

January 2011
Competition

 **aletheia**
www.lhsaletheia.org



Submissions

All Lynbrook students and alumni are eligible to submit stories to Aletheia. We publish every submission that adheres to our guidelines, which may be found on the website. The Aletheia staff is committed to preserving the integrity of your submission and will not make any changes, with exception to certain profanity (which will be asterisked-out). We do not edit stories for spelling, grammar or syntax.

The March topic will be Dating and Friendships. Submissions are due by February 11. If you are interested in sharing your experiences, a submission form may be found online at www.lhsaletheia.org/submit.

Mission

Aletheia is a student outreach publication that strives to provide a voice for all students at Lynbrook High School. Inspired by Los Gatos High's Reality Check and Monta Vista's Verdadera, Aletheia was created to facilitate communication and overcome stigmas concerning prevalent and taboo issues within the Lynbrook community. At the beginning of the school year, the staff designates a list of monthly topics pertaining to the realities of high school. Each issue of the publication comprises of firsthand experiences submitted anonymously by Lynbrook students and alumni, professional articles relating to that month's theme, and resources compiled by the student staff. Finalized newsletters are published into a PDF format and emailed out to Lynbrook families. Back issues may be found on our website, under Archives.

The content in Aletheia is composed by the students at Lynbrook High School in San Jose, California. Ideas and thoughts expressed within the publication are not necessarily reflected by the school administration or staff.

This is the first issue of Aletheia. Due to environmental concerns future issues will not be distributed in paper form, but an archive of all releases will be maintained on our website. Please visit www.lhsaletheia.org for upcoming topics and more information.

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He sat down in his seat just as class was about to begin. He puts his head down on his desk, hiding his face from the bright lcd glow of the teacher's projector. It's another day. Another day where he has to put up a front. Another day where he has to force himself to do the things that he doesn't want to do, yet is somehow obligated to do. Another day that he has to put up with pressures from humanity. He puts up with the constant voices in his head telling him to endure the pain now so that he can be happier later.

And all throughout campus, he is not alone.

In fact, there are just about 1600 students just like him. Expending every ounce of their blood, sweat and tears in hope to receive the glorious mark on a piece of paper.

But what is the point?

Have we just become mindless robots constantly comparing efficiency to see who can perform better? Have we become people that try to force ourselves into a particular "perfect" model?

And when we do receive that exam back, what do we do? For many, we react negatively to our grades, and that is not rarely followed by feelings of anger, depression, or even unwholesome talk. And that brings up the question, "What have we learned? How are we becoming more educated people?"

"The healthiest competition occurs when average people win by putting above average effort."

- Colin Powell

We live in a constant state of competition. And we all like to beat everyone else in our areas of expertise. For example, I constantly feel the obsessive-compulsive need to be the most proficient at Japanese in my level, and when I write poems I expect my hard work to receive the utmost praise from a lit teacher. There are those who excel in running and music and math and good for them, because their strengths deserve to compete and get those self-awarded prizes.

But as a general note of concern, I think it would be nice if people would stop trying to bring others down in the process of competition. It's not fun hearing a classmate complain about a few missed points on a quiz when someone right next to them has gotten

a forty percent, despite their efforts. As humans, we yearn to be on the top of the pyramid, but will evidently keep blasting through the other bricks to be the monarch of a dysfunctional structure.

Next time when you're upset you didn't beat your own record in a sport or missed a point for a stupid mistake on a test, keep your disappointment to yourself and simply strive to do better. Did you know most of the time when you brag about your score to a friend they couldn't care less? Spare them the irritation.

Every man in the world is better than someone else and not as good as someone else.

- William Sarovan

What do you do when you hit rock bottom?
Pick up a shovel and start digging.

Dear Me,

You. I hate you. I really do, you know. There has not been one day that's passed without me hating you. And why is that? Because you're a vile\self-centered\ lying\ disgusting waste of space.

And don't you dare deny it.

From now on, this is a race, a race to see what kills you first: yourself or time. You better win this one. If not, then you should be ashamed, because time doesn't run so fast. Then again, you're not much of a hotshot either. Just keep that in mind when you sit down for dinner.

Every bite you chew and swallow, it makes you FAT. FAT makes you SLOW. And SLOW will cause you to LOSE. Losing is NOT AN OPTION. This is a race to the finish line of life. Win it, and at least you know you'll die happy. At least then you'll know you've died without poison in your veins.

Food will do that to you; food will make toxic and poisonous. So why eat? You shouldn't. It's a raceraceraceRACE to weightlessness. Because only then will you find happiness. It doesn't matter that you have to lie your teeth off to get there, as long as you DO get there. That's all that matters.

One day, you will be the skinniest girl in school. Until then, it's a race to death.

We used to be friends. Isn't that how most problems begin, with a simple friendship? Except it doesn't seem like much as changed on the outside. We both still belong in the same group of friends and everyone assumes nothing's wrong. But I know things between us are tense and we probably will never be the same again.

I remember when we both planned to apply for that. We promised we wouldn't let competition get in the way of things and it didn't at first. But then we both got accepted and that's when the competition began to sink in. Neither of us know how it happened. All I know is the only conversation we have is you feeling the need to subtly brag about you're successes or fish for compliments and me refusing to give you what you want.

You used to call me your best friend and now we don't even say hi when we pass each other by on the way to class. When I see you I feel angry inside because of all the supportive things we used to say to each other and what it's like now. Competition got in the way of things and now all I hear you talk about is your accomplishments and I only reply by saying oh. Is this what high school is about, losing your friends to college apps?

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.

- Mark Twain

You are perfection, or as close as one can be to it. Your grades are stellar, you maintain incredible relationships with your family, friends, and even strangers. Both your personality and physical appearance are charming; everyone's immediately drawn to you. Nobody could possibly hate you, despite how jealous they are of you. Except me. I hate being around you. You converse with others so easily, while I stutter awkwardly. Everyone wants to be your friend. You're open to everybody, you make them feel as if they're part of something special. You never show off, yet everybody acknowledges how flawless you are. I can't compete with perfection. Well, it's not that I want to compete, but with you nearby, nobody notices

me anymore. Those of my friends who were previously unaquainted with you are practically your siblings now. It's as if you've unknowingly (I'd rather think that than consider the chance that you may have willingly done so) taken everything away from me. Sometimes, no, all the time actually, I feel like I'm not good enough for you, especially when you ignore me to talk to others of a higher social status. It's as if you've forgotten about me, as if you don't care anymore. You succeed academically, socially, in every way possible without effort. Who would notice a rag doll next to Barbie? How could I possibly compare?

"The higher we soar, the smaller we appear to those who cannot fly."

- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

I'm a senior. I love Homecoming. I was angry about the results. These statements contradict each other, but all three make up who I am. Actually, the last one isn't completely true: I still am upset about the results.

Last year, when we tied for first place with the class of 2012, I was proud. The sophomores deserved the victory as much as we did, and I was happy for everyone. This year, I thought everyone did well. I was impressed by the juniors' decorations and their skit may not have been too exciting, but it was clean and polite. As much as I love 2011, that's much more than I would expect out of my own class. I want to cover my face in shame when I think about how rude we were to the juniors. The juniors tried to hold their heads up high through all the hate some of us and 2013 gave them, and in the end it didn't pay off. Seeing all those seniors telling them to grow up ("It's only Homecoming!") made me feel so bad for them. Listening to the winner try to console you never makes you feel better. My class is amazing, but we should have just left them alone and celebrated our victory quietly. The sophomores should've done the same.

Everyone says the class of 2012 is cocky, but I know a lot of them and they're just like any other class: they have their loud, cocky ones who seem to represent the entire class but don't cover half of the attitudes of the class. To be honest, I feel sorry for them: they get all the s***. They get called cocky by people older AND younger than them, they have to balance

SATs with school and Homecoming, they have to work when only two people go to meetings, they have to deal with people telling them their work sucks and in the end, they lose and people still call them cocky and rub their losses in their faces.

None of my friends know that this is what I think because if they knew, they'd call me a junior-lover and make fun of me, but it's time everyone grew up and stopped getting so defensive about the most apparent form of competition at Lynbrook.

Homecoming is over, but the way the juniors got treated wasn't fair. We didn't like getting hated on last year so we shouldn't have passed that on. I can only hope that the class of 2013 doesn't have to go through the same ordeal, though knowing how our school handles competition that probably won't happen.

"The object of this competition is not to be mean to the losers but to find a winner. The process makes you mean because you get frustrated."

- Simon Cowell

I go to school every day and always feel like everyone there's prettier than I am. That sounds hella shallow, but i can't help it, people are everywhere and they're all hella more pretty. That's why I put my hands over my face when I talk and stuff, cuz I don't want people looking at my acne and my fat cheeks and s***. I'm hella not confident and I diet a lot cuz I feel fat. I should worry more about academic competition but I care more about being prettier than people more. My friends try to reassure me and say it's okay but really it's not cuz they're so pretty and I'm just ugly me.

A few years ago me and my friend liked the same guy. He was hella cute and funny and stuff, so we both fell for him. I'd liked him for a really long time but she just started liking him at the beginning of the school year but once we found out we both liked him (I'll call him B) it was kinda weird. I started putting on a little more makeup, exercising more, and dressing more nicely so he'd notice me and I'd text him and stuff. I was scared of hanging out with him though cuz I still felt like I wasn't pretty enough for him and so I wouldn't hang out with him as much as I could've. I don't know if my friend thought I was competing

against her but secretly I was trying to compete with her cuz I really liked B and stuff. The less pretty I felt or the more I felt like I was losing to my friend, the more makeup I'd put on and the more I'd wash my face and stuff. In the end, I lost the competition and B asked my friend out.

I hella cried that day when she texted me saying she was sorry but she was gonna go to the movies with B. I felt like I totally lost and this just showed I was as ugly as I thought. I probably should've realized that no one gives a shit what you look like but I still think I'm not pretty compared to other people and I still secretly compete and try to make myself look good and stuff. This sounds stupid, but I can't help it and in the future, I think I'm always going to be the girl who can't get over her looks.

"The competition is one aspect of the job, but I think if you're too busy worrying about the competition, you don't focus enough on what you're doing."

- Katie Couric

While I don't consider myself to be of a competitive nature, I still believe that competition is a factor of our daily lives that is critically important to us. For me, competition is something that I rely on to not get lazy and always search for a way to improve and get better in whatever I do. Back in my elementary school days, I was definitely one of the faster kids in my group of friends. I was always proud of being able to outrun everyone in the games of tag or being the first pick for games of capture the flag. It got to a point where I didn't really have to try to beat my friends in these games so I gradually became lazier and lazier at improving my speed and at practicing my endurance.

However, when I got to middle school, all of this changed. I suddenly had a larger range of people to compete with and among those, many were faster than I was. This foreign sense of competition motivated me to get faster and to once again be the fastest runner which totally erased any sense of that "laziness" as I constantly searched for ways to get faster. For example, in the old Miller days where we ran super laps and miles and what not, I would always wait to run with the "fast group" of my class simply because that

if I run with them, I would have someone (who would usually be someone who was considerably faster than I was) to pace with.

On the other hand, if I always ran with the slower and more laid back runners, there honestly wouldn't be much of a sense of competition for me as all I would have to compete with would be myself. Even though I never became the fastest runner in the school, it's still very evident that the sense of competition gave me great motivation to increase my abilities.

If it weren't for this sense of competition then the motivation to improve and do better would gradually dissipate into a general and everlasting state of laziness.

than I did at my old school.

Competition isn't a bad thing. It generates progress and improvement; without it, we would be less motivated to learn and achieve. So thank you, Lynbrook, for everything you offer— high achieving environment, opportunities, competition and all.

"Live daringly, boldly, fearlessly. Taste the relish to be found in competition-- in having put forth the best within you."

- Henry J Kaiser

"Enjoy the successes that you have, and don't be too hard on yourself when you don't do well. Too many times we beat up on ourselves. Just relax and enjoy it."

- Paty Sheehan

Lynbrook: blue-ribbon school with top students, school with more than 50 clubs and 20 sports teams, school that sends hundreds of students to UC's and Ivy League schools every year.

I think for most people on campus, this description would cause a deep sigh and a groan; I hear people say "I wish I didn't go to such a competitive school" all the time. But really, is going to such an academically successful school a bad thing?

Competition is undoubtedly present at Lynbrook, but I think it just helps me perform better and expect more for myself. There are resources available for me at Lynbrook that allow me to achieve more and offers such a huge range of activities... and I call this a privilege. And the students at Lynbrook are not backstabbing, suspicious competitors. From my experience, most Lynbrook students are nice, supportive, helpful teens who help each other succeed.

I remember I went to a less academically competitive school in the past. I have to admit, the move to Lynbrook was difficult at first and I struggled a bit to keep up. But since the students around me set the bar higher, I started to expect more from myself, put more effort into my work, and ultimately achieve higher

Ihate competition at Lynbrook. Getting good grades and test scores isn't enough at this factory. If you wanna be respected, you have to do a bunch of other stuff too. I can't stand it here. Graduation can't be soon enough. It feels like no matter what I do it's never enough. Thinking about school makes me wanna shoot myself because I'm never gonna be like the thousands of geniuses I go to school with every day. These people become debate captains or FBLA officers or varsity sports team captains and on top of all of that they start clubs too. Guess what happens when I try to compete and be like them? My club gets rejected. How stupid is that?! For the record, I didn't try to make a club just so I can go to a good college. I liked the cause and got people to help me make it but no one cares. Instead Lynbrook rejects it and we get some stupid publication that no one can spell or pronounce. This publication is bulls***. None of the members give a s*** about helping people or raising awareness or whatever crap you put on and everyone knows it. It's just for their college apps, and it disgusts me. I work hard to make a club that doesn't get approved and Altheia or whatever makes some stupid website and gets in. I feel like they stole my spot. Instead of a special interest club, there's some stupid publication. But that's what competition is about I guess. The judges get to decide and there's always a loser and winner. The judges want Lynbrook to look good so we get some publication that's supposed to help "facilitate communication and overcome stigmas concerning prevalent and/or taboo issues within the Lynbrook community" and ignore other stuff. Why is life so unfair? It's all cuz of competition and I hate it.

Competition is in everything. It kind of inhales you and just controls your every move. I remember when I was applying to be on this board for people interested in fashion and once I was a member of the board, the meetings were crazy. I'd look around and all these girls were absolutely adorned with jewelry, makeup, the latest handbags, four inch heels maybe. The ages were all varied and it really stood out as our generation becoming different. Girls younger than me looked older than me. As a board member, we work on-call for the company. It's really a competition to see who can get the job, which days we're able to work, who emails our advisor person first. We all want the chance to earn money and make a good impression. I sometimes was able to get the job but a lot of other girls already had the experience and so they were more likely chosen. My mom continued to tell me to be more aggressive, try to ask for my opportunities, appeal to them. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes I lost it to someone else. And that's all very true to me, I should and I plan to get what I want. I just wouldn't want to ever tear people down in order to get to the place I need to be. Competition is necessary in the working world. We're all after something, and if we don't have the determination to pursue your goal, it'll never happen. Although it's probably easier to not face all the other competitors around me, I still have to and I learn from it. It's like you can't live with it and you can't live without it.

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

- Einstein

I feel really inadequate at Lynbrook sometimes. I know people always say that it doesn't matter what other people think of your grade on a test, as long as you're happy with it and you worked for it. As much as I would love to believe that, I simply don't and I know a good percentage of my peers don't, either. Quite often, I secretly celebrate the failures of those around me. The fact that they messed up and I was fine is just so comforting. Sometimes it's even the only comfort I have about my academics. And if I'm the one that failed, I just feel so embarrassed I end

up lying about my score. I feel like my extracurriculars aren't anything special, I haven't done anything big for the school, and there's nothing really that sets me apart from the rest of my grade or the rest of the school population. That's why I feel so inadequate. I'm not quite at that point yet, but when I start writing my college apps, what will I have to say about myself? Walking through the halls of Lynbrook where everyone seems to be an overachiever makes me feel so inadequate. All I have are my straight (for now) A's.

"So many times people are afraid of competition, when it should bring out the best in us. We all have talents and abilities, so why be intimidated by other people's skills?"

- Lou Holtz

Competition does not affect me. Now, before you stop reading the rest of my piece and automatically assume that I am faking this point of view to be different, hear me out!

Once upon a time, I, too, cared about what others thought of me if I didn't achieve an A (no, not a 90% A-, a solid 95% and above A) on any given test, especially early on in my freshman year. I used to participate in this so-called "friendly competition" banter with those seated around me whenever we got a test or a quiz back. "What'd you get?! What'd you get!? What'd you get?!?!?!?!?!?"

For a while, I thought it was an important and therefore necessary part of my everyday life to be among those who listened in on these post-test results discussions. Exchanging test scores and project grades seemed to allow me to judge how well I was doing in the class in comparison to everyone else. Perhaps, I foolishly thought, knowing how well I compared would help me weed out the competition and figure out who else I needed to beat in order to be the person with the highest grade in the class!

However, I soon found that these people would do anything to make it seem like they were the best, even if they received a low test score. They would justify their low French imparfait grammar quiz scores with "I have such a high grade in this class so I don't re-

ally care about this small quiz.” or a “Oops, I made a stupid calculation error ugh! I TOTALLY would have gotten perfect on this!” for a Geometry Enriched test.

What was the point? By the end of my freshman year, I’d learned that knowing other people’s grades does NOT (in any way, shape, or form) change the grade that I had received on a test, nor does it make me more determined to do better in the future. All I could think about was how jealous I was of how smart those high-scorers were, and it did not help me at all.

From then on, I’ve been tuning out these useless post-test results discussions. Even for other things as well: there is nothing worse than hearing a group of guys discussing their 2350 or higher SAT scores the Thursday morning after the scores have been released. Barely any of my close friends know my exact SAT score or my current GPA or my scores for the 3 AP tests I took this past May or how well I did on that last statistics quiz. I don’t feel like there is a life-or-death need for me to brag (or complain) about my scores and life if there is no need for me to, meaning, if it’s not something where almost everyone received an D- because maybe the teacher entered the scores wrong, I feel like there is no need for me to disclose the aforementioned information.

Why not set a study-group date for the next chapter test for Physics or even a hangout day instead of mindlessly complaining about your latest Spanish vocabulario quiz score? Why not look ahead into the future rather than incessantly worrying about something you can’t change? It’ll do you a lot of good, so stop comparing yourself to others, and focus on you and how YOU will make a change for next week’s Calculus test!

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measure or far away.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Sometimes competition wants to make us kill ourselves. Sometimes it makes us want to kill others. The competitiveness in us feels like s*** when

someone says “The world has ended I got a 92%”, but we got a C. Do we really want to compete with them? Is it even possible? Honestly, while competition is necessary to better yourself, it also breeds a lot of under-the-surface negative energy. I am really not a competitive person, yet being around the competition, I sometimes find myself becoming one of those ugly people who suspect others. I don’t want them to steal my work. But I want to see their grades. If I beat them, I feel good, and if they beat me, I feel terrible. In the end, competing with yourself is always the best policy.

“I’m not in competition with anybody but myself. My goal is to beat my last performance.”

- Celine Dion

I spend 5+ hours a day studying and doing homework on top of sports and crap, and I still get raped in school. No, not according to my parents... According to other students. Yes, getting a B or C counts as being raped, especially when 15 other people in my math class wave the f***ing test in my face that says “24/24.” Which leads me to wonder: why the hell haven’t I transferred to some s***ty school like Independence or someplace? Even someone with less than a 2.0 here could get a 4.0 over there and probably end up going to some Ivy League School. Here, you can’t deal with competition. Wherever you stand on the educational hierarchy, that’s where you’ll stay. Someone who got a C in Pre-calc only generates “What the f***? You’re so retarded. How can you get less than an A in that class?”

Well maybe math isn’t my thing! I haven’t gotten an A in math since heaven knows when. Maybe I am more stupid than the others who get the A’s, but making that differentiation shouldn’t be the point. Now, it seems that school doesn’t look for standardized people. It TRIES to standardize you-- and fails. Except if you gets straight A’s. then you have nothing to worry about.

C=College, D=Diploma? No. In Lynbrook, D=Retarded, C=F***tarded, B=”You didn’t get an A? GTFO,” A=”like omgawsh you are SO going to Harvard!” Perhaps the counselors should have told us that before we even enrolled in LHS.

People here are always complaining about how competitive our school is, how friendships get ruined and tears are spilled because everyone's racing to get an Ivy League college acceptance letter. Walk anywhere around campus, and you'll hear students complaining about competition. Look inside the Yearbook or Epic rooms when applications come out, and they're overflowing with hopeful students. I bet this issue will be full of stuff about how bad competition is.

I'm not agreeing with these people, but I'm not looking down on them either. Except I think the amount of competition we have at Lynbrook really helps me in the long run. Competition here has me on my toes at all time. Because I'm not the only one who wants that position or that college acceptance letter, I work hard to make sure that I'm the chosen one. People complain competition ruins friendships, but personally I have not had such an experience. All my friends are competitive like me, but it's not like we fight over stuff or whatever. We wouldn't get ruthless, you know?

Once when a club that me and like six of my friends were in started passing out officer applications, we all applied. Since there weren't that many positions available, we knew not all of us were going to be officers. We didn't discuss it, but it was understood we'd have to compete against each other for the same positions and not everyone was going to win. In the end, only three of us made it and the other three didn't cry or get mad at the people who'd succeeded or anything. They understood this was just a part of life. Friends might have to compete against friends. We're all still friends. Nothing has changed.

Looking back, I don't remember feeling anxious or frustrated about competing against my friends at all. I don't think unhealthy competition exists. Everything is what you make of it. If you're going to be miserable about competing and whine about it, it will suck. Otherwise, what's wrong with a little friendly competition here and there?

"Competition is easier to accept if you realize it is not an act of oppression or abrasion - I've worked with my best friends in direct competition"

- Diane Sawyer

Competition, especially among students, has been very detrimental to my relations among family, friends, and even team members. The act of maintaining the "perfect" GPA throughout high school has sparked much conflict within my family. Every single day is a skirmish with me and my parents which is nothing compared to the four year war of high school, yet it impacts me all the same. Every day when I get home, I am barraged with questions upon questions upon questions. Why aren't you doing your homework? Why do you keep chatting; it's not even necessary! Why are you playing games? I'm tired of being interrogated by you. It's f***ing annoying. Can you f*** off for at least 10 minutes of my life? First of all, I have my wants too. Can't I just fool around for a few minutes when I get home? Do you even know how stressful school is nowadays? That's right. You don't. I know you're probably doing this just so I can do better in school and get into a good college, but seriously. You're going overboard. You don't have to watch me 24/7. I can do things myself. Although I probably am addicted to the computer and games, I'm trying to limit myself and stop the addiction. Can't I at least take control of what I do? That's like the only way I'll stop it. Even now you come by to tell me to go sleep. Seriously. F*** off. I know how to take care of myself. I'm a high schooler now. I know when I have to sleep, and I know what to do. But it doesn't stop there. Even when I finish all my homework, and did a little studying, my parents still pester me with questions and annoy the hell out of me. Mom. I finished my stuff. Can I at least stay on the computer till I sleep? I'm sure Lynbrook High School isn't the only school with this problem. Pretty much, every other school in the district has competition. Since when did you have to take four AP classes to be "competitive" to get into college? Before, taking one AP class would be considered intense. But now, four is considered the average amount you should take per school year. Competition has even gone to the extent of forcing people to cheat. It drives me crazy to see the stupidest people in class getting higher grades than me, even if I know more than they do. Can't they just accept their laziness and get the grade they deserve? I feel that the competition in high school drives people to cheating. It doesn't seem fair how we have to deal with such competition. This competition is like a virus. It plants itself in us when we enter high school, and manifests itself throughout our high school life, till our retirement. Even in the job market, I hear of competition.

Joe did this and that to get a promotion and doing that, Bill and Cindy were fired. How can people be so mean? Even in high school. A couple of my friends would always pester me and others for the answers to this test, and the answers to that quiz. What choice do we have? Say no, and be outcasts from the group? Or do we say yes and risk being caught cheating? I have fallen into this situation as well. I admit, that I have cheated on multiple tests, and have helped others to cheat also. Do I feel bad about it? Yes. Do I have any other choice? As of now, I think not. For me, it seems that I have to do whatever it takes to get my parents off me. That goal, to get into the college they want me to get in, has been on my mind since middle school. Only if I accomplish that goal, do I even have a hope of pleasing my parents, and ridding myself of the burden of competition. This competition thing is a beast we cannot tame. When will it end? To what extent do we have to go to in order to get rid of this unhealthy level of competition?

"Competition is very good... as long as it's healthy. It's what makes one strive to be better."

- Christine Lahti

I remember a period of time when I was "competitive". I always, always needed to be doing something. You have extra time? No, no that's not good. You MUST have SOMETHING you need to finish. First, make sure to do all of your homework perfectly. Do sports. Get involved in clubs. Get office positions. Still have extra time? Grab that SAT book and get in at least 2 hours of studying before bed. You really shouldn't be getting more than 6 hours of sleep a day anyway. And oh yeah. Don't forget to hit the treadmill because you really need to lose some weight.

Because free time means another hour you've wasted becoming more "perfect". It means another hour you let your competitors get ahead of you. Free time means you will feel guilty when you go to bed that night. It's kind of like anorexia. You are starving yourself of a healthy lifestyle, yet the craving, hollow ache of an empty stomach (or a "productive" day) gives you a certain, fleeting happiness. That is, until the next time you need to eat. (or in this case, take some time off for leisure) After that moment of indulgence, you

become a useless, self-loathing failure.

Guys, is this normal, healthy behavior?

Well, it's not. And after some time, I cracked.

Since then I've come to realize that living life as if it were under a ticking time bomb was NOT the path to happiness. I've realized that this sort of happiness and pursuit of self-worth was NOT going to last. I need to stop defining myself based on my merits and accomplishments. I need to actually take time to look around and not waste the precious years of my high school life. I don't want to look back and remember spending all my teenage years memorizing SAT vocabulary or locked up in the library. I don't want to ruin friendships because I see kids around me as potential competitors I can't trust.

Rather, I want to remember my high school years as a time where I built relationships with people with whom I would be life-long friends. Where I've made cherished, fond memories. Where, as cliché as it sounds, I've found who I was and what I wanted to do with my life.

Competition (at Lynbrook) is something that sweeps all students and convinces them that if you don't do as well as the person sitting next to you on that Chem test, then your life is headed straight for the drain. I still struggle and battle with competition at times, too. Of course, I still study diligently and try to put hard effort in all I do. But now, I always put people before my studies. I can take time to read a book once in a while. I can afford to spend time on the phone comforting a friend. Because really, (as blasphemous as this sounds!) achieving a 2400 on your SAT or getting a higher grade on that test than your seat partner is not going to help you live a better, more meaningful life.

"I think it's really important to look at the big picture instead of just one competition."

- Shannon Miller

Personally I'm not competitive at all, I feel as if I'm always surrounded by others who are. I hate being bothered by people who take simple things, such as class discussions, and turn them into a debate. No one cares THAT much, it's just the teacher doing their job so that they don't get fired. I'm almost against competition, seeing as how much damage etc.

it causes at school. Outside of school competition is necessary, so it's up in the air I guess. Rather than getting competitive, I'll usually sit back and get jealous, but not really do anything about it. The main reason is that I know I hate competition, and I tend to put others ahead of me, so I usually like to not cause problems. But other times I feel like Lynbrook itself is a competition. Sorry but... it's so F***ING ANNOYING when all these kids are like. "Oh my god nooo I got a 92 on my test!" When I'm sitting there staring at my C. It's like really? You got an A shut up. I always feel like I need to compete for grades, and because of my extra currics I can't keep straight A's. I barely even have a 3.0 at this point and I feel like I'm gonna go no where with that. Lynbrook is obscenely competitive with academics, and everyone including the staff revels in it like we're some godly school. They can't look past that and realize that the whole student body is suffering because of their insane methods. I feel like I'm forced to compete in the 4.0+ gpa race, when I really don't want to. Why does it have to be so competitive? Who are we even competing against? Big whoop if our school has bomb test scores or not, that shouldn't matter. What should matter is kids being able to learn PROPERLY and not tearing their hair out every night with 4 hours of AP lit homework. I'm straying from the topic. ~bye~

"Competition helps people figure it out."

- Brian McBride

Competition's a very prominent factor at Lynbrook, and actively fueled by students who all want to get into "that college," the one which has come to require 5.0, 2400, 800 students. (We have all come to know what these numbers are)

However, along this path to college, many of the "childhood experiences" are compromised - one of which is doing what you love doing, pursuing one's interests and hobbies. While many of us still hang out together after school ends, it's very hard to schedule such a time, with SAT prep classes, extracurriculars which we detest but are there for application padding, and various other activities - many of which we dislike doing. It used to be how friends would come together and draw, sing, dance, maybe ice skate, because they loved doing so. Now it seems like half of the people

doing such activities are not into it - it's only to put a "did such and such for five years" on their college application, and never touch the subject again.

"Unregulated competition is a naive metaphor for anarchy."

- John Ralston Saul

That buildup. That intense beating inside your heart. The time ticking in your head feels like a rocket that's about ready to launch. It's now. It's all now.

It's hard when you're surrounded by the best of the best. When suddenly it seems that you aren't that special anymore, aren't that talented. The competition rises out of nowhere and even if it's not meant for competing, it's competing. We'll compare ourselves to others. We'll identify the winners and the losers. We'll make decisions about their futures. And then we'll look at ourselves. We lose self-esteem because of competition. We become so caught up in wanting to be the best or caught up in the stress of everyone else being the best and in both cases it ends badly. The middle ground is just as intense. Our confidence is lowered each time we see someone else doing better than we are. It's not only school. It's the world around us. It's to see who has more extracurriculars. It's to see who has more trophies. It's to see it all acting as a comparison between individuals who are different. Being calculated every second of my life, well when we put it like that, it's tough. It's an enormous weight on my shoulder.

I don't want to carry that anymore.

"Winning isn't everything, but wanting to is."

Vince Lombardi

Competition, it's all around us really. We breathe it and it mocks us. We challenge it and we end up losing. It's funny how you can end up the best or the worst, and you're just judged. It's as if we have this stamp on us that determines whether or not we'll make it. Whether we'll be a success or a failure. To

people around us, it just seems that we aren't struggling, we're just not trying hard enough. We're not putting in enough effort. We don't give a s*** about where we're actually going in life. That's what they all say. And really, there's no opportunity or voice for us to say that they're wrong. That gut-wrenching feeling that explodes in your body when you didn't do as well as your expectations. And then the voices that appear in your head from your parents, or just people you care about saying that you'll end up a failure, they're disappointed in you. And then all of sudden, it's as if you're spiraling down a black hole, just because you did bad on one thing. And then you feel useless. It's amazing how competition can do that much to one person. One out of six billion will feel worthless because they lost. Because they lost. Maybe it's them who won. Just maybe the world will see it differently.

"I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

- Michael Jordan

I pride myself to be at "above average" on the Lynbrook intelligence and accomplishments scale, due to the simple fact that my talents align with what our current society labels "useful". The ability to memorize facts, for example, or the ability to see problems in a logical light have always been my strengths. (Excuse me if I sound pig-headed.) But really, I am simply lucky that I was born in an environment and timeframe where my strengths could be called "strengths". Had I been born a millennium ago, society would have called me an utter failure; I would not have been able to do anything what was called "useful" back then for females, such as cooking and having patience with children.

Anyway, the point is that society calls us to compete for the best of what it calls desirable. And on the Lynbrook campus, the arena has been narrowed down to 3 sectors: our GPA, college applications, and

"manifestations of leadership through extracurricular activities".

I've never felt the burden of Lynbrook competition TOO much, since I've always managed to maintain a 4.0 and be in the top 15 percentile in all my classes. But really, I am certain from personal experience that accomplishments don't guarantee happiness. I still have family problems. I still feel like a failure every other week. I still feel depressed at times. I wish parents and students will understand that accomplishments should not define ourselves or ever be used to determine the "usefulness" of a person. Because in the end, we're all competing ferociously... but for what? Just because having the perfect GPA and SAT score is what our peers define "success" does not mean that it is really that. WAKE UP, EVERYONE! WAKE UP FROM THE STUPOR AND FACE THE TRUTH.

"You learn so much from competition you gain confidence every time you have to step up and perform."

- Natalie Gulbis

Many students, upon hearing the word "competition," probably immediately think of SATs, APs, GPA, and all the other horrible acronyms we can think of. But competition is the reason many of us are at Lynbrook in the first place; to get a "better edge" in those dreaded college applications. Although it may seem like we're just competing against each other, perhaps we, as students, have made it that way.

View homecoming, which originated as a school-to-school event, where the winner takes pride in winning that year - and hoping, as an entire school, to win again, to cheer each other on.

At Lynbrook it's become a smaller, class-to-class rivalry, each class wanting to "beat the others," "beat the seniors," or "put those underclassmen in their place," etc. Whatever the excuse, it winds down to a class rivalry which wasn't the intention of homecoming.

Although many of us are all at Lynbrook as a cause of competition, it affects much more than our view on GPAs, and other numbers on a transcript, and we need to realize that before we turn everything into a competition, before we turn everything into a fight for the so called "best," or "top spot."

I made a friend around a year ago, and I thought we clicked. Let's call her... Ann. I trusted Ann and shared about myself—including my academic life. But after a while, I noticed a general pattern. I confided in her, but she did not confide in me.

I learned later that Ann was very competitive. Sure, she talks about herself. But it's never about her academic life or extracurricular activities. It's to a point where she gets angry when I find out about what she's doing outside of school.

I know I have to give her room. But it's not like I force her to say anything. I just let her stay silent. But I can't help but have this tiny part in me that feels betrayed when she gets competitive. I tell her my fears, and she views me as someone to beat. After all, I am just one more face hindering her from getting into that prestigious college, right?

How messed up. Friendships aren't supposed to be like this. Getting into a good college is great and all, but is it worth not trusting our friends?

"We humans have millions of years of evolutionary baggage that makes us regard competition in a deadly light."

- Vernor Vinge

I think it's almost pointless. With GPA and all. With SAT scores and all. Really the SATs are comparing people by ability. Is that really right? It's not fair hearing people who have better scores than you, knowing that it's possible that they're just better at taking tests. All our lives, we're told to be different, be unique. And then they give us this STANDARDIZED test that measures if we're good enough. The competition to have the best score. If it's a 2320 that might not be enough. "Yea, you won't get into an Ivy League, you have no chance at all." If it's an 1920 it's considered stupid. But really? REALLY? We have to amount to comparing ourselves with scores. Because our entire individuality is just a bunch of numbers. It's over considered. It shouldn't be this way. Trying to have the best score, competing with millions of high school students, maybe just to get into that one college, it's tiring. It's all too much really.

Competition, something that circulates our lives especially here at Lynbrook and I hate it, absolutely hate it. Of course, there will always be our folks who tell us to no end that competition is what shapes us to be winners, but on our level, in our minds, it's not how we think about it. As a student here at Lynbrook, I know that my parents always want me to be the best fish in the pond; if I get an A on a test, why am I not the one that got the A+? if I ran a sub three minute 800, why wasn't I the one who ran the sub two and a half? While this is definitely one way of thinking about competition, I must disagree. Unless it's during a race or a literal competition, this mentality is okay to adapt, but in the ordinary and regular high school environment that we all live in, this sense of competition is really unneeded and only results in more pressure and stress for us, the students, something we can really do without. In my life, I believe that the best competitor for everyone is ourselves. The way I think about it, competition is a great factor in our lives to always keep in mind as a benchmark. If someone's faster or better than you at doing something, then it's good to push ourselves to work harder to achieve that goal. Doing this almost guarantees us to improve on whatever we do. No matter how good you are at something, someday somehow, there'll be someone that's better than you, probably why Guinness must come out with a new edition of the World Records every single year.

"No matter what the competition is, I try to find a goal that day and better that goal."

- Bonnie Blair

People are ALWAYS complaining about competition at Lynbrook. Well guess what? You should see our MOMS. Especially the Korean ones, UGH. I love being Korean and all except for when our moms get together and gossip. You should see our churches, after service all the moms get together and they talk about their kids. And you know what their favorite thing to compare about us is? Our performance in school. "Blah blah blah my daughter is getting a 100 in Calculus BC as a freshman!!!" or it'll be like "My son is president of Key Club and he started a national

society for geniuses!” That’s all they ever do, gossip gossip gossip. Among their friends the moms will act like their children are amazing but once we get home...ohhh crap that’s when the shit really begins haha.

After every gossip session my mom and I come home and she begins to lecture me. “Did you hear about ____? She has straight As and she’s captain of the water polo team and she started a big club and she has a 2400 SAT I score!!! Why can’t you be like that?” The moms always compete against each other and try to win, but at home that’s when the real losers (aka everyone) begin to show their faces. I love my mom, and all Korean kids love their moms, but this is real crazy. I’m tired of being treated like a robot that has to do a buncha s*** for my mom to love me and be proud of me. I don’t wanna be compared no more, I just wanna be me and do what I want. I hate being gossiped about because other Korean moms don’t think I do enough and won’t get into a good college. Why can’t people mind their own business? The competition here is crazy, man. It really is.

“The competition’s tough, and it requires us to be tougher — tough-minded, never hard hearted.”

-John Kerry

I guess most people think about school and grades when someone says competition. Not that it doesn’t come to mind but I feel like its visible in more than just grades. We all have our group of friends, the people we hang with at brunch, lunch and outside of class. Everytime we go somewhere I feel left out. Even though we’re all chill with eachother its still pretty obvious that we all have one best friend. Oh, except me. I mean they’re good friends and all but nobody ever tells me stuff. They already have someone to tell, and I’m just not that someone. Whenever there together and I’m with them they always have some kind of inside joke that I don’t know about. And it sucks cause they don’t bother to explain and just keep talking about it and leave me out. I guess to relate this back to competition I feel like I always have to compete for their attention or I’ll be ignored. It’s kinda like I value their friendship more then they value mine. I’m

too scared to call anyone my best friend cause I don’t think they’d consider me one. Maybe I’m just selfish and craving for attention.

“The only competition worthy of a wise man is with himself.”

- Anna Brownell Jameson

I hate it when people tell me I’m “perfect” and my life is “perfect”. What do they know about my life? They think I don’t have to try very hard for my grades and “popularity” but what do they know. I barely get sleep at night trying to finish my work. Do they know how badly I wanna bitch about things but I can’t since I have to be nice to everyone or they won’t like me? No. Do they know how much my parents yell at me when I don’t do something as well as they wanted me to? They think my life is effortless. They’re wrong. I spend so much time trying to perfect my appearance and personality to fit their expectations. Some days I just wanna screw it all and go to school a mess and yell at everyone. But nobody wants a downer, right? I don’t think they’d like the real me. I hate being held on a pedestal. I say this now but tomorrow I’m going to wake up and pretend nothing’s wrong. I hate this. I’m tired of this. I don’t know how much longer I’ll be able to put up with this.

“It’s exciting to win and it’s a lot more enjoyable than losing. But winning shouldn’t be so important that you compromise your integrity to achieve it. When you make winning a supreme goal it can be destructive to your personality ... no one wins at everything, and it will be your advantage to realize now that you can’t and won’t win at everything in life. Plus, winning without integrity isn’t winning at all.”

- Doug Fields & Joshua Griffin

Dawn Bridges MFT

I am licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist and have my Master's degree in counseling psychology. I have worked exclusively in the public education setting for the past 13 years. In this role I do crisis assessment, individual counseling and brief family work. I consult with school staff and co-facilitate the Placement Advisory Committee at our district office. Recently I have been a member of the Death Review Committee for Santa Clara County. Prior to this, I worked at a non-profit counseling agency. In that setting I consulted with Sunnyvale Public Safety (in the youth diversion program) in addition to counseling adolescents in schools and families in the outpatient clinic. I have extensive experience working with adolescents and substance use issues and worked for a time at a school for substance addicted youth.

Competition: The act or process of competition; rivalry, one of two or more striving to reach or obtain something that only one can possess; to strive to equal or excel.

Competition can also be described as a contest between individuals or groups for territory or resources. Competition arises whenever two or more parties strive for a goal, which cannot be shared. Competition can be viewed from many different perspectives and like many things in life; competition can have both positive and negative effects.

Competition is a factor in many different arenas: business and economics, politics, sports, biology, relationships and education (to name a few). In business and economics, competition is generally viewed as an important factor. The prevailing notion is that competition forces businesses to develop new, better and less expensive products and services. In politics competition is viewed as giving the public at least two diverse options. Elections are the final piece of a lengthy competitive process after which there are clear winners and losers. In sports, competition (between either individuals or teams) is the thing that drives the athlete to work hard. For all athletes the intent and hope is to be the winner; however, only one person or team can be victorious. In the area of biology, competition within and between species is the critical force in the process of evolution and natural selection. With relationships, competition can become a factor when more than one person is vying for time and/or affection from another. Finally, in the field of education, students compete for certain honors, scholarships, awards and grades. Competition in the area of secondary education is driven by the fact that there are a limited number of students that will be selected for spots at many universities (not to mention an even more so limited number at prestigious universities).

The very nature and definition of competition means that some people or teams will achieve their goals and others will not. But does that mean that if you are not the "winner" all your hard work was for nothing? Does it mean you did not get a significant amount of good from the process? As stated earlier, competition can have both positive and negative effects. There is a long-standing notion of healthy competition. This is the idea that all competitors will do their very best and that this is good for all involved, regardless of the outcome. From this perspective, competition can be positive. It pushes us to practice, work hard, and be disciplined. Competition can get us to excel and go beyond where we have gone in the past. So with these positives, when does competition become negative? Perhaps when we become discouraged, because no matter how hard we work, we are never in the "winner's circle". Perhaps competition becomes negative when we identify ourselves and our self worth only with the outcome and not the process. Or perhaps competition becomes negative when we start comparing ourselves to others rather than celebrating the fact that we did better, finished stronger than we ever had before.

Several things struck me when I read the submissions from students regarding competition. The first thought being, how much emotion and thought went into each of the views expressed. Despite the varying opinions about competition, each view was passionate and articulate. A few of the writers found that competition was motivating, however the majority of the writers expressed negative effects of competition (here at Lynbrook in particular). Many of the writers describe competition as intense, pervasive and all consuming. The impression given is that many find the competition to be exhausting, and that self worth is based on the outcome of many small and large competitions throughout each and every day. It was also noticed in a number of the submissions that competition invites constant comparison with peers. The notion that perfection is not only desired but necessary also stood out. Additionally, a theme of loss is suggested, loss of friendships, loss of the time and energy to follow interests and passions. As noted above, competition can be motivating and beneficial it can also be exhausting and potentially detrimental; therefore it is up to each individual to take charge of how competition influences them.

Additional Resources

■ *Ten Best Gifts for Your Teen*
Steve Saso

■ *Surviving Your Adolescents: How to Manage and Let Go of Your 13-18 Year Olds*
Thomas Phelan, Ph.D.



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