

# THE FEAR OF BEING WRONG!

By Edi Zhang

While classrooms are meant to be an open learning environment, social fears have shaped the classroom atmosphere into a tense and uncomfortable place.

The common question of “Do you understand?” asked by teachers often is faced with clueless and confused faces nodding in fear. Even in a classroom where no one knows the answer, many students are afraid to admit they don’t know a concept because they don’t want to be “that one kid” who never understands anything.

A variety of reasons may contribute to this fear, including a lack of confidence and wanting to maintain a presentable image and a fixed mindset. Anthony Peña, a math teacher at Monte Vista High School, believes this can stem from a cultural misconception of fixed intelligence.

“You hear people all the time say, ‘Oh I’m just not a math person,’ or something like, ‘my brain is just not built that way,’” Peña said. “People have slightly different strengths and weaknesses upon entering the world and based upon their early experiences, but those things are far more changeable than people think.”

While some people find certain subjects easier and others more difficult, everyone can train their brain to the level they desire. Albert Einstein once said, “I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.”

The brain is just like any other muscle: you need to train it, work it, and hit roadblocks to acquire more knowledge. Freshman Humza Mahmood believes that many classrooms, in contrast, are not welcoming environments for students to make mistakes.

“Our school system somewhat expects everyone to be perfect,” Mahmood said. “There are grading scales, and the peer pressure that [makes] people just want to always get it right, and that’s why very few people raise their hand and ask questions.”

Students don’t want to reveal to others that they don’t understand a concept, despite the fact that not filling in learning gaps can be highly detrimental. However, the peer pressure students feel is justified. A student’s activity in the classroom can often negatively affect their relationships.

For many students, it’s hard to exclude others’ perceptions of you from your thoughts. Sophomore Madeleine Kan, for example, is one

of these students, although she said she doesn’t let those thoughts interfere with raising questions in class.

“On one hand, my image is pretty important to me because I’m very interested in being perceived and I constantly need validation,” Kan



said. “That being said, I know it’s not that important in the grand scheme of things so I don’t do all that much to try to control how I’m seen.”

For Mahmood, it is a very different story.

“Being outspoken has affected me pretty horribly,” Mahmood said. “For me personally, I have very few friends. But I’m very close with them. I’ve known all my friends for several years and I trust them completely. And that’s worked for me because they know who I am. They know that I’m able to get things wrong sometimes, and they’re okay with that.”

Mahmood believes that these types of strong friendships mitigates the fear of being judged in the classroom. When people understand and

“Most teachers just want to get the test scores and move on with the lesson,” Mahmood said. “There’s this quote from Khan Academy which says, ‘Teach from mastery not from understanding.’ There’s a difference between just understanding something enough to pass the test versus actually mastering it and being able to move forward.”

Mahmood said our school system should allow second chances more.

“In many classes you just take the test and you’re done,” Mahmood said. “If you fail it you just move on, and then that’s not very good be-

cause then you don’t understand that and you have to be able to have other methods of supplementation to learn that.”

While complaints about teachers and their methods aren’t uncommon, students are responsible for their own work ethic and motivation, which can contribute to their problems.

“If you take tests and you get, for example, a 30 percent, then you’re not going to try and get better because the test has already been taken,” Mahmood said. “But you need to because otherwise if you move on and don’t understand that subject, then you’re going to fail in the future.”

Peña said he is striving to improve the culture in the classroom for students to feel welcomed.

“I try to make sure that people have individual time to ask the questions where they do feel comfortable,” Peña said. “While I wish people were okay asking when they don’t understand something, that’s not the reality and you have to make stuff that works for where people are actually at.”

He said he believes that the change needs to come from people’s mindsets universally in order for it to be successful. It’s important to show people that it’s acceptable to be wrong and make mistakes.

“I might believe in it, but if your peers, parents or anyone else don’t believe in it, you’re not going to do it,” Peña said. “You need that supportive environment in order to take risks. You have to know that you will not be shamed with it. And to do that, everybody has to be on board.”

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accept mistakes that you make, there’s no reason to hide them. However, he claims that many people don’t invest in these stronger friendships.

“What a lot of people do is just go for superficial friendships,” Mahmood said. “For that, you have to always be right and be like that perfect person even though you might not be.”

Mahmood said he believes that teachers and course structures are catalysts to why students are unwilling to ask questions and make mistakes.

# TOXIC CULTURE: DIETS AND "WELLNESS"

By Elisabeth Delpouys

Walk into a cafe. Among the friendly chatter of peers, there is often an ongoing conversation.

*What are you eating? When do you work out? God, I want to lose weight so bad!*

These conversations may seem harmless, but that is also why they are so dangerous. The constant need to lose weight, go on a diet and be healthy is so common all around us that it becomes hard to even recognize the toxicity anymore.

The spread of dieting and losing weight disguised as "wellness" is everywhere, not just at the teenager's lunch table. Social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram are filled with beauty bloggers, fitness models and wellness sites that perpetuate the harmful conversation regarding weight and eating.

"It is so pervasive in our culture right now, especially because we are not calling it 'dieting' in the same way we used to, and now it's under the umbrella of 'wellness' so it doesn't always have the same connotation dieting has," said Dr. Ariel Trost, a clinical psychologist with a focus on eating disorders.

These kinds of Instagram accounts and other people spread all kinds of wellness tips, from "How to lose 10 pounds in one month: Stop eating \_\_\_\_!" as well as the less blatantly obvious dieting tips like recommending diets and certain foods to "help you be healthy." But they are simply fad diet tips disguised as health advice.

"You can distinguish between whether something is actually about health by asking, 'Would you do this if you knew that you would gain five pounds from doing it, but it would be way healthier for you?' Most of the time that answer would be no," said Trost, whose office is in Oakland.

One of the reasons diet culture is so toxic is because of the way we try to hide it and disguise it. People pretend they aren't ketogenic to lose weight; instead, we say they're "keto" because it's "healthier."

The term "wellness" nowadays applies to anything that is supposed to make you healthy, but this is

often unsupported advice from regular people pretending to be professionals concerning nutrition and fitness.

The term "wellness" allows social media bloggers and fitness accounts to pawn off fake diets as health trends and ways to look skinnier without the negative connotation dieting has.

However, social media isn't the entirety of the problem surrounding diet and wellness culture. We see diet culture in our parents and the adults around us just as much as we see it in our friends and peers. Parents nowadays are also involved in diet culture, eating paleo, keto, vegan and gluten free, and

certain foods.

Diets, when used properly and are approved by a nutritionist, can have benefits. Proper diets can help you lose weight and stay healthy with the help of an active lifestyle and adequate hydration.

The issue is not the use of diets, but the abuse of them. The problem lies within diets that propagate an unhealthy or unbalanced food intake or a severe caloric deficit. These diets are more abrasive than helpful for your body.

But what qualifies a diet as harmful?

A diet is harmful when it causes you to obsess over what you eat, to ignore every single craving and desire out of fear of gaining weight, and cause nutritional deficiency or imbalance. This fear can change, grow stronger, and for some, develop into an eating disorder.

The constant role of body image plays a part in the unhealthy obsession with being overweight. Fad diets are a stepping stone into eating disorders.

"If you're predisposed to an eating disorder, what might be a fad diet to one kid can spiral into a lifelong eating disorder for you," Trost said.

The spread of misinformation by non-professionals is harmful to anyone who believes it. They sell their diets to anyone who falls for the pseudo-scientific information that fad diet supporters cite to back them up.

Saying one food causes you to gain weight is not true, and it spreads lies such as "fruit is bad for you, and avocados and bananas have so much fat, they'll make you gain 10 pounds!" Rather than believing in an Instagram fitness and lifestyle blog, talk to a licensed nutritionist who can give you the advice you need. Nutritionists' goals, unlike wellness blogs, are not to sell you false information and sponsored products that fad diet companies are paying social media influencers to sell.

Diet culture is old, and it plays on an even older social culture. People want to fit in with everyone else and fulfill the social norms for an "ideal" body.

WHAT ARE YOU EATING? WHEN DO YOU WORK OUT? GOD, I WANT TO LOSE WEIGHT SO BAD!

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Orange Theory to try and lose weight. Alone, these things are not harmful and can be healthy when used properly. The problem arises when parents obsess about weight and body image, reinforcing these negative ideas to their teens.

"Oftentimes, teenagers try out fad diets because someone in their family is trying it out or their coach or trainer is doing it," Trost said.

However, just because diets are often abused today for weight loss does not mean all diets are inherently toxic or unhealthy. For people with serious health conditions such as diabetes or celiac disease, specific diets are important to survive as they cannot eat