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Voices

On Stage and In Print

2012

Editors

Bonnie Moore
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Preface

This is the 5th edition of the Voices anthology, a collection of student essays from 2011-2012 Voices: On Stage and In Print, a program housed within the English Department of Utah State University. Some 2000 students enroll in English 2010 classes each year during the fall and spring semesters, and the essays in this anthology are from among those written by students chosen as class winners by their peers for the Voices contest. These winners read excerpts from their essays at voices on stage, a public reading held at the end of each semester in the Manon Caine Russell Kathryn Caine Wanlass Performance Hall on the USU campus.

We who teach writing, we who know the role of writing both in academia and in the workplace, are passionate about creating opportunities for students to develop an appreciation for the power of words, of research, creation, and persuasion. Voices, including the publication of this anthology, makes that goal a tangible reality.

The contest is meant to add a little fun and a little incentive to students' writing, but there is reason and pedagogical underpinnings to the experience as well. Voices reinforces the following USU Citizen-Scholar objectives:

1. Being an integral part of every student's experience. Because English 2010 is the only course required for all USU undergraduates, this conference and anthology can reach nearly every student on campus.
2. Expressing and communicating through a variety of media. Students learn how the words on paper translate into speech and multi-media, and undergraduates of any discipline have the chance to publicly present their own work.
3. Helping students develop intellectually, personally, and culturally. Students personally experience a live, fine arts reading by peers in a first-rate venue.
4. Listening and viewing for comprehension. Voices on Stage creates not only a unique visual and auditory experience, it gives students the chance to hear examples of great writing, reinforcing instruction received during the semester.
5. Developing a capacity for self-assessment. Students assist in determining the class finalists, furthering their opportunity to engage in self-assessment.
6. Understanding the nature and methods of humanities

and sciences. Research, writing, presentation, and publication are core methods of any profession. *Voices on Stage and in Print* provides opportunities and recognition for its participants.

7. Communicating effectively to an audience. Not only can students visualize a real audience when writing, they can expect much cheering and applause from classmates when they take center stage.

8. Understanding diversity in value systems. Listening to a selection of student perspectives, well-crafted and persuasive, allows students to gain a new appreciation for their peers' perspectives.

The essays you find in this volume are as the students wrote them, with some light editing for mechanics. No attempt has been made to alter these essays for style or content. As such, each essay represents the viewpoint of its author and not the university, the English Department, or the editors. They were selected by fellow students based on criteria set out by the instructors of each class.

Some are serious and others more humorous, some more formal and some more conversational, but all of the essays contain strong elements of writing. All of the essays are likewise open for critique and discussion—they are by no means considered perfect. We hope that they will be analyzed and evaluated, individually and as part of class or group discussions. They are meant to be used to enhance learning.

The proceeds from the sale of this book are used to fund the *Voices* program for this year, 2012-2013, including the use of the Performance Hall, the publication of the next year's anthology, and an honorarium for its directors and interns. Additionally, students whose essays are chosen for recognition at the reading receive cash awards totaling \$5000. The conference remains self-funded without increasing student tuition or fees.

We want to extend our special thanks to this year's *Voices* interns, Anya Hawke, Amanda Hyer, and Liana McLachlan, who worked with us this year. Their work and expertise has been invaluable. Many thanks also to John Engler, who conceived the idea for *Voices* and has been integral to the success of the program since its inception.

Bonnie Moore
Susan Andersen

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The Meaning of Hate by Wendy Pooley

“Hate is easy. Love takes courage.” - Unknown

It is April 20th 1999, and I am at Janelle’s house helping her mother, Susan, bake cookies before we go to our afternoon kindergarten class. The TV drones the news in the background of Janelle’s and my flour fight. Susan cannot take her eyes away from the screen. Even when Janelle tugs on her arm to start the oven, leaving a little white handprint on her mother’s black blouse, Susan focuses on the history unraveling before us.

“Thirteen people are already dead. Two more will commit suicide before the day ends.”

I wonder briefly why my brother’s high school is famous enough to be on the news. I think it is on fire, though there is no smoke, as the helicopter circles the school and the kids run from the building with their hands behind their heads awkwardly. It is the only explanation my young mind can come up with, for I am not yet stained with the knowledge of what hate can do. I do not understand the significance of this moment.

Thirteen people are already dead. Two more will commit suicide before the day ends.

I pinch my friend and she giggles. The phone rings. It’s my mother. She asks Susan to keep me until the end of the day. We aren’t going to kindergarten class today because just down the street from Leawood Elementary is Columbine High School. I am happy because it is like a snow day without the snow.

I do not understand.

Maybe had Eric’s parents noticed that he was hiding weapons, they could have stopped it. Maybe when Dylan’s English teacher read his disturbing essay about a trench coat assassin, she could

have stopped it. Maybe had the police acted on the complaints about Eric's behavior, they could have stopped it. Maybe someone could have stopped it, but they didn't, and now we have to live with the consequences.

Before plans were even made by Dylan and Eric to attack their own high school, there were multiple signs pointing to their mental instability. It was events in January of 1998 that transformed mental instability into homicidal intent. On January 30, 1998, the boys broke into a van and stole electrical equipment inside. Later, upon their arrest, they were both sentenced to receive psychiatric treatment, complete community service, and serve time in anger management classes.

After the incident, Eric wrote an apology letter to the owner of the van. Simultaneously, he seethed over his conviction to the pages of his journal. When cross referenced, these documents reveal the behavior of a budding psychopath. They display a split to his personality where he outwardly appears apologetic but inwardly is full of hate.

No one had thought of Eric as an angry person. He had a cool exterior, though his journal tells a different story. After his and Dylan's arrest, he was prescribed an antidepressant called Zoloft, commonly used to treat OCD. While on the drug, Eric reported having homicidal and suicidal thoughts. The doctors would switch him to a new brand that may have had the same symptoms, Luvox. His autopsy later on would reveal large amounts of Luvox in his system.

The boy had a fondness for making pipe bombs and though his father tried to curb the habit, he continued creating them and lied to his parents. He firmly believed in natural selection and Darwin. He thought that we should all be placed in a video game like *Doom* so that the strong could survive and the weak could die. This twisted philosophy contributed to the final events of Eric's life where Dylan and Eric believed themselves to be "God-like."

Less is known about Dylan Klebold. He was a shy boy with an explosive temper, shown by his frequent fights with his boss and vulgarity exchanged with teachers. Eric's and his arrest gave his rage

a channel toward revenge against the cops and community that had allowed them to be so subjected.

Together the boys would form a plot to attack their own school specifically on Hitler's birthday. They gathered supplies and created explosives. A few older friends, unaware of Eric and Dylan's plot, bought them two sawed-off shot guns and a semi-automatic rifle. In the months leading up to the shootings, the boys made home videos referred to as "The Basement Tapes," documenting their plan. Their plan included the death of hundreds.

My brother is okay because he didn't go to school that day. The boy in our church is not. His name is Michael Johnson, and he cannot walk or eat solid food because he was shot in the mouth and leg. He still waves at me whenever I see him in church though. I always smile and wave back.

For weeks after Columbine my mother and I walk around the park next to the high school. Today, she has a bundle of white roses in one hand and my hand in the other. Police patrol everywhere. One of them rides a horse that I get to pet. While I do so, my mother asks the officer about the school. It is closed for the year. All the students have to go to the other high schools in the district, like my brother. Some students choose to stay at their new schools for good because they cannot stand to go back to Columbine. Some students don't have a

choice; they had left this world.
“ They had planned to kill so many more. ”

From here I can see several crosses covering Rebel Hill. There are people all around and, though we are too far to tell for sure, I think some of them are crying. My little heart throbs. I don't know why they are crying, but I want to tell them that it will be alright like my mommy does whenever I am sad.

My mom gives my hand a squeeze. "Come on, Wendy." I follow her up the hill. She lays her white roses in front of crosses a distance away from the mourners. A woman to our right sobs so

violently I wonder if she might break.

I look up at my mother uncertainly. "Now say a prayer for them, baby," she says and folds her arms. I bow my head. I don't know what I am supposed to say so I pray that everyone will be happy, that my brother can go to school, and mostly that the lady on my right will stop crying. I pray for world peace even though I don't really know what that means. I had seen it earlier on one of the crosses and think it sounds like a good thing.

When I am done, the lady on my right looks up slightly and thanks us for the flowers through her tears. I smile. "It will be okay," I tell her, and she smiles weakly back.

On April 20th, 1999, Dylan and Eric would attack their own school and would take the lives of thirteen people followed by their own. They had planned to kill so many more. Two homemade propane bombs had been planted in the cafeteria, set to go off when the lunch rush was at its busiest. The pair planned to shoot survivors fleeing from the scene from the parking lot outside. The bombs, however, failed to detonate.

When Eric and Dylan realized something was wrong, they chose to go into the school, killing two people as they went. Upon entering, they went on a rampage that lasted slightly over thirty minutes. Dave Sanders, a teacher at the school, had been evacuating students to safety when he ran into the shooters and was mortally wounded. He was pulled to safety in a nearby classroom, but was bleeding profusely. The eerie sign placed in the window, "bleeding to death," was on his account. He died before help could get to him.

It had been rumored that the boys were targeting jocks due to the bullying Dylan and Eric had suffered from them, but strangely enough they did not head to the gym. Instead they went to the library, where the students had no hope of escape. It was there that they murdered the majority of their fellow students; ten in all. They taunted, teased, and shot the kids who had been their peers, all because the pair had let hate take hold.

The boys headed to the cafeteria and shot at their propane bombs in an attempt to detonate them. All this accomplished was a fire. From there the boys wandered the school, seemingly listless and without purpose. They reloaded their guns and set off pipe bombs, but did not kill anyone else, despite their big plans. In the end, the boys went back to the library, now abandoned after the earlier massacre. Dylan and Eric died soon after from self-inflicted wounds, just feet away from many of their victims.

I do not attend Columbine High School for another eight years. As my freshmen class enters the school's back doors together for the first time, the teachers applaud us at either side. They may have had tragedy in the past, but they still held a hope for us, the future.

I clearly see the scars of the shooting painted on the school like graffiti.

By now the carpet has been ripped up and replaced by sterile white tiles. The former library was demolished and a high-ceiling cafeteria stands in its place. On that ceiling are paintings of trees that over the next four years I often glance up at and wonder about their meaning. A new library has been built on the side of the school, the Hope Memorial Library. When I enter, there is a stone plaque listing the victims of the shooting. Dylan and Eric are not among them, and I wonder if this is not an act of hatred in itself.

A seal close to the front office is one of the first senior gifts given to the school. It is considered bad luck to walk on it because it is one of the only things left that was present during the shooting. Students always give it a wide berth during passing periods, creating a circular empty space in the hall that always makes me chuckle at the ridiculous superstition. I may think it silly, but I still never step on it.

We are still not allowed to wear trench coats or camouflage to school. The pain of the past is starting to fade, but it will never be forgotten. At the park next to our high school, the Columbine Memorial is built, and I hear the stories from the survivors

themselves, warning us of the harm hate could do. I walk through the same halls, study with some of the same teachers, and through my own experiences finally gain an understanding of the meaning of hate, but more importantly, the meaning of love.

As my senior class exits the school's front doors together for the last time, the teachers applaud us at either side. They love us and are now letting us go with a hope in our hearts for our own future. Together, we are healing.

Fifteen people dead, twenty-one wounded, and a community that will never be the same again all because of the actions of two hateful boys. For a long time afterwards, all people want to know is why? Why did they do it? Though we can never know for sure without asking the shooters themselves, their reasons are offered up in the journals left behind.

Their journals tell us they wanted to make an impact on the world. Undoubtedly, this was achieved. The shock they gave the world was probably far greater than they had ever imagined it could be, for no one would ever forget Columbine. Revenge was also a factor. The pair wanted retribution for the incident of January 1998, presumably their arrest, and for the bullying for which they had been targeted.

There were far more factors in play too numerous to mention. What was going on in Dylan's and Eric's minds that drove them to murder can never truly be understood, and the search for answers to the question of why only lead to more heartache. The community, family, and friends harmed by Dylan and Eric's actions after the fact had only had one choice: move on.

I walk over to the Columbine Memorial. It is the summer before I leave for college and the last time I will ever visit this structure. I am somewhat sad to leave it behind, but in my heart I

know it is time to move on.

As I approach the reverent edifice dedicated to the dead, the sun kisses my tan skin with comfort. The memorial's flowers are stretched out in the summer air, giving the sweet scent of columbines to Columbine. There are only two other women here, and they murmur quietly to each other as they look over the victim's names.

There is no ceiling over this monument, only Rebel Hill standing guard next to it. As I climb the concrete path up to the top of the hill, I am reminded of the little girl who told the sobbing woman that it would be okay. I like to think that maybe it is now.

Below me the two women read aloud quotes said by the living from the stone walls. The dead, however, remain silent. But from the top of Rebel Hill I can see my high school, and though the wind whispers through my hair and the birds sing love songs, I swear I almost hear them speak.

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The Western (Mis)Perception of Africa by Jonathan Olsen

Recently, most of the western world was shocked to see the experiences of people living under the influence of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in central Africa through seeing a video that went viral from an organization called Invisible Children (LaFranchi). The video was about the atrocities committed by the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony. The campus at Utah State University was set abuzz with talk of Kony and his apparent horrible wrong-doings. For example, in one anthropology class an entire lecture period was cancelled so that students could discuss the video and the activities of the LRA. During this class period, misconstrued perceptions and overgeneralizations of Africa as a whole were set forth. If one not aware of the video or the LRA were to enter a conversation, it might seem as if all of Africa was under attack and subject to warlords and inhumane activities.

The issue itself is a serious one. To say that just because the issue only affects a few thousand on a continent of over an estimated billion people does not justify the criminal and malicious acts that the LRA inflicts upon its victims. However, it becomes a major hindrance to Africa's global standing when the maltreatment of a few thousand individuals is made generalizable to over a billion people. As a person who has lived in East Africa for two years, I found this biased and ill-informed perception alarming. I had been living within 100 miles of the area in question and had never even heard of the LRA, let alone had similar experiences or seen people living in those conditions. The gross exaggeration of an issue affecting such a small percentage of the population did so much to harm an already negative perception of Africa. I recently spoke about the Joseph Kony issue with one of my close friends, Yeko Balyejusa, a native and current resident of Entebbe, Uganda. I asked him how he felt about the West's perception of Africa and wanting to catch Joseph Kony. His response was that to catch Joseph Kony would definitely be a good thing and that Ugandans would welcome it. Yet, he added, "You Americans, you think you can solve everyone's problems. I don't like how you all think you should

take care of us, when all of us don't always need to be taken care of" (Balyejusa).

Yeko's statement provoked me to do some internal questioning. Is he right? Does the western world view Africa as a problem waiting to be solved? When a typical western view of Africa is discussed, some of the first things that may come to mind are charity organizations, humanitarian work, civil war, foreign aid, tribalism, poverty, and slums. All of these views portray Africa as a dark continent full of problems and devoid of structure and organization. But why do so many think this way? The way I see it, the attribution of negativity is disproportionately given to Africa over other areas of the world. Do not industrialized nations themselves have problems with poverty and other economic issues? Don't many also have problems with racism and other cultural conflicts akin to tribalism? Even such a technologically advanced and relatively prosperous economic area such as Cache County, Utah has a large number of charity and other non-profit organizations aimed at bettering the social welfare of its citizens. So why is it that members of the western world tend to view Africa in such a negative light?

Jamie B. Wallace, a PhD student in Anthropology at the University of Oxford attributes such a negative perception of Africa and its people to the media:

One of the most crucial mediums of shaping public knowledge, and which often works subconsciously, is the media. Television, newspapers, films, and magazines are the ways in which the American population receive "reliable" information. Flashy headlines and eye-catching leads provoke further investigation in events and subjects. However, most of the distributors of this insight often go unchallenged. Most Americans soak up the knowledge presented to them, without questioning its credibility. It is left up to the media to portray what they deem to be facts, accurate portrayals, and interpretation (Wallace, 1).

As Wallace explains, a western view of international affairs not personally experienced can nearly fully be attributed to the media.

Very few Americans will ever travel to Africa, not to even mention stay there long enough to really know the people and how they live their lives. Because of this, Americans are reliant upon the subjective viewpoints of their particular choice in media. Most of the time, media providers will not give positive information coming out of ‘the dark continent’, as it does not catch the reader’s eye. This may create a distorted perception of the African reality.

Not only does the western world receive this skewed information, a majority of Africans also receive a large share of their information from western sources, giving them that same distorted perception of their own continent.

“ Thus, this skewed perception of reality creates a perpetuating cycle of dependence, mistrust, and possible violence. ”

This perception seeps into an African’s viewpoint, causing distrust, corruption, selfishness, and greed. For example, due to media portrayal, governments may perceive their people to be economically destitute and horribly impoverished. Because of this, basic societal functions such as taxing are being undermined by governments who have little to no faith that their people will pay taxes and in turn plead to foreign countries for help. On the other side, the people may not place so much trust in their leaders as to give them a portion of their gross income to pay for public services to which they may not ever receive access. This constant feed of a negative Africa infiltrates the minds of African people and leaders, which sometimes may be a cause for African governments to reach out and ask for foreign aid, not to mention occasional military coups or civil wars. Thus, this skewed perception of reality creates a perpetuating cycle of dependence, mistrust, and possible violence. Now one must ask themselves, “What can be done to stop this downward-spiraling cycle?”

One solution to the underdevelopment, corruption, and economic dependence may be to go to the root of the problem: misinformation. People both inside and outside of the African continent must be educated to a level of understanding in which good decisions may follow. Africa contains all the resources it needs

to solve its problems -natural resources, human support, model institutions of government and education, and most important: intelligence. All people, and particularly Africans, must open their eyes to this notion of complete capability and responsibility.

One striking example of African competence and excellence is that of Stanley Kwenda, a Zimbabwean who was finally able to step out of the shadow into the light. Though a working journalist himself, Stanley Kwenda worked with foreign journalists for years as nothing more than a tour guide for people with no knowledge of the local country and its culture. These foreign journalists told stories that did not correctly represent the situation because they simply did not understand the culture. Eventually he was able to work with Al-Jazeera in doing his own investigative research. The results of his own work demonstrate a superior capacity to gain information that may provide solutions to problems in a way no foreigner would be able to accomplish (Kwenda).

Lack of reliable information coupled with ignorance has led many in the western world to become a people so willing to succumb to surface arguments. People latch on to the idea that Africans are inept at proper living, by their own standards, and thus push the view that foreign countries and other organizations must intervene to save these people from themselves. Ethnocentrism is a curse that inhibits us from global progression. To think that “my way is better than your way” can do nothing but hold us back. All people must stop viewing Africa and Africans as somehow inferior and begin to show a little faith and hope in a continent independently capable of breaking through the dark into the light.

Foreign aid, however, does not need to be permanently expelled. Though Africa is capable of finding solutions to its own problems and progressing independent of outside help, all countries need help during various difficult situations. I also believe that as some of the difficulties African countries now face may be the results of colonial exploitation, those countries responsible for colonization have a particular responsibility of aiding those countries that they have wronged. In fact, thanks to help by Tony Blair, a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, some African countries are already

making progress in terms of new governments working together with their people to stabilize and develop their countries (Guardian).

The old adage, “knowledge is power”, holds true in the West’s relationship with Africa. If they so choose, we should be willing to work with Africans in helping them find solutions to problems that we seem to have a better control over. One of the biggest problems of foreign aid in Africa, as well as many developing countries, is that many projects do not last. Though aid is given with the best of intentions, often times just a few short years down the road the benefits of that aid have burnt out. Water wells can be built by foreign organizations in drought-stricken deserts, but after a few years those same wells are decrepit, dilapidated, and unusable. The locals don’t have the knowledge to repair the well or build a new one. Usually, foreign aid is giving a man a fish. The man doesn’t only need a fish; he needs to learn how to fish. Only then can there be sustainability and continuity in Africa’s progression and growth.

We, as citizens of a developed and industrialized nation, must also remember that we do not have all of the answers. Is our society perfect? Are we free from disease, conflict, and poverty? Are there not the tired, poor, and hungry who call America home? The Western World’s relationship with Africa should not so much reflect a parent-child relationship as it should reflect a peer partnership where altruism is the motivating factor and both are edified and learn better how to deal with life situations.

As members of the western world, we must reject our tendency to simply accept surface arguments from an attention-seeking media. Investigation, critical thinking, and analysis must follow the influx of information. We must also keep in check how emotion is used in a presentation of information. Emotion is a powerful thing when used for good and can be very detracting when used wrongly. We must leave our ethnocentrism behind in an attempt to focus on truly understanding Africa and its people. Only then can sustainable progress be made in our relationship with Africa.

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Aunt Jemima, What Took You So Long?
by Amy Porter

“He who goes to bed hungry dreams of pancakes.”
-Proverb

Saturday morning. 7:00am.

I rest under the warm weight of my comforter, watching the ceiling. In the early light, the bubbles and bulges of the plaster seem to creep and coil, making strange and startling patterns beneath the paint. It reminds me of tapioca pudding and, vaguely, Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Basking in the heavy, nebulous space between awareness and the balmy miasma of dream, I wonder why, dear Lord, I am awake at this ungodly hour. Then it comes again, the drum of an enthusiastic knuckle against my door.

“Moogs,” my father calls, “you want some pancakes?”
My God. Here we go again...

* * *

pancake, n. (¹/ˈpæn.keɪk/): a thin, flat cake of batter, fried on both sides in a pan (“pancake, n.”).

Archeologists—poking about in the dirt and rock, searching for meaning and connection in wasted bone and spent structures and tiny bits of Might-Be-Tools—say griddle-type cakes were one of the earliest and most prevalent cereal staples of the prehistoric world. Conceived as simple fritters of egg, spice and flour, like their creators they have grown and spawned and spread. *Alita Dolcia*: the flapjack, drop scone, *poori*, crepe, *galette*, *palascinta* (Olver). Across kitchens and cultures, this now traditional fare is crafted in countless shapes, sizes, and spirits. *Like a stranger, a different face, a different name. Like a stranger, a different place, a different game.*

We call them pancakes.

* * *

“Tippety, tippety tin, Give me a pancake and I will come in. Tippety, tippety toe, Give me a pancake and I will go.”

–English nursery rhyme

Every Saturday, for as long as I can remember, my father wakes at the crack of dawn to cook a pancake breakfast. I suppose this is something he learned as a young man, brought up on my grandfather’s dairy amid a jovial and generally raucous populace of brothers, sisters, school friends, second cousins, unwed aunts, several indeterminate twice-removeds, and a great many cows. Work was hard, and mornings were a hungry time. Now, the head of his own small colony, my father steadfastly brings this tradition to bear on our weekend ritual. He isn’t home much, except for late evenings and early mornings while we’re all still quiet and dreaming. He cooks only two things: pancakes and sausage, and he serves them with maple and raspberry syrup, butter, and skim milk. My three brothers crowd around our old partition table and challenge each other to pancake gluttony. I lay my head on the worn wood of the table top and plot homicide.

I do not like pancakes. I do not cook them, I do not eat them, and I harbor a disquieting prejudice against Aunt Jemina that has nothing to do with her color or creed. My father knows this. I have told him many times. But today, like every Saturday, he startles me to waking with a knock and a question, “Want some pancakes?” Over the years, I have come to recognize the command beneath the query’s innocuous façade: come to the kitchen and partake, my child, whether you be willing or loath.

When I was younger, I would listen for my father in the still of the early morning, when the world was soft and still coming into focus. Once I heard the first faint clattering of pans, I could tiptoe past the shrill hinges of my bedroom door and find him in the kitchen. I remember the musky tang of his paint splattered t-shirt, a pair of too-short pajama bottoms, the rustle of his knit black socks on the fading lemon linoleum. I sat on the counter in my Winnie the Pooh footsies and helped him mix batter in my mother’s blue glass bowl, relishing the sharp hiss of the griddle as each viscous spoonful of dough spread

across its hot face. His cakes cooked golden and wonderfully round. Mine grew large and lopsided, like smooth, pale tumors stretched over a dark and smoldering husk. These I deemed unworthy of life, pronounced sentence upon, and, one by one, executed with my spatula. My father laughed and called me moog-a-choogs, his little girl. I remember being happy then, with him.

But I am older now. And I don't like pancakes.

* * *

Pancake Day, (n.): Shrove Tuesday, so called from the custom of making pancakes on this day to use up eggs and fat before Lent ("pancake, n.").

One final day of feasting before the Lenten fast. What easier or more indulgent way for any devout Christian to rid himself of those less than Lent-friendly foodstuffs—butter, milk, and eggs—than to whip up a hearty platter of pancakes? Compelling little morsels, aren't they? Today, the revelries of this unofficial holiday unite entire communities in the impious worship of all things Pancake. Sweet batter, loud voices, full mouths, light hearts; mother, father, sister, neighbor, friend ("What is Pancake Day?").

In this moment—beyond the compulsions of physical nourishment and transcending religious observance—the pancake enters the realm of social ritual. Here, we recognize the act of eating as an act of cultural and communal ceremony as much as it is an act of survival.

* * *

"Let them lacke neither Pudding pyes nor Pancakes"

-T. Deloney

In 2001, my father's parents sell their home of thirty-nine years and purchase a small house at the end of our street. I do not know them well, and what memories I have of our childhood visits mostly involve cheese filled hotdogs and avocado shag carpet. My father

can hardly contain his excitement at their arrival. I sit on the lawn, prodding at the parched carcass of some hapless worm, watching my father with his father: one darker, sharper; one broader and quicker to smile. Same nose, same hands, same clear blue eyes. In their difference, I see the same man.

My grandfather believes in three fundamental principles: hard work, discipline, and breakfast. Like his son, he is a great proponent of both pancakes and a variety of processed meats. His specialty is the blueberry buckwheat flapjack: hearty, dark, and unyielding, with the texture of wet sand and the promise of a robust bowel movement. My father calls them an acquired taste. My mother calls them an unfortunate inevitability.

“ These terrifying creations are made bearable only by their blueberries. ”

Sometimes before church on Sundays, we walk to my grandparent’s house. There, seated under the dull gaze of dusty ceramic frogs and fading family portraits, we devour a hearty meal of sausage links, strawberry jam, and, of course, buckwheat hot cakes. These terrifying creations are made bearable only by their blueberries: moist and sweet and scattered like hidden treasures throughout the thick, grainy dough. To bite into a blueberry is to savor—if only for one brief moment—a revelation of the Pancake-That-Might-Have-Been (which, in a perfect world, would be a waffle).

Today, I am having a particularly difficult morning. Slouched and silent amidst the bright clatter of utensils and the undulating drone of breakfast conversation, I stare, sullen and defiant, at a plate full of pancake. Looking up, I see that my grandfather is watching me from behind the kitchen counter. He is a tall, straight man. His leathery skin is calloused and liver-spotted, arms burnt bronze by the sun. His hair—long and transparent—he combs straight back over his head. When the wind blows, the thin strands stand straight up, like the tail of some deranged albino rooster—stalking through the yard, looking for a fight. Just now he is dressed in his Sunday best, swathed in the voluminous folds of my grandmother’s favorite apron. It is a thing of rare beauty, that apron: broad and pink with a border of pale

lace ruffles and a double-wide pocket sewn in front. He catches my eye and a quick jerk of his spatula orders me into the kitchen. Taking care to be sure my father is distracted by the sausage, I slip from my chair and creep to the counter.

Standing on the worn tile, I sorrowfully watch my grandfather flip his latest batch of pancakes. He glances down to meet my disconsolate stare and gives an almost imperceptible nod towards the open shelving beneath the counter. Following the motion, I uncover a bowl, a spoon, and a soggy carton of Tillamook chocolate fudge ice cream nestled between the stacks of canned pear halves and Albacore tuna. Safe behind the barricade of the counter and my grandfather's Sunday slacks, I sit on the kitchen floor and eat three heaping bowls. My grandfather begins to hum—softly, tunelessly—as he stirs another fistful of blueberries into his dark batter. He is a hard man. He is a quiet man. In some ways, I think he is a little like a pancake himself.

* * *

burnt | burned, adj. (/bɜːrnt/ /bɜːnd/): affected or damaged by fire or excessive heat, scorched (“burnt/burned, adj.”).

The average pancake takes approximately two minutes to cook. When tiny bubbles rise to the wet surface of the batter and its edges begin to crisp and dry, it is time to flip the cake. While the popularity of the pancake is due in part to its ease to prepare, garnish, and consume, a good chef recognizes that the perfect pancake is not always so very simple to achieve. Cooking these cakes requires caution and vigilance, because the second side always fries faster than the first. The most beautiful pancake in the world can blister to an unpalatable charcoal in an instant if not constantly and thoughtfully attended (Ashen).

* * *

“The first pancake is always a failure.”

-Russian proverb

When I graduate from high school, my father plans an

expedition back East, just the two of us. My mother says she thinks it will be good for us to spend some time together. Our great daddy-daughter adventure, she calls it. We fly to the coast and lease a car from Dennis, the Hertz rental company clerk with small white teeth and very wide eyes. My father drives. I give directions and discover an incredible ineptitude for map reading. This is shaping up to be a great trip.

I have never been to New York, and it is so much smellier than I imagined. We visit the Statue of Liberty and eat bratwurst with mustard while a bearded Jamaican serenades us on his ukulele. We climb to the top of the Empire State Building and debate tossing pennies over the rail. When it starts getting dark, we walk through Times Square with hundreds of other tourists: cameras clicking, horns yelping, music drifting, lights throbbing. It's magic hour in the Big Apple.

My father is like a child. Even when he's standing, paused and still, I can see his whole body tense, straining forward, impatient for Next and New. He is electrified. He is connected. I stand, rocking in the pulsing mass of people like a buoy anchored in a swelling ocean. I am removed. I am detached. Beside me, my father's face—this face that I have always known—fades and blurs into the blinding crush of human voice and limb. Surrounded by strangers, I revel in happy anonymity.

Back in the car, we cross the border into the Garden State. My father eats pistachios, sucking the salty shells clean and spitting them out of the open window. I sip Dr. Pepper and watch the dark trees rushing by. The city was loud, but we are quiet now. Our fond reminiscings, our droll banterings, our Remember-Whens and Guess-Whats and So-Tell-Me-About-Its we've already spent in the drunken thrill of the metropolis. And so we drive, aimless and unhurried, in a cautious, congenial silence. It may be we are simply enjoying this moment in that comfortable quiet born of long intimacy. It may be we have nothing left to say.

* * *

“For the best pancakes: measure ingredients carefully...don’t overbeat the batter...don’t move the pancakes before [they’re cooked], because they will just break apart... [and] don’t worry if your first attempts aren’t perfect; you’ll get better with practice” (Larsen).

* * *

“Aunt Jemima, what took you so long?”
–1966 Quaker syrup campaign

Saturday morning. 7:00am.

I rest under the warm weight of my comforter, watching the ceiling. In the early light, the bubbles and bulges of the plaster seem to twist and coil, making strange and startling patterns beneath the paint. It reminds me of tapioca pudding.

I’ve come visiting for the holiday break, and this bed feels all at once alien and familiar. I suppose it’s only natural. I know that I have changed. I am five pounds thicker, obsessed with Ray Bradbury, and harboring a secret passion for toe socks and decorative jello molds. I enter my parent’s house, a wary revenant, but by the evening I am settled once again in this easy, remembered space. How effortlessly we fall back into the intimate habits of home.

Basking in the heavy, nebulous place between awareness and the balmy miasma of dream, I realize (in amused exasperation) why I am awake at this ungodly hour. “Moogs,” my father calls, “you want some pancakes?”

The question is, this time, just that: a question. I listen to hear his footsteps fading, then throw the covers back and walk out into the hall. I find my father in the kitchen, whipping batter in my mother’s blue glass bowl. The table is set for six, though one brother is *saving souls* in New Mexico and the others have made plans of their own. My father still sets out their plates, the way he does every time one of us is away from home.

I watch him now, humming softly, tunelessly, as he spoons Soon-To-Be-Pancakes (Might-Have-Been-Waffles) onto the griddle. He notices me in the doorway and gives a happy, stubbled grin. “How many do you want?” he asks.

"Two," I say, and hold out my plate.

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Maid Marian: A Model of Feminine Behavior by Lindi Andreasen

I never liked the ISD tournament very much. I did not like it because inevitably we would be matched up against the host school, the Illinois School for the Deaf, and I was not the only girl on my high school basketball team that did not like to play the ISD Tigers. My reason for dreading that particular game, however, was completely different from my teammates' reason.

All of the ISD players really were hearing impaired and, as is often the case with deaf people, they also had trouble keeping their balance. Balance is crucial in basketball, but the Lady Tigers never let their

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They frequently overcompensated by being extremely aggressive.

”

lack of it detract from their game play. In fact, they frequently overcompensated by being extremely aggressive which meant my team got fouled...a lot. This is the reason my teammates hated our annual game against ISD so much. On the court during timeouts, on the bench, and in the locker room after the game, my usually very congenial teammates would do nothing but complain about the referees not calling more fouls and badmouth the ISD girls, cussing and calling them names. One of my best friends and the point guard on our team was always the angriest. Sometimes it got so bad that she would start swinging her elbows during the game as a means of revenge.

I could never understand why my teammates got so mad, especially because we never lost to ISD. We were usually so far ahead that the referees neglecting to blow their whistles on every foul did not hurt us at all, and the girls on ISD were not malicious. So, why did the traditional feminine characteristics of empathy, gentleness, compassion and intuition that my friends usually possessed fly out the window when we played ISD (Conway)? The girls on that team were simply trying their hardest to win the basketball game, the same as we were; they just had an extra challenge that was out of their control. The way my teammates acted during the ISD game is what

made *me* dread playing the Tigers so much.

Perhaps it was my own dreams of being a “lady” that were responsible for the distress I felt at my teammates’ behavior at basketball games. I grew up reading books like *A Little Princess* and *An Old Fashioned Girl*, the main characters of which were perfect models of traditional feminine behavior. Sara Crew and Polly Milton were polite, kind, compassionate and self-sacrificing, and I wanted to be just like them. My teammates, however, clearly did not share the same vision of desirable feminine behavior as I did, but how could I blame them? Femininity means something different in today’s society than it did in the days of Sara and Polly, or even than it did seventy years ago when another model of traditional feminine behavior was created.

One of my favorite movies has always been *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, Hollywood’s 1938 adaptation of the classic legend, starring Erroll Flynn as Robin Hood and Olivia de Havilland as Maid Marian. As a little girl, I loved the plot, the action, and most of all I loved Maid Marian, an additional example of the kind of woman I wanted to be when I grew up. Olivia de Havilland’s Marian was young, beautiful and the privileged ward of King Richard the Lion-heart (De Havilland). She was what one might call “all girl,” possessing all of the traditional traits of femininity.

Because we loved the 1938 movie so much, my family was very excited for the new adaptation of Robin Hood that hit theatres in 2010. I went to it with my dad, not exactly sure what to expect and came away pleased overall (though still loyal to the 1938 adaptation), but surprised and puzzled by the new version of Maid Marian that I had encountered. In stark contrast to my beloved heroine, Cate Blanchett’s character was a widow in her mid-thirties, who worked hard to keep the manor running in the absence of her husband. Fiercely independent, her first lines are shouted curse words at the forest boys who are stealing food from the village. She wears plain clothes and carries a dagger which, in the course of the movie, she uses to fend off a potential rape by stabbing the man in the back. During the film’s final climatic battle, this Maid Marian refuses to be left behind while the men fight. She joins the fray in full battle armor

(Blanchett). Now, it is not that I totally disliked the “new” Maid Marian; she had many admirable qualities, but I did wonder why such a drastic change had been made to the character between 1938 and 2010.

Sylvia Harvey answers this question in the book *Movies and Mass Culture* when she states, “All movies express social values, or the erosion of these values, through the ways in which they depict both institutions and relations between people” (173). As the behavior and lifestyles of women have changed in real life, so have the representations of women on screen. This parallelism becomes especially apparent when the same character is examined over time in different adaptations of the same story. Maid Marian appears in every film version of the Robin Hood legend, but the very demeanor of her character changes over time to reflect the change in social values of women in American society.

According to research, “the attributes that Americans prized in the traditional culture of women” (Baker 17) were empathy, modesty, loyalty, spirituality, patience, gentleness, intuition, selflessness, etc. Women were identified as the civilizing and moralizing forces in society (Baker 7-21; Conway; Shindo 55). Joyce Baker gives an even more vivid picture of traditional feminine behavior is given in the following lines from *Images of Women in Film*:

Women were also shown to speak a special language of compassion. They tactfully soothed hurt feelings, ably defended their men or children without rancor. . . were devoted basically to peace, had comforting words to offer when tragedy or death occurred, and seldom expressed anger either verbally or in their demeanors (132).

Perhaps the key word in this passage is “were” because it indicates that this was indeed the *traditional* view of femininity, past tense.

In today’s society, there are “different ways of being a girl” and “the contemporary moment appears to further enhance the emergence of new femininities in its appeal to individualized subjects as agentic controllers of their own destiny” (Kehily 56-57). These

statements explain why the 2010 representation of Maid Marian is so very different from the 1938 representation of Maid Marian. The position of women in American society has changed in the last seventy years and along with it, the social values attached to women. Feminist writer Caroline Bird describes this shift in feminine thought:

She is liberating herself not so much from sex, but from what goes with being a girl—all that sugar and spice and everything nice...she has discarded all the little cues and clues and buttons and bows and smiles and wiles that invite a man to look her over. She wants, above all, freedom from the tyranny of being a girl (243).

Between the years of 1938 and 2010, feminist movements placed huge emphasis on this idea of women as capable and autonomous individuals. It was somewhere along this quest for complete and validated independence that traditional feminine characteristics were cast aside in fear that displaying such qualities would make women seem weak and dependent. In her essay on gender stereotyped traits, Gwendolyn Gerber explains that through repeated observation, men have been characterized by the “instrumental or assertive” qualities associated with high status and women by the more “expressive or accommodating” qualities linked with low status (297). Gerber concludes that the “submissive” traits associated with women are undesirable attributes because they are linked with lower status (299). Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, a journalist and writer on women’s issues writes:

She knows that it is her American, her twentieth century birthright to emerge from a creature of instinct into a full-fledged individual who is capable of molding her own life. And in this respect she holds that she is becoming man’s equal. *If this be treason, gentlemen, make the most of it*” (qtd. in Shindo 54).

Cate Blanchett’s Maid Marian of the 2010 Robin Hood adaptation is unquestionably independent and powerful. The evidence is impossible to miss, too cliché, and at first viewing one would immediately find her much stronger than Olivia de Havilland’s Maid Marian of 1938. However once one digs a little deeper, really

analyzing the role she plays, the 1938 Maid Marian is found to be just as strong as the independent woman of 2010. Traditional traits of femininity such as those exhibited by Maid Marian in the 1938 Robin Hood film do not make women the weaker sex.

In her essay “*And the ‘Reel’ Maid Marian?*”, medievalist and librarian, Sherron Lux begins by asking “whether we see Marian in these films...positively, as a woman with agency, or whether we see her marginalized and powerless” (152). Between my own observations and Lux’s expert analysis, that question can be answered.

From the very beginning of the 1938 film, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, it is apparent that Maid Marian is her own person. Lux describes her as, “a beautiful and elegant lady who generally knows her own mind and attempts to act on her knowledge and beliefs” (153). Maid Marian politely declines Prince John’s efforts to persuade her to marry Sir Guy of Gisborne, and makes her disapproval of Robin Hood’s impudence extremely visible (De Havilland). According to Lux, “in the course of the film her character grows, as she learns the (filmic) truth about her own Norman people’s treatment of the conquered Saxons, and also learns that Sir Robin of Loxley, the bold Saxon knight-named-outlaw whose conduct initially offends her, is actually a good man who cares for “beaten, helpless people” (153). Maid Marian does not grace Robin with her affections until he has proven his worth. His dashing good looks and authoritative nature alone are not enough to win her over to the Saxon cause. She is loyal to her Norman upbringing until Robin shows her how her people are persecuting their Saxon neighbors (De Havilland). Then, Marian shows her strength again by having the humility and compassion to admit she was wrong; it takes a very confident person to acknowledge his or her own mistakes.

Later in the movie, when Robin Hood is captured and scheduled for execution, it is not his band of merry men that save him. In fact, they have all but given up hope of ever seeing their leader again when Maid Marian comes to them with a rescue plan, devised through her own intelligence and intuition. In the grand conclusion to the film, Marian once again shows her independence by standing

up to Prince John when she finds out he has sent an assassin to kill Richard upon the king's return to England. She is sentenced to death, but shows no sign of weakness. Maid Marian does not once plead for her life; instead, she remains dignified and brave, sure of herself and what she stands for (De Havilland).

Olivia de Havilland's Maid Marian is proof that women can exhibit traditional feminine characteristics and at the same time, be strong and independent women with purpose. I cannot help but think to myself that this is a lesson the girls on my basketball team needed to learn. Sports are often considered to be more masculine in nature, and it was that desire to seem rough and tough— just as athletic as boys— and strong and independent, that made my teammates act the way they did toward the ISD girls' basketball team and brag about it the next day at school. It was as if they thought being calm and understanding would make people consider them less of an athlete. That idea is false. Maid Marian is a model of feminine behavior that shows women can do anything, hold any position, and still act according to traditional qualities of femininity.

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Don't "Nerf" the Zombies!

by Brayden Smith

Dear Mr. Eric Olsen,*

As I'm sure you are aware, the most recent edition of Humans vs. Zombies (HvZ) has just taken place here at Utah State University. It was a great success, as always. Players had fun, friendships were formed, and memories were made.

However, I understand that you and some other University officials have taken issue with the use of Nerf guns in the game and have requested that a partial ban be put into place. You listed a number of concerns, among them the somewhat juvenile nature of the game, the distraction to students who aren't playing the game, and most importantly, safety (Olsen). These are clearly valid points. If I may, I would like to address them and offer you some alternate points of view with which you can view the game and what it means to players.

Firstly, you express discontent with the "juvenile nature of the game (Olsen)." This is always the elephant in the room for players and non-players alike. Everyone who goes to USU has experienced this in some form or another. Players have to deal with the smirks and snide remarks offered by non-players trying to impress their girlfriends, and non-players have to cope with bypassing "humans" or "zombies" and the occasional zombie attack nearby as they walk to class. Players can't help but feel somewhat sheepish as they walk around campus with neon orange bandanas, rolled-up socks strapped to their chests, and toy guns that say "Ages 6+" on them. I've even had little children come up to me and ask, "What game are you guys playing? Can I play with you?"

You also mentioned that the game is a distraction to students not participating (Olsen). Again, this is a valid concern. It's hard to not look at a horde of zombies chasing after a couple of humans across the quad in the middle of the day screaming "BRRRAAAAAIIINS!!!" and whooping all the way.

Finally, and most importantly, you expressed several concerns about safety, all of which certainly have merit and validity (Olsen). I

* Eric Olson is Associate Vice President for Student Services, USU.

will do my best to address those as well.

In an email to Brice Colby, RHA Events Coordinator and head of the USU chapter of HvZ, you mentioned an incident where out of instinct, a veteran subdued a player who startled him and broke his Nerf gun (Olsen). This clearly presents a danger for both veterans and players alike and is not something we'd like to have happen again. This is a scenario that, if it can be, absolutely should be avoided.

You also referenced "an increasing number of students with serious mental illnesses" that presented a danger as well. In referencing this, you cited the Virginia Tech tragedy, stating, "We live in a day and age where violence on campus is a reality (Olsen)." Taking steps to reducing the possibility of that reality actually taking place is certainly a goal worth reaching for.

Other schools share this fear as well. Alfred University had an incident where campus was shut down due to reports of a man carrying a gun around campus, only to discover later that it was simply an HvZ player walking around with his Nerf blaster. However, it's clear that no school is taking any chances. Charles Edmondson, president of Alfred University, said, "After Virginia Tech, no one would take any report of this nature lightly, and we did not" (Maria). Some schools, like Bowling Green State University, have banned Nerf entirely (Young).

Clearly the school has major concerns, all of which are perfectly reasonable and valid. However, Mr. Olsen, as a two-time player and avid fan of the game, I have some alternative perspectives I would like you to look at. While I understand all of your and the university's concerns, I was disappointed to hear of the partial ban on Nerf guns. At least in part because of this ban, we saw participation drop from over 850 participants last semester to around 420 this semester, cutting the number of players in half and seriously detracting from the overall experience. I hope that after reading the remainder of my letter, you will re-evaluate the necessity of this new policy.

I speak for all HvZ players when I say that you and I are not as far apart on this issue as you may think. Utah State University is a school that prizes and encourages student involvement and

experience more than any school I can think of. The thing I hope to be able to help you understand is that we prize the same thing. HvZ is simply another, if somewhat unorthodox, way of accomplishing the same objective.

Firstly, the game means much more to many Aggies than some administration officials may realize. When talk of removing Nerf blasters from the game entirely began to occur, a survey was sent out to players asking them about their experiences with the game. One of the questions asked how much of an impact the game had on players and their experience at Utah State. The average score was a 7.5 (Colby).

I have included a histogram of that question's results to give you a clearer picture of exactly how high this score is. See figure 1 below.

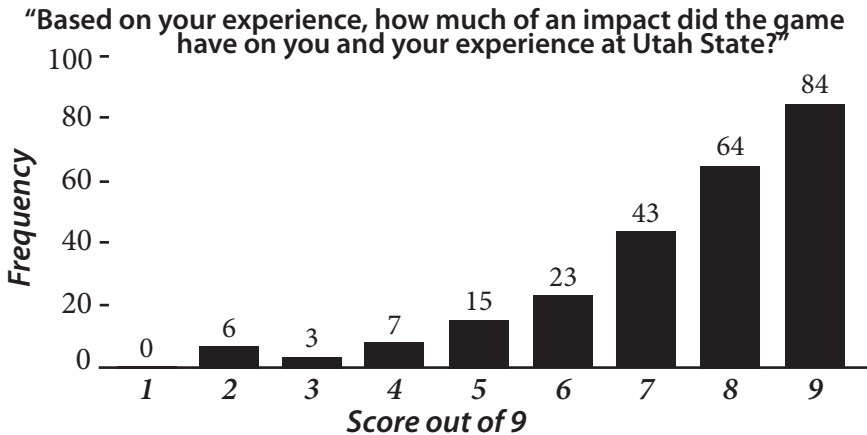


Figure 1. (Colby)

These numbers are remarkable. 78% of respondents answered with at a 7 or higher. Additionally, 84 of the 246 respondents (over one in 3) gave the highest possible rating on how much the game influenced their USU experience (Colby). One would be hard-pressed to find many other events, traditions, or aspects of student life here in Logan with such massive influence as this.

Also included in the survey was a comment box for respondents to include any commentary they would like to be brought before the administration. Some of the comments revealed just how much this game means to some players. For some, HvZ ranks with many events widely considered to be core to USU's

identity. One said, "As a Utah state student, I pride myself in basketball games, ASUSU, and now Human vs. Zombies." When another was talking about his friends at other Utah schools, they said, "They get to have boring College experiences on campus. I don't. I get to have the most fun I have ever had for a full week (Colby)."

“ HvZ transcends awkward social barriers and brings people together in a way that no other event, tradition, or organization on campus can. ”

Many wonder why this game has such a powerful effect on many of those who play it. After all, it's just a glorified game of tag. What's so incredibly profound about a game with pretend humans and zombies who chase each

other around campus with children's toys for a week?

The answer is simple. HvZ transcends awkward social barriers and brings people together in a way that no other event, tradition, or organization on campus can.

This is accomplished in a number of ways. Put simply, neither side can survive the game alone. Because of this, humans are constantly looking out for other survivors to team up with, and zombies are constantly looking out for other zombies to form a "horde" with. In these groups, friendships are made instantly.

Let me tell you a story about how I experienced this myself. During this last game, I was zombified on the first day. Along with me were three others named Hyrum, Josh, and Mitch. After we had become zombies, we were all angry about what had just happened. So we went out into campus determined to take down some humans in revenge. After an hour or so, we discovered that the four of us made a good team. So we exchanged numbers and told each other to text if we ever wanted to meet up for another hunt. Now, I consider them to be my newest friends.

This experience was not unique to me. One comment submitted via the survey talked about how the game gave them a "venue to make friends quickly and to have fun with large groups of people," which they acknowledged is "something I usually avoid." Another commented, "Players in the game become instant friends,

[and] learn to work together as teams.” One talked about how “One of my roommates, who would not leave his computer for any social interaction, actually participated with the rest of the campus for once! (Colby)”

I cannot name a single staple of Utah State University that does this as well as HvZ. I have been to the Howl, basketball games, and frat parties. I’m a True Aggie and have fallen in love with the city of Logan. I’ve gotten involved with the LDS Institute, my church callings, area government, and various clubs and organizations around campus where I’ve held leadership positions and organized events. And still, after eight heavily involved months of being an Aggie, I have yet to encounter anything that can hold a candle to HvZ’s ability to bring hundreds of people together and foster automatic friendships. From what I’ve seen, it just doesn’t exist. There are no cliques. There are no qualifications. There are no expectations, judgments, or prejudices, only players wearing orange bandanas.

Given all this, I think it’s unfair to dismiss the game as “juvenile.” Is it somewhat ridiculous? Absolutely. However, in my opinion, the administration shouldn’t discredit the game’s importance to hundreds upon hundreds of students because they personally feel that a game with pretend humans fighting pretend zombies is “juvenile.” This game is a core aspect of student life to hundreds of students, and as a school that cares so much about enhancing that very thing, it seems somewhat contradictory to characterize this game as such.

With regards to your concerns of the game being a distraction, they can be addressed with simple rules and regulations put into place by the HvZ Council of War. Already we have made efforts to do this, asking that players leave non-players alone when playing the game. Violations incur severe penalties from the many moderators officiating the game as they walk to and from class. Additional rules and penalties can be put into place if the need arises.

However, as far as in-class distractions go, HvZ (specifically Nerf guns) should be far down on the list of culprits. In a world where smart phones and laptops are commonly found in the classroom, it has never been easier for students to be distracted in class. This

applies not only to those using them but also for those sitting nearby. Nerf guns stand out because they are unorthodox and irregular, but in the worst-case scenario, they catch a couple of students' attention for a couple of seconds. Maybe even the professor makes a sarcastic aside comment, like, "Glad to see you're surviving the Apocalypse." However, in a matter of seconds, the distraction is over, and class resumes as normal.

If the school would like to remove major distractions from the classroom environment, Mr. Olsen, I would suggest taking a look at ways to regulate the use of technology in class for things other than productivity. However, banning Nerf guns from classrooms for one week per semester isn't going to do much to solve the problem. Sure, it may remove a distraction that would not be there otherwise, but at what cost? In my opinion, it isn't worth the hundreds of students who chose not to play simply because this compromise was reached.

Finally, on a more serious note, I'd like to show you how HvZ is not a safety concern you should be worried about. It's important to ensure that USU is a safe place for everyone on campus, so this needs to be approached with caution.

As far as minor safety concerns go, rules and regulations can be, and have been, enacted to keep players from hazardous areas, such as the TSC patio or staircases. However, I recognize that this is not your chief concern and that the administration is far more worried about an active shooter on campus.

Here is a scenario I'd like you to consider. HvZ came under fire in 2007 when the horrific events at Virginia Tech took place, after which many called for the game to be banned. However, at Goucher University, the game's birthplace, President Sanford J. Unger recognized how the game's benefits far outweighed its drawbacks. Because of this he wrote this in a column for the school's newspaper: "In the wake of murders at Virginia Tech, we must be careful not to overreact" (Unger).

President Unger was right. What happened at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University, while both tragedies beyond measure, were certainly "horrific aberrations," not a regular occurrence. The game was ultimately allowed to continue unchanged,

and no tragedies have befallen Goucher (Unger). In fact, no tragedies have ever befallen any HvZ player in over 5,000 games (Temkin) played at over 650 locations around the world (Weed, and et al). In an email from Max Temkin, administrator of the official HvZ website, he writes, "There has never been an incident of violence related to HvZ (Temkin)."

Mr. Olsen, if the school would like to improve campus security, I would again argue that Nerf blasters should be far down on the list of priorities. At a university where people over the age of 21 can carry real firearms capable of actually killing people to class, it seems trivial to focus on foam dart shooters as a safety threat. I recognize that as a public university, you have to abide by state law, which permits concealed weapons to be carried anywhere on public lands. However, as lethal weapons present the far more clear and present danger to students' security, the debate should be between the University and our elected representatives, not between the University and students wanting to play HvZ.

In closing, I would like to restate a point I made earlier. Mr. Olsen, you and I, as well as the Administration and hundreds of HvZ players across campus, are not as far apart on this issue as you may believe. Both of us want every Aggie to have a memorable college experience they can take with them when they graduate. We want everyone to be safe and respectful of others as they do this. However, we feel that the partial ban on Nerf guns has detracted from what is quickly becoming one of Utah State University's most celebrated traditions. For hundreds upon hundreds of Aggies, the partial ban makes one of the most enjoyable aspects of Aggie life less enjoyable and ultimately makes Aggie life itself less enjoyable.

And so, having said all this, it is my sincere hope that you take the time to reconsider the necessity of this partial ban. Should you decide to lift it, you would be making a decision that restores an important, if unorthodox, tradition to its true and pure state, bringing the most joy and most memories to the greatest amount of people.

Sincerely,
Brayden Smith

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Toddlers and Torture by Paige Jones

As I flipped monotonously through the channels one evening, my remote drew me to an intriguing show. It was *Toddlers and Tiaras*, a show about children between the ages of 0 and 10 who compete in beauty pageants to win oversized crowns and money. I was blown away by how ridiculous the show was, but yet I could not take my eyes off of the television. Crazy moms, tantrum throwing children, spray tans and a lot of pixie sticks is enough to draw any viewer in. However, as I took a step back and really thought about it, I realized that this hobby was extreme. Most of the toddlers were being dragged

“ These little girls are being trained to look and act like sexual bait.

” into these pageants by their attention-loving mothers.

” They were too young to even realize that what they were doing was unnecessary. That

is why children who are under the age of six should not be allowed to participate in these outlandish competitions.

There is a serious problem with toddlers entering into beauty pageants. It is not their choice, it is their parents'. They are simply too young to have an opinion or say in the matter. Nancy Irwin, a psychotherapist who specializes in working with sexually abused clients says, "These little girls are being trained to look and act like sexual bait. And what's really disturbing is that so many of these girls seem to be tools of their mothers, who think this is the way for the girls to get fame and attention" (Hollandsworth 5). Parents will put thoughts into the kids' heads to make them believe that pageants are good for them. The mothers will throw around words like "crowns," "dresses," and "money" to lure them in. Truth is, no two-year-old likes to be squeezed into an uncomfortable outfit or likes to have makeup caked onto her face. An article by the former editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*, John Hughes, says, "Childhood is a precious time, and children should not be propelled prematurely into adulthood with all its challenges and demands" (Hughes 3). Though some children may indeed enjoy the attention they receive,

they still do not understand the concept. When doing interviews in the show, the majority of the mothers say how much their two-year-old daughters love to do pageants and that they love to show off their routines. However, in the next scene cameras show the child crying and throwing a fit because mom is telling her to practice her routines. Somehow it just does not add up. (Even though the majority of the situations seem to be forced, there are a few instances where the kids actually enjoy the competitions and cannot wait to show off to the judges.)

In the eyes of many, beauty pageants are actually a positive experience for children. They give families a chance to bond and can often be compared to youth sports. Eric Demyan, an experienced pageant father says, "You're just cheering for your kid, whether it's a football game or a pageant" (Bartolomeo 2). Parents also believe that these pageants will build a child's self-confidence. They say getting up on stage and having to be judged develops this confidence. It takes a lot of courage for the children to get up on stage and be judged. Some other benefits of pageants that have been acknowledged are communication skills and stress management. The benefits of beauty pageants are valid and should be taken into consideration; however, the negative effects are much more prominent than the positive. These competitions may in fact build some confidence in children, but the stress, exhaustion, and verbal abuse is enough to completely overtake that little bit of confidence.

After watching several episodes of this show it appeared that parents would do anything to get their child on the stage. Holding a four-year-old down as a stylist tries to glue fake eyelashes on, all while the kid is bawling and screaming seems to be quite unnecessary. Ted Cohen, editor of the International Directory of Pageants says, "I've seen mothers take young girls right off the stage before the judging results even come in and yell at them in the bathroom about blowing it. I've even seen a mother yelling at her kid, and then the child wins the pageant. All of a sudden the child becomes a little angel" (Cohen 123). This type of persistent verbal abuse can be extremely harmful to a young child.

Another area of concern comes from pageant preparation.

Spray tanning a four-year-old is absolutely ridiculous. Especially since none of the kids enjoy standing in a bathing suit while getting covered from head to toe in a cold mist. Consumption of pixie sticks, Mountain Dew, and Redbull is another tactic that parents use to get the kids on stage. I know that children enjoy candy and deserve it every once in awhile, but these parents are using this junk only to keep their daughters from falling asleep during pageants. I even saw one mother mix Mountain Dew and Redbull and give it to her four-year-old in order to increase the girl's energy. The parents called it her "super juice" so the daughter believed that the drink made her perform better. The children's health could be at risk because of the junk they are consuming at such a young age. I feel sympathy for some of the kids. I watched as an overly obese pageant mom instructed her chunky four-year-old daughter to stick out her belly to the judges because they would give her more points for it. I could not help but wonder if the mother was purposely trying to make her daughter's stomach bigger just to try and win. There is a fine line between being mean and being abusive. Some parents seem to be standing right at that line, so close to jumping across.

The push for perfection in this show is insane. The child must have a tan, full make up, and nice glitzy outfits in order to even be a front runner in these competitions. These children are taught at such a young age that beauty is everything. In order to convince their daughters to tan and wear makeup, parents will tell them that the judges will not like them unless they look pretty. These types of comments can really mess with a child's self image. They learn that if they did not win, it must have been because they weren't pretty enough. In an article written for the *Scholastic Scope*, Justin O'Neill says, "Critics also worry that instead of celebrating individuality, pageants encourage girls to change their looks to fit narrow, invented standards of beauty" (O'Neill 2). Believe it or not, these types of thoughts can last a lifetime.

A lot of these kids may end up struggling with body image issues forever because they were taught that perfection of the body leads to success. In fact, a study done in 2005 that evaluated the association between childhood beauty pageants and adult disordered

eating, body dissatisfaction, depression, and self-esteem concluded, “Childhood pageant participants scored higher on body dissatisfaction, interpersonal distrust, and impulse dysregulation than non-participants, and showed a trend toward greater ineffectiveness” (Wonderlich 1). Obviously these pageants are resulting in life-long problems for participants.

Parents are not the only ones to blame in this situation. On the show the judges clearly state what they are looking for. The majority of them say that in a full glitz pageant, a child will not even be considered if they are not tan and are not wearing makeup. Full glitz basically means that natural looks are not recommended. The kids should have fake teeth put in, professional hair done, and full makeup on. Truth is, young children are not gaining anything positive from being in these competitions. These pageants are simply a way for mothers to live out their dreams.

I was amazed when I saw mothers walking their six-month-old babies all dressed up in sparkly dresses before a panel of judges. They were being paraded by their parents in hopes of winning some money. The majority of the mothers in this show are only putting their kids in these competitions for two reasons: money and fame. Some moms just want to have a fun time and bond with their daughters, but usually that is not the case. Every mom thinks their child is the greatest and wants them to grow up having a fabulous life, but these pageant moms are willing to do anything to bring fame to themselves and their son or daughter. It’s almost as if the children were birthed just so mom could live vicariously through them. Any parent who thinks an hour segment on *Toddlers and Tiaras* will give them celebrity status and fortune is sorely mistaken.

There is no reason that any child should be subjected to the torture that is beauty pageants. Even kids over the age of six should be cautious when it comes to competing in pageants. They are incredibly long, stressful days that preach beauty and perfection to innocent competitors. These competitions are certainly doing more harm than good to toddlers. That is why if everyone just took a step back and looked at the big picture, they would see the cruelty in beauty pageants. Parents need to give up on their dreams of making it big and just let their kids be kids.

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The Dallas Cowboys Changed My Life by Rilee Smith

I believe in always cheering for the underdog—the sports team that everyone expects to lose. Every Sunday during football season, my dad sits on our old leather couch and flips through the channels to see who is playing. I don't really understand football but I love spending time with my dad, so when I was younger I would sit by him and cheer for whatever team he was cheering for. One day, I noticed that he had adopted one team as his favorite: the Dallas Cowboys. I also noticed something else. The Cowboys almost always lost. I asked my dad why he cheered for them. He said, "Well, who is going to if I don't?" Sunday nights turned into "watch the Boys with dad" night. Even though the Cowboys never won, my dad still cheered for them, and so did I.

I have learned that there are underdogs in everything, not just sports. My dad cheered for those teams too. He was a friend to everyone, especially people who were having a rough go at life. One rainy November morning, my family and I were driving down the highway in our old green minivan. We noticed a homeless man pushing a cart down the side of the road. The man didn't have much in his cart, just a dirty, moth-eaten blanket and a couple of pieces of wood. He was an underdog if I had ever seen one. My dad pulled the car off at the nearest Wendy's, bought some chili, and immediately turned the car back around. Even though this man had nothing to offer, there was my dad cheering him on.

Most of the time cheering for an underdog isn't enough. No matter how much you support them they still lose. This lesson really hit home for me my junior year of high school.

My school was the typical high school: jocks, nerds, that one weird kid. I was sitting in biology class on a cold morning in October. The teacher walked into the room and something just felt different, bad. He walked slowly to his desk, picked up a paper, sighed, and started to read, "Students of Box Elder High School, last night a fellow student, Brooke Hart, passed away." I knew what "passed away" really meant. Suicide. The classroom was absolutely silent. Brooke

Hart. I could see that some people didn't recognize the name, but I did. We were never that great of friends, but we would wave to each other in the hallways between fourth and fifth period. She was the slightly intimidating girl with heavy black eyeliner, ripped jeans, and the rare but beautiful smile.

“ Every person has value and brings something special to the earth. And it's our job to make sure they know that. ”

That day after school, I was sitting on that old leather couch feeling sad and very confused when my dad walked in. I asked him why anyone would ever want to commit suicide. He told me, "Sometimes people get dealt a tough card in life. And sometimes they think that everyone would be better off without them in the world. But it's not true. Every person has value and brings something special to the earth. And it's our job to make sure they know that."

I decided to adopt my dad's attitude. I wanted to make sure that everyone had someone to cheer for them. I didn't want anyone to ever feel that their life isn't worth living. I worked hard. I befriended the lonely girl with purple hair, the scary guy with multiple tattoos, the popular cheerleader. Still, the same thing happened two more times that year. David in January and Joshua in April. I learned that sometimes, no matter how hard I try, people are still going to lose at life. But I can still cheer and I can still help. I was cheering for you Brooke and David and Joshua. I'm sorry that this time it wasn't enough.

Just a Doll? by Nicole Knight

“Screw you, Ken!” my Barbie yelled as she flew away in the back of an Army helicopter driven by my brother’s hunky GI Joe.

It was a common occurrence at my house when I was little to play and re-play “Big People” and repeat phrases such as this. Today, most people would know the toys my brother and I had played with as Barbies and GI Joes. But to us, they were “Big People” and we loved to create different situations with them. There was usually something tragic that would happen to my Barbie and she would have to fix it, usually with the help of big, strong GI Joe.

There were epic battles, tragic deaths of pets or close friends, fires, floods, villains, and kidnappings. The world that my Barbie lived in was one filled with peril and uncertainty, but somehow she always survived to be the heroine at the end of the day. She would demand the respect of whatever villain had tried to kill her, make GI Joe work to be her man, and still have a great day at the end. She drove her own car, owned her own house, and in my personal version, usually gave Ken a good butt-kicking.

Today, children are at a loss for play like this. The use of video games and the over-watching of movies have stolen this practical and imaginative play from them. The future generations need to regain what has been cleverly stolen from them. They need to reclaim their youth.

In order to develop correctly, children need to play. This does not mean that parents necessarily need to spend hundreds of dollars on toys for their child; they simply need to promote the use of imagination in their play. Tamis LeMonda demonstrated in a study that if parents engage in play with their child for at least ten minutes a day that their child’s standardized test scores and language will improve significantly within a year (Bensen).

That is a great example of how toys can help children figure out how to bridge the gap between practicality and imagination. All children are naturally curious about the world around them; that is why they explore their environments to learn. In return, they use

their toys to explore their world in a way that provides stimulus. That is why using physical toys is better than simply playing a video game (Hill). The colors and noises of the game may be stimulating, but they do not provide the hands on interactions that children need to properly learn. It is better for a child to play with a toy animal, and pretend they are real, than for

them to take care of one on a video game. As Karen Hill says on her toy website, “The child’s physical acts of performing scenarios with toys bring these actions and perceptions to life, which emphasizes the functions and attributes of each item or living creature.”

It is important for children to play not only for their own development, but for learning social aspects. Toys can help teach children the rules of society, both the good and the bad (Bensen), which is why boys are more prone to play with trucks and action figures while girls are more likely to play with dolls like Barbie.

So if we allow her to, Barbie can teach us all the social aspects that we should strive to achieve. While it can be argued that Barbie is a bad influence on young girls today, I just don’t see it. In what world does a woman that has had over 125 different careers, cared for over fifty pets, and had enough respect to dump her 43-year boyfriend not a good influence? (Barbie Media). Barbie represents the best of what women can be. Women can do anything that they want to do; they can do whatever they can imagine.

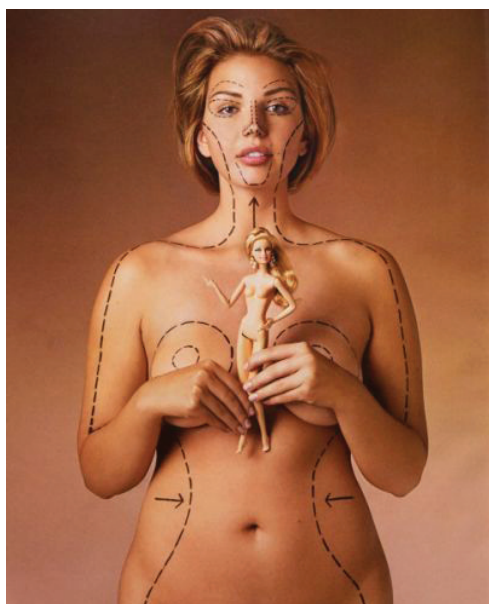
Barbie was created from imagination. In fact, her real name is Barbara Millicent Roberts (Barbie Media). She was given her namesake from a little girl who gave her mother, Ruth Handler, the idea to make a doll for children to play with. I believe that this perfectly summarizes what the point of Barbie is: imagination.

People argue that Barbie is more of a role model than she was ever intended to be; that her body proportions are unrealistic and give girls the “wrong idea” of their bodies. Granted, Barbie’s

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proportions are unobtainable. If you wanted to have the size of body she has, you would have to have a perfect 39 inch bust; your waist would have to be about 18 inches around while your hips would be 33 inches (Slayen). Take for example the picture of this healthy sized woman compared to the proportions of Barbie (Barbie vs. Model). For a woman, this model is a healthy size and body weight. The proportions she would have to be to look like a Barbie are just impossible. If she were the size of the marker drawn on her she would have to weigh 110, be five feet and nine inches, and be categorized in



the anorexia category of eating disorders (Slayen). No matter how you look at it, that is not healthy!

I do not, however, think that Barbie was ever intended to be a body size. I believe that she is a child's plaything that was created purely for children to dress up and use their imagination to do extraordinary things. No one goes out into the world and demands to have their head enlarged because they want to

look like a Cabbage Patch Kid, so why should they believe they need to look like a Barbie doll? By using their imagination, children open the door to what Barbie was truly intended to do: inspire.

Barbie can be an inspiration if we allow her to do so. She promotes so many positive things, especially for women. She has an attitude. She is self expressive, career oriented, caring, compassionate, and holds herself in high regard.

Take for example a Barbie that came out this year in the 2011 Collection. Tattoo Barbie! She comes complete with a full attitude and permanent tattoos all over her body. There is a big debate about whether or not it is a good message to send to little kids. Will they look at this Barbie and think they need to tattoo themselves? My

“ No one demands to have their head enlarged because they want to look like a Cabbage Patch Kid. ”

answer is no. They will look at this tattoo-covered doll like the rest of their toys and create a fun adventure with her.

But do not just take my word for it. In an interview for an article on Forbes.com a mother from Wisconsin, when asked about Tattoo Barbie, stated, “I’m sure my daughter will want one too. And if that is the case, [Tattoo Barbie] might be the only Barbie I would ever buy for my daughter — because at least she has an attitude” (Forbes Magazine). This statement is a beautiful example of Barbie promoting her attitude and how different body images are acceptable. In fact, this model of Barbie may be a good way to tackle a difficult topic with a child and to promote individuality.

The point is Barbie can do whatever we can imagine for her. Take the fact that she has had 125 different careers over her fifty-year span. She has ranged from being an architect, to a pet vet, to an astronaut, to a rock star and everywhere in between. She has been an essential key in the liberation of women in the work force. Through her daring and different explorations of careers, she has shown children the whole world over that we can do anything. Want to be an astronaut? Go for it! Want to run for President? Do it! Barbie herself ran for President four times. This is the message that Barbie would send. She believes that anything is possible if we can dream it (Barbie Blog). She merely creates a positive image for children to look at and emulate.

This message is not just for a lucky few. It is spread far and wide across the whole world. On the Barbie website, when looking at the fast facts available, it shows that 90% of girls in the world between the ages of three and ten own a Barbie doll. Then when looked at closer, girls between the ages of three and six own, on average, twelve Barbie dolls each (Barbie Media).

I was one of those little girls. I probably had at least twenty Barbie dolls that I played with on a daily basis. So while I played, I made a lot of the characteristics of Barbie come out when I created

scenarios with her. Most of all, I emphasized her compassion and caring personality. My Barbie always had some sort of pet she was caring for, whether it ranged from the pet whale that lived outside of her beach house, her horse, or my brother's police dog toy; she was caring for them with love. This trait is something that all girls need to learn, that



Barbie promotes. Treating animals, neighbors, siblings, and friends with love and support is the message that Barbie can send if we allow her to do so. There are even dolls that are specifically for this sort of message, such as Pet Vet Barbie. She has the tools to take care of her pets and do so with love.

I remember that when I was a little girl I enjoyed playing with my "Doctor Barbie." She had the *coolest* stethoscope and white lab coat. I remember I used to make my brother line up all of his soldiers for the "Doctor." I would then proceed down the line of toy GI Joes with my girl and ask them all to cough for me while I held the toy stethoscope to their chests. I was simply doing what I had seen in the doctor's office and on TV, but I was mimicking an excellent role model in the process of playing with my Barbie.

While she herself can be a role model, Barbie can allow us to imitate others while playing with her. I imitated a doctor while my brother imitated a soldier, two heroes in their own right that we were allowed to respect and emulate because of our toys. How could that be a bad thing?

Another thing that Barbie could teach to a lot of women is when to get out of a relationship. In 2004, Barbie and her boyfriend of 43 years, Ken, broke up the day before Valentines. Despite the fact

that thousands of fans were utterly devastated, Barbie cited her reason as “personal differences.” This is a message that women all over the world need to take. It is never too late to get out of a relationship that is unhealthy or not working. She had spent 43 years with her man, but decided they needed a break to grow.

This is a great example of how Barbie respects herself. She takes care of herself and balances her life. She does what will make her happy! What a great message that sends! Even though she and Ken got back together on Valentines of this year, she made a point of making Ken work to be with her (Stransky). He had to prove himself on the set of *Toy Story 3*, and put bulletin boards up all over LA before she would even consider taking him back.

Personally, I have not made it a secret that GI Joe is *so* much hotter than Ken, but this is the way that Mattel intended their story to go. While this may just be a marketing ploy, it is a great and personalized one! But what I want to point out is the fact there is human motivation behind the relationship. Barbie and Ken may just be dolls, but this is a wonderful idea for young girls to see. We need to teach them that they are in charge of their relationships and their own decisions. They have as much of a say as the man does; that’s why it’s called a relationship. Whoever came up with the marketing scheme behind this one may just have been on to something.

The more I have learned and explored the world of Barbie, the more I love and respect what she signifies. She is independent, caring, and driven. She represents the best in women and despite her unobtainable body proportions, I find her to be inspiring. If we can see past her appearance and get to the core of what she represents, she can be a delightful role model.

Isn’t that the point we are trying to get out into the world today? To look past appearances and stereotypes to get to what people truly are? Barbie illuminates this with her diversity in career and life choices. Over her lifetime, at one point or another, Barbie has represented over 50 different nationalities (Barbie Media). She is sold in 150 different countries, thus expanding her message to the whole world. This is just another striking example of how diverse and open Barbie is. This concept is one that deserves to be taught to one and all.

Everyone can be gorgeous; all you need do is look below the skin.

With her story, from just a “small town girl” to making it as a role model, she has always had one message for us. As stated on her Barbie Blog: if you can dream it, you can be it!

I believe that Barbie is a great example of a toy that can teach our children to do more than just play. I believe that by playing with this toy, not only will it increase their development, it will allow children to capture a concept, such as courage and heroism, that they may have never had the opportunity to experience. By allowing today’s youth to experience true hands-on play, to bridge the gap between the imaginary world and the real world, we can give them an excellent understanding of the world. I believe we can give them a chance at success.

Barbie could very well just be a pretty doll that little girls, like me, enjoyed dressing up when they were little. But maybe, just maybe, she could be so much more than that. Maybe she could inspire a little girl to accomplish a goal that seems out of reach. Maybe she could give someone the strength to leave an unhealthy relationship. Maybe she could be there when a child needs a friend. While she promotes imagination, the best part is, Barbie can be whatever we need her to be.

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Harry Potter's Magical Effect on Teaching and Child Development

by Gina Buckwalter

Magic, wands, wizardry, and broomsticks: with words like that, one's thoughts might instantly be brought to Harry Potter. The Harry Potter books, written by author J.K. Rowling, have influenced children, adults, and the genre of fantasy in many ways. These books not only have the ability to influence a child's imagination, but can impact that student's development and growth. This is done through the books' capability to relate to the social environment of a growing adolescent, develop a child's imagination and love for reading, and relate to the many examples and standards of teaching in a child's school atmosphere. The Harry Potter series depict many good life lessons in a fun and creative way.

The use of this series in the classroom would not only help a growing adolescent develop their love for reading but help them through Harry Potter's ability to relate to the social norm of a student. Many people would agree, myself included, that Harry Potter consistently has "a wonderful capacity to draw us in through the power of imagination" (Black 540). However, some might consider the books to be a negative influence on students and in schools. More than once Harry Potter and his friends have ended up on the banned books list. Parents, religious affiliations, and possibly some avid Twilight readers have greatly opposed the use of J.K. Rowling's world of magic in schools simply because it's a world involved in questionable characters, witchcraft and evil sorcerers. Despite these claims, I have found the Harry Potter books to be a wonderful insight to the world around us and of great use in the classroom.

Harry Potter and his rag-tag friends are people that almost everyone can find a way to relate to. From the death of his parents to his fight with Lord Voldemort, Harry Potter has many life experiences that any teenager and student might have. Despite being the "Chosen One", Harry goes through the average teenage drama. He has his close friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, gets in fights with friends, is consistently bullied by Draco Malfoy, takes tests,

does homework, has unlikeable teachers, such as Professor Snape, and plays sports, specifically Quidditch. These experiences are things that almost any student can relate to. Students may not deal with giant trolls or fly on broomsticks, but there are every day issues that J.K. Rowling addresses through her characters: bullying, friendship, schoolwork, playtime, sports, and loss. Through her books, children can learn that they are not alone in these issues. A student who may be coping with the loss of a friend or parent can relate to Harry and his loss of family and friends. A child going through bullying and struggling through school can easily see a reflection of himself through Neville Longbottom. A student frantically trying to get good grades and scan through books may have a connection to Hermione. Through these relatable characters, Rowling has given children a

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Rowling isn't just teaching students how to fly on broomsticks and turn teacups into rats; she is teaching students how to deal with the changes in their everyday lives.

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friend and example they can look to. Harry Potter also defies the norm of the ideals of a “hero”. Harry grew up an orphan, bullied, skinny, unpopular, and wearing broken glasses. Yet, he conquers his fears, saves his

friends, stands up to his enemies, and grows into an overall amazing individual we all can look up to. Lauren Binnendyk and Kimberly A. Schonert-Reichl have stated that “many children are able to identify with Harry Potter, perhaps because he does not look like the typical hero-- he is average looking and wears glasses” (195).

In an interview with students who grew up with the Harry Potter books, Katie Arrington said, “It may be about wizards and dragons and magic, but underneath all the fancy outer layer it’s about growing up, learning to trust your friends and yourself, and learning to overcome hardships in life” (1). Sharon Black, a professor at Brigham Young University in the English Department, gave many examples of the ways Harry Potter can relate to students. She gave one example of Katya, a “Russian immigrant, [who] has seen vast political, military, economic, and religious changes occur in

her native country, and she has adapted to even greater changes in coming to the United States. She understands what it means to be overwhelmed with 'strangeness,' just as Harry is at first overwhelmed by walking through a wall to catch his train to Hogwarts" (540). More often than not, students need a way to express and find confidence in themselves, and Harry Potter gives them a way to do that. Rowling isn't just teaching students how to fly on broomsticks and turn teacups into rats; she is teaching students how to deal with the changes in their everyday lives. She is teaching them that they can conquer whatever challenges they might be facing, whether it's beating a game of Quidditch or defeating Lord Voldemort.

There are some who may scoff at the Harry Potter books. They may argue that Harry's popularity is simply a fluke and that the books are too long or simply too popular and overdone. With so many books, movies, and merchandise, some might find it hard to see the benefits of the Harry Potter series. One such student commented about this saying, "Harry Potter was not an amazing book. It [was] okay, but I wouldn't call it great. The only thing it did for me was make me go to sleep and to never trust your friends' rat because it really is an evil dude trying to kill you" (Parodi). There are those people who don't get much from the Harry Potter books. I am like that with some novels too. I was forced to read *The Giver* over and over again for multiple classes, and to this day, I can't tell you what the main idea of that book was. I just didn't get it. The book was difficult for me to read and I had a hard time understanding it. There are some people who don't see the more in-depth benefits of Rowling's series; they are still there, just as I might not see *The Giver's* benefit though others do. I have found that Harry Potter helped me in my life just as it did other students. If Harry Potter were to be used in the classroom, there would be some students who don't feel they relate or simply don't like the book. Yet, how is this different from any other book?

Many people would agree that the world of Harry Potter strikes the imagination. Who wouldn't want to fly away on a broomstick? Or carry a magic wand? Imagination is an important part of human development. Imagining flying on a broomstick may

seem immature to an adult; however, imagination was the same thing that gave Thomas Edison the ability to think up an invention such as the light bulb. Without developing the creative ideas in our minds, modern-day society would not have iPods, smart phones, or computers. The Harry Potter books are a perfect place to fuel a child's imaginative thoughts. Paul Bloom states that "our main leisure activity is, by a long shot, participating in experiences that we know are not real. When we are free to do whatever we want, we retreat to the imagination--to worlds created by others, as with books, movies, video games, and television (over four hours a day for the average American), or to worlds we ourselves create, as when daydreaming and fantasizing" (B10).

Developing a child's imagination and creative thoughts is a crucial step in learning. Most often when a teacher asks a question, they don't want to hear a blunt one-word answer. A teacher will regularly ask the student about the who, what, when, where, and why. To be able to look at things at different angles and to think creatively is part of school. How disappointing would it be to know that a child got no creative insight from a day at school or wasn't able to see things in a new way? Reading is one of the keys of learning that helps a child develop these creative observations. The Interstate New Assessment and Support Consortium (the INTASC) standards that teachers follow state that "the teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in creative thinking and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local issues." (CCSO 9). This isn't the only standard that asks teachers to help their students think creatively. To promote thinking outside the box, teachers encourage students to give imaginative responses. Harry Potter is a book that promotes imaginative thinking. Black says, like all good fantasy, "Harry Potter engages the reader's imagination. Who can resist the excitement of going to school in a mysterious castle where staircases and doorways are always shifting, rooms and corridors are inhabited by ghosts with names like Peeves and Nearly Headless Nick, popular sports are played on flying broomsticks, and professors occasionally turn into cats or wolves?" (540).

Does Harry Potter really promote the imagination? Some

people might disagree, saying that Harry Potter promotes Satanic worship rather than imaginative thinking. Extreme Christians argue that the books support witchcraft and magic, which the Bible says not to do. A sermon given by Fr. Casimir Puskorius states, "This is not harmless white magic! We're talking about something far more serious. Harry learns a new vocabulary, including such words as Azkaban, Circe, Draco, Erised, Hermes, Slytherin, all of which are names of real devils or demons. These are no characters of fiction."

(1). It's true that Rowling certainly did her research. Characters in her books are often named after historic sources, such as Remus Lupin, a werewolf, named after Romulus and Remus, the Roman twins raised by wolves. Not only are the names from historic sources, but the spells are as well. Many of the spells used by Harry Potter are formed from a Latin Root. Lumos is an example, using the Latin root lumin meaning light. But is such extreme religious behavior all because an author researched what she wanted to put in her books? Kimberly Keith, a Christian mom, favors the Harry Potter series saying, "I want my children to have wonder and imagination and magic in their lives. I want them to read books of fantasy that speak to and challenge their unconscious to be the best they can be." (1). In fact, there are a lot of Christians who have read and loved the Harry Potter books. The Harry Potter books support good more than evil, and I have never once read any mention of Satan in Rowling's novels.

With all its magic, Quidditch, moving stairways, flying owls, and floating ghosts, Hogwarts school still requires its students to take quizzes, tests, homework and listen to teachers. Like their students, teachers can learn from the Harry Potter books. Teachers can gain insight to many teaching and learning styles through teachers such as Professors McGonagall, Trelawny, Snape and Lupin. These instructors all have different and effective ways to teach. It says in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* that "Professor McGonagall wasn't a teacher to cross. Strict and clever she gave them a talking-to the moment they sat down in her class" (133). Though McGonagall may have been strict, she gave students a positive reinforcement and often encouraged their dreams. In the fifth book of the Harry Potter series, McGonagall gives career advice to Harry about what magical career he desires

and heavily supports him in his decision. (663). This shows her caring for Harry, and as a teacher it is very important to create relationships with students. The third edition of *On Being a Teacher* states that “it is in our relationships with children that we earn their trust. Once they have decided that we are adults worthy of their respect they will follow us wherever we wish to lead them. Most children couldn’t care less what we teach as long as they feel connected to us in some intimate way” (46). The relationships that Harry has with his professors provide an important correlation to how he learns. With Professors Lupin and McGonagall he excels, while with Professors Snape and Umbridge he has a difficult time.

The relationships and examples of professors at Hogwarts gives teachers an idea of learning strategies that help their students develop and grow. Not only do the books give us an insight to teaching examples, they also help prompt effective teaching methods. Sarah Coleman, an elementary school teacher, said, “I used Harry Potter as a management system. We read the book and then had each table be a house. I gave house points when they were good and took points away when they were misbehaving. You can do stuff like that with books. When you have a book like Harry Potter that has so much creativity, you can take that into the classroom and just use it”. Teachers can use the books as ideas for classroom management or simply recommend the book for a struggling student to read. Coleman also said, “[The Harry Potter books] are really good and fun to read. The topic and plot line are really enjoyable for the kids and I think that that’s what gets kids into reading. Especially when the characters are so much fun to read about”. Rowling’s world of magic gives teachers and students a lot of creativity to work with. I could probably apply Harry Potter to almost anything or incorporate it into almost anything; there is simply so much imagination there.

A fun plot line, imagination, pure magic and engaging characters don’t seem like a reason for Harry Potter to have ended up on the banned books list. Yet, Harry Potter has been on the banned books list more than once. The biggest reason for this is that some “parents object to the magic and wizardry that is at the heart of the Harry Potter books. Because of their objections, many schools and

libraries have banned these books.” (Wilkins). Harry Potter isn’t the only popular book that has appeared on the Banned Books list; in fact some might come as a surprise. Other banned books include: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Bridge to Terribithia*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Giver*, and *The Lorax* (Wilkins). When such great authors such as Mark Twain or Dr. Sussess land alongside Rowling for reasons like friendship between whites and blacks or the poor caretaking of the earth, it’s a wonder why everything doesn’t end up on this list. Some teachers may argue to not read or use Harry Potter in the classrooms because of this one issue even though so many wonderful classics have been put on the Banned Books list. Being put on this list simply goes along with being a popular book. Every popular person or thing has been degraded by something. The Banned Books list doesn’t take away the creativity and imagination Harry Potter has; it merely puts a warning label on the cover.

Harry Potter adds something that every classroom needs: a little magic. Through the Harry Potter series, students are able to find new ways to look at life. The books engage the young reader, inviting them to read more. Harry Potter helps adolescents throughout their life, giving them friends to relate to through the books’ diverse span of characters. Harry Potter also appeals to a wide range of audiences, allowing teachers to enjoy the books as much as their students. Everyone can find a way to relate to this series, whether they are children dreaming of casting spells on their little sisters or parents promoting their children to fly as high as they can on a broomstick. This is the true magic of the Harry Potter series: the ability to strengthen a child’s imagination and help them grow.

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Speaking Without Talking: The Power of Introverts

by Claire Christiansen

Abstract: I have been labeled as shy for much of my life, even though I am really just introverted, and I decided I wanted to delve deeper into the subject of introversion. Through research, I have found that introverts are often misunderstood, labeled as shy, anti-social, or even rude, and their specific qualities are often judged in a negative light. In order to diminish the often negative stereotype associated with introverts, it is crucial that society learn the value of this personality type and appreciate the balance that comes with a world of both introverts and extroverts. My essay is targeted to extroverts who don't understand the qualities and importance of introverts in our world; I hope that introversion will be viewed in a new light after reading this essay.

It's a Friday night, and while my peers bask in the glory of the weekend through parties and dances, I delight in the quiet of my apartment and the reprieve of conversation, alone at last after a week filled with people. I might read a book, watch a movie by myself, or simply sit and relax. Does this sound fun on a Friday night? Most people wouldn't think so. However, if you can relate, congratulations: you're part of the ranks of society's self-proclaimed introverts, and despite the negative views we're often subject to, introverts are making a comeback.

A search of the term "introvert" on Google Images confirms the skewed perception society has of those who classify with the word. Pictures surface of individuals with paper bags over their heads, moping faces, hiding behind their hair, or alone on park benches. What a revelation! Should I, myself an introvert, wear a paper bag over my head? It might be a good way to avoid conversation on the weekdays. However, I hardly think those images truly describe the average introvert. Therein lies the dilemma: introverts are not always shy, depressed, unconfident, and unhappy with themselves and thus should not be labeled as such. There are many common misconceptions about introverts, and the rest

of the population, extroverts, shall we say, would benefit from understanding a thing or two about their more reserved counterparts. In order to diminish the often negative stereotype associated with introverts, it is crucial that society learn to understand and value this personality type and appreciate the balance that comes with a world of both introverts and extroverts.

At the fresh age of eleven, I came to the realization that I had a label conceived by my peers and their opinion of me: I was the shy girl. Fifth grade is a time when everything begins to stick. He's the funny one, she's smart, he's the troublemaker; these stereotypes formed relatively quickly, but they were long remembered, practically carved out on each individual's forehead. For a long time I didn't argue with my classmates. I was, in fact, less talkative and lively; raising my hand in class, talking to my teacher, and participating in group games and activities just didn't come as naturally or willingly to me, and I learned to make myself less noticeable. These actions may have all been signs pointing to shyness, but I believe I was simply at a malleable age, trying to find myself and my own kind of confidence. Instead of self-discovery, however, I began to feel that the reputation I'd earned was the one that had to stay. For whatever reason, I believed that because I had been told I was shy so many times, my only option was to stay shy.

One of the most common misconceptions about introverts is that they are shy. Some are, of course, but it is not reasonable to assume that every introvert is. A recent article in *Time* magazine, written by Bryan Walsh, states that shyness "is a form of social anxiety characterized by inhibited behavior. It also implies a fear of social judgment that can be crippling" (66). Introversion, on the other hand, describes someone who doesn't mind being alone. An introvert enjoys being social, but generally prefers not to engage and loses energy after spending time with people. While extroverts thrive off of interaction and enjoy being the life of the party, introverts prefer to blend in and avoid attention. This does not mean that introverts don't enjoy being social; it simply means that introverts operate differently and can only handle so much interaction before requiring time alone to recharge. In my case, I spoke up when I had to and associated normally with my

peers, but I simply preferred listening and observing to talking and drawing attention to myself.

I have always been keenly observant. From a very young age, I took time to take in my surroundings before playing or interacting and was never one to run straight for the action. My mom tells me that at three-years old I would observe everything going on at the playground and report back to her what I saw, noticing even who had the same shoes as she did before timidly joining in the fun. Acute powers of observation are one of the defining characteristics introverts possess. Laurie Helgoe, in an article entitled "Revenge of the Introvert," writes that "while introverts have no special advantage in intelligence, they do seem to process more information than others in any given situation... Further, their brains are less dependent on external stimuli and rewards to feel good" (15). While introverts have the ability to process more material than extroverts, it does not always mean that they enjoy excess stimulation, specifically if it involves people. That's why an introvert might find a Friday night spent alone more thrilling than an evening spent in raucous partying.

We live in a country that prizes the extrovert and celebrates those who are outgoing, confident, talkative and fearless. The early 20th century marked the beginning of a new ideal in America: the Extrovert Ideal. Susan Cain, author of *Quiet*, describes the cultural evolution from a society who placed emphasis on being a Culture of Character to becoming a society solely focused on developing the Culture of Personality. It changed "forever who we are and whom we admire" (35). The Culture of Character focused on improving self-worth and becoming disciplined and honorable, while the Culture of Personality idealized becoming bold and entertaining and examined the importance of being perceived in the right way (Cain 35). To this day, extroverts are still automatically seen by most as more attractive, smart, and interesting than introverts. Extroverts, who are outgoing, confident, and speak with ease, nearly always generate more respect in the workforce; whether or not their actual performance is superior to any introvert, their ability to communicate and persuade automatically puts them above introverts in many cases. Consider, for example, who a manager would be more likely to hire: an

individual brimming with confidence who aces the interview and speaks effortlessly or someone who might struggle with words, seems more nervous, and cannot schmooze for the life of them. Both may be equally smart, hardworking, and beneficial to the company, but more often the extrovert triumphs. Unfortunately, it is no wonder that introverts often struggle to feel successful; it's an extrovert's world, and it will remain so unless light can be shed on all that introverts have to offer.

Besides possessing great skills of observation, introverts have the capability to focus intently for long periods of time, especially on solitary work. This can lead to impressive and innovative ideas as well as greater ease of skill-mastery. Significantly better at

“ It’s the personality traits that are more difficult to recognize at a glance that are so valuable to society; introverts may not be able to charm, joke, or make speeches, but they can certainly think, listen, and care.

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listening than their extrovert counterparts, introverts benefit immensely from their ability to concentrate while someone is talking. The aforementioned article written by Bryan Walsh for *Time* stated yet another introvert advantage: “Introverts are more cautious and deliberate than extroverts, but that means they tend to

think things through more thoroughly, which means they can often make smarter decisions” (67). Extroverts tend to seek rewards and ambition without thinking about the risk, while introverts are more likely to pay attention to warnings and heed with caution. It’s the personality traits that are more difficult to recognize at a glance that are so valuable to society; introverts may not be able to charm, joke, or make speeches, but they can certainly think, listen, and care.

Neither end of the scale is superior; both introverts and extroverts are necessary to keep a balance in society. No one wants to live in a world where everyone tries to be the center of attention, just as the idea of a world filled with only thoughtful, quiet people doesn’t sound very enthralling either. However, this important idea of balance has washed away as the tidal wave of the brash,

outspoken, and convincing pushes society evermore towards the Extrovert Ideal. It has become increasingly important in society to have a good personality, to be interesting, a good conversationalist, and the center of attention. What the world seems to have forgotten is the importance of character: there are inner, if less remarkable, traits that go far in leading to success. It's simply a matter of recognizing these qualities and reminding others of the important role that the introvert plays. There is great value in refraining from labeling introverted individuals as shy as well as learning to recognize the unique talents and abilities they possess. Introverts operate differently than extroverts, but there is nothing awry in this; it is simply their nature. No one deserves to be looked down on because they don't speak up as much as others. It is highly important that society learns to recognize the introvert advantage rather than focus solely on the extrovert ideal.

Had my classmates in fifth grade understood anything about introverts or tact, for that matter, I believe things would have turned out very differently for me. Thankfully I have gained confidence and self-assurance over the years and now respect myself for the introvert that I am. However, I could have saved myself from quite a bit of self-degradation and lack of confidence had I focused less on the negative label I had received and more on the qualities I had to offer. Not only are introverts focused, observant, careful, smart and devoted; we are, in our own way, powerful. But please don't make us say that out loud.

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Sex-Worth vs. Self-Worth by Megan Bongiovi

I will never forget the day I sat with my best friend in an LDS seminary as our teacher spoke about being morally clean. I remember having questions and wondering about what exactly meant you were good and what meant you were bad. I remember turning around and watching as my best friend silently sat with tears streaming down her face, I whispered, "What is wrong with you?" and she replied, "I'm not good anymore. I had sex with Justin. Now I'll never be good again." I didn't know what to do. I was so scared and sad and confused. We were 15 years old, hadn't even been in high school for a year yet, and already we were experiencing far too many things we knew nothing about, and had not been taught about.

I went home and was so upset; I broke down and told my parents what had happened. My parents talked to my friend's parents and told them everything that had happened. They replied, "They haven't even kissed yet, everything is fine." Her parents never educated her about sexual activity, but assumed that she knew not to be sexually active based on our religion and what we had been taught at school. They disregarded their influence on her choices and refused to believe that she had made a choice that was contrary to their beliefs. To this day I wonder how those actions have shaped my friend's life. She was right though, after that first experience she was never the same. Her personality changed, she started seeing herself only as a sexual being and freely did sexual acts with boys she often barely knew, feeling that her self-worth came from what she did sexually.

Her parents, however, always believed her to be a 'good Mormon girl' who did as she was taught. They are not alone; several parents assume that their children will be taught what they need to be taught at school and church and aren't using their influence to teach their children what they need to know about sexual education.

Just because my friend chose to be sexually active doesn't mean that she is a bad person. I hate that I judged her based on her actions to be sexually active before marriage, so much so that I

stopped talking to her almost completely and didn't care whether or not we ever spoke again. I considered her to be dirty, slutty, and gross. On the other hand I had multiple friends who were not LDS and who were sexually active, and I didn't judge them at all. Unfairly, I made a choice that because we were taught to be abstinent, and she wasn't, that she was a bad person. According to a study regarding teens and their sexual activity, "number one is parental influence, and the second is moral and religious influence...And peer influence—those are the three big factors that have been shown to decrease the risk of sexual activity" (Hess).

Being raised in the LDS religion sets us apart in many ways. We are taught from an early age about choices and consequences, about a higher power and what it means to be "good" and what it means to be "bad." The term "morally clean" is a phrase commonly used in the church beginning at a young age. The ideal of being moral includes a multitude of things: honesty, integrity, hard work, love, devotion, sexual purity, obedience, and several others. Instead of focusing on all of the ideals that make up moral cleanliness, we focus strictly on being sexually pure and therefore we cut back on what moral cleanliness actually means. We teach girls that their sexuality is who they are. "Sexiness is no longer about just being arousing or alluring, it's about being worthwhile" (Levy). This ideal is one that is openly displayed in our media, and encouraged in high schools due to peer pressure and teenage curiosity.

If parents want their children to be abstinent then they have to teach their children what abstinence is, as well as teach comprehensive sexual education so that their child has a full understanding on the subject. If they don't, somebody else will, and most likely it will not be the message they want their child to learn.

Considering the obsession with sex and teen pregnancies in the mainstream media it is almost humorous to think that abstinence is even taught, encouraged in schools, and federally funded. Although I believe that abstinence could solve a lot of problems, such as teen pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) the education of abstinence is causing a lot of problems that I believe are more damaging. One of the most common ways that abstinence is taught

is by a hands-on approach where they will have a boy volunteer and the “educator” will then get a large piece of clear tape and stick it to the boy’s arm. The tape is then ripped off of the boy’s arm and shown to the class. It is now a hairy, dirty mess, but to make the point across even more, they have several more boys come up and stick the tape to each of the boy’s arm until “

it will no longer stick and is a crumpled ruined piece of tape. The tape is supposed

Our girls are having an identity crisis every day. ”

to symbolize a girl who chooses not to be abstinent. The “girl” is then a ruined mess that is unable to have valuable and meaningful relationships with anyone after she chooses not to be sexually active (Valenti 33).

Notice in this example the boy is not so much ridiculed, just the girl. A lot of girls learn that if they have any relationships that involve more than kissing, they are bad, dirty and considered “sluts.” I don’t think that the purpose of these practices are to teach young girls that they truly are bad people if they engage in sexual activity, but the way abstinence is often taught, that is what girls learn. I did an interview with Brenna Wernersbach about her opinions on Sexual Education. She gave a great analogy that regardless of what a person believes in, it is better to be safe than sorry. She used the example of a fire drill; although we never plan on actually having a real fire, we always know where to go and what to do and feel secure in our knowledge of the topic. She said that is how it should be in sexual education so that even students who aren’t planning on sex, if the heat of the moment comes, they know their options and can make the best choice.

Girls learn two different ideals every day in their lives at school and their lives at home. On one hand they learn to be smart, kind, honest, strong, and responsible. On the other side they are taught that in the “real world” those are not attributes that matter. Instead we have advertisements veering from hamburgers to men’s deodorant that are all so overly sexualized they often are removed from television only to be played and re-played on YouTube (Kilbourne).

Girls who see shows like “Girls Gone Wild” and wear the *Playboy* brand as young pre-pubescent girls learn that the attention they will receive will not be for their personality or intelligence, but instead for their beauty and sex appeal. “For women, and only for women, hotness requires projecting a kind of eagerness, offering a promise that any attention you receive for your physicality is welcome” (Levy). Even in Disney movies that are all so beloved, especially by the American culture, it is interesting that every Disney Princess has cleavage, is beautiful, and has a life that revolves around a man. Girls experience an identity crisis every day. They receive mixed messages that they are often unable to decipher and instead feel they have to make a choice. Often girls decide between being smart, or being sexy. For some reason it is still fully accepted that women can be both at the same time.

Because sex is such a taboo subject most people are uncomfortable talking about it. This creates a huge issue. When only abstinence is taught in schools, and there is no sexual education being discussed at home, this leaves teenagers to ask their friends, look at pornography, and generally get information from the wrong sources about sexual relationships. Or, it may leave teenagers uneducated about the topic in general. An interesting phenomenon that I found was that even those that did refrain from sexual intercourse before they married felt very uneducated and unprepared for sexual intercourse. Several women responded that they often felt guilty and uncomfortable after sex, even though they were married and were intimate with their husband and only their husband. Not only that, but several women also said that their first experiences were painful, embarrassing, and confusing because they hadn’t been taught about sexual activity, but wish that they had. Why are women, regardless of their beliefs, feeling uncomfortable, guilty, and even dirty when they do everything that they were taught was right, and then feel as though they are being punished? And why is it that women are feeling guilty and men aren’t when they come from the same backgrounds and have the same morals and values? The difference is that girls are taught that their purity and moral value depend on whether or not they remain a virgin.

Once females lose their virginity, even if they wait a while for marriage, a lot of them then feel as though they do no matter because their value is gone. A significant part of sexual education, and even abstinence education should be that whether you are sexually active or not, self-worth is not dependent on virginity, but instead on who you are as a person, how you treat others, what you contribute to society. Often sexual education and abstinence education is taught by using guilt and judgment towards people who are sexually active. This creates the idea that people who are sexually active are bad and wrong. This ideal is taught so efficiently that people who choose not to be sexually active until even after marriage experience guilt and then doubt themselves.

It is the parent's responsibility to decide what they want to teach their children about sexual activity, and teach them, whether that is abstinence or comprehensive sexual education, or both, and do so in a way that doesn't teach their children that their worth is dependent on their sexuality. They need to teach that it is important to be safe, and knowledgeable, and ready before sexual activity. Making a conscious decision to be sexually active, whether before or after marriage is most important so that the relationship is healthy and strong, and the person feels that way as well.

The choice to be sexually active or not is a personal decision that encompasses several factors. It is important to be educated on the subject, just as any other topic, so as to be as safe and as informed as possible. It is a parent's responsibility to decide what values they want to teach their children, but it is also their responsibility to teach children that worth is not based in any way on whether or not they are sexually active. It is also parents' responsibility to teach their children to make educated decisions and then trust their children to do that based on what they have learned.

Sex is an important factor in every marriage and in many unmarried relationships. Because of this, it is important for youth to understand the purpose and the value of a sexual relationship and therefore not make rash decisions on something they know nothing about. I will be participating in a sexual education group. I am excited to learn ways to discuss sexual activity so as to better educate people

on how to communicate about sex. By learning more for myself, I can educate my future children. By educating youth, we teach them to be better people, to be safe and healthy, and to make educated decisions, thereby living a better life regardless of when they decide to be sexually active.

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Residential Foster Care as a Viable Alternative to Traditional In-Home Care by Hilary Chistensen

The United States is often referred to as “the land of opportunity.” For thousands of foster care youths, however, the dream is out of reach. After being removed from homes that failed to provide the necessities of life, let alone an environment to encourage success, youths are placed in a system that has a duty to provide every possible opportunity and chance for success to its wards.

The goal of the foster care system, as stated by social work professional Charles Zastrow, is to “...protect the children, to rehabilitate the parents, and generally to return the children to their genetic parents as soon as it is feasible. Foster care is the temporary provision of substitute care of children” (Zastrow 209). The emphasis in this statement is on temporary. Foster care homes focus on the laudable goal of returning children to their parents but are not meant to provide stability, consistence, or longevity. Does this perishable approach provide the best environment for foster care youths?

According to child development expert Urie Brofenbrenner, a person is the sum of the influences of his/her environment. Under his Ecological Theory, environment is divided into five levels or arenas: the microsystem contains friends, family, school, and other intimate relationships; the exosystem encompasses settings which impact a person, but does not have direct interaction (such as office layovers or job transfers of a parent might impact a child); the macrosystem refers to large-scale culture and values, mass media, laws, and government; the chronosystem is a new addition which includes the overall era of time in which the person is living and interacting; and the mesosystem refers to the interaction between each level of environment. This model is useful in understanding how participation in the foster care system influences every aspect of a youth’s life and development (Bigner 123).

For example, abuse or neglect in the home causes a teacher or neighbor (microsystem) to inform child welfare services (a mesosystem) who in turn removes the child from the home and

places the child into foster care (exosystem). Failure of the system on a national level (macrosystem) leaves the child in perpetual motion, changing homes, families, and schools. The constant disruption of the youth's microsystem leaves no time to establish relationships with adults, who may provide protection, good examples, or comfort, or time to learn the skills required to maintain healthy relationships with peers. Entering and leaving school systems abolishes any consistent, planned educational processes, putting these youths at an educational disadvantage.

In *The Children and Youth Services Review*, Barton S. Allen and James S. Vacca call for a major re-haul of the objectives of the foster care system: "It should be noted that we as a nation must accept the fact that our Foster Care system that is supposed to care for and educate foster children has failed and will continue to do so unless we make a drastic change to the process." To make improvements, the restructured focus must be on creating environments in which children and youths are encouraged to thrive for however long the child is in need (1067-071).

Traditional in-home foster care has remained the American approach since the beginnings of the nation and has roots back to the 1500's. The Elizabethan Poor Law was created in England to assuage the upper classes from the annoyances of the masses living in poverty. Needy people were divided into three categories (the able-bodied poor, which were given mandatory low-wage jobs, the impotent poor, and dependent children). A select few children were apprenticed or indentured to a trade master, gaining vocational training that had to be repaid in time. Most adults and children who could not provide for themselves were sent to quasi-prison almshouses (Zastrow 114).

In the newborn United States, dependent children either joined the ranks of the apprenticed or were confined to overcrowded and sickly orphanages. At the turn of the last century, many legal and societal reforms were brought about to preserve the rights of children. Several child advocates, such as New York pediatrician Henry Dwight Chapin, championed the cause. He and his wife established one of the first specialized adoption agencies and fought to eliminate disease-filled orphanages and preached that the best way to raise a child is

inside a family (Herman). Charles Loring Brace is considered the father of the modern foster care system with the foundation of The Orphan Train in the mid-1800's. After noticing the great number of miserable and neglected youths filling the streets of New York, Brace designed a program to send children out of the city and into the Midwest, West, and New England to hopefully find families to be absorbed into.

“ In theory, several aspects of residential care suggest a solution to the weaknesses of in-home care. ”

Like most welfare related programs in the country at the time, services were provided by private associations and volunteers without the support, funding, or control of the government. During the progression of the twentieth century, the federal government took responsibility for the care of these impoverished youths. Regulations were created to screen foster parents. While requirements have varied over time and between states, it is common that prospective parents be at least 21 years old, free of a criminal record of abuse or neglect, and have a steady income, and can be married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, and may or may not be related to the youths in their care. Parents are usually required to complete a training program, become CPR certified, and pass a home safety inspection. Foster parents are expected to simulate the role of a natural or biological parent and provide everything associated with that responsibility. This includes basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter, but extends also to emotional and educational support, comfort, and encouragement (Bigner 124).

While in-home foster care has retained popularity in the United States for over a hundred years, child welfare professionals have begun to re-think the way foster care is handled. Could another form of care be more beneficial than traditional in-home care?

Some child welfare professionals have suggested reevaluating the old system of group or residential style care. In theory, several aspects of residential care suggest a solution to the weaknesses of in-home care. For example, residential care requires fewer professionals,

which allows administrators to be more discriminatory and selective in the hiring process. Residential care also provides for a much higher level of supervision- of both professionals and youth- which discourages undesirable behavior and allows for greater detection. Youths in residential care are surrounded by positive role models and a stimulating, fortifying environment.

Several residential care programs already exist in the United States. The most common kind of residential foster care is group care, which is often used to facilitate group therapy. The youths that are placed in these homes are predominantly youths that have not found success with traditional in-home care for reasons such as emotional or behavioral issues, medical concerns, or cognitive disabilities, or youths that are older or in sibling groups. These wards are provided with supervised, around-the-clock care and attend the local school system. These programs are often met with impediments, however, as the number of youths contained together frequently eases the transfer of delinquent behaviors between youths. Living in non-traditional family-style situations does not adequately prepare youths with the skills to build lasting relationships or to live on one's own. A study in 2010 found that there is no statistical advantage for these students to warrant the extra expense of group care (Lee 229-49).

With problems unresolved in group care, child welfare specialists might look to programs outside of the foster care realm. For example, several non-foster care centered residential care programs have made providing education a main priority while still striving to maintain quality environments for students.

For example, the Milton Hershey School in Pennsylvania is a residential school for at-risk students in underprivileged and low-income areas. Education is paramount; students receive educations of much higher quality than those of surrounding public schools. The school is funded completely by a private foundation, allowing students to attend totally tuition-free provided with housing, clothing, meals, health care, and educational support. Simulating a family environment, students live with 10-14 students of his/her own 'division level' (elementary, middle and high school grade levels) with a set of married supervisory house parents. To ease the transition

into college or independent living, senior students have the option of moving into dorm-like apartments with lower supervision (one RA per floor) and higher responsibility (students are responsible for their own grocery budget, etc.) (“About Milton”).

Similarly, the SEED School in Washington, D.C. is a residential school for under-privileged youths. However, the SEED School is a public charter school funded by the government in grants from the District of Columbia educational budget. Students are admitted on a random lottery raffle system from the local under-performing schools in the surrounding areas and live on campus for part of the week, returning to families for the remainder. The level of education attained at the Seed School is remarkably higher than that of other local public schools; 91% of SEED students graduate from the high school, 94% enroll in college—84% of which are first-generation college students. Students are supported even after graduation with the School’s College Transition and Support Program, which provides students are provided with support from a counselor. The School has found such success that it has expanded to several other urban cities (“SEED Foundation”). However, both the SEED School and Milton Hershey School limit enrollment to youths free of major physiological or behavioral issues, limiting the scope of the youths who may benefit from an alternative to traditional foster care.

In Germany, a program is being implemented which replaces traditional in-home care with residential care. In several at-risk districts a program called Kinderhaus (children’s house) provides a stable, inspiring, and healthy environment for youths coming from troubled homes in the local area. The youths live in apartments with about ten other youths and a ‘responsible educator’. This adult supervisor is attached to the youth from the beginning of his/her stay, playing the role of advocate, example, and mock parent. Responsible educators help their youths with everything from emotional struggles and behavioral issues to homework and checking of house chores lists. Students in the Kinderhaus program attend the local public schools and are provided vocational training and job placement assistance (Benjamin).

Perhaps the most exciting example of residential care is the

San Pasqual Academy in Escondido, California. This program began in 2001 as the nation's only residential foster care institution. Local foster care youths have the option of enrolling at this high school, living on campus with eight other youths and a supervisory house parent. San Pasqual contains every aspect of an average American high school, such as sports teams, art classes, and cheerleaders, but also improves the quality of education available to the underprivileged foster care youth enrolled by providing an environment set for learning ("San Pasqual Academy").

The success of these and similar programs have been substantiated by several recent empirical studies. In 2008, a study by Lee and Thompson found that youths that had participated in residential care produced more favorable outcomes (favorable discharge after receiving care, higher likeliness to return to natural parents, less likely to return into care) than foster care youths as a whole (Lee 746-57). Also in 2008 Loring Jones reported that residential foster care youth displayed less success than non-foster care youth but rated higher than counterparts in in-home care (5-6).

A 2006 study shows that residential care is improving over time. The study finds that youths that had been a part of residential care and continued on to college rated higher in education and lower in criminal involvement and victimization. Youths that did not continue to college displayed more risks concerning housing and unemployment, and all youths rated lower in substance abuse. However, this study indicates that these statistics have improved over the data from the previous three years, and the authors conclude residential care as a viable alternative to in-home care (Jones, Lansdverk 1152-168).

Childhood is an incredibly important time in the life of every individual. When disrupted by a tragedy such as abuse or neglect, it is critical to strive to provide the very best environment for that child to thrive. Residential foster care may be the answer for some of the thousands of abandoned children in the United States.

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Singlehood: Blessing or Curse by Leslie McKinney

As I watched TV a few days ago I could not help but notice that in every TV show, whether sitcom or drama, the girl must always have a guy or be going after one. In some cases, if there was no guy in the show there would be no reason to have a girl in the show either. It is troubling. When did girl shows become about boys? I turned off my TV and started thinking that when it comes to the media portrayal of women our only goal in life as females is to find a partner and get married. When did we start defining women as beings whose only cause for existence is to be with men? Can't women be alone? Is every girl out there seriously looking for a man to complete her and enhance her existence? Could it truly be that our only goal in life is to find a man, marry him, and live happily ever after? What if we were to be single forever? Would being single forever mean being incomplete forever? Are single women doomed in the eyes of society? After thinking about these questions, I finally reached a bigger question: do women see singlehood as a blessing or a curse?

I do not understand singlehood to be a curse. On the contrary, to me singlehood is a blessing. The environment that surrounds me, however, begs to differ. Every day I see young women and guys getting married without knowing each other, their preferences, and their pet peeves. They simply get married. In my opinion, this is shocking and scary. Utah is the state with the highest young marriage rate. While the common young American woman gets married somewhere between 25 or 26, a common young woman in Utah marries when she is 21 (Law). Utah is also one of the states with the highest divorce rates. I cannot help but think that these two—the high young marriage and divorce rate— are related.

As the young marriage rate in Utah is higher than usual, statistics prove that over 40% of American adults nowadays choose to remain single—temporarily or permanently unmarried—for longer periods (Koeing 254). More than 51% of these Americans are women between the ages of 18 and 35 (“Single?”). Reasons to remain single include the following: focus on professional careers,

lowered pressure of society on women to get married, and the wait to find the right person. These reasons are mostly based on one cause: women going to school and getting an education. In the past, women relied on men for the economic stability that marriage implied; however, during the last fifty years women have gained economic independence by getting their higher education degrees.

“ Why conform when we can choose? ”

As women started going to college they realized they were free to do whatever they wanted to do, and they started seeing men as a complement, not a need. Men still play an important role in our lives, but our lives don't necessarily revolve around them.

Understanding what an education meant caused a revolution, as did birth-control. It is no mystery that before the 1970s, single pregnant women were expected to get married; however, when the pill became accessible things changed. Birth-control gave women more sexual freedom than they had ever had and enabled them in the outside world as well (Silverman).

Women started to put off marriage and as this phenomenon increased, women forced society to change the way it viewed them. We went from being housewives and baby carriers to being an active part of society and economy. Our impact on economy cannot be denied. Once we understood our power, everything changed. Understanding our power has freed us from conformity. Why conform when we can choose? Our choice does not only revolve around choosing a guy, but it also involves choosing whether we want to be single or not. Nevertheless, the way our society and the media view singlehood to this day has an enormous effect on the choice women make. If singlehood stopped being portrayed as a negative status, more women would choose to remain single.

Long before many of us were born TV shows like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* were on. *Mary Tyler Moore* ran from 1970 to 1977 and it presented a character different from other single women on TV at that time. Mary Richards, the main character, was a happy thirty-something single woman who had never been married and was not looking for a man to support her (Hamill). This sitcom was greatly

loved by the audience and it is to this day one of America's all-time favorite shows (Hamill). This sitcom was unique, and it offered a

“ Once we understood our power, everything changed. ”

positive view on singlehood and being a woman.

The *Mary Tyler Moore Show* not only showed a modern woman but it portrayed professional

adults in an office setting without making use of sexual content.

Shows like this impact society as they challenge the roles that we have ascribed to individuals. *Mary Tyler Moore* highlighted that women form part of the work force and are not confined to housework and men. TV shows like this are not easily found on air; instead, we find shows like *Sex and the City* and *The Bachelor*, which display single women as man-seekers. These shows reinforce the idea that women need men and that women are not happy unless they have a spouse. By doing so these TV shows promote the misconception that singlehood in women is a curse and that women will do anything to avoid being single. Ironically, according to TV shows and the media, single men are not cursed; they are blessed.

The best examples of this situation are Jennifer Aniston and George Clooney. An enormous number of magazine covers have been dedicated to following Jen's so called miserable singlehood and her exhausting search for the right man; on the other hand, the same amount of headlines have covered George's qualities as Hollywood's most eligible bachelor and his great journies from female to female. Jennifer was married once; Clooney has never been married. She is stigmatized and he is not. This is a clear example of a double standard. The sad part of this is that even as we recognize the double standards in the media, we continue to make these shows the most seen and the most highly ranked on television and we still buy these magazines. We feed the industry that breaks us down and teaches us that we must be desperate to find someone. As we consume misconceptions like this one, we make them out to be our truths even though they are based on false assumptions.

The false assumption that single women must be looking for a partner or are desperately longing of one is one of the biggest

problems with the way that singlehood in women continues to be seen today. This supposition could not be further from the truth. Although a lot of women long for a partner, many women have testified that to them singlehood was instinctive (Baumbusch 110), meaning that they always knew they wanted to remain single forever. Their reasons to feel this way included their love for freedom and their desire to achieve professional and personal goals for themselves in which they did not see men included. To these single women, happiness does not depend on having a partner.

Cultural aspects such as religion play an important role in the way people perceive singlehood. In a study conducted in Utah, young Mormon men and women were asked questions related to singlehood and marriage. These questions revealed that, in general, marriage is “an ultimate goal for [them]” and singlehood is seen as temporary. This mindset has a lot to do with their beliefs. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the LDS church stated that the marriage between husband and wife is fundamental to God’s great plan of happiness (Darrington 643). This statement explains why LDS individuals see marriage as a goal and as essential in life— according to their faith it is fundamental for happiness. This could be a possible explanation as to why young adults of the LDS faith marry young. Young women who participated in Darrington’s study on the LDS culture expressed how they feel pressured by their families and loved ones to marry young and end their singlehood. The LDS culture and its views on singlehood and marriage have defined the way Utahns perceive marriage regardless of their religious or ethnic background. This influence causes Utahns to marry younger than the average American.

Whereas the LDS culture perceives singlehood as a temporary state and marriage as the target, resulting in this culture’s women’s desire to find a partner and get married, other cultures such as the Bathurst culture in South Africa see marriage as a liability (Jones 13). This negative view of marriage causes sixty-seven percent of adult women in Bathurst to prefer singlehood over marriage as they consider men a risk to their families and their economies. These women choose to be single parents over having families in order to avoid being united with men. Some Latin American countries have

adopted this mentality as adult women rate getting their degrees, achieving professional success, and being self-sufficient as more important than getting married and establishing families (Halpin). Latin American and African women are not the only ones having second thoughts regarding marriage. States like Arizona characterize themselves by the high rates of single mothers, single young women, single women in their thirties and forties, and divorced women with no desire to engage themselves in marital relationships. The way these different societies perceive women, marriage, and being single helps determine the choices the women in these societies make. Shifts in society result in changes in individuals.

As the number of women who choose to remain single increases worldwide, I cannot help but think that if more and more females are choosing to stay single it is because singlehood and happiness can go hand in hand. Ever-single women between the ages of 65 and 79 involved in Baumbusch's study (110) expressed contentment with their single status and mentioned that their group of social support, friends and relatives, played an important role in their satisfaction. Younger singles also mentioned the importance of having strong social support systems (Darrington 642). Having others with whom they can share interests is extremely relevant for singles as it offers them a sense of community and a deep feeling that they belong to a group.

Even though the older single women involved in Baumbusch's study were content with being single, they were open about their regrets. Some of them wish they would have had children and say that if they were younger they probably would. They also mentioned the lack of physical contact with people as a drawback. Singles in their twenties demonstrated discontent with singlehood in terms of how they are seen by those surrounding them. They dislike having no one to accompany them to events and being the "fifth-wheel" or the "odd one out." Many singles who are discontent with their status state that marriage would bring companionship and would mean a progression in life (Darrington 649). This kind of mentality causes a lot of these singles worldwide to rush into marriage and see singlehood as a curse, but what guarantees that marriage will bring companionship

and that it will help couples and individuals to develop and progress on to more advanced stages in life?

Unmarried females tend to be marriage enthusiasts and can think about the positive aspects of a marital relationship because they look at marriage from the outside. They frequently do not know the hard work and the issues that accompany marriage; however, divorced women who have seen both sides of the coin can honestly say that marriage does not always mean having a partner or living with your best friend forever. A bad marriage can make a person feel more isolated than being single (Bright). "I had never been more alone than when I was with my ex-husband," said one of the divorcées I interviewed. Such is the case of many married women. Marriage does not equal companionship or everlasting friendship. Nothing guarantees that marriage leads to people's growth; on the contrary, many women admit that in order to get married they had to compromise their careers and other interests in some way (Qing).

I understand the disadvantages of being single as I am single. I have been stuck home on a Friday night with nothing to do, I have attended parties without a date, and I have even been to the movies by myself; nonetheless, I understand that happiness does not depend on marriage or on a partner. I have learned that singlehood is the perfect place to get to know myself, what I want in life and, in the case I choose to get married, what I would want in my partner.

While engaged in singlehood we get to experience many things that build us up as human beings and individuals. We can participate in social activities of our own choice, rather than having to consult a partner (Baumbusch 114). Singles can discover their personalities and interests without limits other than the ones they place themselves, unlike married individuals who, in general, must think about their partner's opinion on the subject. Knowing one's interests and personality before getting married can be a benefit for marriage as it gives singles a guide on what they would like in a spouse. Someone who enjoys skydiving is most likely to become interested in someone who skydives. Someone who likes reading is more likely to become attracted to someone who enjoys reading rather than someone who does not. Similar personality traits are not only a

good predictor of initial attraction, but they are also a good predictor of marital stability and happiness (Lilienfeld).

Twenty years ago the median age for American women to get married was 22. Today it is 26 (Jayson). It is hard to know yourself right after high school or when you are in college because so many changes happen at the same time. During high school everyone is trying to fit in. Once in college, people start becoming their own selves and focus on their interests. What happens when a person who is becoming his or her own self decides to get married during this process? They are bound to change, as is their spouse. Many couples who marry when they are young haven't achieved a fully formed self (Kecskes). If they both change they could lose the things that attracted their spouses to them, leading to divorce and greater unhappiness than the one experienced during singlehood.

Researchers have found that delay in marriage is actually a good thing and that in reality it improves the average marital quality by a fair amount as older marriages, where the spouses are over 30, are more connected. They do things as a couple more often, and they are less likely to report thinking about divorce or that their marriage is in trouble (Jayson). Does this mean that a longer period of singlehood could possibly signify a happier marriage? It does. I was surprised by this finding and even more surprised when I realized that most married and unmarried women I interviewed agreed with this statement. When I asked them what they thought was a proper age to get married they answered that the perfect age to get married is between 28 and 30. These married and divorced women married in their early and mid-twenties but admit that if they were to do it again, they would get married at an age closer to thirty because "you're a more defined person when you are at the end of your twenties."

If it is true that a longer singlehood can lead to a better marriage and greater self-satisfaction, singlehood is to be seen as a blessing and not a curse, whether an individual wants to get married ultimately or wishes to remain single. To those who want to get married, it offers a view of what they want. To those who do not want to marry, it allows them the freedom they want. It is a status in which

they can develop character that can help you and your relationships, including marriage, and not sink them. Embracing singlehood can go a long way.

Twenty-year-olds like me might not consider singlehood and waiting fun because as we wait the people around us are getting engaged and married, but when I hear the testimonies of older, more experienced women I cannot help but give singlehood a second thought. Working with single mothers and divorced women has given me a different outlook on marriage. It is not all fun and games, and although I do not fear marriage, I have become more aware of all the effort it takes to maintain it. I would much rather wait and not rush into a marriage that I might later regret in order to be prepared for a marriage I can enjoy. Waiting does not guarantee a happy marriage, but a delayed marriage has more chances of succeeding than a rushed marriage, and a mature person is more likely to make better choices than one who is not as mature.

Singlehood is one of the few places where we can find women of all ages and backgrounds—single mothers, single young women, single older women, divorced women, and widowed women. Some might hate it; others might love it, but we must all appreciate it. It could well be our final destination or just a transition, but it will mark who we are and who we will become. Being single does not mean we are incomplete and it does not mean we are cursed. Consider singlehood, acknowledge the pros, think about the cons, but do not shun or fear it. A society is made up by individuals. Individuals make their own choices. I choose to say that singlehood is a blessing.

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