

ToK Journal

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Table of Contents

Item	Page #
Title Page	1
Ethics: Are we too obsessed with violence and murder in the media?	3
Science: What defines our sense of self?	4
Art: Does the artist's imbued meaning with his or her work demean individual interpretations?.....	5
Math: Can we ever imagine infinity?.....	6
History: How will the Internet affect the perception of our generation in the future?.....	7
Option: Ethics: How does society's expectations of sex affect our self-worth?	8
Works Cited	9

Ethics: Are we too obsessed with violence and murder in the media?

I was talking to my cousin recently about one of my favourite video games, Dangan Ronpa. Much like stories like Battle Royale and The Hunger Games, Dangan Ronpa's premise is adolescents forced to fight each other for survival in a prestigious school, only to escape by getting away with murder (Something Awful). My cousin looked at me in shock and told me I shouldn't be playing those kinds of things. Also very recently, two of my close friends got into the TV show Hannibal: a show about a serial killer solving crimes (IMDb). What is so fascinating about murder? Why is the media so seemingly obsessed with it? More importantly, is it something we should subscribe to and enjoy? My favourite stories often revolve around horrendous crimes. Will this influence me?

I think we are, or at least I am, fascinated by how one can be driven to do such a heinous act. Dangan Ronpa breaks down the motives of murder very carefully to those who don't understand. A character even states that no one can truly understand how someone can be driven to kill. Love, pride, and desire are all explicitly symbolized as strong motives through each murder. Oddly enough, the villain actually reviews this in the game, going through each murder and asking why each person killed. I think analyzing even the most brutal parts of human nature is very important in the discussion of morality and useful in preventing such horrors in the first place. Through this game, I was able to reflect on how people can be driven to crime without much of the trauma of experiencing it first or secondhand.

I am simultaneously afraid and fascinated by these crimes. Does this mean I will one day murder someone? This is much like parents subscribing to the idea that violent video games will cause violence, which I think is overprotecting and underestimating youth. I think it's walking a fine line: used properly, these media can be enjoyed harmlessly. If one is able to consume so much violence with a critical and open mind, then why censor it from them?

Of course, many people are sensitive to these topics and I can acknowledge the obsession with violence in the media. I can't start a psychoanalysis of Ted Bundy with a stranger. I could with my friends, because we've already reached that social aspect with them, but I digress. This doesn't necessitate its censorship. These topics aren't impossible to handle correctly and people should be allowed to watch TV shows about killers or read about death without placing so much suspicion on themselves.

★★★★★ Wednesday, December 18, 1996 A-

S.F. Man Murdered

ugh guy," Brash-solid. He was in how to fight." Is and face were lice and a doctor nty Medical Ex-said the bruises esult of the body lling as it swung

The body of San Francisco resident Joseph Mazurka was discovered early Tuesday morning by sanitation workers as they were emptying a refuse container in the Tenderloin on Larkin Street between Geary and O'Farrell. He had been shot several times in the head and body.

Mazurka, 34, had been employed for some years as a salesman at Silicon Impressions Inc.

Police spokesman Brian Bassa-t Date: 04/25/13 Word Count: 435



WIFE MURDER FOLLOWED BY...
CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS
CRIME SCENE
HANNIBAL
THURSDAY APRIL 4 - 10/9c



Science: What defines our sense of self?

I was reading a Time article from 1997 entitled, "The Mood Molecule" by John Lemonick for biology class. This article describes how medications for a huge variety of mood disorders often revolved around fixing an imbalance of the chemical serotonin, the molecule responsible for mood, in the brain and the unknown side effects beginning to emerge, such as a contraction of arteries (Lemonick).

As someone who's recently been in the hospital for mental problems, I was able to recognize names of medications and connect stories from me and the other kids at the hospital to the story of a man describing his life treating his depression with medication. He mentioned how his mood was so improved that he was essentially an entirely different person and it made him question if that was the "real" him. Was it him or the medication? He stopped taking the medication and gradually became his old "self", that is, his previous self before medication.

Ask anyone who knows a little bit about brain chemistry or mental disorders and they could tell you how essentially our lives are a result of chemicals in our brain, in layman's terms. Is the "real" me someone with a balance of serotonin in my brain, or someone without? I certainly have the memories and feelings of myself through all sorts of moods, extreme or not. If I consider myself an amalgamation of my previous experiences, I can say that depressed and anxious 16-year-old me is still me.

But what does a professional think? As David McRaney, author of *You are Not so Smart*, summarizes psychologist Daniel Kahneman:

"He says the self that makes decisions in your life is usually the remembering one. It drags your current self around in pursuit of new memories, anticipating them based on old memories. [...] The current self is happy when experiencing things." (McRaney 237)

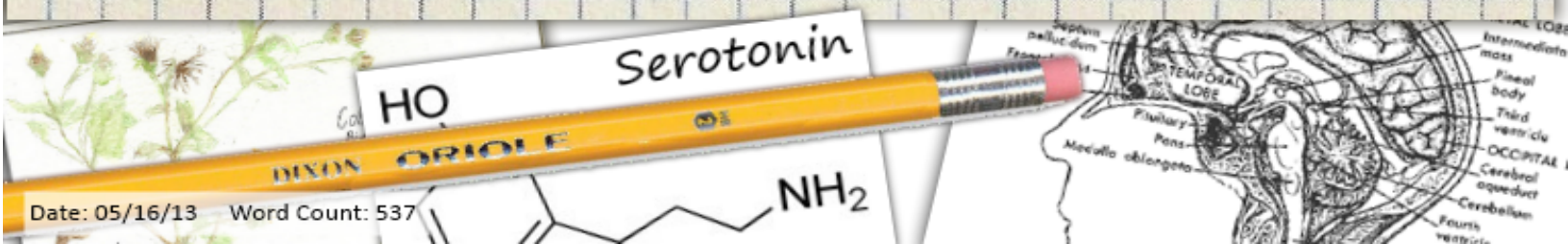
Essentially, there is no one real sense of self but rather, from a psychological perspective, multiple that often conflict. So even in someone with "normal" brain chemicals, the sense of "self" is already complicated.

What about from the more biological and chemical perspective? From a professional, rather than the average person? Neurobiologist David Anderson in his TED talk "Your brain is more than a bag of chemicals" completely disagrees with the common perspective of how mental disorders are treated today (Anderson). He concludes with:

"[...] the brain is not a bag of chemical soup, and it's a mistake to try to treat complex psychiatric disorders just by changing the flavor of the soup. What we need to do is to use our ingenuity and our scientific knowledge to try to design a new generation of treatments that are targeted to specific neurons and specific regions of the brain that are affected in particular psychiatric disorders."

Mental disorders are not as simple as scientists have been trying to cure them. Both the article and the TED talk touch upon the more accurate understanding of how the brain works, and acknowledge the huge gaps in our knowledge of trying to even understand the human brain.

I would conclude science has no definitive answer for our sense of self, as scientists are still working on studying the brain. However, I can definitely say that people are more than their mental disorders.





Art

Does the artist's imbued meaning with his or her work
demean individual interpretations?

"Once given physical reality by the artist the work is open to the perception of all, including the artist."

(Lewitt)

I watched a short film that was circulating the Internet directed by Becky Sloan and Joseph Pelling called "Don't Hug me I'm scared". With a Sesame Street-esque animation, this video portrays a singing notepad declaring to be "creative". It goes on to sing how to "think creatively" to three other creatures. It looks normal, almost fun and for children. This is a bit hard to describe, but around the climax of the video, everyone chose to "get creative!" and slowly they start acting creepy and playing with human entrails. The camera gets shaky, "DEATH" is spelled out, and the music becomes more wonky. It returns to its cheerful music and the notepad sings, "Now let's all agree to never be creative again" (Sloan).

My initial reaction, as with everyone else, was, "What in the world did I just watch?" Then my next reaction, as with no one else, was, "I feel deeply moved". I've been touched by photographs and several pieces of art, but a silly video on YouTube? Nearly every comment on the video talks how disturbing the video is, or how stupid they thought of it. Now, this is just my perspective, but I think it has a deeper meaning. I think this video speaks volumes about the squandering of creativity by hypocrites who encourage it and how truly uncomfortable it is to be a nonconformist and delve into the more disturbing, broken parts of human nature, whatever that may be.

Many people might argue by saying that I'm reading too much into it, or the creators intended nothing of the sort. I know English class is filled with people going, "That's not what the author meant, why do we care about this?" And they're probably right, right? John Green, young adult novelist, states in the video "Life is Like Pizza" on the vlogbrothers YouTube channel:

"Ultimately, it doesn't matter if the author intended a symbol to be there, because the job of reading is not to understand the author's intent. The job of reading is to see into other people as we see ourselves."

I think that is what truly matters: what we can get from it. Art isn't an unrelatable creation we may only marvel at - it is to be enjoyed and scrutinized and pulled from it messages to be a better person, what matters in our lives, how we should live in and construct society, and so much more. So when I enjoy this video and experience something profound, it isn't something I'll dismiss as "weird" or something the creators intended.



Math: Can we ever imagine infinity?

"There are infinite numbers between 0 and 1. There's .1 and .12 and .112 and an infinite collection of others. Of course, there is a bigger infinite set of numbers between 0 and 2, or between 0 and a million. Some infinities are bigger than other infinities." - John Green, The Fault in Our Stars

Not only did this quote shatter what I thought of infinity, it really made me wonder: How much can we understand math? We can toy around with concepts such as an average or pi or as mentioned above, infinity. What I'm talking about is exactly visualizing it. A simple example would be thinking of one apple and putting another apple beside it, visualizing $1 + 1 = 2$. We can understand such abstract symbols in this real life example. However, can you imagine infinity?


As the years went on during school, classmates, though not me since I was the weirdo who enjoyed math, would complain about the lack of application of math. That's another journal entirely, but most high-esteemed mathematicians work with concepts with little to no application at all in the real world, though again that is debatable. It is really hard, I'd almost say impossible, to fully understand mathematical concepts. We literally cannot and can never understand (i.e. fully imagine) infinity. If we say that infinity is the end-all, then how can there be even bigger infinities? Yet here it is, explained so easily in this quote. Pi is also something difficult to imagine, as it contains infinite digits.

So this leads me to ask: If math is something our mind can't process, then... well, is it a real thing? Of course, that starts a whole discussion on what reality is. I want to say that of course it's real -- all circles have a circumference that is pi times the diameter. That's what I would say is so magical about pi -- every circle, any 'perfect' circle (i.e. same diameter from the midpoint to any point on its circumference) has that same ratio. Pi is the placeholder for this ratio. Pi is what we use to understand this ratio.

I would say that about almost all of math. The number one is just used to describe singular objects or quantities. Two is double one, three is triple one, and so on. These numbers can be broken up into parts, such as 1.5. Math has just been building from there. New relationships are discovered. Physics is basically where math's theory come into practice. The number one, the number pi, the concept of infinity - all placeholders to define something intangible.

Essentially, I think our minds have a hard time processing what seems intangible, and that's the beauty of math: it puts these concepts and ideas into symbols and placeholders. Even if we may never imagine seeing an infinity as it is intangible, we can use symbols to display this concept for others.

In der vor-relativistischen Physik gab es zwei verschiedene Erhaltungssätze bzw. Bilanzgesetze, die strenge Gültigkeit beanspruchen:
1) den Satz von der Erhaltung der Energie
2) den Satz von der Erhaltung der Masse.



History: How will the Internet affect the perception of our generation in the future?

"Don't post that online," authorities and people alike warn us. "Once it's on the Internet, it stays forever."

I perhaps take this a bit too far. In elementary school, I got talks from people talking to us about Internet safety. In retrospect, they were more scaring us than informing us, but nevertheless, this didn't stop 10-year-old me from attempting to "delete" myself from the Internet. However, I and millions of other people have all sorts of data that we imagine is permanently etched into the Internet. Parents are now blogging about their children and posting photos of the newborn on Facebook. We are entering a generation where our lives are recorded, digitized, and potentially used to stalk us with a tap of a screen. We have entered - nay, continue to experience - a generation where the first black president of the United States answered questions of common, ordinary people on the Internet forum Reddit. ("I am Barack Obama, President of the United States -- AMA : IAmA") Sometimes I forgot we continue to make history. The strength of the recording abilities of the Internet, as well as how much it has done for global communication, is surely going to contribute to how history is perceived in the future.

Would it be easier to document the history of the 2000s and 2010s with the Internet? There is an unfathomable plethora of information on the Internet. Ask a historian for what a peasant girl in France thought about the French Revolution on September 10th, 1789 at 3:45pm EST, and they'd laugh at you. Ask someone to look up a Tweet on January 20th, 2009 at 3:45pm EST concerning President Obama being sworn into office (White House), and you'd find hundreds, if not thousands of thoughts and opinions and congratulations and disappointment. While there is much more information, it might obstruct opinions of those with more credibility. However, as a collective, opinions on Twitter can provide a slightly biased but still useful perspective of the attitude of President Obama.

Is history expanding to those who are less "important", so to speak? Well, the Internet is still restricted to the literate and wealthy, and perhaps biased to those who know English, but it's a much bigger proportion compared to history. Is reaching out to less "important" people even significant? I'd say yes and no. It is important to know the opinions of the citizens of a country, but less credible people and journalists can be more popular than a credible source.

Ethics

How does society's expectations of sex affect our self-worth?

As I grew up, I was always taught that sex is a dirty deed, only done to procreate, and must stay in marriage. My beliefs have changed a bit since then. I don't have a problem with anyone who chooses to believe to stay a virgin, that sex belongs in marriage and stay abstinent. What I do have a problem with is the shame that can arise from it.

I've seen countless examples of this analogy - that sex makes you worthless. In 10th grade, we went on a religion retreat about abstinence and it only just made me angry and a little sad. We played this game where the girls and guys split into groups and we all had to play rock-paper-scissors. If you lost, you stood behind the winner and they would keep facing people until there were a girl and a guy left. Before they faced off to get the champion, he said imagine that we had sex with the people we played rock-paper-scissors with. Every time you faced someone who's already won, or who's already had sex, you've had sex with them too. So the two people in the middle were people who've had multiple partners. "Just imagine!" they proclaimed. "You have sex with the people your partner's had sex with and you don't know where they've been!"

I'll grant them that - you can never really trust your partner about their number of partners. It's safe and responsible to be careful about spreading STIs.

However, this has unfortunate implications. It means having sex with even just one person 'sullies' you. From what I've seen, it's mainly in females. According to sex educator Laci Green, this made sense when daughters were seen as property and her virginity was a sign that she was faithful to an arranged marriage. However, it's 2013, and I'd like to think we've moved past that.

A non-virgin is seen as 'less' than a virgin. According to scarleteen.com, not only is virginity a non-medical and subjective concept ("Magical Cups & Bloody Brides: Virginity in Context") but abstinence-only education is ineffective at reducing teen pregnancy and not even effective at keeping teens keep their promises. They are only more likely to have unsafe sex ("Does Abstinence Make the Heart Grow Fonder?"). They're pretty trustworthy source considering they are a website dedicated to accurate information about sex and healthy relationships for young adults.

Why do we still hang on to an archaic negative attitude toward sex? I see this akin to homophobia being supported by an out-of-context Bible passage. Everything is about moderation, and while there's nothing wrong with celibacy, I think the sex-shaming needs to stop.

I remember in school one time, I had a teacher who was talking about abstinence. And she said, 'Imagine you're a stick of gum. When you engage in sex, that's like getting chewed. And if you do that lots of times, you're going to become an old piece of gum, and who is going to want you after that?' Well, that's terrible. No one should ever say that. But for me, I thought, 'I'm that chewed-up piece of gum.' Nobody re-chews a piece of gum. You throw it away. And that's how easy it is to feel you no longer have worth. Your life no longer has value.

Elizabeth Smart

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