

Personal Essay: Maintaining Identity
By Sarah Ziroll

Who am I? Where am I going? My identity is the very essence of the answers to these questions. I am a daughter. I am a believer. I am a book enthusiast. I am a sister. I am a creator. I am a wife. I am a mother. I am a musician. I am an entrepreneur. I am a doula. I am a saver. I am a cyclist. But I am so much more than the sum of these parts. Yet, even on my best day, can I be just a part of my identity? Can I maintain individual parts of my identity, or am I locked into the woman I have wielded through time and experience? Identity is more than an explanation of who I am or what I do, because it is how I see myself, and therefore dictates how I spend my time, and what I value.

Values were introduced the moment I took my first breath. Although I did not select my parents, or my place of origin, all of these factors contributed to my original identity, and continue to influence the identity I maintain year after year. Because I cannot maintain what has not been attained, the question at hand is first and foremost, how do I attain my identity? If I own my roles, and allow those to create my identity, I will be able to maintain that piece of my identity. But if I myself to be created by circumstance, and the years piling on top of each other like the princess and her mattresses, in the end, what is left to maintain? The shell of a woman? The skeleton of a monster ravished from the inside out?

Cycles are vital to the establishment of our society. I stem from a great family who values and taught their children. We created family traditions that will benefit one generation to the next. These traditions affirm my values and fortify my beliefs.

I value hard work, and each day I work to create the future of my dreams. But I am also burdened by the amount of work that is required to be a decent wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, PTA member, employee, chef, cook, cleaner, musician, church member, hobbyist. To maintain all of my identities, I am asked to give my all, yet my all will never be enough. Comparisons are too great, and the expectation too demanding to conquer it all. The world states, "You can have it all!" And I scream in response, "But am I able to do it all?"

I am striving to maintain my identity; but that identity is fraught with contradictory identities. The more I lean into one piece of my identity, the more I realize it's impossible to maintain even a fraction of all of the identities I want to be without diminishing another.

Ultimately, maintaining identity is not just about holding onto the past; it's about shaping a future where all of my identities are recognized, valued, and allowed to flourish. As the world continues to change, identity will remain an essential part of establishing who I am, and where I am going. In the meantime, I will navigate the complexities of life while staying true to who I am, every piece of me!