

Self-Improvement isn't Status

Why the SSH is not a self-improvement device

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Over the sixteen years since I first articulated the SSH, there has been an almost comic insistence by the vast majority of people who believe in its legitimacy to misuse it as some sort of device intended for self-improvement. The problem is that, being a taxonomy and not a series of tests or objectives, the awareness of these behavioral tendencies and socio-sexual status indicators does not lend itself to self-improvement.

Let’s say we had observed that it was primarily height and shoe size that dictated where a man fell on the status hierarchy. Most people would understand that there wasn’t much that could be done about changing either of those things. Certainly one could adopt cosmetic measures such as lifted heels and giant clown shoes, and indeed, both measures have been adopted in various societies throughout the past, usually for status-related reasons.

But most people would understand the difference between the cosmetic measure and a man actually managing to change his height and his shoe size, both of which can actually be accomplished to some degree by extreme measures such as cosmetic surgery.

I trust the analogy to the actual SSH here is apparent. For over a decade, people have been assuming that making a cosmetic behavioral change is tantamount to permanently transforming the underlying behavioral pattern that was established in childhood. But this is, quite simply, not the case.

The instinctual liar may, over time, manage to conquer his tongue and learn to limit himself to the occasional, acceptable exaggeration. But he is always, for the rest of his days, going to struggle with refraining from telling lies in a manner that the naturally honest individual is never going to understand. In the same way, the sexually-dominant player can prove to be a faithful husband, but the temptation of other women combined with the certain knowledge that he can have them if he chooses to do so is always going to be something that he will have to consciously restrain.

And it’s the interior pattern, and the internal struggle, that represents your true behavioral pattern.

I was dragged out to a social event last night by a family member. I probably knew 30 or more people there and have no problem with any of them. It was outside, the alcohol was flowing freely, and everyone was friendly and visibly happy to see me. Within ten minutes, I managed to extricate myself and was happily ensconced in the darkness where no one could see me, where I could read the book I had been reading when I was initially ambushed.

Now, anyone can leave a party, for one of a thousand different reasons. So assigning an interpretation to a single observation, or even small number of observations, is intrinsically unreliable. But a series of observations of another individual’s behavior is, sooner or later, going to identify his behavioral pattern with a high degree of confidence. But the average individual is insufficiently detached from himself for his own self-observations to mean very much. Can anyone who isn’t both psychopathic and autistic accurately track their own lies?

And more importantly, how can you transform those internal grooves carved into your psyche by nature and nurture when you don’t know what they are, how they were established, and particularly, when you have no idea what the internal reality of a different behavioral pattern are? I don’t know what drives me to develop a new sound, produce a music viedo, and record an entire album’s worth of songs in four days, and I also don’t know what would drive someone to sell their soul for a modicum of fame, money, and Instagram followers.

This is why it’s a mistake to try to use the SSH as a basis for “self-improvement” by climbing the status ladder. If you want to use it for self-improvement, first identify what is Good, Beautiful, and True, and then utilize your knowledge of where you fall on the SSH to pursue those things. Let the status take care of itself; it is something endowed from without rather than within anyhow.

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Society works so much better when the hierarchies are allowed to form and flourish.

My gamma son did very well managing his worst behavior when alpha son took him under his wing. Alpha simply wouldn't put up with the nonsense, so Gamma reined in his excesses because he didn't want to lose access to Alpha's high-status social groups.

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Just as an alcoholic is wise not to attend parties every weekend where alcohol is in abundance, simply being in environments where high-status behavior is encouraged and low-status behavior is discouraged does wonders for men who have made it a priority to discipline themselves and control their worst urges.

The interior struggle is always going to be there, but taking the hard path towards the Good, the Beautiful, and the True is just a little bit easier when you have other men in your social circle who are also willing to take that path and that you can trust to hold you accountable.

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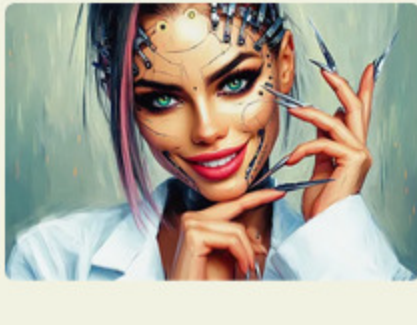
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