

Help! Who Am I? I Don't Know Who I Am?

7 Signs That You Suffer From an Identity Crisis: By Harley Therapy

Who Am I? With the growing popularity of social media, these days more than ever we are called upon to show off 'who we are'. And while things like Facebook encourage the best of us to exaggerate our good bits while glossing over the bad, for some of us, our inability to be authentic is more than an online issue. It is a struggle in every part of our life.

Is this you? Are you plagued by the thought of, "Who am I?" Do you find yourself doing what you think you 'should' do, or what allows you to keep up with others, because you just can't tell what you like and don't like? If so, you might be suffering from a very real "identity crisis" that deserves your attention. What is identity, really?

Our identity is the way we define ourselves. This includes our values, our beliefs, and our personality. It also encompasses the roles we play in our society and family, our past memories, and our hopes for the future, as well as our hobbies and interests. Most of these things can, of course, change. We can switch jobs, move to a different community, or experience life-changing circumstances that challenge our beliefs. So then how do we know our identity is or isn't real and 'stable'? To have a solid identity we need to be able to see that we are the same person in our past as we are now, and as we will be in the future. We need to feel the same no matter what our environment.

It doesn't mean that we act the same all the time, not at all. We might know we are moody, or that we act differently under stress, or depending on who we are around. We are not, for example, going to act the same around a romantic partner as we act around our parents or colleagues. But even with these variances in our behavior and moods, we feel we are the same person underneath.

A person without a sense of identity, however, can instead feel a disconnect from who they have been, and/or no sense as to who they will become next. They don't feel they are the same, but feel a different person sometimes from day to day. Some report looking in the mirror and finding it hard to believe it is them looking back.

Of course we can all feel like we don't know who we are when we experience a challenging time in life. If we lose our job, or a loved one, if we have to move countries and leave our family behind, all these things can leave us so bereft we temporarily lose sight of ourselves. But a real identity crisis is different. A real identity crisis is when we don't form a proper sense of self as an adolescent (see the section below "why do I lack a sense of identity"). It results in certain ongoing behaviors throughout our adult life.

7 Signs That You Lack A Sense Of Identity

Not sure if you are just going through a rough patch or really are suffering from an unformed identity? Check for these seven factors that show you might not have a stable sense of self.

1. You change with your environment.

If you work at one job and everyone is studious and quiet, you will be studious and quiet. If your next job requires you to be chatty and upbeat, it will soon seem as if you were always the social type. It's as if you are more formed by your environment than your own choices and personality.

2. Relationships mold you.

Not only are you likely the sort who feels entirely bereft without a relationship, when you do get into one, you change your hobbies and appearance to match your partner. You will convince yourself that what they like is what you really like, but you just didn't know it, even if you have just gone from wearing black and listening to classical to wearing cowboy boots and listening to country. And if your partner doesn't like things you'll give them up, down to changing your friends sometimes.

3. You often have radical shifts in your opinion.

This can include big things like political and religious beliefs, or just your opinion on popular culture and things like food and fashion. You might even find you change your mind from day to day and never know what you'll agree with next. Whether you realize it or not you will be changing your opinion to give others what they want. Even if you are disagreeing with someone, on a certain level you ascertain they like a challenge so present an opinion that allows for debate.

4. You don't like being asked about yourself.

It makes you uncomfortable when people ask too many questions about yourself. Perhaps you have developed good tactics for avoiding this, like changing the subject or turning questions around on to the other person, then just agreeing with them.

5. You get bored easily.

At the heart of not having an identity is often a restlessness, as if you are afraid to settle down in case you commit to the wrong thing that makes your life worse instead of better. The truth is that as much as you want to know who you are, there is a fear of knowing, too.

6. Your relationships don't run deep.

If you aren't sure who you are, you can have a fear that others will find out that you are actually nothing much and then not like you. So there can be a lot of self-protection going on that prevents real connection with others, even if you tend to attract a lot of friends and are often in a relationship. You will likely suffer a fear of intimacy. You might also have troubles holding on to a relationship or social circle for too long, or find you hang around with people who control you and tell you what to do.

7. Deep down you don't trust yourself.

If you don't know who you are, and you have surprised yourself in the past with your own quick decisions and sudden changes of opinion, you can feel that you can't even trust yourself.

Why do I lack a sense of identity?

Psychologists connect a lack of identity to our childhoods. If we didn't hit the right markers of psychological and emotional growth, we can be left an adult who lacks a real idea of who they are. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson believed the environment a child grew up in was crucial to forming their sense of self-awareness and self. He identified eight stages to a human's psychosocial growth that all build on each other, each of which offers us a positive outcome if we experience them properly, but leave us struggling if we don't.

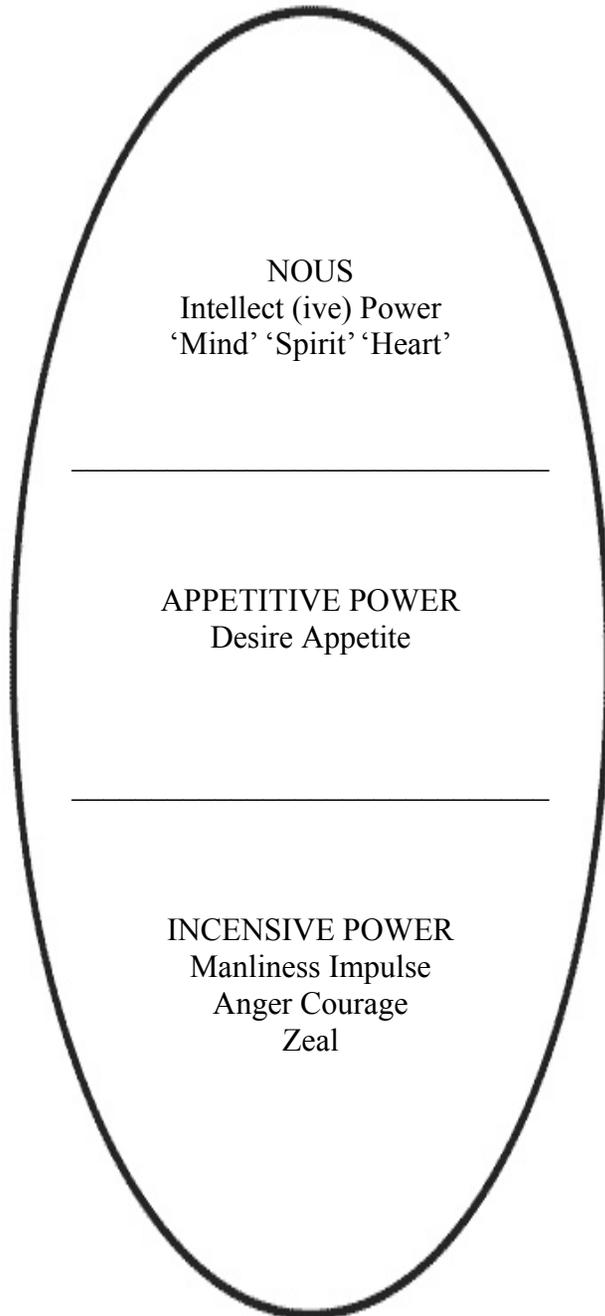
Erikson coined the phrase 'identity crisis'. For him, it occurred during the teenage years, during a stage he called the Identity vs. Role Confusion level, where we learn to be true to ourselves. But if we have not had the healthy environment required to learn the crucial lessons of the earlier levels of our childhood, it will be far less likely that as a teen we can find the success we need to learn to be true to ourselves. Instead we will enter the adult stages of emotional growth at a deficit and confused about who we are.

Another important level when it comes to identity that Erikson talks about is from birth to one year old, what he calls the 'Basic Trust vs Basic Mistrust' stage. Our caretakers help us develop a sense of trust. If they don't, we are left to grow up believing the world is unreliable and inconsistent – which can result in feeling we ourselves are unpredictable and untrustworthy.

More recently Attachment theory has also supported this view, proposing that creating a healthy attachment with a caregiver as an infant determines our character as an adult.

THE HUMAN BEING: PHYSIOLOGY OF THE SOUL AND BODY

THE SOUL



NOETIC GIFTS
(attributes of soul
'In His Image')

THE BODY
(Male and Female)

THE SENSES
(Unnatural Passions)
(inherently irrational)

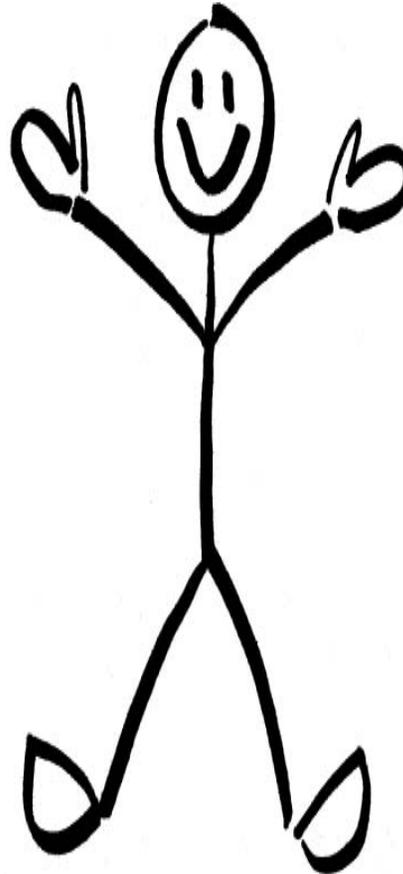
NATURAL PASSIONS
(subjectable to reason)
('gifts' 'medicine')

FREEDOM

REASON

LOVE

CAPACITY FOR
THE INFINITE



SIGHT

HEARING

TASTE

SMELL

TOUCH

HUNGER

PLEASURE

PAIN

FEAR

SADNESS

WEARINESS

SEXUAL ATTRACTION

EMOTION