

A desire for Individuality

When I was young, I didn't have an opinion on unity or individuality. I was only a kid, and I did kid things. I played with friends, I played with toys, just playing constantly. That's all I ever wanted to do. That's all any kid would ever want to do. I still had to attend school, go to church, all of that stuff, but when I wasn't in the serious mode, I'd be in the playful mood. I stuck with my friends and only focused on having a good time. I didn't really care too much about anyone else. I was a little machine dog. The only feelings I had would be when I'd have a good time or if I had a bad time. Sure, at serious times, like at funerals, I'd have strong emotions. Back then, I was vulnerable, a virgin to the pain and grief this world had to offer, and I cried at funerals and most of the shocking and negative news I received.

I switched from public school to private school in the summer of 2008, and things changed for me. I dealt with bullies and teachers that seemed to never have cared. It didn't take the kids long to find out I was a good target for bullying, because I'm a pacifist, lower class, and I was an innocent child. I was an oddball compared to the boys. They liked getting dirty playing sports and dumpster diving (or so they'd say), yet I was rather dainty. They constantly got hurt playing games and doing other things, whereas I'd stay safe. Every week it seemed, one of the boys would get a cast on their arm, and everyone would sign their name. To this day I've never had a broken bone, because I don't like pain, and I do whatever I can to avoid the possibility of breaking a bone.

At lunch, I sat with the boys for the first bit that I was there. The boys were rather chaotic and made me uncomfortable with how they talked, their mannerisms, everything about them. I began to sit with the girls because they seemed nicer, polite, and didn't make me uncomfortable. Before long, a teacher or an administrator, I forgot which, told me I wasn't allowed to sit with the girls because I'm not a girl, so I had to sit back with the boys. Some days I'd get in trouble for something ridiculous, and my teacher would make me eat my lunch by myself on a bench where everyone could see me. At the time, I felt terrible because I wanted to eat with my friends, but looking back, deep down I think I wanted an excuse to be alone.

One day in fourth grade, it was raining outside, so we had recess in the gym. We were shooting free-throws with basketballs. This one kid a grade lower than I came up to me, took my ball from me, and popped me in the head with it. In my reaction, I screamed, "Dude, what the hell?" He responded "Ooh, you said H-E double hockey stick" and ran off to tell my teacher. My teacher at the time reminded me of my grandmother. Her mannerisms and the way she dressed, as well as her devotion to Christianity, and her intolerance to profanity made it to where if I had to pick her or my grandmother out in a crowd, I would not be able to tell which is which. Sure enough, my teacher called me over and made me sit out the rest of recess and let the other kid play on. On the bright side, she took care of me to make sure I was okay, but the fact that I got in

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trouble for swearing, and the kid that assaulted me didn't, let me know just how backwards their sense of morality is and how much they really cared about me.

Fast forward to middle school, I returned to public school. I couldn't take the uniforms, the overly strict rules about every little thing, the lack of individuality. It was around this time where I began to discover a little bit about myself at a time. It started with wearing band tees every day. I still had a variety of clothes in my wardrobe, but as 6th grade carried out, I gradually wore band tees more and more until it became a daily thing. This was also around the time where I got to know more people that belonged in different cliques than the black and white example of popular and nerd. I met people who fell under the categories of emo, gay, bookworm, thespian, band geek, feminist, preppy, sports fanatic, jock, cheerleader, redneck, apathetic, and many more.

I didn't have that in private school. In private school, there were the popular kids who were athletic, who primarily focused on their education. It was very black and white. I was in the middle, trying to break apart the system. Instead, all I got was a bunch of disconcerting looks and many trips to the principal's office.

High school was both a blessing and a curse for me. On one hand, I was able to further discover who Jefferson Davis was, but on the other hand, I lost a few friends along the way. Freshman and sophomore year, I had friends that I sat with at lunch who were in the class of 2016. We used to eat our lunches, then converse about random topics. They mainly spoke of their classes, also goofed around, like everyone else does.

From that group, there was this one kid who arrived my sophomore year, and he was a senior. He was a gay trans man, and quite possibly the first guy I've ever had a crush on that I admitted to myself. I've had other crushes before, but I shoved them down until they disintegrated, because I didn't know being gay was okay. My environment taught me otherwise.

In 6th grade, I was coerced into joining the bandwagon of making fun of this kid who wasn't even gay, but seemed gay to us. By us, I mean not just the kids at my school, but even my Boy Scouts troop. A part of me wants to think it wasn't really about him seeming gay, but because he, his older brother, and the other kid we made fun of were people of color. Race issues weren't as explicit to me then as they are now. It took me a mix of a deviation from the wretched society we currently live in, a trip of self-discovery, and an involvement in the world around me to realize where I lie as a citizen in my community. I had to take the life I was living, destroy it, and rebuild from the scraps that remained to build a better me; I am still building.

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Some things have changed for the better, like my interest in other people, their problems, rather than just my own, and a will to fight for the rights of others including my own. Other things, on the other hand, have changed, but not for the better. For instance, remember when I said I used to cry at funerals and most of the shocking news I used to receive? Yeah, that doesn't happen much. I've grown to be desensitized from trauma because I've been around it a lot, especially if you count the world we currently live in and all the terrible things that have happened. A quote I'd like to share that expresses this feeling more vividly is a quote by Marilyn Manson that I also use for my email signature. "Times have not become more violent. They have just become more televised." I personally believe that as we open our eyes to more things, the more we change as people and evolve as a society. The things about me that won't change are who I am, and my desire for individuality.