

Stuckness and How It Is That We Stay There

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A fish doesn't know that he's wet

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Very often we do not see what is right in front of us. In the case of the fish, he doesn't know that he's wet. In the case of ourselves, it is more often that we do not have a clear grasp of the interior mechanisms that inform our choices, and how those choices then shape our lives, and our relationships. And just like the fish, when we find ourselves out of our comfort zone, we struggle and fight to get back to what we know, no matter how toxic the water.

Our filters are the lens through which we view our world. Those filters are built upon the ideas, assumptions, and expectations that we have about the way the world works. We develop these filters as a result of our experience, as well as our interior predispositions. The internalization of our experience, and our predisposed interpretation of that experience, conspire to form both our picture of the world, and our response to it.

As we experience the external world, we collect our experiences, creating over time a personal, subjective reality for ourselves -- a picture of the world as we know it; and "object vision", if you will. We integrate these various interpretations of experience as templates within our psyche; these are our ideas, assumptions, and expectations. These ideas, assumptions, and expectations are in turn the filters through which we both perceive our social environment, and further interpret its perception of us. This is one part of the larger developmental tapestry that contributes to the manner in which we weave not only our picture of the world, but our self-perception.

The experiences that contribute to our socialization are themselves shaped by organic, innate, and inherited predispositions, each of which informs our interior landscape. As we develop our idea of the world, we also develop an idea of ourselves. So, at the same time that our interior filters are contributing to our experience and perception of the world, they are also contributing to our self-perception. This, in turn, informs our self-worth; a somewhat broader and more inclusive notion than self-esteem.

Self-esteem is self-referential, and does not take into account the social and interactive aspects of self-development. Self-worth, on the other hand, considers the manner in which we perceive ourselves, the manner in which we perceive our social environment, and the manner in which we perceive the social environment perceiving us. It also

recognizes how we interact with our social environment with respect to our self-perception, as well as how we then interact with ourselves, also based on that self-perception. This more complex dynamic is something the concept of self-esteem does not take into account.

One of the unique challenges of our development is that, as we begin to separate ourselves as independent individuals from the people around us, it is often very difficult for us to let go of these filters that we have collected because as they have developed, we have also developed patterns of thought and behavior supporting them. These patterns of thought and behavior inform the tendencies defining much of our social behavior, allowing us to create constancy in our experience, while helping us to also set up our relationships in a consistent fashion.

Whether these set-ups are positive or negative, constructive, or destructive, benign, or just simply not helpful, we often get stuck - partly because the familiarity of the situations does not necessarily allow us to see the situations as negative, partly because we do not understand how to change them, and partly because we are just too close to see what we need to see. In doing so, we often fail to recognize that we, like the fish, are indeed wet.

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