

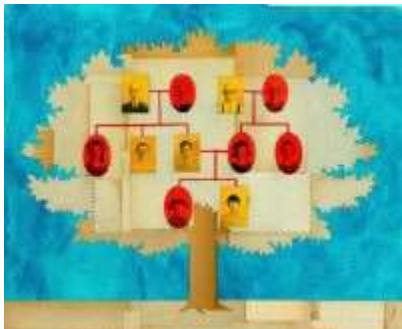
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Identify Yourself At The Franklin

By: Sally Friedman , For The Bulletin



Philadelphia - Who are you?

Not to get overly existential, but identity is surely one of life's most intriguing issues, and it's become the subject of a full-scale exhibit at the Franklin Institute, where it was developed. It will move on to other locations after it ends locally on April 20.

Meanwhile, it's a terrific place to explore how you got to be you, physically, psychologically and socially. The science is there, of course, but there's also an element of pure delight in unwrapping layers of one's own story.

Case in point in the physical section of the Identity exposition: One of the early experiences in this highly interactive exhibition involves your own fingerprints. And if you've never seen them, the initial sight of all those grooves and swirls is an awakening. Officially, there are three elements in all fingerprints: whorls, loops and arch patterns. You can study your own pattern, then you're invited to compare the prints from one hand to the other - and they turn out to be different.

The physical part of the exhibit also includes this grabber, particularly appealing, it seems, to kids: A chance to see how you might look in 30 or 40 years. The wait for that station was a bit longer than for others, but it's well worth it.

Then there's the chance to play Family Match-Up, a chance to look at strangers and decide who belongs in which family. And it's not as easy as it sounds.

The psychological area of identity changes the question from "What Do I Look like?" to "How Do I Think and React?" While the youngest visitors may not find this fascinating, many of the older ones definitely seemed to during an opening week visit.

There are intriguing personality tests that gauge characteristics like introvert vs. extrovert, traditionalist vs. innovator, wired or relaxed. There's even a chance to explore what your reaction to smell tells you about yourself, and that old conundrum, the differences between the male and female brain. Actually, significant differences between the genders do appear near the end of fetal development.

Our interaction with others forms the core of the Identity exhibit's third section, social identity. Its question: "How Do Others Affect Who I Am?"

One of the most active spots is a dance floor on which an inevitable group experience takes place. Each person is assigned a color upon stepping onto the floor, and as more dancers participate, boundaries change and interaction begins. It's a kind of floor show that draws lots of interested bystanders.

Also in the social identity area is one of the exhibition's most engaging attractions. Visitors observe a video scenario in which the same individual is justifying a small transgression to different listeners like his employer, his girlfriend and his mother. We are left to guess to whom he is speaking, and what his tone and body language convey. It's the kind of "game" that quickly becomes addictive.

Other stations allows one to change gender or ethnicity via computer and also to test biases about gender differences in the humanities and science.

This is an exhibition that definitely can't be whizzed through - it deserves at least a couple of hours. While youngsters ages 10 and older are prime candidates for a real immersion, the very young may be more confounded than enlightened.

In the end, the exhibition's tagline, "An Exhibition of You," turns out to be right on target. You're bound to learn something about yourself, and you'll surely recognize the interplay of your physical, psychological and social identities.

Not a bad way to spend a couple of hours.

"Identity" remains at the Franklin Institute, 222 N. 20th St. through April 20. Free entry with museum admission. \$13.75-\$11. 215 448-1200.

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