

What Is The Human Shadow?

The Swiss psychologist Carl Jung used the term ‘shadow ’ to refer to a person ’s dark-side – the part of their psyche they are not comfortable with or are not accepting.

The ego, on the other hand, represents the part of our self-identity that we are familiar with and accept to a certain degree.

Whether you are aware of this or not, you always have two sets of characteristics and traits:

- (1) ones you are happy to hold within your identity (ego), and
- (2) and others you are unhappy to have in your identity (shadow)

Your self-identity or self-image (ego) is nothing more than a creation within your mind that you identify as 'you'. It is not the whole you or the real you.

The shadow-self is whatever is left of your idea of you.

For example, you may describe yourself as “kind,” but never describe yourself as “mean.” In this example, “kind” would be your self-identity (ego), and “mean” would be part of your shadow-self.

However, it’s only when you stop rejecting your shadow-self and learn to accept it that you can enjoy higher self-esteem and feel more in tune with your whole self.

1. Identify Your Own Shadow

Anything we deny as being part of us becomes unconscious. This makes your shadow-self difficult to spot.

However, you can still identify your shadow-self using “Shadow projection.”

Shadow projection is when the ego (self-image) projects rejected, unconscious traits onto the world including people you come across.

This means that if you don't accept that part of your potential is being mean, then you will project that trait onto someone or a group of people.

It's the ego's way to maintain the illusion of being a certain way.

This can be tricky to see and become aware of when we are faced with another individual who acts in mean ways toward us.

In a perfect world, you would accept everyone as they are and experience peace in their presence. If you are not there, then there is something about yourself you're not accepting and are projecting it onto the other person.

How to identify the shadow-self?

A simple way to become conscious of what you're rejecting and projecting onto others is to pay attention to words you use to describe what you dislike, then you go within and reflect on instances where you have been that trait.

Read through the following list and highlight traits you're rejecting from your self-image:

List of Negative Traits

Abrasive	Compulsive	Disorganized	Hateful
Abrupt	Conceited	Disrespectful	Hedonistic
Aimless	Condemnatory	Domineering	Hesitant
Aloof	Conformist	Dull	Hostile
Amoral	Confused	Easily	Ignorant
Angry	Contemptible	Discouraged	Impatient
Anxious	Conventional	Egocentric	Impractical
Apathetic	Cowardly	Envious	Imprudent
Argumentative	Crafty	Erratic	Impulsive
Arrogant	Crazy	Escapist	Inconsiderate
Artificial	Criminal	Extravagant	Incurious
Asocial	Critical	Extreme	Indecisive
Assertive	Crude	Faithless	Indulgent
Barbaric	Cruel	Fanatical	Inert
Bizarre	Cynical	Fanciful	Inhibited
Bland	Deceitful	Fawning	Insecure
Blunt	Delicate	Fearful	Insensitive
Boisterous	Demanding	Fixed	Insincere
Brittle	Dependent	Foolish	Insulting
Brutal	Desperate	Forgetful	Intolerant
Calculating	Destructive	Fraudulent	Irrational
Callous	Devious	Frivolous	Irresponsible
Careless	Difficult	Gloomy	Irritable
Cautious	Dirty	Graceless	Lazy
Charmless	Dishonest	Grand	Malicious
Childish	Disloyal	Greedy	Mannerless
Clumsy	Disobedient	Grim	Mechanical
Cold	Disorderly	Gullible	Melancholic

Meretricious	Presumptuous	Timid	
Messy	Pretentious	Troublesome	
Miserable	Procrastinating	Unappreciative	
Miserly	Provocative	Uncaring	
Misguided	Quirky	Uncharitable	
Moody	Reactive	Unconvincing	
Morbid	Regretful	Ungrateful	
Naive	Repressed	Unhealthy	
Narcissistic	Resentful	Unreliable	
Narrow-minded	Ridiculous	Unstable	
Negative	Rigid	Venomous	
Neglectful	Ritualistic	Vindictive	
Neurotic	Sadistic	Vulnerable	
Nihilistic	Scornful	Weak	
Obnoxious	Secretive	Weak-willed	
Obsessive	Selfish	Wishful	
Oblivious	Self-indulgent		
Odd	Shallow		
Opinionated	Shy		
Opportunistic	Silly		
Oppressed	Slow		
Outrageous	Stiff		
Paranoid	Strong-willed		
Passive	Stupid		
Perverse	Submissive		
Petty	Superficial		
Possessive	Superstitious		
Power-hungry	Suspicious		
Predatory	Tasteless		
Prejudiced	Tense		

2. Discover Gold In The Shadow

Just as we protect our sense of self by rejecting and denying that we have “bad” traits, we often do not fully acknowledge that we have “good” traits.

Those positive traits that we do not acknowledge constitute the gold in the shadow.

Those traits are usually ones that you minimized in your mind and considered as insignificant.

For example, you may project amazing traits onto a talented musician but deny the same level of talent in your dancing skills.

How to identify the gold in the shadow?

In the same way that we project negative traits onto others, we also project positive ones onto them.

When you find yourself thinking of someone positively and feeling infatuated by them or when you put them on a pedestal in your mind, then you are projecting positive qualities onto them.

Just as you did with shadow projection, notice the words you use to describe someone positively and think back to instances where you have been that trait.

Read through the following list and highlight traits you’re rejecting from your self-image:

List of Positive Traits

Accessible	Colorful	Efficient	Heroic
Active	Compassionate	Elegant	Honest
Adaptable	Conciliatory	Eloquent	Honorable
Admirable	Confident	Empathetic	Humble
Adventurous	Conscientious	Energetic	Humorous
Agreeable	Considerate	Enthusiastic	Idealistic
Alert	Constant	Exciting	Imaginative
Ambitious	Contemplative	Extraordinary	Impressive
Amiable	Cooperative	Fair	Independent
Appreciative	Courageous	Faithful	Innovative
Articulate	Courteous	Farsighted	Insightful
Aspiring	Creative	Firm	Intelligent
Athletic	Curious	Flexible	Intuitive
Attractive	Daring	Focused	Invulnerable
Balanced	Decent	Forceful	Kind
Benevolent	Decisive	Forgiving	Knowledge
Brilliant	Dedicated	Forthright	Liberal
Calm	Deep	Friendly	Logical
Capable	Dignified	Fun-loving	Lovable
Captivating	Directed	Gallant	Loyal
Caring	Disciplined	Generous	Many-sided
Challenging	Discreet	Gentle	Masculine
Charismatic	Dramatic	Genuine	(Manly)
Charming	Dutiful	Good-natured	Mature
Cheerful	Dynamic	Gracious	Methodical
Clean	Earnest	Hardworking	Meticulous
Clear-headed	Ebullient	Healthy	Moderate
Clever	Educated	Helpful	Modest

Neat	Respectful	Tasteful	
Objective	Responsible	Thorough	
Observant	Responsive	Tidy	
Open	Romantic	Tolerant	
Optimistic	Sage	Trusting	
Orderly	Sane	Uncomplaining	
Organized	Secure	Understanding	
Passionate	Selfless	Vivacious	
Patient	Self-reliant	Warm	
Peaceful	Self-sufficient	Well-bred	
Perceptive	Sensitive	Well-read	
Perfectionist	Sentimental	Wise	
Persuasive	Serious	Witty	
Playful	Sexy	Youthful	
Polished	Sharing		
Popular	Simple		
Practical	Skillful		
Precise	Sociable		
Principled	Solid		
Profound	Sophisticated		
Protective	Spontaneous		
Prudent	Stable		
Punctual	Steady		
Purposeful	Stoic		
Rational	Strong		
Realistic	Studios		
Reflective	Subtle		
Relaxed	Sweet		
Reliable	Sympathetic		
Resourceful	Systematic		

3. Welcome Back Denied Traits

To heal the shadow means to welcome back traits you previously rejected and excluded from your self-image.

Whether you're aware or not your shadow-self traits are running your life in self-sabotaging ways. The goal from healing the shadow is to make the unconscious, conscious and take control of your own life.

Instructions

1. Choose one of the shadow-self traits you identified above (positive or negative).

For example, suppose that the trait you want to accept was “selfish.”

2. Consider a situation where you either save someone from drowning and drown yourself, or be selfish and save yourself, letting the other person drown.

Can you accept that you are selfish now after considering that?

While the incident didn't happen and may never happen, you still have to accept that you have that potential trait within your experience.

Now it's your turn:

Shadow-self trait: _____

Situation that reflect that trait: _____

Spend a few moments reflecting on that situation, in a non-judgmental way.

Can you accept that trait as being part of your self-image now after considering that situation?
