

Writer's Note:

As a teenage girl, I am constantly struggling with my identity. I feel that my life is based around a constant search for some sense of self. I have realized recently that just about everything I do - how I act, what I buy, what I say - is a way for me to differentiate myself.

This essay is not a spiritual or religious guide towards Enlightenment. It is simply a collection of points I have noticed within myself. I wanted to write something for people my age that does not belittle or patronize them, but is told from a perspective that only a 16-year-old can fully understand. So here are a few things I have noticed in myself that I believe could be helpful to any teenager looking for self-improvement and personal confidence.

INTRODUCTION

Celebrities often talk about their separate personas on camera in comparison to who they are in their personal lives. The truth is we all have two identities very similarly to the way famous people do. We all like to consider our lives as movies where we are the starring role. And we have the opportunity to create a character that interests us the most. This character is called "the ego."

The Oxford Dictionary defines the ego as "a person's sense of self esteem or self importance."¹ Just about everything we attach to our identity is a way for us to feel different and strengthen our ego. Humans are very sensitive beings that are (especially in western culture) obsessed with the idea of individuality and uniqueness. In his book *A to Z in Philosophy*, Alexander Moseley describes philosopher David Hume's definition of the self: "Hume rejected the existence of an unchanging self, and argued that while it can be said that we have a personality, the self is illusory in that it is merely a bundle of continuous and fleeting perceptions and that the association of those perceptions (in the same body) forms a self" (203).² Hume believed that the self is really a collection of constantly changing perceptions connected by the fact that they all exist in the same body. Every person attaches themselves to labels in order to create an illusion of knowing "who they are." Just a few of these identifications include: religion, race, sexuality, nationality, gender and social class. People use these constructed groups in order to differentiate themselves, but also often to locate a place of acceptance and find people who can relate to them. In the end, however, none of these labels can individually define a person, but are essentially used to help make sense of each other and ourselves. And so as we get older we attach ourselves to more and more words as a way of creating an individual self.

From a very young age, children learn to create this sense of self by attaching themselves to things. They learn the words "me," "mine," and "I." Some of their first sentences usually have to do with claiming objects and making "I" statements. The two words "I" and "am" come

¹ "Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar." Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

² Moseley, Alexander. *The A to Z of Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 2008. Print.

together to make a phrase that humans continue to use throughout their lives as a way of making their identities known.

From ages 13 to 19, kids are expected to start understanding “who they are” and begin defining their personalities. At this point in a person’s life, they are thinking about how they want to be seen and what they want to say about themselves. When teenagers reach their junior year of high school, they are encouraged to choose a college and career path that is likely to be what they end up doing for the rest of their lives. If it is not stressful enough to worry about grades, tuition, and the SAT, students also need to make an enormous choice about what is right for them: a decision that is very interconnected with who they are. So when teenagers choose a college or major they are often asking themselves how this decision will look. What will it say about them?

“College is very permanent because yes it’s very expensive, but also it’s just a really big commitment. And so if you go to college for a specific thing it’s very hard to leave that one career path because you have to tell everybody that you changed your mind which isn’t really seen as normal.”

--female, age 17

“People are afraid to realize that they’ve changed. Like I was planning on going to college to be an engineer because I like math and it’s very related to art... but the only reason I can say all of this to you is because I’ve said it a million times to myself. Like this is what I should want to do, this is a logical career path. And so I kind of convinced myself that this was the right thing to do... but it isn’t really what I want to do.”

--female, age 17

Being a teenager comes along with a lot of stress related to college, but one of the most difficult things people have to face is simply deciding on the person they want to display to the world. Many kids dread high school because of how judgmental and “cliquey” people are, but all of this immaturity comes from a place of wanting to act like an adult, and many kids believe that part of being an adult is knowing exactly who you are. The problem with this, however, is that teenagers often feel they need to compete for roles and personalities because they are incredibly envious of each other and attention hungry. They are all trying to find ways to stand out while simultaneously looking for acceptance and approval. Kids then get stuck in roles that they believe to define them and act around the labels that people assign to them.

“I’ve done things just to stand out and be different because that’s something I connect with. I am the “crazy girl” in my town. And I jump off of stuff with the guys and go swimming at night and do stuff that nobody else would do, but that’s me. And I do it because it is ‘me’.”

--female, age 18

During adolescence, people begin building up who they think they are and how they want other people to see them. All of their choices revolve around the strengthening of their ego. And yet there must be some part of our identities that is “real,” and not constructed or made-up. An internal persona must exist. While we are all the same in that we all choose personas to embody, we consciously pick different kinds of titles or labels to identify with. There must be some part

of myself that has pushed me to identify as a girl, an artist, a thinker. There are parts of ourselves that we do not choose, and sometimes defining those things as part of who we are is the best way to feel confident and in touch with ourselves. Gender, sexuality, and race are a few examples of parts of our being that we are born with. Are we erasing people's identities if we tell them the solution to their problems is to eliminate any labels they identify with? Are the ego and the "true" identity really that disconnected? I think not. It is true that humans are so obsessed with individuality that they are willing to criticize each other, excessively buy things, and create unstable situations for themselves just to empower their egos. I believe that in order to improve one's self, one must not necessarily destroy this ego, but simply become aware of it. In order to become aware of our egos, we need to realize everything we do to empower them.

POSSESSIONS

One of the obvious ways in which people build their egos is through their attachment to objects. In his paper, "The Role of Possessions in Creating, Maintaining, and Preserving One's identity," Jim Gentry explains that, "an individual's identity consists of the personal and social characteristics of people as understood by themselves and others. These personal and social characteristics are often expressed, to one's self and to others, through material possessions."³ Many people base their self-worth on how much or little they have. Some people live by the motto, "I have therefore I am." An extreme example of this sort of person is the main character in the 2013 film Blue Jasmine. When her wealthy husband is arrested and their marriage collapses, Jasmine is forced to live a modest lifestyle and practically loses her mind without her extravagant jewelry and clothes. She literally loses her sense of self and cannot come to terms with her life without money.⁴

Advertising knows and understands this weakness. Companies then create slogans and mottos that speak directly to the consumer and show them "who they can be" if they buy the product. L'Oreal Paris, the cosmetics company, uses their slogan, "because you're worth it," to target women by making them feel important.⁵ They are saying, "buy our products and you will be worth something, you will have some sense of independence." Companies display beautiful, unrealistic women in their ads to send the message: "you can look like this, if you buy our products." And because people are so insecure and dying to define themselves, they do. Even I find myself picking out something as simple as shampoo based on the aesthetic of the packaging. "I am going to buy this shampoo with a minimalist, clean bottle, because that's the kind of person I am." People continuously buy things that they do not need to add to their sense of self and boost their ego. We save up money in hopes of getting something that will satisfy our want to define ourselves, and maybe it does for a little while, but eventually we get bored and feel we need to look for something else. Eckhart Tolle explains this



L'Oreal Paris Advertisement

³ "The Role of Possessions in Creating, Maintaining, and Preserving One's Identity: Variation Over the Life Course." By Jim Gentry, Stacey Menzel Baker, and Frederic B. Kraft. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 May 2015.

⁴ Blue Jasmine. Dir. Woody Allen. Warner Home Video, 2014.

⁵ "Because You're Worth It." By L'Oreal Paris. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.

idea in his book, *A New Earth: Awakening To Your Life's Purpose*: “The ego satisfaction is short-lived and so you keep looking for more, keep buying, keep consuming.”⁶ For this reason, teenagers, who are constantly searching for ways to strengthen their identity, are very interested in choosing clothes and buying things.

“I think everything I have ever bought is for that purpose of self-image. I think it would be terrible to say that things aren't for that purpose. Everything that I bring into my life becomes a part of my image. Because objects are a statement. Any object.”

-- female, age 17

“I think everyone buys clothes to somehow represent who they are. You buy clothes to show the world who you are or who you want to be. But also just like stuff. Like my camera. As soon as I had a camera in my hands I knew that's what I wanted to do.”

-- male, age 17

Attaching ourselves to objects is one of the easiest ways to understand ourselves more clearly. Especially in such a capitalist, consumer-based country, constantly being surrounded by advertisements and a culture of always wanting “stuff,” it is almost impossible to escape this sort of connection. So for most people, “who you are” has a lot to do with what you have.

THE BODY AND GENDER

Similarly to the way in which people attach themselves to objects, humans also develop a strong connection to their body, which usually informs their gender or the gender they feel they should be. Of course it is not a bad thing to take ownership of your body, in fact it is good to protect it and care for it. But the problem arises when you feel your body needs to define you. Many people feel that their physical fitness or level of “attractiveness” has to dictate whom they present themselves as or how they act around people. Another enormous way in which the body affects one's identity is through the attachment to gender. Eckhart Tolle explains this idea of body and gender as a possession. He writes, “‘My’ body defines my gender defines my actions define ‘who I am.’”⁷ Many people feel that their body parts need to define their gender. This can be problematic when your true gender is not the one assigned to you because of your body. This connection between our bodies and internal identifications can be incredibly confusing because of the way we or other people (parents, friends, “society, ”etc.) have allowed our bodies to dictate “who we are.” Humans then develop this deep connection with their gender. Their gender and the norms surrounding it tell them how to act and what to be. These norms become increasingly prominent during adolescence. Part of becoming an adult is more than just “growing up.” It is growing up the way you are expected to because of your gender – fulfilling your gender role. In some cultures becoming a woman means being married to a man. In other's it means being “feminine,” polite, and subordinate. For men, it is about being strong, protective, and in control. Being an adult is about being a lady, and being a gentleman.

“There is this kind of desire to be in control and powerful and that sort of thing. It not something that you're forced into but there's a lot of positive reinforcement... and

⁶ Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. New York: Plume, 2006. Print.

⁷ Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. New York: Plume, 2006. Print.

then there's also this weird dynamic that happens when you're with people of the opposite gender. Like guys act differently with a group of guys than when there's a girl. The jokes that are made just aren't the same. Because its not appropriate and it doesn't feel right... Around other guys there's this implied (even if it's not true) sense of, 'we're all guys, we hunt, we chop down trees, we like to have sex with women.'"

-- cis-gendered male, age 17

Simone De Beauvoir poses the idea that gender is actually a construct, that the idea of the "feminine" or "masculine" cannot truly exist and define a gender. She explains this idea in her book, *The Second Sex*: "If there is no such thing today as femininity, it is because there never was. Does the word "woman" then have no content?"⁸ De Beauvoir believed that gender was arbitrary assigned by the body, but the ideas associated with it were not in fact real. The words "woman" and "man" are therefore quite meaningless. It is the meaning that we give it that makes the idea of gender so powerful.

For a lot of people, however, identifying with a gender can be a comfortable way to ground their sense of self. Many people feel they can look to other people of the same gender and create healthy relationships based on that commonality. While the teenage ego can become very easily wrapped up in the expectations of their gender, identification with a gender can often be the best way for a person to grasp an understanding of themselves.

"Identifying as a girl is a big part of my identity. I've grown up and followed a lot of typically feminine paths. Like I'm really into clothes and the way I present myself is feminine. But I also just feel very connected to the female community. Like I am a girl."

-- cis-gendered female, age 17

"I always felt really excited by being a woman. I identify as a woman and I am really secure in that. I think it's really fun to feel sexy as a woman... I think being empowered and feeling good in your body and knowing that you're solid in who you are and being able to celebrate that is amazing. As I grow into realizing that about myself, I love putting on make-up, I love wearing skirts and high heels... for me having a sort of female lifestyle is a celebration of who I am."

-- cis-gendered female, age 17

Although gender is very much associated with how we present ourselves and how we curate our egos, it can also be a way of learning to feel comfortable in our own bodies. Sometimes adhering to norms is not a situation of pressure for people. If being typically "feminine" is something enjoyable and natural for you, then gender identification can be a good way to make sense of your habits and likes or dislikes.

EXTERNAL APPEARANCE

An important way in which teenagers express their identity is through their style and appearance. Teenagers have a reputation for wanting to dye their hair and get piercings and tattoos, but the reason that kids do this is not necessarily to anger their parents. While for some people this goal might exist, the essential purpose of doing things is to create some sense of self.

⁸ Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. New York: Knopf, 1953. Print.

And for some people the way to do that is to separate themselves from their parents by rebelling against them. In an article called, "Self-Expression and Teenagers: Common Problems and creative solutions," Kari Lloyd explains to parents the importance of allowing their kids to find themselves through their style: "It's important not to stifle your teen while they experiment with different versions of self-expression. After all, as long as they are not hurting themselves or anyone around them, there is really nothing wrong with their actions. In fact, self-expression allows teenagers to discover who they are and helps form their adult personalities."⁹ Parents and adults see teenagers with funky hair and crazy clothing and think, "oh they're just being a typical teenager. Trying to express their anger with the world." But to a kid, expression through their clothing and hair is a much more internal experience than adults seem to realize. That is why kids roll their eyes when they hear their parents reacting in the way I explained. Because teenagers aren't looking to "be a teenager," they're trying on different personas and identities to see which one fits best.

"I went to a really conservative middle school, and I would come to school in like in an extra large jump suit covered in sea horses and its cut to pieces and its upside down... and I was the only person wearing red lipstick and people would play the game of 'what the fuck is she wearing today?' And I really had to extend myself there. I was already such an outsider and I had like no friends and I was severely bullied."

-- female, age 17

But it is not just the punk or rebellious kids who do this. Everyone is expressing their identity through their choice of clothing, hairstyle, etc., whether or not they are conscious of it. Even the kids who conform to certain styles or dress plainly may be wanting to say, "I identify with this group of people who dress this way." Many kids also use their style to reflect an internal change and try to make people understand that they are associating with a certain lifestyle or group of people.

"Before Oxbow I was definitely dressed like an asshole. But a stylish asshole. It was collared shirts, preppy sweaters, blue jeans or chinos... But I think I just sort of absorbed a little bit of California into me. And just the general desire to relax a little bit more. Like flip-flops. I never wore flip-flops. And I went home and people were like "you look like you're from California now." And I think part of that was conscious. Like I want to look like I'm from California to express that change that was instilled in me."

-- male, age 17

BELIEFS

For most of people, what they believe in helps define who they are. In a person's teenage years, they constantly have to make choices about their opinions. They need to define their religious beliefs, their political stances, and what issues are important to them. For a many

⁹ "Self-Expression and Teenagers: Common Problems and Creative Solutions - Pick the Brain | Motivation and Self Improvement." Pick the Brain Motivation and Self Improvement. N.p., 16 Sept. 2013. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.

people titles like “Democrat,” “Republican,” “Christian,” “Jewish,” “Atheist,” etc., are ways of creating an identity. Some people will actually not pursue a relationship if they discover that someone does or does not identify with one of these titles. But why are we so attached to our beliefs? Because they make up who we are – what we say, what we practice, who we vote for. And we defend these beliefs because we need to be right. Eckhart Tolle explains why we argue to enforce our beliefs in his book, *A New Earth: Awakening To Your Life’s Purpose*: “For you to be right, of course, you need someone else to be wrong, and so the ego loves to make wrong in order to be right.”¹⁰ We debate and start arguments often times to prove our “rightness.” Being right gives people a sense of self because they get to convince themselves that their life style or ideas are above those of others. People get to think, “there are many ways to live your life, but mine is the *correct* way.” This thought allows people to feel comfortable with themselves and secure in their identities because they know that the ego they have chosen is the best one there is.

“If I really dislike someone I know I’ll try to find a way to disagree with them. It’s like a power thing. Like I want to know more than them. So I want to prove them wrong. And I want to be more powerful than them because I dislike them and I want them to be lower than me.”

-- male, age 18

“I mean I know there have been times where I just didn’t like a person because I thought what they believe in was fucked up. And so I made a point to rub it in their face that I had a different opinion. Not that I didn’t believe in that, but I guess I’m just stubborn.”

-- female, age 17

“When I have a strong opinion about something I want it to be known. I am the kind of person who always wants to be right, and I will do what I have to to make it clear that I disagree.”

-- female, age 17

By enforcing our opinions we are creating a sense of “rightness” in ourselves and “wrongness” in someone else. We often feel very close to our opinions and use others’ differing opinions to get even closer to ours. And so we create a sense of superiority through our beliefs. Though the comparison of our opinions, we also compare our personalities, our identities, our egos.

AN ADDICTION TO NEGATIVITY

Through the act of comparing ourselves to other people, seeking pity, and unconsciously creating anger or sadness for ourselves, people attempt to strengthen their ego. Eckhart Tolle describes why this is when he says, “anger or resentment strengthen the ego enormously by increasing the sense of separateness, emphasizing the otherness of others and creating a seemingly unassailable fortress-like mental position of ‘rightness.’” When we feel angry or upset, we tend to like to hold on to those feelings because they fuel our ego. One of the reasons why it is so difficult to get out of a state of unhappiness is because parts of ourselves tend to

¹⁰ Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. New York: Plume, 2006. Print.

become attached to those feelings. We tell ourselves that we are sad and convince ourselves that it's just "part of who we are." We often find something romantic in the idea of being sad. We get to feel like a character in a movie, the one the audience pities, the good guy.

"There was this time when I was legitimately sad about something, but it wasn't nearly as big of a deal as I was thinking it was. And I was sad... and I was walking around outside, wearing this trench coat, I was looking sad, it had just rained, I was just walking around aimlessly feeling sad. And someone asked me if I was sad, and I was like 'no! I'm fine... I guess...'"

-- male, 17

But sometimes people just like being upset or mad. Being angry with someone helps us to believe that we live the "correct" life. Usually when we are upset with someone, we compare ourselves to them in a completely arbitrary way. We slip into a self-defense mode where all we can think of is how to raise ourselves above that person. A common way one might do this is by comparing their physical appearance to another person. If they cannot win the argument based on intelligence, they might resort to these kinds of random comparisons and insults. People also often call each other names and put labels on each other for this exact reason. This sort of bullying and labeling tends to be the reason why teenagers hate high school. It is essentially a large group of kids so anxious to understand themselves and be liked that they create a competitive and vicious environment.

"People like to hang out with her just because she's famous, but she's also the skinniest girl at my school, maybe the prettiest girl at my school, and like the richest girl at my school. And I look at her all the time and I feel such immense... like why is she getting all the attention when she's not even doing anything? She's not even fun to hang out with or cool, but she's rich and famous. She was just born famous. And like that's shitty for me to think that, but it makes me feel better about myself."

-- female, age 17

Comparisons can go both ways. Sometimes comparisons can be incredibly harmful to yourself when comparing yourself to someone who you consider to be "above you." Competition can be very complicated and often involves many emotions. The comparison is always used to form your sense of identity, whether you are seeking confidence or pity, or any other sort of emotion. The other person in this competition is merely a standard or an example for you to base yourself around.

SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

Often times, people use others as a way to gain confidence, create a persona, or prove something about themselves. For teenagers in particular, building relationships can be incredibly stressful. In high school environments, people believe that who you are friends with defines the kind of person you are. In addition to the pressure around friendships, there is also a lot of anxiety for many teenagers around their sexuality and romantic relationships. Around this time in their lives, many teenagers become sexually active, and there are many pressures around losing one's virginity. As Erin McKelle explains in her article, "Five Reasons Why We Need to Ditch

the Concept of Virginity For Good,” virginity is essentially a social construct that we attach feelings of right and wrong to.¹¹ Many teens feel pressure to lose their virginity, but also to remain pure. For women in particular, this pressure can be especially significant. For girls who haven’t had sex, they risk being called a prude. For girls who have, slut shaming is a common response. And so for many women, deciding whether or not to have sex is a choice between these two personas.

Many people have sex to receive a certain kind of self-confidence. In their book, *Why Women Have Sex*, Cindy M. Meston and David M. Buss explain how it is not uncommon for people to compete for sexual partners as a way of gaining superiority over their friends.¹² Similarly to what I explained previously about comparing one’s self to others, competition for sex or relationships stems from the ego’s want to feel better and secure in its skin.

For teenagers, most romantic relationships are used to receive some kind of confidence, whether or not it happens consciously. Many kids will actually choose to enter into a relationship with someone, even if they are not particularly interested in this person, simply because they know the other person appreciates them. It is an enormous boost to the ego just knowing that someone likes you.

“I wonder about my boyfriend I had a couple of years ago, and I don’t think I’ll ever know this, but I wonder how much of my affection for him was me actually liking him, and how much of it was me liking the feeling of him liking me.”

-- female, age 17

“People like to be wanted... I’ve definitely been in relationships that have felt like ‘why am I continuing this?’ and I guess it’s cause I didn’t see any other better prospects at the time.”

-- male, age 17

“I think one of my first relationships started out so that I could say I was in a relationship.”

-- male, age 18

By receiving external affection, teenagers feel as though they are receiving an approval of their identity. For people that tend to be more insecure, knowing that someone appreciates them can make their ego feel more confident and accepted. This sort of feeling is very interconnected with why teenagers often have the desire to be “remembered.”

FAME

The desire to be famous stems from the ego’s need to feel unique and superior. As Eckhart Tolle writes in his book, “the absurd overvaluation of fame is just one of the many manifestations of the egoic madness in our world.” Many teenagers dream of one day being famous. Even if they don’t want the glamour and red carpet, most young people have a desire to

¹¹ McKelle, Erin. "5 Reasons Why We Need to Ditch The Concept of Virginity For Good." *Everyday Feminism*. N.p., 23 Aug. 2013. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.

¹² Meston, Cindy M., and David M. Buss. *Why Women Have Sex: Understanding Sexual Motivations from Adventure to Revenge (and Everything in Between)*. New York: Times, 2009. Print.

be remembered. This is very much related to how we respond to famous people and romanticize the idea of being famous. We idolize celebrities. We look up to them, strip them of their true selves, and create imaginary personas for them that are no longer human. In her article, "Price of Fame: The Cost of Celebrity Influences," the author discusses how teenagers use celebrities as examples. They base the way they create their identities and their idea of the ideal person around celebrities. She explains, "Teens strive to achieve perfection, just like their favorite stars."¹³ Teenagers are so drawn to this romantic idea that they are willing to do whatever it takes to get the sort of attention celebrities do. For some people this means committing severe crimes or murders so that they can appear on T.V. For other people the result could be positive. Maybe this goal might push you to put yourself out there, or work hard to come up with something ground breaking, or go to college and find a way to make an impact.

"I want to make something where it feels like standing at the foot of the David or gazing at the Mona Lisa... and it's nice to have approval from others. It's not something that people like to admit, but a lot of why people make art is because it's really fun to make people realize, 'aw man I really need to do better art.' It's fun to show people up with art. There is this environment that's like you make some art and then someone makes something better, and then you want to do something better. It's like a way to push yourself through competitiveness."

-- male, age 17

But either way, whether you are making a positive or negative impact, the goal is coming from an egotistic place. The media pushes kids to live for a celebrity lifestyle. But why can't we just do fantastic things for the sake of making ourselves and other people happy? Why is it so important for us to have our names attached to whatever it is we did? Because we need approval from others. We need other people to look at us and say, "wow, *you* are special. *You* did something no one else could have."

"We like being powerful as individuals, and it's very impactful to have a lot of people know about you. And when they look up to you, it's as if you are looking down on them."

-- male, age 18

"I've never imagined myself having a job or existing in a way that isn't recognized... I think just being recognized by this magnitude of people that are all responding to you, whether it be negative or positive, is intriguing. And like you feel powerful."

-- female, age 17

CONCLUSION

Many religious leaders talk about how the ego is the "center of all evil." By letting go of our ego we can reach "enlightenment," or "salvation," or "awakening." In his TED Talk, "Lose Your Ego, Find Your Compassion," Feisal Abdul Rauf, a Muslim activist and writer, explains

¹³ BeyondMe. "Price Of Fame: The Cost of Celebrity Influences." *Teen Ink*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 May 2015.

that the only way to be compassionate and caring is to rid yourself of your ego.¹⁴ But the definition of the ego to most religions is more than just selfishness. The ego is made up of every label we attach to ourselves. It is the end to the sentence beginning with “I am...” It is every word we use to describe ourselves, every identification that we use to better understand ourselves. But discovering and creating those identifiers are not always harmful. In fact, sometimes they can be helpful. They can teach already insecure teenagers feel comfortable and confident with themselves.

I believe that the reason teenagers tend to be turned off to the religious ideas is because it almost seems impossible to feel content with yourself until you reach the goal of “enlightenment,” “salvation,” or “awakening.” This sort of end seems unattainable and it often times uninspiring to teenagers. Instead of telling kids that they should live to go to heaven, or find their spirituality, or reach awareness, why not simply ask them the question, “how can *you* be the best and happiest person *you* can be?” What version of yourself would you like the most? What can you notice about yourself that you want to change? How can you be most honest about who you are?

We need to teach young people to be self-aware, not perfect. People will never be perfect, so what’s the use in making that the ultimate objective? Not everyone is the same, with the same ideals and goals. Kids should not feel that self-improvement is an entirely religious journey. I believe that the most important pursuit for every individual is learning to feel confident and comfortable with themselves. If kids start to become more aware of their choices and actions, all the other lessons will follow. Kids will start to learn what they believe is right and wrong just by being more conscious of their actions. Morals and ethical questions will arise from each person’s individual beliefs based on what feels right to them. Instead of saying, “don’t have an ego, don’t be selfish,” let’s start teaching people how to be aware of their ego and selfishness.

¹⁴ "Feisal Abdul Rauf: Lose Your Ego, Find Your Compassion." Ted Talk. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. New York: Knopf, 1953. Print.

BeyondMe. "Price Of Fame: The Cost of Celebrity Influences." *Teen Ink*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 May 2015.

Chodron, Thubten. *Buddhism for Beginners*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2001. Print.

"The Role of Possessions in Creating, Maintaining, and Preserving One's Identity: Variation Over the Life Course." By Jim Gentry, Stacey Menzel Baker, and Frederic B. Kraft. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 May 2015.

"Self-Expression and Teenagers: Common Problems and Creative Solutions - Pick the Brain | Motivation and Self Improvement." Pick the Brain Motivation and Self Improvement. N.p., 16 Sept. 2013. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.

"Because You're Worth It." By L'Oreal Paris. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.

McKelle, Erin. "5 Reasons Why We Need to Ditch The Concept of Virginity For Good." *Everyday Feminism*. N.p., 23 Aug. 2013. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.

Meston, Cindy M., and David M. Buss. *Why Women Have Sex: Understanding Sexual Motivations from Adventure to Revenge (and Everything in Between)*. New York: Times, 2009. Print.

Moseley, Alexander. *The A to Z of Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 2008. Print.

"Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar." Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

"Feisal Abdul Rauf: Lose Your Ego, Find Your Compassion." Ted Talk. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. New York: Plume, 2006. Print.

Blue Jasmine. Dir. Woody Allen. Warner Home Video, 2014.