"Project I Am Me"

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Thesis Advisor
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Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Expected Date of Graduation

December 18, 2010
Abstract

Looking in a mirror can tell us many things: if our hair is looking its best, what our eye color is, or if our clothes match. The image we have of ourselves affects our everyday lives whether we realize it or not. The media and art in today’s world can act as a catalyst or a constant for our self-image in many different ways and might change the way we think when we look in the mirror. Times are hard in our country with the war on terror, recession, and overall rising levels of various health issues (obesity, etc.). Therefore, maintaining a healthy relationship with one’s self is of the utmost importance. This generation is going on to shape the future of our country, and self-confidence is one of the biggest roots to success.

“Project I Am Me” is a photography project which will act as a photo shoot in reverse. The subjects dictate the creative direction and the styling of themselves, and in turn end up expressing themselves as a media representative for their own self-image. I firmly believe that self-expression through art is one of the best outlets. As a photographer, I channel this privilege every day of my life and I want to take the opportunity in this thesis project to share the wonderful, diverse, healthy community that we live in as we “20 somethings” are on the verge of the real world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents for encouraging me to be a part of the Honors College and expecting so much of me as I have grown. Their standards and encouragement have led me to my academic success and my own self-confidence.

I would like to thank my husband, Ian, for enduring months of insanity and complaints about this project. My eccentric nature for photography is difficult to deal with at times and he is a professional at managing my creative absurdity.

I would like to thank Professor Hans Kellogg for agreeing to take on the task of advising my senior thesis, despite his sabbatical. I could not have completed this project without his support and inspiration the past 3 years in the technology department.

Lastly, I would like to thank those who participated in this project the first time: Ian Davis, Tori Thomas, Nick Bashenow, Eleanor McReynolds, Kathryn Stradling, Christine Jones, and Mandy Dreibelbis. They truly inspired me with their blooming self-confidence. Their exuberance for the project and eagerness to bare themselves to the world made this project a success and such a personal inspiration.
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“Finding Jeans to Suit Your Genes”

You are sitting in sophomore algebra in your high school trying to pay attention but there are other things on your mind: do your new Bobbie Brooks jeans make you look fat? How are you going to cover the giant pimple on your nose? Where will you stow your dorky glasses when you see the cute boy in English class? Then a spitball hits the back of your head, the bell rings, and you remember that you have to do this all again tomorrow.

We all remember those teenage days of social ruin: thinking that the world will stop spinning if your status on the high school ladder plummets. Those years of torture can make or break the way you feel about yourself. Self-esteem is affected by everything including the way that other people portray what is beautiful or "normal." The arts and media have a huge communicative way to broadcast these images all over the world. This could be considered a huge responsibility as well, but the media is not always as diversely encouraging as it could (and should) be. With the dawn of new social developments, historical changes in government, and the constantly evolving job market, the "20 somethings" demographic, hailing from Generation Y, finds ways to put themselves out
there and try to change the world. Some might say that this generation is one of the most socially accepting, liberal, and proudly diverse generations yet. So, although the media emits the squall of unhealthy body images and reports depressing news about the economic status of our country, this hearty generation finds a way to power through, promote youthful ideals, and maintain a healthy self-confidence. Through photography, we can capture this inspiring assurance and prove that, when given the chance, these "20 somethings" promote loving oneself no matter what size, race, or sexual orientation.

The farther we reach into the future as a society, the more ways there are to communicate an idea to a mass amount of people. Radio, television, film, music, and art are in the top favorite forms of mass communication. In the past 10 years we add some new friends to the ranks of popular methods such as: podcasts, blogging, and video chatting to name a few. But what are these industries portraying as the beautiful and successful person? We would like to think that our media is supporting intelligence, perseverance, motivation, and benevolence, but as reassuring as that would be, we often find images of money, materialism, and unhealthiness. Specifically in body types, the media is chock full of anorexic, plastic celebrities teaching young girls that being overly thin is to be beautiful. Truth: thin is beautiful! But so are curvy and voluptuous! We could demonstrate the same for men who are pressured
by various broadcasting to be geometrically toned in an assembly line way. This visual pressure to be a part of the human clones of the world is unhealthy and aggravating, to say the least. The media has become wrought with indirect instructions for people to go out and become the unrealistic forms they see in print or on the screen. Although rising above it is difficult, it can be done.

I feel like the old teasing techniques used to be calling someone “four eyes” and pulling their pigtails. These days, mockery between each other has morphed into something derived from pure bitterness and is downright hateful! As humans, why do we deem it necessary to openly attack someone’s weight, style of dress, economic background, or sexual preference? You would think that some lessons would be learned through major world events centered on prejudice such as slavery and the Holocaust. I realize that calling someone fat is not of the same magnitude as these past events, but I feel that any right or wrong can be triggered with one hateful word.

Our society also has a skewed idea of what “normal” is. Is there really a “normal?” According to the book Religion and Popular Culture in America, “While the average woman in the U.S. is 5’ 4” and weighs 144 pounds, the average female model is 5’ 10” and weighs 111 pounds. Not surprisingly, diet books outsell any other books on the market, except the Bible,” (Forbes). Are the words average and normal not comparable
terms? Still, the images represented in the media are not of average people with average features. The media portrays women using females with mega-mini waistlines as gorgeous, impossible shiny locks. Even in movies, there are scenes taking place in a desert or a jungle and we know that no one in that situation would have hair looking that beautiful and tamed. Advertisements are just the same. I am assistant manager at a retail accessory store called Claire's Boutique and every single one of their promotional signs use girls who are tall, thin, with long hair and plump lips. I have never seen the corporation I work for use models that are a little more “well-rounded” or a girl with braces. How often have you seen a store even use a model in a wheelchair? One of the Claire’s pillars is “offering a compelling, focused assortment of accessories... targeted to the lifestyles of kids, tweens, teens, and young women,” (Work). As a company, Claire’s makes it a priority in their customer service to cater to all girls no matter what style, age, or body type, so why is it that their ad campaigns do not reflect that as well?

Additionally, as a curvy girl myself, I feel so impressed and delighted when a retail store uses curvier models or when there are clothing sizes represented that include all sizes of women. Since I have taken steroid medications for my asthma since age three, I have always been a thick-bodied girl. Watching movies with anorexic-modeled princesses and beauty queens was always disheartening. Because of this, my mother
introduced me to television shows like *Full House* where the girls on the show were much more realistic and it was centered around a diverse and different family from California. Being able to relate is important to all ages.

Blooming out of this societal ruin, there are some very admirable media messages that have emerged in the past years including the *Real Beauty Campaign* by Dove soap. The company introduced this as the “Dove movement for self-esteem!” This project is all about striving to “love the skin you’re in” and taking care of your body no matter what it looks like. The original commercial featured women of all types in their bras and underwear. All lovely. All happy. All beautiful. Dove is still pushing this campaign of a healthy self-image, especially with their active website for the project which includes advice, a “self-esteem toolkit,” and video clips (Dove). It is campaigns like these that make me think that there is still self-confidence out there that can shine even through media storm clouds. I want to prove that people can feel great about themselves and have enough self-confidence on the line to step up and set a shining example for generations to come. I suppose this is where my thesis brainchild enters.

This project, “Project I Am Me,” started out as a small photography project in one of my technology classes. We were prompted, for our final project, to tell a story through photographs. We were allowed 5 images to
show the class, trying our best to illustrate something worthwhile. During this point in my life, I was still developing my artistic vision and style. I spent months developing a cut and paste lookbook of inspiring images so that I could study them and evaluate what it was that inspired me. As I was flipping through this notebook of random images for what seemed like the thousandth time, I came across this image cut from a magazine advertisement of a young farm girl looking straight into the camera, holding a chalk slate. She had written a sentence about herself on this slate, I suppose the sentence now is inconsequential, but I was very inspired by how forward this girl was even after growing up in a dirty, rural, farmhouse. The fact that this was purely an advertisement (and probably completely fiction) was not important to me. What spoke to me was the vulnerability of the photograph. And that is when I realized that I wanted to create something like that for my photo story. I sent out a note on facebook.com asking for volunteers to take part in this new social experiment of mine, and much to my surprise, the responses and volunteers were overwhelmingly positive. After gaining photographs of each person and using them to tell my photo story of self-confidence and diversity, I was completely inspired and wanted to expand the project further. My Honors Capstone project seemed like the perfect avenue.

The rules of the project are simple: take a photo in black and white of each person with absolutely no makeup, no personal prep, and no
extra accessories of any kind. The person had to wear a white t-shirt and blue jeans and nothing more. The idea was to photograph each person in their complete natural state as they would look when, say, they went to bed at night. Completely natural. Completely raw. Completely beautiful. The second set of photos of each person would be styled and dictated by each person as they saw fit. They were instructed to wear whatever they felt described them the most, something in which they felt comfortable. Then each person was given a chalk slate and instructed to finish the sentence: “I am...” I think of it as a photo shoot in reverse. In fashion, the artist has creative control. In “Project I Am Me,” the subjects are the artists.

Surprisingly, each person took what he or she wrote on that slate pretty seriously. Not a single person was photographed that did not think long and hard about what their life meant. The span of responses was so inspiring and almost comical at times. Some participants were quite honest (“I am dyslexic.”), some were thoughtful (“I am loved.”), and some were just blunt (“I am hungry.”), but all were very candid. After the project got its wings, I could feel the confidence radiating off of each person from behind the camera and felt very blessed to have been able to snap a shot of each remarkable person.

Additionally, the editing done to the photos was very minimal. I did some darkening around the edges and color correcting, but I let the
photos and the subjects in them speak for themselves. Originally, this project was to include twenty different models, but I decided to stop at fifteen. I had so many volunteers and could have easily gotten 30 photographs, but I really wanted the viewers of this project to really get to know the participants in the photos. I felt that fifteen seemed like a much more intimate number, so I decided to stop. For the second run of this experiment, I sent out another mass message on Facebook again. I thought that it was very appropriate to use the most popular social networking site of our time because it really represents our generation. “Project I Am Me” means so much to me and I wanted my viewers to gain that same relationship with the models and same inspiration. Confidence is contagious.

In conclusion, some might say that the proof is in the pudding: college age people are setting a good example for the following generations by flaunting their self-confidence. Through media research and a photographic rampage, I am proud to have put together a project with such positivity and zest incorporating such shining individuals. I hope that this mission will not only serve as such severe inspiration to me, but to others as well. I think people of all ages could learn something from the self-nurturing, confident, and strong individuals like these. Showing one's true self to the world can be the most terrifying thing, especially through all of the negative and unrealistic propaganda floating around the
media. Some people set a wonderful and courageous example to rise above social influence and stay true to yourself. As it turns out, the trick isn’t changing to fit the world... it is finding the right place in the world for the one and only you. The most fulfilling thing is to stand up to explain yourself and simply saying: “I am me.”
Works Cited


Institutional Review Board

DATE: November 1, 2010

TO: Elaine Read

FROM: Ball State University IRB

RE: IRB protocol # 127021-1

TITLE: Project I Am Me

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF NOT RESEARCH

DECISION DATE: November 1, 2010

REVIEW TYPE: Administrative Review

The Institutional Review Board received the above protocol. After review and consideration, the IRB concluded that this project does not meet the definition of 'research with human subjects' at this time, as specified by federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.

Research is defined as ... 'a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program which is considered research for other purposes.'

A human subject is defined as ... 'a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains: (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual or (2) identifiable private information.'

Editorial Note: Based on the information provided, this project is a combination of artistic expression and journalism. The project does not qualify as human subjects research, as defined under the Federal regulations, because it fails the first portion of the definition of research (systematic investigation).

Consequently, this project does not require IRB approval as submitted. The IRB accepts this information for our records and will retain it in our files. Thank you for providing the IRB with these materials for review. Please advise the IRB if any details of the study are to change so that we may reconsider the protocol if necessary.

If at a later date there is a desire to use any of the data for purposes of research, please resubmit the request to the IRB for use of existing data.
Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher Curriculum Completion Report
Printed on 8/3/2010

Learner: Kathryn Read (username: keread)
Institution: Ball State University
Contact Information 219 N Meadow Lane
Monticello, IN 47960 United States
Department: Honors College
Phone: 574 583-7092
Email: keread@bsu.edu

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher: Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 08/03/10 (Ref # 4626713)

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For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.
Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator
CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher Curriculum Completion Report
Printed on 9/3/2010

Learner: Hans Kellogg (username: hkellogg)
Institution: Ball State University
Contact Information
Department: Technology
Email: hkellogg@bsu.edu

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher: Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 09/03/10 (Ref # 4777414)

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Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator
**Human Subjects Research Application**

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<td>begin: August 2010</td>
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<td>Principal Investigator: Kathryn Elaine Read</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department: Honors College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(check all that apply)</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Faculty/Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Undergraduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(If the PI is a student researcher or not affiliated with Ball State University, a Faculty Sponsor must be listed below.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Sponsor: Professor Hans Kellogg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department: Technology</td>
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If this project is funded or if the investigator is seeking funding, list the agency(s) and/or sources. (If the title of the grant application differs from the title of the IRB protocol, also specify the grant application title.)

| N/A |

To comply with the federally-mandated educational requirement, you (and all Key Personnel for this project – including the faculty advisor/sponsor) must have completed the online tutorial on the protection of human subjects. A copy of the computer-generated certificate indicating your successful completion of this tutorial must either be uploaded with this application or be on record in the Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs.

Have you and all Key Personnel completed this online tutorial?  ○ Yes  ○ No

**Principal Investigator Assurance Statement**

I have read and understand Ball State University’s “Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research” as stated in the Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook, and I agree:

a) to accept responsibility for the scientific and ethical conduct of this research study,

b) to obtain IRB approval prior to revising or altering the research protocol or the approved Informed Consent text, and

c) to report immediately to the IRB any serious adverse events and/or unanticipated problems which occur as a result of this study.

The Principal Investigator must electronically sign this study prior to submitting the protocol to the IRB for review. When you sign this study as the Principal Investigator, you are also agreeing to the terms in the Principal Investigator Assurance Statement above.
Faculty Sponsor Assurance Statement
As the Faculty Sponsor for this study, I certify that I have reviewed this protocol and affirm the merit of this research project and the competency of the investigator(s) to conduct the project. My involvement in this study is as follows (check one option):

- I will be involved in this project. My name is listed and my responsibilities (described in the Key Personnel section) include supervision and oversight of this project.

- I will be involved in this project. My name is listed and my responsibilities (described in the Key Personnel section) in this project are limited (e.g., data analysis only). I affirm that this investigator has the competency to conduct this research study without my supervision or that of any other faculty or staff member of Ball State University.

- I will not be involved in any aspect of this project (including data collection). However, I have reviewed this protocol and the investigator's research experience and expertise. I affirm that this investigator has the competency to conduct this research study without my supervision or that of any other faculty or staff member of Ball State University.

A Faculty Sponsor must electronically sign this study for all student research projects and for all persons not affiliated with Ball State University before the protocol is submitted to the IRB for review. When you sign this study as the Faculty Sponsor, you are also agreeing to the terms in the Faculty Sponsor Assurance Statement above and accepting responsibility for ensuring that the terms of the Principal Investigator Assurance Statement are met.

Key Personnel
List all persons, other than the PI, who will have a role in the research project (refer to an attachment if necessary):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hans Kellogg</td>
<td>Faculty/Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department:</td>
<td>Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibilities:</td>
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Subject Population

Check all categories that apply to the subjects:

☐ Cognitively impaired ☐ Pregnant women
☐ Minors (individual under age 18 years) ☐ Prisoners
☒ Normal healthy volunteers ☒ Students
☐ Patients/clients ☐ Student athletes
☐ Other, explain:

Will information pertaining to the research be withheld from subjects (incomplete disclosure/deception)?  ○ Yes  ○ No
If yes, for what purpose?  N/A

List the location(s) where the research will be conducted:  I will be photographing with my own backdrop in a
number of locations including the homes of the participants, my own home, and Ball State Campus.

If advertisements will be used to recruit subjects, indicate the format(s) to be used:
☒ Flyer  ☐ Radio
☐ Newspaper  ☐ Television (e.g., public access channel)
☒ Electronic media, describe:  I will be advertising my art showcase through facebook & social networking.
☐ Other, describe: 

Collaborators and Permissions

If any part of the research is to be conducted at another institution with a collaborator, provide the following information
for the research collaborator:

Name:  N/A
Title: 
E-mail: 
Telephone: 
Address:

If any part of the research is to be conducted at an institution, or in conjunction with another organization, other than
Ball State University, provide the name and contact information for a person who is authorized to give permission to
conduct the research. Generally, this will be the person who would write a letter of permission to conduct the research.

Name:  N/A
Title: 
E-mail: 
Telephone: 
Address:
Potential Project Participants:

Thank you for taking the time to learn a little more about the thesis research project I am conducting and how you can participate. Subject participation from college students is the cornerstone of Project I Am Me and I couldn’t do this project without it!

As a little introduction about the project, the research accompanying this project will be my own personal research about self-esteem and self-image in today’s world relating to different types of visual media such as television, advertisements, and art. This research will accompany my photography project, which will act as a photo shoot in reverse. As a subject, you will dictate the creative direction and the styling of yourself.

I will take a series of 2 images of you in front of a black backdrop. The first image will be of you wearing a white tee and blue jeans. You will be wearing no makeup, no styling of your hair, and no other accessories. The image will be in black and white and will be representing the essence of you without other adornments or influences. For the second image, your wardrobe will be dictated by you. The image will be in color and you can wear anything that you believe describes you as a person and represents your own self-image.

The accompanying part to the second image is that you will be given a chalk slate reading the words “I am ______.” Your job will be to fill in the blank as to what “you are.” I understand that this is a loaded question, but it will give the people viewing the photography a chance to understand who you are as a person without ever speaking a word to you. I will have no input whatsoever on your dress in the second image or what you write on your chalk slate.

The only requirements of you for the project as a participant is that you be photographed in the manner explained above. Once your photo session is done, there will be no other expectations of you.

The photography taken will be displayed in a final art show at the end of the semester that is open to the public. Your name will not be displayed with the image given, but your face will be visible, so confidentiality will be limited. In order to participate in the project, you must be comfortable with this aspect of the project and willing to have the photos of you on display for the exhibit. Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time.

I am very motivated and excited to collect participants for my project and am eager for you to respond. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Elaine Read
Project I Am Me
Certificate of Self-Confidence

Name: __________________________
Age: ________
Profession or major: __________________________
Favorite Pastime: __________________________
I feel that I am an: INTROVERT EXTROVERT (circle one)
I feel most comfortable when __________________________
My favorite part about myself is __________________________
My favorite part about my body is __________________________
People think I am __________________________ but really, I am __________________________
I am confident that __________________________
My dream is __________________________
CONSENT AND RELEASE FOR "PROJECT I AM ME"
CONDUCTED BY KATHRYN ELAINE READ

You, the undersigned, irrevocably grant to the Principal Investigator of Project I Am Me (a research project) and Ball State University the right to use your appearance in photographs for any purpose it deems proper. You understand that these photographs may be used to be displayed at a public art exhibit at the end of the research project and possibly showcased on the Internet to promote the exhibit and the project itself. Your name will not be shared with your image in either case for your protection. After a final grade is received for the project, any information provided by you in the project will be destroyed.

The research accompanying this project will be relating to self-esteem and self image in today’s world relating to different types of visual media such as television, advertisements, and art. This research will accompany a photography project, which will act as a photo shoot in reverse. The subjects dictate the creative direction and the styling of themselves, and in turn end up expressing themselves as a media representative for their own self-image.

As a participant in this project, you irrevocably grant permission to use your appearance in photographs in any manner and media throughout the world in perpetuity. You consent to the use of any biographical material provided during the course of project participation.

You understand that the images of you may be edited in the Principal Investigator’s sole discretion at any time. You understand that you may or may not be given credit for your appearance in photographs or recordings.

Although reasonably foreseeable risks are very minimal, emergency medical treatment is available if you become injured or ill during your participation in this research project. You will be responsible for the costs of any medical care that is provided. It is understood that in the unlikely event of an injury or illness of any kind as a result of your participation in this research project that Ball State University, its agents, and employees will assume whatever responsibility is required by law. If any injury or illness occurs in the course of your participation in this research project, you will seek treatment as appropriate and notify the Principal Investigator as soon as possible.

Counseling services are available to you through the Counseling Center at Ball State University (765-285-1376) if you develop uncomfortable feelings during your participation in this research project. You will be responsible for the costs of any care that is provided [note: Ball State students may have some or all of these services provided to them at no cost]. It is understood that in the unlikely event that treatment is necessary as a result of your participation in this research project that Ball State University, its agents and employees will assume whatever responsibility is required by law.

Participation in this study is voluntary and subjects are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice from the investigator. For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Research Compliance, Sponsored Programs Office, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765)
285-5070, irb@bsu.edu. Also, any questions about the project itself can be directed at Kathryn Elaine Read, the Principal Investigator of Project I Am Me. She can be reached by phone (574-870-6480) or by email (keread@bsu.edu).

You expressly release Ball State, its agents, trustees, officers, employees, licensees and assigns from and against any and all claims which you have or may have for invasion of privacy, defamation or any other cause of action arising out of or relating to your appearance in the photographs created by Kathryn Elaine Read, Principal Investigator.

Date __________________________ Signature __________________________

Printed Name __________________________

Kathryn Elaine Read
Principal Investigator
Honors College
Ball State University
(574) 870-6480
keread@bsu.edu

Professor Hans Kellogg
Faculty Sponsor
Department of Technology
Ball State University

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