

It's not OK to be down in 'be happy' America

OUR OPINION: Young and old turn to suicide to escape unhappiness

"I wish I could just get it over with."

"I'll never be successful. I'll never be able to reach the level of prosperity my parents did. I've hated every job I've ever worked at, my classes are boring and depressing, and I don't even like myself. I'm not happy and I don't think I ever will be."

"I don't have any direction. If I did, I wouldn't know how to get there — and even if I did get there, I don't think I would fit in."

"My life basically sucks. I wish I could find just one good reason for not putting a gun to my head to end this meaningless existence."

Thoughts like these may fill the minds of young people who decide to take their lives because they just "can't take it anymore."

While the largest rate of suicides still occurs among the elderly, it is young people aged 15 to 24 years who have seen an alarming increase over the last two years.

This should come as no surprise.

Today's young people face pressures their parents never did. Rolling around in the back of a '57 Chevy "back then" might have resulted in an unplanned pregnancy, but it wouldn't have put the entire generation at risk for contracting the AIDS virus or some other potentially life-threatening sexually transmitted disease.

And why shouldn't young people play Russian roulette with their sexuality? Everyone else is "doing it."

Besides, who really cares? Both parents, or the single parent, has to work to support the family, but that means no one is ever home to be with the family.

To fill the void that family used to fill, young people have turned to gangs, drugs, sex, the shopping malls and other empty materialistic pursuits.

And like never before, today's youth are isolated by the very things they think will satisfy their empty lives.

The media and entertainment industry certainly doesn't offer a rosy world outlook for young people to invest their hopes in. Hollywood's constant production of crime and violence has only added to the psychotic tendencies of a society that has lost its respect for goodness and decency. A single afternoon of Jerry Springer, Jenny Jones or Ricki Lake alone could convince anyone that suicide might be the only exit from this incredibly sick world of ours.

Our society also worships youth, beauty and success. We see it daily in our TV commercials, magazines, billboards, and most every other form of media and entertainment. We are bombarded by this pervasive and shallow preoccupation with everything sexy, seductive, happy and carefree.

Society would have us believe that if you don't fit into the *Bold and Beautiful* category, then you just don't fit in. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Life isn't easy, but it wouldn't be as colorful or challenging if it were.

It's perfectly OK to be sad.



Funding issue should be put to students

Keith Cunningham's column (*ODE*, Feb. 7) articulated quite clearly his disgust for the content of the campus publication the *Oregon Commentator*.

Citing overt attacks against women and women's rights, pro-rape discourse and continued subversion of women's safety, Cunningham accurately identifies the *Commentator* as an undeserving recipient of student incidental fees and as a journal that has no place on the University campus.

He doesn't even have to mention the hate content of the *Commentator's* relentless attacks on campus underrepresented groups that further validate his opinions. Unfortunately, Cunningham further argues against the apathy of campus leaders in deliberating the *Commentator's* funding for next year without consulting those who are elected to do so.

Jennifer Williamson and I, when considering how we wanted to operate the executive office, decided that we would operate functionally as co-presidents, with her the ASUO president over state and federal issues, and myself presiding over institutional affairs, including the incidental-fee budget.

Attacks against Jen regarding apathy or inaction on funding issues are wholly unwarranted and invalid. Jen isn't taking a position on *Commentator* funding because that's not her job. It's mine.

As the keeper of the ASUO budget, each issue of the *Commentator* makes me cringe as I see the product of fees allocated by last year's budget process, through which the *Commentator* staff was able to convince campus leaders that the magazine was contributing to healthy debate and discourse on campus.

COMMENTARY

Zachary Kelton

Based on what I've seen and the complaints I've heard about this year's product, I remain unconvinced, and do, indeed, plan on doing something about it.

Historically, the *Commentator* staff has been able to squelch attempts to defund its magazine by initiating the argument that such action constitutes censorship — something that few people in student government or the media actively embrace.

This argument has invariably led the finance committee toward funding the journal based on a fear of unfairly silencing someone's voice on campus. Recognizing this history and the argument therein, I feel that there is only one truly fair way to gauge whether the *Commentator* should receive funding for next year — referring its budget request to the ballot for all students to vote on.

This will be my recommendation to the Programs Finance Committee; if that body chooses not to follow it and funds the *Commentator* because of these age-old censorship arguments, I will veto it and send it back for reconsideration or put it on the ballot myself.

Rest assured, Keith, that I have every intention of ensuring that the opinions of students are heard on this issue; further, I am confident that students' outrage at the magazine's content will result in dramatic editorial change or removal of the publication from the ASUO budget.

Zachary Kelton is the vice president of the ASUO.

LETTERS

Feminist Keith?

As a woman, I am insulted by the columns written by Keith Cunningham (*ODE*, Feb. 7). As the editor-in-chief of the *Oregon Commentator*, I am amused by his anger.

Cunningham accuses Edwina Welch and Jennifer Williamson of weakness, two women I have never known to be weak, intimidated or content to sit quietly by as others criticize and trivialize their programs.

Both are well-spoken, driven, intelligent women who stand up for what they believe in. The first *Emerald* issue of winter term printed a letter from Williamson regarding the *Commentator's* Kwanzaa back page. She had no

problem standing up to us then.

Perhaps the feeling on the part of these women was that a list, created by four ignorant men in New York, was not worth the fight. The men are chastised for their actions by Cornell and they were made fools of in the article.

Cunningham suggests that we are interfering with the University's educational mission. The number of women taking Saferide and the number enrolled as women's studies majors have not decreased because of our magazine. No interference can be proved. Defunding us for content is censorship, Keith. The Incidental Fee Committee tried it four years ago and failed; a PFC that tries that today will fail.

Finally, Cunningham refers to the *Commentator* as a bunch of little boys. He conveniently ignored the editorial staff that is 50 percent female and the board of directors that is 66 percent female. He also forgot the two regular staff writers who are women. Cunningham seems to say that even if women hold positions of power on the paper, they are not capable of making any real decisions.

Before you take a stand on behalf of women such as Welch, Williamson, and the women of the *Commentator*, consider for a moment whether we need your protection.

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