

Puzzle Pieces

At this stage of my research, I find myself reflecting constantly. Books, articles, essays, television shows, and even simple quotes are now being analyzed deeper than they previously had. As I try to understand “Why I am the way that I am,” I’ve come to realize that the things that speak to me—that I enjoy—all play a part in understanding why I do the things I do, how I react to things, and what values I have as a person.

This week, my research took on a life of its own. I wasn’t exactly sure where I was going with it. I have a few TED Talks I looked up and some articles about personalities, but I still wasn’t sure what I wanted to blog about. I’ve told myself that it would be a disservice to myself, my group, and my classmates if I did not blog about something that I felt had a profound impact on me. So, like any good procrastinator, I decided to binge watch *Shrill* on Hulu. And to my surprise, that is where my research began for this week.

Annie, portrayed by Aidy Bryant, is a plus-size, 20-something writer—so, hello, there is a whole lot to relate to right there. At the beginning of the series, we meet Annie’s sort-of-but-not-boyfriend Ryan who automatically does not sit well with me (this is where my reflection/research moment began). There is a scene where Ryan and Annie are lying in bed together having just had sex and we learn that the common occurrence is that Ryan texts Annie whenever he feels inclined to have sex and, in this particular scene, Annie left her job to go have sex with Ryan. I was infuriated. My inner monologue was saying, *No, don’t do that!* and *How could you be so enthralled by this man that you left your job at his beck and call?*

And that’s when I realized I was projecting onto a fictional character on my television screen because I used to be a version of Annie. I was upset with her for not realizing her potential. I was mad at her for letting her world be completely shadowed by this man’s text message to come over. I was disgusted that she left her job, in the middle of a work day, because he summoned her. Then I realized I had these such strong feelings because I hadn’t forgiven myself for a similar situation. When recalling my past relationship I constantly ask, *How could you have been so stupid?* and *Why did you let your entire life become all about him?* It wasn’t until now that I realized I’ve internalized these feelings towards myself. Sure, I may have “moved on,” but I haven’t forgiven myself for letting my sun rise and set with someone who ultimately didn’t deserve my time, energy, and love.

Realizing I hadn’t forgiven myself, I began to search for some type of clarity on this particular predicament I found myself in. In that search, I stumbled upon a Facebook post of screenshots from British comedian Daniel Sloss’s Netflix original live show episode *Jigsaw*. So I found the whole episode and watched it. Sloss talks about this idea of our lives being a jigsaw puzzle (how his father explained it to him when he was 7). In one corner you may have family, in another you have friends, the bottom might be your career, the top your hobbies, etc. Noticing the center had a hole in it, Sloss asked his father what goes at the center of the jigsaw. His father told him it was where your happiness lies—the person you love.

While Sloss says his father’s metaphor was a nice way of putting it, he realizes now it sent this message:

*If you are not with someone, you are broken.
 If you are not with someone, you are incomplete.
 If you are not with someone, you are not whole.*

And he says it's not just his father who put that in his head—and not purposefully—but society for the last 40 years has raised children this way. He's right. There is an overwhelming feeling that if you are single there must be something wrong with you. My grandmother is constantly making comments to match me with someone because she can't fathom why someone would want to be alone. But that is the other part of it, if you say you like being alone, even just for the time being, people chalk it up to you saying that because you just haven't met the right person yet.

TH: Although that's annoying of people to say, they might be saying it because they think they're helping or being nice. Even though most people don't like being told how they should feel or act.

DM: What advice do you have here for people like this that have harmed you, as Taylor says perhaps out of concern for your or Annie's well being? Or what do you wish you would have said when these ideals were thrust upon you?

KM: Taylor, I definitely do see that side of it. They may think they are trying to help and I am being a bit dramatic about it than choosing to see where they are coming from. Donna, I wouldn't say anyone "harmed" me, it's just more of a realization I've come to learn/feel about the situation when I am in one. I don't think my well being is in jeopardy by being alone either. Remember, I am a person who doesn't like to "rock the boat," so my standard answer is, "I'm fine." I can't fathom trying to explain to my grandmother, who grew up in a completely generation and was married at 17 and spent 50+ years with my grandfather until the day he died, would ever begin to understand where I am coming from.

Sloss says:

When you raise children in that world, where everything points towards love and everything's perfect on the outside, when you raise them for 18 fucking years when we become an adult for the first time in our late teens and our early 20s, we're so terrified. We're so trying to be an adult that some of us will take the wrong person, the wrong jigsaw piece and just fucking jam them into our jigsaws anyway, denying that they clearly don't fit. ... I'm gonna force this fucking person into our lives because we'd much rather have something than nothing. ... Fifty-five percent of marriages end in divorce. Ninety—nine-zero—percentage of relationships that started before they are 30 end. If those were the stats for surgery, none of us would fucking risk it. But because it's love and we're stupid, we just lie on the operating table like, "Maybe this time I won't die inside." ... My generation has become so obsessed with starting the rest of their lives that they are willing to give up the one they are currently living. We have romanticized the idea of romance, and it is cancerous. People are more in love with the idea of love than the person they are with. ... There's nothing wrong with being alone. There's nothing wrong with taking time for

yourself to work out who you are ... because how can you offer who you are if you don't know who you are? There's nothing wrong with being selfish for a bit because you've got the rest of your life to be selfless. If you only love yourself at 20%, that means somebody can come along and love you at 30%. You're like, "Wow, that's so much." It's literally less than half. Whereas if you love yourself 100%, that means a person that falls in love with you has to go above and beyond the call of duty to make you feel special and that's something every single one of us deserves.

TH: How do you define and practice self-love?

KM: Great question (and one I have never been asked before). I think my idea of self-love has more to do with "acceptance" of myself than "love" now that I am really thinking about it. But then again, could those two things go hand in hand when I am talking about myself? With that being said, I practice self-love by treating myself with respect in the sense that I'm mindful of what makes me feel good, what doesn't, and trying to forgive myself for things I think about myself (that are negative) and trying to fill those spaces with more positive things (I guess my last blog had an impact).

After hearing this, I felt like everything I thought about myself being alone was being validated. But more than that, I realized that what I've been doing recently is filling the center of my jigsaw puzzle with bits of things that make me happy (writing, working out, taking time to work on myself, etc.) because, as Sloss said, how could you possibly expect someone to love who you are if you don't know who you are. Maybe this is what my project has been all along, working to find out who I am by myself; not needing another person to validate my "wholeness," and being OK with that.

Network of Controlling Values

Purpose:

When you know who you are, you open yourself up to the possibility of love at its fullest (100%), therefore giving you happiness and a sense of purpose.

Context:

Not knowing who you are will lead to love that might be unrequited, therefore leaving you alone and sad.

Purpose:

When you accept yourself, you have freedom, peace of mind, and the ability to grow.

Context:

When you try to conform to society's ideals and change yourself, you will live a superficial life.

DK: I encourage you to examine that there is a fundamental view of the self that you are working and writing inside of, that is itself a *view*, and possibly not the last word on what the heck this "self" thing is.

KM: As I continue to answer these questions I'm beginning to realize that. I can hear you asking, "What is self?" and I don't have an answer. But it seems in my world, you can only have a "self"

when you have accepted yourself completely. I don't even think that is something that is possible.

TH: Kaytlyn, what do you mean by "you don't know who you are?" People say that a lot, and I have said that about myself too, but how accurate is that language? On Kayla's blog, she did a chart in which she bulleted all the things she knows about "who she is," maybe you could do one of those. I would say that you seem to me to be more self-aware than you might seem to yourself? Even so, what IS self?

KM: Taylor, you caught me. That language is completely inaccurate. It's more of, "understanding who I am." As Kopp said, we are who we say we are. Maybe I am just trying to figure out who to say I am? I will take a crack at what Kayla did in her blog as well. Ironically, this is the second time someone has pointed out today that I seem more self-aware to outsiders than I am to myself. I do not know what "self" is...

DM: I echo Taylor's idea of building a self-chart. I would also like to suggest the book/journal, *List Your Self* (Segalove).

KM: Thanks, Donna! I will look this up this week.

KM: Self-Chart

What I know about myself	What I want to know	What I have learned so far
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am a daughter, sister, granddaughter, cousin, niece, and aunt. • I am a student, editor, writer, reader, and journalist. • I am hardworking, loyal, funny, outgoing, sentimental, and dedicated. • I am a dog-lover, great friend, helpful coworker, and a likeable person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the "self"? • How do I "accept" myself? • Why do I do the things I do? • Can I be multiple "selves"? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am who I say I am. • I am my word. • My idea of "self" is just a lense. • I think I do not "accept" myself which is why I'm trying to find out what the "self" is?

Next up:

Joan Didion's 1961 essay "*On Self-Respect*," that was originally published in *Vogue*.

TH: Didion is awesome. How did you discover that essay?

KM: Somehow I fell into a Google hole from originally searching “essays published about self.” I was so surprised to find her essay.