Despite my past, present, and likely future affiliation, my conventional education before Amherst took place entirely in a Catholic school. There are a lot of Catholic schools in this country, but not all of them are Catholic Catholic. There’s a spectrum—from schools that just wear the uniform and shout out a patron saint every once in a while, to schools where every class is taught by a member of the clergy and an essay answer without a biblical reference is mediocre at best. I’d consider my high school somewhere in the middle. We had religion classes that weren’t entirely unaware of themselves, and liturgies only on a semi-frequent basis. These included several saint’s days and two penances a semester. As a verifiably non-Catholic person, I always attended, under mandatory order, but only participated in the minimal ways allotted to me. I never really minded the small bit of heathen engagement I was sequestered to—much of the tradition was pretty incidental to me—but I always felt a slight pang of longing at penance. The idea of atoning for one’s sins, finding complete absolution and redemption in a twenty-minute tea session with Mr. Gabriel or Father McLaughlin seemed at once a wonderfully romantic goal and an exceptionally efficient concept. My senior year, I went on a four-day spiritual retreat with several teachers and members of my class, during which they offered a confessional space open to everybody. At last, my chance had come to experience that pure, productive redemption, to confess myself. I walked into the room where Father McLaughlin sat, managed about three or four sentences (around one and a half confessions approximately), then proceeded to cry for the next fifteen minutes. I’d never realized how hard it would be to confess in such a way. I’ve always been a fairly open person. But in that next-to-empty room, with only my voice to fill it, I felt the crushing weight of a shame I hadn’t known was there and the struggle of not just confessing to Father McLaughlin, and to God via proxy, but to myself as well.

Confession at once allures and repels. It entails secrecy and sometimes scandal, its illicit connotations stemming from its paradoxical nature as both holy and sinful. Confession to the church of one’s sins is meant to bring relief but just as often brings shame; confession itself, with its secluded booths and intimate interaction, has been used for its power to dominate as well as to forgive. To confess to a crime means guilt; to confess to a trusted listener can mean forgiveness and sympathy, or reprimand and loss of trust. Confession in this more legal sense doesn’t always entail healing, but it also doesn’t always mandate punishment either. To confess in today’s world can be a far more public act than ever before, and can hold incredible weight, as the #MeToo movement has shown. Social media facilitates confession as a freeing act with less pressure than face-to-face interaction, but it can also generate more critical responses because of this same remove.

There are truths and realities that we keep buried within us, shrouded in darkness, for fear of what they will expose about ourselves and the world we know. To us as writers and artists, this is an understanding that we are brought to challenge and confront constantly. Confession is inherent in the process. Each time you create, you confess. You confess your fascinations, your ideas, your identity, your motivations. I have often heard that every piece of art is a self portrait, and as college students so full of the potential to make and remake ourselves, it is ever more important to give this art a space and a voice. The Indicator prides itself in the freedom of expression it gives to its writers, and we hope that this issue is no different. We also hope you, as readers, are affected in some way by the content of these pages, that they may prompt you to confess in return.

Confession entails the revelation of truth, and while some of the pieces in this issue may be fictional or based on opinion, we urge you to recognize the truth in them. These writers and artists felt compelled to create this content, and in so confessing, they have chosen to be vulnerable. Confession requires a listener, so listen well. We hope this magazine encourages you to value this vulnerability, and to search for your own compulsion to confess.

Zoe Akoto’21 and Heather Brennan’20 are the Editors-in-Chief of The Indicator.

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- JM
The struggle to graduate and pursue interests

When people learn where I attend school, they immediately make assumptions. The Amherst College name carries a distinctive pride that seems to follow you wherever you go. Strangers exclaim that I must be intelligent and gifted, going so far as to predict with confidence that I will have a successful future. Thus, with the utterance of a single word, “Amherst,” I am transformed into a magnificent genius and am held to the lofty standards of prestige and excellence that this institution has claimed for itself. Without knowing anything else about me, it is taken for granted that I must be the crème de la crème, a cut above the rest.

For me, college has unfolded as a series of milestones that must be met at the appropriate time. That is to say, there is an appropriate time, or deadline, for everything and, no matter what, you don’t want to be the one who is “too late.” For students who decide to pursue professions such as medicine, choosing classes no longer feels like nourishing intellectual interests so much as a race to meet the conditions for acceptance into a graduate program by senior year. Even without stringent graduate school requirements, every student is drawn toward cookie cutter classes that fulfill the prerequisites for a major. Contrary to the school’s advertisement of freedom of learning with a “liberal arts open curriculum education,” realistically, we are each expected to check off the right boxes at the appropriate time, even as we attempt to explore our interests freely. As soon as I began taking classes here, it was as if a stopwatch had begun to count down. I could only move in one direction: forward, because slacking was not an option.

When I was a freshman, I made the fairly classic premed move of taking multiple introductory science classes during my first year. As much as I was intrigued by the subject matter, I felt lost. I was not accustomed to large lecture halls. Their fast pace of learning was overwhelming and someone always seemed to know the right answers, while I was too timid to stand out among the crowd. Tests were unexpectedly challenging, and I was terrified to watch my grades fall lower than they ever had in high school. More than anything I feared not being as qualified as my peers. I was consumed by the worry that I was not moving fast enough, unable to believe that everyone else could possibly be spending as many hours doing homework and studying as I was. Fear and anxiety slowly paralyzed me, as I became convinced that if I couldn’t meet the idealized standard of a “perfect Amherst student” on my own, I simply did not deserve to succeed.

Two years later, I have learned from my initial anxieties, taken steps to rebuild my wounded self-esteem, and have generally matured as a student. However, while having gained valuable experience, I still find myself running out of time. I am almost done completing my major, but haven’t finished yet. I hope to eventually apply to graduate school, but I first need to complete the required classes, build up my resume, and plan for entrance exams. Questions loom. Can I focus on academics while planning for the future? Will I improve my GPA by senior year…in time to be competitive enough for jobs and internships? I honestly don’t know. Clearly, my struggle to live up to the Amherst College name is a persisting plague, as I constantly wonder how I, just one flawed and vulnerable person among a swarm of seemingly talented and eager individuals, might be perceived by the professional world. I wonder, why should I be chosen over someone else for something students struggle with at many different schools besides Amherst. Hurdles such as serious illness and financial struggles inevitably appear during one’s four years of college, and it can be a challenge to keep on fighting for your goals as a student in spite of these personal trials. The fact of the matter is, life at a grand college institution will move on and cannot afford to stop because of any one student who’s in trouble. (Nothing personal—it’s just not part of the itinerary). Particularly in this fast-moving environment that is so driven by requirements, deadlines, and scores, you can easily lose track of your worth as a person. It is easy to forget that your identity is much more complex and nuanced than the spellbinding “Amherst College” title.

Tragically, in the name of winning academic status, college education has placed too much emphasis on immutable deadlines and requirements and less on individual achievement and learning. I confess that I have had difficulty in this insipidly rigid system, and I believe that I and many others like me would benefit from changes made to encourage a culture of personal academic growth over the herdlike hysteria of regalia-adorned achievement.

As soon as I began taking classes here, it was as if a stopwatch had begun to count down.

“The Lines From Which We Are Drawn”

Monica Diaz ’20 is a Staff Writer for The Indicator.
Illustrator: Emilie Flamme ’20
Confession: I Wish I Was White

Sai Chauhan
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A lifetime of internalized racism

There, I said it. Just hear me out.

I've heard stories from other people of color, too, of their childhood cravings to wake up the next day with white skin. Kids don't like not fitting in. Kids acutely feel the sting of deviating from the norm—they don't yet have the tools or experience required to navigate this difference, so they just cry after school instead.

When I was very young, in all my obliviousness, I didn't even realize that I wasn't white. My mother still gets a laugh recounting the time whenever people mixed me up with the only other South Asian person in my grade. My presence in that very homogeneous school community benefited the white majority so long as I tailored my brownness to their wants and weaknesses. As a good student, I felt the need to not only meet these expectations, but exceed them: I would bring diversity to the student body by proudly inhabiting my ethnicity, my brown body. Though I overcompensated externally, the fact remained: I wished I was white.

For a variety of reasons, I never found a place within the Indian community. I'm actually just not good at residing in communities: my identities feel isolated, and I find it difficult to form these sorts of connections. But this disconnect from my Indianess, engulfed in the whiteness of my social environment, mutated into a sort of hatred.

I would look at other Indian teenagers—outside of school, of course—and feel a burning resentment. That's not me, I'd tell myself. I'm different. But deep down, I also felt fear. I feared becoming one of those Indian people who I saw from a distance, this caricature produced by my preconceptions and biases, because I believed that I would lose myself in the process. That part of me which considered my true self normal—white—never died.

I recognized that this sort of thinking was problematic, but I didn't care to, or know how to, make the effort to change my worldview. I just assigned blame: the disappointing demographics of my town; my parents' tendency to always speak English at home; the South Asian girls, daughters of my mother's friends, who bullied me until I moved away; India itself, for its persecution of the queer and the disabled. The problem couldn't be me, right? Was it my responsibility to mend my warped perspective of my place in society?

Well, yes. But I figured that I'd go to college and figure it out. College, a place with diversity of all kinds, where I would amass a wide portfolio of friends, especially brown friends, who would help me see that normalcy does not reside merely in the white. I expected my wisdom to soar the moment I set foot on campus, all my deep-rooted hatred to dissolve away into a river of books and classes and intellectual conversations. I wouldn't have to try. College would change me, because that's what higher education does.

Though I did gather a more diverse bundle of friends than in high school, unsurprisingly, not too much else changed. Yes, the college environment has improved my perspective and unraveled some of my hatred, but mostly, I just gained self-awareness.

Embracing your difference, your nonconformity, your queerness, in spite of historical oppression or silence, is a radical act of self love. There's value in reclaiming or developing marginal identities—you gain a voice and the power to shape your future. Or so they say.

But I don't want to do that. I'm exhausted. I'm chronically ill and depressed—my efforts center on making it through each day, rather than uplifting myself and finding value in my Indianness. I have enough on my plate already. Maybe I'm just weak or grossly apathetic, but I just want to keep my head down and get through life. I don't have the energy to make our society a better place for Indian-Americans, for myself.

In America, you can't deny that white equals default. Societal norms, aesthetic standards, and educational structures all stem from white, Western traditions. I grew up in America. I adopted this optic, and my personal circumstances certainly didn't help the development of my white-washed attitudes. I don't know how to undo my conditioning—the books and TV shows and teachers and friends who shaped the development of my perspective as a child—most all of them came from a place of whiteness.

My values, judgements, and mode of thought reflect what American society taught me. I admit: when I think of beautiful, I think of white. When I think of authority, I think of white. When I think of humanity, I think of white. I want to be beautiful and powerful and human—ergo, I want to be white. Being any other color means you have to work twice as hard to be seen as any of those things. But I already have enough to do, thank you very much.

Maybe, one day, I'll have the strength to attack my internalized racism and restructure my mentality. Maybe I'll start caring enough to try to love myself. Until then, I must confess: I wish I was white. Sorry.

Confession: I wish I was white.

Sai Chauhan '20 is a Staff Writer for The Indicator. Illustrator: Hannah Zhang '22
A reflection on isolation

F for a dogma choose self-restraint over self-control.
To sit and collect the right words only cultivates dead meat.
They often come too late, anyway, far past their expiration date.
To feed it to someone then would only get you a scowl as they spew up what they could no longer swallow.
Swallow your mistake stew, it steaming a purple smog.
The smog is the best part of what you came up with since it allows people to see they should flee at the very least.
Swallow down your puke from what you made last meal to shovel what you just made down into your grave stomach.
Better one grave than many; limit what you say.
No need to feed people the parasites biting holes in your intestines because you accidentally stumbled upon them in your rush to make something presentable.
Leave your dirty silverware for yourself:
You have to eat something and you've lost the detergent.
Your kitchen's covered in more than enough mold to mould your body into something that aches when it moves and fumbles when it tries to hold anything.
The inflammation won’t go down with a low flame on the stove.
Sit down.
Fear breathing, with all that's in the air after what you've done.
Don't open a window:
who knows what's outside—at least you've dealt with the green under your fingernails before—and your green may make the grass a gross shade.
Instead sit in the shade of your ever shrinking room soon to be without a clear space to walk on from all the toxins tearing across the floor toward you.
In the shade, you won't have involuntary sweat mix with the air or drip down and corrode the floor.
Stay where you can't be seen.
Don't risk someone else to save yourself, especially not someone kind enough to save you.
Don't infect them with your sickness.
Don't try to signal them; avoid all risk of epidemic.
The only thing to stick would be their retching on the roof and the splash it would make in your ears.
Restrain yourself from the outside so it can keep being the outside so you can forget how much it hurt you so you can forget how you were put inside this rancid cell once it no longer knew how to treat you so you can last a little longer so you can last past the pain only to reach numbness so you feel your heart be chewed up a small amount more everyday.
So you can—Restrain yourself.
(I know.
It's hard to cut off your tongue.
I couldn't do it with my rusted butter knife.
Instead I tried to butter up the things resting on my tongue, but they ended up slipping off at the worst times, ruining all my meals without my knowledge until the servings had been tasted.
They would scrape the butter off their tongues, putting it back on their plates.
The plates had a full course on them again. For all the effort I put in, the only taste was butter.
And my visitors couldn't handle a failed chef.
They left me. [You will, too.]
With each failed attempt, I broke down my kitchen until I couldn't even use the sink.
But I still wanted people to visit my home.
I lingered at the window and watched them pass, hoping and waving to get their attention. No one noticed: I had broken the lights a long time ago.
And don't think I didn't step outside and try to get their attention.
They always walked through me.
They always walked through me.
I had broken my image a long time ago.
I merely made an attempt at sharing a dish I liked, but I never made it quite the same for each individual:
Sometimes too bland; sometimes too powerful.
All my tests at wholesomeness never quite met the palate of my loved ones.
“Loved ones” may seem strong but that was exactly what was wrong.
At the very least, I assure you it hurt when they would leave.
I would tell them “see you later” to make it true; it only confirmed to me that my words meant nothing.
I never saw many of them again, no matter how long we spent speaking over a meal, no matter how many servings we had before we decided not to eat again,
no matter how I left my door open and told them,
no matter how I brought them in when the weather was too fierce to weather
through sheer willpower, without shelter.
No matter.
I still had her,
longer than I had anyone.
But it was only a matter of time and grey matter
before she couldn’t distinguish between burnt
dishes and uncooked ones.
I could only look at her, as preparation stopped leading to her passion.
She still comes by sometimes just to sit down somewhere,
since she can no longer see me nor can I:
I’ve lost the ability of communication and seeing my cooking.
No matter.
For a moment I flickered
into existence.
I know because a girl came by and said hi,
just long enough for me to start cooking
before she forgot me.
I hold onto this hell-o.
Maybe it will make for a good ingredient when I decide to cook
myself. But I slip out of my hands.
No matter.
I’ve found self-restraint.
My doors are currently closed.
And my house is blissfully empty.
I don’t starve: I’m a skeleton buried by my stomach.
I spend my days with shadows for blankets.
There’s no chance for anything to break my slumber.
Honestly, I’m surprised you can hear my sleep talk through the crack in the window.
But since you can, heed my whispers:
past pains in daydreams hurt nothing like the present,
so go to sleep on your own and escape;
Master self-restraint; Forget self-control—
You can’t control the world.)

My doors are currently closed.
And my house is blissfully empty.

Kalidas Shanti ’22 is a Staff Writer for
The Indicator.
Illustrator: Mika Obayashi ’19
An exploration in childhood and memory

I was not punished as a child. I spent hours alone in the forest surrounding our house, performing the tasks that every child finds necessary: constructing piles of rocks, finding salamanders, collecting moss, catching beetles, etc. I suppose I was cruel in my violent fascination with living creatures, but at the time I was only indulging in the most noble of scientific inquiry and paid no mind to moderation. When my sister became of age, I brought her along with me and taught her to walk silently in the woods, even when leaves covered the ground. With only a vague awareness of the property lines, we crossed into neighbors’ yards to access new streams and harvest precious red clay. We understood the geography of our forest intimately—the largest boulders and which could be lifted; the best places to find fungi; the time of year when raspberries adorned the tender-needled vine; those caves which were haunted and to be avoided, and others which provided dry safety even during rain.

The crowned emblem of the forest was a tall pine in the empty lot beside our house. In springtime, the pine attracted swarms of wasps. They leeched sap from the creases where limbs met trunk. They congregated in fascination around the sharp-smelling liquid. With pale curiosity and cautious movements, my sister and I placed ourselves between the branches so we could observe their throbbing bodies without their notice. They tilted through the dewy air with ease, their constant hunger motivating their resistance to the cold shocks characteristic of woodland April. The wasps were a sign of good fortune, and we captured them with bottlecaps brimming with sugar water so that we could kill them and harvest their stingers. We craved the coming of the wasps with excited disgust.

The year they removed the tall pine was the first year the wasps did not arrive. The percolation tests evaluated optimistically for the first time, and a construction company moved in and chased the brambles from the ground. Their shovels exposed bald-faced earth and filled the air with noises of collision. After they floored the tall pine, the surrounding space felt empty and different. My sister and I could hardly believe its destruction, hoping that, by some miracle, someone would prevent the horror from actualizing. But things progressed according to plan, and we adapted to the absence of the tall pine. I continued my nighttime wanderings with difficulty, unable to find my house without the distinct black etchings of the tall pine’s branches against the moonlit sky. Silence ensued in the forest for a whole week. Even the mourning doves quieted theirrivals in somber remembrance of the tall pine.

Years later, the greenery had overcome the ground of the old lot, upon which a tall home gazed from the vale with empty windows and unused rooms, abandoned only months after its construction during the recession. The lawn was overgrown with a new chemical breed of grass that grew with verdure unknown to its perennial gray predecessor species. My sister and I have not run free in the forest since the time of the tall pine, and we can barely remember its shape and the smell of its sap, or how many crows could fit among the branches.

When we sleep beside each other, rarely now, we whisper about the tall pine and tell stories from another world when it existed. We devise a strategy to commemorate the tall pine. Sometimes a monument fails to capture the essence of something once living. It would fall short. And with what means, even, would we attempt to construct something that ascribes appropriate gratitude to the age-old splendor of the tall pine? Within the ground is the true memorial, the root clusters all tangled up and extending as far down as they ever will, deep into the soil. The nest of dead and broken roots remains the sepulcher of the tall pine, a burial in remembrance of the heights it once reached.
And so we take up sharp sticks when the moon is full, pure and unobstructed in the sky which was once populated by the tall pine's spread. We shed our clothes and fly through the night like white birds, light-footed upon the rocks. Our fingers sink into the ground and milk gushes forth, filling our palms. Imbued with foreign strength, we notice not thunder nor rain nor the threat of night-prowling creatures. Our whole-hearted vitality recalls the stalwart presence of the once-tall pine. And what happens next, what happens next? The world tumbles and sky is no longer above. We dance with crows in the night.

Sometimes a monument fails to capture the essence of something once living.

We become the beating heart of the forest and disappear into the fold. Man-made wonders do not appeal to us, and so we break the windows of the empty house and hold glass shards in our hands without pain. The heat of the morning sun will wake us, if it’s meant to be. We take up the ritual, the living memorial in awe of things that were, and in wariness of things to come.

Illustrator: Emilie Flamme ’20
Politics in Translation

Leah Folpe
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Political correctness across the generations

My grandfather is eighty years old. His skin is as delicate as paper and more wrinkled than the sheets on an unmade bed. He can’t see very well, nor can he hear full, even with the hearing aids my grandmother regularly reminds him to replace. When I ate dinner with him last night, he ordered a rice pudding for dessert with the gusto one might expect from an inmate on death row choosing his last meal. And yet, despite his declining physical health, his cataracts and deafness, his ever-present walking stick and difficulties traversing even the most diminutive of stairs, my grandfather will still debate the minutiae of politics like a first-year political science major.

The subject is always at the forefront of his mind, ready to spring irrepressibly forth like the water from the Fountain of Youth. Mention the 14th Amendment, and he suddenly recovers his ability to hear. One word about political correctness and he’s off to the races, pontificating about what a fishbowl the political discourse in New York has become. “There’s no dissent, no argument, no opinion,” he insists. “Everyone is afraid to disagree with one another on even the tiniest of points.” My grandfather has never claimed to be conservative, but he now feels he is heading in a direction some might label as precisely that — conservative, or at least fairly be described as decidedly left-of-center. Trudeau. My parents’ political views can only be described as ideologically heterogeneous, the Bush dynasty and the future of the Supreme Court, Angela Merkel and Justin Trudeau. My parents’ political views can only fairly be described as decidedly left-of-center.

Despite this, one of the worst fights we’ve ever had was centered around a hot-button topic of today, my grandfather’s favorite target at which to throw well-placed verbal lampoons: political correctness.

My dad, a diehard devotee of Patti Smith and other experimental artists of the seventies, played a song for my sister while driving her to swim practice in which the chorus is the n-word screamed seven times. Elizabeth and I were horrified. Growing up in an age where influencers, Youtubers, and celebrities are routinely vilified for the smallest of social-justice-related flaws, in a household that regularly discusses intersectional feminism at the dinner table and hangs portraits of the Obamas above the fireplace, we could not begin to fathom this tone-deaf, racially insensitive side of our dad. “Patti Smith is just being transgressive,” he insisted, dismissing my sister’s outrage with a wave of his hand. “It’s art. Art can’t be racist.”

The following day, I attempted to reason with him, only to be rebuffed again and again. The argument over a single decades-old song spiraled out into a wider indictment on my father’s part of cultural appropriation as a whole. “If the n-word shouldn’t be said a white woman, even in the context of a song, does that mean that we can’t have Turkish rugs or eat Chinese food?” my dad contended. “Where do we draw the line between what is and isn’t appropriation?” To my shock, instead of helping me refute his arguments, my mom agreed with him that political correctness had gotten out of hand. Neither one of my parents could see what to me and many other people of my generation is a crystal-clear distinction between appropriation and appreciation.

Flash-forward six months to a September afternoon in my first semester of college: I was standing on a street corner next to Amherst Books, staring at the man with dirty pigtails holding a sign that reads, “WOMEN’S STUDIES 102: GET IN THE KITCHEN, GET PREGNANT, REPEAT.” My initial reaction to this man was one of anger, but I was also resigned to his presence in the way that I’ve had to resign myself to a sexual predator in the Oval Office or the Twitter bots that will call me a c*nt for tweeting about Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearing. Willfully ignoring horrible realities seems to be an inescapable aspect of being alive and not underneath a rock in 2018. However, as the crosswalk light signaled for me to cross the street, I suddenly thought of every conversation I’ve had to have over the past few years, whether I’ve been explaining to my parents why they can’t use the n-word or listening to my grandparents bemoan the fate of free speech. I realized that continuing past without trying to learn more would leave me feeling as helpless as I felt on November 9th, 2016, watching the electoral college counter on FiveThirtyEight slowly tip over into red. My heart pounding, I walked up to the man and very politely asked, “Sir, would you mind telling me why you’re holding that sign?”

At first, sign guy seemed ill-inclined to speak to me. He was visibly nervous and even edged a little ways away, clutching his offensive message like a lifeline while he claimed that my question made no sense. “That’s like asking someone why they climb Mount Everest, honey,” he hedged. But as I persisted, he suddenly began ranting about how feminism is ruining America and poisoning the free press. According to him, political correctness is “the new communism,” and liberal arts students like those who attend Amherst are simply learning how to weaponize it so that we can take over the government once we finish school. “And I won’t argue with you about that either, honey,” the man insisted at the end of his speech, despite the fact that I had been listening silently with what I’d hoped was a blank expression pasted on my face. “I’m not asking you to,” I demurred. I had been hoping to gain some insight into the perspective of a Trump supporter; someone whose beliefs obviously differ quite drastically from those of the adults whose opinions I respect, but who nevertheless has the same dogged resistance to so-called “political correctness.” Instead, I listened for about twenty minutes to what amounted to a synopsis of your average 4chan or Reddit message board.

Neither one of my parents could see what to me and many other people of my generation is a crystal-clear distinction between appropriation and appreciation.

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Leah Folpe ’22 is a Staff Writer for The Indicator. Illustration: Zoe Akoto ’21
It was very, very fast. When I try to remember what happened, there's never as much as there should be. I don't even remember how old I was. I hope I was very small, though, because the whole damn thing was so stupid. It was entirely my fault. I had been told—repeatedly—not to swim to the deep end unless Simone's mom was there watching. As much of an idiot as I was, I understood the logic in this. I was small. The pool was big. Small children in big pools are dangerous; I understood that. So I splashed around obediently as she leaned back in her lounge chair watching us.

And then she went indoors because the cat wanted a glass of milk.

"Don't swim to the deep end."

"We know."

Looking back I don't have the faintest clue as to what motivated me to do this. Most kids break the rules to be edgy and cool. I was never this kid. There was nothing I loved better than attention from adults, which usually meant following the rules precisely. By all means, I should have been the one telling Simone to back off. I should've dashed as far from the deep end as possible and then climbed out of the pool, just to be extra safe. But this one time I was compelled to break the rules. To this day I can't remember why.

As soon as I heard the door shut, I launched myself across the pool.

At first the water was just as it had been, smooth subtle waves warmed by the summer sun. It was a piercingly bright day, but the water was calm and gentle. We'd been out long enough that it felt more natural than the air.

I glided forward through the water, swimming just like I'd been swimming for the past hour or so. And then I wasn't.

It was very, very fast.

All of a sudden I plunged down deep. A burst of frantic flailing launched me up again, and for a split second I gasped for air—and then back down. Up, down, cool blue water to bright white sun to water again. Rivers rushed into my mouth, nose, throat. My ears were filled with the sound of splashing and hoarse gasps for breath. Simone must've been yelling, or crying, or something, but I couldn't hear her. I wasn't even thinking—in that moment I didn't even feel afraid.

I didn't feel anything.

All I was conscious of was thrashing, flailing, helplessly beating the water with skinny little arms and legs. I remember the water all over my skin, feeling like my lungs would cave in if I didn't give them air. But my mind was empty. Maybe it was simply because raw, animal instinct had overcome me. But I didn't feel determined, or even energized. It was as if I had never been swimming. As if my entire life had been this one moment of drowning.

Somehow I managed to break the surface again. This time there was more than a flash of light—there was a figure, fully clothed, jumping toward me in a perfect dive.

But I don't remember that part. I only remember the drowning.

And then I must have come out. I must have been dragged out of the pool, and that must have been the end of the playdate. My parents must have been called. There must have been ruined clothes and a terrifying jolt of what if the door was jammed, what if the phone rang and she was distracted, what if she was simply too slow. There must have been much frantic apologizing on both sides. I must have gone home in shame. I must have been punished.

But I don't remember that part. I only remember the drowning. In fact, I don't remember anything about the rest of that day. I think I thanked Simone's mom, though surely not in any way befitting the magnitude of what she had prevented. I think I was too young to understand the impact of something that hadn't even made me feel afraid. I don't remember how Simone's mom told my mom about what happened, or how I did, or if any of us did at all. I don't remember what I did that evening. I don't remember if I felt any different the next time I went swimming. I don't remember if I swam in Simone's pool again.

I don't remember when I first thought of all this again. I don't remember when I first realized how serious it was. If the door was jammed, if the phone rang, if she was simply too slow this could've been it. I should have more of this. I should at least know why I decided to break the rules. But after all these years of grasping at it I still don't.

All I remember is thrashing, flailing, up, down. As if I had never been swimming.

Elly Hong '21 is a Staff Writer for The Indicator. Illustrator: Mika Obayashi '19

Politics in Translation

Continued from page 10

As I extricated myself from the conversation and headed down Spring Street back to the safety of my politically progressive—albeit imperfect—liberal arts college, I was still left pondering what exactly was meant by the term “political correctness.” Does being politically correct mean quashing every opinion that doesn't align with some magically woke social-justice ideal? Does the term itself imply that one can be politically “incorrect,” and therefore in need of correction? Should those who fail to meet our standards for “wokeness” be called out and “cancelled”? Is there a way for people like me to find a position that is more nuanced than “F*ck political correctness! I’m going to say whatever I want without regard for anyone’s feelings!” or “My mom said the n-word once, so she’s trash!”

I’m not sure what the right answer is. I can understand that, particularly from the perspective of an older person who didn’t grow up with the ideas of “ableism” or “systemic racism” or “microaggressions,” trying to be politically correct can feel like tiptoeing around the outskirts of meaningfully discussing social issues. But from the perspective of myself and my friends, particularly those of us who hold one or more marginalized identities, I also recognize how utterly essential it is for us to make sure we aren’t hurting anyone through our words and actions. Simple actions like using the correct pronouns, refusing to validate racial slurs, and making spaces accessible for people with disabilities only seem like overkill because historically, we as a society have done a terrible job of recognizing who is privileged and who is not.

Like most other difficult concepts, I think the answer to the question of “How can we reconcile political correctness with productive discourse and the realities of everyday life?” probably lies not in the comfortable realms of black and white, but rather somewhere in the grey of a nuanced perspective. I can understand why my grandfather is frustrated that no one in his continuing education course will have a frank discussion about the 14th Amendment. I recognize that when my dad first listened to Easter, it was acceptable to use the n-word to mean “a noble and rebellious outsider.” And although I can’t agree with anything the man on the street corner said, I understand he is scared that the world around him is changing—and that it may have left him behind. Maybe being politically correct isn’t about being above reproach or never offending anyone, ever. Perhaps the secret to political correctness is willingness to examine our own prejudices, to listen with an open mind even when we disagree, and to put in the cognitive work of challenging our own biases.
Poems to Humanity on Love, Sex, and the Self

For Everyone

The color perception theory states we all can agree that the sky is blue and our blood is red, but what I call blue and what you call blue, and what I call red and what you call red, are not the same
Perhaps our perceptions of “love” are just as misconstrued and mis-identified

You call it lust,
I call it love
You call it infatuation,
obsession,
I call it love
You call it bad timing,
I call it love
You call it a mistake,
A disillusionment,
a lie,
I call it love

We were all taught different standards of what is acceptable because her mother left when she was just a girl, and she’s forgotten what it means to be wanted Because her father always had other priorities, like his new wife and kids—
first child a painful reminder of lost potential and broken promises, left buried in the attic with all of the other forgotten mementos She’s been carving apology letters into her skin with box-cutters since her mother taught her how to leave a lasting mark It’s funny how bruises and love bites look the same

Because her husband held her at arm’s length and she spent a lifetime compensating for his emotional void The emptiness could never be filled by her good intentions, for her sons inherited their father’s shortcomings: Walking black holes of insatiable desire, consuming and devastating women whole— denying them of space they never felt entitled to in the first place

Because her father had an unimpressive attendance record And even when her mother was present, she was never really there And the everlasting pursuit for fulfillment would ensue until she would realize she was already complete

We are all a little toxic,
a little bruised,
a little sharp-edged
And sometimes we fall into each other and call that brokenness love Maybe sometimes it is

But even so,
we are the deluded leading the deluded,

romanticizing fantasy, fantasizing about romance, falling in love with each other before we fall in love with ourselves And what a crime it is to succumb to loneliness, to look to romantic love for the cure to loneliness, because we are obsessed with the idea that something—one—is missing
But here is the eternal truth of humanity: People cannot fix people We can only fix ourselves

Now I can only see myself as things I am not,
As things I am not for you

For Him

I am teetering on the precipice of decision and you have audacity that runs for miles through your veins—the audacity to feel security in my embrace, as if I don’t carry scissors in my back pocket as if I smell like potpourri and laundry detergent instead of quarters and a bus ticket still warm from the printer Am I anything to you but a mirror of what you want me to be? A checklist of expectations met and unmet, kept by your adolescent heart I cracked open my ribcage for you, rolled away my caution tape for you, swallowed my hesitation and chased it with absynthe for you, spun out pirouettes, my sanity whirling, faded into a silhouette of a woman Now I can only see myself as things I am not, As things I am not for you Love was not supposed to be a wishing well Me, the empty vessel whose purpose can only be fulfilled by another’s desperation You, the careless caster of thoughts which know no constraints of time or civility, yet I take them in all the same You told me you prefer blue eyes, which is to say my soul is the wrong color I asked you to dance and you told me first to find some rhythm, which is to say there is a time for us and it isn’t yet I wonder if it ever will be
For Me

Before learning how to save myself
I learned how to share, how to give
So I falsify a sense of intimacy by passing myself between partners,
treading calculatingly over hearts and hands
My body has become my greatest asset
Gifting bite-sized pieces of my consecrated self
to make others feel more whole

I intended to welcome you but not to make you stay
You mistake my warmth for hearth and home,
my kindness for genuine interest,
the soft curves of my figure for climbing holds—
But I am no feat to be conquered by palms ripe with entitlement
and aimless desire seeking a target to land on

Liberation is difficult to obtain when your choices exist under a microscope,
when your personal autonomy becomes public opinion,
and the physical manifestation of your being an object of desire
How can I be present in my experiences
without losing myself in all of these crossed wires?

My obligation to nameless others is suffocating
The word “no” burns my tongue like acid and disappears
before I have the satisfaction of spitting it out
I am intoxicated by the contact,
the endlessness,
the denial of both loneliness and mortality
Now I have to remember who I was before I let others in,
before innocence became a burden I forgot how to carry,
before I started jumping in front of moving trains for the story, for the thrill
When I belonged wholly to myself
When the beckoning of those who wanted something from me was background noise
and not a siren call that entrances and penetrates

You, dominating my thoughts
Your touch, dominating my skin
Your lips and tongue trailing down my neck because you have an acquired taste only I can sate
My fingers tugging at the ends of your hair,
Reaching, reaching for salvation—
Something that, in another person, I will never find
Harmonious Discomfort

There was a time when I could fall asleep before midnight. A time when crickets and trains acted as white noise—a constant murmur that underlay daily life. There was a time when silence didn’t scare me so bad. Where has that time gone?

Recently, I’ve been going on dates with my brain.

At 2 a.m., I am asked—over a glass of smooth red wine—where I have run off to.

I try to come up with some kind of witty response, but I never can.

The white tiles swallowed her naked body.

As her pallor fused into the ground, it became unclear where she ended and the floor began. Shivers crawled up and down her sides—forearms to lower back. A string of dissonant vibrations so desperate to be heard—to be composed—that the uncomfortable became harmonious waltz and everybody who walked by applauded the beautiful figure lying across the floor. She was held prisoner to a body with disconnected parts—tangled lines of communication where no message traveled far enough through the destitution to make it to the other side.

Which sin shall be repented for tonight? Lust? Envy? Gluttony? She was too far in to give up now. There was guilt, but there was a craving more intense—more intimate—than even that. There, lying on the cold, cold floor, she could only think about one thing: the first bite. She longed to give in to temptation for the first time again, to mold her fingers around the forbidden fruit, to taste its flesh, to lick its sweet juice off of her virgin lips.

But now, all that was left behind was a bitter aftertaste. Lingering—not strong enough to bring her back into pleasure, not faint enough to let her forget. Instead, the subtlety became a constant reminder of her fragmented innocence, fractures in her glass universe. But the luster, the transparency, the splendor—reflections bouncing from one wall to the next—all the beauty seemed magnified by the cracks. So even as the fractures spread, like a virus corroding its way through each fragile construction, not a word was said.

Everybody stood still as shards rained down from the sky.

Everybody stood still to admire the shattering kingdom.

As her pallor fused into the ground, it became unclear where she ended and the floor began.
The Kavanaugh Case and How He Said/She Said Culture Kills Confessions

We must resurrect the confession.

Earlier this fall, controversy sparked when Donald Trump’s nominee to the Supreme Court, Brett Kavanaugh, faced allegations of sexual assault and harassment. Rather than the Democratic Party, Kavanaugh’s primary opposition became Christine Blasey Ford, Deborah Ramirez, and Julie Swetnick—the purported victims of his sexual misdemeanors (Christine Hauser, New York Times, “The Women Who Have Accused Brett Kavanaugh”). Suddenly, the conversation surrounding Kavanaugh’s nomination transformed from a debate of judicial views to one of competing confessions. The public dialogue was no longer focused on how to weigh Kavanaugh’s values, but instead how to gauge the truth of his claims. “He Said/She Said” culture then began to consume the Supreme Court hearings.

According to TIME, He Said/She Said captures the notion that “when a woman accuses a man of a sexual assault and the man denies it, there is no way to discern the truth and the justice system is impotent” (Allison Leotta, TIME, “I Was a Sex Crimes Prosecutor. Here’s Why ‘He Said, She Said’ is a Myth”). Essentially, the implication is that in cases of sexual assault or harassment, it is often difficult to apply legal action when the stories of the victim and the perpetrator differ. In the case of Kavanaugh and his accusers, his denial of the allegations against him activated the back-and-forth mania of He Said/She Said. This loophole is unique to sexual misconduct, investigation must become more rigorous than a theft or drug possession trial, because the truth is not as easily attainable. The hegemony of He Said/She Said culture has allowed the justice system to deviate from its true purpose. This is a call to action: a more intensive sexual assault/harassment investigation process. Of course, this is one of the platforms of the #MeToo movement, which has made considerable progress in normalizing sexual assault confessions so that society in general takes them more seriously.

In the case of Brett Kavanaugh, Christine Blasey Ford, and Deborah Ramirez, the toxic culture of He Said/She Said trickled into the political system. If our public officials prioritize their reputations over the truth, there is something to be said for where American politics has headed. It requires the United States to reassess its political infrastructure. If a confession loses its validity because of skewed political impulses, we must reconstruct the forces urging our political parties to make unproductive choices.

Therefore, the concept of He Said/She Said diametrically opposes the aim of a confession—it is a means of fictionalizing the truth. As displayed by the Kavanaugh case, for someone charged with sexual assault, all it takes is a denial of the crime to delegitimize a confession and the entire basis of a case. The power of He Said/She Said can be easily capitalized on by the accused to simply blur the line of truth and call into question the credibility of the alleged victim rather than engaging with the accusation. This loophole is unique to sexual misconduct lawsuits. For another crime—maybe theft or drug possession—He Said/She Said is not really seen. Conflicting stories are instead solved with witnesses or other forms of evidence filling in the gaps. When it comes to sexual assault, evidence is less accessible, so the inherent subjectivity of the victim’s story versus that of the assailant yields a larger impact, because it has the potential to invalidate the entire case. The power that society has given He Said/She Said culture has made it so that the justice system can no longer reach justice. This has many implications. It means that when it comes to issues of sexual misconduct, the process of investigation is set up to evade the truth. It means that there is an easy escape hatch for anyone who finds themselves charged with one of the most criminal acts someone can commit. It means that when it comes to sexual misconduct, investigation must become more rigorous than a theft or drug possession trial, because the truth is not as easily attainable. The hegemony of He Said/She Said culture then leads to a call for action: a more intensive sexual assault/harassment investigation process. Of course, this is one of the platforms of the #MeToo movement, which has made considerable progress in normalizing sexual assault confessions so that society in general takes them more seriously.

In sum, He Said/She Said culture kills confessions. By delegitimizing the claims of victims, this culture has allowed the justice system to deviate from its true purpose. This is a call to action both for politics and for society as a whole. In order to reestablish our commitment to the truth, which is a fundamental requirement for a functioning democracy, we must reinstate our trust in those who come forward—we must resurrect the confession.
Indicator Spotify Playlist

The staff of the *Indicator* has compiled a playlist of our favorite songs of the moment and of all time that we want to share with you. The playlist is named “The Indicator” and includes songs like:

- How Big, How Blue, How Beautiful by Florence & the Machine
- She by Alice Phoebe Lou
- Witchy Woman by The Eagles
- Bottom of the River by Delta Rae
- Ashes to Ashes by Warpaint
- California by Joni Mitchell
- Miss Ohio Craig Cardiff
- Still Feel by half alive
- I Love You So by The Walters
- The Great Unknown by Ezra Furman
- Moon River by Frank Ocean
- Drop the Guillotine by Peach Pit
- Monotonia by the Growlers
- Undertow by Dan Auerbach
- Goodie Bag by Still Woozzy
- Aphasia by Pinegrove
- Going Crazy by The Marked Men
- You’ve Never Heard ‘My Aim Is True’ by Mikey Erg
- The Question by The Slackers
- Poison Tree by Grouper
- За окном весна by Kedr Livanskiy
- Terrence Loves You by Lana del Rey
- Drip Too Hard by Lil Baby
- Beethoven’s 6th Symphony
- We Appreciate Power by Grimes
- Deli Nights by Mal the Oddity
- Uno Dos by ¿Téo?
- Fu-Gee-La by Fugees
- and Figures by Jessie Reyez

Head to Spotify and check it out!
Above: “I’m Down for Whatever”
Bottom Left: “Id, Ego, and Superego”
Bottom Right: “Untitled”
BRING BACK SUZANNE COFFEY

We here at *The Indicator* believe in giving a platform to unpopular opinions. We, here at *The Indicator*, don’t want to participate in “echo chamber culture.” We, here, at *The Indicator*, believe in an honest, truthful discussion about the issues of the day. That’s why for this issue, we, here (at *The Indicator*) finally allowed our “renegade Features Editor” (his words, not ours) Jake May to write the following article.

Listen, I get it. This headline doesn’t make sense. Why would I, an Amherst student, want Suzanne Coffey, a certified Amherst villain, to return to our midst? Why would the guy who created a parody twitter account just to criticize Coffey’s actions (@suzanne coffey00, if you wanna throw me a follow) want her to come back? Hikaru Kozuma, Coffey’s replacement, seems to be doing a fine job. Also he’s not a real-life witch, which is a big plus.

However, I firmly believe that Suzanne Coffey must be reinstated immediately. Why? Because as an Amherst student, I live for ~drama~. Where is the drama this year? Parties on the Triangle are not getting shut down immediately. Jenkins is completely mellow. Taplin is only overcrowded by 100 people as opposed to 200. I have barely even heard anyone complain about the social scene! Boooooorrriiinnngggg. I want a campus-wide uproar because an administrator inappropriately storms into an intimate birthday gathering! I want to pack the Red Room on a Tuesday night so we can complain that not allowing drinking games is “unrealistic.” Come on! Didn’t we all feel so alive when that happened?

And Coffey’s replacement, Hikaru Kozuma? This square is “acting responsibly” and “taking students voices into account.” Boo! I want drama! I want him to stand outside Hitchcock on a Saturday night and personally expel every student that walks out. I want him to send out an email to the student body that just says, “Dear students, F*ck you all.” If I see the day that a shirtless Hikaru Kozuma bursts into Val demanding to fight each and every student one-on-one, I will die a happy man. Or, the college could just bring back Suzanne Coffey and inject the drama into our lives that we all need.
Featured Artist

Julia Gill ‘20

is a Contributing Artist to The Indicator. She is a junior transfer student, and works at the Mead Art Museum. She is an American Studies major.
Merrill > The Science Center

- Made of bricks = strong and imposing
- Built in the ‘60s so it’s vintage and cool
- Provides a safe residence for homeless rats
- Made of glass = weak and easy to break
- Built, like, last year. Ew. New stuff is so lame.
- No interest in the well-being of rats. Inhumane.

This message is brought to you by...

S F P M
(Students for the Preservation of Merrill)