

# Improving your relationship with yourself

By Azra Roblin



People can feel bad about themselves for many reasons, but it is suspected that a major factor in the malaise known as low self-esteem is the undercover activity of the Inner Critic. The Inner Critic is like a mirror that reflects a distorted picture of ourselves. It is that inner voice that criticizes us and speaks about us in a disparaging way. It makes everything look ugly. Most of us are not even aware that it is a voice speaking inside of us because its constant judgements have been with us since early childhood. Its running critical commentary feels like a natural part of ourselves. This Inner Critic grows with us, absorbing the judgements of the people around us and the expectations of the society in which we live.

The Inner Critic has the ability to cripple people and to keep them unhappy and ineffective. Psychologists Hal and Sidra Stone urge us to envision this scenario, in their book, *Embracing Your Inner Critic*. — "Let us say that it is midnight and you have gone to the kitchen and eaten two delicious peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Once you have finished eating, the Inner Critic really starts to tear you down. It tells you how horrible you are, what a slob you are. It tells you that you have no self-control and never will have self-control. It tells you that you are a blimp and that it hates you, that it is disgusted by you. The litany of your sins can go endlessly, and soon the act of eating two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches has become a major crime against humanity."

The psychologists continue — "This kind of voice stops all growth. The Inner critic makes us feel so bad about the sandwiches — it so humiliates and shames us — that the Critic itself becomes the

major problem. The issue is no longer the meaning of food in our lives and how do we use it and need it to handle stress and anxiety. The issue now is how to handle the attack of an out-of-control critical voice that has turned eating into a major disease." The Critic is now the problem.

Although it is interesting to think of what life would be without this critical voice, in reality we can never get rid of it, nor would we want to. The Critic can become our ally once we learn to recognize it and to handle it. The Inner Critic's function is to spare us shame and pain. The Inner Critic wants you to be okay. It wants you to be loved and to be accepted.

To make friends with the Inner Critic, we need to understand that although its actions stem from good intentions, it can go beyond the limits of constructive criticism. We need to learn to fight the Inner Critic when it goes on a violent rampage. We need to recognize it and its motives. Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning, authors of *Self Esteem*, recommend that you pay close attention to what the Inner Critic tells you, especially in situations of tension and stress.

They suggest an exercise — on the first day, write down the number of times that you hear the Inner Critic make negative, critical statements about you. The next day, write down the comments themselves in a notebook. At the end of the day, go over the list and write down the function of each negative thought, how it allows you to either feel or do something good or avoid feeling something unpleasant. This should give you a sense of why the Critic exists.

The next thing to do is to talk back to the Critic when it is being harsh. The "Howitzer mantras" are suggested by McKay and Fanning as an effective way of talking back to the Critic. They state — "Choose a mantra that helps you feel angry. It's

good to get mad. Profanity is a perfectly healthy response to the critic. When using the Howitzer mantras, shout them inside. Scream at the Critic." Here are some examples of the mantras: "This is poison. Stop it!", "Screw you, asshole!"

You can't permanently turn off the Critic's vitriol by calling him names. That helps for a while. You are, however, creating a vacuum if you silence the Critic without putting anything in his place. You need to replace its voice with a positive awareness of your own worth. McKay and Fanning state — "Affirming your worth is no easy task. Right now you believe that your worth depends on your behavior. The truth is that your value is your consciousness, your ability to perceive and experience. You are a person who is trying to live, and that makes you as worthwhile as every other person who is doing the very same thing."

Hal and Sidra Stone state — "give yourself permission to be ordinary! The need to be special adds immeasurably to the stress in your life. We do not mean that you should become careless or satisfied with mediocrity. When you are no longer focused upon amazing others or surpassing them, you have much more energy available to do your best."

Re-evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses might help you in affirming your worth. McKay and Fanning recommend making separate lists of your strengths and weaknesses, using very objective, nonpejorative language. You should then write down strengths that substitute or make up for any weaknesses that you possess. Another recommendation is a daily reminder, a phrase that you believe in, and that you can use to replace your critical voice. A couple of examples of these daily affirmations are — "I feel pain, I love, I try to survive, I am a good person" or "I am doing my best, it's okay."

Remember, your Inner Critic can be your friend if you teach it to be one. Be nice to yourself.

## Political Correctness hides discrimination

By Adria Goodness



A common description of the University of Oregon is that its an incredibly diverse institution full of open-minded students and faculty members. Being "politically correct" is quite nearly a prerequisite to attending the University. It would seem that a positive educational and social atmosphere, free from hate and discrimination, would develop. This is not the case, especially where gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues are concerned. Despite the reputation of the University, there is still considerable room for it to evolve in this area. We are fooling ourselves if we believe that due to our elevated status as members of the academic community we are exempt from hatred and prejudice. The mental wellness of indi-

viduals in the University culture would greatly benefit from further assessment of the Eugene brand of political correctness.

To understand how hatred and discrimination develop and remain a part of University culture it is important to question why it exists. The root of prejudice can be found in fear. Human beings tend to fear what is different because they do not understand it. It is very difficult to sustain genuine prejudice against gays, lesbians, or bisexuals if we are familiar with someone who has one of these lifestyles. But the rise of the AIDS crisis has quite possibly decreased people's desire to align themselves with the homosexual community due to an increase in fear. This increase in fear has been caused by the misconception that AIDS is a "gay disease." Fear is not disappearing, even in the realm of scholarly pursuit where students have the opportunity to make conscientious inquiry.

Identifying fear and ignorance in the University setting is sometimes difficult. It is hiding beneath a concept that is widely accepted and rarely questioned in Eugene. This concept is "Politically Correct." P.C. has provided a vehicle for students and faculty to discuss touchy issues without generating the level of awareness and attention that these issues deserve. Talking about the issues is not enough. The way that the issues are discussed go a long way in demonstrating the true tolerance level of any group on this campus. The cultivation of a healthy educational environment must extend beyond political correctness to a new level where language is altered and speaking out is acceptable.

Awareness of why prejudice exists and how it is cultivated is the beginning of change. Concrete ways of dealing with hate, which is rooted in fear and ignorance, must be action-oriented. Students and faculty alike

should look beyond the mask of P.C. and question the language people use and why they are using it. It is important to bring out the content of incorrect, negative messages and reflect them to the sender of the message. Making friends in the gay community is another important method of combating fear and ignorance. It is understandable that a gay person may have qualities you don't appreciate, but differentiate between those qualities and their sexual preference. A gay, lesbian, or bisexual person is no more defined by who they sleep with than a heterosexual person. Perhaps the most important strategy for changing the intolerant atmosphere is for each of us to leave our beliefs at home. No one has the right to impose their belief system on others. When it does occur, students and faculty should be prepared to speak-out for and support those individuals whose voices and choices are not respected.

### SPRING WORKSHOPS

**WALKING**  
MWF, 7:00-8:00am

**LOW FAT COOKING**  
April 18, May 2, 9, 16, 3:30pm

**SMOKING CESSATION**  
Dates TBA

**VEGETARIAN EATING**  
April 2, May 2, 9, 3:30-5pm, Medical Library

**BODY IMAGE/FOOD ISSUES**  
Dates TBA

**HIKING FOR HEALTH**  
Dates TBA

Interested in any of these workshops? Call 346-4456 for information on dates and meeting times, and find out how to get involved!

### Medical funding available for sexual assault survivors

During spring 1993 elections, U of O students voted for the development of a Sexual Assault Fund to be used by survivors of sexual assault for medical care at the Student Health Center. Beginning Fall 1993, the Student Health Center is able to provide no cost STD testing and treatment for student survivors of sexual assault who are unable to pay for the services and/or are unwilling to report the assault incident to their insurance company and others.

The testing and treatment will cover the common STDs, including HIV testing. In order for a sexual assault survivor to access funding for STD testing and treatment, they would first make an appointment at the Student Health Center with a physician or nurse practitioner. Based on the discussion between the student and the practitioner, a plan of care will be devised and utilization of funds will be outlined. Students will be encouraged to file an Unofficial Report outlining the assault.

The funding has been granted for the '93-'94 academic year only. It is hoped that the service will be well utilized by survivors of sexual assault in the effort to address all pieces of healthy recovery. It is also hoped that the funding will be made available beyond the school year.

For more information, contact Annie Dochnahl, Health Educator at the Student Health Center (346-2728) or call 346-2770 to make a Health Center appointment.