

Keeping the "discussion" in Blackboard Discussion Board

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Many of us have become enthusiastic users of the Blackboard Discussion Board (DB). We use it for a variety of purposes:

- * Community-building in the course
- * Collaboration and interaction around course topics
- * Synthesis of material or viewpoints
- * Application of theories or principles
- * Preparation for formal course assignments
- * Extension of class discussions
- * Opportunity to post questions about home work assignments.

As more of us use DB, however, we need to be aware that for some students, we may be approaching the point of saturation. My concern about this was reinforced when I brought a draft of this paper to my English 300-Honors Writing in the Professions class and requested anonymous feedback. One student wrote, "It is interesting to see what other students will write, but at the same time, the process gets old rather quickly. In an odd way it's comparable to Instant Messenger; if you have something worthwhile to talk about with a friend, then it's a wonderful tool, but if the

conversation is meaningless to you, then IM becomes more of an annoyance than anything beneficial. . . . the same holds true for DB."

Unless it is used strategically, students may see DB as busywork rather than as an essential learning tool in the course: "I thought instructors were unaware that students tend to view Blackboard as busywork. . . . I knew it was important for students to write, but I had a hard time understanding before the clear purpose behind Blackboard."

Some students may not recognize the value of DB because they don't yet understand that "writing is not something that occurs in addition to the curriculum, but is instead a means by which students come to a fuller understanding of the discipline itself" (Dornsife 2001); as a student put it, "[writing] helps me fully understand a concept if I am forced to write it and explain it to others. There's something about writing that sets your words in stone, and I want to make sure I understand what I am talking about before I post it." Students who see writing in DB only as way to fulfill requirements or express their opinions may not recognize that such writing is a way to generate new thinking about course concepts, understand others' viewpoints, weigh conflicting perspectives, or sharpen their own understanding of a complex idea.

Thus it is especially important that we think strategically about the way we wish to use the Discussion Board, to maximize its value as a learning tool. Now that I am in my third semester of using DB, strategies to enhance its effectiveness are becoming more apparent:

* Use DB to meet specific course objectives, and explain to students how DB will help them achieve those objectives. Last semester, for instance, I used DB to address two course objectives for English 111:

Read critically and analyze material written for university audiences.

Engage in interactive/collaborative reading and writing activities.

Course assessment at the end of the semester revealed that students understood the collaborative function fairly well (and, whether they were aware of it or not, increased their fluency); however, they did not recognize the critical reading and analysis connection. I should have been more explicit about exactly how their discussions

were to demonstrate critical reading and synthesis of course readings.

I have also found it important to emphasize that unsupported opinions have little value; my slogan has become "No assertions without supporting evidence." Even upperclass students "assume that DB is for giving their own opinions . . . a place to put anything out in the open, in any form. The students just don't realize that you would like them to include [supporting] information." Since underclass students may have limited experience doing this, I plan to use some of the best discussions from previous semesters as models.

* Clearly describe what students are to do in DB. Without clear expectations, students may become frustrated: "Oftentimes there are so many discussions going and so many questions raised, that the task of responding to them all becomes daunting and discouraging. What was once a simple issue has suddenly turned into an exploding volcano of other issues, that melts over the brain, suffocating any previous thoughts on just the simple issue at hand."

I establish both leader and participant roles, with corresponding responsibilities depending on the course. Leaders are responsible to present summaries of the readings on which the discussion will be based; to introduce topics and questions for discussion; to monitor the discussion to be sure all relevant aspects of the topic are discussed; and to summarize the discussion at its conclusion.

Participants generally have two tasks: to read/respond to previous posts and to introduce new issues or topics to the discussion. Students are required to post a minimum number of times and lines to demonstrate their understanding of the topic and their contributions to the understanding of other students.

* State the grading criteria and procedures for DB at the outset. These may be handled in many different ways, but students are not likely to take ungraded discussions seriously. (When developing grading procedures, keep in mind that you must also be able to survive your reading load!)

* Be creative about your use of DB, so that it will remain "fresh" for your students. This semester, thanks to colleagues Lyn Adair (an

English 111 Award Winners

First place: "Paint" by Inez Cappiello... see page 2

Second place: "The Oh So Amazing Flexible Gender Role" by Andrew S. Fort... see page 4

Third place: "Going Dutch" by Perla Messina... see page 5

Fourth place: "Two Block Universe" by Ramon Gamboa... see page 8

Fifth place: "What Stands in the Way of Gender Equality?" by Shannon Ratelle... see page 9

First Prize

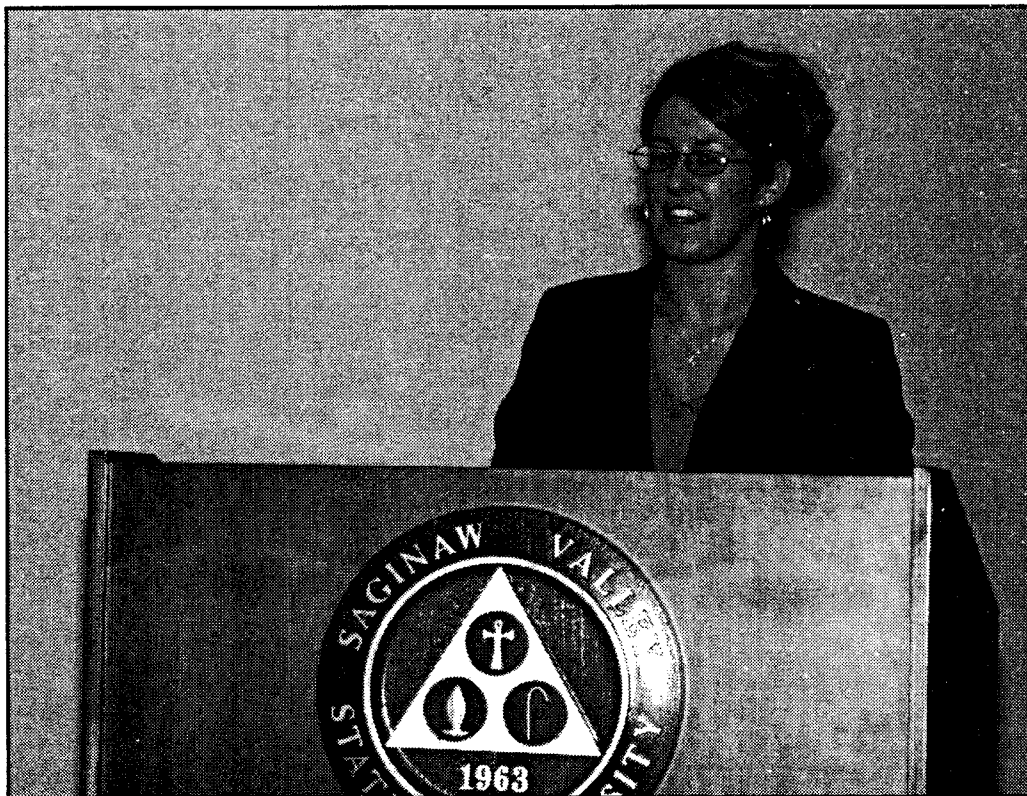
Paint

Inez Capiello
from Dan Villaire's class

Children between the ages of three and seven are at the prime age to be labeled a "problem child." During these years a child will more likely defy her parents, lie, or purposely pick at her younger siblings and friends. The youngster will explore, experiment and become more socially involved with her surroundings. Perhaps this is when a three to seven year old reveals her most pronounced gifts and talents. For instance, a child who writes in marker all over her bedroom wall could be tomorrow's novelist, or the child who makes mud cakes on her mother's best china could some day become the Iron Chef of the future. In any case, I would consider myself a strong statistic of such circumstances.

It was late June of 1987; I was nearly five years old. We lived in a small but beautiful trailer home in Mobile, Alabama. I lived in the house with my mother, stepfather, and younger brother Daniel, just ten months old. My mother loved classical and Victorian-style homes, so our house was filled with an abundance of beautiful things. Our floors were covered in shiny cherry oak varying in shades of dark red and brown. The walls were colored in antique cream crackle paint, with Victorian trim in white that surrounded the room, connecting the walls and ceiling. An extravagant crystal chandelier hung in the center of the room, giving off a warm, soft, welcoming glow. Tucked away in a far corner of the living room was my stepfather's brand new slick-black-baby grand piano. On one side of the piano was a large inset bay window. The window's placement seemed to send an explosion of light through the long flowing lace curtains. Sunlight melted over the top of the baby grand like a crystal clear waterfall that landed on the illuminated wood floor, reflecting light in every direction possible. On the opposite side of the room was my mother's beloved couch. Its legs were small lifelike claws carved from dark oak that seemed to grip and dig into the floor. The smooth cream floral print fabric loosely fell over the plush and fluffy fullness of the cushions. Its over all appearance seemed to beckon you to sit and relax on its inviting curvature.

Just past seven o'clock in the morning the



Inez Capiello speaks at the English 111 award ceremony.

bright morning sun had barely begun to rise, not yet high enough to cast the piano's silhouette on the freshly polished wood floor. I fumbled with my blankets and stretched my short sleep-paralyzed legs to the floor, sleepily making my way down the long hallway toward my routine destination. Rubbing my not-yet-functioning eyes and tightly clasping Sox, my stuffed sock monkey, I slowly carried myself to the kitchen. Once there, I placed Sox in his toy doll highchair and climbed on top of the cupboard to retrieve my favorite Rainbow Bright cereal bowl and Lucky Charms

cereal box. Fetching the milk from the refrigerator, I happened to notice my mother had left her special cupboard open. I had never seen or been inside that cupboard. My mother always locked it up tight. I watched the cupboard tentatively as I finished my breakfast. I knew I was not allowed in there because it would not have been locked in the first place. I still couldn't help wondering what was hidden behind those doors.

I placed my dirty bowl in the sink and tiptoed over to the open cupboard. The door creaked loudly as I slowly opened it. Inside was a huge cardboard box taped together on both sides. I sat quietly and marveled in wonder at its forbiddleness before I finally lifted open the two flaps. Deep within the box were a multitude of oil paints in every shade and color of the rainbow. I timidly reached my hand in and pulled out a small tube in a pale shade of lavender. Then

Please see PAINT, page 3

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cautiously, I reached in a second time revealing a large tube in a bright pink.

Looking down at my newly found treasures, I realized that I would have to open them. I was not quite sure how I was going to accomplish this, but I had some idea of what to do. I climbed up on top of my mother's satin-encased dining room chairs and crawled across the smooth shiny tabletop towards the table's centerpiece. Precisely positioned in the centerpiece were elegant stiff satin and lace napkins, each intricately folded to resemble a lady's handheld fan. I had watched my mother open lids on jars many times, and it looked easy enough, but I was sure I could do it as well. My little hand fumbled with the napkin on the cap a minute or so until the paints finally snapped open. Big blobs of lavender and pink paint came spouting out of the tubes and over my hands onto my mother's oak table, finally splattering itself into wide flat disks on the kitchen floor. Grasping the paints tightly I squeezed two piles of paint onto two separate napkins, then contemplated what to do with them. My young and innocent eyes scanned the room for a makeshift easel, coming to rest on my mother's couch. My mother always loved the hand print pictures I brought home from preschool. "Why not?" I thought.

I trotted over to the cream-colored classical-style couch. I hesitated, as inch by inch I lowered my hands to the fabric. My fingers hovered above the cloth for what seemed an eternity, and then I dropped them making two perfectly formed handprints on the seat cushions. I continued to press my paint-splotched hands on the couch cover, randomly placing a pink handprint here and a lavender handprint there. Before long the entire thing resembled a preschool hand print masterpiece. Finishing the couch, I wandered over to the bay window. While squeezing fresh paint in my hands, I thought of how I was going to paint the glass. Standing on my tiptoes, and reaching as high as I could, my hands slid down the window. It was chilly, but the gooey paint oozing through my fingers was such fun I hardly noticed the cold on my fingers. I moved my hands in circular motions, creating a blend of pink and purple swirls. On occasion I would use my dainty finger as a pencil and sketch little smiley faces and stick people. I drew a portrait of my mom, stepfather, and baby brother, our cat Sheila, and myself. I was sure my mother would love the new decor. Finishing the last swirl I stepped back. It was magnificent, like an ocean of pink and purple waves. When the light from the sun started to peek through the window, it created a kaleidoscope of pink and purple color that splashed across the room.

Satisfied with the bay window panorama, I turned to look at the rest of the room. It seemed so plain compared to my creative work on the couch and window. Something was missing. I scanned the room for another prospective canvas.

BLACKBOARD, from page 1

experienced Blackboard user) and Jim Royle (using Blackboard for the first time), who are guest faculty participants in our English 300H DB, I expect to be more successful in achieving the "professional focus" which is a course goal. Adair and Royle receive the articles chosen by the leader of each discussion and participate in each discussion. Royle reflects, "I thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to participate in this Blackboard experience. . . . Those who have listed comments have exhibited fine critical thinking and have clearly given time and effort to both their responses and the questions which they raise. This dialogue is both stimulating and enjoyable."

Guests from outside the university may likewise be invited into DB by special arrangement with Blackboard administrators. A colleague in Poland and I have been co-researching electronic teaching/learning media in our respective environments; I have added her to my course roster, so that she may observe how our students are using DB and participate if she wishes.

The creative possibilities are exciting. Nursing students use DB to respond to each other's streaming-video descriptions of clinical experiences. Other courses require students to incorporate links to resources within their discussions. I expect there are many other creative strategies that are worthy of sharing.

Additional methods to enhance the use of Discussion Groups can be found on the Blackboard Tip Sheet, "Ways to Get Students More Engaged in Online Conferences," available from the Blackboard training staff. Whatever methods we use, clear purposes and innovative strategies are vital to keep the discussions lively and productive.

Reference

Dornsife, R. (2001, December). Delimiting the writing center. *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 2 (4): 4-7.

There it was, the slick-black baby grand piano. It seemed to look as though it was sad, almost jealous that the rest of the room was redone and it still looked the same. I strolled over to its side and studied its surface area. This was going to be my best piece of artwork yet. I boosted myself up onto the soft black piano stool. Pulling out my two tubes of paint, I squeezed their remains onto the top of the piano. Dabbing each hand in a separate color I placed them on the shiny black and white keys, pulling the colors up and down. I made long streaks of purple and pink until the keys disappeared into a menagerie of fresh paint. I had always thought the piano's keys were like an ugly grin. Once I finished with the piano keys, I continued with the whole piano. I placed swirled handprints all along the side creating a boarder of multi-colored prints. Moving on to the top I decided to make stripes. Starting with the lavender I pulled my hands from the front of the piano all the way to the end. This technique created wide stripes with five thinner ones on the inside where the black piano's natural color was revealed from me dragging my fingers through the wet paint. I repeated this step using the pink paint in the opposite direction. Together the stripes combined to make a plaid of pink and purple lines that spread over the piano's top like an Irish drapery. Finishing touches included painting the front legs in solid pink and the back leg in solid lavender. I stepped back to admire my latest masterpiece, and to my surprise, the piano seemed almost friendly. The ugly grin had completely left the piano and was replaced by a beaming lavender and pink smile, with an outfit to match.

Moving to the center of the room, I stepped back to admire my work in its finality. It was something to truly be marveled upon. It was like

standing in an ocean of nothing but pink and lavender beauty. I was awe struck by my own work. All I had to do now is wait for my mother to wake and stumble in on my wonderful work. Shuffling over to the television, I clicked it on and plopped down on the newly decorated couch. Sheila, my cat, bounced up on the couch next to me and I began stroking her back with my wet paint-stained hands. Together we settled in to watch our favorite Saturday morning cartoons. Before long Sheila and I were fast asleep.

I was abruptly awakened by the boom of my mother's angered voice. When I opened my eyes, the figure of my red-faced mother and a pink and purple spotted Sheila slowly came into focus. In shock I jumped to my feet confused. I thought she would like my artwork. I couldn't have been further from the truth. Before I could react I felt the stinging connection of my outraged mother's hand on my unsuspecting bottom. I looked at her with stunned and teary eyes. "Go to your room!" was all she said. Without hesitation I sprinted to my room and shut the door. As I turned around to lool: in the mirror, I noticed something on my pajama bottoms. Turning to the side so I could see what it was, I couldn't help but grin. My mother had left a swirled pink and purple handprint on the seat of my pants.

That handprint was the least of my punishments, but the amazing thing is that I still have those pajama bottoms to this day. They hang over the top of my easel where I do a majority of my paintings now. I try to stay away from pianos and couches, and stick to a stretched canvas. Those hand-printed pajamas now help to inspire all my "living room friendly" paintings, and to remind myself that I've always had talent deep inside!

The Oh So Amazing Flexible Gender Role

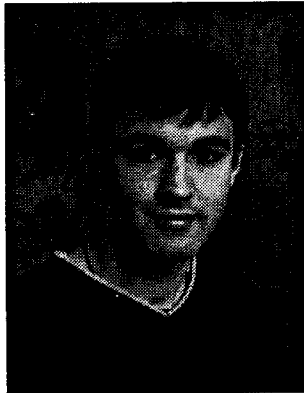
Andrew S. Fort

from James Geistman's class

Throughout the history of western culture, it is apparent that males and females have clearly defined roles. A male is "supposed" to be aggressive, rational, and in control; on the other hand, the female is "supposed" to be passive, docile, and submissive to her male counterpart (Devor 417). How did such definite boundaries get placed around the two biological sexes? Throughout Western culture, gender roles for males and females have been specific and unchanging, and whenever a boundary was violated, people became unnerved. That is Western culture and its doctrine, but it is not the only way of doing things. All over the world different cultures have flourished, each with their own ideas about gender roles. In some cases, the female is the dominant sex; in other cases there exists a third gender. With so many different ways of doing things taking place all around the world, can one culture honestly say theirs is the correct one? While biological sexing may differentiate between males and females, gender, being a psychological frame of mind influenced by culture, may not necessarily follow the patterns of its biological counterpart.

Gender roles are clearly defined by the culture in which they take place. In our own western culture, gender roles are attributed to the "natural" characteristics that follow males and females. Females are thought to be "naturally" more maternal and caring because they bear children and thus must be caretakers of them. Males, on the other hand, must act as providers for the female-child group and thus are more aggressive and dominant (Devor 418-419). This is our western culture, though; there are literally hundreds of other cultures all over the world with different views on gender roles that greatly differ from ours. The gender role is not a constant around the globe.

Who is to say that differing gender roles are correct? No matter where you go, females still bear children and males act as protectors during the time of pregnancy and the infancy of the child. This fact is demonstrated even in the animal kingdom where many birds and some mammals orchestrate a bond in which a male couples with a female in order to reproduce and to protect the female and offspring in order to guarantee the survival of the species. The gender role may very well be instinctual if viewed in this light. Females bear children, and thus must care for them in order for the offspring to survive. Males must protect the female and the offspring in order to



ensure that his genetic material is passed on. Gender roles in fact may correspond to sex; otherwise, propagation would be ineffective. However, shedding such a Darwinian light on the matter reduces human beings to things driven by instinct and possessing none of the free will that Western cultures so value. If gender roles were so set upon sex and instinct, than why would so many individuals choose to live an "alternative" lifestyle? True, females will always bear children and males will always be coupling with females in order to find fulfillment, but that does not mean every person on the face of the Earth must bow to the whims of instinct. One can look at cultures from different parts of the world and see that gender roles differ greatly from place to place. The extreme of these differing gender roles may be the fact that in some native Northern and Southern American tribes, a third gender existed altogether. This third gender, called the "berdache," was a male who assumed the roles of a woman and all the rights and privileges thereof (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle 404). Another example of the gender roles of another culture may be the fact that in Thailand, cross-dressing is an accepted way of life and is in fact encouraged. "In contemporary Anglo-American culture, on the other hand, cross dressers are usually seen as deviant or ridiculous" (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle 403). While sex may be permanent, gender roles are not. They can change from culture to culture and represent a mindset, not necessarily a law set in stone.

Males have typically been regarded in today's society as the dominant sex that is expected to care for the female and his children as well as to act as the link between the family and the rest of society. While many people would like to cling to this idea, the idea of the male as the sole provider is slowly eroding as years pass. The single-mother household is more popular than ever and jobs are opening up in which females can gain a position higher than many males (Crittenden 70). In these changing times, it is only logical to assume the gender roles are changing as well. Women are no longer expected to wear only dresses and look

pretty as they have been expected to in times past (Devor 419). Jeans and t-shirts are now a huge part of the female wardrobe as well as suits and lack of makeup. Many years ago, culture may have defined such garbs on a female as cross-dressing and thus deviant, but the gender roles of the female have changed as have the culture's view of them. The female gender role is becoming more and more masculine as generations pass.

Granted, the female gender role is becoming more and more independent. The fact it is infringing on the territory of the male gender role has the potential for dire consequences. In her article, "About Marriage," Danielle Crittenden recognizes these consequences and asks the question: "If men are told they are not needed to support their wives and children, if they are made to understand that their role as father is interchangeable with the mother's— or, for that matter, with the babysitter's, or the day-care worker's— what compelling reason do men have to remain with their families" (Crittenden 70)? The world does not need more irresponsible men who breed and leave. If the male gender role is reduced to nothing more than a ceremonial one, then the family as we know it will most certainly dissolve.

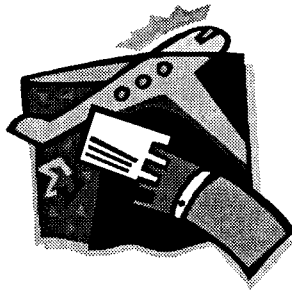
The modern day family, however, may be one result of the oppressed female gender, not a result of the natural direction of females. Holly Devor in her article "Becoming Members of a Society," sums up current gender roles by stating, "It seems that many aspects of masculinity and femininity are the result, rather than the cause, of status inequalities" (418). In order to acquire protection in a violent world many years ago, females were forced to make themselves attractive to males in order to find a mate and thus insure their own security; however, by doing this they placed themselves in a position inferior to that of males and thus brought about centuries of gender inequality (Devor 419). Females were given the inferior social position when the gender roles were "served" out, and as time has passed, the females are slowly tearing away that inferior status and assuming a role much like the male. In a culture whose gender roles had always been male and female, the concept of a single gender role may sound odd. But, as the culture changes, so do the gender roles.

In the present American culture, the gender role of the traditional woman is slowly disappearing, but not without a fight. It can be accepted that challenges to change were bound to happen. Change is not always a peaceful, simple act.

Please see FORT page 11



Going Dutch



Upon Arrival

As unbelievable as it seems, here I am! In the USA. "What is the big deal?" you might ask. Well, it's not

really a big deal being here, as it is how it feels being here right now. It feels strange to say the least. It somehow feels like I've been here forever, like all I have left behind never existed.

It was this way until this morning. When my friend Alex called. I picked up the phone, and a familiar voice was on the other side of the line.

He called me to find how were things going here, and as we spoke I asked him about my house. He then told me that Patricia had painted all walls white. Suddenly this pain, this sharp pain crossed my heart. It was the first pain of loss that I felt since I came here some three weeks ago.

My house, my dream house was being erased and converted into someone else's dream or actually someone else's reality. At that moment I knew, what I had already felt deep inside my heart on my way to the airport: There is no way back! I have to look into the future and let go of all I have left behind. Somehow the memory of my house, as I saw it for the last time before I shut the door behind me that Saturday morning gave me a feeling of security. A feeling that if anything goes wrong, I can always go back to that place. Back to my house. Now, knowing that my memory of it is not a realistic one, that as I saw it that morning will never be again, made me feel lost. Made me feel I had lost that place I called and felt as home.

As I tried to vocalize my surprise, I could almost hear Alex say in his always logical reasoning that I still have the house and that a layer of paint is no big deal. I know! I know he is right, but deep down inside that layer of paint carried memories that are irreplaceable. Memories that we have shared.

I reminded him of the day he came by, when I was painting the bedroom in a purple-pink tone to match the lilac color of the living room and the soft yellow of the kitchen walls and hall way. How he said it reminded him of the day when three years ago I took the decision to turn this house into my dream house by breaking down walls and repainting it the way I have always wanted it to be.

It's funny, but I knew what there was also something else he was thinking of. That same week his boyfriend of two years died all of a sudden in the middle of the night, of a heart attack. During those days of noise and dust as workers came in at 7 a.m. and left at about 5 p.m., demolishing, rebuilding, drilling and hammering, we were both going through a major change in our lives. His personal life was being demolished following the death of Ramadan while my house was going through the same transformation.

All the endless conversations we had while painting the newly build walls until the early morning hours, were engraved in that layer of paint now replaced by a white one. A white layer of paint, as white as the page of this new chapter in my life which began on Saturday, August 18, 2001, at about 9:30 pm as I arrived at SVSU.

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Dutch Fact of the Day

Why are the Dutch also called "Cheese-heads"?

During a time of war, they would wear the wooden buckets they made cheese in, as helmets!



The International Students

As I slowly get to know the American way of life, I've come to realize that it's a land

were issues like minority groups are an every day part of life, and that the general group, called Americans, is a huge puzzle of many different so-called minorities.

Here at the Saginaw Valley State University, with its 1,500 living on campus and about 9,000 students taking classes, our group of about 350 international students can may well be called a minority group.

Most of these students live in Pine Grove. A small village-like housing complex that is a good 15 minute walk from the bookstore/Doan café--which might just as well be considered as the center of our small universe. Their choice of housing was either based on the fact that they didn't know that or they couldn't afford the more expensive housing closer by.

Pine Grove became somehow a small ghetto. More so, since very few of the vast majority of native American students even bothers to meet, get to know or socialize with any of the international students. They, on the other hand, seem to get along with each other very well in spite of the multitude of nationalities, languages and cultures this group includes.

It is expected that students from the same country or language group will eventually tend to hang around and socialize together, but they as a rule don't avoid other nationalities as, to my surprise, American students do.

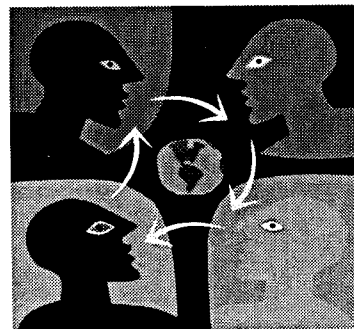
Why do I find this surprising? To begin with, because the American society is like a melting pot of many different nationalities, religions, cultures and origins to name a few. So, why do most of them Americans avoid

us international students? My guess is that it is because they feel a bit awkward or maybe even threatened by the fact that the international students speak languages they don't understand.

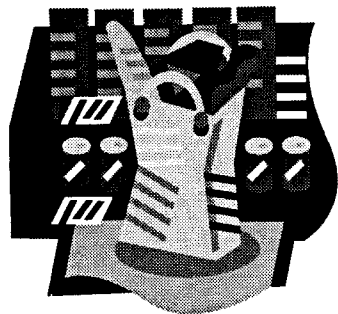
I know that every rule has an exception, and I am more than happy to say that this rule has it's wonderful exceptions as well. In the past few days I have met several American students who not only welcomed the diversity of meeting people from other countries but also used this opportunity to either exercise their existing vocabulary of foreign languages or learn some new words.

Don't laugh, but I have personally met several American students with a rather impressive collection of words in unbelievably many different languages including Korean, Russian, Hebrew and Albanian to name a few. And as the rule goes, everyone always begins by learning how to say I love you and continues by learning every bad or swear word the particular language offers.

So to each and every one of you out there, who appreciates the fact that so many cultures and languages are gathered right here in the Saginaw Valley all I can say is:



"Tot ziens
en ik hou van
jou
klootzaak!"



The Purple Bag

Here in Saginaw Valley one of the household names is Meijer.

Before I ever came here, Meijer was, for me, just a name but since my arrival

Meijer became synonymous with survival.

Being an unfortunate Valley inhabitant without a vehicle to transport myself and my shopping, I need to

endure the painstaking experience of riding the van. I will not elaborate on the type of van, but I will mention that it is far too small to transport the vast amount of international students and their multitude of shopping bags from Meijer.

Not only that it takes about 45 to get there, but it also means to make sure to be the first in line or the number of seats will turn out to be one too few.

The reason it takes 45 minutes is not because of the distance between SVSU and the store, but more because most of the international students live in Pine

Grove and do not commute to the Doan Café for their meals. What the heck does this have to do with the length of the trip to Meijer? Well, they do have to eat and that means that most of them do all their grocery shopping in... were else? Of course! Meijer!

I guess I can consider myself one of the lucky ones. I live in the Living Center right next to the Doan Café, and I don't have to worry about grocery shopping that much. For me a trip to Meijer is more like an escape from the campus and something else to do. A change of scenery more than a survival necessity. I do like to buy and try new kinds of snacks and sodas that I have never encountered back home.

So, here I am again by the parking lot, by the bookstore waiting for the van. Armed with my shopping bag. This time, I also invited my friend Scott to come along. He doesn't have a car either and as he mentions, "it wouldn't be recommended for him to drive."

As always the van arrives late and we are told that we have to wait even longer until the first load from Pine Grove is driven to Meijer; then Ali or Helena will drive back and get the second load from the bookstore parking lot. Patiently, we wait surrounded by a group of Japanese girls.

Upon arrival we are told as always, that we have a little more than an hour to roam the vast building and meet the van back outside. And off we go.

The list at hand: Dr Pepper, Apple Juice, Diet Cherry Coke, Orange Juice, Chocolate Milk, Pepsi, Minute Maid, and what ever else looks interesting to get. Within one hour it's all collected, paid for and loaded in the shopping bag.

On the way to the van I ask my friend Scott to help me with the bag. He lifts it up and puts it on his shoulder. As we walk towards the van he asks: "What color is your bag?" As I love purple, I answer full of pride: "It's purple." To my surprise he puts down the bag and says "I'm not going to walk around with a purple bag! They will think I am gay!"

As I just stood there for a second, not knowing whether I should just crack up laughing or take his comment seriously and elaborate on all the possible different shades of purple and how these could or better could not affect the conclusion on someone's sexual preferences, a guy walks by and as he passes close by Scott he turns around and says: "Cool bag you got there dude, I just love purple, too."



In the Middle of Nowhere

I am a city girl.

I was born in a city that counts about three and a half million inhabitants, then moved to another city that counts about one million and finally ended up here in Saginaw Valley on a campus that counts less than 10,000!

It wouldn't have been so bad, if there was a city around the university so that I could experience the city life I am used to. But no! They had to go and build this place in the middle of nowhere! The three cities around us -Saginaw, Bay City and Midland- can only be reached by car and as I don't have one I depend entirely upon public transportation or fellow students with the privilege of owning a car.

Being a city girl, I never felt the need to have a car, let alone to learn how to drive. I remember when I decided to give it a try, took about three lessons only to confirm my suspicion that if God meant for me to drive he would have given me wheels! I always managed my needs using either public transportation like trains, buses, trams and taxis or my bicycle that took everywhere I needed to go within the city limits.

As unbelievable as it seems I have lived in three different countries, traveled in three different continents and yet never have I felt the need to have a car... until I arrived at the SVSU.

As a rule, everywhere I go, the first I do, is to investigate the public transportation and or taxi/commuter services. Following this rule, this was also the first thing I asked about the student who picked me up at MBS International Airport and drove me to my dorm when I arrived. He handed me a folder saying I shouldn't worry as there were buses commuting from SVSU to both Saginaw and Bay City. Cool! This city girl had nothing to worry about. As long as there are buses, mobility is guaranteed! Or so I thought until the Labor Day Weekend arrived.

Being a holiday, it seemed as the perfect time to go visit my friend Scott's grandparents in Beaverton. All we had to do was get a bus to either Saginaw or Bay City and from there another to Midland. His grandpa was then willing to pick us up from there and drive us to his place.

Proudly I present my well preserved precious bus schedule folder and begin reading the bus schedule out loud. What the...? There are no buses driving by SVSU on weekends and holidays. "Ok," I thought, "no big deal, let's try the Star Lift Service." This should just take a phone call and a ride can be arranged but... wait! What is this? Not on Sundays and holidays? What kind of country is this? I just couldn't believe it!

Unless a person has a car, SVSU really seems like the middle of nowhere!!!



VISA Picnic

It's Labor Day. This means one thing to me: either I go to the picnic or I'll have nothing to do or eat the whole day! Not much of a choice. Don't get me wrong, I

like picnics if it wasn't for the bees, the flies, the ants and the poison Ivy to name a few.

This Labor Day picnic is some kind of a tradition, as I understood from the two kind ladies of VISA (Valley International Students Association), who came to introduce VISA to us and invite us to this year's picnic. They even brought pictures from past picnics to arouse our interest and let us know we somehow shouldn't miss this event as it will be a memorable experience. Amen!

And the day arrived. I missed setting my alarm but my unconscious woke me up anyway at about 10:07 a.m. fearing the consequences. In spite of too little sleep, I was there and greeting the vast Japanese group by 10:56!

"Ohayio-gozaimasu" I say to Yuko, Yuko and Yuko, to Saya and Maiko and some other girls, I can't remember their names. They all know me by know. I'm the weird girl from Holland who speaks some Japanese. I can still remember their initial surprise during the International student's introductory day when I introduced myself to them in faultless Japanese! Little did they know that, in that one session, I almost exhausted my entire vocabulary of their language.

It's a warm, sunny day and knowing that the bus will be late (remember dear readers, I am an experienced van-trips-to-Meijer-student) I just sat on a bench absorbing the last sun rays before the Michigan winter hits again (yes! I have been warned) and observing the group waiting endlessly multiply. I guess I wasn't the only one who was facing the tough choice of either doing nothing or going to the picnic. By 11:15 a.m. a van arrives. "ONE VAN??? How many trips back and forth are they planning to make?" Is all I could think. My experiences with Meijer are turning traumatic.

The driver approaches our group and tries to get our attention. It's not easy when there are about 7 languages spoken all at the same time. Finally he manages to let us know that there will be more vans arriving but if 13 students want, they can drive with him. It's not really working. I can see the growing frustration on his face as he tries again and again to get 13 of us to follow him to the van. The group is determined; either we all go or none! So we all wait. Finally another 2 vans arrive and we still can't depart as the group keeps on growing and the amount of seats is running out. Students who have cars are requested to use those cars as parking fees at the park will be paid for. Finally, our convoy of about 5 vans and 6 cars leaves the gates of SVSU heading for Sanford Park.

We were expected to arrive by noon, but it's about an hour later when the multitude of -by now- hungry students arrives at the picnic site. It also seems that

the kind ladies have multiplied as well. There are about 10 of them now accompanied by husbands and other random family members catering to our needs. Luckily they have also brought an endless supply of hot dogs, salads, pasta's, watermelons, cakes, cookies, soda's and water. I am glad that their experience of past picnics is now paying off. There is enough food to feed about 200 students and our group is almost as big!

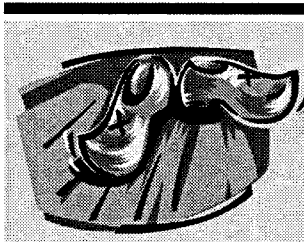
But first things first: name tags and announcements. A kind lady offers to try her one voice against the many who swarm around her. She tries to get everyone to be quiet but is not really working. A microphone with a couple of speakers would have helped right about now, but instead her husband comes to her assistance blowing a whistle to get everyone's attention. We are told the rules of the game, the location of the toilets, the departure time and where to find the emergency kit in case we go rolling on poison Ivy.

Then, as the organizers belong to a church group, a quick prayer for the food and new friends-to-be-made is offered. But before the word "Amen" is even spoken out loud, a line is already forming by the food. Let's eat! The hot dogs begin to quickly pass from containers on to paper plates accompanied by salads and the rest of the goodies. We are all hungry and so are the bees all around us. They are having a picnic, too. It's Labor Day and instead of looking for flowers they are having a day off eating hot dogs and drinking coke out of paper cups.

When we all feel content, many go off to play volleyball, football, soccer, or just walk on the sandy beach by the lake. The weather is just perfect and everyone seems to be having fun. But as all good things come to an end, it's almost 3:40 p.m. and we will be departing soon. We head back towards the picnic area and we attack the remaining food standing in half empty containers. After running around for several hours even cold hot dogs taste like heaven. When all students are gathered, pictures are taken. Evidence of another successful Labor Day picnic and all the new 'friends' the kind ladies made.

By 4:30 p.m. we are all back in the vans heading home. With the radio playing some old tunes from the 80's we all take our blissful naps. Back on campus. As we leave the vans heading for the dorms, the friendships slowly dissolve. We all got what we wanted. The students got something to do and the kind ladies enough pictures to back up their successful event.

When this day will be mentioned to the next year's new international students, I will be considering walking the Mackinac Bridge instead!



SVSU DUTCH NUTS

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Two Block Universe

IRamon Gamboa
from Allan Shauger's class

Childhood memories are some of the most powerful and vivid images a person can recall. Like when you felt cold soapy water against your hands when you helped your dad wash his car or when your heart beat out of your chest during your first schoolyard fight. Most of my memories are good, but not all of them were. Between the years of 1974 and '78, my family and I lived on Saginaw's East Side, at 2014 Fairfax. Fairfax was a small two block long street that was hidden between the loud noises of speeding cars that were on Webber street and industrious sounds of car parts being pressed and break whistles going off at the GM plant on Harold street.

The place where we lived was in a small two bedroom white house with green trim. There were two windows, one on each side of the front door. The window on left side looked into our living room and the one on the right side was my slightly smaller bedroom window. The sidewalk leading to my house was about fifteen feet of uneven pavement that split our front yard down the middle and ran in to our one step porch. The porch had painted black iron handrails on each side of it and was only big enough to hold two people at one time. In the front of my house, by curb of the street, were two huge trees that towered over our house. When the breeze blew through the trees they made an almost nautical sound.

If you stood in my front yard and looked across the street you could see the back of Hoffman party store, a place that always seemed to be getting robbed. Across from the store were the Saginaw Fair Grounds. The fair grounds were a good source of extra income for us because my dad would charge the fair goers a dollar to park in our small yard. The driveway was on the left side of our house and led to the backyard and garage that sat slightly behind the house. It was big enough to hold one car and my bike. The car was a blue '68 Dodge Roadrunner that never ran but always had the promise of tearing up the streets again.

My bike was a green Schwinn chopper that my uncle made for me by taking two sets of bike forks and welding them together. The bike also had a fender mounted just over the front wheel that had a silver eagle taken from a bowling trophy screwed to it. It had ram's horn handlebars, which were bent around forward and back towards you. Also something we called a sissy pole that held my metallic white banana seat and surpassed it by about two feet. My tires were white walls. This bike was so heavy and so hard to ride that it lost me a lot of the races we had



down our street, but to me it was still the coolest looking bike anyone ever saw.

On top of my garage was a basketball rim and backboard, which seemed so high to me at the time that shooting the ball in the hoop was kind of like throwing a rock

at the moon. Whenever my friends and I would play, we had to shut the garage door so we wouldn't hit the car, but that never seemed to work out because someone would always under shoot the ball and bust out the windows in the garage door. After many windows later and the last straw was exhausted in the good faith department, my father replaced the glass with plywood and thin plastic glass. After this, the garage looked like a boxer that had been in one too many losing bouts with the neighborhood kids and had all of his front teeth knocked out.

The back yard was just a small rectangular fenced in lot and the only thing in it was a "T" shaped pole that had two small white ropes attached between it and the house. My mom would use it to hang laundry on. The pole was about two feet away from the backyard fence. Me and my uncle Louis, who was only two years older than me, would jump from the fence to the "T" part of the pole, swing forward, and then try to swing backward to the two inch wide rusted pole that ran along the top of the fence. We had to be careful because on the other side of the fence, also two feet away was the neighbor's garage. The trick to it was when you swung backward you had to start twisting your body and jump off the fence. If we were lucky the neighborhood girls would come out and watch us try to kill ourselves. We would try not to hit the side of the garage, but we still did and we wore our scuffs and bruises proudly, like badges of honor.

This little house was my piece of the world and the two block long street was my universe. Every day my world was constantly visited by family members, usually from my mother's side. My mom was one of ten children and at this time she was barely in her twenties. She had dark brown eyes, dark brown hair, and a fair complexion. She was also very thin which earned her the nickname "Skin" which was short for skinny. She had a smile that was kind of a cross between a strong, working woman trying to understand the world and a little girl who lived in it. My dad was 5' 10" and

185 pounds of hard working, hard playing, quick witted, street-smart country boy and every thing I aspired to be. It seems to me that he was the strongest man in the world and he was because it was my world.

Down the block just over Howard Street is where most of my friends lived. My best friends at the time were a pair of brothers, Tracy and Junior Bowen. Tracy was my age and his brother was two years older than we were. Their Afros were way bigger than a nine and eleven-year-old should have been allowed. Tracy usually had a big black hair pick with a golden peace sign embroidered on it and a fist that was carved into the handle, sticking out of his hair. This was the 1970's, so Afros and bellbottoms weren't unusual-- it was the style. Junior was the cooler older brother. He was starting to get into music and seemed to worship his record player.

When mass started the high priest was George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic. He would let us into his room, which was covered in posters of different R&B bands of the day like Earth, Wind & Fire and Bootsy Collins. We sat on a small orange rug that was next to the hot wheels racing track and listened to Parliament's Earth tour album. We would stare at the cover of the album for hours it seemed, hoping to find some magical message left by Dr. Funkinstein himself.

By this time, the street light would come on and that meant it was time for me to hop back on my green Schwinn bike and ride back through my little universe and back to my little world. It was only a short ride back home, past the corner of Fairfax and Howard Street, and you were there. Once while on this corner, my Uncle Louis and I saw the most horrible accident in front of Ms. Stooler's house, which was also on the corner. She had two huge trees in front of her house just like the ones in front of my mine. We were playing football in the street and when we heard one loud gun shot. It sounded like a car that backfired off in the distance. The next thing we saw was a '72 Chevy blue Impala plowing through the yards across the street and headed straight for Ms. Stooler's house. The only thing that stood between the house and the car were the large trees.

A tree intercepted the car like a football player intercepts a pass. When the car stopped we were the first ones there because it happened about 40 feet from where we were. Someone had shot out the back window of the car and in doing so had blown off the back of the driver's head. His poor body was slumped over to the left of the car and what was left of his head was hanging outside of the driver's side window. The blue door of his car was covered so perfectly in blood that it looked

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What stands in the way of gender equality?

LShannon Ratelle

from James Geistman's class

What first comes to mind when you hear the word, "feminist"? Do you immediately think back to the bra burning radicals of the sixties? Perhaps, you picture influential feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Gloria Steinem who are known for their strong views on women's issues. Despite the definition that comes to mind, women have been struggling for years in order to obtain the goal of gender equality. The first major achievement for women was when they finally won the right to vote in 1920; this was followed when equal opportunity in employment was attained in 1970 (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle 404). Although there have been changes that have aided in the quest for equality, the goal remains unachieved. Until society begins to alter its traditional views on gender, obstacles such as female attitudes towards one another, inequality in the athletic world and discrimination in employment will stand in the way of achieving gender equity.

First off, the extreme verbal abuse women impose upon one another is vengeful and hurtful. Women pass judgments one another's sexual habits based solely upon her style of dress. It seems that the shorter her skirt hem is, or the tighter her top is, the more sexually promiscuous she is perceived to be. Women frequently refer to other women as "sluts" or "whores." This behavior may stem from jealousy as women are competing with one another for male attention as society still conditions women to continue to "dress, move, speak, and act in ways that men will find attractive" (Devor 419). They call each other these hurtful names and pass cruel judgments on one another in an attempt to keep each other in line (Kilbourne 450). This form of "friendly fire" takes place because women hold themselves responsible if something goes wrong in a sexual situation. This idea stems from the media that encourages women to look and behave in very sexually suggestive ways, yet in turn, blames a sexual assault on that "very sexiness" (Kilbourne 449). Instead of creating divisions between each other, women should be supportive and compassionate to one other in order to build a stronger unity which could be more powerful in achieving equality.

Another area in which there is a visible difference between the sexes appears in the sports world. It seems that females are going about trying to be accepted here the wrong way. Women are trying to become more masculine in order to



feel equal in this male dominated area; however, they are setting themselves up for failure. It is essential that women be proud of what makes them female, as well as the feminine qualities that accompany that, instead of trying to be masculine.

Women should not be trying to play on already existing men's teams, but instead should strive for their own teams to be considered just as important. For example, the WNBA is considered the female counterpart to the NBA. This is true on the surface; however, media coverage suggests this isn't so. The NBA has a huge multi-billion dollar industry behind it. The athletes appear in commercials for everything from soft drinks to shoes.

It is considered modern and fashionable for a boy or girl to wear a jersey from an NBA player, but it is extremely rare to see a male wearing a jersey for a player from the WNBA. I'd guess that he probably couldn't even name a team in the WNBA, let alone be brave enough to wear a jersey celebrating that team. Although it's considered acceptable to represent and support the men's teams and players, it is still far from being socially acceptable to support the women, especially if you're a man. Also, women's sports don't get nearly as much television time as the men's sports. Sports that traditionally have had both male and female professional athletes, such as gymnastics, are unpopular in society because the men who participate in such sports are seen as less masculine, or even homosexual. The attitudes of both men and women need to change before any major advances towards equality can occur.

Also, another major contributing factor to the large amount of dissimilarity visible in the sports world is due to the fact that physical characteristics largely differ between men and women. Genetics creates a natural inequality between the sexes. Men and women should not be compared to one another in a physical sense. There are too many biological factors that make it impossible for men and women to successfully play sports on the same teams, or against one other at the same competitive level. This is one area where equality will never happen. Women are naturally less muscular and smaller than men. Five foot, eleven

inch tall Tina Thompson, the number one ranked player in the WNBA (Bowerton 63), would not have the admirable playing statistics she has now if she were playing against men such as seven foot, two inch tall Shaquille O'Neal (Abbott 38). If women want to gain equality within the sports world, they need to stop striving to mix in with the men and instead promote their own talents and abilities as female athletes.

Comparing men to women is like comparing apples to oranges. They both have similar qualities, but they still remain different fruits. No matter how much we may want an apple to taste like an orange, it is an impossible task. However, it is possible for female athletes to "retain the manners of women, although they sometimes show that they have the hearts and minds of men" (Tocqueville 408). Women's sports will continue to gain popularity over time because it provides young girls with realistic role models to look up to. Women have learned many positive things from playing sports; for example, they've acquired self-discipline, determination, and a sense of independence. Despite these positive outcomes, female athletes are still not taken seriously, as their version of sports is considered less entertaining because of restrictive physical attributes.

Similar to sports, there has been some progress made towards gaining equal opportunity within the work world; never the less, employment and the workplace still remain quite far from actually being equal. Unfortunately, "When women enter jobs traditionally held by men, they often encounter discrimination, harassment, or 'glass ceilings' that limit their advancement" (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle 404). A man tends to feel intimidated by an intelligent woman who is in a position superior to his, so in order to keep the peace, a woman will tend to downplay her intelligence, thus allowing herself to fall into the traditional feminine role of passivity, submission, and male dependency (Devor 418). This shows subordination that could ultimately inhibit her opportunity for advancement. Holly Devor's article, "Becoming Members of Society: Learning the Social Meanings of Gender," expresses her belief that women are willing to compromise their own desires in order to maintain harmonious relationships with men because by nature, females have a greater yearning "for cooperation or communion" (417). In business situations, women in authority are seen as being somewhat masculine. Women who hold positions of high status have reached that level through "competitive and aggressive

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Change can be extraordinarily violent, as in the case of the Bolshevik Revolution in which the Czar and his entire family were executed. It is fortunate that the change that is occurring today in America is not violent, but there is still resistance. One can only hope that those who oppose the modern woman will gradually clue in to the advantages the modern woman possesses today. Jobs, security, respect, and independence are all benefits of the new modern woman, and slowly but surely, they will win out despite the resistance.

Many religious institutions are strong supporters of the traditional woman, not only in third world countries, but in our own country as well. The Quakers, Amish, and many other denominations of Christianity are very outspoken about their position on the traditional woman (Sommers 485). The Bible is followed word for word, especially in matters pertaining to women, and though the regulations stated therein are up for interpretation, a vast majority of Christian denominations interpret them as rules for the traditional woman. If so many people over so many years all believe the same thing, can one honestly say they must be wrong? Religion isn't the only thing that stands against this new and "improved" woman. Human society as we have known it since the beginning of recorded history has held true to the position that women are in no way equal to men, and that position was accepted. Only recently have women been standing up against the regulations set against them. But once again, can one honestly say that a precedent that has been in force through millennia and throughout the lives of some of the greatest thinkers of human history is, in fact, wrong?

The fact of the matter is that the traditional role of the woman has been in existence for so long, that it is hard for many to accept the inevitable change. Males are reluctant to accept that females can now be their superiors simply because the gender role of the female has been in a weaker position for so long (Devor 418). It was only fifty years ago that divorce was still a rarity and a working woman was almost unheard of. In the history of the human race, fifty years is not a long time for things to change, thus some individuals may experience a sort of "culture shock" in their own culture. Fortunately, the American culture is gearing towards equality between sex and race, and though it may take time, that integration will eventually be complete.

It has been shown that gender is simply a frame of mind, a set of instructions impressed upon a person from a very young age (Devor 415). Culture defines what gender roles will be passed on. As culture changes, so do the gender roles, and cultures do change, whether it is gradual or sudden. This is clearly evidenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the break in South African apartheid. Change usually brings progress as well, because as people gain experience, they learn to better themselves. The era of inequality between sexes has run its course, and now males as well as females can proudly hold high positions in jobs and in society. Granted, the change is not yet complete as women still do not have all the rights and privileges men do, but they are gaining position with each passing year. It needs to be accepted that, while sex may remain permanent, gender roles do not. A simple child can prove this fact, because children "only gradually come to understand the meaning of gender in the same way as the adults of their society do" (Devor 415). Children see gender not as an actual frame of mind,

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behavior" which are two behaviors often associated with masculinity (Devor 420). In addition, Devor states that those who control the flow of conversation or tend to speak louder are seen as exhibiting masculine speech patterns (421). Both these speech traits would be consistent with a female authoritative figure. The business world is socialized to appease the men and ensure a woman feels unnatural and out of place. A belief remains that "in many cases, femininity is not particularly useful in employment" (Devor 419). Therefore, women must continue to strive to overcome the traditional gender roles that stand in the way of achieving equal rights.

As a society, we want to believe that women are considered equal and treated as such in comparison to their male counterparts. Unfortunately, that idea remains a work in progress. Societal views are hindering progress towards having a world where gender impartiality truly exists. Since "attitudes change even more slowly than laws" (Colombo, Cullen and Lisle 404), there are stereotypical views in existence that need to be changed before men and women can be considered equals. Consequently, without a shift from the traditional mind set, an underlying layer of inequality will always remain.

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but more as a way of dress or behavior (Devor 416). Oddly enough, this is exactly how it is. Gender is defined by culture and is impressed upon children at a young age. Left to their own devices, who knows what kind of gender roles these children would develop. The American people need to look through the eyes of a child in order to see that all humans are the same when it comes to the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of whether they are white, black, Hispanic, Indian, male, or female.

No matter how much some people may protest the equality of women, the change is here, and is reaching its finale quicker than ever expected. Culture defines gender roles, and America's culture today states that women can be just as successful as men can be. For centuries the female gender role has been one of submission and obedience, but not any longer. Women today have the same rights as their male counterparts, due in part to the change in American culture. Women will always be women, in terms of sex at least; but in terms of gender, females can be just as masculine as men can. While the concept of a single gender culture sounds odd, there have been cultures with equally strange, if not stranger ways of doing things. It is unfortunate that not all accept change so easily, but as time will tell, the new and improved, independent woman is here to stay.

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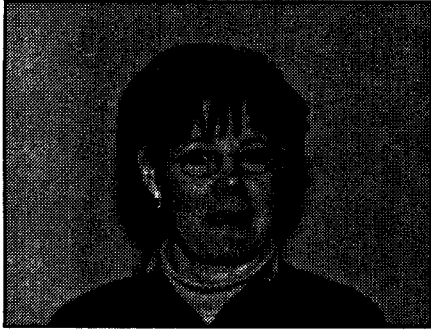
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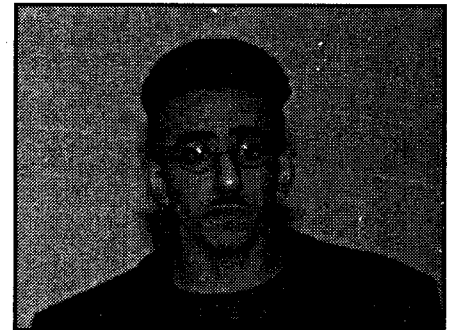
like freshly coated primer. His dark skin was now blue, the same color as the work uniform he had on. He didn't move, not one twitch, because by the time he hit the tree he must have already been dead.

To remember the day you got to see someone die is never a good thing. Childhood memories can be the most powerful and vivid images a person can recall. Most are good, some are bad, but these were just a few out of many. This little neighborhood of mine was an essential part of my childhood. It taught me how to interact with different kinds people and how to respect my family. This is something I will pass on to my kids. This two-block universe and white and green-trimmed world is a place that never leaves me. The seeds of my childhood are planted here, and those seeds grew into a man. I will always be grateful for what the neighborhood has taught me, and always have a special place for it in my heart.

Honorable Mentions



(right) Fahad Medrasi and (left) Kathleen Boice both earned Honorable Mention for their writings at the English 111 Awards Ceremony. Medrasi's piece was titled "The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait." Boice did her paper on "The Media and Violence." Medrasi's work was written for Laura Yelsik's class while Boice's was for Melissa Seitz's.



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