

Quadrophenia and Personal Identity

Mark Dixon - September 2016

This morning I want to talk to you about personal identity. Who we are and who we present to the world. Often they can be different things. Sometimes we can be so bothered about what we present to the world that it causes who we are to become confused and us to be uncertain about that. If we are not careful we can then lose our own idea of who we are.

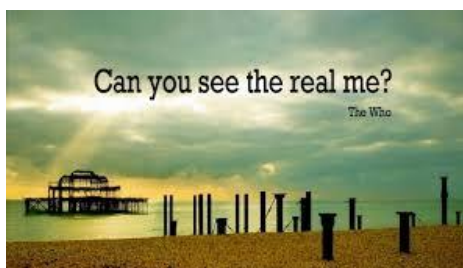


To help us consider this question I am going to introduce you to one of my favourite albums. It came out in 1973 and is 'Quadrophenia' by The Who. The album is a concept album, which means it is all based around telling a storyline with the individual tracks working together to tell this story. In 1979 a film was made from the album. An irritation for me is that people often call the album a soundtrack, when it worked the other way around. A film was made of the story behind the album.

The album is all about personal identity and the lengths people will go to 'fit in' to their surroundings. In the 1960's teenagers and 20-somethings would often define themselves as being either a 'Mod' or a 'Rocker' and it became very important to clearly be one of these groups. This was very much the case in London and Brighton and in this area of South London, but was a national picture too.

In order to fit in to one of these groups, young men would behave in very particular ways: the wearing of certain clothes, the listening to certain music, haircuts, where they hang out, what vehicles to drive. For Mods it was clear it had to be a motorbike with many mirrors on, as the album cover shows. In the album cover we see the main character, Jimmy, looking at a group of mirrors on his Mod bike. Staring back at him are different images. He is trying to look at himself but seeing lots of different people staring back.

The album tells the story of Jimmy trying so hard to fit in that he forgets who he is or who he wants to be. In one of the lines in the album he cries "*I work myself to death, just to fit in*" - as if this is his aim in life; that fitting in is his whole purpose. He becomes so good at presenting different faces to different groups of people: his Mod friends, work, family, girlfriend, that he genuinely loses his own identity. The album covers the story of that confusion, loss and him regaining that sense.



Click on the link below to hear 'The Real Me' from the album – as played in the assembly.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2h1MY70uag>

Of course we want to fit in where we are, and within our surroundings. However it is a mistake to make that our main purpose or to change everything about us just to make that happen. I like the fact that we are a community of individuals with different likes, characteristics, interests, etc. That enriches our community and makes it an interesting and vibrant place.

I have a request of you – please be yourself and, as importantly, allow others to be themselves. Don't exert pressure on each other to change just to make you more comfortable. Embrace each other's personalities and enjoy the differences.