



## **National High School Ethics Bowl**

### **Regional Cases 2017-2018**

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## 1. Bodily Identity Integrity Disorder<sup>1</sup>

Since she was a young child, Jewel Shuping dreamed of being blind. “When I was young my mother would find me walking in the halls at night, when I was three or four years old,” she says. “By the time I was six I remember that thinking about being blind made me feel comfortable.” She would stare at the sun for hours, hoping that it would damage her eyes. As a teenager, she began wearing thick black glasses and carrying a white cane. By the time she was 20 years old, she was fluent in braille. Shuping describes her desire to be blind as a “non-stop alarm that was going off” in her head. Finally, at nearly 30, she found a psychologist willing to help blind her by putting a couple of drops of drain cleaner in each eye. Though the process was painful, she remained hopeful: “all I could think was ‘I am going blind, it is going to be okay.’”<sup>2</sup> The drain cleaner severely damaged her eyes but did not render her completely blind, so she is not totally satisfied with the result. Nevertheless, she has said she is happy to be “much further along her path to blindness.”<sup>3</sup> She explains: “I really feel this is the way I was supposed to be born, that I should have been blind from birth. When there's nobody around you who feels the same way, you start to think that you're crazy. But I don't think I'm crazy, I just have a disorder.”

Bodily Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID) is a rare condition where there is a conflict between a person's actual, physical body and their idea of how their body should be. It usually involves an able-bodied person who believes that they should be disabled in some way.<sup>4</sup> The most common manifestation of the disorder is a desire to have a specific body part amputated. Getting such procedures done does not cure BIID. However, for many who have BIID, the desire to make their bodies match how they feel they are meant to be is so strong that they are willing to take desperate measures to make it happen. Such measures might include putting drain cleaner in their eyes like Jewel Shuping, cutting off their own limbs, or jumping off of cliffs in order to paralyze themselves.<sup>5</sup>

A doctor cannot amputate a healthy limb without risking his or her license. A Scottish surgeon who performed two such surgeries in the late nineties was banned from performing any more. He had given the issue considerable thought, consulted his professional organization, and received written permission from his hospital's chief executive. His patients were convinced that surgery was the only relief for their condition and were completely happy with the results of the procedures.<sup>6</sup> One such patient says he finally feels like “a complete person” now that he is an amputee.<sup>7</sup>

### Study Questions:

- (1) In absence of a more effective way of managing BIID, is it in the interests of BIID patients to give them the body modifications they want?
- (2) If BIID patients are likely to resort to dangerous measures to modify their bodies, is this a good enough reason to allow doctors to perform these modifications?
- (3) Do BIID patients harm themselves when they modify their bodies to give themselves disabilities?

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<sup>1</sup> This case is adapted from a 2016 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl (IEB) case, with permission. Please visit their website for more information about the IEB: <http://appe-ethics.org/ethics-bowl/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/psychologist-blinds-woman-drain-cleaner-6552282>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.snopes.com/2015/10/02/jewel-shuping-blind/>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://biid.org>, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/22/health/psychology/at-war-with-their-bodies-they-seek-to-sever-limbs.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1127127/>; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/625680.stm>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/632856.stm>

## 2. Best Man or Worst Man?

Bijan doesn't get along with his best friend Mike's girlfriend, Yasmin. When she and Mike began dating, Bijan had a bad feeling about her almost immediately, but tried hard to give her the benefit of the doubt. However, as months went by and they all spent more time together, Bijan started to catch Yasmin in small lies that she wouldn't admit to, noticed that she'd sometimes make petty and mean-spirited remarks about mutual acquaintances, and felt uncomfortable with what he perceived as her subtle contempt for those less privileged than her. It also seemed to Bijan that Yasmin was slowly attempting to separate Mike from some of his friends and even family members, each of whom she seemed to have some small problem with. In his most cynical moments, Bijan speculated that Mike was only interested in Yasmin for her good looks and hoped they would break up. At other times, though, Bijan told himself to have more faith in his friend's judgment. "They seem happy, after all," he thought. "Maybe I should just let this go."

Now, Mike and Yasmin have just gotten engaged, and Mike has asked Bijan to be his best man. Bijan feels torn about what to do. He is not sure whether he should be fully honest with Mike and reveal his feelings about Yasmin. On the one hand, Bijan is almost sure that Mike will be devastated if he shares his misgivings, and he highly doubts that his remarks will change Mike's mind about her or the engagement. Mike is so head-over-heels for Yasmin, in fact, that Bijan suspects that saying something would be far likelier to lead Mike to cut off contact with him than with Yasmin. On the other hand, Bijan feels that it might be his duty to speak up. "If I don't do this, no one will," he thinks. "I'm Mike's best friend. How could I live with myself if I say nothing and he ends up in a miserable marriage to a bad person?" He also wonders whether if he doesn't speak up, he should agree to be Mike's best man. On one hand, it would seem dishonest to agree given his feelings about Yasmin; on the other hand, it would be difficult to turn Mike down without being able to give his true reasons for doing so.

### Study Questions:

- (1) If Bijan decides to speak up, what would be the morally best way for him to confront Mike?
- (2) If Bijan doesn't speak up, and Mike's marriage goes poorly, should Bijan blame himself?
- (3) Would Mike be justified in being angry with Bijan if Bijan shared his concerns about Yasmin? If not angry, how might he reasonably feel?

### 3. What Morals Should Drive Driverless Cars?

Cars of the past required us to do everything manually, from shifting gears to locking doors and rolling down windows. Now we have cars that “can adapt their speed to the surrounding traffic automatically, maintain a safe distance from the vehicle ahead, keep within their own lane, and even park themselves.”<sup>1</sup> Tech companies like Google, Apple, and Uber are aiming for the ultimate autonomous driving experience—cars that can drive themselves—and driverless cars are already being tested on the roads. Even though we may be years away from their release to the public, concerns about driverless cars are already surfacing.

Driverless cars are poised to make life much easier and more convenient. Elderly people who have difficulty driving could regain freedom and independence using driverless cars. Busy parents would no longer need to drop off their children at school or take them to after-school activities. People with long commutes by car could use that time to focus on rest or work instead. Even more significantly, driverless cars could be much safer than human drivers. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 94% of traffic accidents are attributed in part to human error.<sup>2</sup> Driverless cars are designed to follow all traffic laws, including obeying speed limits and completely stopping at stop signs. If human drivers are taken out of the equation, we can imagine that our roads could be much safer. If driverless technology becomes reliable enough, we might even decide that human drivers should be outlawed and removed from the roads for the sake of overall safety.

In addition to the question of whether the aim of such technology should be to get rid of human drivers entirely (along with their dangerous potential for error), the question of what counts as safety also arises. What happens when there are no good options for a driverless car to choose? For example, imagine that a van with a family of five ahead of you suddenly brakes, and your driverless car can either brake but potentially hit the family of five, or it could swerve to the right where there is a school bus full of children, or it could swerve into the median rail on the left—in each case potentially endangering your life as well as or instead of the lives of others. In such situations, human drivers react in unpredictable and generally uninformed ways. Driverless cars, on the other hand, potentially allow us the capacity to be more intentional about how to react to unexpected accidents or emergencies on the road, but there is much disagreement about how to best use this new power.

#### Study Questions:

- (1) Given the choice between endangering 5 lives or your life, should a car in which you are the sole occupant be programmed to endanger you?
- (2) What moral principles should guide us as we decide what to do about the possibility offered by driverless cars to be more intentional than ever before about reacting to unexpected dangerous situations?
- (3) Would people be morally permitted to drive at all if driverless cars are on the whole safer and more reliable?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.economist.com/news/science-and-technology/21722628-forget-hype-about-autonomous-vehicles-being-around-cornerreal-driverless-cars-will>

<sup>2</sup> <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812115>

#### 4. Breed-Specific Legislation

Breed-specific legislation (BSL) is a term for legislation or policies that ban or otherwise restrict certain breeds of dog for the stated purpose of reducing dog bites and attacks. BSL might involve bans on owning or breeding certain dogs in certain places. It might involve banning certain breeds from being imported into particular countries. Some people might even include under the heading of BSL policies such as increased insurance premiums for owning certain breeds.<sup>1</sup> Among the breeds most frequently targeted by BSL are Pit Bulls, Rottweilers, Chow Chows, and Doberman Pinschers.<sup>2</sup>

Advocates of BSL point to the fact that over 75% of deadly dog attacks are committed by some of the breeds frequently targeted by BSL. Part of the issue, these advocates claim, is that many of these dogs were bred either for fighting or for protection and so they are both powerfully built and unpredictable, and thus potentially dangerous. One advocate for BSL compares it to car recalls. Suppose that we discover that a certain kind of car is disproportionately likely to malfunction and result in the death of the passengers. We would, of course, call for a recall, the immediate discontinuation of the production of such cars, and a ban on anyone still driving those cars. The same can be said for certain breeds of dog. If we discover that certain breeds of dog are disproportionately likely to attack people, then (the argument goes) we should call for the discontinuation of breeding that kind of dog and a ban on people owning that kind of dog.<sup>3</sup>

Opponents of BSL, in contrast, think the risk identified fails to justify the legislation. First, they point out that the dog attack statistics fail to represent the actual likelihood that any particular dog of any particular breed is likely to attack people. Although the statistics do indicate that Pit Bulls are involved in more dog attacks than other breeds, the reason might simply be that Pit Bulls are particularly common dogs in the areas in which the attacks occur, or are disproportionately trained as guard dogs.<sup>4</sup> And even leaving the statistics aside, opponents argue that BSL is a form of morally problematic discrimination. Imagine what we should think, they suggest, were we to apply similar policies to human beings. Suppose we discover that members of certain racial or gender groups are statistically more likely to commit certain crimes. Would that mean that we should ban, quarantine, or otherwise place certain restrictions on members of those racial or gender groups? Such a proposal, opponents of BSL argue, would be morally abhorrent precisely because it failed to take account of the difference between the characteristics of groups and those of individuals, in effect blaming the latter for the former.

#### Study Questions:

- (1) Is BSL morally permissible? If so, when? If not, why not?
- (2) If acts of discrimination are morally wrong when committed against human beings, are structurally similar acts of discrimination morally wrong when committed against animals?
- (3) Are some versions of BSL more morally acceptable than others? Which ones?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://bslcensus.com/>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breed-specific\\_legislation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breed-specific_legislation);  
<https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/insurance/expert-faq-pit-bull-increase-homeowners-insurance-premium/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aspca.org/animal-cruelty/dog-fighting/what-breed-specific-legislation>

<sup>3</sup> <https://dogbitelaw.com/breed-specific-laws/arguments-for-and-against-breed-specific-laws>

<sup>4</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20150411211206/http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/images/dogbreeds-a.pdf>

## 5. School Choice

Gilbert and Anne have a five-year-old, Fred. Anne and Gilbert were the first of their families to go to college and want to make sure that they give Fred as many advantages as they can. They have been reading to him since birth and have spent a great deal of time working with him on numbers and letters. Fred is very bright and is well-prepared to begin school soon.

When deciding where to send Fred for kindergarten, they toured a local traditional public school and a nearby publicly-funded charter school. There were clear differences between these schools. The charter school had computers for the students, a great music program, and an enriched science program—even the kindergarteners had a science lab! The traditional public school, in contrast, did not have any enrichment programs—its classrooms had little beyond books and desks. The differences did not end there. The charter school classrooms had fewer students. As a result, they received a considerable amount of individual attention. These students generally seemed engaged and motivated. Gilbert and Anne also noticed that there were a number of parents helping in the classroom, suggesting that parents were highly involved. In the traditional public school, in contrast, the classrooms were crowded. The teachers seemed dedicated but overworked. While there were additional teaching assistants present, they were primarily there to help kids in need of additional behavioral support. There were no parent helpers to be seen.

Given what they saw, Anne and Gilbert believe that Fred is likely to get a better education if they send him to the charter school. However, they are torn about whether this is a good enough reason to take him out of the traditional public school system. Anne and Gilbert are strong supporters of public education. Even though traditional public schools are often far from perfect—especially in lower-income communities—Anne and Gilbert believe that a strong public education system is vitally important for society. They worry that charter schools are undermining this socially-critical institution from within. For instance, they are concerned that charter schools often divert funding away from traditional public schools that are already stretched thin financially.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, while lower performing students do better in classrooms with higher performing students, it seems that higher performing students are leaving traditional public schools for charter schools at higher rates. While Anne and Gilbert want what is best for their child, they do not want to contribute to these trends that they see as problematic. They don't want to participate in something that they believe could ultimately hurt other children and leave them further behind. At the same time, they know that these are systemic problems, and one child is not going to have a large effect—so why should they limit their child's educational prospects if their choice ultimately won't make much of a difference when it comes to these larger trends?

### Study Questions:

- (1) In what ways and to what extent (if any) is it morally (in)appropriate for parents to put their child's interest first, over the interests of other children?
- (2) What is the value of having a strong public education system? Do charter schools undermine or strengthen it? Explain.
- (3) How should one feel about participating in larger social trends that one finds morally problematic, when opting out would not likely have made a significant difference to those trends?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/01/09/a-disturbing-look-at-how-charter-schools-are-hurting-a-traditional-school-district/?utm\\_term=.1277fe5e63c8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/01/09/a-disturbing-look-at-how-charter-schools-are-hurting-a-traditional-school-district/?utm_term=.1277fe5e63c8)

## 6. The Case of the Missing Serial Number

Cora is an avid cyclist. For the past year, she has been saving money to upgrade her bike. One day, she discovers an amazing deal on Craig's List. The bike she finds is just what she has been looking for but much cheaper than she was expecting to have to pay.

Cora and the seller agree to meet at a park near Cora's workplace, so that Cora can try out the bike. The seller, Megan, helps Cora adjust the bike to fit well. Megan points out some scratches on the frame, but Cora agrees that these are minor cosmetic issues.

Cora loves her new bike, but she receives troubling news 6 months later. A mechanic notices that the clear-coat serial number glued to the bottom of the frame has been stripped off. Cora's stomach sinks: the missing serial number almost certainly indicates that the bike was stolen.

If Cora had known that the bike was probably stolen, she would never have bought it. But she realizes that there is little chance of getting her money back. She never learned the seller's actual identity beyond her first name and no longer has record of the email conversation planning their initial meeting, and she also knows that stolen bikes are almost impossible to trace.

Cora needs to decide whether to turn the bike over to the police. If she does, there is at least a chance—however unlikely—that the police could find the bike's original owner. In addition, she feels guilty that her purchase might have made it worthwhile for a thief to steal the bike. Indeed, the very idea that her prized possession is potentially stolen property is depressing to her.

On the other hand, Cora does not think that she was irresponsible in making the purchase (although it is true that she never checked for the serial number). And Cora worked hard for a whole year to save money for this bike. And again: it is at least *possible* that the serial number was stripped off accidentally. Cora doesn't want to risk losing her bike, especially since she did nothing wrong. Why should she suffer negative consequences if her bike turns out to be stolen property? She wishes the missing serial number had never been brought to her attention.

### Study Questions:

- (1) Should Cora turn over the bike to the police for their review?
- (2) What should Cora do if she *did* have the contact info for the seller after all?
- (3) How, if at all, does the monetary value of the (allegedly) stolen property affect the case?

## 7. Smokers Need Not Apply

While tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, the country has undergone a substantial cultural shift in regard to smoking.<sup>1</sup> Due to recent changes such as the banning of cigarette vending machines, the creation of no smoking policies, and increased education about the health impacts of tobacco use, the prevalence of smoking has decreased substantially. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that smoking-related medical care costs \$170 billion dollars annually.<sup>2</sup> In the interests of employee productivity, as well as saving on the cost of employees' health insurance, some employers will no longer hire smokers.<sup>3</sup> Hospitals in particular have taken the lead in adopting such policies, but they are not the only employers making this change. Some states have laws that prohibit this kind of discrimination against smokers in hiring but many others do not.<sup>4</sup>

While the prevalence of smoking has declined, it has not done so evenly across groups. Prevalence is higher than average among non-Hispanic multiple race individuals, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and Blacks. Prevalence is also higher among populations with low socioeconomic status, within the LGBTQ community, and among those who have not graduated high school or who have a GED.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned above, supporters of anti-tobacco employment policies cite both health insurance costs as well as employee productivity as important factors. In addition, healthcare professions and healthcare settings note that healthcare workers who smoke are setting a terrible example and sending a very bad message to patients. Advocates also argue that such policies create an incentive for prospective employees to quit smoking.

Detractors point out that policies that exclude employees who smoke infringe on employee freedom by dictating their behavior even when they are not at work. Moreover, to the extent that smoking is addictive and difficult to quit, these policies punish smokers for their addiction no matter their efforts to stop smoking. Another worry is that these policies have a disproportionately negative impact on poor and disadvantaged populations. This exclusion is especially worrisome given that many of these populations already struggle with employment discrimination and are already underrepresented in many professions, including those in healthcare settings.

### Study Questions:

- (1) Is there a morally significant difference between anti-tobacco employment policies in a healthcare setting as contrasted with other kinds of employment?
- (2) When, if ever, is it morally permissible for employers to discriminate on the basis of tobacco use? Is it morally permissible to exclude applicants that engage in other health risk behaviors, such as eating unhealthy foods or drinking alcohol?
- (3) When and to what extent should employers be allowed to exert control over employees' lives?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2016/05/24/479349619/cdc-report-reveals-decline-in-american-smokers>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/index.htm)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/11/us/11smoking.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.workplacefairness.org/smoking-rights-workplace>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/adult\\_data/cig\\_smoking/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/adult_data/cig_smoking/index.htm)



## 8. The Cull

In August of 2015, the city of Ann Arbor, Michigan, implemented a deer cull.<sup>1</sup> The cull aims to decrease significantly the population of deer in an effort to reduce automobile accidents, to mitigate the damages to local flora, and to stop the spread of chronic wasting disease, a neurological disease that affects elk, moose, and deer.<sup>2</sup> To achieve this, the city hired sharpshooters to hunt deer until the population was reduced to a target number. Though the deer cull was intended by city officials to promote the good of the public, it has been highly controversial. Soon after it began, a lawn sign campaign was launched with the message “Stop the Shoot”.<sup>3</sup>

Those who oppose the cull argue that the deer’s damage to property and local flora is not a weighty enough consideration to merit the killing of innocent animals. Another argument made against the cull is that deer have only become a nuisance in Ann Arbor because of human encroachment on their natural habitats. Some “Stop the Shoot” advocates have even argued that the deer have become “refugees” due to human activities. Besides concerns about the rights of the deer themselves, many residents are also concerned with the safety of lethal methods of reducing the deer population, worrying that due to the proximity of deer to residential areas, sharpshooters might endanger residents of those areas.

Supporters of the cull argue that deer overpopulation poses a significant enough threat that culling deer is a necessary cost. They claim that deer have significantly damaged residents’ property, including causing automobile accidents. Furthermore, they argue that the deer population’s damage to local flora is not just a nuisance, but a serious threat to the local ecosystem, as deer feed on native plants that are essential habitats and food sources for other wildlife. The cull, supporters say, is the only way to make the city safer and restore balance to the local ecosystem.<sup>4</sup> In addition, since 2015, they have introduced non-lethal but potentially more expensive methods of population control, such as sterilization, to complement their original methods, and attempted to address concerns about danger to humans by increasing the distance between residential areas and target areas for culling. However, many residents are not satisfied with these steps—as the cull enters its third year, the “Stop the Shoot” campaign continues to advocate against it.

### Study Questions:

- (1) What is the moral relevance of the fact that humans have encroached on deer’s natural habitat?
- (2) When, if ever, do benefits to humans outweigh harms to non-human animals like deer?
- (3) Is culling the most humane way to address overpopulation problems? If not, what is?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/11/06/ann-arbor-winter-deer-cull/75283900/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.michigandaily.com/section/faceoff/roundtable-should-deer-cull-be-stopped>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2016/01/backlash\\_against\\_ann\\_arbor\\_dee.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2016/01/backlash_against_ann_arbor_dee.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.michigandaily.com/section/editorials/daily-u-involvement-deer-cull-necessary>

## 9. Questions of Loyalty

Singapore is an island nation in Southeast Asia that has managed to achieve great economic success in the fifty years since its founding. However, due to its small size and lack of natural resources, it is economically and strategically vulnerable to larger nations and global events, and relatively more reliant on skilled human capital for its economic survival. In 2002, the Prime Minister at that time cited a news media report in which several Singaporeans were quoted as saying they would “run at the drop of a hat”, and that they felt “no sense of belonging.” He called them “fair-weather” citizens and “quitters,” asserting that their loyalties were fickle, only willing to remain part of the country when times were good, and would quickly abandon it in times of hardship or crisis or if better prospects arose elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister’s speech naturally generated a fair amount of debate among Singaporeans. The more patriotically minded largely agreed with the Prime Minister’s implicit moral judgment of those who chose to leave Singapore. Singapore, like many developed nations, provides its citizens with education, protection, infrastructure, and a host of other public goods and services. Like any nation, its success was only made possible by generations of people who stuck it out through hard times. In accepting citizenship and all the benefits that follow, one might argue, its citizens also incur a duty to “give back” and to remain loyal to their nation in the event of crisis or economic hardship, especially because a mass exodus of the people most able to leave (the rich, professional, or educated) would severely inhibit the nation’s ability to sustain itself during, and recover after, any such crisis.

On the other hand, many of the more cosmopolitan argued that the Prime Minister’s remarks were an unfair characterization of those who might wish to seek better opportunities elsewhere or to avoid danger or economic hardship. They argued that while they might not feel the degree of patriotic loyalty that would motivate them to stay in Singapore, to brand them quitters and claim that they were wholly disloyal people was a step too far. Some might have simply wanted to give their children better prospects or a more stable environment in which to grow up. Furthermore, many feel that nations are not relevant moral categories in this highly international and globally interconnected age and find it archaic to think that a person’s character might be judged by whether she feels any sense of loyalty to one particular group of people.

### Study Questions:

- (1) What, if anything, is good about having a sense of loyalty or belonging to one’s nation?
- (2) How is loyalty to one’s nation similar to or different from loyalty to one’s friends and family?
- (3) Do we have moral duties to contribute to our nation, even at our own expense?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.todayonline.com/more-singaporeans-overseas-brain-drain-concerns-dissipate>

## 10. Appearances at the Office

After graduating from college, Maria had a hard time landing her first job. Eventually, her perseverance paid off. After months of searching, and countless applications, she managed to find a full-time, entry-level position in a company she likes. After a couple of months on the job, though, Maria is convinced that her boss does not like her. It seems as if he often doesn't recognize her abilities or accomplishments. Additionally, she feels that several of her co-workers share a similarly unfavorable opinion of her.

When discussing her professional concerns with her parents, their response surprised her. They argued that she should start by trying to look more professional—if she dressed nicer and wore some make-up, maybe she would be taken more seriously. They also advised her to spend more money on cutting and styling her hair, and buying more expensive shoes. Maria's parents argued that immigrants like them often need to put in extra effort to look polished and professional in order to be seen as professional.

Maria finds this advice frustrating. She has little money to spend on expensive clothes, shoes, make-up, and haircuts. She has even less interest in these things. She believes that she should be judged by her work performance, not by how she looks. She also resents the gender roles that govern the way women dress and look. She often hears disparaging comments about how her female co-workers dress, no matter how much effort they put in; yet, two of her male co-workers who wear the same shabby clothes every day, and who don't regularly cut (or even wash) their hair, have reputations as geniuses. Their style (or lack thereof) seems to work in their favor by reinforcing the perception that they are too smart and too focused on their work to be concerned about appearances. Just thinking about this double standard makes Maria annoyed. She has no desire to follow unfair gender norms, put effort into challenging people's stereotypes about immigrants, "look like a grown up" (as her parents put it), or spend a significant amount of her salary (which would be better spent paying down her student loans) on her appearance.

At the same time, Maria secretly agrees with her parents. She thinks that if she followed their advice, her boss and co-workers probably would take her more seriously. If she wants to increase her chances of receiving a promotion or of getting a strong reference, maybe she should just do these things, even if she doesn't think she should need to.

### Study Questions:

- (1) To what extent (if any) is it legitimate to consider personal style and grooming when evaluating an employee? Does it matter what the job is? For example, does it make a difference if the employee works in an office or if they work with the public?
- (2) How far is it appropriate for an individual to go when modifying their behavior to follow norms that they consider unjust or otherwise objectionable?
- (3) Should Maria follow her parents' advice?

## 11. Science Unfair

Valentina's high school biology teacher has paired up students for a project and announced that the partnerships are final. The assignment involves crafting and executing an experiment and will take each group approximately a month to complete. At the end of the term, each group will be responsible for writing and delivering a report of their findings. The project will be worth a third of each student's grade.

Valentina's partner is Gerald, one of the worst students in the class. Gerald doesn't care about biology and only signed up for the class because he was required to do so. All year long, he's put in the bare minimum effort and, as a result, has fallen behind. Valentina, on the other hand, is an unusually good biology student. She is also highly motivated, driven by a desire to attend a prestigious college. Despite her excellent scores on every test so far, however, Valentina knows that the group project will determine her final grade in the class.

When Valentina and Gerald meet to design their experiment, it quickly becomes clear that after almost a full year of slacking off, Gerald has neither the knowledge nor the skill to contribute to a successful project. He gamely offers to help, but both he and Valentina know that he would almost certainly be a hindrance if he got involved; Valentina would just have to re-do everything he did! Ultimately, Valentina decides that the assignment is too important to leave to chance, and tells Gerald not to attempt to make any significant contributions. Gerald feels guilty, but also relieved—he hadn't fully appreciated that his laziness might affect any other student negatively, and he's glad that he won't be responsible for bringing Valentina's grade down by doing substandard work. To be honest, he's also at least a little bit happy that his grade will get a boost because of Valentina's excellent work.

### Study Questions:

- (1) To what extent, if any, is academic laziness ethically problematic? If it depends, what does it depend on?
- (2) Suppose Gerald wanted to contribute meaningfully to the project. Would Valentina have been morally obligated to risk her grade by allowing him to take on major responsibilities? Why or why not?
- (3) Should Valentina tell the teacher that Gerald did not contribute to the project? Why or why not?

## 12. Contributing to Gentrification

Dave is a recent college graduate who has just started working his first career-track job in the city. His commute from the suburbs to work is over an hour, and he wants to live in the city to be close to work and to enjoy an active night life with his friends who live in the city. Rent in most places in the city is too expensive, but there is an up-and-coming urban neighborhood that he can afford. Historically, this had been a relatively impoverished neighborhood with a high crime rate which made it undesirable to young professionals like Dave. But now it's undergoing gentrification.<sup>1</sup> New coffee shops, bars, restaurants, and independent clothing boutiques have moved into the neighborhood, and these have attracted people willing to pay higher rents to move in. As these new, wealthier residents have moved into the neighborhood, along with the higher-end businesses that serve them, rents have increased; now, many residents and businesses that have been part of the community for decades can no longer afford to stay. Dave dislikes how gentrification can disrupt established communities, but he knows that he would also very much enjoy a shorter commute and a fun and vibrant yet affordable life in the city.<sup>2</sup> "Would it be wrong of me to move into this neighborhood and thus contribute to the problems of gentrification and displacement?" Dave wonders. Dave feels dejected wondering about the right thing to do. Torn by the issue, he posts his dilemma on social media to gather the opinions of his friends.

In response to Dave's social media post, Angelie replies, "I love living in the neighborhood. Thanks for pricing me out..." Jonas replies, "Haha, you're a gentrifier!" Greg replies, "You've got it all wrong. It's a myth that gentrification causes widespread displacement. Even though some residents do move out, many long-term residents actually want to stay and see their neighborhoods improve. Also, some gentrified areas become more diverse rather than less."<sup>3</sup> Kristina replies, "If you're not going to move in, other people will. So, it might as well be you. At least you have a conscience and can address the problems of displacement and poverty in other ways." Clearly, gentrification is a complex phenomenon with many dimensions – moral, social, and political. Dave's informal poll has only made him more confused and troubled.

### Study Questions:

- (1) Assuming that gentrification does directly cause displacement, should Dave feel guilty if he chooses to move into this neighborhood? Why or why not?
- (2) Does anyone have a right to live in a particular neighborhood? Why or why not?
- (3) Overall, is gentrification positive or negative? Explain.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/pov/flagwars/what-is-gentrification/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/this-is-what-happens-after-a-neighborhood-gets-gentrified/432813/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-gentrification/2016/06/03/b6c80e56-1ba5-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.ea16721c7e70](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-gentrification/2016/06/03/b6c80e56-1ba5-11e6-8c7b-6931e66333e7_story.html?utm_term=.ea16721c7e70)

### 13. Losing Admission to Harvard

In early June 2017, *The Harvard Crimson* reported that Harvard had rescinded the admission offers of at least 10 students who had previously been admitted to Harvard’s Class of 2021.<sup>1</sup> Harvard rescinded these offers because of the students’ participation in a Facebook group devoted to sharing highly offensive memes—including memes joking about sexual assault, child abuse, and the Holocaust, and memes mocking racial or ethnic minorities.<sup>2</sup> While the Facebook group was not affiliated with Harvard, it was exclusively for members of Harvard’s Class of 2021, and was formed by students who found each other on the official Facebook group for students admitted to that class—a page managed by the university’s Admissions Office to help students connect with each other before arriving on campus.

To some people, Harvard’s decision seems like an objectionable form of censorship or thought-policing. For instance, one student interviewed by *The Crimson* thought that as long as people aren’t directly harming or threatening someone else, they “can post whatever they want because they have the right to do that,” adding that it was just “people doing stupid stuff.” Moreover, since this Facebook group was not officially affiliated with Harvard, this may seem like an unwarranted intrusion into students’ private social media lives. Partly due to such concerns, some colleges shy away from monitoring students’ social media. The University of California system, for instance, issued a statement that “Social media presence plays no role in our admissions process. [...] Only if an incident is reported to us that purportedly violated our Principles of Community and/or Student Code of Conduct, will it be investigated in the proper channels.”<sup>3</sup>

Others defend Harvard’s decision. Students are frequently reminded that their social media activity has consequences. In fact, the official Facebook group for Harvard’s Class of 2021 explicitly states, “As a reminder, Harvard College reserves the right to withdraw an offer of admission under various conditions including if an admitted student engages in behavior that brings into question his or her honesty, maturity, or moral character.” In this case, many people think that the offending students simply crossed the line. “I appreciate humor, but there are so many topics that just should not be joked about,” said another student interviewed by *The Crimson*—“those actions really spoke about the students’ true characters.” Additionally, some people argue that Facebook groups like the one in question promote a less respectful culture, and undermine colleges’ attempts to establish safe and welcoming learning environments—especially for members of socially disadvantaged groups that are often targets of vicious memes. Thus colleges have a responsibility to place a check on their students’ social media behavior.

But some who agree that the students should not have shared these offensive memes still worry that having their admissions rescinded was too harsh a penalty. Perhaps there was a better way to make this into a learning opportunity for these students and their peers. Rescinding admissions offers, it might even be argued, could have a chilling effect on student speech, and might ultimately scare students away from discussing important issues openly and honestly in an online setting. But then again, maybe not—there is a clear difference between engaging in an open and honest debate about sensitive topics, and sharing patently offensive jokes.

#### Study Questions:

- (1) Should students’ social media presence play a role in the college admissions process? If so, what kind of role?
- (2) Should offensive social media use lead to rescinding admission? If so, how should we decide what is offensive enough? And how should the line between public and private social media be drawn?
- (3) How should the right to students’ free speech be weighed against colleges’ interest in promoting safe and welcoming learning environments?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2017/6/5/2021-offers-rescinded-memes/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/05/harvard-withdraws-10-acceptances-for-offensive-memes-in-private-chat/?utm\\_term=.8b3418679c83](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/05/harvard-withdraws-10-acceptances-for-offensive-memes-in-private-chat/?utm_term=.8b3418679c83)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/06/06/531591202/harvard-rescinds-admission-of-10-students-over-obscene-facebook-messages>

#### 14. HR Confidential

Fatima works in the HR department at a large tech company. She has recently learned that Travis, a programmer at her company, is applying for a job at a small startup where her friend Alice also works. In her role in HR, Fatima knows that during his time with the company, Travis has been accused of sexual harassment and other inappropriate behavior by multiple coworkers. However, there was never enough evidence of misconduct for him to be fired or significantly reprimanded. Because the company never found him guilty of any misconduct, the accusations against Travis are strictly confidential.

Fatima knows that Travis has a great reputation in the field and is very likely to be hired by Alice's company, which knows nothing of the past accusations against him. While he was never found guilty of any misconduct, she is quite confident, given her own review of the evidence, that Travis very likely sexually harassed his coworkers and may do the same at another company.

Alice's position with her company is such that she could affect the decision about whether to hire Travis. For this reason, Fatima is considering telling Alice about the accusations against Travis, even though doing so would be a violation of confidentiality. While Travis would be unlikely to get away with future misconduct at his current job given past accusations against him, Fatima thinks that if given a fresh start at a new company, he may feel he can harass coworkers again with impunity. And he wouldn't be going to just any company but one where her friend Alice works.

On the other hand, Fatima's judgment that Travis is guilty goes against what the company found, and she is not absolutely sure that her assessment of the evidence is the correct one. She worries that if he is in fact innocent, she would be unfairly hurting his career. Furthermore, she takes very seriously the fact that telling Alice anything about the company's internal investigation of Travis would be a serious violation of confidentiality. Finally, she realizes that doing it could get her fired or even sued. Nevertheless, she is not sure she can simply leave Alice in the dark about the situation.

#### Study Questions:

- (1) Fatima obviously doesn't want Alice to be the subject of sexual harassment. But she also doesn't want to damage Travis's career prospects if he is in fact innocent, and she admits that she isn't sure if he is guilty. What should she do? How should we decide what to do, ethically speaking, in conditions of uncertainty?
- (2) Is it morally permissible to violate what we can suppose are morally justified company rules in order (potentially) to bring about a morally desirable outcome?
- (3) Is it fair to change one's behavior towards someone accused of sexual harassment if that person has not been found guilty of any charges?

### 15. Sperm of the Dead

Amy's husband, Bob, has just died tragically in an accident. Before Bob's death, the couple had agreed that they would like to have children together one day, though they never had a conversation about exactly when they would start their family. After Bob was pronounced dead, Amy began inquiring about a process called posthumous sperm retrieval, a procedure in which doctors would retrieve Bob's sperm, potentially allowing Amy to become pregnant with Bob's child.

Amy is still committed to the couple's shared goal of one day starting a family. She doesn't want to raise just any child; she wants to raise *Bob's* child. She thinks that their earlier conversations about someday having a family make it morally permissible for doctors to go ahead with the retrieval procedure.

But some of Bob's family members are uneasy about Bob fathering a child after his death. They feel uncomfortable with the fact that the retrieval would occur without Bob's consent and find the whole process objectionably intrusive. Amy, they argue, does not own or have a right to Bob's sperm.

#### Study Questions:

- (1) Would the situation be different if Amy and Bob had never seriously discussed the possibility of having children? Why or why not?
- (2) What moral difference, if any, does the opinion of Bob's family members about the procedure make?
- (3) What difference, if any, would it make if Bob's religious beliefs precluded organ donation after death?