

University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

UWM Digital Commons

English 102: Community Engaged Research in
First Year Composition

English Student Research

Spring 2022

Water is for the White and Wealthy

Duaa Majeed

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.uwm.edu/english_eng102-community

Recommended Citation

Majeed, Duaa, "Water is for the White and Wealthy" (2022). *English 102: Community Engaged Research in First Year Composition*. 12.

https://dc.uwm.edu/english_eng102-community/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in English 102: Community Engaged Research in First Year Composition by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunicationteam-group@uwm.edu.

Water is For the White and Wealthy (Script)

Duaa: Hello listener, welcome to today's podcast called "Water is for the white and wealthy" If you happen to be a person of color, of low income, and a woman, I advise you to stay and listen, because the truth that will unfold in the next few minutes is something you may not be aware of but truly affects you. I have a special guest with me here today, Samawia who is a dear friend and someone who can relate deeply to this topic, but heads up, you probably don't even know how much you might relate to this

Samawia: Hello to everyone listening, I'm so excited for this. I really want to know why this affects me, because to be honest, I didn't think I had to be concerned with the quality of my water.

Duaa: Well then you're definitely in for a ride, because I feel like this topic is so important to people like us mostly because we don't even know of the injustices in drinking water that we endure just because of certain factors, that are essentially out of our control.

Samawia: Oh for sure. I'm honestly mind blown that this is even a thing. There is so much that can be done and changes that can be made, but people need to be aware first. That's the most important thing.

Duaa: I definitely agree and I'm sure this podcast will be the first step in recognizing that this is a major issue, enabling a move for change. So Samawia to start off, can you tell us more about your identity and in what neighborhood do you live in?

Samawia: I am Pakistani and live in a predominantly Hispanic Neighborhood in Milwaukee

Duaa: So about that, did you know the water you drink, if you do from the tap, most likely has sanitation violations and you don't even know it

Samawia: What do you mean? Is that why they say not all water tastes the same??

Duaa: I think that has to do with branded water. But national utility data shows that safe drinking water act violations are greater in low-income communities with higher Hispanic and Black populations. Other sources also show that poor communities that are predominantly Hispanic or black are likely to experience worse SDWA health compliance than similarly poor communities that are predominantly non-Hispanic and white.

Samawia: Oh wow I never knew that. What is SDWA?

Duaa: SDWA is The Safe Drinking Water Act. It is the principal federal law in the United States intended to ensure safe drinking water for the public.

Duaa: You know whets even more interesting? From 1900-1940 there was far less discrimination when it came to public water and sewers and this led to major reductions in mortality from waterborne diseases like typhoid and diarrhea

Samawia: what happened between 1900-1940 that would cause improvements, even better than today?

Duaa: And just to bring this into perspective, data shows that as the population served by community water systems increased, the proportion of Hispanics and African Americans in a community changed to being positively associated with initial violations, and previous studies found that Community water systems that served a larger percentage of Hispanics and renters had higher nitrate levels in the drinking water and increased odds for arsenic violations

Samawia: Ok so you're stating all these facts, but what is the government doing about it? Like I'm sure it's aware of what's going on and I'm sure it's concerned for the safety of everyone right?

Duaa: Well Congress mandated that the nation's public water supply be regulated to protect public health, the public has little knowledge of how water regulation actually works which is why it's essential to create awareness among the general public, especially those who are affected on how the SDWA operates, and ways in which citizens can take civil action against any federal agency for violations, and to overall be engaged. Public health workers also need to be involved in the process to evaluate the effectiveness of a states practice of sanitation and health.

Samawia: Like doctors and nurses who actually see these things first hand and have actual test results.

Duaa: Yeah exactly, remember what happened in flint with the water and how it was tied back to racism

Samawia: I remember the crisis and the water shortage, but never heard of how it related to racism

Duaa: So since 2014, flint citizens who are mostly African American and the poorest in America complained that their tap water was foul and discolored and officials did nothing about it due in part to the cities demographic composition which is approximately 55% black, with more than 40% living below the poverty line.

Samawia: You know I bet if what had happened in Flint happened in a wealthy, white neighborhood, public officials would have acted quickly

Samawia: But because the crisis has an element of racism I'm sure citizens can now sue or get money right?

Duaa: Citizens that were harmed filed individual and class-action lawsuits for compensation because officials who have a legal duty to safeguard the water supply covered up their failures to act even though they knew that the drinking water was contained and had levels of lead that were well over federally mandated levels. Because the Flint water crisis was a man-made disaster, the city does not qualify for federal disaster assistance in the same way that cities affected by natural disasters like earthquakes and floods do.

Samawia: Wow, yeah its kinds of like the cholera outbreak that happened in I think the UK on Broad street which is a very impoverished area in London. But besides the clear point that race affects the quality of water received, what does being a woman have to do with it?

Duaa: So women are primarily responsible for health, hygiene, sanitation, and other productive activities at the household level and when water and sanitation sources are at a minimum, the specific needs of women and girls are often not taken into account. And in many countries, land ownership, which is a precondition for gaining access to water is often denied to women which makes it difficult.

Samawia: So there's no way out huh, either women are financially dependent on a man to get good water or they are discriminated against if they are the head of the household

Duaa: Sad isn't it. I feel like these issues will be resolved within the next few generations, but I think right now states should prioritize water and sanitation provision to in particular households where women and girls have the least adequate alternatives, they should create an environment for women and girls to safely use water and sanitation facilities, and to keep in mind that gender based inequality is often coupled with other grounds of discrimination and disadvantages.

Samawia: Yeah those are good solutions and I totally agree with the change in even our generation, but like if you're poor the treatment is not gonna change don't you think? Like I mean the water quality they are going to get, because this Country runs on people's money.

Duaa: I mean, households that don't have plumbing in cities are more likely to be headed by people of color who earn low incomes, live in mobile homes, rent their residence, and pay a higher share of their gross income towards housing cost. And to tie this together, plumbing poverty is produced by these radicalized wealth gaps that are expressed through the unequal geographies of housing in the largest 50 largest US metropolitan areas the median household income among all households is almost double that of unplumbed households

Samawia: Wait so how much is median income so that I can put it into perspective

Duaa: Around 65,000 dollars. Yeah they are also less likely to lack piped water, especially renter-occupied households which are 1.61 times more likely than owner-occupied households to lack piped water.

Samawia: I didn't know it was that bad. The way we go with our lives and don't realize the harm we might be causing our bodies

Duaa: That's the thing. A lack of reliable water access hinders essential practices like drinking and cooking, and it affects physical health by causing things like dehydration, diarrhea, and can even trigger stress and anxiety. People don't realize that the transmission of contagious diseases, like COVID can be accelerated simply due to the fact that people do not have secure access or an adequate water supply of tap water at home.

Samawia: So everything that you're saying about the affects of low income in relation to water is a lot to grasp, but the first thing that comes to my mind is that this is also a humanitarian issue, so why isn't the country doing anything about it?

Duaa: Well there are 3 main factors that worsened the neglect of low income water issues, firstly starting off with the US reporting few low-income water deficiencies to international development organizations, so the issue isn't even well known or acknowledged although it

clearly exists. Second, the United States has low-income water programs that help explain what has and has not been achieved, and these programs deserve critical assessment both in the US and internationally because I'm almost positive that the majority of the population know nothing about this. Lastly, at the start of the present century the United States reduced its involvement in international water and poverty programs relative to other countries around the world and to its own role in the late 1900s.

Samawia: So in conclusion what I clearly understood with multiple pieces of evidence is that to be a person of color, of a low income background, and a woman all play a major role in the quality of water, that we get. The crazy thing is that I feel like as someone who can identify with more than one, I'm like totally screwed.

Duaa: The majority of the country identify with at least one of the criteria, but I feel like the people that are all 3 of the criteria are the most affected so I feel like we definitely need to spread awareness and make this publically known so that the victims themselves can firstly all gather together to fight for their rights at the end of the day. The quality of water and sanitation is definitely a privilege, and from what it looks like, water ways create numerous ways to identify a deep rooted superiority-inferiority complex that the Country is arguably founded on.

Samawia: Thanks for having me on this podcast, I honestly a lot especially considering I never thought about the water quality and how being a person of color or a woman affects the level of quality that we get.

Duaa: Yeah for sure, it was a really interesting topic to research about. Thank you all for tuning in!

Sources:

Clark, Cassandra J., et al. “Community Concern and Government Response: Identifying Socio-Economic and Demographic Predictors of Oil and Gas Complaints and Drinking Water Impairments in Pennsylvania.” *Energy Research & Social Science*, vol. 76, 2021, p. 102070., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102070>.

Gostin, Lawrence O. “Politics and Public Health:the Flint Drinking Water Crisis.” *Hastings Center Report*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2016, pp. 5–6., <https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.598>.

Harper, Sam. “Did Clean Water Reduce Black–White Mortality Inequalities in the United States? Water, Race, and Disease.” *International Journal of Epidemiology*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007, pp. 248–257., <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyl302>.

Heller, Leo. “Gender Stereotypes and Stereotyping and Women’s ... - OHCHR.” *Gender Equality and the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation*, 2016, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/OnePagers/Gender_stereotyping.pdf.

McDonald, Yolanda J., and Nicole E. Jones. “Drinking Water Violations and Environmental Justice in the United States, 2011–2015.” *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 108, no. 10, 2018, pp. 1401–1407., <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2018.304621>.

Meehan, Katie, et al. “Geographies of Insecure Water Access and the Housing–Water Nexus in US Cities.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 117, no. 46, 2020, pp. 28700–28707., <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2007361117>.

Seager, Joni. "Gender and Water: Good Rhetoric, but It Doesn't 'Count.'" *Geoforum*, Pergamon, 22 Aug. 2009, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016718509001006>.

Switzer, David, and Manuel P. Teodoro. "The Color of Drinking Water: Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Safe Drinking Water Act Compliance." *Journal - American Water Works Association*, vol. 109, 2017, pp. 40–45., <https://doi.org/10.5942/jawwa.2017.109.0128>.

Wescoat, James L., et al. "Water and Poverty in the United States." *Geoforum*, Pergamon, 16 Jan. 2007, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016718506001357>.