

“The following conversation regarding “inauthentic” or “false” selves was posted on our forum, and we are quoting it here as we feel it raises important and evocative questions for those interested in Voice Dialogue work and The Psychology of the Aware Ego.”

FALSE SELVES

A Forum Discussion

False Self

DOES ANYONE OUT THERE HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT HOW VOICE DIALOGUE LOOKS AT THE IDEA OF A FALSE SELF, SPECIFICALLY THE NARCCISISTIC FALSE SELF, THANKS FOR THE INFO.

—Ethan

IN RESPONSE TO: FALSE SELF (ETHAN)

Hi Ethan,

Another way of answering your question is to say that from a Voice Dialogue perspective there are no “false selves.” A self that behaves “narcissistically” is doing so for a reason that makes sense to that self in its world view. Talking with the self and separating from it gives the person who has this self choice about the behavior and freedom to balance that behavior with other aspects of their humanity.

Through understanding the self and its history we learn how it chose this particular way of being and what it hopes to accomplish by being this way. We can also choose perhaps to balance its so-called narcissism with an awareness of and caring for others. At a reduced level of intensity this self’s behavior might not feel like “narcissism” at all, but rather a healthy instinct for self-preservation in balance with awareness of and caring for the rest of the world.

Also, just as there are no “false selves” in the Voice Dialogue world view, there is also no single “authentic self.” From the perspective of The Psychology Of Selves all selves are authentic. If a self is critical, it is authentic in its role of critic. If a self is belligerent, it is authentically belligerent. If a self is a caretaker, that’s authentic too, and so is narcissistic behavior authentically what it is. From center, from the view point of the Aware Ego, we see each self as real and truly what it is. Instead of judging the selves, the Aware Ego recognizes them and helps us to create a new internal balance where each self can contribute its gifts or essence while also not overwhelming the system with too much of any one kind of energy.

Thank you for asking this question—it goes right to the heart of what this work is about.

—Miriam Dyak

IN RESPONSE TO: FALSE SELF (MIRIAM DYAK)

Dear Miriam and Ethan,

I would like to offer another perspective on this very central question of inauthenticity and the selves. Miriam suggested that there are no “false” selves and that all selves are true. I am going to assert that a more useful perspective is that a person whose self-expression is controlled by a self or combination of selves is being inauthentic. Notice I am not using the word “false” self because this

is inherently judgmental and problematical as is also the word “true” self. Being authentic in the language of Voice Dialogue would mean that a person’s self expression is coming from aware ego and is an expression of the whole person in that moment. The implication of this is that most of the time we human beings are inauthentic in our expression and that authentic being is on the leading edge of human development. I believe that the Stone’s work regarding the possibility of being generated from the Aware Ego is on the leading edge of human development. From this perspective it is essential not to collapse authentic and inauthentic with good and bad or right and wrong or for that matter with true or false. The Stone’s work on distinguishing the critic/judge voice is of great value in sorting this out as is their distinguishing “mind” as a self or system of selves. To accept our humanity is to accept our inauthenticity and have compassion for the human condition. Voice Dialogue and the Psychology of Selves are great tools for doing this.

Why do I say this perspective is more useful? Mainly because it opens us to looking at the impact that being inauthentic and covering up our inauthenticity has on ourselves and others. Getting in touch with these impacts takes us right into our vulnerability where we have buried all the pain and suffering that came and still comes from operating from a self or self system. Being aware of and owning and being responsible for our inauthenticity is a powerful access to being free, compassionate, vulnerable, generative and fully self-expressed.

I would like to acknowledge that the perspective I have put forth here comes out of my engagement with three main sources in addition of course to Voice Dialogue: 1. The psychiatrist, Carl Jung whose work opens the possibility of individuation from wholeness, 2. Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now*, a transforming expression of the possibility of acceptance and presence, and 3. Landmark Education whose programs including the basic one called the Forum have transformed the lives of thousands of people including my own. For more information on Landmark Education go to www.landmarkeducation.com.

—Gordon Keating

IN RESPONSE TO: RE: FALSE SELF (*GORDON W. KEATING, MD*)

Hi Gordon,

I really appreciate your taking the time to continue this discussion. I feel it touches on a lot of core ideas in Voice Dialogue and *The Psychology of the Aware Ego* and opens questions that come up often in this work and are very useful to address. I know also that you personally have a great deal of experience with this work, so I hope you won’t mind if I go ahead and use this as an opportunity to include some ideas and discussion that might be useful to folks who are perhaps not yet as familiar with the issues being raised.

I’d like first to expand on my earlier comments and hopefully make it more clear why I feel as I do about the importance of not labeling any part of a person or process as authentic or inauthentic in the context of Voice Dialogue work.

I’d like to begin with some dictionary and thesaurus definitions of these words. I realize that everyone may have their own meaning for authentic or inauthentic, but I think it is valuable in a general discussion to have a sense

of the culturally accepted meanings of the words we are using so we don't get into the gray area of trying to converse without any shared agreement on these meanings. The dictionary defines authentic as "Conforming to fact and therefore worthy of trust, reliance, or belief: Having a claimed and verifiable origin or authorship; not counterfeit or copied." It defines inauthentic as "Not genuine or authentic. intended to deceive." The thesaurus I referred to defined authentic as "real" and gave the synonyms as "accurate, actual, authoritative, bona fide, certain, convincing, credible, creditable, dependable, factual, faithful, for real, genuine, legit, legitimate, official, original, pure, reliable, sure, true, trustworthy, trusty, twenty-four carat, valid, veritable." Antonyms were listed as "bogus, counterfeit, fake, phony, spurious, unauthorized." I think, looking at this evidence, that there's simply no getting around the reality that the terms "authentic" and "inauthentic" imply a great deal of judgment, positive or negative. I don't think there is any way to use these words in a general context without bringing all that judgment along.

I do very much share your view that the Stones' work and the development of an Aware Ego process is "on the leading edge of human development." However, I don't personally feel that this has anything to do with the Aware Ego being authentic and the selves being inauthentic by comparison, or that the Aware Ego is in any way superior to the selves. Certainly the Aware Ego would not judge itself to be superior to the selves as the the Aware Ego is a process and not a self. It is a process that occurs between opposite selves or energies and by nature it holds both sides (each opposite) in great respect and esteem. The Aware Ego process is really different in form and function (and in our experience of it) than the selves.

I'd like to use the familiar comparison of the Aware Ego to the conductor of an orchestra. The conductor has choice about what is played and how it is played (how fast, slow, soft, loud, etc.), but the conductor does not have an instrument of his/her own. The conductor doesn't actually create any of the sound being heard. The conductor also has an overview of all the instruments that no other member of the orchestra has. In a similar fashion the Aware Ego has an overview of the selves (at least the ones that have been separated out). We can compare the selves to the individual instruments each playing their part. An orchestra without a conductor could generate disharmonious cacophony. A personality without the Aware Ego process often results in certain selves "playing the same tunes" over and over as well as keeping other "instruments" out of the "orchestra." Developing an Aware Ego process in relation to these selves gives a person an overview of who inside them is playing what part of the music of their life (or who is not being given an opportunity to do so). It gives them a chance to choose different "music" and choice about how that "music" is played. It does not, however, make the Aware Ego more authentic than the selves, any more than a conductor is somehow more authentic than a tuba player or violinist.

This last point becomes even more evident when we consider that each self is not at all limited to some one particular behavior, a behavior some other part of us finds objectionable. Part of the richness of discovery in doing Voice Dialogue facilitation is discovering how real and alive each self is, how much depth and

breadth each of them holds. Separating out the selves makes us aware of the history and memory they each hold, the reasons for their evolution. There is even evidence that different selves or energy patterns in our personality “live” in different parts of our brain (how could something that has its own neurological programming and physical brain locus possibly be “inauthentic?”). As I have come to see it through my own experience, each of the selves may only play one “instrument” in the “orchestra” of my personality, but that instrument has a tone, an evolution, a range, and a potential for playing music that is essential to the wholeness of the composition of my life. A member of the “audience” of my life may point out that a particular instrument is out of tune or the player pretty rusty, but that may really be more an artifact of that player (self) being disowned and not allowed to practice with the primary selves. Or, I might get the feedback that other instruments (ways of expression) are overbearing and unpleasant to listen to, but fortunately each and every self as well as the Aware Ego has room to grow and evolve. With a new “conductor” on the scene, the part of me that has been blaring judgment can learn to shift into a subtler song of discernment—same instrument, different way of playing it. And I would say, both are “authentic” even though in most situations I may find one way of playing more desirable and effective than the other.

Your letter also brings up another view that I have often heard from people involved in personal growth, and that is that it is somehow necessary to accept negative judgments of certain parts of ourselves in order to actually get in touch with our true nature and vulnerability. You comment that “Being aware of and owning and being responsible for our inauthenticity is a powerful access to being free, compassionate, vulnerable, generative, and fully self-expressed.” When I read this I have so many questions including the very basic ones such as “what is freedom, what is compassion, what does it mean to be self-expressed?” I imagine the answers are as many and varied as the people who might think of them.

Perhaps the first question that holds a great deal of importance in relation to Voice Dialogue is “who is it who decides what is or isn’t ‘our inauthenticity?’” Since by definition the Aware Ego would not be making this sort of judgment, as far as I can see we’re right back in the place where certain selves decide that others are not authentic and there is a value system being established where “compassionate, vulnerable, generative, self-expressed” are considered desirable and good and the opposites of these are labeled inauthentic—qualities that need to be ‘fessed up to and overcome because they are in the way of our realizing our full human potential.

It is this idea which is directly contrary to the Voice Dialogue model of consciousness. What is so different in the Voice Dialogue model of consciousness is that it gives equal value to awareness, to the experience of the selves (i.e. the selves living life in all the myriad ways they do that) and to the Aware Ego process. The Aware Ego process draws on the observations of awareness, balances between opposite selves, and finds new ways to live life that include the energy of many selves while also going beyond the limited vision and world view of any one self. The brilliant and revolutionary quality of The Psychology of the Aware Ego and the Voice Dialogue work is

that it defines consciousness as inclusive of ALL our humanity. You do not HAVE to be compassionate, vulnerable, generative, self-expressed, etc. in order to be a conscious human being and you do not have to NOT be tough, selfish, uncreative, or any other opposites of those valued qualities in order to be a conscious human being. And, ironically, it is not the selves we judge as undesirable that are usually in the way of our getting in touch with our vulnerability or expressing ourselves more fully. On the contrary it's the primary selves which hold all our positive values that are also the ones who have built walls for safety around all the sad, painful, scary places in our lives. These selves which hold our value systems in place are most often also the ones keeping us from experiencing all of who we are. These are the selves judging some aspects of our being as authentic and others as inauthentic.

Voice Dialogue perceives the inner universe of a human being to be very much like the outer universe. As in nature where all of creation has its rightful place, ALL of who we are as humans is valuable and we have choice about when and where and how to use each part. Perhaps, going back to our orchestra analogy, we may choose to play a life full of violins and harps without much percussion, but we don't throw out our capacity for percussion out of some judgment that drums are not as sweet and loving and acceptable as the strings. Some occasions in life call for some pretty tough responses—some days you just have to roll out the drums. I've learned from experience that my very authentic selfish, tough, stubborn, invulnerable selves can save my life in those situations. I wouldn't want to be identified with those parts of me, but I sure wouldn't want to abandon them either.

And just a thought about compassion and the freedom to express ourselves. After 20 years of doing Voice Dialogue work I have come to the conclusion that much (if not most) of the distress we experience in each self is really not at all the fault of that self. The stress and distress seems to me to be much more the result of our overidentification with the self in question, by which I mean that if a person uses one energy, one part of themselves, way too much it eventually starts to have repercussions through their whole personality and throws everything into a state of imbalance, discomfort or maybe even disease. Again everything has its place and, as in nature, balance is what's important. The indigenous cultures of the world, for example, are rich with legends, fairy tales, and stories about what happens when the world gets out of balance—when the sun won't set or the night won't end or Demeter won't let the plants grow or an angry God causes endless rain, etc. There is never an implication in these stories that day or night or winter or summer are in some way lacking, at fault, inauthentic because of these problems. No, the implication is that balance must be sought and all elements must be honored in their rightful place.

And what about compassion and vulnerability? Again, I can only draw on my experience. So far what I observe is that people are willing to change when they feel safe and protected, not when they are under threat or judgment. People are made up of energies, patterns, histories, memories (both mental and cellular). We are walking stories, and my question has always been how do I find the way these multi-colored energies all weave together to create a fabric that is vibrant

and beautiful and whole without any one thread being denigrated or losing its essential nature and identity? I think of compassion as the invitation to all the parts to join in this weaving, to be honored and embraced. I have not yet had an experience (with myself or my clients) where accepting negative judgments has led me to want to reveal my vulnerability or express myself fully—it just doesn't happen. On the contrary these experiences have usually led to my feeling either depressed or resentful. I have stayed involved with the Voice Dialogue work because it has made it so easy for myself and others to move into a natural and organic place of compassion, really a sort of state of grace where I'm not in conflict with any part of creation in my own internal landscape or in the world around me. I have found this to be a state of being that both invites and encourages growth and change.

I do want to add one more observation before I close, and that is that there are often parts of us that have an investment in harmonizing all the aspects of our lives and ironing out any disquieting bumps and irregularities. I'm guessing it is important to some part of you that the understanding you have gained through the Voice Dialogue work and the understanding you have gained through Landmark in some way reconcile and fit together. I would respectfully suggest that that isn't possible in exactly the same way that it isn't possible to reconcile the opposite selves inside of us. I do have to admit that I am woefully ignorant about Landmark and that particular way of looking at human reality. Perhaps within the Landmark context there are different nuances of meaning given to the concepts we have been discussing here, and these may be very useful to you (and to many others) for your own growth. I don't think, though, that this understanding of these concepts can be translated into Voice Dialogue without sacrificing something very important and precious in the Voice Dialogue work. Trying to move Voice Dialogue concepts into Landmark might have a similar deleterious effect, which then leaves you having to simply hold the tension between these different ways of approaching personal growth and appreciating each of them ... separately.

From an Aware Ego perspective there is nothing wrong at all with letting Landmark be itself with its own language and world view and letting Voice Dialogue simply be itself with its own language and world view. The Aware Ego is quite content in having these two things be separate and different—they don't have to agree or fit together and much can be learned from each separately. In fact, trying to make them reconcile could very easily lead to losing the value of what each has to offer the world—just as trying to fit our different energies/ways of being/selves into each other's judgments and expectations leads to a real loss of self. In my opinion this is the only loss we face, that we may lose access to precious parts of ourselves because other parts of us may judge them as “less than,” as inauthentic.

—Miriam Dyak

Please visit Miriam Dyak at www.thevoicedialogueinstitute.org