These drawings deal with themes of the intersectionality and oppression of women, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and low-income people. People who identify with two or more of these groups face an exacerbated level of oppression. I am interested in the many ways that media, police, and the court systems contribute to the oppression of people in America. This is something very important because it is going on right now in ways that people of privilege do not acknowledge. Oppression cannot be solved until the structures that hold some people above others are torn down. This is why it is important that all people seek to understand the hardships of others in order to solve the issue together. An important idea in my work is that one can only liberate themselves and, once liberated, we must not take on the role of the oppressor.

I approached my artwork in a very literal way. I created an installation to force people to feel oppressed and go through the process of liberation. The pages represent my struggle to create a literal box of repression, as well as the struggle to solve this subjugation. I could not build a box to symbolize oppression and liberation because liberation has not yet occurred; therefore, it cannot be replicated. I created large-scale versions of my plans for the box; I also created small models. One of my models, made of cardboard, is a maze. To complete the maze, two people must work together. This represents how people must work together to bring about revolution. I want my piece to make people think about how we can all work together to solve the issue of some lives being valued above others. I want people to feel frustrated, for the solution is not simple and, ultimately, I want my artwork to unite people in the search for a solution. I want viewers to think about how we can break down the power structures and unite all oppressed people to create a world in which we all are equal.

Maia

Preface:

       This essay is a discussion of the oppression faced by American people today, the intersectionality of this oppression, the role of the media in oppression as well as how liberation can begin. Oppression takes many forms, for the sake for this paper it means; the exploitation, dehumanization, mistreatment, abuse of human rights, and discrimination of certain groups of people. While many people are oppressed in the US, those who are not oppressed have privilege. People with privilege have full rights and do not face discrimination, marginalization, or dehumanization. Oppression uses many excuses to make unprivileged groups different and less than those in the position of privilege. I am focusing specifically on the oppression and intersectionality of women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ communities, and people of low socioeconomic class. I acknowledge there are many groups who are oppressed based on other factors such as, religion, age, physical ability, and more. This discussion of liberation is applicable to any and all oppressed people- not just those discussed. The root of oppression in our country comes from how money translates to status and worth of human life. Any time some lives are valued over others, there is a situation of oppressors and oppressed. Whenever people are dehumanized by others in order for the others to gain is an oppressive situation. Oppressive situations can only be augmented/addressed through active liberation of the oppressed, the oppressed must discuss the issues and educate themselves before action can be taken. Liberation occurs through oppressed people gaining full human rights, demarginalization, and breaking down the structures that hold others above them. This liberation can only be achieved if all oppressed people come together, they must hold discussion, tell each other about their struggles, and tear town the levels of oppression within their groups. Only after these tasks have been achieved can they tear down the entire power structure and gain full liberation. It is important that through the course of liberation the oppressed do not take on the role of oppressor.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

       The phenomenon of people being doubly oppressed and the acknowledgement of their unique challenges is known as intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw first brought this term to the public's knowledge in her discussion of the intersectionality and oppression of women of color (specifically black women) in the late 1980s. When discussing the suffering of marginalized people it is very important to understand the intersectionality they endure. People face oppression in the forms of violence, discrimination in the workplace, court and police bias, as well as general discrimination and mistreatment from the rest of the population. People in all of these groups are oppressed, however those who belong to two or more of these groups face heightened levels of mistreatment and loss of opportunity, by both the oppressors of the groups[1] as well as within one or more communities they belong to. Though all people endure slightly different forms of oppression and have different oppressors, all marginalized people experience

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[1] Upper-class straight cis-gendered white Christian men have the most power and status in America in most situations. Especially in politics, law, the court system, and the media. They are not however the only people who oppress in our society, they just have the power to oppress the most. Upper class white women have almost as much power, as well as upper class people of color, members of LGBTQ community, and others. Anybody can be an oppressor; the only defining characteristic of a person in this place is that they have power over others due to their class, race, gender or any other measure of status in their society. Not all people in power contribute to oppression. People are only oppressors if they contribute to the marginalization, mistreatment, misrepresentation or other forms of oppression.

similar mistreatment and the general oppressors in our country remain the same for all. The people with the most privilege and power in our country today are straight, wealthy white men. These people in power have the ability to impact the media, the law system, the court system, and many more aspects of our society in their favor. People in oppressed communities are marginalized and dehumanized by those in power. This is multiplied when people identify with two or more affected groups, resulting in them being treated as less human than the already less human. By manipulating the media to dehumanize some groups, dominant members of our society are led to believe other people are of less value. When people are seen as less valuable than others, they are greatly mistreated by those made to feel they are more important.

Dual oppression is present for women of color, people of color in the LGBTQ community, poor people in the LGBTQ community, poor women, and poor people in other minority communities. In her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," Crenshaw gave a very strong analogy for the oppression of people who exist within multiple oppressed groups.

> *"Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked—feet standing on shoulders—with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are* not *disadvantaged in any way reside. In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that "but for" the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room. A hatch is developed through which those placed immediately below can crawl. Yet this hatch is generally available only to those who—due to the singularity of their burden and their otherwise privileged position relative to those below—are in the position to crawl through. Those who are multiply-burdened are generally left below unless they can somehow pull themselves into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch."*
> (Crenshaw, 152)

This passage perfectly illustrates how, through the process of liberation and demarginalization of oppressed people, only the people who deal with the very least of these issues are freed. Many argue that discrimination of people based on race, sex, class, and sexual preference is improving. What they fail to understand is that it is only improving for those who are privileged within those parameters, or only fall into one of those groups. Intersectionality addresses and discusses the unique oppression which members of doubly marginalized communities face. Oppressed people must embrace their unique differences and hardships and come together in order to free themselves. All oppressed people cannot be liberated from the most privileged while there is a power structure within the oppressed. This means that oppressed groups need to look beyond things like race, sex, class, and sexual orientation. Everyone's hardships must be acknowledged and discussed in order for the oppression within oppressed groups to be dissolved. Once all people within oppressed groups see themselves as equals, they can band together, learn from each other, and organize themselves in order to tear down the power structures holding them all down.

Women of color experience oppression within their communities as well as in anti-racism movements. They are also subject to discrimination within the white-dominated feminist movement. The intersectionality of the oppression of women of color is one of the most discussed instances of intersectional oppression. Not only is there discrimination in the communities and rights movements that women are a part of, they also face discrimination in court. Crenshaw states that "in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex-or-class-privileged Blacks, in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race-and-class-privileged women."(Crenshaw, 140) This means that in the courts system the dual oppression of women of color is not really acknowledged. Women of color only fit into one of the two categories depending on their situation.

The media plays a significant role in the oppression of people in the U.S. Lack of representation, poor representation, and negative stereotypes, are just a few examples of how the media oppresses minorities. Lack of representation in the media allows the oppressors, (in this case the generally wealthy white men who own media companies) to paint minority groups negatively and spread stereotypes of these groups. Stereotypes give the population a skewed and toxic picture of women, minorities, and LGBTQ people, directly reinforcing the oppression of the stereotyped people. Negative representation in the media gives the impression that mistreatment of women, people of color, LGBTQ people, and people of low socioeconomic class is justified.

There is an overwhelming problem of lack of representation in the white, male dominated news industry. The number of people within minority groups in newsrooms has been close to 12% since the 1990s and is showing no signs of much growth.[2] Growth in numbers in this area is not, however, a solution to the problem of how the media portrays minorities. In her 2002 article, "Bias Against Minorities Remains a Problem," Pamela Newkirk states, "In interviews conducted around the country many black journalists told me that they feel pressured to validate a societal perception of black pathology in order to succeed in their newsrooms. They feel their credibility assaulted or harshly scrutinized when they attempt to present balanced portraits of black life" (Newkirk, 39). This observation is important because it shows how even with minority representation, the media twists stories and pressures journalists to skew facts. Though it seems that people of color reporting on stories relating to their communities would create a less biased picture, it is not necessarily true. Many people of color who do work in newsrooms are pushed out because they are expected to reinforce the bias held by the mainstream media. Every year the number of people of color entering the newsroom is matched by those leaving. With the numbers of people of color in the newsroom already low, the number of women of color in this field is extremely low. The views and perspective of women of color are therefore very seldom heard in the news.

Poor representation and lack of representation in the news and media act as demented justifications for mistreatment and marginalization of black lives. In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" Crenshaw discusses the marginalization of rape of black women and the issues of representation of people of color in the media. "Professor Smith suggests a sexual hierarchy in operation that holds certain female bodies in higher regard than others." Based on statistics in rapes cases we can see that this

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[2] Based on statistics discussed by Newkirk in 2002 and by Riva Gold in her 2013 article for The Atlantic. Gold states that the percent of minority representation in the newsroom peaked in 2006 at 13.73%. Since 2006 it has fluctuated slightly but today it remains at 12.76%. It is important to understand that minorities make up about 37% of the U.S. population today.

hierarchy is a generally overlooked, however very prominent factor in the treatment and analysis of attitudes around rape. "A study of rape dispositions in Dallas, for example, showed that the average prison term for a_man convicted of raping a black woman was two years, as compared with five years for the rape of a Latina and ten years for the rape of an Anglo woman. A related issue is the fact that African-American victims of rape are the least likely to be believed." (Crenshaw, 1268-69). Both the way that rape of people of color is under acknowledged and under punished, and the ways that black rapists are portrayed in opposition to the way white rapists are, unquestionably dehumanizes people of color. The fact that rape of white women is punishable by so much more jail time than the rape of women of color is a blatant example about how marginalized women of color are.

The issue of the rape of women of color and the way this crime has less severe consequences than raping a white woman is a prominent one. "The racism and sexism written into the social construction of rape are merely contemporary manifestations of rape narratives emanating from a historical period when race and sex hierarchies were more explicitly policed. Yet another is the devaluation of Black women and marginalization of their sexual victimizations."(Crenshaw, 1268). What this means is that rape culture came from historical ideas of human worth and how certain groups were clearly defined as less valuable than others in the past. Rape culture did not appear out of thin air, it developed from centuries of social structure. In the past there were strict parameters around the value of lives in relation to others, we see the residual effects of this system today. Breaking down this horrific culture will take a lot of opposing action as it has been justified for a long. Rape culture as been normalized which gives rapists an excuse, this must be reversed. Issues of race and class are also conditioned into our culture. Historically lower class women and women of color were valued less, therefore as rape victims there is less concern for them. "This was dramatically shown in the special attention given to the rape of the Central Park jogger during a week in which twenty-eight other cases of first degree rape or attempted rape were reported in New York. Many of these rapes were as horrific as the rape in Central Park yet all were virtually ignored by the media. Some were gang rapes, and in a case that prosecutors described as "one of the most brutal in recent years,"[3] a brutal rape consisted of a woman being violently raped and thrown off a four story building resulting in a shattered pelvis, many internal injuries and broken legs and ankles. "This rape survivor, like most of the other forgotten victims that week, was a woman of color."[4] (Crenshaw, 1268) The media, police, and court systems all contribute to this issue. By not covering stories of the rapes of women of color the media reinforces the idea that white lives are more valuable than the lives of people of color.

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[3] The victim of the Central Park rape was a white upper class woman with a professional job. She was not a not only race but also class privileged woman. The rapists were all young Black men.

[4] The Central Park rape incident took place in 1989, though this issue is still very prominent today. This is just an ideal example that was discussed and evaluated in depth. Some of the information in this quote is from a New York Times article by Don Terry, from May 1989. The issue of the Central Park rape caused national uproar against black males. This clearly illustrates how white women are held above women of color in cases of rape. The way that the media speaks about black men in these situations dehumanizes them, directly contributing to their oppression. The media wants to paint black men as monsters and animals out to get white women but do not care when either black or white males violate women of color, or as much when white men rape white women. The Smith referenced is Professor Valerie Smith author of "Split Affinities: the Case of Interracial Rape".

Women and people of color are not the only groups affected by media representation, there is an issue with the representation of members of the LGBTQ community in our media. Not only are there very few permanent LGBTQ characters in TV, almost all of the existing characters fit into extreme stereotypes that skew the public's view on people within the LGBTQ community. Based on a graph from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), an organization that advocates for proper representation of the LGBTQ community and much more) in 2010 gay males made up 2% of characters on T.V., lesbian characters made up 0%, and bisexual females made up 1%. Most gay characters in T.V. are stereotypically flamboyant and defined by their gayness. Very few gay characters are complexly developed beyond their sexual preference. There is a problem with lesbian characters being represented for the sexual appeal of men and not as strong characters that exist without this aspect. As stated in Setoodeh's article "Television Promotes Gay Stereotypes" "Lesbians face a different problem. They are invariably played by gorgeous, curvy women straight out of a straight man's fantasy—Olivia Wilde on *House,* Sara Ramirez on *Grey's Anatomy*, Evan Rachel Wood on *True Blood*—and they're usually bisexual. How convenient."(Ramin Setoodeh, 44) There have however, been some strong gay characters in T.V. shows that are not defined by stereotypes and therefore move us forward into the realm of healthy representation. As described by Kevin Hilke, "NBC offers us *The Office's* Oscar Martinez (Oscar Nuñez), a gay member of Dunder-Mifflin Scranton's three-person accounting department whose character debuts as ostensibly straight. Oscar is revolutionary in network TV comedy not because he defies outmoded stereotypes, which he does, but because his homosexuality—along with what his culturally insensitive boss, Michael Scott (Steve Carell), terms his "Mexicanity"—is kept consistently incidental to his character."(Hilke) Characters like Oscar are very important in our media, characters that both stand outside of stereotypes as well as not being defined by their race and sexual orientation. By portraying characters in this way, they are made to be human rather than "gay" or "Mexican" as many TV shows illustrate minority characters.

The misrepresentation of members of the LGBTQ community often leads to negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community from the rest of the population. There is a critical issue of hate crimes and homicides against members of the LGBTQ communities, specifically people of color, trans women, and poor or lower class people. In their 2013 report The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs gives these statistics. "Almost 90% of all homicide victims in 2013 were people of color, yet LGBTQ and HIV-affected people of color only represented 55% of total survivors and victims. The overwhelming majority of homicide victims, 78%, were Black and African American, 11% of homicide victims were Latin@, and 11% of homicide victims were white. Almost three-quarters (72%) of homicide victims were transgender women, and more than two-thirds (67%)of homicide victims were transgender women of color, yet transgender survivors and victims only represent 13% of total reports to NCAVP. In 2013, 27.78% of homicide victims were men, all of whom identified as gay." (NCAVP, 2) These statistics show us how specifically people of color in the LGBTQ community face violence, and hate crimes on a much larger scale than other people. You can see from these statistics how people identifying with two or more oppressed groups are affected with an even more extreme level of violence than those who identify with one. Straight white men are faced with almost no violence when compared to minorities and the LGBTQ community. It is clear to see that the percentage of these minorities affected by violence is very high. Violence against minorities and members of the LGBTQ community is a direct response to the way that these oppressed groups are represented to the rest of the population. We cannot stop hate violence until we stop the

misrepresentation of oppressed people. For as long as some people are portrayed as less than others violence against them will continue without proper concern or counteraction.

The issue of people facing oppression, violence, and mistreatment at the hands of the police must be addressed. The numbers of people of color, members of the LGTBQ communities, and people in poverty who face police violence and mistreatment at the hands of officers are extremely high.[5] LGBTQ people of color are extremely at risk when it comes to police violence. The rates of law enforcement and other violence against these groups are increasing, this is a huge issue, and we need to be moving forward rather than back. This leads to mistrust of authorities, which in turn leads to cases of violence and assault not being reported for fear of further abuse. Again NCAVP reports, "This year we are seeing fewer survivors reporting hate violence to the police, and those survivors are being met with increased hostility when they do report. For some of our most impacted communities, especially transgender people and transgender people of color, the hostility and violence faced at the hands of the police is at an alarming level." (NCAVP).[6]

Law enforcement officials are an ideal example of how some people in our society are placed above the general public. Officers of law hold power over everyone else and therefore get away with many things that nobody would otherwise. Officers break laws, mistreat people, and discriminate without anybody even looking their way. It is a well-known fact that police discriminate against people of color, or if people say have a rundown car (suggesting poverty). Many people of Hispanic decent are pulled over and searched or made to prove their residency for no reason other than the color of their skin. People of other minorities face similar discrimination at the hand of the law enforcement system. The fact that our police hold the power to do this over the rest of the population is very damaging.

People will never be able to liberate themselves if there are institutions, which place some humans above others. This idea is mirrored in many other walks of life for example in modeling, or owners of large corporations. Our society is extremely dependant on money, people are valued based on their assets not their character. Affluent power structures use all the tactics discussed in this essay to keep others below them, by discriminating based on race, gender, sexual orientation etc. the oppressors keep the lower class below them. The media often paints minorities as violent however it is really our world, police, the media and other aspects of our society that are violent. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher who worked all around the world helping educate people to liberate themselves, and much more, in his most famous book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" states, "Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons—not by those who are oppressed, exploited,

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[5] "The 2013 report also documents a number of troubling findings related to the interaction of LGBTQ survivors of violence with police. Overall, 45% of survivors reported their incidents to the police, a decrease from 56% in 2012. Of those survivors reporting to the police, 32% reported experiencing hostile attitudes from the police in 2013, a slight increase from 27% in 2012. In 2013, 24% of hate violence incidents reported to the police were classified as bias crimes, a substantial decrease from 77% in 2012. Of those reporting, transgender survivors were particularly likely to experience physical violence at the hands of the police. The report found that transgender survivors were 3.7 times more likely to experience police violence compared to non-transgender survivors and 7 times more likely to experience physical violence when interacting with the police compared to non-transgender survivors." (NCAVP, 2-3)

[6] Said by Christopher Argyros, the Project Manager for the Anti-Violence Project at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center in Los Angeles, California.

and unrecognized. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves." (Freire, 54)

The first big step in the liberation of all oppressed people in America today is acknowledging that there are many people who are marginalized by the rest of the population. Everyone must understand that there are people in our society who face more oppression than us, and that there are people who have a lot more privilege and power as well. In order to stand together and elevate ourselves we must understand that everyone faces unique hardships. In order for all oppressed people to unite and improve the situation, they need to communicate with each other and learn what the others deal with. Once all people who are oppressed understand where they stand in the metaphoric basement of oppression, they can begin to tear down the ceiling and allow everyone in the world to be on the same floor. Those who are oppressed cannot seek to bring themselves to the position of the oppressors nor can they seek to bring the oppressors to their state of oppression, trading roles would not be a solution. In his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" Paulo Freire states, "Because it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restores of the humanity of both" (Freire, 44).

Freire discusses in depth the way that people must interact and hold dialogue in order to liberate themselves. There can never be interactions in which one person seeks to teach another or give them knowledge, power or status (this puts the teacher above the student). Instead teachers, or those who wish to begin a rebellion/liberation must hold discussion with the oppressed in a way that puts them as equals. "The liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of women and men, not things. Accordingly, while no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others. Liberation, a human phenomenon, cannot be achieved by semihumans. Any attempt to treat people as semihumans only dehumanizes them. When people are already dehumanized, due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanization" (Freire, 66-67). The "teachers" must learn as much as they are teaching, this is achieved when they pose questions to the oppressed and discuss issues with them. In this form of education and liberation movement the teacher is never above the others, they are merely the catalyst for discussion and problem solving.

The media, court and law systems all effect how the rest of the population views oppressed people. The way these institutions treat and represent marginalized groups of people sets an example for the rest of the population. These structures and treatment make it seem like abuse and denial of human rights for these people is justified. Lack of representation in media, poor representation, and mistreatment at the hands of law enforcement as well as in court all contribute to the way women, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and members of low socioeconomic classes are dehumanized. All of these examples of oppression are directly linked to each other and in order to rise up oppressed people need to set aside their differences and stand together. They must hold critical discussion and deconstruct our society.

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