Selfhood & Individuation · About 4 minutes

# A Preference Can Be Provisional

Giving a wish attention before turning it into a decision

“Anything is fine.” You can say it so fast that the wish you were about to have never quite reaches you.

Perhaps a preference was difficult to express. Perhaps it had not formed yet. You might be tired, short of money or uninterested in the available choices. There is no need to turn uncertainty into evidence that you have lost your authentic self.

A preference can have a smaller job. Wanting a quiet afternoon does not define your whole personality. Curiosity about a class need not announce a new career. You can give a wish some attention before deciding what to do with it.

In this fictional situation, Hugo is visiting his sister. She suggests a busy outdoor festival. He likes spending time with her and is interested in one performance, but he also wants a slower afternoon. He says anything is fine. Later he feels that nobody considered him.

His disappointment matters. So does the fact that his sister has not heard another proposal. He could say, “I'd like to see that performance, but I don't want the whole afternoon in the crowd. Could we have a quiet meal afterward?” She may like that plan or want something different.

He might discover his preference only after going to the festival. That does not make the first answer dishonest. Experience sometimes tells us something that anticipation could not.

Research on adolescents' accounts of behavior that did not feel like themselves found different reported motives, including experimentation and seeking approval.[1] The findings cannot establish an adult's history from one uncertain answer. They do encourage care about treating every changing preference as the same kind of difficulty.

Hugo's interest belongs alongside his sister's wishes, transportation, costs and any promises already made. If he had agreed to accompany a child, a wish for solitude would not cancel that duty. It might lead to a request for a different arrangement.

Knowing what you want can make a choice better informed without making it automatic. You may willingly choose something else because a commitment or another person's need matters to you. You may decide the preference matters enough to change the plan.

There is also no requirement to make every wish public. In a workplace or relationship where disagreement brings retaliation, privacy may be a considered choice. Greater exposure is not always greater freedom. Support and safety can matter more than finding a brave sentence.

Hugo’s first answer gives him a place to listen for the preference he barely heard.

A preference can begin as quietly as “I think I'd like to eat outside.” You can find out how that feels once you get there.

Companion reading · The Self You Became to Belong

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Full pathway companion · included with paid learning
Pathway introduction: Selfhood & Individuation (public introduction; full modules require access).

## Sources and further reading

[1] Harter, S., Marold, D. B., Whitesell, N. R., & Cobbs, G. (1996). A model of the effects of perceived parent and peer support on adolescent false self behavior. Child Development, 67(2), 360–374. Source.

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