



# Relieve Social Pressure

by John Barrow

The pressures of academia being what they are, it is nice to be able to relax with people that you like and with whom you feel comfortable. It can be especially comforting to "blow off steam" or "get away from it all" with one or more people really special to you. Yet how many of you at Dalhousie are discouraged or frustrated by your lack of truly rewarding relationships and social contacts? I suspect that many of you are on at least mildly dissatisfied with this aspect of your university lives.

Some of you can accurately point to your particular external situation as a major source of difficulty - not enough opportunity to meet people of the opposite sex, no good places on campus to meet and get to know people quietly, etc. To be sure, the Dalhousie campus is not known for having the world's friendliest atmosphere. Even so, many of you probably attribute at least part to the problem to yourselves. You are not completely happy with your own ability to meet and get to know other people. It is often difficult for a person in this category to identify what contributes to his/her lack of social success. Many have trouble getting more specific than the statement "The only thing I know is that I'm not happy with me." Unless you can assess your situation with more precision than this, it is very difficult to progress to a more satisfying level of development. The following are some of the aspects we at the Counselling Centre encourage studies to consider in assessing their social difficulties.

## 1. Social skills development.

There is a certain amount of "know-how" involved in socializing. Many people fall into the error of assuming that qualities such as "extroversion" or "self-assuredness" are unchangeable personality traits, when to a large degree they consist of social skills that are learned in the process of one's development. The skills involved in such social interactions as listening, expressing one's feelings, standing up for one's rights, flirting with the opposite sex, etc. are probably learned through a process involving observing, imitating others, and trial and error. This means that a person is not necessarily stuck with his social attributes. Admittedly, change is difficult, because one's ways of responding have become habitual over the years. However, change can be accomplished if a person can identify accurately his social deficiencies and commit himself to a process of relearning.

The first thing a person can do is to try to translate his dissatisfactions with himself/herself into observable activities. Do you talk too little about yourself to others? Do you avoid taking the initiative in conversations (setting topics, greeting people, etc.)? Do you fail to express yourself clearly and fluently? In socializing, non-verbal skills are often of

subtle importance, although this aspect may be overstressed in some of the popular psychological literature. Do you fail to establish eye contact with others? Do you move back from people when they come close to you?

When you have determined what it is you have trouble doing, the next question is - in what kind of situation does the trouble arise? When? With whom? In what surroundings? Such an analysis of the situation is important for two reasons. It limits the problem and makes it easier to approach. It can also give you a more realistic, less negative perception of yourself. For instance, you might have labeled yourself as "overly reserved and withdrawn," when in fact you are relatively outgoing except when in small groups of people your own age. The kind of self analysis suggested above can sometimes be difficult to someone to do himself.

Once the skills one is dissatisfied, you can observe how others handle certain situations and try to pick up ideas to try out. How does

she handle it when someone disagrees with her? How does he go about starting up a conversation with a girl he just met? Take an experimental attitude toward your socializing - try to incorporate different approaches to situations to see how they work out. If you meet with success, fine; if you do not, make adjustments. At first your efforts may seem practiced and artificial, but after awhile new approaches will be assimilated into your natural manner. Of course, professional counselling in analyzing one's situation and developing strategies for improving it is available at the counselling centre.

## 2. Reducing anxiety

Sometimes a person is not effective in social situation even if his skills are adequately developed because he is inhibited by feelings of anxiety and apprehension. He is so "up tight" that he cannot think clearly or act spontaneously. Again, it is important to look at the situations that are associated with these feelings. Do you get anxious

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### Cloudy Issue

To the GAZETTE:

I wish to express my opinions on a problem that is becoming increasingly irritating to me personally. The issue: smoking in class. I am a non-smoker and own a pair of eyes, a nose, and a throat that suffer miserably from contact with cigarette smoke. While prepared to accept a certain amount of discomfort simply because permanently avoiding this 'pollution' is apparently impossible, I fail to understand why, 1) the officials of this university do not prohibit smoking in classes, and 2) why students and faculty cannot for one hour consider the interests of those people who are physically irritated by cigarette smoke.

Now this letter would not have been written if sitting at the back of the class and/or near an open window solved this problem. The fact of the matter is that my right to attend a lecture and not expect to be feeling physically nauseous when it is over is being threatened by cigarette smoke from people who claim they have just as much right to smoke as I have not to.

But even pushing the 'smoke' issue aside, is this the case? Does not common sense and countless number of gutted buildings suggest that smoking is a fire hazard? For how long are the classrooms in the A & A building containing wooden elevated flooring (rubbed to the point where slivers and matted fibres can be pulled off) expected to remain 'fireproof' -- for I assume that this building is considered so due to an absence of 'No Smoking' signs?

I am new to Dalhousie and am therefore unaware of any previous policies regarding smoking in university buildings. However, I don't think there is anything unreasonable with my argument. My experiences at the University of Victoria last year where smoking is NOT permitted in buildings (which are relatively new) suggest two things -- buildings here at Dalhousie are not worth much, and people don't give a damn.

Yours faithfully,  
Clifford Cottingham

### Tube Troubles

To the GAZETTE:

GOD DAMN-IT! I've absolutely had it! Now I don't tend to frequent the "TV" lounge in the SUB very often but Sunday was an exception. I arrived in the lounge for the latter stages of the Eastern Conference Final game of the CFL and, no sooner had I placed my "butt" on the chair when I realized the target of this letter. Sittin' there on the couch was a small rabble of students (this I have no objection to) but when they started blatin' on about "Gary lives with Rosie and Bebop got somethin' old and somethin' new" and who knows what the "hell" (for fear of puttin' in a stronger term) else. Now, if people want to hurl insults or comments about the program....that's fine but let's keep it confined to the tube, not "Jackie's" love life!!!

Barry Lewis [II]

### Graffiti

To the Gazette:

Early Monday, Nov. 18, the notorious "DIRTY HALF-DOZEN", acting on the part of the Student body of Dalhousie University, of their minds and added a verb to a bill, by now famous statement. For four weeks, bothered by the phrase "St. Mary's U." on the roof of Dalhousie's rink, we took our own action. The Dirty Half-Dozen, making their campus debut-used tactics, until now unheard of, in their successful mission. The Mission ??? - To change the present phrase to read a bit different, such as "St. Mary's U. Sucks". Although the CP's foiled our first attempt, we kept our cool, attacking from the rear, and completed our mission, uncontested by the police. So we are happy to change the roof and keep Dalhousie clean. Until we meet again, the DIRTY - HALF DOZEN signs off.

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