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# Truth and Lives: Beneath Our Skin

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TRUTH AND LIVES: BENEATH OUR SKIN

A Master's Project Presented

by

Jeanette Miller

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Science  
Specializing in Natural Resources with a Concentration in Leadership for Sustainability

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Project Committee:

Matthew Kolan, Ph.D., Advisor

Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees

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## Abstract

“Art can be fundamental to our collective understanding of who we are, what we believe, and how we relate to each other and our surroundings. Artists can weave the cultural fabric necessary for a sustainable, vibrant society.” (Surdna Foundation, 2016).

With this in mind, I’ve sought to create a project aimed at generating insight, compassion and critical dialogue around the common threads of body diversity. Through a practice of relationship building with individuals from diverse and marginalized intersections of society, I’ve begun adapting stories, shared by participants, about how they live and thrive (or not) in their bodies. Adaptations are in both visual art format (2D and 3D) and digital catching of the creative process. The stories are then released in video format on the project website [www.beneathourskin.org](http://www.beneathourskin.org). The catch and release format of this process is aimed at broadening audience impact to create change in how culturally we view and treat our own bodies and the bodies of others. I’ve also engaged in a reflective process around personal impact and assessment with participants to gauge impact and change over time. My intent is to continue this work, growing it to a sustainable program with the potential to impact change for participants within themselves, their relationships and their community. Through participation, contribution and reflections upon seeing their own stories through a new publicly shared lens participants will experience personal change, while their stories help lift perceptions of body diversity into a new light exposing where ongoing societal change is needed.

## Truth and Lives: Beneath Our Skin

Bodies perceived as “different” or “wrong” in our society get treated differently. Many individuals who fall within this “different” paradigm experience discrimination in their workplace, in health care, in education, and wherever else they dare to live their lives in such a body. Bodies that are deemed as “right,” most often white, thin and able bodies, are privileged in a society that puts high value on the mythical construct of beauty (Wolf, 1991). “We blame our bodies for the ways in which bias is baked into the entirety of our society” (Taylor, 2017). The “othering” of bodies outside those deemed as acceptable in our society impacts ALL people, regardless of size, shape, gender, sexuality, race, and dis/ability. The preferencing of any one body type over another creates an imbalance of power and privilege that can be impossible to overcome and can set standards that are impossible to meet.

Media and popular culture contribute in major ways through written and visual communication to this belief that there is only one right way to have a body. Whereas, if we take lessons from the natural world, we can see that biodiversity is necessary for sustaining life (McShea & Brandon, 2010). Why then are we so challenged by the concept that diversity in how the biological makeup of our human bodies manifests (body diversity) is also necessary for sustaining life on our planet (Zoltan, 2016)? And how might we arrive at a place together where ALL bodies are acknowledged as necessary for contributing to our sustained existence?

With these questions in mind, I’ve created a project aimed at generating insight, compassion and critical dialogue around the common threads connecting how we move through the world in our bodies. Through a practice of relationship building with individuals from diverse and marginalized intersections of society, I’ve begun catching, adapting through visual

art and digital story sharing, and releasing stories shared by participants about how they live and thrive (or not) in their bodies.

### **Strategies**

The Surdna Foundation (2016) suggests,

Art can be fundamental to our collective understanding of who we are, what we believe, and how we relate to each other and our surroundings. Artists can weave the cultural fabric necessary for a sustainable, vibrant society. The development and sharing of artists' work contributes to the strengthening of communities—culturally, socially, and economically.

Art can impact change. With this in mind, it was the goal of this project to develop a pilot plan for creating a public platform to explore the experiences of others through the sharing of stories as a contribution to the building conversations around body image/positivity and body diversity in media and popular culture (Averill, 2017; Petronzio, 2015).

To accomplish this, I began this project with these questions in mind:

- How might we get to know the stories and experiences of others?
- What role does relationship building play in the ability to catch these stories and experiences without creating a situation where oppressed and marginalized individuals are doing the emotional labor for explaining their oppression?
- What role can creativity play in the adaptation and sharing of these stories that may provide the conditions for deeper listening and a fuller presence, deepening our ability to know?
- How does being in relationship with someone different than ourselves help us see ourselves more clearly?

- How might these stories be utilized to participate, intervene and engage in concrete ways with others to create conditions for all life to flourish?

Maya Angelou once said, “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you” (n.d.). In this project, individuals share their stories about how they live and thrive (or not) in their bodies. The stories are then adapted in both visual art format (2D – drawings, paintings and 3D – sculpture, found art collage, dioramas, etc.) and digital stories; then shared on the project website and social media to reach a broad audience with the intention of impacting potential change in how culturally we view and treat our own bodies and the bodies of others. Long term, the project has the potential to impact change for participants within themselves, their relationships and their community. Through participation, contribution and reflections upon seeing their own stories through a new publicly shared lens participants will experience personal change, while their stories help lift perceptions of body diversity into a new light exposing where ongoing societal change is needed to contribute to our sustained existence.

The project also includes a long term component of seeking funding that will allow for the development and growth of the project into a sustainable program providing opportunities for education, personal growth and contributions to community development.

It is my hope that this creative work will challenge the conventional representations of the human body and expose what we need as humans to thrive as a whole, while living and thriving as individuals in our own bodies. Challenging these conventions can create an entry point for change in the larger conversation of sustaining life on our planet.

## Results

### Participants

A call for participants (see Appendix A) was sent out and shared via social media and email through activist groups, academic, and social communities. A handful of personal inquiries (phone and in person conversations) to share the call for participants and encourage individuals to participate also occurred. The call for participants was also included on the project website (see Appendix B for link).

Seventeen individuals completed the participant interest form (see Appendix C) and I selected initial participants who self-identified as follows:

#### Gender.

7	women
1	male
1	Transgender male
1	Transgender woman

#### Sexuality.

6	heterosexual/"straight"/cis
1	pansexual
2	queer

#### Body Shape/Size.

5	"thick"/"big"/"rubenesque"/"fat"
2	"fit"/"average"
1	"petite"

**Race.**

4	White/Caucasian
1	Mixed, Pakistani, Turkish
2	African American
1	Black
1	Filipina

**Dis/Ability.** Able, privileged, diabetic.

**Other Ways They Identify.** Mother, daughter, wife, friend, advocate, bicultural, average, middle of the road, athletic, tall, milk chocolate, short, small framed, teacher, daughter, Christian, sister, human.

**Relationship Building and Story Catching**

At this time, I have built and am sustaining relationships with eight active participants. In most cases these relationships have been built through regular phone calls, text, and email. The close proximity of one individual has allowed for some in person time as well. These relationships have yielded fifty-plus hours of recorded audio of shared stories about how these individuals navigate the world in their bodies and their very personal experiences with body image issues, racism, sexism, body shaming, disability shaming and more. Not all conversations are recorded to allow for time to just get to know each other and become more comfortable with each other. Most individuals have had both positive and negative experiences and stories to share. As I've moved into the creative phase of this project, I've maintained communication with participants, sought feedback on their experience with the project and working with me to date, and have continued to work towards building relationship and trust.

## **Creative Phase**

The creative phase of this project which includes the visioning and creation of 2D or 3D art work and the production and editing of video and audio to create a three to four minute digital story, has taken significantly more time than I anticipated when setting out on this project. To date, I have completed two full story catch and releases (see Appendix B for links). Both have been shared first with the relevant participant and then on social media and on the project website. Because the creative process relies on inspiration and must allow for a flexibility of time for working on projects, gathering supplies, etc. there is no means for predicting the amount of time any one piece will take to complete. As an artist, I work from creative impulse. This process includes, but is not limited to:

- being mindful of and tracking thoughts and creative impulses that arise at times when I'm not able to immediately act on them;
- a consistent practice of sketching and journaling to track thoughts and ideas;
- keeping lists and saving concepts and ideas that spark creativity when I see them (Pinterest, books, etc.);
- immersing myself into the works of others that inspire, the work of unknowns (visiting galleries, street art, etc.) and reading or listening to audiobooks that are autobiographical, feel authentic, and challenge me to dive deeper into how stories are told and shared (see Appendix D);
- and, in all honesty, there is a lot of staring at the ceiling during this process.

On average each piece has taken two to four months (approx. eight to ten hours a week) to envision and complete. Often multiple projects are simultaneously in various stages of production.

## **Evaluation/Assessment**

Assessment of this project has been a critical aspect in providing valuable feedback that has moved the project forward. It's also served as a useful tool for gauging potential impact. Primary assessment has consisted of a participatory monitoring and evaluation process based on the most significant change (MSC) technique (Davies, 2005). MSC is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation that involves multiple stakeholders and occurs throughout the program cycle to provide information for managing a program. It provides qualitative data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the project as a whole. The assessment yielded feedback which provided for expanding the capacity for growth of the original project proposal concept, fostering a shared vision, and gave opportunity to celebrate successes.

Repeat monitoring and evaluation is and will be ongoing a critical aspect of this project to assess true impact over time. Checking back in with participants and other stakeholders ongoing will help continue to inform and build the capacity of the project to impact change. There are a number of immeasurables in this project: how does one measure the depth and value of relationships and sharing? Or measure the perceptions that have changed about one's self and/or others? These are anecdotal (qualitative) (see Appendix E) and critically important to the success of this project.

Assessment has occurred in the following ways:

- Participant Assessment Questionnaires (see Appendix F):

Assessment #1 - Post Story Sharing

Assessment #2 - First Response to Digital Story

- 2 Formative Assessment Meetings with Committee (see Appendix G)

- Presentation at Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association National Conference April 2017 (see Appendix H)
- Conversations with mentors, anchors, cohort members and others

Initially, this project was challenged by the lack of people of color willing to participate which had me asking: how do I center the marginalized voices of people of color, if no one will participate and what would I need to do to encourage participation? One individual who I'd asked to share the call for participants amongst his contacts, came back to me with the concern, "Only flag for me is the title --- what is the experience of a black man (specifically) whose body is often the source of disdain and historically of annihilation because of his skin?"

This led to further conversations, one specifically with a woman of color who shared how in her community, individuals are unlikely to do something of this nature when asked by a white person because of hundreds of years of having their own stories stolen, twisted and used against them. She suggested that given her trust in me based on our relationship through other social justice work and her understanding of the project, that she would send out the call for participants and that she'd include that she herself was participating and encouraged others to do so. She said that in most cases, people of color were going to have to see how someone else's story was handled before being willing to share their own. This approach yielded interest from a handful of individuals, but no follow through in making the necessary connections to begin building relationship around this project. For me and the project, I knew this would mean an even stronger focus on building relationship and trust throughout the process with participants in these marginalized communities and not rushing any part of that simply to yield a product. In the second formative assessment with my committee, this approach was celebrated and I was encouraged to continue to prioritize building relationships.

To date, this project has shown that through sharing their story, participants have become more aware of how they move in and talk about their own bodies and the impact it has on them and others. One participant shared, “I’m more aware of how I celebrate my body and all its accomplishments. I am a work in progress as I continue to unlearn the many years of bad feelings and judgments about certain parts of my body.” Another said,

I was able to relate the story of my own bullying and the name I was called without hesitation (to my 5th grade class). In the past, I have shared that story, but always felt a sense of shame or that I deserved to be called names.

Additionally, a participant shared,

Because I don't talk or think much about some of the things we talked about, they've stayed with me since our conversation. I've referenced the conversation (in my head) in day-to-day activities and conversations. This has been the case, especially around the idea of how one's presence is "accepted" or not as a tall, plus-sized woman who's into fashion. I've noted some differences from time to time in how people engage with me, when I'm dressed down or not.

My committee has provided feedback throughout during formative assessments which helped to fine tune project direction. One significant element encouraged by the committee was the importance of attuning to my own story throughout this process, this metacognitive approach has yielded a deeper insight into the potential impact this work may have on others as the process of hearing and adapting these stories has had significant influence in my own connections to my body and to others over the course of the past year.

This project was designed to continue well beyond the boundaries of completing the required elements for the Master's project and degree work. Assessing its impact will be ongoing.

### **Next Steps**

Like the art of Jason deCaires Taylor and several emerging artists<sup>1</sup>, there is a growing movement of art and artists, "conceptually-based," aimed at raising "awareness of the broad health of the environment or highlight specific concerns" (Taylor, n.d.). The concern raised through this project focuses on who and how we value the precious resource of human life in its various forms. This project will continue to raise awareness of how individuals move and thrive (or not) in their bodies and encourage conversation around the contribution of body diversity to sustaining life.

Moving forward, I will continue to refine my practices and approach in story catching and relationship building. Also, attaining funding sources to support and grow this work will be crucial. The next six to eight months is a window in which many grant cycles reopen and proposals will need to be submitted. Once the online library of digital stories contains a selection of stories from diverse participants there will be a need to further publicize the project. I recommend that this be done through press release to outlets that tend to bring subject matters like this to a greater audience, such as: Refinery29, Jezebel, Buzzfeed, and Huffington Post.

I also plan to continue seeking mentorship on the artistic process from Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees, committee member, and seek feedback from participants, community members, and others.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Rachel Herrick's [Museum for Obeast Conservation Studies](#); Trans teen artist [Jasper Berhand](#); and [Fatter IRL: a fat art show](#).

## Project Synthesis

One area I have wrestled with since embarking on this coursework is connecting my experience and passion in body politics and body justice work to my growing knowledge and deeper understanding of the natural world. While I believe that our human bodies are connected and integral to the workings of nature, I also know that we as humans have done significant damage to this planet and its viability to sustain itself. We are constantly interrupting systems in return for convenience and through that, we have invoked a rapid decline of the planet we inhabit. Many argue that it is the sheer biomass of humanity that has caused significant damage to this planet, which may indeed contradict my theories about body diversity as biodiversity. To lead in the Anthropocene, we must “use human ingenuity to set things up” to allow for planetary healing, renewal and sustainability (“Welcome to the Anthropocene,” para. 9). This project utilizes the concepts of interdependence, self-organization and differentiation to establish a way of addressing how we as humans might contribute to the healing of our planet through both acceptance of self and others, through this lens of body diversity. What I’ve learned throughout the MSLS coursework is that we have much to learn from natural systems and applying those lessons to the renewal of our planet. First and foremost, this healing requires us to not only stand in the gap between what is and what we will be, it requires us to take action, to catalyze change and to be leaders for a better world. We can’t get there by ignoring, segregating, genocide, or assimilation. Plants and animals evolve, adapt, change and work together in systems to survive over time. Variation and difference is required for sustainability. Humanity cannot be any different in this approach. We must work together, learning to accept variation and difference in order to sustain life. This project strives to build an understanding of how our differences are

actually strengths that can create the connections between us that provide for standing in the gap and bringing about great change.

Setting out on this project, I wanted it to be a collaboration between the story sharer, the story itself and me as the artist. I intended for the connections with both participants and those who view the final product to be relationships of mutual learning and reciprocity and to challenge the expertocracy. Knowing that we are all individually the experts of our own bodies and having an understanding of how others live and thrive (or not) in their bodies can contribute to our connected understanding of the role of body diversity in sustaining life. Learning about the stories of others, both our similarities and our differences, can help make sense of one's own story and our perceptions of others. O'Toole and Kropf note (2012), "People differ in how they perceive, learn, and make sense of their environments" (p. 46). Perceptions occur in patterns helping to develop integrity over time. "Recognizing and working with these differences allows the value of contrasting perspectives to emerge for the benefit of the individual, relationships with another, and with the group" (O'Toole and Kopf, 2012, p. 46).

Throughout the experience of the MSLS coursework, I have worked to strongly ground my leadership practice in the core practices of the program. "Truth and lives: beneath our skin" feels like a manifestation of those core practices. One of the core promises I made to myself throughout MSLS course work was to integrate the practice of creativity, improvisation, and play with conscious communication into my learning. This opened the door for the potential concepts that have become the base of this project. Deep listening has become a critical aspect in my developing leadership practice and is essential to this project. Brene Brown says, "Rarely does a response make something better, what makes something better is connection" (2013). Deep listening helps me to make the connection between project participants and the production of the

adapted story. The creative impulse is not generated from the voice recording of the story, but by the emotions of the story sharer and my capacity to connect to their story through empathy. “In order to connect with you, I have to connect with something inside myself that knows that feeling” (Brown, 2013). It is this empathy that drives the creative impulse and manifests the creativity for the story concept and video production. And inevitably, this sense of empathy will connect the viewer as well.

Perhaps the most crucial and also most challenging aspect of this project, is relationship building. With the desire to prioritize the stories of those most marginalized in our society by gender, race, sexuality, and ability came the need to recruit participants within these intersections that would be willing to share their personal stories. This, I knew, would require relationship building. The level and degree to which I would need to build those relationships in order to reduce the amount of emotional labor being done by, in particular, people of color, and to build enough trust and solidarity with individuals was more than I had initially anticipated. Slowing down, adapting and learning to meet the needs of individuals where they and myself are at, became a crucial part of this process and has contributed to the ongoing development of my leadership practice. Being in solidarity with individuals who are different from myself, who have different experiences, stories, and histories that have informed their culture and ways of working and sharing with others is a critical aspect of leadership.

I’m learning that we are all, in some way, healing from something - physical, relational, colonialism/settler colonialism, cultural appropriation, discrimination, racism, sexism, etc. (the list is infinite). Dori Midnight suggests (2012) that what we need is to “transform - the privatization of healing, the illusion that our struggles are also private and separate” (Midnight Apothecary, para. 4). Being able to lead while caring for self and others at the same time,

requires this type of transformation. We must be vulnerable. We must open ourselves and our stories up to others in ways that will both help to inform and to heal, but we also need to be allowed safe ways and spaces for doing this. Many who live without the privileges so many others of us take for granted are hesitant to open up their world to outsiders. Also, the trauma and in most cases retraumatization that occurs when marginalized individuals are expected to do emotional labor in order to educate those who are less marginalized creates greater and longer lasting challenges and divides instead of the sought after connection, understanding and healing. I believe that this project provides an opportunity for individuals in marginalized communities and bodies to share their stories, to be vulnerable, without putting their physical personhood at risk and, as some have chosen to do, without revealing their identity, while still sharing the identities with which they align and connect with personally.

I've also learned a lot about self-care throughout the work of this project. The work of this project requires vulnerability not only from participants, but from me. I must remain open and welcoming to others, accept difference and incommensurability without question and share parts of myself and my own story that I am not accustomed to sharing. At times, this practice of vulnerability has left me raw and struggling to move forward. Other times it has served as inspiration for additional creativity and plans for ongoing projects connected to my own journey. I've utilized similar processes for working through some of these challenging moments with my own developing story as I did when working with the stories of others. I have conceptualized creative works, journaled, and cried. I've cried a lot. In ways that have been clarifying and healing. I've found that working with the stories of others can at times feel like I am sitting in front of a mirror for hours and hours with the inability to *not* consider all the histories (good and

bad) and the implications of those histories upon the stories of these participants and upon humanity as a whole.

It sounds incredulous as I include this experience here, as if I am centering myself in some way. Learning how to not center myself in this project has been a process in and of itself. As an artist who gets positive feedback about the digital story and the art pieces themselves, I am quick to ask follow up questions about the impact of the story. What ways are viewers connecting with the story and the storyteller? I like to ask viewers, “What would your story look like?” The product of this project is intended to be the vehicle as a means of arriving at this critical inquiry about how we treat our bodies and equally as important, the bodies of others. How do those actions, this way in which we interact with others around the identities that make up the perception of our bodies, create conditions for mutual thriving instead of trauma and destruction?

Learning edges for me still exist around multiplicity, tension, and incommensurability. This entire project is about relational leadership. It wouldn't exist without the participation of others and so as the individual who moves this project forward, I've needed to remain open to the many different ways in which various individuals and communities arrive at the table and manifest their participation in the project. I am also very aware of the damage that could be done to existing or potential relationships and how this project could turn others who might benefit from the experience or might have greater contributions away. How I show up, how I lead with integrity and how I am accountable to both myself and others is critical to the success of this project and inevitably to my overall leadership practice. I strive to maintain that integrity by working to check my privilege, doing as much learning about “difference” and “other” as possible on my own from reliable sources, by not asking participants to do the emotional labor of

having to explain cultural differences and ways in which their cultures have been co-opted, appropriated, and made to be invisible. This provides the space for participants to be their full selves, as much as they want to be while sharing their story(s) with me. I am however then still accountable for adapting those stories with the same integrity, weaving in the knowledge and understanding of difference and being especially diligent about not appropriating one's culture in order to adapt one's story. This is challenging work as one might expect. I love every minute of it, regardless of how tired, sad, or indignant (at times) I may grow. This work is worth doing.

Dori Midnight (2012) writes, "In my dream, our bodies are part of our collective body and our collective body is not just us, but our whole planet, our earth body" (Midnight Apothecary, para. 7). I too have dreams of bodies, my own and others. Moving in them freely, without stigma and trauma. Healing ourselves, others and the planet. I also have dreams about ways in which we can get there, they often begin with "so, tell me your story...."

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## Appendix A

### Call for Participants (social media)

What stories do you know about your body? What are the stories you tell about your body? What stories do others tell about your body?

I'm looking for individuals interested in sharing true story experiences about their bodies and how they move through life in them.

Stories will be voice recorded and adapted using a variety of visual art mediums (painting, sculpture, found object, 2D and 3D, etc.) as part of a pilot project for my graduate school studies. The goal is to launch a long term creative project providing for the catching, adaptation and release of stories in visual format of how individuals across all intersections live, thrive (or not) and move through the world in their bodies in a way that has the potential for unexpected impact and change around perceptions of differing body types and body oppression.

People of all body types, shape, size, gender, race, sexuality, dis/ability are welcomed and encouraged to participate.

Priority will be given to people of color, gender queer, cisgender male and otherly abled individuals.

As project grows, more participants will be included to broaden the intersectionality of the work. If you are interested, please submit your information to be placed on the waitlist.

Time Requirement: 2 to 3 hour long conversations via skype, google hangout or other between now and mid-December.

Follow-Up: Provide feedback and insight based on the impact of your participation within the project and the impact of and your reaction to experiencing the adaptation of your story.

Participants must be willing to sign a release permitting use of their voice and visual likeness online and in other formats as part of sharing the project with a wide audience. Name use/identification will be optional.

See project proposal for overall scope of project.  
Submit a [Participant Interest Form](#).

For questions: Direct message or email me at [Jeanette.Miller@uvm.edu](mailto:Jeanette.Miller@uvm.edu)

**Personal Invitation to Participate**  
(when individuals were referred to me)

I'm writing to personally ask you to consider participating in my Master's research project, "Truth and lives: beneath our skin."

Over the past year, I've been studying in University of Vermont's Leadership for Sustainability program with others committed to deepening our capacity to catalyze change and transcend boundaries. I've been making connections between these studies based in natural systems and the examination of power and privilege with my previous work and activism in the body politics/size acceptance arena. Specifically, I've been looking at how differently we hold the perception of biodiversity versus body diversity--accepting biodiversity as necessary for sustaining life, while condemning body diversity, explicitly individuals outside of thin, white, able bodied, as different or wrong and something that must be changed or cast out. And perhaps more importantly, why we have such a difficult time talking about it.

With this in mind, I'm creating a visual art and digital story-sharing project that lifts up the voices of marginalized individuals and how they live and thrive (or not) in their bodies to expose where change is needed for a paradigm shift that will allow for the acceptance of diversity in all bodies and strengthen our connections as human beings.

I'd like to invite you to participate in this project by sharing the story of your body with me. Your participation would include a series of voice recorded conversations with me where we talk about the stories you feel most comfortable sharing. These stories may include stories we tell ourselves about our bodies, the stories others tell us about our bodies and the stories we know to be true about our bodies. I'll use portions of these recordings to create a visual art adaptation (2D – drawings, paintings and 3D – sculpture, found art collage, dioramas, etc.) of your story to share on the project website, social media, and other platforms.

I believe your voice and story can be critical to changing perceptions of body diversity and the inclusion of difference, encouraging others to open up and become involved in a broader conversation about this important issue. I hope you'll consider participating.

If you'd like to read more about this project, you'll find the full project overview as well as examples of some story-based visual art I've created on the website [Truth and lives: beneath our skin](http://beneathourskin.weebly.com/). <http://beneathourskin.weebly.com/>

If you are interested in participating, please complete the **Interest Form** linked on the [Call for Participants](#) site. If possible, it would be great to know by Friday, October 21st if you are interested.

Should you have further questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this and I would be honored if you would accept this invitation to participate in this project.

Yours in commitment to advocacy,  
Jeanette Miller

## **Appendix B**

### **Relevant Links**

Project Website <http://www.beneathourskin.org/>

#### Digital Stories

Shelly's Story <https://youtu.be/Uz-lZOWtx78>

Kim's Story <https://youtu.be/X5lEkc1sR9k>

## Appendix C

### Participant Interest Form

"Truth and lives: beneath our skin" is a pilot project I am doing as part of my graduate studies program.

The impetus for this project is to provide a different means for sharing the stories of how individuals live and thrive (or not) in their diverse bodies. The goal of this approach is to give opportunity for the voices that may not currently be "heard" to be shared with a wide audience in a format that is aimed at providing a point of connection for impacting change.

Over the course of the next year, I want to connect with individuals living in marginalized bodies and build relationships that allow for the sharing of stories of how they live and thrive (or not) in their bodies. With participant's permission, I plan to record their stories for use in digital storytelling and visual art adaptation (2D – drawings, paintings and 3D – sculpture, found art collage, dioramas, etc), which will be shared with a broad audience. These stories may include the stories we tell ourselves about our bodies, the stories others tell us about our bodies and the stories we know about our bodies. The goal of this catch and release process is to provide for individual voices to share their stories in a way that exposes where change is needed for a paradigm shift that will allow for the acceptance of diversity in all bodies and strengthen our connections as human beings.

For questions or more information, email Jeanette at [beneathourskin@gmail.com](mailto:beneathourskin@gmail.com)

\* Required

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People of all body types, shape, size, gender, race, sexuality, dis/ability are welcomed and encouraged to participate. Priority will be given to people of color, gender queer, cisgender male and otherly abled individuals. As project grows, more participants will be included to broaden the intersectionality of the work. If you are interested, please submit your information to be placed on the waitlist.

**1. Your Name: \***

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**2. Email Address: \***

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**3. Preferred Pronoun:**

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## Identity

Please share the ways in which you identify yourself.

### 4. Race

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### 5. Gender

### 6. Sexuality

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### 7. Body Shape

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### 8. Body Size

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### 9. Dis/Ability

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### 10. Other ways you identify:

Ways you identify that I haven't considered in the above list.

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## Other Details

**11. Are you willing to sign a release permitting use of your voice and visual likeness online and in other formats as part of sharing the project with a wide audience. Name use/identification will be optional.**

**12. What is the best time of day for us to talk?** *Mark only one oval.*

- 8 AM to 12 PM
- 12 PM to 5 PM
- 5 PM to 9 PM
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. What time zone are you in?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- PST
- EST
- CST
- MST
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

THANK  
YOU

## Appendix D

### Creative Immersion/Inspiration

- Bell, W. Kamau. (2017). *The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell: Tales of a 6'4"*, African American, Heterosexual, Cisgender, Left-Leaning, Asthmatic, Black and Proud Blerd, Mama's Boy, Dad, and Stand-Up Comedian. New York: Penguin, Random House.
- Gay, Roxane. (2017). *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*. New York: HarperCollins
- Irby, Samantha. (2017). *We Are Never Meeting in Real Life: Essays*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Lawson, Jenny. (2015). *Furiously Happy: A Funny Book About Horrible Things*. New York: Flat Iron Books.
- Levy, Ariel. (2017). *The Rules Do Not Apply: A Memoir*. New York: Random House.
- Lowe, Rob. (2014). *Love Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Mock, Janet. (2017). *Surpassing Certainty: What My Twenties Taught Me*. New York: Atria Books.
- Robinson, Phoebe. (2016). *You Can't Touch My Hair: And Other Things I Still Have to Explain*. New York: Penguin, Random House.
- Sidibe, Gabourey. (2017). *This Is Just My Face: Try Not to Stare*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.
- West, Lindy. (2016). *Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman*. New York: Hachette Books.

## Appendix E

### Anecdotal Feedback

#### Assessment #1

Participant	Since sharing a story of your body, what, if any has been the most significant change that took place for you as a participant in this project at this point?	Is there anything else you'd like me to know?
1	Better body awareness and trying to be kinder and gentler on myself regarding my own perception of my body. I am a work in progress as I continue to unlearn the many years of bad feelings and judgments about certain parts of my body. Also, being more aware of how I celebrate my body and all its accomplishments.	I'm always learning something new in Jeanette's presence. I'm excited to see how this project of hers will positively impact others.
2	In a recent class meeting with my 5th grade class, I was able to relate the story of my own bullying and the name I was called without hesitation. In the past, I have shared that story, but always felt a sense of shame or that I deserved to be called names. During this class meeting I was able to share it without any sense of personal shame and what a relief that was!	I'm eager to see the artwork that my story inspired.
3	No change at this point. I'm guessing I would feel different once I know that people relate to my story.	Nothing that i can think of
4	My sister has been experiencing massive (unintentional) weight loss. Hearing her obsessing over calories and carbs (she has a medical condition) has been upsetting to me. I find myself wanting to eat more chocolate to prove to myself I'm not triggered. Sigh.	Nope!
5	Because I don't talk or think much about some of the things we talk about, they've stayed with me since our conversation. I've referenced the conversation (in my head) in day-to-day activities and conversations. This has been the case, especially around the idea of how one presents and is "accepted" or not as a tall, plus-sized woman who's into fashion. I've noted some differences from time to time in how people engage with me, when I'm dressed down or not.	No.

**Assessment #2**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Now that you've had a chance to view the visual interpretation and digital story of the story you shared, what were your initial thoughts/responses?</b>	<b>How are you feeling about your story being made public on the Beneathourskin.org website and social media?</b>	<b>What (if any) impact do you think your story may have on others?</b>	<b>Since sharing this story of your body, what, if any has been the most significant change that has taken place for you as a participant in this project up to this point?</b>	<b>Is there anything else you'd like me to know?</b>
2	<p>In a nutshell: blown away. While I have believed I had processed and gone beyond the bullying I suffered, seeing the video and the art my story inspired became a sort of resolution for me. The incident now feels finished. "Pregnant pig" was put in the garbage where it belongs. I don't return to it because it has been taken out with the rest of the refuse. The feeling is one of completeness and it is marvelous.</p>	<p>I feel hopeful. I'm hopeful the story, the video, and the art spark both understanding and response. Bullying, for many, is a universal experience. Ninety percent of the students in my 5th grade class claim to have been bullied. And 40% of those feel that the bullying has been detrimental to their esteem and worth. My classroom is not atypical; the percentages are on average with national studies. If my story helps someone feel empowered to not accept the messages of the bullies, then it will be a benefit. The story and the artwork have a power and life of their own now that Jeanette has released them. I sincerely hope that power helps others hopefully as profoundly as it helped me.</p>	See above.	<p>When I first told the story for this project, I was taken back to that little 8 year old. She felt abandoned and hurt. She felt shame and alone. To tell the story - one of the few times I have told it - took me to a place where my esteem was taking another pummeling. That's the power that bullies have over us. Their words are not just short term discomfort, but long term harm. Even though it's been over 40 years since the bullying occurred, I was reliving the feelings after I told my story. I thought I had moved beyond a long time ago, but sharing it brought it all back. It took seeing the artwork and the video to help me to exercise that particular demon. As I mentioned earlier "Pregnant pig" is in the trash and I'm not prone to retrieving items from the trash.</p>	<p>I am so grateful that Jeanette has created this method of helping people and creating universal empathy. I look forward to hearing and watching the stories of others as she creates and records.</p>
1	<p>I loved it! Very tastefully and respectfully caught and portrayed my story.</p>	Please proceed.	<p>Finding the positive in the situation. Smile.</p>	<p>Happy to share in hopes that someone else may find their smile thru their (perceived) flaws.</p>	<p>That Jeanette is an amazingly talented and gentle vessel for these stories.</p>

## Appendix F

### Participant Assessment Questionnaires

# Truth and lives: beneath our skin

\* Required

## Assessment #1

Throughout this process, I will be assessing impact of the project by asking stakeholders/participants and others about potential moments of significant change based on their/your connection to this project.

Please take a few minutes to answer the below question as it applies to your participation up to this point.

- 1. Since sharing a story of your body, what, if any has been the most significant change that took place for you as a participant in this project at this point? \***

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- 2. Is there anything else you'd like me to know?**

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- 3. Date**

*Example: December 15, 2012*

- 4. Name: \***

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## Truth and lives: beneath our skin

Thank you for giving me the gift of your story and allowing me to share it with others. I'd really appreciate your time to complete the below assessment that will be used as part of my Master's Project.

\* Required

### Assessment #2: First Response

Throughout this process, I will be assessing impact of the project by asking stakeholders/participants and others about potential moments of significant change based on their/your connection to this project. Please take a few minutes to answer the below question as it applies to your participation up to this point.

**1. Now that you've had a chance to view the visual interpretation and digital story of the story you shared, what were your initial thoughts/responses? \***

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**2. How are you feeling about your story being made public on the Beneathourskin.org website and social media? \***

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**3. What (if any) impact do you think your story may have on others? \***

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**4. Since sharing this story of your body, what, if any has been the most significant change that has taken place for you as a participant in this project up to this point? \***

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**5. Is there anything else you'd like me to know?**

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**6. Date**

*Example: December 15, 2012*

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**7. Name: \***

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## Appendix G

### Formative Assessment Agendas

**Agenda: Project Formative Assessment #1**

M.S. Leadership for Sustainability

12.7. 2016 11:00 am ET

**Project:** [Truth and lives: beneath our skin](#)

**Facilitator:** Jeanette Miller

**Committee Members:**

Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees

Kelly Clark/Keefe

Matt Kolan

**Outcome:** An assessment by both student and committee members of student progress on project goals and objectives with feedback/guidance for moving forward.

**Essential Questions:**

What progress has been made on project goals and objectives?

What has been learned?

What is the most significant change to date? What is the impact of this change?

**Prep:**

**Progress Video Presentation**

**PDF - Presentation Notes**

**Agenda Items:**

1. Presentation of progress on project goals, objectives, deliverables (video)
2. Challenges, learnings and their impact on moving forward
3. Most significant change
  - a. Assessment Results
4. Questions/feedback from Committee
5. Next steps
  - a. Dec - Story Catch
  - b. Jan and Feb - Story Adaptation (Creative Process) and Funding Sources/Applications

**Agenda: Project Formative Assessment #2**

M.S. Leadership for Sustainability

5.19.17 11:00AM EST

Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android: <https://zoom.us/j/5546974111>**Project: Truth and lives: beneath our skin****Facilitator:** Jeanette Miller**Committee Members:**

Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees

Kelly Clark/Keefe

Matt Kolan

**Outcome:**

1. Update and assess project progress
2. Formalize final deliverables and evaluation plan
3. Set date for Summative Assessment

**Essential Questions:**

What progress has been made on project goals and objectives?

What has been learned?

What is the most significant change to date? What is the impact of this change?

What remains in this phase of the project?

## Agenda Items:

1. **Brief update of progress on project goals, objectives, learnings, deliverables  
PCA-ACA April 2017**

**Status Update**

Release of Shelly's Story

Assessment

Assessment #1 - (Post Audio Story Catch)

Assessment #2 - (Post Story Release)

Assessment #3 - will address impact of participants watching other  
participants' stories.

Funding Opportunities Spreadsheet

2. **Formalize deliverables and evaluation**

**Project Website**

Total # of completed/released stories: 5

Gallery of photo stills from project work

Assessment at all levels of participation and impact (viewers, community, etc.)

**Project Abstract** (July 7th)

**Final Project Report and Synthesis** (July 21st)

**3. Set timeline/date for Summative Assessment**

July 28th ?

**4. Questions/feedback from Committee**

**5. Next steps**

## Appendix H

### Popular Culture Association Conference San Diego, Ca April 2017



Dear Jeanette:

I am pleased to announce that your paper, "Truth and lives: beneath our skin," has been accepted for presentation in the Fat Studies Area of the 2017 Popular Culture Association Conference to be held at the Marriott Marina in San Diego, CA from April 12-15, 2017.

The conference sessions begin Wednesday, April 12 and continue through Saturday, April 15. Unfortunately, I won't know for at least a couple of months when the Fat Studies panels will be scheduled, and I can't request specific time slots. Panels run 90 minutes, with four presenters per panel, so each presenter has 15-20 minutes total for their presentation and Q&A.

For complete information about the conference, please visit <http://pcaaca.org/national-conference/>. There you will find information concerning deadlines, A/V equipment, registration and hotel forms and links, and information about joining the organization. Regarding A/V needs, my understanding is that if you have an Apple computer, you

must provide the adaptor that will allow you to hook your computer up to the provided projector equipment. You can find more information about A/V equipment here: <http://pcaaca.org/audio-visual-support/>.

Also, there is a Facebook page set up for the Fat Studies Area of the Popular Culture Association. If you'd like to join, here is the link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/250014675072387/>. The PCA has a Facebook page as well: <https://www.facebook.com/pcaaca>.

Finally, we Fat Studies folks try to organize at least one social gathering (typically a meal) during the conference. I'll be in touch to iron out logistics, but I hope you'll keep a spot open to celebrate Fat Studies and its brilliant practitioners!

Thank you for participating in the PCA Conference. I look hugely forward to hearing your presentation. If you need to contact me, my email address is below.

Have a dazzling autumn.

Sincerely,  
Lesleigh Owen ([lesleigh.owen@bhsu.edu](mailto:lesleigh.owen@bhsu.edu))  
Chair, Fat Studies Area, PCA