

# Your Brain, Your Disease, Your Self

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***The New York Times:***

WHEN does the deterioration of your brain rob you of your identity, and when does it not?

Alzheimer's, the neurodegenerative disease that erodes old memories and the ability to form new ones, has a reputation as a ruthless plunderer of selfhood. People with the disease may no longer seem like themselves.

Neurodegenerative diseases that target the motor system, like amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, can lead to equally devastating consequences: difficulty moving, walking, speaking and eventually, swallowing and breathing. Yet they do not seem to threaten the fabric of selfhood in quite the same way.

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The only way to tease apart which changes render someone unrecognizable is to compare all such symptoms, across multiple diseases. And that's just what we did, in a study published this month in *Psychological Science*.

What we found runs counter to what many people might expect, and certainly what most psychologists would have guessed: The single most powerful predictor of identity change was not disruption to memory — but rather disruption to the moral faculty.

We surveyed 248 family members of people who had one of three types of neurodegenerative disease: Alzheimer's, A.L.S. or frontotemporal dementia.

Read the whole story: [The New York Times](#)