Annie Dillerd *won the Pulitzer Prize for her very first book,* Pilgrim at Tinker Creek *(1974). In that book, she describes herself as "no scientist," merely "a wanderer with a background in theology and a penchant for quirky facts. " She has since written many other books, including collections of poetry, essays, and literary theory. Her most recent book,* For the Time Being *(1999), is a collection of essays. This selection comes from her autobiography, An* American Childhood *(1987).*

In "Handed My Own Life," we see the early stirrings of Dillard's lifelong enthusiasm for learning and fascination with nature. As you read her story, think about why she wrote it. What do you think she wants to tell readers about herself? What impression do you have of Annie Dillard from reading her story?

Handed My Own Life
Annie Dillard

After I read *The Field Book of Ponds and Streams* several times, I longed for a microscope. Everybody needed a microscope. Detectives used microscopes, both for the FBI and at Scotland Yard. Although usually I had to save my tiny allowance for things I wanted, that year for Christmas my parents gave me a microscope kit.

In a dark basement corner, on a white enamel table, I set up the microscope kit. I supplied a chair, a lamp, a batch of jars, a candle, and a pile of library books. The microscope kit supplied a blunt black three-speed microscope, a booklet, a scalpel, a dropper, an ingenious device for cutting thin segments of fragile tissue, a pile of clean slides and cover slips, and a dandy array of corked test tubes.

One of the test tubes contained "hay infusion." Hay infusion was a wee brown chip of grass blade. You added water to it, and after a week it became a jungle in a drop, full of one-celled animals. This did not work for me. All I saw in the microscope after a week was a wet chip of dried grass, much enlarged.

Another test tube contained "diatomaceous earth." This was, I believed, an actual pinch of the white cliffs of Dover. On my palm it was an airy, friable chalk. The booklet said it was composed of the siliceous bodies of diatoms-one-celled creatures that live in, as it were, small glass jewelry boxes with fitted lids. Diatoms, I read, come in a variety of transparent geometrical shapes. Broken and dead and dug out of geological deposits, they made chalk, and a fine abrasive used in silver polish and toothpaste. What I saw in the microscope must have been the fine abrasive-grit enlarged. It was years before I saw a recognizable, whole diatom. The kit's diatomaceous earth was a bust.

All that winter I played with the microscope. I prepared slides from things at hand, as the books suggested. I looked at the transparent membrane inside an onion's skin and saw the cells. I looked at a section of cork and saw the cells, and at scrapings from the inside of my cheek, ditto. I looked at my blood and saw not much; I looked at my urine and saw long iridescent crystals, for the drop had dried.

All this was very well, but I wanted to see the wildlife I had read about. I wanted especially to see the famous amoeba, who had eluded me. He was supposed to live in the hay infusion, but I hadn't found him there. He lived outside in warm ponds and streams, too, but I lived in Pittsburgh, and it had been a cold winter.

Finally, late that spring I saw an amoeba. The week before, I had gathered puddle water from Frick Park; it had been festering in a jar in the basement. This June night after dinner I figured I had waited long enough. In the basement at my microscope table I spread a scummy drop of Frick Park puddle water on a slide, peeked in, and lo, there was the famous amoeba. He was as blobby and grainy as his picture; I would have known him anywhere.

***Jean Brandt** wrote this essay as a first-year college student. In it she tells about a memorable event that occurred when she was thirteen. Reflecting on how she felt at the time, Brandt writes, "I was afraid, embarrassed, worried, mad. " As you read, look for places where these tumultuous and contradictory remembered feelings are expressed.*

Calling Home
Jean Brandt

As we all piled into the car, I knew it was going to be a fabulous day. My grandmother was visiting for the holidays; and she and I, along with my older brother and sister, Louis and Susan, were setting off for a day of last-minute Christmas shopping. On the way to the mall, we sang Christmas carols, chattered, and laughed. With Christmas only two days away, we were caught up with holiday spirit. I felt light-headed and full of joy. I loved shopping-especially at Christmas.

The shopping center was swarming with frantic last-minute shoppers like ourselves. We went first to the General Store, my favorite. It carried mostly knickknacks and other useless items which nobody needs but buys anyway. I was thirteen years old at the time, and things like buttons and calendars and posters would catch my fancy. This day was no different. The object of my desire was a 75-cent Snoopy button. Snoopy was the latest. If you owned anything with the Peanuts on it, you were "in." But since I was supposed to be shopping for gifts for other people and not myself, I couldn't decide what to do. I went in search of my sister for her opinion. I pushed my way through throngs of people to the back of the store where I found Susan. I asked her if she thought I should buy the button. She said it was cute and if I wanted it to go ahead and buy it.

When I got back to the Snoopy section, I took one look at the lines at the cashiers and knew I didn't want to wait thirty minutes to buy an item worth less than one dollar. I walked back to the basket where I found the button and was about to drop it when suddenly, instead, I took a quick glance around, assured myself no one could see, and slipped the button into the pocket of my sweatshirt. I hesitated for a moment, but once the item was in my pocket, there was no turning back. I had never before stolen anything; but what was done was done. A few seconds later, my sister appeared and asked, "So, did you decide to buy the button?"

"No, I guess not." I hoped my voice didn't quaver, As we headed for the entrance, my heart began to race. I just had to get out of that store. Only a few more yards to go and I'd be safe. As we crossed the threshold, I heaved a sigh of relief. I was home free. I thought about how sly I had been and I felt proud of my accomplishment.

An unexpected tap on my shoulder startled me. I whirled around to find a middle-aged man, dressed in street clothes, flashing some type of badge and politely asking me to empty my pockets. Where did this man come from? How did he know? I was so sure that no one had seen me! On the verge of panicking, I told myself that all I had to do was give this man his button back, say I was sorry, and go on my way. After all, it was only a 75-cent item.

Next thing I knew, he was talking about calling the police and having me arrested and thrown in jail, as if he had just nabbed a professional thief instead of a terrified kid. I couldn't believe what he was saying.

"Jean, what's going on?"

The sound of my sister's voice eased the pressure a bit. She always managed to get me out of trouble. She would come through this time too.

"Excuse me. Are you a relative of this young girl?"

"Yes, I'm her sister. What's the problem?"

"Well, I just caught her shoplifting and I'm afraid I'll have to call the police."

"What did she take?"

"This button."

"A button? You are having a thirteen-year-old arrested for stealing a button?"

"I'm sorry, but she broke the law."

The man led us through the store and into an office, where we waited for the police officers to arrive. Susan had found my grandmother and brother, who, still shocked, didn't say a word. The thought of going to jail terrified me, not because of jail itself, but because of the encounter with my parents afterward. Not more than ten minutes later, two officers arrived and placed me under arrest. They said that I was to be taken to the station alone. Then, they handcuffed me and led me out of the store. I felt alone and scared. I had counted on my sister being with me, but now I had to muster up the courage to face this ordeal all by myself.

As the officers led me through the mall, I sensed a hundred pairs of eyes staring at me. My face flushed and I broke out in a sweat. Now everyone knew I was a criminal. In their eyes I was a juvenile delinquent, and thank God the cops were getting me off the streets. The worst part was thinking my grandmother might be having the same thoughts. The humiliation at that moment was overwhelming. I felt like Hester Prynne being put on public display for everyone to ridicule.

That short walk through the mall seemed to take hours. But once we reached squad car, time raced by. I was read my rights and questioned. We were at the polite station within minutes. Everything happened so fast I didn't have a chance to feel remorse for my crime. Instead, I viewed what was happening to me as if it were a movie. Being searched, although embarrassing, somehow seemed to be exciting. All the movies and television programs I had seen were actually coming to life. This is what it was really like. But why were criminals always portrayed as frightened and regretful? I was having fun. I thought I had nothing to fear-until I was allowed my one phone call. I was trembling as I dialed home. I didn't know what I was going to say to my parents, especially my mother.

"Hi, Dad, this is Jean."

"We've been waiting for you to call.”

"Did Susie tell you what happened?"

'Yeah, but we haven't told your mother. I think you should tell her what you did and where you are."

"You mean she doesn't even know where I am?"

"No, I want you to explain it to her."

There was a pause as he called my mother to the phone. For the first time that night, I was close to tears. I wished I had never stolen that stupid pin. I wanted to give the phone to one of the officers because I was too ashamed to tell my mother the truth, but I had no choice.

"Jean, where are you?"

"I'm, umm, in jail."

"Why? What for?"

"Shoplifting."

"Oh no, Jean. Why? Why did you do it?"

"I don't know. No reason. I just did it."

"I don't understand. What did you take? Why did you do it? You had plenty of money with you."

"I know but I just did it. I can't explain why. Mom, I'm sorry."

"I'm afraid sorry isn't enough. I'm horribly disappointed in you."

Long after we got off the phone, while I sat in an empty jail cell, waiting for my parents to pick me up, I could still distinctly hear the disappointment and hurt in my mother's voice. I cried. The tears weren't for me but for her and the pain I had put her through. I felt like a terrible human being. I would rather have stayed in jail than confront my mom right then. I dreaded each passing minute that brought our encounter closer. When the officer came to release me, I hesitated, actually not wanting to leave. We went to the front desk, where I had to sign a form to retrieve my belongings. I saw my parents a few yards away and my heart raced. A large knot formed in my stomach. I fought back the tears.

Not a word was spoken as we walked to the car. Slowly, I sank into the back seat anticipating the scolding. Expecting harsh tones, I was relieved to hear almost the opposite from my father.

“I’m not going to punish you and I’ll tell you why. Although I think what you did was wrong, I think what the police did was more wrong. There’s no excuse for locking a thirteen-year-old behind bars. That doesn’t mean I condone what you did, but I think you’ve been punished enough already.”

As I looked from my father’s eyes to my mother’s, I knew this ordeal was over. Although it would never be forgotten, the incident was not mentioned again.

***Alan I. Leshner** is the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), one of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIDA supports worldwide research on drug abuse, prevention, and treatment. In addition to his administrative duties, Leshner advises the president and Congress on drug policy and informs the public about policy issues and research developments. Before coming to NIDA, Leshner was acting director of the National Institute of Mental Health and served at the National Science Foundation. A former professor of psychology, Leshner's scientific research has focused on the biological bases of behavior. He has received many awards for his national leadership in substance abuse and addiction, science education, and mental health. In 1996, President Clinton gave him the Presidential Distinguished Executive Rank Award, the highest recognition for federal service. In his role as NIDA director, Leshner writes and speaks to a wide range of audiences, from research scientists to schoolchildren. As this reading demonstrates, he also writes syndicated newspaper columns intended to influence public opinion. 'Why Shouldn't Society Treat Substance Abusers?" first appeared in the* Los Angeles Times *(June 11, 1999). As you read, notice that Leshner refers to scientific research but, following newspaper convention, does not cite specific sources.*

Why Shouldn't Society Treat Substance Abusers?
Alan I. Leshner

Imagine a debilitating disease for which there are effective treatments. Imagine that this treatable disease costs society $110 billion a year. Can you imagine not using the treatments? It seems unfathomable, but that often is the case with the treatment of drug addiction.

Addicts are frequently denied treatment that would not only improve their lives, but also would improve our own lives—by cutting crime, reducing disease and improving the productivity of employees and the economy. People are polarized on the issue of treatment: They are either strong advocates for treating addiction or they hate the idea. People debate with passion whether treatment works or not, which approaches are best and whether treatments such as methadone simply substitute one addiction for another.

From my observation post, the core of the issue cannot be simply whether drug treatments are effective or not, since there already is abundant scientific data showing that they are. In fact, research shows that drug treatments are as, or more, effective than treatments for other chronic disorders, such as forms of heart disease, diabetes and some mental illness.

The central issue for many people is whether addicts should be treated at all. I frequently hear people ask: Do they really deserve to be treated? Didn't they just do it to themselves? Why should we coddle people who cause so much societal disruption? Shouldn't they be punished, rather than treated? Even many people who recognize addiction as a disease still get hung up on whether it is a "no-fault" illness.

Science has brought us to a point where we should no longer focus the drug treatment question simply on these kinds of unanswerable moral dilemmas. From a practical perspective, benefits to society must be included in the decision equations. The very same body of scientific data that demonstrates the effectiveness of treatments in reducing an individual's drug use also shows the enormous benefits that drug treatment can have for the patient's family and the community.

A variety of studies from the National Institutes of Health, Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania and other institutions all have shown that drug treatment reduces use by 50% to 60%, and arrests for violent and nonviolent criminal acts by 40% or more. Drug abuse treatment reduces the risk of HIV infection, and interventions to prevent HIV are much less costly than treating AIDS. Treatment tied to vocational services improves the prospects for employment, with 40% to 60% more individuals employed after treatment.

The case is just as dramatic for prison and jail inmates, 60% to 80% of whom have serious substance abuse problems. Science shows that appropriately treating addicts in prison reduces their later drug use by 50% to 70% and their later criminality and resulting arrests by 50% to 60%. These data make the case against warehousing addicts in :prison without attending to their addictions.

Successful drug treatment takes a person who is now seen as only a drain on a community's resources and returns the individual to productive membership in society. Best estimates are that for every $1 spent on drug treatment, there is a $4 to $7 return in cost savings to society. This means that dwelling on moralistic questions, such as who deserves what kind of help, blocks both the individual and society from receiving the economic and societal benefits that can be achieved from treating addicts.

It is true that the individual initially made the voluntary decision to use drugs. But once addicted, it is no longer a simple matter of choice. Prolonged drug use changes the brain in long-lasting and fundamental ways that result in truly compulsive, often uncontrollable, drug craving, seeking and use, which is the

essence of addiction. Once addicted, it is almost impossible for most people to stop using drugs without treatment.

It is clearly in everyone's interest to rise above our moral outrage that addiction results from a voluntary behavior. If we are ever going to significantly reduce the tremendous price that drug addiction exacts from every aspect of our society, drug treatment 'for all who need it must be a core element of our society's strategies.

Mariah Burton Nelson *is a sports reporter and writer who has written extensively on sports and gender. As a former Stanford University star athlete and professional basketball player, Nelson is highly critical of the unequal funding of men's and women's college sports programs, the issue addressed in this reading from her controversial book,* The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football: Sexism and the American Culture of Sports *(1994). Her latest book is called* Embracing Victory: How Women Can Compete Joyously, Compassionately, and Successfully in the Workplace and on the Playing Field *(1999).*

As you read this excerpt from The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football, *which we have titled "Adventures in Equality" after the cartoon from her book, notice how Nelson uses the journalistic convention of quoting people and presenting information without specifying her sources. For college essays, however, readers expect every source to be cited consistently.*

Adventures in Equality
Maria Burton Nelson

In the early 1990% as female athletes and coaches sued dozens of universities for equal opportunities and as judges consistently ruled in favor of the women, football coaches and administrators waged what one woman called "an offensive" against athletic feminists, claiming that women were attacking the sacred football cow.

Women weren't, in fact, attacking football. They just wanted to swim, row, play soccer, play tennis, or golf, and to coach and direct programs, as men do. They just wanted equal salaries, uniforms, travel schedules, scholarships, and facilities.

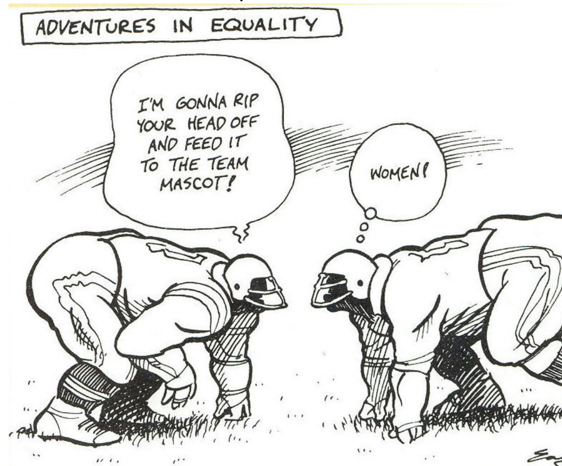
In fact, football—or, rather, male support of football and lack of support of women's sports—is responsible for much of the disparity between male and female college sports opportunities. Football "requires" oodles of athletes (108, on average, in Division I), scores of scholarships (75, on average), excessive coaching salaries ($81,574 is the average "base"), and exorbitant operating expenses (more than for all other women's and men's sports combined).

Inevitably, if women are to have half of all sports allocations, as they are entitled to by law, football will have to change. Some schools will trim football's bloated budgets. Others will drop football altogether, as the University of Wisconsin, Superior; Wichita State; the University of Southern Colorado; and Northeastern Illinois University have already done. Others will leave football alone and add several large-squad women's sports, market women's programs to increase revenue, or find other creative ways to stop discriminating. But football defenders fear that their glory days are limited, and they blame women.

"What I'm afraid of is that somebody is trying to put a bull's eye on football's chest," said Oregon Athletic Director Bill Byrne, former president of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics.[1]

The Reverend Edmund P. Joyce, former executive vice-president at the University of Notre Dame, accused "militant women" of waging a "strident, irresponsible, and irrational campaign" against football. "Never have our football programs been in such jeopardy as they are today," Joyce said. "I think we are fighting for our lives and had better act accordingly."[2]

The fight for college football's life includes arguing that football is the cash cow upon which all the women's programs suckle, even though this is a lie. "Revenue producing"—a term often used to justify discriminatory football and men's basketball programs is not synonymous with "profit producing." Football programs that earn money almost always spend more—not on women's sports, but on football. In 91 percent of all colleges, the football program does not make enough money to pay for itself.[3] Even in the big, football-dominated universities (Division I-A), 45 percent of the football programs lose money. In the other three divisions (I-AA, 11, and Ill), between 94 and 99 percent of the schools lose money on football.[4]



Besides, judges have ruled that "financial considerations cannot justify gender discrimination."

The fight for football's life includes arguing that football should be exempt from gender-discrimination calculations. Thomas Hearn, president of Wake Forest University, defended his school to Representative Cardiss Collins of Illinois during a congressional hearing by saying, "At Wake Forest, our athletic scholarship awards without football would approach parity, with 60 percent going to men and 40 percent to women." University of New Haven football coach Mark Whipple has said, "Football shouldn't have anything to do with gender equity. If you don't count football, I think everyone would be happy."[5]

"I don't think football players are a third sex," Women's Sports Foundation executive director Donna Lopiano responded. The courts have agreed.

The fight for football's life includes arguing that women are being unAmerican, even communist, by depriving young men of their right to play football. Auburn University football coach Pat Dye has said, '70 tell a kid he can't come out for college football as a walk-on because it creates a numbers problem with the women in another area, I mean that's almost like communism. That (isn't) what this country was built on, or what it stands for."[6]

University of Iowa women's athletic director Christine Grant's response: 'Schools have had twenty years to think about this. It's unfortunate for the young men who get cut, but it's even more unfortunate for the millions of young women who have missed out for 100 years."[7]

The fight for football's life includes redefining "gender equity" to mean men get 60 percent, women get 40 percent. In what was hailed as a bold move, the Big Ten Conference recently approved a "gender equity" plan requiring 40 percent of its athletes to be women by 1997. Only the University of Iowa committed itself to a 50-50 split, which will make it the only Big Ten school to comply, finally, with the 1972 law.

The fight for football's life includes arguing that "progress" toward Title IX compliance is being made. In fact, if athletic directors had wanted to end discrimination during the wealthy eighties, they could have added women's programs while holding men's programs steady. Instead, over the ten-year period between the 1981-1982 season and the 1991-1992 season, for every two female participation slots created, 1.5 male slots were created.[8]

Representative Cardiss Collins has introduced a House bill called the "Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act" that would require school administrators to disclose participation rates and expenditures for male and female athletes. Football coaches and male athletic directors testified against the bill.

The fight for football's life includes contending that few women want to play sports. This is a last-ditch effort to deny women their rights based on a Title IX interpretation that allows unequal allocations if "the program fully and effectively accommodates the interests and abilities" of both sexes. Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delaney told me, "Not as many women are interested in playing sports as men. Look at field hockey versus football. Hundreds of men go out for football. It carries more status."

Collins's response: "Lower participation rates are the *result* of discrimination, and 1, not an *excuse* for continued inequities."[9]

At the Division I-A level, only one out of 107 schools complies with Title IX. This is 15 Washington State University (WSU), which was forced to do so by its own Supreme Court. In response to a class action suit filed by fifty-three female coaches and players, a judge ruled in 1982 that the number of WSU scholarships must be proportional to the ratio of women and men in the undergraduate student body. However, he exempted football from the count. But in 1987, the Supreme Court of Washington overruled the football exemption. The number of female athletes at WSU is now 44 percent, up from 29 percent in 1987. The female undergraduate student population is 46 percent.

"We were dragged kicking and screaming into the forefront," recalls Harold C. Gibson, 20 Washington State's associate athletic director. People "thought the sky was falling."[10]

They still seem to think so. The College Football Association's Charles Neinas recently launched a public relations campaign with the slogan, "College football: More than just a game."[11]

In a surprisingly frank speech to his fellow football coaches and athletic directors, Neinas said, "Football may be the last bastion of male domination."[12]

Which explains a lot.

Notes

1. Ben Brown, “Law Gives Women Their Fair Share," *USA Today,* 9 June 1992, p. C1.

2. Buck Turnbull, "Notre Dame's Joyce Says Future of Game on Line vs. Militant Women," *USA Today* 7 June 1993, p. 12C.

3. Mitchell H. Raiborn, 'Revenues and Expenses of Intercollegiate Athletics Programs: Analysis of Financial Trends and Relationships 1985-89" (Mission, Kansas: National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1990). This data refers to NCAA member institutions, which includes most colleges and universities.

4. Ibid.

5. Woody Anderson, Greg Garber, and Lori Riley, "At Last, Title IX Gets Serious Look," *The Hartford Courant,* p. D4.

6. Pat Dye, quoted in the *Birmingham Post-Herald,* cited in "Fundamentals Apply in Education," *NCAA News,* 19 August 1992, p. 4.

7. Chris Grant, *Chicago Tribune,* cited in "Coaches Question Baseball Use of RPI," *NCAA News,* 23 June 1993, p. 4.

8. National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1993, cited in Donna Lopiano, "Statement Before the Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. House of Representatives, 17 February 1993).

9. Cardiss Collins, 'Opening Statement," Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness (Washington, D.C.: U.S. House of Representatives, 17 February 1993).

10. Mary Jordan, 'Only One School Meets Gender Equity Goal," *Washington Post,* 21 June 1992, p. Dl.

11. Debra E. Blum, "Officials of Big-Time College Football See Threat in Moves to Cut Costs and Provide Equity for Women," *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 16* June 1993, p. A35.

12. Brown, 1992, p. C2.

***Rob* Ryder** writes screenplays and directs movies. Because of his experience playing and coaching basketball, he has served as an adviser on several recent hoop-related movies. Ryder's proposal to turn basketball into an eight-player game was published in 1998, in the sports section of the New York Times. His style is informal, like that of a sports announcer at work. His sentences and paragraphs tend to be short, and his words are familiar ones, except for a few technical terms from basketball. Ryder mentions several professional basketball players and coaches, but you need not recognize them or know much about the game to follow his proposal. Your experience with any sport will help you understand Ryder's attempt to make basketball a more challenging and interesting game.

Ten Is a Crowd, So Change the Game
Rob Ryder

Along with about a billion other people on this planet. I've had a lifelong love affair with basketball. I've known ***the Game*** the game as a player (Princeton), as a mach (Hollywood Y.M.C.A. 5- to 8-year-olds), and as a basketball supervisor for the movies (White Men Can't Jump, Blue Chips, and Eddie among others).

So, it is with deep regret that I must finally go public with the truth: Basketball is a mess. A muddled, boring, chaotic, overcrowded, utterly predictable game of slapping, clawing, double and triple-teaming, endless stoppages, timeouts, whistles, whining, and countless trips to the free-throw line where players continue to stupefy us with their ineptitude.

Yet the game is still punctuated by enough moments of pure poetry, grace, power and creativity to keep us coming back for more.

So, now that we can admit the game is flawed, let's fix it.

I'm not tinkering here—this is no "raise the rim," "widen the lane" Band-Aid I'm proposing. Rather, I'm going straight to the heart of the problem. It's just too crowded out there. Basketball is meant to be played four on four.

Too radical? You're forgetting your American heritage. It's our game. We invented it; we can change it if we want to. (I'm sure there was a lot of groaning when the forward pass was introduced to football.)

When I ran the concept of four-on-four basketball, or 8-Ball, by Doc Rivers during the filming of Eddie, his eyes lighted up.

"Guards would rule," he said. Not necessarily, but we'll get to that later. Working on another movie, The Sixth Man, I proposed the change to Jerry Tarkanian, who replied: "I've been saying that for years. I've been saying that for years." When I asked Marty Blake, the crusty old N.B.A. war horse, he responded, "What, are you nuts?" Yeah. And so was James Naismith. The man almost got it right. But how many realize that in the old days, there was a jump ball after every basket scored? Or that teams were allowed to hold the ball indefinitely? Or that there wasn't always a 3-point shot?

The new game will be a lean, sleek, fluid game—dominated by high-flying superbly coordinated athletes, with no room for defensive ends. Charles Oakley, I love your work ethic, but you're going to have trouble keeping up. Kobe Bryant, Tim Duncan, Keith Van Horn, Ray Alien, the future is yours.

Lisa Leslie, Teresa Edwards, Venus Lacey, you too will love 8-Ball. As will all the little kids out there whose Saturday morning games often resemble two swarms of bees fighting over a Rollo.

Remember the pick-and-roll?—now it's more commonly known as the pick-and collide- into-two-defenders-coming-from-the-weak-side. In 8-Ball, the pick-and-roll will rule. Help from the weak side leaves the defense much more vulnerable without the fifth defender there to rotate over the passing lane.

The old back-door play (which only Princeton seems to pull off regularly these days) will be back. Only now, there will be a cleaner path to the basket. Defenders, deny your man the ball at your own peril.

But what about Doc Rivers's comment that guards would rule playing four on four? Tell that to Hakeem Olajuwon, who cannot only run the floor but will now also have enough room for this dazzling array of post-up moves.

You see, everybody wins: The big men will finally have some space, the shooters will get plenty of open looks from the 3-point line, and the slashers, like Eddie Jones, should have a field day with one fewer defender out there to clog the lane.

So just what are we sacrificing by going to four on four?

Well, the lumbering big man will go the way of the dinosaur. Sorry, George Mhuresan, but no one's going to cover for you when your man releases and beats you downcourt. A four on three is infinitely tougher to defend than a five on four.

And for you little guys, if you can't shoot, you're a liability.

There'll be a lot less room for the role player out there because 8-Ball will demand: that every player on the floor polish his or her overall skills.

So where's the downside? Nolan Richardson knows—as Arkansas' 94-feet-of-hell amoeba defense will be reduced to a quick detour through purgatory. It'll be a lot tougher to press full court with only four defenders. Any good ball-handler will be able to break the press, and this will definitely hurt the college and high school game. For the pros, it's a moot point-full-court pressure disappeared years ago. Even Rick Pitino's on his way to discovering how tough it is to ask pro athletes to press full court over an 82-game season.

But will this mean a reduction of the 12-man roster, reduced playing time and howls from the N.B.A. Players' Association?

Not at all, for two reasons. One, 8-Ball will be a running game, and in some ways may adopt the more exciting characteristics of hockey (yes, hockey). Coaches may actually find themselves injecting four new players into a game simultaneously (a line change)—a nifty way to ratchet up the action while giving your starters a rest. And secondly, in the world of 8-Ball, the time of game will expand; in the pros, from 48 to *60* minutes. But how do you keep these games from running over three hours? In 8-Ball, the time wasted on stupor-inducing foul shooting will be reduced by two-thirds, allowing for extra minutes of real action. Whenever a player is fouled but not in the act of shooting, his team automatically gets the ball out of bounds. When fouled in the act of shooting, a player gets one free throw worth 2 points or 3 points, depending on the shot he was taking. But in both cases, the offensive team gets the option of skipping the foul line and taking the ball out of bounds.

This will eliminate the ugly strategy of intentional fouling, choke-induced shooting and subhuman fan behavior all in one easy stroke.

A good basketball game is about rhythm, and 8-Ball will flow. The substitutions will make for marvelous matchups. We'll see more fast breaks, cleaner inside moves, purer shooting, more offensive rebounding, fewer turnovers, a lot less standing around, more minutes of actual action, and more scoring.

Plus, 8-Ball would bring forth the elimination of what must be the stupidest addition to N.B.A. rules: the illegal defense violation. Just try playing a four-man zone in 8-Ball. It'll turn to a man-to-man real fast.

There it is, 8-Ball. Is there any realistic chance that the N.C.A.A. or the N.B.A. will change over to four on four? "Never happen," Dick Vitale answered.

That's why a group of former Princeton players is launching a professional basket-ball league—the "8BL." Look for it in '99 following a televised exhibition this fall. In the meantime, all you rec league and intramural players out there—with your smaller courts and running clocks and purists' love for the game—8-Ball's for you, too. Show us the way.

"**Katherine *S. Newman,*** *an anthropology professor at Columbia University published this proposal in 1995 in the* Brookings Review, *a journal concerned with public policy. Addressing fast-food corporate executives and managers, Newman tries to convince them to adopt policies that would help their employees find better jobs. Her proposal comes out of her two-year study of fast-food workers in Harlem in which she learned that workers experience great difficulty finding better jobs because they lack the kinds of "social networks" that middle-class workers depend on for job information and referrals. As you read Newman's proposal, notice why the social networks that inner-city fast-food workers do have fail to lead to better jobs and evaluate whether you think the proposed solution-an "employer consortium" (a group of cooperating employers—will provide the type of networks that the workers need.*

Dead-End Jobs: A Way Out
Katherine S. Newman

Millions of Americans work full-time, year-round in jobs that still leave them stranded in poverty. Though they pound the pavement looking for better jobs, they consistently come up empty-handed. Many of these workers are in our nation's inner cities.

I know, because I have spent two years finding out what working life is like for 200 employees-about half African-American, half Latino-at fast food restaurants in Harlem. Many work only part-time, though they would happily take longer hours if they Could get them. Those who do work full-time earn about $8,840 (before taxes)-well below the poverty threshold for a family of four.

These fast food workers make persistent efforts to get better jobs, particularly in retail and higher-paid service-sector occupations. They take civil service examinations and apply for jobs with the electric company or the phone company. Sometimes their efforts bear fruit. More often they don't.

A few workers make their way into the lower managerial ranks of the fast food industry, where wages are marginally better. An even smaller number graduate into higher management, a path made possible by the internal promotion patterns long practiced by these firms. As in any industry, however, senior management opportunities are limited. Hence most workers, even those with track records as reliable employees, are locked inside a low-wage environment. Contrary to those who preach the benefits of work and persistence, the human capital these workers build up—experience in food production, inventory management, cash register operation, customer relations, minor machinery repair, and cleaning—does not pay off. These workers are often unable to move upward out of poverty. And their experience is not unusual. Hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers in American cities run into the same brick wall. Why? And what can we do about it?

Stagnation in the Inner City

Harlem, like many inner-city communities, has lost the manufacturing job base that once sustained its neighborhoods. Service industries that cater to neighborhood consumers, coupled with now dwindling government jobs, largely make up the local economy. With official jobless rates hovering around 18 percent (14 people apply for every minimum wage fast food job in Harlem), employers can select from the very top of the preference "queue." Once hired, even experienced workers have virtually nowhere to go.

One reason for their lack of mobility is that many employers in the primary labor market outside Harlem consider "hamburger flipper" jobs worthless. At most, employers credit the fast food industry with training people to turn up for work on time and to fill out job applications. The real skills these workers have developed go unrecognized. However inaccurate the unflattering stereotypes, they help keep experienced workers from "graduating" out of low-wage work to more remunerative employment. . . .

As Harry Holzer, an economist at Michigan State University, has shown, "central-city" employers insist on specific work experience, references, and particular kinds of formal training in addition to literacy and numeracy skills, even for jobs that do not require a college degree. Demands of this kind, more stringent in the big-city labor markets than in the surrounding suburbs, clearly limit the upward mobility of the working poor in urban areas. If the only kind of job available does not provide the "right" work experience or formal training, many better jobs will be foreclosed.

Racial stereotypes also weaken mobility prospects. Employers view ghetto blacks, especially men, as a bad risk or a troublesome element in the workplace. They prefer immigrants or nonblack minorities, of which there are many in the Harlem labor force, who appear to them more deferential and willing to work

harder for low wages. As Joleen Kirshenman and Kathryn Neckerman found in their study of Chicago workplaces, stereotypes abound among employers who have become wary of the "underclass." Primary employers exercise these preferences by discriminating against black applicants, particularly those who live in housing projects, on the grounds of perceived group characteristics. The "losers" are not given an opportunity to prove themselves. . . .

Social Networks

Social networks are crucial in finding work. Friends and acquaintances are far more useful sources of information than are want ads. The literature on the urban underclass suggests that inner-city neighborhoods are bereft of these critical links to the work world. My work, however, suggests a different picture: the working poor in Harlem have access to two types of occupational social networks, but neither provides upward mobility. The first is a homogeneous lateral network of age mates and acquaintances, employed and unemployed. It provides contacts that allow workers to move sideways in the labor market—from Kentucky Fried Chicken to Burger King or McDonald's—but not to move to jobs of higher quality. Lateral networks are useful, particularly for poor people who have to move frequently, for they help ensure a certain amount of portability in the low-wage labor market. But they do not lift workers out of poverty; they merely facilitate "churning" laterally in the low-wage world.

Young workers in Harlem also participate in more heterogeneous vertical networks with their older family members who long ago moved to suburban communities or better urban neighborhoods to become homeowners on the strength of jobs that were more widely available 20 and 30 years ago. Successful grandparents, great-aunts and uncles, and distant cousins, relatives now in their 50s and 60s, often have (or have retired from) jobs in the post office, the public sector, the transportation system, public utilities, the military, hospitals, and factories that pay union wages. But these industries are now shedding workers, not hiring them. As a result, older generations are typically unable to help job-hunting young relatives.

Although little is known about the social and business networks of minority business owners and managers in the inner city, it seems that Harlem's business community, particularly its small business sector, is also walled off from the wider economy of midtown. Fast food owners know the other people in their franchise system. They do business with banks and security firms inside the inner city. But they appear less likely to interact with firms outside the ghetto.

For that reason, a good recommendation from a McDonald's owner may represent a calling card that extends no farther than the general reputation of the firm and a prospective employer's perception-poor, as I have noted-of the skills that such work represents. It can move someone from an entry-level job in one restaurant to the same kind of job in another, but not into a good job elsewhere in the city.

Lacking personal or business-based ties that facilitate upward mobility, workers in Harlem's fast food market find themselves on the outside looking in when it comes to the world of "good jobs." They search diligently for them, they complete many job applications, but it is the rare individual who finds a job that pays a family wage. Those who do are either workers who have been selected for internal promotion or men and women who have had the luxury of devoting their earnings solely to improving their own educational or craft credentials. Since most low-wage service workers are under pressure to support their families or contribute to the support of their parents' households, this kind of human capital investment is often difficult. As a result, the best most can do is to churn from one low-wage job to another.

The Employer Consortium

Some of the social ills that keep Harlem's fast food workers at the bottom of a short job ladder-a poor urban job base, increasing downward mobility, discrimination, structural problems in the inner-city business sector-are too complex to solve quickly enough to help most of the workers I've followed. But the problem of poor social networks may be amenable to solution if formal organizations linking primary and secondary labor market employers can be developed. An "employer consortium" could help to move hardworking inner-city employees into richer job markets by providing the job information and precious referrals that "come naturally" to middle-class Americans.

How would an employer consortium function? It would include both inner-city employers of the working poor and downtown businesses or nonprofit institutions with higher-paid employees. Employers In the inner city would periodically select employees they consider reliable, punctual, hard-working, and

motivated. Workers who have successfully completed at least one year of work would be placed in a pool of workers eligible for hiring by a set of linked employers who have better jobs to offer. Entry-level employers would, in essence, put their own good name behind successful workers as they pass them on to their consortium partners in the primary sector.

Primary-sector employers, for their part, would agree to hire from the pool and meet periodically with their partners in the low-wage industries to review applications and follow up on the performance of those hired through the consortium. Employers "up the line" would provide training or educational opportunities to enhance the employee's skills. These training investments would make it more likely that hirees would continue to move up the new job ladders.

As they move up, the new hirees would clear the way for others to follow. First, their performance would reinforce the reputation of the employers who recommended them Second, their achievements on the job might begin to lessen the stigma or fear their new employers may feel toward the inner-city workforce. On both counts, other consortium-based workers from the inner city would be more likely to get the same opportunities, following in a form of managed chain migration out of the inner-city labor market. Meanwhile, the attractiveness of fast food jobs, now no better reputed among inner-city residents than among the rest of society, would grow as they became, at least potentially, a gateway to something better.

Advantages for Employers

Fast food employers in Harlem run businesses in highly competitive markets. Contrast pressure on prices and profit discourage them from paying wages high enough to keep a steady workforce. In fact, most such employers regard the jobs they fill as temporary placements: they expect successful employees to leave. And despite the simple production processes used within the fast food industry to minimize the damage of turnover, sudden departures of knowledgeable workers still disrupt business and cause considerable frustration and exhaustion.

An employer consortium gives these employers-who can't raise wages if they hope to stay In business-a way to compete for workers who will stay with them longer than usual. In lieu of higher pay, employers can offer access to the consortium hiring pool and the prospect of a more skilled and ultimately better-paying job upon graduation from this real world "boot camp." . . .

Consortiums would also appeal to the civic spirit of minority business owners, who often choose to locate in places like Harlem rather than in less risky neighborhoods because they want to provide job opportunities for their own community. The big franchise operations mandate some attention to civic responsibility as well. Some fast food firms have licensing requirements for franchisees that require demonstrated community involvement.

At a time when much of the public is voicing opposition to heavy-handed government efforts to prevent employment discrimination, employer consortiums have the advantage of encouraging minority hiring based on private-sector relationships. Institutional employers in particular-for example, universities and hospitals, often among the larger employers in East Coast cities-should find the consortiums especially valuable. These employers typically retain a strong commitment to workforce diversity but are often put off by the reputation of secondary-sector workers as unskilled, unmotivated, and less worthy of consideration.

The practical advantages for primary-sector managers are clear. Hirees have been vetted and tested. Skills have been assessed and certified in the most real world of settings. A valuable base of experience and skills stands ready for further training and advancement. The consortium assures that the employers making and receiving recommendations would come to know one another, thus reinforcing the value of recommendations—a cost-effective strategy for primary-sector managers who must make significant training investments in their workers.

Minimal Government Involvement

Despite the evident advantages for both primary and secondary labor market employers, it may be necessary for governments to provide modest incentives to encourage wide participation. Secondary-sector business owners in the inner city, for example, might be deterred from participating by the prospect of losing some of their best employees at the end of a year. Guaranteeing these employers a lump sum or a tax break for every worker they promote into management internally or successfully place with a consortium participant could help break down such reluctance.

Primary-sector employers, who would have to provide support for training and possibly for schooling of their consortium employees, may also require some kind of tax break to subsidize their efforts at skill enhancement. Demonstration projects could experiment with various sorts of financial incentives for both sets of employers by providing grants to underwrite the costs of training new workers.

Local governments could also help publicize the efforts of participating employers. Most big-city mayors, for example, would be happy to shower credit on business people looking to boost the prospects of the deserving (read working) poor. Government involvement, however, would be minimal. Employer consortiums could probably be assembled out of the existing economic development offices of U.S. cities, or with the help of the Chamber of Commerce and other local institutions that encourage private-sector activity. Industry- or sector-specific consortiums could probably be put together with the aid of local industry councils.

Moreover, some of the negative effects of prior experiments with wage subsidies for the "hard to employ"—efforts that foundered on the stigma assigned to these workers and the paperwork irritants to employers—would be reversed here. Consortium employees would be singled out for doing well, for being the cream of the crop. And the private sector domination of employer consortiums would augur against extensive paperwork burdens.

Building Bridges

The inner-city fast food workers that I have been following in Harlem have proven themselves in difficult jobs. They have shown that they are reliable, they clearly relish their economic independence, and they are willing to work hard. Still, work offers them no escape from poverty. Trapped in a minimum-wage job market, they lack bridges to the kind of work that can enable them to support their families and begin to move out of poverty. For reasons I have discussed, those bridges have not evolved naturally in our inner cities. But where they are lacking, they must be created and fostered. And we can begin with employer consortiums, to the benefit of everyone, workers and employers alike.

Patrick O'Malley *wrote the following proposal while he was a first-year college student. He proposes that college professors give students frequent brief examinations in addition to the usual midterm and final exams. After discussing with his instructor his unusual rhetorical situation-a student advising professors-he decided to revise the essay into the form of an open letter to professors at his college, a letter that might appear in the campus newspaper. O'Malley's essay may strike you as unusually authoritative. This air of authority is due in /age part to what O'Malley learned about the possibilities and problems of frequent exams as he interviewed two professors (his writing instructor and the writing program director) and talked with several students. As you read his essay, notice particularly how he anticipates professors' likely objections to his proposal and evaluates their preferred solutions to the problem he identifies.*

More Testing, More Learning
Patrick O'Malley

It's late at night. The final's tomorrow. You got a *C* on the midterm, so this one will make or break you. Will it be like the midterm? Did you study enough? Did you study the right things? It's too late to drop the course. So what happens if you fail? No time to worry about that now you've got a ton of notes to go over.

Although this last-minute anxiety about midterm and final exams is only too familiar to most college students, many professors may not realize how such major, infrequent, high-stakes exams work against the best interests of students both psychologically and intellectually. They cause unnecessary amounts of stress, placing too much importance on one or two days in the students' entire term, judging ability on a single or dual performance. They don't encourage frequent study, and they fail to inspire students' best performance. If professors gave additional brief exams at frequent intervals, students would be spurred to study more regularly, learn more, worry less, and perform better on midterms, finals, and other papers and projects.

Ideally, a professor would give an in-class test or quiz after each unit, chapter, or focus of study, depending on the type of class and course material. A physics class might require a test on concepts after every chapter covered, while a history class could necessitate quizzes covering certain time periods or major events. These exams should be given weekly, or at least twice monthly. Whenever possible, they should consist of two or three essay questions rather than many multiple-choice or short-answer questions. To preserve class time for lecture and discussion, exams should take no more than 15 or 20 minutes.

The main reason professors should give frequent exams is that when they do, and when they provide feedback to students on how well they are doing, students learn more in the course and perform better on major exams, projects, and papers. It makes sense that in a challenging course containing a great deal of material, students will learn more of it and put it to better use if they have to apply or "practice" it frequently on exams, which also helps them find out how much they are learning and what they need to go over again. A recent Harvard study notes students' "strong preference for frequent evaluation in a course." Harvard students feel they learn least in courses that have "only a midterm and a final exam, with no other personal evaluation." They believe they learn most in courses with "many opportunities to see how they are doing" (Light, 1990, p. 32). In a review of a number of studies of student learning, Frederiksen (1984) reports that students who take weekly quizzes achieve higher scores on final exams than students who take only a midterm exam and that testing increases retention of material tested.

Another, closely related argument in favor of multiple exams is that they encourage students to improve their study habits. Greater frequency in test taking means greater frequency in studying for tests. Students prone to cramming will be required-or at least strongly motivated-to open their textbooks and notebooks more often, making them less likely to resort to long, kamikaze nights of studying for major exams. Since there is so much to be learned in the typical course, it makes sense that frequent, careful study and review are highly beneficial. But students need motivation to study regularly, and nothing works like an exam. If students had frequent exams in all their courses, they would have to schedule study time each week and gradually would develop a habit of frequent study. It might be argued that students are adults who have to learn how to manage their own lives, but learning history or physics is more complicated than learning to drive a car or balance a checkbook. Students need coaching and practice in learning. The right way to learn new material needs to become a habit, and I believe that frequent exams are key to developing good habits of study and learning. The Harvard study concludes that "lying regular evaluation to good course organization enables students to plan their work more than a few days in advance. If quizzes and homework are scheduled on specific days, students plan their work to capitalize on them (Light, 1990, p. 33).

By encouraging regular study habits, frequent exams would also decrease anxiety by reducing the procrastination that produces anxiety. Students would benefit psychologically if they were not subjected to the emotional ups and downs caused by major exams, when after being virtually worry-free for weeks they are suddenly ready to check into the psychiatric ward. Researchers at the University of Vermont found a strong relationship among procrastination, anxiety, and achievement. Students who regularly put off studying for exams had continuing high anxiety and lower grades than students who procrastinated less. The researchers found that even 'low" procrastinators did not study regularly and recommended that professors give frequent assignments and exams to reduce procrastination and increase achievement (Rothblum, Solomon, & Murakami, 1986, pp. 393, 394).

Research supports my proposed solution to the problems I have described. Common sense as well as my experience and that of many of my friends support it. Why, then, do so few professors give frequent brief exams? Some believe that such exams take up too much of the limited class time available to cover the material in the course. Most courses meet 150 minutes a week-three times a week for 50 minutes each time. A 20-minute weekly exam might take 30 minutes to administer, and that is one-fifth of each week's class time. From the student's perspective, however, this time is well spent. Better learning and greater confidence about the course seem a good trade-off for another 30 minutes of lecture. Moreover, time lost to lecturing or discussion could easily be made up in students' learning on their own through careful regular study for the weekly exams. If weekly exams still seem too time-consuming to some professors, their frequency could be reduced to every other week or their length to 5 or 10 minutes. In courses where multiple-choice exams are appropriate, several questions could be designed to take only a few minutes to answer.

Another objection professors have to frequent exams is that they take too much time to read and grade. In a 20-minute essay exam, a well-prepared student can easily write two pages. A relatively small class of 30 students might then produce 60 pages, no small amount of material to read each week. A large class of 100 or more students would produce an insurmountable pile of material. There are a number of responses to this objection. Again, professors could give exams every other week or make them very short. Instead of reading them closely they could skim them quickly to see whether students understand an idea or can apply it to an unfamiliar problem; and instead of numerical or letter grades they could give a plus, check, or minus. Exams could be collected and responded to only every third or fourth week. Professors who have readers or teaching assistants could rely on them to grade or check exams. And the Scantron machine is always available for instant grading of multiple-choice exams. Finally, frequent exams could be given in place of a midterm exam or out-of-class essay assignment.

Since frequent exams seem to some professors to create too many problems, however, it is reasonable to consider alternative ways to achieve the same goals. One alternative solution is to implement a program that would improve study skills. While such a program might teach students how to study for exams, it cannot prevent procrastination or reduce "large test anxiety" by a substantial amount. One research team studying anxiety and test performance found that study skills training was 'not effective in reducing anxiety or improving performance” (Dendato & Diener, 1986, p. 134). This team, which also reviewed other research that reached the same conclusion, did find that a combination of "cognitive/relaxation therapy" and study skills training was effective. This possible solution seems complicated, however, not to mention time-consuming and expensive. It seems much easier and more effective to change the cause of the bad habit rather than treat the habit itself. That is, it would make more sense to solve the problem at its root: the method of learning and evaluation.

Still another solution might be to provide frequent study questions for students to answer. These would no doubt be helpful in focusing students' time studying, but students would probably not actually write out the answers unless they were required to. To get students to complete the questions in a timely way, professors would have to collect and check the answers. In that case, however, they might as well devote the time to grading an exam. Even if it asks the same questions, a scheduled exam is preferable to a set of study questions because it takes far less time to write in class, compared to the time students would devote to responding to questions at home. In-class exams also ensure that each student produces his or her own work.

Another possible solution would be to help students prepare for midterm and final exams by providing sets of questions from which the exam questions will be selected or announcing possible exam topics at the beginning of the course. This solution would have the advantage of reducing students' anxiety about learning every fact in the textbook, and it would clarify the course goals, but it would not motivate students to study carefully each new unit, concept, or text chapter in the course. I see this as a way of complementing frequent exams, not as substituting for them.

From the evidence and from my talks with professors and students, I see frequent, brief in-class exams as the only way to improve students' study habits and learning, reduce their anxiety and procrastination, and increase their satisfaction with college. These exams are not a panacea, but only more parking spaces and a winning football team would do as much to improve college life. Professors can't do much about parking or football, but they can give more frequent exams. Campus administrators should get behind this effort, and professors should get together to consider giving exams more frequently. It would make a difference.

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***Jill Neimark** is a journalist and author living in New York City. She has contributed many articles to magazines, especially* Psychology Today. *(Several of her* Psychology Today *articles are available on the Internet at <http~/www.nyu.edu/classes/neimark>.) She has also published a novel,* Bloodsong *(1994). In addition to writing, she teaches a course in digital journalism in the Science and Environmental Reporting Division, Graduate School of Journalism, New York University.*

This essay was originally published in a 1998 issue of Psychology Today, *a publication of the American Psychological Association designed to translate research findings into useful information for general but educated readers who have no formal academic training in psychology. Relying for support on publications by academic specialists, Neimark speculates about why the annual Miss America contest remains so popular thirty years into the feminist revolution. She begins with the assumption that "Miss America informs us about our culture's ideals and conflicts' and in so doing mirrors America. Such an assumption requires that Neimark attempt to convince readers that particular ideals and conflicts are revealed by the Miss America contest. As you read, notice what ideals and conflicts she singles out as possible causes for why the Miss America contest remains so important to many Americans. These are easy to recognize because Neimark sets them off graphically (with bullets and italics).*

Why We Need Miss America
Jill Neimark

Miss America. For a skin show, she's been caught in the crossfire of colossal cultural battles: women's rights, pornography, changing racial and religious values. Feminist poet Robin Morgan claimed that the pageant inspired the formal launching of the women's movement in 1968, when a crowd of protesters burned their bras, torched host Bert Parks in effigy, stormed the exhibition hall, and accused the contest of being lily-white, racist, and pro-military. Since then, Miss America has changed with the times: she has been black, deaf, and a social activist with platforms ranging from AIDS prevention to children's self esteem and aging with dignity-although she still struts in a bathing suit.

In the last decade, interest in the title has been flagging, and the pageant has had to offer gimmicks like viewer phone-in votes and two-piece swimsuits to boost television ratings. Still, every September, at least 20 million Americans stay home on a Saturday night to scorn or applaud the winner and see the kitschy crown passed on. If you're one who observes that annual ritual, you may watch out of simple nostalgia—Miss America as a kind of Proustian madeleine of days long gone, when you were a girl and she was a queen. Or you may watch for the treacly high camp of it all, or just out of an ambivalent blend of disgust and fascination. Yet somehow, at 78-years-old, this icon still lives.

The fact is, Miss America informs us about our culture's ideals and conflicts. That's what all beauty pageants do, according to Richard Wilk, professor of anthropology at Indiana University. "They're always about fundamental contradictions in the culture," he declares. "How else could you get millions of people to watch a bunch of relatively untalented women in bathing suits?" The Miss America contest has always knit together in its middle-class queen the deep schisms in American society. Whether her contestants flaunt pierced belly buttons or Ph.D.s in veterinary medicine, wear pants or ballgowns, Miss America is a mirror of America, even now.

So what *is* she really saying about us-and why do we need to know, anyway?

- *We're a big clubhouse, but we're not sure you should be a member.* We may be a melting pot of races and types, but we have a fairly inflexible standard of beauty. Almost all the Miss Americas have been white. According to Frank Deford, author of *There She Is,* the composite contestant in 1971 was 19 years old, 5 feet 6 inches, 119 pounds, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. And she hasn't changed much since then. "Miss America is the official standard of beauty, kind of like the dollar bill," observes Wilk. "The rest of us schlubs are not necessarily ugly. We may be beautiful, but by different standards." As an example, he cites Monica Lewinsky, with her plump curves and formerly big hair. "She is extremely beautiful by the small-town standards of the Midwest, and that big hair is the peak of fashion in southern Indiana where I live. But she does not look like a Miss America."

Give the pageant a bit of credit, though. The first black winner was chosen in 1984—Vanessa Williams (and her replacement, Suzette Charles). Since then, three more African-Americans have worn the crown. Williams, with her fine-boned features, was said to match the "white" ideal, but Marjorie Vincent, the 1991 titleholder, with her very dark skin and full figure, represented a different, and more diverse, vision of

beauty. In 1997, the contestant from Colorado was Hispanic and Miss Washington, D.C., was of Indian descent.

"More Latina young women and African-Americans are entering the contest, and those audiences are now watching," says New York City psychologist Elizabeth Debold, author of *Mother Daughter Revolution: From Good Girls to Great Women.* "The pageant may be providing a way for immigrant and outsider groups to enter the mainstream."

It is at the smaller local contest level that the clash of immigrant culture and mainstream America is most clearly seen. In fact, some local competitions seem to exist precisely on that fault line, providing a stage on which to battle out cultural assimilation in the arena of beauty. "These pageants let immigrants ask who they are," says Wilk, "how much of the American model they want, how much they're going to adapt, how to pass their culture's values on to the next generation." For instance, the Miss India America pageant, held in Atlanta, Georgia, offers teenagers of Asian Indian descent a chance to parade their own standards of beauty and their position in American society. One teen performs an acrobatic routine to disco music; another does a classical Indian dance.

Though such local contests don't feed directly into the Miss America pageant, the conflicts of the microcosm spread ripples that are felt in the macrocosm. Even so, the favored contestant hasn't altered all that much. If beauty does reflect cultural and social values, we-the great democracy-don't know how inclusive we really want to be. Bess Myerson, the first Jewish Miss America, was crowned in 1945. "She meant as much then to Jewish women as Vanessa Williams meant to blacks," says Vicki Gold Levi, co-author with Lee Eisenberg of *Atlantic City:* 125 *Years of Ocean Madness.* Myerson is still the only Jewish woman to wear the crown. And most of the finalists and winners are still white.

- *We're still a nation of Yankees and Southern belles.* Miss America unmasks the schism between the North and the South-it never went away-and the penumbra of the Southern belle still holds sway in our national psyche. Only one New England contestant has ever won the Miss America title, Connecticut's Marian Bergeron in 1933, while southern and western states have been overwhelmingly represented. New England women don't seem to cotton to beauty pageants. In Vermont, the Miss America organization has such a hard time dredging up contestants that a few years ago there were only 10 candidates for the state crown. One recent Miss Vermont flaunted a pierced navel—not exactly Miss America's brand of all-American.

- *Cinderella ought to come from the middle class and go to college.* Miss America gives us a capsule look at middle-class America and its values. After World War II, Miss America became part of the culture of middle-class civic boosterism. The girls who make it to the national pageant start out competing in county or state contests sponsored by community organizations like the Elks or the Rotary Club. "At the local level," says anthropologist Robert Lavenda, a professor at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, "the community is looking for an appropriate representative. When a girl wins a small-town queen pageant she'll be announced as 'Mary Jo, the daughter of Frank and Suzanne.' The community knows these girls." These days, however, junior contestants are drawn from a different circle than earlier. Where once they came from cheerleading squads and drama clubs, nowadays they're picked off soccer fields and basketball courts.

The "bawdy" pageant initiated its scholarship program at the end of the War, and today the organization gives out $32 million in scholarships to young women every year. Many of the early winners of the crown vowed to use the money to enter college. Today's Miss America often has her sights set far higher. Older than earlier candidates, she's likely to already be in college and aiming for medical, law, or graduate school. In fact, many Miss America contestants now say the sole reason they enter the pageant is to finance their education. Practicality-what could be a more middle-class and American virtue?

- *We've got faith.* She reminds us of our bottomless sincerity and spirit. Miss Americas say things like "Mental attitude is so important" and "Every day is a gift from God." You might snicker at the platitudes, but who's buying all the self-help books that offer precisely that inspirational message? She comes out of the same cultural spout as that runaway bestseller, *Chicken Soup for the Soul.*

- *We've got pluck.* Miss America embodies our Horatio Alger can-do spirit. We believe that by dint of hard work we can overcome anything. It's the triumph of nurture over nature. So many aspects of being a beauty queen are beyond personal control—you've got to be between 5 feet 6 inches and 5 feet 10 inches, for instance. "On the other hand," notes Wilk, "everyone always talks about how hard these girls work."

Reflecting our preoccupation with fitness, today's Miss America is pumped and streamlined, whereas in 1921 she was soft and plump. Bodybuilding is practically a given for contestants as are strenuous sessions in the gym. One participant in the 1990 pageant, Karrie Mitchell of Colorado, admitted, "I was not a swimsuit winner a year ago, let me tell you." She worked out until she shrank from a size 12 to a size five.

Many contestants are willing to undergo extensive cosmetic surgery (which the state pageants sometimes pay for). They also resort to the old stand-bys, mummifying themselves with surgical tape to enhance their cleavage and the curve of their buttocks.

- *We're all equal, but we love royalty.* Sure, she's just an ordinary American girl, but she wears a crown and is cloaked in celebrity. Norman Rockwell was one of the pageant's original judges, others have ranged from Grace Kelly to Donald Trump. Miss America opens shopping centers and moves in power circles. As a *Boston Globe* editorial recently noted, "In a letter to the President, one icon to another, Miss America asked for federal funds for needle exchange programs [to prevent AIDS]." Icons, of course, gain status when they rub noses with other icons. She's got to be more than a bathing beauty, asking the president for federal funding.

anessa Williams is one of the few inners to gain fame.

Very few Miss Americas have gone on to lasting fame, but that makes perfect sense. To win, she has to be the ultimate paradox, everyday royalty, the thing that every American secretly believes he or she is. *We love to gossip.* It's the corollary to fame. Miss America lets us know we love knowing a secret, no matter how trivial. Journalists have asked competitors about the "firm grip gunk" they spray on their butts to keep their bathing suits from riding up; during one recent pageant, the press rooted out that 37 contestants had been arrested for speeding at some time in their life.

- *We love glitz.* Let's face it, America has always had a purple-spangled heart, always been genuinely and even naively trashy. From its start, Miss America has been high camp. "The pageant always manages to confuse the wholesome with the wholesale, a clean time with a good time," says Levi.

In the late 1940s Miss Montana rode her horse onstage and almost fell into the orchestra pit; after that animals were banned; Miss Nevada lamented, "You mean I won't be able to have my cow perform?" Miss Nebraska tossed a flaming baton into the judges' booth; flaming batons were banned. Later, a church choir member did a striptease-and won the crown.

Alas, such glorious moments are gone. The highlight of the pageant, though, remains: the declaration of the winner with her requisite burst of tears and careful stroll down the runway, crown slipping from her head.

- *Superwoman is alive and well.* This pageant tells us what women are supposed to be. "She's the cultural icon of the perfect girl," declares Debold. Today, Miss Americas are asked to be beautiful, to achieve, and to serve. (In the pageant's official parlance, she no longer "reigns.") She has a platform, and it's inevitably for social good. One recent Miss America was a cancer survivor studying to be a musical therapist for the gravely ill.

"It's a totally contradictory model," asserts Wilk. "She should be strong but weak, aggressive but submissive, totally committed to her career and her family, have touches of the social worker, and basically walk on water in high-heeled shoes and make it look easy." Whew.

It's all for one and one for all. Miss America tells us, finally, one last fact: that we still believe a single person can serve as a living snapshot of an entire country. Like the Mercury astronauts, like baseball's boys of summer, Miss America thrives, simply because we believe in the best and the brightest. What could be brighter than her Vaselined smile, telling us, at the close of that special September evening every year, that we still believe? We're a nation of believers. God Bless Miss America-and does anyone have a handful of popcorn to throw at the TV?