

Identity Theft: Rediscovering Ourselves After Stroke

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Chapter 3 Summary: A Teacher Without Words

Before her stroke, Debra was a professor at Stanford University. In 2001, she published a book called, *Tempered Radicals*. It was about people with identities that do not fit easily into big organizations. Debra studied the concept of “identity” for many years. She loved her work.

People have many different identities. Identities also change over time. For example, Debra was a student and daughter when she was young. Then she became a professor, wife, and mother. Our identities are shaped by the things and people that are most important to us. When Debra had a stroke, she felt she lost her old identity. Suddenly, she was an athlete who needed help to walk. She was a teacher who was unable to speak. She tells a story about **Manny Gigante**, another survivor who worried he could not protect his family.

After Debra’s stroke, she worked very long and hard to recover. She was determined to get her old life back. But three years later, her speech was still difficult. She had to give up her job at Stanford. She was very hurt and scared about her future. Slowly, Debra began to think differently. She thought about the things in life she valued most and why. She knew she still could make choices about her life. She asked herself a very important question: who do I **want** to be **now**?

Debra remembered a tool she had studied developed by a famous psychologist named Abraham Maslow. It was a pyramid that described the different needs that must be met for people to feel happy and fulfilled. Basic needs like food and safety were at the bottom. In the middle were psychological needs like strong relationships with friends and family. Only at the very top did people feel fulfilled. Debra had been there. Debra started at the bottom of the pyramid after her stroke. Her desire to be independent motivated her a lot. She decided to find a new way to teach. She could still inspire people. She could still share knowledge. She could find meaning and purpose in her life again. With help, she could write another book.

Chapter 3 Highlights: A Teacher Without Words

1. Debra tells us about her life before her stroke. She was a university professor and consultant. She was passionate about her work. In 2001 she published a book called *Tempered Radicals*. It was about people whose personal identities sometimes made it hard for them to fit easily into big organizations. Debra studied the concept of identity as a scholar for many years.
2. People often define their identity by their roles in life. We each have multiple identities that change with time. For example, Debra was a student and daughter. Then she became a professor, wife, and mother. Our identities relate to other people. They also reflect the things that are most important to us.
3. When Debra's stroke happened, she felt that the old ways she defined herself were no longer true. She was confused about her identity. She was an athlete who now needed help to walk. A mother who was comforted by her children.
4. Debra introduces **Manny Gigante**, another stroke survivor. Manny was a hard working software engineer in California. When he was 29 years old, he had a bad stroke. Manny's young son died in an accident after Manny's stroke. Could Manny have stopped the accident before his stroke? Using a wheelchair made him worry he could not protect his family.
5. After Debra's stroke, her life changed a lot. This was very difficult for her to accept. She was stubborn and refused to give up her career at Stanford University. It was something she had worked so hard to build. She wanted to ski and bike. She wanted to go on adventures with her family. She kept working hard to recover her old life.

6. Three years after her stroke, Debra's speech was still difficult. She could not teach and research at Stanford anymore. She was very hurt. And she was very scared about her future. She cared a lot about her work and the topics she studied. Who would she be without them?
7. Debra tried to accept that her life had changed. It was very hard. She was so frustrated. Sometimes she felt hopeless and trapped. Her emotions were complex and scared her. Debra started to wonder if she had lost important parts of her life and identity forever.
8. Slowly, some of the ideas Debra had once taught as a professor began to help her. She tried to understand what made her happy and why. Debra realized she still could make choices in her life. She asked herself a very important question: who do **I want** to be **now**?
9. Debra remembered a tool she had studied. It was created by a famous psychologist named Abraham Maslow. It is a pyramid of the different needs people must address to feel happy and fulfilled. The needs at the bottom of Maslow's pyramid are basic ones: do I have the food, water, warmth, and rest my basic needs? Am I safe from harm?
10. The middle level of needs are psychological. Do I have strong relationships with family and friends? Do I feel accomplished and proud? The very top of the pyramid relates to self-fulfillment: do I feel creative and powerful? Do I feel like my best self?
11. Right after her stroke, Debra was at the bottom of the pyramid. She was completely dependent on the hospital and other people to keep her alive and safe. Nothing else mattered. As her health became more stable, Debra hated that people always had to help her. Her desire to be independent motivated her.

12. Meeting her psychological needs was harder. Without the ability to speak Debra’s relationships changed. She had to find new ways to create meaning and be happy. She needed to build a different life with the abilities and limitations she had now. Debra was a teacher without words. But maybe she could teach in new ways. She could still inspire people. She could still share knowledge. With help, she could even write another book.

Chapter 3 Points for Reflection: A Teacher Without Words

1. Debra feels her identity was changed a lot by her stroke. How much do **you feel your identity was changed** by your stroke?

Very Little				Some					A Lot
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. What **parts of your identity** and life were changed by your stroke? (circle all that apply). What changed **the most**?

Family		Friends		Career
	Home Life		Hobbies	
My Dreams		What I Value		Something Else

3. Manny worried that he could not be a good father and protect his family after his stroke. Were **you worried** about your family and friendships after your stroke?

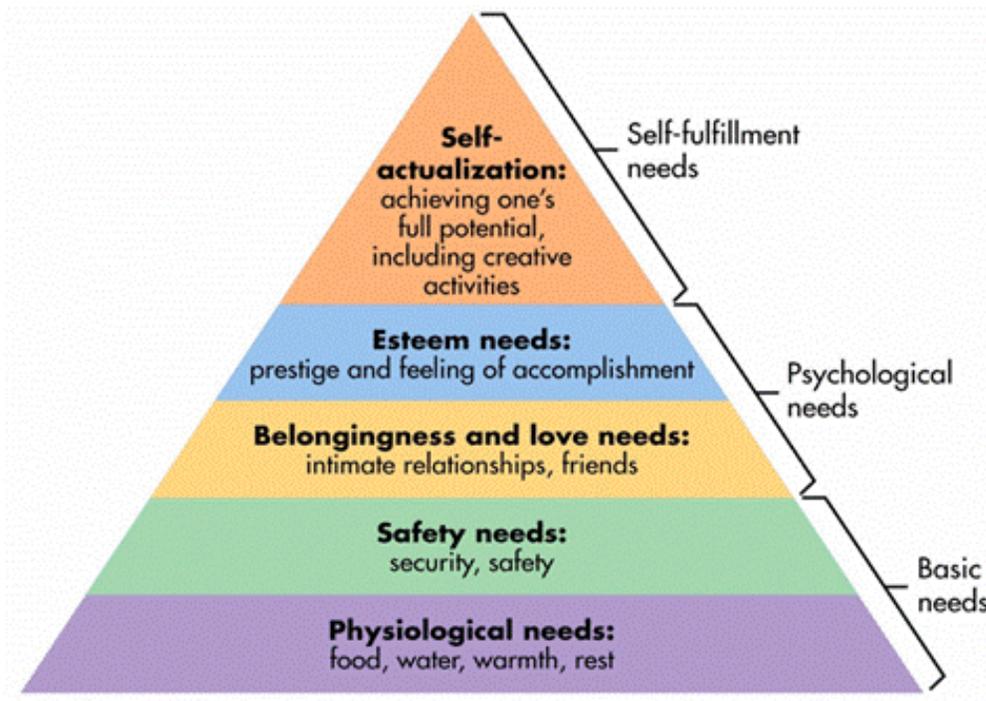
Very Worried			Somewhat Worried		No Worries at All				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. Debra worked very hard to recover. It was very **important** to her to be **independent**. Was **regaining independence** a high **priority** to you?

Not at All			Somewhat Important		Very Important				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5. How would you describe your identity **when you were a child**? (For example: I was a son/daughter, I was a brother/sister/only child, I played sports, I studied hard, I liked to tell jokes...)?

6. How would you describe your identity **before your stroke**?
7. How would you describe your identity **after your stroke**?
8. Debra describes Maslow's Hierarchy or pyramid of needs. How high on the pyramid were you **before** your stroke? (Mark with a "B") Where are you now **after** your stroke? (Mark with an "A")



9. Debra felt very frustrated and scared when she was told she could no longer be a professor. Did you have a **similar experience** after your stroke? What were you told or happened that made you feel this way?