



Honesty, Trust, and Love—In That Order: A Sociology of My Emotional Kaleidoscope

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Should I take anti-depressants? I've been thinking about this question on and off for the last few years. And, for the last six months, this has been one of many questions that I have asked myself. Although I am better equipped emotionally and mentally than I have ever felt, lately I have been endlessly asking questions about values such as honesty, trust, and love—so much so that I end up completely depressed.

Why anti-depressants and not talk therapy or just letting everything work itself out? Clearly, if I wanted the easy path, I would have been a prescribed patient long ago. Laziness may be one of the many reasons for my delay in pursuing a prescription, for even the latter involves going and talking to a doctor, and driving to CVS for a prescription. However, another reason may be my fear of anti-depressants as a band-aid. There are well documented side-effects of psychotropic drugs and I've seen first hand these effects on a close friend.

It has been a long six months of what seem like endless hours thinking about my past filled with negative emotions and

memories, linking them to my present in pursuit of finding answers. I would have argued exactly six months and a day ago that my many years in therapy had allowed me to make peace with my childhood, but here I am today without that peace. I don't feel desperate, nor do I feel as alone as I once did, but sometimes I feel overwhelmed with thoughts and emotions—making my brain feel as if it's on a psychological vice, giving me moments of mental clarity and "feeling" happy. It's my hope that through the exploration of my understanding of how honesty, trust and love are defined and used in my life, I can answer the question, "should I take anti-depressants"?

I am reminded here of an experience I had as a child, looking through a kaleidoscope. I remember seeing the colors and being in awe of how the slightest touch, or twist could drastically change the outcome and visual presentation of the infinite combinations of shapes and colors. I often wondered if anyone else who was looking at it at the same time as I would have experienced or seen exactly what I saw. I now think of that experience as being indicative of the question whether there are universal standards of perception. This experience with the kaleidoscope solidified in me the feeling of being alone, which was already deeply rooted in my subconscious mind and conscious awareness.

Although others may argue that there are universal truths associated with all of the three values mentioned above, I feel I need my own exploration of their meaning since in my kaleidoscopic view they are subjective in nature. It is not such an easy task to analyze my thoughts regarding the three values clearly without exploring all the elements of my life that have shaped who I am—which makes my head swim in confusion. But, amidst this confusion, I've managed to come to some conclusions about myself and at the core of this change of heart is a friend who unknowingly

changed my perception of who I am.

When watching the movie **Erin Brockovich** in class, I often sympathized with what Erin might have felt facing challenges in life but making the decision to fight and make her life better. She let her instincts guide her—not really knowing but having the inner faith needed to sustain the energy to find possible answers. When she discovered the obvious discrepancies in a box containing real estate information with medical records of people living near the Pacific Gas & Electric Company plant, guided by her own motivations (disregarding company policies), Erin investigated for a week away from the office. Not surprisingly, she went back to the office, shocked to find out that she had been fired from her job. Others' misperceptions of her work ethic and prejudgments about her choice of "inappropriate" office clothing exerted a lot of pressure on her to accept a wrong picture of who she was—but her confident attitude prevented that from happening. I felt akin to Erin, but I also wonder about how many times, with my bottom chin trembling, I have accepted without a word wrong perceptions others have held of me, my head steaming in hurt and contentiousness but not doing anything about it.

A casual outsider might consider Erin to be a strong woman facing the Pacific Gas & Electric Company, but I think she like me is a vulnerable and sensitive person who, when pushed too far, when desperate enough, becomes a soldier. Erin did get to that point; she was feeding her kids fast food, herself eating out of a can dodging cockroaches while balancing her baby on one hip. I definitely don't have that kind of physical strain, but the last six months of mental agony has also pushed me to my limit, wondering if there is no other choice than to fight against what is making me so sad.

I have spent a lot of time rehashing old memories and sharing some of them as

background information may be useful in providing a context to the my exploration of meanings of honesty, trust, and love in this paper. Before the age of eight, I was a homeless girl living on the streets of Seoul, Korea, until somehow miraculously I landed in an orphanage and was in turn adopted a few months later. My reality then was shaped by the space of the streets in which I lived, and that space was one that was filled with darkness, mistrust, loneliness, and of course, loveless-ness.

HONESTY

Berger and Luckmann argue that our everyday lives are shaped through communications with others. During my early years, my **face to face interactions** were limited only to those between me and my brother. We **socially constructed** our reality together based on what we observed around us and others' behaviors, which were very limited in scope. I remember putting conscious effort into trying to understand the world in which we lived, but obviously since there was so little communication with other people, my reality back then was warped and shaped by a child's brain. Since I only interacted with my brother, how true were my observations of my surroundings, if I had so few interactions to compare them with? And how accurate are my perceptions now of what I experienced as a child? In therapy I learned that memories have a way of changing every time they're spoken out loud depending on such things as the day, the mood, prior night's dreams, and mental imagination.

The universal truths that were presented to me about honesty, trust, and love were poorly shaped back then. At that time, if I was honest, I would not have survived. If I respected others, I would not have eaten. Aside from the innate love I had for my brother, I did not feel love for anyone or

anything, including myself. The **macro** world, outside of my **micro** world did not exist for me because when you don't have any other purpose in life other than to find food, the larger macro world is just an indistinguishable, uninteresting blob. Plus, it was easier to deal with life not admitting the possibility that a colorful and delicious meal existed in the world outside. Why commit false feelings to what were impossible realities?

Berger and Luckmann's notion of "**here and now**" consciousness in everyday life is so relevant to my understanding of my reality back then. In my mind, however, I often tried to escape the here and now reality I lived in. My immediate reality back then was filled with anger, hunger, and confusion about a world that I didn't have a choice in. Even then, I didn't live in the moment. I often tried to take me away from the reality of the moment, imagining other possible realities. All I did was to recreate the conscious moment(s) of my here and now by tricking my brain to imagine the state right before sleep, when you can see shadows of darkness in the blackness caused by your eyes being closed. No goals, no ideas, no dreams, no visions, no wishes, just escape from the present moment.

Just as I didn't choose to be born homeless, I didn't choose to be adopted. This is another reality which I have struggled to understand. How utterly absurd and miraculous is it to be adopted into an upper-class white family with seven other siblings, living in a 99.9% white suburb after living the first eight years of your life homeless—to be raised now in the midst of love and support? It's safe to say that my **self-identity**, which was skewed from the beginning, only got more confused after being adopted. Mead suggests that "**I**" and "**Me**" are in constant dialogue with one another in society. This was so true in my life. Right away, after being adopted, I knew that I was only as good as how I was perceived by others to be doing well in school,

excelling in sports and appearing happy. This is best portrayed by **Erving Goffman** when explaining how self is presented in everyday life through management of others' **perceptions** and **impressions** of oneself:

In short, since the reality that the individual is concerned with is unperceivable at the moment, appearances must be relied upon in its stead. And, paradoxically, the more the individual is concerned with the reality that is not available to perception, the more must he concentrate his attention on appearances. (Goffman, in Farganis 365)

I tried very hard to influence how others saw me, what Goffman refers to as **impression management**. My perceptions of myself did not jive with reality since I was always conscious of the feeling that my persona was not really me at all. So, if I was only shaping my outer persona to fit the perceptions of others, what exists in reality other than just appearances?

Mead also states that we are in a constant **reflective** interaction with the world, emphasizing that we can adjust and modify how we react to the world in the future. Since adoption, I've had the time and space to be honest with myself and to react to the world around me in a manner that I was consciously aware of. Yet I have continued not being honest with myself even to this day. I know this is one of the main reasons for my confusion and depression at times. I experience self-hatred when dealing with this subject, only because I think that if I had been honest from the beginning, I wouldn't have had to constantly re-evaluate my perceptions of my reality, and desire always to re-examine my past in order to correct mistakes.

This reminds me of the book, *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin*, by P.D. Ouspenskii. The protagonist, Ivan disappointingly

admits one day that he has not turned out to be the man he envisioned. He finds himself broke, without love, and desperate for a better future. Then he meets a magician who can grant his wish to go back ten years to live again his life (without losing all his present knowledge about himself) so that he can change the outcome. Ivan in his excitement doesn't pay much attention to the words of the magician who forewarns him that life is such a strong force that in some cases carries individuals through life without their active participation in it. Ivan was granted his wish and sent back to relive ten years. Even being granted full access of remembering his future actions, he relives the ten years to the detail exactly the same, and out of his pain, he ends up killing himself.

I can't help think that I would share Ivan's fate if I had the chance to relive my past. I'll forgo the chance to go back in time for the chance of making new and wiser perceptions of my past. Just knowing that I have been dishonest with myself has changed my self-perception and not so obviously others' perception of me. One clear example is my recent evolution from denial into acceptance of my **ethnicity** as being a part of my **identity**. All I wanted was to see myself as I imagined how others saw me, as a validation for all the work I did to keep appearances, but deep down knowing a lot of my behavior was fake. I never knew how others saw me, and the more I tried to see and control others' perceptions, the more I felt dishonest. I can't think of anything more dishonest in identity construction than purposefully denying the relevance of ethnicity to who you are.

This brings me to the present. The friend I mentioned earlier who has unknowingly changed my perception of who I am did so just by being who he is; a man from a different ethnic background than I who lives out his life to the best of his ability by identifying, learning, re-learning, adjusting, seeking, probing, and without fear actively participating in his life. **Exchange**

theory tells us of the importance of culturally variant **expectations** and **norms** in social interaction. I bring these up also to emphasize that all cultures are deeply rooted in these concepts. It was my expectation that I could not feel romantic feelings for my friend because of my negative perception of myself as being part of an ethnic couple and how that would be perceived by other people. I hated that I was different, and I didn't want to remind myself of that difference by being with another ethnic person, making me constantly insecure. Why was I so insecure and who or what instilled in me these expectations of others as well as my own negative perceptions? If the author Charles E. Henderson (1983) is right in talking about dysfunctions stemming from subconscious imprinting, it's easy to understand how the idea of insecurity attached to negative feelings about ethnicity can leave a permanent **imprint** on our subconscious minds. Henderson writes:

Whether caused by one event or several, whether occurring early in life or later, the subconscious ideas formed by such significant experiences are highly resistant to decay. We ordinarily think of things growing weaker with age, but this is not usually the case with subconscious ideas and beliefs. They can retain their potency throughout one's lifetime if not either spontaneously or purposely changed. (Henderson 74)

Knowing this, I really shouldn't beat myself up for having subconscious imprints still impacting my life today; instead I should almost expect it. The last line of the passage above is what interests me in my quest to redefine my meanings of honesty, trust and love. Early on in the semester, you said something that struck and convinced me to stay in your class. It was the idea that we are a product of **habits** and you sug-

gested that we have the ability to change our thoughts and behavior if we understand this. This is directly related to what Henderson suggests is possible as a precursor to purposefully changing the imprints leading to unwanted behavior. I think the ironic thing about habits is that you don't realize they are habits until they're so much a part of who you are that it's hard to distinguish when it started and how it became a habit in the first place. Habits also exist in thoughts that keep repeating in one's own mind. These are the habits that cause people to be drawn to or repelled by one another—habits which we all share and what prompt us into social networks in smaller or larger social contexts. These are habits which allow us to say, “okay, he's like me,” or “she's like me,” which make us feel we are okay. This conclusion does not work for me because the habit of denying my own identity for the sake of others' acceptance doesn't leave me with the feeling that I'm okay. In addition, being confronted with my habit of being dishonest about my identity on one hand and feeling love for my “ethnic” friend on the other hand, I need to choose to actively seek out a change in my life for otherwise I would have to live with the way I feel about myself today.

TRUST

Now I switch to the idea of trust. It has always been hard to trust myself never mind others. This is because of fear imprinted through insecurities experienced in my physical, emotional, social, and mental realities in the past—manifested in distrusting the world around me and in turn, myself. What comes first, dishonesty about who I am, or distrusting who I am? To me, it's the perfect tail chase. If I distrust first, I can understand the need to be dishonest as there would be no point to being honest. On the other hand, if I was dishonest first, of course I am distrustful because I know

myself that I cannot be trusted, so why would I think otherwise of anyone else?

Symbolic interaction emphasizes the reciprocally shaped nature of “definition and interpretation” (Farganis 349) of interactions among individuals and groups in society. This leads me to believe that I have as much influence in shaping my personal characteristics as any of the strangers do on me throughout the course of my life. **Herbert Blumer** states

'joint action' captures this view of social life as a process rather than structure, and projects a view of society as a complex web of collaborative actions in which participants are constantly reflecting, negotiating, and fitting their actions to others in order to achieve common objectives. (Farganis 349)

I interpret the common objective to be the desire to find communities and similar others that we can associate with in order to feel significant and accepted. I'm certainly not discounting my habits of dishonesty or distrust, or trying to avoid self-criticism by blaming others, but if the common objective is to feel accepted (and this is done through mutually shared habits as I suggested earlier), then really, I am no better or worse off than anyone else I know or don't know. Then I ask the question, does everyone lie to themselves to fit and feel normal? I really think this might be the case, and I'm willing to acknowledge it at this time, perhaps as a justification to help me accept and understand myself.

The **capitalist** society and culture we live in today is portrayed well in the documentary film *Affluenza*, which depicts our world speeding into destruction through emphasis and rewards for **competitive individualism**. Living in such a society, how would it be possible to trust ourselves as well as others or be honest with who we are? Given such discriminating factors as

socioeconomic class, racism, sexism, etc., who is to say to that honesty and trust can be equally present across the board?

LOVE

Let me turn now to my idea of love. Having expressed my views on honesty and trust, and understanding these terms in relationship to others as well as to the world, it's cathartic for me to be able to freely express my own definition of love in the way that suits me even if it doesn't fit my parents', friends', or society's ideologies of love. Having been imprinted early in my childhood that love does not exist, I felt awkward about feeling love because a lot of what I read in the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, or talked about with my girlfriends, or saw in movies didn't match any of my thoughts on love—never mind that I felt no love for myself, and contrary to the popular cliché of only being able to love someone else if you love yourself, I think it's possible to love another human being without loving yourself—as I loved my brother. That's not to say that I didn't feel opposing feelings of anger and resentment towards him, but love in whatever form that I was able to feel was there.

Here is an important example from my life. How can I logically believe that in the same breath I tell to one man that I have never felt more in love with anyone than him and then sleep with another person? Rationally, anyone would argue that my love is not pure, or enough, to have sustained what I said to be true since I consciously decided to sleep with another man. And in the process of doing this, lying and deceiving at the same time, all the while being adamant and believing in the realness of my love. It was not until the office meeting that I had with you that I linked this experience and other behaviors associated with love to my adoption experience, and previous understandings and

interpretations of honesty, trust, and love. This multiplicity of the “selves” that allows contrasting behaviors and oppositions in the mind to occur—not always jiving—I think that all people are susceptible to this or at the very least understand the nature of this multiplicity. We are all constantly trying to juggle many things in our lives, and while appearing to make things work well in the outside world, I think there is a lot of inner struggles that only the individual sees and feels. We all face the multiplicity of having many roles that may or may not interconnect with one another, making our “selves” more complex. I think the idiom “ignorance is bliss” may refer to the idea that it's easier to be simple-minded, and not face all the complexities going on in one's mind. I've joked when comparing myself to people I know who appear to be so happy and lead simple lives—but at the same I wonder if the choices they've made to make their lives and minds simple is actually a cowardly way of not facing the “bigger picture”? Is it so unbelievable that I could have many “selves” that may or may not be working together harmoniously, but nevertheless shaping all the facets of who I am?

I look around to many of my friends that have recently gotten married, and while I do not impose my beliefs on them directly, I do so indirectly by being who I am, suggesting that marriage is a sham. I cannot help wonder why in the face of statistical facts on the success rate of marriages; do individuals not look deep within themselves to admit latent basic or primal instincts that may affect the endurance of any marriage? Is it not obvious that everyone has the best of intentions, that this couldn't possibly be the reason for not facing the truth before marriage? If there was a clause in the vows of marriage or in our cultural morés that not only allowed but encouraged sexual freedom (whatever that may be for the individual), then I would confidently say that marriage is not a sham.

I believe as most do that honesty and trust are critical factors in love, but only achieved through being honest with the one's self or "selves" first. I know that presently I cannot stay attracted to one person while abstaining from everyone else except that one, as stipulated in the bonds of marriage. I guess it's not really a matter of whether or not I can do this; it's the question having the choice given to me. If I choose to be with only one man, that is more beautiful than being subjected to the rules of marriage and pressured to stay with one man. I believe I am capable of loving beautifully one person above any other because I too desire that close bond with one other person—but for the success of our relationship, there must be mutual respect and understanding of honesty, trust and love, first given to oneself and then to another. And what would be more beautiful to share the freedom to be our "selves" with another person, not hiding, not lying, and not being held back from any thought or desire but to share with another through understanding and support?

Schutz's phenomenological theory accepts as fact that social structures are there, and "seeks to understand the world from the point of view of the acting subject" (Farganis 303). Phenomenological theory is something that I can really sink my teeth into because it already comes so naturally to me. It's the idea that in order to learn about the phenomena that happen in our every day lives, we need to dissect every little detail of our lives. Purely from a gendered viewpoint, I believe women naturally do this—though, I don't mean to say that the conclusions or even the way women get to those conclusions are rational or logical (as many of my male friends, straight or gay, would agree). When I was in Korea, interpreting and living experiences gave me some **knowledge at hand** for my future interactions with the world. My actions and feelings at that time were **rational actions** based on my knowledge at that time which

was considered normal and which was expected of me. The rational actions back then did not fit in to the new conditions when I came to the U.S., thereby forcing me to interrogate anew what was normal. But ironically, these differences in my interpretations of what was normal, and being an "acting subject" who really didn't have a clue—I now feel lucky to have feelings that are different than those of the status quo. But at the same time, I don't pretend these thoughts are original or so different than many out there now. In the movie *Billy Elliot*, Billy certainly didn't fit the status quo in his Irish mining town, yet he stuck to his instinct and managed the impossible to forge out an unexpected path in life. Even though his mother was no longer with him due to her death, faith in her love gave Billy the strength to express his true feelings and desires. I would like to experience this kind of love from someone that I can also be intimate with. In my opinion, love that goes beyond the earthy boundaries as in *Billy Elliot* can be liberating and definitely achievable and attainable.

Henderson states, "One of the most important concepts related to good health has to do with personal responsibility" (Henderson, pg. 155). This is one imprint that has long existed in me and after reading this same thought in a book, I feel proud that it has been a part of who I am. I have always felt personally responsible for my life and would never allow someone else be the driver of my body through it. Yet I believe that others allow society and other influences become the drivers of their lives. I believe that many people get married or go through life not taking personal responsibility, by postponing their understanding of the immediate impacts of actions on themselves and to others hoping that the good intentions never waver. I think the philosopher and mystic **G.I. Gurdjieff** would argue that going through life not taking personal responsibility isn't all that

unexpected given the fragmented nature of self and how it operates. Gurdjieff suggests that individuals are made up of not one but three brains actually. He presents these brains using an image of a cart on wheels driven by a driver hooked up to a horse and with a passenger who represents the “I.” Metaphorically, the **driver** represents the **intellectual self**, while the **horse** represents the **emotional self**, and the **cart** represents the **physical moving self** all sustained and kept watch over by the **passenger**, the “I.” Like Gurdjieff, I believe that we are fragmented selves all trying to control our selves but not allowing them all to work collaboratively as one. Gurdjieff sees patterns of behaviors that correspond to any one of these metaphoric components, therefore concluding that individuals once seeing the patterns, have the power to change them with the aid of such therapies as visualizations, auto-suggestions, exercises, and physical movements. This can also be linked to my prior thought of my “selves” acting opposite one another, but co-existing within one body. This also links to Ivan’s life mentioned earlier where one always knows the outcome of any given decisive action—at least the probable outcome either based on knowing oneself or all possible outcomes, thereby narrowing down a probable answer. I don’t think, however, that people admit to themselves that prior knowledge exists or that patterns ever emerge. As I stated earlier, I think people let others drive their lives and this is explained by observing and understanding how fragmented we are. Not taking the personal responsibility of driving one’s own lives is a pattern that is common. If so, then how shall I as the passenger go about ensuring that my horse will always take my commands, my cart will always be in good shape and the driver is always awake and listening?

Like Neo from *The Matrix* I have chosen to seek answers outside of the predetermined set of standards set by the society I

know, but I have chosen to do so by seeking the truth in my self with faith in myself. One issue that I touched briefly on, but will use as a means for bringing together all my thoughts is the issue of fear. Fear is an imprinted habit that has latched onto me since the day I can remember. The obvious physical fear in my early childhood is not existent today, yet it has left a huge imprint that has affected every single aspect of my physical and mental life to this moment. Some fears are so small, buried in either my subconscious or conscious minds, that I would hardly give them a second thought. I feared writing this paper. I thought hard about discussing some other reasonable topic (but one that was much more superficial), but I was also fearful of my transparency.

Really, I don’t know what it’s going to take to sustain this level of letting myself and others see who I really am. And why should I be so scared anyway; I may be fearful of something that cannot be detected as “abnormal” to anyone else. It’s making me depressed that I am showing others that I’m depressed, but at the same time realizing that part of understanding myself is to allow for this negative interaction process to happen. Not surprisingly writing this paper has allowed me to shed some guilt over feeling so self-absorbed for the past six months. I also thought about what the word theory meant. When I’ve taken theory for music, it’s been the supplemental education of the other side of music rather than just audio aspect of it. Given the meaning of **theory** in sociology, as being a “tested/testable description or explanation of social reality” (Notes from class on 9/10/03) I am looking forward to seeing how my theories in this self-exploratory paper hold up.

Lastly, to get back to the question posed in the beginning, I don’t know 100% if I want to or not take anti-depressants. On the one hand, I think it would allow me to take the edge off of the fear that looms everyday

so I would be able to confront and deal with other outstanding issues. On the other, I fear that drugs will take the problem away so much that it becomes non-existent. This would definitely be unacceptable. As far as my concern for it being a band-aid, as long as I believe that psychotropic drugs will only be used temporarily to immediately put into action momentum to change what I need to change, I think I could use them and be satisfied with the outcome.

I think about how short life is, and how many years I've spent working and growing myself into who I am; I wonder if there is really enough time in our lifetime to know who we really are. But the point is to continually try to see and perhaps influence, through our inner and outer kaleidoscopes, the changing colors, patterns, and relationships shaping our selves and our world. It's this thought that actually gives me peace and makes me think of the proverb; "Life is a journey, not a destination."

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