



# Why I'm Not Vaxxed

Don't assume about unvaccinated people when you don't know

By Josie Furst

**M**y family is upstairs laughing over some movie they found to watch for Friday movie night. Popcorn is flying, which my dogs are happy to clean up. And they're happy to be spending this time together.

I, on the other hand, am sick with a disease that I have luckily escaped for the two years this pandemic has lasted. I stare at the same TV, the same teal carpet, and the same barn door that I've been staring at for the past four days.

Only six more days, I tell myself. Six more days of quarantine, where everyday I wake up and a new prominent symptom makes my life hell. A stuffy nose that causes me not to breathe, chest pain that forces me to take painful breaths, or a swollen throat that makes it near impossible to swallow anything.

And I just sit on this couch and take it. Day in and day out.

Sometimes I blame myself. Maybe I wasn't careful enough. I took all the precautions. Six-foot distance and masking, unless I'm outside. But that won't quiet the voice inside that yells at me for not getting that stupid vaccine. A vaccine that could have made this sickness easier to bear.

However, it also could have hurt me more than I care to admit.

I have one, soon to be two, autoimmune issues that affect my heart, immune, and nervous system. Getting that "life saving" vaccine could enlarge my heart, complicating my current heart problem.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "People with autoimmune conditions...should be aware

that no data is currently available on the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines for people with autoimmune conditions."

I spent a lot of sleepless nights deciding whether I should get it. And for a while, I made peace with the decision not to get it, telling myself that if I took precautions, I could live my life.

Now that I have COVID, that peace is shattered.

For many people in my generation, there are only two explanations for those not getting the vaccine. First, your parents were anti-vaxxers before this pandemic started. They prefer to use vitamins and natural treatments as protection.

Second, your family has hard-core political views. It isn't about saving lives. It's your right as an American. Choosing to ignore national mask mandates and not get vaccinated is your choice. Even though your choice also affects my safety.

And yet there is a third group of people like me, who often don't come to mind. People who still choose to wear a mask in crowds. Those with serious health conditions in a similar situation to mine.

Those people, like myself, who were so happy to hear that according to the Boulder County Website, Louisville is over 80% vaccinated. This meant that herd immunity was reached.

Little did I know, people in my vulnerable spot would receive major backlash. Even around school, hurtful comments are being thrown at the unvaccinated like, "Do you have hippie parents or something?" or even so far as to ask, "What's wrong with you?"

I, thankfully, have not had to deal with this

discrimination because I've been keeping my vaccine status in the dark. When I thought of this article being published, I was terrified. Telling the whole school that I'm not vaccinated? I had to make an extremely tough decision for my health. And now I might face backlash of some sort?

However, telling my story is important. And everyone needs to know that many people in my shoes don't want to be unvaccinated. Students at Monarch need to understand what we're going through. It's like you don't know that we have a fear of being isolated from those we love because we caught COVID at Homecoming, which I did. Or ending up on a ventilator because for some people it's so hard to keep your mask above your nose.

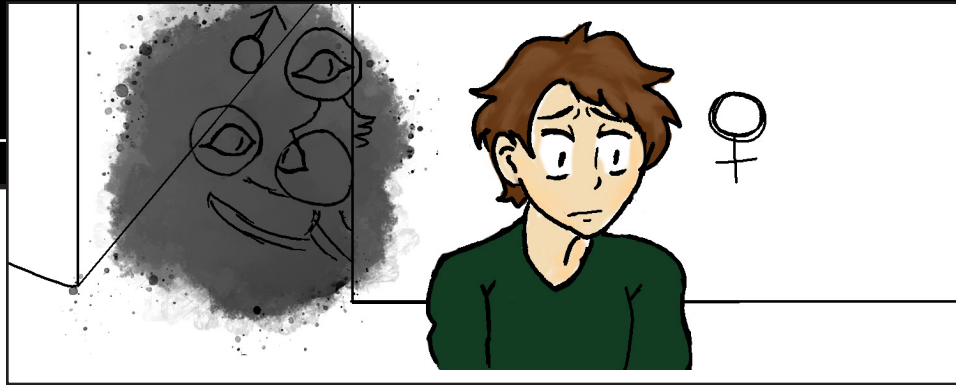
Earlier this year, I chose not to attend a retreat for the Leed Colorado Leadership Program because I have to take my mask off at night. And during that time, I could catch COVID from someone in my cabin. I cried for the entire night after I made that decision because I couldn't bring myself to believe that these were decisions I had to make. To not only protect myself, but also my family.

I only ask for simple things for the people like me who are in the minority.

Be kinder.

Before you push us away or discriminate against us, ask for our story. Think about how we're struggling before you decide that we're challenging your health. Wear a mask around us, above your nose, because although you may not get symptoms, we could die from it.

And just because I'm unvaccinated and got sick doesn't mean I deserve it.



# Lost in labels

Gen Z is obsessed with labels. Am I the only one who's noticed?

By Josie Furst

**W**hen I lived in Pennsylvania, I was lazy. Sounds harsh, but it's true. I cut my hair short because I didn't want to deal with knots, I wore my brother's hand-me-down clothes, and I lived in slip-on shoes and sneakers. I was content in who I was. I didn't need a label from anyone.

Questioning my sexuality and gender never crossed my mind.

In 2015, Caitlyn Jenner came out as a transgender woman. Multiple sets of judging eyes turned my way. I became, "The girl who looked and dressed like a boy." My first label.

I've been mistaken for a boy a few times, but that never affected me like the next couple months did. My best friend's boyfriend started telling the whole school I was transgender simply because of my appearance. I felt everyone stare daggers into my back as I walked down the halls and look up immediately as I walked into class.

I became exiled. This wasn't a label I wanted, but I didn't have much of a choice. As rumors do, though, it passed as soon as some kid puked in the hallway and my time under the spotlight ended.

During those couple months, however, two things crossed my mind.

First, maybe I should change how I dress because everyone thinks I look like a boy. I spent way too much time looking in the mirror trying to figure out if I looked enough like a girl to go to school. I felt like a girl. It never occurred to me that people would judge my gender on what I wore.

It was the first time in my life I saw myself through other people's eyes. I didn't love what I saw.

Second, if I was trans, how could I survive the isolation? It drove me insane. There were people out there, struggling to express who they are, and it wasn't just me who saw this. According to the Pennsylvania Youth Congress, 69% of teens are harassed for their gender expression in schools.

At the end of seventh grade, my parents told me we would be making the move to Colorado. A place 26 hours away and a major culture shock for me.

If I could ever find a place the polar opposite of my small town in Pennsylvania, it would be Monarch High School, a place more accepting than any other place I'd lived.

As I went through high school, I tried to become more confident in who I was, but I actually felt peer pressure to not be straight. My friends would ask me, "Don't you think girls are attractive?" and "Are you sure?" They even made harsh jokes about being straight. I ultimately came to the conclusion that being a cisgender straight female is who I am, and I love it. But it didn't end there.

One time, my friend told me I dressed like a "trendy bi person." This surprised me. I thought I dressed like a straight person. Their comment reminded me of my time in middle school when I was given a label that wasn't me because of others' thoughts. After a couple more people said they also understood the comment, it sealed the box my friend made for me.

Questions swirled around me.

How many people thought I dressed like that? What does it even mean to dress like a straight person?

I would pick out an outfit and stare at myself in the morning wondering if I looked straight enough to go to school. I knew I was straight and didn't want other people thinking differently. I have no hate against the LGBTQ+ community, but I just knew I wasn't in it.

Then I realized a similarity between Pennsylvania and here. Everyone in my generation is obsessed with labels. Yes, people who label themselves can feel relief. But for some of us, society shoves you into a stifling box, giving you little room to live. You have to be straight.

Or Bi.

Or Gay.

Or Trans.

Or Asexual.

Or use They/Them Pronouns.

There is something called a gray area in life. We can't label it because then we complicate an already complicated world. How do you expect people to live their lives doing what they want if they need to be labeled? Or told what to be through peer pressure and rumors? Do we need to eradicate the gray area?

Some part of me wonders if this is a stupid trend we're creating in high school. I also think sometimes I'm the only one who sees this. The fact that every single thing in this life needs a label, from what you wear to who you love. Then I remember high school isn't the real world yet. Because let's be honest...

The real world still has gray area.



# Too numb to speak up

Let's recognize what we feel, or don't feel

By Josie Furst

## ARE YOU DESENSITIZED TO VIOLENCE?

### BRODY HUANG '23

*"Personally, I haven't experienced much violence because we live in a safe and protected community...so it doesn't affect me too much."*

### RYLAN REAVIS '25

*"Yes. I've grown up around violence...it's something that goes into my day-to-day life."*

### MCKENNA SELBY '22

*"I'm a person where even if I watch movies with violence, it definitely still affects me."*

### EMMA NEIMAN '24

*"You see it everywhere...it still gets to me sometimes but it's kind of normal."*

Netflix's hit show "Squid Game" was watched a total of 1.6 billion hours in the first 28 days of its release, according to Variety. Everyone with a Netflix account, from first graders to middle-aged women, was hooked on the show.

I hate the show. Not because of the acting, or the plot, but because it enforces a concept that has been evident across members of Gen Z since we were born.

Its name is desensitization.

Just thinking about it makes my thoughts drift to when I first watched the graphic final scene in the first episode. The piles of dead blocking the door from anyone who tries to escape. The characters' glazed eyes staring towards the ceiling and blood dripping from their lips into the coarse sand. The bodies bent in unnatural ways as if already in a mass grave.

According to Metro News, "[In Squid Game there are] a total of 454 deaths. That's not just more than the first season of 'Game Of Thrones'—but more than the first three seasons combined."

I was shaken by the violence. I would never watch the show again. That was the end of it.

So I thought.

My sister and I made a bet the next day. Would my dad, who is a big fan of "Game of Thrones," like "Squid Game"? We shook on it and watched the first episode again with my dad.

This time, I had a different reaction.

I noticed how fake the blood looked. The dramatic deaths. I thought to myself "this isn't so bad." Yet, it was the same gory scene. This time I wasn't scared of the show but of

my reaction. How come after only watching it two times, I became numb?

This is the problem.

We watch so many movies with graphic violence starting at a young age that by the time we are teens, police violence doesn't shock us. We struggle to feel something.

We've all heard about people feeling insecure because of social media, but it never crossed my mind to think that what I see numbs the idea of violence in my head. Swiping past clips of school shootings or watching videos where Tiktokers recreate death. All that senseless scrolling has done nothing but hurt us more.

We can do something. The first step is awareness. There's no way to go back to feeling something for violence, but we can prevent others from being this way.

We can say something about content like this being made or brought to our doorsteps. Our voice matters. We should also acknowledge the insane amount of small children getting access to this like we did as kids. Children's restrictions should be revisited.

We can catch ourselves when we go to watch something with a number of mature topics. While we may not feel anything for it anymore, we shouldn't further the damage we made to our numb nerves.

This has future consequences if we do nothing. We won't recognize the injustices around us unless they go beyond the extreme. Situations like assault will become commonplace because we're numb to their effects if they don't happen to us directly.

We can't be remembered as the generation who was too numb to speak up.