Writing for a Multicultural World:  
An Anthology of Ethnographies

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Appendix I
Introduction to An Anthology of Ethnographies

Students in the Fall 2018 course *Writing for a Multicultural World: An Introduction to Ethnographic Writing* prepared the collection published in this anthology. The course is offered by the Department of Anthropology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

This fall was the first time the course was offered, and I was thrilled to teach it. I asked students to undertake their own ethnographic research and writing project, and to allow themselves the freedom to experiment in finding their own writing voices. The goal was for students to engage the research and writing process with care, thoughtfulness, sensitivity, and enthusiasm in hopes of gaining deeper self-awareness and awareness of others. The results are on the pages of this book. Topics range from street corner society in Manhattan and beer culture in Brooklyn to motherhood, childhood, disability, addiction, religion, language, and surfing culture in Long Beach.

Ethnography is the central research method developed and applied by anthropologists to study human beings in context of the social worlds within which the live. Over the course of the semester, we explored the purposes, techniques and styles of doing ethnography with a focus on how contemporary anthropologists push the boundaries of the discipline’s research and writing conventions. We examined how a sample of ethnographers integrated their knowledge and sensibilities into writing for particular audiences, and we explored genre, voice, and the quality or texture of writing in various works (see Appendix I for excerpts of the course syllabus).

In the pages that follow are the results of these examinations and explorations—student ethnographies that help illuminate important aspects of contemporary life and the human condition.

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The Bad People:  
The stories of young adults, addicts in recovery, and the society that raised them  
Connor Gilligan

Introduction
I have been interested in drugs for most of my twenty-five years. I have experimented with most of them, and I have had my hardships with them. These experiences have motivated my passion for the topic. I am beyond fascinated with drugs and the people who use them. I also want to better grasp how people perceive drugs and what cultural meanings are attached to drugs and drug users. This interest has led me to explore narratives about drugs, and the laws and social stigmas constructed in U.S. society, presumably to thwart their use. This ethnography is the result of that exploration.

Like many others, I was told from a young age that “drugs are bad” and “only bad people and losers use drugs.” Even from the age of 10 or 12 I could see the hypocrisy in these words. I was well aware that nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol are drugs, and despite their legality, they are potentially as harmful and addicting as certain drugs deemed illegal. I have come to learn certain truths about drugs: they can be bad, very bad in fact, but they can also be good, harmless, and even beneficial.

This work is very personal and intimate. As autoethnography, it recounts my own story with drugs, and as such, is fraught with emotion. This project is also an intimate ethnography because the people at the center of it are among my closest friends. The aim is to understand the narratives surrounding drugs in the United States by using the stories of these close friends and myself. On the pages of this ethnography are their stories and my own told in prose and poetry.

Participants
The subjects at the center of this ethnography are my closest friends, of which there are two groups. The first are my childhood friends, Chris and Blair, who were both heavy drug users. They, like myself, have tried almost every drug under the sun, and they view drugs as both tools that expand consciousness and compassion, and as weapons that destroy people, personalities, and communities. The second group are my new friends, friends that I have made since moving back to New York, friends that only found out about my history with drug use when I felt comfortable enough to share it with them. There are eight of us that hang out regularly: Sam, Richard, Pablo, Jay, Brian, Janine, Ling and myself. These friend groups do not have radically different views on drugs, but they do have drastically different stories and experiences.
My best friend Chris and I, no longer living in the same state, spend hours each month on the phone talking about everything we can fit into an hour-long conversation. We have known each other for over 10 years, and have a long history and strong bond. Chris and I became addicted to pills together, then addicted to heroin together, then got clean off heroin together. We share a bond that is hard to explain to someone who hasn’t experienced these things. We were there for each other through the process of getting clean, and we both acknowledge that we couldn’t have done it on our own. There are times still—some five years later—that I’ll call Chris and tell him how I’m feeling physically, mentally, or emotionally, and he will know exactly what I’m talking about, exactly what I’m going through. I don’t have that kind of connection with any other human being, and for that reason I will use the term “consigliere” to describe him. This term derives from Sicilian Italian and roughly translates to a person who advises and guides you. A consigliere is akin to a confidant and trusted friend. I use this word for two reasons. The first is because Chris is my close friend who I share a lifelong bond with (and I know he will get a kick out of this when he reads it). The other reason is because we are both of Sicilian descent and spent much of our teenage years fantasizing and talking about the “good old days” of Sicilian crime rule.

Chris and I spend countless hours talking about our past and future. About how hard it is being an addict and recovering addict. About how society treats people like us. How they see us, and what they say about us—both behind our backs and to our faces. It is this history with Chris that is the inspiration for this ethnography. The relationship we share is much different from that of my new friends, who only learned about my drug use and addiction after we had known each other for a few months. One of my friends, Justine, told me that, “I had a whole different opinion of addicts before I met you. You really changed my thinking.” This is inspiring to hear, and is another reason why I write, which is to change people’s minds about people who use drugs and drug addicts. If this ethnography does one thing, I hope that it changes the minds of at least a few people who viewed drugs and drug users as bad. Drug addicts are seen as society’s scum. The worst of the worst, degenerates and losers. It hurts to know that that is what most people think of you. I’ve had people stop being my friend or stop talking to me after they found out I was an addict.

The Auto-Ethnography of an Addict

When I was a kid my parents always used to tell me not to do drugs. I was probably eleven or twelve years old when my dad used to ask me, “Who does drugs?,” waiting for me to say “Losers and bad people,” to which he would say, “Exactly, you’re so smart.” I remember one day when I was around that age, I sat in the front seat of my dad’s Ford F-150 pickup truck, sinking into the large leather seat. He asked me this question, as he had done many times
before, and I gave the answer he wanted to hear. But on that day, I didn’t do as I had done every time prior. On that day, I asked “Why?” I don’t remember exactly what the response was, but I remember my father’s attitude. He was a little confused, a little angry, a little upset, and seemed a little disappointed. I’ll never forget that moment, as it so perfectly encapsulated the parent-child drug narrative. Parents are supposed to tell their kids not to do drugs, and kids are supposed to say “yes” and not ask questions.

I always knew this wasn’t the full story, and yearned to find the truth about drugs. Maybe this curiosity was the reason for trying as many of them as I could. And that’s how it started, as it does with most drug addicts, as experimentation. I started with alcohol, then nicotine, then hydrocodone, then Xanax, then ecstasy, then cocaine. I was able to do those drugs on occasion. The real trouble began when I started taking morphine, which led to taking OxyContin, which lead to smoking OxyContin. I was still very against trying heroin, knowing the social stigmas associated with it, and fearing what I might become. It wasn’t until I noticed the physical withdrawal that I contemplated it. OxyContin became more and more expensive as the months went by, until finally, after their chemical composition was altered to make them abuse-proof, I succumbed to the lure of heroin.

Heroin wasn’t like they made it out to be in D.A.R.E or on TV. After the first time trying it, I distinctly remember feeling it was no different than the OxyContin or Roxicets I had been smoking. Except it felt a little dirtier for some reason. This is when I was truly hooked. I had such bad physical withdrawals that stopping seemed next to impossible. I drained my savings account to buy the drug day after day. Soon running out of money and turning to a life of crime, I would sell drugs, rob people, break into houses, and sometimes commit crimes for the sheer adrenaline. But then it became too hard to keep up with the habit, and I would spend more of the day sick than well. I calculated how much I spent after I had been clean some time, and came to the conclusion that I spent anywhere from $80,000 to $250,000 in my five years of heroin addiction. I couldn’t rob, steal, or cheat enough to fulfill my habit and something had to give. I knew I had two options, either continue what I was doing and probably live a very short life, or get clean and live my life to my full potential. I was out of money and options, doing the only thing I could do, I got clean. Of course this didn’t last long. As any addict does, I had a series of relapses. Getting sober and then relapsing probably a hundred times in two years. Getting clean is probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done. No part of it was easy, but every part of it was worth it.

It’s hard being a heroin addict, and especially a recovering addict. People do not understand you. They don’t understand your mindset or attitude. They don’t understand your struggle. And often times they don’t care to get to know you. They don’t ask how your feeling, only why you did it. When you’re addicted to heroin, you lose your feeling. You stop feeling
happy or sad or excited. All you feel is numb. Getting clean, you get all your feelings back in a sudden wave, and they are hard to deal with. Once again you feel happy, sad, and excited, but you also equally feel hopeful and hopeless, not sure of how your life without drugs will turn out. Writing helped me a great deal during this period, and is one of the reasons I am writing this ethnography. I love writing, and in some ways, I feel that it has saved my life. I go back and read the stuff I wrote when I was experiencing these new emotions. Oh, how sad, depressed, and lonely I was. I used to write things like “I don’t think I’ll ever get out of this,” “I don’t think I’ll ever get better,” “I don’t think I’ll ever feel normal,” and “I don’t think I can make it.”

Looking back on it makes me both happy and sad. I was so depressed for such a long time. I had no hopes and no dreams. And then writing turned that around. I was forced to write when I came back to school, and I haven’t stopped. I turned to writing poetry to understand myself and my feelings. I still do the same today, some of which is shared in this very project. I want to start with a poem, which describes the life of an addict:
Broken

The spoon is full, and the vein is too
Now so is the needle and ready to shoot
   Arm is tied, and candle lit
   The dirty floor is where I sit
A moment away from sweet surrender
   Spike in arm of body slender
   Now I lay my head to rest
   Barely moving like my chest
   Hard to see and shallow breath
   It seems to be a date with death
   Mind and body, both are broken
   Hopes and fears, both unspoken
   At total peace, but should be nervous
What the meaning? What’s my purpose?

This poem was written years after I got clean, but I can remember days like this as if they were yesterday. Writing about this topic is emotional, and poetry helps me funnel that emotion into something positive. It helps me organize my scattered thoughts into something beautiful. I know there are other people who can relate to this poem, like Chris for example. Chris told me that he feels like our time as heroin addicts felt like “just yesterday, and a lifetime ago.”

Chris and I both got clean off heroin by using the prescription drug Suboxone. Suboxone is comprised of the two drugs Buprenorphine, a synthetic opioid, and Naloxone, an opiate blocker. The doctors never mentioned the risks of using Suboxone. In fact they pitched it to us as a miracle drug of sorts, one that just cures your addiction. We now know this is far from the truth.

Chris told me that he believes that addiction doctors are just “glorified drug dealers” who were doing the work of the pharmaceutical giants—in particular Perdue Pharma, the people who created both the drugs OxyContin (which is what we started our addictions with) and Suboxone (the medicine we both currently struggle to get off of). He went on to say, “If I would have known that I would be on it forever I would have never gotten it in the first place. My doctor says now that I’m gonna be on it forever since I’ve been on it for years already.” This conversation, revolving around the idea of switching one addiction for another, inspired me to
write another poem that sheds light on what it’s like getting clean from heroin only to get addicted to another drug.

**Twisted Truths**

We tell ourselves all kinds of lies
   We tell ourselves all kinds of twisted truths
We say just one more hit
Just one more bag
Just one more day
Just one more week
Just one more month

We tell lies to feel better
We tell lies to feel less worthless
We tell lies to tell lies
And we tell lies with no purpose
We tell lies till the truth is a distant memory
We tell lies to not hurt from pain and life
The pain of addiction
And the pain of not knowing

We say it will be over soon
And that we can do it
We say we can be clean
But we can’t when it comes down to it

But then we do
And we wonder how

We live normal lives... for now

Then the emotions overwhelm
Overwhelmed by emotion
We are called right back into the painless ocean

Only painless for weeks
And then it reverses
We are back where we started wondering how
wondering why
This process repeats
Until it doesn’t
Does it still hurt?
Does it?

The pain so great we turn to others
Others hurt too
We turn to each other
We turn to pills
To cocaine
    To liquor

We hide from the pain

We’ve never been sicker

Trade one for another
Than another
Than another

Trading addictions
Our thoughts we must smother

We tried to mend our pain
Now we must mend our minds

Our actions are vain
But we still try to leave this all behind

Can we?

Does it ever really end?
Does it?

Does it?
Chris and I often find ourselves talking for two or three hours about Suboxone. How we will get off of it. Why we got on it in the first place. The new methods or drugs people are using to stop their Suboxone use. The lies the doctors tell, and the truths they leave out. The role of Purdue Pharma in creating addicts and then re-creating them.

An Intimate Ethnographic Encounter

On a rainy Thursday night in November, we—Janine, Richard, Pablo, Brian, Sam, Ling, Jay and myself—sit at a bar in Hell’s Kitchen, all drinking mojitos and talking about school. As is common for our dinners, the conversation turned to the topic of drugs. We talked about where we got our views about drugs from, who taught us about drugs, and then what we re-learned about drugs. We all mentioned that are parents were the first to talk to us about drugs. Janine told me, “My parents didn’t talk about drugs too much. They just told me that they were bad.” Jay also said that his parents rarely mentioned drugs, only occasionally talking about the “devil’s lettuce” to “hint at the fact that it was bad.”

Richard said, “I grew up in a very strict Catholic Dominican household, so I can’t do drugs cuz I’ll die. They told me ‘no drugs whatsoever…but alcohol is fine.’ So, I always associated drugs negatively and alcohol positively even though they are both very similar.” Pablo recalled a situation like Richard’s, saying “Drugs were really looked down upon in my house. Illegal drugs particularly. Not really alcohol like that, it was not really looked down upon. Because it was against the law and my family doesn’t want me doin’ any stuff that has to do with stuff that’s illegal.” This brings up an interesting point: despite the fact that alcohol is a drug, we don’t view it as such. We tell our children that drugs are bad and that alcohol isn’t, never being truthful and explaining that alcohol is a drug too.

The conversation then shifted to what we learned in school. I told me friends all about the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program I was forced to endure as an
elementary school student. I shared with them the words of my childhood friend, Blair, who told me, “Yeah, ha. I remember D.A.R.E. when we were in elementary school. It honestly made me even more curious about drugs. Like I didn’t leave there going, ‘Oh drugs are bad, I’m never gonna do them.’ I was more like ‘Damn they’re not telling us everything,’ and I was just more curious. I was always curious about drugs though. Even when I was that age I wanted to know what drugs were like. I was like ‘Oh yeah?,’ you wanna know more about drugs. Like you know. Like some people know, they’re not telling you something. And that makes you want to try for yourself... And I think that D.A.R.E. exposed us kinda young. What’s the point of teaching third graders doing heroin is gonna make you go to jail? What were they even trying to achieve?”

Blair and I sat through the D.A.R.E. assemblies together, flippant and skeptical even at eleven years old.

We both now subscribe to the idea that teaching children—or any person for that matter—the half-truth is going to make them more curious about drugs. The historian Howard Zinn once wrote “Just giving people certain information about one situation may lead them to look for what else has been concealed from them” (2009). This quote has stuck with me and made me re-understand my lifelong curiosity with drugs. We are taught in school that “drugs are bad because they are bad,” as Ling put it, but then we realize that this isn’t the whole truth, and we search for the rest of the information.

After I shared my D.A.R.E. experience with my friends at the bar, we continued our conversation. Now talking about what we were told in school. Richard told me, “Elementary and middle school I didn’t learn anything about drugs. Like absolutely nothing.” Pablo said the same. Sam, too, had a similar story, claiming “None of my teachers ever spoke to me about drugs. Probably in high school it was very brief, but what my schools focused on was sex education.”

As strange of an idea it is to pretend drugs don’t exist, what really threw me for a loop is when Jay and Brian told me that when they were in middle school, the NYPD came to their school and handed out “anti-crime coloring books.” These coloring books features cartoon pictures of different crimes and the criminals that commit them. There were pictures of robbers and prostitutes and pimps. Jay said “In our Catholic school, the NYPD used to come by and drop off these books. They were like coloring books that would like teach you how to like live a proper civilian life.” He went on to explain that there were pages about drugs featuring “kids smoking what we thought were cigarettes and ones with needles.” They were part of their daily lesson plan in second grade. And on the pages phrases like “I will not play with needles” were written, also featuring a drawing of an addict and used needles.
After hearing the coloring book story from Brian and Jay, and recalling my own experiences with D.A.R.E., I was inspired to write the following piece of poetry that describes the approach of the United States educational system in teaching children about drugs:

**Shut Up Kids**

What are drugs? Well, we didn’t know
Sat us down for a one-man-show
Shouts at us, says that and this
It’s funny now to reminisce
Be yourself, not a copycat
Drugs are bad remember that
They’ll ruin your life or make you fat
So listen up, and cut the chat
Drugs should never be done no matter what
Unless the doctor tells you such
Color these pictures of hookers and needles
Never too soon to be grown-up people
We know you’re young, but it’s never too soon
And don’t forget to color the spoon
Learn your junkies, it’s important
And always call law enforcement
Show some respect for the men in blue
Even when they come to murder you
Remember all this and you’ll be just fine
Oh, and one more thing... Stay in the lines

**Cultural Implications**

Being an anthropologist, I know it is impossible to gather all this information and not connect it to larger society. We are left thinking about drug use, drug laws, and cultural attitudes towards them. Where did these ideas come from? Have we always had them? The short answer is no. We did not have laws related to drugs in the United States for roughly the first hundred years
we were a nation. One of the first drugs to have been criminalized was opium. Anthropologist Alisse Waterston in her book *Street Addicts in the Political Economy* connects the criminalization of certain drugs with the need to contain and control surplus labor. For example, in the period before the turn of the twentieth century, the United States had a surplus of Chinese immigrants who had been brought over to build the railroads. With no work left for them to do, public “attention was directed at the drug habits of lower-class Chinese.” Waterston explains that “Although opiate use was commonplace among Americans in general, the evils of [Chinese] opium smoking became front page news and cause for great concern,” leading to social policies of exclusion (1993: 17).

Much of our nation’s drug laws are rooted in racial bias and prejudices. In addition, much of what we think about drugs comes from political ideology. Another example of this is the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, better known as the “War on Drugs,” which was created by Richard Nixon and his administration. Some believe that the drugs were not the goal, just a tool used for political ends, similarly to our nation’s first opium laws. There is evidence to support this idea. For example, John Ehrlichman, who was one of President Nixon’s advisors during the time, claimed in an interview that “We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war [Vietnam] or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities...Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.” This is a common theme of American culture and politics. We have seen this done with opium and the Chinese, marijuana and Mexicans, and crack and African Americans, to name a few. It is almost impossible to understand American attitudes towards drugs without understanding American attitudes towards race. This is something that was mentioned by many of the people in my ethnography, most who are minorities. The idea that race and cultural attitudes towards drugs are inextricably linked was referenced by Sam, Richard, Janine, and Blair.

We must work on separating race from how we feel about drugs. We still have the idea that a typical drug addict is a poor, homeless, young, person of color. And it seems that addiction is only getting more attention recently because it has started to drastically impact white, middle-class, suburban youths (a category I fell into at the time of my addiction). Drug addiction is finally being recognized as a disease, as it should be, but we still incarcerate people all over the country for possession. As a society, we still opt to send them to prison rather than to get the mental health services they need. Anthropologist Angela Garcia, in her 2010 ethnography *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession Along the Rio Grande*, claims that “The notion that addiction is a disease—chronic, subject to relapse, rooted in the subject’s neurobiology and beyond his or her rational control—corresponds to the development of in the
technosciences of addiction...and distancing from the older lexicons of moral failure, stigma, and social causality.” She claims that to move away from the stigma of drug use and addiction, it must truly be understood as a disease. This is an idea that, as a former addict, I truly believe in.

I have read countless articles and books on drugs that leave you depressed, thinking things are even worse than you first believed. I don’t want this to be like that. I want to offer some ideas and suggestions for becoming a better, more accepting, and more mental health care-oriented country. There are other countries, such as Switzerland that offer prescription heroin to addicts to prevent crime, and Portugal that decriminalized all drugs to reduce the spread of disease and criminal activity. There is much we can learn from systems such as these. We are on the right track with legalizing marijuana, but there is still much work to be done. We must all critique our own culture in order to make it better for people. We cannot continue to arrest people who suffer from a disease. We do not arrest people with diabetes for buying candy. We do not arrest people with heart disease for buying cigarettes. But we still arrest heroin addicts for buying heroin. We may still be years or decades away from national drug reform, but there are some things we can do now to speed up that process.

We can no longer ignore the fact that drugs exist, and that they are here to stay. We cannot afford to not teach children about them in school, or worse, use propaganda and scare tactics to dissuade their interest in them. Drugs are everywhere in our culture. We advertise them on TV, we romanticize them in movies, and we glorify them in music. There is no way of escaping them, so isn’t it time that we start to tell the truth about them? I believe it is, and I think the first step to take is to change the way we approach the topic in education.

Even at the college level we spread misinformation. At John Jay College of Criminal Justice, there are pamphlets regularly handed out claiming things like “Myth: You can tell if anything is added to marijuana” and “Fact: Chemicals can be added to marijuana leaves without the user knowing it. Drugs like PCP could be put on dry leaves.” It is obvious that the person/people writing this do not know much about drugs, and are writing with the sole intent of scaring people into never trying drugs. First, marijuana “leaves” are not smoked; it is the buds that are smoked, the leaves are trimmed off and often discarded. Next is the idea that marijuana is laced with PCP. This is almost unheard-of unless the person wants their weed to be laced. Does it make sense that the dealer would spend their own time and money lacing weed, just to charge the same price for it? Not really. This is a common tactic used to scare people away from drugs, and it is the same phrase that we, as kids, were told in DARE.
One of the pamphlets called “Drug Facts” has a list of 11 drugs giving a description, and a list of short-term and long-term dangers. Most of the information in this section is correct, but some of it is untruthful or misleading, such as LSD leads to “permanent mental problems.” This statement is not scientifically backed, and in fact, there is science that directly opposes this, claiming that LSD can be good for your brain, reducing anxiety and depression and opening up new neural pathways. And by that token, many things can cause “permanent mental problems.” This is a very vague sentence designed to scare people. One step in the right direction would be to stop teaching this information from kindergarten to college. This information is at best an attempt to keep people safe, and at worst propaganda designed to keep people from seeking their own information. And we can fight to stop the spread of this misinformation. We can stop telling our kids that “drugs are bad because they’re bad.” This is an approach that everyone I spoke with claimed they would not take when they had children, claiming that it does more harm than good. We can also start to treat addicts with more compassion. We can fight to change national drug laws that criminalize a disease. We can fight for prison reform, since imprisonment has the potential to ruin someone’s entire life for something as benign as possession of a single joint.

My goal is to revisit this work a few years down the line and expound on my ideas and research, eventually writing a full-length ethnography. I believe that much will change between now and then. Both in terms of how this country views drugs, and also in terms of what I will have done to help spread knowledge and enact change regarding drug use and especially addiction. This is a topic that I feel so strongly about that I am willing to dedicate my academic and professional career to help people who suffer from addiction. I consider this ethnography to be a work in progress, and I am looking forward to the day when I can revisit it with fresh eyes and new ideas, eventually turning it into a full-length published work of intimate ethnography.
References


The Outsiders: Stigma, Visible Disability, and Healing  
Agu Xtanley

Introduction
This is an auto-ethnographic and small-scale ethnography of the struggles faced by people who have a visible physical impairment. Disability is an important topic because people’s attitude towards disability focus on what is apparent even though some disabilities are not visible. It is debatable whether or not every person has some form of disability, with some more obvious than others. For the most part, those who have visible disabilities struggle alone in social situations and in any social encounter. They are tasked with how to interact with people who for the most part don’t know themselves how to interact with someone with a visible disability. There are few mechanisms available to support those with visible disabilities in coping with these painful social interactions. It is likely that those with an invisible disability stand a better chance of being accepted by others and of being able to socialize with them due to the hidden nature of their disability.

In invoking the word “disability,” I use a word that has a socially agreed upon meaning, which is a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities. The term itself is problematic because one’s senses, in my opinion, is even sharpened by the loss of a body part. It is even assumed/expected that a disabled person will work twice as hard as a normal person to make up for any lapses his status may incur. My preconceived notion allows me to believe that the burden of truth in proving a disability should rest on the stigmatized individual: It is only what you believe that matters and not the public’s perception of you.

Given this ethnography focuses on stigma, it is important to use the word disability because that is how those designated as such are perceived by others. I also invoke the term “non-stigmatized” (Goffman, 1950) to refer to people who are perceived by others as “normal,” and therefore do not suffer the stigma associated with visible disabilities.

It is my hope that this ethnography gets the attention of anyone who considers themselves non-stigmatized and of those who consider themselves to be abnormal, including those who have contemplated suicide because of their difficulties dealing with the stigma of their visible disability. I also hope that this writing will be of interest to middle-schools and high-schools in developing awareness of the struggles of physically disabled people and ways to address those tagged with the stigma, and encourage bullying prevention programs.

It is in hopes that my writing will help people understand how to approach others who share the kind of difficulty I experience, which at its core is being tagged disabled and treated as such even though I do not see myself that way. I also want readers with disabilities to be
encouraged, just as I have been, to tap into available resources for support, however, limited those resources are.

An Auto-Ethnography of Visible Disability

This hypocrisy stirs a lot of mixed emotions when you look at me. What do you think? What do you want me to think? Am I to believe what I see or what ought to be? Your actions speak louder than your intent, and that’s why my emotions vary hence my consciousness. I am brought back to this place of remembrance, this place I fight so hard to forget. Now that I have remembered, because of how you look at me, I fight even harder to maintain any form of normalcy in an attempt to control my mixed emotions to suit your expectations. However, I do not tell you this. I mostly leave you with a notion of deviancy when I anticipate your reaction when you look at me, because I may not be willing to return fake smiles and pleasantries. These thoughts occupy my heart as I walked through the Macy’s mall although not fast enough.

-- excerpt from fieldnotes, Xtanley Agu

I was welcomed into the world of “disability” fourteen years ago at the age of twenty in Nigeria, my country of origin. I was forced by a group of seven assailants to drink sulphuric acid. I was drenched with the same corrosive substance, which left me with second-degree burns on my face, back, and hands. I also lost my right ear to the acid and partial vision in my right eye. Before this traumatic experience, I lived a “healthier” life with preconceived notion of “disabled” people. Prior to my personal experience, I believed that “disability” referred to a sickness from birth or by accident. My own traumatic experience provided me with a unique perspective on how some people perceive others who are labeled as disabled. I now have a deeper understanding about the quality of life issues that come with the experience of disability, which may be heightened in cases such as mine where I am also adjusting to life in a new country.

Before embarking on this ethnographic project, I wondered why it was difficult for me to be entirely accepted by people. I had always experienced an immediate divide between me and those around me. I knew I stood out from the crowd due to the facial burns that are evident on my face. There was also something internal that kept me apart from others—my own self-rejection that deprived me of the motivation to reach out to and socialize with other people. Even when I summon up the courage to meet people, I find myself disinterested in the topic being discussed or catch myself lost in thought guessing how those around me perceive me. With this mental picture of how others are provoked by my appearance, I find it challenging to keep the attention away from myself.
An Ethnography of Visible Disability

My personal experience of visible disability led me to wonder about others who have experienced a traumatic event that led their attaining “disability” status, whether officially in terms of garnering certain services or unofficially in terms of experiencing social stigma. In my case, the fact that I am an immigrant adds another dimension to my adjustment and integration experience that US-born people with visible disability do not need to address.

The ethnographic research component of my project focused on three physically disabled adults who are members of a Long Island Physical Impairment Support Group that I belong to. On the basis of my research findings and qualitative analysis, I identify factors that influence how people with apparent physical disabilities cope with the persistent conundrum of stigma. These factors include: race, self-fulfilling prophesy, gender, religion, and life experience.

I conducted five telephone interviews and three in-person interviews with three physically disabled adults (John, a thirty-nine year old black man; Judith, a fifty-eight-year-old white woman and Mariah, a forty-year-old woman; these names are pseudonyms) all of whom belong to the same support group. I will draw insight from cross-cultural experiences I have had on the social construction of disability to highlight how cultural or life experiences can help in improving the quality of life of a disabled person.

John

John lives in the town of Hempstead, New York. He was involved in a ghastly motorcycle accident and he is also a gunshot victim whose left side part of the body is paralyzed. The town of Hempstead on Long Island is stigmatized with residents who are low income and are members of minority groups, and with high violence rates. The town aggregates approximately 70 percent black and 20 percent others.

The first time I met John, he walked into the support group's annual meeting on crutches and by his side was a black elegant young woman who I will call Martha. During the course of our interaction and relationship, I got to know that the young lady he introduced to the members of the support group was his fiancée.

John wore sun shades and a black leather jacket that matched his shoes. I would have guessed he was in a motor circle bike club but for the reason that he was a black man. Not to derail from my point of reference or point out my preconceived biases, I just didn’t see black men as those interested in a motorcycle bike club, but the way John dressed gave the impression. However, the way he walked implied that he was still experiencing slight pains on his legs as he applied more body weight and dependent on his arm muscles. His disfigurement appeared to be on his legs which makes him walk as though he intentionally imitates a swag in his steps when he is not using his crutches.
That day, I was invited to play the keyboard for the gathering in an attempt to provide music therapy to the support group as the program progressed. I had limited vision due to the positioning of the keyboard to the audience who by this time were sharing their thoughts and experiences.

John’s arrival made quite an impression on me because it came with an unusual sound. I had a mental picture of John walking into the gathering while I meditated on the music. It was episodic because it affected the tempo of the chord progression I played on the keyboard. The mental picture and the motion of gravity are displayed below.

In a follow-up phone interview with John, I found out that he was experiencing a whole lot of difficulties embroiled in institutional racism as a result of his disability status, which he does not accept but is forced to deal with the reality. During the interview I had with John, I asked him about the history of his disability because I wanted to know how long he has been living with the disability and his reintegration process. I observed that it was very difficult for me to have my participant provide me with information not until I have explained a bit about my life experience before they provided me with their personal experiences. This was some of the problems I experienced as I tried to collect data from my participants.

John told me he did not understand the question I asked, so I had to explain by telling him that even though I am tagged disabled, I was not born this way, and I wanted to know for how long he has had the disability as to acquire if it was from birth because that would affect
the quality of life in a different way if compared to someone whose disability came at a later part of life similar to my experience.

When he understood the question, John told me that his whole life has been affected because of his disability, which happened only a year ago (June 19, 2017). When I asked what he meant by “his whole life,” he said his fiancée is about leaving him because of his disability status and its effects on his ability to provide financially for his family.

John also informed me that his employer had recently changed his title which prevents him from being paid as much as he used to before his disability even though he performs the same task he is assigned to at work. His salary had been reduced drastically which has a snowball effect on his domestic and relationship life. He blames his disability for the reason he is having a failed relationship which is connected to the inability to provide money to assist in the family upkeep.

Judith’s History
Judith is a white 58 years old woman who had had approximately 30 facial reconstructive surgeries coupled with the loss of her vision due to a traumatic experience she had when she was 16 years old. When I first met Judith at one of our annual meetings, I could not really see any real apparent physical deformity, perhaps only a few slight added outlines from a past facial reconstructive surgery, although I knew we had gathered for reasons pertaining to disability and rendering moral support to each other. I also observed that she wore glasses, so I assumed, as most people there, she had an issue with her vision. But after my first interview with her, my perspective about her apparent disability changed drastically.

My interview with Judith
During my interview with Judith, I could feel as though she was the one encouraging me with the history of her struggles which was different for a change because I am the one doing the encouraging most times when I speak to people about my experiences, but speaking with her gave me reasons to believe that she has outlived the stigma that I struggle with even today. She told me of an episode where she was given a job because she assumes her employer had mercy on her because of her disability status and possibly her race (skin color). She also informed me of how she struggled as a younger person to cope with the effect of the stigma. By this time, she was in high school and being a woman made it quite difficult for her to intermingle because she was more worried about the scars that were evident on her face rather than the impact the disability had on her, like not being able to see as clearly as before. She further explained how she would stay all day inside her room to avoid interacting with the opposite sex because of the fear of possible disheartening comments that may be demoralizing.
During our discussion, I could sense the effect of insecurity from a woman’s perspective whereas men have a different set of priority and security issues where appearance may not be at the top of the list. She also informed me of how satisfied and fulfilled she feels lately especially amid the presence of her children and a loving husband. Nevertheless, she has an episodic memory of the change in the quality of life. Her testimony made me remember, “Wounds turn into scars and scars make you tough,” to quote the actress Aisha Tyler.

From the information gathered after my interview with Judith, I know that she is now happily married and seems to have outlived her struggles and manufactured a coping mechanism that enables socialization or reintegration and her perception of herself and other people’s perception towards her. A considerable part of her reintegration comes from her spiritual faith and belief.

Part of my finding suggests that vulnerability differs according to gender because from her perceptive as a woman, there is more sensitivity involved in women compared to men in terms of apparent or visible disability. In contrast, because John suffered vision loss, his supervisor demoted him. It also appeared to be that insecurity from a man’s perspective may not necessarily depend on one’s appearance, but the ability or inability to provide for his family due to a disability.

Mariah’s history
During the course of my fieldwork, I had visited another friend of mine Mariah (Pseudo), (37, black, woman) for the purpose of gathering data for my research. She lives with her parents in the town of Elmont. She has a visible physical disability (burn scars on her face) from a cooking gas explosion she was involved in when she was 12 years old. She has had about 24 major and minor facial reconstructive surgeries and anticipates having more in the near future. During our conversation, she had mentioned as a coping mechanism she had to develop a “thick skin” to cope with the circumstances she experienced.

Interview with Mariah
During a visit I had with Mariah, I asked her if she has ever been in a situation similar to what I experienced. I had informed her of an experience I had on a train where the commuters preferred to stand instead of seating on the available chair/space next to me, even though the train was crowded and during rush hour. She said maybe once or twice on a flight. “I could feel some people asking to switch seats that are assigned close to mine” Mariah explained. She further stated that it bothered her at first, but she had to learn to develop a “thick skin.” I then asked her how this is done and what a thick skin means. She said, “just act as if it doesn’t affect you and with time such reactions will have no impact on you” that’s how you get a thick skin.
She further stated, I also pretended as if they were my subordinates by allowing me to occupy so much space because they assumed I needed some rest due to my appearance and I ventured not to misuse the opportunity considering how small the leg room spaces were on the airplanes.

In a subsequent phone interview I had with Mariah, she mentioned developing a “thick skin’ to tackle with the adverse effect of the stigma. Her answer to my follow-up question of what it means to have a thick skin was that “that a thick skin only comes with years of endurance, perseverance, and self-believe that the public perception does not define you.” Her response reminded me of journalist Faith Salie’s words, “Wildfires can leave the land with burn scars that last for years.”

**Disability:**
Who is qualified to be tagged disabled and what is a disability? As noted in the preceding section, disability can be seen as a circumstance or situation that prevents you from achieving your life ambition. At the same time, it may equally create an opportunity to achieve. From my perspective, this question of disability is dependent upon what prism you look from, or the understanding of the word disability can be influenced by the present culture you are in, your cultural upbringing, location, and access to an institutionalized system of government set aside to provide accommodations for people that are tagged disabled.

When the desirable is unavailable, the available becomes desirable: disabled people manufacture other means to cope out of any available means left. It surprised me how my hearing improved tremendously when I lost my vision. The lived experience sharpens the individual’s characters and perspectives on his or her limitations which plays a vital role in the reintegration process. For instance, Judith’s successful job hunt in my perspective was only possible due to her disability status.

during my conversation with Judith, she mentioned that her perspective on disability has changed through the years. She mentioned that she got a job because her employer pointed out her obvious disabilities and offered her the job after the dehumanization. We were both marveled how a good thing could come out from a negative situation.

Even though John’s present situation with regards to employment wouldn’t be a typical example to emphasize a point, Judith, on the other hand, achieved success through her apparent physical disability, used as an advantage by inevitably provoking empathy from her interviewer, which made it possible for her to get employed. Other factors notwithstanding, such as her gender, race, and lived experience shows the possibility of an advantage in every disadvantageous position.
It is incredible how God can take a seeming disadvantage and turn it into an advantage for His glory. The Bible states that: “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong” (1 Cor. 1:27)

Inventing a Coping Mechanism

According to Goffman (1950), a sense of self-dehumanization affects individuals like a double whammy. It was terrible enough for me to think about people’s perception towards me but even worse when I think how I actually looked like. It almost confirmed and justified the reasons why I felt unaccepted. This invisible load I carried on my chest made my reintegration process quite slow and uninteresting for me, leading me into isolation and deep depression. The coping mechanisms used during periods like these were my music and religion: faith and hope for a better tomorrow. This feeling I had towards those that have apparent disabilities was compared to the lived experience of two of my informants.

An Excerpt of my Perception of Feelings Towards me

What do you see when you look at me? Are you really seeing me or looking through me? What strikes your mind when I catch your attention? Is it a normal person or a stigmatized person that you see? Do you see me as a sample of the stereotype you associated me with? or do you see an affixed perception of yourself through me? Does my presence urge you to be grateful to your creator for the profound normalcy you feel you have when you look at me? Or is it a reminder of how cruel your creator can be to you?

I can feel your eyes; I can feel your thoughts, they constantly remind me of me when I used to be like you, staring at a deformity without a clear picture of the meaning of the word. This word that is used in this world to cause misinterpretation to the heart of man irreversibly in its translations and action too. Little wonder why the heart of man can never be understood. It is, in times like these, when you look at me. What do you think? What other value am I to you? Can I purchase what you are selling or do I fit the criteria for your requirements of normalcy? However, I may have what you require, perhaps that’s why you look at me.

When Do We Cope?

Coping mechanism, in my perspective, is only a mastery of ways to minimize the apparent truth. Considering the fact that John is experiencing some domestic emotion problems, a sense of agency or family support system would have sufficed as a form of encouragement or means to cope with his experiences. Most people who are faced with a similar problem have opted for
an easy way out contemplating suicide as options but only with cultural, and spiritual upbringing are such episodes avoided.

I believe that John is facing a direct result of institutionalized racism and explicit-biases that is rooted in the socio-economic system. However, he has failed to realize that coping mechanism is not preordained or available to tap into when needed instead it comes by taking advantage of every disadvantageous position.

He mentioned to me during our interview that the kids make him happy when he is asked what happened to him, as though he was a superhero (which he is indeed), but this happiness that he expressed even when the countenance of his voice changed as soon as he mentioned children’s perceptive about him, signifies that he has an avenue to accommodate smile, laughter and happiness even if it’s gotten from the most unlikely sources. I also agree that this is true because I derive a huge source of motivation and happiness from my 14-month-old daughter whose face makes all my suffering seem worth it. As a validation, Judith who seems to have successfully lived through the stigma thanks God for her family and hold them responsible for her description of a fulfilled day.

**Fulfillment**

I also recall asking Judith what she considered as a fulfilled day? She said, “Right now, I am at a point in my life where my children are all grown and out of the house. To me it is my family is where most of my fulfillment comes from. When I’m with my family, that’s my success. When I look at them, and I see how much they love each other, this loving family that I have created. When we are all together, and I am with them, that’s where most of my fulfillment comes from.”

Cross-culturally, the hardship and social construction of violence that persist in third world countries like Nigeria influence the rate and likelihood for one to be quickly identified with a disability which is associated with poverty, homelessness, illness, and tribal differences, which creates a notion of disability and helplessness. For instance, the present religious battle between the Muslims and the Christian in Nigeria has dehumanized and maimed many people leaving them deformed and disabled. The grass is definitely not greener at the other side when this sudden traumatic change in self-image has occurred.

Depending on one’s location, those people that need medical or financial assistance due to inability to health or traumatic events can be viewed as beggars, outcast, or thieves, subjecting the disabled to work even harder to achieve success because of limited chances to attract favor or empathy. In contrast, in a setting such as the United States, provisions are provided for such individuals so they do not constitute a nuisance to the society. Although the politics that have resulted in this funding is of minor importance in this ethnography, it is
important to note that such reservations influence people’s perception and attitude toward disability, which is that it is socially constructed and hinders the reintegration process of the disabled.

This is why I agree that lived experiences help in molding disabled persons’ perspectives and quality of life. It does not only help you appreciate what is available to you, but it also motivates you to achieve more because of the present opportunity that you may never have seen if not for your present location and access to assistance. The dampening effect of this, however, is a self-dehumanization where you feel as if your agency is taken, rendering you constantly vulnerable to the assistance of the state or country you are in. For instance, there are no accommodations set aside in my country Nigeria that will enable me to undergo more than 32 major and minor facial reconstructive surgeries like I have had pro-bono in America. This gratefulness, in my perspective, takes away agency and replaces or repays with loyalty.

Factors that influence the likelihood of reintegration
I had mentioned that factors like one's race, cultural or lived experience, gender, religion, and support system helps in the manufacturing of a coping mechanism. How does race affect the quality of life?

Race
The excerpt from my interview with John denotes that peoples’ race also plays an important role in deciding the quality of life one gets. John, being a black man and living in a neighborhood like Hempstead, which is labeled for high violence rate, is most susceptible to be denied the essential amenities that a disabled person needs in comparison to Judith who lives in Garden City, with a statistics of 70 percent white has better chances of attracting favor and empathy due to her skin color.

During my interview with John, I asked him if his disability has affected his life in adverse ways. In response, he said, “it has affected everything about my life.” He did not only mention the threat of his employment status but the fear of being single. Without hope for a better job or a better future, as most black men are subjected to, he is most likely to lose his fiancé, which he blames his disability for. It is almost automatic that once you are black, you have inherited a significant share of the burden that even gets worse when you are tagged disabled.

Gender
I can only imagine that Judith’s successful job interview was partly possible due to her gender. It has come to my attention that most men tend to be more open-minded and bearing towards women than when both parties are of the same sex. This preconceived notion or biased of mine
should be sought after and pursued if any advantage can come from such a disadvantageous position that persist for the disabled.

**Normalized Disability**
The notion of ‘thick skin” as expressed by my friend Mariah is obtained when one has acquired a healthy amount of lived experiences. Thick skin comes when your agency is taken leaving you to the mercies of what you allow your self-internalize as the truth about you and not what actually is. For instance, someone who is disabled can only tell himself, I am able to do this and that even though it is not physically and medically possible. The hope and optimism of change bring about change even if the change means that you agree with public perceptions or agree to stay quiet to comments that are derogatory and may come as a result of your appearance.

**Support system**
The importance of a support system can never be over emphasized hence the reason for the support group in Long Island. Some people like myself, travel from various continents and without cultural customs or family to support you during recuperation and reintegration. Having such a gathering is similar to having your achieved or ascribed family to talk to, love, and encourage you when the environment continually reminds you of your disability. Judith has her children and her family to motivate and encourage her during trying periods which is a decisive factor however, the loss of the only family John told me he has, which is/was his fiancé, cost a spiral or snowball effect of series of unanticipated adverse events, which he claims were caused as a result of his disability. He also mentioned that if he had known, he would have preferred staying back home to claim a disability/unemployment status in an attempt to afford him time to repair his emotional/domestic problem, but giving more priority to his work cost him his family and job. This shows how vital a family support system can affect or influence your success rate.

**Religious Beliefs as a Coping Mechanism**
In my case, my religious upbringing helped me in my reintegration process. There were few Bible verses that I held close to the heart during my most trying times. Such bible verses like (Matthew 10:28) “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” helped build my patience and faith for a better outcome to manifest. This waiting and praying period allowed for a re-enforcement of my religious beliefs and doctrine especially when success is attained after this religious exercise.
In the case of Judith, she said: “with maturity and spiritual growth” she was able to overcome to the adverse effect of the stigma. She accords her success today to her religious faith and believes that provided her with a beautiful and loving family.

So many other people have different ways of tapping into a supernatural being in times of distress. Brian believes in self-affirmation or prophecy. According to him, he looks at the mirror and tells himself “you re the same dude! You are the same dude! The ritual of repeating this phrase evokes a form of spiritual enforcement that enables him to cope with the effect of the stigma.

I am hopeful that those who might read this mini-ethnographic research, would understand how to approach those tagged disabled, understand what it means to call someone abnormal and to learn how to socialize with those who may be finding it difficult due to the public perception of disability. Finally, it is my hope that the views I expressed in this write-up will change the reader’s public’s perception of disability.

Considering the fact that this mini project was conducted in a small scale capacity, I will urge that further research to be conducted on the adverse effect of stigma on people with disabilities as to ensure unity and promote diversity.
Anthropology in Practice:
Bringing Motherhood Out of the Shadows
Elizabeth Streat

Cover Art by: Alisse Waterston (1981)
Wake up, wake up, my love! My greatest and my best. Time to greet the school day for both of us!
Whines and grumbles, stumbles. Cereal, and puppies and kittens on Animal Planet. Giggles and cuddles. Ah, there he is, my sunshine boy. My puppy.
Get dressed – we’re running out of time! Underwear BEFORE pants. Put on your shoes. Put on your shoes. PUT ON YOUR SHOOOOOES!!!
Do you have your homework, lunchbox, jacket? There’s nothing in your lunchbox??? I could have sworn I packed it last night. Or, was that the night before? Oh, well – school lunch for you today! Isn’t that exciting??? That look again. The kid’s onto me.
Backpack, keys, phone, wallet, purse, child – go! Oh my god, I left my coffee on the counter. Must go back for it or I’ll never make it through the morning. No soldier left behind!
It’s windy; let’s use our arms to fly to school! Hurry – I heard the playground whistle! They’re going to close the gate! Goodbye, goodbye, my love! My greatest and my best.
What classes do I have today? Do I have my homework? Eat. Must remember to eat. Coffee is not a food group.
Things to remember after class: prescription, grocery store, thaw chicken, sign permission slip, not to lose my mind. What day is it? Does he have soccer, coding, karate, or, chess today?
Hello, hello, my love! How was school today? What? You’re always hungry! Grins and giggles. Silly mama.
Forgot to eat. PB&J snacks for two. Mama has to study, honey. Let’s do our homework together. Baby. Baby, please. Mama loves you, but I must get this done before dinner.
What time is it? Shit! Dinner. Too late, too late for chicken. Jesus, woman. More than one vegetable – remember the pyramid? It’s not a pyramid anymore, though, is it? What? Yes, honey, daddy will be home and we’ll eat soon.
Serve. Forget utensils. Remember napkins. Do dishes. Sorry, baby. Mommy didn’t finish her homework. I can’t. Ask Daddy. I’m sorry; I love you; I wish I could. How late do I have to stay up tonight to finish this paper, this reading, this thing I should have done when I was 22???
Yes, I would never miss tucking you in bed. Yes, even though I still have homework. Don’t you know you’re the most important – my greatest and my best? Cuddles and lullabies.
Goodnight. Goodnight, my love.
Hey, Folks! Are you currently a human being? Then chances are you were the result of a pregnancy and were once a child, too. This serious affliction affects millions of Americans every year. Yet, it seems it is one of our secret shames. Please join me as we take a closer look at Motherhood in America: Confronting the Crisis...

I confront this crisis daily as a full-time student and mother to a seven-year-old child. When I first set out to complete my bachelor’s degree after a 21-year absence from school and a six-year absence from paid employment, I quickly realized I was playing by a whole new set of (ill-defined) rules. So, I endeavored to write ethnography about the differences in challenges between “working” and stay-at-home parents, and as so often happens in life and in anthropology, found myself being drawn toward another understanding of what I was observing and a different conclusion than I anticipated. Through speaking with and observing my participants, I began to appreciate that enacting our existences should not be about our differences, but our similarities – regardless of our parental or employment status. I now see the difficulties I encounter not as not my own, personal burden, but a shared set of circumstances that are called life. Each of us wears multiple hats, fills many roles, throughout our lives, days, minutes. I am a woman, mother, wife, daughter, and anthropology student. But I am also a friend, counselor, jester – by turns a triumphant hero and awkward schlemiel. Though we may not all be parents, I see me in you and you in me – triumph, anger, frustration, joy, fear, pride, or, just simply trying to endure a moment, a day, a life event.

I will borrow from Andrea O’Reilly going forward and use the word “mother” to denote “individuals who engage in motherwork” and her term “matricentric feminism”, which is “a feminism developed from the specific needs / concerns of mothers”. (O’Reilly, 2014). As anthropology is the study of how societies express their humanity through culture, I feel we can all do better in recognizing our similarities that span microcultures, motherhood being my exemplar, in our fellow humans. It is our duty as anthropologists to make the strange, familiar, and the familiar, strange. What I have found the most strange in my studies is that we can sympathize with and develop an understanding of a different way of being while undertaking the study of a tribe thousands of miles away, but it is more difficult for us to do so when it is our neighbor.

We must not rail against gender politics and emotional labor issues only in the academic abstract, but also express the same enthusiasm when it comes to the boots on the ground experiences of real people. Matricentric feminism is a very real, very consequential piece of the feminism puzzle. Furthermore, how can we expect people who do not study people (i.e., most of the general public) to recognize a matter as deserving, not just of academic study, but import of implementation if we do not? I am inspired by Sally Slocum’s clarion call to re-envision our approach to anthropology – all of humanity’s history, in fact – in her iconic
“Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology” (1975). She upended the paradigm that men, as hunters, were the driving force of evolution and cultural development. It was women, as gatherers, who fed the masses, developed the tools for gathering and slings for carrying babies. It was the mother-infant bond and the “raising of dependent children” that were the seeds of the family unit. These are the foundations of culture and society. Motherhood must not now be negated in contemporary times as simply a woman’s issue when it touches all of us and is the reason we are all here. As is so often the case, it is the duty of anthropology to be the vanguard in demanding we find not just the cause worthy, but the people themselves.

Though my participants do represent a cross-section of races and socio-economic positions, this paper does not attempt to explore in detail the intersectionalities of race, class, or, sexuality in motherhood. I fully recognize any one, much less a combination, of these intersections brings its own complexities, but owing to the short-term nature of the research period (two-and-a half months) I chose not to explore them as I would not be able to give them the proper scrutiny they deserve. Additionally, I fully recognize my own reflexivity in the process of conducting my fieldwork and in writing this paper. Unbeknownst to me, I have unwittingly been a participant observer since I gave birth over seven years ago. I most definitely have a horse in this race and chose my topic based on my experiences both as a stay-at-home mother for six years and subsequently a full-time student and mother to a dependent child for an additional one-and-a-half years.

My child is in elementary school, so I have an arsenal of parents within easy reach... or, so I thought. I requested interviews with nine parents and secured a sample size of four. From those who did not accept my request to act as a participant, I received many apologies and murmurings of time constraints of work and after-school activities and maybe-next-times. Two of the parents I asked to participate, a husband and wife duo, initially agreed to interviews, but then ceased responding to phone and text communications when I had a prior commitment at their first suggested meeting time. After a few weeks of averted eyes in the schoolyard, they both resumed normal contact with me and we all happily pretend they did not “ghost” me.

Scheduling interviews with those who did accept was an exercise in frustration that was tantamount to herding a kindle of kittens, owing to conflicting schedules (mine included) and the short-term nature of this project. All four of the participants requested we meet in public places and none were receptive to suggested meetings in their homes, with two of the participants making vague references to not having been able to clean “recently”. Owing to my full schedule, I did not solicit a home visit for my participant who lives in the Bronx. The fourth, and only male, participant did not offer any reasons and declined with a simple, but firm, no. Likewise, proposed observations of parents with their children in any other, non-school setting were rebuffed, perhaps proving that parenting is something we feel we must perform with
relative privacy. Consequently, subsequent meetings with my participants were snatched moments from school drop-offs and pick-ups, as scheduling a follow-up interview proved exponentially more difficult than the first. I sensed that each of the four participants felt as though their duty to me had been discharged after the initial interview; however, I was able to wrangle timelines of a “typical” weekday from each parent to augment my materiel and expand my understanding of the struggles they encounter as they navigate their lives. I have herein included samples of these timelines and changed the names of three of the four participants, as denoted by an asterisk.

Cindy* is in her late thirties and is a white, married, stay-at-home working mom to a six-year-old daughter and four-year-old son with a part-time job in the same field in which she was employed prior to having children. Pre-motherhood, she was a food chemist, working in the laboratory to develop and test new food products, which she found engaging and exciting. She now works an average of 30 hours per week in product development through her computer and three, two-week business trips per year. These travels cause her a great deal of stress because she does not like leaving her family for extended periods, but cannot refuse because doing so would negatively impact her job stability. I asked if she had a designated office space in her apartment and she guffawed and said it’s the couch with the coffee table as her desk. Cindy often tries to wake up one hour earlier than everyone else so she can get some work done, but she feels like her children never see her at home without her clicking and clacking on the computer or phone because she has to insert work-time in where she can. Cindy’s own mother was working on her master’s degree when she began having children and left her program to care for her children full-time. As a consequence, Cindy always felt her mother was bitter while she and her siblings were growing up, so she endeavors to parent with the equanimity that was lacking during her childhood. According to her own estimation, she “often fails miserably” and resorts to yelling when she’s unheard and frustrated. Cindy’s family arrangement is fortunate in that her husband is a corporate tax attorney who has flexibility in his schedule and a salary that allows her to stay at home and earn only 25% of his salary.

Cindy was the one participant who eagerly and quickly provided a timeline and I have included it below, as I feel it is largely representative of what I call the “Mommy Mambo”. The Mommy Mambo is a frequently inelegant and frenetic dance in which one attempts to cram the needs and demands of multiple people (hopefully, yourself included) into the time-space continuum of one Earth day. Please note it is the spirit of the dance that is most crucial and the name may be changed to suit one’s needs.
Cindy’s timeline as provided to me (with children’s and husband names changed to initials):

Hi! Happy to help. Typical day...what is that? Haha. This is what Monday looks like and then I'll clarify afterwards what other things get interwoven:

6:50 Alarm goes off, up, make coffee, check email to see if anyone scheduled a morning meeting at work or needs anything urgently (many of my colleagues are in Europe and I don't want to miss them before they end their day). If something needs to be dealt with, I get the kids to the table for breakfast and then pull out my laptop for about 30 minutes.
8:00 Out the door for drop-off
8:30 Back home, open laptop and start wading through emails and the tasks that spin out from that.
11:30-12:30 Get the dog outside. If I have a very busy work day, it is just around the block. If I have time, it's about 30 minutes.
1:15 Scrounge in the fridge for leftovers for lunch and work more
2:35 Pick E... up from school
2:50 Give E... a snack and chat about her day WHILE I do more work
3:45 Pack up and get out the door to bring E... to tennis. If it is a slow work day, I bring a magazine and just keep tabs on email while she is in class. If it is a busy day, I bring my laptop and use my phone's personal hotspot so I don't have to worry about finding free WiFi.
5:15 Pick H... up from daycare, get home, make the kids dinner. Chat about their days while checking email.
7:00 B... gets home around now. Not a bath night for the kids so they are usually playing/fixing or we are reading.
7:30 Start bedtime routing for kids and try to have them in bed by 7:45.
8:00 Start dinner for me and B.... Pack E...'s lunch (H... eats school lunch). Eat around 8:30, hopefully. If there is still work to do, haul the laptop out and work for about another hour in front of the TV. If there is nothing urgent to get to, pull phone out and play games for about another hour in front of the TV.
10:30 One of us takes the dog outside and the other takes the kids to pee. Bedtime for us.

Things that get interwoven into the week amidst work and kids' activities: 3 loads of laundry a week, loading and unloading the dishwasher daily, tidying (very, very low priority), catching up with Lamaze moms on WhatsApp (that probably takes up too much of my time but I am not on other social media so I guess it offsets), calling home to talk to my mom for about 1.5-2 hours a week, running grocery and household errands (those are generally me taking about 3 hours and driving up to the Bronx/Yonkers and help me feel like a normal human OR are neighborhood
errands like drug store, coffee pod replenishment, supplementing FreshDirect groceries that came on Sunday).
On Thursdays, I spend 3 hours on the Intrepid so I am grateful for Chess that means I can focus on work from 1-4:50 without having to physically get E... to an activity.
Let me know if you want clarification on any of the parts of my day or specific tasks.
Thanks,
Cindy

As is evidenced by Cindy’s timeline, she is constantly in a tug-of-war between her competing interests of “home” and “work”. Forty years ago, Rayna Rapp illuminated exactly this when she wrote, “Women have structurally been put in the position of representing the contradictions between autonomy and dependence, between love and money, in the relations of families to capitalism.” (1978) It has been forty years and this sentiment is still as applicable today as it was then.

Marisol* is a 25-year-old daughter of Mexican immigrants and is the youngest mother I interviewed. Her four-year-old daughter has sporadic contact with her father and his financial involvement is as erratic as his visitation. Marisol and her child live in the Bronx with her parents in a building they lease that also houses their family, upholstery business. Her daughter attends the John Jay College childcare center while she is in class and is with her the remainder of the day, even when she is working for her family’s business. I raised the topic of privacy with Marisol since, not only does she live with her parents, but everyone who works in the building knows who she is and may be interested in her comings and goings. She loudly exclaimed, “Yes, I have NO privacy!”, but also stressed that she would not be able to afford to care for her daughter, work, and go to school without living with and working for her parents. She makes no salary, but receives a free place to live and money whenever she needs it in exchange for working 20-40 hours per week performing administration duties in the office or overseeing deliveries and installations onsite. As such, it is not surprising that Marisol most misses having a social/night life with people in her age range. Thankfully, she has been very lucky to find a group of young-ish, single mothers at John Jay, and credits them with helping her keep her sanity and become a better parent to her daughter. Marisol appeared to me to be a little sad and wistful, most definitely tired, but also proud of herself for overcoming multiple odds to accomplish her goal of obtaining her bachelor’s degree and independence from her parents for her and her daughter.

My next participant is Fania, who requested that I DO use her real name. Fania is in her early forties and is an African-American, married mother of two girls, ages eight and five. I began our conversation by thanking her for her valuable time, as I did with all my participants,
and her response was that she thought my work was important and she would support me any way she could. She stated “women have to support one another” and “women have been shamed for far too long for working, for staying at home, for everything motherhood related”.

Fania is an entertainment lawyer in a global corporation and has been with her company for over 14 years. Her husband is also a lawyer, but he works on a project-by-project basis. This affords him the ability to not accept a project when they know that the girls will need him more. They employ a part-time nanny to pick up the girls after school (or after-school activities) and care for them until she or her husband gets home. Fania states that she is lucky because her corporation is in the entertainment industry and does not adhere to an early start time. She is able to get up at 6:30 a.m. and get the girls ready, her husband takes them to school, and then she goes to work. Now that she has attained a vice-president position, her flexibility has greatly increased. Fania disclosed that she used to work 10-12-hour days, but now that she is a VP and many of her clients are working mothers, she has been able to relax over the last several years.

In a quote that is perhaps the most emblematic I’ve encountered regarding the of mothers working in the public sphere, she opined that when she first became a mother and even after the birth of her second child, “I was determined to act at work as though nothing changed, while everything had changed”. She further stated that she had an epiphany when she came home at 6:00 p.m. one night and the babysitter said, “Wow, you’re home early!”. Fania decided then and there that she IS, in fact, a working mother and that is nothing to be ashamed of and that she should not and would not pretend otherwise. I asked if Fania and her husband get alone-time and she said they do, but the most important is that she gets “me” time. She goes to the gym at least twice a week, including for three hours on Saturday mornings. She said that at all other times she belongs to other people, so she had to learn to take the time for herself. Fania remarked that even when the husband shares half of the duties that it is her responsibility to manage it all. Even though Fania is an equal financial contributor to her household, she is experiencing a typical feature described by Rayna Rapp (1978) of American capitalism, whereby “women’s work” inside and outside the home and “mothering” are not considered valuable, though they should be.

And work it really is. Weinbaum and Bridges (quoted in Rapp 1978: 288-289) tell us that the centralization and rationalization of services and industry under advanced capitalism may be most efficient from the point of view of capital, but it leaves a lot of unrewarding, technical work to be done by women in supermarkets, in paying bills, in dealing with huge bureaucracies.

We now move on to my final participant and the only male I interviewed. Thomas* is an Asian-American, married father of two girls, ages nine and seven. I selected him because he is the parent I most see at school pick-up and drop-off and he has served on the school’s PTA for
the last four years; therefore, I determined he is the parent of the two who expends a greater portion of his time performing “motherwork”. Thomas is the oldest parent I interviewed, with his 50th birthday being within three months of our interview. He credits his age with a maturity that has helped him realize he’s in charge of how he wants his own life to work. Thomas has owned his own law firm for twelve years so he has much more flexibility than his wife, who is also a lawyer, but works in a corporate environment. His girls often accompany him to his office after pick-up if they don’t have any after-school activities and he is unable to conduct his business over the phone. He asserted that portable technology allows him more freedom to care for his children, in conjunction with owning his own firm. When asked if he and his wife have any assistance in the form of a nanny or babysitter, he said no, but that his secretary, who has known his children since birth, is amazing and often shuttles the girls between activities if he’s with a client or in court. Thomas takes his girls to school at least three days per week and is always the one to pick them up, unless he’s unavailable, in which case his secretary does. His girls being nine and seven now also affords him another layer of latitude. He is able to set them on their merry way, either at home or in the park, and he can continue with whatever he needs to do. The girls adhere to the strict rules he has set so that they don’t wander out of his sight in public.

I inquired what Thomas enjoys doing other than his practice and his children, and he informed me he is always taking non-law-related courses. He has A.I. certification, among multiple other certifications, and when I asked where he found the time, he said he only sleeps five hours a night. When I joked that I wish I only need five hours of sleep a night, he corrected me by saying that, no, he needs more sleep, but there are just so many other things he needs that he chooses to only sleep that amount. Thomas said he’ll always have all these other things to fall back on if his career as a lawyer comes to an end. I’ve included below Thomas’s timeline that I received after much cajoling.

Generally, my timeline is as follows:
7 am wake up and hang out with kids and have breakfast together
8 am to 2 pm - at the office for meetings and 2-3 times a week, I’m in court.
2 pm-5pm pick up the kids and bring them to the office. I work while they do homework and kids sometimes nap.
530 pm - 3 days a week, I bring kids to after school music classes.
630 pm or so is dinner with kids and Katherine
After kids' bedtime, which is 830 pm, do some reading and work at home until midnight or 1 am.
Repeat 5 days a week, times 52. That's my year.
Hope this helps.

Thomas might not have been as large a font of scheduling information as Cindy, but he did provide me with my second favorite quote from my fieldwork, which is, “Repeat 5 days a week, times 52. That’s my year.” Who among us cannot identify with that sentiment?

As for myself, I have written this ethnography as I complete all of my schoolwork – between classes, while my son is in karate, after dinner, and long after everyone has gone to bed. I am a white, married mother of one child and the poem that ushered us into our journey together was a snapshot of a day in the life of me.

Even if we cannot identify with the exact circumstances, we can feel a snippet of the emotion or rationale that went into a thought or event. We all share certain desires – to have love, feel happiness, be fulfilled. It is only the ways in which one reaches the desired effect and expresses it that differ. I want to not set aside parents from non-parents or stay-at-home parents from working parents, but to show the humanity in the processes of how people fail and succeed and carry themselves through the moments where simply existing is all that you can do.

The Motherhood Movement calls motherhood the “unfinished business of feminism”. How it is created by and attended to in our social structure is germane to our understanding of the American value system and how much emphasis we actually place on gender politics and the ways in which emotional labor factors into the economy and society-at-large. Whether you are a mother or not, if you are female, you are defined in society by your relation to your reproductive organs. As brilliantly posited by Andrea O’Reilly,

I believe we can simultaneously argue that gender is constructed and that motherhood matters; that maternity is integral to mother women’s sense of self and her experience of the world. Maternal scholars do not reduce women’s sense of self to motherhood, say that this is what makes her a woman, or that motherhood is more important than other variables that constitute self; only that motherhood matters and that it is central and integral to understanding mother women’s oppression in patriarchy and their resistance to it. (2014)

We must weave motherhood into the tapestry of American existence outside of the private sphere and no longer treat the institution of motherhood as if it were an unwed, pregnant teenager in the 1950s, sent to “live with an aunt”, away from the public eye until such time as the shame could be politely ignored and forgotten. Mothering issues aren’t women’s issues,
they’re people issues. We are all in this together, and it is with that in mind that we should sally forth into the great, wide world of the person standing next to us.

References


Surfing Fix
Rosie Anderson
I’m sitting watching the surfers, wrestling through gigantic sets to sit patiently awaiting the next wave. They are searching for one that lines up perfectly with their position, and indicates by its shape, that it won’t close out and body slam them into the sand bar. Patience and timing. The skies are grey and the ocean even greyer. Mother nature is roaring, as am I, at least internally. Frustration, desire, admiration, fear, adrenalin, self-loathing, motivation. What differentiates them from me, why I am on the sand and they are in the water. Even if I was good enough, would I have the balls? Maybe this study is just a selfish endeavor, an attempt to better understand my fear in an attempt to overcome it. Where did my fearlessness go? Are these people irrational? Do they just have more skills and confidence? What insight can I gain to break these barriers? Why am I so fixated on this goal? Consumingly so.

As a girl, living nowhere near the beach did not seem to stop my yearning to be by the ocean, more specifically, riding it. I grew up in Bath, a small city about a 3-hour drive from England’s surf capital of Cornwall. Every year, my family and I would spend a cold blustery week by the ocean in the tiny village of Polzeath, on the northern coastline. It became a family tradition over the years, that even my parents upheld; that everyone has to go in the water at least once over the course of the week, come rain or shine, and giving England’s relentless forecast, more often than not it was come rain...not shine. As a kid I remember spending hours in water with my brother and family friends, bodyboarding the waves, the bigger the wave the better. Being cold was a non-issue, and we definitely were not equipped in the latest, warmest gear. Often our heads, hands, and feet were fully exposed and the wetsuit was grabbed from a mixed pile of old ones from my family and other family friends who routinely joined us. At age 11 I was on a week-long school trip to Bude, another coastal town in Cornwall, for a week of adventurous activities, the theme was right up my street. One of the activities was surfing, I remember thinking that this was my moment to learn, was I cut out to be a “surfer girl” or not. We were in a group and all left somewhat to our own devices after being given a land lesson on the basics. As I caught my first wave I vividly remember popping up and feeling sheer joy. I look over and saw another boy in my class had figured it out too, we were the only ones that day able to get to our feet. I was secretly immensely proud, and a fire was ignited. Throughout the years, it was always burning, even as a dim low glow, it never went out. As our Polzeath kid crew grew taller each year, the scramble to find which wetsuit semi fit, at least enough to get in the water, was all part of the fun. The teenage years approached and the body boards soon got ditched for rented soft-top surfboards. The once a year trip meant I had very limited skills and experience, yet the obsession never waded.

After a long time of not surfing, living in NYC it didn’t seem like an option, until one summer day I went to Long Beach and I saw surf lessons taking place. It was the end of the season, but I now knew it was possible. As soon as the season started the following May, I did a
weekend group class. Flying on water, man how I had missed that feeling. The falling, the attempt after attempt, immense focus, no distraction, the biggest reward. The following week, the sunshine had gone and with it seemed the rest of the people. The sky was dark and the waves were huge. It was supposed to be a group lesson but only myself and another girl showed up. I was nervous. Very nervous. No-way did I feel my ability was ready for these waves, it felt like playing with fire, so no wonder I went for it. The girl and I ended up having an instructor each due to the conditions. The boards were 9 foot and soft, but heavy. They were going vertically over the waves, we had to paddle through the break and we were instructed to always paddle directly through the wave. I remember one huge wave was coming and every fiber in my body was telling me to bail. The instructor who is in the Big Wave Surf League of the World Surf League could apprehend that no matter how hard I paddled I was not going to make it over. He jumped on top of me to add weight in hopes we would make it, we didn’t. Instead, him, the 9ft lump of plastic and foam, and myself were thrown, tumbled, and held down. “Cover your head” that was all I was thinking, reciting the words drilled into us during the land lesson. I came up gasping for air, the instructor was smiling, half with relief half amusement by looks of things. Apparently, my face was quite a picture! Regaining my breath, I grabbed the board as was ready for more action, he looked at me and said “you’ve got the bug”. Little did I know at time what that meant.

After a summer of lessons, moving to Long Beach to save the LIRR trip from Jamaica Queens, was not good enough. I needed to take it one step further. Suffocated by routine, and hungry for another adventure I made a bold step and moved my daughter and I a little further south, actually a lot further south, to Costa Rica. Where we spent a year and half in the sun, sand, and surf. Returning to New York was a decision based on necessity as I needed to graduate. Once I returned, I soon realized that my time was once again robbed from me and finding windows to surf was near impossible, even though I was now at Long Beach, arguably the surf central of New York. Before I knew it, the cold had hit, the waves were roaring and I had been out the water a few months. I felt like I left my confidence in Costa Rica. Judging by the lack of surfers suddenly in the water it seemed I was not the only one impacted by the seasons. Maybe I am not alone in my inability to be at peace back seating surfing for half the year, surfing is more than a sport, defined a sport is “An activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team, competes against one another or other for entertainment” (Oxford Dictionary). That definition only scrape the surface, it seems to have become an innate part of my being, what have I got myself into!
History
That exact date that surfing was born is unclear, however, “before the arrival of Europeans in the Pacific, surfing was practiced throughout Oceania- in Hawaii, Polynesia, New Guinea, even New Zealand” (Finnegan, 1992, pg 12), later it made its way to California and Australia. The shortboard was created and changed the game, the first boards came from Australia in the late 1960’s. When this happened, the traditional longboard was neglected and as author and surfer William Finnegan recalled, “Nothing was the same afterwards” (Finnegan, 2015, pg 86). Now surfing can be found worldwide, most countries with ocean access and some waves will undoubtedly find surfers in their oceans. This is not limited to countries with warm climates, as demonstrated by Long Beach NY. A small coastal city, named “City by the Sea” on the south-shore of Long Island, New York. New York and surfing do not have an automatic association in most people’s minds, you hear New York and you think of city life, most probably forget that the Atlantic is in fact on its doorstep. Long Beach is a community that embraces its geographical position, with a long, new, post-Hurricane Sandy boardwalk, and many businesses engulfing the beach vibe. It is no wonder that people of all ages can be seen enjoying the beach location all year round. explain history and how it is in Long Beach and explain from my observation how it is in the community. As someone who surfs, it was a no-brainer to move to Long Beach when relocating back to New York. The longer I am here, the deeper I am diving into the surf subculture present here. It seemed unique and had a heavy presence, one which I never felt surfing in Costa Rica. I decided it would be worth diving deeper into, to learn more about my new neighborhood and the subculture that is very much alive in it.

Limitations
It is important to acknowledge the limitations that I knew I would bring to my study. I am still learning to surf therefore there are many aspects of the sport that I am uninformed about. That being said, I do have a lot more knowledge of the sport that someone who does not surf or is a very new beginner. The gap in experience means that there is plenty left for me to discover, but it also means that I have to be careful that my own experience does not cloud the perspectives of others I speak to. We are all engaging in the same activity, yet their experience is theirs and not to be compared to mine.

The How and Why
The initial purpose of the study was to find out more about surfing at Long Beach during the hurricane season. However, with the purpose of not limiting my data, I decided to take a more open approach and focused on surfing and the surfing subculture at Long Beach, NY. I used a combination of participant observation, auto-ethnographic accounts, and recorded interviews. I
wanted to gather data from different angles in order to learn as much as I could with the limited time available. For my tools, I kept it relatively simple using my laptop, notepad, and voice recording app on my phone.

**The Surfers**
The four participants will be identified using a combination of pseudo and actual names, depending on their preference.

**Jairo**- Born and raised in Costa Rica, he spends 6 months of the year there and for the last five years, 6 months of the year (the warmer 6 months!) in Long Beach. He shares a surf vacation business with his wife based in Costa Rica, surfs professionally, and he also works as a surf instructor. He is in his early 30’s.

**Meg**- Like her husband, she also spends half the year in the states and half in Costa Rica, running their business together from both locations. She is an intermediate level surfer and surf photographer who is also in her early 30’s.

**Claire**- A self-described beginner/intermediate level surfer who moved to Long Beach 2 years ago for the surf. She works fulltime in marketing and surfs around her schedule. She is in her mid-late twenties.

**Mark**- The boyfriend/roommate of Claire, Mark also says he is of beginner/intermediate level and surfs around his work and school schedule. He is also in his mid-late twenties.

**The Lingo**
Many subcultures develop their own language, and surfing is no exception. Going in I was fully aware it existed, however, the list of emic terms continuously grew along-side my study until it was so long it deserved its own page! The variety of words illuminate the relevance of a mutual form of communication from surfers globally, providing a collective understanding among those who surf. The word, followed by a brief explanation, can serve as point of reference for readers
unfamiliar with the term. I would like to acknowledge that this is not all the words but more of a select handful.

**IMPACT ZONE** - The area where the waves break, it is typically dangerous and not somewhere you want to hang about.

**SET** - The arrival of a group of waves (typically 6 or 7) that due to many factors, arrive in intervals seconds apart. It could be 6 seconds or 15 seconds; the number varies depending on the conditions. For surfing longer intervals usually means better waves.

**CLOSEOUT** - a wave that breaks all at once leaving the surfer nowhere to go, as most waves are ridden to the right or to the left.

**GOOFY footed** - somebody who surfs with their right foot forward on the board (allegedly named after the Mickey Mouse character Goofy, who surfed in an episode with his right foot forward).

**REGULAR FOOTED** - someone who surfs with their left foot forward (most people are regular).

**SOUP** - the white water from a broken wave.

**BARRELL/TUBE** - riding in the hollow part of a wave in an enclosed chamber.

**PUNCH THROUGH** - paddling out into the ocean through the breaking waves.

**HEAVY** - waves which carry a lot of water and are thick.

**LINE UP** - the area in the water where the surfer is most likely to catch the wave, therefore most surfer congregate in the same area.

**WHITE WATER** - the water that has turned white as a result of the wave breaking.

**PEAK** - the highest point of a wave before it breaks.

**TAKE OFF** - the transitional moment between paddling for the wave and the standing first part of the ride.
**POP UP**- the action of standing to ones feet on the board from the paddling position which requires a lot of technique.

**GROM**- a young surfer.

**CARVING**- pattern or design surfer makes on the wave.

**YEW**- sound made or written to give credit to a surfer for a wave ridden skillfully or to generally express excitement.

**WIPE OUT**- falling or being thrown off your board whilst attempting to ride a wave.

**KOOK**- word used for a beginner surfer who does not follow surf etiquette, usually used as an insult.

**WORKED**- if you are getting worked then the ocean is pretty much kicking your butt! Repeatedly wiping out and getting held down by waves.

**OFF SHORE**- is the wind direction travelling from the land to the ocean which is ideal for surfing as it tends to mean the waves break slower.

**ONSHORE**- is the wind direction from the ocean to the land which usually results in poor conditions as the wind forcing the waves to break.

**CHOP**- choppy conditions are due to high winds and are disorganized waves which are usually even more unpredictable.

**STOKED**- really excited

**WAVESTORM**- soft-top surfboard which can be purchased at Costco for under $100
Visceral Vibes - In the Water
“I like the feeling of the fear, like am I scared... but if the wave looks scary go for it, if the wave doesn’t look scary and doesn’t look like you’re going to die, don’t go for it... it’s like a motivation”—Jairo

Positive Vibes - Here are some of the positive words/phrases the participants used to describe surfing.

Fun
Freeing
Clear mind.
Not really stressing
Exercise-kicks my ass like physically,
Used every muscle in your body, it’s a feeling you can’t replicate you know.
Eases my mind
Therapeutic
Not focusing on things that are unimportant
You take life with a greater ease
Didn’t waste it spending time you didn’t want to do, at the end of the day.
The ocean and the waves are my best therapy, both physically and mentally.
Satisfaction
relaxed and chilled
Solitude
Stoked I get really excited you know.
The best feeling
Feeling of just being free physically, mentally
Pretty hard to forget.
Excited
Relax
Patient
Excited

**Talking about big swells:**
Intimidating.
Scares me
Freaks me out
Fear
Intimidating.
Not calm
Intimidation
Exhausted because I simply don’t have the stamina.
Nervous like the adrenalin
Nervous
Pressure

...The positive words used to describe how they feel when surfing all were very similar, and insinuated a combination of an excited high, matched with a therapeutic, escapist element. Being in the ocean provides a physical removal from land, and with it comes a mental removal also. Leaving behind the problems and stresses from land and feel the exhilaration of riding waves, it is no wonder so many people become hooked.

When discussing larger waves, the vocabulary had a change in atmosphere, words like “fear” and “intimidation” were used frequently. Part of the appeal of the sport is stepping outside your comfort zone, but it is evident that everyone has their limits. Only a small handful of people are able to channel the fear and look death in the face and enjoy the feeling.
Collective Nature

On the block preceding the boardwalk, two surfers, kitted out in head to toe in winter gear, were hunched over, frantically rubbing wax on their propped-up surfboards. My daughter curiously asked me what is what they were doing. I have learnt that seeing surfers before I’m even close to the boardwalk, usually means that the waves are decent that day. On this warm day (relative to the bitter cold we had this past week), it almost felt like spring time and summer was on the way. It’s amazing how the boardwalk can go from ghost town to the place to be in the matter of a day. I guess most people really do not enjoy the cold. Strolling past the Hurley center, where the Skudin surf school are based on the east side of the boardwalk, it was evident that a lot of people were taking lessons from the hustle and bustle of people overflowing from the center and spreading outside.

The Eastern section of the beach was boarded off for construction, however, some surfers have snuck through the barriers to get to the oceans. I would imagine they wanted the less crowded wave as gazing further west I could see black blobs in the water grouped together in clusters. Once we passed Skudin, and access to the beach was regained we made our way onto the sand and proceeded to walk west. As we walked along the beach, aside from the odd civilian jogging, strolling, or taking photos on the jetties (most people even on the warmer days stay on the boardwalk) we passed and ongoing stream of surfers all walking with their boards, heading east. The strong current had dragged them across and you could see those in the water were constantly paddling, fighting a losing battle and unable to sea-anchor. The constant paddling would also help keep them warm in the now cold-water temperatures. We walked for about 20mins and passed by around 50 men, and one woman. I was surprised, pleasantly, how many men were older, and appeared to be over 45, some well over that.

I sat on one of the jetties as this allowed me to sit close to the water as well close to the entrance. As there is always a current running alongside the jetty heading out to sea, saves some arm strength for when they are already out. I witnessed on older man with a surfboard and flippers on, at first, I was wondering if he was confused, as I had only ever seen flippers used for body boarding. I soon saw him in the water, riding monstrous waves on his knees. Very innovative and I would imagine due to his age he was restricted physically and had created an adaption. I overheard one guy say at the water's edge to another surfer “it’s heavy out there today man, it’s hard to stay in position”, the other guy agreed and paddled out. The other waited at the water's edge for his friend who was traipsing behind.

I observed one man stood with his board by the water, it had it stood up vertically next to him, he then sat down, watching the water for a very long time. He then appeared to have made the decision to enter the water, his board was very small, suggesting his ability was enough to not struggle out there, yet he seemed very hesitant. His vision was fixated on the
water. He then began to enter the water but was being very slow, a few guys who entered way after him, paddled right past him. He then started waving at someone who waved back in the water. I then thought that the whole time he was looking for his friend and now that he has located him, he would head on out, but this was not the case. He still waited and waited until he eventually made the plunge and passed through the white-water break and out to his friends.

As Mark explained, surfing is “literally it’s an individual activity but it’s nice having other people out there knowing that you’re not the only one out there in case something bad happens”. In practice it is a solo sport, yet many people seem to find their team of moral support/company, and a safety net. Over the weeks I have witnessed many instances of people waiting for friends before entering the water, running together to the water, changing in and about of wetsuits together, prepping equipment together, and paddling out to each other, An element of healthy competition is present among peers, but not surfing alone is based on the humble fear and respect of the ocean and its unpredictable ways. As Finnegan states: “The cardinal rule of safe surfing is that one should never surf alone (Finnegan, 1992 pg 29). This creates a collective atmosphere between surfers, “if the wave if I wipe-out they are going to look for me, I feel comfortable with more people, I feel safe. It’s like if you were surfing by yourself and in good conditions, when surfing together if feels like humanity cares” (Jairo). This mutual spotting system extends beyond peer groups and extends to strangers, “even if you don’t go with each other you know the other people out there will be looking out for each other” (Meg). There will always be lone wolves and surfing is no exception, however, a level of comfort is drawn from surfing as a collective and not individually. Waiting between sets with friends is a lot more fun than alone and is usually met with chit-chat and banter, with everyone enjoying the present, “I like it when it’s just me and a few of my buddies, you know, nothing beats that” (Mark), I couldn’t agree more.

Committed Relationship/Lifestyle

I perched myself sat on the top on the bench as large water droplets lingered from the night’s rainfall. At 7am on a Tuesday morning, a rich sunrise demanded my attention, the deep oranges rays radiated from the perfectly clear sun, they reflected off the wet boardwalk and off the windows of the beachside apartments. It was one of those moments when time seemed to stand still, I was snapped back to reality by the sound of a runner’s sneakers splashing past. Although there was a crispness to the air which made it undeniable that fall has arrived, for the start of October it felt comfortably warm.

I had arrived in attempt to catch someone who was going for a morning surf, however, although I arrived with the rising sun, it appeared I had missed the morning party! The early crowd of around 8 surfers were already in the water. Surfboard travel bags tossed in the sand,
suggesting a sense of urgency to get to the water. Perhaps they are squeezing in a session before heading to work. Lonely footprints in the sand lead to the water, some in pairs, however they are clearly indented as the rain reset the sand. The waves are fairly small but evidently still big enough to be worth paddling out for.

For surf enthusiasts a high level of commitment is required in order to get into the water alone. For some like Claire and Mark, making the decision to move to Long Beach was one decision, yet living in close proximity to the beach does not guarantee ocean time. The pace of life in Long Beach feels substantially slower than in the city, however, work schedules and commutes are a common denominator between the two locations. Those dedicated to surfing will find a way to squeeze it into their routine, and find balance between the notorious chilled out surfing lifestyle and the equally notorious New York hustle. Waking up extra early, especially in the cold months, or racing home to get in the water afterwork and before sun down are steps Claire and Mark both take, “I can either go early in the morning right before work cos the beach is right on the way or after work, I get off in the afternoon I just go on the way home” (Claire), “It’s not very flexible (work schedule) I can go before but usually I have to be in very early, it depends on the time of year also, day light savings time just ended, I could only really go like after work but that is only if I get off early, it’s kind of hard during the winter, in the summer if I can get off a little earlier and the suns up earlier so I have a much bigger window of opportunity to go (Mark). Navigating going surfing around 9-5 type jobs is even more complicated with changes in season and the shrinking hours of daylight. The challenge increases when there is a continuous run of swell for a lengthy period. Meg reminisced on people’s reactions to the Hurricane Hermine swell in 2016, “Like they make it a priority to go surf, we had like 7 or 8 days straight of really good waves, people were like joking even on like social media like oh “I’m going to run out of vacation days” because they were taking time off and literally using vacation days to go surfing cos the waves were good. Which lucky we didn’t have to do. Like literally they would call in sick”. Rational thought seems to go out the window when the waves arrive. The swell is intermittent in NY so the moment needs to be seized when it arrives. People are willing to jeopardize getting in trouble at work in order to surf.

Moving to a coastal town is a committed decision to make, yet some take it a few steps further. Jairo and Meg have the “Endless Summer” lifestyle, their lives are 100% based around surf and where the waves and sun can be found. Their business CR Surf Trip, a surf vacation company, allows for them to maintain a sustainable income which aids their travel plans; they live the lifestyle most surfers probably dream about. Mark and Claire have committed to surfing while still living in the rat-race, like the people using up sick days to surf, Mark intends to use his vacation days to do the same, "every vacation I want to go on from here on out is going to have to involve surfing... (I smile but my reaction was immediately shut down)...I’m not kidding
about that either”. Claire’s surf aspirations extend into the future, “my goal in life is too like have a beach where I can surf and live any time any day of the year”. With surfing, like most things where there is a will there is a way. To live in New York, often means learning how to overcome obstacles, and surfing in NY is no exception.

**Surf Turf War- NYC**

*A low fog hangs over the grey waves, creating an eerie yet exciting energy. In the distance out on the horizon eleven cargo ships are making their slow voyage, in what appears to be an obedient line, across the Atlantic. Hurricane season has arrived, the endless warmth of summer evenings has expired and a crisp bite to the sunset air is present. Somewhere far off into the ocean, Hurricane Florence is wreaking havoc, consequently producing a healthy swell to the shores of Long Beach. The air is surprisingly still, and the smell of salt and seaweed triggers a feeling of nostalgia. The sound of crashing waves overbears any other distant sounds, as mother nature seems to be letting off some steam after a long flat summer. Sat perched on my upturned skateboard, the raw scene of nature at its finest is interrupted by heavy machinery further down the beach. Workers have been dredging the sand over summer, pulling the sand further out to sea, meddling with nature. A cause for concern as the impact it will have on the eco system and the surf is yet to be determined.*

When people hear “New York” it is safe to presume that surfing is not the first thing that comes to their minds, however, a 45-minute train ride from the city will find you at a small city laced in surf from head to toe. Here a unique subculture can be found of surfers. Overcoming environmental, structural obstacles whilst cultivating unique social interactions and structures, all to achieve the same goal of surfing. The previously mentioned scheduling obstacle, that for a lot of people is unavoidable as the cost of living in New York means most people work fulltime and often more than one job. In addition to the lack of time available, the climate is another challenge. The change of seasons means in the colder months there is physically less time available to be in the water, “in the winter you have more barriers blocking you, you don’t have as much time. The sun goes down earlier, and you know it just becomes a lot harder” (Claire). This may not be such an issue for someone who has a job that is more flexible, but is certainly very real for a lot of people. The temperature of the water and air means that additional gear is required in order to avoid hypothermia “So right now I have to get a wetsuit that is 5/4 so that’s mm, so it’s a thickness so the thicker the wetsuit the warmer it will make you so I need to get the wetsuit so you get a hood with it, clothes, and booties” (Claire). These are not cheap items, with hooded winter suits averaging between $200-$400. Therefore, the financial implications are once again present. Exposing yourself to thirty degrees Fahrenheit is not for the faint hearted on land, and in the ocean, it requires a whole other level of determination and
strength, “I mean this time of year it’s harder because the sun goes down a lot earlier so it’s harder to get your ass out there because it’s so cold” (Mark). Based on the significant drop in the numbers of surfers in the water that I have observed once summer ended, it is evident that for many the cold alone is deterrent enough. New Yorkers are known for being tough, but New York surfers are extra tough.

The beach in Long Beach is divided into separate smaller beaches named after the streets that run perpendicular to it. They are divided by man-made rock jetties set approximately a block apart, which are used to establish territory between surfers but are also a source of intimidation for others. Navigating the waves and currents is challenging, but add in the risk of being thrown onto a pile of rocks and the conditions are now even more serious and less appealing. Meg, who surfs half the year in Costa Rica, finds the jetties a contributing factor as to why she avoids surfing in large swells, “you have the jetties which are like these rock formations, and so honestly they scare me, like it freaks me out that I might get smashed into them, or that I might eventually catch a wave and smash myself into them”.

I have observed that the waves vary from beach to beach, which leads to some being more favorable than others to surf. People who live in Long Beach or surf there frequently are more likely to be aware of the difference and feel attached to a certain one, “listen I know some different beaches in Long Beach, and some beaches are like more like angry people and like right now because I’ve lived more than like 5 years here, I know like which beach is more crowded than the others, and of course it’s about the locals. I don’t have, in my case I don’t have a problem with anybody here I go where I want but of course if I know it’s going to be
crowded here, I’m going to move to another beach” (Jairo). Knowledge of the local social
dynamics allows Jairo to avoid unpleasant situations and chooses to retreat from the surf turf
war. People become attached to certain beaches for reasons of proximity or how the waves
form.

The stereotype of the “angry New Yorker” seems to have penetrated into the surfing
scene, present in a select group. From talking to people from all ends of the ability and
experience scale, it is apparent that there is a group who are able surfers and not kooks but not
at the professional level, therefore unable to surf so frequently. Due to in the inconsistent
swells, it creates a real sense of urgency that I have felt and seen when waves do arrive, people
literally run to the ocean. This is a possible explanation for the animosity in the water of people
being “jerks” or “assholes”, a group identified by both learners and professionals, “Long Beach
we got like good surf friends and like nice people but still you know you have some I don’t know
how to say it...like some assholes you know, but in Costa Rica for example I think it’s a more
friendly surf community, everyone is happy to see you in the line-up in different beaches.
California is pretty similar, but Long Beach, maybe because we don’t have so many waves in the
year so when we have a wave people are more like angry” (Jairo). Jairo has surfed in many
countries and beaches all over the world aside from only Costa Rica, therefore he is able to
provide comparative insight. He assessed that “like 40% of the population, the surf population
at Long Beach is very respectful and friendly and the 60% is going to be like the jerks...the best
surfers from long beach long island, they are good people and good surfers, this part the jerk
people, are no good surfers, that is why because they don’t know how to surf, they don’t know
how to surf the etiquette”. Surfing has the reputation as being very chilled out, and in a lot of
places it is, but in New York they are always “a few people that are taking it way too seriously”
(Mark). Long Beach serves as a contradiction for the surf reputation yet a prime example of the
New York stereotype.

I have identified three groups, number 1 is the “kooks”, those who are learning and an
easy target for the higher ups. Number 2 the competent yet angry surfer, this person is
intermediate level, and is stuck in no man’s land as he has left the land of the kook, yet is still
not part of the elite as his ability, lack of etiquette and attitude prevents him from escalating.
Number 3 is the elites, they know their ability, and do not have to try to be a surfer because the
simply are one, this means they are more relaxed and embody the stereotype of the laid-back
surfer.

I did not witness such accounts firsthand, however, on social media especially on
Instagram, pages called “kook-of-the-day” provide worldwide videos of “kook” behavior.
Depending on your sense of humor the videos could be entertaining or uncomfortable to look
at. Most videos are making a light-hearted joke that “kooks” themselves would even find
amusing. However, on occasions there are videos of violent manner. It is not uncommon for people to be victims of physical violence either in the ocean, or being “settled” on land after. On the one hand surfing has a very relaxed connotation attached to it, of being at one with the ocean and being in the moment. On the other hand, there is a deviance attached to the sport, so much so that historically surfing has been labeled “barbarian” (Finnegan, 2015), a subculture separated from mainstream society. Exploring the causation for the undercurrent of violence present in surfing is a topic I would love to explore further in the future.

Bullying Undercurrent
Surfers can be seen in groups running up the boardwalk from the street, I can feel their sense of urgency to get into the ocean. In contrast, those that have finished their session are rolling down their wetsuits, relaxed but buzzing, exchanging stories of waves they caught and waves in which caught them! A group of three young men in their mid-twenties who have finished in the ocean, are stood talking in a group. They have their wetsuits rolled down and shortboards in hand. A man who appears to be mid-late thirties is leaving on his bike, mastering carrying his board at the same time, a large “soft topped” board, of the brand “Wavestorm”, which can be brought at Cosco for about 100 dollars. It is notoriously used by beginner surfers or Kooks, “a “kook” (an insult usually reserved for an incompetent surfer-the term derives from kuk, a Hawaiian word for excrement)” (Finnegan, 2015, pg 70). The three young guys are visibly laughing at the older man, and not being subtle about it, he ignores them and cycles off. Being accepted/respected into the surf community appears to be a tough process and one not automatically gained.

Watching the floating upper bodies bobbing around waiting on the incoming set, everything looks peaceful and tranquil. Yet like the ocean there is a lot more going on under the surface than meets the eye. A complex set of dynamics, relationships, social structures, and hierarchies are happening simultaneously. For those learning to surf, the setting can feel a lot less peaceful than it looks. Learning a new skill is usually met with its challenges and is all part of the process. The saying “if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere” is relevant to surfing as well. I do not have copious amounts of data to make lengthy comparative conclusion. However, from learning to surf in New York and Costa Rica, hands down New York is much harder, and I’m not the only one who can testify to it. When Claire told her friends, who surf, that she wanted to started learning she was often met with the response “oh my god good, luck there is such a tough learning curve in New York”. The collectiveness is intertwined with a strongly established, unwritten, hierarchy. Surfers of different abilities and experience levels are very much aware of its looming presence. Everybody I spoke to whether directly, or inadvertently, all mentioned a hierarchy, and as they are all of different levels their perspective
on the topic varied. For those at the bottom of the barrel, the “kooks” expressed an inherent awareness of their ability level whilst in the water. An assessment is made as a surf enters the water, how he carries himself, the board (a soft board indicated beginner or a board with a sticker indicates a sponsor therefore a professional) he uses, to his ability to execute a take-off successfully on a wave and maneuver through the water. The ranking will then take place through behavior in the water. Mark, who is still climbing the ropes explained “if you don’t have a certain level of skills and you don’t get it done, they aren’t going to let you get it done, you have to prove you are able to do it...people are going to be running circles around you, paddling a lot faster than you, catching more waves than you”. Obviously, the ability to paddle stronger means the person will catch more waves. However, it is interesting that he feels the need to prove himself in the water. There appears to be a real stigma surround with learning to surf, from the word “kook” to the shame of having a soft-top board. In a conversation with Claire I asked which board she uses, “I hate saying foamboard cos it’s so embarrassing but I use a 7ft board” I asked why it was embarrassing, she confessed “cos it shows that I’m still a beginner”. One reason why being labelled a beginner causing embarrassment is potentially due to attitudes in the water. Claire identifies the importance of the positioning in the line-up, “usually the more advanced everyday competitive surfers usually surf closer to the jetties cos that is where the waves break and they are usually bigger... I stay away from the jetty because people can be jerks you know and I don’t wanna get in the way...it’s almost like a high school cafeteria you know it’s like clicks”. Ability means dominance in the water and the access to the better part of the wave. The fear of getting in the way implies a threat of aggression or intimidation from other surfers, this causes her to remove herself from the area, as she has not yet “proved” herself or earned the right to be there.

On the other hand, speaking to Meg and Jairo is it clear that those with more experience surfing are equally aware of the hierarchy, yet share a completely different perspective. Jairo is confident in his ability in the water and knows when he paddles for a wave it will be his wave, “yeh so they know for example it’s like if I paddle um for the wave so a lot of people, they know that it’s my wave...sometimes it will be like a lot of guys in the line-up so sometimes when its big they will start shouting like go go go”. This ownership of the wave is not guaranteed for the less experienced, talking about a male friend of hers who is an experienced surfer Claire explains “one guy friend who just like gets in the way of everybody because he is a good surfer so he can just do that”. Like rules on the road, there are also rules in the ocean, and these tie in tremendously with the dynamics in the water. Surf etiquette is vital for a safe surf experience for all those in the water. Less patience is granted for those learning who do not respect or no the etiquette to practice it in the water. Surfing is a dangerous sport, but unlike driving, no license or test is required to give it a go. Therefore when someone enters the water who poses
a threat to others, it is understandable that they may be met with some hostility from more experienced surfers, “like for me I’ve even told people who are like still learning to surf, like as long as you know that the person at the peak is allowed to get the wave, I don’t have a problem with two people paddling for a wave, as long as you see that other person gets it, stop paddling, but if you both paddling if you don’t know the guys ability next to you why not paddle because if that waves goes passed both of you and there is nobody else, then both of you wasted the wave but like when its, like what Jairo is talking about really, which is not so much like no knowing or paddling and the but whatever but like blatantly ignoring it” (Meg). Practicing etiquette trumps ability in regards to gaining respect in the water, that being said, Wavestorms and kooks seem to given free pass to be mocked at liberty.

The undercurrent of bullying has been ingrained so deeply into surf culture that professionals have created a competition inspired by kooks and Wavestorms but for experienced surfers “There are no rules at the Wavestorm World Championship, which is part demolition derby, part beach party. (Dollar said that most of the hundred or so surfers were pretty buzzed.) It’s also a sendup of the surfers who tend to ride on Wavestorm boards—“kooks,” or surf newbies, who don’t necessarily know or follow the sport’s tacit codes” (Will, 2017). Even Claire who has a foamboard and is a beginner joked mockingly as a guy passed with his Wavestorm as we were wrapping up our conversation “ah look at this kid and his Wavestorm”. One tactic for overcoming the stigma is to own it, “I’m a kook and I’m proud. I feel like more girls can... not to sound sexist but I feel like more girls can get away with being called a kook and not take offense to it but you know. When you see a guy with a foamboard....” (Claire). Meg also had a similar opinion, saying that generally girls who are learning generally get cut more slack in the male dominant sport, unsure of exactly why this is and exploring different reasons she theorized, “I mean you’re also wearing a bikini and your butt looks good when you take off, so maybe they are thinking they have a chance with you if they are nice to you but um I don’t know what the reason is but it’s definitely different!” Also how you react to a kook in the water depends on you as person more than you’re ability level, “But if you see someone who is like being a kook in the water you know I like whether you say something or not, or whether you are physically aggressive to the person or not, I think depends on where you are too” (Meg), since everyone was technically a kook at some point, it is safe to say some surfers have more tolerance towards them than others.
Social Status

Onshore
Surfing has a reputation in the wider society of being a “cool” sport or activity to participate in. Even those that don’t surf can usually appreciate the risk involved in entering the ocean, an unknown, unpredictable territory which most prefer to view from the sand. When talking to Conner, who resides in Long Beach but does not surf, I asked what he thinks about all the surfing influence in Long Beach, “I think surfing is cool, I like the culture, chilling vibes”. The “cool points” gained associated with being a surfer could be part of the motivation to start the sport, however, from my data it appears the reason people continue stems from intrinsic visceral feelings. Meg recalled her first surf lesson, and the impact the instructor had of her impression of surfing, “he did a headstand on his board and I just remember thinking that was like, I can’t believe he just did that, and he must have been like coolest guy ever and no other instructors did it and I was like I’ve got the coolest instructor so I remember that just being really cool”. “Cool” was used three times in one sentence!

When conversing with people, Claire and Mark both noticed that when people learn that they surf, they immediately show interest; “hearing a lot of people talk about it that don’t surf they are always super interested about how it is and um but people are always very interested you know they kind of wish they could, even though they don’t try, although think that they should kid of a thing” (Mark). Claire also made the same assumption, that a lot of people want to surf, “you know what it is a lot of people wanna learn how to surf, it’s the people who judge other surfers and say like erh, they wish they could surf, so I just feel like there are stereotypes, but it just depends you get the good and the bad, the majority is positive” (Claire). She also theorized that those that have a negative opinion on surfing only do so out of jealousy and desire to learn. In Long Beach, there has arguably been an influx of those coming to learn to surf, particularly in the summer months due to Skudin Surf, “seeing what Will Skudin has brought to the table, you know that just brings up the appeal, makes people want to live down here” (Mark). The local, family owned surf school is head fronted by Will, a wave rider in the World Surf League (WSL) who is on the “Big Wave Tour”. He competes annually in a contest riding the biggest waves in the world. Even since I started coming to Long Beach in 2016, it is evident that they have expanded, offering year-round opportunities to learn to surf for all ages and abilities. Meg also noticed in Costa Rica that people will go as far as to buy an expensive board with no experience in order to take photos “you see people with like these awesome surfboards and they don’t know how to surf so that is a money thing, cos they own a shortboard but have probably never surfed a shortboard in their life so like how are they going stand up on a shortboard, but it’s for like photos or whatever”. It seems like people are able to use their financial privilege to attempt to gain cool points. The same is true in Long
Beach, with the surf camps, Long Island is a wealthy county and like most things, if you have money you are already ahead. Jairo noticed teaching in the camps that, “here if you’ve got a wealthy family, parents, it’s easy to be a surfer right because they are going to give you brand new surfboards, not a regular one, one with a shaper and um dimensions...I can see the kids right now, all the groms, they have a sponsor already and maybe they don’t surf very well but daddy and mommy have money”. Money can get you a head start but does not guarantee success or social status, I doubt money alone would allow someone to buy their way into the elite, as this would be counterintuitive to the history of surfing and its rebellion against Capitalist society.

Offshore
Internal to the subculture, the social status is more complicated, and the surf community/scene is strong in some areas. It can be considered inclusive to all who like to surf or a more exclusive “elite” group, like that is established in Long Beach, “here in LB it’s more like you have to part of the team of the group or maybe like just to be part like eh of the surf community” (Jairo). He explains that based on his perspective of the surf community, growing up surfing in Costa Rica, “the surf community for me is going to be like people who have boards and like to surf and go surf”. This is a very inclusive structure, and anybody who wants to surf would be consider a “member”. Yet in Long Beach there is an exclusivity, reserved for those who are professionals or consider themselves to be, “for example surf community they are going to make like meetings like parties like are really not like involved inside the surf community, they really aren’t going to say anything to you, but it’s really like a local thing”, earning his place in the inner circle took Jairo a few years, however, now he considers them friends. As a professional who is not from Long Beach, his perspective is unique and helps strengthen the existence of this group. I question if the shape of surf cultures reflects the society that they are present in. New York is an individualistic society, and Costa Rica is a collective one, both are reflected in the attitudes of the surfers. On the other end of the scale those learning to surf are equally aware of the elite surfing scene. Claire explained that the longer you surf and live here, the more you become aware of it, “so you actually get to learn how big it is when you get into the surfing scene”, it gives the notion that the surfing scene is like a separate realm, another dimension of society that surfers are striving to enter. Those still learning yet who try and emulate that they are in the group merely enhance their kook status.

Wave Fix
I did not consider, even passingly that I had a choice when it came to surfing. My enchantment would take me where it would” (Finnegan, 2015: 41).
The most surprising discovery was not the feelings or emotions people experience when they can surf, but those they experience when they cannot. Everyone I spoke to, and I can attest to it myself, expressed very strong psychological, and physiological responses during periods, both long and short, when they are not surfing. The intensity is similar among all participants, regardless of how long they have been surfing or their ability level. In addition, collectively it was a fairly immediate response after only a few times surfing.

The many different reasons that prevent access to surfing whether it be work, wave size, medical issue, financial struggle, the response is the same. Work scheduling leaves Mark explaining that, “nothing makes me more bummed when I have to go to work or go to school and the surf is really good...That definitely kinda you know upsets me a little bit (sigh) I guess after a while (sigh) I kind of accept it”. This is an emotional response, and it seems like Mark has chosen to accept it as his circumstances, but it sounds like he has not made peace with it. Claire gave insight into how fast this phenomenon occurs, “that was it, first wave, you get addicted, you feel addicted to the feeling you get when you are gliding on water it’s like a huge adrenalin rush” and since that moment she has been coping with challenging moments, “I like a mental breakdown this morning cos I haven’t been in like a month... It's a full body withdrawal you know...my insides you know I’m dying to go, but I don’t have the right gear right now, it’s depressing but it’s also motivating me to get the stuff, but I definitely feel the withdrawals”. She was the first participant to use the words “addiction” and “withdrawal” and since that conversation it became evident that surfers arguably are addicted surfing, with the highs and the ugly withdrawals.

The financial aspect blocked Meg from surfing as much as she would like over the summer, she uses photography as a way of still connecting to surfing when unable to get in the water “I get stressed out. For example, if I’m at the beach and there are decent waves but I don’t have a board. Its stressful”. That’s why photography helps. Like if I take the camera to watch Jairo, I have something to do to distract me that is super rewarding” At one point this summer she had no camera and no board, “I was actually depressed to be at the beach watching surfers; I felt like I had no purpose because I didn’t have a board to get in AND I couldn’t even take pictures so I felt like just sitting there was wasteful ... and I was definitely like angry, depressed, annoyed, fidgety”. She experienced both physical and emotional responses to being on the beach not surfing, and even identified the time as “wasteful”. She suggested I ask Jairo how he feels when he is unable to surf, she witnesses his strong reaction when he cannot surf at all, or to his full potential. Jairo, who due to medical condition was unable to surf for a prolonged period, but feels the same when waves are small expressed “Just the same, it made me feel sad and depressed because I consider myself an athletic person and the ocean and the waves are my best therapy, both physically and mentally”. When the good,
positives feelings that one experiences in the water are taken away, then the longing to regenerate these feelings has overpowering consequences.

**Findings**
People initially start surfing to explore a new “cool” sport, yet the reason they continue is due to the visceral implications it has. After the first or second wave, the person is now owned by the sport, and not surfing is no longer an option. Their lives are now a constant search and effort to get back into the ocean, if they are not surfing, they are thinking about it, and constantly physically and emotionally effected by it. The individual is in a committed relationship with the sport. The addictive nature of the sport was not an area that I was expecting to uncover.

The collective, chilled out reputation of the sport is true, however, there is also a dark undercurrent of violence and bullying. One less spoken about, and one worth exploring further. It is aspect true to its historical deviance, yet contradictory to its relaxed persona. The strong emotions provoked by the sport can lead to an unhealthy outlet, and possession of a wave can lead to unfortunate results. The violence is not always of an obvious physical nature, it can also be displayed through subtle verbal remarks, usually aimed towards those learning the sport. One further question that I would like to explore is the element of privilege, surfing is primarily a “white” sport, and its deviance and violence seems to be swept under the rug, socially accepted as part of the sport. Does the race of the participants and context of the violence mean it is forgiven by society? Physical assaults related to surfing and how they are documented and handled by the police or not at all would be interesting.

A final area that would serve as a comparative study, it was would involve analyzing the culture of a surf community and to see if the surf subculture of that community varies in comparison to others. In other words, is the surf community a common ground between all surfers, or does each surf subculture have its own set of behaviors, attitudes, and structures, reflective of their local non-surf culture.

**References**


Course description

Ethnography—the close study of flesh-and-blood human beings situated in social dynamics, interactions and institutions—is at the heart of anthropological research. In this course, students explore the purposes, techniques and styles of doing ethnography with a focus on how contemporary anthropologists push the boundaries of the discipline’s research and writing conventions. We will examine how a sample of ethnographers integrates their knowledge and sensibilities into writing for particular audiences, examining genre, voice, and the quality or texture of writing in various works. Students will learn what ethnography is and explore new ways of writing ethnography. They will also undertake their own ethnographic research and writing project. As a class, we will workshop our adventures in writing ethnography for a multicultural world.

The course will be divided into three parts, loosely following the structure of a sonata, a classical musical form. Like the sonata, Part I is Exposition: describing and explaining the idea and theory of ethnography. Part II is Development in which we explore critical experimental writer-anthropologists and deconstruct their intellectual and creative expressions, exploring their relevance to your research and writing projects. Part III is Recapitulation with Coda (the concluding section) in which we build on what came before to further the development of your creative research and writing work and bring it to some closure.