

Hipsters

I was thankfully released from caring too much about what other people think of me a few decades ago, and I haven't thought much about it recently. Maybe once or twice when I silently celebrated after doing or saying some foolish thing in public that resulted in a few friendly chuckles from witnesses when I smiled, shrugged and let it pass over me like a breeze.

As I was doing dishes and staring out my window at some audibly self-assured crows in the tree, I remembered someone I knew in NH, who resembles so many other people I know, and who was so incarcerated by having to be "cool" and be perceived as one of the "in crowd" that she was ever so slightly trembling from nervousness whenever in public. Her face was strained, she struck a stiff and awkward pose while trying to look relaxed and confident, even blasé. She seemed to measure every response as though weighing it on a scale of coolness before any words escaped her lips that made her seem, God forbid, warm and genuine, or, even more ghastly, enthusiastic. I always thought she was very cool and I was, for a while, intimidated by her, until I realized what a tortured existence she must live, being such a prisoner of superficial judgement by equally superficial people. Her prison made her cold, defensive and even hostile at times. I began to see that any moments of happiness she snatched from being considered "cool" were hollow victories that sat on the razor's edge of her next move. What insane pressure to have exerted on her for such a cheap reward.

Where is the logic in caring how other people who don't really know us deeply, perceive us? Their perceptions are filtered through all their own baggage, and that baggage has absolutely nothing to do with us or our lives. Even more so, the very perceptions we may assume they are having about us are often not what they are perceiving at all. It's a perfect storm of false assumptions.

Why is it not enough for us to know what our own truths are? Our own value? We know the whole story behind our own actions. That should be enough for us to feel compassion for ourselves and just carry on undaunted by these ridiculous fears. Why would it even cross our minds to alter our choices and behaviors based on what other people, foreigners out there who know nothing of our trials, our pain, our tender underbellies, might think? My force field still goes up from time to time when sensitive issues are being triggered, but for the most part, the growth of this non-stick surface that has been slowly overtaking my thin, crap-absorbant skin is accelerating, and I am now enjoying a sustained stroll in the perfect grace of Teflon.