

FM REVIEW 2018 34 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This well-written essay is a reflection prompted by the author's pregnancy on the uncertainties and family dislocation resulting from the growing risk and reality of deportation for undocumented individuals. Interestingly, both reviewers voiced the same concern regarding the author's lack of awareness of the privileged status that enables her to love her unborn child so freely and easily. They also point out that her calls for advocacy and giving voice to the voiceless are rather vague. By addressing the issue of privilege in terms of how it intersects with care of underserved populations; and by specifying steps the author plans to take as a resident to "advocate" and "give voice" to her vulnerable, marginalized patients I believe the essay can be improved.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: In this touching essay, you show how your overwhelming love for your unborn child heightens your empathy for the fears and suffering that increasingly in our current political climate race through families as a result of their undocumented status. Both reviewers liked your essay, but express similar concerns, which can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The essay would benefit from an explicit acknowledgment of your privileged status as a well-educated, gainfully employed physician which gives you the luxury of loving your child in a fearless and uncomplicated way that is not always available to people who are persecuted and oppressed. Privilege can also encumber our desire to "help" others in ways that are sometimes unintentionally patronizing or condescending, and you might say something about how you have wrestled with this issue as well.
- 2) Your final paragraph, in which you call for advocacy and giving voice to the voiceless, is admirable, but vague. In the two narratives you share, you end up each time feeling helpless and with a "heavy heart.". This is an honest and understandable reaction. But in my read of your essay, your primary purpose in writing is not merely to share your feelings, but to show how these feelings lead you to commitment and action. You still have about 250 words. Use them to describe how you advocate on behalf of your patients and what steps you take to help them find their voices.
- 3) Please consider using the concept of temoignage (testimony) if not that exact term. Bearing witness is an act that respects the strength of the suffering other, and is indeed one way of advocating for patients.
- 4) I agree with reviewer 1 that you might rephrase the line about "loving" other people's stories. This may come across as though these stories are there for your enjoyment, although of course this is not what you mean. Maybe talking about the privilege of receiving others' stories and the opportunity this provides to help them develop the stories they want to live could be a more nuanced way of expressing your thought.
- 5) I think the couple of lines in your essay that talk about your experience in Honduras is a little tangential. In such a brief piece, you need to develop a very clear through-line. Your essay will be more focused if you stick to the theme of deportation and undocumented families here in the US.

Please consider rewriting the essay in a way that shows how your awareness of your profound love for your unborn child revealed how complicated such connection can be for more marginalized families; and, as a family practice resident, how you can use feelings of helplessness and heartache to motivate you to speak out for the patients you describe. Doing so will significantly strengthen the value of this work to our journal.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: The author has really wrestled with the feedback she received from reviewers and editor, especially with regard to acknowledging her privileged status. She has also shifted the essay, as requested, from focusing solely on her feelings of sadness and helplessness, to incorporating the concept of temoignage (testimony) as a first step in developing a position of advocacy. The result is a deeper, more insightful essay with a clearer message. There are a few very minor issues around word choice and a bit of rough writing in the final overall very powerful paragraph that I'd like the author to consider, but this one is a keeper.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for such an impressively thoughtful, humble, and nondefensive cover letter. We appreciate so much your digging deep to consider issues of privilege of status, and how they pertained to the essay you wrote. We also appreciate the way you embraced and incorporated the concept of temoignage as a first step in developing a position of advocacy. The result is a deeper, more insightful essay with a clearer message.

There are a few SMALL issues around word choice and some stylistic questions in the final overall very powerful paragraph that I'd like you to consider. Specifically, 1) I didn't think your advocacy "must invariably grow" - unfortunately, there is nothing "invariable" about developing a commitment to advocate for and empower others. Please consider rewording. 2) The word "convict" is a stumbling block to the flow of the narrative; perhaps you can replace it with a more conventional verb 3) The last several sentences in the essay (starting with "This testimony, this interplay of stories") are at once powerful and authentic and also a bit rough. We discourage the use of fragment sentences unless you feel strongly about retaining them. Please look at this section once more and focus on the writing craft. The message itself is inspiring.

These are very minor suggestions for an essay that has confidently found its voice, and says something important about bridging the gulf between privilege and oppression.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: The author has made suggested minor revisions and has reworked the concluding paragraph to improve its flow. I feel the essay is ready for publication.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Thank you for the minor word changes and for your thoughtful reworking of the final paragraph. I am completely comfortable with the fragment incorporated into the concluding line. As you argued, the final arbiter should always be art above grammar - and in this case, the lyricism of this phrase lingers powerfully in the mind. Thank you for a compelling essay.