

# Identities contrasted

Family



Ancillary Essay 3 (AE3): Identities in Contrast Essay Prompt Read both "Shooting Dad" and "On Being a Cripple" in 50 Essays and consider the contrasts in how they articulate identity. How do both essays configure exclusion and inclusion? In both essays, the authors distinguish their identities from groups. In an essay of 500-750 words, organize an analysis of how the ideological and physical identities in these two essays converge and diverge. As with AE2, quote from the essays to support your thesis, using MLA format (commas & periods inside the closing quotation mark for in-text citations; periods after parenthesis for page citations). A key element of writing a compare & contrast essay is finding the point of convergence. While Cohen has already done some of our work by putting together the two essays under the heading of "identity," we also know that at a detailed level there will be differences. In a sense, both Vowell and Mairs want their essays to be about those differences. Ironically, they also want their audience to identify with those differences. In effect, writing a comparison & contrast essay is like walking across a rocky riverbed: the more familiar you are with the highs and the lows (research), the more quickly you can lead the way across (explicate and argue). But remember that you won't be crossing alone; you'll be leading, so give us a concise statement of what you think is the best way to the other side (thesis) and then lead the way. In writing AE3, be sure your essay gives accurate summaries of both essays.

These summaries should be brief and should follow your thesis, which itself should appear early in the essay. Following the summary should be the paragraphs in which you analyze the specific contrasts between our ideological and physical identities. You will need to decide whether to organize your essay so it contrasts the two essays in their totality or whether

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it contrasts specific points from each essay. There are things that happen in our lives that help shape our identity. Although the process and the result of finding it is different for every person, the manner in which one comes to grip with an identity that has been thrust upon them, is fairly similar. In the essays “ Shooting Dad” and “ On Being a Cripple”, the authors Sarah Vowell and Nancy Mairs, both share their individual identities and how they came to not only accept it, but also comprehend and make the best of it. Both follow a similar process and they are able to overcome the invisible voids that separate them from the ideal version of themselves they wish to become. For Vowell, it is the relationship with her father and for Mairs it is her self-perception as she struggles with a terminal disease. Their differences of how they managed to cope with their identity become more apparent as they discuss their journeys. In “ Shooting Dad”, Sarah Vowell talks about the canyon that exists between her and her father. Vowell’s father makes guns for a living while she wants nothing to do with them. Their beliefs so greatly differ that growing up all they would do was fight and argue. Growing up with a father who makes lethal weapons for a living could be difficult, specially when your viewpoints are more leaning to the banning of all arms. Vowell expresses her reluctance to joining her father’s hobby and describes how her twin sister, Amy was the complete opposite of her. When they were first allowed to shoot a gun at the age of six, Vowell was terrified while Amy was delighted. The void between them increases and only when she has grown up does she realize she wants to understand her father. While doing so she discovers things about her and her father that she never even knew. In “ On Being a Cripple”, Nancy Mairs talks about her disease and how much she hates it for eating her inside, making her more dependent and less tolerable

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of people who insist on labeling her anything other than her preferred name: cripple. Mairs reminisces about her past, when she did not have multiple sclerosis. She was twenty-eight years old when she realized her clumsiness was getting out of hand and was diagnosed. With a degenerative disease like MS, Mairs describes how though at the beginning she led a fairly normal life, after being diagnosed, she was never the same. She feels lucky to have been given more years to live even though it was at the expense of being weak and often feeling like a burden to her own family. She describes so honestly and amazingly how her view of the world has changed and how even through the constant pain and humiliation, she is not sorry to be cripple. Both authors are discussing their experiences with individual identity and acknowledge that a gap exists between them and something else. Vowell feels her and her dad are on different islands and she simply can't comprehend him, the void between them is almost like a fact of life and therefore she sees her identity as being isolation. Mairs feels the same way, except her isolation is between her and the rest of the world, including her family. This is frustrating for both of them, since they can't find a bridge to alleviate the seclusion. Vowell says, " If you were passing by the house... you wouldn't have needed to come inside to see that it was a house divided. " Though she does not explicitly say how much this fact pained her, she is aware of the gap that existed. Mairs, on the other hand, acknowledges her seclusion and describes what she feels about it. She says, "...let me say that I don't like having MS. I hate it. " And "...[it is] maddening as well as sometimes painful. " Both Vowell and Mairs recognize their individual identity and feel separated because of it, though only Mairs addresses her feelings more overtly. When coming to grips with an identity that is so different from that of others, you sometimes can't

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help but compare yourself to an ideal and ‘enhanced’ version of who you wish to be. Vowell and Mairs both do this. In her essay, Vowell talks about her twin sister, Amy, who was delighted to be handed a gun at the age of six, and who has been going hunting with their father ever since. “Amy shared our father's enthusiasm for firearms and the quick-draw cowboy mythology surrounding them. I tended to daydream through Dad's activities... My sister, on the other hand, turned into Rooster Cogburn Jr., devouring Duke movies with Dad.” Vowell is essentially describing how she could not only see that her and her father were standing on two different islands, but that standing with her father, was her twin sister. She compares herself with her sister, saying she didn't like to “engage in family activities” like her sister. I believe in some ways she was jealous, not of her sister, but of the type of daughter Sarah Vowell wished to be for her dad. In the same way, Mairs compares herself to the person she wishes to be. She writes, “Physical imperfection, even freed of moral disapprobation, still defies and violates the ideal, especially for women...” Mairs goes on to talk about the ideal woman and she talks precisely about the things she is no longer able to do. At the end of the list she adds, “But she is never a cripple.” Her tone seems angry and hurt at her reality that has become her identity. Like Vowell, she feels like she's not meeting the ideal standards. Where Vowell's revolved around how a father-daughter relationship is supposed to look like, Mairs' revolves around what a woman, a mother, and a wife is supposed to look and be like. It is frustrating to try to accept that you are very far away from the superficial ‘ideal’.