

OPINION

Blind acceptance of phrases, norms obscures truth

The other day I was trying to explain how much fun I had on a recent trip, when I used the phrase, "I had a field day."

And then I realized I didn't even know what that phrase meant.

I knew what it meant in the context of what I was trying to say, but I didn't understand why it meant what it did.

This puzzled me a bit, so I began to be more observant to see if others used similar phrases whose meanings perplexed me.

Sure enough, I heard a friend who was having a difficult time answering a question say, "I'm drawing a blank."

And then my observance began to plague me. I began to analyze many things I said or heard others say.

I described a bad day as having gone "haywire." Someone warned others to take the factual content of the Internet with "a grain of salt."

I overheard another person say that their internship gave them the chance to "learn the ropes." A frustrated student "drew the line" at having three tests in one week.

Phrases such as these usually are not taught in schools. We learn them through hearing others speak – and although the true meanings are unknown to us, the context into which they fall allows us to understand what the speaker means.



KYLE LITTLEFIELD
ASST. OPINION EDITOR

Why did I feel perfectly comfortable with using these words to explain my thoughts when I really had no idea what they really meant?

It is called blind acceptance, and it is not exclusive to language.

When a couple marries, it is taken for granted that the woman take the man's last name. But why? I know a guy who took his wife's last name.

How many times have you arrived to your next class to find other students sitting down outside the door? You assume the door is locked, as do they, but along comes another student who tries the door and finds it unlocked. Those who were waiting outside feel pretty stupid.

This way of thinking is second nature to humans.

Maybe that's why Mom and Dad are always reprimanding you by asking, "If your friends all jumped off a cliff, would you?"

Well, in a sense we all have "jumped off similar cliffs" at one time or another – even Mom and Dad.

A school rich in tradition such as Texas A&M is a good example.

Students are encouraged to stay off the grass surrounding the Memorial Student Center. Because the building is a memorial to Aggies who died defending this country, it is respectful to steer clear of the grass and remove one's hat while inside.

But what makes the removal of a hat or not walking on grass in situations like this respectful?

"It's just something you do. It has always been

done that way," someone might say.

If you don't know the answer, you are accepting this "norm" blindly.

Take a show like "Rush Limbaugh," for example. Many viewers perceive the words of Limbaugh as the words of God.

It wasn't until I tuned in to see what all of the "hubbub" was about when I heard him say, "the only thing beautiful about a tree is found after it is cut down."

I thought of all the "Ditto" bumper stickers of the many people who let Limbaugh dictate their stance on issues and concluded that if they believed that, Limbaugh is an even better liar than Hitler was.

Talk about blind acceptance – possibly the scariest example of what believing everything told to you can do is the Nazi holocaust.

I'm sure if the German masses really knew Hitler's true motives, they would not have supported him so religiously.

We accept many things at face value, such as language, common practices and norms and what others tell us.

While the true meanings of phrases may be trivial, going along with the crowd can be dangerous.

It isn't always easy to question what "has always been." Those who raise these types of questions aren't always too popular.

Both Columbus and Galileo questioned popular belief. And both were ridiculed. But if you accept things blindly, you may never know the real truth.

Kyle Littlefield is a senior journalism major

Common phrases and what they originally meant:

- "To go haywire" refers to the process of bounding hay in the 1820s. The hay was wrapped in stiff wire that easily became tangled, and would cause machinery to malfunction.
- "Take with a grain of salt" refers to the ancient practice of eating a questionable dish only if it was sprinkled with salt.
- "Knowing the ropes" is an old sailing term. Because ships had many ropes to position the sails, sailors really had to "know the ropes."
- "Drawing the line" is related to the sport of tennis. Before official rules were established players would draw their own lines, signifying their limits.
- "Egging one on" has nothing to do with eggs. The Anglo-Saxon word for spear-point, was "ecg." Used to urge prisoners to move faster, they "ecg"ed them on. When the phrase was heard by English-speaking peoples, it evolved into "egg."
- "Going against the grain" is a woodshop term. Certain types of wood splinter more easily if cut against the grain. Also, wood becomes smoother if sanded in the direction of the grain.

Some examples taken from *I've Got Goosepimples* by Marvin Vanoni.

Lessons in the often-confusing game of love

Modern relationships have silently become contemporary rites of passage into adulthood.

Courtship is essentially training for marriage, and even with all of its pitfalls, it sure beats the hell out of your parents finding a mate for you.

Besides, you've seen the people who mother thinks you should date.

The following is an overview of five basic types of relationships every person can expect to eventually encounter. Incidentally, various combinations are possible, and I feel for you if you've gone through them.

Your First Love

We've all been through this one already. You're young. You're naive. You're full of raging hormones.

To you, this is not some "puppy love" infatuation like you had back in junior high. You're honestly thinking about spending the rest of your life with this person.

Wrong. Your significant other usually doesn't have a clue about your feelings toward them – you're too busy making out with them to ever talk.

When they finally decide to leave you – and they will – it's usually for someone who they "can relate to better." And it hurts.

The first break-up is tough, but somehow you survive. There's still a plethora of heartaches lying ahead of you.

The Rebound

For some reason, you figure the best way to get over your "ex" is to dive directly back into the dating pool.

Of course, no matter who you meet, that person will always pale in comparison to your last flame – who you're still hung up on, even though you won't admit it.

QUATRO OAKLEY

STAFF WRITER

Consequently, you end this relationship abruptly, claiming that, "it's not really what you're looking for right now."

In addition, when you are unwarily on the receiving end of this kind of relationship – i.e., the soon-to-be dumpee – you never really see the break-up coming for some reason.

After you get ditched, though, you'll eventually learn to ask beforehand whether or not the person you are dating is on the rebound. It's just safer.

The Just For Fun Relationship

By now, you're indignant toward this whole "serious relationship" thing altogether and decide to adopt the old adage/lie that "dating can be fun."

Yeah. Sweaty palms and spending your beer money on overpriced dinners. Sign me up!

You eventually find someone more dating-impaired than you, partake in a few night-time excursions with them (you can't stand to be around them during the day) and then mutually decide to put an end to the whole sordid affair after about a month.

Harmless. Except now you're out of beer money.

The Problem Relationship

This could be any variety of accidents just waiting to happen. There's the "Going Nowhere Relationship," where it's simply pointless to continue. This relationship usually ends when you both come to the conclusion that you are never going to change each other.

Another variation is the "Competition Relationship," where you're constantly trying to one-up your mate. Expect numerous hissy-fits involving flying household items.

The Long Distance Relationship

Only attempt this one if you:

1. absolutely love writing letters
 2. possess loads of money for trips to see your sweetheart
 3. have plenty of patience for those late night, marathon telephone conversations.
- Finally, the dreaded "Psycho Relationship." During this one, you occasionally have visions of coming home and finding a bunny boiling on the stove. Avoid this one at all costs.

The God, I Want Him/Her Relationship

(otherwise known as a crush)

This one can have you believing that stalking someone is actually a good thing. It is also not uncommon to devote countless hours toward coming up with a cool, unobtrusive way of introducing yourself to yet another person who doesn't have a clue about your feelings toward them.

With any luck, this relationship actually comes into fruition and transforms into something resembling the sitcom *Mad About You*, where you come up with witty little sayings during every conversation and receive spontaneous kisses from your honey.

Wake up and put down the remote. That's TV. Real life involves smart-ass remarks directed toward each other and bottled-up resentment that can last for years.

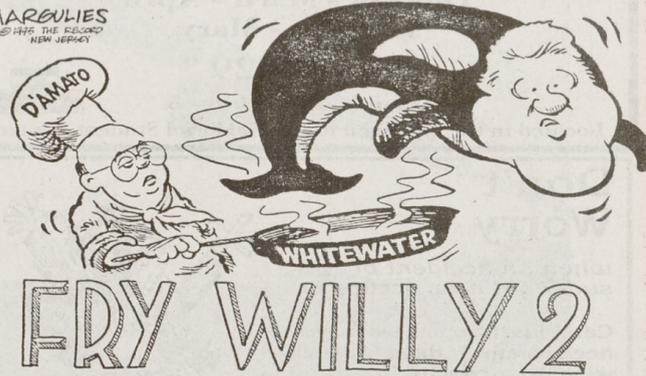
The only advice that I can offer is that relationships require ample amounts of respect between two people in order to be successful. Guys, train yourself to leave the toilet seat down, keep the thermostat above 65 degrees and clean up your crap at least once a week.

Women, share more of the covers, admit to being wrong more than once a year and tell your man what really pisses you off instead of making him guess.

At least make the inevitable halfway bearable.

Quatro Oakley is a junior management major.

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EDITORIAL MATTHEW GAINES

The former senator deserves recognition for his contributions.

Most every A&M student is well versed in the contributions that Lawrence Sullivan Ross and James Earl Rudder, Jr. have made to Texas A&M University.

But how many people who attend this University are aware of the pioneering efforts of Matthew Gaines?

Gaines, a lay minister, Texas state senator and former slave, played a great role in enacting the Morrill Land Grant, which was responsible for the creation of Texas A&M University.

University officials and student groups now are considering erecting a statue of Gaines in recognition of his tremendous contributions to the school.

Gaines was a personification of the many qualities this University has stood for in the past and will continue to stand for in the future – pride, honor, leadership and educational excellence.

For this fact, Matthew Gaines deserves recognition from the University he helped to create.

If sufficient funds cannot be found to erect this statue, steps should be taken to ensure that Gaines is remembered in some other appropriate fashion.

Matthew Gaines accomplished much for a cause greater than himself.

Gaines became an elected member of the Texas Senate only six years after being freed from slavery. During this time, he helped to create a University that would not admit black students until years after his death.

Gaines' actions exemplified his devotion and dedication to freedom and education.

As a University dedicated to moving forward in the cause of diversity, A&M should take the opportunity to embrace a man who embodied that cause.

Texas A&M currently is taking steps toward becoming the culturally aware, well-balanced University it should be, but it is easy to see progress when one stands on the shoulders of giants like Gaines.



MAIL CALL

Hernandez column was misunderstood

It is obvious that Barry Shaeffer's response to J. Frank Hernandez's guest column on July 20 was written with neither an adequate comprehension of Hernandez's column, nor any understanding of what "society" truly is.

Society is an association of individuals united by their interactions. We are all a part of and are affected by society.

Every time we have a conversation with someone or watch a television program or read a newspaper article, we are interacting with society.

We are playing a part in a

symbiotic relationship in which we simultaneously affect and are affected by the people around us.

To suggest, as Shaeffer does, that "society is merely a fictitious misrepresentation of [people's] minds, and that our everyday interactions with the people around us do not affect our mental and emotional state is ludicrous and indicates the true extent of Shaeffer's ignorance.

Perhaps if people didn't walk through society with their eyes and mind closed, they would realize everyone is affected by it.

Shaeffer's response also included the claim that the oppression of groups is merely an illusion and that these groups should "take responsibility for their own actions" instead of

blaming an imaginary foe.

It seems peculiar to me that Shaeffer can find it so easy to blindly evaluate the degree to which society affects these groups.

Shaeffer goes on to suggest that Hernandez should have urged people to break away from the "it is society's fault and we are only helpless young people" mentality.

If Shaeffer had read Hernandez's column without a warped, right-wing preconception, he probably would have realized that Hernandez never suggested for anyone to merely sit idle and let society take advantage of their gender, race, socioeconomic status or weight.

In fact, he encouraged people to "rise up and destroy these negative characteristics that have been unjustly put upon us."

To "attack every instance of prejudice and reshape society's attitude toward us."

Next time, Shaeffer should open his mind before he spouts his uneducated opinions.

Adam Houston
Class of '96

Bisexuals also have moral boundaries

I found Elizabeth Preston's column on July 18 to be irrational and narrow-minded.

It is clear that Preston is trying to impose her own "boundaries" of sexuality to try to explain the "social phenomenon" of bisexuality.

Bisexuality is not new, as anyone who has studied Greek or Roman civilizations will tell you.

The column equates bisexuals to "people who end up abusing drugs or living reckless lives."

This is not only absurd, but it lacks an appreciation for the complexity of variables which lead to drug abuse or reckless living.

In conclusion, bisexuality does not equate a lack of social or sexual "boundaries."

It is an extremely complex issue which to the present can not be fully attributed to either nurture or nature.

To assume that only heterosexuals can have moral "boundaries" is ignorant.

David Northcutt
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