MIND

identity

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Mind Over Identity

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Preface

What you see when you look in the mirror is all that matters, and your values mean nothing. This is what seems to be our reality in the twenty-first century…identity. Identity has been taught, for many, to be the greatest influence in one's life. What does this mean from our top politicians down to our neighbors who are looking at who we are on the surface without care for what the pages between the covers hold? Power.

If a person is simplified only to what they are, those who seek power can easily control them. Power can be easily gained democratically by grouping people together according to what they are on the surface. Power is not easily gained by addressing an individual's values. Individualism must become what matters most to the collective world by understanding that we are a collective of unique individuals. We can't all get to know each other on a personal level, of course; it would take many lifetimes to do so. However, we could change the way we understand individualism and realize that although we may not know every story, each of them is different.

In a person's lifetime, what they are at birth is insignificant compared to whom that person becomes by the time they pass. A loving mother, compassionate father, hardworking neighbor, reliable friend… These things are part of who a person is and are far more important than what one may be on the surface. These are

features of one's mind, which should be held above everything else regarding our characteristics.

Why must we understand that identity is hurting us? Unfortunately, the majority of the human populace has been convinced that their identity—Black, White, Asian, gay, man, woman, etc.—is their most important identifying factor. This results in thinking with our identity and not our minds, which has been proven to be a dangerous and unprogressive way of going about making decisions. Because of this, many people have used identity to take advantage of the majority of the population. For example, many Black Americans in the twenty-first-century vote for the Democrat candidate in elections simply because they feel inclined to because they're Black, regardless of the candidate's policies or political background. An article from the *New York Times* speaks of the Black vote as a monolithic tool to be used to secure political positions for the Democrat party before the 2014 midterm elections:

> Now, Democrats are deploying other prominent black elected officials and other surrogates, buttressed by sophisticated voter targeting efforts, to stoke black turnout. At the White House, the president is waging an under-the-radar campaign, recording video advertisements, radio interviews and telephone calls specifically targeting his loyal African-American base. "Anybody who looks at the data realizes that if the black vote, and the brown vote, doesn't turn out, we can't win. It's just that simple," said Representative Marcia L. Fudge of Ohio, the chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, referring to African-American and Latino voters. "If we don't turn out, we cannot hold the Senate."[1]

Constantly voting the same way at more than 80 percent for decades in presidential elections is an indication of how identity plays a big role in swaying the opinions of Black people.[2-3] This is due to years of brainwashing fueled by the power of identity politics. Proof of this is displayed by the then-Democrat front-runner and later president of the United States, Joe Biden, when he remarked during an interview, "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't Black."[4]

How do we solve this? We must rethink what is most important and put mind over identity. We must also learn to recognize those who try to persuade us using identity and not allow ourselves to fall victim mentally. Lastly, we must learn to educate each other on the principles of individualism. Living with individualism as a core value and standing up for what makes you who you are is important for our growth. Respecting individualism in others regardless of their beliefs is equally an important part of individualism.

At twenty-seven years old, what has brought me to address this in the world, unfortunately, is my skin color. Growing up as an identical twin, I've always had someone close with whom I could share *who* I was without the need to mold who I was to fit the world around me. For as long as I can remember, I never allowed what I was, a Black male, to define who I was as a person in the slightest. I grew up hearing the usual things other Black kids like me went through growing up in west Dayton, Ohio. From "You talk White" for not using the slang of my peers to hearing whispers

of my twin brother's sexuality being questioned because he decided to wear a pair of shorts that showed his knees instead of sagging like the others. These were a couple of the many arbitrary "Black" social standards my brother and I contradicted in our youth. Many of the adult figures in my life would tell me of the outside world, referring to it as the "White Man's" world, as if we had no place in this world of the "White Man." I have always questioned this and never allowed myself to take it to heart as something that could limit me from being whatever I wanted in my life. Overall, childhood was full of most of the stereotypes for a Black kid growing up in America. When I think back on it today, so much about it would have been different if I was surrounded by people who didn't think with their skin.

The 2008 and 2012 election years were when I noticed my skin more than ever. I didn't start to look at what it was the way many people during this time would. Some looked at being Black as just that—a skin color. Some looked at it as their culture and admired what it has been through historically. Others looked at it as a target for the rest of the world to take aim and direct their hate toward. I, however, began to see it for what it truly has become… a tool. What I was on the outside was made into a tool for those who seek to gain power. Over the years, time and time again, I've seen what I am on the outside being leveraged for political gain or leveraged to push harmful ideologies.

The year 2020 was the breaking point for me, seeing what division can be caused by breaking people into what they are, instead of us being brought together by who we are. Too many people see only

what makes us different instead of asking what makes us the same. We will never agree with everything, but putting identity behind us will bring us together more than ever before. This book will focus on differentiating between the identifying characteristics that make *what* you are and the mental characteristics that make *who* you are. These points are broken into two words: mind and identity.

My identity has been that of a Black male in America. The issues of identity, from my perspective, revolve mostly around the color of my skin. When writing about identity and the effect it has on society, I would hope that it's obvious that this motivation for my writing could be shared with anyone who has witnessed their identity misused, whatever it may be.

Identity is important, as it gives us something to look into, such as our ancestry. Looking at what life was like for those who share similar characteristics is, subjectively, an interesting thing to do. What we are is interesting for those that plan on looking back on history and studying past humans and behaviors. This only works looking backward and doesn't work looking into the future of a person in the modern era. A person cannot predict the future actions of people that share an identity trait based on the actions of those in the past with said trait. A person's mind, on the other hand, is unique to that individual and can't be given any scientific definition or referenced in any way besides using that person's name.

The mind consists of a person's values, choices, opinions, perceptions, knowledge, and many other personality traits. The

only way to label these ever-changing variables is by using one's name. Why is using one's name so important for this book on mind and identity? To avoid using any generalizations when referencing people. Generalizations are fuel for the divide and are only used for either those that seek to divide or are too simple to look past the surface. When we learn to value our individualism, we learn to see and respect it in others. When we put our minds first, our identity can't be used against us.

Part 1: Identity

What do we see when we look into the mirror? Black, White, male, female, old, young, maybe something in between these. Many of us are taught that these characteristics are the most integral part of *what* makes us, us. This is arguably true as if we needed to identify a stranger, we would be bound to use visual traits to describe who we were referring to. When asked what a person looked like, our descriptions would be based on variables we saw, such as their sex.

Identity is such a broad word, as it can often now be defined in complex ways by labeling personality traits into an identifying word. From sexual preferences to religious beliefs, we've come up with an identity to label many things about the person we see when we look in the mirror. Unfortunately, while this may seem like a harmless human social behavior, it can be studied and used against us. Identity, within this writing, will cover both superficial identity (literal characteristics we see in the mirror) and non-superficial identity (personality traits). When one of our personality traits consumes too much space in our mind, its role in our lives becomes similar to that of a superficial identity trait. This can be found in the study of *social identity theory*, which explains the interaction between personal and social identity.

Social categorization refers to the tendency of people to perceive themselves and others in terms of particular social categories—that is, as relatively interchangeable group members instead of as separate and unique individuals.[5]

When those who wish to gain power address the masses with an identity trait with statements we've heard before, such as "I'm the candidate for the LGBTQ community," or, "I support those in the Black community," they are using our identities to gain power and don't have to answer for the actual policies they will implement or the ones they fail to. We have been taught to see identity as important to an unnatural extent for it to become something that can be used in advantageous ways. When we come into this world, the majority of our most fundamental identifying traits are determined, and those traits are the building blocks for people to teach a way of thinking with identity, which has negative effects on our society.

Regardless of if positive or negative, teaching each other to act or make judgments based on identity will continue to make *what* a person is take priority over *who* they are. Children who grow to have biases based on what they learn and experience are being taught more than ever to think with identity. A top-selling children's book, *Antiracist Baby* claims that "children are taught to be racist or antiracist; there's no neutrality."[6] Those that seek to put mind over identity will find issues with both, as they're based on identity.

When we're born, what we are from that day forth on the surface is predetermined for us with little to no input from us at all. What we

are at birth, although beautiful, is not special. A child who has not yet developed complex personality traits is not able to comprehend these traits in others until they do so in themselves first. Because they can't comprehend identity the way most have been taught to, they have no deterrence toward those who don't share their similar identifying traits. When experiments on racial bias were conducted on a diverse group of children by Katherine Kinzler and Elizabeth Spelke, the results showed that the different backgrounds meant little to nothing to the children.[7] Children aren't born racist; they turn racist when they are taught to be or have negative experiences with a member of a certain ethnic background. Though a morally wrong generalization, people do develop bias and prejudice due to their own knowledge and experiences. Children lack both knowledge and life experience to form any opinions based on identity. Over time, our lives change and we lose this ability and build up a lack of tolerance toward those who don't identify the way we do. Studies such as the Clarks' *Racial Identification in Negro Preschool Children* have shown that as children age, they become more and more aware of race.[8]

At birth, the consciousness of our identity isn't what it is as we mature; we become more and more aware of it as we mature over time. This is natural, as, throughout evolution, many species gravitate toward others that share their appearance. However, for humans in the twenty-first century and for thousands of years of recorded history beforehand, we've been made more identity conscious due to social pressures—social pressures that cause us to believe that what we are on the outside should dictate our behaviors and doing the contrary labels you as one suffering from

an identity crisis. Although what we are from birth may never change on the outside, who we are does. Identity is an issue for a society that looks to define individuals by the vast groups they identify with.

Groups of people (White, Black, gay, Jewish, etc.) all have stereotypes and generalizations that society has placed on them and can be perceived as positive or negative. These can cause many issues and contradictions in one's identity. For example, in America, it is commonly stated that White Americans have the privilege of wealth and opportunity that other groups do not have. If being born White puts one into that group, what would we call a White American born into poverty and a broken family structure? Do we dismiss this person's identity to keep our definition of what they are on the surface by labeling them as an anomaly to our definition of White American? What about a Black American who has had a privileged upbringing, a financially strong family, very educated, has advantages in terms of work connections after university, etc.? Is this person's "Blackness" now in question? This is a valid question based on societal norms saying that being Black is associated with poverty, lack of opportunity, and oppression.

This is where the identity crisis comes into play, as those who do not fit into social beliefs are cast to the side as an enigma so that we can keep identity at the front of what makes us who we are. Rather than question societal beliefs, society ignores those who don't fit into its stereotypes. The norm for society to address Blacks as Democrats show well when a member of *The View* Sunny Hostin called a Black Republican an oxymoron during a

broadcast that would be viewed by millions.[9] We should never put an individual into a box based on our "understanding" of others that share their identity.

There are many people, especially in America, who have been taught to think with their identity. People who act based on what they are, or the identity of others, have caused harm to society and individuals throughout history. We can look at the ethnic cleansing of Indigenous peoples, the Holocaust, slavery in America and around the world, hostility toward gays, etc., just within the last few centuries, to see how harmful using identity can be. All have examples of judgments and discriminating actions being implemented based on identifying traits. A popular way to see this is segregation based on race in America's history. Using identity alone determined what one could or could not do—from not being able to use the same water fountains to being denied educational opportunities, all based on identity.[10] Identity creates winners and losers, often based on what's on the surface alone.

Society has become obsessed with identity, and it is the driving force behind the most important parts of it. From choosing who gets a job to who gets admitted to universities, identity is a key factor in these decisions. The vice president of the United States was picked after soon-to-be president Joe Biden announced that he would make the pick for vice president a woman. During a Democrat primary debate, he stated: "I commit that I will, in fact, appoint a woman to be vice president. There are a number of women qualified to be president tomorrow."[11]

This announcement gained him lots of praise from voters and positive press as identity often does for politicians. Later, during his presidency, when addressing who his nomination for Supreme Court would be, he indicated that the person would be a Black woman, doubling down with two identity traits that work so well. What does this say exactly, besides the point that identity has become so important? It says that those who do not fit into this minority are now disqualified from these positions, which is something our civil rights leaders died for. It also could suggest that on an equal playing field, considering all contenders, those who implement such actions don't believe that those they chose will succeed. Individualism is being pushed to the background today because identity is prioritized by society at large. Employers provide another example of this. Employers are pushing for diversity in the workplace, which, as an unintended consequence, discriminates against any group that is deemed to not help diversity.

Individualism must be hidden, as modern diversity does not apply to the diversity of individuals' thoughts and values. For this reason, many people with strong minds tend to shy away and keep quiet due to the backlash that comes with speaking out against their identity's norms or the identities of others. When it comes to identity, society is intolerant of those individuals who have minds that reject social norms.

Thinking with identity is also the cause of things such as White supremacy and, not so commonly discussed but equally as harmful, Black supremacy. These viewpoints, based on one's

identity and the identity of others, have caused much division, hate, and even bloodshed in the world. When identity is at the forefront of a person's mind who is constantly subjected to information that validates their views, no good outcome will prevail. Many of those labeled White or Black supremacists are obsessed with identity, and the actions that follow their obsession do nothing but keep hate in circulation between the groups. We've seen many instances of Blacks and Whites inflicting violence in the name of their race, most notably in America. Whether violence is being committed in the name of Blacks or Whites, the common denominator will always point to an obsession with identity.

Post-2020, racial identity has plagued the minds of many pushing the issue of race further back than it's been in decades. In New York State, two events clearly show how identity has consumed the minds of people to bring them to cause harm to others. In April 2022, a racially deranged person opened fire on a crowded subway car in New York City. *Rolling Stone* points out some of the shooters' many racial ideologies, such as follows:

> White people and Black people should not have any contact with each other, their anger is building up. Nothing can happen here differently than what happened over in Europe with the Jews.[12]

Just over one month later, another racially deranged person opened fire in Buffalo, New York. His motives were also derived from the role identity played in his mind. Although he was of the opposite race as the subway shooter, there was a very similar way of thinking as it pertains to racial coexistence. In his manifesto, he wrote:

The attack was not an attack on diversity, but an attack in the name of diversity. To ensure that the people of the world remain true to their traditions and faiths and do not become watered down and corrupted by the influence of outsiders, they must be separate. The attack was to ensure a preservation of beauty, art and tradition. In my mind a rainbow is only beautiful due to its variety of colors. Mix the colors together and you destroy them all and they are gone forever and the end result is far from anything beautiful.[13]

Those who look to seek power count on us to illogically use identity also as the source of our decision-making for their benefit. We see many figures campaigning in democratically run countries pushing citizens to exercise their right to vote. Many of these figures count on the voting population's illogical thinking and will use identity as much as they can to influence the voting population.

When we think with identity when entering the voting booth rather than thinking logically about a candidate's proposed policies, experience, and most importantly, our core values, we play right into the hands of the powers that be. When we fail to use logic in these situations, we then have to directly face the consequences of our identity-based thinking processes. Thinking logically when making decisions of importance, such as who will represent citizens at large, is imperative for the benefit of society.

We must, as individuals and as a society, put identity behind us. Identity has and will continue to cause society harm unless we devalue it almost completely. Identity, although usually more than what's seen by the naked eye, as we will see later, is most toxic on

the surface. Traits we see, such as race and gender have nonsensically divided society, causing harm and an overall lack of human progress. Each individual must take it upon themselves to look in the mirror and make a conscious decision that identity is not an integral part of their life regardless of what society says about the matter.

Limit identity in your thinking.
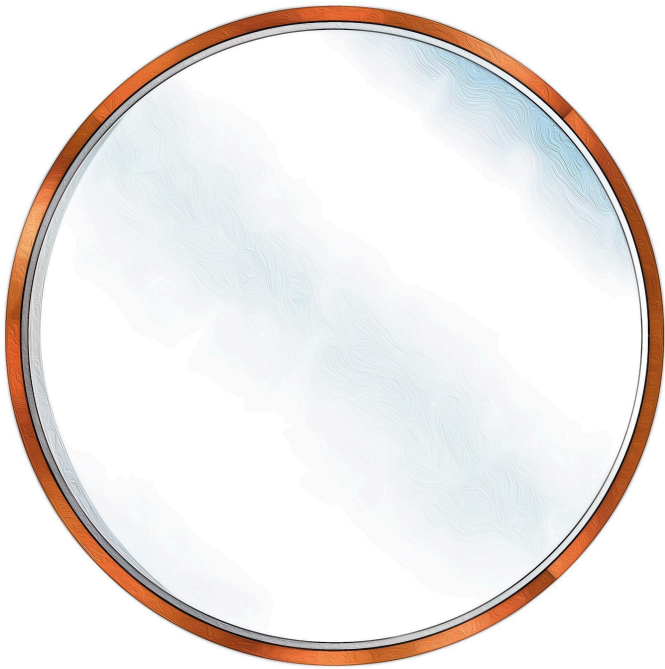
Part 2: Mind

The most important thing in a person's existence is what their mind develops into throughout their lifetime. The mind contains everything we use to describe an individual's character. The mind, which we can't see when looking at a person, is by far the most important factor in that person's existence. As mentioned before, what we are from birth, in comparison to the mind, is not special at all, which is seen by looking at the numbers. Millions share similar physical traits as us, but when it comes to the mind, we are one of one. No two people are truly alike mentally, just as fingerprints aren't shared, even by twins.[14]

What makes up our mind vs. our identity? When it comes to our identity, we can describe it by looking into the mirror—tall, short, Black, White, old, young, etc. How do we describe the traits of a person's mind? These traits are displayed and described much differently than traits of identity. Some of these traits include timeliness, diligence, compassion, rudeness, intelligence, incompetence, funniness, laziness, loving, etc. Personality traits are what we think of when we're asked *who* a person is. These traits have more impact on a person's life than any trait visible to the naked eye. Thinking about physical and mental personality traits you have, which would you prefer to use to describe who you are?

A way to think about the mind for those seeking to strengthen their individualism is to think of it as a diversified portfolio. The mind is a container of many attributes that together make us the unique individuals we are. How much space these attributes occupy in our minds is important to understand. When the space of the mental container is too heavily allocated to a trait, such as our belief systems or those of others, it simply means that these individuals are not using the mind effectively. This over-allocation of one personality trait or another will be addressed side by side with superficial identity traits going forward in this reading. Although things such as religion, political views, values, response patterns, etc. are all non-superficial personality traits that make up a person's mind, the over-allocation of these personality traits is the flaw we'll seek to correct. Attributes of one's mind, such as education, profession, family values, religion, etc., should be prioritized over any superficial identity trait. However, when the mind isn't diversified, a trait that would otherwise be only a part of who an individual is could become their full identity.

Our minds develop throughout our life based on our experiences and what we're taught by others. One that experiences struggle and poverty may develop empathy over time and seek to help people less fortunate. Others may be taught to be helpful to those less fortunate by others, such as their parents. Either way, being charitable is a trait of a person's mind. A person's mind will be molded by their knowledge of the world and what they're exposed to during their lifetime. Nobody lives the same life experiences as another; even when they're similar, they're not equal. We all also have different learning styles, so what we're taught develops our

personalities differently based on how we comprehend information. Our minds develop to be complex and unique, making us who we are far more than what we see on the surface. Who we are and the contents of the mind are not being held as more important than identity in our society.

The contents of our minds are not being encouraged in society, therefore questioning things or speaking your beliefs out loud is something that can be greatly scrutinized. Freedom of thought has been discouraged given that freedom of speech is under attack. What is an idea or belief if we're unable to express our thoughts to the world?

The concern of the lack of tolerance brought on by society, although seemingly at an all-time high, is nothing new. David Wark Griffith was a prominent and controversial member of the entertainment industry in the early twentieth century due to his arguably racist depictions of Black Americans, amongst other things.[15] Although we may not agree with everything that everyone says, intolerance can affect any individual. Griffith faced similar challenges individuals face today, yet many may not agree with his views. He wrote about his grievances of intolerance in his book *The Rise and Fall of Free Speech in America.* The challenges of his time, brought by societal constraints on expression during the time of early motion pictures, led him to write the following:

> The right of free speech has cost centuries upon centuries of untold sufferings and agonies; it has cost rivers of blood; it has taken as its toll uncounted fields littered with the carcasses of human beings all this that there might come to live and survive that wonderful thing, the power of free

speech. In our country it has taken some of the best blood of our forefathers. The Revolution itself was a fight in this direction for the God-given, beautiful idea of free speech.[16]

When someone's mind doesn't conform to what society believes, the individual is put under scrutiny for many reasons. Two we will point out are lack of tolerance and what has been referred to earlier as an "identity crisis" on the part of the individual. Both are brought about because we live in a society that holds identity and our depictions of it in such high regard.

We lack tolerance toward the minds of others as a society, which discourages people from being who they are. People often feel the need to hide their political, religious, cultural, and other beliefs and traits that make them who they are, for fear of being scrutinized and shunned as a result of the viewpoints of others. People can lose their social status completely, from their friends to their careers, based on not fitting into society's definition of what is and what isn't okay to be, and unfortunately, this is already occurring in our world.

The identity crisis individuals face in society occurs when who they are does not fit societal norms based on an identifying factor. For example, being Black in America and voting for more conservative political candidates (often Republican) causes one to be labeled as self-hating and a sellout to their "community." This is the case because many conservative candidates are often Republican, which isn't what society deems a Black person should be voting for. This is odd being that, as a race, much of the legislative progress in America for Black Americans has been at

the hand of those with conservative values. For example, the right to vote as we know it wouldn't be without steps taken in the past, such as the implementation of the 15th amendment.[17] This legislation gave voting rights to Blacks in America and was led by a Republican congress (arguably for their benefits in the fight for power).[18] Common knowledge to many, the end of slavery in the United States was brought under a Republican president's tenure. As to why the monolithic thinking we see today; *Steadfast Democrats*, by Chryl N. Laird and Ismail K. White, detail many reasons why social pressures cause those sharing the Black identity to be politically captive as they are. from institutional pressures to social networks effects on the identity-based thinking process.[19]

A society that has convinced itself that Blacks in America should be voting for Democrats will not accept one who doesn't. Instead of dealing with the logical challenge that comes from seeing someone not fit into the box they've created, they will take a shortcut and question a Black American's "Blackness."

If society becomes more tolerant of the unique minds we have, more people will focus on building and expressing who they are in terms of the mind. Devoting time to developing who we are should take top priority in our lives. Learning to look past identity needs to become the norm in society for more individuals to be comfortable expressing themselves without feeling as if they'll be labeled as someone facing an identity crisis. Putting the mind, who we are, and our character is no longer something optional that we can forgo. We must recognize the importance of the mind and focus on its growth and development.

The mind is what makes each of us unique—the character traits we have and our actions toward others make us who we are individually. People often relate the characteristics of the mind to an identity when it is convenient to them for reasons of unintentional ignorance or to spread hate. When evil shows its face in the world (mostly in places with a diversity of identities), many members of society want to find and point out what identity was behind such evil. Regardless of if identity is the illogical reasoning behind an individual's evil, it is not evil committed by all those sharing that individual's identity trait. We've seen this throughout our media being televised or within our various social networks. Some make comments such as "the usual suspects" when a Black person is the perpetrator of a crime, for example. Another common narrative is of White men being "the usual suspects," many would say, in terms of school mass shootings. Those that would link an identity trait such as a superficial trait shared by many others are wrongfully stating that there's a correlation between what someone is and their mind.

When a crime happens, many who are quick to point out the identity of the perpetrator are those who are under herd mentality and feel the need to say, "It wasn't us." Attributing evil to an identity is ignoring the important role the mind plays over identity in an individual's life and will lead to no solutions.

Unfortunately, many traits of the mind are ignored because society's obsession with identity has mentally blocked so many from thinking about the traits of one's mind, which are more likely

than not much more important variables for their actions. Good and evil are traits of an individual's mind, and attributing them to identities such as Black or White is racism in the simplest form. We must always remember that identity is insignificant when compared to the mind, as it pertains to an individual's decisions. Bringing up identity when variables of the mind should be discussed is done by those who have often not yet found the importance of their mind.

Various traits that make up the mind of an individual can become the identity of the individual if one allows it. Personality traits that a person observes in themselves or those observed by others can take a leading role in the person's thinking, narrowing the scope of the mind and simplifying one's individualism. When something non-superficial, such as a person's political affiliation, becomes too largely allocated in their mind, it will often become as much a part of them as any superficial identity trait. When thinking of the mind as a portfolio or container for all the traits that make an individual who they are, it is important to be careful of anything that may take too much space. Although any personality trait and its developments are more important than any superficial trait, we must still be careful not to allow a trait to hold the weight of identity. Knowing that these traits, when overvalued by us individually, can both harm the development of our minds and be leveraged against us is important for our development.

Every mind is unique based on the individual's allocation of traits we more consciously dictate, such as our education, religious practices, or political beliefs, and those we are less conscious of,

like behavioral traits such as an anger issue that others are likely to observe about us. Although the development of traits of the mind is encouraged, we still must be conscious of a mental trait's ability to become one that resembles a superficial identity in terms of its impact on our lives. A common thing we see when someone thinks with a superficial identity trait such as their sex (male or female) is that it becomes the leading source of who they are and simplifies their individualism. It can become the foundation for every issue they may face. One's belief in something like their right to bear arms in America might completely take hold of their mind, leading them to be as close-minded to other opinions on anything that threatens their mind-consuming belief system just as any other belief can.

There's no way to measure our mental traits, but individuals have rough estimates of how their traits are allocated by self-observation and asking themselves who's in the mirror. If an individual can only immediately think of a few traits that make them who they are, although not a cause for alarm, it can indicate that their minds aren't as diverse as they should be. The most important thing to notice is what comes top of mind when looking at who we are possibly becoming our identity. These traits of the mind are very important concerning their real effect on our daily lives. We can see ourselves becoming extremists of those highly allocated traits to a point that is unhealthy and harms our individualism. When the mind is consumed with too much of one trait, we're limiting our ability to be open-minded, as the over-allocation of our identity traits has left no room for anything else that may interfere with our

preferred allocation. This has now turned a trait of the mind into an identity.

Just like traits of superficial identity, these traits of the mind can be just as impactful if we allow them to be. The over-allocation of non-superficial traits just as political affiliation, sexual preference, economic ideologies, and religious beliefs will be grouped with and referred to as identity alongside superficial traits.

Always prioritize the mind.

Part 3: Generalizations

When it comes to what makes up someone's mind and all the characteristics that come with it, it's hard to put them in an identifying category that will meet all their traits without any conflict. Because of this, those variables are often ignored in search of what can simplify an individual.

When thinking about many variables and attempting to gain knowledge of commonality, it is only wise to work with fewer variables. For example, the ocean is full of many species and animals; there are barracudas, clownfish, lobsters, snails, sharks, etc. If asked what animals will be harmed by pollution in the oceans, most of the world would respond with "fish." This is a generalization and one used in the simplest way. Generalizations make complexities simple. This can help with the speed at which the brain makes its analyses of things in our daily lives. To make things simple, generalizations are just that: simplifying something to the point it can be applied broadly, such as the ocean being full of "fish," although many creatures of the sea wouldn't fit that definition.

In human society, generalizations are a major social issue due to our application of them. We take complex variables and group them with the simplest commonalities. Each mind is complex, too complex to address each attribute that makes it what it is. This is

where and why identity in our society has been treated in higher regard than one's mind. Identity can be used in generalizations. The most powerful people in this world know this and take full advantage of how we see ourselves.

What do generalizations sound like in our society? It depends on who's making them, as they will depend on that person's knowledge and awareness of the world. For example, someone who states, "White Americans are born with privilege and additional resources than America's minorities," isn't aware that White Americans as a population are the largest beneficiaries of welfare programs in the country. According to the Food Research and Action Center, SNAP, better known as food stamps, participants are 37 percent White Americans, their highest single demographic.[20]

Another common idea is that Black people are affected by voter ID laws because they don't have the resources to obtain proper identification.[21-23] This generalization is based on one's false belief that Blacks lack the financial and mental intelligence to go out and obtain identification if they want to participate in a democratic system. In a field report conducted by journalist Ami Horowitz, many people came to conclusions about Blacks based on their perception of Blacks in America. The interviewees made statements about Blacks and ID requirements such as, "I feel like they don't have the knowledge of how it works," when asked about access to the internet as a hurdle Blacks face, as well as "If you're a convicted felon, you're not allowed to vote… and when you look at certain states like Florida, that's a huge population of the African

Americans" insisting that Blacks poll numbers are due to Blacks being criminals?...[24]

Similar to using the word *can't*, when it comes to our social understanding, generalizations stop the brain from thinking. When we give up on seeking answers because we're too lazy to do so or just quick to jump to conclusions, we'll never have true clarity on reality. For example, if one asks another, "Could you hold your breath underwater for more than ten minutes?" and the response is, "I can't," then the brain stops the process of thinking. Their reality is that it's impossible to hold their breath for more than ten minutes. If a person responds by asking themselves how it can be done regardless of the task, the brain continues to think of solutions and the probability of completing the task. The current world record for holding one's breath underwater is more than twenty-four minutes.[25] Generalizations stop our society's thinking process, which ends up stopping us from being able to find answers to our most complex issues.

This is something that can be easily tested by anyone. Take any task that one deems impossible regardless of absurdity; then ask how it ought to be done. No matter the task, the brain will begin to think of solutions to whatever issue it faces. On the contrary, when we state it can't be done, we see that there's nothing else that comes next. Generalizations have this effect on our brains when we address issues in our society.

Many issues here in America have been simplified with identity and the generalizations that come with them. Being Black in

America, we see this is all too common. Black Americans are addressed as such when it comes to issues that have nothing to do with their skin color. Low education and poverty, for example, are not issues of skin color, but life choices by children and parents. If we generalize these issues by saying that poverty or low education are Black issues, are we saying that an Asian or White American can't live in poverty and have a poor education?

Individual members of groups who are of a certain identity are often misrepresented when generalizations are used. This is mostly used in the most basic form using race, commonly Black and White. These blanket terms try to define groups and the individuals in them, creating harmful generalizations. If we looked at someone, who, based on their knowledge and awareness of the world, makes a statement such as "Black people are criminals," this would offend the vast majority of Black people who are law-abiding citizens.

The mind, as complex as it is for each individual, cannot be minimized to skin color, sexuality, political affiliation, or any one identifying factor. Therefore, when someone uses a generalization based on their current knowledge, they project their personal beliefs onto the generalized group. To lessen the damages and the power of using generalizations, we have to learn to take notice when they're used and avoid them when we make our judgments of individuals who belong to a group sharing a similar identity.

Generalizations are used commonly and misrepresent the individuals in the groups being addressed. Political figures, law

enforcement agencies, teachers, and our neighbors rely on generalizations to take mental shortcuts to reach conclusions that often don't represent the best interest of the generalized population. We can fix this by learning to notice and question those who use them, including ourselves. Challenging ourselves and those who rely on generalizations regularly will cause us to truly solve issues and avoid putting people into boxes or boxing ourselves in.

When an identifying characteristic is used to take an action, noticing such is imperative to avoiding the damage it could cause. In America, people of color commit the majority of violent crimes in the country. A generalization that can be made from this is that Black Americans are criminals, causing many law-abiding Black citizens to deal with more scrutiny under the law and society at large.[26] In this example, using the identity of "Black" puts all into the same category with gang members, repeat felons, school dropouts, and other factors that play a true role in the likelihood of committing violent crimes. Generalizations use shortcuts that do not work in human society because humans are individuals.

Noticing these generalizations becomes simple when we put *who* we are in front of *what* we are. When the most important variable to an issue or speaking point is an identity trait, we have to stop and ask more questions, or we'll never get real solutions. These become unsolved problems that will further harm those that share that identity trait. On the surface, Black people may have a lot in common, but we can't assume such based on their skin color.

Many times, those who seek power will address the group as a whole without addressing individual concerns. When we begin to hold the mind over identity, we can clearly see when our identities are being leveraged for the gain of others. Earlier, we discussed that identity is what we see in the mirror in its simplest form. Identity can also be a character trait if we allow it to define us. In the twenty-first century, we see many people who, with all their being, are Democrats, Republicans, homosexuals, heterosexuals, etc. When we allow ourselves to be defined by a word or two, we simplify ourselves to be easily taken advantage of. So when we don't allow ourselves to be defined by our identities, our response changes when addressed as such, similar to being addressed by the wrong name. Focusing on the evolution of the mind and understanding individualism in ourselves and others will cause generalizations to lose their power.

Practice tolerance for others.

Part 4: Identity's Role in Our Society

United we stand; divided we fall. Many of us have heard this phrase before but fail to realize how important the concept of unity is in our daily lives. As mentioned before, what we are at birth is insignificant compared to who we become in time. Also mentioned was that identity even becomes more than a physical trait if one allows a trait such as political affiliation to define them. This is important when it comes to the ability to divide and conquer for those who seek power, as identity plays a key role in doing so.

For centuries, the method of divide and conquer has been used to gain and often abuse power. Political figures historically used many deceptive tactics throughout time to gain the support of millions. During Hitler's time as chancellor in Germany, he had to gain control of the citizens of his country to have the support needed to carry out things such as the genocide of millions of Jewish people. In his speeches, he was sure to make Jews the common enemy with divisive rhetoric to the people to divide and have the support of millions of Germans. He did well to ensure that the identity of any Jew was defined as evil in the minds of the citizens. Konrad Heiden wrote of his tactics to gain power in his book *Der Fuehrer*:

> There are few that remember Hitler's early speeches, in which he set forth how the Jew, consciously and for political motives, poisoned the Aryan people's sexuality, degraded their sense of honor and emotional life, and subjugated them morally by desecrating their women.[27]

With years of brainwashing propaganda, he was able to gain the German citizens' support politically by targeting their desperation after WWI, promising economic growth and a strong government and using Jews as a scapegoat for Germany's problems. Modern politicians use similar techniques but now focus on identity to gain power. They use identity to create problems, then claim they, themselves, are the solution and create scapegoats based on identity. This will divide society into labeled groups, such as Democrats and Republicans. Once someone has successfully put millions into their identifying groups, they can pander and gain their complete support. Many of those who fail to realize that their identity is being used to control their thinking tend to not realize the other agendas they are subscribing to.

In a democratic environment, it isn't now necessary for politicians to discuss how they plan to implement policies, but rather what demographic they will cater to. This allows politicians to divide us based on what we are and not who we are. Therefore, they do not need to address issues in a complex manner because making things black-and-white is far more efficient.

These days, lots of people follow the majority to fit in with current trends. Most times, doing what is socially acceptable means falling in line with the other members of a society one may be a part of. We often conform to the beliefs of others for fear of being ostracized from our social groups. Many of these social groups are based on identity. Most commonly, those members of the Black community in America fall under this pressure. If something

happens to one member of the demographic, all must be affected. For instance, the events that took place in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 sparked much outrage among Blacks.[28] This is bothersome because it was found that the "Hands up, don't shoot," narrative that sparked the growth of organizations such as Black Lives Matter was a falsehood according to the report from the Department of Justice.[29]

If a member of this demographic fails to succeed, it is a failure amongst the entire demographic. If someone dies unjustly, although sharing nothing in common but the color of their skin with others in the demographic, it is an injustice to all members of the demographic. Of course, hate crimes motivated by the identities of their victims should be cause for alarm, as it shows the existence of people who've allowed generalizations and assumptions based on the identity of others to corrupt their thinking. Black Americans have, over time, become monolithic in the minds of many due to years of identity being taught as the most important variable in one's life. Although this is not exclusive to the Black community in America, it gives the most glaring example.

Women also commonly fall under the umbrella of their identity. When issues of women's rights are brought up, seldom does the conversation truly represent individual women. An argument on abortion can be framed as a women's rights issue for pro-abortionists, yet society has women who are anti-abortion.[30-31] This is common when we use an identity trait when addressing complex issues. We're insisting that all women, all Christians, all

Democrats, and all homosexuals share the same viewpoints as the others sharing their identity traits. This grouping together of individuals causes many contradictions.

Group thinking can also be very dangerous simply because the majority of people could be wrong. If we were to ask one hundred people what the color of the sky is, and if ninety-nine people say the sky is green, that does not make it so. If one person from the group looks up at the sky on a clear day and says it's blue, they risk being ostracized. Many times, this will lead to that one person, although against what they believe is true, conforming to the majority. Conformity causes many truths to go untold in society and many unique individuals to conform to nothing but what is socially acceptable. Dr. Martin Luther King has spoken of this issue in society in the past, stating: "Blind conformity makes us suspicious of an individual who insists on saying what he really believes that we recklessly threaten his civil liberties."[32] Either by way of conformity or due to individuals' failure to put mind over identity, group thinking occurs.

When a person votes for a candidate based on what they identify as and what their candidate identifies as, group thinking is occurring. One identifies as a Republican and votes for every Republican candidate regardless of their credentials, for example. The only credential that mattered to the voter was the identifying characteristic. This was very evident during the Obama presidency. Although most will agree that having a Black president was a great achievement for the country, the issue is that many Black American voters voted for him because he shared the same skin

color and nothing else. For one to refute this, they would have to show which other political stances were strongly shared by the 95 percent of Black voters who voted in 2008.[33] This was the case amongst many voters, although there was so much about his character and policies that qualified him for the presidency, which took a backseat to his skin color.

The mind is what makes us unique. And because we are unique, we have our concepts of reality and different ways to address the world around us. Humans are complex. However, when identity is at the forefront of an individual's mind, it simplifies them to nothing but their identity. Identity has arguably played its biggest role in society in the world of politics. The public relations of many of our most noteworthy officials are reliant on identity politics. With a society of people who perceive themselves as individual minds, politicians would not be able to leverage the identities of their constituents. When they are forced to leverage their policies and success in implementing those policies to gain support, society will benefit. This can only happen with a society that can see through the usage of identity politics.

When listening to many speeches done by those in or seeking political power, we can hear the high usage of identity being used to sway the audience. The media also aids many political figures' ability to use identity politics by creating narratives that favor a candidate. Mainstream media companies seem to favor one politician or another and can sway the audience easily by affiliating their candidate with the identities of their target audience. Those looking to gain power prey on the desperation and

malleable minds of their constituents by grouping them into their identifying groups and continuing to use these traits as buzzwords in their recurring rhetoric. An example of this would be when politicians indicate they're the right choice for the Black community, the impoverished, conservatives, etc. Over time, when the audience allows itself to be simplified to an identity, the most basic of which being what's on our surface, these buzzwords are all that are needed to control our emotions and actions. Identity politics leads to no real solutions and misdirects issues society faces.

Causation to circumstances that have complex reasons boils down to identity by both politicians and the less competent individuals in our modern society. Low education, poverty, wealth, housing shortages, etc., have been made into identity issues mainly in Western civilization, but these issues are present in environments where identity is the same amongst most of the population.

In Nigeria, for example, where the vast majority share the same identifying skin color, the issues blamed on identity in the West still exist—poverty, poor education, wealth disparities, and so on.[34] This is true throughout the world and not exclusive to any group of people. Where there are people, there are the haves and the have-nots. Only when people are convinced that the causation of these complex issues is based on identity can it be used against them. Worst of all, the real solutions are seldom ever addressed.

Do not generalize or accept the generalizations of other people.

Part 5: Power of the Mind

We individually have the power to change the world. Throughout history, we have time and time again seen individuals rise and impact the world at large. Many great leaders, inventors, innovators, scientists, etc., have individually changed the world around them with who they became throughout their lives. People such as Thomas Edison, who changed the world with his contributions to harnessing the power of electricity, were born with the same physical characteristics as many others. His vision, many inventions, and innovations that set the foundation for technology as we know it today are what he is remembered by, not his identity.

Dr. Martin Luther King is another example of an individual that made waves and changed the way the world is today. Many would attribute his leadership and accomplishments to his identity, but this is wrong, as only a person with a strong mind could make the change that he did. He showed resilience when faced with many challenges in his fight for equality, such as the bombing of his home, and kept his composure because of his strong values. Murray Schumach of the *New York Times* in 1968 said while addressing many hurdles King overcame:

> Even more dramatic in some ways, was his reaction to the bombing of his home during the boycott. He was away at the time and rushed back fearful for his wife and children. They were not injured. But when he reached the modest house, more than a thousand Negros had already gathered and were

in an ugly mood, seeking revenge against white people. The police were jittery. Quickly Dr. King pacified the crowd and there was no trouble.[35]

His devotion to equality for all and his persistence in the face of adversity inspired millions, leading to the civil rights regulations that have moved America toward unity and equality for all. King's legacy lives on to this day and has set an example all around the world for equality for all, regardless of identity.

Sir Isaac Newton, a mathematician, changed the world with his observations and studies of the world around him. By asking himself questions about why things are and going down the rabbit hole of complex answers, he changed the way we all see the world and universe overall. These individuals, as well as countless others, have made or contributed to great change in the world as we know it. We don't have to change the world, but we can make an impact on the world around us based on the power of our minds, not our identities.

For the most part, the people we encounter regularly do not view us for what we are but for who we are. This is not the case 100 percent of the time due to the many flawed views of society overall due to the emphasis put on identity. When we interact daily with our loved ones and associates, our character traits are of the most value to them whether they realize it or not. Being compassionate, negative, trustworthy, hateful, timely, hardworking, intelligent, etc., are the reasons why people feel the way they feel toward each other. With that being said, these are what all individuals should put their time and focus on and not what society deems they should

based on one's identity. When we interact with other individuals daily, we must ask ourselves what we hold in higher regard: *what* someone sees us as or *who* someone knows us as in character.

Many people grow up wanting to leave something behind—a legacy to show who they were while amongst the living. For some, their legacy is financial stability for their descendants; for others, it is what they accomplished in their field of expertise. It would be hard to find someone who strives and hopes their legacy becomes what their superficial identity was. When we die, others will only have the memories of us and how we made an impact on them and the world around us. It would be an embarrassment to be remembered as only "gay," "Black," "a woman," etc. when people refer to their recollection of an individual.

Humanity has evolved to be the most dominant species on the planet by a long shot. In the early stages of human evolution, we were more comparable to our many neighboring species here on Earth. When we observe the behavior of animals, we find similar traits shared by all species, from survival and reproductive behaviors to social behaviors such as hierarchy.[36] What separates humans from all other species on Earth are our development of mind and our complex mental characteristics. For example, being curious is something that can arguably be shared with other species but not nearly to the extent of human curiosity. Curiosity is a characteristic that individuals have that could drive them to discoveries, large and small, and humanity's overall curiosity has led us to many discoveries.

Throughout our history, curiosity has brought us very far and will continue to do so as long as individuals of the human species remain curious. During the evolution of humans, from our origins in Africa, we've grown to populate the world by exploring new places, connecting parts of the world that without our curiosity would have remained unknown. Many discoveries in physics brought about by the curiosity of many individuals are the reasons we enjoy many things we take for granted daily. When using our GPS systems daily, we pay little thought to how contributions from individuals such as Gladys West and Albert Einstein played roles in the system we know today.[37]

Humans have been eager to fly since seeing birds do so, and throughout history, many have tried and failed to do so, but curiosity was still present until success was reached by the Wright brothers. Since the first flight in 1903, more than one hundred years later, individuals have continued to innovate aviation. All the examples mentioned prior were brought about by the constant curiosity of many individuals over time. Being curious—just one possible trait in an individual's diversified mind—is no doubt more important than any identifying variable.

Too many people today fall under the social pressures that cause them to think and grow with what they are instead of who they are. Unfortunately, many of those who've allowed themselves to be categorized as minorities, allowing others to dictate who they are based on what they are, most commonly happen to fall under this social pressure. If these individuals escaped the box that society has put them in based on their identity, they would be able to focus

more on the development of their minds, opening the door to accomplish great things, large or small. A future with more people not folding under the weight of that identity will be one of more individuals that are open to dialogue, tolerant, and willing to move the world forward with those that have different viewpoints than they do.

Almost nothing notable in history that is socially recognized as progressive has ever been achieved on the foundation of identity. Excluding the use of identity for herd activities, such as hunting for early humans, it hasn't been of real use elsewhere. Thinking about early human evolution and many animals today, identity was very important to survival. When it comes to the reproduction of species, hunting in groups to survive, and even fighting for territory, identity can play a major factor in the success of tribes and herds. The evolution of humanity has seen the use of identity for these reasons completely fade away in most of the world.

When we think about the advancements seen in history, the ones that include identity have been extremely harmful to millions of people. Most of these negative identity-relevant moments were based on two of the most superficial characteristics of identity: race and nationality. Race and nationality have been used to create winners and losers, haves and have-nots, good and bad, often based on nothing but what society deems moral, with morality being decided by those in power.

When societies at large embrace identity as a leading variable in their social dynamics, it brings nothing but trouble in the long run.

Originally, those who look to gain power may use identity to appease crowds and look as if they're virtuous individuals, but their plans usually lead to real issues that have nothing to do with anyone's identity. An example is the many political figures that used people's emotions and ignorance of police encounters in America to be "pro-Black" sympathizers following the wrongful killing of George Floyd in 2020. They created a narrative only to use identity to gain power, whether it be in political office or financial gain through other channels. This power led to rhetoric against the police at large, which shortly led to more crime, and the victims were mostly the people those in power said they represented.

When a group is given treatment (positive or negative) based on their identity, there are always repercussions that are never considered in the short run by those caught up in the allure of identity politics. To the understanding of many, the goal of defunding the police is meant to allocate funds elsewhere to communities in need. However, the unintended consequences of such policies are seldom considered, resulting in negative outcomes for those communities affected. Defunding the police in the name of liberating Black Americans sounds great to some at first, but what about the rise in the crime rate that Black Americans will have to face due to the lack of policing in high-crime areas? The answer, and unintended consequence, is the loss of life of those the policies were to protect.[38] These are the questions that are not asked by those that think with identity instead of logic and values.

Not only does identity bring issues after those with good intentions seek to help based on identity, but those who seek to justify their bad intentions do so by creating a common enemy, often based on identity. Today, slavery is often looked at as morally wrong and even looking back at our ancestors, many of us cannot forgive the roles played by those who contributed to its history. We often forget that slavery has been present for much of human history, and not all slaves were of the same ethnic background. Milton Meltzer explains in his book *Slavery: A World History:*

> The institution of slavery was universal throughout much of history. It was a tradition everyone grew up with. It seemed essential to the social and economic life of the community, and man's conscience was seldom troubled by it. Both master and slave looked upon it as inevitable. How much slavery was taken for granted can be judged from the absence of discussion in ancient literature. Slavery existed in every society as a vital part of economic life.[39]

Slavery in the Western world, for the most part, has always existed largely because of the role identity has played in history. Who was to be a slave and who would be the master have often been determined and even morally justified based on the identities of those winners and losers in the power dynamic. Identity's role in slavery justified the practice under conditions brought by social stratification. Without the power of identity, many societies could not successfully implement slavery, being that dividing people based on their complex individualism would be unfeasible.

Segregation in the United States was an example of how identity affects our social dynamic on its most superficial level. Although

these examples are clearly understood as wrong today, we cannot miss the point of what they represent. Using identity as the basis of action is wrong regardless of the implemented policy. Segregation is segregation whether it says who can or cannot drink from a water fountain based on race or who can or cannot attend a college class based on their political belief.

When we put our minds before our identity, we can respect the individualism of those around us, not making the same mistakes as those in the past who did the opposite. Identity politics in society has excluded entire groups composed of unique individuals, based on one or a small collection of their identifying variables, from participating in a society that could be more tolerant. For centuries, those members of the homosexual community felt excluded from society in America due to society's treatment of them based on their identity. The past treatment of homosexuals in the military, for example, shows how harsh society can be on those it doesn't approve of. The military wasn't accepting homosexuals during the need for manpower for the Vietnam War. And those who claimed to be homosexual needed to show proof of such with sworn statements. Randy Shilts' *Conduct Unbecoming* details the issue with these practices:

> The catch, of course, was that in forty-nine of the fifty states confessing to a homosexual act also meant confessing to a felony, one that is sometimes punishable by twenty years in prison. When publicly pressed to state its policy on admitting gays, the Defense Department asserted that it would not allow homosexuals to serve because, as Colonel M. P. DiFusco wrote at the time, "The presence of homosexuals would seriously impair discipline, good order, morals and the security of our armed forces"[40]

Over the years, the social dynamic has changed, but the world still has far to go in this regard. Generalizations accepted by a society that puts identity at the forefront of their decisions hurt individualism, causing individuals to conform to the masses, who dictate what is acceptable in an identity-based society. When individuals conform to society's standards of what's "normal," individuals are often pressured to suppress who they are. Conforming to what society at large deems acceptable harms the individual by restricting their ability to express themselves, as well as society, due to the lack of dialogue that is never brought forth through such expression. We could see this in homosexuals that are considered on the "down low."[41] Given that society was unwilling to allow the self-expression of homosexual individuals, society at large delayed the understanding that sexual differences shouldn't divide us.

It will take lots of time and education to live in a society formed by people who put the attributes of their minds before their identity. For that, we must focus on our individualism and how we build who we are daily. All we do, from the way we treat those around us to the contributions or lack thereof to the world, shape our perceived character. The mind is much more powerful than any identifying trait, and understanding one's mental importance should lead to respecting the mental importance of other individuals.

Understanding individualism in those around us will create a society where individuals are comfortable expressing who they are.

The mind, for many, has been boxed in by social pressures, and we cannot allow ourselves to be part of what keeps the box sealed. A society of individuals that sees others as individuals without taking the shortcuts identity allows us to take is a society where one cannot be defined by what others see on the surface.

Question society's conventional ideas.

Part 6: Individualism Under Fire

Being a unique individual with many complex characteristics that make up one's mind is under constant pressure and constraint by a society ruled by identity. Many variables affect someone's ability to express themselves; what is or isn't considered appropriate speech, what action is moral or immoral, and what information is trustworthy or deemed misinformation, are amongst other variables often based on identity by those in positions of influence.

A society with identity at the forefront of its decisions makes judgments of someone's intentions or viewpoints by using identity to take shortcuts in logic to delegitimize one's individualism. A popular example of this is the "race card" in which many people blame an outcome on racism to skip taking any accountability or looking into actual causes. This is also true when society uses political affiliation or any other convenient attribute of someone as an identity factor to avoid further thought into an individual's opinions or actions. Examples of this are seen daily when people completely ignore one another based on the fact that they don't vote the same way during elections. This lack of tolerance leads to ignorance on both sides based on an identity trait we've decided can't be looked past. By doing so, we miss out on information from another individual's perspective.

To grow as individuals, we must gain the ability to tolerate other individuals. The lack of tolerance people see from each other daily is what causes things such as "cancel culture" to sprout into existence in the modern era. At the end of the day, society determines what is right and wrong. However, the fact that society can embrace intolerance so much shows how prevalent groupthink has become. A major issue with this is that society at large isn't controlled by the masses, but is truly controlled by those with the influence to create narratives to further their agendas.

The media is mostly in the hands of a very small minority of entities, meaning that the majority of people are simply subject to the whim of the minority when it comes to their social standards. A small number of companies own ninety percent of our media outlets.[42] Identity is a key tool for these entities to mold the minds of the masses to control society. This wouldn't be possible in a society that has put the attributes of the mind before identity.

Individuals are more prone to comply with things they don't believe in or keep their opinions to themselves due to the lack of tolerance we have developed toward anything contrary to what we believe. Without the ability to tolerate individualism in others, we cannot truly say that our own individualism is of any significance. Being tolerant of others doesn't mean that we must agree with other individuals' character attributes that make them who they are; however, we must respect that they have their own independent ways of thinking and behaving.

Each of us has unique perspectives on reality brought about by our unique current and past circumstances. With this in mind, it's only obvious that no two individuals are alike in every facet of their being. It has become the norm to be close-minded to other perspectives, given that identity has become such a mental roadblock. During the Obama presidency, many people ignored anything positive he stood for because they couldn't stand the fact that he was Black. Even if they had common interests or agreed with something fundamentally, some people just could never get past that the president was Black.[43-44]

This also was the case with many other presidential policies throughout history; oftentimes, the political party is the identifying variable that causes the mental roadblock. When a policy is presented to either a Democrat or Republican, and the policy is coming from the opposing party, the other party usually does not look past party lines and often chooses to remain ignorant of the new information.

These examples of intolerance can also be seen daily in our average citizens. The inability to tolerate the perspectives of others to the point that those alternative perspectives remain unheard and even unexpressed is not progressive for humanity in the slightest. Regardless of if it is our top elected officials or our neighbors, we must learn to be more tolerant of alternative viewpoints and be open to disagreeing with others without throwing them to the wolves socially.

As a society, the lack of tolerance has reached new heights, to the point that when someone steps out of the line drawn by those few with influence, the masses "cancel" that individual. This "cancel culture" is applied in many different ways and is implemented by the masses' ever-changing standards of morality.

Being that public opinion is often non-organic, victims of cancel culture are often targeted by those with societal influence. When the trends start and the endless coverage of what "wrong" someone has done to societal norms begins, we are seldom presented with objective information. Society decides what's right and what's wrong, and when the reality for the masses is controlled by a minority of the powerful, we become their army of blind soldiers.

One day, someone can be scorned for expressing who they are the wrong way; the next day, another person can be scorned for not agreeing with how someone expresses themselves. The fear of being socially exiled keeps individuals from being who they really are and instead toeing the line of acceptance. This isn't exclusive to any one place around the world, as it's human nature to want to be part of society. Being exiled has been a form of punishment going back to the beginning of human history. So it's only natural that one would want to avoid this fate.[45] We must ask ourselves if we would want to face exile if society at large didn't agree with a characteristic of our minds. Our opinions, ways of living, mistakes, ideologies, religions, philosophies, etc. are all subject to ridicule based on what society at large deems acceptable.

Morality is constantly changing based on what society at large deems tolerable. Things that seem completely immoral to us today within our society have not always been morally wrong, nor have they ever been considered immoral to every society around the world. For example, the age of consent in most Western civilizations is eighteen, yet when you look at other places in the world, that number is as low as eleven.[46-47] This may be a tough pill to swallow for many, but what this shows is that morals are based on society and not up to us individually to decide what's right or wrong.

There is little issue with this process when it's an organic decision that most members of a given society can agree upon over time and through further education. Unfortunately, when it comes to the societal judgment of morality, those who look to gain power have manipulated the masses of people to control what society sees as right or wrong and harm individualism for their own gain. When it comes to reaching their own goals, not much is off the table for those with influence. The media we consume is used as a medium between those with agendas and the masses that are needed to agree with these agendas for their implication to work. This has become very easy to achieve for those with influence over the media, backed by their use of identity-based rhetoric.

Identity has become the media's focal point regarding how it relates to many of the most complex issues that face societies. These issues often have nothing to do with any identity at all. However, in a society that puts identity over mind, that is all that's needed to explain most issues with little to no questions being

asked by the audience. The media, be it what we see on television, hear on the radio, or see through our many social networking applications, are all tools that can be used by those with the influence to do so. These media tools are used to push agendas by emotionally captivating the audience using rhetoric centered around identity to take advantage of society's overvaluation of it. For example, consider issues such as climate change, which has many complex variables when it comes to why policies can go one way or another. The media can be used to sway the audience in either direction by saying something as simple as "the opposing policy is racist" without giving any logical explanation for the claim. As strange as relating climate change to race relations may sound to some, it has been done.[48-50] To move the audience by triggering their emotions, race has been brought into many conversations that seem to have no relation. Similar to climate change's relationship with race relations, many other issues can be related to just about any other identity—when the audience doesn't question the information they're provided.

Ask questions, even when you won't like the answer.
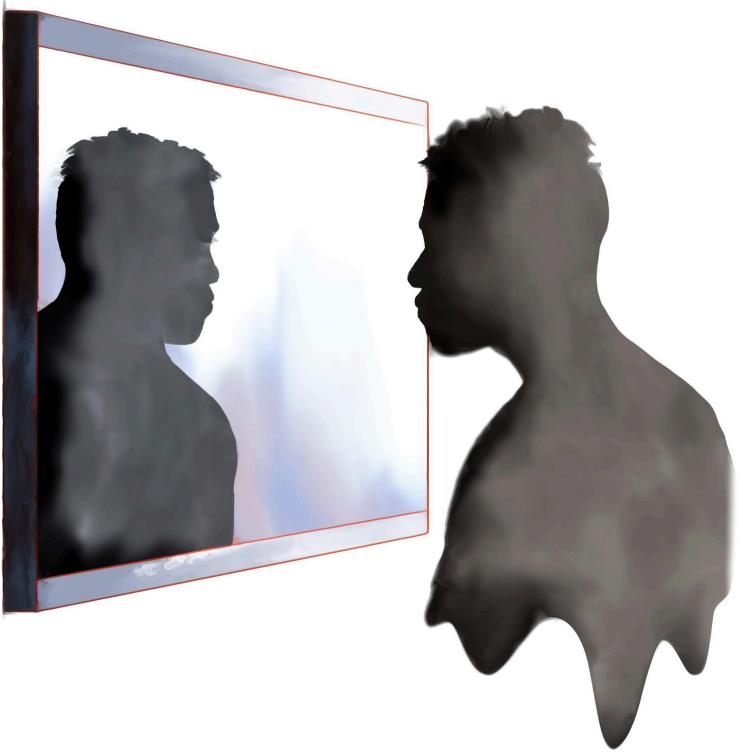
Part 7: Navigating Through Persuasive Techniques

Lessening the role that identity plays in our lives will take work on the part of every individual that wishes to put their mind first. Working on the development of who we are instead of focusing on what's in the mirror is a vital step toward putting identity behind us. We also must learn to see how identity is being used in the world by learning how to recognize when it's being leveraged against our logical ways of thinking.

When we stop and objectively listen to our sources of information, we will notice a common trend. Regardless of which side of a particular argument the source has a bias toward, the same tactics are used in their delivery of information, attempting to discredit the opposition, the tone that triggers particular emotional resonances, and, yes, the constant usage of the identities they feel will move their audiences. Gaining our emotional attention is important, as it often results in irrational responses. Experiments conducted by contributors to the National Library of Medicine found the following:

> The emotions of an individual have an effect on reasoning performance independent from task content. In particular, a negative emotion resulted in a lower falsification index meaning that participants in a negative emotional state were more likely to deviate from logical norms.[51]

Learning the most common tactics used by those with influence to raise an emotional and not logical response from their audience is integral to ending their ability to continue to leverage identity against the population. Emotionally triggering words and phrases, moments in history, isolated events blown out of proportion, and divisive rhetoric can all be cast aside when we use logic. Without logic, we will be continually swayed one way or another by biases however those in power see fit.

Recognizing when identity is being used by the media, politicians, or anywhere there is a chance for power to be gained on the back of public opinion is necessary for a progressive society. Most commonly in the twenty-first century, we often hear variations of racism, classism (one could make their financial status and define them like anything else), etc. spewed from our various devices as variables to all of the world's problems. These identity-based scapegoats are very convenient for those with influence when addressing an identity-obsessed society. Not only do they forgo discussion of logical thoughts they have toward topics they claim to be addressing, which would put them at risk of appearing incompetent, but they also gain favor for whichever identifying group they please by doing things such as vilifying another given group. For example, when classism is used, often, two identities are created: the rich and the poor. The goal is to blame the plight of every individual sharing an identity trait, such as being poor, on a simple identity-based variable so that no one must do any real thinking.

An individual's financial circumstances have many real causes that have real solutions. The area one lives in may have lost jobs due to expenses being too high for employers from a past-implemented government policy. Maybe it's due to the lack of one's completed education compared to others in a competitive job marketplace that causes an individual to be overlooked, causing financial hardship.

There are many factors at play when it comes to an individual's financial circumstances, but why think about what those could be when it can be simplified by saying, "You struggle every day because of the greedy rich." We need to see the oversimplification of issues as red flags and give things more thought. This is especially true when the oversimplification involves an identity trait that is superficial, such as race, age, sex, etc. These need to be looked at as buzzwords for those wishing to see through the identity-based rhetoric and think of things from a logical perspective. When superficial or other identity traits (such as religion, political party, nationality, and others) are being used as causation to paint the victims of a given issue, we must ask why and how these talking points were brought to be. If we do not ask questions and think logically, we will continue to be at the whim of the biases we consume every day.

Asking ourselves questions about what information we consume will cause our brains to think about said information in a more complex way. As mentioned before, when we are faced with a task and use the word "can't," the brain stops at that point. However, when we ask ourselves *how*, our brain begins to think of solutions to see the task through. This concept remains true with solutions

based on identity. When an identity factor is used as causation for a given outcome, we must first ask ourselves, "Why else?" We will often find that identity has little or nothing to do with the given issue at hand. When we do this, we will avoid unconsciously adopting the biases intended by those with influence.

Going with the herd is not always the correct thing to do. Unfortunately, in a society that is so easily persuaded, the vast majority goes in whichever direction they're told without question. More often than not, the leaders of these herds tend to be wrong. The blind will walk off the same cliff their leader does.

Asking more questions about the information that we're presented with daily through various mediums will help us make decisions for ourselves instead of blindly following those around us who fail to do the same. By asking questions about the information we're provided every day, we're opening our minds to more information we were unaware of before to help us best formulate our opinions. Educating ourselves during our process of finding true answers to many issues we face in society will not only help us individually but also show others that they too can think beyond the information provided to them.

Part of asking questions about the information that's provided to us is objectivity. We all have our biases for one reason or another, but failing to look at things from the opposite perspective is willingly being ignorant about information because it could potentially harm our preferred views. One way to do this is by playing devil's advocate. Doing this helps to not only look at things from the

opposite side but also to learn what logic goes behind the opposing viewpoint. Using this newfound information, one can test how well their own preferred opinion stands up to the opposite opinion to help them make a logical decision rather than an emotional decision.

Being objective in a society where all its members are headed in the same direction isn't easy, as opposing opinions aren't always put in front of us, intentionally or unintentionally. It will be up to individuals to critically think about information and society's actions and ask themselves additional questions that, to their knowledge, are yet to be asked. Asking questions has, throughout human history, brought many discoveries and changes for mankind. A society where asking questions is not encouraged is a society that frowns on individualism.

We live in a society that follows trends more than ever, and these trends change sporadically, thanks to the vast amount of information available to us. Oftentimes, these trends are set by those with influence over the variety of sources of information we have at our fingertips. These trends also often discourage individuals from questioning a trend's validity or going against the crowd. Thanks to the strength of herd mentality, these trends are followed as those with influence see fit without question because individuals are afraid of being exiled.

When it comes to pop culture, we need to start asking ourselves why exactly something is popular. Is this thing trending because people are actually interested, or is it trending because it was put in

front of us by those with influence to achieve their objectives? Also, does popular opinion align with our core values? Sometimes when asking ourselves these questions, we will begin to realize that on a micro level, many aspects of pop culture harm individualism, whether that be our own or that of others.

Many things we consider trendy, unfortunately, are not due to society's organic interest in a given trend or another. Even the concept of breakfast being "the most important meal of the day" is not true. It wasn't until the twentieth century that many food giants were eager to increase profits by increasing the consumption of food purchased by customers. To do this successfully over the course of many decades, rhetoric has been pushed to make people believe that the human body needs breakfast, especially cereals, every day to have a healthy diet. Olga Oksman's article, *How lobbyists made breakfast 'the most important meal of the day* states:

Our reverence for breakfast is actually relatively recent. Before the late 19th century in the US, breakfast didn't have any particular importance ascribed to it. But all that was changed by a small group of religious fanatics and lobbyists for cereal and bacon companies..[52]

Using the same methodology, those with influence can manipulate human behavior toward whatever agendas they have at the time. An individual can choose to research the requirements for a healthy lifestyle for the human body and see that pop culture has been wrong about nutrition for decades.

Asking questions about why this is so popular would have easily halted society's belief of needing three meals to remain healthy and arguably would have left society healthier given that overconsumption of food has led much of the Western world to be overweight.[53] Here pop culture was influenced by a corporate agenda to increase profits. Without asking ourselves questions about why something in particular is popular, we will be continuously subjected to this type of manipulation. Political agendas are often pushed the same way, and if we're not careful, these agendas will impact our lives much worse than gaining some weight.

Oftentimes, many of us don't give enough thought to what our core values are because we live in a society that puts identity over mind. Who we are as individuals is highly influenced by what we consider as our core values. These things are for us to decide individually. An example of pop culture influencing a core value would be our views of one's freedom of choice. Individual liberty has been considered a human right in the majority of the Western world. Many inhabitants of Western civilizations would say that they believe in individual liberty to the core.

Over the years, following the outbreak of the virus known as Covid-19, many methodologies have been used by those with influence to control the populace. The reaction to the virus exposes core values or the lack thereof of the individuals in these societies. We saw identity become a factor when it came to the beliefs shared by the members of society.

The basic concepts of identity politics were used to divide society—masked versus unmasked, vaccinated versus unvaccinated—arguably done to distract and divide society to make it easier to control based on proven methodologies. The emotion of fear played a huge role in this divide that could have been avoided if people looked for more information outside of what was being given to them. This fear tactic was done intentionally by those with control of our information. The Department of Health and Human Services decided to use human psychology by implementing fear to get people to see things their way.[54-55]

When it comes to core values, freedom of choice has been debated in the past with regard to other topics. When it comes to the complex topic of abortion, many people claim that they are pro-choice. Pro-choice means they think that an individual has the right to choose what they do with their own body. However, many of the same individuals turned around and displayed distaste for those who made a choice not to be vaccinated against the coronavirus if they didn't feel the need to do so individually. Many politicians saw this issue of abortion as an attack on women's human rights.[56] The mayor of New York City considered legislation that prevents a woman's choice from stripping them of their rights.[57] The same mayor, when it came to the issue of vaccination status, took that choice away from citizens by mandating what he felt they should do with their bodies.[58]

This conflict shows that an individual was never pro-choice at their core, only pro-abortion, because if pro-choice was a core value of

an individual, then they would question society's enforcement of the contrary regardless of how they feel about the issue at hand. As stated before, when we put mind over identity, we have to grow to respect the individualism of others if we expect our individualism to be respected.

Using identity traits as a persuasive technique to sway an audience is not new to those with influence. They use their choice of identity traits to emotionally captivate their audiences, causing them to think of nothing else besides that identity trait. When something happens to an individual that shares an identity trait that could be useful to those with influence, they will continue to use it as a catalyst for their agendas until the day their audience puts their minds over their identities. The Lazaruses write in their book Passion and Reason:

> When an emotion is very strong, it may also lead us to disavow the realities of a situation by denial. This is an important form of coping. If we want very much to believe something, we may believe it in spite of evidence to the contrary. In so doing we might be trying to make ourselves feel better in the short run, but pay dearly for the disavowal of reality in the long run.[59]

In the Western world, race is most commonly used as a tool to trigger the population's emotional response to a given situation. Narratives are then created using the identity trait—for example, that of Blackness—to sway the audience one way or another. Situations such as the death of Emmett Till are still used to this day as a tool to target and manipulate the entire population sharing an identity trait.

Most humans of any moral competence would agree that such deaths are wrong. However, when someone can use a death such as Emmett Till's as a tool to manipulate emotions as they see fit, they will do so with no remorse. His death is constantly used to make Black people in America feel as if they're literally being hunted down by those with White skin. Mentally, this oppresses those with weak minds when they buy into the narrative that they are still subject to past world circumstances today.

The Emmett Till situation is truly a double-edged sword. It shows, on one side, how a situation can be used for the political gain of those sharing the same identity. Then it shows, on another side, how the perpetrators of this and similar situations feel emboldened by their own White identity based on how society views it.

In Los Angeles, rioting occurred when Rodney King was beaten and arrested by police. The issue of police brutality was pushed so heavily on Blacks in America that regardless of the causation of the situation, the emotional reaction caused many of the streets in LA to go up in flames. The fact that Rodney King resisted arrest and had an extensive criminal record played little role in the thoughts of many Blacks in America.[60-61] The fact that he shared an identity trait with the Black audience took priority over the other factors in their minds. Many Black Americans were unaware of the other factors of the arrest due to the shadow King's identity cast on the situation. The arrest itself was excessive; however, the issue is how identity affected how the audience reacted. Those with political agendas know this too well and understand that, regardless of causation, they can use identity to manipulate people

who will not look into true causation themselves. The emotional reactions caused much more harm to the communities seeking justice than the action itself:

> The nation's second-largest city became a war zone tonight, with thousands of National Guard troops and police deployed in riot gear to stop the spread of looting and destruction. The casualty toll rose to twenty-four people dead and at least nine hundred injured.[62]

Negative moments in history are kept alive because they can work as a tool to be used against those who put identity before the mind. These trends are not organic; they fan the flame that will continue to burn for as long as those with influence need its warmth. Situations have been and will continue to be used to put us in groups for the few to better control society. The reason that situations aren't let go and forgiven by society is that those who control society would not benefit from forgiveness because they would no longer be able to use identity as a tool.

Promote individualism by self-expression of character.
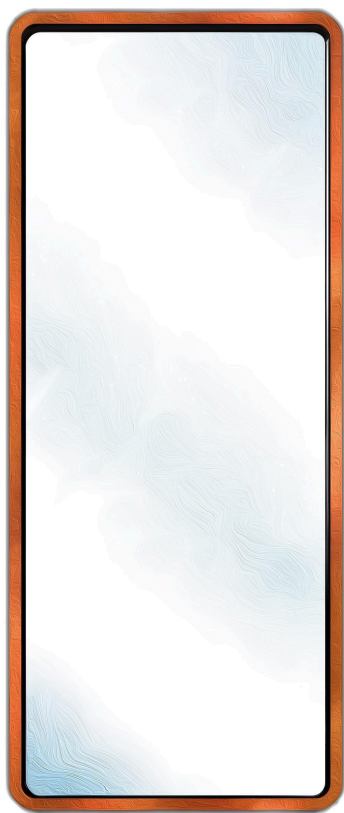
Part 8: Conclusions Based on Logic, Not Identity

Logical thinkers are few and far between in a society that holds identity in such high regard. This is because many of the questions we are faced with in our individual daily lives and as a society are answered using identity as the solution. Sometimes this is done by the influential; other times it is done by us individually deliberately for our comfort, as many of us prefer to remain ignorant and comfortable. In either case, the logical thinking process comes to a stop and we're left without solutions to issues that would benefit individuals and society at large.

An individual who is declined a home loan or another who can't find a job could do many things to come to terms with their situation. They could look deeper as to why they're being overlooked for these things. They could come to find that they're not the most creditworthy person or lack applicable credit history for the desired loan. A person may find that their education or work experience is insufficient compared to those in competition with said individual. These situations can be investigated and improved with real logic-based solutions.

On the contrary, an individual could also use their identity as a scapegoat for their situation. Putting in job applications without

hearing back from any employers "because I'm a woman" will be a sufficient answer for many. Being denied credit "because I'm not White" could help those that don't wish to come face-to-face with variables that might make them uncomfortable. Anyone can take part in this kind of victim mentality. For those who lack accountability, illogical conclusions based on identity are commonplace.

Those seeking real answers to their questions must think logically. As the scientific method causes one to reach conclusions based on logic when stating scientific opinions, we individually must ask ourselves complex questions, make observations, collect data, and reach conclusions about information we are faced with daily if we want to have a progressive society.

Many times, we see issues, varying in complexity, swept under the rug by making identity the answer. In the twenty-first century, often when anyone objects to these answers, they're deemed to have a phobia or subscribe to a negative *ism* or some other way of thinking that delegitimizes their views. For example, when someone questions gender identity and the various roles it plays in society in a way that seems unfavorable to one group or another, they're deemed homophobic, transphobic, and so on. As stated before in earlier sections, this stops the brain's thinking process dead in its tracks. This is also seen when it comes to the issues of race.

When an issue such as the lack of Black people in high executive positions is brought into question, society often immediately jumps

to the cause being race and racism keeping them out of these positions. Again, the thinking process ceases, and identity takes those who accept it as an answer nowhere. Reaching conclusions by taking mental shortcuts, whether it be willingly or unwillingly, will result in ignorance either way. It is up to an individual to become more educated and use logic to reach real conclusions, and this will require us to ask more questions.

Human progression has become what we see when we look around today on the back of curiosity. Questioning information around us leads to innovation and new ideas that move humanity forward. When it comes to identity-based conclusions, given that they are often incorrect, they prevent both societies and individuals from finding real innovative solutions. Many people would greatly benefit from the solutions that can be found by applying logic to a given situation.

Things become clearer and challenges become far less intimidating when we educate ourselves and think about the answers we provide to the world's challenges. Using racism as causation to why few executives share a certain skin color does many things wrong. Firstly, it puts individuals who don't put their mind over identity into a state of mental oppression. They will believe that they are kept from achieving high career status due to the color of their skin compared to other ethnic groups. Secondly, one who accepts that this issue is due to skin color implies that those with black skin are incapable of meeting the same qualifications as other ethnic groups. Giving a group a handicap based on their ethnicity is racism. Lastly, and arguably worst of all, it stops those

affected from thinking of individual self-improving solutions. When people subscribe to answers that are based on identity with no logic behind them, they're creating a continuous cycle of mental bondage.

Learning to look deeper than the surface when presented with an issue that leverages an identity is key to societal and individual growth. When we see an issue that is widely accepted to have identity causation, we must ask ourselves if other variables are at play. These variables are needed to find solutions that will benefit us more than the short-term comfort of finding an easy answer. Many of us have heard that "ignorance is bliss," and there's, undoubtedly, some truth to it. Knowledge is unsettling. The more knowledge and awareness of the world around us we have, the less comfort our minds have compared to one that is in a state of ignorance. Asking questions and obtaining more information helps us to find the true variables needed to reach real solutions.

Is a person's identity the most important variable when we look at issues in society? When we come to conclusions about our questions, is what we are always the answer? Hate exists in this world, and there are bigoted people who we may come across in our lifetime. However, to think that society as a whole is bigoted based on the actions of the minority is wrong. Some people in this world will treat others unfairly based on nothing but their identity. However, one bad apple in the real world only spoils the bunch for those who are closed-minded and will generalize others based on their own experience with an individual that shares an identity trait with many others.

Realizing that some individuals are just not morally "good" based on society's standards is integral to getting over a specific incident and looking past identity in others. If a man is fired from a large company and it is found that management wasn't fond of his homosexuality, that does not mean similar situations are also based on that identity. If another homosexual man is fired from the same company later on, jumping to the conclusion that homosexuals are not welcome at the company ignores what variables could have gone into the employee being let go. The second individual may have had a long-term lack of performance in relation to his peers, leading to him being let go. Possibly due to changing regulations, he was missing a licensing requirement needed to keep his position. These causations can't be reached if one applies past causations to people who share a similar identity trait.

Although identity can be the cause of an issue, society overall has come too far for that to be the logical conclusion we come to when we ask real questions. Putting identity aside, we must ask additional questions about situations, such as our ability to compete in the job market. If we fail to get a job because we feel an identity trait is the reason why we're not seeing results from a job search, we will miss out on finding more logical reasoning as to why we may be overlooked in the job market. We can consider factors such as the type of qualifications other applicants have, how to improve our network, and the skills that are in very high demand in this specific line of business. These are questions that will benefit an individual; accepting that they can't find a job due to identity gets them nowhere.

On a larger scale, education with identity in mind has led to affirmative action, which does harm that goes unnoticed. This practice has prevented those who are favored by it from the benefits of the growth brought about by true competition. Being able to say that you worked harder than your competition to be in the school of your choice versus being there because the school was pressured to give you a handicap based on your identity affects said individual in different ways. Even if applicants share equal qualifications, the process of affirmative action will still create winners and losers based on identity. The negative results of these practices are often faced by those they seek to benefit.

Placing an individual in a university they don't qualify for will lead to the individual's failure. College dropouts amongst those who benefit from affirmative action are some of the highest in the United States. This is commonly due to the student's failure to keep up with their peers once placed in classes that they weren't properly prepared for. Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor have both done much research on these outcomes. In a 2012 article in *The Atlantic* they state:

At the University of Texas, whose racial-preference programs come before the Supreme Court for oral argument on October 10, the typical black student receiving a race preference placed at the 52nd percentile of the SAT; the typical white was at the 89th percentile. In other words, Texas is putting blacks who score at the middle of the college-aspiring population in the midst of highly competitive students. This is the sort of academic gap where mismatch flourishes. And, of course, mismatch does not occur merely with racial preferences; it shows up with large preferences of all types.[63]

If identity-based solutions weren't implemented to affect admissions for the target demographic, real solutions could be made that have long-term benefits. After asking additional questions about why else admissions are low for an ethnic group, solutions can be reached. Increasing education standards for pre-university coursework to compete with higher-performing schools, finding factors that impact individual performance test score standards, and holding teachers and parents accountable for performance would benefit students in the long run. These are things that can only be thought of after looking past the identity-based solution of low admission of a struggling demographic. Real change can only be brought when we find the real answers to our problems. Without asking ourselves the appropriate questions, we will never find the solutions that will move us forward. The responsibility to ask questions about the world around us falls on the individual. Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor's *Mismatch* shows the results of affirmative action from an administrator's perspective:

> A young black administrator who has worked on minority recruitment and retention at universities in the Northeast spoke to us about the frustrations of many students he counsels: "They have these big dreams of being a doctor, but many pre-med students just aren't up to the demanding courses, so they get weeded out very early on and become extremely discouraged." So much so, he says, that many mismatched aspiring scientists and other students at one college where he worked "become miserable and end up leaving. And of those that stay, by the time that they graduate, some students have told me that they don't want the institution to contact them for at least five years, because they feel that they had been used as a poster child for diversity. And so they are just worn out when they leave."

This administrator adds, "You'd be lying if you said that mismatch didn't exist. It's the elephant in the room that nobody wants to talk about... If an institution is just implementing these programs so that they can say that they have these diversity numbers, and they know that they are bringing in kids who are not prepared academically—yet still don't provide the necessary resources for them—then they are definitely doing these kids a disservice."[64]

When it comes to logic, we all have our unique way of thinking. The way we think is based on our own unique experiences and knowledge we've acquired over our lifetimes. The way we've been raised, prior education, work experience, personal tragedies, or any other variables that play a part in our reality impact the way we apply logic to a question. These past experiences, our knowledge, and our awareness of the world around us are aspects of the mind. When we answer questions with answers based on identity, we forfeit using logic that is based on who we are individually.

When we begin our logical thinking process based on our minds instead of our identities, our conclusions are more likely to be based on facts instead of speculations. We must ask ourselves when we are presented with answers or come up with them in our haste if the said conclusion was reached based on identity. Forcing ourselves to look deeper into identity-based answers will cause our brains to use logic based on who we are instead of what we are. We have to ask which answers make more sense if we're to argue our conclusions with others. Would we feel confident standing with our identity-based opinions, or would we feel more confident after critically analyzing information and coming up with logical conclusions?

The history of an individual's identity does not define the individual.

Part 9: Promoting Individualism

We must all learn not to judge a book by its cover. Regardless of whether we acknowledge it or not, we all have biases toward one identity or another. Evolution has put our brains through transformations that are necessary for our survival within the environment we live in. The environment in more primitive times saw our biases take the front row in our minds to better our chances of survival when seeing a certain facial expression of displeasure from another human or a sound of a rattlesnake indicating danger. Seeing anger in a person or hearing the rattlesnake can promote our fight-or-flight intuition, which is a result of past experiences or provided information creating our biases. Biases are natural and shouldn't be apologized for, as we're just victims of our knowledge and life experiences.

In modern society, operating with biases toward one thing or another is flawed. We're no longer as primitive as before, and our ways of thinking have evolved many times over from the point of our more basic survival instincts. When we start focusing on the mind, in ourselves and others, biases become less significant in our judgments of each other based on identity. Our biases can cloud our thinking and our ability to look at others as individuals. This is not sustainable for those looking to put their minds over identity.

Educating ourselves more regarding our moral and cultural history and spending less time on the history of what we are as it pertains to our identity will be more beneficial to us. If we're going to become more in tune with the development of the mind, we must focus less on the history of our identity. This is not to say that history of identity does not have its importance. However, it is of little significance when promoting our individualism. Compared with the benefits that come with developing our minds, spending our time focused on identity is foolish.

Tolerance is key for those who respect individualism in others. We can't open ourselves up to be educated by others unless we are tolerant and allow other individuals to express themselves. Behavior in society that is receptive to others promotes open dialogue and diversity for different individuals not based on identity traits. The goal is to create a society of individuals instead of a collectively-minded society that ignores individualism. It takes a conscious effort from an individual to look deeper than the identity of others. An individual must know that another's identity, whatever it may be, does not define who that person is. With this, we cannot make assumptions about who a person is based on an identifying factor. We must seek to gather more information about a person as it pertains to variables that contribute more to the mind when it comes to our judgments of one's character. Otherwise, no real judgment can be made. Superficial identity, such as a person's skin color, gender, or age, should be avoided when we make our judgments.

We all have biases of identities based on our perception of reality, yet these forms of visual identity traits are the most basic and illogical ways of coming to a judgment of character. As stated before, identity can also be non-superficial when it overwhelms who someone is internally. These identity traits, such as political affiliation, religious beliefs, or any other way of life, can also cause an individual to make a judgment on that trait alone. A conscious effort to question our biases and generalizations is required for us to respect others' individualism by finding out more about others' minds.

For example, many people who practice the Muslim faith have been wrongfully judged by others after the attacks of September 11. In the years following the attack, much of society looked at members with any resemblance to what was popularized as Middle Eastern culture in a negative way.[65-66] The Muslim religion is shared by many around the world with no affiliation to any terrorist activity whatsoever. Regardless, based on the information that people were provided by their many sources and their lack of awareness of the diverse people of the Middle East, negative treatment followed. For years and still currently, many people with any superficial or non-superficial traits of what's considered Middle Eastern culture are still fighting to disassociate themselves from society's perception of them.

Having biases is something that many organizations have begun to attempt to correct. Following the popular demand for social justice for those considered "oppressed" by the many "virtuous" political figures, organizations, and individuals, bias has become a hot topic

in much of the Western world. Bias is being demonized as something that only results in negative outcomes and is rooted in people's inherited hatred toward one another, according to those following the trend. Bias is not being acknowledged for what it really is… which is a completely natural human trait. Biases help us navigate the world in both social and non-social environments based on our knowledge and previous experiences. We cannot pretend that we should condemn or apologize for our biases, for they only exist within us based on what we've been exposed to. What needs to be acknowledged by us individually is that we don't have the whole story and should not rely on our biases when making conscious judgments about individuals.

Making a conscious effort to look deeper than identity requires us as individuals to ask more questions. When we make judgments with identity playing a factor in our logic, we must stop ourselves and seek to know more about an individual. Questions are key to finding out information that will change our current understanding, which will therefore change what our biases are toward an individual, not based on their identity.

Society's obsession with identity is understandable. We are naturally drawn in by things we can observe with our senses. Identity can easily be related to many different cultures around the world. A certain aroma coming from a restaurant can be associated with an identity trait based on the origins of a certain style of cooking. Identity usually can also play a huge role in various cultural activities and holidays around the world. Because generalizing is often inaccurate as it pertains to individuals, we

cannot assume that everyone sharing an identity belongs to a specific culture. However, for the ones that do, it goes to show that identity definitely plays its role in our world. With this being said, identity is still used as a tool by those with influence in our society. Therefore, we must set identity aside and begin to focus more of our energy and time on attributes of the mind. Doing this doesn't mean ignoring everything about our identity; it only means that we should be cautious so that it is not used as a tool against us, and that the attributes of the mind move the individual and world further than those of identity.

Spending more time on the attributes of the mind will bring individuals further than those of identity. We must each ask ourselves, what does it mean to focus on our minds? Focusing on the many attributes that make you who you are as a person on the inside, such as your field of expertise, way of life, work ethic, family values, hobbies, community impact, and legacy after leaving this world, deserves more attention than our identities if we are to grow as individuals.

These attributes mold who we are as individuals and are what we are remembered by. Learning more and developing these attributes can affect those around us and the world so much that failing to give these attributes the time they deserve would be wasting our existence. We could all start by learning more about something we appreciate about ourselves. Many of us, unfortunately, due to the distractions that we consider entertainment, fail to take time to think about ourselves critically. What makes us individuals? What are our interests, and how do these interests affect our lives and

personality? These questions are not being asked to the detriment of the potential of the mind.

These questions shouldn't stop at us individually. Learning more about ourselves naturally causes the mind to build curiosity toward other individuals, causing us to, slowly but surely, put the identities of others aside. Focusing more on the mind causes us to want to learn more about others. The more information we find about other individuals, the more our minds expand, causing curiosity to continuously grow within us, bringing endless learning potential in the long run. Curiosity brings forth question after question, which leads to discovery after discovery. The more we discover about ourselves and the individuals around us, the less identity will become a factor in our daily lives when we see one another.

In the Western world, people are encouraged to overcome societal pressures and express themselves for who they really are. However, many of these expressions are deemed socially acceptable only based on ever-changing trends. This means that there is currently no true freedom of expression, as expression outside of current trends may bring ridicule. Although some expressions are deserving of ridicule, there are others that are due to it not falling in line with current trends.

Gender identity is an example of something that has been made extremely popular, and many people have embraced others' expressions of what's important to them. This isn't the same throughout the world, as many still feel shame and face exile if they are to express what they feel as their gender identity in the

society they live in. This feeling of shame or fear of exile is similar to an individual's muzzled mind. Self-expression of the mind is something individuals must have the courage to do.

There is no freedom of thought if the mind is silenced by societal pressures. Those that put their time and energy into their minds must have the courage to express those attributes. People tend to conform to the actions of those around them. If individual minds are muzzled by societal pressure, then we live in a society that has no freedom of thought as we fall in line with each other's lack of expression. Expression is contagious. Individuals can encourage others by expressing their minds even in situations where they fear doing so. Many individuals are like-minded and will be emboldened to express themselves as well. The promotion of individualism starts with us individually.

Never allow identity to become who you are.

Part 10: The Individual in the Mirror

When we come to analyze ourselves as individuals, we will have to ask ourselves questions to determine who we are and who we would like to become. Our self-analysis is important for us to grow as individuals. Failure to do so will only result in going wherever the wind takes us. That which is measured gets improved; we must consider this when it comes to the context of our own state of individualism.

When we find out what specific characteristics make who we are, such as our core values, outlook on life, goals, spirituality, etc., we can begin to learn more about ourselves and improve on these things, therefore expanding our minds. What we are is something else we must ask ourselves. This will be as easy as looking in the mirror for many of us. Are we Black, White, male, female, or something in between these, or other identity traits? We have to come to conclusions on what is most important when defining who we are—our mind or our identity.

Often, looking at what we see in the mirror is all that's required to see what we are. Our superficial characteristics, such as our skin color, facial features, hair texture, sexual orientation, etc., are things we can see with the naked eye. It's important to recognize these traits for us to compare what we find more important between these and the interworking of our minds. If we've improperly allocated something non-superficial, such as our stance

on gender ideologies, political affiliation, or any other belief, we must also consider that.

Race, with the history of the role it has played around the world in mind, can cause many emotions to arise in an individual. One may feel hatred toward another race because of how one's ancestors were treated by the ancestors of other races. For others, curiosity can also emerge from an interest in learning more about one's lineage. Being a woman could hold lots of meaning for an individual as well. The thought of pursuing motherhood at a point in life may be of great significance to an individual. Also, one could look in the mirror and see a victim of a world where men oppress them, and who might be lacking any logical support for their feelings. This viewpoint could prevent growth by causing mental enslavement to the perception that the world is out to get them.

What is in the mirror will affect each individual differently—some not at all, others a great deal. It greatly depends on the individual as to how *what* they are affects their lives. Do we see what we are in the mirror as a target of society's hatred? If we do, our guard will always be up to shield ourselves or the identity-based motives of others in our minds.

Individuals who look at their identity as oppressed or targeted by those who share another identity are often gullible to see those that look like them as friends by default. As adverse as one is to those they feel oppose their identity based on history or a limited view of reality, they would trust the devil himself if he shared their identity.

When looking at what we are in the mirror, we must ask ourselves how much space our reflections hold in our minds.

Identity can become more than meets the eye when we allow a trait that could be a part of our complex mind to take up too much space, giving that trait the same effect as a superficial one. Democrat, Republican, Communist, Christian, feminist, gender identity, etc., can all consume who we are to the point that it's indistinguishable from our skin for us individually and in the minds of those we come across. The mind is complex and shouldn't be simplified to an identity trait such as political affiliation or skin color. If our answer to what we see when we look in the mirror is an ideology, religion, etc., we must ask ourselves the same question: How much space does this take in my mind? This will help to answer the question of what we are when we look in the mirror.

These identity traits, both superficial and non-superficial, have robbed many individuals of many other aspects of themselves. As discussed in previous sections, this has also enabled those with influence to use identity against those consumed by it. What we see in the mirror is important; what we are plays a part in our lives in many ways, and this can't be denied. The issue is when what we see in the mirror becomes the most important variable in our lives and reasoning. Who we are—our mind—is what deserves our focus. Those that pursue the development of the mind will soon see the mirror as insignificant in comparison to those that highly value the reflection.

An individual's mind is something that cannot be defined. The only way to describe an individual and the combination of characteristics that make them who they are is with their name. Being that no two individuals have the same past and carry the same knowledge of the world exactly, who we are is shaped based on our own unique perceptions of reality. What we consider reality shapes our core values and what we find personally important in our daily lives and legacies when it's all said and done.

Looking in the mirror, and asking ourselves what is important to us, what our core values are, and what we stand for can help us answer who is in the mirror. Something that an individual may hold as a core value is to never give up on their goals. This ambitious way of living will result in facing challenges head-on throughout their lifetime and influencing others who are witnesses to their resolve. When we look in the mirror and see someone who never quits, a person pursuing spiritual fitness, a leader of their community, or a college graduate, amongst other aspects of ourselves, we are beginning to see *who* instead of *what* is in the mirror.

Attributes of our mind are what affect our lives individually and the lives of those around us. Who we are mentally affects where we go in life much more than any identifying trait. Regardless of what we are when we look in the mirror, and if society negatively impacts us based on what we are, who we are can overcome these challenges. Many individuals are outliers to the false belief that an individual who belongs to a certain "oppressed" identity can't succeed due to an identifying factor. More than anything, the

reason we see outliers belonging to an identity group is that those who break away from the constraints of their identity are strong in mind. Individuals with strong minds influence the ones around them more than anyone by living by example and sharing their core values and knowledge with others. When we hold the mind over identity when we look at ourselves, the attributes of our mind can encourage those around us to do the same.

When we put our identities at the forefront of who we are, the simplification of ourselves leaves little to nothing of influence on those around us. The attributes of who we are, whether that is a combination of our work ethic, dependability, faith, knowledge, trustworthiness to our loved ones, etc., are what people around us will remember about us and be influenced by. It is important to hold our mind over identity with this in mind, as not holding these attributes in high regard stunts the growth and development of society and those closest to us who look to us for guidance.

Generational wealth and poverty have been thought of by many as a product of the financial circumstances a child is born into for the most part. However, this downplays what important roles traits of the mind play when we think of economic mobility. Susan Mayer's *What Money Can't Buy* details many of these traits in our control that play a large role in the outcomes of children's lives as they grow.[67] We can control our mindset; we can do little to nothing to change our identity. Therefore, when we think about the impact we have on the coming generations, it is imperative that we improve our state of mind.

When thinking of the attributes that make us who we are individually, we can ask ourselves how these attributes can be improved, if possible. Improving ourselves via attributes of the mind can help us better understand ourselves and the world around us through knowledge, experience, and influence on those around us. Improving the attributes of the mind is something we can strive to do daily, but what about aspects of the identity?

For those who looked in the mirror and saw being a female as their identifying trait or being Black as their trait, ask yourself, how can you improve on this identifying trait? Can you be more Black tomorrow than you are today? Will a certain action make you more or less of a woman tomorrow than you are today? As you answer these questions in a literal sense, if bleaching one's skin or modifying sexual reproductive organs comes to mind, it would actually make more sense than changing any behavior characteristics. Given that the many identities are concrete in definitions, there is no adjusting one's superficial identity in a behavioral sense. However, behavioral attributes can be improved and adjusted, as they're not traits we are born with, but rather traits that we develop and can continue to improve over time. How do we feel we've developed throughout our lives, and is there room for growth?

To broaden our scope of reality and to improve our minds, we should ask ourselves about our previous experiences and the knowledge we've obtained to this point in our lives. Analyzing our scope of reality will help us see where we can improve when it comes to missing areas of our knowledge and awareness of the

world around us. This will help us better understand ourselves as individuals and individualism in others. To start, we can broaden our knowledge of ourselves by asking others about their knowledge and experiences they've been through in their lives.

Asking other individuals about their perspectives on reality can help broaden our own with the additional knowledge we can obtain from others. Alongside helping us see individuals as unique by helping change our perspectives on others, the newfound knowledge will lead to more curiosity for us individually.

We can also expand our minds by pursuing knowledge in traditional ways, such as higher education, whether that be via university or simply opening a book from the local library. Experiencing more than what we are used to by integrating ourselves into parts of society that we have a limited understanding of can also help us expand our minds. Traveling to new neighborhoods locally, new cities, new countries, etc., can provide new experiences for us to change our scope of reality.

Our hobbies and interests also contribute to who's in the mirror. Many individuals fail to realize how important it is to know of and pursue those things that interest us. Devoting time to hobbies and interests will bring fulfillment to an individual in many ways. Unfortunately, many have not asked themselves what their hobbies and interests are, resulting in living life and missing out on the fulfillment these things bring. Forgoing putting time into these things can result in boredom and depression, which could lead an individual astray. Those who have things to live for are less

susceptible to manipulation by those who want to take advantage of their boredom or depressive state of mind. Individuals must realize what their interests are and treat them as important as any other aspect of their minds.

Learning the aspects that make up what we are and those that have made us who we are, we should safely be able to differentiate between mind and identity. Looking at the aspects of both, we must determine what holds more value to us in our daily lives and the lives of others. We also must determine what affects our daily lives from outside sources more between the two, determining if causation makes sense based on traits of our mind or our identity and which we feel is most important in our lives. Are the results we see from our efforts in life the consequences of aspects of the mind or identity? Do we value what we see in the mirror more than the unique characteristics of our minds? Determining what's most important to us and officially removing identity from the forefront of our lives will help both the individual and society as a whole move forward.

Our minds are the most powerful and complex phenomenon in the universe. Our minds have limitless potential and can take us places others before us never dreamed possible if we continue to develop them further. Putting mind over identity is necessary for an individual to grow and for society to move forward and not fall victim to the pressures that come with it. Those that fail to put mind over identity will forever remain trapped in the box that their identity has created.

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