

ME! ME! ME!

Subpersonality Tug-of-War

by Astra Niedra

IMAGINE THIS SCENE...

You are out shopping with friends and you have a great day trying on clothes. You see a dress you are really drawn to and you try it on. Both your friends and the sales assistant say it looks amazing on you and you feel you just have to have it. The price of the dress is almost one month's rent but you know you can put it on your credit card—so you do. When you arrive home you are still excited with your dress and you go to sleep feeling somehow revitalized.

The next morning you feel slightly uneasy. You do not know why. As you get ready for work, you remember the dress and you hold it up against you, look in the mirror and think “Oh my god, what have I done?” Now the dress looks ridiculous. It is definitely not suitable for work and you would never wear it out. It's just not for you—you don't even have shoes that go with it. Then you remember the price. Ouch!

Most of us have had this type of experience and we either beat ourselves up about it or just try to forget it, occasionally taking the dress out of the wardrobe but always putting it back in favor of something else. We put it down to being ‘one of those bad decisions’ or an impulse buy we had not thought through.

We have all also experienced liking something one minute and then not being so sure the next. We've all had trouble with making decisions. When it comes to the big issues in our lives like career and relationships our conflicting desires become increasingly problematic.

Revolutionary psychological research shows that the reason for inner conflicts and situations like the dress example above is that our sense of identity is not quite as simple as we have assumed. When you say ‘I’ or ‘me’ you are in fact referring to a different part of your personality at different times.

Each of us has a number of subpersonalities or ‘selves’ that make up our whole personality together. Different selves assume our identity throughout the day, each one taking care of particular aspects of our lives.

When you are at work your organised self might be dominant; when you are having a coffee or drink with friends a more carefree self emerges; when you are on holidays your lazy self has its turn; and when you are with your partner you probably access your sensual and sexual selves.

We all have our ‘favorites’ which are those selves we use most of the time and by which other people recognise us. These are called ‘primary selves’ while the parts of our personality we hide or are not aware of are our ‘disowned selves.’

All the selves within us have their own feelings, thoughts, opinions and needs—and they do not always agree. This is why you might feel conflicted about your job, for instance. The part of you who likes order and predictability probably loves it that you work nine-to-five and do the same thing every day. This feels safe and comfortable for that part of you. In contrast, the part of you who loves adventure, excitement and constant change feels awful in that same job. The experience you get from this is that

sometimes you like your job while at other times you hate it—it depends on which self's thoughts and feelings are dominant in you at the time.

This way of thinking about the personality was developed by two psychologist from California, USA, Drs. Hal and Sidra Stone. Their theory is called the Psychology of Selves and the Aware Ego and its roots are in Jungian psychology.

This understanding of the human psyche is not widely accepted in traditional psychology in Australia but it is gradually infiltrating mainstream psychological thought in the US and in Europe.

The technique that was born from Hal and Sidra Stone's exploration of the selves in each other's personalities is Voice Dialogue. Voice Dialogue is a way to speak directly with the various selves within you. It is a very simple process where one person literally interviews the selves in another person. When you decide to speak with, for example, your adventurous self, you move to a different position in the room and then just talk. The self talking from this new position will be your adventurous self. There is no hypnosis required for this—it just happens. The person interviewing the self stays in the same place for the whole time and asks the adventurous self about how it feels, what it likes to do, whether it gets expression in the person's life, and so on.

When the conversation is over, the person who has just been expressing their adventurous self moves back to their original position. In this place you would feel different from when you first sat down to do the process. You have a sense of having more 'breathing space' as though you have separated a part of your personality out of the mass of selves who are usually crowded together and there is now more space for 'you' to emerge.

The Stones' call this space the 'Aware Ego'. In traditional thinking the ego is seen as the part of the personality that makes decisions. In this new way of thinking, the ego is really a group of selves that you identify with. Once you have separated from a self and have an awareness of this self and how it functions in you, then you have an Aware Ego.

So what is the point of all this? Why think of yourself as a group of selves rather than just one entity? Think back to the example of shopping for clothes. If you apply this theory to that situation you can see how the different parts of you might like different clothes. Often when you do something that is either exciting or relaxing, such as shopping, you let go a little of the part of your personality who is usually in charge—your primary self. This leaves an opening for other parts of you to emerge, in this case a part that likes extravagant and flamboyant clothes.

So if you usually buy clothes you can wear to work—which for many people means fairly low-key items that are easy to mix and match, when this other part of you emerges and sees something it likes and want to have, you feel that you love this item. However, such feelings are those of the extravagant self in you. The next day when you are getting dressed for work, your primary self would be the one getting dressed. that part of you sees what you have bought and says 'I can't wear this!'

By becoming aware of your different selves, and by having an Aware Ego in relation to them, you can sit in the middle of a pair of opposite selves and make your own decision.

So when you are shopping you would feel the excitement of your extravagant self when it sees something it wants to buy, but at the same time you would feel your more conservative self tell you that you need something to wear to work. It then becomes your responsibility to make the decision—what you decide will take into consideration the views of both conflicting selves. There is no right or wrong decision. You might decide to buy one outfit for each part or buy only the extravagant clothes while being aware that you are disappointing the more conservative part of yourself.

Buying clothing consciously instead of blindly going along with the wishes of one self stops any self-criticism later from the part of you who missed out on what it wanted to buy. Basically, you now have a real choice rather than having just one part of you making your decisions at any given time. You have access to the opinion and feelings of opposite selves and you get to decide.

The other major benefit of understanding that there are a number of different parts to your personality is in regard to relationships—both personal and professional. A basic guideline you can use is that if someone irritates you and you feel judgmental about them, then they are expressing a quality you do not accept in yourself.

According to this theory, the solution is to find and embrace that quality in yourself. If you take up this challenge, you may find that your relationships become easier as you recognise in other people those qualities you have disowned. You could naturally become more understanding of other people and not be as quick to judge them. Other benefits can be discovering that many different facets of your own personality and being able to have more agency over how you behave and feel.

As you can probably imagine, the different selves in each of us relate with other people in their own particular way. This is why sometime you can feel confused about your relationships. One day you admire a quality in your partner or friend and the next day it annoys you. By learning about how the selves in you think and feel and how they interact with other people, you might begin to understand your relationship patterns and your relationships could take on a whole new dimension.

For more information about relationships and Voice Dialogue, see Astra Niedra's new book *The Perfect Relationship—The Ten Essential Steps to Make Your Relationships Work*. It is available on this site, and from <http://www.voicedialogue.com> and from bookstores nationally.

HAROLD BISHOP VS THE FONZ

Perhaps you have more in common with Harold Bishop than you thought. Ever patrolled your neighborhood laying down the law? Or are you too busy jumping sharks with The Fonz?

Now that you're thinking more about your own Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, follow Astra Niedra's simple Voice Dialogue diagram to see which

subpersonality types sound familiar.

Try to identify your primary and disowned selves from the chart below. With this in mind, you've got a better chance of the better half winning the tug of war for the credit card.



Rulemaker

Someone identified with rules will follow the rules of their family and social group. They will choose a lifestyle that fits in with family and cultural expectations and they will do well in that field. Identifying with this subpersonality leads to acceptance by your family and the wider community to which you belong.



Rebel

The rebel breaks the rules! This personality does the opposite of what is expected by their family and culture. Rebels find their own way of doing things and often rock the boat. The rebel likes to think of itself as having no rules but it does have one golden rule which is to break all the rules.



Cautious Observer

The observing and cautious self likes to suss out a situation before it takes action. It needs to understand how something works before it participates. It stands back and observes and can be seen as shy but really just likes to know what is going on.



Spontaneous

The spontaneous self jumps in and participates and then thinks about what it has done later, if at all. It engages with people instantly and takes action quickly. It does not plan or consider consequences of its actions. It is a very 'enjoy the moment' self.



Pleaser

The Pleaser is a great personality for others to have around because it makes other people feel so good. It is considerate, kind and helpful. However, it does not get its own needs met and can feel drained from all the energy it gives to others.



Selfish

The selfish self considers only itself. It makes sure its needs are met - it always comes first. It does not care about other people's needs and has no qualms about stepping over others for its own interests. The selfish self rarely becomes tired or sick because it makes sure its needs are always met, and it does set great boundaries.



Pusher

This is the force which propels us to action. Someone with a strong pusher will get many things done. The pusher is constantly on the go and is always thinking about what needs doing next. Nothing is ever finished—there is always more to do on its list. It leads to high achievement and high energy but unchecked leaves a person stressed, tense and unable to relax. Pushers are unable to enjoy their achievements because they never stop long enough to do so.



Being

The being self is still. It is focused in the moment. There is nothing to do and nowhere to go. This is a restful place where you can recharge your batteries. Time seems to stand still and you feel relaxed and alert if you are a being personality. This is a nice balance to the pusher but if you are always being you are not doing and therefore will not get much done.



Perfectionist

The perfectionist makes sure everything is perfect. Perfectionists look over everything they do countless times and they keep improving. They can stand in front of the mirror for hours doing their makeup and they can get stuck on one task at work, re-doing and revising until everything is just right. Perfectionists find it difficult to finish things and can take so much time doing one small thing.



Slob

The slob does not have any standards. Everything is fine as it is. Mistakes are not a problem, mess is not noticed. You would not want this self performing brain surgery but it is easy-going and relaxed compared to the uptightness of an absolute perfectionist.



Personal

If you are personal then you connect with people warmly and openly. You like being in close contact with people and you share your feelings and thoughts easily. People feel like you are present with them. This can feel good but it also leaves you with no boundaries and can drain your energy.



Critic

We all have one an unfortunately most of us become victim to our own inner critic. The critic points out our weaknesses, flaws, mistakes, and generally anything less than perfect about us—yet perfection, even by its own admission—we can never achieve. A great friend of the perfectionist and pusher, the critic keeps us trying harder and harder. then directed outwards, this self is a judge. The judge looks on others and does to them what the critic does internally to us.



Spiritual

The spiritual self is concerned with matters of spirit. It may have experienced extraordinary things and have a connection with spirit, or it may have a strong desire for spiritual experiences and so follows particular practices to lead to such experiences, or it may be expressed in a more traditional religious way, following the rules of an organised religion. Either way, its focus is on a god or ultimate energy of some kind, and it often does not value very highly everyday matters of life on earth.



Feelings

The feeling self feels. It picks up what other people feel, it is affected by events and people, and it expresses emotions easily. The feeling self is more connected to the body than the mind - feelings are often felt throughout your whole body. The thoughts of the feeling self are mainly about feelings and they can be muddled by the feelings that accompany them.



Outgoing

The outgoing self is focused outside itself. It interacts with people easily and talks out its ideas with others rather than spending time looking inward. It is friendly and very comfortable with other people. It is confident and sure of itself. It has a strong, resilient nature.



Impersonal

If you are impersonal you are cool and more distant. You connect with people but on a more mental level. You can discuss ideas and share thoughts but not feelings. Impersonality gives you objectivity and allows you to maintain your own space. A great self to use in business and when you do not want to take on other people's 'stuff'.



Inner Teacher

This part of us has wisdom, it is supportive and it is on our side. It sees the lessons we can learn from our lives and reveals these to us. Being identified with this self, you would be compassionate towards yourself and others. You might be seen as a wise being who is full of acceptance and good advice.



Earthly

The earthly self is interested in the here and now. It is concerned with the material world, but is not necessarily materialistic, and usually identifies with being atheist. Philosophically it is more of an empiricist, valuing direct experience through the physical senses. The earthly self is also concerned with very earthly things like the environment, sustaining life, the practicalities of life such as food, shelter and family life.



Mind

If you are identified with the mind, you think. A mental person analyses, works out solutions, thinks abstractly. The mind is impersonal and objective. It is not concerned with the experience of feelings and relating to others, but it can analyse feelings and relationships. We all have a mind but some of us are more mental than others—in more ways than one!



Shy

The shy personality is not confident with other people or in groups. It is quiet and soft and more sweet. The shy self is introverted and feels as though it is hiding. It is often perceived more negatively than the outgoing self in our culture but it has the qualities of sweetness and sensitivity.

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