

THE PERSONA

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In analyzing a script, most of us have used abstract terms from various personality theories, especially those of Freud and Jung. And such terms are not always defined or explained. The 'persona' is such a term. In a recent newspaper article, one of Woody Allen's mentors noted "he was just trying to develop his writing persona." An article on smoking stated "She has a small cigarette cough, so subtly woven into her persona, you scarcely notice it." In graphological literature, analysts sometimes refer to a sample as "persona writing." By using the term as Carl Jung describes it, I believe that every writing is 'persona writing.'

According to Jung, the persona is a major archetype¹ involving the process of adapting to a group or society by developing and playing various roles. Although the term 'persona' is frequently used to denote a single role, for Jung it is the collective of all the roles we play. The adaptation process is the basis for social and community life; therefore, it is essential for our survival. Sidney Jourard notes that social roles make life with others possible and that *we all define ourselves in terms of the roles we have had assigned to us*. Jourard believes that the ability to master a variety of roles is a decided asset for the healthy personality. He further states "Roles function to aid in the development of the healthy person by structuring the skeleton of behavior, if not all of the substance of behavior." Roles provide stability for consistent behavior and they provide a context for building a unique self. In essence the persona is the social self and I use these terms interchangeably.

The social self and the self are so interrelated that it is difficult to separate the two. For Carl Jung, the self is the principal archetype and it is the organizing principle of the personality (Hall: 51). It is a goal, a movement rather than a fixed state--a unifying inner force that helps the individual achieve integration or individuation. Gordon Allport used the term *proprium* to describe the view of the self, which he felt included everything important in personality that one regards as his own (e.g., bodily sense, self-identity, self-esteem, thinking, knowing, striving). Sidney Jourard, who focused on the healthy personality, said that "the self is the unique, special identity, the person, the personality" and that "it is a never-ending cause of concern, wonder, pride, or even sometimes shame." From these definitions, the self seems to be what many would consider the 'total personality'--all that pertains to the body, mind and spirit--while the persona is the social aspect of the self.

Since our identity is so dependent on others, the persona is directly related to our self-concept. We begin to recognize that we are separate from our parents and others around the age of two as we begin to call ourselves "I" and "Me," but we must still verify with others that we exist. C. H. Cooley expressed it well in 1902 in the **Looking Glass self** (Source__):

Each to each a looking glass,
Reflects the other that doth pass.

The persona develops early as the child begins to learn the rules, values and behaviors expected by parents and significant others. He quickly develops characteristics, traits, and attitudes (which are normally found in the script) that are incorporated into the roles he must play in order to survive--both emotionally and physically. The socialization process progresses very rapidly in early

¹Archetype -

childhood and adolescence and slows as one proceeds into adulthood. In reporting on the writer's sociability, communication skills, self-concept, defenses, etc., the analyst is dealing with the writer's persona.

Because the term 'persona' originally denoted a mask worn by actors, it is often confused with deception or dishonesty and given a negative connotation. An actor (and the audience) knows when he is wearing a mask and playing a role and knows when he changes roles and when he removes the mask. Likewise a healthy individuals aware of the roles he plays in life and when he changes roles. This is not deception; this is being in touch with reality. Deception, dishonesty and hypocrisy occur when an individual plays an outward role which is believed by others, while hiding his true role and motive (e.g., an accountant who embezzles, a priest who molests children, a spouse who cheats). It may be difficult, or impossible, to determine whether or not a writer is playing a deceptive role, particularly if he has sociopathic tendencies.

I think that it is also difficult to distinguish between the persona and a role being played for a particular purpose. For example, it appears that the movie star, Jayne Mansfield deliberately wrote in a style that portrayed the role that her fans expected her to play--a sexy, dumb blonde (Figure 1a). The exaggerated ballooned loops remind one of her large breasts and the heart-shaped punctuation marks could be endearments meant for her fans. If Ms. Mansfield truly identified with this elaborated script, I would agree with Hans Jacoby that such flourishes on the non-essential strokes indicates an inability to differentiate and that too much attention is given to unimportant things.

When the flourishes are erased (Figure 1b), there is a rhythmic, legible, well-spaced script with garland connective and several well-formed angular letters. She may have expressed the dumb blonde, sex-goddess roles for the benefit of her fans while playing more ordinary roles in her private life. From the positive indicators in the unadorned sample, I believe that she was an intelligent woman who interacted well with others and that she was aware of the roles that she played and knew when she was playing them. It would be interesting to see a diary or a letter written to family or friends.

(Note: The following paragraphs pertain to Timothy McVeigh)

In some cases, individuals are encouraged to play deceptive roles. In the Timothy McVeigh trial both the prosecutor and the defense attorney attempted to establish roles for the accused in order to influence the jury. Time Magazine (6-23-97) noted "The federal prosecutor would allow no attempts at cordiality to mitigate her mission..." McVeigh had evidently been instructed to smile at her (to play nice guy role). Referring to McVeigh's parents, she continued, "They do not know the Timothy McVeigh who murdered innocent men, women and children. Timothy McVeigh is no longer the sweet kid they want to remember." The prosecutors wanted the jury to see McVeigh in the roles of "mass murderer" and "monster," rather than a "sweet kid" role. McVeigh's attorney attempted to create roles (good soldier, teacher, and crusader) that would humanize him. As he stated, "McVeigh had been a good soldier and teacher and was deeply affected by the events at Waco."

McVeigh's handwriting (Figure 2 – google McVeigh handwriting) provides an indication of his persona-- characteristics that indicate his ability to interact, to socialize, and to conform to society's expectations. His script portrays the loner who stays within himself and does not easily join in and participate with others. Intimate relationships with open display of emotions are likely to be difficult

for him. Readers may review a complete analysis of his writing at <http://www.handwriting.org>. Analysts often describe a sample as a “persona writing.” If the persona were a concept regarding our adaptation to society through the expression of numerous roles, wouldn’t all scripts reflect the social self (or persona) to some degree?

Departing from copybook reflects individual differences, but it also reflects the various ways that individuals adjust to their environments. While copybook would seem to be the epitome of “persona writing,” there is no proof that the copybook writer has adapted to society any better than those who write in other styles, since there are countless other ways of adapting to society. If the persona is the process of adapting and conforming to society, wouldn’t adhering to copybook represent the epitome of conformance with society’s expectations? The copybook writer does play society’s role of ‘legible communicator’ of the written word very well and graphologists have generalized this conformance to the writer’s other activities. Does departing from copybook indicate non-conformance? While such writers may be more inclined to express themselves in a unique manner, they usually adhere to society’s values--at least minimally--so as to not be total outcasts. Again, it isn’t whether such types have a persona or not, but how is one deviating and how effective it is in the socialization process.

The copybook was devised by society to facilitate written communications and, by conforming to it, we fulfill society’s expected role of “legible communicator.”