

URL: <https://ecorner-prod.tcg.stanford.edu/in-brief/forget-about-fitting-in/>

Recalling her college days, entrepreneur Catherine Berman describes how each one of us knows what it feels like to not fit in. During her freshman year, she discovered that friends she thought had perfect lives because of family wealth and good looks were actually quite unhappy on the inside. Berman, now co-founder and CEO of CNote, says people have a choice to either hide or embrace what makes them different.



Transcript

- Nearly everyone has that sense of other.. For example, three of my closest friends.. One, incredibly wealthy, I shared you the story of her just signing away.. And so on the peripheral, or just you know superficially you think she's got it all, she wants for nothing.. Incredibly, incredibly unhappy.. She would come home on the holidays to two parents who couldn't stand each other.. Who had been on the verge of divorce for years.. Who had both worked separately, and done tremendously well in their jobs, but had nothing left to give to the family or each other.. And so all this wealth that she'd amassed, and she enjoyed spending, came at a price.. Very wealthy, and very unhappy..

My other friend, gorgeous to date, gorgeous gorgeous woman.. And she would always dress perfectly, perfectly coiffed, you know perfectly made up.. And I would look at her and be like wow, that's gotta be so cool to walk in a room and have that presence and have that, those looks and wow.. Until I got a closer look.. And came to learn that this wonderful woman, who was so beautiful, was so insecure.. She'd been struggling with an eating disorder for years.. She'd had family that cared a lot about looks.. And behind the scenes, when she took off all her makeup, she was incredibly depressed.. And the third friend, very ambitious young lady, was actually my college roommate.. Her father had told her that she is very smart and should pursue something very exciting..

And so when I met her for the first time, she said "oh I'm definitely a computer science major.. "It's in my family, I'm very focused, I'm very ambitious." And so we were all absolutely inspired by her freshman year that she was just so driven.. And so with a closer look I came to find, it was actually her dad who wanted her to be the computer science major, not her.. And he was back home, struggling with cancer.. And she didn't wanna let him down.. Left to her own devices she wanted to do something completely different.. But she felt the weight of the world, of her father, of that struggle of losing her father, that she kept up that front that this is actually what she wanted to do.. And so I share those stories because we all have those stories.. And so, or during that time of a closer look, look I really found that we all feel to some degree that sense of other, and we all have choices.. And so that's what really happened to me, my sophomore year..

Is I recognized, wow, this exterior of perfection actually doesn't exist and we're all struggling with that sense of other.. And what we do with that matters.. That we can choose to shine a light on our other, and just ignore it and keep up the facade.. Or we can choose to shine a light on it and seek to understand it.. Look at it through a lens of what do I value? What do I care about? Who do I wanna be? And do I wanna continue to embrace what I was born with, or what I've accepted to date? Or do I wanna go another path.. And that was a huge moment for me.. Because I decided there were a lot of parts of me that were other, and it was something that I chose to be proud of, and not hide anymore...