

I can vividly recall a moment, prior to getting braces, which upon wanting to introduce myself to someone, found myself in a cold sweat, racked with anxiety, and sputtering, struggling to introduce myself. After mustering all the bravery I could, I forced the words out, however, instead of an introduction, what came out was a jumbled mess of half-formed words and a palpable sense of my insecurity. I had poor mental health; my self-esteem, and body image was dangerously bad and making friends, and socializing became a Sisyphean task. Fast forward to July of 2017, I am studying French in Quebec City, 2502 km away from all my family and friends, and I am more sociable than I've ever been in my entire life; introducing myself without hesitation, travelling around Quebec City with my new friends, unchaperoned, and speaking broken French to anyone who would listen, all without fear of embarrassment. The striking contrast in my confidence stems not from pride in my straightening smile, but instead came from the liberation I felt as a result of learning not to worry about my appearance. This liberation came as I looked around my school and noticed all the other students with braces, and I began to feel a stronger sense of belonging with my fellow brace-mates, as I knew I was not alone in my dental journey. This sense of belonging brought a new perspective that had a radical alteration on my life. There was no reason to feel afraid, shy or embarrassed as I realized there are many other people who are also experiencing the same experiences. Any notions of alienation, or isolation I had felt became assuaged with the sense of belonging braces had given me. This realization bled into other aspects of anxiety in my life and put me on a path of peace as I began to realize that we are not alone in our experiences, which was immensely comforting to me. I began to see no