

'Sometimes we lose loved ones when we find our sense of identity and belonging'

It is an intrinsic propensity of who we are as human beings to want to protect those we care about. Fostering our sense of selfhood across our lifespan, it is often our loved ones, in the form of family and close friends, that provide the initial foundation upon which we establish our identity and forge a sense of belonging. However, this nurturing instinct often acts as a hinderance ^{to} us constituting the notion of our true self. Ensuing from this is a clash of identities, between the one created for you by your family - your first social connection to the world - and the one you forge yourself through the employment of both familial influences and extraneous ones that you encounter as you grow older. Moreover, due to the innate proclivity ^{of} for your loved ones to want the best for you, they may often find it difficult to accept the person you choose to be, a notion that is typified if attached to your preferred identity is a certain stigma that will connote you no longer have an accepted place in the same society as your loved ones, resulting in a detachment from them in order to be the person you truly are. However, losing your loved ones does not always come as a result of establishing your identity. Instead, it is often necessary to disaffiliate from those close to you in order to establish an independent singularity.

"First your parents, they give you your life but then they try and give you theirs" (Chuck Palahnuik). Our family, typically, is the source of our initial sense of self, as from the moment of our very birth they accept us into a place of belonging, and surround our beings by constant, indelible understandings of identity. However, as we progress through life and begin to naturally digress from these close family ties, we become susceptible to the influences of the new and disparate people and environments we encounter. It is by means of these influences that we come to discover how the identity first shaped for us by our parents is not a true reflection of our selfhood, creating a further divide between us and those we love. Sandra Laing's journey of self-discovery in Anthony Fabian's Skin serves as an exemplar of this. Growing up as a coloured child surrounded by her white parents, which included her father and his staunch support for the Apartheid Era, Sandra was inflicted with the many appellations thrust upon her by the government - labels which she vicariously accepted through her father's unwavering corroboration of the ever-changing policy. As a result of her parent's acceptance of her appearance and their pretence of this reality, Sandra never made the distinction between herself being coloured and her family being white. However, as Sandra came of age to attend school, she was influenced by the ideas presented by her peers - people who did not care for her like her family did. Occasioning from this was Sandra's realisation that she represented a dichotomy to her family, and more significantly, to the person they had led her to believe she was. Thus, this extraneous influence coerced Sandra to realise that she could never be identified as a 'white' person, and influencing her to make the conscious choice to assimilate into the black community, becoming estranged from her family as a result of the discordancy between the person they wanted her to be, and the individual she felt she needed to become. Consequently, we can perceive that although our loved ones provide us with our initial superficial identity and place of belonging, we become estranged from them as we grow to discover that we are something more.

"I am afraid to show you who I really am, because if I show you who I really am, you might not like it - and that's all I got" (Sabrina Ward Harrison, Canadian artist and author). It is a very real part of our beings to desire the inclusion of our loved ones in our lives, and as a result we may build a facade that delineates an identity we know will be accepted by them, in order not to lose them. Due to the indwelling tendency of our loved ones to desire what is best for us, it is often extremely difficult for them to accept the person we are underneath those masks. This is especially the case if, when we unearth our hidden identity, they know a certain opprobrium will follow. This difficulty to accept one's veracious identity and place of belonging has the effect of tainting an individual's identity in the eyes of their loved ones, causing a divide and eventual loss in connection. To typify

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this we can examine the battle Andrew Solomon (American writer) and many other members of the gay community fought in the disclosure of their true self to their loved ones. Especially considering the era he was brought up in where homosexuality not as widely accepted as it is today, Solomon understood that he "would have had an easier life if [he] were straight", but admits that "[he] would not be [himself]" if he acted under this pretence. Thus after hiding his true identity for so long, and going to such great lengths in an attempt to forge one that he knew would be accepted by those around him, he tore off the mask he built to conceal his homosexuality, exposing himself to the stigma that coincided with this identity. For many in the gay community, this moment of disclosure was a turning point in their lives, during which the relationship with their loved ones, and the ways they were perceived by them, changed. After seeing them in a new light, their loved ones could not accept the identity they had chosen for themselves, ostracising them from their circle. Therefore, through this exemplar it can be demonstrated how our affiliation with our loved ones can be shattered once they become aware of our true identity, as a result of their inability to give credence to the person hidden under the mask.

"The people who we have known form our identity far more than ourselves" (Veronica Roth, American novelist). Our loved ones are the people who constantly encircle us. Hence, they often have the effect of impeding our ability to see ourselves for who we truly are, instead causing us to fashion an understanding of our own identity based on our perceived notion that we belong with them. This lulls us into a false sense of secure belonging and identity as, fundamentally, our loved ones are there to protect us, creating illusions of who we are and where we fit in to the broader society - an illusion they never dare to shatter. It is in this respect that, in order to establish a sense of identity and belonging, we must first detach ourselves from those we care about so that we are empowered to take a step back and face the reality of our selfhood. This idea is elucidated in Ray Lawler's depiction of relationships in Summer of the Seventeenth Doll. The close friendship between Olive, Nancy, Barney and Roo resulted in their being caught up in the rhythm of the 'lay-off' season, comforting each other with the idea that nothing has changed in them from the very first summer their tradition started. Thus, with their closeness came a naivety that was only corrupted once Nancy left the group, forcing the remaining members to accept the change and consider the circumstances for what they really were. Olive's resplendent view of Barney and Roo as "two eagles flyin' down out of the sun", engendering Roo and Barney to perceive themselves as the "couple of kings" Olive talked them up to be, fell with their acceptance of Nancy's absence. Once they had relinquished their connections with Nancy, the group was able to discern how the identity created for them by being part of a such a close relationship was not necessarily veridical with their being. Spawning from this was Roo's realisation that the lay-off season and nostalgia that came with it was quickly dissipating, and his age increasing, allowing him to accept the fact that his position in the cane cutting team and in Olive's life was coming to an end. Similarly, Barney became open to accepting the fact that his "pride" in being "susceptible" was no longer an attractive quality, begetting him to fathom the idea that he was no longer identified as a successful philanderer. Though while it is our loved ones who play a role in underpinning our sense of identity and belonging, it is often necessary for us to disaffiliate ourselves from them to enable us to establish a faithful sense of identity and belonging.

The establishment of a sense of identity and belonging commonly induces an estrangement from our loved ones. Being the people who constantly encircle us, often from the moment we're born, they largely influence the course of our lives, and are the fundamental providers of our initial identity. However, through age and experience, we come to shun the appellations and ideas they thrust upon us through the development of our own singularity that becomes influenced by extraneous forces. Accordingly, these new identities we undertake can be difficult for those close to us to accept, again resulting in loss from our lives the ones we care for. Contrastingly, it can be said that, in order to clearly discern our absolute sense of self and belonging away from the smothering influences of our loved ones, it is necessary thing, rather than a product of the journey, to detach ourselves from their effect.

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