These photographs explore identity. I have always struggled with the questions: "Who am I?" "Whom do I want to be?" and "What's holding me back from being myself?"

I researched masculinity, for what it means to be masculine is something that I struggle to understand. Growing up, boys are constantly faced with cultural pressures and norms to "be a man."

I chose to photograph a variety of different people on the street to capture the essence of my confusion surrounding who I am. Though I don't specifically associate myself with any of these people, I still wonder when I see them how they became who they are. By having photos of many people, I wanted to alleviate this inner feeling I have that there is some restrictive personality out there for me to find and to stick with. Rather, my sense of self keeps changing, learning, and uncovering new aspects and paths in my life to follow.

This suite of photographs helped me to understand that I should not worry about *finding* myself, but rather I should just keep living and *being* myself.

Arthur

A Title I Didn't Choose

Arthur

A struggle in many people's lives is living through preconceived connotations that others put on them based on the way they look or talk. These connotations limit people from what they can do or who they can be because they are already believed to be figured out. This can range from people of color being seen as terrorists and thugs or just from teenagers being seen as if they are only here to cause trouble and aren't as sophisticated as adults. When choosing this topic, I acknowledge that the magnitude of this issue can range drastically and I do not want this essay to come across as if I am saying my issues are greater than those I didn't write about.

Introduction to Schema:

The preconceived connotation that people give to you is called "schema". Though the word schema is usually used in the context of plans for building, it also applies to social situations by being defined as underlying plans for who a person is. These "plans" are not chosen by the person but rather given and, because of the stereotypes people hold in our society, schema are usually harmful. What I struggle with the most regarding schema people assuming me to be a certain type of person who doesn't have to be taken seriously. I have found that explaining the preconceived connotations that hold me down in my life to be extremely difficult. To further clarify how I feel others see me, I have chosen to write the following letter:

> *I want to drop out. I honestly don't care about my future but instead want to live up my youth completely by wasting my time and school and waiting to get high on the weekend. I talk slowly and mix up my words because I am high and you shouldn't listen to my opinions because I am an idiot. I am interested in music and gonzo journalism because of the drugs associated with them rather than the content and creativity. I don't talk about half the crazy stuff I do so assume the worst because it's probably true. When I go for a walk or go skating it's to escape the rules of my house and to go steal something from a store or to do something else in that realm. I say I have ADHD as an excuse for my bad grades that are due to me just not caring one bit about school. I only care about politics because of the legalization of marijuana and only want to protest as an excuse to vandalize. I have different political views than my family just to stir up controversy and when my sister picks on me or hurts my feelings, I am faking my emotions because frankly I don't care about my family, just my other degenerate friends.*

First encounter with schema:

My first encounter with schema was in the second grade. I went to the principal's office seven times in second grade and I was only sent directly by the teacher maybe three times. Our teacher's name was Mrs. Olan and she began the year by assuming I was the class clown due to stories my sister had told about me. Whenever someone got in trouble in class she lined all of us up and told us to step forward if we had been the one causing trouble. While doing this she gave me a condescending look with one raised eyebrow that convinced me that I deserved to be in trouble just for what I may do in the future or for being who I am. These instances laid a path for the rest of my life that I found extremely difficult to break.

Through the idea of me being a class clown of some sort I assumed that this would be a fitting personality for me. This new, changed personality of mine didn't feel right but made sense

to me because of the stigma that excitable boys are usually troublemakers. Through other stereotypes that were put on me I found myself living as if I fit in these because I thought I was supposed to. At the time it felt good to be a class clown because in TV the troublemakers were portrayed as the "cool kids". I did, in fact, know that at the time this persona I had been placed into was not going to be good for me later on in life since it was causing nothing but trouble for me at the time.

Schema in my life between then and now:

In middle school I decided it was time to shake these old connotations I held by taking everything more seriously. In sixth grade I started talking less and focusing more in school without much success.

My teachers all thought I was there to cause trouble just like they did in years before. I have always been curious and excited to learn but these ideas of me wanting to cause trouble were now starting to stand in the way. After sixth grade this carried on all throughout middle school and high school. In class, I was constantly being called out for talking even if I was silent or being told to be "quiet" while everyone else in the class was talking. This was getting in the way of my learning because I could not prove to the teachers that I was there to learn.

Once I saw this happening in school, I also began to notice that I was just not fitting in with whatever the schema may be for middle school boys. When we played sports like football and basketball at lunch I was not as good or excited to play as the other boys. This led to me getting passed by and picked last which made me feel less masculine than the other guys. When I dropped flag football I received a lot of repercussions from my coach and other students. Flag football was a tradition for the boys to play at my school, but because of how much time I spent on the sideline I decided to drop it. I can also relate this time on the sideline to the fact that the coach never gave me a chance to prove that I was good at football; rather, he assumed I wasn't worth the time because of how skinny I was.

Middle school and high school art have been disasters in their own sense as well. Because of me wanting to fit in with the athletic crowd at my school I looked at arts as something less masculine than sports. This even led me to listening to different music because I thought other people would think I'm weird for listening to music that wasn't rap. I eventually began skating and finding people just like me in middle school, which only helped me act more myself rather than how I felt I was supposed to. In high school, I tried convincing my school to get a darkroom, but I did not even get a consideration because I was not taken seriously. It seemed that because of my more relaxed personality people would assume that I was not entirely serious about anything and this was the worst.

Current Schema:

Now that I am sixteen years old I find people assuming the worst for what type of person I may be. Because I still skate, listen to music from the sixties and seventies, and have a healthy, growing obsession with mycology, I am seen as a stoner or degenerate.
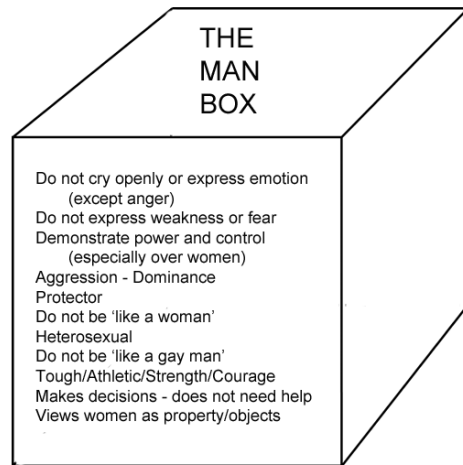
The authoritative figures in my life still see me as if I am looking to get in trouble. I know this by signs of concern that can range from a look at me as if there should be a reason I am in trouble to the person asking me constantly, "How have things been? You aren't getting in any trouble? Do you promise?" over and over again. I have not been able to shake the fact that people just want me to get in trouble and the only thing I can do about it is just not get in trouble. My assumption is that because I do well in school and somehow manage to not be completely

stressed out 24/7 about my SAT scores or what college I want to go to, people will assume I don't care. It is not that I don't care, but rather that I want to be a teenager still. I don't want to lose my creativity and destroy my sleep schedule and mental health because society forces young teenagers to make adult decisions before they can legally buy spray-paint.

Research:

My first discovery of the "man-box" was sophomore year of high school. I saw Tony Porter's TED talk where he describes this world that men are placed in even at a young age where we are forced to be less emotional, and "act like a man". To provide a better example of what the man box is, here is an actual man box:

Tony Porter starts with him talking about the first part of this man box, "Do not cry openly or express emotion (except anger)". He gives a real life example of how his son would come to him crying and instantly start asking him in an annoyed tone, "Why are you crying? Hold your head up. Look at me. Explain to me what's wrong. Tell me what's wrong. I can't understand you. Why are you crying?" He then would tell his son to talk to him "like a man", though the boy was only five. This is not evidence to put Tony Porter down as a person but rather expose the fault in the ideology of "being a man".

THE
MAN
BOX

Do not cry openly or express emotion
(except anger)
Do not express weakness or fear
Demonstrate power and control
(especially over women)
Aggression - Dominance
Protector
Do not be 'like a woman'
Heterosexual
Do not be 'like a gay man'
Tough/Athletic/Strength/Courage
Makes decisions - does not need help
Views women as property/objects

Emotions:

I later decided to dig deeper on the idea of hiding emotions as a man and suppressing feelings to prove that there is a dangerous side to it. I found an article that discusses the correlation between suppression of emotions and violence: with, "Men who suffer from a lack of emotional connection typically struggle with higher levels of stress, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, failed relationships and shorter life spans." My whole life I have been considered emotional but because of the hyper-masculine society I live in, this worries me. I discovered that men and boys commit 97% of school shootings. Violence in males is believed to be a result of men not being able to discuss their emotions or even not allowing themselves to feel emotions, which can build up immensely. Men grow up suppressing emotions, watching action movies with super masculine stars, who do not treat women with respect, and being told that we need to fulfill this role of acting like a man.

Respect towards women:

On the flipside of being a man, our society also holds expectations about being a girl. Women are viewed as objects to men and, most commonly, sex objects. This starts at a young age when boys first start feeling pressure to kiss a girl for the first time or even slut shame a woman. Boys who hang around girls at a young age are instantly going to be accused of trying to be in a relationship with these girls and this starts the practice of objectifying women. Tony Porter says that he went to visit a high school football practice. While at the practice, he asks one of the boys, "How would you feel if, in front of all the players, your coach told you you were playing 'like a girl'?" The boy replies, "It would destroy me". I hear this and think about the fact

that being called 'a girl' is an insult in our society. We now hold such strong connotations about gender norms that being associated with the female gender is offensive to a male.

Men are also viewed in our society with three goals that drive us: sex, drugs, and sports. While choosing which colleges to apply to I was told that, as a male, I have an advantage when I apply to certain arts and liberal arts colleges due to the fact that male art students are heavily outweighed by female art students. You can even see this by looking at the male to female ratio in my class here at Oxbow. When I researched this further I found a statement made by Marco Rubio where he says that we need "more welders and less philosophers" because he would rather support a major that leads to a job. This leads to the stereotype that artists are less masculine than athletes. Now an athlete, on one hand, has to keep their body in pristine shape by avoiding poisoning their bodies with drugs or alcohol. This preserves the idea of fit, athletic men being "men", while art students are not. What I find ironic is that these hyper-masculine men end up heading towards substance abuse because of the suppression of their emotions. If artists do not suppress their emotions, but rather lay them out for the public to see, then why do they face the stereotype of being "druggies"?

Conclusion:

I have faced schema my whole life. The idea of me being someone who I am not just because of my appearance has always been a burden to me. I am not trying to draw away from the fact that due to being a straight, white male I do not face nearly as much harm from schema than others. But I still do see it. The most prominent schema in my life would be along the lines of "being a man" and fitting in "the man box". Though being a man leads to me facing far less discrimination in our society, it also leads to young men and boys being shaped into something that is not their true self.

Bibliography

Greene, Mark. "The Man Box: The Link Between Emotional Suppression and Male Violence -." *The Good Men Project*. The Good Men Project, 17 June 2016. Web. 2016.

The Mask You Live In. Dir. Jennifer Sieble Newsom. Perf. Caroline Heldman. The Representation Project, 2015. Film.

Porter, Tony. "A Call to Men." *Tony Porter: A Call to Men | TED Talk | TED.com*. Ted, Dec. 2010. Web. 2016.

Scalia, Christopher J. "Conservatives, Please Stop Trashing the Liberal Arts." *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, 27 Mar. 2015. Web. 2016.

Xie, Tiffany. "Mass Shooters Have A Gender and a Race | Political Research Associates." *Political Research Associates*. Political Research Associates, 19 June 2014. Web. 2016.