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Introduction to College Writing

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Middle School Mania

“Keiley, it’s time to go! Now, and don’t make me tell you again”, my dad yelled at the top of his lungs. The clock flashed 7:45 a.m., indicating it was way past time to leave for school. I hastily grabbed my brand new, must have bottle cap belt and initial purse, and bolted to the car. I plopped in the seat, and of course the first thing I did was pull open the car mirror. I had to make sure I looked absolutely flawless. “Seatbelt,” my dad prompted. Sighing, I clicked it on and quickly resumed my regular morning routine of analyzing myself. I saw my perfectly crimped hair blowing slightly from the vent’s air, my icy white eye shadow, and a big problem. Panicking, I realized I had forgotten to put my mascara on. There was no way on earth I could possibly go to middle school without my long black eye lashes! Of course my dad couldn’t see the horribleness of no mascara, and forced me to go to school despite my desperate and pitiful begs. I could just hear and see the whispers and taunts I was about to face in my head. I never actually got the chance to find out if my imaginations came true, because I camped out at the nurse’s office all morning, and convinced my mom that I was sick enough to go home. I played sick out of the fear of what my classmates would think or say. Those emotions of fear and uneasiness are still fresh from what I felt that day. As I reflect upon this memory, I find it absurd that I went to those extremes to avoid my peers just because of mascara, which brings me to a question: Why do middle school girls care so much what others think?

I thought the best way to start my investigation of middle school, was to interview a couple of middle school girls. I started with Jordan Westbrook, an 8th grader from Bryant Middle School. My questions started simply by asking Westbrook if she liked Middle School. An immediate response of “NO!” rushed out of her mouth, which made me know that I was on to something. After asking her to explain what she didn’t like about middle school, I could sense the uncertainty, and the pain of past memories that were flooding her mind. “You have to be perfect and cool and it’s a struggle to fit in with the in crowd,” she slowly comments. Biting her lip, she went on explaining that to be accepted by the cool posse you had to say and do the right things, and dress and look a certain way. Why is it so important to all act the same way and where is the individuality of these middle school girls?

I then questioned her if she had ever felt like she wasn’t accepted. She twirled her Abercrombie necklace in her thumb, and sat in silence for a moment or two before she answered. Softly she replied “Last year, I constantly got made fun of because of the clothes I wore. Crocs apparently were out, and I wore them to school one day, and I’ve never been so humiliated in my life. I was out that day, just like the Crocs.” Helplessness shone brightly from her face, and it took me back to those same feelings of insecurity. For me it was Abercrombie, which was like a foreign word to me. If you didn’t own an Abercrombie outfit, you definitely didn’t have style, and I definitely had never even been in the store. No one likes to be embarrassed, and it seems that middle school girls get embarrassed over simple matters. Maybe out of the fear of being embarrassed these girls feel the need to dress and act in a way that is thought of as cool. Perhaps middle school girls are afraid to be individuals out of fear of being made fun of or not fitting in. I knew my answer didn’t rest in that alone, though, so I had to press further.

I continued my interviews, with Chelsea Price, a seventh grader from Bryant Middle School. When asked her biggest struggle she faced in middle school, she as well replied, “fitting in.” Popularity was the biggest and most overwhelming issue for Price. “Every girl wants to be popular,” she stated very matter a fact like. Her remark was extremely intriguing to me. Why is being popular so important? She actually answered my thought, “All the popular girls have stunning features, and not to mention beautiful guys. They are always the subject of conversation and everybody wants to be friends them.” I could see the green envy oozing out of her, but what exactly did she mean by stunning features and beautiful guys? After asking her to go into detail about her last statement, she replied “What I meant by stunning features was size two, tan skin, pretty hair that is always fixed, and a made up face. Beautiful guys are the ever so cute boys that are athletic.” Is it possible that middle school girls see popularity as the only means of fitting in? Why is it necessary to fit in with the popular girls; why can’t they fit in with the others that aren’t considered popular? Maybe that is why middle school girls care so much what others think, so they can fit in with the popular crowd. Middle School is a battle for them and they have to have the right equipment to win the war like popularity, makeup, and current styles, but what exactly does popularity mean?

I decided to interview Jamie Lynn, a freshman at the University of Central Arkansas, to get my answer. Since she had only been out of middle school for a mere four years, I knew she would have great insight, and life experience to help me figure out the mystery of middle school girls. After requesting her to tell me what she thought the definition of being a popular middle school girl was, she rolled her eyes and casually remarked, “Being popular means being the mean girl. You get to be a catty snob and get away with it, because everyone is terrified of you.” Terrified; the word left me puzzled. What about the popular crowd was horrifying? “Generally

the popular girls make fun of people, and can turn people against you. Whether it's based off of insecurities, pure meanness, or just for fun, innocent girls endure the tortures of being ridiculed by these mean girls," Lynn said. It's a crazy idea that rather than stand up for themselves, girls would rather make friends with this awful crowd just to escape taunts. "Mainly the girls that get to be popular are the ones that have the athletic boyfriend, or have well off parents that spoil them with tons of expensive things" Lynn responded after asked what exactly made a girl popular. Could it also possibly be the power and the boyfriends that popularity holds that make girls feel the need to fit in with that crowd?

Next I interviewed, Amy Ritchie, an eighth grader at Russellville Middle School. I inquired about if she ever changed anything about herself to fit in. "I started wearing makeup, after a boy told me I looked like a nun and needed to put some makeup on. I wanted a boyfriend, and all the other makeup wearing girls had one," she said. Boys have such an influence on middle school girls self esteem, and comments they make can tear deep and leave nasty scars. I have a few scars of my own. I was ugly, or so some cute boy from my middle school told me. Tears spilled out of my eyes as I rushed home in embarrassment after that remark. Self confidence is rooted from positive and negative comments. Most middle school girls haven't gained enough self confidence to brush a negative statement off. Their heads get filled with nonsense that they are ugly, fat, dumb, or lame. Hormones run rapid in middle school, and that's where most girls start realizing that they really are into boys. Maybe boys are the reason middle school girls care so much what others think of them, or could puberty be the cause?

Pressing further on in my investigation, I interviewed Chancie Sullivan, a senior at Bryant High School. I questioned her if she thought puberty contributed to the self esteem of a middle school aged girl. "Of course it does," she laughingly responded. "Girls at that age are

experiencing new things like periods and pimples, and they are developing into young women. They are used to being children, so all this new adult stuff is scary for them since they are at an awkward age. They are not little girls, but they are not yet women, so this transition in their lives can be overwhelming,” Sullivan added. I mentioned the idea of bras, periods, and pimples as being embarrassing, and Sullivan immediately remarked, “They can be, because these new bodily functions are so strange to them, and everyone starts developing at different times, so a lot of them are not sure if any of their peers are experiencing the same things as they are.” I can definitely remember when puberty embarrassed me. The bright red spot distinctly shone on the backside of my dark blue, destroyed wash Hollister jeans. My heart sank to my stomach, and I closed my eyes in distress; stupid period had to ruin everything. I didn’t know how frequent I should change my feminine products, but evidentially I should have changed it a lot faster than I had. My light pink jacket nicely covered up this humiliating reminder of puberty, and I hoped that I was the only one who witnessed the awful spot. Puberty is certainly a big contributor on why middle school girls care so much what others think of them.

Through my interviews I’ve uncovered a lot of mysteries. Fears of embarrassment, struggles with fitting in, mass conformity, puberty, and the newly found discovery that boys don’t really have cooties, all play a big part in a middle school girl’s self esteem. Where forgetting to put on mascara can end the world and wearing outdated shoe attire can be the most embarrassing thing ever, shows that middle school girls seriously care way to much what others think. Every girl for some reason or another wants to be seen, fit in and liked, especially by the popular crowd, and confidence is hard to come across. Middle school girls are very self conscious, and strangely enough it can take Abercrombie, makeup, popularity, or a boy’s approval to gain self confidence.

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