
DANNY FUNT PRESENTS
Calling My Shot
PARENTAL
ADVISORY
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Calling My Shot

By Danny Funt

For those who see someone swing for the fences and choose to smile rather than sneer

Danny Funt is a senior at Georgetown University. Funt, 22, was editor-in-chief of *The Hoya* at Georgetown in 2013 and will be attending the Columbia School of Journalism in the fall of 2014. He grew up on California's Central Coast with his parents Amy and Peter, sister Stephanie, and dog Dottie. Funt can be reached via email at dif7@georgetown.edu or on Twitter @dannyfunt.

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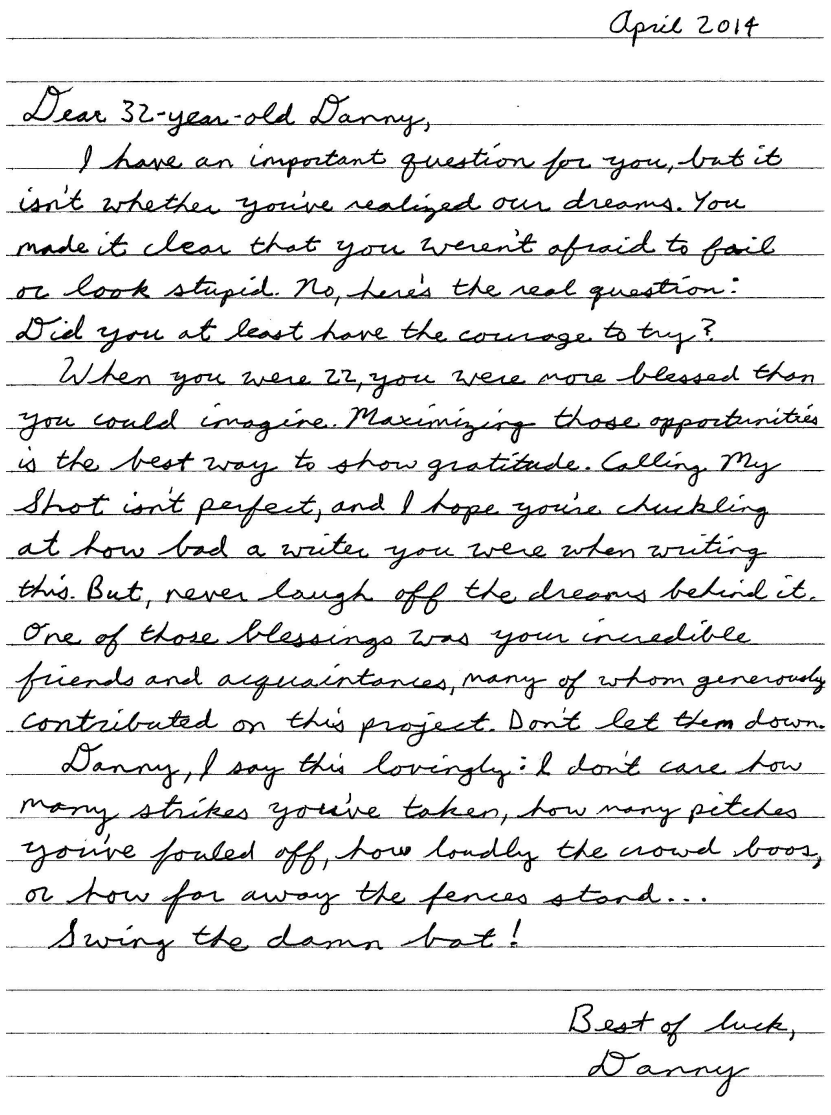
Here's something that you can use as an analogy / My life is like a child's illusions become reality – Kanye West, "See Me Now"



April 2014

Dear 32-year-old Danny,

I have an important question for you, but it isn't whether you've realized our dreams. You made it clear that you weren't afraid to fail or look stupid. No, here's the real question: Did you at least have the courage to try?

When you were 22, you were more blessed than you could imagine. Maximizing those opportunities is the best way to show gratitude. Calling My Shot isn't perfect, and I hope you're chuckling at how bad a writer you were when writing this. But, never laugh off the dreams behind it. One of those blessings was your incredible friends and acquaintances, many of whom generously contributed on this project. Don't let them down.

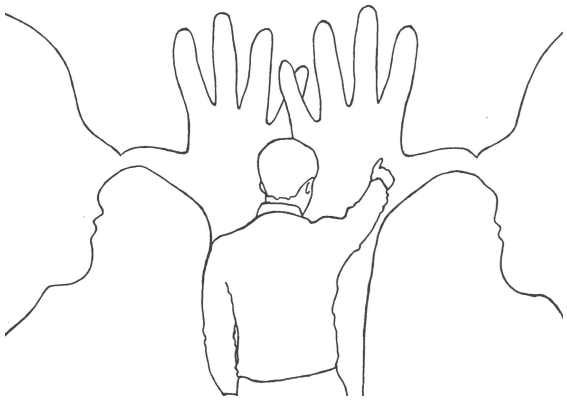
Danny, I say this lovingly: I don't care how many strikes you've taken, how many pitches you've fouled off, how loudly the crowd boos, or how far away the fences stand...

Swing the damn bat!

Best of luck,
Danny

Calling My Shot

Now I could let these dream killers kill my self-esteem / Or use my arrogance as the steam to power my dreams. – Kanye West, "Last Call"



I HAVE SPENT countless hours immersed in late-night "pillow talks" (from separate beds) with my college roommate of three years, Ryan Whelan. Our deepest conversations trail unspeakably late into the morning, when chirping birds make it hard to finally fall asleep. Only one such discussion, however, has ever left the two of us hopelessly aroused in restless befuddlement.

"For all the times when we are paralyzed from boldly pursuing a desire — be it professional, academic, romantic, social, physical, etc. — are we really so cowardly as to fear failure more than we yearn for success?"

On the opposite coast, in my hometown, my childhood friends Alex Dickey, Jason Mitchell, and I have labored to unpack the implications of YOLO ("you only live once"). Yes, it's a jaded and belittled anthem of the Twitter generation, perhaps because taking the concept literally would be, for many, demoralizing. Failure to maximize opportunities, whether due to laziness or lack of conviction, is a remarkably defeatist approach toward determining your destiny.

At Georgetown, there is an alarming tendency to look down on aiming high. It's evidence of a distorted distinction between arrogance and optimism, self-importance and self-confidence. There's no doubt that the Hilltop is an ultra-competitive environment. But, sometimes competition drives people to race to the top; other times it pressures them to stay close to the pack. I don't accept that the dreariness of some Capitol Hill internships or the allure of Wall Street paychecks leads students to awaken

from the naïveté of their dreams. It appears instead to result from a broader cultural phenomenon — one that stifles the idealistic spirit that so many teenagers yearn for when they are drawn to this campus.

Whether you're speaking of politicians, entrepreneurs, entertainers, artists, inventors or anyone seeking to make an impact on a broad scale and break from the norm, ambitious aspiration requires a leap of faith. It demands a sense of personal potential and a commitment to self-improvement, which, for college students especially, should be celebrated, not scolded.[1]

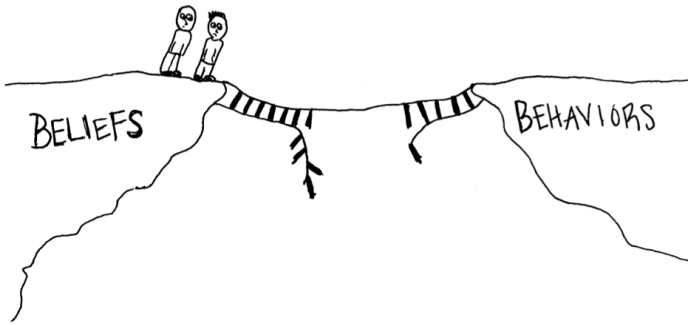
As a young child, Wiffle ball prowess had me certain that I would be a star Major League ballplayer. I even had the assuredness to bet my sister, Stephanie, that I would outperform Babe Ruth's rookie season. (Since she might read this, I'm going to pretend to have forgotten the gaudy dollar amount of that wager.) The ship has of course sailed on those Big League fantasies, and I will forever look back sheepishly on that juvenile delusion. Ironically, it was Ruth who, legend has it, "called his shot" by pointing to the fences in the 1938 World Series before delivering a home run on the next pitch to that exact spot in the bleachers.

"Juvenile delusion" — is that how I'll look back one day on *Calling My Shot*, too? I hope not. I never managed to clear the fences in a decade of youth baseball. But, crazy as this sounds, I don't regret the wager I made with my sister. Even as a young kid, I was never driven by a sense of innate talent, but rather by the limitless potential to control my own destiny through hard work. I just didn't have the discipline to take enough batting practice or field enough ground balls. If part of that came from a fear of failure, then I was doomed from the start. I hope I've learned my lesson.

So, Stephanie: Double or nothing?

A Bumper Sticker Ethos

I had a dream I could buy my way to heaven / when I awoke I spent that on a necklace. – Kanye West, "Can't Tell Me Nothing"



The following is from a discussion with ***Robert Bies****, a professor of management at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business.*

ON ONE LEVEL, we're human beings; we're not perfect. Herb Simon and Jim March wrote way back, "We are boundedly rational." The whole notion of belief to action assumes some rational connection, but we have cognitive failings as humans. My good friend and colleague at Harvard Business School, Max Bazerman, talks about "predictable surprises" — that we just have certain heuristics and biases that we fall victim to. That isn't to say that you can't be more vigilant and minimize their effect, but they're a factor. There's also the other piece that we learn how to behave in a certain way because it's being reinforced, so we continue to act that way and search out situations that reinforce what we do. If the issue is that we have to look at a homeless person on the street, what do we choose to do? We choose not to look because we don't want to see the problem, then you don't have to do anything about it. That's why I talk about "see, judge, act, and revise." The most important step is do you see it?

There are also social pressures. As human beings, we have cravings to be loved. It goes back to the neuroscience of having a pleasure center and a pain center. It's wonderful to have people telling us we're doing the right thing, and when you take on a system and do counter-normative behaviors, you're going to feel pain because people are going to push back. That's why in class I keep saying, "Stand up, but never stand alone" because you have to use those social influences to do good. It is really hard to stand up and stand alone, unless you've developed a capacity to really not care what people think. One of the flaws in this Western

culture view is the idea of the individual hero. Think about America and its rich history, it's usually one individual who's standing up. If we just focus on that — and that's more myth than reality because most of the good that happens in the world comes from a group of people pushing forward — the question is do you have the skill set to do the right thing? First to see it, then to decide something needs to be done, then to decide what are the skills for acting? Maybe sometimes you don't act, maybe you wait until you have enough power and influence. It's all about doing the power/political analysis to connect the means and the end.

When people dismiss Machiavelli, what they never say is that his techniques were effective. We can debate the morality of them, but they were effective. For me, the issue is which means? I'm more of the Saul Alinsky point of view: to do nothing is the most unethical. Now, if doing nothing is the right thing because you are overwhelmed and you would be eliminated, then you probably don't act. You have to think strategically for any action that increases your odds for success.

I focus on the importance of passion and engaging people's emotions. Quotations are inspiring; they get you to feel the better you. On one level they'll provoke you, but on another level they'll evoke emotions. For me, quotations are like distilled wisdom. Proverbs are distilled wisdom; there's a Book of Proverbs! Every culture uses proverbs as a guide. Many times for the quotations I use in class, the figures themselves are inspirational, and their words take it to a whole new level. JFK was right: words do matter. It's when people begin to destroy those words that you see the darkest moments in history.

One of my heroes is Thomas Merton, and Merton has this line in his book, "For me to be a saint means to be who I am." I think that's the Jesuit calling — finding the greatness within yourself and realizing it. If you want to use the business-speak language of leveraging of your strengths rather than berating your weaknesses, I'm not saying you don't work on your weaknesses, but we spend so much time focusing on what we're not that we fail to realize what we do. There's a scene in the movie "Akeelah and the Bee" where Marianne Williamson is quoted as saying, "Our deepest fear is not that we're inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure." That speaks to the issue about the greatness from within.

Potential scares people. It's almost an existential crisis: If you believe you have greatness and skills, that means you have to make choices to realize them. That's a scary proposition. It's a whole lot easier if someone tells you what to do versus you choosing for yourself. You may fail? So? Failure is part of the territory of life. One of the books I assign is *The Adventures of Johnny Bunko.* He has six principles, and one of them is "make excellent mistakes." Persistence trumps talent. This whole pre-professional notion

suggests there is a some plan. It's not like you have some destiny that you're born with; it's up to you to create the plan. I think that is what education is supposed to be about.

Merton writes, The function of a university is to help you understand how you can become a valid offering to the contemporary world, and then to realize whose decision that is." It's yours. That's just a different mindset. I think that, in its purest form, is what we aspire to do at Georgetown. You have gifts and talents, and it's up to you to figure out how to go out and do something with them.

* * *

The following is from a discussion with ***Matthew Carnes****, a professor of government at Georgetown University and a priest in its Jesuit community.*

ONE OF THE things I try to do as a teacher, and to a certain extent as a priest, is to find the right way to invite and encourage people to take that step to do that greater thing, that thing that will both fulfill their own capacities more — those things they have latent within them — and actually do more good for the world as well. The crux of that is very tricky because we can also really hurt ourselves as we strive for things that are either not in keeping with what our true capacities are, or even by not appreciating where we are in terms of living our true capacities. I try to normalize trying and normalize striving, and at the same time I try to acknowledge that if we really strive, we will fail sometimes. We will be more lazy than we would like. We will be more unable to respond the way we would like. It's crucial to recognize that and feel that kind of goad inside us, that thing in the pit of our stomach that says I could do something more, and respond in the best of ways, which I think is more in the flavor of invitation and encouragement. In some ways it's a stepping forward onto the tight rope wire, rather than a stepping off the cliff. It's saying I'm going to take that first step, but doing it with caution and with a full heart.

That's very tricky because I've seen people do violence to themselves trying to do something that is not in keeping with who they are. Especially at a highly competitive place like Georgetown, I think people can be holding themselves to standards that are not their own. But when it comes to that internal one? I think we should really be striving toward that. One of my deep goals as a Jesuit is to help people figure out what that thing is. It's not just going to be not eating ice cream; it's going to be what's that thing that's going to most actualize me? There should be kind of a relentless longing there, and if we can come in touch with that it's almost intoxicating when we pursue it. That's worth following because it's so life giving.

Behavioral psychology is starting to unpack a few of these things, and it's really interesting where we're starting to find things where we're systematically irrational. In spite of general rationality, there are things that we misvalue and misperceive. Maybe one of those that psychology shows but that we also just have a native sense of is a deep status quo bias. It's much safer to stay where I am right now. It's scary to step out on that tight rope, even if I know that wire is leading me to a very safe place; even if I've been practicing and I have a pretty high degree of certainty that I can make it across that. That's why colleges and universities keep pushing you in a gentle, caring, and transformative way to think about things that you wouldn't have thought about before. A lot of us would never pick up Plato or Aristotle, but we're always better for having actually done it. A lot of us would never grapple with the fundamental theorem of calculus, but we're better for having done it. A place like Georgetown says, "Go abroad. Go to some other culture. It's going to be really different for you."

There can be a bias to be safe and secure. One of the reasons I wanted to be a Jesuit was because it keeps pushing me to keep stepping out into new spaces — places I teach, the student's I'm teaching, the academic questions that come up. They keep forcing me to keep rethinking and relearning.

We're human. In a religious sense, what does that mean? It means that we're not God. Christian spirituality would say there's some fallenness in us that keeps us from constantly having our eye so singularly on the focus of where we want to be. That might be a fallenness, but another way to name it is that we have this mortal flesh. It gets tired. It can only concentrate so much. I'm constantly talking to students who think they should be able to study all day. I keep having to tell them to tone that down a little bit. You think about a certain balance there; your body can only tolerate so much. If you want to have a single-minded purpose, you have to have some rhythm so that you can have times when you're focused and some times when you're not. When I think about what we slowly acquire as habits, those can be the things that keep us in the long run aimed on what matters most to us. Ben Franklin famously had his daily schedule. He got up at a certain hour and had a certain amount of time to think about things in the morning, a certain amount of time to read the news, a certain amount of time to working and answering letters. That helped focus him, but he also had a certain time when he would just rest and be completely off. That's hugely important.

Monks do the same thing. Monks are single-mindedly focused on God, but they realize that they can only do that by having others who support them — by having the same schedule, by being around one another praying. The history of monasticism is in some ways people saying, "We need to live this single-heartedly, single-mindedly." They did that for 10 to 30 years, and then

everybody seemed to start to drift from that. Often that order would get shut down, or they would completely re-found themselves. One of my favorite orders is the Trappists. Trappists live incredibly austere lives. Their full name is "Cistercians of the Strict Observance." Their whole goal is to live this ordered life that will keep them focused on God, but they realized that if left to themselves, they will always fall into this certain kind of laziness. So, they have built in that every seven years, a monk from another monastery comes to their house and his role is to be what they call the "corrector." He watches them for a while and he says, "You know what? Our rule says you're supposed to get up at 2 a.m. I notice a lot of you coming in at 2:05. We need you all to be stricter about that." Or, he says, "Our rule says we're supposed to eat incredibly simply. But I notice a lot of you have peanut butter around here instead of eating stuff off the fields." And so they correct one another and they realize that helps them stay focused. I think it's built in our humanity in certain ways that as we become more mature and choose what we will focus on, we choose the structures that will help us with that.

In my own life, I see a spiritual director — sometimes it has been a Jesuit, sometimes it has been a layperson, a nun — who can help me stay honest with myself on staying focused about what I want to do. I live in a Jesuit community and go there for all my meals and am there for masses. There's a way that that order and structure keeps me focused. I don't have a to-the-minute daily routine that I have to follow, but if you look at the way I live, it's incredibly regular. I find that if I don't get up at a certain time or if I don't exercise regularly or if I don't have some time for prayer, I lose focus. I get tired, I become distracted, I become ornery. There's something about saying, "Ok, given the weakness of our human flesh, how can we tie our own hands in the best sense so we can get ourselves focused?" But I don't think we can do it quite the way Aristotle did. He used to work with an orb in his hand. The idea was if he started to drift off asleep he'd drop the orb and it would make this great noise. We can only go so far with that, right? We have to have respect for keeping time to relax and keep ourselves focused.

It's actually quite comfortable and easy to be mediocre. The first thing I was told as a Jesuit was there are three temptations to being a Jesuit. One is to enter for bad reasons, and you'll never last if that's the case. Another is to leave for the wrong reasons. But the third is to stay and be mediocre — to wallow in this pit of mediocrity. It can be very easy to say, "I'm just human, I'm just average, and this is the way I am." If we can find that piece that really makes us most alive, there's something radiant in each person. Too often, by making that cookie cutter standard, if you don't fit that you think you're just mediocre. There's something spectacular in each person, and first we have to name it. I can't name it for someone else, they have to find it on their own. But

when they do, boy, then it's hard not to be motivated. You think about what it's like when that kid finds that sport they're in love with, or that student finds that subject they're in love with, and they stay up at night reading or they go out and practice every night for hours after dinner. Finding that love can really set people off. Without it, people can say, "I'm just mediocre and I'll settle."

My understanding of God and what human kind can be says there never has to be an ultimate settling, so I never write somebody off. I see some people and say, "Oh, gosh, they're settling now." But I don't see that as a final thing; I think there are still opportunities no matter how old they are or how scared they are to eventually find it. The beautiful thing about a place like Georgetown is it gives you lots of opportunities to find those things. The difficult thing is sometimes it can seem like you're on a time schedule to do it, and you're surrounded by some people who seem like they've already done it. And so we can make these comparisons: "Oh, I'm so terrible because I'm not doing as much as they are." This takes time. This is the work of a lifetime; this is the stuff that's worth a lifetime. It's why it's always interesting and new to me. But we have to be really patient and really reverent toward it because it's a tender, beautiful thing.

* * *

By Taylor Coles

IN MANY SITUATIONS, there seems to be a serious disconnect between what people say they believe and what they, under close examination, end up doing. This fact, however, raises a question. What is meant by believing something, and how should we understand belief if we are to go about challenging the beliefs/actions dichotomy? In this essay, I would like to highlight two approaches to belief that have contrasting implications for both this problem and many others in understanding how people come to hold and sustain the attitudes that they represent as their beliefs about the world.

The first approach, the one that I see as dominating much of our implicit attitudes towards belief in America, might be called the "conscience model." Heavily influenced by the Protestant theology of many of the country's founding intellects, this school of thought suggests that political and religious opinions are fundamentally private matters. The paradigm case of belief for these thinkers was the relationship between God and the lone conscience engaging in silent confession. By contrast, I would like to advance a "public model" that seeks to understand beliefs in terms of their status as features of social space. According to this model, a person's verbal and non-verbal actions count as evidence that define what is public knowledge about his or her belief and

for what he or she can be held accountable. This approach rejects the internal focus of the conscience model and also shifts what is emphasized in belief from authenticity to public commitment. It is the dominance of the conscience model of belief, and the consequent isolation of belief from social accountability, that gives rise to much of the difficulty involved in understanding the beliefs/actions dichotomy.

From the perspective of the public model, it is easy to see that the idea that beliefs are produced by solitary soul-searching is very dangerous to many of the central values of engaged democratic citizenship. Without a conception of belief that recognizes the essentially public nature of political commitments, it will be very hard to make any sense of how people in democracies should reason with each other. If I decide that it would be unjust of me to hold you accountable for the opinions of your conscience, as some seem to have suggested when they have acted as apologists for religiously or culturally based bigotry, why should I think that you and I could argue about anything at all? The idea that belief is a matter of some inner faculty of conscience precludes an understanding of society that places ethical importance on argumentation and a rational search for truth. Being an active, engaged, and consistent believer requires that one submit oneself to intersubjective examination. Contrary to the pretensions of the conscience model, introspection is not a path to truth. No one is born with the truth. To put an earlier point somewhat radically, I hold that we need to stop thinking that there are internal mental states that could count as true beliefs. Truth is an engaged, responsive struggle over opinions. It is that struggle that is the normative content of democracy.

By defending, but also amending our opinions when they come under scrutiny, we take up a relationship toward our beliefs that avails us in making our behavior more consistent with our professed attitudes. The luxury of the conscience model is that it denies other people the ability to challenge our perspectives. People begin to use sentences such as "Well, that's just my opinion" to shield themselves from challenge. We become enthralled by the fatuous notion that our opinions, simply in virtue of their being things that we have at one point thought, have some special importance. They do not. By separating the question of what one believes from what one is willing to do, the conscience model allows people to think of themselves as having beliefs in a way that is entirely divorced from the public struggle over finding truth that is central to reasoning as a whole. For the exact same reason, someone's having of an opinion in this private sense says remarkably little about what they will actually do with regard to that opinion unless they have committed themselves to seeing that opinion defended in public practice. Unless people have understood their beliefs as a commitment that they are willing to offer up as a public fact about their positions in society and how those

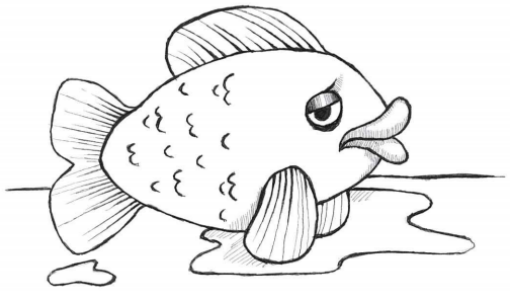
positions constitute their identities, they are unlikely to reflect on those beliefs as they go about their daily lives. It simply will not be relevant.

In short, people ought to treat their beliefs as public commitments and take up the challenge to engage debates over their beliefs. Having done so, they will see that beliefs can become central to ethical action in the world. If one begins the arduous process of developing a life philosophy with an eye towards commitment and holding oneself accountable for one's opinions, the result will be much more consistent and much more central to one's everyday life. Responding to the blatant hypocrisy that characterizes the belief systems of so many people requires nothing less.

Taylor Coles *is a junior at Georgetown University and a member of the school's national champion debate team. He is originally from Spokane, Washington.*

Small Fish in a Big Pond

I feel the pressure, under more scrutiny / And what do I do? Act more stupidly. – Kanye West, "Can't Tell Me Nothing"



By Sam Schneider

The Cynic & The Activist

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT cynics and activists don't mesh well. While archetypical activists believe they can make a difference, cynics doubt and mock. How can a small fish have an effect on such a big pond? Does the small fish just want to be a bigger fish?

If we take a look at history, there are, indeed, countless examples of small fish (a relative term) transforming big ponds (another relative term). Names like Martin Luther, Charles Darwin, and Mahatma Gandhi come to mind. All had different pursuits, and not all of them were "activists" in the strictest sense, but all started off as small fish in big ponds. Admittedly, they each became quite big fish, but they were dwarfed by the world around them until the very moment they helped turn it on its head. There have always been individuals like them who challenge the status quo, work with unwavering determination and attract others to their cause. While the cynic may call their motives selfish and harp on their flaws, the cynic also enjoys the fruits of activists' labor.

But what most distinguishes the activist from the cynic, in my opinion, is courage. Not necessarily the courage to stand up to an oppressive regime, a morally objectionable norm, or anything of that ilk. Rather, it is simply the courage to *try*, to pursue change with the fortitude one needs to stare down adversity, and keep pushing forward with uncertainty, regardless of rate of progress or odds of success. The cynic may claim her non-committal skepticism protects from idealistic folly, but she also must admit it can, paradoxically, be a self-imposed impediment to any transformative success.

For every small fish that is able to impact a big pond, and in turn, become a big fish, there are countless small fish that do not. That doesn't necessarily mean they did not have an impact, it could simply be that they went unrecognized. Many small fish also come and go without ever having any large impact whatsoever. But as my friend Sa'ed Atshan, an activist and academic who has devoted his life to the Palestinian cause, once told me: the pain of inaction can be far greater than the pain of failure. To the activist, being a small fish in a big pond is better than being a fish out of water.

Technology & The Activist

SWITCHING GEARS, WHAT interests me most about this dilemma as I see it — that is, whether or not to *try*, to jump in the pond no matter how big it is and how small we are — is how technological advances have fundamentally altered the equation. It seems clear that advances in information and communication technology over the years have empowered the individual, opening up channels to more places, more people, and more ideas.

Take Julian Assange, the founder of the whistleblowing site Wikileaks and a self-identified transparency activist. Regardless of how you feel about him, his actions, or his cause, he is by most measures a small fish in a big pond, miniscule compared to the leaders, institutions, policies, and systems he seeks to expose. But for some reason, I have a hard time seeing him that way. It's not because of his celebrity status, which came as a result of his most influential leak back in 2010. No, more accurately, it is because he became something more than a small fish once he got a computer in his hands. It is only through technology that he is able to coordinate his global network, attract leakers, and publish confidential documents that threaten the behemoths he confronts. If it hadn't been for modern technology, his crowd-sourced, hacking-driven activism would be impossible.

Or take Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian man who set himself on fire to protest the injustices he was tormented by at the hands of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali regime. Self-immolation has been tried before; Tibetan monks have practiced it as a form of protest against China's occupation of their country for years. But it wasn't until Bouazizi's story went viral across social media in Tunisia that revolution seemed possible. His act alone did not spark the Arab Spring, but rather, the narrative of disenfranchisement and disaffection that it embodied did. And it was the pervasiveness of social media and communications technology that helped leverage that narrative into a wave of mass uprisings that overthrew four heads of state. With the world watching, one small fish became millions.

Talk to most IT and communications people and they'll tell you the map is shrinking, barriers are falling, and the building of a global community is well underway. Perhaps the fact that millions of people, with more everyday, can access and share nearly any information they want at any given time means ponds are not as big as they once were. Or perhaps it means fish are not as small as they once were. Either way, for activists, having an impact now seems somehow more in reach.

Sam Schneider *graduated from Georgetown University in 2013. He is a reporter for TOLOnews, stationed in Kabul, Afghanistan. Schneider is originally from Sandy Spring, Maryland.*

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By Alex Honjiyo

IN MEXICO, CAMPAIGNS to fight poverty, empower women, and support economic development literally litter the street corners of cities and towns throughout the country. Yet these efforts by the state and federal governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations are often met with overwhelming frustration, mistrust, and apathy within the Mexican populace and, above all, among Mexican youth.

However, one buzzword has been changing this cycle: entrepreneurship. It's not a new concept in Mexico, but a rash of structural reforms and exciting economic development has inspired people to take part in an unprecedented number of government and private initiatives to promote a change in Mexican business culture and make Mexico into a hotbed of entrepreneurship and innovation.

In a world of more than seven billion people, it can seem like we are all small fish in a big pond. Being the small fish that most of us are, it can seem as though the actions that we make in life are fairly inconsequential; our actions only relevant for the few family, friends, and coworkers that we interact with in our day-to-day lives. In a modern world saturated with stale advocacy campaigns, elections, and efforts to "change the world," our individual impact on the goals of these public endeavors can seem negligent.

The sentiment behind the question "Why vote when my vote doesn't count?" is a relatable one on election days around the world — especially in the face of seemingly insurmountable systemic obstacles that provide a decent rational basis for believing that for small fish, it makes more sense to stay out of the fray.

So what is happening in Mexico? For the first time, Mexicans can see how they can make ripples. The entrepreneurial spirit empowers an individual to not only think about how they can survive, but how they can thrive and dramatically change a community or an industry with their ideas and their ventures. It's this empowerment of the individual that can impact not only the business culture of a country, but can influence the webs of family and contacts that channel through a country like Mexico.

Has Mexico become the new Silicon Valley yet? No. But the growing tide is a shift in attitude that could come to impact Mexico in a big way. It is an attitude that looks to empower individuals, communities, cities, and countries that can show small fish how what they do, despite the occasional grueling feeling of inconsequentiality, has the potential to snowball into sweeping, grass-roots change.

Alex Honjiyo *graduated from Georgetown University in 2013, and is working in Mexico on a Binational Business Fulbright grant. He is originally from Woodinville, Washington.*

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By Nicholas Dirago

I VOTED FOR Andy Shallal in the recent Democratic primary election for mayor of the District of Columbia. I did so knowing that Shallal, the uber-progressive restaurateur who was polling a distant fifth, was not going to win: the 2014 race featured a crowded field of candidates with two clear frontrunners, and the punditry had made it abundantly clear by Election Day that the primary was really a choice between incumbent Mayor Vincent Gray and Councilmember Muriel Bowser. The latter won, comfortably. I was the proverbial small fish in the big pond of D.C. Democrats, and my vote for a candidate with no chance of being elected was ultimately "not going to matter."

What's more, I had to go out of my way, to some extent, in order to cast my unimportant vote. When I arrived to the polling place — located a *grueling* three blocks away from my house and from that of many nonvoting Washingtonians — my name didn't appear on the register; there had been an error in processing my registration. Fortunately, D.C. offers same-day registration, so all I had to do was go back to my place and grab a utility bill in order to prove my residency. This procedural snafu cost me about 15 minutes of my day. The disruption was slightly frustrating but, I think, worth it.

All this isn't to say that I was a more responsible citizen than you if you didn't vote and could have (though, if you didn't, chances are I was). I'm almost certain, however, that many people — especially young, temporary residents of the city — would have just said "fuck it" if they found out at the polling place that there was an error in their registration. "I've got a thesis due in three days, and my vote's not going to matter anyway. I tried, at least." (After all, at soccer camp, trying got you a trophy that was just as big as the one they gave to the kid who scored four goals against you.)

The point is that your vote isn't supposed to matter. Neither is mine. Nobody's is, you self-absorbed 20-something. We're all entitled to an equally miniscule share of the electorate and a complementary "I voted!" sticker. Most talking heads who offer commentary on this subject will try to convince you that your vote, in fact, matters: "Every little bit counts. You could be the one vote that turns the tide!" Man, oh man, you would be one special, history-making snowflake. Of course, even in the case of an election decided by a single vote, the obvious answer to this commentary is that there's no reason to think your vote in particular was the deciding one any more than any other schmuck's vote. But, I digress.

In deciding who wins an election, it doesn't matter *who* casts the individual ballots; it matters what the voters decide *collectively*. Voting is not about you; it's about us. Your vote doesn't matter; ours do. It's about the entire pond and every fish in it, not any individual fish. "Your vote" is not really even a category in this game.

The fact that the "my vote isn't going to matter" line of reasoning is so pervasive is, I think, a really interesting statement about Western identity construction. (Feel free to roll your eyes, skeptics, but please roll them on to the next sentence after you indulge yourself.) When defining ourselves, we are all but incapable of doing it in anything but terms of difference from some Other — our friends, our compatriots, Jennifer Lawrence, whomever. And, if you've read your Hegel — or, you know, the Wikipedia entry on him — you'll recall that our own self-understanding is largely hinged on two processes: First, recognition by that same Other against whom you're defining yourself, and second, *dominance over* the Other, entailing some sort of struggle that yields an unequal distribution of power in the relationship between you and the Other. This might seem abstract or maybe even excessive, but why else do you think I've 1) chosen to involve myself in this expressive project, and 2) included semi-clever asides that imply that I'm better than you?

A major reason that so many highly educated, otherwise motivated individuals don't vote, then, would seem to be that voting, for the most part, deprives us of realizing either of those two processes: recognition and domination. When voting, we can

express ourselves to a certain extent and certainly define ourselves in relation to the Other, but we vote in secret; the Other isn't there to provide recognition. Nor can I really dominate any Other, at least not nearly as extensively as I'd probably like to. To be sure, a party or a candidate can achieve dominance, but *I* — the voter — cannot. I need other voters in order to win, and that makes me feel dependent rather than dominant.

Voting reminds each of us that we are indeed small fish in a big pond; it reinforces the unsexy truth that we are one of many and that our contribution doesn't matter any more or less than anyone else's. There's a word for this: equality. And that's the funny thing for a culture in which equality is a bedrock principle: we don't really like experiencing the nitty-gritty of it.

Especially for students at elite universities and other occupants of the upper-middle class habitus for whom sources of dominance and self-actualization — not unlike *Calling My Shot* — come at us left and right, voting just doesn't cut it for our standards of feeling decisive and important. To be sure, everyone should have the opportunity for a deep sense of empowerment ownership over his or her life. The problem is that we tend to extend this power and ownership over others. Then we start doing things like colonizing and enslaving — or, more immediately, making our student organizations "competitive" and "prestigious." It's all wrapped up in the same Western mode of self-understanding.

No, voting won't make you feel special. It will, in fact, remind you that you're not special — that you're *equal*, or a small fish or whatever. Maybe that's disappointing to you. But if we want a thriving democracy, people can't stay home on Election Day because they've got something else to do that will meet their standards for self-actualization. Every once in awhile, we deserve to be taken down a peg — at least if we live our lives under the impression that we're situated a peg or two above others.

And, crucially, the fact that your individual vote doesn't matter in no way means that voting is unimportant. John Lewis was bludgeoned within an inch of his life in the name of equal access to the vote. Hundreds of millions of disenfranchised slaves, women, children, and minorities throughout history would leap at the opportunity to cast a ballot once or twice a year. Even today, equal access to the ballot box is in jeopardy in states around the country. Not to mention the fact that votes help decide how tax dollars are spent and what we value as a society. The privileged and educated — especially the many in our generation who claim to be "socially conscious" — have no real reason not to exercise their right to vote.

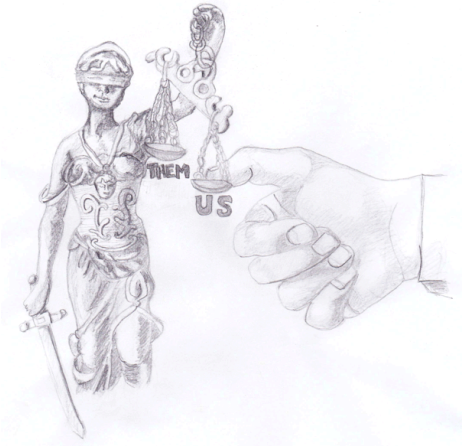
So, next Election Day, please vote. Go out of your way if you have to. It might be tedious. Your candidate might lose. Your vote won't matter. You won't feel special. But you just might feel equal, and that's something that we need to get better at being ok

with. Voting is just one of many ways that we can enter into a space defined by equality, and in the grand scheme it's probably a small step. But it has immense symbolic and didactic importance. I think that with every ballot cast, we're a little bit closer to a dialectic not of masters and slaves, but of brothers and sisters, citizens and equals. That's what matters — not your vote.

Nicholas Dirago *is a senior at Georgetown University. He is originally from Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey.*

Some Lives Are More Equal Than Others

I feel the pain in my city wherever I go / 314 soldiers died in Iraq, 509 died in Chicago. – Kanye West, "Murder to Excellence"



By Mark Joseph Stern

IF YOU LIVE in America, your life seems better than almost anybody else's. From the moment your existence comes to light, you are the constantly the center of somebody's attention. You are the star of your own sonogram, the scene-stealing supporting actor in that horrifying video of your entrance into the world. Your birth certificate announces your induction into the world of bodied humans. Your parents will nurse and coddle and care for you, and if they fail, the state will find other parents to nurse and coddle and care for you. When you are a teenager, your mundane and, yes, first-world-specific angst will be treated as something more than mundane by your friends and, if necessary, a paid professional. And so on. Even if, in adulthood, you find yourself wracked with physic pain and existential anguish, there will be people there to care for you, to offer you a miracle cure. You will live the good life.

All life may be equal, then, but American life feels emphatically more equal than most. This has become vaguely impolitic to say. It seems somehow insensitive to note that billions of humans get none of the perquisites listed above, that a child born in Uganda simply won't be as valued by as many other humans as a child born in the United States. The reason, I think, is that valuing the worth of life in terms of how many people care about you at any given time feels fundamentally faulty. Life, we are often told

(correctly), is inherently worthy, no matter where you're born, no matter whom you're born to. But that can't override the fact that, the more people who care about you, the more likely your struggles, your ideas, your victories, and your failures will seem, in short, to matter.

I'm not convinced, however, that it's particularly healthy for us to feel we matter quite so much. On a normal day, we see ourselves refracted through a hundred shattered mirrors and, from that, have to piece together some semblance of a self. I am not bemoaning modern technology or labeling a whole generation narcissistic. But I do think it's worth noting that, now more than ever before, we are able to view ourselves as the perpetual center of attention. It gives us a sense of value, of importance, to feel so many pairs of eyes trained on our every move. Our lives become performance; our performance becomes our lives. So when the eyes turn away — when we realize that we have all along been very much alone — the balloon pops, the value drains away, and though we remain the stars of our own shows, we realize there is no one left in the audience.

Is it the presence of an audience that makes American life seem to matter so much? Is it why we expect a great hue and cry for every American death, but treat a thousands deaths on another continent as a somewhat sad but inevitable fact of life? If so, I fear we are in for a reckoning. The Declaration of Independence averred that all men are created equal. The idea, of course, is that our equality is there from the start. Life in America feels more equal because it seems to matter more. But what happens when we realize — as we all eventually must — that the things we think matter so dearly are often, at bottom, profoundly empty? That's the moment when we slide straight back to the point where we started from, when our life is revealed to be no more or less important than any other human in the world. The moment, in other words, of complete and total equality.

Mark Joseph Stern *graduated from Georgetown in 2013 and is a writer for Slate. He is originally from Tallahassee, Florida.*

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By Thomas M. Gibbons-Neff

THE SUN GLANCED off the top of the village in a burst of crimson, and then they shot Matt.

They shot him twice in his left arm, two thick thuds and he was on his back writhing in pain. Chad James, an avid Florida

Gators fan and a god with a medium machine gun, picked up his rate of fire and stood up on the bullet-raked roof to cover us as we dragged Matt back behind an outcropping.

I was kneeling and Matt was gasping. Blood darkened his uniform as his brachial artery pumped with abandon. He was my assistant team leader and my best friend. Two years my senior and from the same state, we found ourselves, in the winter of 2010, trying to lead an eight-man sniper detachment as two brothers would helm a gym class football team. We disagreed loudly and publicly, but the days would always end with our arms around each other's necks, as we marched towards the curvature of the earth, assured in our friendship and our faculties.

But now he was dying and I had forgotten my script. "Breathe, take it easy, the helicopter's coming," I fumbled for words as I jammed my knee into the pressure point in his armpit and wrenched down on a tourniquet.

Matt lived to see us come home seven months later but was never the same. He died on his motorcycle only a block from his house in August of 2011. My eulogy quoted the definition of ballast. That was Matt to me, the team and to everyone he knew. Our ballast.

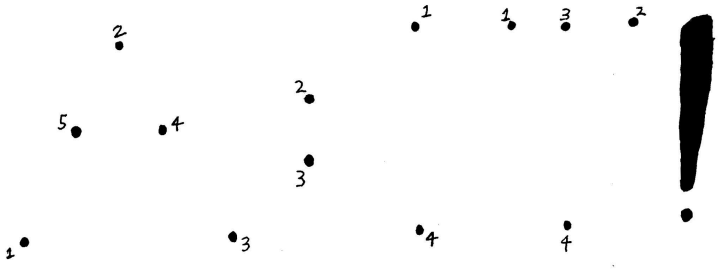
The war is ending and Matt's death is just one in so many that seem to spiral out from Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, his death and the man Matt was, is emblematic of a generation that answered the sound of the guns with a smile and a happy heart only to return changed.

And so we buried Matt on a rainy day in Arlington, and my white gloves soaked through with the autumn drizzle. I gave the flag to his mother on behalf of a grateful nation, and as I kneeled at her feet I was back on that roof with Matt. He was bleeding underneath me and I had forgotten my script.

Thomas M. Gibbons-Neff *is a junior at Georgetown University. He served as an infantryman with the First Battalion, Sixth Marine Regiment from 2007 to 2011 and participated in two deployments to Afghanistan. He was executive editor of The Hoya in spring 2014, and his writing has appeared in The Atlantic, The New York Times, and TIME Magazine. Gibbons-Neff is originally from Boston, Massachusetts.*

Professors, Profess!

Scared to face the world, complacent career student / Some people graduate but be still stupid. – Kanye West, "Good Morning"



THERE IS AN unwritten rule for classrooms, whether in elementary school or the university: teachers should remain politically neutral. Yes, students of all ages are highly impressionable. Yes, professors are entrusted with an authoritative platform. But refusal to connect the dots between academic issues and their real-world implications is a severe disservice.

As a senior at Georgetown, I took a government course on "Prisons and Punishment," which highlighted this country's tragically deficient criminal justice system. To my surprise and dismay, classmates approached our professor privately on at least several occasions throughout the semester to chastise him for, as they saw it, advocating for political responses to the subject at hand. What a twisted interpretation of the classroom's purpose and the professor's function.

Many of us have had bouts of price tag sickness while studying at Georgetown. No matter how exhilarating the experience or promising the post-graduation prospects, some guilt and uneasiness accompany any indulgence valued at nearly a quarter of a million dollars. The antidote for guilt is conviction, and students perform a civic service of sorts if education informs action. But when we fail to live up to that promise, a disconcerting disconnect emerges between how we behave in the real world and what we espouse from the comfort of our academic armchairs.

Education is more than cerebral gymnastics. Rather than take courses on Sudoku puzzles and Rubik's cubes, the content of our studies matters — not only for vocational training, at least at Georgetown, but also for moral maturation.[2] If we are truly committed to making something of our academic labor, we should be more supportive of the rare professor who occasionally, you know, professes.

* * *

The following is from a discussion with ***Mark Lance****, a professor of philosophy at Georgetown University and co-founder of the school's Program on Justice and Peace.*

THE WAY THE norm of neutrality is usually put is, in my view, completely incoherent. The idea that anything could be presented in a politically neutral way strikes me as absurd. Even if I'm not explicitly arguing for a position, the range of topics that I take to be relevant and the kind of issues that we discuss constitute taking a position. So, if I teach an economics class and I never tell you that capitalism is the right form of economic organization, but all we do all semester is look at monetary policy within a capitalist world and never discuss socializing banks, then of course there's a political agenda there. You're being trained implicitly to think within certain parameters and with certain presuppositions. What's particularly bothersome to me is that, by doing that, I'm training you to do that while hiding that fact from you. I would much rather someone say, "Capitalism is the best way to organize a society. Here are my arguments why."

Now, of course it would be wrong for them to say, "You have to agree with me or I'll fail you" — that's straightforward coercion — but my view is that I ought to be upfront about the point of view I've got. If I do that in a way that's open and inviting and encouraging you to think for yourself, you can agree or disagree or take another class with a professor who teaches it differently. I think you get a better and more honest education and, in the end, far fewer restrictions on student autonomy when you get a wide variety of people arguing for positions.

If I just get up in front of class and start announcing a bunch of things dogmatically, then of course the kids who came in with the other point of view are just going to get defensive and hate me; some may just write what they think I want on the exam. But if I'm openly offering reasons for positions and listening to people who object to them, then I think I've got as good a chance at opening a real dialogue where everyone, including me, is capable of changing their views. I think that's the whole point of education: to keep us in a practice where we call our views into question and figure out which ones are right. I don't like this way of thinking: Do you teach your controversial opinion? It all depends on how.

The caricature that you get from the outside is that professors are saying, "Believe this political claim or I'll flunk you." There are probably some people who do that, but I think it's extremely rare, and the ones who do are recognized by everyone as being incompetent teachers. Everyone agrees that our job is to make you think well for yourself. For those who hide that they've

got views in a way I take to be ideological, that's pretty common. There are tons of classes that tacitly frame issues in politically controversial ways without being upfront about the fact that they're doing so. As Howard Zinn said, any historian who chooses some finite amount of stuff to talk about from the infinite amount of events that have happened in history is making politically nuanced choices. Whatever the choice is, good or bad, it's a choice.

I also think there are a lot of professors who do it the way I do. I'll often tell people, "Here are the famous people who disagree with me." Even in sketching the arguments for the alternative views, I don't pretend like I'm neutral. I'll do my best, but maybe a defender of that position would say I misrepresented it.

The one view that drives me up the wall on the abortion debate is, "Well, I think abortion is murder, but I'm not telling anyone else what to think." If that's what you think, shouldn't you be telling people not to do it? If you think that, you can't also think, "Who am I to tell people they're wrong?" It follows that it's your duty to tell people that. If you actually think people's lives are being ruined, get off your ass and do something. As Martin Luther King said, there comes a point when silence is complicity. I can respect to some extent differing views on many issues, but if it's a really pressing issue and I think they're wrong, I think there's something really important hanging on the fact that they're wrong. So no, we don't need to be wimpy relativists, we need to argue this out. On the abortion issue, either I'm right and these restrictions are repressing women, or you're right and we're murdering people — either way it's really bad! One of them is wrong, so let's figure out which one and stop doing the bad thing.

One caveat I want to make in the other direction is that we also have to pay attention to the fact that in the classroom there's a big power differential; I can imagine my utopian form of a classroom, but that's not the one we're in here. So, given that we don't have a neutral discussion space — and we have it less the more heated the issue is — I don't take exactly the same approach to discussing a controversial political issue with my students as I might with a colleague. It's very easy given the power dynamic for my assertions to come across as dogmatic rules of what you have to believe. You have to actively work to build a space in the classroom where everybody understands that these are just arguments, not demands from the authority figure. If the issues are emotionally raw for people, that gets harder to do.

The classroom is a funny space in some ways, but I don't think the right way is to pretend like you don't have opinions or that they don't really matter. That's just dishonest.

* * *

The following is taken from a discussion with ***Marcia Chatelain****, a professor of history at Georgetown University and the recipient of the 2013-2014 Dorothy Brown Award, which is given annually by students to the school's most outstanding teacher. The interview was not recorded, and therefore some responses are paraphrased.*

CHATELAIN IS ADAMANT in challenging "the fantasy that professors have a responsibility to always remain neutral, and that students can't glean a professor's ideology any way." "I find it alarming," she adds, "how much we don't take advantage of discourse in the classroom out of a sense of neutrality."

In particular, Chatelain cites the value of addressing contentious current events. She was previously a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma, where professors were instructed not to address the shooting of Travyon Martin because the topic was too volatile. "I think it's silly to think we don't bring in all sorts of baggage when we teach," Chatelain explains. Failure to allow open discussion makes college seem like "an exercise," which she finds inappropriate.

Professors should model clear thinking, Chatelain says, as opposed to enforcing a double standard of open-mindedness for their students. "You have to be really honest about things you grapple with," she adds.

Part of the reason why professors can be so guarded is because of the potential for confusion and false allegations. "You see examples that become so disastrous and so misunderstood," Chatelain says. "I've seen the consequences of when students say one thing, the professor says another, and it blows up in your face."

* * *

The following is from a discussion with ***Henry Schwarz****, a professor of English at Georgetown University and director of the school's Justice and Peace program from 1999-2007.*

IN THE HUMANITIES, we're talking about what's the goal of human knowledge and the point of life? We are asking the big questions here, and we're asking them in a place that is not only academically excellent but also one that's dedicated to really transforming the human species so that it's not just efficient, but just. Democracy and citizenship are utterly tied up with our theoretical search for truth.

In the case of Marx and if there is a Marxism, which is open to debate, Marx himself lived the life of a revolutionary, and his life was devoted to social transformation. Whatever he wrote was secondary to that purpose, although he wrote from the perspective of a revolutionary to create a more just society. The philosophers thus far have only interpreted the world, he wrote, the point is to change it. It's the most central sentence in the Marxian corpus. To divorce those things as if there's an abstract theoretical Marxism from the purpose of Marx's life would be utterly false to the spirit of the enterprise.

A long time ago, one of my professors professed a kind of Marxism, and he had a very interesting take on this which was that at the time young adults get to college their minds are made up; their character is formed. They've made the existential life choices that will determine how they will progress through adulthood. In college they get seasoning, they're given options, but really the die has been cast by adolescence. It has to do with more than the individuals' conscious mindset, but rather what their parents allowed, their class situation, their sexual orientation, their gender, and their race. Life's choices are largely made before they even get to college, and what they learn in the classroom is really only a small fraction of what goes into them. So to think that professors are preachy and that a student is going to become a Kalashnikov-carrying revolutionary after four years at Georgetown is a bit of a stretch. Professors can be shaping, but they're not going to change someone's life so radically.

Do people teach value-neutral facts in the humanities? I don't know if many people still subscribe to that, if they ever really did. What model would that really be? Fair and balanced? That's more an ideology of journalism than it is professional academia. Somehow journalism — really very recently — has developed this mindset that there is an objectively neutral presentation of the facts in which the reporter is not supposed to take sides or have an evaluative stance. But, that runs counter to the nature of presenting facts because whenever you do that, you're taking an evaluative point of view and you are connecting the dots, making inferences from different sources and creating an analytical package. The journalistic ethos of objectivity is recent, and the idea that it extends to academics is really an imposition.

Who Are You (or Am I) to Judge?

MY MIND IS haunted by the faceless Internet commenter's inevitable rebuttal whenever I write for publication: "Who the hell does this guy think he is?" It can be a stifling challenge to young journalists, but it's also an important question in an age when traditional gatekeepers no longer control access to a mass audience. I discussed this issue with **Maureen Corrigan**, a professor of English at Georgetown University and book critic on *NPR*'s "Fresh Air" for more than two decades. Corrigan has served as a judge for the Pulitzer Prize and the Los Angeles Times Book Award, and authored the memoir *Leave Me Alone, I'm Reading* and the upcoming book *So We Read On.*

DF: There is an American tradition of anti-intellectualism that even Tocqueville observed, and yet I suspect that a lack of respect for expertise is not as rooted in our history. Is this populist sense of authority — that you're no better qualified to speak or judge than I am — more of a recent development?

MC: My first response even listening halfway through your question is, "Wait a minute. What about the Know Nothing party?" There is this idea in a democracy that everybody gets to open their mouth and say what they think; no person is better than the other. We've got that strain all the way through our history. I think what's different is that we do, from the '60s, have more of a suspicion of authority, more of a suspicion of experts and what they're doing with their knowledge, and more disillusionment. So, there is more of a sense that it is American to be part of the crowd, and if you set yourself up above the crowd there's something arrogant or self-serving or elitist about you; that that's essentially un-American. Why have the Tea Party and the Republicans captured this vast stretch of people, mostly white middle-class, who feel like they're being ignored in all sorts of other ways? They're always railing against pointy-headed intellectuals as though there's something antithetical to the very idea of being American if you want to know things and live that life of the mind.

DF: On the subject of the Tea Party, one can't deny the revived role of religious traditionalism and how that can run counter to a respect for intellect and education. That's certainly at play in politics, but does that also extend to commentary and the sort of work you do?

MC: No, because of the media outlets I'm on. The only way I feel it is if I'm in a particularly masochistic mood and I look at some of the posts that my pieces receive. For instance, two or three weeks ago I received a book called *The Heathen School* by the historian John Demos, who taught at Yale. It was about a school set up in the early 19th Century in Connecticut that drew young men from Hawaii, from Palestine — from all over — to this little rural spot in Connecticut. It was called the Heathen School because they would go back to their home countries and be missionaries. My producer didn't particularly want to do the piece, but she emails me a day later and says, "Your piece has taken off on the *NPR* website. It's one of the most clicked-on pieces of the week." So, I look,

and mostly what it is was this raging argument by a lot of listeners who think that somehow, by talking about the failure of this school — there was some intermarriage there, and racism came into play — that Demos and I were celebrating the failure of these missionaries. Once again, here was the liberal media waving their cudgel and ridiculing the efforts of people of faith. That's nutty, but any excuse will do in order for people to feel disrespected or victimized. I think certainly the Religious Right has political power, it has economic power, and you see it in all these states waging fights on closing abortion clinics.

But, I keep thinking about this question "Is it more?" and I keep going back to people like H.L. Mencken writing about the Scopes trial. Certainly there were a lot of yahoos running around then, too, who had power and who said you can't teach evolution. We're still waging that battle, but is it more? Maybe they just have more of an opportunity to voice their views.

DF: Right. It might not be a new element in society, but certain media have allowed it to proliferate. Whether it's Amazon.com or the existence of self-published blogs, more people have the ability to broadcast their voices. How has that trend played out during your career?

MC: I don't think it's a good trend. When I came up, I was inspired by reading people who really knew their stuff and owned their material. I've mentioned John Leonard in class, who in my lifetime was one of the best all-around culture critics and literary critics. For a while he edited *The New York Times* book review. He was on *CBS Sunday Morning* talking about just about everything, and was also the books editor for *The Nation* for a while. He got his start, by the way, from William Buckley. Politically, they were completely poles apart, but Buckley saw Leonard's writing and gave him his start. There's a place to revere people like that who've got that sort of intellectual expertise.

Everybody can have their own blog now or weigh in on Amazon or wherever as to whether a book is worth four stars or five stars. There's this sense of "Hooray, the gates are open. There are no more gatekeepers. Thank goodness the tyranny of the big publishing houses is over." It's not a perfect system, but I'd prefer to have the gatekeepers. I'd prefer to have people who know what they're talking about, telling me what they think about certain issues rather than having this cacophony of people who mouth off easily about things. Once in a while you'll get somebody who mouths off who comes up through blogs and actually does know what they're talking about. So, great, more access for them. But, there's much more skepticism toward any authority weighing in and saying they know what they're talking about and you don't. We see that especially in criticism and journalism, but also in a lot of different areas.

It's sort of the nightmare that Dwight McDonald (the distinguished 20th Century commentator) was talking about where everything is audience-driven. Even academia is audience-driven. We hand out these evaluations electronically now at the end of every semester: "Did you like the class?" or "Rate your professor." It's a good thing in that when I was in college you never had that power as a student and, yeah, there were duds who should have been tossed out. But, on the other hand, it has led to a watering down of the curriculum and more texts being selected in classes that are designed to please or entertain rather than to challenge. So, the power of the audience is not something I celebrate.

DF: When you speak of "gatekeepers," that certainly applies to publishers, but it does also, to some extent, apply to critics. Reviews influence sales and visibility, and you especially have that effect as a Pulitzer or LA Times Book Award judge. In your position you'll inevitably face charges of elitism — often unfounded, from people who don't know your credentials and experience. But from your own perspective, when you're thinking about writing in a review, "I dozed off twice while reading,"[3] or when you're receiving a phone call from an author saying, "Professor Corrigan, you've ruined my life,"[4] how does that weigh on you?

MC: Not at all. The only way it weighs on me is if it's a debut novelist, in which case if it's going to be a negative review, I won't do it because nobody is going to read the book anyway.

DF: Is that a confidence you developed over your career, or when you started were you already that sure of yourself?

MC: Oh, no. No, I think I've become more hesitant over the years because I know from the side of being an author, and I know from hearing, that it does matter. People work on these books for years. As a professor, I factor in effort and revision into people's final products, but I can't grade the authors on their effort.

DF: Might you also be reluctant to criticize because their livelihood is at stake and they might not get that second book deal?

MC: No one outlet is going to determine someone's career, so it's not all up to me. Honestly, I do feel like the big responsibility is to this platonic ideal of literature. What does this book say that it's setting out to do and has it done it, yes or no? It's not about pleasing the author, or the publishing house, or even particularly the audience who's reading the review. It's about what do I think. Every week is this great exercise in me sitting down and trying to be really clear: What do I really think here? If I'm having trouble writing a review, I know I'm lying to myself.

DF: Is it possible to articulate a threshold for when you sort of pass the bar as a commentator? Is it a PhD in English? Is it a certain number of books read or years of experience? As a consumer, you look for ways to know that beyond just judging the text.

MC: I always say that they don't give out a PhD in book critic-ry. I wrote a forward recently to this collection of writing by Nelly Bly (the turn-of-the-20th-Century investigative reporter). I'm looking at the forward and it has got all of my credentials there: professor, Pulitzer Prize judge, blah, blah, blah. That has very little to do with my legitimacy every week or my authority to say whether something is good or bad. I think the authority derives from how much have I read. The threshold? How many hundreds or thousands of books? I don't know. It has to come from years and years packed with reading. The second place the authority comes from is the strength of my own writing. That's why all those awards and lifetime achievements have nothing to do with anything, because you can have all of that and still not be a very good writer.

DF: If you don't share the perspective of the author or have familiarity with the subject matter, are you more hesitant in a review?

MC: The short answer is no. The reason why is: If you're an author writing for an audience, then it's part of your job as a writer to bring me in, whoever "me" is. If I'm supposed to be part of that audience, then I can weigh in on how well you've done it.

There have been a lot of flaps over the years. The most recent one was a few years ago when I reviewed a Korean novel (*Please Look After Mom*), which I thought was like a romance novel; the level of writing, the story — it was melodramatic and sentimental. The problem was, in addition to giving it a really bad review — and this was an international bestseller — I said it was "kimchee-scented Kleenex fiction."[5] (Kimchee is a traditional dish in Korean cuisine.) We thought that was akin to saying that a movie is like a "spaghetti western." I was the focus of the type of attack when your inbox is breaking down with emails. I thought maybe I could see how someone would think it was racist. But come on! If I had said, "It's kimchee-scented Kleenex fiction and boy did I cry reading this …"

I still think I can say whether this novel is worthwhile or not. Can I say whether it's an accurate depiction of the Korean experience of an 80-year-old confused grandmother? No, but I can say whether the novel evoked a powerful experience, whether the characters were developed, whether the plot drew me in. That I can say. Another reviewer at the *Washington Post* reviewed the book months later and gave it a tepid favorable review. He said to me one-on-one, "I saw what you went through." A lot of the comments to mine were, "Who are you to say? Who are you to judge?" The novel is published internationally, so there's my invitation to judge. It wasn't just published in Korea.

DF: For college-age writers who want to address something that might be over their head, do you have any advice for how they can approach that topic without being oblivious to their own lack of expertise?

MC: It's a great question. I'm just coming off writing this book about F. Scott Fitzgerald, who has got to be one of the most written-about American authors we have. People have spent their lives saturated with his work and life. Again, who am I? But then you turn the question back — who am I? I'm someone who has read *The Great Gatsby* 50-plus times, who has spent decades of my life teaching it, and I think my strength as a critic is I'm a really close reader and I love the book. That's what I've got; that's what's on my plate. I'm not going to be the person who knows everything about Fitzgerald's life or the publication history. You're going to come to me because I'm funny, and I'm spirited, and I'm not afraid to show love and reverence for something. If you like that, great. If you want something else, you won't come to me. But for that question of "Who am I?" you have to constantly turn that on yourself and take the snotty challenge out of it. What have I got to bring to this conversation? You'll never have the perspective you have now, and that's what you've got to bring to the table.

Big Enough for Billboards

Hood phenomenon, the LeBron of rhyme / Hard to be humble when you're stunting on the jumbotron. – Kanye West, "Devil in a New Dress"

WHEN PLOTTING THE marketing campaign for *Calling My Shot*, my reluctance to engage in aggressive advertising felt self-contradictory. Why should there be anything shameful about shameless self-promotion? Isn't that the essential theme of this project? And yet, something like a poster in the center of campus was simply out the question. Some of us just aren't big enough for billboards.

Who makes that call? At what threshold of popularity does putting your oversized face on public display become savvy branding instead of unsavory self-importance? Of all the criticism levied against public figures, one critique strikes me as tragically misguided: "I just can't stand her. She takes herself so seriously." Sure, John Edwards' $400 haircuts or Sarah Palin's thousand-dollar shopping sprees are an unbecoming show of vanity, but is that true of anyone in the business of courting public approval?

This is one of those topics for which I have more question marks to offer than periods. Fortunately, *Calling My Shot* has the support of insight from a collection of distinguished perspectives. Here are reflections on this question from two people with extensive experience staring down the ever-scrutinous public eye.

* * *

By John J. DeGioia

IN CONTEMPLATING THIS question, it is helpful to keep in mind two key elements: perspective and authenticity.

Perspective speaks to the manner and context in which you consider your position or successes. Do you view them in a vacuum, independent of external forces — of the many people, institutional structures, and other factors outside your control? Or do you recognize that you are part of a system, part of a particular community or institution's history, contributing to its health and vibrancy just as it provides a context for you to flourish as well? When your perspective is appropriately comprehensive, with credit appropriately apportioned, the question becomes less about self-promotion than it is about telling a complete story in which you — and your accomplishments, to be sure — are a component.

This is where authenticity enters. A deep understanding of yourself — of your innermost values, beliefs, and passions — is essential to any leadership position or ambition. What drives you to chase certain dreams? What contributions do you believe you can make? How do you feel that you, uniquely, can be of service to others? And do your motives deserve further examination?

Leadership that is based on a deep understanding of such questions — and is therefore an authentic extension of your deepest beliefs and values — connects you and your accomplishments to a "good" outside of yourself. It provides a foundation for connection to those around you, and so any conversation about perceived self-promotion is no longer relevant. Your common goals and common work, in turn, receive the proper attention and engagement they deserve.

John J. DeGioia *is president of Georgetown University, an office he has occupied since 2001.*

* * *

By Nate Tisa

TWITTERING BUCKLED WHEN Ellen Degeneres' Oscars selfie received more retweets than the website could handle.

President Obama later referred to the incident as a cheap stunt. However, politicians have seized onto the popular trend in a big way. The president's attempted selfie with Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt earned him some very visible disapproval from the first lady at Nelson Mandela's funeral. Bill Clinton appeared in a selfie with "Late Night" host Jimmy Fallon.

A recent photo of Hillary and actress Meryl Streep *taking* a selfie went viral. "Bipartisan" State of the Union selfies by congressmen and senators polluted the airwaves with grainy, smiling faces and outstretched arms.

Why are our nation's leaders suddenly so keen on this cultural phenomenon? *Politico*'s Natalie Villacorta had this to say: "Elected officials are increasingly employing the selfie as a digital-age tool to appear as authentic, accessible and spontaneous to the public, even while what's often underlying their growing use of the self-snapped photos is a calculated effort at control and careful image-making."

Before replying with cynicism — "those phony politicians and their self-aggrandizement" —we must remember the underlying principle of democracy: ultimately, it's our fault. In the age of mass media we have intentionally and unintentionally heaped impossible and contradicting standards on those who dedicate their lives to public service.

Candidates have to be tall or risk appearing weak. They must be attractive but not too attractive, particularly for women seeking to carve out a space in a field still very much stacked against them. They must be superhuman but relatable, perfect in their governance but imperfectly just-like-you in their personal lives. What do we expect in an environment where even the genuine must create and deploy facades in order to accomplish anything meaningful? We no longer elect men and women to public office. We elect characters.

Student government may be one of the largest scales of polity before the honest-to-God political theatre, and we often do our best to imitate it. During my time as president of the Georgetown University Student Association, I was face to face with the expectations and criticisms fixed on (campus) public figures every day. The most common critique conveyed to me was that I was arrogant; that I took myself too seriously because of the position I held.

In many ways, they were right. In so much as GUSA is a form of public service, it requires what most service does: personal sacrifice. The massive time required from the office, and other leadership posts like it across campus, will inevitably affect your GPA, personal relationships, and structure your college life. There will always be those who seek positions in order to gain rather than to do. But for myself and the dozens like me who I have met at Georgetown, peer universities, and in local and federal government, we make those sacrifices in the name of service precisely because we believe in what we are doing.

In Washington, D.C., we sip ambivalence like a fine wine to demonstrate that the concerns of others hold no power over us. We use it as a weapon to protect ourselves from caring, sometimes to indicate we are doing bigger, better things, other times

because we lack the confidence to stake a claim or take a stance in a given area. That public figures demonstrate passion on any given issue does not mean they take themselves too seriously; it makes them honest advocates.

In order to succeed in public office, you need two things. First, you need to believe in your ideas. The sense of direction they give you needs to be strong enough to get you out of bed every day and set you marching off to make them a reality. But that alone makes you an idealist or a commentator. Second, and most importantly, you need to believe in yourself as someone who is uniquely capable of executing those ideas.

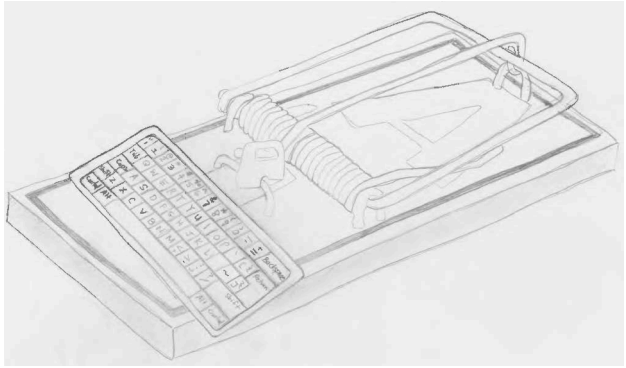
Is it narcissism or arrogance to believe you're something special? Maybe. But leaders have to believe in themselves and their convictions before they can persuade anyone else to join their cause. Strong belief that you are the best man or woman for the job implies that you have a unique responsibility to excel in serving your constituents. Without that sense of purpose you end up with leadership from behind — leaders without confidence who are too easily influenced by the opinions of special interests and privileged advisors. All too often, they pander for popularity by deferring the ideas and duties they swore to uphold. Losing that sense of responsibility has done a number on our Congress over the past few terms.

Success can breed arrogance, especially when it comes after pursuing ideas with genuine passion. But it always breeds the perception of arrogance. For those seeking to change the world or just the world they live in, buckle up. There will always be those who criticize with no intention of acting. That path is much easier, but those who seek out public service chose a different path. Our society would do itself a service by reaffirming the humanity of our leaders and the authenticity of passion.

Nate Tisa *is a senior at Georgetown University. He was president of the Georgetown University Student Association from spring 2012 to spring 2013. Tisa is originally from Rochester, New York.*

Keystrokes to Success

Who complain about what he is owed? And throw a tantrum like he is 3-years-old? / You gotta love it though somebody still speaks from his soul
– Kanye West, "Diamonds From Sierra Leone"



A CLOSE FRIEND of mine in high school was destined for political greatness, but his youthful shortsightedness doomed any such prospects. For his senior yearbook quotation, the friend regrettably wrote, "Thanks Tut, Gramps, Choom Gang, and Ray for all the good times." Ray dealt the weed; the Choom Gang was a circle of intimates who smoked it. And so, with that incriminating disclosure public for perpetuity, my friend's future in elected office surely went up in smoke, too.

Or not. As you may already know, that's not the story of a hometown friend, but rather of President Obama, back in his days as a wayward renegade at prep school in Hawaii. He discussed those experiences in his 1995 memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, and by the time he ran for office, Obama's fling with recreational drug use was old news. It makes you question whether widespread concern over the threat of Internet activity coming back to haunt you is just baseless paranoia.

Tempting as it may be to mouth off online, some self-censorship is prudent. However, an entire generation of Web users has developed a debilitating degree of guardedness when dealing with anything that could leave e-fingerprints. As a journalist, I've witnessed the extreme illogical depths of this reluctance to speak candidly. Here are two such examples.

For an annual get-to-know-the-campus-type project at *The Hoya*, I recently interviewed the veteran secretary of a prominent university administrator. To give a sense of tone, the most provocative question I asked might have been, "What's your favorite

place on campus?" It was a light-hearted five-minute chat, but later that afternoon the woman sent a frantic email to my colleagues at the paper. Apparently, she had grown worried that the interview could put her job in jeopardy. I did my best to assure her that she could not possibly face discipline for such a tame conversation. If we found out she ever had been punished, you can bet *The Hoya* would raise Hell.

While collecting material for *Calling My Shot*, I interviewed one of the most impressive and passionate professors I've encountered at Georgetown. He teaches a politically charged government course for which he also has a personal connection, and I anticipated no reason for him not to speak openly on the subject. However, as I went through the formality of asking to record the interview, he shook his head. "Things can get out there," he explained matter-of-factly. I could quote him directly, but only with notes taken by hand. Sorry, but that's a nonsensical arrangement. Material from the interview should not be limited by my speediness as a note taker; it only provides the interviewee an opportunity to deny the accuracy of any problematic remarks. As much as I wanted to include his insight, I had to shelve the interview notes on principle.

Trepidation of online accountability doesn't just stop people from posting lewd photographs or crude jokes on social media. No, the chilling effect is much more substantive. To all the 20-somethings with political or professional ambition who might, for example, support marijuana legalization— not for personal use *per se*, but to stop disproportionate racial enforcement or to allow patients to utilize the drug's medical benefits: Would you be comfortable affiliating yourself with that position online? For many, I suspect the answer is no. Young Barack would be disappointed.

Let's reconsider the weight of the baggage accumulated from online candor. For many pursuits, appearing disingenuous can be more damning than owning up to missteps or an evolved perspective. Instead, perhaps we should take greater care to avoid developing a paper trail with too many eraser marks.

* * *

By Lauren Weber

IT IS ONLINE forever.

In today's day and age, anything you write for your college newspaper, on your Facebook page, or even tweet about can never be completely wiped. Future employers and your bored grandmother can find it in a pretty effortless Google search. And for

those Georgetown students who most likely are already plotting their future political moves, every Facebook status that's mildly offensive, even if it's an inside joke, is up for grabs.

As a former executive editor of *The Hoya*, I used to see frequent requests from students asking for old pieces of writing or quotations to be taken down. Most of the requests were motivated out of concern for future job opportunities, but others originated from a change of heart, which gets to the crux of the Internet question: Is the easy accessibility of anything with your name attached to it, combined with the viral nature of scandal and gossip, enough to create a guarded Internet culture?

The short answer is yes. The slightly longer answer is that's a damn shame.

I've been guilty myself of self-editing, of thinking about how pieces of writing will look later with my name attached to them, of not posting how I really feel about the latest buzzing political topic. Heck, I've even deleted posts seconds after writing them for fear that they would be judged or because I didn't want to deal with the resulting online commentary. And that's a problem.

Part of the problem is the media, where a 24/7 news cycle makes juicy stories about scandals of yesteryear on the interwebs perfect for easy filing and lots and lots of clicks. Part of the problem is the newness of perpetuity with the Internet. Part of the problem is a lack of public discourse and an automatic dismissal of opinions other than one's own. But most of the problem is the challenge of publishing something you feel you can stand by 50 years from now.

For me, that used to be the standard, and it's an absolutely ridiculous bar to meet. Life's a learning game, and if you have the exact same opinions about the vast majority of things that you had when you were 18, you're missing out on a lot of life lessons along the way.

So, next time you're thinking about self-editing your latest tweet or published piece, don't. Give it a part of yourself at this time in your life. Take the risk that while everyone may not like it, you do. After all, you finally didn't compromise. And if it comes back to bite you on your congressional campaign 20 years from now, just blame me.

Lauren Weber *graduated from Georgetown University in 2013, where she was executive editor of The Hoya in fall 2011 and later chair of the newspaper's Board of Directors. She is an editor for The Huffington Post and author of its Morning Email. Weber is originally from St. Louis, Missouri.*

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By Brandon Anderson

I REFUSE TO write about my racial experiences as a Black man on campus. I'm well aware that it will shatter any shot I have at a political career or even landing a good-paying job once I graduate. I understand that it will pigeonhole me as a candidate who makes excuses — "always pulling the race card" — and tag me as the Angry Black Man who can hardly maintain his bearing in school, let alone during a legislative session. If I were a free man and had a chance to speak my mind, though, without catching spokesperson pressure — like I speak for the whole damn race — or the fear of being ~~Black listed~~ denied access to the job market, I'd tell the truth.

I'd bring attention to the images that colonize popular media outlets and preoccupy academic research that often serve to legitimize America's already low expectations of Black men. We're continuously reminded of our distress and subordination. These images fashion a master narrative that reduces us to hyper-masculine decedents of dysfunctional families, "self-destructive drug addicts, and materialistic lovers of flashy possessions" — all in need of hyper-surveillance and policing.[6]

I'd tell the honest-to-God truth about the professor who just last week, once she saw me enter the empty classroom, quickly shimmied to the nearest exit like I was Godzilla. Shit! Don't get me started on the one who jokingly threatened to hang me during an employee meeting then laughed it off. (I wish I were Godzilla, then.)

Still, the general public is flabbergasted of the results of rapidly growing research that prove victims of racism suffer from a range of consequences from feelings of invisibility and constant anxiety to the inability to sleep and difficulty thinking coherently. (Then, folk wonder why the hell there ain't more Black men taking on campus leadership roles.) At a Brother-to-Brother event put on by the Georgetown Collegiate 100, the host asked us, about 30 or so African American men, why we aren't more involved in campus leadership positions. I damn near flipped over the table.

See? If *I* were a man, free to speak his mind, I'd verbally support ideas such as that of New York Knicks executive and former player Larry Johnson; focus on having an all-Black league, especially in light of the recent events with L.A. Clippers owner Donald Sterling, who has voiced his concerns regarding his girlfriend publicly having Black friends.

But ya'll know, just as well I do, that'll never fly. I'd be called a racist and criticized for "turning back the clock to [the times of] segregation …" Even though, Chinese-Americans have demarcated landscapes (used for business and living spaces) in this

country for decades. You can taste a world apart, listen to a foreign language, and try to barter for a trinket on the street—without ever leaving the country.

The community and others like it (Koreatown, Little Italy, etc.) realize the value of group economics. That is, creating and exchanging resources (e.g. currency, talents, gifts, and skills) that a group deems equally valuable among one another. In the Sterling case, it's obvious that the skills of Black players aren't equally valued.

Moreover, It's clear that any other racial cohort can participate in group-economics and most of us think nothing of it. But the first time an African-American fixes his mouth to say, group economics, he's being called a "self- segregationist."

Never mind the fact that Black-owned businesses are the greatest private employer to Black people. And that non-Black owned businesses seldom invest in or hire from our communities. Why-in-the-hell we continue to support businesses that sell us inferior goods, won't hire us, and sometimes don't even want to live with us — I'll never fully comprehend.

I wish I could author a piece that told the truth: that all my skin-folk *ain't* my kinfolk. That there are thousands of ~~Negropeans~~ honest Black folk who, after having relatively poor service at one black owned establishment, will attribute that poor service to every other Black business within a hundred mile radius, but vote George Bush into office two times!

Nah! That can't be me. But, if it could, I'd tell every Black boy struggling to be truthful with his self to forget worrying about being seen as a radical, for "extremism in defense of liberty is no vice."[7] I would openly resent that *any* Black person needs to "represent" their respective community. In fact, this is the stereotype threat that lingers in spaces of (white) privilege that we often detest yet find unavoidable; the fact that, for instance, our lateness to an event is attributed to and reflects poorly on our entire race. But, when random white person is late: "Oh that's Johnny. He's always late."

I would respect his feelings of trepidation, however, I'd ask him not to perpetuate the false dependency of an entire group to represent themselves to broader society. Rather engage in the same sort of individual autonomy others are often allotted. Finally, I'd beg him to "please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause him to endure does not testify to his inferiority, but to their inhumanity."[8]

Brandon Anderson *is a senior at Georgetown University. He is originally from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.*

Unfriending Social Media

Maybe I should reconsider / Maybe I should stop being real, maybe I should get on Twitter. – Kanye West, "Never See Me Again"

By Steven Piccione

THERE IS A paradox arising with social media. As millions flock to sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat and the developed world becomes increasingly connected, we are also witnessing the fastest increase in depression and suicide rates in history. With the proliferation of all these new social platforms, many studies propose that social media are contributing to growing mental health issues among their users; For the most connected generations in history, we are feeling the most alone.

In a recent op-ed in *The New York Times*,[9] Stanford University professor T. M. Luhrmann proposes that there really is a relationship between social media use and depression. "We have recently learned that Facebook leads people to feel less good in the moment and less satisfied with their lives," Luhrmann writes. "The authors of a University of Michigan study speculate that what drives that outcome is social comparison. Other people post flattering photographs and funny comments while your own life just feels so dull."

Furthermore, according to a 2012 study released by Anxiety UK, more than half of British social media users reported that Facebook, Twitter, and other sites negatively affect their lives. Forty-five percent report that they feel uncomfortable and anxious

when unable to access their online community, and 60 percent of participants responded that constant connection with social media impacts their ability to sleep.

Personally, I've experienced my own rise in social media anxiety. I don't use Snapchat anymore because it was becoming more of an obligation to respond to people with meaningless pictures. I deleted my Twitter account because it would bother me when someone "unfollowed" me. I limit the amount of time I spend on Facebook, and I turn my phone on silent when I sleep. Surely there's a difference between leaving social media because it contributes to anxiety and depression and leaving it because one finds it boring and obligatory, but why are people — especially younger generations — so glued to social media even though they make them unhappy? Part of the addiction of social media, even when it turns into a source of anxiety, is the fear of missing out. It's part of the reason why I limit my time on Facebook but haven't deleted my account. Facebook is the best way for me to stay up-to-date on what my friends are doing and to be easily accessible if someone wants to send me a message or an invitation to an event. I weigh the utility against the negativity. It's Social Media Game Theory, a term I just made up (although it probably exists already on the Internet).

In line with my potentially misapplied new theory, I deleted Snapchat because I can live without it. My social life isn't affected, and it's hardly an inconvenience not to be able to send my friends a time-limited "snap" of my dinner. Getting rid of Twitter was a bit more difficult, but again, I weighed the utility against the negativity and found that there really isn't any huge advantage to keeping my account if the platform was causing me stress. In reality, the number of "followers" I have is not a reflection on my self-worth.

But maybe that's the core issue for why more people aren't abandoning ship. Humans intrinsically want two things: to be part of a community and to feel loved. In some distorted way, people are conflating social clout with love and validation. Followers on Twitter, Likes on Facebook and Instagram, and barrages of "snaps" are being interpreted as little doses of love and validation. And that's a problem.

It's a losing battle. It's the nature of sites like Facebook and Instagram for people to post only exciting moments, flattering photographs, and shameless self-promotions. Since the vast majority of most people's lives are not spent at expensive gatherings or trips to Dubai — but rather working from 9 to 5 or running to the dry cleaners — the endless feed depicting lavish lifestyles will

make even the most exciting life seem underwhelming. The mundane aspects of others' lives go unreported in tweets and status updates, so what happens when you're not constantly attending chic events, but rather spending a quiet night, or month, at home? Facebook and the like — not to mention the Likes — are wonderful tools to coordinate events, to share happy memories through photo albums, and to stay connected with family and friends who now live distantly. It's easy to fall into the trap of validating and valuing one's own life by comparing it with those of their online community. But as addictive as Facebook can be, one can only hope that as our global community becomes more connected, we can also find a way to remember that one's virtual life does not fully represent one's actual life.

Social media are not a reflection of oneself, but rather are only a tool. And, when a tool no longer makes one's life easier, it belongs with the broken-down station wagon and busted washing machine: in the junkyard.

Steven Piccione *graduated from Georgetown University in 2013, where he was managing editor of The Hoya in fall 2012. He is originally from Chicago, Illinois.*

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By Hunter Main

IN CONVERSATION, THERE are few times when we really are blunt and direct. The words being said are often a formality — what's missing from a veiled response or what's present in a certain inflection is largely what shape conversation. Although subtext has been a social convention before language has even existed, the feeling of never being sure you understand what's really going on has never ceased being stressful and exhausting. *Does she really want to "see me later," or was that just a way to leave a conversation she had no interesting in having?* A life without obfuscation or uncertainty would be hellish, sure, but wouldn't it be a nice place to take an occasional vacation?

Enter social media. Unlike what's being said during a conversation, the majority of content put on Facebook or Instagram is sent to no one in particular, with responses anticipated but not directly expected; it's like yelling into a mountain range and getting back in response not your echo, but a chorus of self-selecting voices. More important, however, are the quick affirmations of approval built into the fabric of the networks — the "like" button on Facebook, the yellow star on Twitter, the double-tap on Instagram. There's no need for explanation or expansion; simply not ignoring it is endorsement enough. I wouldn't compare the

use of Facebook to an in-person conversation; they aren't meant to accomplish the same thing, and all popular forms of social media have some sort of direct messaging function where true back-and-forth interaction is meant to be had. But never before has the quest for basic affirmation been so democratized, where anyone can say anything and get any number of quick thumbs-up in response.

But the *certainty* of such approval is even better. There's no such thing as a partial retweet, and by and large, anything that is given the social network's built-in seal of approval by a friend is something that he reacted to positively in some way. All sorts of nuanced responses a statement would get in conversation, like an acknowledging nod of the head, are lumped together into a mass cloud of disregard that's held together only by inaction—the *lack* of a Like, retweet, etc. Subtext is structurally eliminated; a conversational equivalent would be responding either with only a firm "Yes" or a blank stare. This sort of binary thinking even permeates the less binary sections of a social network; while Facebook has a commenting system that has the capability to facilitate a public back-and-forth, using it for anything longer than a sentence or two is rare. The blunt pseudo-conversations pushed by social networks make up a good amount of our current communication.

And yet how a little "like" can mean so many things. The digital equivalent of the simple thumbs-up can be interpreted as intensely as a sentence. We look at when the photo was liked, how often he or she likes our photos, if this was the only thing on Facebook liked in a certain period — these things mean just as much as any conversational tic. We are able to mine subtext out of that which is supposed to lack it. *Does she really want to see a movie later, or was that "favorite" just a way of recognizing me retweeting her earlier?* Appealing as it may seem, there's no vacation from the sometimes frustrating world of complex human interaction.

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Death of the Love Letter

She find pictures in my email, I sent this bitch a picture of my dick. – Kanye West, "Runaway"

AS PRESIDENT OBAMA tells the story, he waited about a month to ask his Chicago law firm adviser, Michelle Robinson, out on a date. "I asked her out. She refused. I kept asking. She kept refusing," he later wrote. "'I'm your adviser,' she said. 'It's not appropriate.' Finally, I offered to quit my job, and at last she relented."[10]

It's an endearing story, one that makes me yearn for a Golden Age of courtship I can only know vicariously. Here's how I imagine the overtures from love-struck Barack playing out were they to take place nowadays: "I asked her out. She refused, and later laughed with her girlfriends about how sketchy I was. I kept asking. She kept refusing. I noticed she also blocked me on Facebook and Twitter. 'I'm your advisor,' she said. 'It's not appropriate, and you better never speak to me again or I'll report you to HR.' Finally, I relented, but I soon had to quit my job anyway because by then I had become the office creep."

I used to marvel at the romantic idealism of *Pride and Prejudice*, and I remember chuckling at the 2009 parody *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. What really makes me shiver, however, is imagining what Jane Austen might have authored had she been living in 2014: *Pride and Prejudice and Dick Pics.*

It's perplexing why today's single ladies (I'm sorry, my perspective is gender-specific) hold Mr. Perfect to such low standards when it comes to courtship. Do today's teenage girls fantasize about the guy with ocean blue eyes, silky smooth hair, and

a charming method of asking for casual sex via Tinder? I doubt it, which is why I don't think the problem lies in the modern dream guy or girl, but rather in a withering willingness to pursue that person. Social media enable a culture of convenience for the inherently nerve-racking task of courtship, but I suspect that technology is not the real culprit. Rather, I believe technology — be it online dating, social media stalking, sexting, etc. — has done nothing more than expose the worst in a deep-seated social norm for personal ambition.

As explained by the overarching spirit of *Calling My Shot*, the spontaneous love letter has died off because unabashed conviction in chasing romantic ambition breeds bitterness in those who are left to wonder, "Damnit, why don't I have the balls to do that?" Dream girl, dream guy, dream job — it doesn't matter; if a jealous majority resents something, that behavior becomes taboo and people learn to avoid it. When women are "weirded out" by a surprising sign of affection, I suspect their reaction is more reflective of a programmed response than a genuine feeling of disapproval.

Like I've said before, boos from the crowd shouldn't stop us from swinging for the fences. In the context of courtship, however, skeptics must appreciate that a "home run" constitutes so much more than getting your crush in the sack.

* * *

By Lucy Anderle

I WANT TO begin by telling a story near and dear to my heart. I caution that this is not to dissuade the skeptics, but to clear some room for contemplation of the modern romance.

Fiona[11] and Wes met on Tinder. After expressing mutual admiration for each other's photosets, Wes was quick to initiate conversation by addressing an un-cited Lord Byron quote Fiona had included in her personal information. *Chase the glowing hours with flying feet.* And chase, he did. Fiona was impressed by Wes' literary *savoir-faire*, his job at a top-tier management-consulting firm, a proclivity for cooking, and an uncanny ability to make the otherwise unimpressed Fiona laugh at whim. In short, Wes was perfect. But, a year of dating later, Wes announced he was abandoning the world of big business and moving across country to join a start-up. For their last night together, Fiona booked a hotel room, rented a video camera, and filled every pocket of his two jackets with salted caramels. Wes left in the morning. Fiona remained in Boston.

It wasn't until a month later that she spun the dial on her campus mailbox and opened it to find a letter from Wes. A love letter.

All right, you say, so what? So what if Fiona somehow negotiated a love-letter out from between Tinder's snarling teeth?

Well, it's this: Fiona is the poster-child of Modern Romance. Having the privilege of watching her relationship unfold fundamentally changed me. Previously, I'd considered meeting online a shortcut, a cheater's way out. Subsequently, I had trouble validating any relationships that resulted from these online forays. I smugly felt that my own long-term relationship — filled with many a love-letter and impromptu plane ticket — was somehow more genuine than a contrived meeting on an impersonal dating site.

But when presented with the empirical evidence of Fiona's glowing face upon receiving a message from Wes, something inside me melted. Where before I felt a calcified disdain for online dating lodged deep in my chest, I grew a tender spot, a burning conviction that whatever enables an end to loneliness and facilitates human connection is something to support with my whole, throbbing, liquid heart.

I began to carefully reconsider my preconceived notions of romance and how they'd crippled my ability to appreciate modern relationships. Was I afraid that admitting the effectiveness of online dating would devalue my own traditional relationship?

The hegemonic narrative of the "ideal romance" I'd been clinging to has taken a significant beating in the modern world. Our lives can be fast-paced, hyper-organized, pre-destined, sterile, and lonely as hell. For all the Facebook friends, we can drown in our own insignificance. Ultimately, there is no time to waste when it comes to love in the modern world. It makes perfect sense that traditional courtship has been ousted for a highly efficient, algorithm-based method of picking a mate.

Online, we can be candid about desires for uncomplicated sex or a long-term relationship. Niche dating sites like JDate or Farmers Only narrow our preferences to a top priority and expose us to likely matches that share common interests and values. Even digital rejection is efficient and effective.

While some argue that the perceived death of the love letter and the advent of technology limits spontaneity, I argue that it allows for creativity where there was once tradition. The playbook of romance has been thrown far, *far* out the window. Initiating conversation is no longer a role delegated to men in a heterosexual relationship; it is the task of both parties to struggle to make themselves noticed in a much wider pool of applicants. This takes stamina, honesty, creativity, and a fierce examination of what you

yourself are looking for in a potential partner. Social media present a unique challenge in demanding any serious members to present their best selves in order to attract the best mate.

I do not think that we have lost the art of the love letter; I think we are re-strategizing its use to suit the demanding needs of our modern society. Technology presents an ever-increasing number of hoops to jump through before coming face to face with a potential partner, but the chances of the partner being "the right one" are vastly higher.

Therefore, I encourage you to think of technology not as a crutch, not a trapdoor, not a shortcut or a royal flush, but a starting block on which to place your feet, waiting for the gunshot of connection. Save the love letter for precision romancing.

As is the case for Fiona, meeting the right person will perpetuate many, many acts of great and genuine love — a sentiment that will never change.

Lucy Anderle *is a sophomore at Wellesley College. She is originally from Carmel, California.*

* * *

By Ryan Whelan

THE GAME OF romance has undergone a complete overhaul from how it was played by prior generations. Going on a date has evolved from the first way to get to know somebody to a reward for weeks of pursuit through texting and social media. Persistence, which was formerly one of the best ways to show your dedication, has turned into a creepy practice that can damage your reputation. The entire concept of taking risks with love has disappeared for the millennial generation and, to me, it can be largely attributed to the comfort-zone lifestyle favored by young adults.

We make compromises with our career choices and academic pursuits for the sake of finding a level of comfort that only entails not being disappointed. Young entrepreneurs with brilliant ideas go to college to study business and come out working for large corporations because the financial security of the corporate path provides substantially less risk. The problem is that there is limited reward. Students give up on personal dreams, shelve innovative ideas, and compromise happiness because they would rather avoid sadness than pursue bliss.

I see this happen with love every day, and it pains me to see how the safe-minded attitude impacts the world of romance. Instead of seeking out the pinnacle partner, men and women instead just find the puzzle piece that seems to fit. They squeeze, bend, and bite away parts of the piece to force it into an empty space with the hope that the final picture will turn out fine. It is this type of attitude that has perpetuated the downfall of romance in today's world.

My parents met on the Jersey shore while my mom was on vacation. She lived full time in Boston and was at a bar with her sorority friends from college. My dad chose to walk over to her table, ignore the crowd of other girls surrounding her, and ask for her phone number. She replied immediately and graciously, offering her number to my dad, having been impressed by his honest and direct approach. In today's world, I envision a completely different scenario. First of all, this exchange doesn't occur in a bar anymore because bars are no longer places where women are courted, but rather objectified. Putting that aside, if my dad did that today, I imagine he'd be greeted by an outpouring of laughter from the table and a rejection. My dad would be viewed as "some creepy random guy at the bar," and my mom and her friends would have just moved on with their vacation. Nowadays, there is a new and unfortunate model for how to find a girlfriend, and it allows no room for spontaneity.

The new format of beginning a romantic relationship starts with somehow already knowing one another. For example, people now might meet through a mutual friend, the office, or by living in the same apartment complex. This encounter is followed by several weeks of texting, online chatting, Facebook stalking, and having your closest friends assess the other's appearance and text responses. Before even sitting down to talk face to face for an extended period of time, guys and girls alike have to pass a multitude of tests to earn the right to go on a date. In my eyes, this norm has brought the downfall of the courting process for our generation. I am a firm believer that the only way to understand a person is to sit down with them one on one, yet people determine if someone is worthy of a date based on electronic communication and social media. Don't get me started on Tinder.

The death of the love letter is largely due to the stigma that it is pathetic to be single. What used to be perceived as a kindhearted gesture by a guy is now viewed as a sorry attempt to talk to a girl. Somehow, this action has evolved from chivalrous and respectful to desperate and disturbing. Instead of being honest and direct, the expectation is to strategically play your cards right and only make the move for a date after multiple clear-cut signs that the girl is interested (such as a hookup). For prior generations, you had to treat a girl with respect to earn the first kiss; now, we've got it all backward. I think society has seen a lot of important progress with the rise of our generation, but romance has seen a regression. Even if in the next five years the dominant

form of dating occurs on the Internet and mobile apps, I will happily be the creepy and desperate guy who takes the risk of asking someone out in person. Tradition is important to me, and I know eventually I'll find a girl out there who will appreciate that, too.

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Married to Your Morals

After that he's just hopeless / Soul mates become soulless – Kanye West, "Hold My Liquor"

By Thomas Christiansen

LAST SUMMER, I nearly converted to Buddhism. The Tibetan kind. The disappear into Chinese political prisons kind. You're probably thinking, "No. Tom, the Mormon? Convert? Never … unless, of course, a woman was involved."

I met her while serving a mission in Australia, where she studied finance. Intrigued by my church's unique flavor of Christianity (we're a sort of tiramisu gelato surrounded by variations on vanilla ice cream. Some claim we aren't even a frozen dessert) she began meeting — more specifically, arguing — with missionaries.

In our first discussion we jousted intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally for four hours, debating which faith presented the richer theology. I recall two facts from that first clash: somehow gym shorts found their way onto my head, and we both walked away with a deep, uncomfortable feeling that we knew each other before we were born. It was love, it seemed, before first sight.

Our obvious mutual yearning haunted every interaction. Terrified by the implications of romance combining with religion, I recused myself from teaching her. Two months after our introduction, she joined the church.

I baptized her.

The allure of our seemingly supernatural attraction, though mysterious and intoxicating, could not keep us connected for long. Too many walls and not enough bridges. She soon left the church. Hurt and angry, I ended all communication with her.

But a year later I went to China and, finding myself in her hometown (population 13 million), looked her up. Old feelings reemerged, her Buddhist mentor got involved and — a few temple visits and a lot of incense later — I began to consider leaving my faith to join hers and, thereby, join her.

But changing faiths is like emigrating to a new country: you don't speak the language, understand the traditions, or even know what "success" looks like, let alone how to get there. Like she had a year earlier, I soon reneged on my promise and, in another role reversal, left her crying on a rainy sidewalk.

Before walking away she, grasping at a fading dream, begged me to, if not keep her faith, then at least keep her. Buddhism and Mormonism, she claimed, could spend a lifetime together. I told her she was wrong.

I maintain that she was wrong. Now, I don't doubt that many mixed-faith couples have found great happiness in marriage. What I do doubt, however, is that many of those who are happy in mixed-faith relationships really take seriously the doctrines and commandments unique to their faith.

The fact is, most people do not center their identity on the narrow worldview and ethos prescribed by their faith tradition. In 21st Century America, for better or worse, much more is shared than divisive. And what do we share? A relativist ethic that is agnostic about our place in the universe and permissive about how we ought act in it.

The mantra of our day claims that happiness comes from satisfying personal wants, with the stipulation that we neither harm nor restrict the agency of others. Most of us participate in the rites of this (post-) modern belief system, epitomized in Georgetown's cross-cultural hook-up culture. In this context, then, couples can commune together despite a smattering of different labels: black or white, rich or poor (sometimes), Catholic or atheist — we can all be together because, ultimately, those terms don't define us.

But in those instances when belief does fundamentally strike at the core of what makes us uniquely us, we will not be able to become one with someone who at best does not share that foundation and, at worst, finds it repulsive.

Perhaps another Mormon and another Buddhist could have made it work, but not this Mormon and that Buddhist. We both believed too strongly in the absolute truth of our worldview and loved each other too deeply to merely tolerate our mutually heretical faiths.

In short, we made two controversial decisions that will doubtless face ridicule from the agnostic peanut gallery: First, we decided to absolutely subscribe to an exclusive truth claim; second, we decided that love and tolerance are not the same thing.

Allow me in closing to repeat that line. Love and tolerance are not the same thing. Tolerance emerges from principles of reciprocity: don't bother me and I won't bother you. Love grows from the deepest respect for each other's freedom to choose how to live inseparably entangled with a yearning to help each other live well.

And so she and I loved each other and, no doubt, will continue to love each other. But we could never be together. You can't endlessly try to save someone who is convinced that they already are.

Thomas Christiansen *is a junior at Georgetown University. He is originally from Salt Lake City, Utah.*

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By Alex Dickey

THE WAY THIS essay started was with the following prompt from Danny: "There are undoubtedly happy romantic relationships between people of opposite political ideologies. The question, rather, is whether one could properly appreciate the profound moral underpinnings of political beliefs and their weighty consequences while still being in a respectful and intellectually honest marriage with someone of the opposite political inclination."

I started forming a response based on what I would personally find morally intolerable in a partner, and trying to navigate from those convictions to the political issues in which they've found root. I'm not sure discussing those issues makes for a particularly interesting essay. You might not know who I am, and if you do, the opinions someone would need to hold for me to qualify him as an asshole are either uninteresting or obvious: bigotry, racism, etc. What might be interesting is that as I started to make that list, I began feeling a little bit uncomfortable. This feeling lasted through the list's creation, and was strongest at its conclusion. This is because that list was woefully, ignorantly short.

I generally have a hard time figuring out my moral position about new things. I'm not religious and I don't follow any other dogma, so taking an ethical stance about something often feels a bit feeble not having some "objective" source to consult. Absent this source, I begin my ethical probe by checking my gut feeling, and proceed by trying to find arguments that support, supplement, and challenge that feeling, while doing my best to be open to having my position swayed.

Due to this moral malleability, I had a hard time figuring out which issues I'd absolutely need to agree with a partner about to consider her a possible partner. As I got frustrated trying to decide what those were, I came to the following conclusion: when looking at what makes a good partner, consistent moral synchronicity simply isn't one of the most important things to me. I tried to think about it this way: let's say I married someone, and that we've been blissfully happy, supportive, and loving for years. After these years of dedication and support, what is something that, if revealed, would break our marriage?

Again, there's not much. This then goes back to the original question: does recognizing disagreement among some of the less significant politico-moral issues I identified and choosing to stay together make our relationship less "respectful and intellectually honest?" And if it doesn't, does that mean we're just not "properly appreciating the profound moral underpinnings" of these politico-moral differences? I don't think so. I think in creating these binaries, some presumptions were made that don't necessarily extend to all people. It presumes that morality is (or should be) the fundamental informant of political opinion, and it presumes that respect and intellectual honesty are (or should be) dependent on moral consonance.

To the first, I think a nation that decides all its political issues based on morality is one destined for a short life. If religion A says: you must not kill animals and religion B says: you must kill what you eat, politicians that follow religion A and B are destined to be in forever political opposition. If they can examine the issue through a lens other than diametrically opposed one of morality, however, the possibility for negotiation then exists. To the second, I don't think that accepting this need for compromise diminishes respect or prevents intellectual honesty between moral opponents, and neither does it lessen the appreciation of one's own morals. It instead recognizes that there are times when moral differences can't be resolved, and that in those times we must find reasons beyond our ethics to find some type of harmony.

So, to my future, hypothetically vegan wife: I respect that you think it's ethically wrong to eat animals slaughtered en masse, and I hope you can respect that my convictions are not as strong. If we want to live happily — and I think we can without

compromising respect, intellect, or mutual moral appreciation — we're going to have to agree to disagree about this moral issue: I really, really love bacon.

Alex Dickey *is a senior at the University of California, Berkeley. He is originally from Carmel, California.*

Colorful Language

Drug dealer buy Jordans, crack head buy crack / And the … get paid off of all of that
– Radio edit removing "white man" in Kanye West's "All Falls Down"

I AGONIZED OVER the phrasing of one line more than any other in *Calling My Shot*: "Swing the damn bat," the closing sentence of the introductory letter to my future self. If I had been frank, it really would have ended, "Swing the fucking bat!"

It might seem as if I would have preferred that phrasing just to get a rise out of readers. Yes, that's exactly why it was fitting. In this context, "fucking" has a dramatically harsher impact. I don't normally say "damn" in that sort of situation, and I certainly don't think it. "Swing the fucking bat!" is truest to the raw emotions that elicit that illicit exclamation.

Why, then, did I choose to censor myself? Because I was ashamed to imagine my parents encountering that crude opening, or President DeGioia, or Fr. Carnes. Certainly my grandma. It doesn't matter that I find most of the stigma surrounding "bad words"[12] to be prudish and dated. Tastefulness here is in the eye, or ear, of the beholder.

But, just as I'll happily remove my shoes if that's the protocol for your home, I also reserve the right to track in a little filth in mine. Profanity is, at the source, instinctual. It's genuine. As with all linguistics, profane words are just arbitrary sounds that point to something real, whether it's an emotion, activity, or belief. For that first category, it's an awfully radical position to enforce an

indiscriminate ban on one sound but not another if both point in the same direction. One person says, "ah, shit," another says, "ah, shoot" — are we really going to be morally outraged at the former, simply because he's trespassed into the unspeakable?

Slurs are a different story. An FCC ban on saying the six-letter F-word (that's a term too vile to spell out for my taste) is hollow if the same on-air personality can freely say, "Homosexuals are an abomination." The greater accomplishment, of course, is not cleansing the term from the airwaves, but from our minds. Slurs are uniquely reprehensible because what they denote is reprehensible. Anyone who claims some moral accomplishment for eliminating that F-word from his vocabulary, for example, while still holding the "abomination" viewpoint is either an asshole or dumbass.

Here's the oddity of our linguistic state of affairs: "fucking bat" only packs a punch because it's stigmatized. If we realized that "fucking" in this context is just an excited utterance and not blasphemy, the edge is dulled off "fuck" and you might as well say "stinking," "darn," "dang," or any of its euphemisms. In that regard, an antiquated social imposition that attempts to turn language gray has really given it a wonderful infusion of color.

Although I'm posing here as an advocate for salty discourse, I wince in disapproval just like my grandma when I hear profanities dropped at the wrong moment. There's a time and place, and it's not when your lexicon is lacking of more eloquent and descriptive alternatives. The same goes for context; you might be comfortable with masturbation in the proper company (or, hopefully, lack thereof), but you don't need to do it on an airplane or a crowded sidewalk. Likewise, sometimes you should tuck in your shirt, other times it doesn't matter. Etiquette has practical functionality even when its underpinnings are arbitrary.

With all of this said, I've actually decided that it would probably best if I attempt to eradicate profanity from my working vocabulary. It's just too unseemly, and someone of my upbringing and desired stature should probably know better.

Nah, I'm just fucking with you.

* * *

By Andrew Miller

I'M SURE SOME people would say I swear too much. All my life I have been given reasons not to swear. Some say it's rude. Some say it's a crutch. A cheap, angry, substitute for more thoughtful self-expression.

For me, though, swearing has never been about anger. Swearing is comfortable. It can spice up an otherwise ordinary sentence. I swear when I'm tired, when I've had some beers, when I'm in a good mood. I generally only swear around people my age, and, even then, only if I've gotten to know them. Why, when my mother calls and asks me how the weather is on a 60-degree day, do I have to tell her that it's "really nice"? If my roommate asked, I'd tell him the truth: it's fucking gorgeous out. Does this make me a fraud? Does being honest with someone depend not just on the content of the message, but its delivery? To some extent, I think the answer is yes. When people curse in front of me it sends a signal that they don't feel the need to censor themselves in my presence. It's oddly endearing.

Swear words are, to my knowledge, the only words that most people make a conscious effort not to say in certain situations. This is mildly astonishing when you think about it. Imagine if we, as a culture, decided to instead limit our use of the words "literally," "awkward," or "like"? English teachers would die of happiness. People young and old suffer from an inability to express themselves meaningfully, and this has very little to do with their reliance on curse words. I admire the work of comedian Louis C.K. and the late writer David Foster Wallace because of the honesty, not the profanity, of their words. This honesty is accomplished in part by their use of words that are normally reserved for informal talk. For every genius who swears, I'm sure I could find you hundreds of non-swearing idiots.

In terms of habits I need to drop, cursing is slightly further down my list of priorities than biting my nails, but it's a hell of a lot more enjoyable.

Andrew Miller *is a senior at the University of Kansas. He is originally from Kansas City, Missouri.*

* * *

By Alex Dickey

I HAVE BEEN thinking a lot lately about growing up. I've been thinking about who I was, who I am, and what facilitated that change. With this thinking, I've come to a surprising and uncomfortable discovery: I can't remember how I used to think. In

my reflection, the quality, syntax, and diction of younger-Alex's thoughts are exactly the same as present-Alex's. In order to test the waters of my old mindset, I practiced a method I hoped could put me there: recreating and thinking in younger-Alex's vocabulary. Being a regular user of profanity, I hoped that their removal from my thought process would help with that recreation.

I was wrong. Thinking without any "damns," "fucks," or "shits" felt unnatural. "It should feel unnatural!" I reasoned. That's the point of the exercise: to think in a way that is unfamiliar to my present self. While mulling this over, a memory soon surfaced, that helped me qualify my discomfort. I remember playing football with my friend — and this mixtape's progenitor — Danny. We were 9 years old and playing on our school's grassy field. He was wide open in our makeshift end zone, and a halfway accurate throw on my part would have meant an easy six points. The toss, however, was off; it sailed over his head and into the marsh behind our school. In frustration, I let out a resounding, confident, "Fuck!" One of the teacher's assistants tasked with monitoring the playground immediately rushed over to me and said, "Alex! You are not allowed to use that word."

I then realized that the abnormality I felt while thinking without profanity was born not of temporal distance from a bygone vocabulary, but of distance from a vocabulary I literally can't recall having. I've been cussing since I was nine, and I can't remember if or when I ever wasn't. The fact that profanity has become more prevalent in my speech as I've grown older, I think, is not a product of me changing, but a product of my environment changing. More precisely, it's that those around me have come to deem my vocabulary as more age appropriate. The obvious question, then, is why? Why is it that we have this secret list of words accessible only to those deemed old enough to use them? Why isn't their usage *always* a question of tact, instead of first being a question of permission? I'm not sure there's a good answer.

A huge part of growing up for me was learning how to define myself compared to the adults around me. As a kid, I was burdened with their rules: go to school, finish all my homework, look both ways before crossing the street, don't spend hours watching TV, etc. All of these are generally good pieces of advice that have obvious applications in the adult-world. Another rule, naturally, was: "don't curse." If I cursed at school, I was chastised by teachers. If I cursed at home, I was chastised by my parents. It wasn't that I had been hurtful and directed curse words at my peers — in that case, I'd agree wholeheartedly with the discipline. Kids should be taught to be nice to each other, regardless of the words they use. Instead, I was using them in the same way adults do: out of frustration, for emphasis, or as an oratorical exclamation point. I was the obnoxious kid who would ask "why?" *ad infinitum* until "because I'm your ___ and I know what's best," or, "because I say so" was the only retort left. After thinking about

how I'd discuss this issue with a child of my own, however, I don't think that I could deploy "because I say so" in good conscience. Conversations that I'd had when I was young simply addressed how expletives fell into a category of "naughty" or "bad" words.

Because profanity becomes widely adopted as one grows older, their prohibition then seems to be a rule that is a rule for a rule's sake. That conversations with children discussing the usage of "fuck" and "cunt" will likely lead to conversations about sex is not an adequate reason for their wholesale ban. Profanity becomes a part of almost everyone's vocabulary in time (whether it's used or simply known), and the hypocrisy of keeping them under lock and key fosters distrust and unnecessary opposition between children and adults. By breaking down the barrier their prevention erects and democratizing their usage, the gap between these discourse communities will hopefully narrow, allowing for a more open dialogue between two groups that often find communication futile.

Parents, teachers, coaches, and so on: know that language is not yours to hold hostage. The next time you try to shame a child for using profanity instead of teaching them their appropriate context, I ask of you, please: Shut the fuck up.

Sports Fanaticism

Breaking news: death's less important when the Lakers lose / There's lead in that baby food. – Earl Sweatshirt, "Hive"

BEFORE EVERY PITCH when he's up at bat, St. Louis Cardinals catcher Yadier Molina untucks the necklace from beneath his jersey and kisses its crucifix pendant before stepping back into the batter's box. To a stranger to sports, Molina's routine could seem oddly ritualistic, better fit for a fighter pilot than a grown man playing a game for $14 million a season.

But to those of us who "live and die" with our favorite sports franchises, who "bleed [team name] [team color]," that's nothing out of the ordinary. Superstition is a hallmark of competitive sports, as is prayer — sometimes the two are hard to tell apart. It's parodied quite well, unintentionally, in the 1994 film "Angels in the Outfield." A child prays for his incompetent baseball heroes to perform better, and soon angels are meddling with the on-field action to propel the team to the World Series. By the movie's end, all the fans in the stadium are flapping their arms like angel's wings. Stirring stuff.

(The zero-sum nature of sports, of course, is totally lost on viewers of that movie. For fans of the opposing teams, the divine intervention against their more-deserving side must have seemed rather devilish.)

I'm in no position to pontificate on whether it's blasphemous to praise God for every moment of achievement in professional sports (but come on, it totally is). No, the more uncontroversial problem is that we've elevated a game to that level of worship in a secular sense, to the point where fans truly become fanatics. Worse, for those junkies whose emotions ride on the highs and lows of an abstraction like wins and losses, they become utterly apathetic to their fix's real-world ramifications.

There are so many angles to attack intemperate fandom. On a psychological level, it teaches us arbitrary hatred. I'm a San Francisco Giants fan, so therefore I hate the Los Angeles Dodgers with all my heart. Why? Gosh, I don't know. Because they're the Dodgers, damnit! Some sports stars are charged with crimes and their devoted fanbases could care less (linebacker Ray Lewis, murder co-conspiracy; quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, sexual assault). Concurrently, others become national villains simply for being too clean-cut (college basketball star Jimmer Fredette, quarterbacks Tim Tebow and Tony Romo, golfer Phil Mickelson) or for making the slightest PR misstep on the road to stardom (basketball player LeBron James, quarterback Eli Manning). On the other extreme, our hearts go out to the hardships of the "little guy," even if he happens to be a millionaire. I've been heartbroken when one of my less-accomplished heroes on the Giants gets sent down to the minor league club in Fresno. Sure, he's still better off than most of the fans who watch him in either league, but how could you not feel for someone banished to go live in Fresno!

Fans are also driven to denial of their responsibility as consumers. Major League Baseball exploits thousands of poor Latino teenagers who will never make a living in the U.S. and the National Football League has been frighteningly obtuse when dealing with brain damage and other debilitating injuries facing its workforce in retirement (or sooner), yet fans happily pump billions into both leagues. Sure, we might voice disapproval for these abuses at the bar or on Twitter, but that would never stop most from buying jerseys, television viewership, video games, tickets, etc. Stephen A. Smith, co-host of ESPN's "First Take," spoke on Georgetown's campus recently. He discussed the Philadelphia Eagles' offseason dismissal of their star receiver Desean Jackson, which supposedly was motivated in part by his alleged hometown ties to gang members. "Why did the Eagles even care?" Smith said in essence. "Desean Jackson's gang ties, real or false, would have absolutely no impact on attendance at Lincoln Financial Field. It's going to sell out regardless."

It's too substantial a topic to give proper attention here, but I'll just note that college sports involve profoundly different circumstances for players. When considering the debate over athlete unionization, remember that when you see a college athlete praying during a game, the livelihood of him and his family could very well be hanging in the balance.

Sports fandom has been a major component of my life since childhood, and I doubt that will change anytime soon. It's great escapism, but you can't escape the realities of the professional sports behemoth. I'm reluctant to say my interest in following sports is a bad habit, but I can't help acknowledging that it does feel like a guilty pleasure.

* * *

By Connor Gregoire

LOOKING BACK, THE first sign of the problem came when I was 12 years old. The son of a lifelong Boston sports fan, I had inherited the Red Sox and bet my happiness on them winning Game 7 of the 2003 American League Championship Series.

I'll always remember where I was when Aaron Boone hit that walk-off home run to win the series for the Yankees. I'd been a huddled mess on the living room couch for the past four hours, never more excited by anything in my life than the thought that the Red Sox might win and go to the World Series and never more stricken with genuine fear than by the thought that they might lose. They lost, of course, in spectacular fashion, and I was inconsolable.

When the Sox were down three games to none to the Yankees in the ALCS the following season, one loss away from elimination, I lied awake in bed and prayed that it wouldn't happen again. It didn't — the Red Sox pulled off one of the greatest comebacks in sports history — and I was elated.

And then life went on.

Nine years later when the Sox won it all again, I drove up to Boston from New York to be there for it. The moment was great, but on the way to the hotel that night, I realized that as happy as I was, it hadn't been the life-altering experience I had told myself it would be. Somehow the cumulative angst I had felt watching the Sox navigate the postseason didn't seem to equal the joy of the ultimate payoff.

Tennis great Jimmy Connors once said, "I hate to lose more than I love to win." I think that's a simple way to express the problem I mentioned at the outset. For your sports fandom to have a net positive effect on your happiness, the enjoyment you derive from your team's successes must be greater than the distress you endure as a result of its failures. The fair-weather fan might actually accomplish this, but for the "true" sports fan, it's an almost impossible balance to strike. Far more often than not, even in the cases of the most successful teams, seasons end in defeat and without a championship. The lows are recurring, and the highs are fleeting.

Still, sports fandom is a worldwide phenomenon, and despite the fact that so many of us would have to agree that our teams leave us frustrated more often than they fulfill our dreams, we keep coming back, keep betting some measure of our happiness for that night, that week, that year on their success. Put simply, it's an irrational devotion.

For those of us that hate losing more than we love winning, it's a necessary step, I think, to admit it to ourselves. In the long run, experiencing sports that way is irresponsible, the same way it's irresponsible to gamble with more than you can afford to lose.

If we're conscious of that default setting, perhaps it's possible to change it.

Connor Gregoire *graduated from Georgetown University in 2013, where he served as editor-in-chief of The Hoya in 2012 and its sports editor in spring 2011. He is a communications analyst for SeatGeak, a sports and entertainment ticket service. Gregoire is originally from Kinnelon, New Jersey.*

* * *

By Patrick Curran

WE ALL HAVE churches.

Yes, you too. I don't know if you identify as religious, or even spiritual. Maybe your church doesn't have an altar; maybe you've never even been to the building itself. But I bet you have one — a place you go to feel like part of something larger, for joy, fraternity and community, free from the bounds of purely rational action. How do I know? Well, for one, you're reading this piece. And that means you're probably a sports fan.

From brat-fueled tailgates to mercurial message boards, deafening arenas to drunken barrooms, sports fandom allows even the most calculating and skeptical among us to abandon our analytical mindsets in reverence to an arbitrarily selected group. We worship our chosen players and coaches — so long as they keep winning — and wage holy war at the water cooler with zealots of a different colored jersey.

Americans may be moving away from belief in supernatural forces, but the draw to blindly devote ourselves to groups is alive and well. We live and die by allegiances determined occasionally by family history, frequently by education, and nearly always by simple geography. For years, we have elevated sport to sacred status, shielding it from the sociopolitical struggles of a diverse, modern world. The shield cracks at times, of course, but its power is evident in our go-to mantras.

Don't be a Distraction.

Play The Right Way.

Do it For The Love Of The Game, dammit.

What happens, then, when the shield suffers a blow too substantial to ignore? When we realize that your team's mascot is indisputably racist, or that the most popular league in the country can't admit to its own brain trauma epidemic? We don't love whichever teams have the best business practices or the least cartoon-villainy owners, we love *our* teams. Does continuing to watch, to cheer, to buy memorabilia make us complicit in their crimes? Churches have crumbled over less.

Realistically, we can't be expected to abandon our houses of athletic worship each time they fall behind the social justice curve. What we can do is talk about it — the sports umbrella does not excuse any issue from public debate and criticism. Bring injustices to the national conversation, and let those who have fallen on the wrong side of history know so. Someone labels you a "distraction?" That, as *Deadspin*'s Drew Magary put so eloquently, is bullshit.

As young religious people are finding more and more often, it's okay to participate in worship without approving of every church doctrine. Sometimes, the most faithful and loyal fan isn't simply the loudest one — it's the one who calls out the organization he loves when something's awry.

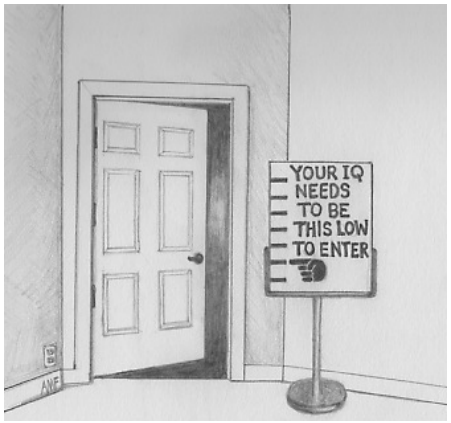
So keep watching your team; keep cheering as loud as ever. But when there's something serious at stake — something bigger and more meaningful than the score — pay attention. If necessary, don't be afraid to boycott. Above all, talk about it, even if that means shaming your chosen seal.

That's how progress happens.

Patrick Curran *is a senior at Georgetown University, where he was sports editor of The Hoya from fall 2011 to spring 2012. He is originally from Montpellier, Vermont.*

The Dumb Demographic

I sold my soul to the devil, that's a crappy deal /Least it came with a few toys like a Happy Meal – Kanye West, "Eyes Closed"



ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM HAS A rich tradition in the United States. A womanizer has a better chance at elected office than a nerd, as there's something off-putting to the American voter about the leaders of the free world being too bookish. The result, however, is not uneducated leadership, but rather a populace that is often afraid to look in the mirror.

* * *

By Evan Hollander

IF A 2011 *Newsweek* survey is to be believed, 29 percent of Americans, more than 90 million people, cannot correctly identify Joe Biden as the vice president. Ignorance of foreign affairs is, according to most surveys, considerably higher. For those of us who read Politico Playbook in bed, this seems unfathomable — and frightening.

Journalists — perversely, since they are remarking about the ignorance of their target audience — often seem particularly exercised about these figures. In the 2012 presidential campaign, for instance, *CNN* columnist LZ Granderson chastised "ignorant" voters and *Politico* writer Alex Burns set off a firestorm with an article that compared the public to Forrest Gump.

There is a distinction between a concern that voters are not well informed and an elitism that presumes someone has to read the Financial Times to be a good citizen. Scholars have developed a fairly convincing theory that voters use so-called information shortcuts to make rational decisions when casting a ballot.

But one can eschew any sense of superiority and still harbor a more serious concern: that the public is increasingly disengaged from the day-to-day developments in the world. That fear is neither new nor trivial.

In his 1968 presidential campaign, Bobby Kennedy spoke with concern about the "intelligence of our public debate." Five decades on, it takes only a few minutes of watching cable news to understand what Kennedy was referring to.

The consequences are serious. Confused about its broad benefits, many American have fallen for specious arguments about free trade. Likewise, senior policymakers of both parties fret over the bizarre but widely held belief that foreign aid is one of the largest federal expenditures.

It's rare that liberals like myself find areas of common ground with Justice Antonin Scalia. But like him, I fear that an impoverished public debate — especially one where the average citizen has too little information to understand and participate — undermines our greatest ideals. I'd offer three areas for improvement.

First, we should look to our schools. Although it is voguish — and misguided — to heap abuse for what ails the United States on its public school system, educational bureaucracies have neglected their role in shaping an informed citizenry.

Driven by well-meaning ambitions of creating a more technologically savvy workforce, states and school boards have emphasized science, math and basic reading curriculum at the expense of nearly everything else.

School curricula are arguably the greatest influence government ever has on public knowledge. Today, the balance is tipped too far from civics (and art, which also builds a more thoughtful public debate) in favor of developing students who can pass standardized tests. Blame also falls on the media. The decline and fall of major metropolitan newspapers has hurt both the quantity and quality of coverage, particularly stories that draw a direct connection between proceedings in Washington and their effect on individual citizens.

When a well-informed friend told me recently that the only way she felt the government had affected her life in recent years was by reducing the cost of her birth control through the Affordable Care Act, I shouldn't have been surprised.

Political coverage increasingly revolves around the "horse race" of who's up and who's down in the polls. Foreign coverage has been eviscerated to the point that we will likely close 2014 with the missing Malaysia Airlines jet as the top foreign story for the American press. And that's just among the segment of the media that claims to cover news. Without a tradition of public media — although NPR and PBS offer robust options for many listeners and viewers — the United States relies on a commercial media to cover news.

Of course, public funding is not a complete explanation. The august BBC still manages to churn out a lot of programming that would be familiar to American viewers, with reality shows such as "Snog Marry Avoid" and talent competitions like "Strictly Come Dancing."

But the pressure to make money explains why President Obama's pronouncements on issues like the name of Washington's football team are often treated with as much concern as his views on sanctions against Iran.

Finally, we need more inspiring political leaders. The Barack Obama who offered a substantive vision for America contributed to a debate in 2008 that was much richer than in 2012. Political leaders, especially in the era of shutdowns and sequestration, inspire little passion about our government. Some, like Alan Grayson or Allen West, offer nothing but demagoguery. Others, like Michele Bachmann, seem to relish neglecting basic facts.

Although I too enjoy settling in with Josh Lyman before bedtime, I'm astonished by how many very well informed friends cite "The West Wing," and fictional President Josiah Bartlet, as political role models. Surely that speaks to the weakness of our real-life political debate.

Until the infrastructure is in place to excite people about the biggest issues our country faces — and how to solve them — we can expect more of the same. Until leaders emerge who are willing to engage in a real dialogue, not a super PAC-driven air war, our hopes for a more intelligent public debate won't be fulfilled.

And that's the paradox. If we really want to build a more intelligent public debate, it's up to us to demand it.

Evan Hollander *is a senior at Georgetown University, where he served as chair of The Hoya's Board of Directors from fall 2013 to spring 2014. He is originally from Louisville, Kentucky.*

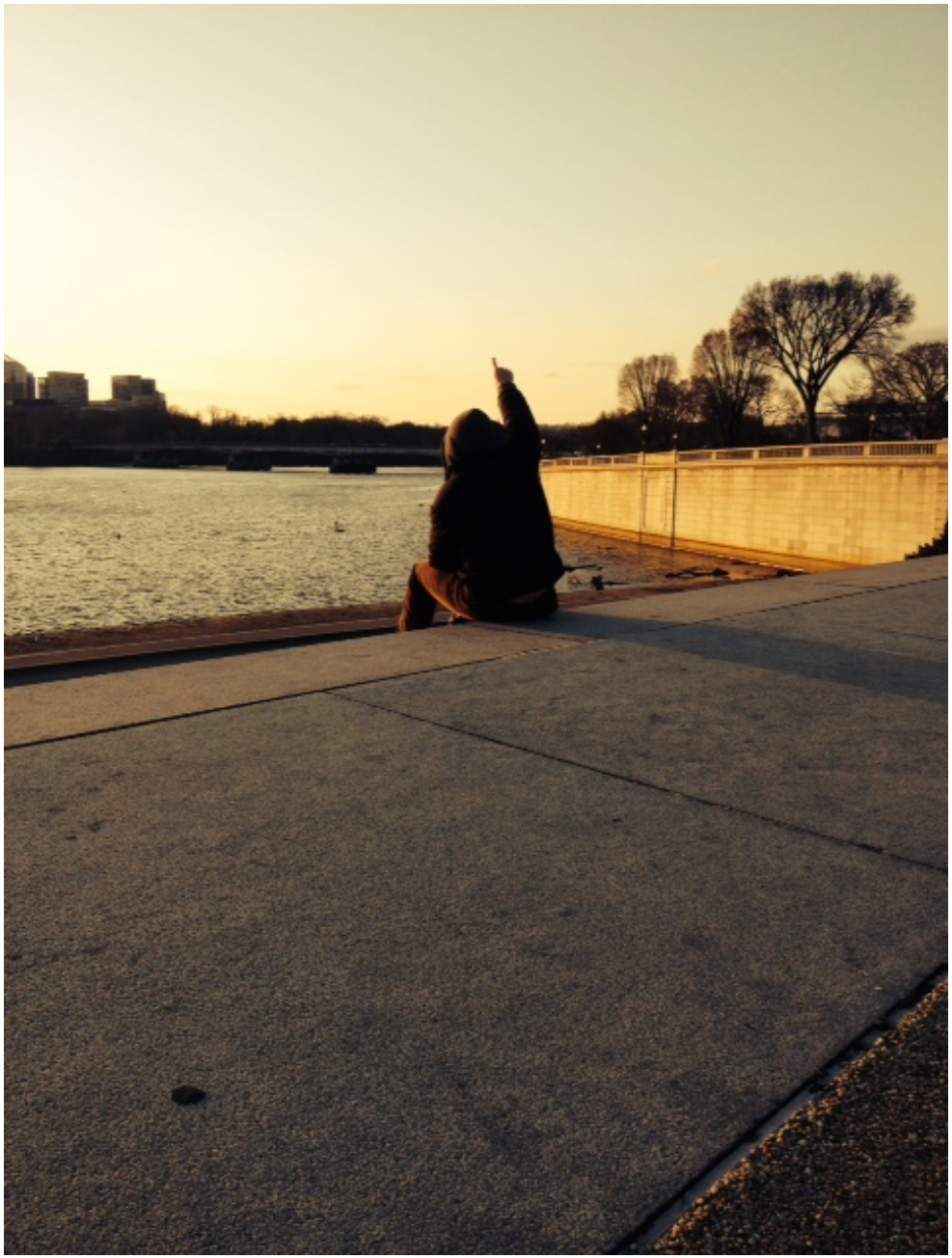
Yeezy Taught Me Well

When you say justice, it doesn't have to be about war. Justice could just be clearing a path for people to dream properly.
– Kanye West, in an interview with the New York Times [13]

KANYE WEST LIKES to occasionally call himself Yeezus, and I try to practice and preach his gospel. At the root of mainstream America's determination to villainize Kanye is a cynicism of his motives. It's frightening, really, how suspicious we can be of the well-intentioned.

"I always felt like I could do anything," Kanye told Zane Lowe of BBC Radio last year. "That's the main thing people are controlled by: their perception of themselves. If you're taught you can't do anything, you won't do anything. I was taught I could do everything."

Self-confidence is important. But, although many fail to hear it, Kanye stresses the necessity of collaboration and, in turn, gratitude, just as forcefully. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this project, to everyone who read and supported it, and to everyone who prefers to look at the world through the lens of possibility. We shouldn't be afraid to call our shot if we are willing to put in the work to reach those heights, but it sure helps to be standing on the shoulders of giants.



Look for these bonus dialogues in the *Calling My Shot* deluxe edition, coming summer 2014:

DUTY TO RESCUE FRIENDSHIPS
featuring Ryan Whelan, Beth Anne Kadien, and Steven Piccione

RECYCLED ROMANCE
featuring Victoria Edel and Emily Perkins

I'MA LET YOU FINISH, BUT …
featuring Max Pete, Andrew Miller, and Hunter Main

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Michelle Xu — artist
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Notes & Credits

[1] The preceding two paragraphs are adapted from the column:
Funt, Danny. "You May Say I'm a Dreamer." *The Hoya*. 24 Jan. 2014.
[2] The preceding two paragraphs are adapted from the column:
Funt, Danny. "Overcoming a Bumper Sticker Ethos." *The Hoya*. 11 Feb. 2014.
[3] Corrigan, Maureen. "'Lean In': Not Much of a Manifesto, But Still a Win for Women." *NPR*. 12 March 2013.
[4] Corrigan, Maureen. *Leave Me Alone, I'm Reading!* (Vintage Books: New York, 2005). pg. xv.
[5] Corrigan, Maureen. "'Please Look After Mom': A Guilt Trip to the Big City." *NPR*. 5 April 2011.
[6] Harper, S.R. "Niggers no more: a critical race counternarrative on Black male student achievement at predominantly White colleges and universities.' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 22, no. 6: 697-712.
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[8] Baldwin, James. 1963. My Dungeon Shook — Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation. *The Fire Next Time.* New York, NY. Dial Press.
[9] Luhrmann, T.M. "Is the World More Depressed?" *New York Times*. 24 March 2014.
[10] Obama, Barack. "My First Date With Michelle," *O, the Oprah Magazine.* Feb. 2007.
[11] Names have been changed for the sake of privacy.
[12] For an explanation of the nuanced differences among terms such as "profanity" bastardized here to be interchangeable, see: Safire, William. "Bleeping Expletives." *New York Times*. 31 Dec. 2008.
[13] Caramanica, Jon. "Behind Kanye's Mask." *New York Times*. 11 June 2013.