Is it “Me > Others” or “Others > Me”

By Caleb Barnet, B.S.

I would not say that I am fluent in fractions or mathematical proofs, but I have found that many college students struggle with the following mathematical formula: “Others > Me”. This formula is perhaps best understood by asking ourselves the following question: are the needs of others more important than my own? For many students, I am surprised to see how debilitating the formula “Others > Me” can become. It is sometimes incredibly disheartening to see how some people will forfeit joy or push themselves to such incredible lengths in order to uphold their perspective that others are more important than themselves. Whether it involves being somewhere you would not want to be or just doing something you would not otherwise do, some people become hyperconscious of the opinions or approval of others. It is sad to hear when a student represses his/her inner self or chooses to not share an answer or opinion out of fear of how others might react. To be aware and concerned about the opinions of others is a perfectly normal thing. However, becoming overly concerned with the opinions of others can become very debilitating. Fortunately, there is good news. Many struggle with “Others > me”, yet few act on it.

Charles Darwin, author of On the Origin of Species, was also believed to struggle with anxiety and the outlook “Others > Me”. Several historical accounts suggest that Darwin was so paralyzed by his fears about how others would react to his research that he postponed his research nearly a decade. Ironically, it was not until a rival researcher began to publish similar findings that Darwin convinced himself he should publish his book On the Origin of Species.

Perhaps you struggle with the formula “Others > Me” or perhaps you struggle with a similar mathematical equation: “Me > Others”. All in All, most people struggle with one of two mathematical equations: “Others > Me” and “Me < Others”. If you struggle with any of these formulas just know that there is an additional equation to consider: “Others = Me”. In other words, be aware of your personal outlook and know that it does not have to be permanent. Be informed that it is possible to see others eye-to-eye and relate to others with the implicit understanding that you are equally important as they. To treat yourself with the same importance and value as someone else is to practice assertiveness. Being assertive involves saying “no” when you do not want to do something, defending your needs, or telling your roommate that he/she had no right to take your clothes/computer/phone…at least without asking. If you want assistance in finding your voice or changing your outlook to “Others = Me” maybe the Counseling Center can help. Call: 903-886-5145 to schedule an appointment and see if we can serve you.

Take a hint from Charles Darwin and take action. You might find that the world becomes a completely different place and, perhaps, even adopts a completely different perspective: “Others = Me”.