

Challenge How Others Categorize You

An ordinary person is so afraid to define himself that he stumbles accidentally into whatever social function resists him the least. Never going too far in any direction provides safe barriers for him to avoid injury, but they also nullify all forms of heroic action. He spends his entire life chasing a dream that a collection of voices planted in his head many years ago, only to die never having lived at all.

You cannot help but conceive of the world through the lens of internal categorization. Categories are useful filters for the intellect. Your mind filters reality into fine details, which overlap, sharing qualities that can be applied for specific functions. Categorization is what makes information useful, including information about what you are supposed to be. You develop your categories through observations, but more often the influence of people who came before you.

If you allow other people to set your categories for you, you will never be fully yourself. If you embrace tradition, you will never look for exceptional alternatives. If you accept that your life must proceed according to one of the plans society offers, you will never express the parts of you that exist outside these boundaries. Your conception of what you think you are supposed to be will always rely on clues given by other people as to what is acceptable.

An idealized version of you is created the moment other people project their preferences onto your mind. When they identify something they like about you, it creates a positive feedback loop. You desire their approval, so you emphasize the quality they picked out as more important than all the rest. With enough positive feedback, you start to forfeit anything contradictory, amputating large swaths of your potential.

Pretty girls grow up believing they cannot also be intelligent or daring, so their beauty becomes the sticking point of their entire identity. Boys learn that their natural toughness violates the ability to be soft and caring. We all ascertain that there is only enough room in the psyche for a few culturally relevant traits to dominate and define our place in the surrounding social machine. False dichotomies rule us, fragmenting everyone into shattered, compartmentalized identities. Abandon the old world's way of seeing and instantly expand your possible self-expression.

When you awaken from the illusion of your idealized self, your struggle will have only just begun. The people in your life will continue to pressure you to conform to what they know. They need you to be easy to accept. The people closest to you already have a space carved out for you in their sense of identity. Even strangers will resist if you stray too far from the prevailing social narrative around you. They don't even know they are doing this. They simply don't know any other way to exist.

You cannot explore yourself completely so long as you remain a character within their stories. You yearn to be something more, but you don't yet know what that is. You cannot escape the ideal they prefer over the authentic you. You fear to lose what you have built over the course of your life so far, as everything you have ever been is contained in the contextual filter of the person others know you to be. You don't know what to do. You only know it cannot go on. The fear of rejection keeps you enslaved.

As things presently are, no matter how stifling, you know there is at least one comfortable position for you to exist in the world. Anything too new, any emerging trait which contradicts the image you are already living out, threatens the social standing you have been building over the course of your entire life. Within the confines of your familiar social context, you feel no pressure to change your life to what you want it to be. You remain an amalgam of collective allowances from dominant personalities. You must step outside what you know to become something more.

Do not forsake who you are to conform to what others have chosen for you. Do not depend on bland generalities to find meaning, or fear the pursuit of whatever excites you most. Ask yourself how every label truly applies to what you know yourself to be, and if in necessarily prevents you from living up to other labels you know you desire. That kind of dedication is how you break out of the mold created by from where you came.

Only nature knows its absolute limits. You will not know everything you can become until you challenge every limit the world taught you because it feared what you might one day become.