues transgender individuals face on a daily basis, both in and out of prison. Sophia works as the hairstylist at Litchfield, and appears extremely knowledgeable about issues related to appearance including hair, makeup, and clothes. Sophia's consistent use of makeup and styling of her hair addresses the fact that gender is "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (McNay, 1992, p. 113). Sophia consciously performs her gender, moving and speaking in an extremely feminine manner. The camera often captures her in the process of styling inmates' hair in the beauty salon, gossiping or discussing beauty related issues. In "Lesbian Request Denied" (Heder & Foster, 2013), Sophia receives news that she will no longer be able to receive hormone treatment due to prison regulations. Sophia becomes emotionally distraught when she notices facial hair begin to grow, representing a partial loss of her femininity. Eventually Sophia is able to continue receiving hormone treatment, however, she continues to suffer from the incessant criticism from other inmates and guards. For example, Sophia's vagina is referred to by one of the guards, Mendez, as a "cyborg pussy" (Heder & Foster, 2013.), and by one of the other inmates, Taystee, as a "plastic pussy" (Trim, & Morelli, 2013). These micro-aggressions signify the ignorance and

transphobia that is still extremely prevalent in mainstream society. *Orange Is the New Black* also draws viewers' attention to another serious issue facing the transgender community – the extremely high rate of suicide attempts. A national study found that “forty percent of transgender adults reported having made a suicide attempt” (The Trevor Project, 2017). In “Piece of Sh\*t” (Briesewitz & Morelli, 2016) Sophia appears depressed and drained of any source of hope; she attempts to take her own life.

Sophia's character represents a breakthrough in representation for transgender individuals on television, a group that has continuously lacked a significant amount of representation. Sophia's character's resilience through times of immense suffering can provide transgender children and teenagers with a sense of hope, that other individuals are also struggling with issues similar to the ones they currently face. Sophia also provides mainstream society with insight into the extremely negative impact that harmful stereotypes and microaggressions can have on an individual's mental health and self-perception. *Orange Is the New Black* alerts viewers to the power of verbal violence.

## **Pennsatucky**

Pennsatucky (played by Taryn Manning) is portrayed as a redneck with decaying teeth and an accent signature of the Appalachian region. She has a past history of prostitution, drug abuse, and multiple abortions. Before arriving at Litchfield she underwent a religious conversion, becoming a religious zealot who denounces homosexuality. In the first season, Pennsatucky becomes *Orange Is the New Black's* primary antagonist, bullying other inmates for engaging in lesbian sex and frequently making racist comments. By season three, Pennsatucky has undergone an immense transformation from an uptight tattletale to a more easygoing and less judgmental individual. In “A Tittin’ and a Hairin’” (Morelli & Peretz, 2015), the viewer learns about Pennsatucky's story and her past experiences as the victim of sexual assault. The viewer witnesses a worried, ten year old Pennsatucky in the midst of experiencing her first menstruation cycle to which her mother's response is:

Now you're like a case of pop. You got value. Look, there's something you gotta know. Now that you're a-tittin' and a-hairin', boys are gonna see you different, and pretty soon, they're gonna do you different. Best thing is do go on and let 'em do their business, baby. If you're real lucky, most of 'em be quick, like your daddy. It's

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like a bee sting, in and out, over before you knew it was happening  
(Morelli & Peretz, 2015)

Pennsatucky's mother's statement reinforces the patriarchal conception of sex: that women's bodies exist for the purpose of pleasuring men. Young speaks to oppression women often face due to gender exploitation, arguing that "the norms of heterosexuality, moreover, are oriented around male pleasure, and consequently many women receive little satisfaction from their sexual interaction with men" (Young, 2011, p. 51). Pennsatucky's mother instilled the belief in her daughter that she should not develop a sense of sexual agency; rather she should cultivate a sexually submissive and passive demeanor, allowing men to use her body however they please. Later in the episode, teenage Pennsatucky sells sex for a six-pack of soda to a man named Abe, consciously treating her body as a commodity that can be purchased by men. While Abe is penetrating a blank-faced Pennsatucky, she gets stung by a bee and ends their session before Abe is able to cum. A while later, Abe corners Pennsatucky in a bathroom at a party and rapes her, claiming that she "owes him" for the soda. While Abe pins Pennsatucky against the wall repeatedly penetrating her, she remains completely blank-faced, appearing to completely shut down emotionally. Immediately after zooming in on Pennsatucky's lifeless expression, the scene switches back to Litchfield. The new prison guard named Coates, who had previously shown romantic interest in Pennsatucky, flirting with her and giving her doughnuts, begins aggressively yelling at her, blaming her for getting him placed on probation for missing count due to their doughnut detour. Coates then proceeds to pick up Pennsatucky, place her in the backseat of the van, and rape her from behind, as she remains blank-faced and motionless.

Pennsatucky's character addresses and humanizes the issues of sexual assault and violence against women that occurs both inside and outside of prison. Across the United States, many women grow up immersed in a culture within which women are expected to submit to the exploitation of their bodies and their labor. Pennsatucky's character portrays the "devaluation, objectification, and deprivation of personal autonomy" that victims of sexual assault frequently experience (Schur, 1983, p. 145). Surveys of incarcerated women in the United States have found that "more than half of the women in state prisons and local jails report having been physically and/or sexually abused in the past" (Law, 2012). Furthermore, Pennsatucky's story highlights the reality that "half of all substantial incidents of sexual victimization in prison involve staff" (Cecil, 2015, p. 134). The suffering Pennsatucky endures in *Orange Is the New*

*Black* poses the challenge to the viewer to both develop a sense of empathy for victims of sexual assault and violence, explore ways to address the issue of sexual assault in women's prisons, and challenge the objectification and commodification of women's bodies in American culture.

## Conclusion

In *Images, Power, and Politics*, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2009) argue, "Practices of looking...are not passive acts of consumption" (p. 46). Jenji Kohan's *Orange Is the New Black* provides viewers from mainstream society the unique opportunity of hearing the stories of women who identify with groups that have been historically underrepresented in media writ large. *Orange Is the New Black* is an immersive experience that grants the viewer the privilege of having a behind-the-scenes look at the social dynamic within a women's prison, while highlighting issues commonly faced by inmates such as inadequate access to medical care, sexual assault, and mistreatment. Furthermore, by presenting each woman as multidimensional and worthy of telling her story, *Orange Is the New Black* effectively works towards normalizing alternative sexualities and gender identities. *Orange Is the New Black* encourages viewers to re-examine their attitudes towards heteronormativity, gender norms and viewing sexuality as binary rather than as a spectrum.

However, it is also significant to note a few common critiques of the show, since the show still has space to grow in terms of its inclusivity. First, there has been widespread controversy surrounding death of one of the primary characters, Poussey, at the end of Season 4. Poussey's character is a black, queer woman, thus, the killing of Poussey aligns with the greater trend among television shows of "burying your gays," which is the killing of LGBTQ+ television characters. Second, it is important to acknowledge the whiteness of the show's creator and directors. In light of this, it is important to remain critical of the portrayal of people of color in the show. While *Orange Is the New Black* has challenged White mainstream society's perceptions of what is deemed socially acceptable in terms of portrayals of gender and sexuality on television, it is important to recognize that aspects of the show are undeniably problematic.

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# Starting Early: Closing The Achievement Gap Through Public Preschool

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### The Issue

The achievement gap is a disparity in learning between students in high-income families and low-income families that was first noticed around the time of World War I (Gardner, 2007). Achievement is high in affluent white areas and low in schools where poverty is common mainly because of unequal funding, but also due to geographical location, failure to meet basic health and nutrition needs, and lack of teacher professional development and quality standards (Noguera, 2009). The level of education a person reaches is directly linked with higher wages and greater wealth attainment. Individuals who obtain a college degree earn higher wages than those who obtain a high school degree or vocational school degree (Heckman, Humphries, Veramendi, & Urzua, 2014). Because income and wealth are the most direct source of inequality in America, the achievement gap is crucial to reducing it. One proposed solution to the achievement gap is high-quality public preschool.

Preschool education across the country is now firmly linked to two aspirational purposes: as the first step on a path of academic and life success for all children, especially low-income and minority children, and a wise economic policy for the nation (Phillips, 2017). According to Phillips, “both purposes are grounded in an assumption that the early developmental boost children receive from preschool will produce lasting impacts” (2017, p.1). This boost is considered one of the best ways to halt the growth of the achievement gap early on. Enhancing preschool education programs with high-quality, evidence-based curriculum and teaching can enhance children’s social-emotional outcomes. Resultantly, improvements in social-emotional functioning translate into an increase in long-term educational attainment and other indicators of positive adjustment, such as high school completion, employment outcomes, and personal satisfaction (Nix, Bierman, Heinrichs, Gest, Welsh, & Domitrovich, 2016). Ultimately, preschool is a great way to start a child on a life path to success.

### The Current Preschool Landscape

Currently, preschool varies dramatically by state. In the United States, only 69% of four year olds are enrolled in preschool. While this number may seem high, it actually makes the United States ranked #26 in the world for preschool attendance (Herman, Post, O’Halloran, 2013). Only three states and Washington, DC, serve over seventy percent of pre-school age students, whereas eleven states serve less than ten percent of preschool age children. For Latino children, the unmet need is even higher.

While Latinos are the fastest growing and largest minority group in the United States, making up a quarter of three- and four-year-olds, Latinos demonstrate the lowest preschool participation rates of any major ethnicity or race. The participation rate for Latinos is 40%, compared to 50% for African-American children, and 53% for white children. In addition, children from low-income families are less likely to be enrolled in preschool than their more affluent peers— 41% compared to 61% (US Department of Education, 2015). From this data, it is clear that not enough American children are not being served by our current public preschool system, especially low-income and/or minority students

## **Public Preschool Policy Proposal**

One potential solution to this achievement gap is a federally-mandated, fully-funded preschool program. This policy will require that all children be enrolled in school by age four. The program will be an extension of the current K-12 system, and will be administered at the state-level through the Department of Education. To ensure that all students have access to this education, the program will be fully-funded by a model similar to the current K-12 model. Most of the funds will come from the state, a portion of the funds will come from the federal government, and some funds will come from property taxes. The program will offer both half-day and full-day options. The full-day option is particularly important for helping lower-income families because studies have shown that that low-income families often have both? parents working forty hours a week and struggle to find adequate childcare (Phillips et al., 2017). The full-day option will allow poor families, especially single-mothers, to work more, knowing that their child is in safe hands. The full-day option will also have the added benefit of offering relief to lower middle and middle-class families, because it is a free program as opposed to private pay (Phillips et al., 2017). At the same time, the half-day option will allow stay-at-home parents to choose to keep their child at home half the day, and the child will still receive the social benefits of being in prekindergarten.

This program is purposefully aimed at all children. Research consistently shows that low-income and minority children benefit most from preschool (Phillips et al., 2017). Preschool increases children's concrete math and literacy skills, improves executive functioning, and prepares children for kindergarten (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013)., low-income students need this the most because they are statistically more likely not to attend preschool or to be enrolled in a low-quality program (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, higher socioeconomic

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status students will also benefit from a greater inclusion of low-income and minority children from the cultural immersion they receive in relation to their otherwise often homogeneous environments (Phillips et al., 2017). Finally, if the policy aimed to only help low-income families, there would need to be a ‘cut off’ or determination as to who qualifies, which is hard to determine. This would likely exclude swaths of people that are just above this ‘cut off’ line, but still need the benefits of a preschool program.

### **Program Design**

Although states will be able to administer the preschool program, as they do in the current K-12 system, this policy will have guidelines for program design and implementation. This program will be designed to maximize positive outcomes with the ultimate goal of reducing inequality.

#### *Curriculum*

The first element of the program design will require states to adopt a well-developed, evidence-based curriculum. There are currently three types of curricula present in the early education field: whole child, skill-specific, and locally developed curricula. Rather than target specific educational domains, whole-child curriculum promotes learning by encouraging children to interact fully and independently with the whole classroom—equipment, materials, and other children. On the other hand, skill-specific curriculum promotes learning by focusing on specific developmental domains such as literacy, math, or self-regulation. Locally developed curriculum can be a combination of any elements from the other two curricula and is usually sensitive to the local culture and demographic the program serves (Phillips et al., 2017). While there are pros and cons to each of these curricula, having every program or individual school district chose their own with little guidance creates disorganization, limits assurance of quality, and prevents streamlining and alignment. In order to ensure that every child receives the full-benefits of preschool education, this policy will not require one individual national curriculum, but will require each state to adopt a curriculum with strict guidelines as to what that should look like.

When designing curriculum guidelines, there are three big questions to consider: Does the curriculum contribute to the concrete development of math and literacy skills such as recognizing numbers and letters? Does it improve executive functioning and self-regulation skills such as sitting still and engaging in the material? F, does it teach practical behaviors such as the ability to recognize emotions and get along with others in the classroom?

Current research suggests that skill-specific curricula is most effective at addressing these three questions. Specifically, skill-specific curricula that focuses on math or literacy is most effective at boosting math and literacy achievement relative to other curricula (Phillips et al., 2017). Interestingly, despite widespread support and use of whole-child curricula, there is an overall lack of empirical support for its effectiveness in boosting school readiness (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006; Schweinhart, 2005). However, whole-child curriculum can help to address the full development of children's social emotional capacities in a way that domain-specific curricula do not (Phillips et al, 2017). Due to the current evidence, the best policy practice will be to require schools to have a baseline whole-child curriculum with a focus and emphasis on skill-specific curricula that address the three big questions.

The policy will also outline expected outcomes of the chosen curriculum. Guidelines are based on empirical evidence suggesting that these expected outcomes will have the biggest impact on achievement. The ability to analyze arguments, make inferences, use reasoning, and make decisions to solve problems are important skills to be taught (Kinzie, Vick Whittaker, McGuire, Lee, & Kilday, 2015). Additionally, the curriculum should aim to improve self-regulation skills such as the ability to sit still and engage in the material being taught. It should teach behaviors such as the ability to get along with teachers and fellow students. Besides executive functioning skills, the chosen curriculum should contribute to the development of children's concrete literacy and numeracy skills such as knowing letters and numbers (Phillips et al., 2017). All lessons and materials should be developmentally appropriate, and careful scaffolding guidelines should be included in the curriculum. Finally, curriculum should use seasonal linkages where possible, and a yearlong span of activities to develop concept knowledge and skills in situated contexts (Kinzie et al., 2015). If all of these elements are present, the curriculum will be effective at increasing school readiness.

### *Classroom*

Equally as important as other elements of a high-quality program, but sometimes overlooked, is the physical classroom design and materials. When effectively designed, a classroom promotes a myriad of opportunities for social skill development and emotional regulation (IRS Center, 2015). This policy will require classrooms be organized in accordance with the current model Universal Design for Learning. This model stresses the design and materials should be accessible to everyone. Furniture should

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be arranged in such a way that the room has different activity areas with clear boundaries. There should be areas for children to work independently and for classes to gather as a community. Areas should keep in mind noise levels of activities, and there will need to be a place for children to relax and recharge. Materials need to be relevant to the specific areas. There should be enough materials to avoid conflict, materials need to be accessible to all skill levels, and they should be safe but challenging. Finally, there will be an array of posters and decorations all at eye-level so children can see them. Lighting should be natural, building supplies cannot be toxic, and noise-reduction materials should be used to reduce outside noise interference (IRS Center, 2015).

If a classroom is designed this way, it will have the biggest impact on student outcomes. Young children will know that school is a safe and exciting space. This in turn will help to increase their social skills, especially emotional recognition, lowered aggressive responses, and increased competency (Beirman et al., 2008). The classroom will promote learning, while also being fun and inviting. Children's interest in education will increase and hopefully continue into their elementary and secondary school years.

### *Teachers and Instruction*

The third aspect of the plan will focus on teacher quality and instruction. Teacher quality involves two key aspects: hiring and retaining highly-qualified staff and offering evidence-based, strategic, and consistent professional development. Currently, there is an extremely high turnover rate in early education (Barnett, 2003). Qualified teachers quickly realize that they will be better compensated elsewhere and leave the field. Inadequate teacher compensation is a serious problem as it lowers preschool program quality and leads to poorer cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes for children. According to Barnett (2003), high turnover makes it difficult for children and teachers to maintain good social and emotional relationships, which are important for children's cognitive, as well as social and emotional, development. Among the adverse effects identified as related to high teacher turnover is increased aggression. Furthermore, educational effectiveness suffers from high turnover and low morale because teachers who are less career committed do not teach as well. In order to combat these effects, the proposed policy will mandate that preschool teachers be compensated at a level comparable to a public kindergarten teacher. As a caveat, all preschool classroom teachers will be required to have at least a Bachelor's degree in early education or a related field. Research shows that teacher education, as



measured by the achieved education level, is significantly related to quality scores (Mims, Scott-Little, Lower, Cassidy, & Hestenes, 2008). Due to its direct relation to quality, and the fact that all kindergarten through twelfth-grade teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree, this is something that will be absolutely mandatory in all programs.

In order to support continuous teacher improvement, all programs will need to offer engaging, frequent, research focused professional development. The classroom and curriculum are only as effective as the person implementing practices. In order to ensure the best practice, professional development with coaching should take place at least twice a month. Programs will be most effective if curricula-guided teacher practices are strong and up to date (Phillips et al., 2017). These professional development times will be mandatory and teachers must be compensated for attendance. This will ensure the best outcomes for children, because it will help retain high-quality faculty. Teacher education, as measured by the achieved education level, is significantly related to quality scores and outcomes for preschoolers.

## **Benefits of Public Preschool**

Once implemented, this policy will ensure that everyone benefits from high-quality preschool. This program will constantly be monitored and assessed for competency using tools like CLASS and student assessment tools like Teaching Strategies Gold, which have been shown to be the highest indicators of quality (Philips et al., 2017). The high-caliber program will jumpstart the ultimate goal of closing the achievement gap and reducing inequality.

Providing public preschool for all children will help to improve academic performance, and therefore increase graduation and higher education rates. This will raise income potential for low-income families, helping to close the economic gap (Belfield et al., 2006). Research consistently shows that children who struggle initially rarely get better on their own. Ensuring that all children living in poverty have access to high-quality preschool may be one of the more effective means of closing the gaps in school readiness and increasing the likelihood of lifelong success (Nix et al., 2016). On top of solely academic and economic benefits, research shows that preschool increases social-emotional skills. Social-emotional skills are highly indicative of overall well-being, health, and positive behaviors (Phillips et al., 2017). Additionally, people with better self-regulatory skills as a result of preschool are significantly less likely to end up in the criminal justice system and face the negative repercussions

of that system (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Ultimately, the benefits of public preschool far outweigh the cost, for both low-income and wealthiest families. Everyone benefits from the costs saved as a result of the investment, and inequality is reduced because low-income and minority students are prepared for school and more likely to finish formal schooling.

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# Staff Bios

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**Kara Murdock** is the editor-in-chief of SocialEyes. Kara is a member of the class of 2018 majoring in Psychology and Sociology. In addition to SocialEyes, Kara is a 4Boston volunteer at a nursing home in South Boston, a student intern at the Brookline Senior center, a research assistant in the Arts and Mind Lab, and a student assistant in the Social Work Library. In her spare time, she enjoys graphic design projects, reading character-driven novels, and eating nachos. Kara will attend Boston College's School of Social Work in the Fall of 2018, specializing in clinical social work with older adults and families.

**Cristina (Cris) Zubizarreta** is the Senior Managing Editor and one of the featured writers for this year's issue of SocialEyes. A member of the class of 2019, Cris is pursuing a major in Sociology with minors in French and Women's and Gender studies. In addition to contributing to SocialEyes, Cris works at the Boston College Women's Center and volunteers at a drop-in center for homeless youth. Cris' passions include: cooking vegetarian recipes, hammocking among the trees, hot yoga, and good coffee. After graduation, Cris hopes to work at a social service agency serving LGBTQ+ youth prior to attending graduate school. She will be editor-in-chief of SocialEyes for the 2018-2018 academic year.

**Juliana Hillis** is an Associate Editor of SocialEyes. She is a member of the class of 2018 and studies Sociology in the College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College. Beyond SocialEyes, Juliana is the secretary of Italian Club, runs the mentorship program for Links, and volunteers at Gifford Cat Shelter. After graduation, she will be attending law school to specialize in family law, hoping to focus on women's healthcare, reproduction, and reproductive justice. In her spare time, she enjoys cooking, doing yoga, and working on jigsaw puzzles.

**Ashbrook Gwinn** is an Associate editor for the SocialEyes journal. Originally from Aiken, South Carolina, she is a member of the class of 2018, and majoring in Sociology with a minor in Faith, Peace and Justice. She has a passion for social service, and hopes to integrate her heart for service into work in the field of Public Policy. In addition to SocialEyes, she is a member of the BC cross country and track & field teams. She is happy to have worked with Bridgette Merriman on her piece concerning the effects of organized sport on stigma. This is Ashbrook's second year working for the journal and she is very thankful for all the work everyone has put in to bring this year's SocialEyes journal together.

**Joe Ertl** is a senior from Stamford, CT, with a major in Sociology and a minor in English. He is hoping to utilize these two fields with a particular focus in writing about public policy and economics as he prepares for law school in the upcoming fall. In addition to working as an editor on SocialEyes, he is a part of the BC Big Brother Big Sister program, the BC running club, and works at the Welsh Dining hall on campus. He is excited to be joining the Sociology journal for the very first time and grateful he gets to contribute to the team!

**Bridgette Merriman** is a sophomore from Rochester, NY, studying Sociology and Biology in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences on a pre-med track. She is both an editor and writer for SocialEyes, in addition to being a violist in a chamber group, a Tour Guide, a swim instructor for children with special needs, and the President of Boston College Dance Marathon. Bridgette has a passion for helping others, which drives her deep interest in sociology, and she aspires to be a pediatric oncologist. She loves spending time with her friends, staying active at the Plex, FaceTiming her family, and relaxes by watching comedy specials on Netflix. Her favorite comedians are Dave Chappelle and Jim Gaffigan :)

**Deniz Uyan** is a second year Ph.D. student in the Boston College Sociology Department and graduate student editor of SocialEyes. She recently defended her M.A. thesis entitled “Inclusion and Alterity: An analysis of American flag hijab discourse.” Her research interests include sociology of race, postcolonial theory, and global and transnational sociology. She has presented her work at the Society for the Study of Social Problems, and the Eastern Sociological Society.

