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Patrick Bond
College of DuPage

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol2/iss3/20

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OUR EGGSHELL EXISTENCE

by Patrick Bond

"To be yourself, just yourself, is a great thing. And how does one do it, how does one bring it about? Ah, that is the most difficult trick of all. It's difficult just because it involves no effort at all."

— Henry Miller from The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder.

It is sad to say that while "being yourself" should and ought to be relatively easy, natural even, such is rarely the case for human beings. Be it our own human insecurities or simply the complexity of our modern society, being true to ourselves is becoming an increasingly more difficult task.

Can any one of us honestly say that the person whom we display in public is truly the same person who we are in the solitude of our own home?

I don't think so.

Rather, like actors in the theater we regularly put our masks on — each one uniquely suited for our many diverse human relationships.

In our seemingly schizoid existence we are husband or wife father or son, daughter, brother or sister, student or teacher, employee or employer and so on. The roles obviously are different and oddly enough so too are the characters.

Think about the self which you present to your close friends. How does that "self" compare with the self which you allow your boss to see?

Is there not a vast difference?

Why?

Perhaps it is because we feel that our true self (if indeed we are able to discern it from the many we show) is somehow insufficient.

We feel as though we are expected to live up to the social norms in our various activities. In order to compensate for doubts in our own ability to fulfill these expectations we assume various roles. Roles which we perceive to be better suited for a given situation.

We, as human beings, strive to live up to those standards which society dictates. In order to appease others we assume roles which seemingly enable us to attain these standards.

But what are the standards which society, rather man, has prescribed? Youth or beauty? We have a multimillion dollar cosmetic industry to aid us in these areas.

How about wealth and success? Society measures everything from fashions to foods and alcohol to homes on a sort of success scale. Advertisers recognize this stigma which society has assigned to many of our endeavors. This is evidenced by the fact that a great deal of their marketing is directed precisely at the human desire to attain the much desired status of wealth and success.

Professions as well are not immune from forcing us to create an actor for this particular segment of our life. Society has associated certain expectations with various occupations and in order for us to abide by these we must again enter the role which is appropriate for that profession which we have chosen.

I am not suggesting here that we handle all of our human encounters in exactly the same way. To do so would be ludicrous. Certainly various situations require various degrees of attention and intimacy on our part. But genuine attention and intimacy not that which society has prescribed for this particular situation. We should utilize the different aspects of our personality rather than adopting contrived personalities or roles.

FRIENDS

I've always needed friends,
But never had the guts to admit it,
My friends are few, but precious,
But I have friends that care,
It makes me proud to know,
That people really care,
I want to be a sensitive caring person too,
And be able to be a friend...
Like you!

— Leslie E. Church