



So here I am – what next?

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'When people start writing they think they've got to write something definitive ... I think that is fatal. The mood to write in is "This is quite an interesting story I've got to tell. I hope someone will be interested. Anyway it's the best I can do for the present." If one adopts that line one gets over it and does it'. (Holmes)

'Who am I?' is the question I asked myself having been married five times, four of which ended in divorce, and had countless failed relationships? I have four children and four grandchildren and without me they would not be here, so I have achieved something to be proud of. Why was it, then, that I didn't feel a sense of pride, and I was filled with the feeling that I had no right to call myself my own children's father? I needed to understand why I felt the way I did.

Because I was brought up as an infant by my grandparents, I felt that I was unable to form any meaningful attachment to a particular care giver. I was moved into another situation when my mother remarried, and we lived at his mother's house. I was brought up to regard this man as my father and was given his name, although my birth certificate had been registered with my natural father's surname. My mother did not have a happy time living with her mother-in-law, and I have only

vague memories of the first eight years of my life. My mother had two more boys and a girl by the man I now call my step-father.

What is Attachment?

"Attachment" is an overall term which refers to the state and quality of an individual's attachment. This can be divided into secure and insecure attachment. ...To feel attached is to feel safe and secure. By contrast an insecurely attached person may have a mixture of feelings towards their attachment figure: intense love and dependency, fear of rejection, irritability and vigilance.' (Holmes)

Pendry (1998), in a review of work undertaken by Bowlby and Ainsworth, states that a 'group of infants were characterized by a lack of distress during parental separation, and avoidance of the parent upon return. This group was called insecurely attached, and

avoidant'. I feel that this described my early childhood, with the only person of any relevance to me being my maternal grandfather. I used to spend a lot of time in quiet isolation, inventing games when I visited my maternal grandparents. During one such occasion I was looking through some drawers and found papers which were the divorce papers of my mother and natural father, and my step father and his former wife. The truth was now known to me, but I could not tell anyone because I felt I would be punished for doing something wrong. The impact of this 'secret' on me was dramatic. I virtually withdrew from the family. I had lost my identity but I felt that it would be 'wrong' if I asked anyone about it,

I detached myself from the family, exhibiting what Bowlby describes as 'defensive exclusion'. Holmes (1993) describes this as:

'where no secure base exists, the individual is in a state of "dissuagement", and resorts to defensive manoeuvres (such as splitting off anger; inhibitions of sexuality; or conversely compulsive sexualisation of relationships) in order to minimise the pain of separation anxiety, and if needs be, to manipulate support at the expense of a truly reciprocal companionship. ...An insecurely attached child may view the world as a dangerous place in which other people are to be treated with great caution, and see himself as ineffective and unworthy of love.'

I was creating a false self to protect my true self from being hurt, the process described by

Bradshaw (1998) as 'narcissistic deprivation' which he defines as 'If I can't have my feelings, my needs, my thoughts, my wants, then something must be wrong with me. I must be flawed as a person. I am worthless of my parent's time and attention. I am worthless'.

I went through school and left to become an apprentice engineer. I met a girl at work and she became pregnant, I saw this as my opportunity to escape from the family environment, so I was married. The child was born and only lived for about three minutes. I remember being told beforehand that this was likely to be the case, and I think that I suppressed the feelings of bereavement because I had not known the child. Both my family and my wife's parents did not understand why I did not cry or show any sign of loss. I had to register the birth and death of the child and I believe that I was shocked into becoming an adult on that day. I certainly feel that I exhibited a great indifference to the death of a child I had never attempted to be interested in. I must have appeared distant to the unfortunate mother whose high expectation had been destroyed, and whose husband did not seem to care. I feel that I was going through the stages of grief prompted by the child's death, but in effect I was mourning the loss of my own childhood. I was angry because I hoped that some mistake had been made and things would be made right. I was beginning the long path into the depression that consumed me from then on. Parental pressure resulted in another child being born, but within three months the marriage was over and my eldest daughter was being brought up by

my mother. I did not accept responsibility for the child and seemed to live a separate life to her, even though I was still living with her and my parents.

Understanding the mind

I started college and became an obsessive over-achiever, when nothing less than one hundred percent was good enough. I was driven to be a super achiever and believed that I was always right. I was superior and controlling, and I blamed someone else for my situation e.g. mother, father or wife. It is also true that I believed I was a failure, worthless and extremely self-critical. Bradshaw (1998) would describe this as a more than human personality.

These feelings continued through college and university where I gained a first class honours degree, but felt that I had just learned how to beat the examination system. I became aware that I had two types of mind whilst at university; the first type was my 'logical' or rational mind, and the other my 'wandering' or emotional mind. I was suppressing my emotions because I was afraid that if I did not, I would experience further rejection and hurt.

I have realised that I was being triggered to respond in a defensive pattern because my early expression of feelings had not been recognised, and I had learned to conceal them. I believed that it was wrong to show my feelings and it would lead to me being rejected by the person that I wanted to receive love from. Goleman (1995) states that the 'protective bond between parent and child allows maturation to go on over the course of a long

childhood ... during which the brain continues to develop'. My emotional mind did not develop but was suppressed to protect the hurt child within me.

According to LeDoux (1998), the most primitive part of the brain regulates the basic life functions, and from this primitive root the emotional centre emerges. The thalamus or thinking brain develops from this emotional centre, and as the brain grows it develops and refines two tools, namely, learning and memory. The amygdala is a cluster of structures which acts as a record of emotional memory, and the thalamus acts as a filter and produces a reasoned response. I believe that is what I was doing during the emotional turmoil experienced in my relationships. I imagined that because I was rejected last time I was going to be rejected again, and I responded in an insecure avoidant responsive pattern which made it into a self fulfilling prophecy.

Satisfying attachment needs

I married for the second time on completion of my university course because the woman involved was also pregnant. I seemed to drift into situations without working out the consequences, because I thought I was doing the right thing. The marriage produced a further child but within six months of that birth that marriage was also over, and I was told that I had no role to undertake. I don't really understand why I accepted that situation, other than to use Main and Weston's (1982) statement that 'the avoidant response is a way of dampening aggression and so appeasing a mother to whom the child needs desperately to feel

close, but whom he fears will rebuff him if he reveals his needs too openly, or shows her how angry he feels about being abandoned'. I was chasing someone to love me, but was always feeling insecure so went ahead with marriage so that I might be attached, though still feeling that the person was going to leave.

I married for the third time and another child was born but the marriage ended. I had become addicted to the desire to find happiness, and I was continually being 'triggered' to act in the same obsessive manner. I employed the maxim that 'the grass was always greener on the other side of the fence' and I married again as I chased my long lost childhood. The marriage failed. I had been married four times and had four children, and I was alone and angry.

Dynamic Psychotherapy

I was diagnosed as depressed and started attending Dynamic Psychotherapy sessions on a weekly basis. I was obsessed with punctuality and would get angry if delayed by traffic and would then be angry at the sessions. It was important to me to show my commitment to the process but the sessions were just a catalogue of the previous week's events. I remember being aware of the clock and always finished the sessions on the exact second. I also challenged the therapist to answer questions about my illness, 'How mad am I?', and 'When will I be better?' were frequent questions. I wanted someone to tell me the answers and behaved like an angry and sulking child. I had written the

script and I had constructed my realities. The objective of the therapy was to enable me to get beneath the events and experience my emotions.

I now understand Kelly's (1955) statement: 'Man looks at his world through transparent patterns or templates which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed. The fit is not always good'. This defines where I was at the beginning of the therapy, where I wanted to be as defined by Goleman (1995) as 'self-awareness', which he sees as the key for making decisions with a positive attitude and assurance. I now realise that I need to be in a position to manage my emotions, such that I can recover quickly from setbacks. I want to motivate myself to achieve emotional self-control and to feel empathy towards others, and to develop interpersonal skills to provide me with the ability to handle relationships.

Constructing the future

Kelly (1955) saw human beings as scientists who develop a hypothesis about life and then attempt to prove that their hypothesis is correct. I can appreciate that I see the world through 'constructs' I have created for myself. These allow me to anticipate the patterns of my life in order to understand them and to some extent make them predictable. I have constructed a view of relationships which has constrained me, such that I find it difficult to view a relationship without generating the anxiety that it will fail. I find it very difficult to trust and this makes it difficult, if not impossible for me to connect

with people. I need to recognize how I use my constructs to prevent me from moving forward, and to loosen those constructs so that I am not so limited in my approach to life.

I am now in a better position to enjoy my new marriage without anxiety. I can now recognise my 'core constructs', which Kelly defines as 'constructs that are most significant to you', and this is enabling me to approach situations more flexibly, being aware of my thought processes and my habitual patterns of response. This awareness enables me to have more choice about how I deal with my feelings and behaviour.

Sub-Personalities

In order to achieve my aim of becoming self aware, I feel that I must also identify the sub-personalities that I have created to protect the insecure child within me. Ferrucci (1985) describes sub-personalities as 'psychological satellites, coexisting as a multitude of lives within the overall medium of our personality. Each sub-personality has a style and motivation of its own, often strikingly dissimilar from those of the others'. I have developed several sub-personalities and this can lead to inner turmoil and conflict. Roberto Assagioli (1974) noticed 'that a great deal of psychological pain, imbalance, and meaninglessness are felt when our diverse inner elements exist unconnected side by side or clash with one another'.

I have a sub-personality which I call 'Mr. Perfect' who was created to protect my 'Vulnerable Child' sub-personality. I believe that I have consistently identified with 'Mr.

Perfect' such that I believe that I am it, and I am always trying to attain the perfect state. A further sub-personality I call 'Mr. Grumpy' who serves the purpose of criticizing those around me who have failed to attain the same perfect state. 'Mr. Grumpy' also severely criticizes 'Mr. Perfect' and undermines his self confidence and invokes a further sub-personality, who I call 'Mr. Invisible', a sub-set of the 'Vulnerable Child', who disappears into the background and isolates himself.

I can gain awareness and, quoting Ferrucci(1982), 'pass from a disordered collection of clashing tendencies to being a meaningfully harmonized whole around a centre: the self. Through the action of the will, the self can then regulate each function of the psychophysical organism'. If I can recognise the sub-personalities I may be able to step aside emotionally and observe them from the position of the 'self' or 'I'.

Understanding 'Self' and the 'Will'

Brown (2004) summarizes 'the psychosynthesis model of the individual is that Self, or Luminous Source, manifests itself through the many functions of the personality under the direction of 'I'. Self is consciousness acting and creating through will'. He describes Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs as 'a familiar model for exploring the progression from survival to Self-expression'. I hope that, by undertaking the process of discovering my sub personalities, I will learn how to integrate them and experience the feeling of being 'I'. Ferrucci (1982) states 'We can truly and freely choose, bearing

the full responsibility for self determination. It is to this evolutionary acquisition, still very much in development, that we give here the name will'.

I do not want to just understand what 'will' means, but to apply it such that the will can be balanced with love; I believe as Assagioli (1974) states

'The danger of untempered will is that it lacks heart. We see, and used to see especially in Victorian times, the operation of cold, stern and even cruel will. On the other hand, love without will can make an individual weak, sentimental, over emotional and ineffectual. One of the principle causes of today's disorders is the lack of

love on the part of those who have will and the lack of will in those who are good and loving. These points unmistakably to the urgent need for the integration, the unification, of love and will'.

I understand now that I was swinging from one state to the other in my life, using my will to enable me to achieve and 'succeed' and in my 'love' relationships operating from being needy for love and not using my will to make them work. In these relationships I reverted back to my powerless and withdrawn child state. Hopefully now I can achieve the balance that Assagioli describes operate in my current relationship from the unification of love and will.

Further Reading

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