

The battle field

Business



I lay on my bed, motionless and floating on the sea of biology, statistics, and creative writing papers. Staring at the ceiling, I see my life in its emptiness. I pity myself as the victim of Burnout Syndrome victim. I silently revolt against my desire to be “ successful,” whatever that is.

My feeble rib cage is slowly being crushed by the merciless textbooks on my chest. I wait for the weight of the knowledge to snap my bones and send the shards of stress straight through my delicate lungs. The sound of my rib cage collapsing rings up my spine and into my eardrums, like a building plummeting to its death. The initial puncture causes my body to seizure. I dance to the beat of my panicked heart and ignore my brain’s pleas for relief. Air.

You need air. No. I need an escape. I can’t remember the last time I wasn’t inundated with schoolwork. Ever since entering high school, I have been smothered by homework, standardized tests, and thoughts about college. Society defines “ achievement” as battling through multiple AP classes, receiving above average SAT scores, and balancing being captain of the football team, affluent member of the Habitat for Humanity club, and participating in community service.

No one ever told me that the steep road to success was laced with land mines that blew shards of barbed wire and glass everywhere. Even the most successful people will agree that this comparison is slightly extreme and that their path consisted only of steep hills and a couple sharp rocks. So why are we being dragged by a leash across this ghastly road? Society has lost sight of what “ success” is and the enjoyment that should come with it. There is

evidence that I am not the only person that feels that school can be detrimental. In most surveys, students identify academic pressure as the main reason for their stress. A survey taken by over 3, 500 students attending high schools in the California Bay Area showed that more than 70 percent of the respondents “ often” or “ always” feel stressed by their schoolwork, and 56 percent “ often” or “ always” worry about grades, tests, and college acceptance (Blazer).

These numbers are severe to the wellbeing of students. Sebastian Lara, a 21 year-old biology major at Notre Dame University can attest for the stress he has experienced and continues to experience with school. “ I know that a lot of students, me included, feel so much pressure that they’re afraid to mess up even once, like getting a bad grade,” Lara said. “ Things are so competitive. It’s like, if you don’t get perfect grades in high school, you might not be accepted into a top college. And if you fail an exam in college, you might not do well in the class, which means you won’t get into a good enough graduate school or be offered a job and then bam!- your life plan is ruined.

Just like that. I know people who have had to change the course of their entire life just because they didn’t do well on a major specific test” (Welsh). This snowball effect of failure is destroying the aspiring flames of learning. Too much stress is physically and emotionally annihilating high school and college students. Chronic stress can lead to insufficient sleep, anxiety, depression, irritability, a decrease in academic performance, social withdrawal, drug or alcohol experimentation, and suicide.

In a recent survey, the National College Health Assessment (NCHA) surveyed 17, 000 college students dealing with stress. Twenty-five percent of the students reported they have “ felt so depressed it was difficult to function” three to eight times in the past twelve months. Twenty one percent of the students reported that they “ seriously considered suicide” (Hardy). Our bodies clearly are not capable of handling the amount of stress we deal with today. These statistics should be more than enough of an indication that the 21st century road to success needs construction work.

Education should not cause a person to have the desire to stop breathing. Knowledge is supposed to be healthy for the brain, but nowadays it is only demolishing this vital organ. As a society, we need to change our image of success. Simply enough, accomplishment should be happiness. Students should not be forced across this battle field just because a college acceptance or an “ A” waits on the other side. I would not mind stubbing my toe or even gashing open my hand.

But to have my leg blown off? This life is extreme.