

## ENGLISH

### Expository Essay

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Our individual identity is a manifestation of judgements, societal expectations, peer pressure, relationships and traumatic experiences. While identity takes the appearance of self, it is often the formation of a false, misinterpreted sense of who we are which carries many repercussions. Through forces beyond human control, our identity is moulded and shaped both negatively and positively. Though we may strive for individualism, our external façade is unfairly based on another's perception and interpretation of us. In this regard, socially imposed identities, encountered traumatic experiences and primary relationships all construct our identities. In many cases, our beliefs, morals and perceptions are ignored, and our true self is overlooked. The expectations and opinions of others are misjudged and miscalculated, resulting in us embarking upon a journey of not knowing who we truly are. Nevertheless, as humans, we each possess the power of self-determination to choose who we want to be, for, just as a ship is able to anchor itself amongst tumultuous tides, so too can we break free from repressive imposed identities to create an individualised version of who we truly are.

When trapped inside an identity on which society has placed upon an individual, their sense of self can be heavily influenced and moulded by the perceptions of those around them. If this occurs, their ability to be who they are deteriorates, and the resulting feeling is one of complete entrapment and imprisonment. This notion is crystallised in Gwen Harwood's poem, Suburban Sonnet, which idealises that perceived insignificance of a suburban housewife to undermine the packaged product of patriarchal households. The speaker adopts a melancholic, defeated tone combined with a demoralising, sympathetic mood in attempt to accentuate the existential angst she feels. A loose ABAB rhythmic pattern shared with a sonnet format raises the notion of the dissipation of self in the face of a gender bias identity. Metaphorical analogies, alliterations and symbolic representations like "taste dishes from stale bread", "children chatter" and "a sprung mousetrap where a mouse lies dead" are used to portray the subject's sense of entrapment. While her appearance may deceptively seem happy and beautiful, the internal turmoil within her is described as "stale", emphasising the discrepancy between reality and appearance. By fulfilling her imposed identity, she has embarked on a journey in which "zest and love drain out". Each verb is met with an equal negative – "a pot boils over", "she rushes to the stove too late" – signifying that all her attempts to do right fail. Henceforth, her inherent need to satisfy society has resulted in an existential sense of defeat, extinguishing her true self. Indeed, just as a ship rocks back and forth by vicious storms, identity can be shaped by societal expectations that impose a false, misinterpreted identity upon an individual to such an extent that they become entrapped and imprisoned in an identity that diminishes self.

Moreover, as individuals, traumatic and turbulent experiences have the capacity to completely alter our life circumstances, thus shaping our identity. As such, our relationships and environment play an integral part after a traumatic event, possessing the ability to either build our identity or completely extinguish it to an such an extent that we can no longer know who we are. This concept is exemplified in Bruce Dawe's poem, The Raped Girl's Father, which explores the limited response of a father after her daughter's rape. By adopting an aggressive tone, Dawe seeks to draw parallels between the primitive acts of the rapists and the primitive acts of the father to denote that both responses effectively become interchangeable. Immediately, the assonance "buzz-saw whine" objectifies the father, transforming him from man to machine. The speaker is sympathetic to her plight, however the shamefully righteous and pitiless response of the father makes him as primitive as the rape itself. The alliteration "darker dark" denotes that the father exacerbates the actual rape, where the "darker" represents the father and the "dark" is merely the rape. Henceforth, the poem is rife with images of vulnerability with the speaker remaining voiceless and defined only in relation to her father and her "frenzied suitors", the epitome of powerlessness and helplessness. The response of the father signifies that he has a masculine honour embedded in his identity which is both dysfunctional and distorted. The verbs "hunched" and "shrank" denote that in the face of the assault, the subject's identity is diminished, and her sense of self is slowly dissipating. She describes the

rape as a “fresh assault of reason”, imposing reason upon an unnatural, irrational act, suggesting that perpetrators perhaps aren’t as damaging as the father’s response. The defining moment in the poem is when the speaker becomes completely invisible to herself – “somebody sobbed” – where she is dissociating from herself to become someone unknown. Furthermore, the phrases “swung the wheel”, “rolled on black” and “dice bones” contain connotations of luck and chance. In this regard, her traumatic experience was merely a matter of chance, a gamble that cannot be predicted. Hence, the poem exemplifies how in times of devastation and calamity, like a ship awaiting an impending storm, identity can be completely extinguished to such an extent that we no longer know who we are.

Similarly, our interactions with people and our primary relationships with family form so great a portion of our lives that their ideals, beliefs and values impinge upon us, shaping our identity. Amongst these relationships, the most prominent is the relationship between child and parent. Exemplifying this notion is Phillip Larkin’s poem, This Be The Verse, which is a satire that attempts to pique consciousness by raising the question of ‘if we are the victim of childhood’. The speaker adopts a cynical, satirical tone combined with large hyperboles to directly address the audience. The poem takes the appearance of a nursery rhyme with a simplistic, repetition, whimsical nature as well as being rife with jargon and colloquialism. Larkin transits from the specific “they” at the beginning to a much more universal abstract of “man hands on misery to man” to address the plight of the human race – we are all flawed. However, Larkin seeks to convey that our flaws are solely due to the childhood, and children are a product of their upbringing. The simile “like a coastal shelf” denotes that we are all flawed from birth and damage is inevitable. Thus, our identity can be determined by our upbringing and the influences we have when we are young. Our interactions with people can have a powerful, underestimated effect on who we are and what we become. However, just as a ship is able to choose when to anchor itself in consuming tides, so too can individuals choose to use their power of self-determination to fulfil an identity of who they want to be.

Ultimately, identity can be involuntarily imposed upon us through forces beyond our control, inevitably being subject to change. In many cases, we can find ourselves entrapped and imprisoned in an identity that is the construct of perception and interpretation. However, in order to experience personal growth, we must use our inherent capacity of self-perseverance to form our own individual identity that will stimulate personal and emotional prosperity. With courage we can sail forth into the hazy abyss with an identity that mirrors self. As Canadian author Vithu Jeyaloganathan sanguinely cogitates: “The identity of one changes with how one perceives reality”.