

Udaya Tejas Vijay Anand

Ms Kara Fontenot

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### The Social Self

An individual's personality is derived from their ideologies, ethics, values and morals. Every individual has different experiences making their growth distinctive and unique. This essay discusses one such phase that has profoundly influenced my personality and who I am today – my transition to a boarding school. Being my parents' youngest child, I was favored. I've always gotten what I desired with ease and never really had to struggle for the necessities until I joined my boarding school. A personal choice of willingness to move out of my comfort zone to face reality – the pressure of meeting people's expectations – has shaped who I am.

Society calms us with comforting statements like "People can be whom they desire to be, what they want to be." Regardless of how much we try to neglect it, at the end of the day, people are going to judge. Our natural instinct is to adapt ourselves to get accepted in the communities we aspire to join – which leads us to change our inner and exterior selves. One such place where this is highly practiced is in high school, where students go through ups and downs – both because of hormonal developments and to fit into the community.

When I switched to an international boarding school from a regional school in Tamil Nadu, I felt like I had entered an alternate world. When I joined my boarding school, I met people of different races, people who spoke a "cooler" version of English, which I could hardly interpret.

The people I met there were covered with branded outfits, which I felt unnecessary. Where I was from, brands of necessary items were the least my community cared about. As long as the item got the job done, people were satisfied. We used to wear uniforms to school to avoid the segregation of the rich and the poor. I witnessed that segregation for the first time when I went to my boarding school.

I had a huge language barrier switching to boarding school, communicating with people and finishing my assignments was tedious. In an effort to make new friends, I started talking to different people and getting to know them, but in the end, I was made fun of for the way I spoke. At later stages, I got opportunities to talk to native Tamil speakers whom I noticed code switch depending upon whom they spoke to. I was too naïve to understand what was happening and why they were doing that until I asked one of them why. By the end of my first year in school, I also unconsciously started code-switching.

At the end of my first year in my boarding school, I ended up changing my behavior and appearance to adapt, which was the beginning of the community influencing my personality.

At the beginning of my second year in high school, I became part of the very group which made fun of me for the way I spoke when I joined this school. Looking back, there were so many unanswered questions within myself. Had I given up on my morals and values so much that I had become one of them? Or had they accepted me the way I was? Since I had to change myself to be a part of the community, I don't think it accepted me for who I was when I arrived in this school.

Connecting it back, the friends' group I tried to be a part of at a later stage, which I eventually joined, feels like it significantly influenced the person I am today. I care about what people think about me more than when I arrived at the boarding school. I have started behaving

according to others' opinions to make a favorable impression. I started judging people based upon things I never imagined before— the way they spoke, the shoes they wore, the cologne that they used. **The verbs in the paragraph above leave some confusion about the time period to which you refer.**

Towards the end of my third year in high school, I left the group because of how self-absorbed the community was. It had a reputation that other students respected, but towards the end, they were just individuals like others with a bunch of self-branding. Spending time both inside and outside the group allowed me to explore different people and realize that the community was just a brand. But when I came out from the group, I met new people from different communities, understanding what made each of them unique. It initially felt awkward to start a conversation with someone I've known for years but never spoken to, but they never looked at it that way, which surprised me the most.

To conclude, the people around you or the community you're a part of influences the kind of person you will be. From being an extroverted person to becoming an introvert just because of how humiliated I got, there are times when tiny little judgements and comments significantly changed my actions and my behavior. But the key to being yourself is to accept and appreciate yourself and to find the right community for you, people who share similar interests, rather than becoming a part of a group because the outside world reposes them better.