

Our hidden identities



Why do people downplay and/or hide their true identities, or at least parts of it? The simple answer to this question to me is denial. I believe most people alter their perception of what their true identity is to make life simpler for them. It is human nature to want to try to impress or have some type of impact on others. With that said, parts of identity might have to be downplayed in order to make that happen. Something my parents have told me throughout my childhood and young adult life has been to be a Leader and not a Follower.

It is much easier to conform to what people want you to be vs. what you want to be for yourself. In some circumstances it may be better to downplay your identity for a greater purpose such as for the community you are a part of. Personally I think it makes things less complicated when you keep a simple profile, in order to do that parts of your identity might be hidden for others not to see. That always isn't a bad thing; we all have secrets and personal information that the public doesn't need to know about. In today's day and age with the media that is easier said than done.

Today everything is brought to the forefront and all the information about a person is exposed, which I believe is wrong. In the article called My Genome, My Self psychologist Steven Pinker discusses what factors play into an individual's make up. " No one knows what the nongenetic causes of individuality are. Perhaps people are shaped by modifications of genes that take place after conception, or by haphazard fluctuations in the chemical soup in the womb or the wiring up of the brain or the expression of the genes themselves.

Even in the simplest organisms, genes are not turned on and off like clockwork but are subject to a lot of random noise, which is why genetically identical fruit flies bred in controlled laboratory conditions can end up with unpredictable differences in their anatomy. This genetic roulette must be even more significant in an organism as complex as a human, and it tells us that the two traditional shapers of a person, nature and nurture, must be augmented by a third one, brute chance. ” (9) Individuality according to Pinker has three components, nature, nurture, and brute chance.

These three factors all play into the makeup of an individual and this is what separates one person from the next. This topic reminds me of what my dad has said at certain times in life, “ Canning business is Canning business, and no one else’s”. I can remember going to Kent School, which is a prestigious boarding school in the northwest corner of Connecticut, the kids that attend this school come from all over the world and typically are very wealthy.

Living in this atmosphere for a year, I remember hiding and downplaying my identity to some extent.

Coming from an upper middle class family where we lived comfortable lives and had nice things it still wasn’t close to the wealth that almost everyone else had. By no means was I ashamed of not having as much wealth as my classmates but I didn’t allow them to know I didn’t have a summerhouse, personal drivers, yachts in the Hampton’s, etc. Looking back I can remember hiding parts of my identity because I wanted to fit in as much as possible. In one This I Believe essay a woman named Tammy talks about the real man her father was.

She can remember her father being ashamed of being German and was content when people assumed his last name was Polish. “ And so this I believe: Ultimately, it doesn’t matter which man my father was. I believe we should accept that our loved ones hold parts of themselves secret and we should celebrate our ignorance, for the promise of new discovery is then in our future”. Like me, Tammy’s father hid things from others to keep a low profile and ultimately make life less complicated by not having to answer questions of who he really was. Another example I can think of when I downplayed my identity was my experience with high school football.

My freshman year our team was the first to ever have a perfect season going 11-0. After that I felt like I needed to stick with it for the next four years because I was a part of something “ special”. My passion was for baseball but I chose to continue play football at the varsity level because of the things that come with being a varsity football player. Saying this now seems foolish and a little laughable but that was my thinking when I was 15 years old. We were known as a football school and I wanted to share the limelight with my friends and other players on the team.

I was content with just being a part of the team, whether or not I played a lot was beside the point. The other kids on the team ate, slept, and drank football; I wasn’t nearly as passionate about it. It took me until my senior year in high school to realize my identity was not as a football player but as a baseball player. Not only was I more passionate about the latter but also I was far more skilled at it. I decided not to play football my senior year and that is when my identity began to break through, no longer did I fit the mold

everyone else had for me. This example reminded me of Greg Chapman's: This I believe essay.

Here was a man raised to be a good Baptist and patriotic American, homosexuality didn't fit under either of those categories. After struggling with the identity others wanted for him he finally decided it was what he wanted that was going to make him happy. " I started to change the basic stories of my life: that I'm bad, alienated from God, a freak of nature. I started to love myself and to believe the Divine did so as well. As that belief strengthened through the repetition of story, I began to love others and I was loved back. The racism I grew up with faded. The more I loved myself, the more beauty I saw in everyone else.

The more I healed, the more I viewed the Bible and all of our great myths as stories told by others, and I looked more and more to my heart to find the right one for me. " It took him until he was 35 and myself until my senior year to realize what we wanted for ourselves vs. what others wanted for us. As a result we found peace within ourselves and simply began to love ourselves and in turn love others. In the last This I Believe essay a man named Frank who was a Holocaust survivor allowed me to realize knowledge is the best medicine in combating one's personal identity.

Hindsight is 20/20, if we could all go back in time knowing what we knew after the fact all our dreams, goals, and aspirations would have been fulfilled. Unfortunately it doesn't work that way and all we can learn from is our experiences. After being under Nazi and Communist regime for most of his life Frank was asked if there was anything left for him to believe. " Having

survived the horrors of living under the Nazis and the Communists, I believe a world view based on solid knowledge is the best safeguard against the danger of revisiting the horrors of the past.

To my mind, the best investment one can make for the future is to provide financial support for the education of young people. " If we can give our knowledge that we have picked up through our own personal experiences and share it with the next generation than we will only be bettering the world in which we live in. Everyone is different and that is something that our society needs to realize, they're shouldn't be a certain way to live your life. I have realized it is extremely difficult to please everyone, and if you are not happy with yourself than it is impossible to please others.