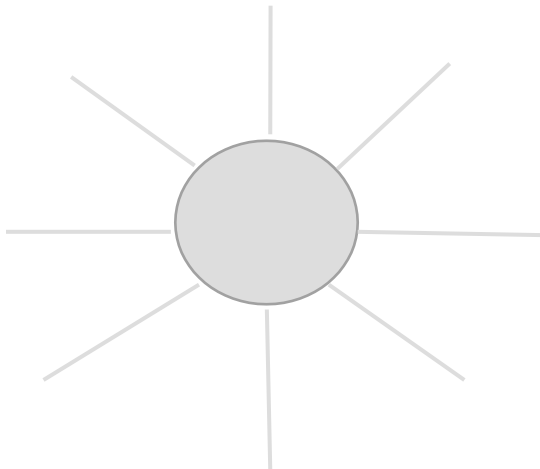




How I See Myself

Draw a circle on a piece of paper or in your journal, write your name in the middle, and then draw several spokes that radiate out from the circle (it will look a little like a sun).



Now, think about the characteristics, behaviors, and accomplishments that represent who you are. How do you see yourself? How would you introduce yourself to a stranger? What are the most important things to know about you, past, present, and future? At the ends of the spokes, write down what comes to mind, and feel free to add more lines if needed. Don't overthink this; simply write down what comes up without judging the result.

When you're done, look at your wheel and ask yourself the following questions:

- How many of the items are personality traits or characteristics that are internal aspects of yourself (*patient, adventurous, caring, hard-working, humorous*)?
- How many are physical descriptions (*the color of your hair, eyes, or your body type*)?
- How many are social roles (*mother, son, friend, teacher*)?
- How many are achievements (*college graduate, financially independent*)?
- How many are activities you engage in (*running, cooking, blogging*)?
- Did you list your job, where you live, what inspires you, or aspirations (traits you hope to embody or goals you wish to achieve)?
- What about more abstract, existential ideas about the self (such as *“I’m a human being,”* or *“I’m a spiritual being”*)?

Humans are social beings, and a part of your self-concept is going to be derived from information you obtain from the outside world. For example, you know you have a great sense of humor because people laugh at your jokes, and they tell you that they think you’re funny. At some point, this belief sticks, and if you have a stable, resilient self-concept you don’t necessarily need external feedback to confirm it. Just because your cousin doesn’t laugh at one of your jokes today doesn’t change your self-belief that you have a great sense of humor. You feel confident that you’re a funny person based on your cumulative past experiences—it has become a constant belief you have about yourself that doesn’t require confirmation from the outside world. If, however, your self-concept is insecure, you may end up as the class clown, constantly affirming and confirming that you’re funny by performing for others and seeking their approval.

Connected explorers, or those who are securely attached, tend to maintain balance in the various components that make up self-concept. Their self-descriptors include a range of

categories and aren't too heavily focused on one at the expense of another. Their self-concept also strikes a balance between beliefs and ideas that are rooted within themselves and those concepts and ideas that rely on information from the outside world.

That balance is what gives secure attachment its power. We can't always predict how others might react, what mood they're in, or how much they want to engage with us on a given day. During these moments, having aspects of self, rooted within us, that are stable, consistent, and relatively impervious to change is important for us to feel good about ourselves and to carry out the things we have to do on a daily basis with efficiency and ease.

The world and the people around us change from moment to moment, as do our relationships with them. So, if your self-concept relies on one aspect of your life over another (such as an overidentification with a romantic relationship or a job), when that area isn't going well, it is easy to feel like, somehow, your whole self isn't worthwhile or lovable. These self-beliefs can then impact your functioning in other important areas of life.

However, if your self-concept is diversified, when you have an argument with your romantic partner or your boss offers you negative feedback, the other aspects of your self-concept can buffer you against negative self-beliefs. For example, if you're beating yourself up for being unproductive at work, you can go home, focus on being a parent, and feel good about honoring your top values of family and community.

Bonus Exercise: Diversifying Your Self-Concept

Look back at your self-concept drawing and make a conscious effort to add different categories related to how you see yourself. Add physical characteristics or personality traits if they were missing from your original exercise. Consider adding more abstract definitions of

yourself (e.g., I'm a spiritual being) or different roles that are important to you (like being a sister, a volunteer, or a mentor). If you didn't list goals or accomplishments, this is a good opportunity to add a couple. If you feel that your original exercise showed an overdependence on certain people or relationships, expand your self-concept to include roles with other important people in your life. Fill in as many additional spokes as you'd like; the more multifaceted, the better!

Now, think about how you might nourish and strengthen one "spoke" of your self-concept. You are looking for ways to make this aspect of your self-concept take root within yourself so that it will be a solid part of who you are and not as dependent on the day-to-day influences of others.

When you have selected one "spoke" of your self-concept that you'd like to nourish, think of one way you could invest in, and strengthen, this aspect of yourself. How can you increase a skill, improve your mood, or make yourself feel like you are aligning more closely with this aspect of who you are? It would be helpful to think of something you can do right now, even if it's a small activity that takes only a few minutes, as well as think of something that you can do over a longer period of time (for example, over the next week or month) that will continue to build upon your skill or investment in this area of yourself.

For example, if you wrote "knowledgeable," you could spend some time delving into a new topic of interest or reading a chapter in a book on your bookshelf that you've been meaning to get to. Over the next week, you might decide to finish the book or think about a way to expand your knowledge on a topic of interest by doing something to build your knowledge over time (like enrolling in an online course on graphic design). You could choose to invest time in one of your favorite activities (like working on a jigsaw puzzle) or revisit a past hobby (like buying

some knitting supplies today and then over the course of the next month knitting a hat for your baby nephew) to affirm that you are a multifaceted person, and all aspects of yourself are worth cultivating and honoring.

Again, the purpose of diversifying your self-concept is so that you aren't overly reliant on any one aspect of it to fulfill your self-esteem needs. Take the time to invest in *all* the spokes in your wheel, but don't feel you need to nurture them all at once.