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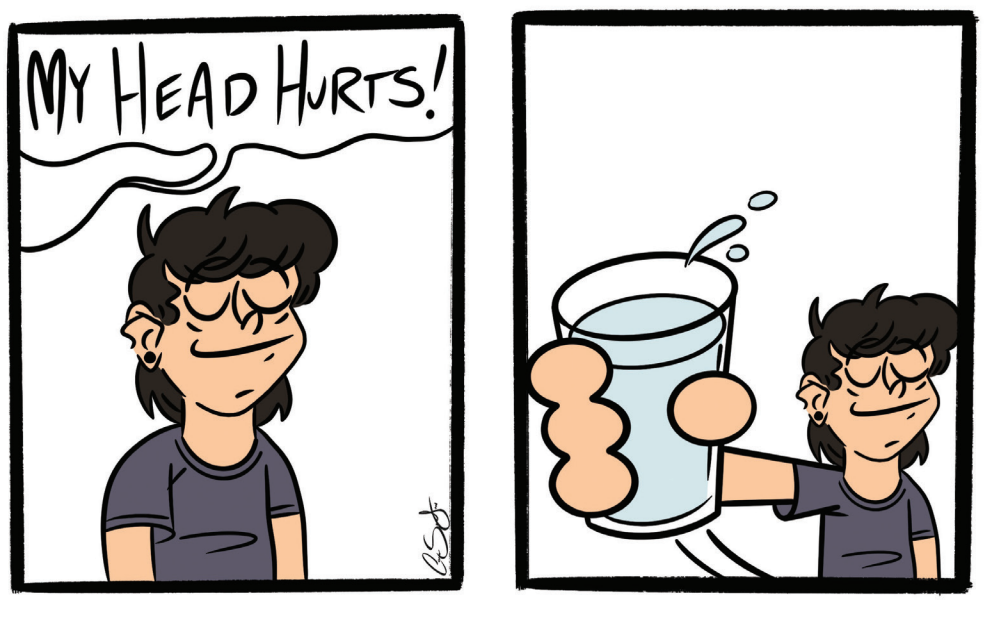
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Daily OPINION

You are not just someone's future wife

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This weekend, I was planning to go out to celebrate my birthday with my girlfriends. Then I decided that I could not do that because I am, after all, someone's future wife. I don't know who he is yet, but I do know that it would be disrespectful to him to entertain other people. In fact, I should probably stay home altogether. It is rude to have fun without him.

If you have spent time on social media during the past two weeks, you have likely stumbled upon the idea of "someone's future wife." Women online are posting videos explaining why they're skipping the bar on Halloween or avoiding engagement with men because they want to save themselves for their husbands.

While many of these videos are satirical, satire only comes as a response. This time, the response is to a real and concerning shift in attitude toward womanhood and relationships: the idea that women should base decisions in the present day off of the expectations of a man they haven't met. As young women pursuing an education, we need to push back against this narrative and focus our futures on ourselves — not our potential husbands.

The idea of saving yourself for your husband is not a new one. Particularly popular in the 1990s, purity culture teaches young people, mainly women and people who identify as religious, to feel shame around sex and to consider the emotional impact that it would have on a future partner if they were to engage in pre-marital sexual behavior. Although the primetime for purity culture has passed, the underlying message still exists: a woman's choices should be guided by a man.

Today, Generation Z seems to embrace a more reserved lifestyle. Reports show that we are drinking less, moving out later, driving later and have less sex than previous generations. These changes can't be explained by a single factor, because technology, mental health and economic pressures have all influenced Generation Z's willingness to participate in social activities.

Among these influences, social media voices promoting modesty and male-centeredness have gained prominence. These same voices regard abstaining from activities like drinking or partying as virtuous, especially for women. The "future wife" trend reflects one aspect of this cultural rewind, lifting up the idea that a woman's choices should be based on her desirability to a man.

There is no inherent problem with choosing not to drink, go out or engage in casual relationships. There is no problem with looking forward to becoming a wife and a mother. If you choose these things for yourself, it is a strong exercise of your independence.

The real problem occurs when the choices are not necessarily yours and reflect the expectations of a hypothetical man. By limiting yourself on behalf of your future husband, you're relinquishing an incredible amount of independence to someone who doesn't even exist in your life yet.

College and your 20s are often framed as a time for exploration, self-expression and personal growth. You are supposed to explore different subjects, study abroad and make friends, but increasingly, college women are encouraged to look at all of these experiences through the lens of marriage.

College and your 20s offer an opportunity to discover your passions and make mistakes without letting any of them define your future. What once was a time for ambition and wonder is now a waiting room for marriage.

In the last century, women have fought so that you can have financial independence, access to birth control and the right to an equal education. Women have come so far that to voluntarily give up our rights, interests and desires would be an act of disservice to those that came before us. Our freedom of self-determination is worth protecting whether it includes marriage or not.

That being said, I'll be celebrating my birthday this weekend with my girlfriends. Maybe I will go out, maybe I won't and maybe I will talk to a man who isn't my future husband. If my future husband has a problem with that, then maybe I don't want him to be my future husband at all.