

Avatar



Vol. 4, Issue 12 • June 2011
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THE DANGERS OF SELF DIAGNOSIS

THE SINGLE LIFE
PART TWO

THROUGH
DISTORTED
LENSES



EDITORS' LETTER

HELLO AND WELCOME TO ANOTHER ISSUE.

As spring draws to a close, so does another volume of Avatar. It's been an interesting year; we've seen old editors resign and new editors join the team, and have faced many challenges – but here we are for yet another great issue.

In News and Debates, there's a thought-provoking article on stereotyping, spurred by the story of the parents who refused to tell their child's gender.

Over in Mind and Body, there's a piece explaining the impacts of diagnosing yourself, and why it's always best to see a professional. We also answer questions from regular users in our Dear Avatar section, so be sure to take a look.

Meanwhile, in Lifestyle, we have the second half of the series on the benefits of being single, where some of the most frequently asked questions will be answered. In Fun and Games, we have the usual trivia, recipes, and all the other features you love. As always, remember to check out the Horoscopes and Self Expression.

See you next issue!
The Avatar Editors.

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MIND AND BODY

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DEAR AVATAR

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LIFESTYLE

Vacant

FUN AND GAMES

Nat (Gymnophoria/Natsumi)

CONTENTS

NEWS & DEBATES

03 THROUGH DISTORTED LENSES Casey
(Casey.)
A look at how stereotypes affect our lives.

MIND & BODY

04 THE DANGERS OF SELF-DIAGNOSIS Robin
(PSY)
Why it's better to get a professional opinion.

06 DEAR AVATAR: ADVICE FOR YOU Robin
(PSY)
Requests for advice from users like you!

LIFESTYLE

07 THE SINGLE LIFE, PART TWO Dave Katrina
(dr2005)
Part two: frequently asked questions - answered!

FUN & GAMES

09 FUN AND GAMES Nat Chess
(Gymnophoria/Natsumi) (Sidhe./x.Psychic Crisis.x)
Enjoy yourselves with this month's Fun and Games.

10 MOTIVATION STATION Robin Chess
(PSY) (Sidhe./x.Psychic Crisis.x)
Keep up the motivation this June.

MORE

11 SELF-EXPRESSION AND PHOTOGRAPHY
Expressing life through your fingertips.

15 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & WINDING DOWN

feature

ON **04**

THE DANGERS OF SELF-DIAGNOSIS
BY ROBIN (PSY)



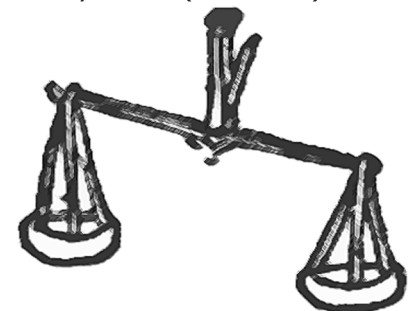
Why it's better to get a
professional opinion

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

by Chess
(Sidhe./x.Psychic Crisis.x)
and Lyndsee (Amoroso)

13

HOROSCOPES



CONTACT US!

Are you a writer? Photographer? Artist? We need your submissions! Valuable contributions from readers like you are what make Avatar so unique and successful! Please consider emailing your submission to avatar@teenhelp.org or submit content online by visiting www.teen-help.org/avatar/submit.



THROUGH DISTORTED LENSES

By Casey (Casey.)

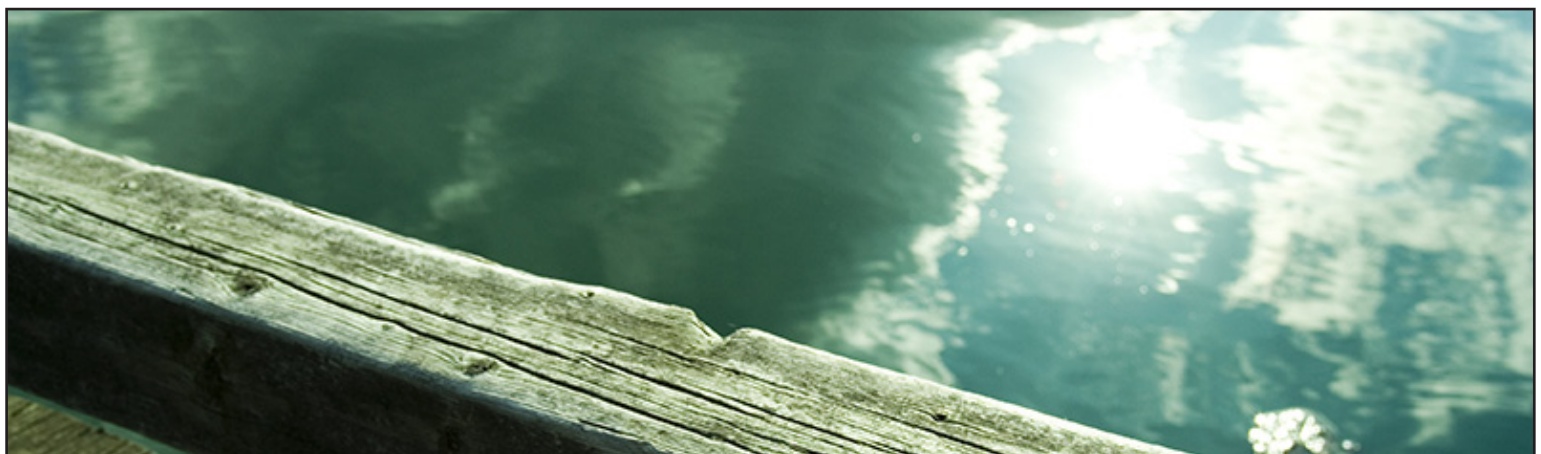
Stereotypes. We all hold some form of them in our minds. Everyone stereotypes others, even those who claim they do not. Sometimes these stereotypes influence how we see the world and how we react to things that do not fit these stereotypes.

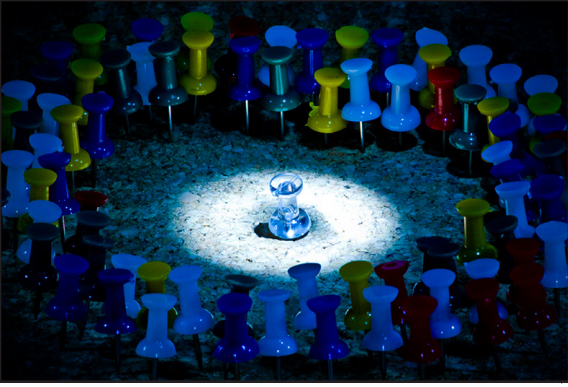
Recently, in the news, there was a child whose parents refuse to tell anyone whether the child was a boy or a girl. They decided to let the child grow without being forced into the molds of gender roles and the stereotypes that people would push on that child. The child would be able to choose what kind of clothes s/he wore and what kind of toys s/he played with. Most children are placed in pink or blue when they are babies, a sign to the world that the child is a boy or a girl. They are given gender appropriate toys and clothes. These parents are trying to let their child grow up without having to fit into a specific mold, to let the child decide who they want to be.

However, although the parents are fighting gender stereotypes, they are also not letting the child grow naturally. All children grow up knowing that they are a boy or a girl, even if that is not reflected by their bodies, and the parents' choice blurs the borders between gender roles and sex. Sex is defined as whether someone is a boy or a girl, whereas gender roles are a vastly broad gray area depending on how a person was raised and where they were raised.

Stereotypes in general are not always a bad thing, but rather a narrow way of looking at the world. Not everyone fits into the social stereotypes of Goth, Punk, or Prep; nor does everyone fit into the stereotypes of smart nerds and dumb jocks. Blondes are not always dumb; kids wearing black are not always goth; theater kids are not always gay; and gender is not always a simple matter of physical characteristics.

My point with this is that stereotypes are all fine and dandy, but it does not do much to show the reality of the world. Everyone is different and although we tend to group people into stereotypes based on how they act, what they wear, and who they hang out with, along with factors that they can not change, like their gender, their sexuality, and the colour of their skin, these stereotypes do nothing to show how people as individuals are. You cannot judge one person based on how the group that they 'belong' to acts, but rather you should look at each person as a different piece of a puzzle, the puzzle that just happens to be humanity and the world we live in. Everyone has stereotyped at one point or another and everyone has been grouped as part of a stereotype, but wouldn't it be grand if we lost the labels and just let people be people, without damaging them as a whole? ■





MIND AND BODY



SELF-DIAGNOSIS | DEAR AVATAR

THE DANGERS OF SELF-DIAGNOSIS

By Robin (PSY)

"I'm depressed." This statement may seem straightforward at first, but think about it for a moment. If someone you knew said, "I'm depressed," what would you conclude? Would you assume that they were merely feeling sad, and that their feelings would go away after a few days? Or would you assume that they were suffering from a chronic mental illness, where their mood was affected by a number of biological and environmental factors? Your conclusion could affect the nature of your advice to that person. For example, if you felt the depression was temporary, you might tell that person to focus on the positive aspects of their life, spend time with friends, and take a day off from everything in order to relax. If you believed that the person suffered from a mental illness, however, you would probably encourage them to see a psychological professional in order to receive therapy and/or medication, if needed.

It's amazing how such a simple statement can lead to so much confusion and uncertainty! Yet despite knowing how easily a statement can be misinterpreted, we are all too eager to make judgments about our family members, friends, partners – and even ourselves. Those of us who suffer or have suffered from mental illness(es) often have to deal with the stigma that comes along with receiving a diagnosis of depression, anxiety, ADHD, bipolar disorder, and so on. In addition, we may feel we have to "compete" with the occasional friend who claims that they, too, suffer from a mental illness. Sometimes, it's simply a matter of blowing emotions out of proportion, assuming that they suffer from a chronic depressive disorder when what they are really experiencing is just a temporary (and perfectly normal) feeling in response to hormonal changes or life events. Other times, they are on the

right track, but are coming to the wrong conclusion before weighing all the possibilities.

Before I elaborate on the dangers of self-diagnosis, I want to provide you with an example of a time when I mis-diagnosed myself! Perhaps you can relate, since nearly everyone has visited websites like WebMD.com or MayoClinic.com in order to identify physical and mental illnesses based on their symptoms. About six months ago, I started having vision problems. I would see flashing lights in my left eye, along with what looked like squiggly worms. After conducting some research online, I came to the conclusion that I was at risk for a retinal detachment – which meant I could lose all vision in my left eye! I made an appointment to see my doctor the following day, but I was so nervous about my vision problems that I couldn't concentrate on schoolwork. When I finally arrived at the doctor's office, I was prepared for the worst-case scenario: surgery, and a full week of recuperation afterward. After meeting with a medical professional, however, I was told that there was nothing wrong with my eye. The flashing lights may have been caused by a number of factors, ranging from excessive caffeine intake to poor sleeping habits. The squiggly worms turned out to be genetic in nature, and nothing to fret over. My doctor offered a few suggestions, along with instructions on what to do in case my vision suddenly worsened again. After an hour-long appointment, all of my questions had been answered, and I was able to go home and study in peace. After one week of improved sleeping habits, my vision returned to normal!

The internet is a wonderful tool that allows us to conduct research, looking up the symptoms for physical and mental

illnesses alike; however, a list of symptoms can only take us so far. Mysterious lumps under our skin can be mistaken for cancerous tumors, and sores on the insides of our mouths can be mistaken for sexually transmitted diseases. Oftentimes, physical symptoms can point to multiple diagnoses – and when we fail to consult with a medical professional, we may reach the wrong conclusion. The same thing can happen with mental illnesses.

Let's return to our original statement: "I'm depressed." Someone who believes they suffer from a major depressive disorder may find various ways to "treat" their depression that aren't very healthy. I once had a friend who claimed they suffered from chronic depression. Because they felt they would never be happy, they turned to alcohol and drugs for relief. For a short amount of time, they could forget about their problems; however, they would always come crashing down afterward, and feel even worse than before. Drinking alcohol and taking drugs never actually solved their problems, and it never led to a lasting sense of happiness. It was just a way to escape. If that friend had seen a psychological professional, they may have discovered the source of their unhappiness and found a way to effectively treat their depression. They could have received support from their family members and friends, as well as attended regular therapy sessions and obtained medication to correct chemical imbalances that may have contributed to their negative mood. Because they chose to diagnose themselves with a depressive disorder, however, they ultimately limited their ability to receive help.

Someone who has erroneously diagnosed themselves may also fall victim to a self-fulfilling prophecy. For example, if

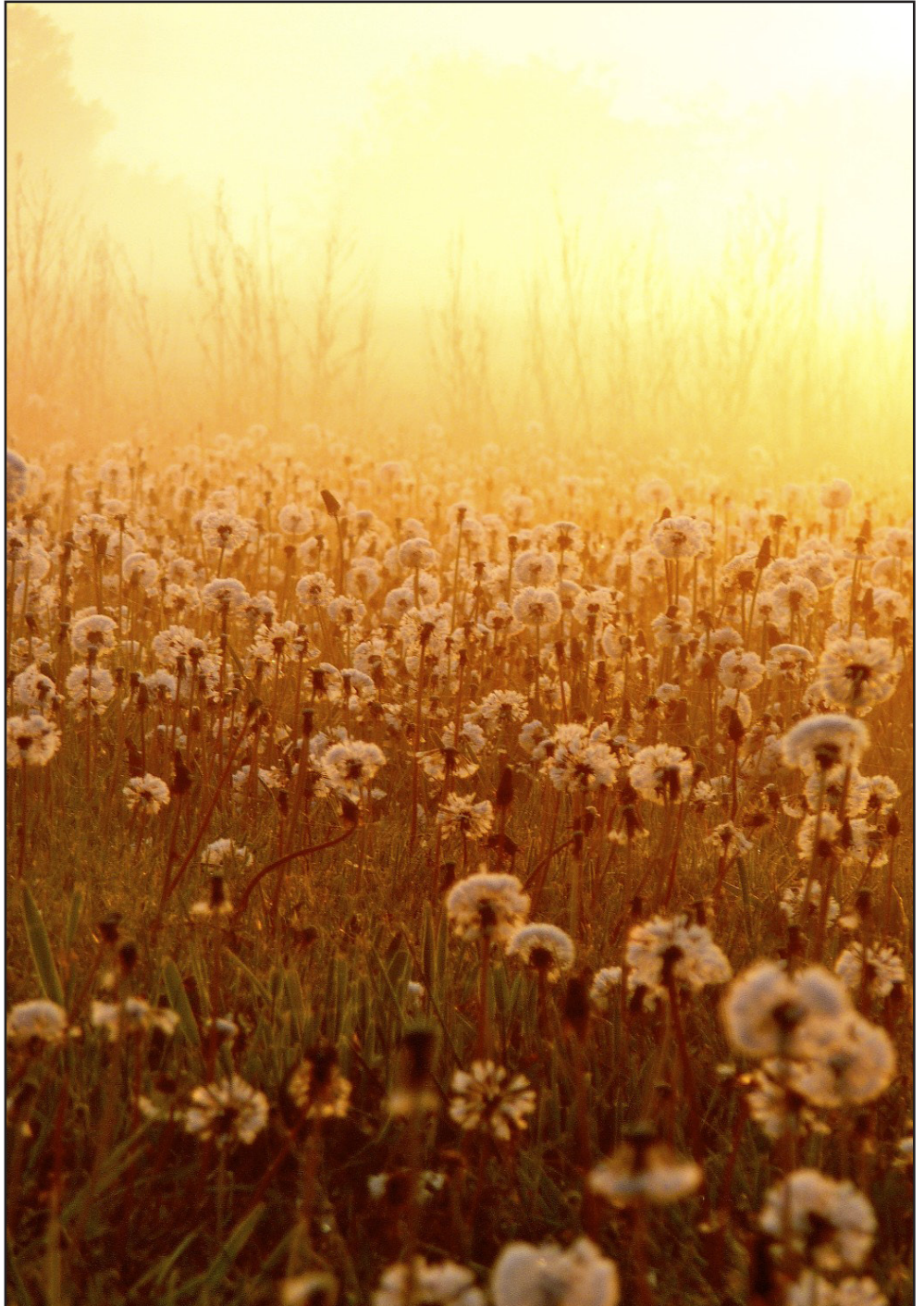
MIND AND BODY

someone were to say, "I'm depressed," then looked up the symptoms for a major depressive disorder, they may essentially convince themselves that they have a mental illness when they really do not! They may be influenced by the list of symptoms and begin to act differently. If someone believes they suffer from depression, they may feel... well, depressed! And if they feel depressed, their symptoms may become more pronounced, which will only further convince someone that they are suffering from a mental illness. You may have experienced this with physical symptoms. Imagine yourself in a classroom, feeling perfectly healthy. A few minutes later, someone sits next to you and begins coughing incessantly. It's obvious that they have a cold. Suddenly, you feel a tickle in the back of your throat. Your mouth feels dry, and you feel a bit feverish. Could you have caught their cold? Probably not, since the person has only been sitting next to you for a short while. Your mind, however, has begun to play tricks on you, and you may become convinced that you are sick. The same thing can happen with mental illnesses!

Finally, by improperly diagnosing oneself, a person may fail to recognize other symptoms of a genuine mental illness. For example, if a person believes they suffer from a depressive disorder, they may become so focused on their depression that they fail to take into account occasional periods of "mania". Manic episodes may consist of inflated self-esteem, a decreased need for sleep, and increased goal-directed activity, among other things. Someone with depression may struggle with low self-esteem, feel the need to sleep more often, and fail to complete important tasks such as homework assignments and paying bills. So if a person who diagnosed themselves as "depressed" experienced a period of "mania", they may conclude that the "mania" is actually "normal", and how a person should feel and behave when they are "happy". By reaching such a conclusion, they may fail to consider another possibility: they may actually suffer from bipolar disorder, a mental illness that may be characterized by both depressive AND manic episodes.

So the next time you begin to speculate about a physical or mental illness, whether it be for yourself or someone you know, remember how dangerous it can be to rely on self-diagnosis. Considering various possibilities and conduct-

ing research online is perfectly fine, but the danger lies in reaching the wrong conclusion. Therefore, ALWAYS consult a medical or psychological professional, and encourage your loved ones to do the same if they suspect something is wrong. ■



DEAR AVATAR

By Robin (PSY)

My mom recently found out about TeenHelp! I don't know if she has been spying on me, or if she just discovered this website by chance. I don't know if she has my username or if she has read my posts in the Forums, but she has told me that I am too young to help anyone and that I would probably just make things worse if I offered advice. Maybe she's right... but I love TeenHelp and I don't know what I would do if she made me stop using it. What should I do?!

Hey there! I think many of TeenHelp's members worry about what parents (as well as some friends and boyfriends/girlfriends) would think if they discovered their posts on TeenHelp. TeenHelp is a great place to ask for advice and meet people who are going through similar struggles, so I hope you will not have to leave this community because of your mother's concerns.

If you haven't already, I would configure your Internet browser's settings so that the history, cookies, etc. are deleted after each session. For Firefox, go to Tools > Options > Privacy > Select "Clear history when Firefox closes", along with any other settings you would like to increase your privacy. For Internet Explorer, go to Tools > Internet Options > General > Click on the "Clear History" button and set the days to "0". By doing this, your mother will no longer be able to "spy" on you by looking at your browser's history and seeing where you've been.

You could take two different approaches with your mother. One would be to avoid talking about TeenHelp altogether. The other would be to tell your mom about how TeenHelp has helped you with a particular problem. Your mom seems to be focusing on your age and how your lack of experience could make things worse for other members. What she may not realize, however, is that teens aren't always looking for solutions to their problems. Oftentimes, teens just want

to know that they aren't alone in their struggles, and they want someone to talk to. You could tell your mom about a time when you cheered someone up in the Chat Room, or how you helped someone who was going through a similar problem! You could also emphasize how TeenHelp has helped you, and how, by offering advice, you're giving back to the community that has proven to be so helpful for you.

Whatever the outcome may be, I wish you all the best. Take care! ■

I was hanging out with my boyfriend last night when he confessed that he has a sexual fetish! I'm glad he felt comfortable enough to tell me about it, but in all honesty, I think it's kind of weird. He wants me to help him act out his fantasy, but I'm not sure I want to try it. I don't want to tell him he's weird, though. How do I address this issue?

Oh boy, that's a tough one! I can understand why you would feel uncomfortable with the idea of participating in your boyfriend's fantasy - most people have difficulty accepting things that are out of the ordinary, especially when they are of a sexual nature. I imagine it took a great deal of courage on your boyfriend's part to tell you about his sexual fetish.

First, have you tried identifying what exactly makes you so uncomfortable? If you think the fetish is unhygienic or dangerous in some way, then I strongly suggest you avoid participating in your boyfriend's sexual fantasy until you can ensure that no harm will come to you or your boyfriend. Even though it is your

boyfriend's fantasy, YOU need to be just as well informed about the potential risks as he is.

Sometimes, people find fetishes unnerving because they feel like their partner won't get "turned on" unless they engage in a particular sexual fantasy. If this is why you feel uncomfortable, the best way to work through this issue is to vocalize your concerns. I know you don't want your boyfriend to feel "weird" about having a fetish, but if you don't talk about your concerns, you may end up doing something that you will regret later on. It's important that BOTH of your needs are met, not just your boyfriend's.

You may end up enjoying your boyfriend's sexual fantasy just as much as he does! However, you may end up hating it and no longer want to participate after trying it once. There is nothing wrong with that, but again, it's important to communicate with your boyfriend. Explain that rejecting his sexual fantasy isn't the same thing as rejecting him personally. Everyone has their preferences, and it's not his fault that you don't share the same preferences that he does. If you

two are willing to work things out, I'm sure a compromise can be reached.

Finally, you should NEVER feel obligated to do anything that you are uncomfortable with doing. If your boyfriend ever attempts to force you into doing something, get away from him and seek help from your family members and friends. It can be quite embarrassing to tell people what happened, but try to realize that sexual molestation and abuse is still wrong, no matter how you slice it. Whether or not a fetish is involved shouldn't matter, because it doesn't change the fact that your boyfriend violated your rights by attempting to force you into doing something you weren't comfortable with doing.

I wish you and your boyfriend all the best. Good luck in working things out with him! ■



L I F E



THE SINGLE LIFE, PART TWO

By Dave (dr2005) and Katrina

Here is Part Two of our article on The Single Life - be sure to check out Part One in May's issue if you haven't already!

Questions and Answers

Thus far, we have conjoined our thoughts and views on each of the above issues presented. However, to give readers a more comprehensive look, we have chosen to answer each of the following questions separately. In doing this, readers are given a male perspective as well as a female perspective, each from different countries, backgrounds, and upbringings.

Question #1: "I've been single forever. Where do I look for love?"

Katrina says: Reread your question; I think you may have misunderstood or accidentally disregarded a huge part of this article. "Looking for love" seems to be such a commonly used phrase, but in my opinion, that's not how it works! Madonna got it right in saying, "first love yourself then you can love someone else" in her song, "Hey You." Shift your focus from looking for love to utilizing some of the tips we have provided in this article, such as not framing your thoughts around the fact that you are single. Furthermore, as you meet new people, it's okay to not always be categorizing them into "potential future partners"; remember, when relationships do form, they very often evolve from friendships.

Dave says: There isn't any real place to look for love, and in any event when you're actively looking for love you're un-

likely to find it. I know there were plenty of occasions where I really wanted to meet someone and nothing ever came of it, and then as soon as I stopped chasing the idea and focused on just enjoying here and now it suddenly happened. It isn't a coincidence - thinking that you need to be in a relationship will have the side-effect of making you feel unhappy if you're not in one, which makes you appear less confident and thus makes it harder to meet a potential partner in the first place. Confidence is after all a big part of attraction. If you want to "find love", the first step really is to accept yourself - and more importantly, LIKE yourself - so that when you meet new people or catch up with friends you come across in as positive a way as possible. Not only does that give your relationship chances a boost, it'll also make your friendships and general socialising more enjoyable, so it's really a win-win scenario.

Question #2: "Can I date someone or date multiple people without being in a relationship?"

Katrina says: The concept of "dating" has evolved so much and likely varies immensely depending on who you talk to. To me, dating means going on more than one date with the same person without being exclusive, while being "in a relationship" typically does imply exclusivity. So, in my opinion, yes, those of us who are single can certainly be dating one or more people without being considered to be in a relationship. Just remember to always communicate with the people you may be dating in order to avoid any

confusion or misunderstandings concerning each other, and once again, I believe there are more important things to focus on (as a single) than the fact that you're not in a relationship. To me, it's kind of a "go with the flow" situation.

Dave says: There aren't really any restrictions on how you approach dating outside of a relationship - as Kat says, dating means different things to different people. In its most basic form, all a "date" actually means is meeting up with another person to have a good time, with the possibility of some kind of romantic development later - the old "looking for friendship and maybe more" cliché. So as long as you are fully honest about things and communicate properly with people (and that is important in any situation, not just the one above) then there isn't a problem in dating more than one person. Just make sure you don't end up getting indecisive if it becomes more serious, otherwise that can bring all its own problems!

Question #3: "I've just recently gotten out of a relationship and become single again; where do I draw the line, as far as going on dates goes, in making sure I'm not rebounding?"

Katrina says: If you've only recently become single, it's certainly no accident you've stumbled upon our article about making the most of singledom! As you're feeling out this new concept of not being committed to someone, do give yourself time to get used to the things that may be a bit different than they were when you were in your relationship. During

this time, it's important that you are able to reconnect with yourself, particularly if the break-up was difficult. In the same regard, there's something important you must consider if you're looking to start dating again. Are you trying to start dating again to fill a void you associate with not being in a relationship, or are you back in a place where you're in sync enough with yourself to know that you're fine either being in a relationship or living the single life? Question your motives, but do so in a constructive way that can hopefully lead you to draw your own line concerning rebounding from relationships.

Dave says: The best way to make sure you're not rebounding is to be absolutely honest with yourself as to what's motivating you to go on dates. Is it because the person you're dating is someone you're genuinely interested in and would want to meet in normal circumstances anyway, or is it just a way to fill a hole in your life? You're the best judge of your own actions, and while you don't want to go to the other extreme of questioning every action or looking for sin in every shadow a healthy dose of introspection can go a long way. If you have doubts, take a step back and think, "How would I react if one of my friends was doing this?" Sometimes that can bring up surprising answers. Try and make sure you strike a balance between going out on dates and general socialising, particularly meeting up with friends or doing activities you want to do or indeed need to do – don't feel as though you need to go on dates to prove a point. You don't. The main thing is to enjoy what you do, give yourself time to heal if you need to heal, and as our article says focus on the upsides of being single. Everything else

will come in time.

Question #4: "I've been invited to a party, but I know some couples are going and don't want to feel like the only single person there. Should I ask a friend to go with me or just go it alone?"

Katrina says: Up to you, really! Just because you know that there will be couples there certainly doesn't mean that there won't also be singles there. In fact, I think you'd be surprised as to how many people come solo to parties, school dances, and other things of the sort. If you think you'd have more fun with a friend, go for it! If you're not really too concerned about that and are focusing more on wanting to dance it up, I'm sure you'll be just fine flying on your own.

Dave says: It's entirely normal to feel worried about an unfamiliar situation, especially if you feel like you'll stand out. However, being able to "work the floor" without having to track down a partner every so often can not only result in some surprising socialisation, it also does wonders for how others perceive you and how confident you are. That in turn attracts people to you, even if you don't have a partner to bounce off or show off.

Question #5: "I don't mind being single, but Valentine's Day/public displays of affection etc. REALLY bug me. Any tips?"

Katrina says: I learned this past year that Valentine's Day REALLY is all about what you make it. In years previous, I've held a grudge against those in relation-

ships and been a scrooge the entire day. This V-Day, though, I chose to spend it with those I love. Why does it matter if I don't love them "romantically?" I love and care about them all the same! So, you have two ways to go about this: you can choose to have a great day and be happy for those who are in relationships, or you can choose to base your entire day around the fact that you're single. If it was up to me, I'd try and choose that first option! Give it a whirl; I think you may find that Valentine's Day, even for singles, can be an incredible day.

Dave says: Ah yes, Valentine's Day...the day when it can sometimes feel like the world's rubbing it in! As we've said all the way through, though, it's all about your own attitude towards being single as that has a big impact on your thought process. When I'd just come out of one relationship and saw all the stuff for Valentine's Day it really wound me up – fast forward to this year and while some of the hype grates a little the day itself is a non-issue. All that changed was how I felt about being single. It's also worth bearing in mind that Valentine's Day and PDAs can bug couples just as much as well, so it's not necessarily something to worry about. If you're looking for ways to take your mind off it, try arranging a film night with your friends (single or otherwise) or something similar. As for PDAs, best advice is not to stare really!

So, there you have it – our easy-to-digest primer to the single life. Needless to say, if you've got any questions we haven't covered here or want to know a bit more about certain things we've mentioned feel free to track us down on TeenHelp and we'll do our best to help. ■





JUST FOR FUN

WORD OF THE MONTH

Susurrous – full of whispering sounds

(dictionary.reference.com)

CAN YOU SAY...

Light?

- English - light
- Croatian - svjetlo
- Dutch - licht
- Finnish - valo
- Indonesian - cahaya
- Latin - lux
- Lithuanian - šviesa
- Portuguese - luz
- Turkish - ışık

TRIVIA

How many committees does TeenHelp have?

Challenge: Which committee used to have members called 'Officers'?

Answer: Disputes, Operations and Procedures, Performance, Talent.

Challenge answer: Talent Committee

JUNE MOVIES

June movies:

- Beginners
- X-Men First Class
- Mr Popper's Penguins
- Green Lantern
- Cars 2
- Transformers: Dark of the Moon

NAME THAT TUNE

So how come when I reach out my finger, it feels like more than distance between?

Rihanna – California King Bed

RECIPES

To celebrate the beginning of summer, here's a couple of light recipes that are sure to please.

Pea, bean, and feta salad

- Ingredients:
- 500g broad beans
 - 2 cups peas
 - 200g feta, crumbled
 - 1 cup mint leaves
 - 1 finely chopped red onion
 - 1 finely chopped lemon quarter
 - 100g baby snow pea tendrils
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons lemon juice

Method:

- Cook the beans in a large saucepan of salted boiling water until tender. Cool under cold running water. Drain well; peel and discard the skins.
- Repeat with the peas (minus discarding the skins).
- Place beans and peas in a large bowl, and add feta, mint, onion, lemon, and snow pea tendrils. Drizzle with oil and lemon juice; season with salt and pepper, if desired.
- Gently toss to combine.

Apple Pikelets

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups sifted self-raising flour
- 2 tablespoons caster sugar
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 300ml buttermilk
- ½ cup apple puree
- 20 g melted butter

Method:

- Combine flour and sugar in a bowl.
- Whisk egg and buttermilk together in a jug, then add to flour mixture.
- Whisk until smooth. Stir in puree.
- Heat a large frying pan over medium heat, then brush base with butter.
- Using tablespoons of the batter, cook until small bubbles form on the pikelets (should take 2-3 minutes). Carefully turn them over, and leave until cooked through.
- Leave to cool, then serve.

(Both from <http://www.taste.com.au/>).

MOTIVATION STATION

by Chess (Sidhe./x.Psychic Crisis.x) and Robin (PSY)

A quote to note: Replace the word 'problem' with the word 'opportunity' in all your thoughts. - Matthew Keith Groves

(like chasing cars or pulling on the lead). It's nice to have people who understand, who've been through the same thing, and who can help.

Reason for the Season: Fun in the sun is what you have to look forward to this month! School is coming to a close, which means it's time to whip out the sunscreen and bathing suits. Celebrate your freedom from homework and enjoy the warm summer air. Be daring and try something new, whether it be riding a skateboard or planting your own personal garden!

Send a Grin: Never underestimate the importance of a helping hand. If you've gone through a hard time, dealt with a certain issue, or learned about a particular problem, don't keep it to yourself - there's always someone you can pass your wisdom on to. As long as you're polite and friendly, your advice will probably be well-received.

Reveal the Real: We all know how important pets can be. They take over your home and your heart, and it can be hard to imagine life without them. I've noticed lately that pet-owners seem to have a certain loyalty to other pet-owners. Whenever I walk my dog, the other dog-owners around always give me a smile, a friendly word, a knowing look, even when my dog is being difficult

Dare to Share? Have you been inspired lately? Did you see something that just made you smile? Has a friend told you a piece of advice that really did change your life? Let us know, and get involved with the Motivation Station! ■



Photo by Lyndsee (Amoroso)

SELF EXPRESSION

untitled

Whoever said "sticks and stones may brake my bones, but words will never hurt me" obviously was never verbally abused. I have been told this expression since I was a little girl and was always told to remember it. I have learned through the years that it's not true.

The first time I was bullied was in first grade. My friends and I were all sitting together talking at recess and one of them brought up a secret I had told at a sleepover. The secret I do not remember, but I do remember what happened afterwards. My other friends all started laughing at me and ran around and told everyone. The whole class made fun of me for a while. When it finally stopped, my friend did the same thing with another secret. The school year was terrible.

The real bullying didn't start until 4th grade. I was friends with the popular girls, but looking back on it now I realize they just kept me around to make fun of me. I was the butt of every joke. They always told me I was stupid, annoying, ugly, fat, you name it, but I just wanted to be a part of the group.

5th grade was worse. I had the same friends, but they learned some new torture techniques over the summer. I told one off them that I liked this guy and she told him. The guy then proceeded to tell me he thought I was so ugly I would never get a guy in a million years. They joked about that for a while.

The worst year was 6th grade. I had gained a lot of weight over the summer and I had very low self esteem. I wore all black for the first quarter of the year, to hide all the extra fat on my body. That started the goth jokes. Which then made me start wearing brighter colors, that show my stomach. The abuse about being fat began. After that I wore big sweat-

shirts and didn't really worry about my hair or anything, the ugly comments ensued.

On Valentines day of that year, I got a carnation from the guy I liked. I went on IM that now and a chat box popped up. I saw it was him and a smile spread across my face for just one second. I read what he had wrote and started to cry. It consisted of calling me so fat and ugly I should just kill myself. I decided to take his advice and sat down to cut myself. Then I heard a song. It was called "Hold On" by the Jonas Brothers. It stopped me from being a total idiot.

After wearing black for the last half of 6th grade I decided to start 7th wearing pink. It was a way of trying to be happy. I could not do anything to get away from the stares and whispers though. I was the new "weird" girl of the school. I made the mistake of trusting another guy, an 8th grader this time. He told me he liked me, hugged me and kissed me on the cheek. When I got home there was a message on the voice mail of my cell phone. He called to make fun of me. None of the insults were new to me. They were the same old, your ugly, your fat, you'll never get a guy, etc. I just stopped trusting guys after that.

8th grade rolled around and I was dreading the first day. I went into school slouching with a frown upon my face and no one even asked what was wrong. I got into class and sat next to someone who I had never met before. Apparently she lived on my street. We started talking and hanging out and she was really nice at first.

Around December everything changed. She started making fun of me for being loud and obnoxious and then made fun of me for yelling at her when she said

that. She would criticize everything I did. Worst of all she told me a guy had liked me, she told he thought I was pretty. She made the whole thing up even though she knew my past with guys. I just tried to laugh it off, but it wasn't funny. At the end of the year I would just come home crying everyday. This girl made my life miserable, but she was my only friend and I needed a friend.

My last year of bullying was freshman year. Everything was going great until April. I decided I didn't really ant to be a part of just one group so I would switch groups every other day at lunch. My original group of friends was not happy and decided to start harassing me. It started with texts and face book messages about not liking me. Then it was the mean nickname, "the hulk." They called me that because I was ugly, fat, mean, I had mood swings, I boxed and I wore green tights one day. After that came the physical stuff, them getting up at a table I would sit down at, tripping me in the hall, elbowing me in the stomach and getting me in trouble in class. The year ended terribly, with me needing to get out, which led me to the New School.

Do not ever say that words don't stay with you because they do. I may seem like a happy person on the outside, but my mind is racing with insecurities ever second of the day. Next time you are about to say something mean to someone, just stop and think about the consequences first.

By Devon (lovatoac)

My Mask

I smile to hide my tears
I fight to not show my fears
People may call me fake
But I'm hiding for their sake
People who know only my Mask
Are those who weren't there in my past
That's why they can never understand
This pain that never seems to end
So I'll stay hidden in this dark closet
to most
Should I come out I know I'll be lost
Lost in the disgrace and hate
And have no more faith in fate.

By Chelsy (smiley...)

Why can't you see me?

I'm dead, numb, ice cold inside.
And you still believe the lies.
My smiles, my laughter, my jokes,
They're meaningless; it's all for show.
Why can't you see me? It isn't that hard.
Just look in my soul, at my heart, at my scars.
What do you do when no one knows the real
you?
You sit and you wait,
Keep your feelings inside.
Avoid other people, find places to hide.
Wait for a time when these shadows will go.
In pain, and no one can ever know.
Why can't you see me?
The real me?
I'm here, I'm waiting, I need you.
Why can't you see me?

By Paige (the.real)



READ THE STARS



by Chess (Sidhe./x.Psychic Crisis.x) and Lyndsee (Amoroso)

GEMINI

MAY 21 - JUNE 21



Happy birthday! June is expected to be very significant. It appears that you will be starting something that might result in repercussions in the future. June is also going to prove to be a meaningful month, as you're going to meet people and make important plans. Also, don't lose hope, because things are going to start looking up for you this month. As far as love and relationships go, I'm sorry to say that you might be getting some confusing messages from a crush, or a partner, but if you give it some time, things should sort themselves out.

Gemini in love: Confusion and chaos might be the order of the month, but don't despair, because some of the greatest things come out of this kind of disorder – and they might well for you.

Gemini on the job: Planning is the best way to go this month, because if you're on top of your workload, you may well be offered promotions or new responsibilities – so seize the day, Geminis.

Gemini, the bright: Not only are you smart, but you're enthusiastic, and those are both things that will help you navigate the troubled waters of June.

AQUARIUS

JANUARY 20 - FEBRUARY 18

You may feel like you've hit a wall in your life, but this month is all about moving forward – in more ways than one. This month's turning point is going to be a surge of growth and discovery for you. You're going to hit a point where you're going to be faced with some tough decisions. The best thing you can do is think it out, weigh the pros and cons, and make an informed decision. As far as love goes, you're drawn to romance this month. Towards the end of this month, everything is going to stabilise nicely, and all will be well in your life.

PISCES

FEBRUARY 19 - MARCH 20

This month, your mood is going to signify a major change of events, whether that be through school, or through relationships. Instead of waiting to see where things will take you, it could help to become proactive, and take things into your own hands. This month is a great time to stay at home, and spend time with the family. This month may also bring a welcome sense of calm at points, so be sure to enjoy it while it lasts.

ARIES

MARCH 20 - APRIL 20

June is one of the best months to enjoy any successes you have made. Be proud of yourself this month! You deserve it. This is also the month to enjoy your body. I know a lot of us don't like the body we've been given, but it's important that we love ourselves. There are going to be some misunderstandings this month that can easily put you on the wrong track. So, don't allow yourself to go astray. Find your path again. This is a great month for creativity as well!

HOROSCOPES

TAURUS

APRIL 20 - MAY 21

Be prepared, this month is going to be an extremely active one! The ball is in your court. This is a wonderful time to appreciate all the resources you have at your disposal. This month, you need to be careful with spending. It might be a good time to go on a budget. On the bright side, there is a renewal of self confidence and optimism that you've seemingly been missing for quite some time now. Because of this, your influence on people will grow.

CANCER

JUNE 21 - JULY 22

This month is all about looking into your inner self. Use this month to sort through your web of thoughts and ideas. Things are also going to get hectic for you this month, but don't worry! You can minimise the stress through organising and allocating time and energy. You're also going to want making an imprint on this world - you can do this through change of mindset, and sheer determination. Use this month wisely, Cancer!

LEO

JULY 22 - AUGUST 23

You're going to have a very busy social life this month. This month is all about creating new friendships and relationships, while maintaining the old. Also, this is the time to get a job! Not just any job - a job that suits your interests and talents. Despite your socially active month, you're going to hit a period of seclusion. This would be a great time to look into your inner self and develop it.

VIRGO

AUGUST 23 - SEPTEMBER 21

Your main focus this month, Virgo, is your career. Whether you have a job or not, take a more active role in either getting a job, or bettering the one you have now. Unfortunately, there is going to be some confusion with relationships this month. Be clear with your expectations and desires, and you should get through it unscathed. The most important thing to remember during this time, is to be forgiving, especially of yourself.

LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 21 - OCTOBER 23

This month is going to emphasise planning, especially in connection with education and travelling. Now's a great time to plan a trip with your family, or focus on your school, college, university, or other type of work. Communication is excellent this month, so take advantage of that. As for love, you're going to find yourself feeling some strong, intense emotions for another person. Just remember to take things slowly, and enjoy the journey - sometimes that's more important than the destination.

SCORPIO

OCTOBER 23 - NOVEMBER 22

Relationships are very important to you this month, even to an extent where you want to control every aspect of it. You can't control everything, so it's best to just relax and let your partner take the wheel once in a while. This month is going to bring good fortune, so focus on some good self transformation. You're also going to get confused about your emotional status with a partner this month. The secret? Share your inner most thoughts with your partner. Come to some sort of agreement.

SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 22 - DECEMBER 22

June is going to be a huge month for you, Sagittarius. Your energy and daily focus is going to change. This means your daily routine and how you take care of your body will change. Your relationships with colleagues and classmates are going to be your main focus. Expect more responsibility from either or both. As far as relationships go, there is a lot going on! Confusing signals are being sent all over the place, and perhaps a crucial decision must be made. Trust yourself to make the right one.

CAPRICORN

DECEMBER 22 - JANUARY 20

This month is all about strengthening yourself. This may mean overcoming tests and challenges, or even figuring out something new about yourself. A turning point is going to occur this month. This means you're going to have time to achieve your goals, and get things done. All relationships this month seem to be mostly stable and functional, though partners may become more assertive. This may tempt you to respond in kind, but try not to. This month is great for resolving arguments with loved ones.

Thanks!

THE WIND DOWN

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All comments, questions, suggestions or criticisms should be directed towards the editorial team. Email us at avatar@teenhelp.org. We look forward to hearing from you, and hope you enjoy the next edition of Avatar!