

#118 - The Enneagram Part Two: How to Make Sense of Yourself

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 118. It's part two in our talking about the Enneagram - how to make sense of yourself. If you haven't yet listened to part one, that's just a couple of episodes earlier - episode 114 - The Truth About Your Enneagram Number. Even if you already know your number, that episode is required listening before getting into this one. The gist of that first episode is that The Enneagram is about motivation, not behavior. We get stuck on our behaviors being the clue into what number we most identify with, but our behaviors often change and multiple numbers can share the same behaviors. The key is motivation - why do you do what you do, what lens do you use to see the world. So go back and listen to that episode if you haven't already or again if you listened to it when it came out a couple of months ago but need a refresher.

In this episode, I want to share some of the other aspects of the Enneagram and put them in the context of making sense of yourself. Self-awareness is one of the most powerful things in becoming better humans, and I think some of the tools of the Enneagram are fantastic in drawing us into a deeper self-awareness. Before we do that, I wanted to give you a quick reminder to join the Lazy Genius VIP list, mostly because I'm making a big announcement to that list next and don't want you to miss it, and the next Latest Lazy Letter is coming out in two more weeks. I will never ever stop being humbled by your emails in response to that Lazy Letter, saying it's your favorite email you get. I also get a ton of feedback about the book reviews I share, so if you're a reader and a Lazy Genius, I think you'll find some great gems in those Latest Lazy Letters. Click on the link in the show notes, or go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/join to get on that VIP list.

Alright, let's talk a bit more about the Enneagram. The Enneagram has its own language in many ways. You'll hear folks talk about the numbers and arrows and wings, and if you aren't familiar with the concepts, it all sounds a little insane. I'm going to go through a few of the main concepts of The Enneagram and give them some context in how they can help you make sense of yourself. Remember that personality in so many ways is a construct; it's something we created as kids to keep us safe in the world. Of course we all have natural personalities; I'm not saying everything about you is fake. But before self-awareness, our motivation to do what we do is almost always rooted in survival, in feeling okay in the room and in the world. I said this in the first episode, but one of the ways you usually know you've hit the number you most identify with is that you feel really gross about it. It's like your insides are opened up because you didn't know you were so motivated by image or being loved by others or staying far away from hard things. The beauty of The Enneagram is that it helps us all live in less bondage to those motivations, and a few of these concepts dig into that a little deeper.

So first, the actual numbers. There are nine numbers and therefore nine main motivations for moving through the world. We all probably resonate with more than one number because we're humans and not robots, but we all likely have one singular motivation that steers the ship all the time. Each of the nine numbers represents a core fear and a core desire. I will run through those in just a second, but I think it's important to take a step back first. The nine types are divided into three triads or centers, three groups of three: the feeling center, the thinking center, and the instinctive center. I heard an Enneagram teacher once describe them as cul-de-sacs. Or culs-de-sac even though that's the actual worst. Each center is its own cul-de-sac, and if you're ever having trouble figuring out your number, sometimes it can be helpful to just narrow in on the center you most resonate with. So I'll go through the nine types quickly as they relate to their center.

The first is the feeling center, and that includes types two, three, and four. The feeling center is characterized by an overall emotional driver of shame, and each of the three types within the feeling center approaches shame in different ways. Twos deal with their shame by trying to get everyone to like and need them. The main desire of a type two is to be loved, and their greatest fear is that they are unloveable. The shame takes deep root in that they themselves are not enough, so they have to help and do and care for others at the expense of themselves in order to deal with the shame of not being enough on their own. Super light, right?

The next number in the feeling center is the Three. Threes also have the primary emotional driver of shame, but they repress it hard by being awesome. They seek to achieve and be impressive so that they don't have to confront their feelings of inadequacy. A Three's core motivation is to feel valuable, and the core fear is that they're worthless. That's why many Threes are some of the most successful people you'll ever meet; they don't want to give anyone a reason to think that they're not worthwhile.

The final number in the feeling center is Four. Fours tend to deal with their shame by seeking to be different. Fours are often really creative and interesting people with worldviews and perspectives that you don't often hear. They have a core desire to be significant and have a deep fear that they have no real identity. Being just part of the crowd taps into deep shame for Fours because then they're just like everyone else, so Fours might be outwardly unique individuals and, what most of us don't see, they have a really elaborate fantasy life. They can create other scenarios and lives even that are more unique than their reality. That's how they deal with the shame of feeling insignificant.

Not every type within the feeling center is super emotional, and that's true of all the centers. There's often one type in each center that represses that main emotional driver. For the feeling center, it's the Three. Twos and Fours generally move through the world with their feelings, and Threes move through the world trying to keep their feelings down.

Let's move to the next center - the thinking center. This includes types five, six, and seven. The thinking center has the emotional driver of fear, and each of the three types approaches fear in

different ways. Fives deal with their fear by retreating. They want a ton of information to feel like they understand the world they're walking into, and if they don't know enough, they stay put. Their deepest desire is to be competent, and their greatest fear is being incompetent. How can a Five feel competent? Knowledge. They seek to know everything and don't want to move into the fearful world until they feel like they're on solid ground. But since it's impossible to know everything about anything, a Five who isn't as self-aware will often stay hidden away.

The Type Six is a little tricky. We'll get into subtypes next, but within each of the nine types, there are three subtypes, and the three Six subtypes look the most different from each other which can make it hard to fully identify as a Six. We don't have time to dig into that super deeply today, but Sixes in general are the most fearful number. They immediately go to the worst-case scenario, and they seek after their greatest desire of safety and security by looking outside of themselves for confidence. Sixes have a core fear of not having guidance, and they often don't recognize that they have guidance within themselves and are too afraid to trust themselves. So they trust anything and everything else - until it lets them down. Then they're out. If they can't trust you once, Sixes that are less self-aware and don't see that lens as a construct and something that can move past will be far less likely to trust you again.

The final type in the thinking center is the Seven. Sevens don't seem afraid of anything in a lot of ways because they're usually so positive and optimistic. And that's how they actually cope with fear. Sevens are always looking at the next fun thing so they don't have to confront the hard thing in front of them. They're super fun people, and since their deepest desire is to be content, it's hard to imagine being content with fear being a natural part of life. A Seven's deepest fear is pain, so of course they're afraid of dealing with hard emotions and situations. Sevens are the friends who say "it'll be okay let's go see a movie!" That is sometimes the kind of friend we all need, but it's a lot for a Seven to carry, to push down the fear of negative emotions, especially when life might be tangibly difficult. Sevens who aren't self-aware find it super hard to cope.

The final center is the instinctual center, and that includes types eight, nine, and one. The emotional driver of this center is anger, and each type deals with anger in different ways.

Eights have no trouble acting on their anger. It's on the surface and not scary, so Eights aren't afraid to be loud and mad and say exactly what they think. An Eight's deepest desire is to be in control because the deepest fear is being controlled or harmed by someone else. When anger shows up in an Eight, they're not about to let it just sit beneath the surface and have their silence taken advantage of. They're in control of their own self and their space in the room, and they do it without fear. And all of this is if an Eight isn't super self-aware. Self-aware Eights are some of the best advocates and most loyal friends you will ever encounter.

Nines deal with their anger by repressing it. Their deepest desire is inner peace, so sharing their anger or even worse, showing their anger, puts them at risk of their deepest fear which is being

separating from or completely losing a relationship. Nothing is worth messing up an existing relationship, even if it means not being honest about how they feel.

And finally Ones. Ones deal with the emotional driver of anger by trying to control it. Their deepest desire is to be fully balanced and seen as good. Anger puts that in danger because a One's greatest fear is to be seen as evil or defective or not enough. It's very nuanced, but Nines repress their anger because they don't want to rock the boat and risk messing up the relationship. Ones repress their anger because they don't want to be seen as an angry or volatile or rigid person. They don't want to be seen as anything that isn't good, so they keep their anger to themselves and channel it into being perfect to prove their goodness.

So those are the three centers. Maybe one of those three emotional drivers - shame, fear, or anger - really made sense to you. Maybe it put some context around how you see yourself and how you make the choices you do. If it did, chances are, you've narrowed down your type to one of three. And if you already know your type, it's so important to see how that type sits within its center. It helps your way of being make sense, and it helps you be more compassionate for how someone else makes sense. I'm a One married to a Nine, and knowing that both of us have repressed anger is incredibly helpful. It makes our relationship make more sense. We don't have big fights hardly ever, and for the first fifteen years of our marriage, I thought that was a badge of honor. It made us good which is important to me, right? And we were still together which made my Nine husband very happy because the relationship was at peace. But really neither of us was very good at really communicating how deeply we were feeling towards each other. My anger can calcify into resentment, and his can calcify into complacency and just not caring anymore. On the outside, our lack of fighting might look good, but our lack of authentic communication is not. I don't have to be afraid that he'll see me as bad by sharing how I feel, and he doesn't have to be afraid that I'm going to leave him if he gets mad about something. Do you see how these lenses are really just constructs? They're lies really. If I make every decision out of desire to be seen as good and perfect, I will be constantly exhausted. In fact, I lived most of my life that way. Everything I did was in pursuit of being good enough and not giving anyone any reason ever to think badly about me. That's no way to live. That's why self-awareness is incredibly powerful because now I see that narrative within myself and can call it out for being unkind and a lie. Hopefully some of this language around the centers can offer you the same beginning of self-awareness.

There are so many other parts to the Enneagram language that we don't have time to get into today. We'll do a part three soon, but let's finish out this episode by talking about the subtypes a little. I'm not going to go into all of them because this episode is almost over. But each of the nine types is divided into three subtypes which really means there are 27 enneagram types. I'm not going to name all 27 obviously, but seeing how each is formed might help give you some clarity in making sense of yourself.

Each type has three subtypes characterized by these three instincts: self-preservation, social interaction, and sexual bonding. So there's a self-preservation four, a social four, and a sexual

four, and that's true of every number. If the emotional centers didn't give you as full a picture as you wanted in making sense of yourself, perhaps these three instincts will.

The way these three instincts can be helpful, other than giving you even more of an awareness and language about how you see the world, is if you're still struggling to find your type. It might be that you deeply resonate with one of these instincts and then can read about that instinctual subtype within all nine types to help identify your number. In several of the numbers, the Six especially, the three subtypes look very different from each other, so these instincts could be helpful in narrowing down what motivates you.

The first instinct is self-preservation, and each of the nine types has a self-preservation subtype. It sounds like what it is: the instinct is to preserve self. At its deepest root, it's about survival and security with your stuff, not necessarily with your relationships. Folks who are led by a self-preservation instinct are primarily interested in having enough resources, in having structure, and they want to stay away from danger. When that instinct connects with a type's basic desire, it creates a nuanced version of that number or a subtype.

The second instinct that exists in all nine numbers is social interaction. The subtype is often listed as just the word social followed by the number... a social three, a social seven. The social instinct also sounds like what is: a focus on relationships and belonging. From a basic instinctual perspective, you can think about it through the lens of herd mentality. What's the best thing I can do to get along with the herd?

The third instinct is sexual bonding. This is the instinct that doesn't necessarily sound like what it is because it really doesn't have to do with sex as a main thing. It's more about intimacy and one-to-one connections. Having quality connections with the people that matter is the primary drive.

Here's the thing: we all have all three instincts. It's just that we each have one that's dominant. But that's the basic understanding of the subtypes. Maybe you feel really drawn to one particular instinct, or maybe you can start paying attention to how those three instincts show up in your life and if one is more obvious than the other two. Knowing that can be incredibly helpful in your own self-awareness. It's like a lightbulb goes off in your head about yourself. Ah! That makes sense with who I am and how I live! And then you can start to recognize that you don't have to live that way if it's harmful to you. You can move beyond that animal instinct of self-preservation and recognize that you're not always in danger or need to protect yourself, that vulnerability is good and beautiful and draws us closer to each other. It's just so helpful.

Okay, I've talked enough. We'll do a part three eventually, but today think about how the emotional centers of feeling, thinking, and instinct might show up in your life. You're dominant in one of those, just like you're dominant in one of those animal instincts. Paying attention to how those flesh out in your life and then naming those as your current mode of operation will help

you make so much more sense of yourself. And a deeper awareness of self makes us more compassionate to ourselves and to others which is the whole point of the Enneagram.

I hope this episode has helped. If you have any questions which I'm guessing you super do, I'll be live on Instagram this week. Usually it's Thursday around 12:15pm EST, but this week it's Friday around noon. We're still in summer, so we already have a date with the pool on Thursday. We'll hang on Friday at noon, so follow me on Instagram @thelazygenius to join the conversation.

Thanks so much for listening, guys! Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next time.