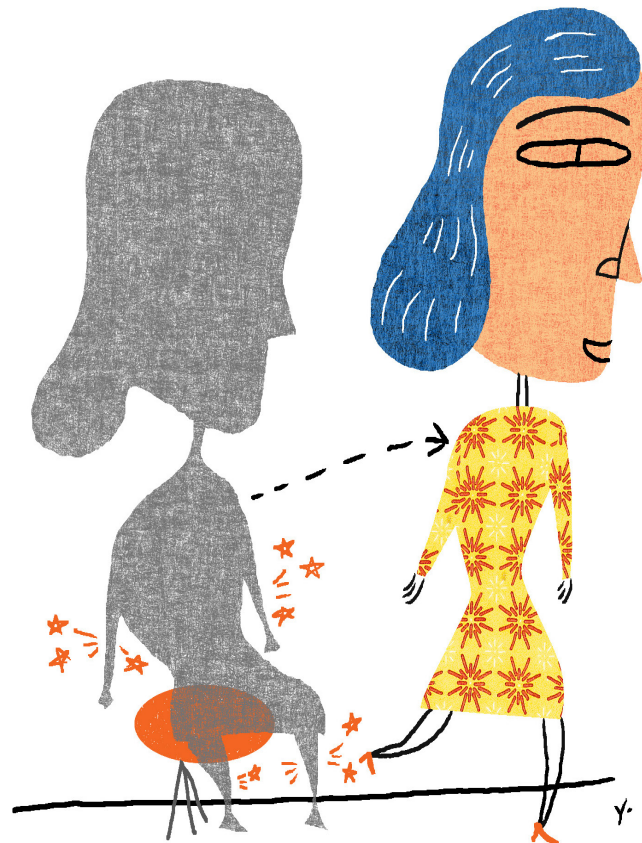




Recovery, Identity and Use-of-Self: A Personal Journey

Julian Walker



ABSTRACT

This article offers insights from my experience of crisis and growth which have shaped my outlook as an OD practitioner and, in particular, my understanding of *use-of-self*. By this I mean the ability to bring the entirety of my experience, emotions and being to a situation, whilst simultaneously taking care of my own emotional baggage¹.

I believe that self-change is necessary to achieve organisational change, for reasons of **ethics** (earning the right to intervene) and **effectiveness** (removing personal blinkers, knowing and owning all parts of ourselves²). Ghandi's famous call to "be the change you want to see in the world" I take as not just an exhortation to *model* a desired future state, but also as a call to *undergo transformation oneself*³. What occurs in the system of 'me' (intrapersonal) can then present in my relationships with others (interpersonal), and at the organisation or system level.

INTRODUCTION

This article describes two strands of my personal development: my membership of a 12-step fellowship; and my on-going explorations of personal identity within wider group identities, especially race and gender. I sum up the changes these developments have brought to my worldview by contrasting my old, western, intellectual paradigm with a more subjective and intuitive paradigm that I identify with use-of-self. I end by examining the conditions that make change possible, and offer observations from the process of writing this article.



Part 1: The 12-step fellowship – a journey of personal recovery

I joined a 12-step fellowship in 2008. I was 40, single and struggling with an Executive Director role in a large charity where I felt isolated and stifled. I urgently needed change: my previous coping strategies (overwork, exercise, relationships, drugs and alcohol) were leading to breakdown and despair. At the time of publication, I have been clean and sober for five years – so, what *has* changed?

A spiritual, not religious, programme

First, I am constructing a relationship with a ‘God of my understanding’. As a confirmed atheist, only desperation made me willing to push beyond my prejudices to try this. Finding a higher power is central to any 12-step program. Addiction is seen not as a medical or a moral problem but a spiritual condition of chronic self-centredness and dissatisfaction. Carl Jung, who indirectly influenced the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous, took alcoholism as an expression of unmet spiritual need: “...the equivalent on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: union with God”⁴.

I believe that spiritual practice engages the power of the unconscious in the effort of the human organism to heal itself. William James⁵ made the connection over 100 years ago between finding ‘God’ and meeting our own unconscious. He examined stories of first-hand religious experience and found all shared a unifying narrative of salvation: the sense of a struggling, divided Self surrendering to, and uniting with, something greater, and being, thereby, saved. James hypothesised that “whatever it may be on its *farther* side, the ‘more’ with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected, is, on its *hither* side, the subconscious continuation of our conscious life”. Opening to our own unconscious, we feel united with something that is at once greater than, and fused with, our everyday conscious selves.

Jonathan Haidt⁶ uses the image of the psyche as elephant and rider to make plain where the power lies in this union. While the conscious, rational mind (the rider) may think it is in charge, the elephant of emotion and unconscious drives wins any contest of strength.

Keeping my side of the street clean

The 12-step process helped me recalibrate what I take responsibility for. Completing steps 4 and 5,⁷ I shared with my sponsor every resentment I harboured from infancy onwards and examined *what I had contributed* to creating, exacerbating or prolonging the pain. Thus I start to take responsibility for my choices and to let go of a worldview in which I am a helpless victim.

Accepting responsibility for what is mine, I lose the need to manipulate the vast universe of things that are not. In Kant’s terms, every person is an end in themselves, not a means to some end of mine, however benevolently I may envisage that end. I take responsibility for my own feelings, thoughts and actions and allow you responsibility for yours. Accepting that I am powerless over others’ thoughts, feelings and actions liberates me from a futile effort to control outcomes in any human system. I pray instead for “the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference”⁸.

The value of personal testimony

Most 12-step meetings encourage personal testimony. To speak at a 12-step meeting I must connect with myself in the moment and trust that whatever ‘comes’ is what is meant to be said. The very subjectivity of what we say is its power. This is use-of-self in action.

My experience has been that when I hear you speak authentically about yourself and your life, I cannot help but react with love. Something opens automatically in the heart: “We become hopeful when somebody tells the truth”⁹.

Self-acceptance through the acceptance of others

My sense of shame on entering the fellowship was exacerbated by believing that as a rich, educated, white professional from a loving family, the narrative of my life gave no excuse for the mess I was in. Yet I was treated no better or worse than anybody else, and gradually came to see myself that way too. This radically inclusive, self-organising community with ‘no requirement for membership except the desire to stop using’ is teaching me self-acceptance.

I started going to women’s meetings in the fellowship and initially found it harder to identify as a woman than as a recovering addict. I had avoided all-women groups all my life, seeing them as an admission of individual weakness and collective failure. I preferred to compete with (and for) men; there was nothing I wanted from other women.

12-step women’s meetings have helped me confront my internalised misogyny, borne of my earliest desire to identify myself with power and success (male) and distance myself from femaleness¹⁰.

The power of Not Knowing

This community of addicts welcomed me with no interest in my cleverness or my opinions. What was valued was not abstract intelligence but first-hand experience, shared without proselytising. Accepting that I lacked experience of living without drugs and alcohol, I became teachable. An ability to drop the mask of expertise in service of learning is an on-going benefit of my new way of living.



I embarked on the UK NTL OD Certificate Programme in 2010, two years into my recovery. I was struck by parallels between OD and the 12-step programme, summarised below:

	12-step programme	OD theory, ethics and practice
Spiritual programme	<p>Let go and let God (paraphrasing Step 3)</p> <p>Practise prayer and meditation (Step 11)</p> <p>Practise these principles in all your affairs (Step 12)</p>	<p>Trust the process, facilitate the system to heal itself</p> <p>Engage with the system's unconscious to support change</p> <p>Live your values, practise ethical congruence</p>
Personal responsibility	<p>"Accept the things I cannot change, change the things I can"</p> <p>"Keep my side of the street clean; mind my own business"</p>	<p>Respect everyone's humanity and autonomy</p> <p>Earn your right to intervene in the client system, Do your own work and own what is yours</p>
How we share	<p>Speak from the heart, spontaneously</p> <p>Speak your own truth, do not lecture</p> <p>Do not comment, console or offer advice</p>	<p>Let go of status/role authority, allow for serendipity</p> <p>Reality is socially constructed</p> <p>Be a servant to help others find their own solutions</p>
Democratic community	<p>The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using (Tradition 3)</p> <p>"The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel" (from <i>How It Works</i>)</p>	<p>Be inclusive, engage the whole system</p> <p>Help should be requested not offered, solutions have to come from the client system</p>

Part 2: Personal identity, whiteness and feminism

Shortly after I joined the 12-step fellowship, I took responsibility at Board level for a major race equality programme. In the process I learnt a lot as a leader and change agent, and much more as a human being.

Whiteness and white privilege

I benefitted from conversations with two women of colour, one of whom introduced me to Peggy McIntosh's work on white privilege¹¹. McIntosh showed me that many freedoms I take for granted (like dressing scruffily or swearing, without having

this attributed to poverty or bad morals) are privileges accorded by my skin colour. One aspect of white privilege is that, as a leader - including as a senior civil servant following the publication of the Macpherson report¹² - I had been allowed to be ignorant of race without thereby being deemed incompetent.

At a Tavistock seminar I learned of the pressures of being a *Black leader in a white organisation*. I saw how this played out in my own organisation, where Black leaders were expected to be unofficial go-betweens, spokespeople and unpaid internal consultants on every race-related issue. This misallocates responsibility, making racism your problem because you are Black instead of my problem because I am white, and perpetuates white people's selective ignorance about race.

I started to explore what it means to me to be white. As a young adult, my consciousness of my colour was of something neutral or absent. Being straight, white and middle class, I felt invisible, lacking an identity. I did not racialise my privilege, seeing it either as earned (I was clever and industrious) or straightforwardly the result of middle class wealth and expectations.

I envied the solidarity and pride I saw among gay men, and imagined I saw in Black folks. I romanticised their oppositional identity and culture. In my cultural hegemony I felt bereft – because everything was mine, nothing was mine. And I felt ashamed of my privilege. Today I believe that - shameful or not - I must own my white privilege as part of who I am. I recognise that speaking of my white shame does not necessarily help me connect with people of colour; nevertheless I must acknowledge where I am before I can hope to move on.

I now recognise 'whiteness' as being as particular as 'Blackness'. In the same way that 'man' is not the norm from which woman deviates, so there is nothing normal or universal about being white. It is how I experience the world, not how the world *is*.

White fear and Black anger

At a training programme by Jane Elliot¹³ I was shocked to hear a Black professional describing calmly how part of her job was dealing on a daily basis with white fear and discomfort when she walked into the room. Being white and middle class I feel free to voice anger or contempt if I encounter sexism; but anger is denied as a legitimate response for people of colour. Audre Lorde wrote: "I speak out of direct and particular anger at an academic conference, and a white woman says "Tell me how you feel but don't say it too harshly or I cannot hear you"¹⁴. As white people, we simultaneously hold ourselves justified in fearing people of colour, and deny the recipients of racism the right to be angry.

I noticed how white people feel threatened when people of colour congregate without us. There was widespread mistrust in my organisation of the Black



Staff Group. I accepted intellectually the group's value, yet experienced embodied anxiety and self-consciousness when invited to attend an all-Black gathering. What does this fear say about my fantasies of how Black people think and feel about me?¹⁵ And the reality? What struck me most was the warmth and physical affection between members of the group across organisational hierarchy, something I never experienced with white colleagues.

Intersectionality – race, gender, class, sexual identity...

An interesting conversation took place at that time when the CEO (a white man) and I took up an invitation from two women and a man from the Black Staff Group to talk about privilege and power. Quite early on, I spoke about my gender. I recognise that my preferred lens for viewing the world is a "2 X 2" matrix that opposes *person of colour/white and woman/man*¹⁶. This simple schema has some basis in material facts about the distribution of historical global power and privilege. Significantly, it is also psychologically comfortable for me, being 'Up' in one context and 'Down' in another, allowing me to shift my allegiance from whiteness to womanhood¹⁷.

The CEO brought class into the conversation. As a straight, white, able-bodied man he is in almost every dominant group. But as a working class boy he had felt isolated among top civil servants. Both he and I were playing to type – while we all have multiple dimensions to our identity, as Evangelina Holvino observes, "we tend to be more aware of the differences that bring us disadvantage and less aware of those that bring us privilege"¹⁸.

Rediscovering my feminism

Examining my whiteness, and grappling with my recovery, led me to feminist theory. This theory takes seriously subjective experience and the power of diverse narratives in constructing reality¹⁹. It spoke to me of the personal being not just political but revolutionary²⁰. Like OD theory, it gave me a way to see my struggle for personal integration as being in service of wider social goals. It thus helped me to reconcile the joy, pain, hope and confusion I felt in rebuilding my sense of Self.²¹

Part 3: Conclusions and reflection

A new paradigm

These experiences have given me a new way of being in the world, which I identify with use-of-self. This new paradigm contrasts with what I ingested whilst studying philosophy and political theory at the University of Oxford, and with which I operated as a civil servant. The two are contrasted here:

New paradigm: USE-OF-SELF	Old paradigm
Humility, trust, ease with uncertainty, serendipity	Self-confidence, conviction, planning/strategising
Wisdom of the body, 'gut instinct', emotions	Wisdom of the intellect, logic ²³
Lived experience, direct apperception	Concepts described in words
First person, here and now, subjective	Universal, context-free, ahistorical, "objective"
Servant	Expert
Going with the flow, collectivism, harmony with nature	Self-determination ²⁴ , individual will and effort ²⁵
?female, eastern ²² , spiritual, originating with people of colour	?male, western, intellectual, white

Take-aways from this article... how change is possible

So how is this relevant to practice? For me, it illustrates what Argyris called 'double loop learning', by which we reflect back upon ourselves and uncover for critical examination the hidden beliefs and assumptions that *actually* govern our behaviour (our *theory-in-use*, as opposed to our *espoused theory*).²⁶ This honest examination can be painful and unsettling. But in exposing our hidden wiring it makes powerful change possible. *What are the conditions that enable us to take on such a task?*

Here are five tentative conclusions...

First, **we need to let go of our defences**. This cannot be forced: defences exist for a reason. What allowed me to complete Step 4 was a feeling of being held after Step 3 ("we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him"). Feeling held and not judged, I could face the truth of my failings and accept the pain²⁷. A person or a system needs to be accepted as it is before it can change.

Second, **we must trust the process**²⁸. In the 12-step fellowship, I follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before. Faith allows me to realise that any difficulty I encounter is not necessarily a diversion from the work I need to do, it may be the work I need to do. If I can believe in a greater wisdom at work, I do not need to micromanage for results.

Third, **we engage the subconscious**. We need to find a way around the rationalising rider, and engage the power of the elephant. Robert J Marshak speaks of the importance of talking about what is 'under the table' in organisational change²⁹; bringing what is unconscious into light is a powerful intervention.

Fourth, **we take it a day at a time**. We break a transformation into bite-sized pieces and focus on the work that is here and now. *New habits need daily*



*reinforcement*³⁰. If old ways of being are reinforced by wider society, I need a like-minded community to support me in my new approach³¹.

Finally, **we need the right kind of help**. Ed Schein explains the importance of power differentials in a helping relationship³². In 12-step fellowship we recognise that “the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel”. Authenticity matters – help offered from a position of superiority and smugness reeks of hypocrisy. I need to risk being changed myself in order to facilitate change in others.

The process of writing this article

Finally, I offer a reflection from writing this article. Writing about my recovery and growth seems both to reinforce and to undermine my sense of progress. I notice how provisional this progress feels. I think I am enlightened around my white privilege; then I see myself unconsciously and uncritically acting the selfish, attention-seeking, competitive white woman during T-Group training *immediately* after a woman of colour has shared painful truths about her interactions with white women.

I seemingly swing from arrogance to shame, apparently unable to handle either the powerful or the pitiful me.³³ Maybe learning to bridge these opposites is my future work; my instinct is that this learning will happen in community. For me it starts with a conscious effort to stand in solidarity with other white people on this journey. When I distance myself from others who are like me I know that I am seeing in them what I cannot love in myself. And if I cannot love myself as I am, I cannot change.

BIOGRAPHY

Julian Walker grew up in Essex, the third of four children.

After a gap year spent in Zimbabwe teaching English at a rural secondary school, she studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford University then took the well-worn path from Oxford into the civil service fast stream in 1990. She spent the next 12 years in a variety of posts in the Home Office and Cabinet Office, leaving for an 18-month spell as a public sector consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers. Leaving the civil service in 2001, she embarked on her first period of freelance consulting, working on governance projects in the UK, Afghanistan, Palestine, Bosnia and Dubai.

She was Director of Policy and Research at Barnardo's from 2006-2010 and, on leaving, spent half of her redundancy payment enrolling on the NTL OD certificate programme in the UK, graduating in 2012.

Since September 2013 she has been based in Juba South Sudan, and is currently in London awaiting permission to return to her work there with the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs.

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NOTES

1. One model of Use of Self comes from Jamieson, Auron & Schechtman (Jamieson, D., Auron, M., & Schechtman, D. (2010). Managing use of self for masterful professional practice. *OD Practitioner*, 42, 3.) This defines Use of Self as the conscious use of one's whole being in the intentional execution of one's role for effectiveness in whatever the current situation is presenting. The model notes that Use of Self is influenced by:
 - Race, ethnicity, national culture, gender and other social identities
 - Life and family histories
 - Intentions, personal agency, etc
 - Levels of consciousness, self-awareness and defensiveness.The model is organised around three core competencies (seeing, knowing and doing) and three levels of development (functionality, efficacy and mastery).
2. Edward Hubbard “*How to Calculate Diversity Return on Investment*” estimates that in circumstances where one does not feel able to bring one's whole self to work, 40% of an employee's time is spent managing the issue(s) around which s/he feels unwelcome – race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability
3. In *The Raft is Not the Shore* Thich Nhat Hanh writes about the ‘misleading’ nature of the concept of the way. He says “most people think a way presupposes a distance and is like a rope linking one to a point in space, in time... When we detect a way to arrive at our destination, it is as though we made reservations on a flight....That is not the case, I believe. Because if you are not transformed on the way, you remain at the point of departure all the time; you never arrive at the destination. So the way must be *in you*; the destination also must be in you and not somewhere else in space or time. If that kind of self-transformation is being realised in you, you *will* arrive.”
4. Carl Jung's letter to Bill Wilson, January 1961
5. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* published in 1902
6. *The Happiness Hypothesis* chapter 1 page 17 “...the rider is...conscious, controlled thought. The elephant, in contrast, is everything else. The elephant includes gut feelings, visceral reactions, emotion, and intuitions... each have their own intelligence.”
7. Step 4: “*We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*” Step 5: “*We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*”
8. Wikipedia has an interesting discussion of the origins of this prayer, attributed to American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer
9. Meg Wheatley *Turning to One Another: simple conversations to restore hope to the future.*
10. bell hooks recognises the paradox of those who fail to thrive because they see it as a weakness to be with others of their kind, speaking in *Outlaw Culture, Moving Into and Beyond Feminism* of “women who enter spheres of power and who feel ‘it's important for me never to show bonding or allegiance to another woman,



because that will show I'm weak.' Whereas the irony is: we're more strengthened when we can show the self-love expressed through bonding with those who are like ourselves."

11. <http://www.nymbp.org/reference/WhitePrivilege.pdf>
12. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/sli-46.htm>
13. A white school teacher in Riceville, Iowa who conducted the now-famous blue eyes/brown eyes experiment with her all-white primary class following the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968.
14. Audre Lorde quoted in *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to be White*. Note the 2012 twitter jokes riffing on hash tag 'Muslim rage' prompted by Newsweek's cover. Or how even President Obama is castigated if he shows "Black anger" – see Ta-Nehisi Coates September 2012 article prompted by coverage of Obama's comments about Trayvon Martin. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>
15. James Baldwin "...it is one of the ironies of black/white relations that by means of what the white man imagines the black man to be, the black man is enabled to know who the white man is." Quoted in Henry Louis Gates, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*.
16. In Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* the heroine's grandmother tells her "So de white man throw down de load and tell the nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks..."
17. Frances Kendall *Understanding White Privilege* "As white women we have the ability...to focus on gender and commiserate with other women about men if we don't want to be aligned with other whites. We are able to slip in and out of conversations about race without being questioned about our loyalty..."
18. *Time, Space and Social Justice (Practising Social Change, Issue 5 May 2012)* Arguing for a more nuanced and fluid model of overlapping and mutually interacting dimensions of identity - 'the simultaneity of differences' – Holvino wonders whether "part of the resistance to owning our multiple identities is that we cannot tolerate the contradiction of experiencing ourselves as disadvantaged and privileged at the same time."
19. See Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk on the danger of a single story, which discusses the power relations involved in determining who gets to do the telling and who gets to be told about. http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html
20. Toni Cade Bambara quoted in bell hooks *Sisters of the Yam*: "revolution begins in the self and with the self."
21. "Once we take responsibility for our mental processes we take responsibility for our lives - that is what feminism has become for me, looking fiercely and accurately not passively and defensively at the pattern of our lives and acknowledging all the ways which we are not victims but are responsible for the way we connect the past to the present." Molly Haskell, film director, quoted in bell hooks and Cornel West, *Breaking Bread*.
22. In the period between writing this article and having it prepared for publication, I have read Edwards Said's *Orientalism*. I see how the descriptor "eastern" here designates not any external reality but my own (white, western) fantasies and projections. With this defence, I retain it as offering valuable information both about the author and the stage of my development at the time of writing.
23. "Logic is in the eye of the logician" Gloria Steinem, *If Men Could Menstruate*.
24. James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*: "People who believe that they are strong-willed and masters of their destiny can only continue to believe this by becoming specialists in self-deception."
25. Consider the furore sparked by President Obama's politically ill-chosen but nevertheless sound contention in October 2012 that "You didn't build that".
26. See *Teaching Smart People How to Learn*, Argyris.
27. Jack Kornfield *A Path With Heart* says spiritual practice "will not save us from suffering and confusion, it only allows us to understand that avoidance of pain does not help."
28. Quoted in Lesley L Green *Stories of Spiritual Awakening: The Nature of Spirituality in Recovery (Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment)* "You can't recover if you don't have faith that you can recover."
29. Robert Marshak, *Covert Processes at Work: Managing the Five Hidden Dimensions of Organizational Change*
30. Cornel West in *Breaking Bread* "...very much like alcoholism, drug addiction, or racism, patriarchy is a disease and we are in perennial recovery and relapse. So you have to get up every morning and struggle against it."

Judith Katz *White Awareness* "...racism runs deep and we can never be completely cured of the disease. What we can do is control that part of us and not let it control us."

See Jay Smooth's TED talk referencing his dental hygiene model of racism where I need to refresh myself daily rather than it being possible for my racism to be removed like tonsils. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbdxeFcQtaU&feature=player_embedded
31. bell hooks in *Sisters of the Yam* describes support groups as "... a space within and without where [the individual] could sustain the will to be well and create affirming habits of being."
32. Edgar J Schein, *Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help*
33. See Brené Brown TED talk on the power of vulnerability <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEPbkvhPuRk> and then the follow up on listening to shame <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psN1DORYYV0>