

iThink, Therefore iAm

As he woke up in the morning, he immediately reached for his iPhone charging on his nightstand. Blinding light flashed before his eyes. He flicked through the notifications, mostly from Messenger, some from Tumblr, a single one from Twitter – a “like” affirming that at least one tweet held relatable substance.

His shoulders ached and his neck was rather stiff – not a very ideal sleep. He cursed the swipe right on Tinder that led him to Juana de Dios, but swiped right on her notification anyway and reattempted awkward flirting.

He showered, brushed his teeth, wore his uniform, and slung that Jansport onto his shoulder. He exited the house, of course not without tweeting “Smh late for school again” with a smirking emoji followed by the 2015 *word* of the year – the ‘Face with Tears of Joy’ emoji. The car doors opened; he slung the books off his shoulder. Finally, with a selfie, he was good to go.

That is a typical morning in the life of Juan de la Cruz.

As for me, hideous eye bags were exposed by my lack of glasses. I had earlier tweeted the night before, of how I destroyed my glasses, and of how I had morphed into a panda without the cuteness and all. Everyone by the lockers looked at me, expecting my transformation. I stepped foot inside the classroom, where there were nine empty seats upon an initial glance. At least I am not the *only* one late. Tumblers lined the desks, providing the distinct smell of a classroom – freshly brewed coffee.

How would I ever survive this day? I made my way to the front, asking one of my friendlier friends for a sip. “You’re just gonna finish half of it” she said with a smirk. “Nah, I swear, I just need a little bit to get me through”. I finished a quarter instead.

Coffee was actually supposed to be an old people drink. Only Instagram could have reinvigorated the drink into a youthful form, a symbol of high society amongst intellectuals or self-proclaimed intellectuals. Not just any coffee, though – not the Kopiko Brown in *Sari-sari stores*. It had to be *branded* brewed coffee. It had to have that STARBUCKS on the cup.

The status symbol part is probably only a side-effect of something bigger; the drink's role in school has not only become an exam buddy booster, but the life-force of students. A side effect of how our vanity, of how our flagrant obsession with attention has kept us up to the early hours of the next day. No one sleeps at ten anymore.

Newspapers were now being distributed in class. My eyes scanned the paper for any news that deserved my further scrutiny. Nothing! I read it all last night in a single 140 character tweet. Donald J. Trump gets the votes of the angry white male, I have seen it a hundred times (not exaggerating). All those articles helped build the rage inside me and the friends that I discussed Trump's infuriating comments with. They only reinforced the pre-existing opinions that I had about Republicans: *homophobic, racist, sexist*. When you have millions of people shouting their views into the Tumblr megaphone, you cannot help but solidify your positions.

The generation is forced in unanimity into camps of those with like-minded ideologies, a strength that no political campaign has ever seen on such a scale ever before the dawn of the twenty-first century. Obama pointed out this phenomenon: the increasing polarization of politics. It is a dichotomy that helped him win the 2008 elections, made the youth love the Marcos family again, and made ISIS look cool to millions of Twitter teens.

The generation built unity in the divides because on the internet, we can see the things we *want* to see with a quick search on Google. We wait no longer than .38 seconds. A library may yield a thousand books, but the search engines index over a million. Of course, it would be so

impossible to sift through those thousands. That is where social media comes in as a filter. The mentality is that the content left on a page is the “best” a person has to offer, the best “information” they could, to disseminate information that would not make them look like a fool.

An easy filter is the hashtag. It is on almost every tweet sent, though at times it is used in a satirical context. But a *trending* hashtag, now that is what really matters. Trends like AIDub, whose related hashtags ruled the Philippines and the world for months.

The groups we are in, the hashtags we tweet on, they all became a safe playground for our thoughts and tastes, because we can freely express ourselves without fear of being bashed, for we are in the company of people who share the same thoughts and tastes as us. This unity *made* AIDub. It made us feel safe in our own skin, in our own identity.

That identity is one aims to build an ultimate self, one on the edge of the spectrum’s ends. More than the egalitarianism that most teens push is the push not to be outdone. It is the need to be better than the standards marketer’s standards.

A few years ago, everyone wanted a thigh gap, because that was sexy. Thus, there was the rise of the *pro-an* blog (short for *pro-anorexia*) to help users achieve the impossible beauty standard. Fast forward to today and pro-an meets body positive blogs featuring plus size models that just might ironically shame those thinner than them.

In this race for the best, both genders seek higher expectations in what a partner is – a toned body, subjectively “pleasant” traits – we no longer compromise, because we have come to teach ourselves in this age of instant gratification, that we can find a perfect person with the touch of a finger. Maybe we have come to believe ourselves as perfect beings.

After all, that is all we talk about on the internet. It is all about *me, me, me* – so much that Time Magazine has dubbed the millennial generation the “*me, me, me*” generation. Although

these news sites' judgment of our generation's future is not rational, as they have judged us as teenagers, they invite us to reflect on our current state now – as *teenagers*. Are we really that full of ourselves?

We are, justly so. After all, your internet identity is – you. But it is special in the sense that you can *control* your identity. You become god where you create who you are. It does not have to be you. YouTubers do not post videos under names like Felix Kjellberg; they post under names like PewDiePie. Not that different from Ashley Nicolette Frangipane using the stage name of Halsey. But before MySpace, there was no place for someone to express themselves in the way they wanted to. Expression among peers was limited to existing cliques. You were bound to your groups, because you feared what lay outside of those bounds.

When the first networks came along, teenagers finally had a say in something. They could share the music they loved knowing that someone could actually *relate* to them. Not just their friends, but other people that liked their tastes. If people disliked their tastes or even took the time to bash, then there was a safety net – a screen. When Facebook came along and introduced Pages, that safety net was given a double layer. Individuals would not be at the mercy of attackers. Instead, they could just hide behind a colloquial page.

Some take identity to the level of none at all – *anonymous*. It even became its own un-organized organization, Anonymous, one of the “beasts” of 4chan. Anonymous actually has good intentions; they have exposed the accounts of ISIS on Twitter, child porn users, and corruption. *Anonymous users* on 4chan though, quite the opposite – they have shown that the state of anonymity on the internet reveals the truest darkness among human beings. Rules do not apply; morality does not apply; only anarchy does. Here we are given a free-for-all playground with no repercussions. One might argue that an internet persona is merely just a persona, merely

just an *alter ego*. We are not actually our *alter egos*; they are not actually us, right? Alter ego means “the other I” in Latin, the other self. They are us, just a different part of us, but still essentially us. It is dangerous to think that who we are on the internet is not who we are in real life. A study by Erin Buckels found that internet trolls are actually real life trolls, possessing more narcissistic, Machiavellian, psychopathic, and sadistic qualities.

Even if we are not trolls, who are we to say that we are spared from being the selfie-posting, coffee-loving, poet-turned-musician-“genius”? That is exactly who we are – we are the people we project ourselves to be, even if in real life we are the camera shy introvert who hates being asked out to coffee and just absolutely hates performing for a school show. We are given the opportunity to show the world that we are actually better than the person people see us as on the school yard. It gives us a way to excel at our own pace, behind a keyboard and a screen.

Before all of these sites, the question “who am I?” on the school yard was degrading. The question was left exposed to the rawness of the world. Now the answer is refined. Check out my account. That is who I am. And I am proud of it.

The other side of the coin is where instead of others degrading us, we degrade ourselves to the ever accessible achievements, those with the same circumstances and age, and yet (in our eyes) *simply better than us*. In a race to be better, we are left with choosing to succumb to the pain of another person’s success, or proving the world that we are successful in our own right, even if we have not earned the privilege. So we will play into the godlike selves that we have created. As Shakespeare said it, hundreds of years before it could appear in a feed: “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players”.