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Letters

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Other

Views of 'Brokeback Marriages'

To the Editor:

Re "Many Couples Must Negotiate Terms 'Brokeback' Marriages" (March 7): At a recent 35th reunion of six women from Cambridge University who had been thrown together as undergraduates because of the alphabetical proximity of their last names, it was determined that the first marriages of three of the six had been to men who turned out to be gay. A fourth responded to this news by saying: "You remember my brother Paul? He's now my sister Paula." So much for statistics!

Ann M. Altman

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Hamden, Conn.

To the Editor:

Re "Many Couples Must Negotiate Terms of 'Brokeback' Marriages": There is no negotiating when the wife has no clue. I used to assert proudly that my husband and I were both virgins when we married. That was only half true, as I found out after nine years of marriage and three children when my husband disclosed that he was gay.

Recently, I was prepared for a cathartic cry when I went to see "Brokeback Mountain" and instead was perplexed when the audience laughed as the wife looked out to see her husband kissing another man. In disbelief, I saw the movie again in a different neighborhood only to witness the same laughter.

In my own situation, divorce didn't resolve anything. We remained best friends, business colleagues and emotional supporters until he died in my arms six years ago. In the wake of our relationship, two short marriages crashed in the waves, and my children had to endure far too many sea changes in their young lives.

Gina Ryan
North Bergen, N.J.

To the Editor:

While I can sympathize with the pain suffered by the women profiled in "'Brokeback' Marriages" I must object to

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the way a woman characterized her shock on realizing that her husband was gay.

She said she had "no suspicions whatsoever" and added, "It's not like he had Barbra Streisand or show tunes on." I've been married for almost 31 years, I've had two children, and can reasonably lay claim to being "straight," but ... I love show music. I have collected cast albums since I was a high school freshman, and over the last 40 years my collection has become sizable.

It is reliance on these sorts of stereotypes -- that gay men are entranced by the likes of Sondheim and Streisand -- that may blind women to other indications that a man is conflicted about his sexuality.

Incidentally, I was the one who helped my daughter pick out her prom dress, since she trusts my eye for line, color and fit.

Michael G. Dell'Orto
Wilton, N.H.

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To the Editor:

In "'Brokeback' Marriages," you quote a woman surprised by her husband's same-sex orientation: "I had no suspicions whatsoever. He's very masculine looking. It's not like he had Barbara Streisand or show tunes on."

Quite ironic, given that it's exactly this kind of dehumanizing stereotyping that impels many gay people in our society to desperately conceal their sexuality.

Elissa Lear
Naperville Ill.

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To the Editor:

"Brokeback Marriages" dealt with only half the situation of same-sex relationships within heterosexual marriages. I was astonished that an article dealing with the subject neglected totally to consider the other side -- married women who have lesbian relationships. They exist; I've known several.

Is this just another example of an article that ignores half the population, and by a woman, yet?

Sarah Moench
Boulder, Colo.

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To the Editor:

Re "Brokeback Marriages": As a therapist who lived a hidden life in the 70's, I am struck by the regularity with which the subject of mixed marriages involving a gay spouse and a heterosexual one focuses exclusively on gay men.

Women often hide in their marriages because they fear so many losses -- the acceptance of parents and family members, possibly their marriage, the love of their children, economic security and the security of fitting into the dominant culture.

My experience proved to be one of the most difficult times I have faced thus far in my

life. Decisions that I and others in my shoes have had to make affect the people in our lives we most love. Today, the "Brokeback Mountain" arrangement is just one of many options that women choose to resolve the dilemma of being torn in two directions.

Joanne Fleisher

Philadelphia

The writer is the author of "Living Two Lives: Married to a Man and in Love With a Woman."

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To the Editor:

"'Brokeback' Marriages" was written as if men who are married to women who have sex with women do not exist. Is this another form of sexism?

Years ago, I knew a very loving couple who, after having giving life to four beautiful daughters, decided to separate. The reason? The wife was head over heels in love with another woman.

She finally went to live with her lover, leaving the girls to the care of her husband. The couple was divorced shortly after. We as friends were very upset, feeling especially sorry for the four devastated and bewildered girls. I think another article is due, this time from a suffering man's viewpoint.

Timothy Tung

Manhattan

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To the Editor:

An intriguing angle on the "Brokeback Marriages." When black men sleep gay and marry women, news stories focus on the "down low" aspect and the devastating effect of AIDS on black women.

"Brokeback Marriages" focused on the love gay men have for their wives (even though many also maintain boyfriends on the side). It carried no AIDS warnings. Why?

Andre Mack Barnett
Columbia, Md.

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To the Editor:

I read "'Brokeback' Marriages" with much sadness. It is unfortunate that we are not living in more liberal times.

Should men automatically be labeled "gay" because they have sex with other men? Clearly many of these people are bisexual and should be labeled as such. The gay community, unfortunately, is as eager to claim them as their own, just as the heterosexual world would like to.

This leaves no room for one to move or breathe. It is not reflective of the reality of many of us bisexual people, who have open relationships.

Unfortunately your story does not include this larger group of people who can "negotiate" these terms successfully. You present us, yet once again, with an "either-or" situation. The door is shut on any bisexual option.

Patricia Davis
Campbell, Calif.

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To the Editor:

In "Brokeback Relationships," Joe Kort, a clinical social worker in Michigan, discusses some of the things heterosexual women like about gay men. One quality missing is that gay men are fun and in most cases more interesting than straight men. This is evidenced by the fact that more and more of these women appear to be attending gay bars.

Stanley Wright
Manhattan

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To the Editor:

Re "'Brokeback Marriages": While I understand that this article was inspired by the story of the two closeted gay men in the film "Brokeback Mountain," I was disappointed that it failed even to mention lesbians in straight marriages.

So often discussions of sexuality revolve around men's needs, desires and behaviors, and women are included only in terms of how they cope with the male expression of sexuality or factor into it. We need to raise the analysis of human sexuality to a more balanced and comprehensive level.

Rachel K. Jones
Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

Counting Calories

To the Editor:

The recent article regarding the study published in Pediatrics failed in its attempt to connect soft drink consumption to obesity in adolescents ("Study Links Sugary Drinks to Teenagers' Weight," Vital Signs, March 7).

In fact, the results found no statistical difference in body mass index among adolescents who received noncaloric beverages versus the control group that did not. Only when the authors pulled out a small select group of the heaviest adolescents did they find a small B.M.I. difference between the two tested groups over the six months.

It stands to reason that anyone could lose weight if calories from any certain food or beverage are removed and not replaced by other calories, and that is what happened in this study. Soft drinks are not distinctive in this regard. Obesity is a complex issue that has no single cause, but is dependent on many factors including genetics, lifestyle, eating habits and exercise. All beverages can be part of a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

Kevin Keane
Washington
The writer is senior vice president, communications, of the American Beverage Association.

À la Carte Hospitals

To the Editor:

Re "For Hospital Menus, Overdue Surgery" (Being a Patient, March 7): For years I have been baffled as to why it is acceptable for a hospital, which normally charges many times what a luxury hotel

charges, to get away with their abysmal food service. Even airline food (remember airline food?) put it to shame. While I'm whining, I note the thoughtlessness experienced a few years ago by my wife who was an overnight patient after surgery for a broken arm. Her breakfast included one of those single-serving cereal boxes that required two hands to open. Thank you very much!

Robert A. Myers
Manhattan

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To the Editor :

Reading "Hospital Menus" reminded me of what I saw in a major general hospital. Food served for the elderly ended with a dessert, a fresh fruit. The only problem was that the apple was solid as a rock. How could a patient eat this healthy choice? As expected, the apples returned intact to the kitchen. What a failure, I thought!

Elie Feuerwerker
Highland Park, N.J.

Focusing on Attention

To the Editor:

Re "Attention Surplus? Re-examining a Disorder" (Essay, March 7):

I am so glad someone finally said it. Attention-deficit disorder becomes a problem only when we insist on having people do boring things.

A knowledge-based society, however,

doesn't really have to be boring. If textbooks or school assignments are tedious, then let us look at them and see how we manage to take the life and the fun out of them.

Much school work and many jobs function by the obsessions of another time. Not even once have I met anyone who thought a computer was boring.

Henry Detlev Fishel
Glen Cove, N.Y.
The writer is a psychotherapist.

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To the Editor:

Re "Re-examining a Disorder": The writer argues that attention problems may be vestiges of survival skills that are less useful in today's world than they were 150,000 years ago. However, he fails to mention that cases of A.D.H.D. and related disorders have skyrocketed in the last 15 or 20 years, a fact at odds with the idea that attention problems have an evolutionary root.

I'm all for reducing the use of potentially dangerous drugs and making accommodations for special-needs children in school. But as long as attention disorders are diagnosed by a list of symptoms rather than by identifying faulty neurological or biochemical processes (or environmental factors), we are never going to understand or effectively treat what is really going on in people with attention disorders.

Meridyth G. Burrows
Simsbury, Conn.

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To the Editor:

Re "Re-examining a Disorder": As the writer notes, sustained attention during an extended task can be an issue in A.D.H.D.

But in my experience as a (now elderly) man with this disorder, a far more serious matter is the switching of attention, or a requirement for dual attention. If I am driving, I need to turn off the radio and halt conversation in any difficult passage. If someone speaks to me while I am reading, I have trouble switching attention to the speaker and then picking up the thread of what I was reading. In general, if I am doing any task, I lose my place in it if anything else claims my attention.

As for medication, if any would alleviate this problem, in my view it would be well worth while. I don't use any of the available medications only because I don't tolerate them well. I wish I did.

Richard Aronson
Westfield, N.J.

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To the Editor:

Re "Re-examining a Disorder" (Essay, March 7): As a parent and as a psychotherapist who has worked with children, I applaud and deeply appreciate the words of the writer, Dr. Paul Steinberg, on attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder:

"If it is indeed a context-driven disorder, let's change the contexts in schools to

accommodate the needs of children who have it, not just support and accommodate the needs of children with attention-surplus disorder."

Recently, a so-called "learning specialist" recommended that we consider Ritalin for our 8-year-old boy who had been blithely given the A.D.H.D label by his school. When trying to convince us of the drug's efficacy, said specialist proclaimed, "He may have less of a spark, but he'll get a lot done!"

What a sales pitch, we thought. We fired him.

Peter Loffredo
Brooklyn

When Men Age, Gracefully or Not

To the Editor:

I tried hard to enjoy the humor in "Not Wanting to Be Left Out, Men Find Their Own 'Pause'." (Side Effects, March 7). After all, what could be more hilarious than men complaining alongside women about change-of-life issues. But I just couldn't budge the laugh-o-meter.

Menopause in women and andropause in men are often accompanied by increased risks to cardiovascular disease, cancer, bone-thinning osteoporosis and diabetes. Low testosterone should be discussed with a doctor, determined with a simple blood test and, in some cases, treated with therapy.

The writer apparently knows this because he asks us not to write letters explaining that there are serious medical consequences

of low-levels of testosterone in older men. "I know that," he says. But his article quickly returns to the easy jokes about "just plain getting old," which apparently includes losing one's pitching arm and falling asleep during dinner.

Shrugging off the early signs of medical problems that can come with aging is no laughing matter.

Daniel Perry
Washington
The writer is executive director of the Alliance for Aging Research.

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To the Editor:

"Not Wanting to Be Left Out, Men Find Their Own 'Pause'." (Side Effects, March 7) makes light of a rather serious process for men, namely successful aging.

With baby boomers fast approaching 60 and beyond, it is important to understand what men go through as they move on in years.

As a therapist whose practice is devoted to "men and aging" (and I'm a man who is 61), I know what appropriate aging is all about, and much of that has to do with redefining expectations and doing some serious reality testing.

Hair dyes, hormones and youthful clothing prevent a man who has reached his 60's from basking in the joys of moving forward in life and celebrating the freedom that comes with the 60's. It's quite empowering.

Masking the process may well be

symptomatic of masked anxiety and depression.

It's authenticity that we're after, not phony adolescence.

Robert Schwalbe
Manhattan

Faith's Role in Dire Times

To the Editor:

"As Surgeons Clasped the Heart, He Reached for the Soul" (Cases, March 7) brought back bittersweet memories of the birth of my first child, a stillborn daughter.

The young, inexperienced priest on duty told me he "hated doing this." As a distraught, grief-stricken young mother, all that mattered to me was the soul of my lost child. The only thing I asked of him was to baptize the baby. He refused, telling me he couldn't, because only the living receive the sacrament. His explanation only compounded my horror.

An empathetic nurse overheard our conversation and whispered that she was Roman Catholic and in lieu of a priest would perform the baptism. I will never forget the gentle, loving way she treated my baby, and will be forever grateful for her kind gesture.

Its own way was every bit as beautiful as the church ceremonies for my three living children.

LuAnn Wierdsma
Milwaukee

Abuse Among Siblings

To the Editor:

I was happy to see your coverage of the underexamined topic of sibling abuse in "Beyond Rivalry, a Hidden World of Sibling Violence" (Feb. 28). But I was sad to see that few studies have been conducted and even fewer measures taken since 2002, when I wrote an undergraduate paper on the topic.

When cases of child abuse are perpetrated by adults outside the family, parents who witness sibling abuse may feel culpable or ashamed for letting it happen in their families.

This shame prevents them from acting as advocates for their children by acknowledging the abuse and then seeking professional help to stop it. Because this abuse most often occurs within the confines of the home, there may be no adults in these children's lives at all who are in a position to halt the abuse.

Adina Gerver
Manhattan

Results With Premature Babies

To the Editor:

Thank you for your article "Achievement of Premies Is Found to Be Near Normal" (Feb. 28): As the mother of a premature son born in 1972, I was gratified to read something positive about these tiny babies. Most articles cite devastating issues that almost make it seem as if the heroics used to save them were in question.

My son Jonathan was born 10 weeks early and then, at less than 3 pounds and severely septic, underwent major intestinal surgery. Thank goodness, he was born at Long Island Jewish Hospital. Their neonatal center was prepared to deal with his problems and nursed him back to good health.

Although he had some learning problems, he finished his graduate program in the top 10 percent of his class. He is a happy, healthy, successful 33-year-old today, a testimonial to the health care workers who have brought these tiny babies so far.

Susan Abrahams
Great Neck, N.Y.

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