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Each semester, professors submit the best essays from their first year composition and other writing classes, and the best of the best are selected by committee. This year we are featuring a double issue to coordinate our time of publication with activities during English Week.

The Kudos Generation

By Jaden Elrod

In August of 2015, Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker James Harrison sparked controversy when he returned his young children's participation awards through social media. He stated that while he was proud of his boys, the trophies they received at the end of the season "will be given back until they EARN a real trophy" (qtd. in O'Sullivan). He went on to say that he was "not about to raise two boys to be men by making them believe that they are entitled to something just because they tried their best" (qtd. in O'Sullivan). His words began a great debate over the idea of the participation trophy. Should every child in a specific activity get a trophy, or should only the winners be the ones entitled to the trophy? Though some parents claim that the participation trophy is necessary to praise children for their effort, the idea of getting rewarded for doing nothing but showing up is detrimental because it creates a false sense of achievement and sets the child up for failure in the future.

While many scholars agree that the idea of a participation trophy is one that needs to be done away with, the reasons they give are drastically different. According to Reason Rupe Poll, an online public opinion research project, 57% of Americans believe that only winners of a sport should get a trophy (Ekins). Jonathan Fader, a sports psychologist, argues that not only are participation trophies harming children, but all "trophies are a bad metric for winners and losers alike" (Fader). He goes on to say that the child needs to be praised during the effort he put forth instead of the end result but also warns that praising the natural skill can also lead to toxic results when they lose (Fader). On the other hand, John O'Sullivan, author of the national bestseller *Changing the Game*, replies that he is against participation trophies because they are a "poor use of scarce funds" in the organization (O'Sullivan). He mentions the time when children were

being turned away when they wanted to play because they did not have the \$40 required to sign up, and their scholarship fund had been taken away to give more money to the trophies at the end of the year. I think denying a child the ability to play so that another child can get a piece of metal at the end of the year is wrong on every level. While Fader and O’Sullivan can agree that motivation is not found in a trophy at the end of the year, they both have different ideas on why. I agree with both of them in that participation trophies are raising an entitlement generation which is praised for mediocrity and false achievement. The wasted money on the trophies can be spent giving more children the opportunity to play.

Not only does the participation trophy give a child a false sense of achievement, it can also set the child up for failure in the future. Patrice Bendig, a recent graduate from St. John’s University, relates how the participation prizes in her childhood affected her career. Like many millennials, Bendig grew up with many trophies from activities that she was never any good in. She said that the “routine celebration of all of [her] work as good work positioned [her] to constantly expect to be a noted as a top performer” (Bendig). When she entered the workforce after college, the lack of acknowledgment of her work or her failure to accomplish every task

successfully the first time became disheartening

and made her feel inadequate. As her work

progressed, she had to realize that “meeting expectations and producing high-quality work

[was] ... why [she] was hired” (Bendig). Overall,

Bendig stated that she would “rather have a few

larger trophies awarded for true merit, instead of having shelves full of plastic trophies handed to everyone just for paying their dues” (Bendig). She, like many others her age, had become a

“NOT ONLY DOES THE PARTICIPATION TROPHY GIVE A CHILD A FALSE SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT, IT CAN ALSO SET THE CHILD UP FOR FAILURE IN THE FUTURE.”

victim of the idea of entitlement because of participation trophies. Being expected to receive constant praise for everything one does is unrealistic in the workforce, but that is exactly what this worthless trophy is teaching children. A young adult who has been taught that one gets rewarded for showing up sets himself up for failure in the real world.

Now some parents and experts will argue that participation trophies are not relative because of achievement, but they are necessary to support the effort that the child has put forth. In his news article supporting participation trophies, Jason Powers quotes child psychologist Joe Evans in stating that these awards are “really not for achievement but for the effort” (qtd. in Powers). I agree with Powers in that praising the effort of a child is vitally important. However, coaches should not wait until the end of the year to tell a child he/she did a good job for trying. The praise should be ongoing throughout every practice and every game. Coaches can tell the worst player and the best player of how proud they are that the children are trying their best. Both children will feel ecstatic that their coach is proud and will continue to play to the best of their ability. When the effort is praised by a participation trophy, the trophy is what the child sees as their accomplishment instead of the hard work they put into every practice and game.

Overall, participation trophies are more damaging than they are beneficial. James Harrison is not the model father that every parent should aspire to be like, but he does make a valid point that his boys should not become entitled to something because they tried their best. Participation trophies praise a child for showing up, which wasn't even the child's responsibility. They do somewhat praise the effort the child put forth, but a trophy should not emphasize their effort. They should be told by the coaches at every practice and every game how well they are doing and where they can improve. Waiting to give praise until the end of the season devalues all of the hard work the children put in throughout the season. The participation trophy also has

risks for later in life. The expected praise that comes from these awards for mediocrity carries into the adult life, and young adults then expect to be praised for every piece of work they produce, no matter how insignificant. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness in some cases. Had the young adult not been praised all of his life for everything he did, he would have a better understanding of the real world when he entered it. Sadly, there are more and more young adults like this as the “kudos generation” grows older, and it will only get worse if trophies are continually handed out like candy.

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Submitted in English Composition II, March, 16, 2016, to Dr. Marcia Bost

The Nature of Freedom

By Payton Lippert

Freedom is defined as the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint. The concept of freedom is often associated with the feeling of having no obligation to anything other than one's own immediate wants and desires. I would like to challenge this accepted view of freedom. What if freedom is not simply the ability to act as one's nature would have him act? What if freedom is actually the ability to act contrary to innate nature?

Freedom does not exist unless there is something from which one is to be freed. Freedom is not its own idea; it is the opposite of bondage. So, in order to be free from acting purely according to feeling, one must have freedom from himself. He must have freedom from his own nature.

David Foster Wallace describes freedom in this way: "The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day. That is real freedom." He then goes on to explain that the alternative to freedom is acting without thinking. He describes it as an unconscious "default setting." Freedom should be so much more complex than something described as a default setting. It should be something that you normally would not have liberty to otherwise do.

Wallace brings up an interesting point pertaining to freedom. He presents the idea that freedom is not the chance for people to do whatever they wish, but rather he says that true freedom is actually the ability to think and serve other people better. Service is almost never thought of as a freedom. Being a servant to someone is associated with quite the opposite of freedom. Why then does Wallace call this true freedom?

Serving people by choice is contrary to human nature. Doing things for other people in general is often contrary to human nature, so service requires someone to act against his first instinct. Service is

freedom from thinking of one's self as the center of his own meaning of life. It requires thought and being intentionally humble to serve other people. The act of service exhibits a freedom--a freedom from having to act without thought, emotion, or conviction.

Wallace's idea of freedom directly relates to a biblical definition of freedom. The Bible over and over again describes our enslavement to human nature as being in bondage to sin. In Ephesians 2:3, Paul describes the grips of sin saying, "We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath." In Romans 6:6, our ability to have freedom from sin is presented: "We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." Therefore, acting as

the world acts, as our own nature would have us act, is not true freedom. True freedom is having the option of choosing to act contrary to this innate selfish desire.

"ACTING AS THE WORLD ACTS, AS OUR OWN NATURE WOULD HAVE US ACT, IS NOT TRUE FREEDOM."

Galatians 5:13 says, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." This verse directly correlates with the ideas David Wallace presents: freedom and servanthood go hand in hand. Paul goes on to say in the next verses that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Freedom from sin sounds like the exact opposite of society's accepted view of freedom.

Human nature presents itself in many ways in society: gossip, drunkenness, selfishness, sex, and the list goes on. All of these things are presented by the world to be fun and, in a sense, freeing. They all come with the ability to basically do anything one would want to do, but as described earlier, freedom is found in the ability to choose to go against the human default setting. Jesus Christ is the only One who offers freedom from this. Galatians 5:16 says that if people will only walk in His spirit, then they will not

gratify the desires of the human nature or the default setting. When Jesus Christ died for the sin of mankind, He offered mankind the ability to reject the default setting of life, a life of sin. The world says that sin is freeing, but Christ says that freedom is found when one no longer is bound to choose to live the way the world does.

The world is constantly telling people there is a freedom in being different, but it actually means to be different in the ways that everyone else is being different. Society wants everyone to change at the same rate whether it be a choice in music or in fashion trends. In an attempt to be different, most people end up falling into a stereotyped category. For example, body image is an area in society in which people are allowed to be different. Unfortunately, the problem with this concept is that the idea of the freedom to look however one wants is proclaimed, but really looking however one wants to look only falls into an acceptable category if one is not too skinny or too fat. Therefore, as long as one's body type falls into an accepted range, then one has the freedom to be shaped however he or she wants.

Body image is just one of the many examples showing that freedom cannot come from following trends, society, or a default opinion. Freedom is a choice. Freedom chooses to be different, not only in ways society deems acceptable but in ways that require people to think--ways that require people not to look at a pattern but to make their own pattern.

As Americans, freedom is often presented as the ability to chase the American Dream. The problem with this idea of freedom is that it never satisfies; there is always something more that can be gained. The view of American freedom is only focused on bettering one's self, and the goal of perfection, completion, or contentment is never reached. Consequently, the American view of freedom is not freeing at all because it is only focused on what one individual has the ability to gain. This view results in dissatisfaction and the feeling of never being good enough compared to what others may have.

Barry Schwartz speaks about this American Dream in his book *The Paradox of Choice*. He uses many examples to illustrate that as a society American are harmed by having so many choices to satisfy our

desires no matter how unimportant they may be. Schwartz uses the process of buying jeans as an example to support his argument that having the freedom to get more actually leads to feeling unsatisfied. He says that as he walked into the store, he was shocked by the dozens of different kinds of jeans from which he had to choose: different fits, styles, cuts, and washes. After an hour of trying on jeans, he settled for the kind he thought best fit. Schwartz then says that he left dissatisfied because he worried whether he could have chosen better than what he settled for. Because there were so many difficult choices, he felt as though his decision was rushed, and he possibly missed out on the best choice.

Schwartz's example perfectly describes why more personal freedom does not directly correlate with more satisfaction. Freedom is supposed to be a good thing, so there should be a type of freedom that is satisfying. Through all examples, using personal freedom to serve other people is the ultimate type of freedom. It is fulfilling because it requires no personal gain or loss; the freedom to help, love, and serve people better is always going to bring more fulfillment than using personal freedom to gain.

Freedom is something that is always desired. Everyone wants to say that nothing controls him that he can act however he wishes. The idea of having freedom is usually related with having no feeling of obligation to anyone other than one's self. This is such an unfulfilling way of life. It requires no thought, discipline, or care; it is only focused on self-satisfaction and meeting immediate wants.

Lasting self-satisfaction will never come as long as the focus is on making decisions and gaining things merely for pure pleasure. There will always be someone or something that will be thought of as a better option than what one may currently have; this circle only leaves dissatisfaction and unhappiness in its wake. True freedom comes when we exhibit more thought into everyday life and when we decide to use our freedoms to buy into something bigger than self. It is manifested in the way we can serve other people and put other people's wants and wishes in front of our own wants and wishes. No, this type of

freedom may not be the most appealing of the two, but it is the most complex and respectable of the two, and the world could always use a little more complexity.

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Submitted in English Composition II, March 1, 2016, to Dr. Mark Hamilton

Shawshank Recidivism

By Jenna Kemp

Pregnant actress Sharon Tate had just arrived at her home, quite tired after a night out with her friends. Shortly after she and her friends arrived, however, intruders in the home forced all of the occupants into the living room and tied them up. The intruders began harassing Tate. A fellow hostage, celebrity stylist Jay Sebring, tried to defend her. The intruders beat him, kicking and hitting him until he was on the edge of death. Then they shot him. During the ensuing chaos, two other hostages made a daring attempt to escape. The intruders chased them down, mutilating and stabbing them. One of the would-be escapees, Abigail Folger, made it as far as the front yard. There she was caught and stabbed twenty-eight times. Meanwhile, inside the house, Tate was begging for the intruders to spare her child's life. Susan Atkins, one of the intruders, mercilessly stabbed Tate in the stomach, telling her "Look, bitch, I have no mercy for you. You're going to die, and you'd better get used to it" ("Leslie Van Houten Biography").

When the authorities arrived, they found the word "pig" scrawled on the door in Tate's blood. The very next night, real estate broker Leno LaBianca and his wife were found slaughtered in a similar fashion. The culprits were picked up a few days later on suspicion of vandalism. Once they were in custody, however, the authorities realized that they were also guilty of the Tate murder. It became apparent that the murders were carried out under the instruction of Charles Manson, by his cult-like following, commonly referred to as the Manson Family.

During their trial, the killers often exchanged smiles with each other and showed no grief over their actions. Manson released a music album entitled *Lie* to pay for his defense. He arrived in court with an *X* carved onto his head. Several of his female Family members followed suit. Not all of the Family members were on trial, however. Linda Kasabian acted as the key witness against the Family. She was granted immunity in exchange for her testimony. Manson himself, along with Susan Atkins and Leslie Van Houten, were sentenced to death in 1969.

The Manson case was not controversial. The brutality of the murders incurred the wrath of the public. No one questioned whether or not the death penalty was merited. However, in 1972, the California Supreme Court ruled the state's death penalty statutes as unconstitutional. The state government commuted 107 sentences, including those of Atkins, Manson, and Van Houten to life imprisonment with the possibility for parole.

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” (US Constitution) Does this sound familiar? It would be extremely difficult to find a U.S. citizen who was not forced to memorize the preamble to our constitution. The authors were careful to establish the boundaries for their new government in the document. How can the government fulfill its promise to “provide for the common defense,” when they insist on releasing rapists and murderers back into society? The answer is simple: they can't. By allowing prisoners to walk out into the world, the U.S. government endangers the very people they swore to protect.

Today in the U.S. there are approximately 4.8 million people on parole or probation. ("Bureau of Justice Statistics") The officers in charge of a parolee do everything they can to make sure the parolee is following the terms of their parole. When the parolee is willing to comply with these conditions, there isn't a problem. Unfortunately, too often they aren't willing to comply.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2013 only thirty-three of every hundred parolees exited their parole due to completion. Nineteen out of every hundred exited their parole due to incarceration, absconding, or other unsatisfactory completions ("Bureau of Justice Statistics"). A study completed by the Bureau showed that 68% of people who have successfully completed their parole were arrested for a new crime within three years of their release, and 77% were arrested within five years ("Bureau of Justice Statistics"). 71% of violent offenders were arrested for committing another crime ("Bureau of Justice Statistics"). These numbers are more than a little unsettling.

Manson Family member Susan Atkins died in 2009 from terminal brain cancer. Manson and Van Houten are still alive, and, what's more, they're being considered for parole. Leslie Van Houten was recommended for parole this month. An article from *LA Times* dubbed her "the least blameworthy member of the group" (Hamilton). On the night of the LaBianca murders, Van Houten held Rosemary LaBianca down while other family members mutilated her. She then stabbed Rosemary fourteen times. During the trial, she was high on LSD which caused her to constantly giggle and mock the proceedings. After she made statements, she would look at Manson for approval, until she realized it only made him look guiltier. She even went as far as to

carve an X onto her forehead to match Manson's. This is the woman they are considering releasing back onto the streets.

This will not be the first time the judicial system has released a killer. In 1982, 17 year-old James Ealy was convicted of killing a woman and her two daughters, and molesting and then killing her grandson . The jury found him guilty, and he was sentenced to life without parole. However, in 1986, the case was appealed. The defense said that Ealy had been arrested without probable cause, and that his confession had been beaten out of him. The charges were dropped, but Ealy remained incarcerated until 1993 on a previous rape charge. He was arrested again on a lesser charge in 1996, and paroled in 1999.



“WE CAN NEVER BE SURE THEY HAVE
COMPLETELY CHANGED”

He was arrested again in 2006. He was jailed without bail on suspicion of robbing the Burger King where he worked, stabbing the manager with a screwdriver, and then strangling her with her own tie. He was convicted in 2013 and sentenced to life in prison. In 1999, this man sat before a parole board and was deemed fit to return to society. Parole boards are thorough. They look at past offenses and behavior in prison. They have psychiatrists testify about the mental health of the patient. They read petitions from family members of both the victims and the prisoners. James Ealy was put through this process, and he was released. Clearly this rigorous process is not enough to determine whether or not a person has really changed their ways ("Released to Kill Again").

When the system of parole was established by Alexander Maconochie in the 19th century, it was designed to reward good behavior with the possibility of earlier release. Sadly, the standard for good behavior may no longer be as high as it was back then. It is important to note that all of the cases mentioned above are murder and or rape cases. They are not manslaughter cases or petty theft. Manslaughter can be self-defense or purely accidental, and petty theft can be a sign of desperation. This does not exonerate the perpetrators of such crimes by any means, but it is highly likely that these criminals have a different frame of mind, and different policies may apply. However, people who killed or raped with that as their intent are extremely dangerous and need to stay locked up. We can never be completely sure that they have changed; therefore, they will always be a risk to society when they are released. Because the judicial system cannot ensure transformation, they put everyone at risk when they let a killer go.

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Submitted in Honors English Composition II, April 21, 2016, to Dr. Angela O’Neal

Literacy Narrative: *The Good Teacher*

By Tiffany Crawford

First place winner, 2016-2017

Reading and writing has been a skill I have performed ever since I can remember. Now, I obviously was not just born and blessed with the ability to read and write; someone taught me how. A first grade teacher, maybe even a kindergarten teacher, but I do not remember learning how to read or write – I just can. I do, however, remember my younger sister, Sarah, learning to read. I remember because I was the one who taught her.

“HER FACE LIT UP LIKE THE
CHRISTMAS TREE IN TIME
SQUARE.”

Sarah had just started kindergarten, and I was in the fifth grade. (And as a fifth grader, I was a pretty strong reader.) One night she asked if I would read her a bed time story. I said yes and told her to go and pick out a book for me to read. Sarah came back with *The Cat and the Hat*. As I started reading, I noticed Sarah would repeat the words I read to her. I stopped and asked her what she was doing, and she replied, “I’m learning how to read!” I laughed and asked if she would like for me to teach her how to read. Her face lit up like the Christmas tree in Time Square. She was so eager to learn and to be taught by me, her big sister. I held her tiny fingers as we scanned the words. We sounded out each and every letter, putting syllables together, and finally forming words, but then Mom and Dad told us it was time for bed and that we could pick back up after school tomorrow. So we did.

We read every day after school. We would run inside, throw our book bags down, rush upstairs to my room where Sarah picked out the next book we were to read. Oh, how much fun it

was, the big sister actually teaching her little sister how to read. I thought I was so “cool” and “smart” teaching Sarah.

Eventually, Sarah stopped needing me to sound out words with her. She quickly became the best reader in her class, so good, in fact, that she was reading above her grade level. So many teachers commented on how great a reader Sarah was.

“Sarah is so smart!” “Sarah is an amazing student, and she’s only a kindergartener!” They commented on how “y’all” (Mom and Dad) must have worked all summer with Sarah on her reading.”

Mom and Dad would just smile and say, “No, no one worked with her before starting school.” Her teachers were in awe by this, their faces expressing how impressed they were by Sarah. “Why did teachers never talk about me that way?” I wondered.

I remember having a rough day at school, and when Sarah and I got home she ran up the stairs, grabbed *One fish, Two fish, Red fish, Blue fish* -the book we had been working on that week- and placed it in my lap, waiting for me to open it.

She asked, “Tiff, why are we not reading?”

I snapped back, “Because, you already know how to!” I threw the book down and went to my room, leaving Sarah sitting on the couch.

Mom came upstairs and asked why I acted the way I did. I explained to her how Sarah is so much better at reading than I was her age. Teachers think she is the smartest student they have ever seen. Mom began to laugh at my reasoning. She told me that yes, Sarah is smart, and learned to read very quickly, but it was only because she had a good teacher. Mom told me that “the good teacher” was me and explained that without my help and guidance, Sarah would not have been such an amazing reader.

I suddenly felt a great sense of importance knowing that I was the cause of Sarah's rapid success. I remember running back down the stairs for Sarah, taking her hand, and telling her that she was going to be the best reader in the world, and I was going to help her do it. We ran off to engross ourselves in the study, laughing and giggling with one another.

Sarah and I eventually grew out of our fantasy to become the best reader and best reading coach in the world, but we never stopped helping each other. The satisfaction of teaching Sarah to read was amazing, and it will always be a fantastic memory of reading and bonding between sisters. Even though I have no memory of learning to read myself, I will always carry with me the wonderful image of an older sister leading and assisting her younger sister.



Submitted in English Composition I, September 21, 2016, to Dr. Marcia Bost

Help Wanted: Housewife

By Sydney Holmes

Imagine not being able to scream when you were in pain. Imagine if you could only bake a cake but never eat it. Envision that you are only allowed to exit your home on certain days. Try to depict that you are a dog led by a leash. Form an image of yourself laying on the ground when there is an empty bed right across the room. Imagine yourself as a canary forced to sing inside of a cold metal cage. You are a glorious oil painting hanging on the wall, always seen on the surface level but never examined for a deepened understanding. What would it feel like to be seen and not heard? This is how many women felt before the 19th amendment. Trapped by social norms and gender roles, women were not allowed to be anything more than a housewife. Many authors such as Emily Dickinson, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Sui Sin Far help to change the definition of what it is to be a woman and help show that women are more than a Cinderella story.

In early American societies, women were expected to take care of the household. They had to get all the household chores done, take care of their children and husband, and some even had gardening tasks. In some earlier societies, like the Puritan, the women had to take over the men's duties when they fell ill or went away on a business trip on top of all their other duties. All women were expected to fit in the same mold. Not all apples look the same, not all grapes are the same size, and not all people have the same desires and expectations. They felt. They dreamed. They yearned to explore, change, create, and learn.

Yet, they continued to be trapped like a ship in a bottle with so much potential and greatness. This leaves a hole in their hearts, causing them to feel like a nobody. Some women lived so long in a mold they believed being a nobody was the best thing that could happen to a woman. As Emily Dickinson elegantly wrote, "How dreadful to be somebody. How public - like a frog" (85). A nobody could hide in the shadows. It was better to be seen and not heard. They had lived in a continuous wave of negative peer pressure to not unlock their full potential. Not only was breaking social norm to be something unheard of, it was frowned upon. However, even nobodies desire something. Women desired things that ranged from living as a housewife to breaking free of the confining and strict definition of what they can and cannot accomplish. Katy Perry, a modern American pop artist states,

"I used to bite my tongue and hold my breath
 Scared to rock the boat and make a mess
 So I sat quietly, agreed politely" (Katy Perry, *Roar*).



WOMEN LIVED A
 "PERFECT" LIFE, AND IT
 DANGLED ON THE
 APPROVAL OF A MAN.

Once upon a time, women would wait for their husbands to finish their 9-to-5 work day to gain his approval. They would make the house perfect for his arrival. The house would be spotless; a perfect meal would be on the table as he walked in the door. She would attend social gatherings with him as a token of his success. She would have children and raise them right. It was the perfect ending to a fairytale life. Women lived a "perfect" life, and it dangled on the approval of a man. Women like Emily Dickinson and Katy Perry have helped depict what life was like for some women and voiced their concern for their generation. They helped their generation of women explore and move beyond their societies' rules of what they could accomplish.

Dickinson called women out for not being anything more than some nobodies going through the

motions. Katy mentions that women still feel that they do not have a complete say in their lives today. The call for change has been made; now it is up to the rest of the women to answer it.

Getting tired of their way of life, women started to wonder if there was a different lifestyle awaiting them. Husbands were not always infallible and invincible, as much as they tried to get their wives to believe. Some wives had a loving husband, and all was well. Some had a neglectful husband who turned to mistresses, alcohol, and other distractions from their home life. A more common situation was the sweet but tempered husband. He was the man that the wife loved as much as she was afraid of him, and as Kate Chopin wrote, "When he frowned, she trembled, but she loved him. When he smiled, she asked no greater blessing of God" (423). Some ladies knew that they were in a terrible situation, but they did not see an escape. Women, already feeling trapped, began to fantasize about a different life. They started to think about what they wanted in life,

"You get off on your 9 to 5

Dream of picket fences and trophy wives

But no I'm never gonna be, cause I don't wanna be

No I don't wanna sit still look pretty" (Daya, "Sit Still Look Pretty").

Women started to yearn for the day that they would be more than a stereotypical woman. They wanted the day that they could become anything they set their mind upon. The seed of women's independence has been planted. Now it is up to the rest of the women to nurture it and help it grow.

Courage and determination start to creep in the cracks in the foundation of the castle built by men and maintained by women. Women start to realize that they can no longer rely on their Prince Charming to rescue them. In some cases, the "knight in the shining armor" is actually the

one hindering them and hurting them the most. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gillman, the woman is trapped and psychologically abused by her husband. He keeps telling her to trust him because he is a physician, and he knows best. Finally, his wife realizes that she needs to be free from her cage, that she cannot be invisible like the wallpaper, "I've got out at last," said I, "In spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back in" (Gilman 497). The woman came to an understanding that her husband was the one hindering her. The spark of women's independence starts to spread like wildfire. Women want a change in their lives,

"Because these things will change

Can you feel it now?

These walls that they put up to hold us back will fall down

This revolution, the time will come

For us to finally win" (Taylor Swift, *Change*).

They scream and shout a need for change, but very few have yet to act on this notion of change. They still have the fairytale idea that someone else will do it for them. Most agree to change at a rally of justice but turn right around to return to their lives of servitude. The revolutionary flower is grown and budding, but it has yet to bloom. It is up to the rest of the women to help it bloom.

Women finally had the courage to act on their new ideas of independence and rights. They finally realized that they had a voice. A voice that could be heard. A voice that had something to say. A voice to be reckoned with. Women started to take control of their lives. They became the main character in their own story. In the story of "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," by Sui Sin Far, a young couple's love is put at risk by an arranged marriage. Mrs. Spring Fragrance takes it upon

herself to break tradition and help the young couple. The bride-to-be is too timid to break tradition, but she wanted it to happen desperately. Mrs. Spring Fragrance realizes that she's the one that needs to break tradition. Fortunately, she is successful: "We are to be married next week, Kai Tzu and I. All through you, all through you- the sweetest jade jewel in the world" (850). Mrs. Fragrance does not make excuses. She goes out into the world and takes control of the situation. Women everywhere are slowly starting to take a stand. They are rising above the clouds of doubt and hardship. They are find their voice and making it heard.

"And all those things I didn't say

Wrecking balls inside my brain

I will scream them loud tonight

Can you hear my voice this time?" (Rachel Platten, *Fight Song*).

Finally, the flower of independence is in full bloom, but that does not mean the fight is over. It is up to the women of future generations to continue to nurture and care for the flower that generations past have worked so hard to grow.

The fight to protect and nurture a revolution of women's rights is far from over. It is up to future generations to make sure that the flower is watered, given sunlight, and weeded. Generations past have done the hard work. They planted the seed, nurtured it, and helped it flourish. Through women such as Emily Dickinson, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Sui Sin Far, women have learned to find their voice. Women now know that they must think for themselves, and they can also make the world a better place for themselves and others by standing together. There will be times in the future when someone will try to choke the spirit of flower and everything it stands for, and when that time comes, the present generation of women will be ready to take a stand.

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Mastering Song Evaluation

By Jennings Gardner

Eras ago, the original geniuses of music were brought upon the Earth in a timely manner by God's favor. They had very few to emulate, to learn from, to observe. Composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Haydn, Mozart, and others were given the gifts of writing music strictly from one source: God. They had very few composers born before them to gain knowledge and ideas of how to write music. It came to them like it was absolutely nothing. It was nothing other than absolute destiny for these composers to be created by God and build the foundation of music, especially choral hymns. Just as there would be no English language if Latin had not been the starting point, without these composers, there would be no gospel music today. Furthermore, there would be no rock 'n' roll, jazz, alternative, heavy metal, dubstep, rap, RnB, trap, none of it.

As time goes by, the common soul and even the common musician forgets all about these wise men. They wrote their music flawlessly. Their music (and most classical music in general) is so intelligent that it is even proven to benefit the brain, decrease stress, and improve sleep (Engel). They incorporated poetry into their text and structured their notes and rhythms to be a direct translation of the text to the language of music. Every piece by these composers, when heard by an open minded ear, will take you to a different area, a different time period, distinctly themed, all in its own series of events.

As a performer, the most important lesson to learn is how to evaluate every detail about the music. The way artists or composers write their music, they constructed it to have much more than just notes to be played or sung. Every bit of the song has meaning, the lyrics, the contour of the music itself, the composer's background life and the events that were going on in the song's time period. To fully master a song and tell its story, all of this knowledge must be studied before performing it. This way, the audience is drawn in and feels the way the artist wanted them to feel. Compositions of pieces are expressions of the way an author feels about something. The intention is to make the audience feel exactly how the composers felt when writing the piece (Kania).

If an audience is not convinced by the performer (who can be thought of as "the messenger"), then he has failed the composer along with the audience. The audience may not always realize it, but it is never known who is watching. A minor pattern may be heard in the music at the time where the slightly depressing music comes in. Later in the song, it may become a happy melody again as the lyrics become positive. A performer should always be asking "Why does the music do this at this measure?" or "Why did the artist write these lyrics at this part?" As the answer is rarely just "Because he/she felt like it."

The first aspect to master is the poem. If the song is not in English, find a way to translate it and learn its meaning. Research as much as you can about it, including the events that were taking place during the time. Think about how the composer was feeling, what drove him/her to write about it in such a passionate manner. Find out as many details as possible until a picture is painted in your head. Answer all of the questions that you can come up with until it is difficult to ask "Why" about anything else. It will become much easier to make the performance more

conversational with the audience, which creates a significant difference than just simply “having a good voice.”

The second step is to learn the rhythm. Practice saying the words in the rhythm in which they are written as if you are having a conversation. As if you are telling someone something. This defeats the habit of treating a song as if its purpose is nothing other than to make pretty noises with your vocal chords, overly stressing about the way the voice sounds. In the long run, this will actually enable the voice to sound more tonal and on pitch. When the singer is

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passionate about the message they are delivering, they are less stressed which creates less tension in the voice and allows it to ring freely. It is the same exact issue as a stutter going away as soon as the speaker stops thinking about how they sound and just says what they want to say. The more flow in the rhythm and the message and the more freedom in the voice, the better the performance as a whole.

The third step is to master the pronunciation. The diction is probably the most important aspect in singing a song. This is so because the words are the whole point of the song. If the audience simply cannot understand what the singer is saying, it is difficult to entertain them unless the voice stands out so much from other singers that they have heard that the singer is just one in a million. This is rare, and untraditional, so the best way to entertain an audience is to complete the key point of singing, delivering the message. Putting emphasis on the consonants and voiced consonants also adds passion to the voice, along with putting extra emphasis on the stressed syllables in a word. The clearer the accent and pronunciation, the more interesting the lyrics are to the audience.

After putting words and rhythms together, you must finally learn the melody line. Study the notes, but keep the technique that has been mastered through rhythm and lyrics and diction. Practice with a piano to check and make sure the pitches are all being sung correctly. You will master the song much more quickly than just practicing singing it right away. Remember to incorporate the background information of the song when learning these pitches, to understand why the contour of the melody is the way it is. The most important part of this step is commitment, constant practice, not just until you get it right but until you cannot get it wrong.

Importantly, learn and practice the dynamic markings in the music. This gives a starting point of how to add passion to the voice. First, look to see if the ideal volume is marked soft, loud, or in between, and make sure that there is room to grow in volume or become softer when it is marked so. This will require learning music theory but only the basics which are not very difficult to memorize. The markings that indicate whether it is sung in a slow and connected feel or a bouncy and piercing feel will direct the energy as well. There are also commas on the staff lines which indicate where to take a breath. This way the energy does not suffer from poor breath support, which is one of the most common issues while singing.

The final step is to study the song vocally. The song has a style to the voice in which it should be sung. Opera arias and classical art songs should be sung with a classical vocal technique, which is usually the foundation for all vocal styles because it teaches the basics of singing but not required to learn first. Pop should be sung in a bright poppy tone and is usually what comes most naturally to beginners. Musical theatre is by far the most conversational singing style there is but also one of the most dramatic. Country needs to have a drawl to it, and there needs to be a fine balance between authenticity in the voice and sounding too hillbilly for

anyone to want to listen to the singer. This is where taking voice lessons may be beneficial, but with hard work and thorough research it is possible to self-teach any vocal technique.

When all of these steps have been put together, the true magic will come with not only dedication but passion. The more singing is loved, the quicker talent is earned. If the goal is to just become better than your neighbor or sound better in angst of what people think of your singing when you attend church, the plateau in your talent will come with haste, and it may never progress any further. Singing must be a destiny, rather than a priority, to truly never stop improving and learning new things. This is not to say that those who enjoy it but do not have a passion for it cannot become talented whatsoever. However, to be the best singer possible, the incentive to improve and share your talents with the audience must become nothing other than stronger as time goes by and make you happier than doing almost anything else.

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