

Identity - Part 2 of 2

By Minni K. Ang, Ph.D. Autistic Self-Advocate



My own personal quest has led me to multiple diverse destinations. Multi-faceted is possibly the word that I feel best describes who I am. My identity is multi-faceted. I feel a sense of belonging to a number of vastly different groups, some which I discovered many, many years ago, and others which I discovered far more recently. Perhaps there may yet be some other group in which I belong that I have yet to discover. Interestingly, I have relatively recently discovered that there are also groups to which I once felt I belonged but which I do not feel so any longer - I am not talking here of transient groups to which everyone belongs to for a time and then moves on or leaves, such as clubs or neighbourhoods or such, but core groups that help define the essence of who we are as individuals.

Who am I? Who am I really? Do I truly know myself?

What I have discovered is that different aspects of my identity have had a difference in their significance and impact on my life, and also at different times in my life so far, with certain aspects overshadowing all else during certain periods. Some aspects of my identity have faded into the background after a period of prominence, while others have maintained a pretty steady influence throughout, and yet others have surged and receded multiple times over the years.

Reflecting back over my entire life so far, I now believe that the majority (though by no means all) of personal challenges I have faced arose due to me being an undiagnosed Autistic, and that some things would have been infinitely better had I received an early diagnosis and appropriate interventions. Also, because the autism is something that has been with me all along - not something that emerged or developed as a teenager or later in life - and is something that I have recently discovered has held me back in a number of different areas of my life (for example, my social ineptitude has caused me to inadvertently offend others which in turn created barriers for me that a more socially capable person would not have faced) - it is one aspect of my identity that has had and continues to have an outsized influence on who I am.

The other aspect of me that has been with me since day one, although only formally "diagnosed" at age 18, and that has permeated my being and impacted everything about me and how I relate to the world is my giftedness. Just as autism is frequently misunderstood by those looking in from the outside, so is giftedness, although the general attitude I have observed from those "on the outside" towards each of these neurodiverse identities is diametrically opposed. Autism is typically regarded with dismay or pity, while giftedness seems to elicit admiration, envy, or suspicion. But looking out from the inside, both of these identities have one overriding commonality that sets someone on either spectrum apart - the majority of people we meet on a day-to-day basis do not think like us. The way our brains work is different enough that without some form of mediation, either through self-awareness and behavioral modifications or through education and societal acceptance, miscommunication is inevitable. Whether or not this miscommunication brings about any degree of negative consequences depends on many different and variable factors, all of them social. It is the way others perceive and relate to the non-typical individual and the subsequent continuous feedback loop of how everyone responds to each other from that initial point on that determines whether or not that individual develops any self-esteem issues or more serious psychopathologies.

About the Author: Minni K. Ang

Let me introduce myself - my name is Minni, and I was diagnosed with Level One Autism only a few years ago, although I have of course been autistic all my life - autism is not something you catch or develop: it is rather a non-neurotypical wiring of the human brain that some of us are born with. Today I am employed full-time as a software developer by a great Canadian company, Kinaxis. I love my job - it is interesting, sufficiently challenging, and the company culture is amazing and inclusive; I was hired through their "autism at work" programme, intermediated by another great Canadian non-profit human resource agency that specializes in work placements



My backstory is pretty complex. I emigrated to Canada in 2009, although I was here for several years as a young child when my dad did his doctoral and post-doc studies at the University of Waterloo. I have a Ph.D in Computer Applications, but also have degrees in Music and in Physics. I have worked in exceptionally diverse fields including academia, as a professional musician, in broadcasting, as a youth worker, ran my own music production start-up company, as a freelance iOS developer, as a consultant for academic and research development, and even spent a year driving a big yellow school bus!

I live in Ottawa with my spouse Sofia, our teenage daughter and our three dogs. To relax I love doing puzzles of any sort, playing one of my many musical instruments, reading or watching science fiction or fantasy, and woodworking. I have many special interests, but especially love learning how things work and creating new things for others to enjoy.