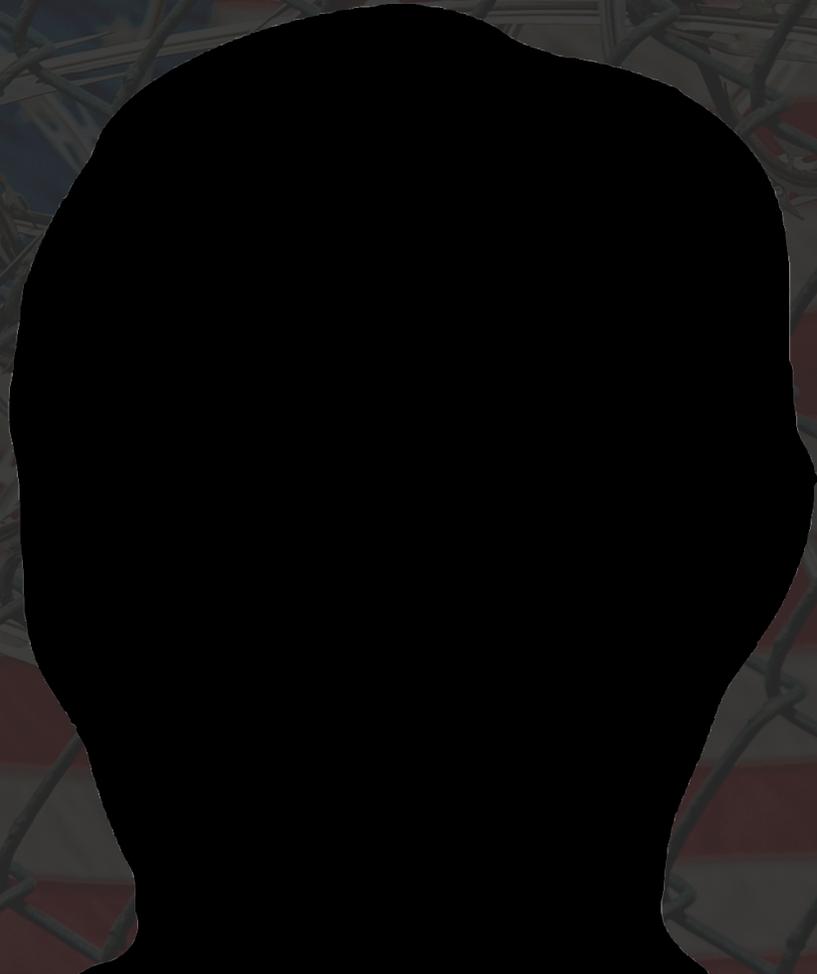


SPRING 2017

THE MATRIX



IDENTITY

Seeking truth within ourselves

Editor's Note

We all have an identity, a truth that rings loudly in our souls. We all seek this no matter where we are or who we are. It can be difficult to embrace our identities. But *who are we* if we can't let ourselves fully accept and express the truth of *who we are*?

This issue of *The Matrix* was a wonderful and collaborative project between Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) students and inmates of the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW) that focuses on the truth of who we are.

Participants of this project came together to be involved in writing class workshops at WCCW in which many prompts were explored. In the end, all the participants submitted work to *The Matrix* to be published. This issue consists of these writing pieces from the inmates at WCCW and students from the IHON 253 Gender, Sexuality, & Culture class. The surnames and statuses of the contributors were deliberately left out to challenge our readers to consider how one's reading of a piece changes when the author's identity is not sharply defined.

The Matrix staff embraced this collaborative project with WCCW because it is the goal of this magazine to not only be an outlet for social justice in the PLU community, but also to create connections and opportunities with the greater community.

For more information about programs to support education in prisons visit the websites of these organizations: University Beyond Bars, Freedom Education Project Puget Sound (FEPPS), Bard Prison Initiative (BPI), and Prison Education Project.

Thanks for reading,
Morgan Stark
Editor

Interested in working on *The Matrix* for the fall?
Contact Robert Wells at wellsrm@plu.edu.

*Correction from Fall Issue: We apologize for the misspelling of Ariel Wood's name.

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Samantha

I just might be...the one for him, in this we call life, slow and steady, calm and collected.

I just might be...me, and who doesn't like it can truly set me free.

I just might be...the one that says or does something to or for someone that may change the outcome or what's on their mind.

I just might be...the one voice between a positive choice versus a negative one.

I just might be...the best mom this life allows me to be behind a wall, but

I just might...need that little voice to encourage me that this is a temporary life and when we embrace one another outside the fence for the world to see

I have been a proud mom,

my life still has a huge purpose

and I fully intend on following my guide from my higher power

to allow all the blessings into my life

while staying out of all the obstacles

better yet, overcoming them with kindness.

Teresa

patience.

be still; keep the promises I make to myself.

as long as crisp air calls me out of bed each morning, I'm doing just fine.

so, truly, call me as you wish:

the preacher's daughter?

an abomination?

a redneck GRIT [Girl Raised in Texas]?

sear whatever words you choose deep into my skin

but I'll hold onto

patience.

because

to my heart, I am just "teresa"

to my mind, solely my OCD

touching light switches 7 times suppresses all my fears

checking, counting, checking, counting.

so tell me, what do others see?

because if I wrestle with a gap this large

between the foot-long distance

from my chest to my skull

who can you really pin me down to be?



The Mask You Never See

James

The mask that I show you

The mask you never see

The mask that is Forbidden

The mask that Defines me

The mask that controls me

Is hidden beneath what I show

The mask that is real

Is one you will never know

The mask that is empty

is simply a disguise

The mask that hides me from fear

and hides beneath the skies

The mask that is lurking

is the one I want to share

The true mask of who I am

is the one I want to wear

Kandyce

The mask I show you said “Big Girls Rock.” I’m bald and beautiful and determined to stay the same. The mask I show you it seems like I would never be afraid. I can protect you and me from all those who make fun of us and call us names.

The mask I show you is full of humor, smiles, and laughter that could be heard for miles. The mask I show you has a voice and can speak loud and clear.

The mask I show you knows I have a right to be here.
The mask I show is so confident on who she wants to be.
The mask I show you protects me from all my fears.
The mask I show you is only part of who I am.

The mask I show only lets some of you break through my skin.
But what’s underneath is so raw and yet has it’s own beauty.

What’s underneath is all the love I have that flows through my veins.
What’s underneath is all my guilt and pain.
What’s underneath is a skinny girl who wants to be free.
What’s underneath are my insecurities that I don’t want people to see.
What’s underneath is my fear of being free, not wanting to disappoint all the people who believe in me.
What’s underneath are the tears I cry because I know that I have to try to be the woman I was intended to be.

Amanda

If you look closely you will see...

My eyes don't always smile when my mouth does
When my lips are literally and physically holding back a truth I know will sting
A hope so desperate your heart would ignite with my dreams

I am so beautiful...

I am a once-broken, now glued together, Tiffany lamp
That I amplify the sun's rays
I can pull off the half-bald headed look even with grow out

I am so powerful...

I can build walls or eviscerate matter with my words
I can create my own reality and change my world
I can move mountains and hearts

I slay...

Glad-handing
Selling others their own dreams

I just might be...

Amazing.
Extraordinary.
The coolest walking contradiction ever.

Hannah

Muscle, bone, and tissue,
I am proud
of the pistons that carry me
over rivers and beyond safe places
to summits and to home.

For facing humiliation,
and for giving an embrace;
for working for change and getting shit done,
I am squared shoulders; iron hands.

Behind my eyes –
two lenses of craggy Montana brown
– spins a reeling slide show
filled with mountains,
tenderness, and friends.

Even and especially
when my body fails
I am a precious Child of God.
This, an unrelenting truth,
is infinitely more
glorious
than the beating of my heart.

Pieces of a Whole

Ashley

Janet

The truth of what I am
not who I am...

If you look closely you will
see...

I am broken. I am scared.
I am sad.
I hide behind my humor
you saw me you broke me
I am nothing without my son
and my mother!

ME
I am so beautiful in red hair
Alter ego
Other Body.

I am going only
when they tell
me I can for
it is DOC who decides
not me.

I am so powerful
With the gifts I've been given
with skull nation

I slay
Who tries to slay me

I just might be
A God U See.

THE TRUTH OF WHO I AM

Siobhan

I am a girl, a daughter, a woman
Who can possibly know the truth of who I am, when I seem to lose sight of myself
everyday?
I am a being that is constantly changing, evolving, growing, and dying
I am an individual who is no different from anyone else
The truth of who I am is reflected in the people I love
I am at my best, strongest, happiest, and safest when I am with those who love me in
return
I am a woman, a daughter, a girl

This poem is from a postcard to be sent:
Everywhere, Across Waters, Across Borders, To the World.

YOU SAY YOU KNOW ME...

Alex

to my mother i am the plow
to my father i am his legacy
to my brother i am punching bag
and confidant.
to my friends i am a disciple of Hamilton
to my church i am home too much
to my team i was keeper
now a memory of shouting.
to the left i am privileged
to the right i am sensitive
to both i am a devil's advocate,
undecided and unhelpful.
to the marginalized i am told i am an obstacle,
my absence the only way to achieve equality.
to the stranger i am
white- racist?
male- sexist?
straight- homophobic?
Christian- intolerant?
American- unintelligent?
to myself, I am a stranger,
each day an opportunity for a new introduction.
how can I confront criticism
how can I show you differently
how can I address those labels given to me when
I am not sure myself.
would you describe me as someone given opportunities
who had a head start from birth
someone to catch up to
or a product of environment like you.
I could be a doctor, lawyer, politician, writer
I could be a drop-out.
Am I what I hope to think I am or
Am I the fulfillment my fears?
Could I be the inspiration for your perspective or
Am I the reflection of your perception?

Guess Who?

Rebecca

to my parents I am their *baby girl*
to my brother I am *pretending*
to the monosexual biphobes
I am *slut, cheater, and a phase*
to the gay community I am *straight passing*
to the media I need proof through
multiple relationships
to heterosexual misogynists I am a *porn category*
in Capitol Hill I am *welcome*
at the university I am *bisexual,*
queer, and non-binary
on surveys I am "*other gender*"
or "*gender non-conforming*"
to my extended family I am *single*
to strangers who see me in public
I must be *lesbian* or *unfeminine*
because of my short hair
because of my androgynous expression
I muse being *the prettiest boy on the block*
I could be the *world* in existence
I could be *Seattle*
I could be your cousin
your doctor, your waiter, your friend
I could teach your children,
make your coffee
I could be you

So, who *am* I?

Tiffany

It doesn't interest me where you've been, where you are today. I want to know where you dream to be.

It doesn't interest me where you live. I want to know where your heart resides.

It doesn't interest me how many friends or followers you have. I want to know would you take a bullet for me, trade places with me, take my pain as your own, feel what I feel just to better understand me.

I want to know how open you are for love, would you risk a broken heart for a slight chance of everlasting love.

I want to know if you'd make a complete fool of yourself in a large crowd, not even think twice of embarrassment, all to put a smile on my face.

It doesn't interest me how we meet, only where we take one another, I want to know, would you stand by my side if everyone else turned their back on me.

I want to know that everything you feel towards me is unconditional.

It doesn't interest me what other people think, I want to know that you'll always be 100 with me.

I want to know you will wipe my tears and that you'll mend my broken heart, piece by piece.

It doesn't interest me the skeletons you have hidden in your closet. I want to know that you will treat me with compassion, that you'll keep my secrets safe, locked away in the closet with yours.

It doesn't interest me what others see when they look at us. I want to know we will have each other through life's trials and tribulations, regardless of how we appear to the rest of the world.

It doesn't interest me who you were when you were high. I want to know who you are when you're with me today, sober.

I want to know when there's nothing left to smile about I will still have you and you will have me.

Haley

I have a dozen different masks that I wear everyday.

One is of a student, a prim smile on her face.

The next is of a dreamer, her eyes set all ablaze.

This one is of a girl I hardly recognize, her eyes are cold and hard, her mouth is a flat line.

Not one fits me completely, yet none feel out of place as I continue growing daily, changing every face.

Being young is difficult, with no place left to hide.

I can see the world through my screen, into the other side.

The touch of my finger lets me see

how every one else lives,

and I watch in jealousy as they seem to wander happily through every path life seems to give.

I want to be like every one else,

so I paint on my next display.

I have a dozen different masks that I wear everyday,

I've never even gone to bed without some role in place.

I wonder if the sun still shines upon a naked face.

Maybe one day I'll be brave enough

To see if what lies beneath still clings to any grace,

But as for now don't mind me as I search

for how my masks reflect this girl,

trapped inside a self-made case.



Taylor

to my parents I am *daughter*
to my partner I am *love*
to the sexist men I met in Washington, D.C.
I am *miss, bitch*, and “*legs*”
to the boy that forced my first kiss, I was *an experiment*
to my future employers
I need a *man’s work ethic*
to the politicians I am *future mother*
in the locker room I am *pussy*
at the university I am *female*,
white and *Pell-grant eligible*
to the magazines I am a *neat hourglass*
with “*pear-shape potential*” if I don’t subscribe

to my grandparents I am simply *sweet pea*.

to those who see me lead
I must be *bossy* or *in-over-my-head*
because of my long legs and thin frame
because of my maternal Norwegian heritage
I am *model material*, not *scientist*, not *CEO*

I am the universe and all of time.
I am alive between boundaries.
I am the story of my mother.

I am resilient, strong, unrelenting.

and sometimes, I am not.

who are you?

Heather

It doesn’t
interest me where you come
from. I want to know your
destination and if you have the
dedication to get there.

It doesn’t interest me what you have or
the level of your financial success. I want
to know if you have been loyal and kind along
your journey and how you contribute to your
community.

I want to know how you intend to make a difference in
this world. And I want to know if you can practice empathy,
compassion, and integrity on the way to making that mission a
reality.

It doesn’t interest me who you love or what your spiritual beliefs are.
What I want to know is how deeply and passionately you believe in both.
I want to know if you are willing to sacrifice other people’s expectations to
fulfill your wishes and dreams.

I want to know if you have the courage to accept your defeats and still hold your
head high, and present yourself with the confidence and wisdom that comes with learn-
ing from your mistakes.

It doesn’t interest me why you are kept behind these walls and what secrets you keep. I want to
know if you possess the commitment and fortitude necessary to change, and if that change is
something you desire deep in your soul. I want to know if you can maintain self-respect, if you can
believe in yourself, and if you can forgive yourself.

Emma

Who Am I?

Well, it's simple, really

I am Not.

Let me explain:

I do not exist.

Not within the bounds of marriage,

Not within the realm of legitimacy,

and certainly not to the right-wing
traditionalists on my father's side;

as if his decision to leave was my fault.

Perhaps, because my mother and I did not fulfill
our duty as women,

we were to blame when *he* went away.

Excuse me. My bad. I'm sorry.

May I exist now?

It's not that easy.

I am still not *real*, *worthy*, or *valid*

because I am still *bastard*, *freak*, and *girl*.

I am, as I have been informed, damned to hell,
sinful, taking up space I have not earned.

I will *always* need to prove myself,
and it will *never* be enough.

But here I am

a functioning Not, defined by society:

In TV shows I am the one-night stand,

easily convinced on the grounds of resolving
"daddy issues."

At the university, I am first-in-the-family,
pell-grant eligible, and female.

In my family I am the only girl: precious,
inherently less than my male cousins, shamefully
sensitive.

Jeez, Em. Lighten up. Take a joke. Laugh it off.

(Make a joke that isn't deeply rooted in sexism. I'll laugh
so hard milk squirts out my nose.)

But to my mother

I am.

I am daughter, sunshine, worthy, capable, love.

I am a blessing.

And she taught me

I can.

I can speak for myself, decide what jokes to laugh at,
and if I take issue with my father

I can decide what I *am*

And what I *am not*.

I am not seeking a father in a partner.

I am not subject to sexist remarks.

I am not overly sensitive, sorry, guilty,
illegitimate.

I am not a Not.

So, who am I?

Anastasia

If you look closely you'll see
The true image part of your self.
You will see the true you inside
You will find comfort

I am so beautiful
I love myself so much
People love to see me and love me
They see the real me.

I am so powerful
I am so powerful I can see with my eyes closed.
The people don't need a flashlight to see me.
I am bold.

I slay. I am good at book keeping. If there's a book you gotta find I know where to find it.
And where the bar codes are at.

I just might be

10 The right player you want me to be. You could put me in any kind of position. I play the part right.

The Truth of Who I Am

Madeline

I am constantly checking heartbeats
Making sure that the repetitive beating is
still there
You often see me, two fingers to the
throat, monitoring the pulsing
I am worry personified—waiting for the
worst
But sometimes, the worry leaves.
And then I become
Passionate and daring, able to take on the
world, and ready to fight for those who
cannot
This feeling never lasts long, I
suddenly become aware of the beating,
The reminder that I have what some do
not.
That is when I hear the people from my
past speaking, reminding me to behave.
And I am cowed.
I will keep this secret—because if
someone knows everything about you,
will they stay?
There are times when the veil is lifted,
When I hear the waves, and see the trees.
Gravel dust fills my lungs as I begin to
feel at peace in the islands.
The warm summer days relax me into
comfort, and I let myself
Be free.
Eventually I will let go of the doubt
entirely, and open myself up to
possibilities.
The way it should be

I Am FREE

Camille

Hello. I am sensitive.
Whatever the hell that means.
As if human beings weren't made to crave
affection.
As if by wanting you to like me,
I have shown you my biggest flaw.
Oh, was that a joke?
I'm sorry I didn't laugh and fill up my lungs
with your words that are rooted in oppression.
I am sensitive.
Apparently, I am not supposed to have emotions
That could start an earthquake.
This power is dangerous.
When I laugh, the sky splits open and the sun
pours down.
When I scream, my whole body breaks.
I melt.
I am sensitive.
You may attribute the cause of this
To my genitalia,
But I attribute it to my humanness.
Hello. I am sensitive.
And I am free.



SPRING 2017 • THE MATRIX

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In Spring 2014, the connection between the women at the Washington Corrections Center for Women, Pacific Lutheran University students, and storytelling began.

The student directors of the Vagina Monologues connected with Taryn Collis, an actor and teacher from the Freehold Theatre Lab/Studio in Seattle, to bring the production to the facility. Women in WCCW worked with staff there to coordinate the staging as well as advertise and introduce the production. Both the cast and audience were electrified by the telling and hearing of stories that resonated with many of their own common experiences as women.

Reconnecting in Spring 2016, PLU students wrote their own monologues, extending their own stories to the WCCW audience to be listened to and heard. Because the Monologues were not being staged in 2017, Taryn and I began brainstorming other ways to deepen this collaboration.

Taryn, as a long-time teacher at WCCW, and I, having taught two courses at the WCCW as part of Freedom Education Project Puget Sound, embraced the opportunity to bring these two groups together as students in the same class sharing their words with each other and more broadly via *The Matrix* and the Prison Arts Coalition.

Together, we responded to the same prompts, pursued the same questions, creating and listening to each others' stories to uncover the truth of our experiences and the threads--the moments of joy, confusion, love, fear, insecurity, and laughter--that bind us together, despite seemingly disparate identities and circumstances.

We hope that this edition of *The Matrix* is only another chapter in a much longer story of sharing and understanding between PLU and WCCW.

Dr. Jen Smith

Director, Center for Gender Equity
Faculty, Women's & Gender Studies

The Matrix thanks the contributors from the IHON 253 class and the women from the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW). Thank you to Jen Smith, Taryn Collis, Beth Kraig, Joanne Lisosky, Hansel Doan, the staff at WCCW, Mast Media, and Sound Publishing.