

Who Are You? Self-as- Process



"Statements that reflect the self as a process of knowing, or ongoing awareness, typically begin with phrases such as 'I feel...,' 'I think...,' 'I wonder...'"—Louise McHugh, Ian Stewart, & Priscilla Almada, A Contextual Behavioral Guide to the Self, p. 111

From a drama therapy perspective, I think self-as-process can be conceptualized as how one embodies or portrays a given role. Self-as-process can be thought of as how you embody roles in your life. It is your experience of experience as move through your life. At least, this is how I think of it.

A specific role can be "...played in a variety of ways depending on the actor, who brings his or her unique expression to the performance" and characters can be considered "'embodied roles', marking an individual actor's unique way of portraying the role' (Haen, 2015, p. 227). Roles are brought to life in a variety of ways through characters.

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Drop the idea of roles entirely: self-as-process is how you do you at any given moment. It's how you move, express yourself, love, be, feel. As Mae West said, "it isn't what I do, but how I do it. It isn't what I say, but how I say it, and how I look when I do it and say it."

Let's pick up those roles again. I think roles can be helpful to conceptualize as containers of new ways of being. The process of a role is how you bring it to life.

Consider any role that is relevant to you and/or that you previously identified (you can do this multiple times for numerous roles)—

What are the emotions, feelings, wants, desires, values of that role?

How does it feel to be in that role, speaking from it, moving through your life?

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You can certainly create fictional characters from the roles you identified, and that may have utility for some people in some contexts.

Creating a fictional character may give you some distance if working directly with personal material is challenging for you.

Here is a suggested activity to work with roles and explore self-as-process:

First, choose a role you'd like to work with.

Next, consider either how you already embody that role or how you might embody that role. This is your process of being in that role. This is your self as a process.

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What behaviors would that role entail/what do you do in that role?

What worldview might you have in that role?

What values might be associated with that role?

How do you feel in that role?

How do you express yourself in that role?

How do you move (fast, slow, etc))/what is your physicality (hunched over, stand up straight, etc) in that role?

You might try standing up and moving around your space, or remaining seated and moving in ways that are accessible to you. If you experience pain when moving, perhaps try moving your eyebrows, your eyes, and/or your fingers. Be as gentle as you need. If this is still difficult, imagine yourself moving. You may close your eyes but that is not necessary.

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I am not suggesting you become different characters, or that you are comprised of a collection of different characters.

What I am suggesting is to try different ways of being and doing informed by attributes of the roles you find empowering, helpful, and/or useful. Roles, and how those roles can be embodied, might guide you towards your values and values-based actions.

I invite you to consider the different ways of being available to you at any given moment. Perhaps roles, at any point along the fictional/realistic spectrum, might offer you a kind of 'roadmap' to shifting your own processes in ways that matter to you.

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Regarding a current issue, challenge, or struggle in your life, what is a different role you might take in relation to it?

What might a different way of responding to it look like? This exploration process can be active and/or imaginal.

After completing this process, what is one small change you are willing to try?

You might find it helpful to pay attention to and journal your experience of enacting that change during the week.

References



Haen, C. (2015). Advancing a dramaturgical theory of group process. *The Drama Therapy Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 219-223.

McHugh, L., Stewart, I., & Almada, P. (2019). *A contextual behavioral guide to the self*. Context Press.

Reach Out!



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