

Your memories shape who you are

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“The tests show you’re not losing your memory. Are you doing anything worth remembering?”

In his extraordinary book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, psychologist Daniel Kahneman teaches that we have two mental operating systems; there are two expressions of self: the experiencing self and the remembering self.

He describes the experiencing self as an example of the fast, intuitive, unconscious mode of thinking that operates in the present moment, focusing on the quality of our experience in the present. The remembering self is the slow, rational, conscious mode of thinking that tells the story of our experience and how we think about our experience. The experiencing self is the “you” in the moment who lives through the event. The remembering self is the “you” who writes the history. Our short- and long-term sense of well-being is influenced by both.

Our *experiencing self* is shaped by what’s happening to us in the present (with a little influence from the most recent past and a projection into the near future). As I write this essay, I’m relaxed, sitting in a quiet library early in the morning, having slept well last night. I’m drinking a cup of coffee. In several hours I’ll visit Malaga, a delightful Spanish town on the Mediterranean. All bills are paid, family members are okay, May and I are fine. My experiencing self is happy.

Don McMinn

Think with me

Our *remembering self* is composed of memories of the past that we have chosen to remember and have allowed them to shape and influence our lives. I'm 66 years old so I have tens of thousands of memories to select from. Which ones will I choose to focus on? Which ones will find purchase in my life and which ones will fade away?

For instance, my family of origin had some problems. If I allowed myself to linger on those memories, they would negatively impact my present life. But also during those growing-up years, my church had a wonderful and consistent influence on me—it was everything a loving community should be and it provided wonderful opportunities. At church I felt affirmed, encouraged, accepted, welcomed, and loved. When I reflect on my first 17 years of life, I choose to reminisce on the positive experiences.

Please listen to this TED Talk by Kahneman.