

Carl Jung first termed the word shadow as an indication that people were often driven by unconscious principles which people did not necessarily identify with. To Jung, everyone has a hidden shadow side. When the psychological term shadow is used in modern times it is frequently associated with evil or badness. People tend to think that their shadow is their repressed bad side or that it is something inherently bad about themselves that does not often get displayed in public. Shadow often has this connotation of darkness and negativity surrounding it.

A man who is unconscious of himself acts in a blind, instinctive way and is in addition fooled by all the illusions that arise when he sees everything that he is not conscious of in himself coming to meet him from outside as projections upon his neighbour.

“The Philosophical Tree” (1945). In *CW 13: Alchemical Studies*. P.335

Our shadow is dark but only in the sense that it is largely unconscious and not readily known to the experiencer. To understand shadow, we also have to understand what Carl Jung termed the persona. Our persona is our public face where the public includes ourselves. The latter is an important point.

In a few hours from the time of this piece of writing I will be seeing a few clients in psychotherapy sessions. When I do so, I will be wearing the hat of a psychologist. This is my persona which I will have on display to my clients. I will also have it on display to myself in the sense that it is a role I will immerse myself in. Later tonight I will be seeing a friend. When I see my friend my persona changes into one involving friendship and intimacy. It's visible and palpable by anyone who really looks.

It is also something we usually associate ourselves with. For example, if our conscious identity is one of a business person, we might accentuate the confidence and financial savvy we exude. In a way we are shining a light on the features of ourselves we wish to associate with. If we think about some of the more popular spiritual teachers, it is not difficult to see their persona front and centre. But it applies to everyone, not just spiritual teachers. Everyone tends to accentuate the features they like most.

Our persona can also manifest in what may seem to be a negative identity. For instance a person's identity may be so bound up in victimhood that it becomes their persona. There is a lot of value playing the role of a victim because of the attention a person receives.

Similarly, a depressed person may have an air of sadness and anguish. From a lay person's point of view, we can think of these sorts of outward manifestations as their persona on display.

Having a persona is not particularly problematic. At least it is not when there is an unencumbered freedom to move between numbers of different alternate roles. It is when rigidity enters the picture that a persona can be highly problematic.

It is not particularly difficult to see how having a rigid persona can be problematic. The depressed persona is a good example of rigidity taking hold of the person's identity and then becoming problematic. A mother whose persona is solely wrapped up in being a mother, often can exclude other potential rewarding areas of life. A hard worker soon becomes a work-alcoholic. The hallmark of a rigid persona is that it diminishes life in some way. It is a way of shrinking into a very rigid way of being instead of expanding and exploring what we are capable of.

If our persona is our public face, then our shadow is our hidden face in the sense that it largely is our unconscious face. It is our repressed, disavowed and neglected parts or roles that constitute our shadow. The relationship between persona and shadow is a reciprocal one. For example, a person who always puts on a happy face, but has been traumatized, may experience intense and profound sadness out of the blue or starts to cry for no discernable reason. The sadness will seem out of character to the person - as if it does not fit. A pastor who acts out sexually with his congregation, is frequently wearing the mask of a good holy person, but it is the repressed and disavowed shadow which is reeking havoc in people's lives as another example. It's usually the shadow which gets the bad rap, but in practice the behaviour stems from a rigid persona as much as a repressed shadow.

Consider what might occur if someone has not been allowed to express anger in appropriate ways as they were being raised. By and large, the anger is excluded from conscious experience. Yet anger may raise its head at the most inopportune moments. Sometimes it is the intensity of anger which arises and catches those involved by surprise. If we are not on good terms with our anger, our dreams and fantasies might start to become filled with angry images and people. The unconscious compensates for the lack of attention anger receives in conscious life - i.e. the persona. It is as if anger has a life of its own and needs to be heard or seen. At one extreme, we might become physically ill from the toxicity of all the pent up unconscious anger. Sometimes anger manifests as life threatening conditions. Many of our emotions find their way into the body via pain and illnesses when important aspects of our inner life are neglected.

Our shadow can be seen in many different aspects of life, but two mediums where it tends to express itself regularly are our dreams and in the psychological mechanism of projection. Projection is when we see things in other people that also belong to us. For example, a person may complain about another person's tardiness in keeping to schedules, complaining that their schedules are often a mess, but the person who is complaining their own home is also a bit messy with bits of clothes thrown here and there. The mechanism involved is that one person is seeing a mess in another person but not recognizing the mess in their own life - hence the term projection.

What is important to understand with projection is that there is always some validity to the projection. For instance, that a person tends to make messy schedules may indeed be a valid observation. This sort of validity makes projection tricky to spot.

We can tell when a projection is occurring by the intensity of emotion involved in the moment. If we become overly angry with the messy schedule person, we may well be throwing in our own anger at ourselves for not being able to maintain a clean orderly home. It is the extra bit of anger which does not really belong to the other person but yet is attributed to them which constitutes the mechanism of projection.

Another way to tell when a projection is occurring is to also see if it's occurring with other people. For instance, if the messy schedule person does not bother other people as much as it does us, then it is very likely we are projecting. What we are often projecting is our shadow. Our own messiness becomes disavowed. It is a thing we barely have a relationship with. Yet it is still there in our lives affecting us on a daily basis. Because our own messiness is not being dealt with appropriately or dealt with very maturely, then we start seeing messiness in others in a variety of different ways.

The bad rap that often is associated with our shadow is largely because we do not pay attention to the neglected/forgotten/disowned aspects. It is not because there is anything inherently bad about our shadow. Carl Jung referred to our shadow as containing pure gold. This is because our shadow/shadows contain an enormous amount of unused energy. We can use this energy to great effect in our lives.

Quite a few decades ago now, someone told me that I would never make anything of myself. Who said it to me and the manner in which the message was delivered hurt me a great deal. After all the pain and hurt had simmered down what remained was a whole lot of anger. In my mind I set of to show them they were wrong. The following year I enrolled in university, finished my degree and went on to further study. Dependency issues aside, it was a constructive use of anger. It enabled me to gain a number of degrees and excel at

academic life. When anger is employed in this fashion it is an incredibly powerful tool which can enable a very rewarding and happy life. Thus it is so with our shadow. We can utilize it to gain much from life in ways which are neither nebulous nor impractical.

Readers should also note that although I used anger constructively in this instance, there are many examples from my life where I did not.

Shadow also entails groups, community, countries etc. What is your country's shadow, what is not owned, what is disavowed. Apply the same to any groups to which you belong. What is the persona and what is the Shadow? If we start to look at things through these lenses and more importantly start to have a more conscious relationship then all that much better in the long run.

Shadow work is not for the faint of heart. It is difficult, arduous work often bringing us into contact with parts of ourselves we do not like or wish to know. But the gifts which can come with having a more conscious relationship with our shadow are many. They not only benefit us, but also those around us and the community at large.

There is much more to the unconscious than the shadow (e.g., anima, animus) which I will write about in a future article. I think having some form of framework for understanding how we function can be useful for our endeavours in life. I also think we should not be overly attached to them. Use them as important guides by all means, but remember they are meant as guides. Remember it is the rigidity of the persona and the lack of attention/awareness of shadow which often lands us in trouble. Also bear in mind that they often go hand in hand.

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