My Choice of a Lifetime:

"Finding True Love" in a Sociological Imagination

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I fell in love in ninth grade. There was no doubt in my mind that I had found the person I was supposed to be with forever. However, after six years together we broke up and I moved away. I now find myself in what most people would think of as the perfect situation: I have a handsome sweet boyfriend, we have a beautiful apartment, and for the most part we get along really well. There is nothing wrong with my situation with him, but I still seem to question very frequently whether there is anything right about it either. Was I supposed to end up with my high school sweetheart? When it comes down to it am I going to be able to say yes to marriage with my current boyfriend, or have I come to see love in such an unrealistic way that I will never feel confident that I have indeed found what we are all **socialized** to believe is true love?

Over time it seems that I have developed this idea in my head as to how I will feel when I have truly found the one for me. It is something that I have felt before, in high school, when everything was perfect with my now ex-boyfriend. When that relationship seemed to turn stagnant, problems arose and it ended. Now I feel like I am in a search for the situation I have now but I also want the feelings I had then. Have I constructed a vision that rarely or never exists? I feel that it is important for me to look at this from a **phenomenological** perspective, not taking for granted what I have learned about love and how it should be, but to question it instead. I think that in doing so I may find that I am worrying more about this situation than I should be. Are there not other things that I should be more concerned about in my life? Not taking into consideration things that I have learned from my culture and only looking at my own experiences, I would say that I am in a really good situation now and I should be grateful. However, our culture has a tremendous impact on us and the shaping of my romantic expectations which I have never really thought about. Writing these words has led me to acknowledge the fact that the media that surrounds us is constantly teaching us what the **norms** are as far as falling in love and marriage goes.

What I see all around me on a daily basis are advertisements suggestive of love at first sight, and the majority of movies portray relationships that are perfect in all ways (most of the time, even in movies where a relationship goes bad, the character will end up finding a new perfect love that they never even knew existed). It is rare that I actually stop to think about how many real couples I know that have absolutely perfect relationships filled with never-ending absolute infatuation with their partner. Of course I know people in great relationships, but even they are not as fabulous as the ones we are led to believe are real by our entertainment media and advertisements. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's **social construction of reality** is interesting to consider in this situation. They examine the "processes by which *any* body of 'knowledge' comes to be socially accepted *as* 'reality'" (Wallace and Wolf, 277). Who is to say that what we are shown by our culture surrounding ideas of love

and relationships is right? Perhaps my concern over finding a dream relationship is unnecessary. Am I looking for something that has been accepted as reality but might not even exist? Keilah Billings, for instance, wonders in "Questioning Motherhood: A Sociological Awakening" (2003/4) about how much we consciously make important decisions about our lives and how much we just accept as being predetermined. This struck me as very interesting because it made me acknowledge the fact that I have this hope that the person I am going to spend my life with is in a way predetermined or determined by fate and at the same time I am fighting to make "the right" conscious decision so that I will go on to live out my fate.

My quest for a relationship that may not even exist has been a continuous stress in my daily life for several years now. Fear of making the wrong choice and not finding the love and life that I believe I am supposed to have has led me to question my own **identity**. I always saw myself as a genuinely caring and honest person. Now, examining some of the steps I have taken simply because of this fear that I am going to miss my chance at true love, I see that I am not exactly the person I hoped I was. The behaviors I have acted out can best be understood by looking at Erving Goffman's theory surrounding **dramaturgy**, where he "takes the dramatic situation of actors and actresses on stage and applies this theatrical representation to the everyday lives of ordinary woman and men who are acting out their roles in the real world" (Wallace and Wolf, 230). There have been times when I have even pictured myself as if I were in a movie or play because I have felt that my situation is one that does not happen to real people but instead one that we are used to seeing in the movie theater. I was scared to really let go of my ex (who still believes we are meant for each other) and I was scared to ruin things with my current boyfriend. What if one of these peo-

ple is the right person for me and I mess it up by making the wrong decision? I was beyond relying on fate to lead me down the right path and that is how I became trapped.

I became an expert on what Goffman terms "**impression management**." Impression management is "the ways in which the individual guides and controls the impressions others form of him or her" (Wallace and Wolf, 230). I wanted both men to like me in order to ensure that when I figured out which one was the Mr. Right, I would be able to have him. For a period of time nearly every action and spoken word to each of these people in my life was planned out in such a way that they would both be happy with me or have an impression that I felt about them the same way that they felt about me. This makes me out to be an awful person and it definitely made me feel bad about myself. My only consolation was the fact that I was genuinely confused. I did love both of these people, so it was not that I was saying things I did not mean, it was that some information was left out.

My actions that were observed by these two men existed in what Goffman calls the **front region**. This refers to "that part of the individuals' performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Wallace and Wolf, 230). What goes on in the front region is an attempt to manipulate anyone who is watching and can include everything from the way one dresses to the body language one uses. I was able to change the way I appeared in the front region depending on who I was with in order to get the reaction that I wanted. When I was not presenting myself in the front region, at times when I was by myself, I felt very different. This is what Goffman termed the **back region**, or "the place closed to and hidden from the audience where the techniques of impression management are practiced" (Wallace and Wolf, 230). This is the place where one

can relax and just be oneself. Unfortunately, I spent little time feeling relaxed even in the back region. At these times my anxiety over what to do and my feelings that I was being unfair to two people that I really loved were at the forefront of my mind. Here I was able to show my true feelings of confusion and concern whereas in the front region I appeared confident and calm.

George Herbert Mead developed an idea called **role taking**. This idea has to do with how human beings communicate. In order for one to decide how they are going to act or what they are going to say to another person they have these internal conversations with themselves in which they essentially put themselves in the other person's shoes. By doing this one can organize their thoughts and decide how best to proceed when they communicate with others. By doing this, interactions between people are more effective than they would be if we did not do this. In my situation it was role-taking that made it possible for me to communicate exactly what I wanted from each of the men. By putting myself in their shoes I could imagine what I would most like to hear coming from me and this allowed me to get the desired response from each of them. In a way this has allowed to me to continue with a sort of game that clearly should not be continued.

I knew very well that the right thing to do was to make a choice and to stop playing this game; however, my behavior was being encouraged by the results I was getting. Looking at **social exchange** theorist George Homans' five propositions, I am able to see why I was reluctant to break my pattern of behavior. In his propositions he does not focus on exchange, but on "universal principles, applying to all forms of social activity, and incorporating human emotions as well" (Wallace and Wolf, 307). Out of his five propositions, it is his first one, **the success proposition** that applies most to my situation. This proposition states that "For all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action" (Wallace and Wolf, 306). Perhaps this statement is an extremely obvious one but having it mapped out helps me to examine my behavior in my ongoing situation. Why didn't I just do the right thing and stop playing games with these people? It is simple; I was getting the desired response or reward from each of them by acting in certain ways.

The reward was having both of them want to be with me which to me was a huge relief; it meant that I would not have to worry about making a wrong choice and ruining my life. In other words, I was able to keep both of my options open and having it any other way really scared me. Logically I knew I could not keep this up forever and that what I was doing was not right. Interestingly, pointed out in discussions of Homans' propositions, is the fact that people are not always *right* about what the most rewarding choice is in a given situation. This idea applies in my case because it is important for me to recognize that while in the moment I see that anything other than having both of these people in my life would be a disaster, in actuality what would make me happiest, or be the most rewarding, is probably a very different situation where I would be caused much less stress.

I feel like I am stuck in Neo's place in *The Matrix* except I am not having a clear choice offered to me in the form of a blue or red pill. In the film Neo has to choose between seeing the truth or simply carrying on believing what he sees: a fake world designed to keep all humans under control. I want to see the truth within myself of what will make me happy and what I can make happen but there is no red pill for me to swallow, the only thing I have to help me through this one is myself. At times I feel that I have been caught in a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. I have come to feel so trapped by my inability to solve my situation that I

think I have convinced myself that I will always be confused and may never feel with complete confidence that I have found the person for me. It is quite possible that the solution is right in front of me, that I am living it right now, but that I do not even see it because I have set myself up to believe that I never will.

In her article titled "Will I Marry Her?" (2003/4), Chris DaPonte describes how her being given a Barbie and Ken doll along with their two babies and a dog for Christmas one year when she was little led to her having the belief that she would grow up to live the life of those dolls. As it turned out, her beliefs changed entirely when she got older and discovered she wanted to have a relationship with a woman. The theory of **symbolic interaction** comes into play in DaPonte's situation as well as mine. The Barbie family that her aunt gave her was intended to represent to her the ideal happy family; this is the meaning her family placed on the dolls. However, to DaPonte, she might now view the same dolls as representing her worst nightmare; the fact is they are pieces of plastic without any significance until we give them some. I think I can apply this idea to my situation in that love and a successful relationship are both terms that can be defined completely differently by different people. Perhaps I am too much into looking at my relationship in terms of how other people say a perfect relationship should be. DaPonte's relationship with a woman is very far from ideal to many people but it is the absolute ideal for her.

Horton Cooley's concept of the **looking glass self** involves three elements: "the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance; and some sort of feeling, such as pride or mortification" (Wallace and Wolf, 195). The images of myself that I envision when reflecting on this concept in my inner conflict reflect back both positives and negatives. The times when I have been less of an actor and related more honesty to both my current and my ex boyfriend, I have not been proud of the way they would have seen me. Times when I have been acting to get a desired response, I see them seeing me as a wonderful girl. Unfortunately using this concept encourages me to hide some of my true feelings of doubt in order to get what I imagine to be a positive view of me through their eyes instead of a negative. This concept then seems to offer another clue as to why it is so hard to break my behavior; no one wants to see her/himself as a bad person.

I had procrastinated making a choice in my situation for over a year. In her article "The Roots of Procrastination: A Sociological Inquiry into Why I Wait Until Tomorrow" (2003/4) Jennifer M. Kosmas states that a "growing body of literature suggest that chronic decisional procrastination may be a maladaptive personality tendency … A cognitive antecedent of performance delay, decisional procrastination, or indecision, is said to be a coping pattern used to deal with decision-making situations perceived as stressful" (Kosmas, 78). This really seems to describe one of my personal qualities. I find it stressful at times to decide what restaurant to eat dinner at and will avoid making a decision by having someone else decide for me. If I can't make a decision like that, the probability of my being able to make a decision about the right person to spend my life with without extreme stress is very low. My way of coping with my situation then has largely been procrastination.

Over time, I had to acknowledge the idea of **distributive justice**, where the reward in a given situation must be proportional to the investment or contribution. Trying to keep two people happy in order to keep myself happy ended up doing just the opposite; I was making myself miserable. I was putting in an immense amount of effort and although I was getting the reward I was trying to get, it was not enough.

What I really wanted was clarity, not the ongoing option of a choice between two men. **Rational choice theory** assumes "that people are rational and base their actions on what they perceive to be the most effective means to their goals" (Wallace and Wolf, 294). It became clear that by continuing on in the same way I had been I was not only not helping myself to reach my goal, I was actually blocking myself from ever being able to reach it. My desire for clarity and to have one really great relationship would not be a possibility if I continued to try to keep both men happy with me. So, I made a choice to be with my current boyfriend. This does not mean that my conflict has been resolved; thoughts about who I will be most happy with and what that happiness is supposed to feel like still come to me often. But in different ways, including understanding my situation through a sociological perspective, I am hoping to eventually come to resolve this problem.

It was not until writing some of these words that I was able to realize that C. Wright Mills' idea of the **sociological imagination** can be applied to a variety of personal conflicts. Being able to understand personal problems by looking at larger issues in society seemed to be irrelevant in my situation. However, I see now that some of my dilemma has come about due to the fact that society has been feeding me information about love and relationships that may be totally unrealistic but that I have come to internalize nonetheless. There is a definite link between **micro and macro sociological theories** and by examining all of them bits and pieces can be extracted that have led me to have a better understanding of myself—something I did not think I would ever find in theories published in textbooks. As can be seen in the film *Twelve Angry Men,* one occurrence made up of hard facts can be viewed and interpreted in a variety of ways depending on who you are speaking with. The possibilities of the different ways that the same thing can be understood are oftentimes endless. By utilizing various tools, in my case different pieces of knowledge, you can break down a situation little by little in order to find truth and clarity. In the end I think I will be able to understand myself and the world and will be able to define and find my own true happiness.

After viewing a film like *Affluenza*, we come to see that even if people have all the material possessions in the world they are still not happy. In fact, people with much less in the way of material objects rated themselves most pleased with their lives. It seems that we now live in a society that tells us we should care for things more than we should care for other people. The very fact that we spend so much money in this country on material possessions when people in other countries are starving and living in horrible conditions with no health care demonstrates this. If we spent even a portion of the money that we spend on material possessions on helping other people who are less fortunate, we would probably have enough money put together to save lives and improve living conditions for an enormous number of people. Instead we choose to spend this money on things that we do not even need. When our media does bring up the importance of caring about other people it then goes on to link that caring to a material object. For example if a man really loves his girlfriend or wife he should prove it by buying her expensive jewelry. We seem to have our priorities very mixed up in this country. We are told to care about things more than we are told to care about other human beings. Of course I do derive some pleasure from some material possessions but what I am most concerned with is caring about others; most of all being entirely happy in a relationship is why I am determined to find the person that is right for me.

Being caught up in a situation like mine is very problematic because there are many other things going on in my life and in the

world that deserve my attention. We take so many things for granted in our society that we forget about other things of importance. It is difficult to really even understand fully what is meant by the word "love." Of course there is not just romantic love but the idea of love in a broader context. In *Tuesdays With Morrie* (Albom, 1997), the real life story of a dying sociology professor as narrated by his student, we meet a man who seems to understand this idea better than anyone else. Morrie Schwartz tells his student Mitch Albom at one point that the "most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love, and to let it come in." He goes on to say, "We think we don't deserve love, we think if we let it in we'll become too soft. But a wise man named Levine said it right. He said, 'Love is the only rational act'" (Albom, 52). I think that what Morrie is talking about here is something that our society has difficulty understanding. There is love all around us; it exists in more ways than with the person we choose to be our significant other. We are so caught up in the hustle and bustle of everyday life that it is rare for us to stop thinking about our immediate preoccupations and our own survival and instead to think about others.

My favorite quote from the entire book *Tuesdays With Morrie* has to be the following: "You see … you closed your eyes. That was the difference. Sometimes you cannot believe what you see, you have to believe what you feel. And if you are ever going to have other people trust you, you must feel that you can trust them, too—even when you're in the dark. Even when you're falling" (Albom, 61). I think that these words can apply to so many things in our society. We are all trained not only to believe what we see, what our culture is telling us to believe, but we get so caught up in it that we do not take the time to recognize how we actually feel. I think that this applies to love as well. I feel that I have definitely been impacted by our society to think of true love

in only one sense; perhaps this is why I have come to have such a struggle with deciding who the right person for me is. I think what Morrie suggests is that we have to push aside these ideas that we are fed in order to really tap into ourselves. If we can find our real feelings, the ones that we would have without outside pressures, we will find true happiness.

The movie *The Big One* well illustrated how our society has come to care so much more about things that we do about people. What we see in this film is how all of the big corporations want to make ridiculous amounts of money in order to stay competitive and they do not care how they treat people in order to reach that goal. In fact, they make actual choices to use poor people in other countries in order to make their goals a reality. People in the countries that these corporations move their factories to are so poor that they will work for horribly low wages and in dangerous conditions, something that most Americans will not do. Do the corporations stop for a second to think about how awful what they are doing is? Do they realize that they are exploiting people so that they can make enormous sums of money while the people that they are exploiting will continue to live in extreme poverty? I think that they do acknowledge these types of questions but the sad thing is that they choose to go with money over respecting other human lives. When our society sends messages like this to people then we really do have to ask, where is the love? It is no wonder that people have difficulty defining what love is because it is certainly not something that we are shown in the society that we live in.

I think that the film *Tuesdays With Morrie* really tackled the question of what love is. Mitch is clearly in a troubled relationship at the beginning of the film. Time after time he disappoints his girlfriend because he is working so much and he does not have time for her. Every time that he got off the phone with her or when he was trying to

assure her that everything was going to be okay—even though he had not made time for her—he would say to her "I love you." He must have said it a hundred times but he was not showing it. When she breaks up with him the same words come out of his mouth, as if he had been programmed to say it. She says that she loves him too but clearly that is not enough to make their relationship work; there has to be more. Clearly Mitch did love her but there is more to love than just loving someone. Morrie recognizes that Mitch is holding something back and tells him that we are "too afraid of giving ourselves to someone we might lose." I think that Morrie teaches Mitch that in order to really love, it involves letting down your guard so that you can really give yourself to someone and in turn that person can love you back, not just in words but with all of themselves.

We currently live in a ***class society*** which may partly explain why love and caring for others has basically been replaced by an attitude that materials are most important. Basically our society is ***stratified*** where a sector of society ***owns the means of production*** and others don't. This is a core defining feature of our society currently. ***Marx*** felt that ***conflict*** is not a constant throughout history and that class society will come to an end; however, at this point in time it seems that what our society is based on is essentially ***exploitation*** of others. Whereas exploitation was obvious in the time of ***slavery*** and ***feudalism***, it was outright and highly visible; today it so appears that everyone is "free." However, although workers may have more freedom to decide who they are going to work for, they are still have to go to work for one employer or another, and be exploited based on the fact that they are making very small wages and the corporations that they work for are making obscene amounts of money because they have such cheap labor. A worker makes the company enough money in the first few hours of their shift for the

company to cover their wage; every hour after that is just profit for the company. Marx sees that this class exploitation is only possible when a society is producing more than they need which was not the case long ago. You own your labor power today so technically you can do whatever you want, however, when you do not own the means of production you have to work for someone else in order to survive. Marx called this ***wage slavery***; there is an illusion of non-exploitation but it is indeed coercive.

What results from living in a society that operates in this way? For one thing people are constantly worrying about how they are going to survive. In other words work becomes the main focus for many people. Marx's idea of ***alienation*** refers to the fact that workers are not in control of the object or product of their labor. They are just performing one task that will lead to the development of a product but all important decisions are made by others. "Not being permitted to perform the inherent functions of a species-being, or even to view one's labor-power as one's own, the worker feels demoralized and dehumanized" (Farganis, 28). I think that if this is the circumstance under which people in our society are frequently operating, then it definitely impacts how they view one another, what they focus on, and it diminishes the amount that they actually care about one another. There is so much competition among workers that they are alienated from one another even. As long as ***capitalist*** society continues to function as it does now, we are going to continue to see this a focus on money and a lack of love and caring for others.

Max Weber had a very different idea than Marx about the future of our society. While Marx thought that capitalism would eventually give way to ***socialism***, Weber believed that "there is no turning back from modernity and the scientific and industrial revolutions that made it possible" (Farganis, 103). However, Weber wanted us to rec-

ognize what we have become. He wanted us to acknowledge the effects of living in a society that he saw as an "***iron-cage***." By this he was referring to "capitalism [becoming] a rational system ... in which people have become money-making instruments who no longer believe passionately in salvation and damnation" (Farganis, 103). It is a bit disheartening to think that we will always be like this, but if it is true I guess the first and best thing to do is to recognize it. By recognizing it you are more apt not to become entirely trapped in the iron-cage. Here again the point is made that our society is not one to place high value on caring about one another, on loving one another. We only care about one another when it comes to making sure that we are better off than other people. Love in a broader context than romantic love does exist but is very difficult to define in our society where it is rarely seen. All we seem to be left with then is what the media tells us love and caring is (and still it is usually linked to some material object). Without the presence of true love and caring in the world around us it becomes something that we take for granted; we almost assume that it exists but do not know what it really is.

Emile Durkheim concentrated a lot on the shift from traditional to modern society. His most famous concept is that of ***anomie***. Anomie when translated from the French means "normlessness, a situation where rules or norms are absent" (Wallace and Wolf, 23). Durkheim saw two types of anomie: "acute anomie, which is the result of an abrupt change, like a business crisis or a divorce; and chronic anomie, a state of constant change, characteristic of modern industrial society" (Wallace and Wolf, 23). Perhaps we are living in a society today that is changing at such a rapid pace that we really are in some state of normlessness all of the time. Things do not remain the same but are constantly changing at a rapid pace. This idea and the fact that it represents how our culture is operating today re-

ally poses a problem when it comes to love. A thing not remaining the same but instead changing all of the time somewhat contradicts the enduring and deepening nature of love, though love can itself be dynamic and growing. Love is supposed to be about growing and deepening relationships, something that is always there for you no matter what. It is interesting then to think about how people do stay together. With everything changing around them what keeps couples together? I suppose that that is the one thing that we do or can have control over. With a whirlwind of change around us we are lucky if we find the right person because they can be the one stability, the one thing for us to lean on that we are more confident is not going to change in an instant. I think that is why it is so important to find someone like that in your life; without it you may not have anything to count on.

Robert Merton's concept of ***dysfunctions*** may apply to love and relationships in that it recognizes that certain situations may be thought of as generally functional or dysfunctional but one has to go on to ask, "Functional or dysfunctional for whom?" (Wallace and Wolf, 49). Merton believed that "an institution need not be generally functional or dysfunctional but may instead be functional for some people and groups and dysfunctional for others" (Wallace and Wolf, 50). One example of this is marriage and family living. These are most often thought of as indispensable, as things that are crucial to the health of society. In fact, they may only be functional to some people in society whereas for others those institutions may be dysfunctional and they may be happier being single, focusing their energy on other things, or living with someone but not actually getting married. I think that this is important when thinking about love and relationships. This addresses something that I have tried to think about in this paper. Who is to say that one way of being in a relationship is the most

functional way? Perhaps what we see in movies as well as what we are told we should feel and do when it comes to love is only functional for some people. However, if we are all seeking something that may or may not be functional for us, we are bound to wind up frustrated. I think that acknowledging Merton's idea could be very important for me because it helps me to recognize that there are many options out there for me and that I should not panic if I do not fit in with what the media says is right.

When it comes to the ***Postmodernist Critique*** I think that one group of writers focus directly on what I have been confronting as far as how our society tells us we should be and what we should want. Charles Lemert, an American sociologist who writes within a postmodernist perspective, recognizes differences in various postmodernist writings. One argument is that there has been a tremendous shift in our society's nature and that the society that we have labeled as modern has gone on to yet another type of society, a very different one. People who agree with this approach often "emphasize the profound effect that mass media have had on our experience of the world and on what people experience as real" (Wallace and Wolf, 405). I think that this idea is entirely true and altogether frightening. The fact that we may literally see the world in a certain way based on what we have been fed by the media is a scary one. I wonder then how one truly breaks free of it? Is it even possible or are we now wrapped up in a society were we are essentially brainwashed and can never get back to independent thought?

According to Wallace and Wolf, Michele Foucault thought that "the prison and the asylum exemplify the modern world ... while we commonly see the advent of the modern mental hospital and the declining of the death penalty as signs of progress, Foucault sees them as epitomizing a shift in the way power is exercised in a society" (407). He believed that we are all imprisoned in our own world and that everyone has in some way conformed to rules and regulations. Most of us do things so that we will not be punished. The difference that Foucault sees with more modern society is that the punisher is now invisible. Whereas in the past people might be publicly flogged for doing something wrong, this is not how it is today. We have come a long way from the classic model where it is visibly clear who has the power (for example a master and his slave). However, someone has power over us even if we can not see him or her. Basically we obey by the rules because we assume we will be punished by someone even though that person is not visible like would be in a prison (it is still the same idea). This is interesting to think about in terms of how we treat and love one another. How would we treat others if there was not this fear that someone is watching over us and will punish us for doing wrong? Without controls how would love and respect for other people be affected?

The idea of ***intrinsic versus extrinsic*** value was discussed in class in relation to Mitch Albom's role in *Tuesdays With Morrie*. What we saw in Mitch was a shift where he went from a life of extrinsic value orientation to a life focusing on intrinsic values. Morrie helped him to see that what is really important in life is not the materials that you have but the relationships that you make. Material possessions can disappear at any point in time whereas relationships most often continue to grow. Even though people do sometimes leave you for different reasons, relationships do not have to end. Morrie even saw that death did not bring the end of a relationship. In the movie he says that "death ends a life, not a relationship." I think that the only way for our society to really understand love will be to make the same shift in consciousness that Mitch experienced; putting things of extrinsic value at a lesser spot on our personal hierarchies and putting things of intrinsic

value up at the top. Part of the reason that it has been difficult for me to link my problem to some of the macro theories is that love and relationships do not hold much importance in our society compared to money and possessions. Will a shift like this ever happen? Right now it seems highly unlikely for my lifetime. I think that the best we can all do for ourselves now is try to think independently from the rest of society. We need to take a step back in order to decide for ourselves what is really of value and what we want to spend our energy working towards.

I think that one step that I can take in order to work towards resolving my issue is to do what I have just talked about, take a step back. I need to find an outlet where I can escape from everything that I have been told and shown and can instead really hear myself. How can I do this? I think that a good way could be to get away from my normal routine and to go somewhere far away from everything that I am used to. Removing myself from the situation I may be able to think with more clarity and maybe I will be less worried about my responsibilities which will enable me to just feel what is inside my own body. Instead of always listening to that voice that is advising me in my head—the one that says what it says because it has been taught what it *should* say—I need to hear the one that reflects what I am actually feeling. I think this could help lead me to some form of clarity.

Fortunately I am going to Mexico for my sister's wedding in January and I think that the time away, away from my routine and my boyfriend, will help bring me closer to feeling what it is that *I* am really seeking, not what I have been told to seek. Morrie summed this up well when he said: "I have developed a clear image of myself, partly by identifying what's important to me. I try to see reality for what it really is, to rid myself of all the conditioning that I've been subjected to. Look beyond society's conditioned responses and effects, so you see reality for what it is" (Schwartz, 62).

I think that another solution to my problem comes from another aphorism of Morrie's. "Accept the past as the past, without denying it or discarding it. Reminisce about it, but don't live in it. Learn from it, but don't punish yourself about it or continually regret it. Don't get stuck in it" (Schwartz, 53). I think that I have spent a lot of time reviewing the relationship that I had with my ex-boyfriend. I have wondered for years now if I made a mistake and that he may have been the right person for me all along. This is a waste of my time. I can only do things in the present. I have to stop thinking about the past in terms of what I perhaps should have or could have done. I need to move forward and if what comes to me as I do so is that I feel that I should be with my first love, then that is okay and I can do something about it. However there should be no more dwelling on the past; it is not going to help my situation. I am in the perfect place in my life now to really move forward. I have just finished my last semester of college and I have the world waiting for me; I am not really being held back from anything. I hope that one step that I can take to help resolve my situation is simply to look ahead now and to move on. Who knows what the future will bring?

One last thing that I can do that I believe will help bring about some resolution with my problem is simply to admit that I might not be able to fix this problem on my own. I have to realize that if I need help that it is something that is okay to accept. I have been stuck inside my own head for years with this problem and very rarely if ever have I shared with others the frustrations I have had. I know that ultimately it is my decision who I am with and what path I choose in life, but I do not think that means that I am not allowed any help in making those decisions. Whether it is talking to friends, talking to my boyfriend, or even talking to a therapist, I think that accepting

some guidance would be a healthy thing for me to do. It may help me to feel less frustrated and to feel like I am not in this all alone. I think that writing this paper has definitely helped me to realize that my problem stems from many different things; it is not just something that lives inside of me. More importantly, I think it has made me realize that there are concrete actions that I can take to try to fix the problem. I plan to begin with those actions right away.

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