

Ever Changing Identities

It is the groups we belong to who determine our identity.

I remember the first time I saw him. There was a flash of red hair, and a piercing scream. His tiny little face was scrunched up. He was distraught by the strange new environment he was forced into. I remember the instant relief I felt when the nurse put him in my arms. He stopped crying at my touch and looked up at me with his perfect blue eyes. I felt my heart melt. He was mine. I was no longer alone.

For a while, life was perfect. He was a perfect child. I was a perfect mother. Everything was perfect. I could not have asked for anything more. We were happy. He did everything he was told, and looked at me through his bright sparkling blue eyes with admiration. Then as he grew older, his attitude began to change.

I remember my first day of high school. My mum ironed my shirt, and I combed my hair. I put on my polished shoes and mum took a photo of me, her faded blue eyes sparkling with tears. She dropped me off, and kissed me goodbye. Then suddenly I was walking into a cage of hungry lions. Every pair of eyes was glued to me, sizing me up, determining who held dominance. They obviously concluded that I was not a threat, and they made this clear at recess.

“Look at mummy’s little boy!”

“Did mummy comb your hair for you, mummy’s boy?”

I went home in tears, desperately trying to think of a new plan of action

I sent my little boy off to high school, and got someone else in return. He walked through the door and stormed straight to his room without a word to me. He slammed the door and wouldn’t let me in. I felt my heart ache. Was I alone again?

I waited till I knew the boys from school could see me. I felt my heart race, and a bead of sweat run down my forehead. For a second I thought of my mother, and almost backed out. Then I remembered the lions, roaring with laughter at me. I slid the watch into my pocket. I saw the lions eyes grow wide and their jaws drop. They looked at me with admiration. Suddenly I was the dominant one. I was the king of the jungle. My chest filled with joy, so much so that I did not care when the security guard caught me. I felt accepted. Nothing else mattered.

I was starting to panic. I looked at the clock, 5:30; he should have been home hours ago. What if something happened to him? I didn’t know what I would do without him. Somewhere between the moment he was born and this particular day, we had switched places with each other. He no longer relied on me, I was the dependant one. I needed him. Where was he? I did not want to be alone again.

I was nervously drumming my fingers on the kitchen bench when the door bell rang. I jumped with alarm at the sound. I opened the door to find two police men. They towered over both myself and my son, who stood awkwardly between them. My little boy was in handcuffs, it was an unbelievable sight. The blue shirt I had ironed for him that morning was torn, but his hair was still neat. There was a slight smile on his face, and something strange was hidden beneath his blue eyes. I remembered when I could read him like a book, now it was as though he was written in another language.

I saw the disappointment in my mother's blue eyes, but she did not understand. It wasn't about the watch, it was about the reputation. I didn't bother to try explain this to her, whenever I tried she would look at me as if was speaking another language. I went to sleep smiling. This was a new beginning.

I prowled around the school grounds. Whispers followed me wherever I went. No one bothered me, or my combed red hair. I was beaming with joy, at least until I got home. My mother stared out the window, she did not appear to notice me come home. Her red hair looked duller somehow, and looked as though it hadn't been brushed in days. She looked at me, through eyes that used to be the same as mine. Now hers appeared grey, and had deep dark shadows beneath them. I kissed her on the cheek, and whispered softly in her ear: "I'm still the same on the inside, I'm still yours. I love you."

Explanatory statement

My narrative 'Ever Changing Identities', was written in response to the prompt: 'it is the groups we belong to who determine our identity'. 'Ever Changing Identities' would be published in a collection of student writing that explores identity and belonging, aimed at adolescents going through changes in their identities. I came across the idea of my narrative while imagining the prelude to Bruce Dawe's poem 'The Boy', which was one of Dawe's poems that particularly stood out to me. I found 'The Boy' interesting because of the mystery it beheld. The boy appeared to be smiling, as if he knew something those on the outside did not. It seemed almost as if he got caught for the crime he committed on purpose. As if he was flashing a badge of rebellion (which also links to Dawe's poem 'Flashing of Badges') in desperate hope to fit in even though it is not his true identity. This is why I chose to write inside the text of 'The Boy', to explore the identity and belonging of the character Dawe created, as well as the reasons behind the boy's actions, how those around him influenced his actions and how his actions affected those around him. I used the multiple perspectives of the mother and her son to illustrate how at his birth, her identity became that of a mother, while his life had just begun. Then throughout his early childhood, both their identities were determined by each other, but this balance was disturbed as the son grew older. It was in fact the mother's excessive smothering of her son, which is similar to that in Dawe's poem 'Americanised', which turned her son towards the fringe of society. When placed in a social environment, the boy was victimised and so forced to belong by going outside his original identity.

I used various linguistic features in my narrative, which are similar to those present in Dawe's poetry. Dawe uses a variety of images and motifs in his writing which come across in many of his poems, such as the motif of the stars, which is present within 'Enter Without So Much as Knocking' and 'Star Light, Star Bright'. In my narrative I used the motif of the mother and son's blue eyes. Every time I switched perspectives in my piece, I referred to the blue eyes of the other character. In my second paragraph the mother describes her son looking at her with his "bright sparkling blue eyes", then when I switched to the son's perspective in the next paragraph, he describes his mother's "faded blue eyes sparkling with tears". I used repetition of "sparkling" in these descriptions with the purpose of showing the link between the mother and son. I continued with this motif and way of linking the mother and son throughout my entire narrative. After the son gets arrested for shoplifting, his mother is unable to distinguish what was hidden "beneath his blue eyes", this represents his changing of identity because of the image he is trying to portray in order to fit in at school. As the mother and son's identities are no longer completely determined by each other, the son saw the disappointment in his mother's "blue eyes". Here I used "blue eyes" as a pun, for not only describing the physical appearance of her eyes and the link between the mother and son, but also because she has become depressed because of the recent incidents. To support this notion I went into further detail of the mother's state; "Her red hair looked duller somehow, and as though it hadn't been brushed in days... eyes that used to be the same as mine. Now hers appeared grey, and had deep dark shadows beneath them." The "deep dark shadows" are again a pun describing the physical appearance as well as the shadows that life has cast upon her.

I used metaphors and similes in my narrative to help readers visualise and understand the concepts I wrote about as well as linking to stylistic features Dawe uses. I used an extended metaphor throughout my piece, with lions describing the kids from school. I began this when the boy first walked into his new high school; "then suddenly I was walking into a cage of hungry lions. Every pair of eyes was glued to me, sizing me up, determining who held dominance." Then there was the start of his identity change. The people around him at school influenced his identity greatly. The boy felt

that he had to flash a badge of rebellion in order to belong. This is why I decided he would shoplift, so that he could be accepted. Yet just before he committed the crime, I crafted the boy to think of his mother and nearly back out, but then remember the "lions, roaring with laughter at me". With this I hoped to present the idea that this is not who he truly is, but the "lions" are what drove him. The final link to the extended metaphor of the lions is when the boy "prowled around the school grounds" after he flashed the badge of rebellion in order to fit in.

I used a simile in a similar way to how Dawe does throughout 'Sometimes Gladness' when describing how the mother could no longer interpret what was beneath her son's eyes. "I remember when I could read him like a book, now it was as though he was written in another language." I did this with the purpose of helping readers visualise how the mother and son are drifting apart, and how their identities are changing because of those around them, and in the mother's case this causes her to suffer greatly. I linked to this simile in my next paragraph in the boy's perspective when he is describing how whenever he tries to explain to his mother, she would look at him as if he was "speaking another language." I did this to again demonstrate how close their identities are, and how they are suffering while drifting apart.

I chose to remain the mother and son nameless in my narrative firstly because in Dawe's poem, the boy has no name and also in order to reflect their identities. A person's name is an important part of who they are, so with the mother and son having no names, this works as a metaphor symbolising how they lack one single, solid identity. Their identities change continuously throughout my piece, which makes them struggle to grasp reality and belong to current society.

The end of my narrative in some ways sums up my entire view on identity and belonging which I attempted to present in my narrative. The beginning of this paragraph shows how much both the mother and the son have changed due to the groups they belong to. The boy has turned into a lion who "prowled around the school grounds", whereas the mother has become depressed and isolated because of how her son has changed. I chose to make the son recognise how he was affecting her in order for him to sum up my narrative. He does this by stating to his mother "I'm still the same on the inside, I'm still yours. I love you." This supports the idea that it is the groups to which we belong to who determines our identity, because the kids from school have forced him to change his identity in order to belong, but on the inside, he still obtains the identity that his mother shaped for him.