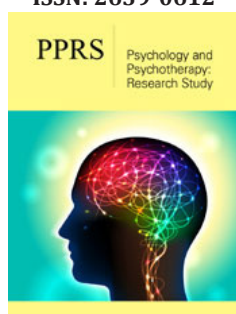


Getting To Know Ourselves: Self Discovery and Self-Knowledge – A Reflection

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Abstract

The concept of “self” preoccupies humanity since ancient times. One of the most famous philosophers, Aristotle, once said that “knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” However, what is the true meaning behind “self,” and can we truly get to know and understand everything about ourselves? The theoretical purpose of the paper will be to introduce the idea of self, what losing it looks like, and how to reconnect with ‘the self.’ In addition, the paper will present the influence of social media on ‘the self’ and include theories that deepen the analysis of the ‘self.’ The practical purpose of this article is to familiarize the reader with the psychological concept of self and psychoeducation in the mental health community in daily life.

Definition of “Self”

Sense of self can be defined in various ways. According to Sarah Crosby [1], author of the “Five Minute Therapy” book, the self-forms early in life and can be influenced by the experiences people go through. In psychology, we have different definitions of self. For example, we can divide the topic into self-image, self-concept or self-identity. Dennis Coon [2], in 1994 (p. 443), defined self-image as “total subjective perception of oneself, including an image of one’s body and impressions of one’s personality, capabilities, and so on (another term for self-concept).” Some other psychologists, like Carl Rogers [3] (1959, p. 498), defined self-concept as an organized, consistent set of perceptions and beliefs about oneself.” Furthermore, self-identity is an internal schema built on structured beliefs and emotions about ourselves [4,5] or cognitive evaluation of our social, physical and academic abilities [6,7]. Additionally, self-identity develops over time by mixing our innate traits with those we gain through experiences. We form values and beliefs that influence our decisions, create a personal philosophy, and get feedback from people around us about our behaviour [8-12]. Let us consider two examples to illustrate the forming process of self. Imagine a person in two different environments from the moment they are born. If we place them in a loving, caring family with a stable income, they will probably turn out very differently from someone in a family that does not care about their kids or struggles with money. In addition to our family background, the place where we grew up, the education we received, the friends we met along the way, and how we see ourselves can also be affected. Sarah Crosby [1] brings closer attention to questioning who we are as a person, as when we grow and experience different things every day, our perspectives, beliefs, or even habits change. It does not necessarily mean that one “version” of us is fake and the other is “true”; it can just mean we are developing as people and discovering new things about ourselves. Learning how to accept ourselves and dealing with the fact that we will not be able to uncover all parts of it immediately can be challenging to accept. However, getting to know ourselves helps us understand what matters to us, builds a sense of self-worth independent of external validation and improves relationships by allowing us to show up authentically [12].

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Why does Self-loss Happen?

Self-loss is a sense of not knowing who one is or disconnection from oneself [12]. It is the feeling of being inconsistent - when one's behaviour, actions, and feelings alienate one from understanding the true self [13,14]. Therapist Sarah Crosby, author of Five Minutes Therapy, recognizes seven signs of self-loss:

- A. Feeling like something is missing in life
- B. Doubting judgment
- C. Acting on impulse and chasing quick fixes
- D. Struggling with simple decisions and second-guessing
- E. Being overly critical of oneself and others
- F. Engagement in codependent relationships
- G. Challenges in establishing deep connections with others

They can be caused by numerous reasons, including:

Relationships: Sometimes, a relationship can lead to a loss of personal identity, especially when another person's needs are consistently placed above one's own or in a case of abuse where a person needs to lose contact with friends and sacrifice their hobbies to avoid triggering further acts of violence.

Family units: When caregivers are absent, inconsistent, or emotionally unavailable, the foundation for self-development might be compromised. In the future, the child may have problems expressing themselves through their emotions if this has been met with anger from the guardian.

Grief: Grief can deeply shake our sense of self, especially after the loss of someone close, or even someone distant or a pet. It can make us question our priorities and feel disconnected. However, an important aspect is remembering that people are not truly lost; they are hidden under a layer of mourning and will be discovered when people are ready for it- not always in the same version [15].

Trauma: Acknowledging our trauma is crucial to healing. It is important to give oneself enough time to recover and not blame ourselves for not recovering fast enough or not comparing our healing process to others. The process may be complex, but it does not define our strengths or weaknesses.

Changing roles: Changing roles can make one question, "Who am I outside of this role?". When a child leaves the family home, parents may wonder - am I no longer needed? Similarly, one feels a sense of self-loss when losing a job, ending a relationship, finishing university or becoming a parent. Our roles are constantly changing. With each change can come a sense of loss of self [1,11].

How does One Reconnect with Oneself?

Bob Edelstein, psychotherapist and author of many articles from Psychology Today, suggests the following approach, which may guide toward rediscovering the sense of self. If a friend asks, "Who are you?" the response should be the first thing that comes to mind. This response may be an association, an object, a sensation,

a colour, or a concept. Then, a friend repeats the question over and over for approximately five minutes. The point of this game is to delve into one's roles, desires, and feelings. The author suggests doing this exercise with a friend. However, if the participant feels they can be more authentic in isolation, they can do the exercise independently. Individuals can approach this task by writing their thoughts on a paper to have a broader and clearer perspective of thinking patterns or speaking them out loud without excessive thinking. The essence of the task is to bring out our unfiltered thoughts about ourselves. The deeper into the task, the more we should delve into 'who we are' instead of 'what others require of us' [16].

Sarah Crosby [1] emphasizes that rediscovering oneself should be approached with understanding and gentleness. The stress of self-loss is already enough of a burden on the mind and body, but there are a few points worth bearing in mind.

a) Avoid avoiding: Sometimes, it is believed that avoiding a subject will make it disappear. However, consider situations where a task causing discomfort was avoided. At first, this helps to escape the unpleasant emotions linked to the task. Over time, though, the approaching deadline becomes apparent, and merely thinking about the task creates more stress and harm to the body than addressing it early on would have. In the same way, when it comes to 'self-loss,' it is essential to confront the issue as soon as it emerges.

b) Discovering and Reconnecting: It is a mistake to think of self-discovery as a marathon with a clear finish and a medal because the real value is in the process, not the finish line. Further, the primary emphasis should be placed on actions and choices promoting self-discovery.

c) Notice and name: Words hold significant power, so they can be used to shift the narrative. Rather than saying, "I am angry," try saying, "I am feeling angry." This subtle change helps to create distance between emotions and identity. Emotions are not the description of a person, but they are valid and allowed to be felt.

d) Play with life: There is no need to be afraid to explore. This point aims to return to a time of childlike curiosity and make use of it. It is worth reflecting on one thing that has always been interesting to try. It may have involved signing up for a dance class, but external influences created the impression that it was too late to pursue this dream. Another possibility is to return to old passions that were a source of joy and cohesion. If moral backbone is considered an essential part of life, it is vital to ensure that passions and activities align with the values professed. Summarizing-to better understand oneself, it is necessary to remain open to new experiences and nurture curiosity.

e) Seize the opportunities: Awareness serves as an essential tool for personal growth and for understanding the roots of specific behaviours-especially those driven by anxiety and fear. After a social situation that leads to behaviour

inconsistent with one's values or sense of self, it is helpful to reflect by asking, "Why was that the reaction?" Exploring the answer can help keep it in mind the next time a similar situation occurs.

f) Give a positive outlook: Be gentle. Instead of engaging in self-criticism for behaving in ways inconsistent with personal values, offering oneself compassion and support is more helpful-be a comfort blanket, not a punching bag [1,17].

g) Crave time: Spending time alone is a powerful tool to understand oneself. It is essential to find manageable time in the schedule. Alone time might include journaling, walking, creating routines (stretching every morning, meditating right after waking up), and connecting with nature. Time in solitude also allows one to face emotions and thoughts that are often repressed in the company of others, which are worth dwelling on to understand their source.

h) Connect with others: Time spent in solitude is essential to self-discovery, but we need to feel connected as humans. It is necessary in today's world, where we work and live increasingly fast, which can overload us. Our relationships with other people can become a source of information about ourselves by observing our behaviour and reactions around other people [1].

How Social Media Can Affect the Self

Social media has become a robust and influential part of modern life, particularly among younger generations. While it offers many benefits-connection, self-expression, and access to information-it can also significantly impact how we perceive and relate to ourselves. The constant exposure to idealized images, curated lifestyles, and validation through likes or comments can distort our sense of self. According to [17], individuals who frequently engage in social comparison on platforms like Instagram and Facebook tend to have lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression. This is because social media often showcases only the highlights of others' lives, leading people to compare themselves to unrealistic standards and feel inadequate. Moreover, "performative identity" arises when people feel pressured to present an ideal version of themselves online. This pressure can lead to identity fragmentation and a growing disconnect between one's authentic self and online persona [18]. Over time, the individual might feel lost or even start to believe the curated version of their life, leading to increased stress and inauthenticity.

Additionally, the feedback loop created by likes and comments can contribute to a dependence on external validation. As Sarah Crosby [1] explains, building a solid sense of self-worth should come from within, not outside opinions. However, social media often encourages people to seek validation from others, making them more vulnerable to self-doubt and identity confusion. Despite the challenges, social media does not have to affect the self negatively. When used mindfully, it can also serve as a tool for self-expression, finding communities that share our values, and learning more about who we are. The key lies in developing awareness of how

online experiences shape our thoughts and emotions and making conscious choices to protect our mental wellbeing.

Psychological Theories that are Connected with Self

Carl Rogers-Humanistic Theory

Rogers proposed that every individual has a self-concept formed by experiences and how we interpret them. He emphasized the importance of congruence between the authentic and ideal selves. A person who perceives a large gap between who they are and who they think they should be may experience anxiety or distress [3,19]. Rogers also introduced the concept of unconditional positive regard-individuals thrive emotionally when they feel accepted and loved without conditions.

Erik Erikson- psychosocial development

Erikson's development stages highlight identity formation, especially during adolescence. In the fifth stage-identity vs. role confusion-individuals explore their values, beliefs and goals. They develop a strong sense of self if they successfully navigate this phase. If not, they may struggle with identity confusion, which can carry into adulthood [20].

Albert Bandura- social learning theory

Bandura's work emphasizes the role of observational learning, modelling and social influence in developing the self. According to Bandura A [21], individuals learn from personal experiences and watching others-especially role models. It influences behaviour, beliefs, and self-efficacy, which refers to belief in one's ability to succeed [15,22].

Henri Tajfel- social identity theory

Tajfel proposed that our sense of self is deeply tied to our groups. Social identity theory suggests that people define themselves based on group membership (e.g., nationality, religion, gender) and that these affiliations help structure the self-concept. While group belonging can be a source of pride, it can also lead to conflict when one's group is perceived as inferior or discriminated against [23,24].

These theories demonstrate that the self is a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by personal experiences, social contexts, and internal reflections. Recognizing these influences allows us to understand ourselves and others better [25].

Conclusion

In a nutshell, self-discovery is the ongoing process of determining who you are at the core level beneath all of life's roles, expectations, and distractions. It is about shedding the layers to find underlying values, passions, fears, and dreams. It is often a process of reflection, trial and error, moments of discomfort and moments of clarity. It requires honesty and courage to face what is otherwise rather not. As people become more aware of themselves, their choices align with who they are. People become more trusting of their instincts, set healthier boundaries, and go for

what truly makes them happy. Self-discovery does not just occur-it develops within people. Moreover, the more people create, the more connected they are to who they are supposed to be.

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