

## Passion Project College Admissions Essay

Clovers make me itchy. I think throwing salt over my shoulder would be quite wasteful. I actually like black cats, and I really have no problem walking under ladders. I don't worship colorful rocks, and if the thirteenth of the month lands on a Friday, I hardly notice. But 40 million families would still consider me lucky. I was found, targeted and followed to be sold into human trafficking- but I escaped. 40 million didn't.

The day I got hired to be the social media manager for a major jewelry company I could not have been more ecstatic. I was so proud of myself and all my hard work that my subconscious had ignored a few major red flags. I let my guard down. On only the second day of my new job, I was cornered into mysterious and uncomfortable conversations from a couple of 'business partners', while they recorded me and sent photos of me to the man that currently occupies a permanent residency in my nightmares. By the grace of God, I noticed the shadows behind me that weren't my own, and after what had felt like hours, I was sent an angel in the form of a mall security guard. But evil doesn't stop at red lights. Little did I know, my ~~predator~~ boss had continued to send me on strange tasks in an attempt to lure me into his trap. And now, every time I close my eyes I see that wicked white van.

I've always been distinctly aware of my surroundings; keeping my head on a swivel at all times. I've been called paranoid, anxious, and crazy. But I am a woman- I have no choice. Society is grotesquely desensitized to the existence of modern-day slavery. I should not bond with a classmate over our matching purple pepper sprays. I should not have to wait to fill up my gas tank until my father gets home to accompany me. I should not have heart palpitations each time a stranger looks in my direction. I should not have to get a gym membership solely for a treadmill in order to go on a walk. I should not have to grip a metal kubaton until my knuckles turn white each time I dare to walk out of the grocery store. But I am a woman- I have no choice. When I was ten, my mother took me to a sex trafficking seminar, and naturally, I was mortified. "But that will never happen to me", I thought. It's what we all think. But 40 million is a big number- and it's growing everyday.

I have a job as a full-time nanny while I am in school. I care for a seven month old baby boy named Oliver. Seeing him giggle when I sneeze, fall asleep while he takes his bottle, or crawl and try to bite my socks brings me so much joy. But with that joy comes fear; fear for Oliver and fear for the 1.9 billion beautiful children that brave the earth. My heart breaks for the entire 25% of the 40 million victims that are children. Kids are the quintessential symbol of all that is pure; of beautiful naivety and endless, simple joy. No child should be stripped of their innocence. No child should be abused. No child should be taken advantage of. No child should have to fend for themselves. No child should be unable to recognize their own body. But there is a revolting amount of evil in this world; predators that prey on the weak, entirely devoid of remorse for the inevitable misery they are ensuing upon tens of millions of innocent kids every single day.

The most vital step to begin the diminishment of trafficking is public awareness. It is exceptionally critical for the world to understand the heinous realities for trafficked slaves, and to be able to recognize the signs of a trafficking ploy or victims if seen in public. Women and children are the most

at risk to be targeted, with no child being too young. These victims are exploited, and forced to sell their bodies for their abuser's financial gain. Their skin is branded as property, and they are physically forced to meet sex quotas, and to allow strangers to violate their bodies upwards of 15 times per day- failure to meet these quotas results in brutal punishments. Beatings, burning, rape, starvation, sleep deprivation, and threatening of loved ones are all possibilities following defiance. For most, the concept of escape is a work of fiction, only attainable through fantasy and REM sleep. At the end of the day, the sun goes down, the earth keeps turning, TikToks keep posting, movies keep filming, college essays keep submitting, and the 40 million keeps expanding. It is long overdue for this cosmic issue to be recognized and fully understood- this epidemic is lethal & omnipresent, and nobody is immune. It has been contaminating your neighborhood grocery store, local shopping mall, and favorite coffee shop as its infection site; rapidly spreading right before your eyes- and you had no idea.

These traffickers come in all shapes and sizes, and use a number of calculated tactics to manipulate the oblivious- abduction, blackmail, exploitation, coercion, grooming; absolutely nothing is off limits. A common example of this subterfuge is reliant on the target being kind, and agreeing to help a seemingly friendly stranger catch their dog, borrow a phone, or even pretend to be in danger themselves. They are not lurking in the shadows, they are all around us; malevolent chameleons living amongst society. They are constantly shedding and changing their skin, adapting to their surroundings to camouflage the vicious agenda that lies underneath with each faux social media profile, deceptive first date and illusive rideshare trip.

This issue has been tugging at my heart since I was a child myself, and I believe I was called to do something about it. As a hopeful Public Relations student, I would like to further my education in communication and publicity so that I may utilize my God-given skills to bring awareness to this worldwide crisis, in hopes of decreasing the frequency of sex trafficking. My first assignment would be to publicize the petition encouraging the SB 14 Bill that, if passed, would determine trafficking a serious felony in California rather than the 'non-serious' and 'non-violent' crime that it is labeled and punished as such today. California has been my home for the past ten years, and I will not stand for this injustice to continue, and to be dismissed in my own backyard. The whole world might not understand yet, but 40 million women and children who do not own the rights to their own bodies can undoubtedly testify that their experience has been anything but non-serious and non-violent. My dream is to one day live in a world where I do not have to deny my future child a visit to the playground, in fear that they may not return. A world where I can have a conversation with a neighbor without my key wedged between my fingers. A world where I have no hesitation in helping a woman that asks for directions. A world where a social media dream job is truly just an exciting opportunity. I dare to dream of living in a world in which I am able to trust.

## Statement of Purpose College Admissions Essay

Name: Carly De Girolomo. Grade: 3. Address: Homeless. My third grade registration form shook between my mom's fingers as she shyly handed it over to my soon-to-be elementary school principal on my very first day of school in Southern California. "This is our last move...", she declared, walking me to my new class, "I promise". We were going on our fourth month living out of different motels in this strange, loud new city, anxiously awaiting a job opportunity for my father. It was our fourth cross-country move in the past six years, so I had the routine down pat. As I approached the door, I took a deep breath, slapped on a big smile, and strutted my way in the class like I owned the place; I mean, this is third grade- it was survival of the fittest. Most people who grow up in inherently nomadic families find themselves developing into lone wolves, finding no sense in forming relationships that would be lost in the dust of a moving van in a mere couple of months- but not me. I took a page out of Darwin's book and had decided to adapt to each new environment however necessary. Eventually, with each new home and each new group of friends along the pit stops that have made up my life's journey, I found myself with an even stronger pair of beautiful wings to solidify my identity as a social butterfly.

I have always been extremely loquacious, eager to strike up a conversation with anyone and everyone; charisma and caffeine run deep through my veins. The number one career path for my ENFP personality type is the performing arts, to absolutely no one's surprise. Throughout the duration of my childhood and teenage years I was convinced from the bottom of my heart that I had found my calling in the form of film and television acting. I even confidently stood up in front of my entire freshman class and promised I would be seen on their television screens someday- the response, of course, a cacophony of laughter. But I knew I was special, and destined for something amazing. I spent day in and day out working, improving, and visualizing my success. Alas, it took me four years of headshots, showcases, auditions, hidden fees, and quiet agents for me to realize I had been shanghaied with an easy two-ingredient concoction of empty promises and big dreams. By the end of high school, I found myself lost, with absolutely no sense of direction for my life's journey. I knew I needed to utilize my wings down whichever path they led me, I just didn't know what that would look like anymore.

My family's lack of financial security had assured my attendance at a community college rather than a university following my graduation, so I paid my dues in credits over the years, watching my friends thrive all over the country. During the time I've spent at Fullerton College, I found myself picking up new hobbies and interests, desperately searching for the perfect career. I discovered new passions in the culinary arts, creative writing, child development and the fashion industry. After years of soul-searching and prayers, it finally dawned on me what all of these things had in common: they are all vessels of communication. Entertainment, indulgence, expression, guidance- no matter the niche, they are all established upon human connection. I only cooked for others to taste, I only wrote for others to read, I only sang for others to listen, I only taught for others to learn, I only designed for others to wear. The epicenter of everything that I love to do is rooted in interconnectedness, and making people feel something. I loved performing because I loved my relationship with my audience; making them smile, laugh, cry, or think. I crave interaction as well as the opportunity to apply my intrinsic social skills in a way that is used to benefit others. After years of extensive research, counselors, and advice from friends, I finally uncovered the career that I was born to pursue; and its title alone validates my confidence.

The field of Public Relations requires the perfect combination of communication, problem solving, and creativity that I have come to possess and strengthen throughout my ever-evolving environments and constant challenges. It took some time to nullify the bitterness from my failed missions of becoming a movie star and making it in the world on my own, but I eventually realized my gratitude for my defeat and delay, because now I will be able to use my strengths but in a way that can help others, and make a true impact. I may have missed out on two years of the infamous 'college experience', but it brought me to where I am now- hungry, eager, confident and 100% ready to fulfill my potential. I am a firm believer that everything happens for a reason, and this application is no different. After all, what better place to sharpen my skills in communication than at one of the best Public Relations programs in the country? Being a student at the Moody School of Communications at The University of Texas at Austin is my dream, and I truly believe that I will flourish in the halls of Moody, and that your network of expert professors undoubtedly have the capability to mold me into the best communicator, and the best woman that I can be. My very first move was to Texas when I was five years old; it was the origin of my metamorphosis. I leave unto you the opportunity for my growth to come full circle, back to where it all began. I wholeheartedly believe that the University of Texas at Austin is the perfect school to teach me how to fly.

## **BEAUTY AND THE DIGITAL BEAST**

The concept of "beauty" is entirely relative. The definition of this incredibly powerful word is as diverse as the 7.7 billion people inhabiting our planet. Each individual holds their own unique interpretation of what qualifies as beautiful. You might awaken one morning, look into the mirror, and genuinely see beauty reflected back at you. However, beauty is also relative upon comparison. This self confidence could come to a screeching halt as quickly as it takes to unlock an iPhone or pick up a magazine, where you'll be instantly met with a perfectly lit, beautiful photo of the tan, chiseled model with brilliant pearly whites, luscious plump lips and a sharp jawline. Suddenly, the person in the mirror has developed a multitude of previously imperceptible flaws. If only you knew that this very picture, the one that has single handedly altered your perception and undermined your confidence, is just an illusion? This Instagram post contains a beautiful woman indeed, but one that lies far beneath the surface. She's trapped behind a superfluity of distinct and precise editing, drowning in her fabricated perfections. The specifics of these masked modifications are the industry's best kept secret; so how could we, her audience, ever recognize their existence? Therein, lies the problem; the unrealistic falsities that are presented to the public on social media and printed media keep the women of our society in a chokehold, unable to ever live up to the unrealistic standards of beauty that have been imprinted upon us. Standards that, in fact, are but a Photoshop mirage, created by a machine application rather than God.

Instagram, TikTok, Vogue, Allure- whichever vessel of pop culture you may favor, each and every form of media is guilty. Although the decline of women's self-esteem may not be an intentional result of the fashion industry or influencer culture, we would certainly qualify as collateral damage. Due to the surplus of technology-driven photoshop and digital enhancement in modern-day, photos can be easily warped from reality into fantasy, hence creating an unrealistic standard of life and beauty. The habit that humanity has developed pertaining to the distortion of physical appearances in order to fit the carefully curated mold of 'perfection', has the potential to give viewers, especially the coming generations, a false understanding of the world outside their screens. It can be practically impossible to debunk the seamlessly camouflaged virtual surgery of published photos, so we, as an audience, are quick to compare our authentic selves to the people in these pictures. It is when the line between appreciation and obsession thins, that we see the treacherous formation of dangerously poor body image. Body dysmorphia, namely, is a "condition where an individual becomes obsessive about a perceived flaw in their appearance"; 'perceived' being the operative word. In some cases, this flaw can be entirely imagined, warranted by the fixation to reach the unattainable goal of flawlessness (D'Amore). Unfortunately, the existence of this grim mental health issue is much more prevalent than one may guess; between 5 and 10 million people suffer from this disorder in the United States alone (BDD.org). Once an influenced follower has found themselves affected by the building pressures of these standards and develops an inkling of body dysmorphia, a snowball effect of negative repercussions begins to ensue. This condition is linked to a variety of eating disorders that can arise as a result of poor self esteem, which is commonly derived from the advertising of perfectly constructed bodies in the media. Bryn Austin, professor at Harvard School of Public Health, warns of image-based applications such as Instagram having "very harmful effects on teen mental health, especially for [those] struggling with body image, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders", because they can "draw vulnerable teens into a dangerous spiral of negative social comparison and hook them onto unrealistic ideals of appearance and body size and shape" (Harvard.edu). Disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and orthorexia are common results, affecting 30 million people in the United States (MentalHealthFirstAid.org). It is imperative that we, as a society, not be fooled by the media's smoke screen. We must not hold ourselves to these unrealistic standards, or God forbid we get to the point where our most human traits- pores, birthmarks, curves etc.- are frowned upon, and forbidden.

This issue is incredibly important to me, as I have found myself personally affected by declining self esteem and body image due to the fact that I grew up in a very technology-driven society. I have never known a world without social media; posting one's every gym outfit and beach photos and mirror selfies is just second nature- it's what my mom calls 'the new normal'. But for me and my Gen-Z friends, there's nothing new about it. I grew up constantly comparing myself to the seemingly flawless supermodels and influencers I saw on social media, billboards and magazines. This environment has led me towards my current state of body dysmorphia that I struggle with on a daily basis. I am consumed with the constant need to go to the gym and workout six days a week as well as spend every extra penny I have on the newest trending

skincare and makeup products so that my reflection is similar to the faces I see on my ‘For You Page’. However, this is not out of the ordinary, and since starting the research for this paper I have noticed inherently similar behavior in all of my friends as well. It has deeply saddened me to notice the gravity of the repercussions have become normalized in my generation- all of which stem from our obsession with social media, and the media’s obsession with digitally altering their content in hopes of profiting off of our insecurities.

After this year of attending a variety of public relations courses, I have grown a deeper understanding of the vitality of honesty and transparency as a practitioner in order to maintain and strengthen the relationship between two publics. The very premise of incorporating Photoshop programs into advertisements for brands is entirely dishonest, which goes against everything that an ethical publicist should stand for and practice. I believe that it is critical for future public relations and advertising practitioners alike to emphasize to their clients the negative effects that digitally altering women’s bodies for advertisements have on society, and instead encourage them to implement healthy, and ‘normal’ sized models and refrain from changing their bodies in post-production. According to my research, this strategy would not only take steps toward improving the overall body image issues in the coming generations, but also this approach would ‘enhance the brand’s credibility’, and ‘transcend conventional marketing, inspiring a movement towards greater truthfulness in advertising’ (Carlos). For the advertising and public relations industries to continue engaging in these deceptive practices can also potentially damage the reputation of these roles entirely in the future. By taking what we have learned in this class about staying true to our personal ethics and differentiating ourselves from the false beauty standards of today, we can even reach a whole new demographic of consumers, and we can create campaigns that ‘positively contribute to social change and promote inclusivity’ (Dee, 2024).

The forgery of women’s physical appearances in the media has the potential to disintegrate the self esteem of the future generations by deceiving our understanding of reality. The unnecessary tampering of physical appearances in publications can cause a rapid decline in mental health and self-esteem. I believe that the implementation of a newfound transparency would finally allow the world to grow together in self-confidence, and Maslow’s appeal for human esteem shall be fulfilled. “Be the change you want to see in the world”, Mahatma Gandhi powerfully encourages us. This is a special case in which we, individually, possess the power to make a change- one selfie at a time. Regardless of size, color, shape, or number of followers - we must not let today’s beauty standards define who we are.

