

The Thicket of Life

By Sarah R. Blanton, PT, DPT, Editor-in-Chief

“Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

--James Baldwin

The “thicket of life.” This metaphor resonates deeply with me as I struggle under the weight of unanswered emails, overdue tasks, and demands for my attention from every angle. Searching for a salve to calm the self-judgment around missed deadlines and unmet expectations, I always return to the humanities as a compass to a more grounded, centered place. While the image of a [thicket](#) captures how a dense over-growth can limit movement forward, it also illustrates how such a stand of trees or shrubs is frequently a domination of one or a few species—at the exclusion of others. I pause and wonder: What do all my “yeses” exclude? Who am I overlooking? What am I missing when I feel overwhelmed by an onslaught of information? The humanities offer us a creative space to re-evaluate our current processes, reflect deeply on our values and assumptions, adopt a critical lens to explore other perspectives, and re-imagine new avenues to tackle old problems.

In that vein of re-imagining, the *JHR* editorial staff have been closely examining our publication model. Working collaboratively with the [Emory Center for](#)

[Digital Scholarship](#), we have decided to shift our bi-annual (Spring and Fall) issue format to a **rolling publication** model. This change in our timeline creates several opportunities:

We can bring to press new articles in a timelier manner, reducing the lag time for both author and reader.

With a revised homepage layout, we can pull articles from our archives—“Encore articles”—in response to current events.

We also can bring to the forefront previous *JHR* articles that may offer context to a newer piece.

In this inaugural issue, for example, we present our first set of paired articles—the previously published [The Intouchables--A Reflection on Disability and Caregiving: Who Helps Whom?](#) and a new piece, [The Intouchables Revisited: Shifting Perspectives With our Dynamic Society](#), both by Dr. Sarah Caston. The author re-visits her previous article with a fresh perspective.

The *Intouchables* movie is a true story about a wealthy white man living with a cervical spinal cord injury, and his relationship with his unorthodox caregiver—a Black man from a disadvantaged background. As Dr. Caston notes while viewing the original article through a different lens:

*“I now have a deeper recognition and awareness of the complex dynamics portrayed in this movie, which go beyond a traditionally conceptualized ‘opposite side of the tracks’ tale. I have been able to reflect on other aspects of this story, thinking about what people who are often marginalized—or viewed as ‘untouchable’ as the title of the French film denotes, such as Black and disabled individuals—have experienced, and continue to experience. I can never know that reality firsthand; however, **by centering the voices of those who have been harmed by unjust systems, we can learn how to widen our view, to combat the ignorance that privilege affords, and become better advocates in our respective spaces.**”*

On her own journey to revisit this piece, Caston invites us into this “space of curiosity,” to question our long-held presumptions, and rethink words like independence, autonomy, and *flourishing*. She asks us to ponder what it means to “relinquish...our power in order to *empower*.” We present both her original review and her current commentary together, to observe the process of critical thinking—and *re-thinking*—and to perhaps prompt us to do so in our own work.

With our new model, we are crafting strategies to periodically land more gently in your inbox with a less dense thicket of articles, and instead present a smaller selection of new ideas and Encore articles.

We hope this first in a series of thoughtfully-curated selections will serve as a gentle nudge to invite you back to *JHR* on a more regular basis throughout 2023—to find novel ideas and revisit past issues in a timely

manner.

As Dr. Caston so eloquently offers up to us:

I hope the JHR Newsletter will prompt readers to revisit, remember, and rethink. In our world of overcrowded inboxes, overcluttered minds, and overwhelming news, what a welcome reminder this is to cultivate humble perspectives, challenge preconceived notions and ill-wrought structures, and consider first not the ability, but the humanity of others.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you for joining us on this unique and exciting journey to integrate the humanities into rehabilitation, and for continuing to support *JHR* as it updates for today and into tomorrow. We are incredibly grateful for our community of readers and contributors who help make this work possible. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions for us, please feel free to [reach out to me](#) directly. We are eager to have your feedback. It is our deep and true intention to be a model of humanism in publishing and to embrace our collective work of meaning-making in our shared path toward healing.

Warm regards,

Sarah Blanton, PT, DPT

Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation*

About the Author



Dr. Sarah Blanton is Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine, Division of Physical Therapy. She graduated from the University of Virginia in 1987 with a BA degree in biology, from Emory University in 1992 with her masters in physical therapy and received her clinical doctorate in physical therapy in 2003. After nine years working in neurologic rehabilitation at Emory Center for Rehabilitation Medicine, she served as project coordinator for several research studies, including two multi-site, NIH-funded national clinical trials. In 2006, Dr. Blanton joined the faculty of the Emory Doctor of Physical Therapy program and her teaching has included geriatrics, mental health, cultural diversity and neurorehabilitation. Dr. Blanton's current research focus includes stroke survivor and family quality of life, including depression, fatigue, caregiver/family functioning and post-stroke education. The long-term goals of her research efforts are to develop methods to support family focused rehabilitation approaches that facilitate the active integration of the caregiver throughout physical therapy practice. Dr. Blanton's interest in the *Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation* stems from her ongoing exploration of the intersections of creativity and spirituality to gain insight into the human experience of suffering, joy and mystery. In her teaching, she has found the use of narrative to be an exceptionally powerful tool to foster reflection and personal insight for both students and patients. In her research, she is incorporating multi-media formats to develop family education interventions in the home environment. A photographer since childhood, she has enjoyed sharing her artwork through exhibits at Emory University, speaking with chaplaincy students on "Reflections of Art and Spirituality in Appalachia" and as a guest contributor to the Public Radio show, *On Being*.

Dr. Blanton is the director of the DISCOvER lab (Digital Scholarship Enhancing Rehabilitation), exploring various ways digital scholarship can enhance rehabilitation research, education and clinical practice. In 2018, she was awarded the American Physical Therapy Association Societal Impact Award and the Emory University Creativity and Arts award for healthcare faculty.

Website Link (Official Bio): <https://www.emorydpt.org/sarah-blanton-pt-dpt-ncs-2/>

Website Link (Emory University, Division of Physical Therapy): <https://www.emorydpt.org/>

DISCOvER lab <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/blantonlab/>