

University of Georgia

Capstone Project: The Final Portfolio

“Breaking the Shackles: A Study in Personal Growth and Human Trafficking”

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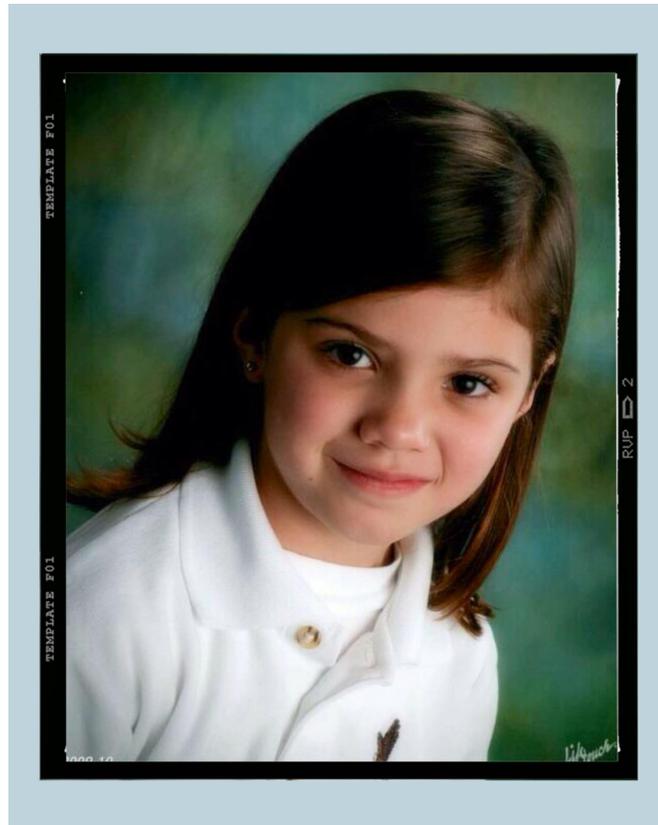
ENGL1101: English Composition 1

Professor Jessica Lambert

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The “Do I Matter” Dilemma

From a very young age, I found myself enamored with the possibility of fame and renown. When I was in kindergarten, I announced to friends and family that I was on track to be the next Taylor Swift. At ten years old, I penned an essay about my dream career in archeology – not because I had any genuine desire to unearth the remains of primitive bodies and civilizations, but instead because of the allure of those bolded, underlined names of celebrated archeologists in my fifth-grade ancient history textbook. In middle school, I aspired to be as influential a writer as J.K. Rowling, with the power to shape millions of young minds with my own beguiling tales of valor and courage.



I was 6 years old in this picture. Even then, I had big dreams and aspirations – mostly about being the next Taylor Swift but still dreams.

This is how my fear of mediocrity began.

What started as a benign fascination with stardom silently morphed into an obsession with being respected and remembered. This fixation with being someone who “mattered” was crippling. Regardless of how many sports I played, clubs I joined, and leadership positions I assumed, I felt hollow. So, I worked harder and pushed myself farther, blurring the line between hobbies and diversions from my dissatisfaction with life. I drowned myself in schoolwork, fantasizing about giving the valedictorian’s speech and receiving acceptance letters to prestigious universities. I strained to become a better athlete, imagining how impressive the list of sporting accolades would look on a college application. I made myself sick working to maintain toxic friendships as the need to be liked consumed me.

I told myself that all of my work towards being the best in every realm was a means towards a better end. The possibility of all of my dedication and anxiety paying off to produce the happy, successful life I so desperately wanted was tantalizing.

But, despite my best efforts, I fell short. There was always a classmate more intelligent, a teammate more talented, and a friend more charismatic than me. As the years progressed, my passion for learning and leading withered. My enthusiasm for life, once a raging inferno, flickered and dimmed. And, one day, the weight of my own expectations smothered the flame within me.



These pictures portray the success I experienced as an adolescent, particularly during the early years of high school. I won numerous academic awards, like the ones displayed in the top picture. I also participated in winning sports teams, even going five-peat in region basketball championships as a sophomore, as seen in the bottom photo.

But, despite all of the awards and success, I was burnt out and discouraged.

On March 1, 2019, I published a blog post titled, “The ‘Do I Matter Dilemma’”.

Confused and disheartened, I typed the first sentence:

“I struggle a lot with the fact that I haven’t done anything very significant with my life yet.”

The response by friends, family, and strangers to my post was staggering. Individuals that I considered role models in my own life echoed my longing to be seen, wanted, and loved by the world. However, it was one of my internet friends, a fellow blogger by the screen name “crushedcaramel”, whose words impacted me the most. In her response to my post, she commented:

“I think that to achieve what many deem as success – you kind of have to make yourself a slave to the world. The world can use us – use our youth, energy, talents. But to invest in the souls of those people closest to you – what a difference!”

While these words did not revolutionize my life overnight, they did allow me to grasp the freedom brought in understanding where my purpose is *not*. I am realizing that my value is not in academic achievements, and my worth is not summed up in empty titles and records. Rather, the significance that I so desperately long for is found in small moments over coffee with friends, long hugs with my sister, and intentional conversations with the stranger at the bus stop. GPA and grades are of finite importance, but the impact I have on the souls of the people around me is infinite.

So, when my breath is gone and my heart has stilled, I pray I am remembered as someone who was kind in word, resolved in action, and, above all else, unfaltering in love. I want to be remembered in hearts, not history books.



As I have shed my obsession with “success”, I have found so much joy in simply being and enjoying life for what it is. Here is one picture of me from this spring celebrating my acceptance to UGA...



*... and these are just a few of the people who have made my life so beautiful and meaningful.
There is truly no cause more worthy of my time and efforts than to invest in the lives of the people I love most.*