

2024 Elie Wiesel Competition

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Loss of Identity in Societal Pressure

Like many others in the Holocaust, Kitty had to lose her sense of self and identity for survival. While this is an extreme example, what society deems as preferable influences our daily decisions and overall identity. From what I have experienced, the way that I and others act is heavily influenced by who we spend the most time with. Since Nazis saw Jewish people or "Jews" as subhuman, they didn't fit in society's norms and were seen as outcast. Due to this stereotype, Jews were discriminated against, tortured, and killed on a large scale. Propaganda and politics swayed the way that a whole society thinks. This event was a major example that shows how society's standards influence people to act in ways that they may not have acted like if they weren't pressured.

Schools are a place where young students are introduced to the topic of societal pressure. I have often observed peer pressure in friend groups out of most groups in school. People often are influenced by the groups that they hang around the most. Whether we like it or not, whoever you spend time with will slowly leave impressions on you. It doesn't matter if it's a new word that has sunk into your vocabulary or a whole new opinion of an idea, friends will change the way people think. I know that the friends that I have spent the most time with leave a good impression on me. It's important to me that I spend time with people that I know share values and traits with. I have to carefully pay attention to what actions I mirror from my friends, and which ones I wouldn't copy. Nonetheless, these impressions of people can come with consequences. If we spend too much time around people who we wouldn't want to think like, we could end up changing our words, thoughts, actions, and identities. When the Nazi were in office in Germany, they turned a whole society against Jews, which shows how powerful sharing thoughts can be. However, school isn't the only way people are challenged with pressure; and peer pressure doesn't always have to be negative.

Another pressure that has influenced me greatly is siblings. I have two older siblings and one younger. My older siblings have influenced me the most. Even just being around older and more mature people have played a major role in my personality. They have shown me how to think differently. They have introduced me to new hobbies and people. Since they have constantly been in my life, I have learned to take after them. With that comes times where I need to be cautious and make sure I'm not blindly following them. They are great role models, but I still have to be careful what actions I mirror from them. While peer pressure has a negative connotation, siblings are a great example of something that should pressure and change someone.

Today, retaining your identity under peer pressure is challenging. It is highly important to do what you want under pressure and not to cave in because all of your friends are doing it. Our judgment is clouded due to outside pressure. On the other hand, there are things to be learned from people and peer pressure can be beneficial. Pressure can build character and personality. Anyway you see it, peer pressure changes your identity for the better or worse. It is important to retain your identity while constantly taking in new ideas into consideration.