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Could university clubs be overrated?

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University clubs are the self-proclaimed best places on campus to meet like-minded people and net a couple of extracurriculars under your belt. While recruitment, club activities, and the whole “we’re more than a club, we’re a family” shtick gives the promise of a rose-tinted four-year tenure, university clubs come with their slew of pitfalls.

To begin with, there’s more than meets the eye regarding the whole “family” culture these clubs enshrine. Nepotism, biases, and animosity exist within most university clubs. Furthermore, the over-supply of members and intense competition that members go through can ultimately destroy a sense of community amongst the members the club set out to achieve in the first place.

Most university clubs require a significant time commitment to be a member. Clubs generally have events and activities happening all year-round, so active participation is expected from members. These commitments can be a major burden for students who are already stretched thin with classes, work, and other responsibilities. Club treasurers and others in-charge tend to forget members can have a life outside the club and will relentlessly grill them to do “club work” during exam season.

Additionally, certain clubs can be exclusionary and cliquish, making it difficult for new members to feel welcome and included. Some clubs are notorious for enforcing unreasonable requirements, going as far as mandating formal dress codes in the clubroom. Furthermore, many of these clubs have a whole Orwellian-style hierarchy between the members, where questioning higher-ups is greatly discouraged.

Getting involved in a university club provides students with networking and socialisation opportunities. It is not uncommon to see the average clubgoer send requests to people left and right on every possible social media platform, while attempting to double the number of people added to them in order to widen their network. However, these rarely grow into fruitful job opportunities down the line. Club experience does not equate to job experience, despite what the club may have you believe. Even though club experience can be used as a springboard to garner employment after graduation through networking and skills, there’s a fine line between exploitation and due work.

Additionally, many skills learned by participating in club activities and events are menial and may not be used in a corporate setting. During recruitment, clubs announce a slate of skills prospective members can learn, from writing to web development and Structured Query Language (SQL). But rather than teaching members these skills, clubs divert their attention to members with existing foundational skills and leave others in the dust, teaching them rudimentary copy and caption-writing.

University clubs are still a great way for students to get involved and explore who they are during their formative years. But sometimes, these organizations can overstate their benefits and underscore the numerous problems they are riddled with. When choosing to enroll in a club, it is imperative to remember that it should not dictate your whole experience at university, and it is crucial to discover yourself as an individual beyond these clubs.

Turns out Taaseen Mohammed Islam can write semi-decently at the expense of being able to do basic math. Send him pointers at taaseen.2001@gmail.com

Men need to treat each other better

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The idea of men not being allowed to cry has been a wildly propagated notion in society. Men’s mental health isn’t talked about enough, nor are men’s vulnerabilities prioritised by our society. The expectation of the patriarchy and the burden of masculinity steamroll us to the point that we unlearn the very necessity of sharing our vulnerabilities, insecurities and sorrows.

No matter how negligent the society around us might be, most men are aware of all of these complications deep inside, which gives rise to a burning question – if men are truly aware of the rough treatment they receive and the negligence that follows, why are most men so harsh with each other in a friendship?

How often have we been in a room packed with our friends, men like ourselves, and yet completely alone on the inside? Sure, the people around us might be entangled by the primordial narrative that men are supposed to be unresponsive to stress, unmoved by depression and endure physical or psychological traumas without displaying any vulnerability. However, in this day and age, if men are willing to acknowledge the negligence regarding mental health and admit that it’s okay to ask for emotional support, then they should also be willing to take that one step further and start reaching out to the men around them.

Male friendships mostly develop on the idea to impress. We feel the need to prove ourselves as humorous, witty, fun-loving and a good company in front of our male friends. As children, boys are taught that expressing vulnerability is a feminine trait and will cause them to be deemed unworthy of love, respect and admiration. While gender roles projected onto general human traits is a problematic notion, most boys carry the weight of the futile lesson through their adulthood and implement it in other relationships, pushing them to create an impenetrable shield of insensitivity.

As men get habituated to hiding their vulnerabilities, their natural response to others’ vulnerabilities also gets distorted. Often, their response comes out as insensitive and hurtful because they’ve never experienced the appropriate response themselves.

Consequently, the solutions suggested by male friends are simply to distract the person from the pain by hanging out, going on trips or doing things as a group while dodging the real issue. All of these are commendable ways of helping someone go through trauma, but displaying affection and talking about the incident are far more effective. Since most men aren’t used to sharing affection in a friendship, the entire conundrum becomes too awkward for them.

It is necessary to comprehend that admission of vulnerabilities and insecurities doesn’t make a person weaker than the other in the equations of a friendship. In fact, sharing each other’s weaknesses is one of the building blocks of any healthy relationship – romantic or platonic.

Sometimes all you need to do is listen, create a safe space in the process and slowly overcome the barrier of the fear of insult that lies within the friendship.

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