Table of Contents

Group Activity Involvement 3
Dannie Allen

Culture Jolt 9
Yumi Lee

Anxiety Enhances Maturity 16
Linda Peña

The Power of Peer Pressure 25
Heidi Burkey

Avoiding Unhealthy Relationships 31
Ralph Davis
For humans, all intelligence, thought, perception, viewpoint, opinion, emotion and feeling reside between the ears. In comparison to the rest of the body, this area is very miniscule, weighing little more than three pounds. Despite its weight, the role of the brain is prodigious.

The articles highlighted in this journal are primarily concerned with the brain’s emotional component. Obviously all factions of the brain are important, however a student’s emotions can either make life pleasurable or a nightmare. It is the intention of this journal to view a student’s emotions in reaction to peer pressure, student group involvement, student anxiety, cultural issues, and relationships.

In the past decade, the term “emotional stability” has been coined to define the degree to which an individual is calm, self-confident, and cool versus insecure, anxious, depressed and emotional. For students, it is often challenging to maintain a level of emotional stability when constantly being bombarded with academic demands, relationship issues and increasing responsibilities.

A person’s self-identity and reactions to life events are influenced by multiple factors. One such factor is peer pressure. These forces can be exerted from friends, peers, other social groups, family members, as well as cultural groups. Students can learn to pick and choose from each group the ideas, manners and precepts that work best for them. Another challenge college students are facing is to handle relationship issues. The article here allows students to learn useful guidelines for creating relationships positive to students and their partners. At times, students may look to others for emotional comfort when they are confronted with situations that cause anxiety. Students are affected by academic, financial, health related, and self-imposed stressors. This emotional reaction to stress may actually cause students to exhibit symptoms of physiological distress such as: apprehension, uneasiness, helplessness, and anticipation of danger. By learning how to manage these stressors, students discover accountability for their actions is truly the key to emancipation from these emotions.

It is critical to remember the full potential and power of the brain. Even though the brain is capable of producing a myriad of emotions, it is our hope that these articles would help students in learning to make decisions based upon rational, not emotional and irrational thinking. Not only have we been gifted with an organ that gives us intelligence, but also the ability to make choices in all areas of our lives.
People are involved with various groups throughout their lifetime. This group involvement can have positive and/or negative effects. One of these effects could include pressure to conform. Sometimes this conformity leads to extreme behavior, as noted in the fraternity/sorority example given in the article. Reasons for involvement in groups may vary from person to person, depending on their needs. Often the incentives for group involvement include the necessity for security or protection. This article examines how group involvement for students can lead to misconceptions about sex, the impact of athletic and academic group involvement, and how group involvement compounded with the pressures of college can lead to alcohol abuse. Since group involvement is unavoidable, it is essential that students develop their own boundaries in order to avoid negative consequences that can arise from this involvement.

At one point or another, every person will be a part of a group, whether they realize it or not. Various groups that college students are commonly committed or connected to include fraternities, sororities, employee groups, church groups, athletic teams, and extracurricular clubs and organizations. Group activity involvement can prove to be very exciting as well as a wonderful learning experience. Along with group activity involvement comes the dynamics of group behavior. Belonging to a group and being a part of it holds influence over a person in many different ways and the influence can be negative or positive. Group pressure can take on different forms including reinforcement of behaviors that the group feels are positive. Furthermore, group pressure can lead to monopolization of time, which can be seen in college groups such as fraternities, sororities, and athletic teams. Group pressure can influence a person’s behavior and perhaps even their beliefs. Sometimes, the minorities of a group will change their behaviors or beliefs based on certain conditions of the group, and they will submit to conformity. It is very possible that beliefs and attitudes can be altered through group involvement.

People join groups for many different reasons, but sometimes the reasons entail some type of psychological need or desire for security and/or protection. People may join groups to have more self-confidence, to diminish self-doubts, to improve their popularity status, or to feel less threatened and stressed by new situations. College students have been joining fraternities and sororities for as long as they have been able to, but the reasons and issues underlying an individuals’ decision to join such groups are sometimes not viewed as having psychological origins, even though that may very well be the case. Many college students join fraternities and sororities in an attempt to feel a sense of security and belonging in their new college environment. Going to a college where you don’t know anyone can be a stressful situation, and joining a fraternity or sorority quickly provides new friends in this new and otherwise unfamiliar environment. Fraternities and sororities, by using the terms ‘sister’ and ‘brother,’ provide a feeling of family, familiarity, and belonging for the members. To understand just how deep-seated the psychological need for belonging to a group is for some students, look at the example of “hazing.” Rookies of groups (particularly fraternity and sorority groups) must go through hazing as a “rite-of-passage” to belong. This ritual can include very embarrassing and/or mortifying circumstances, as well as possibly life threatening situations. Being part of a group can mean immeasurable things for some people. The positive aspects for them far outweigh the negative ones they had to endure to become a part of the group. For the most part, being included in a group is seen as important because it offers the member a sense of status and recognition.

College is a time and place for individuals to grow in many ways and to start building a foundation for the rest of their lives by earning a college degree, experiencing internships and gaining valuable work experience for those students who work through college. It is also a time to learn to cooperate and to get along with different people from various walks of life through class and campus participation and through diverse living conditions. One of the best ways to receive the most from your college education is to become involved as much as possible,
and campuses offer many different ways to accomplish this interaction. Campuses have fraternities and sororities, athletic teams and intramural sports, religious clubs, and other campus clubs and organizations. Being part of a group is a great way to develop friendships, to gain leadership experience, to have fun, and to learn how to effectively communicate and cooperate with others. This being said, there are some groups, in which involvement can be negative to an individual if taken too far. For example, even though being part of a fraternity or sorority can be fun, exciting, and positive, if it distracts a student from their studies and causes grades to suffer and to deteriorate, it becomes negative. Or if playing on an athletic team requires the student to devote so much time that he/she can no longer sustain healthy relationships with family, friends, and/or a significant other, then that could become a negative influence for the student as well. If being involved in a particular extracurricular activity places repeated pressure to engage in activities that a student is not comfortable with (i.e., drinking alcohol, using drugs and illegal substances, or having sex), this conformity to the group could become a concern that merits attention.

Group Involvement Leading to Misconceptions About Sex

Because members of a group share a common interest of the group itself, it can be assumed that group members will spend time together, but the amount of time depends on the type of group and what amount of time is deemed appropriate or possible by the group. In any event, it is safe to say that as a result of spending time with group members, people become friends and get to know one another quite well, sometimes even forming lifelong friendships. But no matter how well we think we may know our friends, what we believe about them may not always be true. Through making assumptions about our friends and/or group members and their activities (such as sexual activities and sexual experience), we can unknowingly pressure ourselves to match their experience or behaviors. Within the dynamics of romantic relationships, sex can be an issue and can also be a source of pressure for one or both parties involved in the relationship. In college, sometimes students overestimate how often the peers in their groups have sex, and furthermore underestimate how “safe” these peers are when it comes to using protection. Because students can have these misguided beliefs, they may feel pressure to “keep up” with the crowd when it comes to having sex and experiencing multiple sex partners. Assuming their misguided beliefs to be true, some students may feel that using protection is not important since they believe their peers are probably not using protection. In this way, being involved in a group can lead students to engage in risky behaviors they otherwise might not, and sometimes the consequences can be negative.

In the January/February 2005 issue of the Journal of American College Health, an undergraduate study regarding the social norms theory explains perceptions and sexual health behaviors of college students. The study defines the social norms theory as, “…[it] predicts that widely held misconceptions may encourage risky behavior in a misguided attempt to conform to perceived norms and that information correcting these misperceptions will lead to a decrease in such behaviors.” The authors of this study conducted research regarding students overestimating peer sexual activity, underestimating rate of condom use, and thus employing misguided beliefs about social norms, which contributed to their own engagements in high-risk behavior. High-risk sexual behavior can be defined as sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. Such high-risk sexual behaviors include not using condoms for intercourse, not using other birth control methods (such as the birth control pill), having multiple sexual partners, being sexually active with a partner who has a sexually transmitted disease, and using drugs and alcohol prior to sexual intercourse (which is known to impair judgment when it comes to safe sex negotiations). It is believed through this study that information correcting the misinterpretations of college students could lead to a decrease in risky sexual behaviors.

Each year, 12 million new cases of STDs occur in the United States, with 3 million of these being among teenagers. Engaging in high-risk sexual behavior can lead to STDs and infections or unintended pregnancies that have the potential to interfere with student academic success and can lead to possible life-altering consequences. Through peer group and campus interaction, college students may overestimate their peer’s level of sexual activity, number of partners, and incidence of STDs. They may also underestimate peer rate of condom use. By believing in these misinterpretations and by succumbing to potential pressures to live up to their peers, students may engage in high-risk sexual behaviors. Through the spreading of information and messages that reflect true norms (i.e., reflections of surveys conducted on one’s own campus), social norm research has demonstrated that rates of risky behavior among college students often decreases.

HIV-related deaths in the United States has the largest impact on America’s youth and middle-aged adults, and in 1999, HIV was the fifth leading cause of death for Americans between
the ages of 25 and 44. In the year 2000, 1,688 youth (ages 13-24) reportedly had AIDS. The road to improving HIV prevention in young people, including the college population, is to have clear communication between parents and youth to understand the importance of protective sexual behaviors. Most importantly, the sexual and drug-related risks must be adequately addressed to young adults. Many college students report using alcohol or drugs when they have sex, and surveillance data from 34 different states with integrated HIV and AIDS reporting systems suggests that, “drug injection led to at least 6% of HIV diagnoses reported among those aged 13-24 in 2000, with an additional 50% attributed to sexual transmission (both heterosexual and MSM).”

**Group Involvement in Sports and Athletics**

Athletic teams on campus are another realm of possible pressure and promotion of risky behavior. Although strong friendships can be forged and student athletes grow close to one another through countless hours of practice and games, college athletes are sometimes labeled under the stereotype as being heavy drinkers. According to a research study titled Athletic Status and Drinking Behavior in College Students: The Influence of Gender and Coping Styles, it is indicated that athletes drink more frequently and more often to the stage of intoxication than non-athletes. We usually hear about the negative physical dangers involved in drinking too much, but we don’t always hear about the academic dangers for college students, which are addressed in this particular study, “Extensive or abusive alcohol consumption is considered to be a negative influence on academic performance…” Various sociological factors that influence binge drinking in male athlete students are typically the number of close friends, emphasis on partying, and amount of time spent socializing.

Findings particular to the Athletic Status and Drinking Behavior in College Students: The Influence of Gender and Coping Styles study indicated that female athletes and non-athletes, and also male non-athletes are more likely to drink for coping reasons such as using alcohol to feel better or to get through difficult personal situations. For the students in this study, “drinking to cope” was the most significant predictor for drinking behavior, and the students admitted to using alcohol as “a way to feel better.” Despite counseling and psychological services available to students on college campuses, not all students opt to appropriately address and cope with their problems with the help and guidance of professionals. Instead, it can be much easier and less intimidating to engage in risky drinking and partying as “a way to feel better” and also to cope. Moreover, some students may be in denial about their difficult personal situations or problems, or they may not be ready to work through and fix those problems, hence turning to alcohol which is all too often readily available. Athletic parties provide an atmosphere for drinking and taking it overboard, which can have very negative aspects for students, especially if they are susceptible to pressure that might come from fellow teammates and friends.

From the Athletic Status and Drinking Behavior in College Students: The Influence of Gender and Coping Styles study it was concluded that many aspects can play a role in drinking behaviors of students, and that to address the specific needs of individual students and to develop more effective intervention programs, college campuses should identify the factors that influence the drinking behaviors of college students. The pressure of competition and success at the collegiate level can be an influence on drinking behavior. For student athletes and non-student athletes, the pressure to succeed can also be daunting, which may be a factor that influences drinking behaviors.

**Academic Group Involvement**

In college, some of the people we spend the most time with are those in our classes. Each semester, as we embark on a new set of challenges and new classes, we can make friends and create groups within the academic realm. These groups are quite interesting, seeing as how the majority of them are short lived (the typical semester is approximately 16 weeks long), and the group is usually quite small. However, some students who create groups within the classroom sometimes see that group through a succession of semesters, especially if the members of the group all have the same major or minor. It is undeniable how much time we spend in the classroom throughout the semester and also in laboratories that are combined with certain classes for certain majors. These groups that we create can have both positive and negative impacts on students. Some students purposely seek out the “smart group” in the class and try to join their circle, hoping that some of their positive study habits and motivation will rub off on them. Being a part of the “slacker” group in class or in your lab can have the opposite effect on a student as well.
Group Involvement, College Pressures and Demands, and Drinking

With academic pressure, extracurricular demands, parental expectations, racial and cultural differences, and dealing with involvement in all of the various groups that a student might belong or have connections to, it is no wonder that all of these pressures and stresses make some students feel like they are drowning in the depths. “Students juggle demanding academics, social relationships, and extracurricular activities; with so many balls in the air, collisions are inevitable. Stress and emotions need an outlet somewhere. Sometimes the built up stress and emotions manifest themselves in mental health problems such as depression, sleep disorders, substance abuse, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, impulsive disorders, and suicide.” Unfortunately, an emotional outlet that is well known and easily accessible for students is the outlet of alcohol and drug abuse. When things get to be too much, and if the majority of group members are drinking, alcohol consumption can become a very real pressure. For many students, drinking alcohol is a common and favorite pastime. Many groups participate in drinking, and if a student chooses not to, then that student will either have to cope with being around drinking, or will seek out others that choose to abstain. Finding such groups may be hard and particularly so in the college scene because drinking is considered to be normal and something that “everyone does.”

Drinking on college campuses is more enveloping and more destructive than most people realize. Alcohol consumption on many campuses has evolved into a rite of passage. Furthermore, certain campus features perpetuate this culture of college drinking. For example, rates of overly-excessive alcohol use are the highest at colleges and universities where the Greek system (fraternities and sororities) dominates, and also campuses where sports teams have a prominent role. Because drinking is a risky behavior that can stem from stress and emotion in college, and because it is more prevalent in groups such as fraternities, sororities, and sports teams on campus, some questions to ask yourself if you think you might be abusing alcohol will follow. These questions can help you put your drinking behavior into perspective. For most student athletes and students involved in the Greek system, alcohol consumption is an expectation even before they enter athletic teams and fraternities or sororities. The expectation exists because drinking within these groups is something that has been ingrained in our society. For some athletes and Greek members, drinking at their respective parties is a bonding experience for the members, which brings them closer together. Students who enter the realms of collegiate sports and the Greek system and choose not to drink, may find themselves under heavy pressure to engage in the activity of drinking that has become such a normal activity within sport and Greek systems.

Questions to consider:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Does your drinking worry your family and friends?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself that you won’t?
- Do you ever forget what you did while you were drinking?
- Do you get headaches or hangovers after you have been drinking?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you may have a drinking problem. Here are some steps to help cut down on drinking:

YOU CAN FIND WAYS TO CUT DOWN ON YOUR DRINKING AND STILL BE PART OF YOUR GROUP:

- Pace your drinking by allowing time between drinks
- Consider alternating non-alcoholic drinks with alcoholic ones (i.e., drinking orange juice every other drink)
- Eat before you drink because food with fat and/or protein slows the process of alcohol absorption
- Stop drinking before the party is over to allow your liver time to burn off alcohol.
- Drink non-alcoholic beverages for at least one hour or more
- Add ice cubes to your drink and use a smaller glass, both options of which can go undetected by others. These options help one to resist the well-meaning efforts of others who can’t stand to see someone without a drink in their hand.
“Since 1988, the likelihood of a college student suffering depression has doubled, suicidal ideation has tripled, and sexual assaults have quadrupled,” also, “thirty-one percent of college students met criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse and six percent for a diagnosis of alcohol dependence in the past twelve months.” Consequences of underage and excessive drinking among college students affect essentially all college campuses. There are 1,400 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 who die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including car accidents.\textsuperscript{8, 9} Immoderate drinking among college students opens the doors for a slew of problems such as academic problems, health problems, drunk driving, police involvement, alcohol abuse dependence, unsafe sex, sexual abuse, assault, injury and death.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has taken a positive step toward guiding students and campus groups to turn to other things besides alcohol to deal with the emotions that can be overwhelming to students. Jose Barraza, an MIT student, says fellow students are searching for ways to have fun with their friends and cope with the high pressures of MIT.\textsuperscript{10} One of the strongest reasons why students use alcohol at MIT is stress. Luckily, MIT has figured out how to encourage students and groups to deal with their emotions and stress in college, without putting themselves and their futures at risk, which can happen when alcohol use gets out of hand. There are alternatives to relieving stress and dealing with your emotions in college: carefully plan your day, don’t defer homework until the nighttime or weekends which can cause stress to build up and makes most students feel overwhelmed. Prioritize work and schoolwork, giving yourself a sense of control over what you do and a sense that you can do it.\textsuperscript{11} Also, plan your work and sleep schedules. By getting enough sleep, one won’t start the day exhausted and won’t need to rely on heavy amounts of caffeine to stay awake and alert. Constant fatigue is also a contributing factor to stress, so try your best to aim for seven or eight hours of sleep each night which will contribute to your overall well-being.\textsuperscript{11} Participate in extracurricular activities. By getting involved in activities such as sports, theatre, clubs, student newspapers, and other organizations, one has new opportunities to meet people and engage in another interest other than just coursework. Incorporate relaxation time for yourself everyday. Sometimes this can be hard because students often feel strapped for time and have many things to accomplish each day, but by taking five or ten minutes to sit quietly and breathe deeply, students can feel an enormous sense of mood restoration and returned focus.

Conclusion

There are many ways to become actively involved on campus to make the most of college. If the only education that one receives in college is from that of which occurs within the walls of a classroom, than one is not taking advantage of other instruction outside the barriers of a classroom. There are multiple ways to make the most of an education outside the classroom (e.g., fraternities and sororities, athletic teams, maintaining relationships with friends and significant others, etc.), but there are also negative aspects that can result from involvement with any of these groups if balance is not maintained and/or if pressure becomes negative. The development of personal values and standards is a personal thing and is an individual’s prerogative. Each person needs to decide for themselves the boundaries and limits that they are comfortable with and they have the right to make their own decisions. Each person has their own personal limits to how much pressure they can take in a given situation, and they know when their breaking point(s) will get the better of them. College is the perfect time and place to develop your own set of personal values and standards, but be aware of some of the negative consequences of group involvement and group pressure on your quest to make a life for yourself.

“The college years, although a time of unbounded intellectual, emotional, and social growth, are fraught with pressures: fitting in, getting along with roommates, exploring sexuality, and myriad issues of the transition from adolescence to adulthood.”\textsuperscript{5} Academic pressure is very real (gotta get all A’s). There are on-campus programs that can help you if you are struggling with some of the negative aspects of group involvement and/or pressure such as CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services); ATOD (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs); HRC (Health Resource Center), which provides free HIV testing and counseling and a sexual health awareness workshop, which informs students of various methods of birth control and STDs; the Women’s Resource Center; University Interfaith Center; and Student Support Services.
References:


Culture Jolt

Yumiko Lee

When entering a new environment such as attending college, students are bound to encounter cultures other than their own. Culture is defined as a “system of shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors of a particular group of people.” Since many cultures converge on college campuses, students must be able to accept and understand the differences between themselves and others. The inability to make such an adjustment could lead to emotional distress, including feelings of loneliness, depression and irritability. While there are various cultural centers or support groups on college campuses, it is important students interact with others and step out of their comfort zone. This interaction could mean the difference between isolation and a fulfilling college experience.

Similar to a surge of electricity, the coming together of diverse cultures can electrify our interactions with others. This cultural charge can be positively felt on university campuses across the nation. For many, this type of interaction between students of different cultures is very enlightening. Culture is defined as the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors of a particular group of people.¹ For most, this culture is passed from one generation to the next. Culture will dictate certain assumptions. For instance, some cultures stress education. In such a culture, every member would strive to achieve the highest level of learning possible. Others have descended from cultures bound by specific religious beliefs that direct their life choices. Their culture could influence the manner in which they celebrate specific holidays, foods to be eaten, sports to be played, or emotions to be expressed.

For some students, accepting and understanding cultural truths of others may be difficult, especially if these principles and values are diametrically opposed to their own. Unfortunately, if they are unable to interact with others because of these differences, they may develop some emotional stress. These feelings could affect a student’s emotional wellness. Universities encourage emotional stability for all students because of its benefits towards achieving a positive college experience. There are times when students from different cultures may develop severe emotional distress due in part to their adjustment to cultural changes to which they have been exposed. Sometimes, without even knowing, they begin to experience symptoms that could prove harmful to their physical, mental and emotional health. It must be stressed that culture does not always deal with universal truths. However these arbitrary cultural beliefs do influence a student’s behavior, emotional expression and involvement with others. While interacting with a culturally divergent campus community, a student’s understanding of one’s own culture, as well as those of others is important for achieving emotional peace.

It is significant to remember that college students are in a transitional stage of emotional growth. Most young adults will complete their value framework and individual identity during their college lives.² As many adolescents develop their ideologies, they can find exploring other cultures to be a fascinating experience. Although the adolescent stage is a biologically and culturally universal phenomenon, the concept of its definition is different in different cultures.³ Hence, the expectation of adolescence can vary greatly between different cultures. Sometimes students may experience a culture shock when they interface with students from dissimilar cultural backgrounds.

The following article details student emotional health in relation to cultural issues, consequences of cultural emotional distress, cultural support groups on campus and guidelines of how to transform cultural shock into a positive energy. It is this article’s intention to highlight the acceptance of cultural differences as a positive force, transforming cultural shock into an electrifying jolt. By doing so, a student has the opportunity to experience college years at a far deeper level.
Emotional Health in Relation to Cultural Issues

It is critical that students maintain emotional stability during their very demanding years on campus. If one’s life becomes stressful, a student is more susceptible to having their emotional health unbalanced. According to the former U.S. Surgeon General’s executive summary, emotional health is fundamental to a person’s well-being and contributes to their productivity in society. Students may begin to exhibit symptoms of emotional “ill health,” but simply choose to ignore them because they think they are too young to have any such problems. Currently, there is much more information about emotional illness experienced over long periods of time leading to various forms of mild mental illness. Mental illnesses are real conditions experienced by one in five Americans today. However, a student’s culture may prohibit him or her from seeking help.

According to the CSULB campus facts published by the Division of Student Services, of 33,479 students enrolled in Fall 2004:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>11,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>6,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>5,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>2,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>1,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others and Unknown</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>7,203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, there are students who belong in an “others” category, because their cultural background is a patchwork of many different ethnicities. These students are considered multicultural. Multiracial and multicultural individuals may often feel isolated because they cannot identify with or belong to any one specific ethnic group.

Outside the CSULB community, there exists a multicultural environment. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, ethnic minorities (African Americans, Chicano/Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans) constitute 23% of the population, and the nation’s educational system is experiencing a tremendous influx of immigrant students. Regrettably, many of these minorities are uneducated in the area of emotional and mental health, despite the growing numbers. At times, cultural centers are finding that they do not have enough programs to meet the needs of their constituents. Usually people who are coming into the U.S. are concerned about jobs, housing and education for their children. Attainment of information about mental health and related issues is not always one of their primary concerns.

Consequences of Emotional Cultural Distress

Members of a monoculture minority group may find it difficult to interact with the surrounding majority culture. Sometimes these differences may cause a member of a minority, to experience some form of isolation and discrimination from the majority and other minority groups. Unfortunately, adolescents are faced with the large task of establishing a sense of identity. During these formative years at college, maturing adolescents reflect on who they are and what makes them unique. Identity is made up of two components. The first component is their self-concept. This is a set of beliefs about oneself, including attributes, roles, goals, interests, values and religious or political beliefs. Second is self-esteem, or in other words, how one feels about one’s self-concept. The process of developing a sense of identity involves experimenting with different ways of appearing, sounding and behaving. Each adolescent will approach this exploration in his or her own unique way.

If a student begins to question his or her self-concept due to cultural background, they can lose all self-identity and become adrift. Some minority students might attempt to take on the belief systems of other cultures in hopes of feeling a sense of belonging. More detrimental to the student is their denial of their cultural background for fear of being ridiculed or ostracized. When a student makes choices in order to hide a cultural identity, his/her emotional stability becomes at risk.

Moreover, students must develop relationship skills that allow them to get along well with others and to make friends. The specific skills that they need to master as part of their emotional development include:

- Students must recognize and manage their emotions.
- Develop empathy.
- Learn to resolve conflict constructively.
- Develop a cooperative spirit.
For international students, this may be the first time that they consciously recognize their ethnic identity. Ethnic identity includes the shared values, traditions and practices of a cultural group. For instance, members of Asian communities may demonstrate behavior misinterpreted by Americans as a form of social anxiety. Through research and recorded observations, Asian Americans may exhibit the following behavioral traits: 

- **gaze avoidance** (amount of time the participant is clearly not making direct eye contact with a peer or professor);
- **prolonged silences** (silences between meaningful statements lasting five seconds or greater);
- **fidgeting** (involving the participant changing seating positions or shifting his or her torso abruptly during the task); and
- **statements of negative affect** (the number of times the participant made statements describing a negative affective state such as discomfort, unease, anxiety, and frustration, separated by changes in topic or by prolonged silences). Therefore an Asian student exhibiting these forms of behavior may feel quite confused if other students or professors treated him/her as though he/she was unable to cope with the class activities. An Asian student may interpret their reactions as a form of negative stereotyping, when it simply is a lack of understanding of cultural differences.

During the last 40 years, the incidence of humans shifting across national boundaries has greatly increased. Reasons include the invention of the jumbo jets that make international travel quicker, easier and cheaper. Furthermore, natural and human-made disasters such as floods, famine and regional conflicts play a major role in stimulating cross-cultural travel, and include growing numbers of refugees, immigrants, guest workers, and students. The reactions of these immigrants to their new environment are considered the framework upon which their emotional stability is built. For some, their reactions become all encompassing and they cannot interact successfully within their new community. Cultural distress is an emotional reaction to the actions of others, perceived as scorn and non-acceptance of their cultural differences. Students experiencing cultural distress can show various symptoms. For some, symptoms may be more severe than for others. It is important to emphasize that most students, at one time or other will encounter mild to severe forms of cultural discrimination. When experiencing severe forms of cultural reactions, whether it is from others or from within (the inability to accept a culture in which one lives) an emotional shock can occur.

**Feeling Different**

The phrase “culture shock” has been attributed to the anthropologist Kalervo Oberg, who in an article in 1960 used it to illustrate how people react to strange or unfamiliar places. It must be emphasized the word “shock” infers only negative circumstances in reference to meeting new situations, without acknowledging that these experiences may have beneficial consequences for participants. Social/psychological research has indicated individuals have a preference for people who are similar and are less favorably disposed to others regarded as being different. Similarity is a complex matter because individuals and groups can be alike in a variety of ways. Even so, studies have found that most aspects of similarity have an effect on how people will respond to and perceive each other. In general, individuals are more likely to seek out, enjoy, understand, want to work and play with, trust, vote for, and marry others with whom they share characteristics. These include values, religion, group affiliation, skills, physical attributes, age, language, occupation, social class, nationality, ethnicity, residential location, and most other aspects on which human beings differ.

The technical term for preferring like-minded people is “in-group bias.” As a theory, “in-group bias” is based on the principle that the similarity of another person is reassuring. Therefore, interactions between culturally dissimilar people may be adverse, and cause culture shock. This effect generally sets in after the first few weeks of coming to a new place and students relate that they have both physical and emotional discomfort. Everything is different; for example, not speaking the language, not knowing how to use banking machines, and not knowing how to use the telephone are just a few examples. Students may exhibit a myriad of symptoms in reaction to attempting to maneuver through this new way of life often without a clear guideline to follow. Possible symptoms exhibited may be:

- Sadness, loneliness, melancholy
- Preoccupation with health
- Aches, pains, and allergies
- Insomnia, desire to sleep too much or too little
- Changes in temperament, depression, feeling vulnerable, feeling powerless
- Anger, irritability, resentment, unwillingness to interact with others
- Identifying with the old culture or idealizing the old country
- Loss of identity
- Trying to hard to absorb everything in the new culture or country
- Unable to solve simple problems
- Lack of confidence
Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs and symbols represent the copious ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life. Furthermore, students must deal with the ups and downs of their emotions. Psychological studies suggest that emotion plays a key role in intercultural communication, focusing especially on anxiety attendant to the uncertainty in intercultural communication, and the fear, anger, and distress that often occurs in intercultural misunderstandings. Indeed, successful communication of emotions may be considered a necessary ingredient to effective intercultural communication. It is crucial that students discuss with friends, peers, and professors these feelings they may be experiencing.

Culture shock has four stages:

1. **The Honeymoon Stage**
   - Pleased by all things encountered.
   - Feels euphoric.
   - Duration could be 6 months or longer.

2. **The Emptiness or Rejection Stage**
   - Encounters difficult times and crises in daily life.
   - Communication difficulties may occur.
   - Feels discontent, impatient, angry, sad, and incompetent.
   - Dissatisfied with transitioning between the old methods and the new.
   - Begin to think people don’t like foreigners and become alien.

3. **The Conformist, Negotiation or Readjustment Stage**
   - A new feeling of pleasure and sense of humor may be experienced.
   - One may start to feel a certain psychological balance.
   - Begins to accept the norms and social codes.
   - Individual is more familiar with the environment and wants to belong.
   - Learn to deal with problems by integrating them with your own cultural beliefs.

4. **The Acceptance, Assimilation or Adaptation Stage**
   - Accept the food, drinks, habits and customs.
   - Develop a strong sense of identity with customs of the host country.
   - Find things preferable to their culture.
   - Begin to feel confident to operate in two cultures.

**Consequences of Cultural Rejection**

Many students feel separated or isolated because they cannot find a group in which they feel comfortable. Sometimes this loneliness, taken to its most extreme effect, could cause a student to withdraw from college. Another result could be that some students are led to risky behaviors such as consuming unwise amounts of alcohol, using drugs or having unsafe sexual relations in hopes of taking their mind away from the loneliness. Emotional support from peers is critically important. On a campus as large as CSULB, a student could easily drop from sight and lose track of goals, while experiencing feelings of loneliness and helplessness. Therefore, it is extremely important for universities to have centers and support groups to serve as an aid to these students.

**Cultural Centers and Support Groups on Campus**

In January 1968, the Inter-group Human Relations Center opened on the campus of CSULB. The center was one of the first multicultural institutes ever established in an American university. This center affords the opportunity for American, Mexican American, Asian Pacific American, and American Indian students a place to come together and work for racial understanding amongst diverse cultures. The Multicultural Center not only assists students, but also offers to the faculty, the administration, and the community an opportunity to develop campus dialogue programs to strengthen interracial relations. Regrettably in the late 1980’s, the CSULB campus stalled in its progress toward improving race relations. Therefore, the university decided it was time to renew its commitment and the campus formed a President’s Task Force on Multicultural Education and Campus Diversity in the summer of 1990. In 1992, the work from this task force resulted in the formation of the Multicultural Center.

The Multicultural Center is an organization that assists in uniting and integrating all categories of university staff in finding ways to develop workshops, forums, and special events. A primary goal is to establish the Multicultural Center as an educational resource center that serves as a vehicle for the expression of the needs and concerns of CSULB’s increasingly diverse campus community. Students Talk About Race (STAR) is a signature project of the Multicultural Center. STAR has trained over 400 students per semester and drawn from CSULB as well as other Los Angeles area campuses (including UCLA, USC, Pepperdine, and Loyola). STAR has recruited over 2,500...
college volunteers, training them to become facilitators in cross-cultural communication and placing them into 76 middle schools and high schools.

Another on-campus organization promoting and supporting racial diversity is the Upward Bound Program. It is a federally funded program offered through the U.S. Department of Education and is designed for first generation or low income high school students who have the potential to succeed in college, but whose high school grades and test scores do not reflect that potential. The program assists these students in making that transition into college. It offers a sound base upon which students can begin to build a social and academic life that includes honoring their cultural identity. Furthermore, CSULB offers the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP). Both programs are committed to increasing access to higher education for California residents who are historically low-income, educationally disadvantaged and first-generation college students. This program provides admissions assistance, financial support, and academic and personal support.

Sometimes students may need professional counseling for their cultural issues. CSULB students can find such help at the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) located in Brotman Hall. CAPS offer not only individual professional counseling, but seminars and group workshops. Such workshops as Black Women’s Relationship Therapy Group and Asian American Women’s Group both provide a confidential space for women to explore relationships and cultural issues in their lives. The International Student Discussion Group affords students an opportunity to discuss the positives and negatives related to being an international student adjusting to a new culture and environment. Latinas Unidas is a women’s group in which to discuss relationships, culture, academics, identity, family, stereotypes and other issues. The services are free to all the students and confidential.

If a student were to actually have physical symptoms resulting from cultural stress, he/she would be encouraged to visit Student Health Services. There are fully accredited doctors and nurse practitioners that can meet the needs and requests for CSULB students and all visits are free of charge. For doctors and nurses who are interested in furthering their communicative skills with those of different cultures, there are some very helpful Internet websites such as: The Center for Cross Cultural Health www.crosshealth.com, Cross Cultural Health Care Program (CCHP) www.xculture.org, Culture Clues www.depts.washington.edu/pfes/cultureclues.html, Food and Nutrition Information Center www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000010.html and Diversity Rx www.diversityrx.org.

Cultural Shock Becomes a Positive Jolt

Accepting other cultures is difficult for some students, especially if a student feels superior to another’s belief and value system. However, university students have the opportunity through the support of their peers, professors, friends and on-campus groups to move into acceptance of others.

In many instances, students may avoid integrating with other cultures because they are not comfortable. However, the emotional support from friends who share a similar cultural background can be priceless. Those friends who share similar cultural backgrounds can truly understand and empathize with one another. Through sharing the challenges and difficulties together, they can gain strength in coping with their everyday tasks. By talking about their experiences they share their failures and successes. And if they can laugh at themselves and at the mishaps they have experienced, this can begin a healing process. Also this type of sharing can foster the courage and strength to live in this foreign environment.

However, it must be stressed these students cannot stay within the safe confines of their own group. It is critical these students interact with all. For most international students, English is their second language and it is only understandable they might feel self-conscious about their ability to communicate with others. One can only imagine how difficult it could be when attempting to ask the professor a question or giving an oral presentation or simply asking someone to have a cup a coffee. International students who have been successful in integrating with their peers and into campus life indicate there are several important facts to remember.

1. **Keep Active.** By getting out of your room, apartment or dorm, one can experience what Americans are doing. It is highly valuable to visit public places, such as shopping malls, attend sporting events. While there, watch others and learn how American customs are practiced.

2. **Make American Friends.** Making friends gives one the ability to discuss with others what is not understood about
the culture. Remember most people like to be of service to one another. International students are pleased to realize how much help other students are willing to offer when asked.

3. **Read.** Not only should one read the local newspapers and magazines, but also access the Internet. Ask other peers what they like to read and follow suit.

4. **Exercise.** By finding an activity that one enjoys, one will be able to reduce stress and depression. In Southern California there are many sports and activities available. Equally important is to take risks and try out many different types of sports. A student can easily and readily become a member of a new group.

5. **Community Activities.** Talk with other students and professors about community activities, religious services, or volunteer opportunities. Through working with others, it is difficult to remain culturally egocentric.

6. **Work on Your English.** This is extremely important because it is easier to understand a culture when one can comprehend the language.

7. **Introduce Yourself to Other International Students.** Other international students may be experiencing similar problems and sharing about actions one is taking can prove to be a way to positively cope. And by aiding others, one begins to forget about themselves and their needs.

8. **Be Patient.** Students from other cultures have stated that it is important to be patient. A student could find they have mastered the living skills and are feeling let down or dissatisfied. Students stress that these are simply emotional swings and to just ride out these lows. They promise that these moods will pass and a student will feel renewed and excited about their life once again.

**CSULB Students Studying Abroad**

Each year some 300 students take advantage of both short-term and yearlong study abroad opportunities around the world. These students are advised to approach the move with a good attitude. It is stressed to maximize the good aspects of the new culture and language. Do not compare, criticize and complain about the customs of the new environment. Learn about the new culture through books, brochures, embassy visits, videos, and meetings with someone who has been to the country. If possible, increase contact with the new culture by volunteering in community activities that allow one to practice the language. By following these guidelines, students will have a positive cultural experience that will truly enhance their lives in the present and future.

**Conclusion**

At college, students will be interacting with others from many different cultures. Prior to attending college, students may not have had to be so aware of a self-identity. However, through interaction with others they may be stimulated to examine their cultural backgrounds and enhance their own identities based upon some of their cultural values and beliefs. Students coming from other countries have definite challenges. Their cultural frame consists of language and a set of tacit social understandings, which is labeled “vital understandings” as well as of the social representations and practices that reflect and enact these understandings in daily life. In North America, a key element of the cultural framework is a set of beliefs about the self. These beliefs are concerned with what a self is and what to do with it. Students must remember that this “set of beliefs about the self” can be different and even divergent when comparing them to another person from another culture. Thus, the reason students indicate tolerance is so critical when interacting with one another. It is crucial to remember there is no “set of beliefs” that is better than another. A far wiser attitude is to not compare one to another, but instead be open to learning all one can about all cultures.

Culture shapes how people perceive their world, their community, and their family. It provides people with a blueprint for living and for interpreting their environment. Culture is often defined as the traditions, norms, shared values, customs, arts, history, and institutions of a group of people. It makes sense that there should be similarities across cultures. Human beings belong to the same species; our brain, our bodies, our autonomic nervous systems, our hormones, and our sense organs are similarly constructed, and our consciousness shaped by the constraints and opportunities that they provide. However, it is the dissimilarities between cultures that can provide one with greater diversity in their lives. If students, no matter their cultural background, can learn to accept and appreciate these differences, there is no way to measure the richness that this will bring to their lives. Remember to allow that positive cultural jolt of interacting with others to enhance your life both socially and academically.


References:

Anxiety Enhances Maturity

Linda Peña

Stress is caused by the body’s defense impulse, usually in response to a threat or danger, and sometimes indicates the need for a change in behavior. When stressors arise, decisions made enable students - who often enter college in late adolescence - to transition into adulthood. Many students believe that without rules and no authoritative figure in their lives, stress and anxiety is eliminated, while others believe that without the order rules and regulations provide, one can be more susceptible to anxiety. In life, one will always experience forms of stress; the key to success is how an individual deals with this stress. This article presents facts about anxiety and it’s causes, various stress measurements and suggestions for ways to decrease unnecessary stress.

Most freshmen enter college as late adolescents and graduate as young adults. During these years, each collegian is afforded opportunities to make life choices, based upon responses to current events and interactions with others. Students transition into adulthood through these decisions. Naturally, students may have divergent definitions for adulthood. For some, maturation is defined as an age at which one makes decisions not influenced by a higher authority. This can be exemplified by freshmen living on campus, making choices, no longer curtailed or overseen by parental control, as in curfews, chore schedules or other home/family rules. A CSU female sophomore recently stated, “… half of the reason people go to college is to learn about drinking, about getting hangovers and having fun, about growing up, having sex, learning what comes next, which is life.” Students who concur with this sophomore’s sentiment might hypothesize it is necessary to experience hangovers, sex and risky behaviors in order to become an adult.

Furthermore, these same students may promote that this emancipated lifestyle allows them to live free from stress and anxiety. They might contend stress only exists when one lives within the rules and restrictions set by those in higher authority. It is their contention that students experience conflict when expected to meet imposed deadlines set by others. For instance, students indicate stress can develop when parents threaten to stop paying tuition unless a certain grade point average is maintained. Therefore, students present this formula as a way by which to live an adult life free from stress and anxiety.

Students identify specific factors that cause stress/ anxiety. Most perceive deadlines such as dates for exams, essays, and other class assignments as definitive stressors. Some students imagine an ideal university as one at which expectations for students were set at a minimum. On this model campus, students would dictate their own mandates for academic success and in by doing so, would create a stress-free educational environment. However, other students forewarn certain consequences to living a ‘restriction-less’ life style. For if the emphasis is always placed upon “free choice and will,” a student by avoiding all rules, may find they are more susceptible to experiencing anxiety. If one has no restrictions, rules or standards to follow such as attendance, studying wisely, exercising and eating well, a student’s life could be affected in a negative manner. Living in this way could alter a student’s health and emotional well being, causing class attendance to weaken and grades to deteriorate. This chain of events could eventually cause the student to drop classes and possibly lead to withdrawing. These actions could cause even...
greater anxiety.

Therefore, it might be more significant to view emancipation as a developmental stage at which a student is acquiring skills to effectively resolve stress and anxiety. As stated by the sophomore, students come to college to learn what comes next, which is life. And sometimes this life can be unpredictable and learning how to deal with it can cause stress. By shifting this emotional energy from negative to positive, a student begins to experience rewards from completing rule-dictated tasks, whether they be academic or extracurricular. Acceptance of one’s responsibilities actually becomes the key that unlocks the door through which a student passes in route towards achieving both current and future goals. And in doing so, students sense a new freedom from stress. Thus making possible this second formula that is diametrically opposed to the first.

### Emancipation = No Stress No Anxiety
Emancipation = Following Rules and Regulations

Alarmingly, there is a rising rate of students experiencing anxiety and stress. Students are affected by academic, financial, health related, and self-imposed stressors. A study conducted with British students confirmed empirically that financial and other difficulties could increase levels of anxiety. The primary intent of this article is to educate students on how to better manage stressors through gaining knowledge about the following: stress and anxiety facts, causes of stress, stress measurements, and coping methods. Furthermore, by being aware, students may come to understand the value of being accountable for all actions and choices. It is this form of emancipation through accountability that truly enhances their maturation process. In fact, the willingness to experience stressors in college could be construed as an extremely positive action. It is hoped students will focus upon discovering effective solution for challenges presented by university life.

### Stress and Anxiety Facts

Stress is caused by the body’s instinct to defend itself. This instinct is good in emergencies, such as getting out of the way of a speeding car, but it can cause physical symptoms if it goes on for too long, such as in response to life’s daily challenges and changes. The stress response of the body is somewhat like an airplane readying for take-off. Virtually all systems (the heart and blood vessels, the immune system, the lungs, the digestive system, the sensory organs, and brain) are modified to meet the perceived danger.

Change can make one feel stressed, even good change. It’s not just the change or event itself, but also how one reacts to it that matters. What may be stressful is different for each person. University students quickly realize they have many requirements to meet, such as mandatory class attendance, readings, assignments and exams. Any of these demands could cause stress. Moreover, there are others, who for the first time may be dealing with living away from home and being responsible for their own actions. Sometimes this college lifestyle entails finding balance between emancipation from authority and the constraints of academic life. It is when the shift of balance leans too far in either direction that one can begin to experience stress.

All of your senses are involved in gathering information about your environment and delivering this data to your brain, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Stress is one of the many ways the body responds to the environment. It’s how the body reacts to the things it sees, hears, tastes, smells and feels. If a student were to experience stress for an extended period of time, illness could be a result. For instance headaches, muscle tension, ulcers and insomnia are all examples of possible stress-induced ailments. Also, students under stress have indicated an increase in smoking and caffeine consumption, a decrease in healthy eating, emotional control, frequency and duration of physical activity, maintenance of household chores and self-care habits, attendance to commitments, and monitoring of spending and a deterioration in sleep patterns and study habits.

### Causes

Anxiety is a multi-system response to a perceived threat or danger; an individual’s direct response to stressors experienced in everyday life. It reflects a combination of biochemical changes in the body, the student’s personal history and memory, and the social situation. Anxiety seems to be a uniquely human experience. Other animals clearly know fear, but human anxiety involves an ability to use memory and imagination to move backward and forward in time. This emotion is sometimes defined as a tense anticipation one might experience towards an upcoming event, such as an assignment, an exam, a speech, a date or an athletic event. Often, anxiety can be puzzling for a student to experience. In its purest form anxiety is diffuse, objectless, unpleasant, and persistent. Anxiety is a state of heightened vigilance rather than an emergency reaction.

Another stressor for students is the unpredictability of college life. An event that is unanticipated and unplanned is
called a non-normative or idiosyncratic life event. For students such an event could be a pop quiz, unexpected visit from a parent, winning an academic award, failing a class or the break-up of a relationship. It is these non-normative events that can temporarily disrupt the rhythm of a student’s life. And it is just this type of disruption that can lead to anxiety.

Although anxiety is related to fear, it is not the same emotional state. Fear is a direct, focused response to a specific event or object and the person is consciously aware of it. However, many students will use these two words interchangeably. It is not uncommon to overhear a student say, “I’m afraid I am going to fail,” or “I know if I don’t get a passing grade on this exam I will be forced to take an incomplete.” And fears can be tied in with non-academic concerns such as relationships, peer pressures or family concerns. It is important for students to know whether they are experiencing fear or anxiety.

### Academic Anxiety Checklist

- Believe that practically all your classmates are more knowledgeable, less error-prone, or better prepared than yourself.
- Get upset with yourself after a test for having made a “stupid” mistake.
- Find that panicky thoughts, worries, or extraneous ideas repeatedly frustrate your efforts to concentrate.
- Impress on yourself again and again the importance of getting a good grade on a test or assignment.
- Find that remembering past successes fail to boost your confidence.
- Escape from important studying by performing irrelevant tasks.
- Worry during an exam about the loss of emotional control and could ‘freeze up.’
- Repeatedly resort to makeup exams or time extensions for assignments.
- Study too meticulously, such as trying to memorize almost everything or underlining virtually every sentence in the textbook.
- Get so flustered during an exam and forget already known information.

### Social Anxiety

It is important to mention that anxiety can also be experienced within a social context. There are several types of anxiety that people experience in social situations. These forms are all instances of social anxiety, apprehension, trepidation, or fear that arise from “the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings.” College students may perceive these social anxieties in response to dating, public speaking, and meeting new people. Social anxiety is ordinarily anticipatory, with the sufferer worrying about undesired evaluations that have yet to occur. Thus, students can fret long in advance of an upcoming date or speech, and the events that cause social anxiety are rarely unexpected. Being anticipatory, social anxiety involves sympathetic nervous system arousal as an individual prepares for a threatening experience with increased heart rate, perspiration, and faster breathing.

### Measurements

In order to begin assessing a student’s anxiety there are several tools that can be administered. One such method is the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS), a questionnaire whose objective is to assess the range of social interaction and performance situations that individuals with social phobia may fear and/or avoid. The questionnaire includes 24 items. Each item
consists of a given situation, the rate of anxiety (0 to 3 = none, mild, moderate, severe) and the rate of avoidance (0 to 3 = never, occasionally, often, usually).\textsuperscript{11}

\section*{Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Action</th>
<th>Anxiety or Fear</th>
<th>Rate of Avoidance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Telephoning in public.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Participating in small groups.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Eating in public places.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Drinking with others in public places.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Talking to people in authority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Acting, performing or giving a talk in front of an audience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Going to a party.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Working while being observed.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Writing while being observed.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Calling someone you don’t know very well.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Talking with people you don’t know very well.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Meeting strangers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Entering a room when others are already seated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Being the center of attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Speaking up at a meeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Taking a test.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Expressing a disagreement or disapproval to people you don’t know very well.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Looking at people you don’t know very well in the eyes.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Giving a report to a group.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Trying to pick up someone for future dating.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Returning goods to a store.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Giving a party.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Resisting a high-pressure salesperson.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the column marked Anxiety or Fear, the student would place the appropriate number that designates their level of feeling. A higher number score represents a more intense level of anxiety.

\section*{Test Anxiety Inventory}

Charles D. Spielberger, Ph.D., a distinguished research professor of psychology, developed the State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). This was initially conceptualized as a research instrument for the study of anxiety in adults. It is a self-report assessment device that includes separate measures of state and trait anxiety. According to Dr. Spielberger, state anxiety reflects a “transitory emotional state or condition of the human organism that is characterized by subjective, consciously perceived feelings of tension and apprehension, and heightened autonomic nervous system activity.” State anxiety may fluctuate over time and can vary in intensity. In contrast, trait anxiety denotes “relatively stable individual differences in anxiety proneness” and refers to a general tendency to respond with anxiety to perceived threats in the environment.\textsuperscript{12}

The Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI), a self-report psychometric scale, was developed to measure individual differences in test anxiety as a situation-specific trait. The test is one page and contains twenty items. Based on a Likert Scale, the respondents are asked to report how frequently they experience specific symptoms of anxiety before, during and after examinations. This technique presents a set of attitude statements. Subjects are asked to express agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale. Each degree of agreement is given a numerical value from one to five. Thus, a total numerical value can be calculated from all the responses. A typical question using a Likert Scale might pose a statement and ask the respondent whether they Strongly Agree – Agree – Undecided – Disagree or Strongly Disagree. The TAI subscales assess worry and emotionality as major components of test anxiety. The item content reflects examination situations and is useful in studies and treatments for test anxiety. The following is a brief sample of such a test: A student would circle the number level that best fits their reaction to these events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Almost Never = 1</th>
<th>Sometimes = 2</th>
<th>Often = 3</th>
<th>Almost Always = 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. I feel confident and relaxed while taking tests</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Thoughts of doing poorly interfere with my concentration on tests.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. I feel my heart beating very fast during tests.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. During tests I feel very tense.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Before a test is returned, I feel uneasy.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Dr. Spielberger was interested in charting the emotional reaction or response that is evoked when a person perceives a particular situation as personally dangerous or frightening for him or her, irrespective of the presence or absence of a real objective danger. A heightened autonomic system activity (e.g., increased heart rate, blood pressure, and galvanic skin response) is a component of the state anxiety response, together with unpleasant feelings and apprehensive thoughts.

Test anxiety occurs in varying degrees and is characterized by emotional feelings of worry, fear, and apprehension. It is important for professors to be cognizant of three types of text-anxious students. The first type is one who lacks the proper study skills and the ability to organize or comprehend the main ideas for the content being taught. Due to a feeling of incompetence, the student becomes anxious before an exam. The second type of text-anxious student possesses proper study skills, but also possesses “fears of failure.” The third type believes he or she possesses quality study skills but, in reality, does not. Hence, this type continues to be anxiety ridden when assessments are administered.

**The Negative Problem Orientation Questionnaire (NPOQ)**

Sometimes students can self-sabotage themselves. A measurement for this type of negative action towards oneself is The Negative Problem Orientation Questionnaire (NPOQ). Originally, Grosselin, Pelletier and Ladouceur developed the NPOQ in France and it is a 12-item measure assessing NPO as a dysfunctional cognitive set. Two components were identified through factor analysis reflecting threat beliefs about problems, and self-doubt of problem-solving ability. The NPOQ appears to have sound psychometric properties. In a current study, 142 undergraduate students completed questionnaires assessing worry, intolerance of uncertainty, experiential avoidance, and the fear of anxiety, anger, positive affect, and depression. The results demonstrate that both experiential avoidance and fear of emotional arousal are important variables in worry; however, fear of anxiety was more uniquely related to worry than fear of other emotions and experiential avoidance. This study indicates that intolerance of uncertainty maintained a significant relationship with worry when controlling fear of anxiety. Both fear of anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty are important in understanding worry and results of this study suggest it may be involved in the development and maintenance of excessive worry. Take a moment, reading each item and mentally check which column applies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NPOQ Questionnaire</th>
<th>Not at all true of me</th>
<th>Slightly true of me</th>
<th>Moderately true of me</th>
<th>Very true of me</th>
<th>Extremely true of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I see problems as a threat to my well being.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I often doubt my capacity to solve problems.</td>
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<td>3. Often before even trying to find a solution, I tell myself that it is difficult to solve problems.</td>
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<td>4. My problems often seem insurmountable.</td>
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<td>5. When I attempt to solve a problem, I often question my abilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I often have the impression that my problems cannot be solved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Even if I manage to find some solutions to my problems, I doubt that they will be easily resolved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I have a tendency to see problems as a danger.</td>
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<td>9. My first reaction when faced with a problem is to question my abilities.</td>
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<td>10. I often see my problems as bigger than they really are.</td>
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<td>11. Even if I have looked at a problem from all possible angles, I still wonder if the solution I decided on will be effective.</td>
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<td>12. I consider problems to be obstacles that interfere with my functioning.</td>
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Coping Skills

For students who identify with one of the before mentioned types of anxiety, there are ways to alleviate your stress. Students are surprised that by committing to these basic steps, test anxiety either disappears all together or is greatly diminished. Organization, planning, and time management are essential to becoming a successful student; so start studying as soon as classes begin. Read assignments, listen during lectures, and take good classroom notes. By taking notes, reviewing material and utilizing various visual study techniques, students soon discover their test scores begin to rise. Many professors will specify it is not necessary for students to write verbatim all that is spoken. Furthermore, notes should be considered a work in progress and be used as study guides for tests. Regular reviews help students avoid cramming and reduce test anxiety. The biggest benefit is that it gives more time to absorb information. Read difficult assignments twice. Sometimes a second reading will clarify concepts. If one is having difficulty with a subject, get help. Meet with the instructor during office hours. Use an alternate text to supplement required reading, or hire a tutor. Many students find being a member of a study group becomes an effective tool. Study groups allow students to combine resources; members share an academic goal and provide support and encouragement. It is important for each meeting to set an agenda to avoid wasting time. List the material that will be reviewed so members can come prepared.

Many professors will offer these suggestions to displace test-anxiety on the exam day. They encourage students to arrive early and get organized. Specifically pay careful attention to the verbal directions as the tests are distributed. Read the directions slowly and scan the entire test, noticing how many points each part is worth, and estimate the time needed for individual questions. Check the time and pace yourself. If one becomes stumped by a question, be sure to move on to the next. If one moves forward and answers all the questions that they know, this will then allow time to return to those questions left unanswered.

Diminishing Stress Levels

It is necessary for students to identify their sources of stress. Once this has been accomplished, one can begin to restructure priorities and make changes in response to stress. Furthermore, one can actually begin to manage and reduce the effects of stress. Identifying sources of stress is useful to start the process of stress reduction. For someone who is dealing with anxiety, it might be useful to start the process of stress reduction with a diary that keeps an informal inventory of daily events and activities. It is not necessary to keep an extensive record, but simply jot down a few words accompanying a time and date to serve as reminders of significant events or activities. Writing about general life stress can lead to improved academic functioning.

- Note activities that put a strain on energy and time, trigger anxiety or precipitate a negative physical response as in a stomachache or headache.
- Note positive experiences, such as those that are mentally or physically refreshing or produce a sense of accomplishment.
- After a week or two, try to identify two or three events or activities that have been significantly upsetting or overwhelming.

Once this note recording has been completed, students should then ask themselves the following questions in reference to events that induce anxiety. Do these stressful activities meet their own goals or someone else’s? Has the individual taken on tasks that they can reasonably accomplish? And it is critical to understand which tasks are within their control and which ones are not.

The next step is to attempt a shift in balance from anxiety producing to anxiety-reducing activities. Eliminating anxiety is rarely practical or feasible, but there are many ways to reduce its impact. One study indicated that adding daily pleasant events has more positive effects on the immune system than reducing stressful or negative ones. For students, fill the weekends with activities that are fun. Furthermore during the week, be sure to take time out from studies to indulge in enjoyable activities whether it be sports endeavors, reading a book, painting or chatting with friends, if only for an hour or

Anxiety and Health

Individuals with high levels of anxiety are predisposed to a number of ailments. This is usually labeled "somatization." Students can actually exhibit symptoms due to emotional and physiological distress. An example is affective (emotional) symptoms such as apprehension, uneasiness, helplessness, and anticipation of danger. Moreover, a student can have somatic (bodily) symptoms. In the musculoskeletal system, these symptoms are tremors, tension headaches, muscle tightness, and weakness, neck and back pain. Related to the cardiovascular system, a student can develop palpitation and a rapid heartbeat; and in the respiratory system, hyperventilation, dizziness, feeling of choking, and shortness of breath. In the central nervous system, warnings are insomnia and lack of concentration.

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two per day. Evaluate one’s schedule and discard, whenever possible, unnecessary time-consuming chores with pleasurable or interesting activities.

It is crucial that students keep a perspective and look for the positive. Reversing negative ideas and learning to focus on positive outcomes helps reduce tension and achieve goals. Research has revealed humor is a very effective mechanism for coping with acute stress. Keeping a sense of humor during difficult situations is a common recommendation from stress management experts. Laughter not only releases the tension of pent-up feelings and helps keep perspective, but it appears to have actual physical effects that reduce stress hormone levels.

Relaxation Techniques
Since stress and anxiety are here to stay, everyone needs to develop methods for invoking the relaxation response, the natural unwinding of the stress response. Relaxation lowers blood pressure, respiration, and pulse rates, releases muscle tension, and eases emotional strains. This response is highly individualized, but there are certain approaches that seem to work. Combinations of techniques can be highly effective. For example, yoga, a brief massage, and progressive muscle relaxation can reduce both feelings of anxiety and stress hormone levels. No one should expect a total resolution of stress from these approaches, but if done regularly, these programs can be very effective.

Quieting the Mind and Body
When under stress and anxiety, some students may experience a constant stream of negative “self-talk.” Throughout the day the conscious mind may be inundated with thoughts, feelings, and fantasies that trigger unsettling feelings. Many of these thoughts replay unresolved issues that could exist in schoolwork and relationships. This relentless mental replay of unresolved issues can reinforce the anxiety symptoms and be exhausting. It is important to know how to shut off the constant inner dialogue and quiet the mind.

Students can quiet their mind through the act of meditation. Through meditation, one can create a state of deep relaxation that is very healing to the entire body. Find a quiet place to sit or lie in a comfortable position. Close the eyes and breathe deeply. Allow one’s breathing to slow and become relaxed. Begin to focus all attention on breathing, noticing the in and out movement of the chest and abdomen. Begin by blocking out all other thoughts, feelings, and sensations. If one feels their attention wandering, bring it back to the rhythm of the breathing.

As one inhales, say the word “peace,” and as one exhales, say the word “calm.” Draw out the pronunciation of the word so that it lasts for the entire breath. The word “peace” sound like p-e-e-a-a-a-c-c-e-e-e-e and the word “calm” sound like c-a-a-a-l-l-l-m-m-m-m. Repeating these words as one breathes will help to concentrate. Continue this exercise until the body begins to relax. With this type of meditation, the metabolism slows, as do physiological functions such as heart rate and blood pressure. Muscle tension decreases. Brain wave patterns shift from the fast beta waves that occur during a normal active day to the slower alpha waves that appear just before falling asleep or in times of deep relaxation.

Sometimes, students may experience anxiety from feeling ungrounded and disorganized. In other words, they have a pervasive sense of “things falling apart.” When this state of mind occurs, it often takes a concentrated effort just to get through the day, attend class, study for an exam or write a paper. In an effort to organize one’s energies and proceed more effectively with the daily routine, a student can practice the following type of meditation called “The Oak Tree.” Begin by sitting in a comfortable position, with arms resting at your sides. Close the eyes and breathe deeply. Let the breathing be slow and relaxed. See your body as a strong oak tree. Your body is solid like the wide, brown trunk of the tree. Imagine sturdy roots growing from your legs and going down deeply into the earth, anchoring your body. One feels solid and strong, able to handle any stress. When upsetting thoughts or situations occur, visualize the body remaining grounded like the oak tree. Feel the strength and stability in your arms and legs. As one repeats this type of meditation, they will begin to feel confident and relaxed, able to handle any situation.

Conclusion
It has been discovered that all life experiences, including formal education, hold the potential for learning. Learning is in the attending to and the reflecting on the experience. The learning becomes significant when it personally affects us and is subjectively valued. Sometimes the result is a more developed perspective, ability, or skill, and sometimes the result is a transformation. In any case, learning seems to be the key to becoming more mature.

Students will recognize that by accepting responsibilities, their horizons will expand. Learning is the key to understanding how maturity evolves from interactions with life events. It is critical for students to not be governed by fear in making life decisions. Often times, advice by well-meaning
friends, relatives and advisors may recommend following a “safer course” in hopes of avoiding stress and anxiety. Imagine the freedom gained if fear is removed from the decision-making process. If students are willing to make choices based upon their convictions, their dreams and their goals, will they not gain far more self-worth and wisdom? They will attain confidence from learning how to handle life’s challenges. In doing so, students may find the courage to take paths less traveled because they have begun to utilize skills that assist in reducing anxiety or stress as a result of choices made. Students gain wisdom from knowing how to manage their lives. Therefore, students graduate not only with a degree, but also with enlightenment about embracing, “what comes next, which is life.”

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The Power of Peer Pressure

Heidi Burkey

Peer pressure is not just a part of adolescence. It is the effects and influence that the people with whom one socializes has on him or her and whether or not a person will perform certain behaviors. These effects are a result of the need to find acceptance from one’s social group. Most people tend to gravitate toward others with similar beliefs, and base their self-identity partly on the level of acceptance or rejection within this group. This article will discuss social influences that change over a lifetime, the role of drugs and alcohol social influence, peer pressure and sex, and the effects of social influence in academia. People are often unaware of the social influences with which they are surrounded. However, becoming aware of these influences is one step toward positive change.

Many people believe that peer pressure affects only teenagers or adolescents; however, this is not the case. This socio-psychological phenomenon, peer pressure, is also known as social influence and affects everyone, even adults. Social influence begins when we are small children and continues throughout our lifespan. Whether peer group pressure is about clothing choices, substance use, or partner selection, it is a constant for most people. The effects of social influence can be observed in almost everyone’s life. Surprisingly, even the smallest actions such as washing one’s hands before leaving a restroom are affected by social influence.

Peer pressure is defined as coercion from social group members to perform some behavior or to prevent some action, whether the individual wants to or not. Self-identity is closely linked to whether or not a person can be pressured into behaviors or kept from performing a behavior. The perceptions we have about our peers’ behaviors, attitudes and beliefs will likely have a strong influence on our own behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. Peer pressure or social influence is not necessarily as strong an indicator that one will perform the behavior, but there is a strong association that it may have an effect. Commonly, people gravitate towards others like themselves, whether it is similar interests or social attributes. For example, this could include athletes, smokers, drinkers, drug users, and also sexual behaviors that one has in common with others. Finding acceptance from others is easier if those we seek acceptance from are much like ourselves. Moreover, we find greater comfort with those in our own peer group who accept us.

According to one theorist, Icek Ajzen Ph.D., our intentions to perform a behavior have a far greater effect on whether or not we will carry out that conduct. These intentions are formed by our attitudes about the behavior and the norm, which is defined as “…people’s perceptions of social pressure from significant others to perform the behavior.” This theory is called the Theory of Planned Behavior. “People’s attitudes are seen to be functions of their beliefs about the likely costs and benefits of performing a behavior, whereas subjective norms are based on people’s beliefs concerning the extent to which particular others want them to perform the behavior.” These attitudes are influenced by the perceived costs and benefits of executing the action. Consequences of performing the behavior may include pleasing others, being reprimanded by others, or even being ostracized from the social group.

A person’s self-identity is influenced by multiple factors, but one of the most significant is the social group that defines their personality. Their membership with a particular group provides norms about behaviors and attitudes for the person to grasp when stumbling through life. Conforming to these social norms set by the group gains one “…approval or acceptance or avoids disapproval or rejection.”

For example, a student named Adam began college in a new town where he did not know anyone. Adam was very interested in art and spent time either being creative or visiting...
galleries and museums. In the first few months of his freshman year Adam was lonely but soon he met other students who had similar interests. He was able to identify with these new friends who also enjoyed creating and immersing themselves in the world of art. Now that Adam had a social group who he shared commonalities with, he began to feel he was a part of a social group. Some behaviors shared by this group were body tattooing and piercing.

As a child, Adam had been taught tattoos were inappropriate and desecrated the body. He had always agreed that permanent images or even body jewelry was not something he could ever do to himself. Over time his feelings changed as he was exposed to body adornment more frequently. Most of his new friends had piercings and/or tattoos. Adam’s initially strong beliefs began to wane and only months after meeting these creative friends he changed his mind and got his first tattoo. Do you think that he was influenced by his friends’ beliefs? Was this peer pressure, social influence, or did Adam simply have a change of heart about body adornment?

How Social Influence Transcends Throughout a Lifespan

Our sense of self is “…formed, maintained, and changed primarily through assimilation” of the feedback we receive from others in a “social context.” Parents and family members are the first influences children experience. The feedback given to children helps develop a sense of self. This process creates self-esteem and sets the tone for the remainder of a person’s life. Family members also determine attitudes and beliefs about society and life. Perceptions of acceptable substance (drug, alcohol, and tobacco) use are initiated during this developmental stage and are influenced by familial affiliations.

As children begin school, the influence from peers starts the next chapter of development. Friends in school and other activities are an important component of this process. These peers provide socialization for what the “norms” are in society. As children age and enter adolescence, they start spending an increasing amount of time with their peers and less time with the family unit. By the time an adolescent enters college, the peer group has become more important than parents and siblings for support and friendship. For those students who live in the residence halls, the support network becomes even more critical. This new group of friends takes the place of family, and those bonds that develop can be especially strong. These bonds also help forge a “new college student identity.” Parental control is no longer enforceable since the student does not live at home and has freedom to be and do what they want. Development of identity becomes solidified and influenced by those with whom they spend their time. These persons become known as the peer group or reference group.

As we age, this social influence does not end and may be defined as pressure to “keep up with the Jones.” For example, purchasing the luxury SUV, the expensive purse and jeans, a boat, a home, and even having children are obligations adults may feel they need to meet for society. Some of us are more prone to following the crowd and may not even realize that we are bowing to this pressure. Others may feel very strongly about not taking the same path that our neighbors and friends follow, which can cause feelings of discomfort. Moreover, socioeconomic status differences among friends and others can cause this sense of inequality or pressure to fit in with others.

Another type of coercion commonly felt by most people is within relationships. Families and friends believe it is their duty to influence decisions made in relationships. Furthermore, religion, race, education level, and socioeconomic status may be critical factors in our social pressures to choose the appropriate mate or friends. Anecdotal evidence from interviews revealed that parents and family members might believe it is extremely important to stay within one’s race and religion when dating and/or marrying. Also, socioeconomic status and education levels may be criteria for family members and friends to disapprove of a prospective mate. This force is felt by many people but varies in intensity and is not the same for all. What one person finds unacceptable may be completely appropriate for another. For example, Jewish parents may want their daughter to only marry another Jew in order to continue the cultural and religious lineage. A Native American parent who is “full blood,” may want their children to marry only within their tribe or with another Native American. Cultural heritage may be important to a parent who desires that their children only marry within their culture, no matter what the race/ethnicity.

How Do Drugs and Alcohol Play a Part?

Some people may begin smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and using drugs at young ages, while others may wait until later in life to begin experimentation with substances. Initiation into substance use may be due to family instigation, such as older brothers and sisters, and even parents. Extensive
research has been conducted about the reasons that adolescents begin using alcohol and drugs, and peer pressure is considered one of the most significant factors. Peer groups can foster the abuse of substances or quite oppositely ban all substance use from the dominion of the group. For example, an anecdotal story from one college student describes how her friends were only smoking marijuana, believing this was the best drug one could use. Others using cocaine or crystal methamphetamine were considered absolutely “evil” and were not allowed to interact within her social group. Unexpectedly, one of these outside acquaintances showed up at a party and was asked to leave for their participation in using the “bad” drugs. How is it any different, she asked her friends? Everyone was using alcohol, pot, and hallucinogens. The use of cocaine and methamphetamine placed those people on the outside and they were ostracized from activities with the “pot smoking” group. This group action created peer pressure in that others would not be accepted in the group if they dabbled in the world of the “ speedy” drugs. Furthermore, this student began to positively question her peer’s decision to exclude people for specific drug use and evaluate the truth about her own substance use.

Peer pressure can be direct or indirect, also known as active or passive, respectively. For example, active/direct peer influence may be as simple as buying someone a drink or even coercing someone to consume mass quantities of alcohol in a drinking game. Belittling the person or shouting “drink, drink, drink” / “chug, chug, chug” until they drink more alcohol is a common method used to force friends to drink at a faster rate. Indirect methods of peer influence include the imitation of peers’ drinking behaviors, or even the perception of what their peers are doing. Without even being conscious of the existing pressure, we can be strongly influenced by our peers to drink more alcohol. Being aware of this phenomenon may be helpful while consuming alcoholic beverages around others in order to temper the possibility of matching your drinking to your friends’ behaviors.

A study was conducted to evaluate whether or not there is any effect on someone’s alcohol consumption based upon his or her drinking partner’s use. “Confederates,” who were actually trained research assistants, would vary their drinking behaviors to note changes in a drinking partner’s pattern. The latter was unaware of being tested. Traits observed by the “confederates” were as follows:

- The unknowing drinking partner did alter their alcohol consumption based on what the “confederate” was doing.
- The unknowing participant would mimic the drinking pattern of the “confederate.”
- If there were more than one “confederate,” the participant would model the fastest drinking “confederate” and/or the majority of the group.

People sometimes behave in a particular way because they believe their peers are performing in a similar manner. For example, high school and college students frequently perceive that their friends are drinking more alcohol, using more drugs, and are having more sex than is actually the case. Fictitious as it may be, students who believe that their friends are actually doing these things may change their behaviors to match this mistaken belief. Perceptions among college students about their peers’ alcohol consumption can create a reality, also known as a “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Interestingly, the perceptions of peer behaviors are not necessarily the reality.
• PEER PRESSURE •

The figure below is a depiction of the Social Norms Approach Model.

![Social Norms Model](image)

In order to dispel these myths or mistaken beliefs about behaviors, a Social Norms Approach was developed. Advertising messages, tailored to a target audience, illustrating the reality of peer use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and safe sex can be an effective technique towards changing the perceptions of social norms. Many college campuses are utilizing this method for creating change among their students. The theory of social norming has been used for a multitude of social issues such as campus violence, risky sexual behaviors, and sexual assault. This model works by changing perceptions about the behavior; hence, it is believed that the actual behaviors will be altered as a result. As an example, CSULB Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Program utilizes an advertising campaign to change the social norms of alcohol use on the campus. One of the advertisements is a large poster with pictures of students and a fact about CSULB students and the percent of students who actually drink less than 1 to 2 drinks per week. See Figure 1 for an example of one the advertising posters. These are placed in various locations around campus so that the students will observe them frequently and start to recognize the fact that most students drink responsibly.

Although the social norms approach has been criticized heavily, there are some who believe it is a good method for changing perceptions about risky and violent behaviors. Many studies have been conducted evaluating its effectiveness and there is no overarching general truth about this technique for changing behaviors. However, the opposing argument is that peer pressure plays a less powerful role in shaping one’s decision to use drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and even performing risky behaviors. Unfortunately, the power of personal choice and motivations are frequently forgotten in the battle to reduce substance abuse problems in our society.

Peer Pressure and Sex

Once again, the perception of what friends and cohorts are doing in their lives has a heavy influence on our own behaviors. This also may be described as “perceptions of social expectations.” According to a study by Romer et. al., the more the participants perceived that their peers were having sex, the more the participants engaged in sexual behaviors. This association of peer norm beliefs affected condom use as well. For example, if the participant believed that their friends were using condoms then they were also more likely to use condoms. Results of this study also indicate “peers influenced normative boundaries for acceptable behavior rather than individual attitudes.”

Even sexual characteristics of friends, such as abstinence or sexually active, may be traits that draw people together. It is easier to spend time with people who understand you, especially when it comes to sexual behaviors. Although sexually active people may have friends that are abstinent, it is more likely that those they spend time with will be similar in nature. Parents play an active role in shaping an adolescent’s behavior choices, particularly sexual risk practices. Initiation to sexual activity, practicing safe sex, and using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy are important elements that parental role models influence. Peers are an important factor, but parents can build the strength of individual choice in their child. As students enter into college they bring with them the bevy of experiences and risk behaviors that they have learned as adolescents. Some have
great inner strength, never bowing to the pressures they face from peers to take part in activities that may be risky. Others are more vulnerable to societal pressures and the influence of their peers. Societal pressures may come from the media consistently pushing a sexually charged environment on the masses. Television, film, and print media are dominated by commercials having a sexual tone; however, not expressing sexuality in a healthy or natural way.

The pressure of one’s culture to remain chaste until marriage may come from religion or even heritage. Parental control in transmission of this cultural trait would be a strong influence on the college student. Also, religion influences the choice to delay coital debut until marriage. For example, in a recent interview with a member of the Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) faith, the ward members have a very powerful effect on other members using social influence to maintain the culture of the religion. The influence may be indirect, but is still discussed openly among the members (personal communications, May 11, 2005).

Academics and Social Influence

Academic social influence can be observed in multiple ways. This pressure can be observed in competition between students to achieve higher grades and positive reinforcement from teachers; parental expectation to excel and receive high grades; and choices about colleges and majors. Of course, these may be considered positive social pressures because it is about bettering oneself. Unfortunately, the pressure can be overwhelming to always strive for a 4.0 GPA and to always compete against your fellow students. This pressure can cause students so much stress and anxiety that they become ill, do not get enough sleep, drink too much caffeine and lash out in unhealthy ways.

Even cheating to succeed has been reported among some students. An unpublished study was conducted at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in 1999 about the “influence of peer pressure on the reporting of academic dishonesty in a survey.” Simply, these collegian researchers wanted to know if students answering questions in a survey were more or less likely to be honest about their own cheating if they thought that others cheated too. More than half of the respondents admitted to not reporting another student cheating, and giving or receiving unauthorized help on an assignment/examination.\(^{16}\)

Choosing a college and a major can be stressful for many students. Selecting a college can be a harrowing experience when conflicting influence can be felt from parents, friends, and high school counselors and teachers. Location, major options, conveniences, and school visibility all may factor heavily on the decision process. For some, cost will be the sole element of choice. But once this choice is made and the education begins, the next step is choosing the major. The major is often influenced by parental judgment about what will provide the most economical independence for the student in the future. Sometimes friends will influence this selection. Hopefully, the student will be fully empowered to make their own personal decisions without any social influence from others. Utilizing career planning tools on the Internet or through a career development organization can be very helpful in creating a major that fits the needs and personality of the individual.

The pressure to achieve seems so natural for many people; however, an opposite side does exist. This reverse force can have a very profound effect on academics. For young adults, there can be negative peer pressure to not excel and to not learn. Not being studious and achieving good grades is considered “cool” among some in the K-12 grade levels. In the early 1990’s, only 87 percent of high school students graduated in the U.S. Suburban and inner-city school students alike have similar problems with the attitude that academic achievement and school does not have any importance in their lives. This pervasive attitude is much too common and some educators and policy makers are attempting to create a social influence to counteract this negative concept about education.\(^{17}\) Once again, parental influence has an effect on self-efficacy of the student. If the parent believes that the child can do well in school this bolsters the student’s belief in themselves that they can achieve. Although socioeconomic status affects many aspects of educational achievement, family goals about educational achievement is a much heavier influence on whether children will excel.\(^{18}\)

Conclusion

Social influence is not an easily observed characteristic in our lives, but yet, holds a very strong power over us all. Notice the feelings one has when making choices about a college major or on a lesser scale of importance, what brand of clothes or car to buy. Are these choices influenced by anything else besides our own personal desires and needs? Do friends hold any sway over decisions made about alcohol, drug, or tobacco use? Who is in control over choices made? All of these questions may affect us at differing stages of our lives. Some of these pressures are never in the forefront of our conscious thought, but once felt or experienced, directly or indirectly, can cause one to pause when
making a choice. For those that feel a negative peer influence, being aware of personal choices and the process of decision making may be a positive experience in self-empowerment. By exploring the feelings brought up by negative social influence/peer pressure and actually being aware that they exist at all is a step towards a positive change in life.

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Avoiding Unhealthy Relationships

Ralph Davis

College students encounter many things for the first time; one of those could be a serious relationship. However, it is important to be careful when building this relationship in order to avoid the trappings of an unhealthy one. There are many myths about what a healthy relationship is, but research shows that one of the main keys to a healthy, long lasting relationship, is communication. Many factors contribute to the success or failure of a relationship, from compatibility to the idea of being able to mold and create the perfect mate. Although some things remain a mystery, this article offers a few important things to remember when trying to avoid an unhealthy relationship.

Myth versus Reality

The myth of the perfect relationship has been around for years. Growing up we all imagine what our futures will contain, including the ideal partner. These dreams can often distort our view of real relationships. One of the major myths in relationships is that couples must spend as much time as possible together. Many people imagine their ideal relationship to be with someone that they are so compatible with that they will cherish spending every waking moment with them. According to Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, this thinking is flawed, and couples need space to maintain their independence and personal growth goals to prevent the creation of “walls” of suffocation around each other.

Another common myth about relationships is that they will fill a void in an individual’s life. Many people look to a relationship to complete them, to make them feel better about themselves. This way of thinking is totally contradictory to a successful, healthy relationship. Helm and Zenthoefer write that it is necessary for one to experience autonomy and a love of one’s self in order to receive love from another. This concept cannot be stressed enough. Helm and Zenthoefer go on to say that when this love of one’s self is lacking, and one has bad feelings about themselves, negative emotions like jealousy surface, creating additional walls in the relationship.

Many couples also tend to ignore the importance of
communication in their relationships. Communication is an essential component of a successful relationship. Interaction can be verbal or non-verbal and couples must have both for a lasting relationship. According to Helm and Zenthoefer, “Two way communication is the ingredient that separates the great love stories from those tales of despair as illustrated through separation and divorce.” Research stresses the importance of non-verbal communication. Two-way communication can occur through couples touching, caressing and visually sensing each other. These non-verbal cues can enlighten partners to each other’s states of being.

Relationship participants may also expect their partners to demonstrate their love and affection in an exact form or fashion. These expectations are formed from the myth that in good relationships a partner will know the proper expressions to please the other. Helm and Zenthoefer state that “each person involved operates at a different rhythm, and this must be recognized by both individuals in the relationship.” How and when a person chooses to express their love is not the important component. What is important is that in whatever way, the feelings are expressed. This advice is crucial for young couples that may not have the life experiences necessary to understand that ‘real life’ may be different than what is imagined or hoped for.

Compatibility and Affection

“Compatibility, being able to exist together in harmony,” is essential in the success of any relationship. In romantic relationships it may be the most important factor. When thinking of compatibility, people tend to focus on mutual interests, common backgrounds, and similar goals. While these things are very important, many people forget to consider the role physical affection types may play in the success of a relationship. Does one’s desire to kiss, hold hands, hug, or give a backrub, in comparison to their partner, influence the success of the relationship? Research says, “yes.” Gulledge, Gulledge, and Stahmann found that there is a high correlation between physical affection types and relationship satisfaction. 

Research shows that gender does play a role in physical affection types, impacting compatibility in heterosexual relationships. Men and women may prefer different types of physical affections, and partners of the opposite gender may demonstrate their preferred methods when another type is more appropriate. For instance, the favorite physical affection type for men was kissing on the lips, while women’s favorite was cuddling and holding. Are men offering more kisses while women are expecting more cuddling and holding? The answer to this question could explain our society’s high rate of relationship failure. Couples can learn from this research the importance of understanding a mate’s physical affection style.

Lack of compatibility often results in conflict. Conflict tends to arise when one of the participants in a relationship feels as though their needs are not being met or even worse, ignored. A large part of developing and maintaining compatibility is inquiring about a partners needs and working towards fulfilling them. Getting through conflict is part of that work. The research of Gulledge, Gulledge, and Stahmann showed that couples with increased amount of physical affection demonstrated the ability to resolve conflict easier. This should prove crucial in the success of a relationship, being that conflict seems to be inevitable.

As couples seek the ability to coexist in harmony, it is imperative they stay mindful of the factors required to maintain compatibility. Even something that seems relatively simple like physical affection can have serious implications on a relationship. In the complex interactions between two human beings, respect for differences must be recognized for any chance at coexistence.

Creating the Perfect Mate

The death of many relationships occurs at the start. Often times one or both of the participants enter with the idea of creating the perfect mate. This idea of molding someone into the mate of your dreams as the relationship progresses can have devastating consequences. Far too often young adults of both genders have these intentions, thus ruining their chances for a successful relationship.

This concept of change appears to be rooted in the life experiences of young people. In a study conducted by Knox, Zusman, Shearhouse, and Raji, one-half of the women and one-fourth of the men surveyed witnessed their mothers attempt to change the behavior of their father. These findings lead to the concept that people, especially women, are socialized to attempt to change the behaviors of their mate. The research indeed showed that women (86%) were more likely than men (72%) to have interest in changing their partners’ behavior or attitudes.
The researchers also found that 80 percent of the respondents felt that their partner had tried to change their behavior. This statistic is important because it is often on perception, not reality, that people base their attitudes and decisions. If someone feels that their partner is trying to change them, they are going to have a certain reaction (negative or positive) whether or not the partner is actually attempting to change them.

Knox, Zusman, Shearhouse, and Raji state that women may be more interested in changing men due to their desire for egalitarian relationships. The quest for equal treatment may lead women to attempt to change all men with whom they enter relationships, instead of seeking out men who share their values.

With most adults firmly entrenched in their personal value system, the struggle to change someone is often in vain. Perfection, or the perception thereof, in a human being cannot be created. It is subjective and one must randomly encounter another they consider to be perfect. No matter how hard one tries, successfully changing someone to meet a preconceived standard rarely, if ever, works. It is much more feasible to meet the person that most closely matches your expectations and enjoy them for who they are.

**A Healthy Model**

So what is a healthy relationship model? Research indicates the healthiest model would be one where individuals can maintain their independence, people feel they are complete before entering, communication is valued, all demonstrations of love are accepted, there is compatibility and similar physical affection styles, conflict resolution, and little interest in changing a participant’s behavior. Relationships work best when they involve people seeking enhancement in their life, not completion. The relationship can only be as strong as the weakest person involved.

Young people, including university students, can learn a lot from what researchers have shown. Relationships may have better odds for success if people have a more realistic approach. Knowing that a partner is not going to change, and that one should focus on compatibility that is pre-existing may give them a better start. All the research in the world however can’t provide a definitive answer to making relationships work. With divorce rates hovering around 50 percent, there is certainly a large audience that wishes they could.

**References:**

Health Resource Center

Outreach
Presentations
Presentations on STDs and birth control are available upon request for all campus classes and organizations

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Individual counseling to meet your nutritional needs

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