

ENGLISH: IDENTITY & BELONGING

Expository Essay

Prompt: 'Sometimes it is hard to balance belonging to a group with keeping one's individual identity'

The ability of the individual to conform to society determines not only their well-being, but also their identity in terms of belonging. The notion of belonging frightens many people because one has to often change a sense of their personality or their appearance in order to fit into a specific group, often bringing about a false sense of identity. This is why it is extremely difficult to balance belonging to a group with keeping one's individual identity. Belonging can be defined as a feeling being wanted by an array of groups and the different people within them. There are often various implications and problems associated with belonging and conforming with the unwritten rules of society.

New groups are refined each day, meaning that the needs or desires of assorted people determine the group in which they belong. Family can be said to be the most significant group to be affiliated with, however the families that are dysfunctional produce humans that lack a sense of belonging. This idea is further portrayed in the novel "A catcher in the Rye" by J.D Salinger, through the use of the main character Holden Caulfield. Holden yearns for the love of his parents, further realised in the chapter of the book when he sneaks into his house and he wants his parents to catch him. Unfortunately individuals are often ranked in society in terms of wealth and properties, which is why Holden Caulfield refers to the adult world as being 'phony.' 'Phoniness' is linked with false identity, used throughout the novel to describe the superficiality and shallowness of the people that Holden encounters.

People go to extreme lengths just to fit into the group with most appears to them, often resulting in diverse consequences. Generally a sense of oneself is altered in order to fit into the 'popular' group. This feeling of belonging may be healthy at first, however in the long run it may lead to a false sense of identity. Holden's definition of phoniness relies mostly on a kind of self deception: he seems to reserve the most scorn for people who refuse to acknowledge their own weaknesses. This is why it is not only sometimes, but most of the time, difficult to balance belonging with keeping one's individual identity.

Ultimately the 21st century has a variety of different groups. Belonging to a group has many consequences in one form or another. It is rather difficult to be well-known and liked by many without conforming to society, which is exactly what Holden Caulfield does not do, resulting in him being unbearable to some. Conforming is a frightening and powerful word within itself. Over the years technology has enabled us to be exposed to so many modern gadgets, although none which make the subject of belonging as easy as it seems. Family structure shape our fundamental sense of identity and belonging, however it is through the environment and other influences, such as peers, that configuration of our final self-hood occurs.