

This is me! Becoming the best of be: A case study

¡Este soy yo! Llegar a ser mi mejor yo: Un estudio de caso



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Abstract

Since the beginning of humanity, questions about our identity, purpose, and origins have been at the forefront of our existential concerns. This case study article aims to approximate practical answers to these questions. Drawing upon the Morenian theoretical perspective that posits that our identities are shaped by the roles we play, arguing that becoming aware of those roles can enable us to make informed decisions about how we think, feel, and act. By noticing and paying attention to our roles, we can pause and reflect on our behaviour, recalibrate our actions and emotions, and strive towards becoming the person we aspire to be. The Play of Life technique, which utilises 3D physical or digital figures to access subcortical and non-verbal areas of the brain, can be particularly effective in this regard. By bypassing rational constructs, this technique can reveal new insights about ourselves that would otherwise be obscured. Rather than simply asking for more information, the Play of Life practitioner asks the participant to "show me" using these 3D images, which can serve as a reflection of themselves. The Play of Life app is readily available for free at www.app.Playoflife.com.

Keywords: Psychodrama, Play of Life, Family – Group Therapy, Psychotherapy, Coaching, Pastoral Psychology

Resumen

Desde el principio de la humanidad, las preguntas sobre nuestra identidad, propósito y orígenes han estado en primera línea de nuestras preocupaciones existenciales. Este artículo de estudio de caso pretende aproximar respuestas prácticas a estas preguntas. Basándose en la perspectiva teórica moreniana que postula que nuestras identidades están conformadas por los roles que desempeñamos, argumenta que tomar conciencia de esos roles puede permitirnos tomar decisiones informadas sobre cómo pensamos, sentimos y actuamos. Al darnos cuenta de nuestros papeles y prestarles atención, podemos detenernos a reflexionar sobre nuestro comportamiento, recalibrar nuestras acciones y emociones y esforzarnos por convertirnos en la persona que aspiramos a ser. La técnica Play of Life, que utiliza figuras físicas o digitales en 3D para acceder a zonas subcorticales y no verbales del cerebro, puede ser especialmente eficaz en este sentido. Al pasar por alto las construcciones racionales, esta técnica puede revelar nuevas percepciones sobre nosotros mismos que de otro modo quedarían ocultas. En lugar de limitarse a pedir más información, el profesional de Play of Life pide al participante que "me muestre" estas imágenes en 3D, que pueden servir como reflejo de sí mismo. La aplicación Play of Life está disponible gratuitamente en www.app.Playoflife.com.

Palabras clave: psicodrama, Play of Life, terapia familiar - de grupo, psicoterapia, coaching, psicología pastoral

INTRODUCTION

The big questions of existence, like “Who am I?” and “What’s my purpose?” have been on our minds since the beginning of time. One reason for this is that humans are unique in our ability to think beyond just our basic needs and senses. Our advanced neocortical system drives us to seek answers to deeper questions. We also have strong analytical skills that allow us to overcome physical limitations and control our environment through tools like fire, steam power, and global communication.

But while we can manipulate the world around us, we struggle to control our own minds and emotions. Even though we can create technology to ward off mosquitoes, we can’t always silence the thoughts buzzing around in our own heads. Unlike our physical surroundings, the inner workings of our minds can be elusive and difficult to manage.

In a Hassidic tale, a group of students of an elderly Hassidic sage sought his advice on whether they should visit a young Rabbi who had recently arrived in a nearby town. They also wanted to know how to determine if he was a wise teacher. The sage encouraged them to go but suggested they ask the young Rabbi if he knew how to prevent intrusive thoughts during prayer. If the young Rabbi claimed to know how to do so, he is likely a fake.

Although some people may believe they have complete control over their minds, the truth is that our thoughts and emotions are not entirely controllable. However, the objective may not be to control them but to live a gratifying life that brings us closer to our ideal selves, even in times of difficulty and suffering. As a writer, I am discovering how to discern my expectations and desires and detach myself from anything restricting my freedom. This journey is a process of self-discovery, where I aim to become the best version of myself and find happiness and fulfilment by staying true to my identity. Nonetheless, the fundamental question lingers: Who am I truly? Who am I, really?

WHO AM I?

There are a variety of perspectives and traditions that attempt to answer the fundamental question, “Who am I?” Two notable frameworks include the Hellenistic view (Griswold Jr, 2010), which emphasises individual self-knowledge, and the relational model, influenced by Jewish (Hatch & Fairbairn, 1890) Eastern (Hatch & Fairbairn, 1890) and African traditions (Battle, 2009), which focuses on the connection between oneself and others. These differing views have important implications

for fields such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and spirituality-theology, and our everyday lives centred on the relationship between the I and the other. (Buber 2012)

The contrast between these perspectives extends beyond just semantics to deeper ontological and phenomenological distinctions.

In the temple of Delphi, the inscription “Know thyself” invites and appeals to all who pass by to practice self-reflection, embodying the Greek belief that one should examine their life. Plato’s Apology, quoting Socrates, emphasises the importance of examining oneself and others, stating that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” (Nicholson, 2002) Socrates positioned himself as a role model for this way of thinking, as he made the pursuit of knowledge a central part of his life and worldview. However, he also acknowledged his own limitations in achieving this goal, admitting in Phaedrus that he was “not yet capable to know myself.” (Moore, 2014)

This way of thinking involves the subject examining both themselves and others, making judgments based on observed qualities. The subject becomes the examiner of themselves and others, creating a closed system of thinking. Bertalanffy (1988) argues that this closed system is isolated and does not interact with its surroundings, whereas an open system is dynamic and interacts with its environment.

According to Heschel (1951), a Jewish Rabbi and scholar and some Eastern philosophies, particularly those of China (Gupta, 2011) and Africa (Battle, 2009), propose a relational view of identity. This view considers the self not as an isolated entity but as including the other. Therefore, the self requires the other to understand oneself fully. In this relational model, identity results from the person’s perception of oneself in a relationship with the other, which includes the other’s perception of themselves as seen by their community, environment, values, and so on. The crucial aspect of this model is that the “who I am” is found in the in-between, which is constantly changing and not static. This view requires self-reflection and feedback from others and is an open system of thinking.

Additionally, Moreno and Buber’s perspectives on relationships provide further insights into the importance of self-reflection and feedback from others in shaping one’s identity (Briefly analysed).

Philosopher Martin Buber’s book “I and Thou” (2012) emphasises the importance of the relationship between

the Self and the Other. Buber's collaboration with Moreno resulted in the concept of the encounter and the emotional space of the meeting, highlighting that individuals are continuously engaged in interpersonal relationships (Marineau, 1989). Buber's relational approach aligns with Moreno's sociological perspective on the development of Sociometry (Fox & Moreno, 1987), which is also supported by other theorists such as Rojas-Bermudez (1979), Levinas (1998), Damasio (2010), and Mead (2015). All of these theorists agree that the essence of life does not lie solely in the self but rather in how we relate through the roles we play.

According to Moreno (1953), behaviours or actions can be considered as roles, a combination of individual and collective elements (p. 75). Moreno further argues that roles do not arise from the self, but rather, the self emerges from a person's roles (p. 76). In other words, a person's identity is shaped by their roles in a given moment rather than their intentions. This suggests that individuals are defined by their actions and behaviours, including their thoughts and feelings, within their interactions. The roles they play have the power to influence and shape not only themselves but also those around them. Therefore, it is important to recognise individuals' roles, as they can contribute positively, enriching, or negatively, draining, to society, with global consequences. Ultimately, our roles shape who we are and how we impact the world.

I AM THE ROLES I PLAY.

From a relational perspective, one's identity is determined by the roles one assumes at any given time. This aligns with Morenian theory, which posits that our actions and behaviours are determined by the roles we play (Moreno, 1953). Moreno's theory suggests that rather than roles emerging from the self, the self emerges from our roles throughout our lives. This is an important philosophical point, as our identity is tied to the role we play at any given moment, which shapes the person we become and the relationships we develop.

Rojas-Bermudez (1979) expands upon Moreno's perspective on the Nucleus of the Ego, which describes the development of self and role since birth. Rojas-Bermudez argues that social roles emerge from a person's psychosomatic roles during infancy. This supports Moreno's theory and highlights the importance of early experiences in shaping one's identity and role in society.

ABOUT ROLES

Roles such as father, mother, son, daughter, uncle, policeman, mailman, doctor, friend, nurse, plumber, and electrician are examples of familiar or social roles that

describe a person's function or occupation. However, the way in which these roles are carried out can vary greatly and is known as Active Roles. For instance, a police officer who stops someone for speeding may behave as either a compassionate and patient educator or a domineering prosecutor-briber. Likewise, when attending to a distressed patient, a doctor may act as either an empathetic and warm healer or a detached and clinical problem-solver. Although both approaches may yield similar physical outcomes, the experiences of those involved will differ. As Moreno (1953, p. 162) notes, the latter approach is akin to a robotic fixer, while the former is more akin to a spontaneous creator.

In his work, Raimundo (2019) explores the concept of Active Roles and how they shape our relationships. Active Roles combine feelings and actions, such as being gentle or calm while acting as a traffic educator or prosecutor. These roles can be categorised as constructive, fragmenting, or ambivalent. Constructive Active Roles benefit both the person and their relationships, while fragmenting Active Roles drain and weaken them. Ambivalent Active Roles combine conflicting feelings and actions that can create confusion, disharmony, and burnout. For example, a person may feel resentful and angry while trying to be helpful. Recognising the different types of Active Roles is important to understand how they affect us and those around us. (Raimundo, 2019)

MAKING IT PRACTICAL

Using a previous theory as a framework, we attempt to define our identity and understand how others perceive us. However, understanding oneself clearly is challenging due to the brain's tendency to filter out experiences that cause feelings of failure or uncertainty (Raimundo, 2020). According to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2010), our brain stores all our experiences and responses to them in non-conscious and non-verbal areas of the brain. Additionally, cognitive neuroscientists Robert Burton (2008) and Michael Gazzaniga (2011) propose that the rational part of our brain, the frontal lobe, communicates with lower emotional areas of the brain, a top-down communication. This communication process creates a sense of knowing, which may result in cognitive biases that justify our actions or cover up failures. In cases where an experience involves failure, trauma, or uncertainty, the story created by the rational brain may not align with the actual experience. The purpose of constructing a story is to avoid feelings of inadequacy, resulting in the sense of knowing that it is difficult to challenge because it is constructed within our minds, a closed system of thinking.

In the same way, we cannot see our faces or our behaviour. Instead, we create a story, a narrative based on how the rational brain evaluates what we do, which must filter a sense of failure and create a sense of certainty and knowing. This is like imagining how we look before looking in the mirror. The image in the mirror will reflect images that will confirm my perception of myself, resulting in a satisfied grin on my face and the words, "I look good!" Or, "Yes, I knew I needed to look at my hair." However, this will also reflect what we did not know or expect, causing us to be disappointed or surprised. The therapy or coaching process aims to assist the person in discovering hidden behaviours; however, it is laborious and frequently almost impossible to achieve when relying solely on verbal communication. By accessing the emotional brain, where the experiences are imprinted in images, 3D visualisation can facilitate the process of knowing oneself better and faster.

THE PLAY OF LIFE

The Play of Life is a 3D mirror reflection of one's identity. It enables players to tap into subcortical and non-verbal regions of the brain through physical or digital 3D figures. The client constructs images to represent the symbolic relational dynamics between players and how they feel and behave in their relationships.

According to research, The Play of Life is a process that operates beyond language and rational constructs. It enables individuals to uncover novel insights that might otherwise be filtered or blocked by their rational minds. Instead of prompting clients to provide additional verbal information, practitioners using this approach ask them to "show me" through the use of small Playmobil® figures, digital templates, props, and protocols. These tools help individuals transition from a verbal narrative to a 3D visual representation, facilitating access to non-rational areas of the brain. As a result, previously suppressed

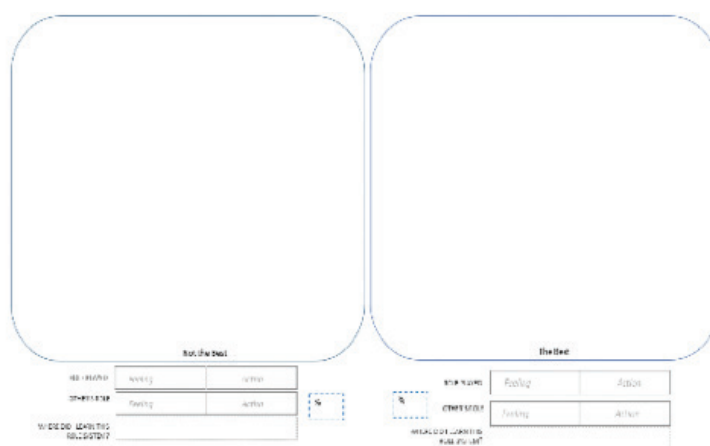
experiences, ways of living, and behaviours are revealed through visual, tactile, and playful (Lúdico in Spanish) experiences.

The Play of Life involves representing one's story or narrative in 3D symbolically, which accesses non-verbal areas of the brain due to the process occurring in silence. The creation of a 3D image informs the rational brain, resulting in bottom-up communication and the development of new knowledge. This new visual information validates and exposes hidden dynamics, expanding one's understanding and potentially leading to "aha!" moments. Visualisation of a 3d image also facilitates self-reflection and expands the closed analysis system into an open system of thinking. Additionally, when utilised in family or group therapy, the process allows for exploring how others perceive the individual in a 3D representation, further enhancing the therapeutic experience.

The process is further expanded when the player can see, in 3D, how others perceive them, carried out in family or group therapy. Creating an image improves the person's understanding of their emotions and behaviours, as well as their awareness of the impact of their actions on others. It provides new knowledge and awareness of one's behaviour, empowering individuals to choose what to do to build their desired life. This is the essence of Emotional and Social Intelligence, as Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) proposed. In addition, the Play of Life, using the This is Me! process approximates how to get to know ourselves better in relationships. This understanding allows the player to reflect on current behaviour and determine if it builds their best self or feeds their not-the-best of them. It helps the player come closer to answering the existential question of "who am I," who they are and facilitates the steps towards becoming the person they desire to be.

THIS IS ME!

One of the Play of Life training techniques is called "This is Me." This technique allows individuals to visually represent two aspects of themselves in 3D: their Best and Not Best selves. This process aims to give seekers a deeper understanding of themselves through a visual and experiential approach. The two pictures represent a spectrum from the best to not the best of oneself; life happens within that spectrum.



The physical Play of Life employs a template (Fig. 1) with two squares side-by-side in which the seeker depicts in 3D the Not Best of Me on the left and the Best on the right. Next, they use small Playmobil® figures or digital app and place a figure that represents them on the stage to represent their perception of the Not Best in themselves symbolically. Finally, they position the figure in any position that could represent how they feel in the chosen situation after placing it.

Jaime G Rojas Bermudez (2017) developed the Image Technique, which involves creating static and symbolic images on the stage in a dramatisation of psychodrama. This technique is employed at the start of a dramatisation or during a pause in the performance. The protagonist uses auxiliary egos to assume their role and construct an image of the situation. This provides the protagonist with a phenomenological experience by viewing the image from the outside and being part of it later. The Play of Life also utilises this technique using figures instead of auxiliary egos. The digital version used in this article uses a similar process on a computer screen, making it suitable for online and face-to-face sessions. This approach is especially popular with younger, tech-savvy individuals.

A CASE STUDY - "THIS IS ME" BY KARL.

Karl is in his late forties and is in the process of a sad separation after a long marriage. He is emotionally distressed, trapped by how he has been living and yearning for freedom. One day, during a time of self-reflection, he imagined wishing to be like Moses, the biblical character that crossed the Red Sea, liberating his people from slavery. Karl wanted to be free of those feelings too. While he was imagining being Moses, metaphorically, suddenly, a thought came to his mind in the form of a message, "before you're a Moses, you need to see the Pharaoh in you." That thought disturbed him, and he tried to push it away, but it kept coming. Karl considered himself a strong but kind, loving, generous, and fun person deserving of freedom. Hearing "you must see the Pharaoh in you, was daunting. He thought I felt like Moses, but I needed to see the Pharaoh in me. Who am I? Karl seeks professional help to clarify this dilemma and someone who could accompany him on this journey.

The meeting with the Companion was online. In the first session, companion (C) heard Karl's (K) story about Moses and Pharaoh and his wonder about "Who am I?" Instead of discussing the situation, the companion used the This is Me! Technique from the Play of Life method. Instead of asking him to tell him more and listen to a long story, he asked to show him.

C.- Karl, you mentioned what it is like to be Moses and

seek freedom, but a strong thought came to mind like a message saying, "you need to see the Pharaoh in you," something that has distressed you.

K. - Yes, this is a very weird feeling. I'm not a Pharaoh. I'm not an insensitive, cruel oppressor. In my life, I defended the oppressed and what they needed the most. I've been in big trouble with authorities and many Pharaohs for my attitude toward the poor and those in need.

C.- To clarify, what does a Moses or a Pharaoh represent for you?

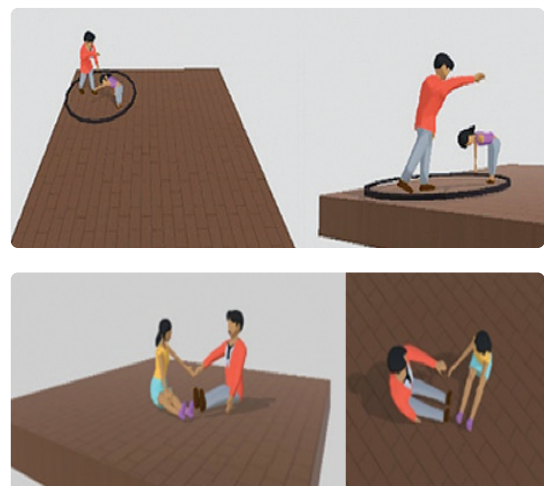
K, - Moses, Mandela, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, and Jesus are role models for me. But I don't know what to do with Pharaoh.

C.- I'd like to use a way to understand better what you're saying. We'll use the Play of Life on the computer screen to have a picture of what it is for you to be a Moses and a Pharaoh.

The Companion opens the This is Me! Technique from the Play of Life App on his computer and shares the screen.

The This is Me! technique explores, in 3d, two opposites ways a person perceives The Best and Not the Best of themselves. Instead of using this terminology, he invites the player to look at him as Moses and Pharaoh. The Companion guides Karl through the process. Karl directs the Companion on which figures and avatars to use and how to place and position the figures on the stage, a type of online or digital psychodrama.

Karl creates the first picture, the Pharaoh (Fig. 2), on one stage (left) and Moses (Fig. 3) on the other (right).

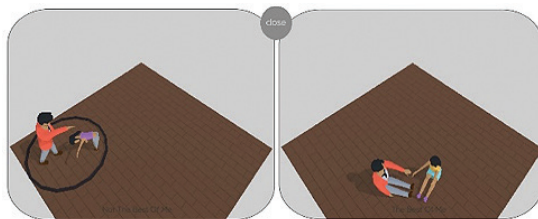


Karl can look at each picture separately from different angles, while C rotates the stage using the app.

Karl is looking at a mirror. How often can we see ourselves in a mirror from a third person's perspective? This is a transcendent moment for Karl. This process had been carried out in silence. The picture represents how Karl perceives himself in a relationship created by bypassing cognitive biases.

Karl can see both pictures together, side by side:

C.- Karl, what do you see?
K.- The figure of the Pharaoh is terrible. I can see myself there. It is hard to face and accept. I am there shouting, imposing, making the other person feel small and without a way out.



C.- Tell me more about it.

Karl's brain is working differently now. Instead of the rational brain (frontal lobe) seeking information from top to bottom, interpreting and justifying his behaviour, the emotional brain "informs" the rational brain in bottom-up communication. This is one of the key strengths of the Play of Life process.

K.- It is hard to accept this, but I can see myself there. I feel embarrassed.

C.- Place yourself in the picture that represents you. What do you feel about that position?

K.- Angry and powerful.

C.- you mentioned you are shouting. Putting together what you say, you are an Angry, Powerful Shouter in this picture.

Karl is shocked; he cannot argue about what he sees; it is what he created. He has created a "picture that tells a thousand words." He recognises this behaviour in him but has never associated it with "who he is." The description of the feeling and action is the Active Role he is playing.

An important step follows; Karl is invited to put himself in the other person's shoes, called Role Reversal. Observing a situation from the other person's view means including the other in how I perceive myself, a fundamental point in a relational approach to identity.

C.- Place yourself now in the other person's place. Project yourself in that position, what you feel, and what you are doing.

K.- I feel fearful and trapped and can only see the floor. It is scary. I feel I need to shrink and be very tiny, insignificant.

C.- Write the feelings and actions into the template.



On the template, he writes:

Role Played: Angry Shouter

The other's role: Fearful, trapped Shrinker, nobody.

He identifies where he learnt that role dynamic: His father and the country.

Now that Karl has the experience of being a Pharaoh, he is invited to experience being Moses and follows the same process of reflecting by experiencing this way of relating.

In the Moses scenario, he sees himself as a happy, relaxed companion, to which the other person responds as a content, open sharer. This is what I want, says Karl. He writes those active roles on the template too. He also reflects on what he sees. On the left, I can make a woman feel like a small, scared girl, but on another scenario, the woman feels like a woman.

Karl reflects on the "system" at play in the scenario and connects where he has learnt those ways of relating, which are also written on the template.

C.- Karl, if this represents the Best and Not the Best of yourself, which one do you prefer?

K.- Dah!!!! Obviously, Moses is the Best.

C.- Karl, do you want to be a Moses or yourself?

K.- I want to be me, the Best of Me.

C.- How much do you live in the Best and Not the Best? The companion changes the language from Moses to the Best of himself.

K.- Now that I can see it, I think that, without knowing, I live 80% in Not the Best and 20% in the Best. I feel sick in my stomach.

C.- Karl, this can be the beginning of a journey of discovery for you.

Looking at the two scenarios, which one are you?

K. – I am the one on the right.

C.- Karl, you are both; we are both the best and not the best of us. Karl Jung, the same name you have, calls the shadow of ourselves. Something we need to know, accept, and notice.

You have, in front of you, a representation of who you are; you are both and in between.

K.- This has been a revelation, but how can I apply it in my life?

C.- Good that you ask.

First, I will send you a screen picture of both scenarios from different angles. I suggest you use the Best of You as a screen saver on your phone and computer. Then what you have identified as the Best of you can be a permanent reminder of the person you want to be.

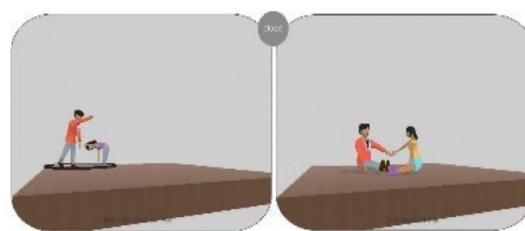
You will also have access to the Play of Life app and the technique we have done today. You can play with it and create other scenarios.

You have a snapshot of the Best and Not the Best and have practised naming what you did using emotions and actions; these are the Active Roles you play.

You can pause at any time and reflect on what you are thinking, feeling, and doing, and reflect, do that feed the Best or Not the Best? Life happens in the immediate present, and it is at that moment that you not only can empower yourself in choosing the role you are playing, but you can also choose who you are.

K.- That seems like some homework for me.

C.- Yes, it is it's a journey to learn how to live better.



CONCLUSION

In this case study article, the Play of Life is introduced as a 3D visualisation technique to gain insight into one's own and others' emotions and actions. The technique, called "This is Me," represents the best and not-so-best aspects of a person's perception of themselves in relationships. The approach is grounded in rigorous research on neuroscience and the importance of using nonverbal methods to assess personal experiences while bypassing cognitive biases. The Play of Life techniques are based on ongoing research on experiential approaches to therapy and communication, and the use of small figures both physically and digitally offers new avenues for research connecting insight and behavioural modification with various fields, including neuroscience, phenomenology, philosophy, therapy, coaching, and education. The Play of Life techniques have been used professionally worldwide with individuals, couples, families, and in corporate work. It has also been used with refugees to help them deal with trauma and resettlement, bypassing language and cultural barriers. Visualising personal feelings and actions has also been used in meditation, mindfulness, contemplation, and prayer. Active Learning International is conducting ongoing research on the efficacy of the method and its combination with AI artificial intelligence.

Note: Readers can access Play of Life digital by visiting www.Playoflife.com and downloading the application for free. Email to Info@Playoflife.com to receive a copy of the file of the session with Karl.

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