

“Our whole guise is like giving a sign to the world to think of us in a certain way but there’s a point between what you want people to know about you and what you can’t help people knowing about you.”
– Diane Arbus

Why wear a mask? One reason for wearing a mask is to pretend to be something or, communicate the emotion of the wearer. In addition, it may be used to protect one from being hurt. Diane Arbus’s photographs often explore the “secret world of freaks” to explain how our society has the mindset of observing the flaws of other people. This is a serious issue that prevails in the world today, as it causes insecurities and transformations of many people. Everyone has their own different culture, race, identity, living style, and stereotype; however, some people aren’t comfortable enough to reveal and express their true selves to the entire world; they are afraid of being judged or mistreated. I am one of those people. I figuratively shelter myself by wearing multiple masks because I am afraid of rejection. I wear masks to hide my true identity when meeting new people because of my own discomfort with my sexuality. Without these masks, I feel vulnerable and unsafe; they serve as my layer of protection. Rather than opening up to others, I create different impressions of my self. Because of this, I’d like to explore my different “masks” in an effort to become comfortable with myself.

In middle school, a whole series of torments and social pressures opened up. I spent the majority of my time around girls, making me different from the guys at my school. To me, this was normal, but my peers seemed to feel differently. I wasn’t even aware of my sexuality at the time, but students assumed I was gay and teased me for it. In the school hallways, locker rooms, and classrooms I was hit with cruel remarks such as “Eww it’s the gay boy!” It really bothered me because all I wanted was acceptance. I had no idea that this issue would deeply impact growing up and it soon became very difficult for me to be myself and open up to others. My torturous years of middle school produced a terrible imposed idea in my head—I live in a reality that is preserved in a bubble of close-minded people. I believe this because I am afraid of receiving the same reactions I experienced in middle school. I honestly dislike hiding behind a mask. I would really like to be my genuine self; however, my fears of being rejected take over me. This is why my goal is to identify my different masks and work towards becoming comfortable in my own skin.

When I put on a mask, it is like I’m entering a parallel universe. According to Wikipedia, the multi-verse theory, coined in 1895 by William James, is “the hypothetical set of multiple possible universes (including the historical universe we consistently experience) that together comprise everything that exists and can exist: the entirety of space, time, matter, and energy as well as the physical laws and constants that describe them.” The various universes within the multi-verse are known as parallel universes, which led to the fictional ideas of them. Brian Greene, American theoretical physicist and author of *The Hidden Reality* explains that there are many different synonyms to parallel universes such as “alternative universes,” “quantum universes,” “interpenetrating dimensions,” “parallel dimensions,” “parallel worlds,” “alternative realities,” “alternative timelines,” and “dimensional planes” among others. Although there are many different parallel theories, the one that is significant to me is the “fictional” theory of alternative

realities, which are separate realities coexisting with one's own. In the Princeton Dictionary, to "coexist," means to exist together at the same time or same place. The idea of being in multiple places at once relates to me since I often put on different masks to hide my true self. I have always been curious if there were other versions of myself that exist in separate realities. If I can witness parallel beings of myself living in different realities, it will help me learn to accept myself.

Similar to myself, scientists and astrologists question the existence of parallel universes. On the documentary, *The Cosmos: A Beginner's Guide, Episode 6 – Other Worlds*, astrologists use a huge telescope called a WASP (wide angle search for planets) to see if there are other worlds. There is a meter attached to these telescopes, which distinguishes if big planets are moving through the stars. This meter is essential to the discovery of parallel worlds. The discovery of "WASP 1" and "WASP 2," which are unordinary moving planets captured from the two telescopes, revealed hope that parallel worlds exist because they looked similar to other existing planets in the solar system. Later in the documentary, it is shown that scientists use a tool called "Virtual Planetary Laboratory" to compare Earth's real atmospheric composition with that of theoretical worlds. When placed in another star's orbit, under those conditions, in what's called "the habitable zone." Towards the end of the documentary, the host Adam Hart-Davis, discovers that the Earth's moon is still geologically active; that Saturn's moons, Titan and Enceladus, hold many fascinating Earth-like features and that evidence of water has been found on several other moons and planets. This proof excites me as it shows that it won't be long until they find a parallel planet to the earth; and hopefully that means that I would get to find other versions of myself to help me learn to tolerate myself.

Fantasy has long borrowed the idea of "another world" from myth, legend and religion. Many fictional movies and stories revolve around ideas of escaping to another world. According to Wikipedia, in fantasy and science fiction, a parallel universe is a different world, and its co-existence with ours is an underlying principle to bring a protagonist from the author's reality into the fantasy's reality, such as in *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis. The stories follow the same ideals of having epic settings and godlike protagonists, as well as coexisting realities. American mythologist, Joseph Campbell mentions that a "mythology is a control system, on the one hand framing its community to accord with an intuited order of nature and, on the other hand, by means of its symbolic pedagogic rites, conducting individuals through the ineluctable psycho physiological stages of transformation of a human lifetime—birth, childhood and adolescence, age, old age, and the release of death—in unbroken accord simultaneously with the requirements of this world and the rapture of participation in a manner of being beyond time." This idea led to his method of the "hero's journey" and employing similar methods such as "magical realism" to use for plotting stories; it gives a great structure we automatically recognize, since it is based on classic fairy tales and myths most people study in school. For example, in most superhero movies and comics, the settings take place in earth or a world very similar to the earth, but in real life there aren't exactly superheroes who rescue the community and fight off villains who disrupt the world. My mind and thought process is similar to the stories of fictional fantasy as I want to escape into another world where I can be myself—a place where I am with my friends being funny, happy, comfortable, crazy, carefree, and loud.

Dreams are comparable to parallel universes; the dream world allows me to create and imagine a whole new reality from my experiences. In the dream world, each individual possesses the power to coexist and alter events that take place in a world similar to reality, as explored in the movie, *What The Bleep Do We Know?* The main character, Marlee Matlin asks the question of whether or not “reality is what we’re seeing with our brains or seeing with our eyes?” This leads to the topic of human consciousness. The scientists, mystics, and scholars who were interviewed answer that “our dreams and brain can only project what we have in our consciousness.” The best dreams I have are the ones similar to ideas found in *Harry Potter*. In the dream, I am the only wizard in my town who flies on a broomstick and knows how to cast awesome spells. I am not allowed to reveal my magic powers in public and there tends to be a villain in the dream, who I eventually battle. These types of dreams are influenced by many fictional stories I have read and watched that revolve around parallel and alternative universes. My dreams are filled with similar aspects to parallel universes; they serve as my own secret, alternative world. My dreams speak to my true self and motivate me to learn, change, and accomplish my goals in reality.

Brian Greene, author of *The Hidden Reality*, describes his childhood room. This was the starting point of his curiosity towards parallel universes because he had a mirror built into his door, aligned with another mirror on a wall. As a result, a “seemingly endless series of reflections of anything situated between them” appeared. He had imagined a “mocking version of himself way down the line of mirrors who refused to echo and reflect in unison.” This opened up his imagination, for he had created his own imaginary parallel worlds constructed of light that were driven by fantasy. I relate to him a lot because I create imaginary worlds in order to escape my everyday reality. For example, one world is composed of a place where my closest friends and I live. There aren’t any rules and adults, therefore all of us can live carefree and do whatever we want to do. Another one is a place of peace and tranquility. In this world, all my social pressures and stresses become erased, which allows me to be happy and comfortable with myself.

According to Wikipedia, a persona is a role or a character played by an actor. In a way, it is a mask to resonate with the voice of the actor. In a previous homework assignment, I wrote about what I live for and expressed that I live for being a source of entertainment. I try to please people in order to gain acceptance, which is one of the reasons to why I have different personas. There are plenty of roles I act out towards different people. For example, I have a “crazy, rebellious teenager” persona, which was developed from the help of social media sites, such as *Facebook*. Once I got my new camera, I immediately documented every moment I had with my friends and posted photos on my *Facebook*. The photos generally show the many events, concerts, and parties I go to with my friends. The photo posts lead other people to think of me as a loud, crazy teenager. In addition, I also have what I like to call the “husky dog” persona, for I tend to look happy and innocent like most husky dogs. I don’t consider myself innocent; however, putting on this mask in front of my teachers and peers give me advantages for getting out of trouble since most people who don’t really know me think I would not commit any sort of crime. I am not a happy person all the time, however. I like to put a smile on my face rather than a frown so that people won’t ask, “What’s wrong?” because I hate when people sympathize with my problems or pity me. Furthermore, the

most significant persona I have and hate is the “paper bag” persona. When I was little, I watched a cartoon that revolved around a scene of a new student in school. The student wore a paper bag as a mask because he was afraid that his peers were going to judge and reject his appearance. I am the student who wears the paper bag because I feel that I need to hide my true self with other people. I am very shy and uncomfortable with opening up to people whom I’ve never met. Part of this is because I am insecure about my own sexuality (due to the discrimination I suffered in the past). This persona was developed from my middle school torment, and it is the essential reason for my exploration of my different personas.

Because people search for flaws, I am uncomfortable with opening up to those I don’t know well. I wear masks to communicate my emotions and protect myself from getting hurt. My masks allow me to enter alternate universes, for there, I can pursue different personas. Once I discovered who I am and what my sexuality is, I became very conscious in the ways I acted in front of different people because I thought that if I revealed anything about myself, I would be teased like I previously was. Ever since my middle school agony, it has been difficult to deal with the same feelings of discomfort in high school. I feel very misunderstood most of the time and it makes me really excited to soon be leaving for college and escape my mindset of having a hometown “bubble of close-minded people.” In a way, I feel that I am also going to enter another parallel universe when I go to college, where I will fully learn to accept myself. The observation of my different personas helps me figure out ways I could change my problems of feeling uncomfortable. “Will they laugh at me?” “Will they hate me?” “What will people do if they know who I actually am?” These are the questions that are constantly in my head. Everyone has experienced a time where they shelter themselves due to fears of rejection. So readers, if you have had that experience, do you wear a mask?

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