

Identity; the fact of being who or what a person or thing is.

A year ago, I applied for a leadership position at my school. As I scanned through the questions, filling out my qualifications, I fell short upon a question asking about my identity – who was I?

This is a common question that I'm sure we've all faced throughout our lives, in job interviews or first dates, a recurring opening is always the simple; 'Tell me about yourself', but at this moment, I was so lost on what to write. Empty for inspiration, I turned to the girl beside me and asked her to describe me.

I dutifully typed what she told me, that I was a confident, born leader, with a bubbly personality. I'm not sure if that's what she actually thought, or if she was giving me a good place to start so I'd be more likely to get the position - lucky for me I did. But the monetary confusion still stuck with me – who am I? Beyond my personality, beyond my physical traits, and beyond whatever I *should* say.

When I realized this, I began to notice many people felt the same way. Questions of personal identity were always met with empty responses or chuckled ignorance. People can't seem to piece together who they really are.

However, whenever these people told me that they just 'didn't know' I rolled my eyes – I knew who they were. I could see their brilliance—intelligent, inventive individuals from diverse backgrounds. I admired them, but still felt adrift. What made me unique?

I'm an Australian-born girl – I have no sob story to speak of, no devastating backstory, no major loss. I had nothing that made me stand out, nothing special or unique enough about me to start upon like my peers did. I couldn't relate to the powerful narratives of adversity that others shared. I felt ordinary, just me.

For a while, I existed to fill this hole. I filled it with activities, skills, and friends, but even then, I still faced the ultimate realization that I wasn't anything different or special – no matter how I did my makeup, or how I spoke. I was still just myself – unchangeable and wholly incomplete.

Maybe this was an identity crisis I was having. This deconstruction of my personhood became obsessive, altering the way I spoke and acted – was I just doing this to be different? To be better? Wiser? These questions yielded no real answers and led me down a compulsive path for my identity.

Yet, the very image of a confident leader that I had adopted for my application ended up becoming my reality. Even though I felt like a ghost within my own skin, I still led others. Suddenly, I had taken up a new role, and all of these snowballed into a new facet of my identity – leadership. Slowly I agreed to the words she had described me as in the application, even though I didn't feel like it.

Suddenly, others recognized me as a leader—asking questions, seeking my thoughts, valuing my input. I was seen for more than my personality or background; I was recognized for my leadership.

I was being seen as a leader.

This gave me the much-needed breathing room to establish some of the core concepts of identity. My first realization? Self-identity isn't a race.

Nobody is pushing anyone to realize who they are. Despite the pressure we feel, nobody is waiting on you to realize who you are, or telling you to hurry up at the other side. In fact, I realized many people were also going through this as well, even if it was present as mine.

It's personal, really, these senses of fragmented identity. It can be mitigated, either, by reassurance by other people. It has to be sort, and understood by that person, then earned. Without that, it lacks any real personal property – any personal identity.

I'm still navigating this path, piecing together who I am. It's not easy, but it's a rewarding journey. As Aristotle once said, "Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."

Nobody ever lacks an identity – It's likely that they are blinded to how others perceive them. Once you've realized this, you can help shape your own identity. It's a lifelong journey for many, and one that isn't simple.

I know I will keep forming my identity, and I hope I've inspired you too. Discover who you are, and let that knowledge empower you to change the world – and through that, yourself.

Thank you!