

Me and My Shadow

A recent experience reminded me of the power and potency of my shadow. I don't mean that dark outline on the ground when a light is shining. The shadow I am referring to is the collection of behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and traits that have been hidden within.

As we grew up we learned that some behaviours, no matter how natural they were, were not socially acceptable. Children playing with their genitals quickly learn they shouldn't. Or that they need to keep their clothes on. Temper tantrums are generally ruled out, as are many other behaviours. We learn that our life is easier when we comply with social norms. Those parts we bury as we socially comply are collectively referred to as our "dark shadow". We also have a "light shadow", which is where socially acceptable behaviours that we did not feel safe to display are hidden. Examples might include playfulness, innocence and creativity.

As I have become acquainted with my shadow over the years I have been shocked by some aspects and surprised, even disbelieving, of others. My shadow's repertoire includes common themes of anger, sexuality, and power, common themes throughout society, though the specifics vary person to person. The environment we grew up in shaped our shadow. One shadow character I

Author

[Stephen Harrison](#) BSc (Hons), PMP, FPMINZ

Abstract

Psychologist Jung introduced the concept of our shadow, both light and dark, those aspects of our personality that we are afraid to bring into public view. This article explores shadow, and provides some examples from the author's life.

Keywords

Anger, dark shadow, light shadow, emotional states, personal change, reclaiming personal power, sadness / sorrow, self-responsibility, shadow

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have become acquainted with is the *Seducing Assassin*. She beguiles the man in power and kills him before he gets his sexual desires met. That character embodies all



The shadow in one of its guises

the elements of power, sexuality and anger. At the other end of the scale my shadow includes the *Potent Virgin*, a young, vital woman committed to protecting her chastity for marriage, and is totally equal to resisting all pressures and recognising all subtleties from others wanting her to relinquish it. What? I have feminine shadow characters? Yes, or as the psychologist Jung named them, anima. And women have animus, the masculine portion of their psyche. We all have mixtures of masculine and feminine energies that comprise our shadows.

Recently I found myself in a situation that awoke me emotional to:

- Fear and powerlessness in the face of overwhelming aggression directed at me from someone of superior physical strength;
- Rage felt for someone who betrayed my trust and abandoned me; and
- Helplessness when confronted with suicide attempts of a loved one.

I was very aware of my emotional responses as they arose, but it was the emergence of part of my shadow that caught me by surprise. I found myself in a political debate, something I normally avoid like the plague,

and was in a thoroughly “take no prisoners” mode of debate. I was unflinching in ripping apart what I heard, and had no tolerance for anything I judged as illogical or unfounded emotional fluff. I found myself suddenly manifesting a part of myself I had long ago, 30 years ago in fact, buried and decided was not how I wanted to present myself.

Now, I recognise that part of my shadow has emerged and as an energy it has legitimacy, providing me with a greater repertoire of possible responses and approaches over the artificially restricted ones I have used. There is power in the energy; there is nothing that dictates how that energy is applied. That is choice.

This experience has reminded me that nothing of my past is lost. Everything I have ever been is still part of who I am. That is only a problem if I have a lack of acceptance for who I have been or who I am. Generally, I am okay with who I am. I am okay as me with my shadow(s).

How are you with your secret, hidden parts? Are you able to integrate the energies that emerge, as and when they do, productively into the rest of your visible psyche?

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 6 (Deciphering Your Internal State) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). *Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*. Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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