**2007**

 **11-13 Years**

**2nd Place**

**Ruby Faith Nothando Aworinde-Smith**

**Age 13**

Peer Pressure

Many Teenagers are going through Peer pressure at school and amongst their friends away from school. Although Peer pressure can start as early as in primary school I feel that the bulk of it is mainly felt in high school. This I state from personal experience.

My definition of peer pressure would be when you feel obligated to follow a trend or fashion of other people that surround you in your day to day life. These people are usually those of the same or similar age to yourself. The definition and meaning of “Peer”, in the “Collins English Dictionary”, is “member of the nobility; person of the same status, age, etc”. There is also a definition in “peer group”, which is “group of people of similar age, status, etc”. This would explain why peer pressure is rife in social such as schools and out of school activity learning centres such as dance schools/brownies/guides etc.

I would consider peer pressure to be a natural part of the growing up process. I believe it is only natural that children, teens and some adults (if they haven’t grown up yet!) may be competitive amongst social groups. An example of peer pressure can be if friends/peers were asking you do to something that you were not comfortable with but felt obliged to do so in order to be able to fit in

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I believe that there can be good and bad peer pressure, it must be advantageous at times and quite worrying at other times. A typical and worrying example of peer pressure among the young generation is when teens may be having a try at smoking or worse still drugs. If your circles of friends have agreed to try it altogether as a group, you may feel like you’re letting them down or not fitting in if you don’t try it yourself. I believe you have to be strong enough and wise enough to know that going along with such things is in fact silly and naive. Thankfully I am pleased to say that I haven’t been put in such a situation as yet, but do know if I am put in a situation like this, I will be strong and remember that I do not need to put my health at risk by trying to impress others. There is always the concern that if you don’t do what others are doing, then they may not want to hang around with you any more. For me I believe that such people cannot be true friends in the first place, so there’s no loss. There is also peer pressure when it comes to fashion and trend following.

I will now talk about my personal experiences with peer pressure, mainly in a school environment.

In year seven my mother sent me to a school called “Harvington School for Girls”, a private school in Ealing. Prior to that I was at a mixed state primary school In Greenford. My primary school was quite largely sized and there were approximately thirty two or more children per class with three classes for each year.

At Harvington School there were approximately fifteen children per class with only one class per year. So this school was very small. On my first day I didn’t really talk to others that much as everybody seemed so different from me! The first thing that seemed to stand out as different was the way the other children spoke. They all seemed to be so posh! My mother has always encouraged me to be well spoken but this was beyond that! I felt obligated to speak the same way in order to fit In. At the beginning I found myself trying to be like them, dress like them and behave like. Later on I discovered that I didn’t really need to do that as I started being myself as I became more confident. People did accept me for who I was and they probably liked the fact that I was different in a way. I noticed when it was my friends birthdays I felt very much under pressure to buy expensive gifts as they did for me at Christmas time. It was difficult as it was too expensive for my mother. Even though I began to fit in gradually I still wasn’t totally comfortable. I was struggling to keep up academically as well and I felt my grades suffered here too as I wasn’t happy.

Eventually my mum said she was going to apply to send me to another school. Mum got me a place at “Douay Martyrs”, a mixed catholic school in Ickenham. I started this school in September 2006 in year eight and I can say that I am a lot happier now, more relaxed and my grades have improved so much! Don’t get me wrong, peer pressure is a rife in this school too. I started to follow a trend and of wearing baggy tracksuits again feeling pressured to save pocket money in order to buy them! Luckily mum helped me out in Christmas time. It was so also important to have the latest trendiest trainers and ended up asking for new trainers for Christmas from various family members and ended up with so many pairs! The girls that hang around with also use gel to style their, which I had rarely used before, but have learnt to style my hair like them with my baby hairs gelled to my face using creative designs, I know you know what I’m talking about!

At the moment I am finding it difficult as most of my school friends meet up on a Saturday to go shopping, well at least window shopping! The are always asking me to go with them, but I need to say no as I have other commitments at “Vuka Arika”, where I learn Southern African dance and music. I used to feel pressured to follow them as I didn’t want to let them down, but these are good friends who are very understanding. At school I am more relaxed as I feel I don’t have to hide things.

At Harvington School I would tell people that I lived at my grandparent’s house in Greenford rather then telling them I lived in a split level maisonette with my mum. Its not that I was ashamed of where I live but everyone in my class lived in big massive in Ealing and their parents drove big Mercedes Benz and BMW cars! When I invited friends over, they would visit me at my grandparent’s house! A large three bedroom house with a big garden, animals and a music room with a drum kit and keyboards! At my new school my friends will meet me at home, know where I live and nothing bad to say about me. I’m so happy to be at ease at school, I do like going and I feel for those peers of mine who are under so much pressure to impress that they forget who they are.

There is also such a thing as “good peer pressure”, well at least I think so. I believe it can also be in the form of encouragement. An example would be that I may ask a friend to come to my church and they have never been to good per pressure. I’m only trying to encourage my friend to have faith and trust in God as I do, you can only benefit from having a faith. I would however respect their wishes if they didn’t want to attend or if they were from another religious background.

Also, sometimes I feel embarrassed to eat in front of friends, especially when you’ve just met them. A good friend will encourage you to eat regardless of whose around, I find this person will encourage self esteem and not lower it in any way. I believe this is a good form of peer pressure and the right sort of person to hang around.

I hope you have enjoyed reading my views on peer pressure. To those who are suffering with bad peer pressure I would say to them, be strong, keep your head held high, know who you are and where you’re from, be proud of who are, don’t be ashamed or embarrassed to say no, be strong enough to tell your parents if things are getting out of hand, its nothing to be ashamed of.