

Overview

[The Global Health Education and Learning Incubator at Harvard University](#) (GHELI) supports interdisciplinary education about world health through the production, curation, and dissemination of educational public goods. This exemplar work was a final project for “World Health: Challenges and Opportunities,” a General Education course at Harvard College taught by GHELI Faculty Director Sue J. Goldie. For this creative assessment designed with support from GHELI, students systematically analyze a societal health challenge they care about and create a “real world” product intended to influence policy or motivate change.

Abstract

Shedding light on maternal mortality in the U.S. through creative dance choreography.

Artist

Sheila De La Cruz (2019)

Caption

The issue of high maternal mortality in the United States is particularly worrisome for minority groups from lower socioeconomic status. This issue presents a significant racial disparity as the MMR (maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 births) is 12.4 for white women, but 40.0 for black women and 17.8 for women of other races (CDC). This shows a tremendous inequity in terms of access to care, especially since many maternal mortality deaths are preventable... It is essential that the importance of the maternal mortality issue be open to the public eye in order for there to be significant change.

Artist Lens

My audience for the video was aimed toward the women of the general public, but was particularly targeted for young women and women of child-bearing age as I created a special emphasis on the issue of maternal mortality in the video. The main message of my piece was to show that regardless of whether a woman chooses to focus on her career, become a mother, do both, or follow any combination in between, she deserves the right to have her choices respected, and honored.

I choreographed this piece to depict the different identities that a woman can have by contrasting the gentle ballet style of dance from one of my good friends with the more abstract, contemporary style of my own background. I edited the video to show that while the two styles may appear very different at first, they are actually very similar and integrate nicely when one movement complements the other. I also implemented certain motifs, such as the hand movements at the beginning of the piece, to symbolize the certain constraints women may feel from the challenges of their circumstances (in this case, especially for women of color). By the end, though, my friend and I changed the quality of our movement to be much larger, demonstrating confidence in our optimism for the future.

The final quote by author Chimamanda Adichie, in particular, eloquently motivates the target audience to act, by working to change society’s view of the culture of women with regards to humanity. In working to change

cultural norms, especially such that maternal mortality is given more attention when discussing women's rights, it is my hope that there will be a push from the people to have lawmakers, physicians, and the public as a whole honor the lives of women in a higher regard.

[Watch Sheila De La Cruz Reflection](#)

Media

Dance Performance



[Watch Maternal Mortality in the U.S.](#)