Is it better to be at the center of one group of friends or at the perimeter of several?

The relationships we form in our school years are very important in shaping who we will become and the groups with whom we associate during our high school years and beyond. While having a close group of friends can be very comforting and secure, it can also limit the possibilities for someone who wants to expand his or her interest into new areas.

To be a well-founded individual requires relationships with all different kinds of people—people who sometimes offer ideas and perspectives that differ from our own The author of the first article shows what happens when we are limited by a single group of people by citing his participation in a group of “band geeks” at his high school. He says, “The problem with a group like that is it is hard to change and try new things without your friends getting mad at you or thinking you are rejecting them.” Consequently, many students remain stuck in their one group of association to avoid rejection from their friends. This cliquish view of high school built around stereotypes of football players, cheerleaders, band members, and the like has been around forever, promoting the often cruel behavior of the social hierarchy.

It is also important to remember that when young people are in their teens, they are experimenting with who they are and what they believe. As the author of “A Cauldron of Closeness” points out, “The teenage years are times of great change and growth, and children should be free to rethink themselves and their friendships without the limitation of what can amount to a group veto.” Teenagers who belong to multiple groups with different purposes and activities tend to be more well-rounded and understanding of people who are different from them. There are students at my high school who participate in activities as different as football, the Model United Nations team, and the environmental club. They have the opportunity to not only gain a more diverse academic program but also form a number of rich relationships with people from different races, cultures, countries, and economics. These types of varied experiences will enrich their lives and provide more opportunities in college and career.

Opponents of the expansion of multiple social circles will argue that keeping to one tight circle will promote a sense of well-being and confidence, ultimately shaping students into citizens who believe in themselves. The author of “A Cauldron of Closeness” is points out, “Being a part of a small, tight group can bolster a teen’s sense of identity, supply a feeling of belonging, and provide close, loyal, and lasting friendship. Being part of a group can mean fewer awkward social moments, fewer social decision to make, and more social stability and security.” However, it is important to remember that people do not meet higher standards without some pain and suffering. It is part of adolescence and essential to one’s personal growth. It can also provide other benefits during high school. As the author of “New School, New Groups of Friends” points out, “It’s a relief not to have to worry about any of the intense friendship drama and just have fun doing cool activities and meeting new people.”

Close friends are an important part of growing up, but limiting ourselves to a few friends reduces the opportunities to expand our world. The world is a huge place made up of diverse people and places. When we multiple our social circles to include all kinds of people and experiences, we open the door for ourselves to grow in ways we never thought possible.