

Review Article

A Critical Personal Identity Informed by Psychological and Spiritual Issues

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Abstract: Self-identity is difficult subject to discuss, but the author dares to investigate it by critically viewing it from a perspective of “personal identity informed by psychological and spiritual issues.” The understanding of identity is that identity is shaped by our dreams, visions and values which define our actions and doings. It embraces our very mind, influences our thinking, new information and how decisions are made, and what we consider the most for celebration. The identity denotes one’s personality traits, physical attribute, values, and belief systems. A personal identity is the unique ways that make one a unique individual (Patrick, 2019). Self-identity is the identity one has given to oneself. Personal identity is a subjective concept that changes constantly as one learns and grows (Locke, 2021), and consciousness is the key to personal identity. The author believes that personality is the psyche. The psyche embraces the thoughts, feelings, and behavior, both conscious and unconscious. According to Carl Jung, there are 3 levels of the psyche: the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The author understands the psyche functions as guide to regulate and adapt one in social, physical environment. The conscious awareness grows daily through application of the four mental functions Jung described in personality theory he called thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition. There are also two attitudes that determine the orientation of the conscious mind – extraversion and introversion. The extraverted attitude orients consciousness toward the outside world while the introverted individual orient himself towards the inner world. The author realized that before change and grow, and development could take place in him, he had to be conscious of what he (self-awareness by revisiting his unconscious (reservoir) so that he could modify his behavior defined as personal, social, cultural, spiritual, troublesome, undesirable, or unacceptable. The author considered his early stages of life as undifferentiated wholeness. He was shaped by his family, social, economic, religious, cultural, environmental conditions into differentiated balanced, unified personality.

Keywords: Self-consciousness, self-control, conscious and unconsciousness, collective unconscious, extraversion and introversion.

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to speak objectively about oneself and even more difficult to say who one is, self-identity. But I have always dared to venture into investigating my own identity from childhood till adulthood. To help me do this investigation, I am taking a critical look at a “personal identity informed by psychological and spiritual issues.” But before I get into discussion, the general idea of identity is that identity is shaped by our dreams, visions and values which define our actions and doings. It goes further to embrace our very mind,

influences our thinking, how we come up with new information, how decisions are made and what we consider the most for consideration.

Therefore, self-identity is how I identify and refer to myself. One would suggest that primarily, it addresses the question: Who am I? My identity comprises everything that makes me a person. It denotes my personality traits, physical attributes, values and belief systems. My personal identity is the unique ways that make me a unique individual (Patrick, 2019). I can decide to emphasize my family, religion, and interests as

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may be featured in this write-up. Self-identity is the identity that I have given to myself. It is the role which I believe defines me. Personal identity is a subjective concept that changes constantly as I learn and grow. According to Locke (2021), consciousness is the key to personal identity. The core of my identity is clearly determined by my beliefs of what is right or wrong and are adopted rightly or wrongly during childhood as I will explain in my life experience.

Psychological and Spiritual

From life experience I have come to believe that personality as a whole is the psyche. The psyche embraces my thought, feeling and behavior, both conscious and unconscious. The psyche is composed of numerous diversified but interacting system and levels. There are three levels according to Carl Jung, the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious (Lisa, 2023). Freud searched the human psyche in terms of the three elements he described as the Id, Ego, and the Super-Ego Homayoun pour, G. (2023). For us to understand why humans act the way they behave it is compelling to comprehend the functions of such elements of the human psyche.

My psyche functions as a guide which regulates and adapts me in social and physical environment. I can say the conscious is the only part of mind that is known directly by me. It appeared early in my life, probably prior to birth. When growing as a child I could observe conscious awareness operating in me in that, I could recognize and identify my parents, my toys and other objects in my surroundings (Gary, 2021). My conscious awareness grew daily through the application of the four mental functions that Jung described in his theory of personality development he called thinking, feeling, sensing an intuition.

My non-directed thinking was what expressed my inner reality. I did it through the language of images and symbols. The non-directed thinking was the natural given life of the psyche from which formed the directed thinking of consciousness, just as the ego as the center of consciousness in the human personality develops out of the matrix of the unconscious (Ananta, 2018). I constantly, conscious or unconscious work toward fueling or achieving the common goal of humanity through the collective unconscious.

In addition, to the four mental functions there are two attitudes that determine the orientation of the conscious mind. These are extraversion and introversions. The extraverted attitude orients consciousness toward the external objective world. I happened to be introverted person myself. And I can trace this orientation to my mother who was also an introvert by orientation. And my mother told me my grandmother and grandfather were also like her, suggesting that they were introverts. And so, I will be tempted to say that it is something inherent in the family.

I think I am a type of person always very serious, quiet, and modest about things in my relationship. I tend to be a bit gentle, sympathetic, and supportive of friends and colleagues. I like to care for others and to help them in a practical way, and that made me to go in for a career as a social worker until I resigned from the job to enter religious life. I was happy to have taken the Myers Briggs test which affirmed my orientation. I know I tend to be somewhat reserved in my feelings and at the same time I can have strong reactions to situations and events. It would seem to me that I am like the perfectionist type as described in enneagram as well. In all my work I like quiet time for concentration. And I always like careful details not just sweeping statements. I do not like my work to be interrupted. My preference in this theory of psychological types reads ISFJ.

The process by which the consciousness of a person becomes individualized or different from other people is known as individuation. The goal of individuation is knowing oneself as completely as possible, or self-consciousness.

Behaviorists such as B.F Skinner, Joseph Wolpe and others have developed sophisticated techniques for influencing behavior of persons as well as animals. They try to explain human activity without recourse to terms referring to consciousness, such as reward or satisfaction. Instead, they invoke a circular argument, stating that behavior is shaped by reinforcers. A reinforcer is any consequence to action which strengthens, that is increases the probability of the recurrence of a response. To an observer who is not a behaviorist, the reinforcing stimulus may look suspiciously like a reward or a pleasant experience, the behaviorist prefers to avoid such subjectivistic terms. Healthy personality, according to a behavioristic view, calls for competence and self-control- the ability to suppress action that no longer yields positive reinforcers, and to learn action that is successful in attaining the good things. Such rapid adaptability is mediated by the ability to discern the contingencies, or rules implicit in nature or in society, according to which needs are gratified and dangers averted.

Considering myself as an introverted person, before change, growth, and development can take place in me, I have to be conscious of what I am (self - awareness) by revisiting my unconscious (reservoir) so that I can modify my behavior that has been defined as personal, or social painfully, troublesome, undesirable, or unacceptable.

Knowing myself as ISFJ, I'm aware of my strengths and my weaknesses. So, if I want to grow and develop, in other words for conversion to take place in me, then I have to have my attention balanced. It is possible that that I, as ISFJ I live very much in the present and may have difficulty seeing events in global terms or

anticipating outcomes of a situation. I can be caught up in my daily grind and unending work around me. I can easily become overworked, doing everything to be sure that the tasks are complete in a meticulous manner. To be able to grow spiritually, I may need to work on my fear, withdrawal, attachment to things like work, sentimentality, over-protectiveness, inappropriate control, judging others, emptiness, dependence, abstract, coldness, distrust rigidity, perfectionism. Impatience with complications worry over anticipated problems may have to be checked too if I am to allow growth or conversion to occur.

Starting with my stages of life, I was in a state of undifferentiated wholeness. And as I grew up I was shaped by social, economics, religious, historical, political, cultural, environmental conditions into a fully differentiated, balanced, and unified personality as I have it today. The personality of an individual is destined to individuate just as surely as the body is destined to grow. But just as the body needs proper food and exercise for healthy growth, so my personality needs proper experiences and education for healthy individuation.

I had to die to self in order to grow. I went through tension and crisis of life whether undergoing conversion, suffering loss and bereavement of parents and relations, or a host of other eventualities, all presented to me a painful and bewildering demand that I had to die to the existing ego form and get into a new interaction of the two great constitutive forces, of oneness and separateness (Pargament, 2021).

The past life that I lived as a child always with my mother and sisters and which nearly affected my socialization and personal identity has made me to be more conscious this time around. Individuation or differentiation from my mother and sisters was difficult and self-identity and role playing were achieved much late (Feifer, 2024). All these contributed in the formation of my self-esteem which I often think is not very good enough self-esteem. And that is why as a helper I pay attention on family education and family therapy most especially about parenting culture, to pay attention to separation and individuation at the appropriate time so that children and adolescents can find their identity among their peers and mature properly.

Spirituality has much to do with the human identity. To borrow the words of Andrian Van Kaam, my whole being – the situated self, vital self, functional self, and spirit self are part of a mystery, and all are in the process of transcending the human self or identity. St. Augustine in his confessions said, “I have tested you, now I hunger and thirst for more you touch me, and I burned for your peace.”

The growth of my person is the progressive liberation of desire. I have the desire of transforming my human identity in a progress which comes from the first

cry which can be of infant desire to the final liberation of desire in union with God (Ananta, 2018). Desire is fully liberated when my person comes to the deepest self, where my identity is at one with God in who I live and move. I am convinced that desire is not an emptiness but a fullness in relation to God. The desire whereby I am drawn to the another is partly constitutive of who I am. My self-identity is in the mystery that I call God. I become who I am to the extent that this mystery is working on me, and changing me.

For me, looking at myself as I am with my theory of psychological types as ISFJ, being spiritual consists in being myself and accepting myself, and to be wanting to excel in healthy personhood and salvation is to find out who I am and to discover my true self. Everything living true to its nature is worth of its creator. Only God knows the secret of my identity and he alone can make me who I am.

My true human self-identity is spirituality itself for it is embedded in the carbon self of me with God and is made manifest when the conditions are favorable. My spirituality is kept hidden in my identity which is only released from God's love and mercy.

If I become myself and not the self, I had always thought of becoming then a relationship between human maturity and spiritual development is already on the way to being established. My psychological human maturation paves the way and promotes my spiritual development (Hariharan, 2020). For instance, the strengths of my ISFJ promote and effect changes in my spirituality. And in a like manner, my weaknesses in the psychological types if nothing is done to improve upon them will bring down the level of my spirituality. Anything material, physical which is good for the body, is good for the mind. And anything good for psychology can be good for spiritual development Hariharan, 2020). Pride for instance can destroy my body and if the body is destroyed then there can't be anything spiritual. The presence of pride eliminates that of humility. Then if I 'm delivered from detachment to my own work and my own reputation, I discover that true love and joy are only possible when I pay no attention to my own life and reputation and my own perfection that I am at least completely free to serve God in perfection for his own sake alone. My strive for love is God, and my true identity is love. Selflessness is the true self I seek, which is sanctify if it can be obtained, is the way to eternity.

Biological inheritance such as the gene can contribute greatly to my behavior. For instance, I sometimes act very much like my mother. And as I said earlier on in the work, inherited the attitude orientation of my mother as an introvert, and a bit of that of my father. My father was hardworking and a kind of a perfectionist. I see a combination of all that in me and that made up my personal identity and the way I function. Environment is also very powerful in contributing to

shape heredity. Despite my biological make-up, environmental influences also help the process of change in my behavior and functioning as a person. When I went into seminary life (both the minor and senior seminary), I was shaped by the studies, the seminary community life, friends around and so on. I came out of the seminary now with an integrated self-identity with which I first entered the seminary (Brandt, 2019). My way of looking at things and doing things is changed, and since then change and growth continue to take place in me as I experience different life situations both psychological and spiritual (Bergins, Payne, 2019).

The self-concept is a very important topic some people would always want to have discussed, and I am one of such people. There are differences who believe about what the self-concept is (Kendra, 2022).. There are those believe the self-concept should include an executive self that directs behavior, or the self as a knower, while others argue that the self-concept should be restricted to the views an individual holds about himself or herself or the self as an object of knowledge. There are several aspects of the self that one can talk about, but I wish to focus my attention on particularly important aspect of the self-concept, namely self-esteem which is the individual's overall evaluation of himself or herself (Branden, 2021).

When I assess any aspect of myself favorably, I experience an overall rise in self-esteem, and consequent good feelings. When I assess any aspect of myself unfavorably, I experience an overall drop in self-esteem, and consequent bad feelings. In this work, I intend to discuss my own self-esteem and how that does influence the ministry that I do. I shall be looking at my self-esteem in these dimensions-parental acceptance, relationship, competence, passion for life and a pastoral look.

One of the reasons why I have decided to discuss this topic is that as a assistant of God's people, I have come to the realization that if I 'm to function effectively, I have to know myself, who am i? And I think self-esteem is one of the areas in which I can get to know myself (Gary, 2021). The search for my self - image will also help give me a clear image of God as I do ministry.

Parental Acceptance

Generally speaking, I may not classify myself as someone with high self-esteem but just a good enough self-esteem. I say this simple because I feel as a child I did not receive enough or good enough parenting from childhood into adulthood. And as a result of that the self-esteem that I developed through the process of socialization did not give me enough of the foundational self-esteem that I needed to build on. The foundational self-esteem is always based on the emerging true self or the authentic expression of the feeling, sensation, and needs (Miller, 2024). I grew up with my mother and my father who was working down in the south eventually

retired and came to live with the family. I was fifteen years old by then, and my father blamed my mother for spoiling us (myself and my sisters) during the period he was away from the family. I guess, to get his wife and spoiled children (according to him) to behave well, he became such a difficult man that he never tolerated or accepted any of our failures. I became anxious and afraid of the outcome of whatever I did because of the blame I would get (Brett, 2021). I became sensitive to failure and rejection, to have low tolerance for frustration, to take a long time to recover following disappointments, and to have a pessimistic view of life.

When I lost my father as a teenager while in the minor seminary, I kind of faced life in a defensive way. In order to develop an authentic secondary self-esteem, I had to work hard to rework that weak and faulty foundation self-esteem formed. I became a very hardworking person, and to be truthful to myself, the energy with which I worked, I could have noticed an anger and anxiety in my person (Rohen, 2024). Are these elements part of my person now? I will find it difficult to quickly claim the answer, no. The reworking however, has not remedied completely or perfected my self-esteem, though through authentic, respectful relationship I did recover a good percentage of the lost true self. I would not have been able to improve upon my not good enough self-esteem if I kept on with the agenda of my father which insisted on certain feelings or behaviors and forbidding others. The false self-defended me from my father's judgement and thus assured his acceptance. I must admit that my father did possess some good qualities and strengths but as my topic (self-esteem) is concern, I find his contribution to the formation of my self-esteem and person to be just the way I said it. Wholeheartedly, he wished us well and wanted us to be of the best personality possible. But he probably was not aware of the psychological consequences that would follow later.

Relationship

My relationship with my mother unlike that of my father helped me to re-establish myself and develop an authentic good enough foundational and secondary self-esteem (Schab, 2022). My mother was a responsible and respectful woman in the family but probably not when my father was still alive. When my father was still alive my mother was not the all-powerful figure for us, the children. My father made us (both his wife and children) to be irresponsible, and misunderstood. My mother worked hard and sacrificed to correct that image.

My mother was open and encouraging, and she would often tell us to master courage and to do something in our own way. Through her relationship I enjoyed a fairly good self-esteem in which I could discover, accept, and experience myself freely about my thoughts, feelings, dreams and fears.

My mother wanted us (myself and my sisters) to develop in such a way that without her relationship, we could still maintain our self-esteem. I saw my mother to be someone who did want to help but we should not be an attachment or co-dependent. I think this kind of self-esteem. And of course, the self-esteem that will be developed will be the good enough self-esteem type.

Competence

In my development into adulthood my mother had always been seen in the family as my model. I must say she helped and influenced my life in various ways. One of such ways is, she helped me to have confidence in myself and, thus developed competence. Competence here is understood in terms of my experience of achievement and success in meeting personal and social goals and expectations (Schnitker, William, Medenwaldt, 2021). I needed confidence in my ability to learn what needed to be learned in order to function completely. I think my mother did help me but my father I will find it difficult to say he did. However, as the beloved child of theirs, I kept on the struggle to maintain self-esteem (Miller, 2024) if I couldn't meet the normal expectations of parents, teachers or other significant in life. From experience I can say that the competences I discovered in me did help me to feel called to assist others in their daily struggles.

Passion for Life

As an adolescent still in the minor seminary I had passion for life that I might be able in future to assist God's people to find real peace and happiness. It was this dream or passion in me that mobilized my energy and enthusiasm to the kind of structured life that I now live. I should say here that I do feel good myself because I think I do discover a meaning that transcend my own wants, needs and personal satisfaction (Brett, 2021).

Pastoral

I think as a child all the religious stories, education etc., all informed me of faith in a loving God which resulted in a positive self-esteem. My self-esteem is related to the unconscious God representations, I formed through my childhood interaction with my parents, the ideas I learned through socialization in the family, school, and society. And the experience of God in my life. The unconscious representations of God and self, do have the strongest impact of self-esteem in me. As I encounter different people in my ministry, I at times realize that I have a faulty God representation as a result of my negative God representation.

My mother has been very instrumental in the formation of my self-esteem. And in my theologizing and doing ministry, I often will like to have God spoken of in a soft and gentle manner as a caring mother who can relate well with the children than the sovereign male over his dependent wife and children. I like to say here that even in the Hebrew Scripture we can see God imaged as mother (Is 66.13), as a woman giving birth (Is

42.14) etc. Just as gender assumptions pervade the parent-child relationship, I think also gender matters too, slant religious beliefs. And exclusively male God perpetuates a male-dominated hierarchy. As long as one gender which is assumed inferior suffers injustice and often practices self-rejection. The one assumed superior suffers from ego inflation. And if this is projected onto the God of faith, patriarchal hierarchy will continue. God is male and male is God.

I did suffer a kind of inferiority complex as a child in the hands of a male dominated family and I struggled to get out of that inferiority complex which I may call low or not good enough self-esteem. During my days as a student and now as a religious, it has always been my wish to help people develop a sound and a balanced good enough self-esteem. And I have noticed in me I 'm always very conscious of this and as much as possible to respect the feelings of others. To use the common language, I know what it is to speak of high self-esteem and low self-esteem. So, in doing ministry I make sure that I fight in a gentlemanly way all forms of injustices which keep people's self-esteem low. I should think that people with high self-esteem sometimes tend to oppress others in some sense, and I always refers to the experience I had in my family. However, it may not be true in some other cases.

I find it hard to understand, if man dominate the woman and the siblings, how can we say that God created humankind in the image of Godself. In the image of God, God created them, male and female created them (Gen 1.27). The two should be equal then, not one lording it over the over the other. None is inferior to the other, neither is one superior to the other. So, for me to be able to function well as a helper, my self-esteem should not be low type self-esteem but good enough self-esteem. It should be moderate or be in the middle way. It is bad I think, to approach people with a very high self-esteem. The tendency is, always to put everybody down. Low self-esteem is not good. With low esteem, I will function inadequately as a helper because I will feel incompetence.

Sometimes, I think of myself as one who lacks faith in one's value and responsibilities, that is, a lack of faith in self. I think of God as a loving God but at times I ask myself, am I able to love myself as I should or to receive that loving acceptance at the deepest level of my being? My religious faith in the goodness of life is only complete when I build it on my personal faith in the intrinsic value and beauty of myself. Religious or spiritual faith does not contribute to self-esteem unless it grows out of and along with faith in my true self.

CONCLUSION

I think I do let myself down and raise myself high in a number of ways, and I often evaluate myself in those situations in terms of self-esteem. I have been trying to look at myself closely on understanding the

dynamics of faith in self and self-esteem. I developed a foundational self-esteem out of my early parent-child relationship which I felt was not good enough self-esteem. During my school and seminary years of formation I suffered also but not so much of the good enough self-esteem but low self-esteem.

As someone doing ministry, I try to cope with situations and avoid conflict involving anxiety and fear, which prevent growth in the self and self-esteem.

The God images formed in the early years of my life as well as the theology and language which dominate in institutional religions, play a central role in the ideology out of which I value or disvalue myself. I have realized that in many cases self-esteem is destroyed by gender assumptions than is built by gender matters (Brandt, 2019).

As I interact with people in my ministry my self-esteem is on test each moment of time and it does help me to know better myself with the help of my supervisors and directors, thus enhancing my personal growth and good relationship with the people with whom I work. I keep on studying the self in me and constantly working on my self-esteem. It is a continuous struggle (Pargament, 2021) which does not end today nor will it end tomorrow.

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