

# Make valuing life a priority, not an afterthought

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SENIOR EDITOR

Emotions ran high; people picketed, families divided and discussions of living wills filled TV screens and newspapers. Almost everyone had an opinion about Terri Schiavo, the woman caught in a battle over keeping in a feeding tube or removing it. Some people felt the judge was a murderer, some said he was compassionate. Others said we should just leave the poor family alone. As a person with a disability, I had a different opinion about the case. Of course, I did feel concern for Terri and her family, but I was also concerned with the attitude of people watching the case.

Some people said she should die. "Why should it even matter. She's not even contributing to society," one person wrote on an online

message board. Others said the resources should go to someone who had more potential for recovery. Others questioned if how she was living was any way to live at all.

Truly, I do understand these concerns, but society is looking at this issue the wrong way. Society tries to put a price tag on life. Society expects everyone to contribute equally. People need to look good, be able to do everything and help support society as a whole. Certainly, having expectations for others is not a bad thing. If our teachers do not have expectations for us, we do not work to achieve the reward of a better grade. Wanting people to have abilities is also important; if an employer hires someone to sing in a coffee shop, that person needs to be able to sing. It is also important to value life. But valuing life and prioritizing it are two different things.

Valuing life puts the emphasis on protection. We have laws that protect people from being murdered. The problem with prioritizing life is that it does not value it. If someone says that women are stupid, weak or worthless, we call them sexist. If someone says people with a different skin color cannot participate in an activity or should not be hired for a certain job, we call them racist and threaten them with a lawsuit. To a point, we even protect the rights of people with disabilities although this area of civil rights has not developed as fully yet. But society starts to draw the line when it comes to lives. Suddenly, a woman who is brain-dead or at least brain-damaged should have the "right to die."

I do not believe dying has to be a right. Why do Americans invest so much money in lawsuits when the money could

be helping researchers working on cures for health problems and care for people with severe disabilities instead? Why do people prefer to end a woman's life because they dislike the quality instead of trying to improve it? I do not believe that in 2005 we cannot do more to help people rehabilitate. I do not believe that people with disabilities cannot contribute. I do not believe that people should be measured by their appearance or contribution to society.

I do not know how much brain capacity Terri Schiavo had. I do not know if she could have recovered. Even with the best technology, we can never know what a person can do for sure. I am a walking example of this. Doctors told my parents I could not see colors; all of their pictures of my eye and operations seemed to confirm this. However, if you ask me to

identify a color, I will most likely be able to do this. I have heard reports of Terri's abilities being greater than medical tests lead us to believe. It concerns me to think that Terri could have had more capacity than we thought she did.

Whether Terri was brain-dead or just brain-damaged does not matter now; she is dead. What does matter is how society views people with disabilities. Will society start to value people with disabilities less? Will society start encouraging people who are severely disabled to kill themselves? Or, will society try to find ways of helping people with disabilities to live their lives? The answers to these questions will determine the quality of life for many Americans with disabilities. If we do not draw the line, people with disabilities may find ourselves with fewer rights. America could become

## Blast from the past predicts present society

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The book *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury, was written in 1953. It was a futuristic book for its time. Yet now it seems more like a contemporary book. Many of the predictions that Ray Bradbury made are coming, or have come, true. In the story a girl's uncle is arrested for going 40 miles an hour. And in today's world the minimum speed you

can drive on most highways is 50 miles an hour. And we just keep raising the speed limit. It has now reached 75 miles an hour in some states. The government does this because people say, "Well, they are going that fast anyway." But no matter how high you raise it some people are just going to go faster.

That is what is happening in our society. People are going faster and faster through life, not stopping to "smell the

flowers" so to speak. They zip through things and don't pay much attention. So they miss sometimes very important things, things that matter. If we don't pay attention then we are going to miss things and other people are going to take advantage of us.

Everything is getting shorter, for we are becoming lazier. Books are becoming shorter, and not many people really want to read anymore. They want it all to be quick, to get to the snap ending. Students moan and groan about reading books that are over a hundred pages. It is so sad to see people complaining about reading a book that is so short, when they only have to read about 20 pages a night. And that is exactly what this book is talking about. People "burning" books by not reading them.

In the book, a character named Beatty says, "It didn't come from the government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick."

This is saying that the public "burned books" on their own by neglecting them and not reading them. It mentions technology, a big part of our society. Why read from a book when you can read from the Internet? Why talk on the phone when you can get the same message across with a

few typed words? Or not even words. A few letters that mean a whole different thing: Lol, brb, ttyl, j/w. I'm not saying that I don't use these when typing on an instant messenger. It's easier. But the level of communication decreases.

Also people can access almost anything with just their cell phone. Cell phones used to be just a portable phone, something convenient so you could contact people while on the move. But now on cell phones you can play games, go on the Internet, take pictures, make videos, and instant message one another. There might be one day where cell phones won't be used to call anyone anymore, just be used for all that other stuff. It reminds me of gadget from the first *Spy Kids* movie. There was a watch that could do pretty much everything... except tell time. It was so full of all the other stuff that there wasn't anymore room for the clock.

People bury themselves in their phones. You can't walk down a school hallway or down a public street without seeing someone staring at their phone, pushing buttons. And if these people are so focused on their phone then they are not paying attention to the things around them.

The quote made by Beatty also stated that minority pressure really helped as well. Nobody wanted to offend

anyone. A bigger population means more minorities. And not just people of a different color or religion. Pretty much anyone of a specific group. No one wants to step on anybody's toes or offend anyone in anyway. In a survey made by The Knight Foundation's High School Initiative and conducted by the Department of Public Policy at the University of Connecticut, over 100,000 students were questioned at 544 schools. Thirty percent of students said that they believed that people shouldn't be able to sing songs that could offend anyone. Well, we might as well just get rid of music then. Our society is so afraid of offending someone that we have editors censor almost everything. In *Fahrenheit 451*, society decided that it would be best to rid itself of books and its problems at the same time

So is that where we are headed? A world without books? A world where people don't pay attention to the things around them, to what really matters? A world without opposing views? If so, then we are heading towards totalitarianism. You may think what I have said is wrong, but take a look at the world around you and see what is happening. People are rushing through life, not paying attention. Everything is being censored, which, with some things, threatens a citizen's First Amendment rights. Read *Fahrenheit 451* and you will be

## The Forest Breeze

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# The key is creativity, not immodesty

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"It's hard to find a fashionable shirt that is appropriate for school," said the Assistant Principal Mrs. Ungerecht. The Forest Lake Area dress code defines clearly what is appropriate to wear to school and what is not. Since many teens follow the latest fashion and trends, they feel like it's ok to wear clothes that don't cover everything. "Part of the problem that schools face with dress codes is that youth fashions change frequently," said Mrs. Ungerecht. But one can still be fashionable and not show too much skin or cleavage.

Layering is extremely popular. It's a trend straight from the runways, and it's how you can wear your weekend clothes to school. An example of that is if you want to wear a tank top, wear it over a fitted baby tee. Basketball jerseys worn alone are off-limits, and to keep the sporty look, guys should wear a bright color tee-shirt underneath the jersey to create contrast. Being creative is key to still being in style and not breaking the school dress code. It's about creating personal style. Schools have banned clothes with logos for drugs or alcohol, and that's not the look you should be going for anyway.

Today's teen wear is very small and shrunken looking. Clothes are made like everybody is a super model, that they can wear the tiniest shirt possible. The styles have gotten so extreme, with short shorts, spaghetti straps, the bare midriffs, it has gotten to the point where students pay no attention to the dress code, where they say, 'This is the style and this is what's selling in the stores.' Under the dress code, lengths of skirts have to reach a student's fingertips with the arms at her sides. But students are getting away with a lot shorter shorts or skirts, and not everybody likes it. "A girl was wearing a skirt where you almost saw her butt cheeks," said Senior Krista Weiss. Current fashion made it difficult to enforce dress code. "The staff doesn't pay much attention to students wear other than hats," Krista added.

People express a part of themselves through clothing. "Clothes can say a lot about a person," said Senior Larissa Burlakova. Today's clothing is designed for different activities and occasions. It's all designed to fit a specific occasion. There has to be a difference to what you wear to school, and what you wear when you go out to a party or a place where dress code is not enforced. Be careful what you wear, and be respectful for what other people are wearing as long it's modest. It's a part of who they are, and everybody is unique in their own way. Uniforms are not the answer but are being discussed on staff meetings. Life would be boring if everybody dressed the same way and looked the same way. Be creative, but be modest.

## Hazardous to your self-esteem: T.V. shows that focus on the rich

JESSICA RUKA  
EDITOR

Pretty girls with a lot of money and their own television show. Girls watch and wish they were those pretty girls with a lot of money. Guys watch and wish they were with the pretty girls with a lot of money. Adults watch and wish they could knock some sense into pretty girls with a lot of money. These pretty girls are all over out television spending a lot of money, and viewers cannot bear to turn their heads or the channel. Television executives are making a lot of money off of pretty girls with a lot of money.

The existence of "reality" television is a reality we all have come to accept. Reluctantly or with pleasure, we have given up the primetime spots on local channels that used to be home to great dramas or sitcoms and let them be replaced by shows entertaining America with people competing to work for a man who has the ugliest hair and prettiest wife. Now we are giving up shows on MTV that actually focus on music to be replaced by shows with good looking teenage girls spending a lot of money or living a life that requires a lot of money.

Television producers at MTV are getting rich off of their ingenious idea to fuse together both society's fascination with people who are better looking and have more money than them and reality television. This idea is the core of almost all of MTV's new hit TV shows, including Rich Girls, My Super Sweet Sixteen, and Laguna

Beach: The Real Orange County.

If for whatever reason you somehow haven't seen these shows, let me give you a short synopsis of each program. Rich Girls ran for one season and chronicled Ally Hilfiger (Tommy Hilfiger's daughter) and Jaime Gleicher's (daughter of the man who owned Innovation Luggage) last few months as high school seniors and the summer that followed where they shopped and vacationed. My Super Sweet Sixteen airs once a week (with different people every week) and chronologically shadows a wealthy child's sixteenth birthday party from planning to blowing out the candles. Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County follows the "in" clique, comprised of rich, beautiful guys and girls, as all but one (one junior will be the main character in next season's Laguna Beach) conclude their high school career and move into other endeavors. These shows are definitely packed full of drama, money and beauty, but when you watch, you can't help feel like you aren't watching anything. Why is this?

With these three programs, what you see is what you get. Even the most avid fans of

these shows do not completely understand the message/point of these shows because (let me be the first to tell you) there isn't one. These shows have no moral values, no consistent plots and in the case of My Super Sweet Sixteen, not even the same characters. So aside



from drama, what keeps young society watching shows that are morally bankrupt?

There is an obvious answer regarding the appeal of these shows, and that is the idea of "coveting thy neighbor." These programs showcase wealthy young people doing normal things—graduating, going to prom, shopping, planning a party etc.—but it is entertaining because when people have money they do everything extravagantly. These shows play off of the idea of watching people who have what you only dream about having. When we watch these people do these normal things, we immediately picture ourselves

in their situation, we think if I was going to prom and I had all that money, I wouldn't wear that.

The young people on these shows represent the ideal person; when common youth watch they see themselves in their position, the stars on these

shows embody the identity idolized by common youth. Media teacher Ms. Eikren explained why these reality programs are so appealing, "That is who [young people] want to be, they think they can be rich someday." The stars on these shows are all gorgeous, wealthy and popular, which is exactly what most young people want to be.

"Everyone wants to be rich, loved, beautiful and a part of the young society, especially in this demographic." When watching these programs you can easily put yourself in their shoes because they are doing normal activities, but you are still entertained and intrigued by the money and beauty the stars of these shows have.

Aside from watching and wishing, there is another element that makes these shows addicting, and that is the fact that somehow when watching, you feel good about yourself. Even if you only have 36 cents in your checking account and they have \$36 million, you can't help but feel better than them. They

prance around, acting as if they own the world—even though the world to them is only the size of Los Angeles or New York City – and they are completely disrespectful to those who any "normal" person would regard as a dignified person, i.e. your mother.

On one episode of My Super Sweet Sixteen, a not even 16-year-old girl went on vacation with her friends, despite her mother saying she couldn't. Then, she charged the trip on her mother's credit card, and went on to call her mother several four-letter words when her mother canceled the card, prompting the end of her vacation, keeping in mind the mother was also financing her entire sixteenth birthday party. On Rich Girls and Laguna Beach friends talk behind other friends backs, or sometimes, do not even save their friends or their own dignity and blatantly talk bad about one another when they are standing right next to them. Because most these girls are completely immoral, you feel good when you are watching and lately that is one of the main reasons people watch TV at all.

Feeling good and wishing you were someone else never went together before until the airing of Laguna Beach, My Super Sweet 16 and Rich Girls. Now it seems as if sinning and gaining self-esteem may become the staple effect for all shows MTV airs, especially considering MTV