



Breaking Through

WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

FALL 2010

Emotions in the Age of Emoticons

By Jeanne Haley, LICSW

Texting, Tweeting, and Facebook Chat are quick and easy ways to communicate. Technology allows us to keep in touch with friends, family, and others, near and far. These tools give us the benefit of companionship and a sense of connectedness. The vibration of the cell phone, or the pop on Facebook is an obvious signal that someone is thinking of us. Without our e-communication, we can feel isolated and disconnected. But the sense of belonging we get by communicating online may have a downside too. As we become used to talking online, we may be losing our capacity to read and understand face-to-face signals. We may be losing our emotional radar.

There is more to communication than just sharing information in written format. The human brain has developed a fairly extensive wiring system to interpret the meaning of human interactions. Face-to-face communication allows us to observe facial expressions, to hear the tone of voice, to feel the touch of another, and to "sense" someone else's mood. The brain processes signals that come in through the senses and interprets their meaning. From the time we are infants, we learn to read and understand these signals. A parent says one thing, but may mean another, which we figure out by the tone of voice. The look in someone's eyes can express threat, even when the words are not angry. A "gut feeling" may be the body reacting to brain signals that we haven't consciously registered yet. We communicate and process information through senses as well as through words. As we do this over and over, we develop the skills we use to connect with others, including empathy.

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Empathy is the ability to feel what another is feeling and care about them. It is one of the most powerful ways that we understand and predict the social world. Empathy is a significant part of Emotional Intelligence, a concept described in the 1980's. Emotional Intelligence involves the ability to accurately perceive emotions in oneself and others, to use emotions to facilitate thinking and to understand emotional meanings. Recent studies have shown that by some markers, the ability to empathize is decreasing, particularly in young people. Studies are looking at the consequences of e-communication as a possible reason for the decrease in empathy.



To experience empathy, you have to know what the other is feeling. If you are not physically with someone, it is harder to "read" an emotional state. **Emoticons** have developed as a kind of emotional shorthand to describe feelings. They are the text-based symbols used to represent emotions or facial expressions. You should know if I am happy, sad, confused, or sending you a kiss :-)) :(:-? :-* , based on the symbols I send to you. Emoticons give the receiver information about how the sender is feeling or how the sender wants the message to be understood. The receiver doesn't get the opportunity to evaluate the data face-to-face. The interaction gets filtered and edited before it even gets to the sender. You "know" how someone is feeling from the text message.

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CAMPUS EVENT

NO ROOM

For Hate

- November 1 - 5*
- ALL WEEK
 - College Center
 - Poster Display
 - Pledge to Stop Hate
 - Information Tables 12 - 2 pm
- NOV 1
 - Discussion Session: Homophobia
 - PCR II 4:30 pm
- NOV 3
 - Speaker Peggy McIntosh
 - DPAC 7 pm
- NOV 4
 - Documentary "Mean World Syndrome"
 - O'Conner Lounge
 - 4:30 pm
- For complete details:
www.framingham.edu/healthservices
Contact: Paul Welch
508-626-4640 (Ext. 4640)

Emoticons *continued from page 1*

As more of our emotional interactions are happening without the sensory experience, research shows that our brains are changing to accommodate and process information differently. As we become more dependent on the emotional shorthand of the emoticons, we are getting less practice in interpreting non-verbal communications. Our ability to match emotions with experiences may atrophy as we have fewer opportunities to validate our emotional realities through a face-to-face interaction. Ordinary sensory experiences can start to feel too intense or challenging and so get used less and less.

This isn't to say that e-communication is totally negative for our emotional lives. For example, for some who may be shy or have social difficulties, it can be a positive tool for relating. It gives people the opportunity to start conversations

and relationships in ways that may have otherwise been too difficult for them. For those who might, in a face-to-face encounter, be more impulsive, electronics can give them time to compose their thoughts and manage their impulsivity.

However, we should beware of becoming dependent on the emotional shorthand of emoticons. We should make sure we don't lose our senses through lack of use. Despite all the clever ways we have learned to share our emotions on line, there is nothing quite like the touch of a gentle hand, the sound of a kind word, the feeling you get when you see someone's face light up when you come into the room.

References:

"iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind,"

Gary Small, 2008

"Emotional Intelligence," John Mayer & Peter Salovey, PhD, 2002

"Asperger Syndrome and Emotional Intelligence," J. Montgomery doctoral thesis, 2007

Bullying: That's Not Cool

By Paul Welch, LICSW

You might not think that college is a place where people are bullied. If you believe this, you would be wrong. Like students in elementary, middle, and high school,

college students can be and are bullied. Bullying can take many forms. It is generally defined as repeated harmful actions by one person (the bully) directed at another person (the target), where there is a real or perceived difference in power.

Bullying is considered a form of abuse, and may include name calling, verbal or written harassment, exclusion from social situations, spreading false rumors, physical aggression, and/or psychological coercion.

Males are more likely to be involved in bullying, both as bullies and as targets. Females are more likely to use relational bullying, as in spreading rumors or socially isolating the target.

When bullies are allowed to bully, they may go on to develop other aggressive or anti-social behavior, such as shoplifting, vandalism, and substance abuse. Additionally, some bullies are significantly more likely to have criminal convictions than their non-bullying counterparts. Bullying is serious and should not be ignored.

Targets of bullying often experience internalized sadness, distress, and anxiety, and may also develop somatic issues like stomachaches and headaches. They may also experience anger, lowered self-esteem, and feel insecure with

peers. Academic performance may be impacted and in some cases, those who are bullied may experience suicidal ideation or attempt/complete suicide.

Those who witness bullying may also be impacted negatively by virtue of their bystander status. Bystanders may fear that if they intervene, they may be the next target. Some research suggests that bystanders can experience some of the same negative effects of bullying as those who are bullied.

When bullies target a person based on a protected class (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability), this may constitute what is called a hate crime. If caught, those who commit hate crimes can be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

What can be done to prevent bullying?

Since bullying takes place within a social system, interventions need to focus both on individuals and the system. At the system level, colleges and universities should have clear

In a report published in the September 14, 2010 edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 25 % of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students, faculty, and staff who participated in the study experienced harassment due to their sexual orientation. The comprehensive report, titled "The 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People", asked 5150 people at about 100 colleges across the U.S. about their experiences last year. The report offers institutions of higher education a number of recommendations intended to foster a safer and more accepting campus community for its LGBT members.

policies in place for addressing bullying, and be prepared to take action when needed. Additionally, the campus community can be educated about state and federal laws that will be enforced should bullying occur. Bullying is not cool.

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Individual interventions can address the behavior of bullying and targets. For targets, support can be provided by Residence Life staff, the Counseling Center, and the Dean of Students' office. Those who are targeted are often afraid to report incidents fearing retaliation. Campus police are in an important position, as first responders, to offer support and referral to those students who are targeted.

Those who bully, if caught, should face appropriate consequences, including being prosecuted to the full extent of the law. This may mean losing campus housing privileges or even expulsion from the school. Counseling can also be offered to those who bully after appropriate judicial or law

enforcement actions have occurred, to help bullies understand their aggression and to find appropriate avenues for expressing anger.

If you are being bullied or have witnessed bullying, tell someone. Get help. You are not alone.

For more information:

National Center for Bullying Prevention
<http://www.pacer.org/bullying/index.asp>

Massachusetts law about bullying and cyberbullying
<http://www.lawlib.state.ma.us/subject/about/bullying.html>

Massachusetts Hate Crime Reporting Law
<http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleII/Chapter22c/Section32>

Counseling Center Welcomes Interns

Each year, the Counseling Center offers clinical internships for graduate students in social work in their final year of training. This year, we are pleased to welcome three talented women.

Rue Diamond, Simmons College Graduate School of Social Work

Michelle Guarino, Simmons College Graduate School of Social Work

Lisa Ruane, Boston College Graduate School of Social Work



Lisa, Michelle, Rue

What influenced you to study social work?

Lisa: I feel that I have always been a counselor of sorts within my family, with my peers, and as a teacher with my students. I was a high-school teacher for some time and my students actually had the biggest influence on my decision to become a social worker. I have always believed that everyone has something to offer, although circumstances sometimes make it difficult to find out what that something is. I am in awe of people in general and their capacity to overcome adversity and find their strengths and coping skills. It is a privilege for me to be a part of that process with another individual.

Michelle: I've held an interest in psychology and clinical work since I took my first psychology class as a senior in high school. I loved the subject and also loved the idea of devoting my career to helping others. I majored in psychology in college and knew that I wanted to get into clinical work somehow, but I was unsure about what graduate degree to pursue until I began talking to people who were actually in the field. When I did this, I found that I connected most with the social workers that I spoke with, and loved the person-in-environment perspective that social work is so well known for. After learning about Simmons' clinical social work program, I decided that this was the best fit for me.

Rue: I have always been innately curious about people – their lives, their stories, what matters to them. Even during my nursing studies, I felt certain that my life journey would at one point encompass working as a therapist. The person-in-environment perspective of social work led me to the choice of a graduate degree in social work.

What interests you most about working in a college environment?

Lisa: I am an advocate for education. I believe that individuals make a sound decision when they opt to attend college. It is not always an easy path, yet in the end, it has great potential to be rewarding and give the student a sense of accomplishment that they will always own. Working in a college environment, I have the opportunity to work with students through some of the issues they will encounter along the way. Also, the student population of a college environment is all-encompassing and I look forward to helping students from different backgrounds with a broad range of problem sets.

Michelle: I think the college years can be a difficult time for students, as many issues can arise with the multiple challenges that accompany a 4-year college experience. It also seems that the college experience can exacerbate

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Interns *continued from page 3*

any difficulties that arise, or were already present, that may not necessarily be “college-specific.” I think it is vital for students to have counseling services available to them for these reasons, and I love being part of a center that focuses its efforts on providing support to students throughout this important time in their lives.

Rue: I have always found that transitional periods offer enormous opportunity for growth and self-knowledge. In my nursing career I chose to work with individuals who were becoming parents. I feel privileged now to be able to work with students at a time ripe with opportunity for reflection and transformation.

Do you have any special clinical interests?

Lisa: My clinical interests are still quite broad and I feel that I will always want to be involved in many aspects of treatment. I do know that I would like to work in an educational setting, be it a K-12 school system or a higher education institution.

Michelle: I have a special interest in college counseling, and also in the treatment of adolescents with behavioral issues who have suffered multiple traumas.

Rue: Even in my final year of studies, I am continuing to discover more areas of interest. I suspect that it will be my work with clients co-creating a vision for change and growth that will lead to further clinical specialization.

Bedbugs 101

By Pam Lehmborg, NP, Health Services

There is a lot of talk about bedbugs in the media lately. All the stories of bedbugs in hotels, homes, dorms, and stores may leave you itching to find out the facts. Here are the answers to some of the most asked questions about bedbugs.

What are bedbugs?

Bedbugs are little oval shaped wingless insects the color of an apple seed but a bit smaller in size. They hide in narrow places like the fold in a mattress, in the cracks in furniture, behind peeling wallpaper, in carpet, or behind baseboards. They will hide in any convenient spot that allows them to crawl out at night to feed on an exposed part of a human. Unlike lice or fleas, however, they do not live on humans. They get their blood meal from us and go.

Are they dangerous?

No, bedbugs do not transmit diseases. They are not dangerous. Their bites are painless. The reaction to their bite varies from person to person. Some people will react with red itchy spots which may swell, others will have no reaction at all. Scratching the bites can lead to a secondary infection from the scratching.

What do I do if I think I have been bitten by a bed bug?

If you think you have been bitten by bedbugs wash the area with soap and water and try not to scratch the itch. Call Health Services to make an appointment to see a health care provider. If you live off campus, notify your landlord. If you are a resident student, alert your Resident Director who will then inform Facilities. They will determine the possible location of the bedbugs as well as the best plan of care to get rid of them.

How do I prevent bedbugs?

Bedbugs aren't picky, they don't discriminate. They infest clean houses and messy apartments. They do not live on people. They are carried into the home on furniture, clothes, or in luggage. The best ways to prevent bedbugs are to avoid bringing second hand furniture into your home, launder all clothes taken on vacation immediately upon unpacking, don't bring your own pillow on vacation and, if possible, put clutter which might be around your bed into plastic containers.

What are the signs of a bedbug infestation?

Reddish-brownish spots on bed sheets or mattresses, and/or small itchy red bumps on your skin may be the only signs of an infestation. Little black spots on mattress or along floorboards could be bedbug feces.

Are there any bedbugs at FSU?

Bedbugs are increasingly a problem in many cities and towns. Due to widespread travel and the banning of certain pesticides they will likely remain a nuisance for years to come. Framingham State University hired a professional pest control company to inspect, and where needed, treat all residence halls this summer. According to the Office of Residence Life, prior to opening this fall, all FSU residence halls were 100% "bed bug free."

Where can I learn more?

The following links have great information and clear photos of bedbugs.

http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/environmental/sanitation/bedbugs_faq.pdf

<http://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/guide/bedbugs-infestation>

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129701363>

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