

Altar angst

Urge to wed not a universal phenomenon

As our college years come to a bittersweet end, hordes of my peers seem to be rushing to the altar.

Three of my friends will tie the knot in the next year. That may not seem like a horde, but I don't have many friends. So really, three is an overwhelming proportion.

Watching them get married hasn't affected me as much as I thought it would. I haven't been waking up in the middle of the night, choking on panic and screaming, "MUST ... FIND ... HUSBAND."

Probably the most traumatic part of the experience has been the bridal showers. Bridal showers are second only to Tupperware parties in the line-up of freakish social events.

If you've never been to a bridal shower, I'll give you a briefing:

Friends of the bride and friends of the bride's (and sometimes the groom's) mother gather to talk about things they care nothing about.

Then everyone watches the bride open her gifts, ooh-ing and ah-hing at all the right moments. Guests often discuss each gift in minute detail as it's passed around the room.

"Ooh Nickie, look at the handle on this pizza cutter," some observant soul oozes. "That's the kind of plastic that lasts and lasts. That pizza cutter will outlive you. You can pass it on to your first daughter."

And the rest of the guests coo in amazement, wondering how anyone could create such a sturdy pizza cutter. Tears form in the eyes of the weak.

"That pizza cutter is a blessing straight from heaven," the bride's grandmother whispers, and everyone else nods vigorously. Yes, yes, Nickie, God wants you to have that pizza cutter.

Throughout the ordeal, everyone



Rainbow Rowell

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eats a lot of whatever is available. As long as you have food in your mouth, you don't have to make insincere comments or answer questions like, "So Rainbow, when will we be invited to your bridal shower?" or "Don't you have a job yet?" You just shrug and give people that "Sorry, but I've got a mouthful of Chex mix" smile.

Actually, the standard bridal shower is much less traumatic than the personal shower, in which guests buy the bride skimpy lingerie or other personal goods. Then make off-color remarks as the bride unwraps her flimsy wraps. (This is the type of bridal shower they always have on TV shows like "Wings" and "Full House.")

I've changed my mind. The most traumatic part of having your friends get married is trying on bridesmaid dresses. I could have enjoyed all my

days on this earth without knowing what I look like in tight, purple polyester crepe. But now I must live with that horrific image.

I haven't actually been in any weddings yet. Perhaps the most traumatic moments are yet to come. My first wedding is Saturday. I'm an integral part of the ceremony — the person who cuts cake.

That's right, if you want some creamy white icing, you have to get past me. And if I think you've had enough, I'm not going to give you that third piece. Don't hate me. It's my job.

At least it will give me something to do with my time. Usually, I spend wedding receptions sitting at a table, making sure there's always cake in my mouth so I don't have to say "No, I'm not getting married and I don't have a job" over and over again.

I know more now about weddings than I ever thought there was to know. I even know how to use the Club Wedd bridal registry computer at Target.

I was a little envious when my friends first started making wedding plans, when they first started picking their wedding colors and selecting china styles.

But now, I don't envy them a bit.

Sure, no one is throwing me parties. Little girls don't get all gussied up just to throw rose petals in my path. But I don't think I'm ready for marriage.

I could handle a lifelong monogamous commitment. But I'm not ready (nor can I afford) to choose a caterer and a cakemaker, a photographer, a videographer and a florist.

If I want a nice pizza cutter, I guess I'll have to buy one myself.

Rowell is a senior news-editorial, advertising and English major and the Daily Nebraskan managing editor.

Powerful taboo

Phallic fear causes unconscionable cutting

Like most men in this country, I am circumcised.

If that first sentence makes you feel a little queasy, maybe you should read on.

Because if circumcision is only a simple, hygienic medical procedure then why does it carry such a charge?

It's not like it's uncommon: perhaps 80 percent of all white males in America are circumcised within the first few days after birth.

The various reasons given for the procedure change over time — and seem hard to fathom in light of the fact that the rest of the world gets by pretty well without it.

But the truth of the matter is that circumcision represents a peculiarly American fetish and taboo. The reasons for its continued practice are not medical but psychic, magical, sacramental.

When circumcision was introduced in English-speaking countries about a hundred years ago, it caught on in a big way among American hospitals. By the midpoint of the century, however, it had almost disappeared from every country but our own.

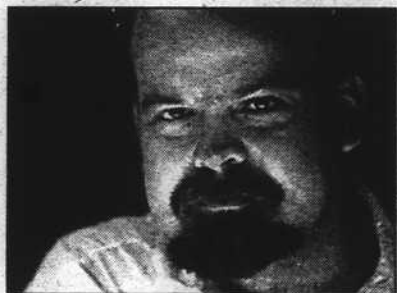
Circumcision had been touted as a preventative measure to ward off a host of ills — everything from epilepsy to masturbation, which was considered a health hazard in those dark days.

It took a couple of generations to demonstrate that incidence of these conditions were not reduced by circumcision. By then, of course, new reasons to circumcise were offered.

Lets take a look at the most common modern rationalizations of this surgical procedure.

1. It is supposed to lessen the risk of penile cancer in the adult.

Cancer of the penis strikes about one in 100,000 older men in America. And circumcising all



Mark Baldrige

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infants to lessen the risk of cancer in a few old men might seem a shaky policy at best — if any evidence existed that it would actually work.

But penile cancer rates in Japan are lower — without hacking off the foreskins of infant boys — and rates among the uncircumcised Scandinavians are almost equal to our own.

2. It is supposed to lessen the incidence of urinary tract infection in boys.

Only one study is cited to demonstrate this — one that has acknowledged statistical errors: It shows association, not cause. Subsequent studies have failed to confirm the findings of this original, flawed one. Yet it continues to be cited in the literature.

3. It is supposed to lessen the risk of contracting venereal disease.

Well, cutting the whole thing off would work even better on that front, wouldn't it? Maybe the money spent on a circumcision would be better invested for the little scamps — so they can buy condoms with it when they're old.

4. Hygiene.

We teach little girls how to clean and care for their bodies. Maybe little boys can learn how too.

5. Aesthetics.

This borders on the criminal. If a similar procedure was carried out on infant girls we would consider its practitioners savages.

6. Everyone else is doing it.

My mom had a remarkably good answer to this line of thinking ... something about everyone else jumping off a cliff.

But my claim remains to be dealt with: that routine infant circumcision is not medicine, but mojo.

America has a lot invested in its self-image. We construct ourselves as a clean, manly, upright society.

We also possess, or are possessed by, the strongest penis taboos in known history — it must not be seen, must not be touched, must not be mentioned. To polite society the penis does not exist. In its erect state it carries an even more powerful taboo.

When was the last time you saw a full frontal nude in film or art? Compare that to the infinite number of female nudes.

As with all ritual mutilations there is something we hope to gain as a culture, some magic protection or power or charm. Some potent good.

As a people we make an offering of blood to this obscure, unknown god.

We sacrifice a piece of the sexual organs of our boy children to our own clean, manly, upright self-image.

And it works. It's gotten us to the top of the greasy hill.

But as we feel ourselves slipping from that ascendancy, what new pain will we offer on the altar of that grinning, ghastly idol?

Baldrige is the Opinion page editor for the Daily Nebraskan.

Our special guest

Warner Kay Myers

Gay student faces life after liberation

If you look at my backpack you'll see a rainbow patch.

The other day a girl I was studying with asked me what it meant.

I told her I am gay. And she told me she knows a few gay people. So I replied, "I know a few heterosexual people."

Ba-Dah Boom! (Hint: That was supposed to be an ice breaker!)

Every man and woman who is consciously gay has at one point in time come out to themselves. Obviously. That's how they know they are gay.

I can't speak for all homosexuals, but I believe that once any person comes to terms with their sexuality, how open they want to be about it is their decision.

My decision to be open about my sexual preference is why I'm writing this column.

My entire life I have tried to be something I'm not. Something I can never be: a heterosexual woman.

I've read romance novels by the dozen hoping to one day magically stumble into the same emotional tizzies the teen-aged girls always felt for Dan or Steve.

I dated boys all through high school and went to all of the dances; I joined a sorority and looked through bridal magazines. All in hope of discovering the connection that would make me normal. Like every other girl I knew. Nothing worked.

This is not meant to be a sob story; however, I was very unhappy growing up.

Until this summer when I came out to myself and my family and friends, my life was one of frustration, anger, hurt, isolation, depression and loneliness.

My parents and I never seemed to get along and we could never figure out what barrier was keeping me distant from them.

I began therapy in high school searching for an end to my inner conflict. It resolved some problems, but I was still hurting inside and unable to express or identify why.

Finally this summer everything clicked into place. I was at a friend's house and we were sitting on his bed.

I blurted I was in love with one of my closest friends from high school.

I still have no idea why that revelation happened just then. I told him her name. And then the rest of the night we spent talking and crying and hugging to work out all of the emotions flying around in my heart.

I started seeing a new counselor to talk specifically about all of these new feelings. I was seeking understanding about myself and looking for support. My old psychologist continued to work with me, too.

I also began to check out every book I could find at the city library on lesbians. I had an incredible appetite for knowledge about people like me ...

I journaled. I cried. I did charcoal sketches and I cried some more.

Everything I read helped me

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find myself. The pieces of my life had fallen into place and I felt a connection with a group of people. A feeling I'd never known before.

The weight lifted from my shoulders when I realized that — while I'd always thought something was horribly wrong with me — I was just trying to force myself into being something that I thought I was meant to be.

You may wonder why I cried so much if I was happy to finally be liberated. I cried because all of the books I read this summer told about homophobia and phobia and the discrimination gay people face.

I read about gay families being torn apart and same-sex partners being refused admittance to the hospital rooms of their loved ones — because of a lack of a piece of paper.

I read about murders and other horrible hate crimes. And this was who I am. Who I can't deny to be.

I decided to take it all back. For about five minutes I considered retracting my statement that I thought I was gay and I planned to tell my few close friends it had been a joke or a huge mistake. Blow the whole thing off.

But then I remembered the years of depression and loneliness and decided that putting up with the hate of ignorant people was worth it in the long run.

I know now that there is no way I'll ever go back to that confining heterosexual hell.

So I came out to my family. My mother and father said they love me and support me. Via e-mail my brother responded to my announcement saying he thought it was an interesting "choice."

Oh, well, at least he's trying. I have never felt so liberated, proud and happy in my entire life. I feel complete. Finally. No one can take that feeling away from me.

Basically, I have decided it is my vocation to be OUT! To be politically active in the gay movement and not hide my sexual preference anywhere. That is what this column is about.

I want you all to know that I am real. I could be your sister, daughter, mother, aunt or girlfriend. We are everywhere ...

So, look out UNL! There's one more out, proud dyke on campus.

Myers is a junior broadcasting major.

BE OUR GUEST

The Daily Nebraskan will present a guest columnist each Monday. Writers from the university and community are welcome.

Contact Mark Baldrige c/o the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588. Or by phone at (402)-472-1782.