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## Title

I grew up learning that it is usually during our twenties where our own, distinct personalities begin to be set in stone and give a good measure to who we will be for the rest of our lives. During that age, our interests, mannerisms and stances on certain issues become more unlikely to undergo a drastic change in the future. I kept this knowledge in mind when I recently turned 21, an age that I have nervously embraced for its access to the abundance of freedom for making my own choices and being completely responsible for them. More importantly, the revelation of becoming a fully developed adult compelled me to clear my mind of everyday distractions and for once, make an honest effort of questioning and trying to understand what kind of person I was. The result was disheartening. Rather than focusing on cultivating characteristics like kindness and generosity, I found that I was more preoccupied with modeling the mannerisms of people who have succeeded in ways that I have not. I found comfort in knowing I had changed parts of my personality to match those of whom I envied, more than becoming a person who promoted the well-being of others. It became an abusive pattern of craving and copying. To an unknowing outsider, their glimpse of my personality was something I had meticulously crafted in secret. Realistically however, my true self was always hidden beneath messy layers of self-doubt and indecision. I quickly learned that the satisfaction of having proved myself to others was always short-lived. My antics kept me from becoming fully

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human and developing an honest personality. Thus, I have made it my goal to recognize the self-harming effects that accompany a person who lives their life prioritizing approval from others.

Sadly, it is well known that I am not alone in this predicament. It is all too common for people to compete with one another in areas such as education, socioeconomic status and accomplishments. More than that, society seems to encourage it, causing our world to become a wild game for the survival of the fittest. Though I agree that some degree of competition can promote a healthy desire to improve, the stress can easily become too much and impair the already slow process of being content with who you are. In Bessenoff's writings on the effects that social media have on self-esteem, he focuses on the social comparison theory. The social comparison theory states that people tend to compare themselves with those who, in their own opinion, are similar to themselves so that they can have a better judgment on where they stand (239). More interestingly, Bessenoff reveals that when comparing ourselves to those who are doing worse than us, we feel a sense of satisfaction and security. When we compare ourselves to those who seem to be doing better, we take this difference personally and strive to copy them (240). His study exposed the detrimental effects that can follow when a person takes their differences to be a sign that they are not good enough. While viewing images of thin models, women acknowledged an increased mood of depression and inadequacy due to the differences in their bodies (247). However, this dilemma is not limited to body image. We often find ourselves striving to be more like those who seem to speak more eloquently, socialize with ease and be more composed with their lives. We become so distracted with demanding ourselves to be better that we completely neglect the idea that there is more than one, clear-cut way to becoming an admirable human being.

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Bessenoff's conclusions not only stress the negative impacts that come with being in a constant state of comparing ourselves, but they reveal that we are not blameless victims as well. When we feel a sense of satisfaction knowing that a peer is not doing as well as us, we are only promoting the damaging idea that our self-worth can only be measured by our accomplishments. Thus, I propose that people must concern themselves with keeping an open mind when determining the worth of others, and focus on one's nature rather than their talents. Better yet, taking part in helping our peers accomplish their goals allow us to develop the most important characteristic to strive for: being a humane person. In *Analects*, Confucius underlines that some of the most damaging traits a person can possess are being judgmental and biased (157). Not only do these traits ultimately separate us from forming peaceful relationships toward one another, but the egotism that causes us to think this way only serves to damage our self-esteem. Confucius continues to state that a true example of a humane person is one who is aware of their faults, but nevertheless seeks to help their peers in their time of need (159). In order to be truly content with ourselves, we need to learn how to build genuine, unbiased relationships with other people. We must follow his golden rule of treating others the way we want to be treated (158). When we learn to judge others with an open mind, we learn the ability to do the same to ourselves. The feelings of inadequacy can come to an end.

In Campbell and Lavalley's study on the behavior of people with low self-esteem, they found that those who had high self-esteem had clear, decisive ideas on who they were (4). We must stop being indecisive individuals, meaning, we must stop questioning ourselves when we are presented with a person who seems to be in a better place than we are. To avoid becoming a copy of others, we should aim to understand that our image, social standing and achievements are things that do not solely define our self-worth. I have spent all my life attempting to imitate

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those who I found admirable. I pursued characteristics that people liked, and let go of those that were not of any use. I finally realize that this behavior will only cause me to suffer and prevent myself from becoming a fully-realized person. People fall into the cycle of feeling worthless and wanting more, only because it is human nature to want approval. However, I stress to both myself and my peers that we can only cease to feel inadequate when we allow ourselves to define our own self-worth. Only when we let go of the fears of inadequacy can we finally take on the challenge of helping others live better lives.

## Works Cited

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