

GENERATIONAL BLEND: UNDERSTANDING SHIFTING GENERATIONAL NORMS AND THEIR IMPACT ON STUDENT RESILIENCE AND COPING

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Introduction

We decided to present on this topic as counseling centers across the nation are seeing unprecedented increases in both the number of students coming in for services as well as the severity of presenting problems

We thought that it might be helpful to explain what factors are contributing to this trend and to discuss how colleges can address it

Summary



Introduction: Background and Purpose

Chapter 1: Parenting/Coping

Chapter 2: Communication
Technology/Isolation

Chapter 3: Generational Vulnerability

Conclusion: Discussion

Today's Focus

- Economic and Political Realities
- Changes in Mental Health Treatment
- Shifting Generational Norms
 - Parenting Norms
 - Communication Technology

Why Shifting generational norms?

Focus on this factor because:

- political and economic realities are not unique to this generation
- changes in mental health treatment have contributed to the rise in severity but aren't something we can (or would) control or change
- this is something we as college health professionals can have an impact on by thinking through our response to student needs

The norms most relevant to the issue of rising mental health needs of generation Y are:

- changes in parenting norms
- changes in communication technology

Parenting in Context

- Happiness as a cultural goal
 - ▣ Suffering is perceived as personal failure
 - ▣ Cultural expectations now include happiness as a “right”
 - ▣ This “right” is extended to our children

What’s Changed Culturally

Pursuit of Happiness

- “It’s not enough to be happy – if you can be even happier.” (The Atlantic article, Lori Gottlieb, 2011)
 - Book: The Happiness Project (Gretchen Rubin) reinforces idea that we should be striving intentionally to foster greater happiness
 - Assumption behind this movement is that if we are not happy, something is terribly wrong
 - -this idea is transmitted to parenting in several ways
 - Pressure that parenting, like happiness, is something we can apply a method to, with constant refinement and improvement – if we just work hard or apply a particular method, then we will achieve “perfect parenting”.
 - The belief that an unhappy child has not has his/her needs met and that with a good parenting method you can met all the needs of your child, big and small.
 - And this belief has caused many parents to go to great lengths to ensure that needs (big and small) are gratified with the good intention of trying to be the best parents possible.
- this is a vastly different locus of control regarding outcome of childrearing -- from individual responsibility for each child to become who they will, to the parent, whose job is now to ensure not only “success” but also “happiness”
- Idea is great in theory, but can backfire due to reality that kids will be who they are no matter what you do, and in every case, we must sometimes struggle (and be unhappy) in order to grow

[9 Things You Can Do to Be **Happy** in the Next 30 Minutes | Real ...](#)



www.realsimple.com/health/mind-mood/...happy.../index.html ▼

by Gretchen Rubin - in 2,596 Google+ circles

Some people worry that wanting to be **happier** is a selfish goal, but in fact, research shows that **happier** people are **more** sociable, likable, healthy, and ...

[Want to Be **Happier**? Stop Doing These 10 Things Right Now](#)

lifehacker.com/.../want-to-be-happier-stop-doing-these-10-things-right-n... ▼

Mar 20, 2013 – And when you get better or smarter, you also get **happier**. ... Yeah, you've been around **more** blocks and climbed **more** mountains and slayed ...

[How to Be **Happy**: 7 Steps to Becoming a **Happier** Person - WebMD](#)

www.webmd.com/balance/guide/choosing-to-be-happy ▼

Show **more** Information ... Happiness Strategy # 1: Don't Worry, Choose **Happy** ... The intention to be **happy** is the first of The 9 Choices of **Happy** People listed ...

[How to Be **Happy**: 11 Steps \(with Pictures\) - wikiHow](#)

www.wikihow.com > ... > Emotional Health > Happiness & Optimism ▼

Nobody is **happy** all the time, but some people are definitely **more** fulfilled than others. Studies reveal that happiness has little to do with material goods or high ...

[45 Tips for a **Happier**, Simpler and **More** Productive Life | The ...](#)

www.thebridgemaker.com/45-tips-for-a-happier-simpler-and-more-prod... ▼

Oct 8, 2008 – Life can be challenging. When Life surprises us with a pop-quiz, it's good to know where we can find some of the answers.

[Get **Happy**: 15 Ways to be **More** Optimistic in Life](#)

www.lamasbeauty.com/lifestyle/august00/get-happy.htm ▼

15 ways to get **more happy**. Sure, you can buy happiness in a pill. Yet rather than relying on a drug to boost your moods, you can make changes in your life to ...

Generation Y Parenting

- Greater Protection
 - ▣ Loss of formative opportunities to “learn through experience”
- Focus on Achievement Instead of Process
 - ▣ From early age, kids encouraged to build a resume rather than a life
- Few Opportunities to Fail
 - ▣ Helicopter parenting prevents development of competence and self-reliance

So in our attempt to achieve happiness and be “the best” amid economic and cultural pressure, parenting has responded with changes to way this generation experienced childhood and adolescence.

Three themes, all of them related and overlapping.

To summarize, themes in the literature regarding how some Millennials were parented include

- 1 -- Greater Protection -- Loss of formative opportunities to “learn through experience”
- 2 -- Focus on Achievement Instead of Process -- From early age, kids encouraged to build a resume rather than a life
- 3 -- Few Opportunities to Fail -- Helicopter parenting prevents development of competence and self-reliance

Overall, we argue, these parenting trends are contributing to a lack of resilience in kids, which in turn disrupts the very goals parents are trying to achieve, which is happy, well-adjusted, successful children

What do we mean by these? A few examples:

- So many practical “protections” that are meant to protect kids (and in many cases do) but also prevent kids from experiencing the bumps and bruises that teach them not only about creativity but also about their natural limits and talents. The concept of child rearing has shifted from a model of “let kids be kids” to a model that emphasizes protecting our children from negative life experiences and distress (Marano, 2008; [Free Range Parenting](#)). Examples include:
 - Toddler helmets and wipe warmers
 - Being consistently supervised or engaged in structured activities while outside instead of free play – no freedom to learn how to negotiate relationships or creative play (no more recess)
 - Monitoring at the bus stop, kids not expected/allowed to walk or travel on public transport alone ([Free Range Parenting](#))
 - Grade inflation and “everyone gets a trophy” – idea is that no one can be a “loser”
 - Constant monitoring of teen activities – restrictions on gatherings, breathalizers at Proms, etc – only encourages the opposite.
- **Achievement, not Process.** Kids taught that achievement is necessary for happiness and “success” and that they must sacrifice to do it. Sacrifice looks different for different income levels, but goal is the same – achievement/academic achievement. Some examples of achievement over process include:
 - Language DVDs – thought to increase cognitive ability, increasing early academic achievement. Eventually, determined that baby DVDs did nothing for language bc it was interaction that was needed...focus on the achievement lost the context/process of learning, which is imperfect and unpredictable, and requires time and interaction with caregiver (Bronson and Merryman, 2009)
 - Parents may sacrifice all free time to working in order to support college-bound child, leaving that child with financial resources but not emotional ones
 - Increased use of “supports” (tutors, speech/language therapists, coaches, etc) sends dual message 1) you aren’t good enough as you are; and 2) if you have money, you can pay your way forward – neither of which reinforces the child’s sense of self-mastery, or unconditional acceptance by parents/society (Marano, 2008)
 - Recess being taken away, kids who may have ADHD (or not) being medicated to change their natural childhood behavior in the interest of “achievement”
 - Toys aimed at “learning” instead of creative endeavor where the child directs the “learning”
 - Competition for spots in top pre-schools/kindergartens when data reveals that “gifted” at 6yo means little in terms of future academic achievement (Bronson and Merryman, 2009)
- **Failure is not an option** – parents often step in to prevent failure at all costs (this is the definition of helicopter parenting)
 - “too much help” with homework, or hiring tutor/academic coach to do that
 - When mistakes happen, parents get involved in mediation with teacher, school system, etc
 - For college students, parents calling professors, administrators, counselors, advisors, roommates parents, residence life, potential employers, etc etc
- Helicopter parenting – while coming from a place of genuine care and concern, these are the parents who are over-involved with their child’s life and decision making

Summary

- Now some of you might be saying, “well, that doesn’t sound so bad” and in some ways, its not.
 - Unfortunately, however, this model is based upon the faulty assumption that our children will experience happiness through achievement rather than struggle, which is counter to the bedrock of what we know in psychology creates satisfaction and resilience, which is struggle followed by growth/mastery
- As a result of this parenting shift, more than in generations past, this generation is entering college without 3 crucial parts of resilience, or coping. They are
 - 1) they have not experienced significant (or even insignificant) failure, disappointment, rejection, uncertainty, etc
 - 2) having to figure out what to do about it, and
 - 3) learning that they are OK even if they have failed because they have had the experience of figuring it out themselves.

The Tide is Turning

-tension between “French Parenting” / “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother” and Dr. Sears Attachment Parenting

..... in 50 years a lot has changed in school

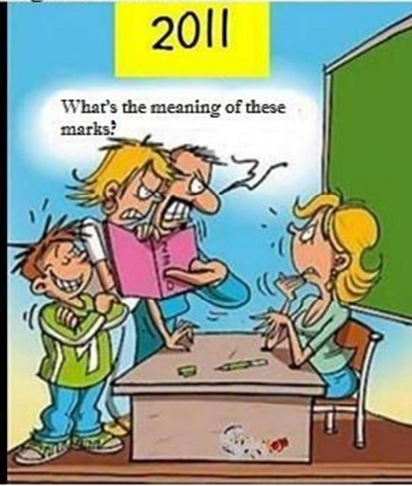
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What's the meaning of these marks?

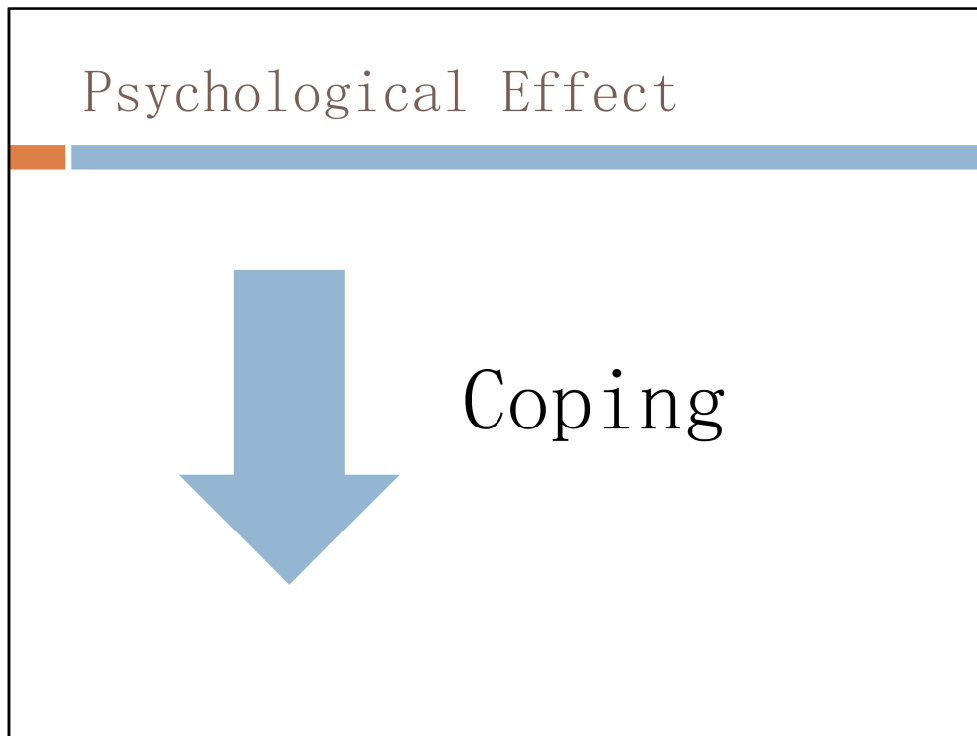


2011

What's the meaning of these marks?



WeKnowMemes



Well, to put it generally, there is a decrease coping, or one's ability to handle stress

-at presentation yesterday from BU, the presenters referred to this as a lack of "Stress-hardiness", a term I like

-mistake is the happiness is not perfection, but rather satisfaction and acceptance of yourself

The Atlantic Monthly printed a fantastic article last July/August on just this subject called "How to Land Your Kid in Therapy"

Effect of Difficulty Coping

- More easily overwhelmed by normal life “ups and downs”
- Self-doubt and decreased sense of competence
- Difficulty tolerating distress/negative emotions
- Difficulty problem solving

What are we talking about when we say decreased coping? Well, people who have less coping:

More easily overwhelmed by normal life “ups and downs”

- Having been protected from having to experience and endure negative life events, this generation has more difficulty handling things such as bad grades, interpersonal conflicts, breakups, or “little things” like car accidents, etc

Self-doubt and decreased competence

-Among these students is a sense of fragility
- Having less experience with “failure” and learning that you are ok despite it, the prospect of failing in college is intolerable
-results in fears of trying new things, taking risks, or engaging in normal life activities that require vulnerability (relationships, academics, etc)

Difficulty tolerating distress/negative emotions (this is connected to happiness...idea one should not be upset about something)

- Instead of seeing distress or negative emotions as a normal facet of life, students of this generation experience it as something is wrong with them
- when distressed, self-critical, and experience shame which only increases distress

Difficulty Problem Solving

-No experience solving own problems after failure, so no past experiences to draw from
-this is emotional (how do I take care of myself when I feel bad?)
-this is also practical (I’ve never had to figure out how to do something on my own, how do I do it?)

COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY

What is Communication Technology

□ **Social Networking**

- Facebook/Twitter
- Instagram/Vimeo
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn

□ **Video Games**

□ **Electronic Communication**

- Cell phones
 - Text Messaging
 - Cameras
- Internet
 - Instant Message
 - Emails

Why Should We Care?

- Because adolescents 13-17 years old send 110 texts per day
- Because adolescents make 14% fewer voice calls than in the past
- Because visiting social sites is the 4th most popular online activity (ahead of email)
- Because time spent on social networks is growing at 3 times the overall internet growth rate



Generational Differences in Usage

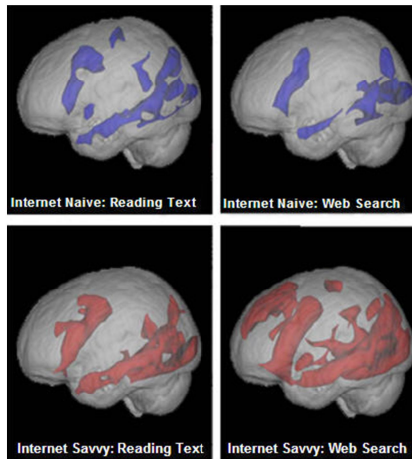
- Texting
 - ▣ Age 13-17 send 3417 texts per month
 - ▣ Ages 35-44 send 709 texts per month
- Reduction in voice-calls
 - ▣ Texting is replacing voice calls for all ages
- Social Networking
 - ▣ 75% of adolescents have profile (55% in 2009)
 - ▣ 48% of those 25+ have profile (27% in 2009)

The second generational shift we would like to talk about that has contributed to the rising mental health needs of Generation Y has been the proliferation of electronic communication

Unlike generations of the past, communicating via electronic communication has become a vital aspect of all relationships.

Your Brain on Internet

Expert versus Novice

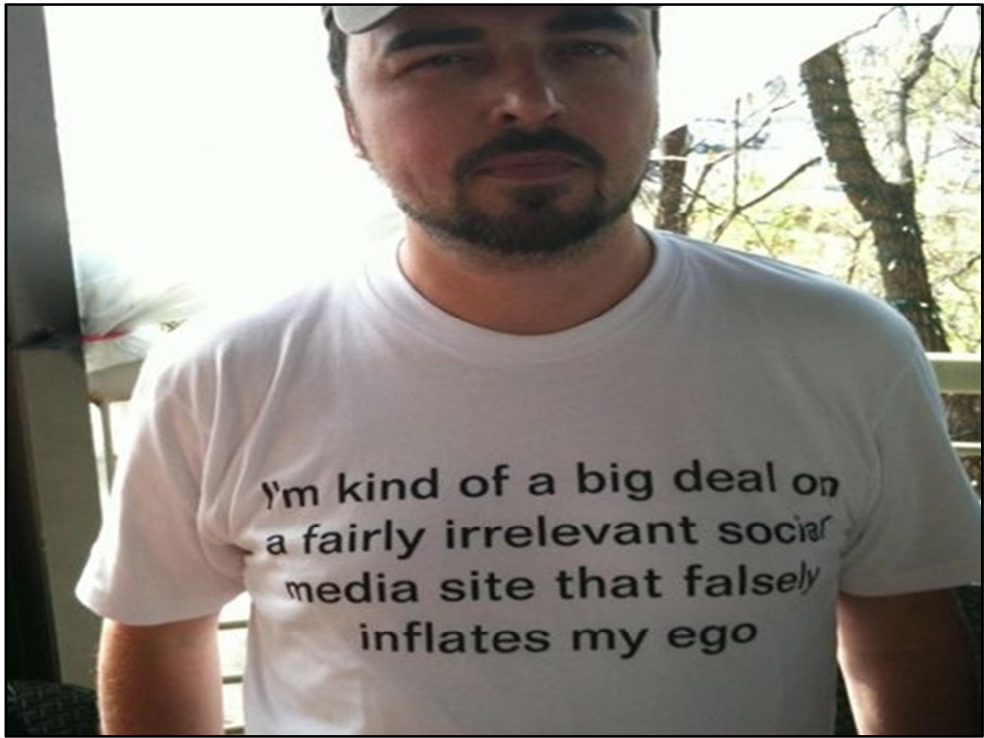


Social Networking and the Brain

- Oxford University neuroscientist Dr. Susan Greenfield – social networking has harmful effects on kids' intelligence by rewiring the brain – and the damage could be long-term and irrevocable
 - “These technologies are infantilizing the brain into the state of small children who are attracted by buzzing noises and bright lights who have a small attention span and who live for the moment.”
 - They become like small children “who need constant reassurance that they exist”
 - Affecting ability to comprehend communication and subtleties such as nonverbal cues

Empathy and Narcissism

- Larry Rosen – Cal State – found that extended use led to decrease in empathy among peers and an increase in narcissism
 - “Kids enjoy social networking, but the real problem arises when the virtual interaction disturbs children’s emotions in real life, or restricts the child’s development socially and emotionally” (Kairen Cullen, educational psychologist)
 - “Facebook Depression” – after spending long amounts of time online, some teens (those who generally have difficulty with social interactions) tend to feel more depressed and



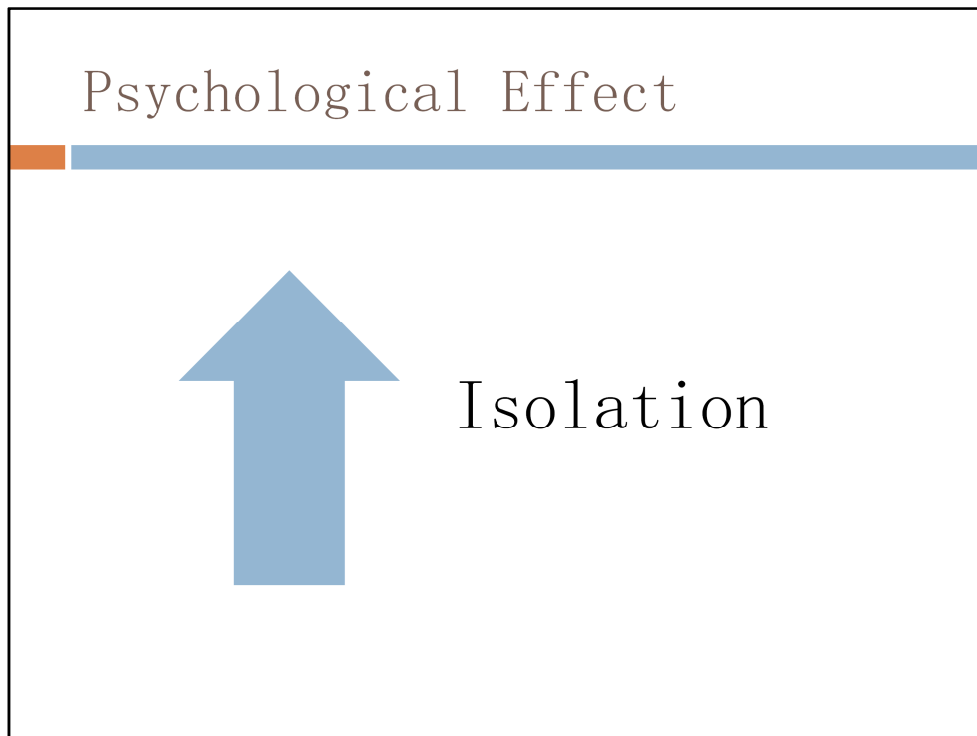
The Positives of Social Networking

- MacArthur Foundation claims that kids/teens are developing important technological and social skills
 - “Spending time online is essential for young people to pick up the social and technological skills they need to be competent citizens in the digital age” (Mizuko Ito - Cal State)
 - Kids learn to adapt to socialization through managing elaborate networks of friends and acquaintances
 - Social networking makes teens more peer-based as they interact and receive more feedback from one another
 - Teens and young adults are communicating and interacting more than ever
 - Social networking makes teens/young adults more relationship-oriented, considerate and empathic (contrasts research from previous slide)
 - Remember birthdays, comment on pictures and video
 - Developing the ability to show virtual empathy
- Can have implications in Developmental Theory/Development

What is Facebook



It's good and important in learning and knowing yourself, but can't adequately prepare you for the interpersonal and self-regulation skills needed to enjoy the real thing.



- Well, among vulnerable groups, we see an increase in a sense of isolation or loneliness
- Why is that? How is it that an increase in the ease in which we can keep in touch with others actually makes us feel more lonely?
 - Psychological theory tells us that feeling connected (the opposite of being isolated) has much less to do with **how many** people we have in our life and much more to do with the **quality and depth** of the connections we have
 - You can have all the “friends” in the world and still feel lonely
 - As such, for the purpose of feeling connected, it is irrelevant how many times a day we text our friends or how many facebook friends we have.
 - This is particularly concerning if these more impersonal means of communicating are serving as substitutions for the real thing

-mistake is the happiness is not perfection, but rather satisfaction and acceptance of yourself

The Atlantic Monthly printed a fantastic article last July/August on just this subject called “How to Land Your Kid in Therapy”

Effect of Social Isolation

- Difficulty establishing or feeling good about one's true self
- Challenges to self-esteem and self-worth
- Shallow, inconsistent, or unhealthy peer relationships
- Lack of communication skills

So, what is the effect of social isolation?

Social isolation can make it Difficult to establish or feel good about one's identity

- Psychological theory suggests that in order for people to develop and feel secure about our identity, we need to share that identity with others, and have it be accepted and validated by them. In this way we can feel safe going out into the world to face potential rejection as we know that there are people who know us to our core and have validated us as loveable and worthy. This is what makes us feel "secure" in ourselves. Clearly, This cannot occur in isolation.

- So, how is this related to technology? Practice of texting and social media has become expressing the identity you WANT to be, rather than sharing the person you ARE (Sherry Turkle, Alone Together, 2012 – Ted Talk and Book)

-This is most damaging to those who have not yet established or gotten comfortable with their identity
-So, by only having this alternate identity validates, we have a more difficult time feeling good about ourselves.

-Further this interferes with experiencing genuine connections with others leading to uncertainty with regards to how others perceive you causing one to feel insecurity in relationships

Another effect of social isolation is that it Challenges to self-esteem and self-worth

ourselves lacking
- Similar to my last point, we tend to be exposed only to the "ideal projections" of others and often find

increased aggressive and passive-aggressive behavior
- everyone looks like they are happy and carefree, why am I not like that? What is wrong with me?
- Also important to note that the removed and sometimes anonymous nature of the internet contributes to

esteem/self/worth
- certainly, cyberbullying is a relatively recent phenomenon that takes bullying to a whole new level
- Given the extent to which cyberbullying has been in the news, I don't have to spell out the impact to self-

Another effect of social isolation is the extent to which it can contribute to Shallow, inconsistent, or unhealthy relationships

- Now, for those with healthy relationships, texting and other social media augments their experience.
- for those who have less healthy relationships to begin with, or who are struggling with relationships, texting and other social media exacerbates the problem, causing students to feel worse

- There is also a tendency to rely upon parents rather than peers for social support, hindering creation of a strong local peer support network at school

- unhealthy interactions online are now public – increasing the shame and damage they create (should this be in the prior category of self-esteem?)

Lack of Communication Skills

- fears of talking to professors in person
- difficulty addressing relationship conflicts in person – much is done over text or email
- The "Dear John" letter has become brief text or facebook status update
- could argue addressing concerns has gotten easier
- but reality is that the relationship rift and subsequent healing is experienced through electronic devices and outside of the intimacy of live connection, making in-person conflicts (and attachments) even more scary

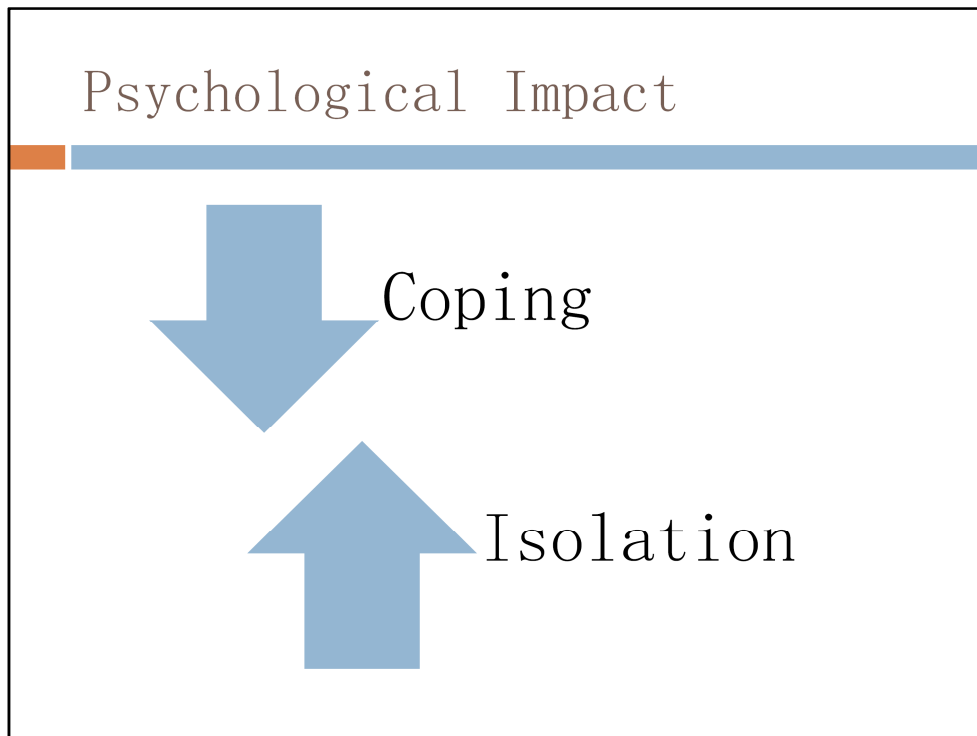
Generational Discussion

- What's your opinion about the role of communication technology in shaping relationships and isolation among students?
- How hard/easy is it for students to develop intimate and supportive friendships?
- What's the role of the institution in responding to isolation among students?



GENERATIONAL VULNERABILITY

So, the big question is, How are these changes impacting the need for counseling services?



All together, the psychological impact of these shifting generations norms has been a decrease in coping and an increase in isolation. This is particularly relevant as coping and connectedness are the primary ways in which we deal with life stress

NOTE

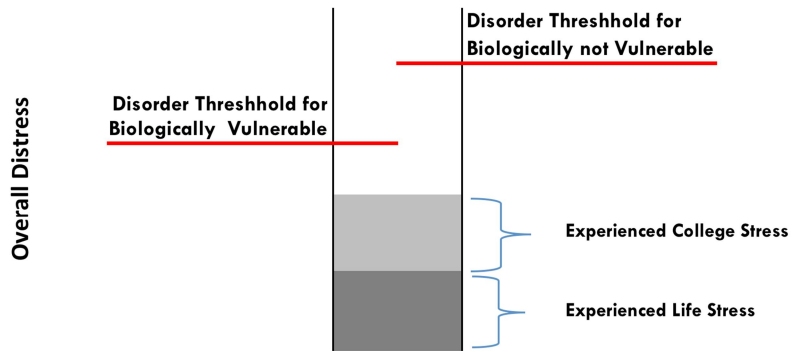
While these issues may seem trivial to those of us who grew up without the options of communication technology, it is important to emphasize that the distress and mental health problems our students experience as a result of these issues are REAL.

- As I referenced earlier, research shows that the severity of the issues students are presenting with is increasing

With that in mind, it is important to not dismiss or invalidated their experience of distress.

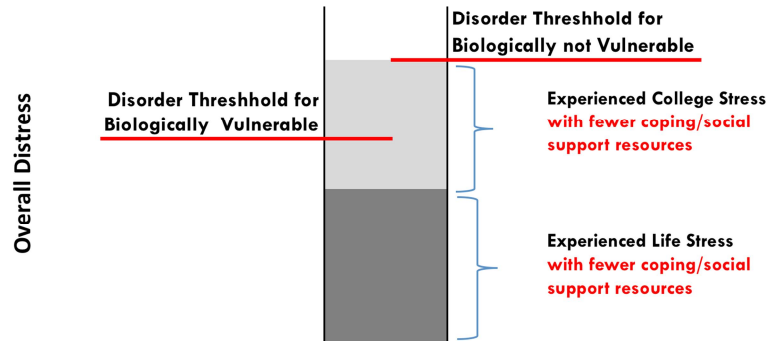
Diathesis-Stress Model

Resilient College Students

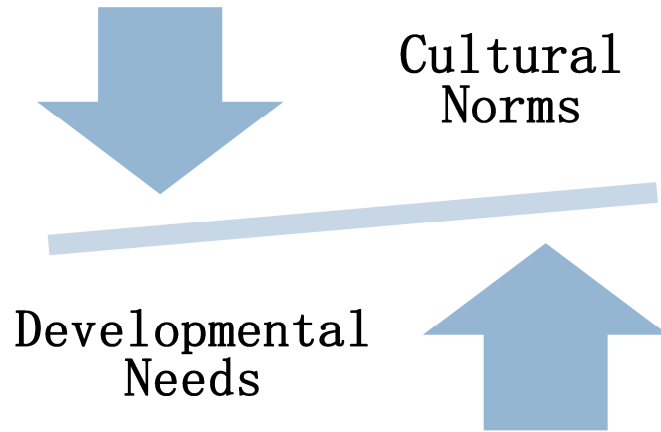


Diathesis-Stress Model

Not Resilient College Students



Balance Competing Forces



Discussion

- What can higher education professionals do to respond to issues of coping and isolation among students?
- What should or could students be doing to support their peers and themselves?
- What are some barriers to creating change? How can students and professionals address these barriers?

All 3 professionals and students sit on panel and ask audience to ask questions about content

answer as they see fit

4-5 questions we would ask, with 2-3 panelists answering

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?