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OUR EGGSHELL EXISTENCE

Bond: Our Eggshell Existence
 And does the problem stem from the fact that we are unwilling to expose our true self for fear of failure in the eyes of society?

by Patrick Bond

"To be yourself, just yourself, is a great thing. And how does one do it, how does one bring it about? Ah, that is the most difficult trick of all. It's difficult just because it involves no effort at all."

— Henry Miller from *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder*.

It is sad to say that while "being yourself" should and ought to be relatively easy, natural even, such is rarely the case for human beings. Be it our own human insecurities or simply the complexity of our modern society, being true to ourselves is becoming an increasingly more difficult task.

Can any one of us honestly say that the person whom we display in public is truly the same person who we are in the solitude of our own home?

I don't think so.

Rather, like actors in the theater we regularly put our masks on — each one uniquely suited for our many diverse human relationships.

In our seemingly schizoid existence we are husband or wife mother or father, son or daughter, brother or sister, student or teacher, employee or employer and so on. The roles obviously are different and oddly enough so too are the characters.

Think about the self which you present to your close friends. How does that "self" compare with the self which you allow your boss to see?

Is there not a vast difference?

Why?

Perhaps it is because we feel that our true self (if indeed we are able to discern it from the many we show) is somehow insufficient.

We feel as though we are expected to live up to the social norms in our various activities. In order to compensate for doubts in our own ability to fulfill these expectations we assume various roles. Roles which we perceive to be better suited for a given situation.

We, as human beings, strive to live up to those standards which society dictates. In order to appease others we assume roles which seemingly enable us to attain these standards.

But what are the standards which society, rather man, has prescribed? Youth or beauty? We have a multimillion dollar cosmetic industry to aid us in these areas.

How about wealth and success? Society measures everything from fashions to foods and alcohol to homes on a sort of success scale. Advertisers recognize this stigma which society has assigned to many of our endeavors. This is evidenced by the fact that a great deal of their marketing is directed precisely at the human desire to attain the much desired status of wealth and success.

Professions as well are not immune from forcing us to create an actor for this particular segment of our life. Society has associated certain expectations with various occupations and in order for us to abide by these we must again enter the role which is appropriate for that profession which we have chosen.

I am not suggesting here that we handle all of our human encounters in exactly the same manner. To do so would be ludicrous. Certainly various situations require various degrees of attention and intimacy on our part. But genuine attention and intimacy not that which society has prescribed for this particular situation. We should utilize the different aspects of our personality rather than adopting contrived personalities or roles.

Are we like boxers before a championship bout? Fighters maintaining the stern and unemotional exterior which the combat situation dictates. Our stoic exterior conceals the true feelings of fright and anxiety which lie within.

Perhaps the delicate feelings of human beings require this type of armor. In order to keep our sensitive feelings from being bruised we assume these roles as a safeguard against the harsh world in which we live. Or perhaps from the harshness of our fellow human beings.

In doing so, however, we are denying those with whom we engage in relationships the gift of ourselves. Truly our most precious gift. If we never allow anyone to see who we really are, aren't our relationships simply that of actors exchanging lines rather than a meaningful interaction of people?

If this is true our situation is truly sad indeed.

Similarly, we are robbing ourselves of the rewards which accompany our achievements. The applause is not ours nor are the merits which we acquire.

Certainly we will have our share of failures as well as successes. But they will be our own failures and our own successes — not those of a contrived character which we have instituted into our lives.

Perhaps we have become so accustomed to role playing that we have lost touch with who we truly are. Maybe it is because life is so uncertain and in some way assuming our roles aids us in dealing with the uncertainties and possible failures which the future has in store for us.

Life, however, is an improvisation. There is no time to rehearse life, we must simply forge ahead into the unknown with an optimistic spirit and the genuine self which we have — indeed which we are.

A contemporary rock group, The Eagles, shows an insight in this area in a song entitled "Lying Eyes". The lyrics state "We live our lives in chains and never even realize we have the key."

The roles which we play are in fact the chains which prohibit us from knowing our true selves and sharing that self with others.

If such is the case our lives are analogous to an eggshell. On the outside or surface we may appear flawless and yet on the inside we are still extremely delicate. The thin shell which separates the two is very fragile.

FRIENDS

*I've always needed friends,
 But never had the guts to admit it,
 My friends are few, but precious,
 But I have friends that care,
 It makes me proud to know,
 That people really care,
 I want to be a sensitive caring person too,
 And be able to be a friend...
 Like you!*

— Leslie E. Church
