

Exploring Continuity and Change: Personal Identity Formation from Childhood to Adulthood

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Abstract. Individuals' initial conceptualizations of the world are typically formed during their childhood years, a period whose influence is notably enduring. This fundamental understanding tends to reach maturation during adolescence, though it remains subject to continuous evolution and reshaping throughout adulthood, influenced by a myriad of personal experiences. The complex interplay of continuity and change in identity formation underscores the multifaceted and dynamic nature of personal identity. This recognition can enhance nuanced understanding of self and others, potentially enriching interpersonal relationships, self-development, and overall life satisfaction. By appreciating the intricate perspectives, maintaining a stable core identity and accommodating the potential for change, individuals can better navigate the complexities of life. This equilibrium provides a crucial framework for individuals to forge their unique life paths, while adjusting to various special expectations and personal growth stages.

Keywords: Personal Identity; Continuity; Changeable.

1. Introduction

Individuals' initial conceptualizations of the world are typically formed during their childhood years, a period whose influence is notably enduring. This fundamental understanding tends to reach maturation during adolescence, though it remains subject to continuous evolution and reshaping throughout adulthood, influenced by a myriad of personal experiences. Identity formation, as delineated by Sokol (2009, p.14), is a process characterized by the development of a seamless and cogent understanding of one's self and one's connection to the world.

The concept of social identity is associated with the roles an individual assumes within society. This role embodies the individual's societal value or those facets of the individual deemed crucial by society. Identity is therefore suggestive of an individual's clear comprehension of their societal role, how they are necessitated by society, and the extent of societal assistance they can avail themselves of (Terry et al., 1999).

A clear cognizance of one's value can bestow a profound sense of security, recognition, and belonging upon the individual. Such feelings are often pursued with great intensity by humans, as a fundamental component of their existence as social entities (Baker, 2015). Identity plays a foundational role in addressing the "three fundamental questions of life", personal identity responds to the question "Who am I?", social identity to "Where do I come from?", and the significance encapsulated within social identity addresses "Where am I going?" (McKeown et al., 2016, p.369)

2. Understanding Personal Identity

From an objective vantage point, an individual's identity is constituted by their choices, actions, and social relationships. Nevertheless, from a subjective standpoint, the construction of the self may not be represented by a single perspective. Instead, the self may comprise a multiplicity of voices - potentially even collective ones - emanating from others, belief systems, cultural values, and personal experiences (Phillips & Moeschberger, 2016, p.122).

A lucid comprehension of the self can provide a definitive direction for forward movement. As Aldler (1931) posits, humans exist within a framework of meaning. The societal identity endorsed by the self inherently embodies specific meaning, and personal identification with this identity also

infuses one's life with significance. This sense of purpose facilitates individuals in their pursuit of personal objectives. Once a direction is established, individuals are likely to pursue it unflinchingly.

Venturing into this intricate terrain, the study grapples with a pressing philosophical dilemma as, if the current self and the ten-year-old self hold divergent viewpoints on a range of issues, and if the worldview has undergone significant transformation due to a host of long-term experiences, can one still be recognized as the same person? Despite its apparent simplicity, this question unfurls a spectrum of profound implications related to the essence of personal identity, continuity, and change, consequently serving as a crucial foundation for the subsequent analytical discourse (Parfit, 1971). The cardinal objective of demystifying the inherent complexities within this question is to shed light on the intricate interplay of continuity and change that typifies the formation of personal identity. Through the analysis and interpretation of these dynamics, the study aspires to augment both scholarly and general understanding of this pivotal philosophical construct, delivering invaluable insights into the nature of the self, personal development, and the overarching human experience. Ultimately, the findings extracted from this investigation contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of personal identity, providing a robust foundation for further exploration and study in this captivating field of inquiry.

Personal identity is an extremely abstract concept that can be analyzed from various perspectives, with each angle offering unique insights. Erikson delineated the process of identity formation into eight stages based on age and societal expectations, while Marcia took it a step further, dividing each stage into four parts according to an individual's level of understanding about their own identity. They depict identity as a series of developmental stages linked by transitions.

In contrast to the individual-centric emphasis of previous theories, Henri Tajfel and John Turner's social identity theory accentuates the impacts of social groups and others, positing that individual identity evolves through social interactions and experiences and is perpetually reshaped.

Simultaneously, the subjective choices made by an individual also form a significant foundation for personal identity. John Locke's theories concentrate on the role of individual consciousness and memory in constructing a sense of continuity in identity. Locke further postulates that individuals should introspectively examine the roles their experiences and memories play, as self-reflection can aid in sculpting a more cohesive identity.

Due to the constraints of their historical context and the multifaceted nature of identity, these theories inherently bear certain limitations. However, when interconnected, they can afford a glimpse into the complexity and dynamism of personal identity. These perspectives demonstrate the diverse influences that the surrounding environment, individual consciousness, and social interactions wield on identity formation.

Personal identity is a fluid and transformative process, shaped by the confluence of internal and external factors, personal experiences, and social interactions. It is simultaneously a personal journey and a social process, a narrative constantly spun and revised throughout our lives. The exploration of person's formative identity transcends academic investigation; every individual's perception of their identity influences their environment and others, shaping personal relationships and social standing. Comprehending the multidimensional complexity of personal identity can significantly mitigate conflict, foster the connection between individuals and the world, and facilitate deeper self-understanding.

3. Continuity and Change in Personal Identity

3.1 Exploration of Continuity in Personal Identity

According to the initial exploration of the fundamental theory of personal identity emphasized the multiplicity of identity and its constant evolution between maintaining continuity and experiencing change. It indicates that continuity and change lay the foundation for the formation of personal identity. Understanding the occurrence of continuity and the degree of change is essentially understanding the process of identity formation.

Continuity is understood as the features an individual maintains over time. This suggests that, while undergoing various changes and transformations, the individual still retains some persistent features and identity. This perspective can be linked with John Locke's theory of psychological continuity (Locke, 1989). John Locke's theory of psychological continuity stresses that, as an individual undergoes changes, memory, consciousness, and experiences form a continuous self. In his theory, change is a constant norm, and the continuity of the individual is maintained by persistent memory and experience. Memory and experience alter an individual's cognition of their own identity, and this cognition change is continuous (Locke, 1989). Consequently, Locke likens human identity to a flowing river – continuous and incessantly changing. An individual's identity does not fundamentally change due to different stages or states in life but rather maintains continuity through persistent memory and experience (Locke, 1989).

3.2 Exploration of Change in Personal Identity

Experience, maturity, and learning can influence the change in personal identity. During the evolution of personal identity, changes in social environment (such as a career change, relocation to a new city, etc.) impact an individual's identity cognition, leading to identity change. Two important scholars, Erikson and Marcia, made significant contributions in this respect.

Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980) divided personal identity cognition into eight stages and four sections based on age and cognitive level, highlighting the impact of social situations and personal states on personal identity cognition. As an individual experiences changes in different social situations and personal states, their identity and states are divided into different stages (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980).

Additionally, theories proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986) suggest that an individual's identity is formed through social interaction, and when the social environment changes, the individual's identity also changes. This implies that personal identity is closely connected with the social environment, and changes in the social environment can impact personal identity.

3.3 Summary

From the above discussion, It can be concluded that personal identity is a complex interplay of continuity and change. Continuity emphasizes the enduring presence of an individual's core self, while change reflects the dynamics and evolution of identity shaped by experiences, environment, and growth.

The continuity of personal identity reflects the enduring core self within the individual. These features might include values, personal beliefs, and basic personality traits. These core features are relatively stable throughout an individual's life and play an important role in self-cognition and behavioral manifestation.

However, personal identity also undergoes changes influenced by external factors. Various environmental factors in experiences, maturity, and learning processes shape an individual's identity. Changes in social situations, new experiences, and learning opportunities might lead to adjustments in self-cognition and the evolution of identity. Such transformation is quite common and is often considered a historical norm, which results in some individuals struggling to adapt to new identities in new environments.

Therefore, understanding personal identity must consider both the enduring core and external influences. Even though the individual's core features demonstrate persistence, it is necessary also recognize the significant role of changes in the external environment in shaping and developing personal identity. An individual's identity is a dynamic process that needs to maintain a balance between the internal core and external influences.

4. Implications of Identity Formation for Daily Life

The exploration of continuity and change in identity formation extends beyond the theoretical, bearing significant implications for daily life. The continuity aspect of personal identity provides a

stable core that informs an individual's decisions, behaviors, and relationships (Atchley, 1989). This persistent thread of identity, embedded with enduring values, beliefs, and interests, lends predictability and coherence to one's life trajectory. The enduring elements of personal identity could influence a wide range of life choices, from career paths that align with deep-seated interests to the maintenance of lifelong friendships that resonate with long-standing values.

On the other hand, changes in identity reflect the capacity for personal growth and adaptation (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). Such changes are essential in fostering resilience and flexibility, allowing individuals to navigate new environments, circumstances, or stages of life with effectiveness and ease. The evolving aspects of identity can alter personal perceptions and societal interactions, contributing to an individual's capacity to grow, learn, and adapt to changing surroundings.

Taken together, the concepts of continuity and change in identity formation underscore the complexity and dynamism of personal identity. Recognizing the interplay of these elements could promote a more nuanced understanding of self and others, thereby enhancing interpersonal relations, self-development, and overall life satisfaction. This understanding further emphasizes the importance of both preserving one's core identity and embracing the potential for change, both of which are vital for navigating the complexities of life.

5. Conclusion

The complex interplay of continuity and change in identity formation, as revealed in this discussion, underscores the multifaceted and dynamic nature of personal identity. This recognition can enhance nuanced understanding of self and others, potentially enriching interpersonal relationships, self-development, and overall life satisfaction. By appreciating the intricate perspectives, maintaining a stable core identity and accommodating the potential for change, individuals can better navigate the complexities of life. This equilibrium provides a crucial framework for individuals to forge their unique life paths, while adjusting to various special expectations and personal growth stages. Back to the beginning question, "Am I still the same person as I was when I was ten and now?". This study response it with highlighting attention on the perspective. As mentioned, from the perspective of identity continuity, "my" memories are connected with who "I" was at the age of ten, and "my" consciousness has not changed; "I" am the same person as my ten-year-old self. However, considering the variability of identity, there are differences between my current self and my ten-year-old self in terms of social identity, physiological age, and experiential insights; "I" am no longer the same person "I" was at ten. Further research on identity formation can draw inspiration from this understanding, fostering a more comprehensive approach that accepts birth the persistence and the evolution of personal identity.

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