

It can be interesting to start with a quote. This is a great example.

*“Louisiana, A.K.A. LOSEiana, A.K.A. the bottom of the barrel, A.K.A. The Boot, the dirty south... This is real life... The crab in the bucket, that’s the type of world we live in today. They gone pull each other down, nobody get ahead of nobody... they gone pull each other down, your own kind.”*

A clear introduction to the topic. The reader knows what the paper will focus on.

My photo project began within the walls of Louisiana State University women’s basketball locker room. Though, as class progressed I began to learn more about the social world around me; about how this world is more than just the bubble I live in as is LSU. LSU being in the center of high crime neighborhoods and the home of not only disadvantaged youth, but disadvantaged families, there is a lot of strain outside the walls of LSU. I have chosen to compare and contrast the life within and outside of LSU, and how each path relates to crime and delinquency. On a wider scale, it could possibly be described as opportunity and strain, why do certain individuals stand where they do.



Photographed to the left in the first picture is a man I met by the lakes. He did not disclose his name, but the man did inform me he had recently been released from jail after a 10-year sentence. Looking at the image

this may not be the first conclusion you come up with, especially once hearing the lady in the photograph on the left is his wife, and the baby in the stroller is his 7-month year old son.

Neither of the pair expressed the level of education they had reached, but both told of how they have high hopes for their children (they also have a 1-year old son); however, while discussing

Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper (all names are made-up to protect privacy).

education, as well as, my current educational standing, we came across the topic of opportunity. With such a prestigious school as LSU standing where it does, one would not expect the crime and delinquency rates, as well as, gang involvement to be as high as they are (which is what I thought). After getting to know Emma's husband, I found crime and delinquency rates can have a lot to do with strain deriving from stress, unequal opportunity, and lack of role models.

Emma faced a case that is not unique at all, many see the American dream, they want to pursue the dream, but unfortunately do not have the resources required to make the dream possible. There are conformers, innovators, ritualists, and retreats, many of today's youth want to be conformists, the lack of resources and relationships deny them that path.

Emma told me that he was convicted of armed robbery, he was convicted of this many times, not because it is something that he wanted to do, but because there was no better way for him to provide for his family: "They leave you no choice to do it... they don't give you a way to reconstruct yourself in jail. No help programs, no self-help programs, no parental guidance, no job training... with me coming from a life of crime I got one strike left before I go back to jail and lose my family." Our discussion was very eye opening because I have never personally heard the voice of someone who has been in the system and seriously wants to make a turn around. Despite the poor helpless conditions within the judicial system, I wanted to see if the community were providing better opportunities for youth and if they were helping in prevention of jail time. So I go on to see what Baton Rouge is doing to prevent kids from being in this place of strain and regret.

With this first example (Emma and her husband) the author describes what they discovered about this person and her family, the author describes their interaction with Emma, and then they interpret what they found (their finding directly relates to their topic).

The author incorporates quotes to show what they found.

At the end of this first example, the author smoothly transitions into talking about their next point.

Observations about youth. The author uses a negative example (abandoned buildings) and positive (a library). Both are related back to the main topic.

Only minutes away from LSU and McKinley High School I find abandoned buildings and houses filled with graffiti of names of gangs, people, people who have passed. The photograph to the right has a sign saying “no trespassing”, yet as I drove around the streets on East Baton Rouge parish, I saw no place for children to play but one playground attached to a daycare center. In the area stood but one community center for teens at the corner of a road that connected to the interstate. This abandoned building could so easily be transformed into play areas, community centers,



or even learning centers for the local youth. LSU being the dream school of many children and teens living in the area could very easily begin the initiative, while looking to the community for help. Close by to these abandoned buildings and houses I found children running in the road and on top of a car so close to highland road (a very busy street).

Though turning down a few more streets I found a pleasant surprise, a library. In 3 years of living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, other than the library on campus, this is the first library I have come across. I was pleased to see the building was well kept and of good size. Nevertheless, on getting closer to the building, I found that the



three boys outside the establishment were actually smoking what appeared to be cigarettes, they looked no older than high school teens. It has been said that tobacco companies target low

income neighborhoods with intent to get what income they do receive. The stress and strain individuals of low income neighborhoods go through leads them not only to crime and delinquency, but also what appears to be a life of cigarette smoking to relieve the stress.

Switching to a different set of observation. The author now discusses some key observations; strategies to overcome disadvantage.

Controversially, a student-athlete at LSU, Jordan Stevens, was granted the opportunity for a free education and a direct path to playing basketball at the collegiate level. Jordan is a Georgia native who first step foot on LSU campus June 2015. Currently a junior, Jordan has travelled throughout the United States and even to Europe visiting Italy. Jordan does not come from a family of athletes, so the spot on LSU's women's basketball team was never a



guarantee for her. The position Jordan stands in is one she had to work extremely hard for, not only just on the court, but also in the classroom. While not a straight A student, nor the member of a perfect nuclear family, Jordan has faced strain and stress and one point or another in her 21 years of life. Jordan has two sisters whom she shares the same mother, but different fathers, yet that never stopped her from becoming the star athlete she is today. To avoid stress Jordan frequently converses with her mother about any stressors that may be concerning her. She built a trusting relationship with her mother enabling her to discuss anything with her mother; this relationship has been built over time and has aided in the avoidance of a life of crime. Additionally, Jordan maintains a close relationship with God, when asked what she does to prepare before a game, Jordan responded: "I pray." Although this may not be the method for all, it is for many. Therefore, a safe place someone can call their church

home is vital. Photographed on the right is a local Baptist church I have not myself attended. Not to secularize or glamorize the church and religious experience, however, somewhere I would want as a “safe place” I would hope looks in better condition than the church photographed. The church had very little parking, assuming most of the church-goers are local. The front of the church had broken paving and looks slightly run-down. One of few churches in the area, I assume it brings the local community together as a family.

Similarly, to Jordan, another LSU student who could have potentially ended up going down the wrong path is Beth Smith (pictured on the right). For the most part Beth has been an A-

B student since enrolled at LSU. Beth recently received an award for being a “Black Scholar”, one of few recognized for this award. Beth has 3 brothers but grew up as a single child on her brothers leaving to enter the military. On speaking to Beth I



found: “kids would hang outside and loiter... there were no rules and a lot of drugs.” In Lafayette, Louisiana, Beth could have easily have chosen not to attend college, but instead pursue a childhood in delinquency or become an exotic dancer, as did some of her peers. Beth’s father also spent time behind bars, during this Beth could have very easily strayed away. Without a male figure in the house to keep her disciplined Beth could have lost her way. With family members involved in criminal activity, what kept Beth away from that life

It is good that the author adds another example, especially since this is someone who uses different strategies.

[Photo redacted]

was her dance school and her field events within her high school. Research has shown the more active youths are and the more involvement they have whether in their school community or local community, the more relationship can be built. Strong, trusting relationships play a large role in the lives of youth. The reason why many youths join gangs are for a “sense of belonging”, or role models and a brotherhood.

Gangs in Baton Rouge are very prominent, especially with the faces of local rappers such as, NBA Youngboy, Webbie, and Boosie Badazz all over them. Kids idolize these rappers for what they are doing and the money they are earning and they want the same. The kids see they are going through the same strain to achieve what they want so feel they have to go through the same means to get it. Although many gangs do emphasize the idea of brotherhood, once a “turf” is marked that becomes their home, any trespassers then become rivals.



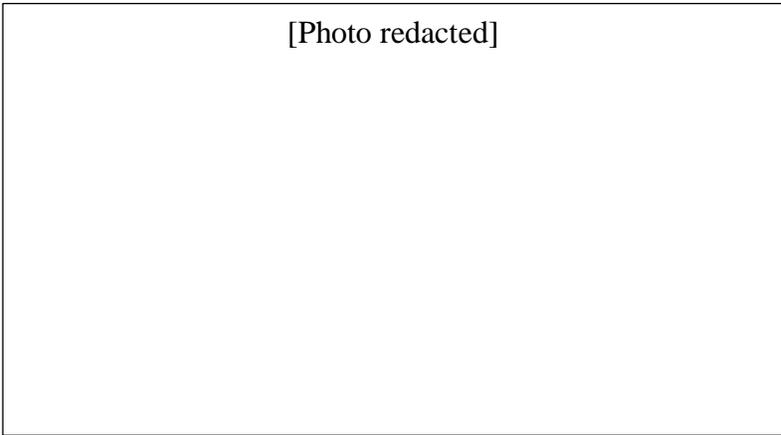
Here the author switches to a different set of observations and begins to analyze what they have found as a whole (in the next paragraph they bring up Emma from the beginning of the paper).

The gang rivalry and gang wars very often result in death, then you find graffiti like this saying “R.I.P” labelled with names of members who were shot and killed. Emma’s husband described how bad it can get: “People selling drugs to their mom’s, their auntie’s, sleeping with family members for money.” There clearly becomes a level of desperation, people have to kill and gain things by illegal means when not provided with a moral method of reaching a dream. I myself have never had to steal, or kill, even in desperate times.



Author reflecting on their own place in this story and relates that to the other people they talked to.

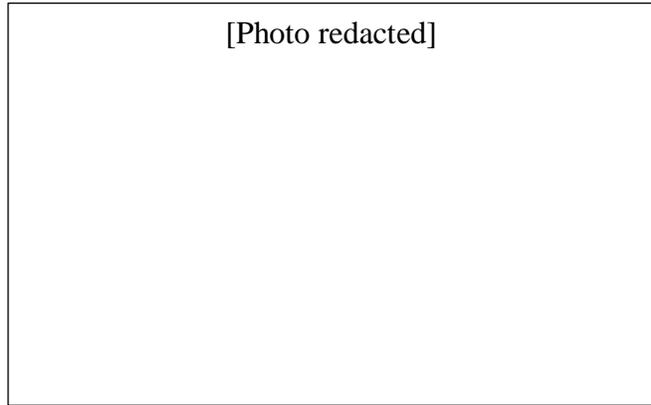
During my college years I have found friends I can call family and have built trust with people who not too long ago were mere strangers. People who encourage me to push myself and



not result to immoral means of reaching my dream. I have found people I can call positive role models. While talking to Jordan and Beth, they also have developed close relationships with people whom they would trust with their lives. Photographed above is Jordan Stevens and Sarah Jones. Last summer Sarah got married; this past month Sarah was drafted into the WNBA to play professional basketball. Sarah has never been involved in any criminal/illegal activity, never been suspended or excluded from school, and she has graduated from both high school and college. Talking to Sarah she maintains close relationships with those who understand what she wants out of her life and who will be there to help her succeed. Jordan also shared these beliefs.

Jordan: “Freshmen year was bad... I would party, drink, alla that. Sarah kept me in my bible, I wake up and read it every morning then read it very night before I go to sleep. I talk to God when I need help and look to Sarah for guidance.” Jordan is proof that even one positive role model can keep you on track and away from crime.

Jordan expressed to me how her team also help carry her toward her dream: “don’t think y’all know that’s the reason I’m going so hard, it’s for y’all”. Everyone struggles because she even said, “sometimes I feel like I’m by myself... so now I know ya’ll right there with me makes me wanna go harder...”



*Jordan and some of her teammates (family)*

Jordan made crime no option for her, as did Sarah and Beth. They made it a point to show that they are earning what they are getting without being a statistic. As for Emma’s husband he began as a statistic. Emma actually shared with me that she doesn’t want her sons to go down that road, she is doing what she can to raise him right and get him into a good, well-educated school; because parents do not have control forever, once in the school system, you never know who your child might meet and what they might end up doing. The quote used at the beginning was a direct quote from Emma’s husband: *“Louisiana, A.K.A. LOSEiana, A.K.A. the bottom of the barrel, A.K.A. The Boot, the dirty south... This is real life... The crab in the bucket, that’s the type of world we live in today. They gone pull each other down, nobody get ahead of nobody... they gone pull each other down, your own kind.”* The world is not always going to be for you, the government is not for you, schools are not always for you; therefore, if given the opportunity, it is to be used (like Jordan, free education). If caught in strain and surrounded by stressors, find

The author makes a strong, conclusive statement, which is evidenced by everything they found.

good people and build strong relationships, find a motivation and never forget why you do what you do. The government is never on your side, there are stereotypes and judgements about who can and cannot “make it”, there are varied definitions of success. Although my sample was small, the stories apply for many. Not everyone has the same story and not everyone has the same dream or motivation, but not everybody has to choose a life or crime because at one point or another everybody is given a chance. Crime is going to be everywhere, the type of crime varies, but crime itself is nationwide. To become involved in crime is a choice, just a Emma’s husband decided to end his criminal career. Giving in to the stress does not have to be a choice, but fighting back and looking for a better way out can be.

Overall this is a very good paper. The author provides detail and insightful analysis. The paper does not end abruptly; the author explicitly connects all their observations through analysis and make an overarching statement about their topic.

Given the topic stated in the introduction, the paper could be improved with more firsthand data from disadvantaged youth.