The different types of Personas

Opening words

The persona is one of the first concepts I came across when I started getting into psychology (even before my studies). It is fair to say that it has had a lasting impact on me both as an individual and as a psychologist. I have been thinking about the persona for the better part of 13 years (at time of writing). I now have the feeling that I have both reflected and had enough clinical experience to add to this wonderful concept!

But first things first what is a persona?

The persona is an interface between the self and the outside world. You can think of it as a metaphorical mask that we show to others in order to adapt or fit in. The persona allows us to navigate the world of relationships with relative safety and/or understanding.The persona can also sometimes protect or conceal the most vulnerable part of the true self. The concept itself was theorized by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung in the 1920's[1].

As stated previously, the persona is a theory that I like and it has greatly helped me in my work as a therapist. But as I have come to realize the persona is not a uniform nor standardized

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[1] Carl Gustav Jung expose in great detail his theories on the persona in his book *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*

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construct. It varies from individual to individual and is context related. As such there is not a singular monolithic « persona » but there is a whole spectrum of them. And it is this multiplicity that I am going to tackle in this essay! Thus in order to do this I will list and define 15 types of personas which I have identified.

The Golden Persona

This persona is formed when the individual feels obliged to maintain a « perfect » image of him or herself. In many, if not all situations they find themselves in, both with others or with themselves. They must always be at their best, helpful and determined, kind, etc. Others and the individual may be easily fooled and unable or unwilling to see beyond the golden persona.

This persona normally requires a strenuous effort from the individual. They never feel fully free or spontaneous to act as they would wish because any mistakes, inadequacies or opposition towards others, can weaken the persona. With time the true self becomes compromised and lost within the ideal projected by the golden persona. The persona then becomes both a fortress and a prison for the true self, making it too difficult to cope without the mask. If ever this persona breaks abruptly then the indvidual may feel distress and powerlessness . Losing what they believed to be their identity and self worth and thus fearing that others might forsake them. This persona is maintained by the unconscious fantasy that if the individual is perfect then everyone within their environment will love and care for them.

It is worth mentioning that the golden persona can be deconstructed. Transformed, be it from within as the individual grows aware that they are different from the mask or by exterior help (therapy, self help groups ect).

The Mirror Persona

This persona is formed when the true self of the individual is vulnerable and insecure and thus needs to imitate another person to maintain a sense of worth and a feeling of being/existence. The mirror persona takes on many,if not all the traits of the « other » from the mundane to the more complex. In this situation the « other » becomes the projection of the ideal self and the template for all behaviors and beliefs.

This persona then becomes vital for the bearer ;as their identity becomes intertwined with that of the « other » In more extreme cases the bearer may even suffer a genuine confusion between themselves and the person they are mimicking. The persona becomes the bases for the self. Also they:the persona and the "other" may merge together to help the individual live their lifes. Thus preventing them from introspection and reaching into themselves. If this persona breaks, the person may feel an intense distress and start reforging this persona. But in an abrupt manner, by identify with anyone or anything (including animals in extreme cases).
This persona is maintained by the unconscious fantasy that the « other » being imitated, is ideal and is good. And thus by appropriating their traits, the individual will gain the same 'goodness' and perfection. Thus becoming the "other" and not just a reflection of the "other "..

It is worth mentioning that the mirror persona can be common among children and teenagers

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because they are still experimenting with their identity and place within society. Also this type of persona was inspired by the 'as-if personnality', conceptualized by Helen Deutsch[2].

The Uncanny Persona

The uncanny persona can develop before or after a psychotic episode in which the individual loses touch with reality (i.e. becoming delusional, feeling intensely percecuted, having hallucinations etc.). This persona is an attempt to maintain a contact with an objective reality and avoid a relapse or a new episode. As these episodes are moments of intense anguish and mental suffering, they also tend to fracture the psyche.

This persona is fully adapted and factual. It is often inflexible with the social rules and lacks playfullness and creativity (expected in human interactions). While being inconsistent and uncompromizing. The rules and social normes become the markers and bounderies of the objective reality. Although it seeks a normative state ; it overcompensate and it can appear to the outside world as false/strange and in the worst cases as a 'caricature' of a persona.

It is important to realize that this persona is aiming to both navigate the world of relationships as well as giving a continued sense of a self inscribed in reality. The true self cannot shine through. It remains hidden because of uncounsious fears of being destroyed by both the internal turmoil and the outside world (upon which the inner turmoil is projected).

In a way the uncanny persona is like an actor on stage, desperately trying not to break character even though they cannot recall which character they are playing. Only being able to recall the setting (i.e.Social rules, familly expectations etc). The setting is what the persona clings on to. If the uncanny persona breaks the individual then he or she is at an increased risk of relapsing or triggering psychosis.

This Persona was inspired by Ronald Laing's concept of divided self[3].

The Flamboyant Persona

This persona is formed as a defense against despair that arises from a deep feeling of emptiness and worthlessness within the self. An emptiness that cannot be fully experienced or over come or transformed . Thus making for a genuine dangerousness and dread.

As such, the flamboyant persona is developed to prevent introspection ,a protection against the true self. This persona appears grandiose and beyond perfection as though it was inflated. It seeks outside validation of it's projected greatness :a greatness that cannot be fulfilled nor gratified enough. This persona is also impermable to criticism .Because flaws are a direct danger to it, as the bad elements cannot be transformed nor internalized.

The individual tries to maintain and grow this persona by seeking others for the sole purpose of being validated and admired. But the bonds they build do not go beyond the usefulness of

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2Helene Deutsch, *Some Forms of Emotional Disturbance and their Relationship to Schizophrenia* in The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 1942 (http://eppelreport.blogspot.com/2014/05/the-as-if-personality.html)

3 Ronald Laing, *The Divided Self* , 1960

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others. If this persona breaks then the individual may experss rage, ressentement and project their undesired emotions (sadness despair, anger, hate) onto others.

In this sense it is different from the golden persona as it (the flamboyant persona) doesn't value or consider what other people believe or feel. The flamboyant persona was inspired by Otto Kernberg presentation on pathological narcissism[4].

The Carnivorous Persona

This persona is quite perculiar,as it is formed to hide the true self and all formes of genuiness, not out of fear nor anguish of being harmed :as it might be the cases for other personas,but in an attempt to manipulate and charm others into a sense of security, admiration, compentence and care. In order to obtain what the true self seeks. Such as power, dominance in relationships, destruction of the other, etc.

The perculiarity of this persona is that it is acting in complete synergy with the true self. In both instances they aim towards absolute power over others (be it within a couple, an organisation, a company, familly etc.). The carnivorous persona is a means to an end. Much like carnivorous plants this persona is an allure but instead of a nice scent and colours, it presents the individual using it as an ideal and a charm in order to lure others into a relationship. And thus trap others so that the true self can 'feed on them'. This dynamic is most likely due to the individual understanding social rules, codes, and social desirability. However they are unable or unwilling to integrate them to the true self both consciously and unconsciously, only mimicking them and using them as traps for others.

The intense urge to exploit, abuse and harm others is caused, in my opinion, by an unbearable feeling of envy toward others that can only be dealt with by destroying them, morally, emotionnally, socially, physically etc. This is also a way of denying that there was any difference in the first place. Once the process has started the carnivorous persona can still be used even if the victim threatens to leave or revolt against the abuse. Presenting yet again an ideal that hides the true unchangeable self. If this persona breaks and cannot be use again then the individual may become implusive, erratic, and or highly agressive and inclined to use addictive substances,etc...

This persona was inspired by Paul-Claude Racamier's concept of "perversion narcissique"[5] (the closest concept in english would be malignant narcissism)

The Dogmatic Persona

This persona is formed when the true self is in a state of fragility and needs support and identitification, to navigate the outside world. The support is built both consciously and unconsciously from social aprioris (unquestioned models), like the social expectations of a role (such as being a policeman, a psychologist, a doctor, a nurse, a father, a mother,etc .) and or the

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[4] Otto Kernberg, *Borderline conditions and pathological narcissism,* New York, Jason Aronson, 1975

[5] Paul-Claude Racamier, *Pensée perverse et décervelag*e in Secret de famille et pensée perverse, Gruppo n° 8, Revue de psychanalyse groupale, Paris : Apsygée, p. 137-155.

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tenants of an ideology (religion, scientism, political belief's, etc.). Once the self has adopted this mask, it merges with it and thus the persona becomes the core of the individual's identity.

However because of the massive mental investment the persona becomes very rigid and dogmatic. Unable to deconstuct or play with it's image or it's beliefs. As such the bearer can appear cold, uncaring and absolute in his or her behaviors and goals.

The process of over investment can be due to a fragile sense of worth, combined with a strong desire to find meaning within society. It can also be a defense against genuine relationships and the potential change they might imply. The dogmatic persona becomes an uncompromising ideal that the true self must follow in order to feel socially secure.

Even though the bearer might not consciously realise that this persona can be a source of limitations and suffering due to the fact that the genuiness of the true self is unable to be expressed because it could contradict the mask. If this persona breaks it can lead the bearer to lose a sense of meaning and their apriori sense of themselves and the world. Thus the individual may be more at risk of developing a depressive state.
But the disintegration of the dogmatic persona is also a chance for the true self to shine and recreate a less contrived and strict persona ,one that allows genuiness and playfulness.

The Persona Non Grata

Perhaps this is most controversial persona I will put forward in this article. The persona non grata is a persona that seeks to create conflict, opposition, resentment or even hatred within others. Often dismissing or mocking others' feelings. This persona is a blantant defense against postive and fruitful relationships, in fact making these types of bonds impossible.

It's aim is to cause rejection. It is often formed when the true self is self loathing and the individual believes they are worthless and deserves rejection. Often reproducing a pattern of being abandoned which started in childhood. By acting in an aggressive manner and an ill adapted way others are pushed away. But secretly the true self hopes that the relationship will survive despite this. By surviving, the relationship would prove it's strength and the inherent value of the true self . The persona non grata becomes the test by which the other is evaluated. This also allows the true self to both hope for change while remaining unconsciously loyal to the pattern of abandonnement and self hatred.
If this persona breaks the person my be at a complete loss and they might experience an emotional break down. Feelings of worthlessness will surface and thus risky behavior or self harm may arise.

This persona was inspired by Arthur's Schopenhauer parable of the Hedgehog's Dilemma[6].

The Jester Persona

This persona is created to entertain through comedy and humor the individual's social environment. It often allows the person to present themselves as a joyful jester and secure other

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6 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, Oxford University Press

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people's affection. However, it can be socially effective, this persona is also a defense against deep feelings of sadness, trauma, despair and meaninglessness. By brightening and cheering up others through humor, the person is keeping both his sadness and those of the environment at bay. This dynamic is upheld by the uncounscious belief that humor is the perfect shield against negative emotions and that it could even heal them. As such the true self becomes the depository of the negative emotions ,it is suffocated and thus is not allowed to shine through or only in specific circumstances that don't harm the persona. As such the person might appear trivial or unable to take things seriously. As effective as this persona might be, it always remains in state of vulnerability because the depressive elements might re-emerge and break through the persona. Making the individual realize the sadness and despair that he or she was repressing. If this happens they might be more at risk of chronic depression or developing a 'smiling' depression[7] (i.e. a depression without external symptoms).

It is worth noting that this persona does not include all forms of humor nor comedy but only those that are a systematic defense against negative feelings. In a way the jester persona is the epitome of the French saying : " mieux vaut en rire qu'en pleurer " (better laugh about it than crying about it).

The Seductive Persona

This persona presents as self confident and charismatic. As well as seeking to form a romantic and/or sexual relationship. The aim is for the individual to appear desirable to others. This desirability becomes the scale on which the individual ranks his or her own self image and self worth. However it is not about forming just one bond but on repeating the process as this persona seeks a form of reassurance that cannot been fully obtained or only if for a short a time. The true self both benefits from this by feeling desired and valuable. However this persona is also at odds with the feeling of love as it's compulsive nature prevents the individual from forming a deeper and continued connection with others. As such the true self feels more and more isolated and disconnected as this persona grows and eventually the negative emotions outweight the benefits.

In my opinion this persona is the result of an unconscious confusion between being desired and being loved. Therefore the persona seeks to obtain desirability in order to experience a sense of love by proxy. But these feelings are not enough for the true self that seeks a deeper and more genuine bond. In some cases the desirability may also become a replacement for any form of self love or care. In these cases the individual may feel obligated to engage with others romantically or sexually in order to maintain a positive image of themselves. It could also be argued that this persona is a way of avoiding being loved as it would put the persona bearer in the situation of having to love another. Thus changing both inter patterns and external interactions that could lead to distress.

If this persona is broken the individual may become vulnerable to the suggestions of others even suggestions that they fundamentally disagree with,in order to recuperate a sense of self. This may lead to risky behavior or unwanted interactions.

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7 https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-guest-room/201411/the-secret-pain-smiling-depression

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It is important to state that this persona is not purely about flirting, seducing or wanting to have a sexual relationship. This persona is formed when those activities become compulsive and seek to support and maintain a fragile sense of self.

The Submarine Persona

This persona presents itself as 'shy', avoiding social interactions, hiding certain behaviors and emotions, keeping others at a distance and trying to minimize the presence or charisma of it's bearer within the normal interactions. It is as if the persona was trying to cloak itself, as well as the true self. It might have formed as the result of feeling the deep pressure of the individual's environment to conform to a set of social rules and aprioris that the individual rejects, does not understand, fears or hates. Thus the individual is able to navigate the world of interactions with less fear of having to perform what others expect of them. Maintaining a good compromise between the 'duties' one might have and the need for the true self to remain hidden from others.

This persona is also the result of an unconscious fear that the environment would not accept and want to try and change the true self of the individual. This true self is often highly creative and playful but cannot be fully integrated by others. As such the individual uncounsciously adopts the submarine persona to preserve the unity and clarity of the self rather than compromise or fracture it. This however is not a perfect defense as it can make the bearer feel a deep sense of loneliness and despair at the idea that others cannot or are not worthy nor willing to understand whom they truly are.
This persona can be partly discarded when the individual truly connects with another person and trusts them. But this persona might comeback at full force, if the individual feels disappointed or let down by the bond.

If this persona breaks then the individual may suffer a meltdown and become aggressive, to protect the true self from being impeded or enter a state of shut down in order to rebuild the social mask.

This persona was conceptualized with the help of a collegue of mine who wishes to remain anonymous. This persona could also overlap partially with the concept of autistic[8] masking but only on certain points.

The Casted Persona

The casted persona is formed during early childhood as a means to adapt to a parent's impossible expectations. Indeed, during the development of the child the parent can't see them for who they are but projects a ideal to which the child must conform to. In this process the infant forgoes it's true self, hiding it deep within it's psyche and thus presents a casted persona to the parent and later to the outside world. As such they might show all the traits their parents

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8https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5509825/

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wanted for them (agreeableness, loyalty, determination.) and repress all those the parents judged unworthy. Thus giving the impression of an inauthentic and unemotional individual to themselves.

Their unconscious hope is to be seen for who they are. But this hope is both desperately seeked out and dreaded , being seen as taking a risk of being rejected at the most intimate level and therefore causing intense mental suffering.

If this persona breaks the individual is at risk of a mental breakdown and regression. To the point of being unable to take care of themselves.

This persona is an integration of Winnicott's concept of pathological false self[9]into the framework of the Persona.

The Golden Plated Persona

This persona is on the surface fairly similar to the « Golden Persona » we have discussed at the beginning of this essay. Like the golden persona the aim of the golden plated persona is to give the allure of perfection to others. This sense of perfection can be highly polished socially.

However, unlike the « golden » this persona is not adopted by fear of rejection but to hide one's true self. A true self that is often hateful or envious of others on a conscious level. As such this persona is vitally necessary for the individual to wear and maintain. As there is a deep understanding that the individual's authenticity would not allow them to navigate the world of relationships. However, in private, these individuals often let their negative feelings manifest. Emotions that are in sharp contrast to those expressed in public.

This persona I believe is a conscious reaction to a strong unconscious feeling of inferiority and self loathing. As such the persona is a defense, a reactional formation that prevents the individual from feeling the despair, powerlessness and envy of the psyche.

This persona might also stem from the desire to hide the true self from a supposed envious gaze of others (i.e. the others might want to steal/ empty me of my good elements). In these situations hate and envy are not recognized by the individual as part of themselves but are projected onto others.

Because this persona hides intense feelings when it breaks. The individual might react with rage and verbal or physical violence. They might also feel persecuted and have paranoid delusion that others are plotting to harm them.

The Clear Persona

This persona is flexible and does allow the true self to shine through at some points while still maintaining a social 'mask' when it is required for protection or adaptation.

This persona is the result of a deep trust in one's own self and it's solidity, as well as a reasonable environment that will allow unpleasant yet necessary negative feelings to manifest.

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[9]Winnicott, D. W. (1960). "Ego distortion in terms of true and false self". The Maturational Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development

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This persona is often underlined by an unconscious sense of freedom and will to be heard and acknowledged by others beyond any preconceived idea. As such the bearer of this persona might feel more freedom to act in accordance with his true self.

However, I must emphasise that this is by no means the 'perfect' persona or an ideal one. There can be many complications that might arise with this interface. One of them could be the misjudgement of the individual in trusting the environment to be 'good enough'. If this were to happens the person might feel uneasy or unable to navigate this environment. And other challenges could come in the inability to fully adapt to the social expectations. The core self is rooted in a feeling of liberty that might not reach the social compromise needed.

If this persona breaks the individual might feel an intense feeling of loneliness and sadness in which his most geunine emotions are not accepted.

The Broken Persona

I have mentioned this persona through out the essay but I would like to go into more detail. As previously stated this persona is the result of it's fracturing. This broken persona can put the individual in a position of vulnerability and anxiety as regards the outside world. The interface has ceased to be effective and it's patterns no long allow for compromise.

This persona should therefore be considered more a 'state' than a fixed entity. The risks of a crisis are more prevalent when the persona is no longer working. These crises can be complicated for the individual to navigate but there are also moments of opportunity for self reflection. To think about our relationships with others and even provide a stepping stone for emotional growth.

The broken persona might occur in a variety of contexts and cause distress, but it is also a chance to break free for alienating patterns and rekindle a genuiness with oneself (both consciously and unconsciouly) and others. Offering an opportunity to rebuild a less harmfull or contrived persona with a better integation of the true-self.

This persona was inspired by psychoanalyst and philosopher Pierre Fedida's ideas on depression being a ability and a chance to change what he named "la capacité dépressive"(the depressive ability)[10].

Discussion, limites and criticism

First and foremost let me say that this essay is by no means and attempt at a scientific classification or typology. I regard this essay as a psychodynamic hypothesis that can and should be criticised.

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[10] Fedida P, *Des bienfaits de la dépression : éloge de la psychothérapie*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2001

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It's goal is to provide an interesting development to the Jungian concept of the Persona. This being said ,no Jungian, Freudian, Existential,etc, institution has approved of this essay, making it free in every possible way but also more open to criticism for being less cohesive on a metapsychological level than it should be. This essay also lacks a full explication on how an individual might change adapt or transform their persona.

I also what to make this clearer that human behavior and interaction cannot be limited or reduced to the 15 personas I have identified.

Lastly as stated a the start of the essay the spectrum of personas is wider that what this texts presents and might need expending in the future.

In closing

Writing this essay has proven to be quite a challenge for me. However I am overjoyed to have made it! And to have contributed to such a interesting concept. I would also like to thank the reader for sticking with the text to the end and I hope you have found the ideas thought provoking.

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