

## Self consciousness - the Supreme Controller!

We are very different when gripped by emotion from times when reason dominates.

Most of us go to considerable lengths to present a reasonable – and reasoning – self to others. Special circumstances for allowing emotion and unreason to dominate are available but carefully bounded – sports fans in all their regalia, music concerts, watching movies or TV and services and rituals which mark transitions or passing on.

The tool we use to govern and monitor this presentation of ourselves in everyday life is *self-awareness*.

There is a uniquely human form of self-awareness called **self-consciousness**. This is the basis of our capacity both to fit in with others and cultural norms, but also to transcend the immediate situation *and live in terms of the possible*.

This in turn constitutes the basis of psychological freedom. It means that the future is not the past, but a place of possibility - providing we are consciousness of our automatic patterns which often respond before we have thought about new possibilities.

Self-consciousness arises as we start to distinguish ourselves from others in infancy and is increased when we acquire 'theory of mind' – the knowledge that other people are conscious too and that their worlds might be similar to ours in some respects but different in others. As we grow in years self-consciousness is moderated by cultural norms and lessons we are taught by life.

By the time we are adults we have a veritable dictionary of modes or practices that we use to moderate the self we display. We continually update this dictionary if we are smart, but may choose to become 'fixed in our ways' either as a conscious strategy or as an unconscious defence against the work involved in further revisions/adaptations.

You will have your own opinion of how you are seen by others. The way you are perceived may also vary between the different groups you find yourself in. You might be the life and soul of the party at home, yet very quiet among strangers. You might make your workmates laugh 'til they cry, or be someone who pursues their work quietly. You may have all these characteristics yet play them differently from time to time.

The important point is that self-consciousness is the filter through which everything you do, say and feel is passed. There is hardly a moment, except when securely alone in the most intimate parts of our homes, that we are free from this filter: it's most common form is: 'what will they think of me if I do or say that?'

As we seek insight, it is this fact, that we are all influenced by self-consciousness that has led us to

create micro-cultures where the standard norms do not apply. It has also made us quite suspicious of attempts to standardize, stereotype or assign traits to people. People are deciding their comportment based on norms, System One thinking and minimizing risk or maximizing effectiveness. It may not reflect their true desires or intentions at all! We are all actors and acknowledging this begins the road to awareness.

If you would like a pdf of this post, it can be found here: