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Intelligence: The Incessant Urge to Succeed

Life occurs in three distinct phases- we are born, we live, and we die. However, the way in which one chooses to live his or her life differs from person to person. Some choose to prolong their life with love and interminable happiness, others- not so much. They choose a life with the incessant urge to succeed. Go above and beyond what is asked. And thus, entitlement was born. While living their lives with seemingly higher aspirations, they begin to coincide with these superior goals and rise above the line of normality- better than the rest. This line of normality goes hand in hand with schemas: the uncontrollable thoughts we have about what it means to be labeled as a certain type such as the “arrogant elite’s.” Those who realize the entitled individuals’ superiority assign this “type”, and shortly begin to stigmatize these thoughts and mold them into what the ideal person would be like if possessing all of these traits. Specifically, I have been the individual below the line, below the entitlement, and assigning these traits to the “ideal arrogant elite mold.” Through the experience of sharing like environments with those who felt they were entitled through where they received their education, and what they chose to study, had led me to believe those who come from backgrounds similar to these, by default, are entitled, egotistical individuals. Furthermore, the individuals that believe they were born with this entitlement have led me to experience this in both high school and college, enabling the creation of my own personal stigmatization about this group as well as the realization that this same stigmatization has influenced society as a whole in which there is great room for improvement both personally and globally.

Like any stigmatization or schema, they start from within. No matter the person, they will arise. Those who felt they were privileged, felt they were above me have directly influenced me. Starting in high school, I became more aware of these individuals who felt they were nothing short of a “gift to earth” solely because they were gifted with the ability to be naturally smart. It all began with an acceptance to an honors academy for arts and sciences my freshman year of high school. I have always been one to push myself, and always wanting to improve my performance in school, but it was just that, self-improvement. It wasn’t to prove to others that I was intelligent, or that I was better than everyone, but for some, that was their intent. That “some,” happened to be two of my best friends. Both very intelligent, book smart individuals that had a lot going for them and I could not have been happier for them.

Although I found myself being accepted into the honors school for math and science, the material was not easy for me to get through. Endless hours studying led to little reassurance of mastering the material while those in which I was surrounded by breezed through calculus and complicated critical thinking physics projects. But for me, “breezing though” was not existent. It required so much more. After failing to comprehend material over and over again, and asking for their assistance, I would be told that I was “un-teachable” or that I “didn’t belong there” because I asked questions, and had not a clue what was going on in classes sometimes. Not because I wasn’t listening, but just because I had to be exposed to the material numerous different times before I actually understood it. For them, this idea was unfathomable that I could not grasp the material right away. After being told things like this, it really became apart of who I thought I was- the un-teachable, non intelligent individual that believed she truly didn’t belong there because even my best friends would tell me that I wasn’t cut out for it.

Not only did this sense of discouragement come from those who were my peers, but it also arose from one specific teacher that I had for calculus. Even though calculus was not the ideal subject for me, I still tried my best because that was the kind of student that I was and I knew, deep down, that I had to be in this school for some reason. The honors school I had attended was all about the statistics of their students and wasn’t afraid for anyone to know it. If their students were better than the rest of the other kids in the district, they most definitely informed the public. After we had all completed the ACT in March of my junior year, my calculus teacher, while sitting at her desk, went around the room, asked for our score, what school we wanted to attend, and what we were planning on doing with our future, and for everything that I had previously been criticized for, I knew this was a recipe for a disaster. It then came time for my turn so I replied “22, U of M or Grand Valley State University, and I would like to major in communications.” The look on her face and the response to follow is something I will *never* forget. “You mean to tell me you think you’re going to get into U of M with a 22 and you want to be a communications major? Ha! They don’t make any money, you know that right?” And with that statement, that was the icing on the cake. Any kind of confidence I ever had, gone. How could someone put down what they thought was their dream career? Why did she, and both my friends think that I was below them? *I’m intelligent. I am capable of doing anything I want, they just don’t know it yet*.

After high school, I thought the belittling was over. But to my surprise, it still happens in college. Upon being wait listed from U of M, and being informed that I later did not get in, I was crushed. I wanted to be accepted. I wanted to prove that I was smart and intelligent like the others that were deemed “intelligent.” But, I realized that sinking down to their level and giving into what they thought was not who I was. Grand Valley was home for me, not U of M. It was a place where I could be myself, and eventually learn how I can grow as a person, gain confidence, and find my potential career for the future. That, for me, was Hospitality and Tourism Management. Not you’re “typical” major that people say they are going to school for, but that is what college is about- finding your niche. And this was definitely my niche. After telling my “friends” what I wanted to do, everything I resented them telling me in high school came rushing back. They made comments that nothing that I will ever do will be hard, or my school work in general will never compare to the prestige of U of M’s exercise science program in which my friend is in now. That is not what I wanted to hear. I finally found something I am passionate about and this is what I will be judged upon? That does not seem like an intelligent thing for an individual to say to another individual especially if they are considered a friend.

Being “intelligent” comes on various mediums: being book smart, having common sense, being “hands on” smart, and being plain naturally smart. But what they didn’t realize was that being intelligent was being unique. Being intelligent was accepting those for who they were. Being intelligent was not putting others down simply because they were a different kind of intelligent. Everyone is intelligent. Everyone deserves a place in the hierarchical pyramid of superiority that we call the educational system, but we all get there in different ways. After instances with my friends, and the one instance with my teacher, one who is supposed to encourage questions, improvement, and achieving our goals, I developed a stigmatization that I still hold today of those who have higher degrees of education, or attend more prestigious establishments are deemed arrogant and self centered. But why do these individuals act this way? Do they not notice?

Intelligence is knowing everyone is different and the “perfect” person comes in all shapes and sizes, backgrounds, and beliefs. Sometimes, it’s hard to stomach that when you’re the one being called “un-teachable” or being told what you want to do will never be financially sustainable to live off of. But there’s a reason they are “perfect” in their own way, there’s a reason they are the way they are, which is something that should be respected. After these occurrences, I tried to ponder the reasons why my friends, and teacher, might be this way. My first thought was self-esteem. Maybe they think that this is all that they have going for them? Maybe they feel they are imperfect and something else, so they put all of their time and energy into making sure they shine in what they whole-heartedly know they are good at? Aside from internal pressure, my next thought was external pressure. Everyone has pressure, and maybe theirs is coming from family, or maybe their boss of how students are supposed to be performing compared to everyone else? Whatever it may be, it’s who they are. It’s how they *feel* they are intelligent.

Beside the fact that this happened on and personal level, globally, this is very prominent. If there is individuals that feel they can blabber demeaning words to other individuals that they feel are below them, then what is this all going to result in? Personally, I feel there will be a great increase in lack of self esteem and confidence in those who may stray off the beaten path and choose to do things in life that aren’t deemed scholarly. Not only will they not be seen as an elite for choosing a career that isn’t typically accepted, but also perhaps they might choose a career that will be accepted and will be seen as elite even though they have no passion for the career. If this hierarchy continues to be engrained in the minds of every “elite” in the world, then how will those that are intelligent in other ways be noticed? As mentioned before, intelligence comes in various mediums with each and everyone needing to be respected.

Like any stigmatization that is formed by any individual, there is always room for improvement no matter your feelings towards these individuals. To improve my thoughts on those who come off as arrogant due to educational background or perhaps the jobs they hold, I have constructed several steps I could take to improve the situation. Upon hearing the occupation of the individual, or even the place in which they go to school, I should not judge because as I believe, intelligence comes in all forms, and I do realize that this society encompasses intensive amounts of pressure on individuals. In addition of not being so hard with initial judgment of individuals, I need to remind myself that achievement comes in all forms. I tend to think that achievement is doing what ever makes you happy to prove that you can be successful at even the things that others do not deem “scholarly.” Theirs, however, might be being top in their class based on GPA. Everyone has different views of this, and understanding that there are other forms of achievement will improve the stigmatization that I have created by myself. Furthermore, the realization that the way that people showcase their pride also comes in all forms. Being open to all forms will improve my understanding of all different types of individuals I may be employed by in the future, or may be calling my future co-workers. Overall, to improve my stigmatization of those to act superior to myself, I need to listen to their insights, not judge what is on the surface, and realize that everyone displays pride and achievement in different ways based on their background and internal and external pressures that they may face.

Going above and beyond what is expected of oneself shows great qualities in an individual. Over the course of one’s life, they will achieve many great things. Some keep it to themselves, and others want to tell the world. Many different achievements, many different ways of sharing them. Through my experiences in both high school and college, I have learned that some of those ways that they are shared can be hurtful. By being told I was “un-teachable” and that what I wanted to do with my life didn’t hold any merit both educationally and financially, I had been a first hand victim of what I call the “arrogant elite’s.” Through the constant exposure of these hurtful words, I began to characterize these individuals into my own, self-created stigmatization that eventually translated to believing every person that mentioned they were in any type of program that was medical or deemed scholarly, I translated it to them and thought they were arrogant like the rest. Having thoughts like this are not fair, and not encompassing my beliefs that intelligence comes in all different forms and pride is displayed in all different ways. To improve these thoughts, making sure I am giving those who possess these traits a chance, getting to know them before I form opinions, and coming to the realization that there are internal and external pressures present in each individual to perform a certain way. Because being intelligent is accepting those for who they are and *everyone* is intelligent and *everyone* should be able to express their intelligence no matter the medium.