

# Finding the line between being self-conscious and having self-awareness.

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As I catch myself wondering what my therapist *really* meant by her painfully long pause — which I'll later realize was simply a lagging internet connection — I am quickly reminded of why I started therapy in the first place.

While I don't think I could name *many* upsides of the pandemic, opening up the conversation about mental health has got to be one of them. As more and more people are left alone with their thoughts for a majority of the day, they've realized, some perhaps for the first time, that their mental health may not be as resilient as they previously believed. Luckily enough for me, I already had some experience on the subject of mental health pre-pandemic and am no stranger to the art of self-rumination. So, this whole thing had nothing on me. Or so I thought.

The people closest to me are well aware of my day-to-day struggles with the demands of modern existence. From my "tragic" inability to keep my room clean to my ridiculous procrastination habits to my ever-anxious brain, things that have always been lifestyle habits for me are often deemed "chaotic" by my inner circle. I am not exaggerating, by the way. Each surface of my room is covered at any moment (including this one), and I fully procrastinated writing this essay until the absolute last second.

Of all of my recurring tropes, a feeling of hyper self-awareness rears its ugly head every single day. Just yesterday, I came across my roommate and good friend Danielle in our kitchen, making herself a mock Café Yumm bowl. I noticed that the can of black olives she was using looked suspiciously like the one I had left in the fridge the day before. I decided to confront Danielle about her olive usage, to which she assured me that they were in fact her olives, not mine. The Great Olive Debate plagued my thoughts for the next hour. I truly was convinced that Danielle was probably furious with me for accusing her of theft.

The shift from in-person interaction to Zoom has provided no escape from this turmoil of awareness. If anything, having to see my face looking back at me while I deliver a five-minute monologue to a sea of silent faces staring at me as I sometimes-awkwardly fumble over my words or make a dumb joke has been, at times, a nightmare.

The common thread between The Great Olive Debate and the torture that is Zoom? There is a fine line between being self-aware and being self-conscious. And to me, the difference lies in seeking validation from others.

With Danielle, it took everything I had not to text her a long-winded apology over the olive accusation, simply so that I would know that she wasn't mad at me. And when I make a dumb joke over Zoom, I always turn to my boyfriend afterwards to have him assure me that it was in fact funny; I just couldn't hear anyone laugh because it was muted.

As self-aware as I have always believed myself to be, it took a global pandemic for me to self-reflect enough to finally seek therapy for the anxiety I've always known I had. I chalk this prolonged search up to my sheer procrastination habits and my — rather impressive — ability to compensate for these issues, rather than any sort of aversion to therapy. But, truthfully, it takes a very strong person to seek therapy. So, I am proud of myself for realizing that however self-aware I deemed myself to be, I could always use the help.

My first few trips to therapy have brought about many things. From my now-confirmed anxiety disorder to an ADHD diagnosis at the fresh age of 21, the generally chaotic way I have always lived my life was given some sort of validation. But I'm learning not to depend on this validation, or on the validation of others. The thin line between being self-aware and being self-conscious is one that I walk daily, though now with more ease than before. But I'll save the rest for my therapist. 

