

Who We Are

Who are we? A very interesting question, and one with many answers. It seems we modeled a lot of people that were imprinted on us as we grew up. The biggest influence is usually our parents and siblings, but grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as those outside the family such as friends and neighbors, teachers, co-workers, religious figures, and others we spent time with can have a major impact. Even one chance meeting if felt deeply good or bad can have a life-long effect. The learned behaviors, conditioned responses, and patterns develop and become habitual over time.

Any of these roles can be helpful or problematic as they bring to light where things are working in our lives and where they aren't. The idea is to identify and work with the roles we play to make them their most functional and useful. Following through on this we may be wise to acknowledge the archetypical roles we may incorporate and utilize in our lives on a regular basis. Some are obvious while others are not, perhaps buried deep within our psyche, but influencing us in many ways none the less, so deserving of attention and practice to really benefit ourselves and others.

So what of these personas, these identities worthy of our consideration and emulation? Some internet sites list over seventy, but the Jungian archetypes come up first and foremost, are generally considered the classics, and so are worthy of investigation and illumination. We will start with the small and meek, the child or innocent.

The child is of course where it all began for us, and where we were most vulnerable and impressionable. What was learned here can literally last a lifetime. Yet because our earliest years were preverbal and intellectually very simple and distant there may be much we will never fully grasp or understand. The events and exchanges can be clouded and confused, some just a feeling or image out of focus. Yet these impressions can still be deep and powerful.

Besides the personas of youth there are also stages of development. Eric Erikson quantified these as first; basic trust in others and our world vs. mistrust. Next comes autonomy vs. shame and dependency. This is followed by initiative vs. guilt, and then proficiency vs. inferiority and defeat. Teens then struggle finding their identity or suffering from identity confusion or crisis. This is another story too large to cover here but worth looking into. You may look to Erickson's Stages of Development under the Power Paths tab here at Cowboy Dharma for information.

There are many childhood personas that have been identified, but we will cover a few of the more obvious and powerful ones here. We may manifest many of these, though one is normally dominant and some may overlap. The question is which ones do you relate to the most and how they affect your life. Unfortunately we may not really fit these roles or become trapped in them so live unhappily or rebel against them. Each has a shadow side that lurks beneath the surface and may express in many ways in differing situations and times.

The first and most glorious child archetype is the golden child or hero. This child can do no wrong and is viewed as the best and brightest even if they aren't. Often the scholastic or sports star, they are perceived as a genius or prodigy. Modern examples are Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, and child beauty queens. Some handle this role surprisingly well, but miss out on a normal childhood so look back sadly later in life. Others accept the role and coast through life actually having to perform less due to excessive coddling and attention.

Later in life they may have resentment for simply having to work hard like everyone else. There may be a lot of pressure in the spotlight, especially if there are high expectations for performance and improvement a child may not be able to sustain. When expectations are not met, the disappointment in the child and others can do serious damage to their self esteem. The fall from grace may also push the child into other roles such as the scapegoat.

The scapegoat seemingly can do no right, and is often seen as the reason for bad things that happen, even if the child actually does very well. Judged never good enough they may become people pleasers in a hopeless attempt to win praise and admiration. Martyrdom comes at a high price as they live out their lives for others and hold back resentment for their abusers. Others give up because they feel "damned if they do and damned if they don't," so fulfill the role of troublemaker with gusto. Whichever path they choose, it is a difficult and empty life bound to dysfunction and problems. This poor child lives in the shadow twenty four-seven.

The orphan or lost child either withdraws in self preservation or is abandoned by loved ones. The feeling is of being ignored, invisible, and unimportant; a nobody. Loneliness and fear also push this child into the shadows or background, and unable to feel deeply due to lack of the bonds of intimate connections. As isolators and outsiders lost kids become lost adults and overlooked for all kinds of opportunities and relationships. Modern examples are orphans such as Snow White, Cinderella, and Dorothy of the Wizard of Oz. Like Oliver Twist, we may take up with other orphans and lost kids to find a sense of family and home. But like Peter Pan we never really grow up, so miss out on all a full and connected life has to offer.

The child seen as sickly, wounded, or disadvantaged is at a significant disadvantage as the label may follow them through life lowering their expectations and those of others around them of what they can become and achieve. They often have suffered great abuse, neglect, and trauma early on that stunts their growth in many ways mentally, physically, and spiritually. Perhaps Tiny Tim of Charles Dickens Scrooge story is the best example here, doomed unless dark forces are overcome and benevolence is embraced. These children are known to become champions of the weak and underprivileged should they overcome their own shadows and reach out to help others from similar situations.

The nature child is deeply in touch with life and the forces of nature. These kids often are very bonded with pets, and perhaps more so than with people. Perhaps it is a learned response, but they feel most free and happy out in the wild riding, rafting, hiking, swimming and the like. A nature child may be somewhat more emotional and sensitive in particular to the suffering of animals and other life forms, but may also have an independence and resilience other children lack. A park ranger or environmentalist are modern examples, and an important part of humanity in this time of great environmental perils.

The clown or entertainer child makes light of our world and worries. This can be a comic relief in dark times, but has the shadow of glossing over problems in need of attention and care. Many believe it takes a wounded child to make a good comedian as suffering is the flip side of comedy. Yet the tears of a clown seem the saddest of all, and a smile that is painted on hides a heart in pain, and evermore so when it is a child. This child eventually realizes trying to make others happy all the time is exhausting, and authenticity is infinitely more rewarding.

The magical or wonder child often lives in a fantasy world of imaginary friends and monsters where anything is possible. Einstein said imagination is more important than knowledge, and the true sign of intelligence, so perhaps this child is one of the wisest, as life is in its most essential being wonderful and magical. Even civilization is the result of imagination as everything we have ever made was once a thought, an idea, a belief, first imagined, then made manifest. We owe much to the dreamers and believers. The shadow is to be lost in fantasy to the detriment of self and others. Healthy living lies somewhere in between.

Researching this writing we came upon a mother's wish that her child have honesty, contentment, serenity, curiosity, learning, wonder, imagination, and be cheerful, joyful, outgoing, happy, sensitive, tolerant, respectful, humble, kind, optimistic, confident, independent, loving, affectionate, and disciplined. A tall order, and perhaps rarely fulfilled, but a goal worth striving for.

For the adult roles clarity can be found by thinking of the middle ages, and its personas. These were the times of chivalry and virtue, and many of the personas are well known today. Writers found it easy to romanticize this age with the likes of King Arthur, Sir Lancelot and his knights of the round table, the wizard Merlin, and Lady Guinevere. Harry Potter plays on these themes, and Game of Thrones and many other shows and movies illustrate that this era is still very alive in our hearts and minds.

The hero is admired for courage and bravery in the face of great adversity, and other noble qualities. Superheroes (and villains) have become hugely popular these days as we look for inspiration and empowerment, even if reserved for fantasy. Sports, music, entertainment, and other "stars" are also glorified by the media as worthy of attention and praise. Unfortunately the media and others are all too willing to try and tear them down as well.

What we are looking for are role models that have withstood the test of time. Many literary heroes come to mind such as Superman, Wonder Woman, and Zorro that focused on serving others and justice in general. Real life heroes such as Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Joan of Arc are an inspiration as well. The medieval equivalent was Robinhood who took from the rich to give to the poor. This icon was both hero and villain as is often the case. Other clear examples were knights that upheld a strict code of honor, ethics, and piety to church and state.

What is it about these individuals that is deserving of veneration and how can this play out in our ordinary everyday lives? We can work on our own courage, bravery, and other noble qualities to stand up and work for truth and justice, protect the weak and innocent, and become a good role model for family, friends, and others. Heroes also often have charisma, authenticity, and determination to succeed. They also make great sacrifices for others, and are focused and compassionate, attributes we are wise to develop in ourselves.

The dark side is when those in positions of power and advantage give into selfish desires and become part of the problem rather than solutions. Temptations and opportunities for wrong doing can be hard to resist when we are holding all the cards. Super villains are also popular in modern stories as a convenient foe for superheroes as the Batman series clearly attests. Yet the real life examples such as Mao Tse-Tung, Joseph Stalin, and Adolph Hitler that were responsible for the deaths of millions of people show just how dangerous and villainous humans can be.

Perhaps on the other end of the spectrum from superheroes is the everyman (or woman), the ordinary man, or good neighbor living out their lives quietly with little or no praise and fanfare. This may be one of the easiest personas to relate to as most people live ordinary lives rarely under the spotlight, and if so then briefly such as at weddings, graduations, or other common social conventions. Yet the lack of attention for the common man and woman may make it easier for them to quietly work in service towards others and enlightenment in themselves.

The dark side is the common man or woman who waste their lives in selfish pursuits, hurting others, or hiding out from life and really living. This is all too easy as we make choices daily to connect and engage with others or to avoid and isolate. This is understandable as many were abused and neglected as children so try to avoid further pain later in life. The goal here is to take good care of ourselves as well as others in a healthy balanced manner.

Parents and caregivers are usually common folk as well, but are in a position of authority, power, and control over others, so have great responsibility as they nurture and mold their children and others dependent upon them. This persona is similar to the leader or ruler as they exert influence over and direct the lives of others in their care. At its best, this person creates a safe and inspiring environment within which to grow and flourish, so children and others may grow and bloom to reach for their full potential.

The shadow side is parents and caregivers that are abusive or neglectful. Alcoholics and other addicts are a particularly bad example as they may be bubbling over with happiness, affection, and praise one moment, then viscerally angry, raging, critical, and violent the next. This can swing into neglect as they leave dependants alone for hours or days going on binges or sleeping off their intoxications. This is perhaps the most damaging of abuses as children and others are at the mercy of these persons and over time come to believe this is normal and are caught in a web of co-dependency and dysfunction they may live out the rest of their lives.

This is a huge problem for many and addressing and healing it the ultimate purpose of our work. The point here is to recognize when and how these dynamics arise and play out. Service to others is our greatest opportunity to be helpful or hurtful, so we must draw on all the forces of good we can to fulfill our duty in the best possible ways. You may want to look to the twelve step program Children of Alcoholics and dysfunctional families (ACA) or others if this resonates for you. We have, and the healing and growth have been amazing and wonderful.

The creator or artist taps into the creativity of the inner child as well as the infinite creativity of universe. History is filled with fine examples such as artists Leonardo de Vinci, Michelangelo, and Mozart, as well as more modern business architects such as Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and Bill Gates. We honor and respect the creators because they touch something deep within us yearning to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, something very useful or beautiful.

This is an area that can be very satisfying and fulfilling to explore as we find places in our life and world for the new and different, and the beautiful and inspiring in small and large ways. Our clothes, homes, foods we eat, workplaces, relationships, and other areas can all become a canvas on which to paint with the palate of creativity available to us through others, classes, videos, the internet, and so on.

Perhaps this is an area that is often neglected as we rarely realize the potential to make so many areas of our lives useful as well as beautiful. Perhaps it is the stressed and rushed pace of these times that makes us forget to take time to arrange our environment with respect and care. Life is so often difficult and ugly that we need meaningful art, music, and beauty on a regular basis to stay happy and satisfied. The idea is for each us to make our homes and public places, as well as our hearts and minds a work of art.

The shadow is using creativity for selfish or harmful ends such as weapons, pornography, or bullying. Nuclear weapons are a prime example of how our God given creativity can exceed our best interests and be reduced to mere cleverness and brutal results. This cleverness can seem innocent in more minor instances such as pranks, but the results are still demeaning if cause embarrassment and ill will. The question is, as always, are our efforts in the service of all concerned, and the higher and greater good.

The identity of the wizard or witch stirs up magic and enchantment. This charmer has more than enough wonders in the natural world to have any need for more. Many of the wonders we see everyday are actually so incredible they could easily be considered supernatural. We can flip a switch and have light, heat, cold, or music instantly. We can ride across town in comfort and ease in cars, fly across the world in airplanes, and some have even been to the moon and back. We can know what's going on with people in the far reaches of the world at any time by watching the news, or pick up our phones to speak with them. The wonders of literature, movies, music, and other arts is no less breathtaking. Science is also so amazing it boggles the mind as we replace joints, bones, hearts and other parts.

For many the best magic is in common ordinary life. When a seed breaks through the crust of soil it could be most anything; a palm tree, rose bush, giant sequoia, or simple mushroom. But when it grows to a big beautiful tree, and then bursts into a full canopy of flowers, and then they become luscious delicious fruits, it is simply amazing and magical. An embryo going through the egg, fishlike, reptilian and other stages before becoming one of many possible animals is no less wondrous. These are basic goodness in full glory.

The trick is to find the magic in little things like just one flower, one fruit, or one person, and perhaps realize they contain all their past and future generations within them now. Thich Nhat Hanh advises us to look into a simple piece of paper and see the sunshine, rain, wind, and earth that made it, as well as the logger, and his family and environment that went into too. The idea is that like gratitude, awe and amazement at the wonders of life is very uplifting. We all need an inner magician, ready to conjure up magic at any time to relieve our boredom, anguish, and woes.

The dark side is the evil wizard, witch, or warlock who conjures up spells and incantations to control and terrify others. For us magic is perhaps best seen in our access to technology and our inventions as mentioned earlier, as we are able to injure or kill dozens with the pull of a trigger, or thousands at the push of a button. Even simple words sent out over the internet or social media that are bullying or hurtful can have devastating effects. These and many others are a dark magic and evil we must learn to limit and subdue.

Another persona that works wonders in medieval imagery is the jester, the joker, and in our days the clown and comedian. The Hopi American Indians have a very fun figure for this prankster called Kokopelli. This trouble maker is over a thousand years old, and a deity of fertility, music, dance and mischief that is typically depicted dancing about playing a flute. One story has Kokopelli walking through the center of town painted white on one side and black on the other so the townspeople have a big argument over what color this silly figure really was.

The point of this identity is to not take ourselves, others, or anything in life too seriously. A light hearted approach to our all too common fervor and drama goes a long way towards taking the edge off, and finding a way to laugh or cry with whatever comes our way. This joyful viewpoint is found in most, if not all wisdom traditions. The interplay of tragedy and comedy are also so inextricably linked that denying one denies the other. Many have recognized that all that is tragedy will one day become comedy. Shows like *M*A*S*H* living proof.

When it comes to the persona of the outlaw a useful image is the pirate, as we all have a broad and colorful idea of this figure in folklore. They are criminals no doubt, but their freedom and flourish somehow seem to endear them to us. Most anyone who has had firsthand experience with pirates likely sees them differently, as the cruelty can be great and horrific. Looking back to the childhood persona it is easy to see how this identity could develop early on and continue into adulthood. If our behavior is always being criticized and punishment comes no matter what we do, it is easy to see why some will take what they want with little regard for others.

The shadow side is the dominant one here though some would try to justify their actions as serving justice such as Robinhood or Zorro would. Reaching justice through non violence demonstration can be a very long and hard road as Ghandi and Martin Luther King discovered, yet it is the only way triumph over evils can be afforded without giving in to the injustices we are trying to overcome. Therefore we are wise to recognize the attraction of quick and easy rewards if they compromise our integrity and sense of fairness. Martin Luther King said that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," and this moral compass is most true within each mans soul.

The lover is one of the most virtuous and beneficent of the personas if it is true love from the heart filled with understanding, compassion, and forgiveness. This aspect informs and empowers all the other beneficial personas to real caring, kindness, and connection. What would a parent, ruler, or artist be without the divine presence of love that seeks to help and heal, and who wouldn't want someone like this to give us attention, acceptance, affirmation, affection, and appreciation.

The shadow lover tricks others into believing they can take what they want selfishly in the name of love, but this is not true love. Don Juan was of this mind, expecting to be forgiven for his sins no matter the number or consequence. Yet karma doesn't wait for judgment day, as time wounds all heels. The temptation is great here, and in particular for sexual encounters, as the deep physical connection can seem to fill an empty soul and at least temporarily quell the pain of loneliness, yet the cost is even more pain and soul loss.

The adventurer and explorer type is one highly revered by humanity with names such as Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, Lewis and Clark bringing images of conquest and discovery. Series like Indiana Jones, Star Wars, and the Hobbit are hugely popular for this reason, as there is a deep wish in each of us for exotic travels and exciting encounters to escape the humdrum existence of everyday life. How we do this as individuals is also a very individual and personal affair as only we know how far and in what direction to go beyond our comfort zone.

The shadow is carefully managed in the Star Trek series as they make every effort to avoid disrupting indigenous peoples and cultures on their journeys across the universe. Columbus is an example of this as well as we Americans celebrate his birthday as an explorer even though the truth is he was also slave trader and apparently initiated a long history of genocide. Our own personal adventures also may be less harmful if we can make them more respectful of nature and others.

Sages are wise, virtuous, or holy persons that have special insight and understanding, and serve as guides or helpers to leaders, heroes, and others. These "old souls" are widely trusted and respected and seen as scholarly, engaged with the issues of their times, as well as compassionate and kind. The sages of history are well known and celebrated through such persons as King Solomon, Plato, and Mahatma Ghandi.

They are known for higher learning, as well as a commitment higher law and greater good, and a persona we might seek to emulate through-out our lives. A more present day example is Yoda from Star Wars, but is perhaps easier to find real life examples here as we think of those often quoted and revered like Albert Einstein, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. The sage is often very spiritually centered and grounded.

What is the identity for a spiritual person? For some the priest, pastor, or other religious figure. Or perhaps the humble monk in his plain cloth robe lending a helping hand where needed. The idea here is to take on the persona and incorporate it into your own personality and character until you can really feel "The peace of God which passes all understanding" intimately on a daily basis. Lincoln said; "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day."

The last of the personas is the greatest in all in its nobility and royal majesty as the king or queen. Often this king or queen began as warrior who became a conquering hero before ascending to the throne. Earths elements are manifested here as a great ruler would be humble like earth, skilful like water, fierce like fire, and visionary like sky or air. I always think of the term servant leader when power over others is concerned, as the best rulers put the needs of the people above their own desires.

The dress here is a purple cape, as it is the color of royalty, and with fur trim, a bejeweled golden crown, a golden scepter in hand, and a sword at the side. We all have a Kingdom or Queendom we must rule, if only our own little world, and we may choose to rule with justice and dignity or tyranny. Our subjects may be our family, friends, coworkers, and others, or our pets, plants, and other possessions.

Our most important subject is ourselves. How do you treat yourself? Would you choose yourself as a ruler, or are you too hard on yourself? I will go off subject here for a moment to tell you that I have found great healing through kind and wise family and friends, counselors and therapists, and through recovery programs. These are great places to learn to rule yourself, those around you, and even your possessions with courtesy, dignity, and respect.

Through-out this journey through the personas we have tried to elaborate on the opposing negative personalities for each identity. Any identity can have a dark side, some just seem more shocking, such as the "bad" teacher, doctor, or policeman. The value of this image and identity is to recognize that the line between good and bad is not drawn between us and others, but straight through the soul of every person, society, organization, or other entity.

To consider ourselves or our fellows above the possibility of deceit or injustice hinders us greatly, and blinds us to the wrongs we may consider or enact. Online sights list a dozen American backed regime change coups since 1949, and many orchestrated by the rich and powerful to become even more rich and powerful. Things like this can be hard to believe but true, and a glaring testament to what evils we are capable of as individuals, communities, and nations.

This realization not only serves as a reminder to be ever watchful of our own affairs, but also gives us a measure of compassion for those who have done wrongs small or great. For if each of us is capable of these self same acts should we have lived as they have, for if each of us has a dark side buried within, then each of us can have understanding and forgiveness as well. Condemnation applies to actions, and not to people. We must work with the good and nurture that if we are ever to make real and lasting progress towards the right.

There you have it; who we are, and who we can be, if we are wise enough to acknowledge, explore, and develop the various aspects of our nature and personality. There are also many other personae and identities you may wish to explore and enjoy. Perhaps, for you, this is just a beginning.

