

Self Discovery

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"Class! Don't forget your project"

The English teacher reminded the class. "The English project. Topic: Who are you?" It's very vague, you could just say you're a human and boom! You're done with your project. I bet a couple of students here will do that. Well, no one takes school seriously these days. The project is about your identity, still very vague but you get the main idea.

"This'll probably be a piece of cake for some students, as it was a simple project but personally, I don't think so. Identity can mean so many things - your nationality, your gender, your interest and maybe your sexuality. There are so many branches to this topic." I murmured to myself. As soon as the bell rang my classmates in the classroom were all buzzing and humming and screaming, which sometimes made me feel like I was going insane.

Students were all getting up at once to leave the tedious classroom as soon as possible. I too wanted to leave immediately. "Get out of the way, loser!" I felt a hand on my shoulder as I was shoved to the side. The *jerk* and his friends are the group that annoyed me the most out of everyone in this entire school. They laughed as if my annoyance was a comedy show

'Identity is a very big thing for a person. It is what defines them as a person, it is what makes them unique. They say that you should take pride in that, be whatever or whoever you want to be and stick with that! Very inspirational for sure. But personally I find that complete nonsense. I try my very best to know who I am, I try my best to *like* who I am. But no matter how hard I try I just can't. How can I complete the project?' I started to think about the project again. My English teacher wanted me to work with someone else to complete this project, but working with others wasn't my thing.

"Knock knock? Earth to Zai! You there?"

As soon as I heard my name, I snapped out of my mini monologue. I turned to my friend, Jackson, who had already started talking about his Star Wars obsession. He's the one who usually does all the talking in our friendship. I didn't tune into what he was saying. My mind was overwhelmed, I didn't know how I was going to do this project. My friend soon noticed the lack of attention I was giving him.

"I find your lack of faith disturbing"

I looked at Jackson with an expression. That sentence didn't even make sense. He was a guy who *spoke* Star Wars so people would constantly hear him spitting out references from the movie series. That sentence he had just said was a reference to the first movie, I think. My knowledge of Star Wars is limited. He waved it off, knowing that I wouldn't get it, which was true. As we made our way out of the dreadful place society called school, Jackson turned to me. He had a mischievous look on his face. If I'm being honest to myself, he always has a mischievous look. Sometimes I can't tell whether he was serious or not. Who am I kidding? He is never serious.

"Bro, come over to my place. Better do the project sooner than later. I'll text the others."

I knew this isn't what he wanted to do. In his terms it meant 'Do you want to come over to my place to fool around and completely neglect this project we have to do?' I was reluctant. It didn't pique my interest a whole lot. But after five minutes of constant begging and pleas from Jackson I said yes, sure, whatever. I didn't have to interact with the other people. I could just stay in my bubble and ignore them as I carried the project for them.

I dragged my feet to my friend's house. Why was I friends with him? Oh right, we're neighbours. I forgot. We were obligated to be friends.

His parents are very welcoming, very kind. Maybe too kind for my comfort. Even though I have been here a million times, I still do not like the atmosphere of it. It feels too clean, as if it has just been newly furnished. Haunted by my friend's family, not at all there but I could see them living a normal life.. I pushed those thoughts away. It was just a me thing. I headed to my friend's room with the other students who I do not know that well. The room was obviously filled with only Star Wars figures and posters. Mostly filled with legos he and I built together quite some time ago. This is the only place of the house I liked. Jackson is a nice friend, but sometimes... he can be a bit exasperating.

As I predicted, they met up not because of the project, but because of a brand new video game that just came out. I sat in the corner of the room, quietly doing my own thing which was the project. I wasn't really keen on video games. It wasn't really my thing. Luckily I had brought my laptop to school. Things were fine at first, the others were happily playing their video games while I did the project.

I started to think once more. We will have to talk a lot about ourselves. Talking in front of the class is already nerve racking enough, but comparing ourselves to one another, talking about what we have in common and we don't, makes things worse. I glanced over at the group who seemed to be on cloud nine when they were together, I seemed to be the outcast. They seemed to have noticed my absence and practically forced me to join them by shoving the controller into my hand.

I tried to play with them, I tried to fit in with them as much as possible. Who likes an anti-social freak? No one does. They talked loudly with one another, the more they talked, the more I

wanted to dig a hole and hide. I was way out of my comfort zone. Everything suddenly became very uproarious, their words became a buzzing sound, I couldn't hear my own thoughts. My head was static. I couldn't help but feel I didn't belong anywhere. No matter where I went, I wouldn't be able to fit in.

It was overwhelming, but the thought of leaving made me feel like a pathetic person who couldn't handle just a simple hang out. I eventually excused myself, saying that I needed the washroom.

I looked in the mirror (they always creeped me out). The longer you stare into a mirror, the longer you see all your imperfections. They stare back at you, with those creepy looking eyes.

Jackson barged into the washroom without any warning. I flinched just a tiny bit at the sudden action. It was unexpected. "May I help you?" I asked softly. We were close to one another but at times I like to stay by myself and let my mind wander off to some place more peaceful and imaginative.

"Yeah, why the heck did you leave in the middle of the game? I know you don't know the others but at least try to interact with them"

I felt bad for sure, but what did he want me to do? At least I tried. That's all it matters. He looked a bit upset, as if he was a bit embarrassed. Embarrassed, huh... Was he embarrassed because of me?

"These are some of the coolest kids in school and your antisocial behaviour is making me look bad" I was definitely taken back by this. I never thought Jackson would say something like this. As I opened my mouth to speak and express my opinion to my friend, I was immediately cut off. "No, do not talk. You either quit being a wuss or get out. I don't want them to think of me any less because of you."

And so I left. I did not want to hang around such fake people. Did I learn anything from this? Not really. I've only learnt that people are dumb and like to argue over something pathetic.

But.. What did I do wrong? Exist? I tried. I really tried my hardest but no matter what I do I am still the outcast. I am always the outcast. Why can I never do something right? Especially if it is as simple as talking to people. I walked across the gloomy street. Today was just a horrid day. It was oddly unrelentingly lifeless. It was an endless empty solitary. All I wanted to do was the frustrating project, but of course, it didn't end that way. Instead, the loner became even more of a lonewolf.

I finally made it to my room at home. The air felt warm and comforting. This was always my safe spot, where I would not be judged. It was only me, myself and my creativity. I sat at my small

and shabby desk where I poured out all my creativity into. I smiled warmly at all the scuffs and scratches that had accumulated over the years. For a brief second I forgot what had happened earlier. But of course, the realization that I may or may not have lost my only friend filled my heart with dread.

I sat in silence. There was something in the pit of my stomach I couldn't seem to get rid of. It felt as if I was vomiting but not at the same time. My sketchbook came into view. Suddenly creativity filled my mind as if someone had poured a bucketful of ideas and inspiration into my head. I picked up my pencil, I chose a music that I enjoy and drew away. I felt as if I was in another world. A world of my own where I was finally happy with myself. A world where I break the unspoken rules of society.

After much creativity, I dropped my pen and thought to myself, 'Is this why I was such a social outcast? Because I had an imaginative mind and would very much rather stay in my own bubble than socialize with other people my age?' I let out a soft chuckle at my silly old self. I'm such an overthinker. This was where I belonged, in my room, in my own inventive mind.

I ended up doing the project by myself. I learnt that you don't need others to fully feel like you belong somewhere. The only one who can do that is yourself. Just be happy with who you are, do the things you are interested in. An identity doesn't have to mean you are a part of a community. It means... It doesn't mean anything, as long as you are happy with yourself then you will feel you are a part of something.