

Mask over the Real Self

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ABSTRACT

We all wear a mask over our real selves. We were not born with the mask but as we grow, society starts building a mask over our persona by guiding us to make us accept societal norms and standards. We become artificial because we want to please others and seek their acceptance. We speak and act not the way our inner self guides us but as others want us to. In this process, we move away from our real selves. We forget the fact that “You were not born on earth to please anyone; you have to live life to express yourself, not to impress someone. Don’t pretend to be someone you’re not, and never lose yourself in search of other people’s acceptance and approval.” — **Roy T. Bennett**

In this paper we would explore how gradually we become unreal, what is the mask- the persona, why the persona develops to hide the real self, the benefits and disadvantages of the mask, and shall also look at the flip side of it i.e., the benefits of not having the mask---advantages of being your true self and how to move towards becoming your real self.

Keywords: *The inner self, the true self, the real self, human persona, mask over real self, the inner voice*

I am yet to find a person who is what he/she is! We all wear masks to hide our real selves. Socrates quoted the reason: “***The greatest way to live with honour is to be what we pretend to be.***” We are not what we are but we project ourselves as what would bring honour in the eyes of humans around us so we pretend and get personas which are nothing but veiled real selves. We say we learn to be social but is it not right that society adulterates us into individuals with *masked individuals* and we don’t remain what we are in reality?

People are not as they appear to be. The upbringing in the artificial environment made of superficial human society puts a veil over each person and the real self is deeply hidden and not visible. We are taught to behave in a particular way from early childhood so that we meet the expectation of society by following society’s norms hence our normal self goes on in hiding behind societal expectations and we become robots of society. We are not ourselves but mechanical beings as per the expectations of family, friends and society.

The shining bright face due to pomposity when assuming a natural look manifests a face which could be dark and ugly when devoid of makeup. Each morning, we camouflage our faces again under bright attractive makeup to face the world to project the best in us. Not only do our faces

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wear makeup, but the whole persona also gets pomposity which is totally at variance from the real self. We hide our thoughts and speak what we would like to hear. We mimic the mannerisms of our idols and behave like them. We are not real but imaginary robots. Appearance wise if you want to see your real self, then look at the mirror when you leave your bed- devoid of make-up, a stranger would stare at you from the mirror! What people see when a person is made up to face society is not that stranger but an actor smeared with attractive make-up. I saw some photographs of actresses without makeup and was aghast to see what I saw. They were beautiful fairies only to be found in our imagination projected on celluloid screens, so charming and stunning!! I was stunned to see them as one of us (as we look when we are out of our beds!) when I looked at the photographs. Looks can be deceptive! I admire the tricksters who could capture them on their cameras when without their makeup. It is not the actresses or actors who pretend and act, we all do in our lives. As Shakespeare said, "*All the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players.*" We are, in fact, actors smeared with artificial make-up not only on our appearance but also in our actions. Our actions are hypocritical when we find ourselves showering heaps of praise on a person whom we despise the most in our hearts; we pretend to show love and act friendly when in our hearts we are seething with hate and anger; we frame pregnant sentences to hide our real feeling; we embrace a person fondly when in our hearts we have the urge to pierce a knife in his bosom. We all are hypocrites!!

Maybe my statement is wild and most of us will disagree. But is it not a fact that there are occasions when the mind conflicts with the heart and we make a comment which is quite opposite to what we feel at heart? The mind wants to speak the truth but the heart says that it will hurt the person to whom we address the statement and we camouflage the real meaning and utter words which are not of hurting nature. I quote some examples from one of my paper¹ - *Imagine a guest arrives at late night hours and the host welcomes, "What a pleasant surprise to have you here at this late hour!"* Apparently, the host is welcoming, but in his heart, he is displeased to have intrusion at late night hours. The Mind frames the sentence to avoid hurting him. Apparently, you are showing the pleasure of receiving the guest but the sentence is pregnant with a real feeling of displeasure for being disturbed at odd hours. Is this not hypocrisy? The above is not a stray example of hypocrisy, we come across such hypocritical statements in our day-to-day life. Some more examples: "*Wife to husband--- It is my ill fate that I got wedded to you.*" Simply stated it means that the wife is cursing herself but in reality, she wants to tell him that he is useless and no good! In her heart, she feels that the husband is hopeless but her mind tells her telling this affront will be too rude so a midway is chosen and the above sentence gets framed.

Mohan to Sohan---"Can I Borrow 2000 rupees from you?" Sohan—"I am passing through very hard times." On the face of it, Sohan is just revealing his difficult financial position but in reality, he is saying "No". His mind says he will not lend money but, in his heart, he feels he should not say "No" as it would amount to being rude to a friend —so a midway is the sentences as framed above sentence. We all, sometimes or the other are forced to make statements which are at variance from our inner thoughts and this is why I say that we are all hypocrites!!

Hypocrites are the ones who speak something and mean something else. They act in a way which is at variance from what the inner self says. Many a time they are illogical, unreasonable and unreal. This is well brought out in the following quotes: "*A hypocrite is the kind of politician who would cut down a redwood tree, then mount the stump and make a speech for conservation.*" -Adlai Stevenson I; and "*Hypocrite: The man who murdered his parents, and then pleaded for mercy on the grounds that he was an orphan.*" -Abraham Lincoln. It is not

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that we become hypocrites by choice, it is the society which pushes people to veil their real selves and act and behave hypocritically.

Our society and the system are continuously promoting artificial behaviour which generates hypocrites who slide behind masks created and pushed by society. We are civilized but are not our real selves. It is normal for us to think something, mean something different, say things differently and act totally at variance. William Hendriksen is right when he says, *A hypocrite says one thing but means something else. He pretends to do one thing but intends to do another. He is play-acting and dissembling. He is hiding his real face under a mask.*” Everybody, in a sense, is a hypocrite created by society.

On hypocrites, Alice Judy says Hypocrites are people who will basically say one thing and then do another. It is most pronounced when they have a very very strong opinion about one thing but then do another.

The most interesting thing about us humans is that we tend to think highly of ourselves highlighting our strengths and achievement, and overlooking our failures and weaknesses and this is what we call self-serving bias. When asked to rate ourselves on skills and virtues or any other desirable traits, we say we are above average even when we are not- sheer hypocrisy! Some people get caught up in their feelings, beliefs and religions that they are unaware they are being hypocrites. Remember that everyone has been a hypocrite at least once in their life, some people realize their hypocrisy and some people just don't and flat-out refuse to see that they're being hypocrites. (<https://www.anquotes.com/hypocrisy-quotes/>)

Society makes hypocrites. When I hold society responsible for making us hypocrites, I have this thought behind my assertion: - We are not born unreal, in our infancy, we are real and transparent, and we appear as we are. But our parents, relatives, friends and society at large gradually slide a mask over our personas by guiding our behaviour to meet their expectations. We do not remain ourselves but get transformed into robots wearing a mask. We become hypocrites and we do not say what we want to say, we don't do what we want to do and even we change our face and outlook to gain the approval of society. I am not saying whether it is good or bad, and I am not being judgmental; I am only saying that we are not what we actually are! Maybe it is good that society veiled us so that we can survive and lead a nice life. Maybe we need to become cultured and behave amicably to get along with others. Maybe if we had not worn the mask, we would not have survived the cruel vagaries of the world. All that seems to be true and leaves me nothing to argue against the masked personas. But still, I wonder how the world would have changed if we did not become hypocrites, how would have our interpersonal relationships changed if we always said what we thought and felt and did not keep anything under our sleeves, how would have our gatherings looked with people without makeup both facially and also in thoughts. Could there be chaos?? I don't know nor do I go into a fancied expedition, I, in this paper would restrict to real hard realities that we are unreal people and would explore how gradually we become unreal, what is the mask- the persona, why persona develops to hide the real self, the benefits and disadvantages of the mask, and shall look at the flip side of it i.e., the benefits of not having the mask---advantages of being your true self and how to move towards becoming your real self. Let us explore the facets of the veil over our persona.

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Let us begin with understanding the veil worn by us all:

Mask on us—the Persona

A. L. Jonas² rightly remarks that we all wear a social mask to hide our true personality so as to conform to social norms. Whenever we go out in public, we always project a good image that exaggerates a version of ourselves. We do this most especially in front of people that we want to impress such as someone we like or a boss. We hope that by doing so, we make a good impression on them. The character that we play in front of others is our persona which is a mask over our real self.

I have repeatedly emphasized in the above paragraphs that we all are hiding our real selves behind a mask which makes our persona and I am not alone in who asserts this. Mark Epstein³ is equally vocal about it. He says:

“I was bothered by a peculiar feeling of unreality. I felt like a facsimile of a person, although I couldn't say why. I discovered that I had learned to hide my true feelings from myself in childhood when expressing anything but positive emotions seemed to displease adults. What kept me from feeling real as an adult was this learned inability to recognize, feel and act on a full set of emotions, negative as well as positive. My interactions with others seemed false because they had no firm foundation in real feelings.”

How true!! Masking begins in early childhood and the mask is created inadvertently by society. We are encouraged to overtake the real self to behave in a way that society would appreciate. We do a balancing act between the voice of the inner self and the loud voice of society and most often the inner voice fades and mask surfaces. Initially, there is a feeling of discomfort when an inner voice is curbed but eventually, it becomes a habit and the discomfort also fades away. We are comfortable with the mask on our persona. The basic characteristic of the mask on the human persona is that the real self takes a back seat and our actions and behaviour get guided by societal norms. The above writer comes across people with masks and finds that the root lies in childhood.

We all wear this mask. Carrie Cabral⁴ says “No one acts true to themselves all the time. Starting from birth, we learn how to use our faces and bodies to get our parents to give us things, and we continue to act throughout our lives to fit into society. ***Acting completely honestly would result in social ruin—we would offend people and open ourselves up to so much judgment and insecurity it would affect our mental health.***”

We hide our negative feelings—such as superiority or insecurity—with words and sometimes mixed signals. A lot of the time we don't even know we're acting, and this conviction is part of what makes the mask believable.

Mask-wearing is impossible to avoid. Everyone acts, often subconsciously, so there's no point getting upset about this because you can't change it. If you don't think you wear masks, think about how you interact with different people. You almost certainly behave differently with your boss than with your best friend.

There are four reasons to study it and why you're hiding your true self:

1. Mask-wearing can help you get ahead because it shows you in a positive light.
2. If you don't learn about mask-wearing, you're vulnerable to being fooled by others.
3. Those who choose not to mask are pushed to the fringes of society.

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4. Learning to see through masks will help you predict people. When someone does something hostile, there are always signs beforehand because strong emotions are impossible to entirely hide.”

The Mask is a social mask which is worn by each of us. Jonas² brings more clarity about the social mask (the persona) when he says,

“We wear masks to protect ourselves and to conceal something. Social masking is the role that we play in different social situations to meet societal standards. “We all have a social mask, right? We put it on, we go out and put our best foot forward, our best image. But behind that social mask is a personal truth, what we believe about who we are and what we’re capable of.”- Phil McGraw

When we are alone, we tend to do the opposite. We do comfortable things. We act based on our emotions and impulses. That is because there is no one to impress. So, there is no need to act. We are free to do anything that we want. That is actually our true personality. It is how we behave when no one else is watching.

Thus, we are unreal and different from the real us when we are in society. Being self is rare as we are rarely alone- either we are with friends, relatives or colleagues and we put up a face and behaviour that would be liked by them. This does not happen to a few but is universal across us all. The process of becoming unreal and hiding the self behind a veil is a gradual and long one. Hiding the real self is because of a need to do this, which to some extent is explained in the above paragraphs. We shall look elaborately into this need, i.e, why we go for hiding our real self?

In the next paragraphs, we shall explore why a person gets to have a mask imbibed on the real self in course of time.

The need for masking the real self:

We have two identities: one visible and the other hidden. There are things practically impossible to hide that, in one way or another, make up our identity. Such is the case of our ethnic origin, sex and stature. There are also personality characteristics that are difficult for us to hide, such as extroversion or shyness. All these characteristics, added to those that we glimpse without problems make up our visible identity, which others perceive. However, we also have characteristics that we do not want to reveal, such as our sexual orientation, some mental disorders, certain motivations or that we belong to minor political or religious groups. These characteristics make up our hidden identity.

Many reasons lead us to want to hide some aspects of our identity. We can think, for example, that those who make up our social network will reject us if they know the truth, or maybe we just want to avoid conflicts because we know they think differently. Perhaps we feel obliged to hide certain aspects of our identity because they represent a social stigma, or simply because we want to continue enjoying certain privileges that would be prohibited to our authentic identity. (Source: Berkley, R. A., Beard, R. & Daus, C. S. (2019) *The emotional context of disclosing a concealable stigmatized identity: A conceptual model. Human Resource Management Review*; 29(3): 428–445.)

The above gives some insight into why we become unreal. Actually, at birth and in early childhood we are our real selves. We are, then, what we are. There is no artificiality in our

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looks or behaviour. It is the learning process which creates the mask over the real self. Had learning been natural without interference from others, it could have created a person who speaks what he means and does what he intends. He /she would have been a person exhibiting the real self and would not be a person wearing a mask. The person, then, would have heart and mind in sync leaving no reason to speak pregnant lines which mean something different than what was intended. We would then have a society free from hypocrisy! But it never happens and never will! Because it is not practical in this civilized society. Society has built up its norms and hence the person has to be moulded to meet those norms. Even that is ok if the person learns the way of life all by himself naturally; he/ she could still be a real self. But once interference starts maybe first from the mother and then by family and lastly by society and the person is forcibly taught to behave in a way that would meet societal standards is the time when the masking process begins and it continues aggressively in the childhood and continues in slow pace throughout the whole life! We do not build real selves but create artificial selves. As a child grows, he is taught what to do and what not to do. These do's and don'ts create the mask which makes him/ her hide the real self. Religions add fuel to the fire and make the masks thicker and stronger. The social mask, thus, generated is the person's persona visible to society.

Frith Luton⁵ says, *“Originally the word persona meant a mask worn by actors to indicate the role they played. On this level, it is both a protective covering and an asset in mixing with other people. Civilized society depends on interactions between people through the persona. Persona, as its name implies, is only a mask of the collective psyche, a mask that feigns individuality, making others and oneself believe that one is individual, whereas one is simply acting a role through which the collective psyche speaks.”*

Fundamentally the persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between the individual and society as to what a man should appear to be. He takes a name, earns a title, exercises a function, he is this or that. In a certain sense all this is real, yet in relation to the essential individuality of the person concerned it is only a secondary reality, a compromise formation, in making which others often have a greater share than he. Among the consequences of identifying with a persona are: we lose sight of who we are without a protective covering; our reactions are predetermined by collective expectations.”

Protective coverings are what the societal mask provides to the individual. He /she takes the teachings provided by society to create one's identity which is his/ her profession, but it is not the true identity. The true identity is hidden in the real self which is masked.

The process of masking the real self has at its core a conflict between the mind and the heart. Mind owns the thinking faculty which is greatly influenced by society and the environment whereas the heart carries the voice of the true self. Societal teachings generate a way of thinking and it continuously keeps on conflicting with the voice of self that emanates from the heart. The result is that the persona or the mask manifests in the form of actions which culminate due to the balancing of these two opposing forces. I gave some examples as to how mind and heart conflict shows a way to speak and act which is at variance from the inner voice and urge. Indeed, the influence of society through its subtle way of influencing the mind is the base for creating a mask over the real self, which creates the mask structure when the mind conflicts with the heart.

In fact, the process of 'masking of real self' starts with the need for hiding something from others. Healthy Journal⁶ expands on this, “People conceal aspects of their identity for a variety of reasons. People hold up the truth to protect their reputation, hide mistakes, conceal poor

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performance or simply look better. You might feel that you'd be rejected by the people in your social network if they knew the inner truth about you, or you might feel that you'll be prohibited from receiving certain benefits at work. Hiding your true self is something many people do in one way or another. As people, we wear masks to fit in and protect our emotions and inner lives.

The need to hide things is, again, a result of conflict between mind and heart as was discussed in the above paragraphs. The balance between the two culminates in a behaviour which was not the real intent. The process of masking continues continuously in the life of a person due to the never-ending conflict between the mind and heart making us artificial personas. While it is universally true that we are not who we are, the question often arises why so?

Why do we want to hide our real selves?

Why is it necessary that we hide our real selves? Why can't we be what we are? The answer is partly provided in the above paragraphs. We can't be what we are because the mind and heart are mostly not in sync and are conflicting with each other and to stop this is not in our hands.

More explicative needs to hide our real self may stem from the worry we are unlovable or there are things about us that people will find unacceptable. This causes us to hide. We hide those parts of ourselves—maybe a secret part of our identity, maybe a troubled past, maybe a neurosis that embarrasses us. Also, masking is mostly used to conceal a negative emotion (usually sadness, frustration, and anger) with a positive emotion or indifferent effect. We also hide because of Self-esteem Issues. Sometimes, we believe that, if we disclose to others who we truly are, people will see us as incompetent, unlikeable or despicable. So, we hide our true feelings, actions, or beliefs in an attempt to uphold a good picture. Another reason to hide the real self could be a need to become secretive, people are embarrassed about their secrets and flaws and are trying to save face by hiding them. This can be a side effect of a lack of social success. Mental disorders also could be a reason that the true self is not visible (source: <https://www.calendar-canada.ca/faq/why-do-people-sometimes-hide-their-true-selves>)

The above sums up the reasons why people hide their real selves. The above discussions also outline some benefits that a person derives from hiding the real self. We shall, in the next paragraphs examine in detail the benefits and disadvantages of wearing a mask over the true self.

Advantages and disadvantages of masking the real self

We have discussed that the masking of the self begins as we grow in our society, so the first beneficiary should be society itself. There could be many more advantages of hiding the real self. Let us explore these advantages:

Advantages-

- ***Stability of Society***--Family, friends and society guide a person to learn to abide by the standard rules of society because the person has to live in society. The person is made civilized even at the expense of giving the real self a back seat. Thus, we the members of society bring stability to society by masking the real self. Any force trying to derail the stability is dealt with severely by society, be it criminals, terrorist groups, anarchists or ordinary people who violate societal standards. All are dealt with firm hands. If each of us acted as per the real self, the situation could become chaotic in society because many a time we could be doing things not acceptable to society, thus, we could destabilize the very fabric of society. If we were always transparent and worked as per

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the dictates of the mind, we shall not listen to our heart and hence empathy could go for a toss; we may not remain humble and civilized and this could create avoidable friction. A lack of empathy and emotion would strain relations among family and friends and clashes could become common. All these would destabilize society. So, the most important positive aspect arising out of masking the real self is bringing orderliness and stability to our society,

- ***People do not get to know your weakness***—Hiding your emotions through a well-constructed veil prevents others to reach your weaknesses and prevents you from being vulnerable. The dormant weaknesses remain latent within you and people cannot manipulate you. This prevents you to avoid getting hurt in relationships because your weak chords cannot be touched by your near dear ones.
- ***The Mask provides a needed social acceptance***—Martin Silvertant⁷ says, “Masking is the process of changing or concealing one’s natural personality to conform to social pressures and prevent ostracization. The ability to mask is good in so far as it allows you to present yourself in a—perceived to be—more acceptable way, which of course has many social advantages and serves as a social shield. The mask is a superficial part of yourself anyway, and so the hurt of getting a rejection is much more limited and manageable as masking allows you to present yourself in the most acceptable way which would not have been possible had you presented your vulnerable true self. Thus, your vulnerability is reduced.
- ***The mask helps protect our fragile hearts***— We all have some past memories (lost love, disgrace in public, humiliating incidents etc.) that we do not want others to know as these would put us in a bad light and lower our value in the eyes of people. Not only do we want to forget this past, but we also do not want anyone to even get a hint about it. The heart is fragile and it would not bear the hateful eyes of society. The way to protect our fragile hearts is by hiding certain aspects of our character from the public. The mask hides these incidents from the public eye and protects our hearts.
- ***Masks over our true selves often protect us from potential threats-*** Many a time, we try to make our adversaries happy out of fear that they may emotionally assault us, and, for this, we have to mask our true feelings. The people pleaser mask is worn in order “to make other people happy so they’ll accept you and be less likely to emotionally attack you. This forces us to forget how we feel inside and begin to be concerned with making others happy even if we become unreal.

The above are some positives emanating from the mask over the real self. The basic purpose of a mask is to display edited, decorated versions of ourselves for the world around us to enjoy. It can create a false version of us to divert people from their darker intentions. It can protect the aspects of ourselves that we don't want to be exposed to and instead only reveals the characteristics of which we are proud. And above all, masks are capable of acting like a protective barrier to managing our own insecurities. The mask provides us confidence as our insecurities are made invisible.

We all know that there are two sides to a coin. If there is the day, there is also the night. Similarly, the veil over the true self has advantages as well as disadvantages. We have discussed the advantages, and now we shall explore the disadvantages:

The dark side of shielding the true self

Hiding the real self is like swimming against the current. It is not only difficult but also drains our energy. One has to make special efforts to curb the natural reactions to situations and react in a way compatible with the expectations of society. There could be many effects

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arising out of swimming against the current. I give below some negatives resulting from hiding my real self

- ***It can lead to stress***—When the mind has to create artificiality, stress is bound to result. I remember a film called “Khamoshi”, where the heroine (a nurse) has to act as a beloved to a patient who is mentally ill and the only way to treat him is to make him feel that he is deeply loved by a woman. While acting like a beloved, gradually she starts loving him and the patient gradually regains the mental balance. When mentally healthy, he forgets that he was loved by the nurse. The nurse undergoes excessive stress when faced with this reality which leads her to the mental asylum because the stress makes her mentally sick. The example is fictitious but is not far from reality. The artificial emotions being played to hide the real self in some extreme cases can be serious and could lead to unbearable stress.
- ***It can create health hazards***—Thomas Oppong⁸ is of the view that suppressing real emotions could be dangerous. He says, “Hiding your feelings has a high cost. A study from the University of Texas found that when we avoid our emotions, we’re actually making them stronger — this can create serious implications for your body and mind. Deciding to bury your feelings, ignore them, internalize them, pretend they didn’t happen or convince yourself that there is no need to deal with them can literally make you sick from the stress. There is always a danger that the stress affects the body and you become ill.
- ***It can prevent intimate relationships***-- When the self is in hiding, the relationships get founded on falsehood. A person in one’s relationship understands the persona projected to him/her and not the real person. It is not that the true self never surfaces, it occasionally does and these occasions could create a crack in the relationship. A strong relationship requires personal closeness, familiarity, and a knowing of the other deeply. This can never be achieved with a person who has the self in hiding. Because we are hiding things, people feel they can’t truly get to know us. Or if they do end up liking us, we constantly worry they will find out the truth. This leads us to a bad cycle of one unfulfilling relationship after the next. The person hiding the true self has a fear that people may not like him/her if they know the real self and this may cause people to not like them. Our fear of not having fulfilling relationships keeps us from having those fulfilling relationships. Hiding may preserve the relationship for a while, but this is at too high a cost. The cost is that in this relationship you always have the feeling that you don’t legitimately belong. Or that if people like you, they aren’t liking the real you, which makes you feel even more inherently unlikeable and vulnerable. (source: <https://www.scienceofpeople.com/the-relational-paradox/>)
- ***It may carry a sense of remorse and guilt***- A person hiding the real self often feels that he is doing something improper. Sarah Newman⁸ says, “When we deny our truth, we hurt ourselves deeply. We communicate to ourselves that we won’t meet our needs. It communicates shame, fosters guilt and creates angst. Hiding own’s authentic self produces feelings of immorality and impurity.”

The most devastating effect of masking occurs when we make it a deeply etched habit and we suppress our emotions continuously, this has lasting effects on us.

We close this discussion with the points made by Doreen Barker⁹ in her paper about such extreme cases where she talks about the lasting effects on our body and mind if emotions are continuously suppressed:

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“Psychologists Richards & Gross completed two studies investigating the effects of emotion suppression on cognitive functioning and physiological activity. The results of the first study demonstrated that emotional suppression affects cognitive functions, such as memory. Emotional suppression affects the brain’s encoding of information from short-term memory into long-term memory. The second study showed that the suppression condition participants experienced a higher activation of the cardiovascular system, meaning that emotional suppression causes the body to undergo higher activation levels in response to the emotional experience.

Those who tend to keep thoughts repressed and feelings bottled or blocked are more likely to develop health issues like emotional exhaustion, low immunity, and depression. There are at least five harmful side effects hiding emotions can cause on the body and mind:

1. **Increased Risk of Heart Disease** — Stress hormones become hyperactive when you hide emotions, causing a release of cortisol and increasing blood pressure. This increases your risk of cardiovascular issues, heart attack, and stroke. Increased heart and pulse rates are also seen with emotional suppression.
2. **Disturbs your Mental Health & Well-Being** — Emotional suppression is a coping mechanism causing an increased likelihood of depression and anxiety. Memory loss and deteriorated communication skills are also an issue. Sleep patterns can also become disrupted.
3. **Increases the Cancer Risk** — Suppression of negative emotions is known to increase cortisol levels. In turn, this suppresses the immune system allowing cancer cells to mutate. According to the Journal of Psychosomatic Research, the abnormal secretion of cortisol increased the risk of developing breast cancer among women.
4. **Harms Sexual & Reproductive Health** — Higher cortisol levels impact your normal sex life, including the inability to reach climax. The increases in stress can affect ovulation in women and sperm production in men. Extreme stress hormones can even lead to infertility.
5. **Lowers Bone Strength** — Emotional suppression is held within the body in the shoulder, neck, and back. People who regularly engage in suppressing emotion can have stiff joints, bone weakness, and possibly movement issues later in life.

We have covered various aspects of the Persona—the mask over the real self. While it is natural for all of us to wear the mask and it does help us in various situations but it is far better to be what we really are i.e. discard the mask and be our real selves. It is easier said than done. It is very difficult to be transparent all the time, the temptation to hide the real self is high and does not permit transparency. But determination and effort can drive a person to become transparent and live in a society with dignity without wearing the mask which hides the real self. But why should we do it? There are many advantages of stripping off the mask.

We shall conclude the paper after looking into the advantages and exploring how to get rid of the mask. Let us first look at the benefits of being true real self, most of the time:

Advantages of being true self and living without a mask over the real self :

Life is easy when we conveniently hide our real selves to get along with people around us but if we want to be transparent most of the time and make it our habit, we shall be living a far superior life. We shall see the positives of being transparent in this section of the paper. The first and foremost positive is living with a clear conscience. Though difficult yet it is possible that we are transparent- we say what we mean, and we do what we really intend. We get guided by the inner voice and never over-rule the true self. By doing so we avoid the guilt of cheating

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ourselves which arises when we pretend to be some entity different from what we really are. Clear conscience gives moral strength and fills positivity in our lives. We are more confident than ordinary people who mask their real selves. Life is easier as we don't have to make special efforts to be always on guard so that we don't do a thing which will go against the worn mask. We are at ease because we don't have a mask.

Melissa Allen¹⁰ lists down many benefits including the ones stated above. Let us see Melissa's views:

- ***Being authentic allows you to breathe easier:*** Hiding and pretending can be emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausting. The more you allow your essence to mature, the less stress will be in your life and the more relaxed you'll be in every area of your life.
- ***Less stress makes you more productive :*** You know it's true. When you're not stressed out and can focus on what's going on in front of you rather than trying to live as you aren't, your productivity in your work, your play and your life, in general, will skyrocket.
- ***Greater trust:*** When people see you living in alignment with your values, and see you being straightforward yourself, their trust in you will soar. And trustworthy people make great leaders. If you become known for being honest and trustworthy, you're more likely to be promoted or given opportunities.
- ***Being true to yourself will help you remember how to dream:*** Surviving each day being untrue to yourself just to survive the next steals your creativity and passion. Allowing yourself to dream again will open doors you deadbolted years ago and lead to your purpose. Imagine actually living each day inspired by doing what brings you joy. Believe it or not, it's entirely possible!
- ***Life will much easier:*** Yes, life will be much easier to live when you are truly yourself. Trying hard to be like Mr A to impress everyone can be mentally and physically exhausting. Life becomes more difficult because you are in opposition to what your heart really needs. When you are truly yourself, you live life at your own pace.
- ***You will make better decisions:*** Yes, you will make better decisions when you are your true self. If you give in to social norms and follow the herd, you are likely to value other's people's opinions more than you listen to what your heart says. You are more likely to make wrong decisions this way. But when you embrace your true personality and follow your heart, you can hardly go wrong.
- ***Being you will give you confidence:*** Now that you're trying on your own shoes instead of walking in someone's that are too small, you won't have to focus on the pain of pretending. You can walk taller, throw your shoulders back and hold your head high. Regardless of your gender, you know wearing stylish shoes that fit makes you feel better about yourself and puts a spring in your step. Let that confidence carry you through the whole day – and the whole day after that.

Some more positives of being transparent are given in an article in Citizen¹¹

- ***You gain trust and respect by being real and transparent:*** As your confidence grows, you'll inspire respect in others as they see you living in your truth. Everyone wants someone to look up to, and people recognize and respect authenticity. You'll find yourself being a role model for others. When people see you living in alignment with your value and see you being straightforward, their trust in you will soar. And trustworthy people make great leaders. If you become known for being honest and trustworthy, you're more likely to be promoted or given opportunities.

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- ***Authenticity gives you greater resilience to reduce stress:*** People who are at peace with their true selves are much more resilient when it comes to dealing with life's ups and downs. They deal better with stress, which in turn has great benefits for their physical health. They don't spend their lives in the cortisol soup that comes from being highly stressed.
- ***Leads you to better health:*** Living in alignment means you're much more likely to take care of yourself, you'll prioritize self-care, rest and balance. Researchers found that people committed to living an authentic life were more likely to eat healthy foods, exercise and get regular physical exams. Being your authentic self also sets you up for better mental health as you are calmer, less conflicted and generally all-around happier!
- ***Helps build stronger and lasting relationships:*** Being authentic leads to better relationships because you're not pretending to be someone else. You can be honest and straightforward about who you are and what you value, without fear of being judged. You're also better at managing boundaries and less judgmental of your partner. All these lead to stronger and lasting relationships as the foundation is on the real self.

It goes without saying that it is always advantageous to go along the flow. Going along the flow of nature is naturally good. If we attempt to wear a mask over the real self we are going against nature. It may give short-term benefits but in the long run, it is the transparency which yields lasting good results. To reap the benefits, we must eliminate the lifelong habit of shielding ourselves behind the fabricated mask. Since habits die hard, it is not an easy transition from masking to transparency. This is an uphill task.

Coming to the end of the paper, we, now, take up the last topic i.e., how to move towards becoming transparent.

How to leave the mask and become authentic- the real self

Lyn Christian¹² explains what authenticity means and how we can become true to our real selves by becoming authentic. She says, "Fear of rejection often prevents people from expressing their authentic selves. They put up a "mask" and change their behaviour in order to fit in or act in a way that others think they should.

This happens to us all and we choose a convenient and easy way to get the respect of people around us. But this makes us hypocrites and no longer remain authentic and transparent. In the next paragraphs, we shall understand what is meant by Authenticity and how can we become authentic and true to our real selves.

I quote Lyn Christian to get to the steps for becoming authentic. She goes on to say,

"Authenticity means having a keen awareness of who you are and what you stand for and expressing yourself honestly and consistently to the world.

Authenticity Means:

- *Speaking your opinions honestly in a healthy way*
- *Making decisions that align with your values and beliefs*
- *Pursuing your passions*
- *Listening to the inner voice guiding you forward*
- *Allowing yourself to be vulnerable and open-hearted*
- *Setting boundaries and walking away from toxic situations*

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To move towards your real self, the worn mask has to be shed away in such a way that social acceptance is not compromised. Following steps are suggested by Lyn to move towards becoming authentic and transparent and maintaining social acceptance:

- **Take personal inventory**—*you have to ask the question to yourself who you are when you are not wearing the mask to hide your real self. You should be clear about the people, activities or situations which make you feel alive and what type of people you do not want to associate with because they make you angry, unhappy or toxic. Once you are clear about these you can take appropriate steps to have a fruitful company. Having done that, analyze the adverse situations to understand what was really going on – who was with you, what emotions came up and what those experiences cost you emotionally and physically. Side by side you should do introspection about authentic situations to understand who was then with you, what activities happened and what were positive emotions or outcomes of those experiences. These analyses will show you a way for making changes in your thoughts and actions to facilitate your becoming authentic and transparent.*
- **Piece it together**- *You need to prioritize those people and activities that bring you joy and meaning. Alternatively, you may need to walk away from those unhealthy relationships and toxic situations if you want to live a more authentic life.*
- **Stick to your real self in all situations and focus forward--** *The ability to be present with yourself, no matter what is going on around you, is essential to authenticity. If you are always distracted by your mental chatter or reacting to external situations, you're not aware of your own state of being and this will prevent you from moving towards authenticity. You must stick to your true self come what may. Never get distracted. When you find yourself wondering how you appear, whether you meet approval, or what you should do next, focus inward. Reflect on your values. Practice taking a pause to breathe and check in with yourself regularly throughout the day. This will strengthen your mindfulness and help you notice when you are being inauthentic. With awareness, you will find opportunities to express yourself more fully and take actions that feel more in line with the real you.*
- **Build your social support system-** *We need to find the courage to say 'No' to the things and people that are not serving us if we want to rediscover ourselves and live our lives with authenticity. If you want to live an authentic life, you'll need to surround yourself with authentic people. That means intentionally giving your time and attention to people who not only are true to themselves but also support you in your journey. Take inventory of your social circle from time to time and surround yourself with supportive people who lift you up. They can encourage you to shine as your true self. To build your support system, you will have to find communities, groups, or people in your life who share your core values. Spend time with them and stand by them and you will have to surround yourself with people who encourage your big dreams, rather than shoot them down and walk away from the naysayers. You must connect with a coach or mentor, who can help navigate your path to self-discovery. Lastly, you must check and adjust your relationships from time to time.*
- **Be assertive in dealings--** *Some people tend to be passive and hold back from sharing opinions. Others aggressively dominate and fail to listen. With passive-aggressive dealings, sarcasm and dishonesty block the way to an authentic exchange. Being assertive means expressing your needs honestly and with confidence; listening attentively to other people when they speak; facing others squarely keeping eye contact and being able to say emphatic no when you disagree. Being assertive ensures open, honest dialogue while still considering the needs of others. This encourages balanced*

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dealings in which both people have a fair chance to collaborate. Along with the above actions, you must set boundaries to prevent unhealthy dealings. All the above actions pave the way towards authenticity.

- **Take small steps daily towards authenticity**—Authenticity can feel like a big, abstract concept. But when you really look at it, it comes down to your day-to-day actions. Because it's those seemingly small steps, the things you say, your decisions, your actions, that add up to who you are. Actualizing an authentic life starts with intentional daily planning. If your time is dominated by other people's priorities, of course, you will feel you are not living your truth. Set aside time to decide your priorities for the day ahead. Include time each day to take a small step forward on your personal goals. This could be as simple as spending a few minutes researching a career change or practicing an art or sport that brings you joy. Commit to those small tasks. You'll be surprised how simple it becomes to see those small changes add up.
- **Don't hesitate to retreat to gain a better perspective**- When you find yourself in a rut, it makes sense to apply all your brainpower to come up with a solution. But sometimes that approach can get you nowhere, and just lead to a cycle of overthinking. Then the best way is to step back and reflect. When you hyperfocus on a problem, you can lose sight of who you are. Sometimes you need to take a step back to see the bigger picture, removing yourself from a situation altogether. You might need to take some time off, a day or a week, to do something fun. Taking a break helps to listen to your heart and your gut, and the answers will flow naturally to help you clear your doubts and reach a fitting solution.
- **Recognize internal/external influences and choose a way to act which takes you towards authenticity**-- When you want to know how to be your authentic self, it helps to differentiate your internal motivations and external influences. Internal motivators are those drives and desires that come from deep within. I'm talking about heart dreams that push you to become a better person and pursue your goals. External motivators refer to decisions you make based on external factors, like money, status, recognition, or expectations from other people. To distinguish between the two, you have to analyze and find answers to the following questions:
 1. Do I feel pressured by other people into taking this step? If so, by whom?
 2. What do I want to accomplish with this goal?
 3. Am I willing to fight through difficult obstacles to make this happen?
 4. Is this truly what I want? Listen to your gut. When you tap into your intuition, you may already know the answer deep down.

The answers will lead you to actions which your inner self will spell out. This will, surely, make you transparent and authentic.

When you discover how to be your authentic self and take appropriate actions, you live in the flow. Creativity and abundance come to you effortlessly. Consistently living up to your core values leads to self-confidence. You trust yourself and know that you can overcome obstacles when pursuing your goals.

When you learn how to be real, you also create genuine relationships. You express yourself honestly, and therefore, attract like-minded people who support you, for who you really are. Indeed, life gets its true meaning when you are authentic.

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We conclude the paper with the thought that while it is easy to shield the real self behind a mask and face society, it is tantamount to leading an artificial life and swimming against nature's flow. Being authentic takes you near nature and gives the world a perception of the real you. Exploring the mask, I have reached the knowledge that the mask is redundant and must be shed off. Let the real self shine brightly and illuminate the world. The path to authenticity is not easy and it is as if a snake is shedding off its skin and getting new brighter skin. That is a difficult process. Andre Berthiaume says, *"We all wear masks, and the time comes when we cannot remove them without removing some of our own skin."* Yes, indeed, it is extremely difficult to mend ways; old habits die hard but if you follow the dictum as propagated by the following quotes, you will see the compelling reason to take the difficult path to authenticity:

***"Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind."* – Bernard M. Maruch**

***"You were born an original. Don't die a copy."* – John Mason**

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