Obstacles That Block Personal Growth

Pressure... struggle...failure. Life has its ups and downs. Each person will face challenges as they follow their journey in life. Making the right moves in life can be very stressful. Some individuals will lose their way in life, while others can be too scared to move. Some people will always receive encouragement and praise for every decision, but others may face criticism for every decision. The two poems "If" by Rudyard Kipling and “Suicide Note” by Janice Mirikitani show that if people can trust in themselves, controls their dreams, and push through difficult times, then they will be able to grow and succeed in life. If the young lady in “Suicide Note” did not allow expectations to control her, she could have found her inner strength to keep on going in life.

First, life is always going to be stressful, but, when individuals have to live by what other people say, it can feel like the person will crumple from all the stress. The Asian American girl in “Suicide Note” was already stressing from school work, but the need to please her parents added too much stress on her. Mirikitani wrote, “Tasks do not come easily” (Mirikitani line 24). An assignment, project, or a task is already stressful, but, when an individual struggles with a topic, it can feel like the work will never get done. So, when an individual completes a difficult task, he or she needs compliments, not harsh criticism. This harsh criticism and pressure is not only placed on an Asian American by the parents, but also from society and schools. The Asian Journal of Social Psychology stated, “Research has shown that Asian Americans have to
outperform other races academically to receive equal consideration by colleges” (Chai 1). How is this fair to these individuals? Each race has an unfair expectation that people have no choice but to deal with. These unfair expectations add on to the stress many must face in order to succeed in life.

Next, the girl felt that her family did not appreciate all her hard work because she was not a boy. In recent Chinese culture, males are placed higher than females. So, knowing this fact, readers can see how the girl felt like she was unwanted. The girl imagined, “If only I were a son, shoulders broad / as the sunset threading through pine, / I would see the light in my mother’s / eyes, or the golden pride reflected / in my father’s dream” (Mirikitani lines 10 - 14). The main character of the poem was held to an unfair expectation. She felt as if her parents were pushing her to accomplish activities that only a boy could easily achieve. The girl started doubting herself because she knew she could not do the activities, when she never needed to try to complete the guidelines her parents established. Instead, she needed to trust in her own abilities. It is crucial for anyone to have trust and belief in themselves. Self-doubting can lead to an individual falling behind in life because they cannot trust themselves with making the correct choice. In his poem “If,” Rudyard Kipling wrote, "If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, / But make allowance for their doubting too” (Kipling lines 3 - 4). Being able to trust that one can succeed in a situation is important, but also being able to forgive those who doubt would allow the girl in “Suicide Note” to move forward. According to two professors from Columbia University, “By reconceptualizing past transgressions with a kinder, more equivocal outlook, clients attain a shift in perspective that is spiritual and cognitive in nature, thereby reducing symptomology and enhancing their quality of life. Such insights bring clients toward their inner Buddha nature, which transcends the suffering associated with clinging to past hurts and resentment” (Menahem
1). There is not enough time in life to let grudges stand in the way of personal growth. The girl in “Suicide Note” was judged and treated unfairly by the people who should have loved her for who she was, but not trusting in herself caused her to cave.

Moving on, it is okay for an individual to create dreams that he or she wants to accomplish. Completing a dream can help people grow in many ways. Jayne Galinsky quoted Saliva Guglielmi saying, "Dreams can provide solace and a fleeting sense of well-being when we are depressed or in difficulty, they can help us imagine new alternatives and directions that may inspire us to action and give us a sense of agency” (Galinsky 2). If an individual accomplishes a dream of theirs, they can help others reach for theirs too. The main goal with having a dream in life is having control over it. The girl in “Suicide Note” did not have control over her own dreams and goals. She allowed her parents to push her dreams to the side to make room for their own. She let their goals make every decision. Rudyard Kipling wrote, “If you can dream—and not make dreams your master” (Kipling line 9). Allowing a dream to make rash decision can place an individual in a bad place. Dreams cannot become the controller in people’s lives. It is only when people can control their own dreams, that they can use it to grow.

Finally, as “Suicide Note” comes to a closing, readers can see the damage that was made by the girl’s parents. She tried to hide all the hurt by trying to work harder and improve her grades, but, sadly, that was not enough. The girl described how she felt every time her parents were not satisfied by saying, “Each failure, a glacier. / Each disapproval, a bootprint. / Each disappointment, / ice above my river. / So I have worked hard” (Mirikitani lines 25 - 29). The parents may have not known the extent of the negative effects they were causing for their daughter. Every single disapproval was more damaging then the last. The girl could not piece together the broken pieces of her self that her parents broke. She could not get past the hard and
sad time in her life. Being able to push through a situation in life will make an individual stronger. An individual will be able learn from the tough times in life. Also, fighting through the difficult times will build one's self esteem. Kipling wrote, "If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew / To serve your turn long after they are gone, /And so hold on when there is nothing in you /Except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’" (Kipling lines 21-24). There will be many times in an individual’s life when they are ready to surrender, but holding on and pushing through will place the person further in life. Julie Nash, who is a registered nurse, wrote, "Everybody trips. Everybody stumbles. Everybody falls. It’s how fast you pick yourself up that defines who you are” (Nash 2). What does this say about the young lady in “Suicide Note”? She was not able to pick herself back up. Sadly, she was not strong enough. As a result, she cut her personal growth short.

In conclusion, life has a unique journey for every individual. There will be a lot of obstacles that will be in the way of each dream and answer, but, when a person pushes through the difficult times, then they will be able to grow. Individuals should also be more aware of whose opinion really matters. Some people are only put in others’ lives to test their strength. There are only two choices. Will the person stand strong, or will the person crumble under the pressure?
Works Cited


