Make sure classroom discussions are a safe space for all

**by Sarah Gouldrup**
People Editor

As generations evolve and schools become more progressive, mental health has slowly integrated itself into the classroom through teacher-initiated conversations, fostering an environment in which students are comfortable talking about topics that adults previously told them to repress. However, when people share baseless perspectives on sensitive subjects, they compromise the previously safe environment. Classrooms must draw a line on what students can and cannot comment on; it has to be drawn at the discussion of suicide, specifically.

Until a discussion I had in my English class, I hadn't really thought there was a need for such a line. I got to class expecting a Socratic Seminar in which we would discuss John Steinbeck's East of Eden and talk about different themes and characters. During the seminar, however, my classmates began analyzing the suicides that occur in the book. My peers voiced how they believed that characters were just giving up, and they weren't strong enough to handle what some of the other characters were dealing with. All of a sudden, my classmates were encouraging a harmful mindset surrounding suicide instead of analyzing the significance of Steinbeck's choices.

Suicide should not be a topic students converse about in the context of a discussion. It has already become so desensitized in our generation with teens offhandedly commenting "I'm going to kill myself" after slight inconveniences. Suicide impacts our generation at a greater rate as years pass by, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reporting that "suicide was the second leading cause of death among people ages 10-34 in 2018."

Suicide affects many in our generation, whether it is through a personal experience or someone they know, and downplaying the impressions it has on people is incredibly harmful. There are already so many misconceptions about suicide that make it that much harder to ask for help when struggling with suicidal thoughts. Encouraging those misconceptions in a "safe" environment is even more dispiriting. There is no way to tell what each individual person in your class has gone through or is currently going through, which makes it incredibly insensitive to speak on a topic that can be so personal and triggering to others.

STEINBECK
EAST OF EDEN
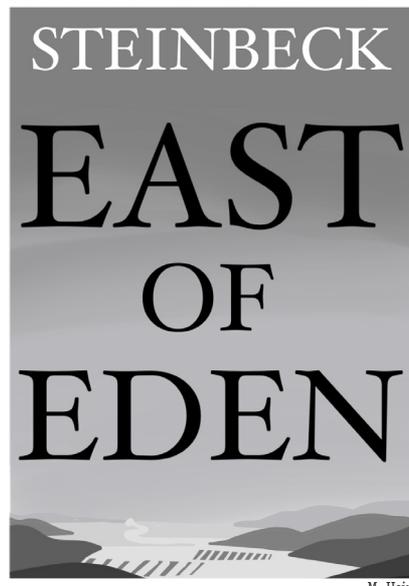
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Suicide is important to talk about, but only if it is done in a way where people who are experiencing suicidal thoughts are able to receive help without any stigma or judgment attached to it. By letting school discussions foster a stigma around mental health when students vocalize an opinion rooted in that same belief, it's detrimental to the students who are personally affected by suicide. While conversations on mental health are a necessity for high schools to conduct, the complex topic should only be addressed in an educational manner when inside the classroom.

It isn't about removing suicide from the conversation, but about where the conversation is held and in what context. Appropriating opinions on suicide in class can be crippling to those who are going through or have experienced anything related to this mental health issue. With over 18.8 percent of teens seriously considering suicide in 2019 according to the Youth Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the vulnerability related to the topic is too great to discuss in a trivial manner by people who don't understand the power of what they say.

Pronoun circles may be counterproductive to allyship

by Jordan Chan
Editorial Editor

School is back in session, and that means it is time to get to know everyone in your clubs, classes, and extracurriculars through name games, icebreakers, and — in the context of the conversation I want to have today — pronoun circles.

Pronoun circles are pretty self explanatory: a leader calls on group members to announce their name and the pronouns they wish to go by, one after another. While this may seem rather innocuous, pronoun circles can be counter-productive to the purpose they serve.

Sharing pronouns is undoubtedly an important step in ensuring that people respect others' identities and treat each other with courtesy. However, pronoun circles often put an unwanted spotlight on non-cisgendered people — people who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. They can unintentionally bring anxiety to those who do not feel comfortable sharing their gender identity in a space in which they don't yet feel safe. In some cases, pronoun circles even force people to out themselves to groups of strangers.

Additionally, enthusiasm about pronoun circles can come off as performative. This most often occurs when it seems as though cisgender allies use these circles to highlight how supportive they are of transgender and nonbinary individuals rather than to uplift those individuals themselves. Rather than cultivating an environment that respects boundaries and makes everyone feel comfortable, allies unintentionally create spaces where their allyship receives more attention than transgender people's needs. In this way, they may inhibit progress or contribute to the misconception that non-cisgender individuals exist "elsewhere."

Eliminating pronoun circles certainly doesn't mean cisgender people should stop asking for and sharing their own pronouns. Taking these steps is still vital to allyship and, simply, human decency. However, there are more inclusive, better alternatives to pronoun circles that create a safe space for transgender and nonbinary individuals.

For example, sharing pronouns in a one-on-one conversation is a great option because it puts less stress on non-cisgender people. Asking in this sort of setting lets the other party know that you are aware of gender identity issues and gives them the choice to reciprocate the act of sharing pronouns or not. It also gives the other party a chance to set boundaries, since some non-cisgender people may feel comfortable using different pronouns in specific contexts. In a school environment, teachers could ask students for their pronouns privately rather than in front of the whole class. In general, cisgender people should also pay attention to whether everyone in a space works to make it trans-inclusive.

In an ideal world, it would be completely safe for non-cisgender people to comfortably share their identity, and thus their pronouns, with every person they meet. However, in the modern world, that is obviously not the case. Although there is certainly more awareness about the difficulties transgender and nonbinary people face today than there was many years ago, we still have a long way to go. As we continue to work on making communities more inclusive, we should avoid putting people in situations that could make them uncomfortable or bring them harm.

he/him

she/her

they/them

M. Hein

Golf causes excessive harm

by Elena Rexach
Public Relations Manager

Imagine cascading, vibrantly green hills, grass as far as the eye can see. The sun warms the air as chuckles are exchanged between friends. As you tap the ball with your club, you can't help but think this place must be paradise, right? Wrong. Golf's reputation of perfection is wrongfully given; it is simply an elitist waste of space that ruins the environment.

First of all, golf courses require hefty amounts of water to be maintained. In the United States, 2.08 billion gallons of water are used to irrigate 2.3 million acres of golf greens every single day. Furthermore, only a fraction of golf greens recycle their water, which shows that the industry isn't very interested in sustainability. California, a state notorious for droughts, contains nearly a thousand golf courses, each needing to be watered continuously. I can barely remember a time when I wasn't living in a drought, and the endorsement of such a water splurge feels terrifying and wasteful. This water could be used for public parks, but instead it's wasted on grass.

The existence of the grass itself is also harmful to the environment on its own. Constructing a course clears large areas, destroying trees and ecosystems in the process. To maintain an image of perfection, chemical fertilizers are often used, harming the animals living among the weeds. Large areas of nature become inhospitable to large groups of animals, all because some people want to golf. Grass does not lend itself to much biodiversity, either. There seems to be this idea that golf is involved in nature, when the sport could not be more detached. The massive amounts of land currently occupied by golf greens could be used for countless other projects including housing, small businesses, or even public parks, yet 150 acre parcels are just set aside for metal sticks and plastic white balls.

On a social level, golf is one of the most elitist sports. The premise of golf is that it is a luxury sport for people with too much time. The participants who meet this criteria are overwhelmingly White and rich. Country clubs are created to maintain exclusivity on courses, often requiring high fees or connections to be allowed in. These resources are only available to people already in high social circles, which just perpetuates the cycle. All of this works to enforce the roles of social class defined by wealth that strengthen by the day. Sure, there are public courses, but the central motif of golf seems to be networking among the wealthy. The rich get richer, and the poor suffer.

While I do not see it as an issue to be solved in the near future, the glamorization of golf appalls me. While golf abolition seems impossible, I hope to see at least some change in the social and environmental structures of golf.
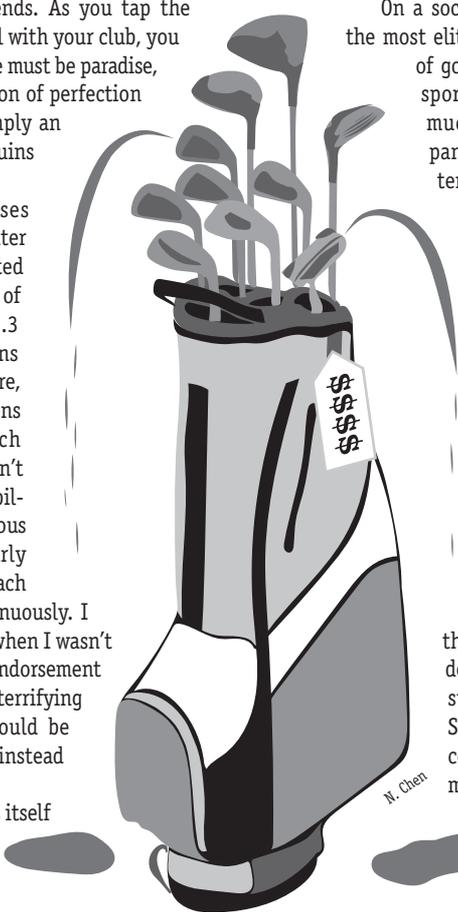
N. Chen

Textured hair is not a trend

by Alia Arafeh
Opinion Editor

If you're wondering how much effort and money I put into my hair, I can tell you right now: way too much. I have to plan out my wash days, do intense online research on different products — then go through the trial and error of testing them myself — and I refuse to touch it when the curls are finally set. Having curly hair is not easy, and without significant effort, my curls are flat and unpresentable. This is why it is frustrating to me that some people claim to have just recently "discovered" that they have curly hair in light of a trend that surfaced on the social media app TikTok. While it is true that anyone from any race can have any hair texture, it is problematic to only take care of your hair for one video, and to make it seem like this is a new discovery. You either have curly hair or you don't.

The TikTok trend involves people making videos where they claim that they've always had frizzy hair and never knew why. They buy a curly hair shampoo, conditioner, and leave-in treatment and follow basic advice for taking care of curls, such as drying their hair with a T-shirt. At the end of the video, there is a final "reveal," and the person claims to have discovered that they have curly hair.

One of the main problems with the recent glamorization of curly and textured hair is that in the past, Western society criticized people of color for embracing their natural hair. Some people are discriminated against in the workforce, suspended from school, or face judgment online. Many people feel the need to hide their natural hair to better fit in with beauty standards, thus damaging their hair with harmful treatments.

For others, however, hair type is becoming a more important part of their identity. Those who previously felt pressure to conform to Western beauty standards have begun embracing their natural hair. The journey to revitalizing damaged curls and breaking out of the habit of straightening hair is important for many people's confidence and self-discovery.

The TikTok trend encompasses none of these aspects. It is a trend fueled purely by online validation and likes. It has nothing to do with embracing your natural beauty, and everything to do with piggy-backing on new trends to conform to the ever-changing online beauty standards. Curls take a long time to perfect. It is a whole process that cannot be achieved with drug-store products. Additionally, products made for curly hair changes the texture of any type of hair, but that does not necessarily mean someone has curly hair. Their natural hair texture is more apparent to those with curly hair, because they cannot brush out the curls or apply the wrong products because their hair will become frizzy.

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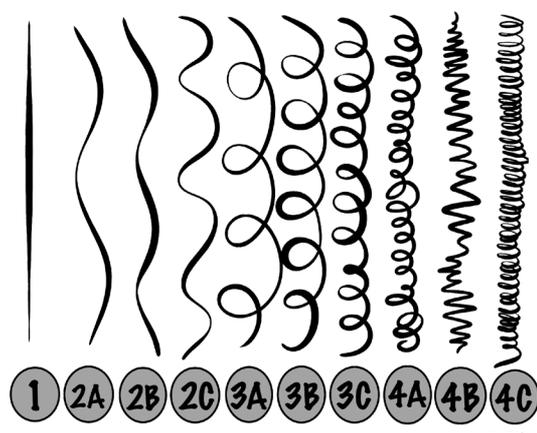
M. Hein

Curly hair should be embraced. It is beautiful and unique. Anyone who has curly hair should learn how to take care of it and wear it naturally with pride. However, critics are quick to judge curly hair, and it can be seen as unprofessional in many settings; so, when people have a choice between having curly hair and not having curly hair, and only choose to embrace their natural curls when they can gain popularity from it, it is problematic.