

# An Open Letter to the Miramonte Community

June 7, 2017

To the greater Miramonte community,

I didn't want to write another article about feminism. I know some of you reading this will exit Safari on your phones right away, close the tab on your computer, lock your tablet and never think about this letter again. And that's your choice. But I don't type this standing behind an altar, preaching yet another sermon from above, trying to tell others how to live their lives or what to believe. This letter is my confession.

Recent events in my personal life and events in the greater community have forced me to initiate a serious examination of my own shortcomings. Two years ago, I saw for the first time a male coach—we'll call him Coach Jones\*—come up behind one of my teammates and close friends and hug her in a supposedly "friendly" manner. Although Jones wasn't our coach, every girl on the team knew him for obvious reasons. From then on, I witnessed first hand this same coach touch girls, many of whom were my best friends, in a demeanor that some will claim was just "friendly." Despite these assurances from bystanders, the girls were clearly, and rightfully so, uncomfortable with these grazes of hand against arm or thigh. Some even went as far as to tell Jones to stop, or physically pull away, but this didn't hinder him. These interactions went on for an extended amount of time, with the passive acceptance from other student-athletes, parents, and coaches. I encouraged my friends to talk to the administration and had discussions with other coaches about this man's inappropriate behavior, asking if anyone was doing anything about it.

But, in the end, I never told anyone who could make a

difference. It wasn't until I got called down into the office myself to talk about what I had seen that I realized that for years an entire community of people was protecting a man who was very visibly making students uncomfortable. Because we were scared of taking initiative? Because we wanted to be polite? I don't know. Technically, he wasn't doing anything illegal. He was making comments and touching girls in a way that was just too intimate, too close for comfort. But the point is that these actions repeatedly put multiple students in a position of powerlessness and extreme discomfort. I don't think anyone could tell you why there was an unspoken agreement between all of these people that bound them to silence, myself included.

To address a series of incidents completely unrelated to the previous situation I've been discussing, I'd like to move on to a more personal story.\*\* An acquaintance of mine approached me in class one day, somewhat upset and resigned. After much coaxing, she told me how a student named Rodney\* had made yet another degrading comment to her. I can't tell you how many times this year she has come to me with the same complaint. And I always heard her out, profusely apologized for this treatment, and encouraged her to talk to a teacher because the comments were clearly very detrimental to her mental health and not appropriate in any context, let alone school. I told her to tell someone, pushing the responsibility back onto her to shoulder this burden alone.

I should have grabbed her arm and marched her down to the office when I heard about the first comment. Again after the second. And the third and fourth and every single time after that. I should have done the same thing after Coach Jones touched and spoke to my friends inappropriately. I had not one or two, but countless opportunities to stop this disgusting and degrading treatment. We all did. And we collectively decided to abstain.

Now, this acquaintance told me about Rodney's most recent

comment a few days after I had been called into the office to talk about Coach Jones, so I had been stewing over my role in the former situation for quite some time. I don't know if I did it out of some sort of guilt obligation or just a new awareness of the need to actually stand by these girls (which I had preached for years but didn't practice), but after hearing her story I knew I had to ensure that it was reported to the office. However, as I was talking to her about why she should report the egregious comments, she revealed a critically important detail that is the center of this second narrative. She didn't think anything was worth reporting because she felt like she deserved to be treated that way. If it was another girl, she said, she would have reported it, but he only targeted her so it didn't really matter.

I can tell you that this theme isn't uncommon among women and girls when it comes to their own personal comfort and safety. I have had the privilege of growing up in a community where at most I have only faced very small, subtle instances of sexism. But this gross injustice against these girls cannot be overlooked, or fade away without grave and considerable discussion of what this says about us as a community. We continue to teach women to be polite and to smile in the face of discomfort because that is what is courteous, that is what is expected. We don't empower girls to protect themselves. Instead we all stand by listlessly, confirming the idea that these instances aren't "a big deal" and should just be brushed aside or ignored. This isn't to say that it was the responsibility of any of these girls to report these events to a person of authority. Too often we focus on teaching girls how not to get harassed or abused or raped, instead of teaching those who could potentially become harassers, abusers, or rapists that these things are wrong. This was even evident at Post-Senior Day, when seniors listened to the story of a brutal rape with a winding lead-up displaying all of the signs that should have told the victim that she was in danger. The retelling ended with one question: "How many opportunities

did the victim have to save herself?"

This is the problem that plagues our culture here at Miramonte, in Lamorinda, and across the entire nation. We place all of the burden on the victims to protect themselves, and teach our daughters and sons to say *nothing* in defense of these people who are basically defenseless themselves. Our kids deserve better. I'm not telling you this because I think I'm superior or because I have illusions of being the savior of these women. This is coming from someone who stood by and let this treatment continue for a long time. All of us need to take a serious look at what we are teaching the young people of this world to do—and what not to do—when we remain silent and foster a culture like this.

Madison Alvarado

\*Name changed

\*\*I ask you not to speculate as to who the people in this anecdote are. They are kept anonymous to protect the victim, and by forming conjectures about the subjects of incidents such as this we are simply continuing the harmful narrative that punishes those in need instead of protecting them.

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## **It Happens Here: Sexual Assault**

*All interviewees for this article were Miramonte students who preferred to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of this*

*topic. All names have been changed to protect the privacy of those in question.\**

In Orinda, the houses are nice and the police rarely see action outside of fender-benders and the occasional break-in. Orinda, we are told, is a safe place to live. But there is both a scope and a depth to the instances of serious violence that take place in our small, secure town. Here, as in the rest of the world, sexual assault is not confined to college dorm rooms or dark alleys; it is pervasive, stealthy, and rampant even in our own privileged community.

Several young women are breaking their silence. They came to *The Mirador* to tell their stories to their peers and to the community in the hopes that their honesty would start a discussion about the nature of rape, sexual assault, and harassment and encourage others to open up.

When Lindsey\* was assaulted in the fall of this year, she was hanging out with friends after a Halloween party. "I was not okay," she said. "I had too much to drink for sure."

Lindsey and her friends were walking from the party to a nearby elementary school. Her male friend, Craig\*, began holding her waist and touching her—in more than just a friendly way. When they first arrived at the school, both Lindsey and Craig were surrounded by their friends. But later, Lindsey found herself alone with Craig. "I don't really remember how he got me away, but he got me away. He started kissing me and... and then it escalated very quickly..." After nonconsensual oral sex occurred, "I told him to stop multiple times and he said, 'No a little bit longer.' I pulled away again and he said, 'No keep going.' Finally, the last time I broke away it just stopped. Afterward, he kept talking about how we should date. 'We should do this again,' he said. I was not okay with it."

Christine\* was studying with a friend, Matt\*, when the

situation occurred. The two were standing outside of her car near the library when they kissed briefly. Christine quickly pulled away and said, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that, I don't know why I did that." She thought this response to their unplanned kiss sent a clear message: she was not interested. "Once we got into the car though, he was really aggressive," she said. "He grabbed my face and wouldn't let go. I tried to pull my face away but he kept pulling my head forward. He was trying to get up my shirt. And he tried to grab the inside of my leg and move his hand up after I pushed his hand away from my chest. I couldn't get him off. I was trying to talk but I couldn't because he was so vicious. I elbowed him in the stomach to get him off. That's why I feel like it's my fault though," she added. "Because I kissed him outside of the car. And I think he took that kiss as way, way more than it was. He did eventually listen. I just had to be really forceful. He didn't have a good excuse. He just said, 'Oh sorry, you know guys just have hormones. We can't really control it.' and I said, "Girls want sex just as much as guys do, so that argument is invalid.'"

Christine confronted her attacker over text shortly after the incident. "You really did seem like a decent guy up until that point," she wrote. "I did not consent to that and you know that. You need to understand that you do not touch someone like that without them consenting. I don't care if you think it's a given because it's not. You need to learn that because otherwise every girl who you do that to will feel used, vandalized, and unsafe. I expect you to respond like a decent guy, because right now I have no idea how to feel about you or what kind of person you are. So why don't you tell me why you thought it was okay."

Lindsey and Christine expressed guilt and shame over each incident. They were also concerned for their own reputations because of the stigmas surrounding female sexuality and sexual assault. "I would just be afraid to get a reputation that I

slut myself around," Christine said. "People can twist stories and interpret it wrong."

Sarah\* became friends with Mark\* a few months before things changed. He confessed to liking her and asked her out; she was taken aback and not interested. Sarah declined his offer. "His reaction wasn't awesome," she said, "which made me feel bad. He kind of guilted me by saying, 'you're just like every girl that's blown me off.'" But Mark wanted to stay friends. "I wanted to make it up to him, even though I hadn't done anything wrong, I just didn't want to date him. I always felt like I had this debt to pay to him. I didn't want to be put in that category that he put me in with 'every other girl.'" After they had decided to still be friends, Mark and Sarah still hung out. She went to his house to watch a movie and she fell asleep. "I had made a point not to sit directly next to him (on the couch)," she said. "I fell asleep on my side of the couch and then I woke up and I was on his chest and lap. I just remember waking up there and saying, 'I did not fall asleep on top of you,' I said. 'Yeah, I moved you over,' he responded. I felt really taken advantage of."

Mark, however, continued to target her. According to Sarah, Mark committed sexual battery against her in the Miramonte weight room. Mark touched or "slapped" her without her consent in a sexually aggressive manner. "He slapped my butt in the weight room and like ran off and chuckled. I remember feeling pretty degraded and just frustrated. The fact that he just thought he could do that was disrespectful in my mind and a violation of my privacy," Sarah added. "I believe respect is give and take and I didn't deserve that at all and it was not only embarrassing, but gross." Sarah expressed her anger and frustration to her attacker with a pointed and simple: "It's my f\*cking body."

Amy was visiting her sister in college on New Year's Eve the night she was raped. Amy, her older sister, and her sister's friend Mike\* went out to frat parties together to celebrate

the holiday. "He was super nice and he always talks about his sisters and how much he loves them," Amy said. "He is training to be a police officer and he was actually on call that night so he wasn't drinking. We were at this party and he was being super protective, so my sister and I felt really comfortable with him." Mike gained Amy's trust that night. "At the party, a group of guys came up to me and tried to ask me to come back to their frat with them, and Mike pulled me away from them and made sure that didn't happen." When the trio got back to her sister's apartment, Amy's sister went to bed and Mike and Amy stayed up watching TV. "I went into the kitchen to get water," Amy said, "and I was leaning over the counter on my phone because it was plugged in. He came up behind me and I said, 'What are you doing?'. He put his arms around my waist and pulled me towards him. So I pushed back and I said, 'Get off of me' and then he said, 'Oh no, you've been flirting with me all night,' and he pushed me back onto the counter. And I tried to get up one more time like halfway through and he slammed me to the ground and put his hand on my mouth. Once he was done I was crying on the floor and he got up, got dressed, and said, 'Don't tell your sister this, she won't believe you. She knows how great of a guy I am.'"

Amy also was concerned about what others would think of her if they knew about her attack. "The reason I didn't tell anyone for a long time was because I thought my friends would judge me. Now that just sounds stupid. I was afraid they would be like, 'Oh, it's your fault,' or, 'Oh, you're very flirtatious you probably wanted it to happen,' or something like that."

Amy struggled with telling her story, especially to those closest to the situation. "I didn't really talk to my sister after (the attack)," she said. "I felt a lot of guilt over it. My sister was basically dating him and I felt like if I told her she'd either not believe me or feel guilty about it because it was someone she knew and was comfortable with and let spend the night and all that." The shame, fear, and guilt



Amy felt rendered her silent and confused. "The longer I waited to tell people, the more I got the feeling that people would think I was lying. I thought that they would want to know why I took so long to tell them. But it's not like I was going to run into the living room that morning and yell, 'Hey, he just did that to me. Also, a big part of me just wanted to pretend like it never happened— like it was just some terrible nightmare."

Lindsey and Amy did gain some insight regarding their own misconceptions of sexual assault. "Before this," Lindsey said, "I thought [a rapist] was a random creepy college guy who did that to girls at parties. I didn't think it could be someone that was my friend. I thought it took a certain kind of person to do that."

"A lot of people think this is something that happens with people you don't know and don't trust. Most of the time it's someone you've known for a while. When I think about what happened I remember thinking the whole night before that, 'he's protecting me, he's someone I can trust. He's being a good friend to me,'" Amy said.

In the aftermath of her assault, Lindsey has been able to focus her energy on trying to prevent this from happening again to someone else. "I've shared my story with so many people in fear that he's gonna do it again. If I've seen girls close to him, I've told them this story, just so that they know that this is what he's done to me because I don't want him to do it to them."

These stories aren't being brought to light because the victims are being overdramatic about hookups they have come to regret. These are atrocities that have been festering under the surface of our seemingly privileged community and it is the time to confront the stigma and shattering illusions that our community has about sexual assault and rape. We, as a community of students, teachers, and parents, must first

believe one another and support each other. Victims know that they are not alone. The conversation must stop revolving around what people should or shouldn't do to avoid these kinds of attacks, and instead focus on the actions of those who are committing these crimes. We should all know how to execute bystander intervention when we see or hear about these kinds of situations taking place in our community so that it can be stopped. We need stories like these to keep being published so that the silence can be broken. It is crucial that we have the difficult conversations surrounding sexual assault with both boys and girls. And we must support these young women who have been brave enough to tell their stories and reward their honesty with compassion, justice, and the utmost respect.

**If you have a story you would like to share, please email [mhsmirador@gmail.com](mailto:mhsmirador@gmail.com).**

*An unedited version of this story was mistakenly posted in the news section .*

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## **Finding Common Ground is Essential**

Mason, Ohio, is a suburb of Cincinnati located in the southwest of the Buckeye state. It was deemed to be the seventh best place in America to live by Money Magazine in 2013. Its high school is attended by nearly 4,000 students, the largest in the state of Ohio.

Until this past summer, I lived in Mason for most of my life, when I moved to Orinda. Over the first several days of school,

I realized the extent of the atmospheric differences between the two schools.

I consider myself to be relatively politically centrist, which is somewhat of a rarity both here and in southwest Ohio. In both areas, most tend to gravitate towards one end of the political spectrum.

At Mason High School, the vast majority of students were more conservative than I. And, in part with the conservative leanings, there was a more candid atmosphere. However, at Miramonte, there is more of an effort to be politically correct. And while it is wise to attempt not to offend everybody, the constant focus on political correctness and non-confrontationalism makes communication more difficult. Californians, in my experience, are not as direct as Ohioans. While there were still school policies against discrimination, there were more people who had less regard for hurt feelings at Mason High School—getting the point across was their primary goal.

These schools are polar political opposites. But at both schools, there is a certain closed-mindedness. Both student bodies fall primarily to one side of the political aisle, and are resistant to beliefs which do not match their own.

And this is a microcosm of the country as a whole. Many regions are dominated by one political ideology, and no matter what it is, people in that region are not accepting of other political beliefs. But in order to understand the divide—and eventually heal it—each side must listen to the other. No one has to agree with the other side, but merely shutting down the opinion of others is counter-productive in an era in which political divisiveness is reaching the boiling point. In order to properly function as a society, everyone must respect the right of others to have a different political position. In a time of unprecedented political unrest, high school students at both Mason and Miramonte can help heal the divide by simply

listening to students with differing opinions without creating an argument.

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## Trump Rallies Spread Nationwide

From Philadelphia, to Denver, to Los Angeles, and even to our own backyard in Oakland, the result of the national election caused an eruption of protests nationwide earlier this month. Millions of agitators exercised their First Amendment rights and came together to express their strong opinions on the policies and actions of Donald Trump during his presidential campaign. Many questions have risen as to the future of our country under a highly unorthodox politician: Why was there so much discontent over a fairly elected president? Is the electoral college outdated? And will there be further disunity in our country?

Although Hillary Clinton did win the popular election by over 3 million votes, over 62.5 million Americans voted for Trump. With such a large portion of our country's population supporting Trump, how was there so much discontent nationwide? The answer may be simpler than expected. With a radically new type of president in office, there will undoubtedly be unrest in those who disagree with his policies, which is a pretty large club.

In addition, because Hillary numerically received more popular votes than Trump, many have argued about the strength of the electoral system over popular opinion. This phenomena has only happened 3 times in our country's history, most recently in

2000 with the election of George W. Bush. However, the US is not a direct democracy. Our founding fathers prided themselves in the fact that the masses could not directly control the future of our country, and therefore established the electoral college in 1787. So, there should not be issue over this 'flawed system' as many have come to claim this past election.

The election of 2016 and the years preceding it witnessed a stark polarization within the nation's politics. Republicans and Democrats seemingly can not agree, and even had completely opposite viewpoint on many issues. Having leaders with such ignorant opinions can have serious consequences. For example, because the viewpoint of many conservatives have on climate change, it is hard to organize a political and economic response to the problems facing our planet's future with the government's consensus split in half. With Trump's election, as well as a Republican majority in Congress, the trends of polarization will undoubtedly continue. Now, Democratic policies will be extremely difficult to implement with a tight republican grip on the nation's three branches of government.

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## **Opinion: Not All Students Walked Out for the Same Reasons**

On November 10th, Miramonte students participated in a walk out protesting the president-elect Donald Trump after his surprising victory over Hillary Clinton. The rally was led by junior Jayne Latimer and assisted by senior Blake Sharp. Students assembled on the quad then moved to the streets of Orinda where they walked around OIS and back to school. After

the protest many students neglected to come back to class, feeling the urge to rebel. "I left because I had a test to do and I did not study so when I heard that there was an opportunity to cut, I did," an anonymous sophomore student said. Another sophomore student said, "I went on the walk out because I hate school and I wanted to leave." Multiple students had the same response, which led me to believe that this walkout was not really a protest, but rather a get-out-of-class free pass. Some teachers encouraged students to protest their anger of president-elect Donald Trump and express opinions about something they truly believed in. If you acknowledge the consequences but decide to continue anyway, then protesting is an admirable endeavor when truly fighting for a cause. Simply joining this protest for the wrong reasons, as many students did, leads me to question some of my peers and how much they actually care about our country and our political system.

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## California Ballot Propositions Need to be Examined

While the focus this election cycle has been almost solely on the presidential race, Orindans and Californians alike will have far more to select than just one name this Tuesday. Among those choices are 17 California state ballot propositions. Following are some of the most consequential propositions:

**Proposition 51: School Bonds. Funding for K-12 School and Community College Facilities. Initiative Statute**

If passed, Proposition 51 would allocate nine billion dollars

to developing and updating public school buildings, and provide more funds to charter and technical schools. Both the Democratic and Republican parties of California support the measure, as do most prominent elected officials in California.

But Governor Jerry Brown [opposes](#) it, saying that it “squanders money” that should be appropriated to schools in communities in more dire need.

A [UC Berkeley study](#) concluded that while state funding is necessary to keep schools safe, “Prop. 51 doesn’t achieve the best results...compared to other options.”

Proposition 51 would provide vast improvements to school infrastructure. But with a high price tag and questions about its fairness towards underprivileged schools, voters will have to choose between expensive improvements to school infrastructure or a delay in state funding. And in this case, it seems that help truly is necessary, even if it doesn’t imminently provide [enough](#) funding to fully complete the task. Proposition 51, while flawed, will vastly improve our educational infrastructure, and thus should be passed.

### **Proposition 58: English Proficiency. Multilingual Education. Initiative Statute**

Prop 58 would loosen requirements of K-12 schools to teach class only in English, and aims to provide Spanish speakers with a more smooth transition to the American education system. Since 1998, non-English speakers have been required to take a one-year course on the English language. Prop 58 would repeal this requirement, and allow for bilingual instruction in schools.

Opponents claim that it deceives the public by removing the mandate that children be taught only English in public school, and opens the door to future schooling being almost solely in Spanish.

This is certainly a flawed proposition. But it does try to address the issue in our schooling system of isolating immigrant students, and with California's [large immigrant population](#), Prop 58 warrants a "yes" vote.

**Proposition 62: Death Penalty. Initiative Statute/Proposition 66: Death Penalty. Procedures. Initiative Statute**

Prop 62 argues for the repeal of the death penalty, which would prevent those who have committed murder from being subject to the death penalty, and thus make the harshest form of punishment a lifetime prison sentence.

There is another layer to this proposition, however. Prop 66 argues to retain the death penalty, but to reduce the maximum amount of time that a criminal may be on death row to five years, and to force inmates to work while on death row.

Only one of these propositions may be passed.

This is an issue that has split the nation for quite some time, with Republicans typically in favor of keeping the death penalty, and the Democrats in favor of abolishing it. This is an issue which is not easy to have a concrete opinion about. Is capital punishment justifiable for the crime of taking another's life? Or does it contradict the eighth amendment's protection against "cruel and unusual punishment?"

However, most would agree that some change from the current system has to take place. And Prop 62, which [would save](#) a projected \$150 million annually in court and prison costs, is more efficient than Prop 66, which [would not](#) cut costs by any noticeable margin, according to the state's bipartisan Legislative Analyst's Office. And for that reason, Prop 62 seems to be the better long-term option for California and the state budget.

**Proposition 63: Firearms. Ammunition Sales. Initiative Statute**



This issue is one of the pillars of the 2016 Democratic Party [platform](#). It would force prospective gun owners to first obtain a permit, and require that sellers perform background checks of customers in conjunction with the justice department. While it may slightly restrict Second Amendment privileges, it is crucial that firearms do not get into the hands of those who are dangerous or mentally unstable.

Guns used in the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting, the Orlando nightclub shooting, and [many other](#) mass shootings, were purchased in the days or weeks prior to the shooting. This amendment could help prevent these shootings from occurring in the future in California, and especially considering the proposition's [relatively minimal](#) fiscal impact, that is certainly an occurrence worth averting.

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## [Why are we Afraid of Year-Round Schooling?](#)

Students cherish the long summer vacation. After all, it is a ten week break from the stress that school brings into the lives of many.

However, researchers have long proven (dating back to William F. White's [1906](#) study) that the current school calendar can impede learning if students do not keep up their academic skills throughout the summer.

In the education community, it's known as the "Summer Slide," and it's a season of students losing abilities that they worked hard to master during the school year.

According to the [National Summer Learning Association](#), a non-

profit organization whose goal is to close the achievement gap, grade-school students [fail to retain](#) two months of math knowledge during the summer break. They can also lose up to three months of reading comprehension skills.

If so much knowledge is lost, why was this system created in the first place?

Many attribute the current schedule to farming needs in the 1800s, when in fact it was simply due to the sheer heat of urban schools in the summer months, which, without air conditioning, were especially unpleasant.

Today, and for the last half-century, the United States and its schools have largely used air conditioning. Yet our country still uses this extremely counterproductive and outdated system which, while it may be slightly cheaper than the alternative, does nothing but decrease retention of the academic curriculum.

The American education system has long lagged behind, and even though efforts are being made to improve our standing, they aren't anything close to sufficient. In last year's Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [report](#), the United States had the 28th best test scores out of the 76 countries included in the report.

Many top countries have a vastly different education system than that of the United States. But Australia, whose government spends about the same per student as the United States, placed 14th in the same OECD report. They utilize a more year-round school calendar. The Australian school year consists of four government-mandated ten-week terms, with breaks of an average length of about 4 weeks in between. If the United States were to adopt a similar system, students would have fewer opportunities to lose knowledge.

[Abbott Middle School](#) in San Mateo has had year-round schooling since 2007, and in each of the first five years, test scores

increased. But the Bay Area has not taken to this idea, even with the [success](#) of Piedmont Elementary School in West Virginia, which has been operating on a year-round calendar for two decades. Steve Knighton, the school's principal, has reported improved attendance and fewer behavioral problems during that time period.

The vast majority of American legislators and school districts have refused to embrace a system that would improve the educational standing of America in the world. And until year-round schooling is adopted, American students will continue to be held back.

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## Why is Prom Stressful?

Junior Riley McCormick sits glossy-eyed and brain-fried at her computer, mindlessly scrolling through dresses, each image just a blur of color and a price tag. She is several hours and multiple websites in, and still hasn't even come even remotely close to finding *the dress*. Until, finally, it catches her eye. She clicks order and progresses to the next step in the process: Facebook. A few seconds later, she has placed her claim on her dress, ensuring she can finally get a good night's sleep knowing that the most stressful part of her spring (besides testing and finals of course) is done.

If only she didn't have to worry about finding a date, somewhere to take pictures before the event itself, and book appointments for hair, makeup, eyebrow waxes, nails, and dress fittings. She can't remember what it was like to be stressed only about school.

So when did prom evolve into such an extravagant event? The term itself is the word "promenade" shortened, which refers to

the procession of guests before a formal event. Prom started at colleges in the 1800s but spread to high schools in the 1930s and 1940s. Miramonte held its first off-campus prom in the 1970s and in recent years it has been held at Round Hill Country Club, and will be held at the Scottish Rites Center this year. So while this won't be anything close to the first time Matadors dress up and get ready for a formal school dance, students seem to be getting more and more stressed each year at the prospect of what should be a fun night.

Amid the 2 a.m. study sessions and talks of college, juniors should get to look forward to a night of dancing and fraternizing with classmates. It should be a break from the stressful day-to-day life of a high school student. Instead, the junior class ages ten years at the thought of flowers or dates.

The first issue with prom is the intense build up to the event itself. Many people consider it to be one of the most pivotal nights of high school. It has been dramatized in countless Hollywood films as the best night of a teen's life and as it approaches, any and all conversations seem to gravitate towards it, being pulled by some invisible thread as juniors anxiously ask about dates, dresses and pictures. Not only does this stress juniors out in the moment, it puts way too much pressure on attendees to make it the "perfect" night.

For girls, the largest source of nail-biting stress is finding the perfect dress. To make this Odysseus-level quest even more difficult, girls take to Facebook to claim dresses in a race to put "dibs!" on any and every single dress that catches their eye. Although it seemed premature to many junior girls, this year's Facebook group was started on December 21st, a full three months before the actual night. Comments like "when even is prom?" and "lol I don't even have my Christmas dress yet" highlight the question in every girl's head: why are we starting this so soon? It adds pressure that has no place in the minds of already stressed students just trying to make it

through their junior year.

Guys, on the other hand, have a huge pressure to ask their dates to prom. Although junior girls do quarrel over which sophomore guys to ask, junior boys are expected to do most of the asking. There is always the possibility of rejection, and the balance of whether to ask a friend or someone in whom they are genuinely interested. Girls, on the flip side, feel the stress of not having much control over their date, because they are expected to say yes, especially if a prospective date shows up with a flashy poster and flowers.

Dress and date stresses aside, prom certainly places a strain on the wallets of parents and students alike. Each year the price of this event seems to rocket higher and higher and higher. Prom itself has become a market that preys on the image of "the perfect night," an idea that has been endorsed by Hollywood, department stores, and other companies who are just looking to get their share of the profit. The priciest item by far is the dress, which can vary in price but can cost hundreds of dollars. This doesn't even include shoes or accessories to go with it. Salons can charge a pretty penny (even \$100 in some cases) for a hairstyle that will fall apart in a few hours, and makeup can add at least another \$50. Add on a \$30 mani-pedi and a \$100 ticket, and you're looking at a night that could potentially cost at least \$500.

So maybe it's the technology that allows us to see every dress and prom asking, or the peer pressure to have the perfect date, but something needs to give. Prom should be a night to forget the stress of the academic world with friends, not another thing added to the plate and several hundred dollars taken from the wallet.

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# Microaggressions: Socially Acceptable Oppression

In our society, oppression is now rarely a direct act. Same-sex marriage is legal. Women can vote. A store worker cannot serve a customer last based on their race. The days of blatant persecution within our nation are, arguably, diminishing; but now oppression comes in a different, subtler, and far more deceptive form. Concealed within comments like, "I don't mind gay people, I just don't really want to see them on T.V.," or "You don't act that (*insert race here*)," oppressive persecution has been wrapped and packaged in a passive aggressive gift box. But the sentiment remains the same—*I am better than you for reasons neither of us can change*. Such comments have a term: microaggressions.

In his book, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, psychologist Derald Wing Sue defines microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership." Essentially, a microaggression is any subtle snub directed at a member of a specific group. The term "racial microaggressions," was first coined in the 1970s by psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce M.D., but, by dropping the modifier "racial," was later expanded to include other populations. Microaggressions come from those with a sense of privilege, who make such comments to maintain that sense. They are designed to keep certain groups down and are subtly oppressive.

Microaggressions differ from blatant bigotry in that they are far more accepted in social situations, and often more difficult to perceive. For example, use of the n-word in a derogatory manner by a white person to a black person would be classified immediately as direct racism. But a comment like, "I don't even see you as black," qualifies as a microaggression. This invalidates the recipient's identity and

experiences, but if they object they could seem overly sensitive. A common example in classrooms and the workplace is a male teacher or employer referring to all male students or employees as Mr. \_\_, but all females by their first names (or vice versa depending on the situation). This shows less respect for the female students/workers and demeans their capabilities as a valid part of the environment.

According to Sue's work, microaggressions appear in three forms— *the microassault*: an explicit derogation, whether verbal or nonverbal, such as name-calling, avoidant behavior, purposeful discriminatory actions; *the microinsult*: communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity, subtle snubs unknown to the perpetrator, or a hidden insulting message to the recipient; and *the microinvalidation*: communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person belonging to a particular group.

Sophomore Samantha Palmer, who is Chinese, Japanese, and Caucasian, has experienced this first-hand. "Any time math is brought up, I get a lot of confusion over the fact that I'm not super amazing at it," she said. "People assume I want to be a doctor." But according to Palmer, if she objects, she is immediately classified as overly sensitive. "I don't have a problem telling people that when they say things like that they're stereotyping and that it's racist, but when I do people say I'm being too touchy."

Palmer is also the coordinator of Miramonte's Rainbow Alliance. This gives her a heightened awareness of the microaggressions against the LGBTQ+ community that she witnesses on a day-to-day basis. "People say a lot of stuff like 'that's so gay' or 'don't be gay' or 'no homo' and they don't understand that it's wrong and offensive," she said.

What makes microaggressions so dangerous is the frequency with

which they go undetected. Microaggressions can be made so unconsciously that perpetrators are rarely aware that they might be offending someone. But any form of microaggression still registers with as making the recipient feel alienated.

If it is so difficult to be aware of perpetrating a microaggression, then what can you do to solve the problem? The solution lies in education and communication.

Try to be aware of the issue, learn about microaggressions. It is important to maintain a level head. Pointing out to someone that they may be biased will rarely be well-received. We have a long history of prejudice within our society. As such, it is very likely that we are all prejudiced in some way, so come to terms with that; and think twice about what behaviors of yours might be a narrow-minded social construction.

When dealing with microaggressions, the "P.C. Debate" often arises. That is to say, the debate over whether or not our culture has become too greatly based upon being politically correct. Are people too obsessed with victimhood? Aren't "microaggressions" just social and conversational nuances that will always be a part of our lives, and shouldn't we just accept that? With the rise of a budding cultural awareness of microaggressions, there inevitably arose groups of individuals, primarily on the Internet and social media, who react disproportionately to the idea. That is, people who use the term excessively and where it might not otherwise be used. As a result of this, just as inevitably, there is another far more common group of those who feel strongly that microaggressions are a joke, and that the concept is unnecessary. But the term has a psychological basis. It was coined by a psychiatrist in a time way before it was trendy to be politically correct. It is thereby impossible that the concept of the microaggression is merely a pesky fad. The term is mainly used by psychologists, and has only recently reached the mainstream level of perception.



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