

I have discovered that this thing we call “the Self” is bordering on, if not completely impossible, to pinpoint. Yes, there are many definitions, and ideas, and concepts of what the “Self” is. Such ideas include Sigmund Freud’s id, ego and superego, or the concept that Self exists within all humans, yet environment influences people to adapt into a changed Self. There is even the idea that Self cannot exist at all because people are simply collections of constantly changing memories and experiences, therefore, Self cannot ever be defined. Self cannot be a fixed notion. The idea of Self pertains to a vast multitude of components and variables, all intertwining and creating this so called “Self.”

In order to deduct my own idea of true Self, I began by researching the historically renowned ideas of various philosophers. Sigmund Freud proposed extremely influential theories regarding the definition of “Self” in the late 1800’s. Freud developed the idea of id, ego, and super ego. The id, ego and superego make up the conscious and subconscious mind. Freud believed that the id is the part of the mind that is completely instinctual. Id is inherited, and holds impulsive personality traits like sexual instinct and aggressiveness. According to Freud, the id is a primitive part of the mind that operates on the idea that immediate satisfaction should be gained, regardless of consequence. The ego is the part of the mind that has been affected by outside forces, and influences, such as parents or social norms. The ego works with the id to guide it in the right direction. Freud believes that ego uses reason, rather than impulse, in order to get what it wants, while avoiding the negative ramifications that come with the impulsivity of the id. Although the id is stronger than the ego, the ego is able to guide the id in the right direction using more realistic problem solving to get what it wants. Freud states, “One might compare the relation of the ego to the id with that between a rider and his horse. The horse provides the locomotor energy, and the rider has the prerogative of determining the goal and of guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it. But all too often in the relations between the ego and the id we find a picture of the less ideal situation in which the rider is obliged to guide his horse in the direction in which it itself wants to go” (Freud). Here, Freud is saying that the ego is the rider of a horse (the id). The ego is meant to guide the id in the right direction, though this is often a difficult task due to the fact that the id is stronger than the ego. According to Freud, the superego is made up of one’s morals, conscience, and the notion of ideal self. The superego guides the id using the conscience, which makes one feel guilty for immoral actions. The superego is one’s ideal Self, one’s aspirations, and who he or she wishes to be. This guides people to make good decisions in order to live up to their Self ideals.

Similar to Freud, Carl Jung believes that there is both good and evil in people. According to Jung, people have a “shadow Self.” This shadow Self is the unknown, or subconscious side to one’s personality. Jung believes that the shadow Self is often the darker, evil side to one’s personality that is being repressed. Things that are commonly found in the shadow Self are quite similar to the id. The shadow Self most often is made of impulsive emotions and desires such as greed, sexual desires, rage, and envy. Such emotions are often repressed due to their incompatibility with the external world, which labels “unacceptable” desires as immoral and wrong. As Jung states, “The sum of all personal, and collective psychic elements, which because of their incompatibility with the chosen conscious attitude, are denied expression in life” (Carl Jung). Jung is saying that our society’s morals and beliefs do not have a place for things like anger and lust because those emotions are seen as wrong. Therefore, those types of emotions become repressed and ignored. Although the shadow Self is seen as a part of oneself, it is the subjugated side of the Self due to what is deemed appropriate, or in the case of

the shadow Self, inappropriate. This creates two different sides of the Self. The side that is shown to the world, and the side that is kept hidden.

Carl Rogers is another influential philosopher who made discoveries about the Self in the mid 1900's that are applied to modern psychology. Carl Rogers believes that all people are adaptive beings, which is why we are the "dominant" species on our planet. As Rogers says, "The organism has one basic tendency and striving - to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism" (Rogers). Carl Rogers is saying that people are constantly trying to make their experience the best they can for themselves. In order to do this, people constantly change the Self in order to thrive in the environment in which they find themselves. According to Rogers, to be adaptive beings, people learn about their environment, and learn what they need to do in order to thrive in it. Rogers believes that all people are born with a particular sense of Self. According to Rogers, there are two major elements that shape whether or not one is able to stay true to his or her "true Self": parents and environment. When kids grow up with accepting, and loving parents, they are more able to "be themselves" because they are accepted. When parents reject their child's "true Self," children learn to reject themselves as well. They create a façade of Self in order to be someone who can be loved and accepted. Children also observe the environment they are in, and are able to learn how to adapt to the environment in order to thrive.

People learn how to thrive best in the environment they are placed in and, therefore, make changes to themselves in order to succeed in their environment. According to Carl Jung, "The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely" (Carl Jung). By this, Jung means that it is quite frightening for people to completely accept themselves with all of the societal and social standards that have been set. These standards paint a picture of what the ideal Self should look like, so when people do not fit those standards, they do not want to admit it in fear of not being accepted. For humans, acceptance and love are basic emotional needs; in order to gain love and acceptance, people attempt to fit in with others, by altering the Self. This also makes admitting one's "imperfections" to oneself (and to others) very difficult because no one wants to be seen as a "bad" person. This causes people to repress the true Self, and falsely create a new more socially acceptable self to show to the world.

Napa psychologist, Barrie Glen, explained to me why people struggle to stay true to their beliefs and desires. Glen states that all children have parents that fall within a spectrum of characteristics from un-accepting, un-loving, and unsupportive, to completely loving and supportive. Children who have un-accepting parents often learn to suppress parts of themselves in order to please their parents. Glen offers an example of a boy she worked with who grew up with two quiet, conservative parents. Both the parents expected him to grow up, go to college, and become a doctor, lawyer, or businessman. The son, however, had no interest in becoming any of these things, and much preferred working with cars, partying, and living a less structured life. Unfortunately, his parents did not accept their son the way he was, and so he struggled to be more like the parents. He began to repress who he was, and what he liked. This example can be applied to an array of social settings in which one enjoys something that is unaccepted by others. Desires are often repressed in order for someone to fit in and be accepted by his or her peers. How are emotions and actions categorized as "good" versus "bad"?

When people determine what differentiates acceptable and un-acceptable emotions, they must determine what the limits of the two sides are. While talking to Barrie Glen, we discussed how and why moral and social norms are set. Glen proposed the musings of John Locke, a philosopher who believes that morals are created because they work the best for the society. According to Glen, Locke thinks that, "All morality is really a function of what works" (Barrie

Glen). In other words, morals are created to set standards for what society needs to do. For example, if two groups were on an island, and they both kept stealing each other's food, neither group would be satisfied. Eventually, the two groups may come to the conclusion that they cannot steal each other's food, because both groups lose. Therefore, it becomes immoral to steal. Basically, if something does not work for the society, rules will be created to prevent that negative action from occurring. Anyone who perpetrates an un-acceptable act is looked down upon by society for failing to stick to the rules that work for society. This is the basis on which social and moral norms are created.

According to Glen, people need to receive love and empathy. It is human nature to want to be accepted. I believe that because social norms are already set, we all have some idea of what is "good" and what is "bad." This predisposition to knowing the difference can lead one to believe that anything he or she does on the "bad" spectrum makes that person a "bad person." Self-image is very important for most people. It is almost impossible for one to admit to being a bad person. If one admits to being a bad person, that person will often feel like they are admitting to the Self and others that he or she is a bad person.

In a documentary, *Upworthy*, psychologist Andrea Garcia Vargas explains why rapists often struggle with admitting that they have committed a sex offense crime, even after they are convicted. Because people need to preserve a good sense of Self-image, admitting to oneself that one has committed a crime of rape, is like admitting to oneself (and one's loved ones) that he or she is a bad person. According to Andrea Garcia Vargas, admitting to a crime is like labeling oneself as a bad person. By doing so, one risks losing the love and support of others. According to Vargas, "The core of our psychological health is our self-concept, our sense of who we are. And all of us, even people who commit sex offenses, like to think of ourselves as good people. Put simply, the challenge of committing a sex offense is that you need to do something bad while maintaining the idea that you are good, which means that you need to deceive yourself" (Garcia Vargas). Vargas is stating that all people like to see themselves as "good" and often deceive themselves to maintain that image. This is an example of why people repress parts of who they really are and create something like Carl Jung's idea of the shadow Self. People try to hide parts of themselves in order to preserve their Self-image.

In order to derive an idea of Self, it is best to find some sort of sensible balance, or, connection between the various ideas I have explored. Self is made of the "Self" that people share with the world, or what I would like to call, the "altered Self." Self is also made up of the repressed, or unaccepted Self. The altered Self stems from the aspects of the Self that are changed by one's environment and upbringing. The altered Self is the Self that has been created for the world to see and accept. Similar to the theories of Carl Rogers, I believe that adapting to one's environment helps the Self to thrive. When one experiences his or her environment and learns to adapt to it, he or she also learns how to repress certain feelings, while promoting other feelings. These repressed feelings turn to what is known by Jung as the shadow Self, or by me as the repressed self. The altered self comes from the feelings that one learns to celebrate and to share with the world such as intelligence, happiness, and motivation. The altered Self is the part of one that is shown to and accepted by the external world.

By this logic, it makes sense to me that people start out with primitive desires and wants. Once exposed to the external world, people alter their beliefs and desires in order to thrive in the environment they are put into. People who have already learned what the society deems acceptable teach younger children social norms. The altered self is created and shared, while the

repressed self is held back. On the other hand, there is the argument that due to constant environmental changes, there can never be a “true” Self.

The Ted Talk, “Is There a Real You?” by Dr. Julian Baggini explains that due to constant changes in one’s experiences and memories, there can never be a Self. Baggini believes that because people are made of up experiences and memories, the self is constantly changing. Baggini emphasizes the fact that we are not people with memories; we are people made up of memories. Baggini says that, “There isn’t actually a ‘you’ at the heart of all these experiences” (Baggini). Baggini believes that because people are constantly having experiences that shape them as a person, the Self is always changing. There cannot be a “you” because Self is a compilation of experiences. He gives the example that water molecules are made up of two hydrogen molecules, and one oxygen molecule. Water is not a molecule with hydrogen and oxygen; rather, hydrogen and oxygen make water. This applies to people in the sense that our identity is shaped by our memories and experiences.

Without memories, each person would not be who he or she is. Due to this logic, people cannot ever have a true Self because the fluctuating memories and experiences will always be altering who people are. Therefore, the Self is constantly changing and cannot truly exist. Because experiences happen constantly, one will never be able to identify the Self at any given time due to the fact that the Self is changing with experience. To some degree, I agree with this. Memories and experiences do shape who we are. We all have our own particular way of perceiving things. I see perception as being something people have due to genetics. Perception is important because it determines how ones identity is shaped. The way that one experiences his or her environment is dependent upon how one perceives the environment.

No two people will ever react in the same way to any situation. So, there must be something more to the self than experience. As Barrie Glen says, “It does not make sense to say that you don’t have an eternal state of who you are” (Barrie Glen). Glen means that everyone is predisposed to act and perceive a certain way. Although external forces alter the Self, there is a state in which people begin to see and experience the world. I agree with this idea of having an eternal sense of Aelf. I believe that this eternal sense of Self is what drives us to make particular choices or view things a certain way. From this eternal sense of Self, people separate the “good” and the “bad” due to what one derives out of the environment he or she is in. For example, if ten people had the same exact experience at the same exact time in their lives, each person would still perceive that experience in a completely different manner. This is because all people have their own individual ways of perceiving things.

The Self is a compilation of various elements of the external world and the internal Self. Different aspects of Self connect to create the bigger Self. There are six major elements that determine how the Self is created and evolves over time. One starts out with a “Self”, having the predisposition to perceive things a certain way, and behave a certain way. The self begins when one is first born. I call this element the “eternal self,” due to the fact that one is born with his or her own type of perception.

From here, the self begins to change and adapt to external forces, while still orbiting around the original thought process, and perception one is born with. There are two major elements that cause the Self to adapt. The first element that causes one to adapt is what works within society. As John Locke believes, morals are determined by what rules work best to stabilize society. Whatever works best is made into morals, and laws. People learn to suppress the urges to do things that go against the morals and norms of society for fear of being seen as a bad person. Locke says that, “Moral laws are set as a curb and restraint to these exorbitant

desires, which they cannot be but by rewards and punishments, that will over-balance the satisfaction any one shall propose to himself in the breach of the law” (Locke). Locke thinks that morals are set to stop unacceptable desires by tying punishment to them, whereas positive actions and desires are rewarded. Societal morals are what cause one to create a Self that will be accepted.

Another force that causes one to adapt is the environment one grows up in. People learn how to thrive the best in the environments they are in, which in turn shapes how they act and how they see the world. For example, if one grows up in an environment in which everything he or she wants or needs is always at hand, one is more likely to learn that he or she does not have to work for much in life. If one grows up in an environment where basic needs such as food and shelter are not consistently guaranteed, he or she may learn to be less trusting of others. These environmental elements shape the Self by adding variables that cause one to adapt the Self in order to thrive in a given environment. Whatever one experiences in a given environment causes one to adapt his or her behaviors. People are motivated to adapt and change themselves due to love. Because people desire love, they are driven to be “good” people by the desire they have to be accepted.

According to Barrie Glen, all people wish to be loved. In order to be loved, society states that one needs to be a “good person” who follows a social code. This desire to be loved gives one the drive to follow the morals that society has created. The desire to be loved, accompanied by set social morals, influences the Self to change into being more “loveable.”

Due to the desire to be a “good person” the Self can be divided into the “hidden Self” and the “exposed Self.” The hidden Self is similar to the shadow Self in the sense that it is made up of the traits that are not accepted. The exposed Self is made up of what is accepted by others. It is often easy for people to divide the self into two different sections, because it makes it simple to openly appear in a way that is socially acceptable. On one side, one will have all of the emotions and desires that can be shared openly, and on the other, one will have all of the emotions and desires that cannot be shared openly. This sort of separation helps to deceive oneself (and others) into believing one is a “good person” without any unacceptable “bad” qualities.

Memory and experience also play a key role in the shaping of Self. Humans have different experiences, and perceive these experiences in ways that create memories of the experiences and the emotions felt with such experiences. People begin to learn what sort of experiences make them feel happy, or sad, or which actions receive positive responses and which actions receive negative responses. As people gain experience, the Self gains an understanding of what occurrences have negative responses, and what occurrences have positive responses. The self changes as one’s understanding of the world changes. Actions also change due to what one experiences. People begin to base their choices and actions on what they have gained in memory from experiences in the past. This creates a sort of domino effect with memories because each experience affects the Self. One may make another decision based on said past experience, and so on. For example, if a person buys a puppy and falls in love with that puppy, he or she may continue to get more puppies due to the positive past experience he or she has with puppies. Memories and experiences are constantly causing slight changes and alterations to the Self.

Using the theories of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, Barrie Glen, and others, I was able to determine what I believe Self to be. I do not see the Self as being any specific entity, but more a potpourri of many experiences in life. The elements I have determined make up the

Self include: eternal Self, societal morals, need for love, environment, memories and experiences, and the hidden Self versus the exposed Self. These components vary depending on one's personal experiences in the world, intertwining to shape the Self.

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