



# Say!

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## Competition - Good or Bad?

It is a universally acknowledged fact that tenacity and self-discipline are vital in order to succeed in modern society. In a world where fame and success are more tangible than ever before, we raise our children and immediately instil in them the belief that only those who want it bad enough succeed. The "it" varies from person to person. For some it is the dream of Olympic gold. For others. The farfetched but oh so tempting hope of celebrity status. Regardless, we all know that only a selected few make it. So where does a competitive nature fit in?

Competition, as defined by the Oxford dictionary, is the ongoing determination to beat out rivals in order to succeed. I would go further as to add that, in my eyes, competition is in our nature. Everyone's been there - sports day, a maths exam, results day. We've all felt that burning at times overwhelming desire to win, to be the best. Competition trickles into our lives in even the most mundane tasks possible. Over a hundred and fifty thousand candidates compete for the coveted title of "Britain's cleanest bedroom". In fact, there is no real skill required. Anyone can tidy their socks and do the vacuuming. And yet that title is tempting to so many....

The undeniable benefits of occasional competitions are a hardened sense of determination., a greater focus, a higher goal that takes away from any elementary distractions. That little voice that screams "you can do it!"

For athletes, a competitive nature is a powerful tool and they utilise it to their utmost advantage. In an interview with Vogue last week, tennis champion Serena Williams stated: "Without competition I would not be where I am today." And unlike thousands of anonymous trolls who attacked her, I agree. Would a ten-year-old Serena have felt the same sense of determination and desire without constant competition? Would anyone have wanted anything feel inclined as to actually motivate themselves without the constant threat of rivals just waiting to overtake you in the final leg of the race? To me the answer is clear! Healthy competition evokes the natural instinct to be the best, an instinct that we suppress in our daily lives and tasks, an instinct that should, at times come out.

But some take it too far. An example that has been prominent in the press for a number of years is the Tonya Harding scandal. We all know the story. Tonya, in fear of her greatest ice-skating rival, (who was the favourite to win in the 1997 Olympics) hired hitmen to break her knees with a metal crowbar. The scandal shook the industry. Tonya was subsequently banned from ice skating for life. It is difficult to imagine your life passion being taken away especially after the high of the Olympic success. Sacrificing everything just for one moment, that feeling of success. Tonya's story, though undeniable tragic, exemplifies the extreme

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lengths some are capable of going in order to secure their dream. It started a public outrage. However, doctors and researchers remind us that unhealthy competition often stem from insecurities as a result of abuse or tragic life circumstances experienced during childhood and is extremely rare.

Dr. Zand, who carried out the initial psychiatric evaluation of Tonya agrees. When approached and asked for his opinion on competition, and whether he agrees that competition in sport, or in any area of life is good for anyone, as this was the opinion of many who were concerned by the Tonya scandal stated this "Competition is necessary in all our

lives. Competition is a quality that although at times is animalistic, but inevitable. Humans are social creatures. We live in such tight knit communities. We cooperate with others on a daily basis. It is perfectly normal for someone who is incredibly passionate about a given topic to be competitive at times- to distinguish themselves, to

feel proud and accomplished"

To me competition will always exist whether we choose to engage in it or not. As long as humans socialise, forms of competition will undeniably exist. That is why, it is so important to teach our children self-confidence. If every child is secure of their own identity and

certain of their own worth, they will acknowledge rivals throughout life as humans. Because we are all human. We all have a certain passion or dream that evokes that animalistic competitive nature. So, remember this fact, to not treat others like obstacles in our way.

*Jasmina*

## Ultimate guide to settling in a new school

Stress free settling in...?

New school, new people, new teachers. Sounds lovely, right? You must be stressing right now, sweating buckets and biting your fingernails raw about how on earth you're going to fit in and if you're going to make it through the battlefield in one piece. But do not fret. Your guardian angel has arrived to aid you through this deadly journey. Yes, I am going to help you, Sophie with glasses and you, Tom with the fringe and all of you newbies-I'll be helping you through this difficult game which is set on hard mode. Impossible! You cry, how on earth do I make it through my first day at **Canterbury school** without being eaten alive.

Well I have a few tips and tricks to make your school life a thousand times better and truthfully, I want this year to be over with, just as much as you.

### Rule number 1: Getting around

When making your way through the never - ending hallways, always keep to your right. You don't want to be squashed to death by the unruly year sevens on your first day, right. Classrooms are a piece of cake to find. The boards above the classroom have the subject, teacher and number on it. However, the difficult task is to spot your classrooms below the enormous year eights and year nine. I don't know what growth potion they drank over the summer holidays, but I want it. Yes, yours truly is only four foot nine

but I find that is easier to climb over the towering giants than weave through them. They won't notice. They are certainly impressive in height but certainly not as smart.

Now the school grounds are a jungle and if you ever get hurled around like a ball, by the year 10 tribe, then trust me, it is painful. They have claimed their territory as soon as they returned from the summer holidays and they have been as mischievous and as troublesome as ever. It is better to tiptoe along the side. Avoiding them is the best solution.

Oh, the cafeteria! (sighs) the classical battle zone! Or, that might be fibbing Phoebe again. Back to the matter at hand, the cafeteria is not the safest place in the world. Might go next to the Area 47 on the list actually. People have marked their territories on day one, so for you new comers that might be difficult to find a seat. I see you, Sophie, trembling with dread but also you have to worry no more. Because I am here to guide you on rule number 2: how to make the right friends.

### Rule number 2: Finding the Perfect Friends

If you are athletic and agile, then go away because it will be easy peasy for you to find a seat. Go sit next to the jocks and the sporty people and start a conversation about protein drinks or something.

However, if you are like me, who can't catch a ball to save your life, your quest is going to be harder and more "difil". However, I am reminding you, over and over again, do not worry.

Ninety seven percent of new comers make a friend on the first day of school. Don't be afraid to say hi and introduce yourself and look confident; everyone loves a confident being! And if you're shy and are getting grey hair thinking about how to start a conversation, you have nothing to be anxious over. People are quite friendly here and will try to befriend you quite quickly. That's how I met my best friend, Emma. She's shy and reserved but she conjured up all her courage to say hi to me. Now she's stuck with me. She knows too much. Some great conversation starters that I saved the trouble for you by googling, are:

Hey! I am new here. Is this class any good?

Hi there! I love/ hate maths. What about you?

Hello! I heard the teachers butcher the children here. Is that true?

Start with some humour, some confidence and you will find out that this place is not as bad as it seems. Word of advice- whatever you do, stay away from fibbing Phoebe. Trust me. It's a long story.

### Rule number 3- Are teachers Friends or Foes?

Rule three is quite simple. Keep the teachers on your good side. Believe me, when I say this. My maths, strange as he is found a way to prevent me getting an F! Let's not talk about that other subject right now.... Back to the topic, are teachers your companions? Teachers want to guide you to do the best. So, go along with them and that will make the school year pass more

quickly. But do keep in mind, they may not be your friend during the school days but they could easily morph into your foe on parents' evening. Follow the rules and you will enjoy a blissful relationship (mostly) with them! Keep this quote in mind "keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer". Additionally, keep away from the

Physics teacher; she is not from this earth- I am telling you!

#### Rule number 4: Don't Worry.

I have repeated myself over and over again but I will say it again. Don't worry. School may be when demonic creatures plague but keep my rules close to your heart and the school year

will feel like a week. You may even miss it during the holidays. Pfft!

Who am I kidding? I can't wait for this year to end. However, this journey will be ten times better with you by my side.

Perseh

## The Sea

The saltiness of the waves rushed past him, the brine tangible on his tongue. He had never seen the sea...

Everyone had always said it was a rough tumultuous beast that roared viciously, pulling far too many to their graves, uncanny in its hideous triumph. But now that he saw it, he saw what they had stupidly missed: the wind an orchestral conductor unifying the waves into a glorious crescendo and peaks throughout the ballad, that was the day, the erratic pulse like a metronome steady and unwavering, enthralling him in its blues. It was powerful, yes. Powerful enough to kill, but too gentle to ever do so. It really is the highest call of nature is it not?

Face set like stone (uncanny and passive), deep lines scarred the canvas, harsh strokes embedded into his skin- evidence that he had lived, his countenance a masterpiece in its own right, retelling its story with every colour, his story hid behind the ocean blue of his woeful eyes.

He was a victim of life it seems, nothing ever did go right. He had lost everything. Everything he had held dear had so carefully slipped between his fingers, so close in his grasp but also too far, too distant, too painfully out of his reach to ever call his own. But the sea, the sea he could be his own - his haven, his peace, his treasure. The sea was always welcoming, a siren to his tiredness, willing to cleanse away his sin, ever ready to wash away his sorrows, accepting of his true manifestation that repelled all others.

He remembered the old folk tales of goddesses being born out of the sea, the most famous being Aphrodite. The goddess of love, they called her but he knew the reality. Love was an illusion that hid death, lust and greed. Aphrodite loved Ares. (God of war) tell me do you know why? It is because love and war go hand in hand, in perfect consummation they produce what we fear most- losing what we hold dear. He knew all too well, to not trust or love or go to war.

He longed for serenity of the sea, he longed for its warm embrace, for it to

enclose him and hold him in its unwavering arms. He wondered if it longed for him as he did it. Perhaps, if he took a step closer? Perhaps if he teetered between the line of heaven and hell and he would fall, tumbling, freefalling, spiralling in motion into the unknown.

So, he did.

He took a step. Then another and then another until he stood at the boundary that prevented him from accessing paradise. He looked at the sky and it truly was beautiful. Baby blue embellished with perfect white- the essence of innocence itself. he looked at the ground underneath his feet, his earthy hues warm and inviting, but he realised his happiness lay within the sea and that no other could compare.

Even he knew that doing as he wished a likened to falling from grace much like Satan's fall from heaven, he knew there would be no redemption or appeasement.

But he had seen the sea.

Rachel

## The Mission

I stepped out of the rattling carriage and the first thing that hit me was the putrid stench of burning human flesh and the metallic smell of blood. Death! Anguish! Decimation! The shiny surface of my meticulously cleaned leather skin shoes looked so wrong amongst the ash and the rubble... so out of place.

I knew I did not belong.

The smoking ruin of the once glorious

city lay around me, the tower blocks toppled to the side like dominoes. The cobbled sidewalk was disrupted at regular intervals by planet sized craters. All that was left of the train station was a single podium, barely raised platform and one sign post banning entry. It was a miracle it had survived. Not much had.

Remembering my companion, I turned around and bowed my head in resignation. We had been lied to.

There was nothing left to repair, no casualties to heal. With a grimace, he ran a shaking hand through his unwashed hair, a nervous gesture and began to piece together an explanation. Not that I needed one. I knew it all too well.

The attackers had swept through our country sowing death and destruction wherever they went. They took no hostages, spared no woman and no child. Killed them all.



Only a handful of the world's elite had managed to hide away, evade exposure. I had been among them. It had been intended for us to formulate a plan, fight back, avenge the fallen and save countless more lives.... our own fear had won over.

I once read somewhere that there is nothing humans' value more than life. Our desire to survive is carnal, animal almost.

There is some truth in that.

My small briefcase which I had filled with medical necessities such as bandages and pain-relieving drugs seemed pathetic now. It was like trying to stop the flow of breaking dam with a single plaster. Useless!

We walked in silence and with each turn, with each new demolished

walkway and our new pile of bodies, the destruction was worse. I had thought I'd seen it all, that nothing could exceed the horrors I'd witnessed at the start of the invasion. This was worse. So much worse.

My companion explained that the people his city had tried to fight back, organised themselves into groups and targeted the enemy. I did not reply. In the end their heroism was futile. They had all died whilst we hid away. Bystanders as our world was torn apart.

I had felt a gnawing sense of guilt and regret over the years, and with each birthday, the life I had so cherished began to feel more like a burden than a blessing. So many dead. So many lives taken.

We came to a junction beneath a half

crumbling bridge, the interior metal construction exposed. There were bodies impaled on the steel, their arms such out contorted in unnatural positions. The black identification badges told me they belonged to the invaders and I felt a sense of satisfaction that my companion was right. The people had fought back. What it had been like for them, knowing they were coming, that you had nowhere to go, nowhere to hide...

The overbearing punch of grief hit me hard in the chest and my knees buckled in resignation. I had turned my back on humanity in choosing myself. By choosing my life, I had died.

And this? This was.... My penance!

*Jasmina*

## The Tower

The coach rushed along the narrow mountain roads, having passed through a long seemingly never-ending tunnel.

Snow fell gently from the grey sky, swirling and diving with the wind. The snowflakes were too small for me to make out through the slowly steaming window, the coach warm compared to the frigid outside.

Trees with greenery dressing their branches were slowly blanketed by waves of white snow, my surroundings, the complete opposite of home. Grey concrete and red brick houses all cramped together in a miserable huddle, were traded for forests of dark emerald trees and layers upon layers of snow- a rare sight for a foreigner who grew up with constant rain and overcast skies.

I hummed along to an upbeat song that played through my headphones, myself in no rush to find my favourite song if there was still a while left before we reached the ski resort.

As we ascended the mountain, thick forest soon thinned to reveal a small

village, small cottages comfortably along small streets that separated them from the road. Christmas lights adorned every roof, trees with glittering lights in front lawns and front rooms, providing a display for the world to see.

Others on the coach "ooohed" and stared in awe at the vibrant display of festivity, cherishing every house and appraising every sight.

Maybe I'll do this at home, I thought wistfully, the idea persuading my parents weighing on me. We passed by the final house, exclamations erupting at an incredibly large snowman on someone's front lawn. How much time did that take. It looked as if it was six feet.

Forests closed in on the road again, branches waving in the fierce gusts.

Narrow twisting turns became more frequent as we ascended to a dizzying height, my stomach churning as I looked out of my window.

The forest that had previously shrouded the roads had thinned out to something akin to barren snow-

covered land. The occasional bare bush popped out of what looked as thick as a metre of snow, dead leaves frozen in the blistering cold.

I peered down the aisle to squint and see what was ahead of us, unsure of how much further there was to drive.

A final, awfully narrow turn would reveal the next turn of the journey.

Slowly, awfully slowly as to ensure the coach wouldn't crash onto an unsuspecting car, the vehicle turned and made what I hoped would be the final turn.

Two large cylindrical towers stood out against more forest. One was mushy red, sticking out like a sore thumb against the green and white landscape. The other tower was a pale yellow, almost a cream colour. Windows decorated both towers in a uniform pattern.

These were certainly unique hotels. Cheers erupted as the coach driver announced we'd arrived, the taxing twenty-three-hour journey at its end.

*Maya*

## On becoming successful...

If you were a caveman 2 million years ago, a successful life would have meant surviving as long as possible; being healthy (so far as you could when living off raw meat), and maybe passing on your genes to some offspring to provide evidence of your successful characteristics. As a medieval peasant your aims would have been similar, but as a knight a successful life was more likely to involve bravery and chivalry and rescuing more distressed damsels than your rivals. Even in Victorian England, 1890 or so, most people's lives would still be centred on survival, and providing for the kids. Or running the country if you were Queen Victoria.

But in this day and age survival is easy, on the rare occasion we do think about our mortality it is more psychological or philosophical - the news of a death may force you to briefly acknowledge that life will end, but it usually doesn't affect your actions in the long run. Taking away the constant underlying worry about survival, which is honestly a huge success for our species that I don't want to deny at all, nevertheless means all this capacity has to be filled with something else. This is actually also a huge success as it allows us humans to spend this time building and learning and inventing more than any other creatures can, and puts us at a huge advantage. But, as you will certainly know, productivity (such as building, learning, and inventing) is only really possible for so long without motivation. And even when revising in this day and age, motivation (for me at least) usually comes in the form of rewards, or the promise of success. "You need to do well in this exam so that you can get good grades and get a good job", who hasn't heard that one before?

So, what can be promised to a population of creatures who have no fear of death and aren't really worried about survival? Material gains are all very well but ultimately somewhat shallow, so this idea of the contemporary 'success' was created. That makes it sound like some

businessman dreamt up the idea for a profit, but I actually think it's much more of a social 'construct' that developed naturally, because who doesn't want acknowledgement? Success is certainly different to different people. Search it up on YouTube and you get plenty of results along the lines of 'five habits of highly successful people'; and ask your friends and they're most likely to name a few individuals who earn a lot of money or have a large social media following.

Overall, success today has a lot to do with the career, and you are usually expected to be successful economically or academically rather than, say, domestically or socially. This isn't a problem as both money and respect play an important part in a good life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and productivity should be rewarded; everyone has to do their bit. However, where the struggle lies for me is firstly the idea that without working, working, you will not be successful, and therefore your life won't be that great; and secondly from this that your life can only be great if you are successful. The focus on extreme productivity and stress is not what determines success for me. But maybe I'm just lazy. I think success needs to be considered in different aspects too. A person who was loved by their whole town and brightened many lives but spent their whole career working at Dominos still led a successful life to me. Success can lie in any area. Academics and career, yes, but also morality and empathy, and definitely kindness. A businessman can make ever so much money, but if he underpays and overworks his employees, his life is not successful to me! A wealth of experiences can make you successful; improving many people's lives; or even learning how to cook the perfect roast chicken, if that's what you're aiming for. But if we distance us from the conventional expectation of success, what does that mean for how we should live our lives?

Now we're getting dangerously close to the whole 'meaning of life' thing, which

I do not want to influence you on, not to mention I have no idea of the answer myself! Still, it could be interesting to explore some of the more usual options. In many religions, for example, a successful and meaningful life centre on the idea of living a (morally) good life according to the religion, and moreover the promise of a blissful afterlife in reward. So, you could live your life trying to be as good and kind as possible, which I think would be great! Other people have very specific goals they want to achieve, and measure their overall successfulness through this. Whether it's cooking the perfect roast dinner like above, or being the best pianist, you can, or participating in the Olympics, the feeling of achieving a huge goal like this must be incredible. Having specific goals can also help measure your personal success, which gives you more motivation in turn. Then there is always still the option of focusing on academics, either to learn as much as possible (and become a successful, distinguished individual) or to get that amazing career and help society and the world to keep working. Or you could centre your life all around experiences, say "I want to visit every country in South America" and then achieve that, and the unique experiences that it brings. You could centre your life around your family and friends, if they're happy so are you, and live your life surrounded by kind and likeminded people. You could set out to make as much of a difference to as many lives as possible, start volunteering for charities, and have endless gratitude poured towards you. You could just wing it and say "I'll follow life wherever it takes me and be spontaneous".

Clearly, the idea of success has changed throughout history. Today, more than ever, we are faced with more choices about success- what to pursue? what to abandon? While I can't answer that for you, of this I am sure: one's idea of success seems tied to that age-old mystery- 'what is the meaning of life?'

*Helene*

## Is equality a myth?

The common definition of equality is the fact of being treated equally regardless of race, gender, status, sexual orientation or religion. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. Is equality a myth?

Today I'm going to focus on race and find out if equality really is a myth. Recent research from the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the UK, outlines a worrying picture of racial inequality. Firstly, let's look at employment. In Britain only 8.8% of ethnic minority groups worked as managers, directors and senior officials. Further data shows that black workers with degrees earn 23.1% less on average than white workers. These shocking statistics show a clear idea of the racial inequality surrounding employment, therefore showing equality to be a myth. There is also a disproportionately high unemployment rate for ethnic minority groups. Meaning 1 in 8 Black employees work in insecure forms of employment, where many are working in temporary zero-hours jobs, where pay is a third less an hour for those on permanent contracts. As a result of this, their families are constantly under financial strain and stress. So, is equality a myth?

Now let's look at education and the large ongoing inequalities surrounding it. It is known that just 6% of Black school leavers attend a Russell Group university. It is frequently argued that there is a racial aspect to disciplinary decisions. Why? Because research shows that Black Caribbean students have rates of permanent exclusion about three times that of the pupil population alone. It doesn't stop there. Not only are children from black backgrounds more likely to be excluded from school, they are likely to be underrepresented and to have their abilities, behaviours, and

grades undervalued. Due to the ongoing inequality, these pupils are unable to access justice should they need it. Research further shows that black students are less likely to be placed in gifted programmes than white students. This shows a clear indication of unfairness and inequality for BAME students in education and they are continually being disadvantaged in relation to higher education. So, is equality a myth?

The next topic is never far from the news, crime. In England and Wales ethnic minority children and adults are much more likely to be victims of crime. As well as this, the homicide rate for black people was 30.5 per million population, 14.1 for Asian people and 8.9 for white people. Rates of violence are higher in more unequal societies such as low income and high unemployment areas. As we know ethnic minority groups have the highest unemployment rates in the UK. This can lead to frustration in the community and lead to crime. The evidence on the link between crimes and background show that crimes such as rape and assault, are affected by inequality. It is illustrated that black people are over 3 times as likely to be arrested as white people. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), show that the black population in London boroughs increases with the level of deprivation, which then causes a significant increase in the level of crime. "It is clear that ethnicity, deprivation, victimization and offending are closely and intricately inter-related."

The last thing we will look at is a really relevant topic today. A Channel 4 programme asked "is Covid Racist?" This programme, first shown on the 23rd of November, ties in many of the issues we have been talking about today. In England and Wales,

males of a Black African ethnic background had the highest rate of deaths involving 2.7 times higher than males of white ethnic background. It's important to know that there is nothing inherently different about racial and ethnic groups, it is the way society is structured that has disadvantaged those groups. It is a matter of inequality. A man named Ranjith Chandrapala was a bus driver from London, he died of Covid-19 on the 3rd of May 2020. The bus driving industry has a large number of BAME workers. The bus drivers were asking for better PPE and better safety measures. His daughter, Leshie, speaks out and says "It is very clear that a lot of bus drivers including my Dad, could still be alive today if Boris Johnson and his Government had taken the pandemic seriously and locked down earlier".

When I started, I posed the question "is equality a myth?" based on what I have told you today it seems quite clear that inequality still exists in society. I have shown that in today's equality is seen to be a myth. But can we ever achieve equality? The answer is up to us. I have only discussed one of the hundreds and thousands of inequalities. There is a similar worrying trend that further proves equality cannot exist, in other words, be a myth. The ongoing structural racism shows us that the battle for equality will take all of us to make changes ourselves. Equality is not a battle for any one group to achieve for themselves, but to achieve it we must all battle to make the changes as bias is structural and institutional. Until then equality remains a myth.

Holly





# The media should be banned from setting beauty standards

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen! Now, I have a question for you- what is beauty to you? The definition of beauty is "a combination of qualities, such as shape, colour, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight", yet the media has a significant amount of influence over what modern beauty looks like.

But have you ever questioned why the media has such a strong influence over what beauty standards are? It frustrates me that it has such a strong influence because large parts of it (the media) don't use photographs of models which are inclusive to different races and body types, poisoning people's views of what they consider 'attractive'.

As a result, we worry about how we look whenever we go out, whether it is going to the shops or a party. We put unnecessary pressure on ourselves to look flawless and live up to ridiculously high standards. That is why the media should be banned from setting them.

A major issue is the underrepresentation that magazines and adverts have when they don't photograph models of different shapes and backgrounds. The media is how we learn about other lifestyles and their traditions, so what must it feel like when a culture is underrepresented or not seen at all? This may cause children and teenagers to question why their ethnicity isn't regularly shown in magazines or online platforms. Underrepresentation is still current, with well-known magazines such as Vanity Fair having a 'diversity drought' on their front cover for 12 months in 2014-15\*. Each ethnicity has a right to be represented in the media and shown as beautiful. The media's lack of diversity places a shadow over these ethnicities, demonstrating a key flaw in the media.

Beauty expectations are seen

everywhere, whether it is on a billboard in Times Square, an advert on TV or an Instagram post. The issue with this is that children are exposed to society's unrealistic standards. It can influence their beliefs on what beauty is and what it looks like from a young age. What does it look like to them? A thin but curvy body, clear skin and luscious long hair, or -for males, because they are not excluded from current 'standards'- an athletic build, broad hips and sturdy muscles.

The worst aspect of this is with the large technological advancements made over the past decade, children are gaining earlier access to the media! As access to phones and television increases for children, so does their exposure to the harsh world of beauty, meaning their belief of what 'true beauty' is can be corrupted. Small, subtle thoughts such as 'I wish my hair looked like hers' or 'I wish I looked as cool as him' can pass through our brains when we're scrolling through Instagram, but can set us up for negative thoughts about ourselves in the future.

This rings true for me, as I was allowed to use social media at the age of 13. Instagram became one of my best friends and I would spend hours online scrolling through posts of 'pretty' people and liking their posts because they looked like what I wanted to be: popular and admired.

However, what I didn't realise then was by looking through these posts, I created unrealistic aspirations for myself and a crushing amount of pressure to have a model-like body.

Firstly, my body type wasn't like any of these people's, shape-or-weight-wise. Secondly, I was in secondary school and the teenagers must've been at least above 16! My perception of being 'beautiful' was incredibly flawed because of outside influences, and I hadn't fully considered my own thoughts!

This is a direct consequence of the media's influence: it raises your

expectations to such an unreachable bar that when you can't even graze those expectations, your self-esteem plummets and negative thoughts assault you.

Bang! You can't fit into that certain size, you must be fat.

Bang! You have stretch marks on your stomach, you can't wear the bikini that you wanted to because people will judge you.

Many people follow these similar thought processes and suffer silently because of it.

This can show the concerning effects of early access to the media, as children from all over the world can see what society expects them to become, which can result in peer pressure and anxiety over not reaching harsh expectations.

Furthermore, this can develop into something menacing and lead to terrible consequences, namely being bullying, low self-esteem and eating disorders. In a study, 44% of adolescent females believed they were overweight and 60%, despite being within a normal weight range, said they were actively trying to lose weight\*\*. Attempting to lose weight in unhealthy ways can affect the child's growth and mental health to the extent of death, which is why media pressure over beauty standards needs to be stopped now.

The media must be stopped from actively endorsing (thereby criticising) a person's body shape and skin colour. The media must be stopped from endorsing the lack of diversity in magazines and online platforms. The media must be stopped from subjecting children to peer pressure, bullying and mental health issues.

With its stronghold over us, the media is unrelenting about what we should value. By feeding us their approved beauty standards, many, many of us are disillusioned. It's time to reject them.

Loud and clear!

Maya

## Why do you act the way you do?

Do you make the choices in your life? Do you? No, no I'm not talking about your parents and how they force you into taking those extra math classes against your will, I'm talking about how you make those choices - the ones you swear are your very own- under the illusion of freedom because in reality not one of your choices are truly your own. Not one. Let me explain why.

We all have apparent differences that distinguish us from one another - each benign in their simplicity. The only aggravating factor being that society allows each the power to change the course of our lives: carving and sculpting and astutely altering our course to meet comfortably between its predetermined confines of right and wrong. The tool used by maestros to unify the masses, to where each plays the very same legato. It's a scarily effective experiment which results are vividly being seen in today's climate. The results of the test being none other than ourselves: we are the results of societal conditioning... and we don't even realise it.

Wikipedia defines social conditioning as "the sociological process of training individuals in a society to respond in a manner generally approved by the society in general and peer groups within society" but personally I think that's a bit tiresome. Instead I see social conditioning through the wonderful example of Pavlov's dog! One of the most famous sociological studies ever done was by a scientist named Ivan Pavlov who studied classical conditioning. Being the incredibly intelligent man, he was, he, well, trained a dog! This basic training proved that repeated exposure to a

particular stimulus results in a specific behaviour being repeated and depending on reinforcement or punishment of a particular behaviour, a response is conditioned. In layman's terms he realised that if he gave a dog a treat for sitting when he asked, the dog would always sit when asked because the dog knew it would get a treat if it did! This forms the basis of social conditioning because much like the dog we have been trained to act just as according to how society wants us to in return for some sort of gratification, usually acceptance.

Let me give you a more modern example of working social conditioning. People are being told, by large corporations, what they need before they even know if they need it or not. And they're falling for it. Look at the way mobile phones are marketed. Nobody, absolutely nobody ever told a mobile phone maker that they wanted a phone that would let them take photographs, send text messages, connect them to the Internet and do all of the other functions that we now take for granted. Most of the extra stuff on them is driven purely by the greed of the manufacturers for more and more profit. This is the law of demand, without supply. This, despite the fact that as consumers we have to pay increasing prices, has no real human cost, but social conditioning can be deadly: Hitler conditioned Nazi Germany to believe that everything that the state did was for the good of the "people" even though many of these actions were overtly against the freedom and well-being of the population and of other human beings. This was to the point that dehumanization of others became rooted in the social and individual conscience of almost everyone and so led to mass genocides of many minorities without remorse. So, what

does this have to do with you? Think about this- do you really need that phone, or that many? Who says that is what you should wear? When did drinking coffee while walking on crowded high street become cool? How about pouting for a picture? Wait... why choose certain people to be your friends? Why favour name brands over other garments. You get where I am going... Why do you act the way you do?

To be rid of the resounding effects of social conditioning takes time - and very often seems an impossible feat. It can take weeks, months or even years. You may also decide that there are some aspects of what you have been conditioned to believe - like murder being wrong - are still in fact morally and socially upright and align with your own conscience. But how far could we push that theory and have a stable society? At the same time, we must recognise that there are societal norms that we must shatter; understanding deemed correct that we must reject; conditioning that we must unshackle ourselves from.

Let me leave you with a final thought: "all conditioning aims at is making people like their inescapable social destiny." So, I am now telling you to free yourself. Escape the destiny that has been engineered for you and create your own path. Make your own choices so that you can proudly say that you do- It's the only way to become a fully functional human; it's the only way to activate perhaps our strongest traits; it's the only way to escape conditioning- to be free!

*Rachel*





## Religious or deluded?

10.1%. That is how much the percentage of people with no religion in England rose by from 2001 to 2011 according to a census of religious affiliations in the UK and ten years on, it's only rising. Though on the other hand the percentage of Christians (the biggest faith in England) fell by 12.3%. To make any claims about faith today is to run the risk of being labelled mad, or worse! Seemingly over the years more and more of us have been losing faith and turning to alternatives such as atheism and agnosticism- Of course neither is new. Though why is this? Though there are multiple social economic and environmental factors that affect one's faith, one of the more prevalent reasons for people deserting faith is the rise of science. Nowadays science is not only about academia, it's a religion. The ever-changing concreteness of science compels those who need evidence to base their beliefs on and in contrast to the mysteries of religion, having seemingly all the answers appeals to many. As well as this combined with the constriction religion seems to serve us, having no rules and living freely with no post-death consequences seems perfect. Though this kind of perfection is overrated. For some, without rules, disorder, and chaos usually follow... The feelings of emptiness and being lost that come with this so-called freedom slowly start gnawing away at them. Though like all things this is not the case for everyone and individuals may find direction and purpose in something other than religion. "Freedom" may bring you happiness. At the same time, many large-scale studies have found a positive correlation between religion and happiness. For example, a study done by Arizona state university stated "we found that religion was significantly, positively related to subjective well-being," going on to state that religion "seems to give hope,

meaning, optimism and security to individuals." Could there be freedom in restriction. Though religion is most definitely not the only thing that brings about happiness, it can bring us direction and new-found meaning. Though science may seem to have all the answers this goes against the nature of science itself. Science itself is constantly changing and on one hand this could be a good thing as it means we are getting closer to the answers but will we ever truly have those concrete answers...? In a way science is a faith too as you have to believe that what has been "proven" to you is correct and the right theory. The only pathway to belief is through a science lab, backed up with equations and experiments. Yet, aren't we expected to believe in things we can't see or fully understand? Though with religious institutions failing to evolve, the appeal of discovery has begun to attract more and more. As well as this, as society becomes more evolved and democratic, as liberalism and post-modernism takes precedent, religion has become something of a background noise to a generation who values liberalism and social justice. As well as this many religious institutions are failing to evolve along with society, pushing teachings that block individual freedoms, something which does not marry well with today's youth.

People have begun to see religion as something of the past and almost medieval and unneeded for today's advanced society. But is this the right approach to take? Yes, religions have been dated to thousands of years old but though we may be more technologically and industrially advanced, the same moral questions and problems persist. The issue of morality is something that plagues humans and something that religion is said to provide an answer to. Humans still need direction, purpose and

security now despite the rise of technology. As well as this, to present religion as an impediment to the progression of society and science is a relative new concept, historically speaking. It could even be argued, according to author James Hannam, that science owes a lot of its advancement to both Christianity and the Middle Ages. For example, through financial support; until the French Revolution the Catholic Church was the leading sponsor of scientific research and starting from the middle ages it paid for priests, monks and friars to study at universities (which were originally created by a Muslim woman) and of course modern genetics was founded by a future abbot (Gregor Mendel) growing peas in the monastic garden. As well as this the father of algebra, which plays a huge role in science, was a Muslim Arabic man named Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi.

Clearly science is not held back by religion, in fact the common insults of religion being from the middle ages are almost ironical as it in fact drove many developments back in the middle ages.

Today many people who do choose to practice a faith are labelled as delusional and crazy and though the everlasting fight between creationism and evolution does not look like it is slowing down any time soon, following a faith or not, does not automatically mean you are deluded or stuck in the past. This logic wouldn't necessarily apply elsewhere. In the final analysis, it seems this question-religious or deluded? - requires a lot more thinking about than we think.

Sehar



## The importance of being organised

Organisation. When you hear that word, you may grunt and growl from the countless amount of times your parents and teachers constantly nagged at you, but it is so much more essential than you think.

To me, organisation is the key to success; it will open up many more marvellous opportunities if you just stopped. And took the time to think and make a clear set of objectives for the day. No rush, no panic, no stress.

Have you ever experienced a period of time in your life where there just too many demands, projects, deadlines, due dates and expectations- all piling up and screaming:

'Late assignment!'

'One day left!'

Trust me, I know the feeling.

I remember during the last week of year 11 every teacher made me slave day after day over the seemingly infinite homework and final project. Just like you, I was tired. Sleepless nights were spent on those dreaded pieces of damnation, and waterfalls of tears flooded my room.

It's so much worse when there are high expectations of you too, right? In fact- the children's health society states that: 8 in 10 students feel extreme levels of stress during their schooling.' Not only that, but it's incredibly devastating that our levels of anxiety today are noticeably much higher than of a patient in a mental asylum in the 1800s. All this just because of an overload of work.

Now thus- this is where organisation can truly change your life. Planning out your week to prioritise the more time- consuming activities makes a startling difference. Your work ethic can improve as you set out healthy realistic hours of labour. Recently, a student voice survey found that students who are able to plan their time effectively are 65% less likely to experience extreme anxiety.

A whopping 65%!

If we all agreed to organise ourselves, mental health rates would skyrocket and shameful suicide rates would decrease dramatically too.

However, I am aware that there may be some of us who would turn our nose and scoff at the idea of organising our schedules. I understand completely that it seems time- consuming, but it honestly doesn't take very long to sit down for a minute to see what requires your immediate attention. No need to look fancy, a simple and clear routine will do nicely. If you invest just an inch of your time, you are bound to reap generous rewards, like higher quality work!

'But what if I don't like a structured schedule?' you may be pondering. I'm glad to tell you that you don't need to be a routine-lover to be organised!

I am confident that checklists would suit you better, and suggest that you highlight, circle or mark- the most labour-intensive activities! At the end of the day, week, month it'll be super satisfying to see the full list of ticks, and ticks and ticks! Do you want to meet deadlines? Do you want to work at your best? Do you want to stop feeling stressed or panicked? Organise your work life.

And don't forget...to also organise your room!

Your work space needs to be clean and tidy!

Imagine that you had a fearful final project, but you can't find those pens, paper, books... they were just here...there...somewhere! You'll need to turn your room- which already looks like a T-Rex was released and caused your very desk to turn - upside down, inside out.

What a waste of time!

Cleaning up your space and organising various resources in clear, labelled containers could make it a hundred times more convenient for you. Simple things like making your bed, folding clothes can serve as motivation, or at the very least make it easier to confront work you have avoiding.

You could work quicker, faster, smarter.

Now that you understand why organisation is so essential, I urge you to manifest a clean and tidy room to help you focus, and create a checklist, timetable, plan or calendar- whatever you think would benefit you best.

Remember: organisation is just a small investment to reap rich rewards.

Thank you for listening.

Bea

