

English III

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Universal Anxiety

by Emme Richards, Sarah Morgan, and Jaeda Moyer

Anxiety inevitably appears in the everyday lives of students all over the world. Rigorous courses clash with the social side of high school, and sometimes parents push their kids to reach high standards set by society's expectations. Uncomfortable situations, which place teenagers outside their comfort zones, increase stress immeasurably.

Occasionally, the comfort of their home life ameliorates students' stress, while other teens simply lack stress in their lives, or find peace in extra curricular activities. Stress is not caused by one specific thing: many factors induce anxiety among students, who try to solve more problems than the ones in their math book.

Clashing Courses

Academic stress is common among students, especially those taking advanced courses. McCall-Donnelly High School sophomore Juliet Montague says, "It feels like I have to be better, not that that's true, but it feels like I always have to do well because I'm in an advanced course." These heightened expectations affect almost all students and cause a lot of anxiety. Students who are in Advanced Placement (AP) classes or Dual Credit (DC) courses must create balance between achievement and stress. "What I have seen is the increase of AP and DC [courses], which has increased pressure in the students," says MDHS Health and Psychology teacher Mrs. O'Connell.

These college-level classes challenge high school students to work hard and excel in school. Senior Jessica Jones is driven by a passion to excel in order to reach goals she's set for her academic career. "I have more motivation to get my stuff done because I have less time," states Jones.

AP classes are also driven at a faster pace in preparation for the national AP exam at the end of each year. The fast pace and harder curricula drive students to excel past high school standards, but also increase stress levels. Dallan Wallace, a junior, takes higher-level classes that forced him to work hard to balance his GPA and athletics. "I realized I wanted more for myself, because. . . [school] was too easy," says Wallace. These students see the advanced classes as an opportunity to benefit their futures.

Map of the Brain

by Emme Richards

The unfamiliar maze of streets and alleyways perplexes me. Tantalizing shops beckon me to explore, but I am too afraid of stumbling with the language to interact with other people. I do not exude confidence when I take two steps towards a shop and back away. A thousand situations of "what could go wrong," flash before my eyes. I might go into a cash-only shop without any cash. I could knock over something expensive. Worst of all, I could come off as rude.

Today as I walk, I am positive the locals think I am insane. I look like a tourist; dressed inadequately for the surprising heat, visibly confused, and in awe at the surrounding ancient buildings. But what kind of tourist is a sixteen-year-old girl, alone, in the bustling heart of Brussels?

I resort to passing along various cobblestone streets. I am not truly exploring or experiencing anything. My mind is occupied with fear, and my head is hung low. I only spare quick glances at passing shops when one catches my eye. Before I understand what I am doing, I stop in front of the shop, turn towards it, and step in.

Today marks my third week in Brussels. I have learned that the uneven streets and neighborhoods are much like the inner workings of my mind. Left unexplored, the depths of my brain always scared me. I did not want to investigate outside my comfort zone for fear of disturbing my perfect illusions. Admitting that Brussels' streets do not smell like waffles, but like garbage, was the first step. Accepting the man in front of me at the crosswalk just tried to commit insurance fraud by running up against a car was the second. This place is not a utopia. Truthfully, it is confusing; as confusing as the human mind.

The adrenaline that rushes through my veins doing everyday tasks leaves me tired by night. Talking to teachers after class (*Does my art history teacher think I'm a delinquent?*); buying a jar of peanut butter from the Carrefour (*This cashier hates me, I know it*); even just sitting on the tram requires my full undivided attention and constant awareness (*Did I miss my stop? Better check the map!*) These thoughts are entirely irrational but in the event that such thoughts are confirmed, my brain only

Stress pushes high-achieving students to finish their work while challenging their minds. "Pushing yourself is really important for success, because there's no way to grow if you don't push yourself," says junior Brooke Richardson. Richardson has set her goals high and combats stress by taking personal time to maintain her mental health. Well-rounded students at MDHS acknowledge the need to excel while battling anxiety in their daily routines.

Pressure from Parents

Anxiety can be relieved or induced by family. Some teens find comfort in their home, while others have added stress from family struggles. Students also have to worry about broken relationships with their families, or about having a low income. These anxieties may affect school performance, mental health, and relationships. Such struggles cause worry that can be too much for some to handle.

Some students face pressure from their parents to be successful in school. Scholars are already trying their best to receive good grades and be timely with their assignments; the added tension can be a breaking point. "[The teachers] said I was in a dangerous state, that if I continued like this I would definitely fail," says Mariam, a fifth-year student at Institute Saint-Dominique in Belgium. "After that [my mom] took away everything that could take away my focus." Sometimes students face punishments from parents that can actually heighten their stress.

This pressure can make students fail in their scholarly responsibilities, as they are too worried about not living up to expectations. When they meet standards, they are not celebrated, but brushed off as having only an average achievement. "They make me more stressed because I'm expected to do well, and when I do bad they get mad, but when I do well they're just like 'Oh, that's what we expected,'" declares Luke Loper, a sophomore at MDHS.

Strained relationships between family members can also be highly damaging to students. Such strain can be caused by many things, such as finances, romance, and life choices, but it all factors into emotional health; it doesn't just stay at home. These anxieties follow students throughout the day, and can affect all other aspects of their lives, such as schoolwork, athletic performance, and relationships with peers. It is difficult for people to open up about these more personal issues, which makes their anxiety even more sensitive.

Some teens find relief in their family. It decreases their stress to come home to a healthy environment where they

says: "I told you so. We better keep doing this."

To some people, anxiety is hardly a real illness. But when it disables people from performing basic human tasks, it can be considered debilitating. Like cancer, anxiety affects one portion of life and soon appears everywhere. Someone may have anxiety over his appearance, which can lead to low self-esteem, and suddenly, full blown social anxiety appears. Social anxiety can figuratively cripple a person, binding him to his home and a few loved ones. Anxiety may further progress to become other illnesses, such as depression or body dysmorphia. It can even be hereditary.

Like biological illnesses, mental illnesses require treatment, often in the form of therapy. Anxiety is difficult to treat because, while medicines exist, mental disability requires conscious effort to heal. A person with the flu cannot suddenly decide to be better. Many people tell the depressed to just "be happy." Therapists and medications only "take the edge off," as my father, who also has anxiety, tells me. It is up the suffering person herself to gradually incorporate therapeutic practices into her life over time. It often takes months or even years to become fully cured.

Here in Belgium, I begin my healing process. I went to therapy in Idaho before arriving in Europe but wasn't able to receive medication due to fears of my exchange program denying my departure if they saw medication on my record. Every day I sit and try to think of absolutely nothing: an easy feat for some; but not for me. The biggest thing I need to learn about are my limits. Every day in Belgium is a strain, but I have yet to see the end. Despite my improvements, my efforts to become fully cured seem futile. However, now I can look at my past and see that some of my original fears were irrational. I can feel myself growing this year, as I leave anxiety behind.

Terminal Illness

by Sarah Morgan

When my seventy-five-year-old grandfather died of cancer, it was my first experience with death. As a nine-year-old, I was shaken. He had been a large part of my life; we shared similar personalities and I had bonded with him since I was a toddler. I have memories of visiting him in the hospital during his chemotherapy, and of how he was always joyful to see us. Later, I realized how difficult staying cheerful must have been when the

are able to confide in their loved ones. "My parents are very open," says Richardson, "and put a lot of trust in me. They trust that I can get my stuff done, but are open to talking." Students' relationships with their families can augment or decrease their anxieties, depending on this affinity.

Anxiety Abroad

Teenagers across the globe experience these same issues. In Belgium, high school is similar to university. Mariam says, "University isn't different from high school here. We're already stressed." In a typical European classroom, one will usually find students rapidly taking notes as the teacher speaks, and in the rare case of spare time, students are studying for upcoming tests. "I, for the whole year, am easy going," Mariam says. "But then they stack up too much work to meet deadlines on the same day. You have to manage your time or else you won't finish [homework] or you won't get sleep."

American college students also face this dilemma: they must prioritize certain activities in exchange for others. Like American college students, Belgian teenagers are kept too busy to even think of their futures. However, Mariam says that the Belgian education system makes for a smoother transition into university in lieu of students' being able to relax. "It's almost impossible to get a hundred [on tests]," she says. "The teachers don't give exercises, don't give practice and only give a few tests that your grade depends on." This kind of system prepares students for the stress of university, but at the cost of their mental health.

Serenity

Sports are a high school activity that many students use to make friends and de-stress. "It's not about the sports," states Richardson. She seeks close relationships and the release that team experiences offer. The afternoon activity is relaxing, because it is more about having fun and practicing for something other than a test, rather than setting kids up for career options. "Sports helped me make my first friends, [at MDHS]" says Wallace. These activities tie people together and form special bonds between players.

Confidence comes through participating in practices and performing repetitions. "It's not something I have to learn, because I've been doing it for so long," remarks Wallace. Even games are not stressful to students, who seek something beyond schoolwork. "They're for fun when it seems like the world is ending," comments Richardson.

School athletics are a reason for many student-athletes to

pain was extreme.

My grandmother had always experienced health problems, and did not take very good care of her body. After she was diagnosed with heart disease, she spent her last few months in a hospital. She passed at age seventy-eight a few months after my grandpa's death. At that moment, my dad started worrying about how his own genetics might affect his health. He decided to become vegetarian to help with possible health concerns. I began to worry if the genes passed down to me would affect my future. I wondered if I could be in danger of inheriting a deadly disease.

The evidence of damaged genes in my ancestry worries me as I grow older. While genetic test kits could reveal every illness in my gene pool, I am hesitant. Once I open the results, my whole biological future would be laid out in front of me. The thought of having a knowledge of my unknown future health terrifies me. On one hand, knowing what health risks I am predisposed to would rest my anxieties temporarily, and could prompt me to make healthy changes to cope. On the other, knowing the specifics would cause me to obsess over the aspects of each potential disease. There would be limitless information for me to access. Infinite studies, case testimonials, and "cures" would overwhelm my anxiety. It would always be at the back of my mind, nagging and calling for me to do something with this information, even though I am unable to. Thinking about possibilities of my potential future health causes me stress, because everything yet to come is uncontrollable.

Many people may have similar subconscious terrors, though possibly not as extreme as mine. Some are cautious about receiving testing, while others have not even considered it. The US National Library of Medicine publishes this statistic on its website: "Seventy-five of every 100 eligible patients with a history of breast or ovarian cancer have never discussed genetic testing with a health care provider. An additional seven patients are lost between discussing and advising, and four more between advising and testing."

These people may fear being burdened by knowledge, as I do, or they may just not have enough information. Most genes have varying chances of showing up in our genome as we age. To a person with little knowledge of genetics, it seems almost random which ones might affect her future. Six out of ten people will be affected by a genetic condition, and I am afraid that I could be one of the six. It troubles me that I cannot prevent this; at best I would be

maintain good grades, so they may play in the next game. The MDHS Girls' Basketball Team's Coach, Cody Hansen, reminds his players: "You're not nervous before a game, but excited." Sports connect students who have common interests, and unite them toward a team goal. Individuals perform well for their team and learn valuable collaboration skills.

The release of endorphins and strong relationships formed during exercise also help kids debrief from the weight of stress they carry on their shoulders. Ms. O'Connell also suggests a more universal path: "Students can also reconnect with nature. Studies have shown that, if people go outside for a walk or just relax in the outdoors, it will reduce anxiety and depression."

While schoolwork, family, and social issues all cause stress, it is possible to overcome anxiety and live a healthy life. Finding an outlet, such as sports, to help cope, may help reduce anxiety. Students everywhere find it difficult to remember they are just teens. As a priority for a good life, mental health needs to come first. Everyone has stress, but balance is the key to a successful future.

Offshoot

by Jaeda Moyer

I sit daydreaming in class, praying for the day I can play basketball and perform my academic duties. Only a few weeks ago, everything was normal and my worst problems were fighting for playing time and receiving an A on a chemistry test. Like church bells releasing a bored congregation, the class bell would allow me to rush to the locker room. There, I would change into basketball clothes, eat a snack, fill my water bottle, corral my hair into a pony tail, align my mask over my nose, and lace up my customized Nike shoes. I'd sit on the bleachers and wait for my coach to putter into the gym. Giving the team the practice itinerary, he'd slap the ball to power up the energy in the room. The team dispersed and we set off, determined as race horses.

It's hard to comprehend that athletes nationwide struggle with brain trauma. Invisible now, I sit watching my teammates live their normal lives. People with concussions look completely normal. Spectators stare, puzzled at players who are sitting on a bench just watching their teammates play. Athletes are criticized for not playing, because their team is dependent on their skill. Negative remarks are thrown by teammates: "they're just milking that injury" or "she's faking it." Ordinary people don't realize

able to lessen or prolong the effects.

People can seek counseling before and after receiving the results of genetic testing, which may be an important step in coping with this heavy knowledge. I wondered how genetic testing would change one's lifestyle, for better or for worse. "The counselor and I were both shocked when the genetic marker appeared," says Marie Furnary, who had genetic testing after starting treatment for breast cancer. "I felt so lucky that I had tested early so I could take steps to prevent the high likelihood that my cancer could affect other organs." Knowing the results of her tests prompted Furnary to take actions that have extended her life expectancy and prevented larger problems that might occur in the future.

Technology can provide answers to any genetic issue one can think of, yet such information may not be in everyone's best interest to find out. If the diseases in our future are left unknown, we don't have specific obsessions, which we may attempt to prevent. Stress and anxiety take over with such knowledge, because there is no certainty over what the future may bring. Refusing a genetic test means having less information. Furnary's sister prevented ovarian cancer by testing and getting treatment early. Perhaps I should not hide myself from genetic testing. According to Harvard Health Publishing, results of genetic tests can show potential for cystic fibrosis, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, multiple cancers (including breast/ovarian cancers), ALS, and many more life-threatening diseases. If I discovered I were to die soon from one of these illnesses, preparation for the end of my life would be an easy step to take. I could make relatives aware of how their genetic inheritance might affect future generations. Such an opportunity would console me greatly.

Adults over forty-five are already required to be regularly tested for colon and breast cancers, which provides doctors with statistics that can save lives. Is testing for the possibility of other diseases any different? According to the World Health Organization, ". . . knowledge of genetic disease or predisposition can lead to better care and management of the patient and ultimately to improved quality of life." Genetic testing can be scary to consider, but the results are extremely beneficial. There are also incredible widespread resources to help people cope with these discoveries and the effects potential diseases will have on their lives. Getting over the hump of anxiety will open up opportunities for a better chance at survival, and total wellbeing.

how hard it is to watch a sport and not be able to play. Spectators act as if it is a choice to be injured, completely misunderstanding the challenges an injured player faces.

I have had two diagnosed concussions and one broken face that have all been basketball-related injuries. Approximately one quarter of the McCall-Donnelly girls' basketball team has had sports-related head trauma. With so many hits to the head, the best response would be to stop playing basketball, but the passion for the game overcomes the fear of getting injured.

When I was recovering from my latest concussion, I read novels exploring the conscious mind. Some delved into what trying to cut off subconscious thoughts can do to a person. Those fictional exercises are similar to the reality of concussed people. My mind feels lost in space -- unattached to anything. There is no escape; thoughts are trapped inside the damaged part of my body. When someone breaks a leg, there can be relief from the pain; but there is no relief from concussions. The brain can't take a break. There is no escaping the problem. The mind is forced to struggle through sorting its thoughts and attempting to remain aware of its surroundings.

My brain is constantly on alert for predators that might hurt it. Every object thrown in my direction creates a flinching reaction. I fear getting struck back into an endless void of loose thoughts. The concussed brain acts as if its cortex is on drugs: slowed reaction time, swayed vision, and lack of focus.

The one thing this concussed mind is good for is empathizing with others who have mental challenges. Until I received a concussion, I never tried to explore what someone with brain damage may be feeling. I thought people with brain damage were just spaced-out and had no connection to what was happening in the real world. I now know that brain injuries allow people to understand they aren't normal; they simply adapt to living in a cloud of haze. Brain trauma is similar to driving in the fog. The car functions, but poor visibility reduces safe, effective driving. When a doctor hands over a release slip for a cleared concussion, the athlete feels the fog lift. The car can travel to its destination in peace.

Being released from a concussion is the best feeling in the world. When I was cleared to play sports, I cried happy tears, because I felt like my freedom was handed back to me. After suffering for what felt like forever, I could fully appreciate being normal. My concussion made me realize how fortunate ordinary people are for living everyday, boring lives. The standard normal life is a gift that should

not be taken for granted.
