

# Are you having trouble with your identities?



Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself;  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Walt Whitman – Song of myself

We call ourselves, or are called by others, four names: “I”, “myself”, “me” and “you”.

These identifiers and identities can be great helps or hindrances to us, but they are often used and seldom examined although we talk about them all the time.

How often have you heard people say things like:

- “I am happy”, “I am depressed” or “I am not good enough”?
- “I give myself a hard time”, “I hate myself”?
- “There must be something wrong with me”, “What is the matter with me?”?

How often have you heard (in your own head):

- “You are so stupid”, “Who do you think you are?”, “You idiot!!!”?

There’s more to you than meets the ‘I’

Each of these sentences address parts of our identity. The parts of ourselves labelled ‘I’, ‘myself’, ‘me’ and ‘you’. Most of us are under the impression that there is just one of us. In everyday use being just one person is very convenient, but within each of us is a collection of I-s, me-s, myself-s and you-s: mini identities that we learnt along our way through life.

Some of those mini-identities are helpful to us – “I am a quick learner”, “I am good enough”, “People like me”

Some of those mini-identities are not – “I am stupid”, “I am not good enough”, “Nobody likes me”.

You might think that these are just descriptions, of course I think “I am a quick learner” because I learn quickly. Of course “I am stupid’ because I can’t learn anything”.

I am going to suggest that they are also prescriptions that guide our experience, and that it is just as reasonable to say that “I can learn quickly because I am a quick learner” or “I can’t learn anything because I am stupid”.

Having beliefs about ourselves can be powerfully influential – for good or ill.

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### How to find your identities

Most of the time these beliefs are below our level of consciousness, in the way that fish are not aware of the water they swim in, we are not often aware of these ideas about ourselves. It's just our reality. But there are ways to spot them and bring them out into the open.

When we listen to other people we can quite easily hear them tell us who they think they are: "I am stupid", "I am not good enough", etc. That is because we are on the outside looking in and it's much easier to recognise someone else's thought processes than our own.

There is a way that we can identify some of our own limiting identity beliefs that is surprisingly simple, using our own built in sense of what feels true.

For example: repeat each of these sentences **out loud** and give them a score from 0 to 10 based on how true they **feel**. Where 0 is completely false and 10 is completely true.

- The sun rises in the east and sets in the west
- The sun rises in the west and sets in the east

This is not a test of the logic of the statement, just how true it feels.

Once we 'know' something we use this quick feeling method of deciding how true or false something is. If we didn't have this innate sense of something's truth then if we were asked where does the sun rise we would either have to look in an astronomy book or wait until the next morning with a compass in our hand to find out. It makes sense that we have a quick way of assessing whether something is true for us.

Here's another one to try which is a bit more personal.

Once again say each sentence out loud and listen for its level of truth.

Depending on your gender one of those is going to feel more true than the other.

Now that you have a simple way of assessing your beliefs about your inner world we can use it to see if any of these limiting identity ideas apply to you.

In the lists below there are a collection of identity beliefs, conflicts and inner criticism that I have heard from my clients as I've worked with them. The list is not exhaustive, the range of possible identity beliefs is huge.

Repeat each sentence out loud and get a sense of how they resonate with you. They may feel completely true (10) to you or just like a collection of words (0) or somewhere in between. Please note that this is not a scientifically validated test, or even a quiz you might find in a lifestyle magazine, it's just a way of indicating what might have relevance to you.

#### I am ...

- I am not good enough
- I am worthless
- I am stupid
- I am disgusting

#### I ... myself

- I hate myself
- I give myself a hard time
- I am ashamed of myself
- I am angry with myself

#### There is ... with me

- There is something wrong with me.
- I don't know what the matter is with me

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**You are ...** (in the voice of your inner critic)

- You are stupid!
- You are useless!
- You are disgusting!
- You idiot!

If you found that some of those had an emotional charge on them you might be thinking “things are worse than I thought”.

### Inner Peacemaking

Fortunately, although these identity ideas can be powerful and debilitating they are not obligatory. Whatever they are, they were learnt as you went through life and they can be unlearnt.

Most of my therapeutic work is spent helping people unlearn these patterns of thinking and behaviour using a mixture of EFT and NLP. You can read about Identity Relief, one of the methods I use to dissolve identity beliefs [here](#) and [here](#).

If you are a therapist who wants an effective way of working with these difficulties you might be interested in the [Inner Peacemaking](#) courses I run.