Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-Day Adventists

A BIBLICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELF-CONCEPT

by

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INTRODUCTION

William James says: "Whenever two people meet there are really six people present. There is each person as he sees himself, each person as the other person sees him, and each person as he really is." (Attwater:1990:163)

Is it then at all possible to discover the "person" in each of us? We have hidden ourselves so successfully in the layers of our public, private and ideal selves that our unique essence, the core of our "selves", created in the image of God may be very difficult to discover, except for the fact that we are "...created in the image of God,... endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator - individuality, power to think and to do." (White:1952:17)

This paper will endeavour to use psychological and Biblical definitions and understandings of the self-concept in an attempt to suggest possible ways to the Christian teacher to better understand and aid himself and his students in developing healthy self-concepts, willing to take on the responsibility of "true education" - directing and being directed to sources of truth.

DEFINING THE SELF-CONCEPT

We have a rather special relationship with ourselves. We are both subject and object. We are self-conscious or self-aware. "... the same person, the same self, is both subject and object, knower and known, thinker and thought about, secr and seen, ..." (Gross:1992:607) What is the self and the self-concept? The following definitions represent diversified thought processes.

"... to Murphy (1947), 'the self is the individual as known to the individual", and Burns (1980) defines it as , 'the set of attitudes a person holds towards himself." (Gross:1992:607) "The self-concept is basically each person's own subjective view or image of him- or herself as a person." (Trenholm & Jenson:1992:118) It is a "system of affective and cognitive structures (schemas) about the self that lends coherence to individuals' self-relevant experiences." (Baron & Byrne:1992:133) "The overall awareness we have of ourselves, consisting of all those perceptions of 'I' and 'me', together with the feelings, beliefs, and values associated with them." (Attwater:1990:149)

Many psychologists prefer to speak of "multiple selves". "...the self-concept includes hundreds, perhaps thousands of self-perceptions in varying degrees of clarity and intensity that we have acquired in growing up." (Attwater:1990:152) It is necessary to identify the components of the self-concept. Traditionally the following three components are included:

    i.   Self-image (Ego identity);
    ii.   Self-esteem (Self-regard);
    iii.   Ideal-self (Idealized Self-image). (Gross:1992:607-609)

A personal, integrated definition of self-concept thus reads as follows: By using the law of God as a mirror and the cross of Christ as my hope, I see both what I am, objectively and factually, and what I can become through the grace of Jesus Christ who saw such worth in me that while I was yet a sinner, He died for me.

In evaluating myself realistically, I find that while God has given me my own specific potential, I also have traits that could be the cause of my downfall. Through a study of God's word in which He communicates to me His will and reveals His character, I grow and mature as a human being, restored in the image of God, to be loosened from the baggage of the past, I accept God's gift of forgiveness which frees me to live as myself within my relationships both in the present and in the future. How does this awareness of who I am, my self-concept, develop?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-CONCEPT

Self is a process, not a structure. "The idea of self can only develop if the individual can 'get outside himself in such a way as to become an object to himself'." (Mead, 1934 in Gross:1992:610); using the mirror of God's grace.

Developing a self-concept is an important task in early childhood. The baby has to recognize and realize that he is a separate being. This can best be shown by looking at a baby's perception of himself in a mirror. Initially they give no sign that they perceive themselves as independent or as causal agents, but gradually they understand how their actions affect their reflected images, and that their own and other people's actions are separate. Gradually they are able to distinguish between themselves and others. An internal and an external image of self develops. By age two they know they are distinct form other people but they still do not see themselves as others see them, because the self-concept is based on fleeting, sometimes inaccurate perceptions.

At school age children start seeing themselves as having unique and defining personal qualities. They gain a strong sense of their gender roles. Although they start middle school with a relatively shallow self-concept, they start selecting and integrating new discoveries about themselves, using their cognitive powers to bring into focus a picture of self that is sharp and unique.

The adolescent self-concept is influenced by psychological and social relationships. They are conscious of their self-awareness, know that people can think about their own experiences and this leads to increased self-consciousness and a sense of control. However, the boundaries of self-awareness and self-control need to be realized. In middle adolescence they recognize self-described inconsistencies and in late adolescence they reconcile the discrepancies in their descriptions and images of themselves. They start thinking in terms of stable, abstract, unifying characteristics. (Clarke-Stewart, Friedman & Koch:1985:605-607) "When this conception of a stable personality combines with a conception of stable beliefs, the mature adolescent has a complex, self-aware, and systematic understanding of self." (Damon & Hart, 1982 in Clarke-Stewart, Friedman & Koch"1985:607)

Thus children's self-concepts are formed from private reactions to themselves and the reactions from others who play significant roles in their lives. The crucial role that the teacher plays in the formation of the child's self-concept is evident. Teachers have a daily, direct influence on the socialization of the child. The mastery of developmental tasks and competence affects every part of the self. The sobering thought is that it is fairly resistant to change the self once it is established. The "looking-glass self" reflects everything.

"We derive our picture of ourselves through the picture we have of other people's picture of us... We build up a continuous and changing picture of ourselves out of our interaction with others." (Gross:1992:611)

The teacher is firmly at the centre of all four factors influencing the development of the self-concept:

    i.   Reaction of others;
    ii.   Comparison with others;
    iii.   Social roles;
    iv.   Identification. (Gross:1992:612-617)

"He who co-operates with the divine purpose in imparting to the youth a knowledge of God, and moulding the character into harmony with His does a high and noble work." (White:1952:19) Every Christian teacher should realize and take full responsibility for the influence they have on their students' lives. They, in partnership with the parents, should execute firm but reasoned control, while giving positive encouragement to independence in a warm and loving atmosphere. (Bee:1978:326) In an attempt to understand the self and ideas about the self-concept better let us trace some ideas about the self and the self-concept through the centuries.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THEORIES ABOUT THE SELF AND SELF-CONCEPT

Man has forever been philosophizing about his "relationship to himself". (Hoekema:1986:102) Primitive man projected his feelings and emotions onto nature. Upper and lower class Greeks had their very "Greek-like" gods. The cosmologists explained everything in terms of the universe. Pythagoras was the first philosopher to distinguish between the mind and the body. For Socrates the understanding of essences was all; Plato considered ideas or forms the ultimate reality, and Aristotle claimed that sensory experience was the source of all knowledge.

Descartes did not allow man a healthy self-concept because of his mechanical view of human behaviour. Locke postulated a more believing, imagining, reasoning and willing mind. Hume is the first philosopher to hint at individual differences because of each persons's unique patterns of emotions, but La Mettrie again brings man 'down' as a human animal to be understood only as a machine.

Hegel, as representative of the Rationalists, clearly shows the complexity of man in his dialectic view of human intellect, which involves a thesis (an idea), an antithesis (the opposite of that idea), and a synthesis (a compromise between the original idea and its opposite).

The Romantics emphasized inner, personal experience as is represented by Rousseau's famous view of man as born free and good but soon contaminated by society, therefore necessitating the guidance of the natural impulses of the "heart". Goethe viewed life as consisting of choices between conflicting forces. Nietzsche, who could be viewed as the first modern existentialist, agrees that many human desires are irrational, and that the basic human motive is the will to power, which could lead again to an unhealthy self-concept. Although

Kierkegaard questioned organized Christianity, he recognized that God needs to become a living, emotional reality in one's subjective experience, and that faith is vital.

The Structuralists did not last very long because of their view of man as a rigid experimental subject. They ignored psychological development, personality, learning, individual differences and practicality.

The impact of Darwin's publication of *Origin of Species* (1859) is well-known. Each person, whether evolutionist or Christian, must have an opinion of the effect of Darwin's theory on the human self-concept. The Functionalists again made man the subject of evolutionary, scientific study.

What can we say about Freud? Freud's pessimistic, deterministic view of man was founded in his differentiation between the id (pleasure principle), ego (reality principle), and superego (conscience), as well as his rigid psychosexual developmental stages. The fragile self-concept, always under attack from life (sex) and death (aggression) drives/instincts, at least has a whole host of defense mechanisms to help it cope in "real" life!

Pavlov, with his famous 'conditioned reflex' experiment, paves the way for Watson, the "father" of Behaviourism. Man is simplified into merely a stimulus-response reaction. Watson's following quote is one of the most famous in the history of psychology: "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select - a doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even into beggar man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and race of his ancestors." (1926:10) Any form of self-concept is given no room for existence. Skinner also only allows for a very mechanistic, controlled self-concept, easily reconditioned.

The Gestalt psychologists remind us again of how vulnerable the self-concept really is, with the important influence of the Gestalt laws or perceptual principles. Humanistic or Third-Force psychology, with contributions by Maslow, Rogers and Frankl to name a few, at least returned to man a bit of dignity, but now the opposite must be guarded against - the glorification of man, fully congruent and self-actualized, with a super-healthy self-concept. Humans should be studied as whole beings, and the search for meaning should be a very important motive. (Hergenhahn:1992) (Note Appendix A for a summary of some "modern" theories about the development of personality and self-concept. [Study Guide to Gross: 1993:109,110]) Secular man has always enjoyed intellectually philosophising about himself,and as can be seen, has produced many useful, thought-provoking ideas and hypotheses. Let us next compare these ideas with the Christian, Biblical approach.

A BIBLICAL/RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE ON THE SELF-CONCEPT

Gen 1:26,27 :   "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...' "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him:..."

The development of a religious sense of self is important if any form of "Christian living" is to be lived. We are not alone. We are helped in and through this process by God himself, His Son, the Holy Spirit, His Holy Word, and other human, heavenly inspired agents. A theology of the self-concept starts in Genesis 1 and ends in Revelation 22. A direct fact underlies this. "As 'self' reflects God's own nature, God's image becomes the essence of humanness. But when man draws himself away from God, a false picture of 'self' is manifest in his selfishness." (Provonsha:1988;10 in Mahlungulu: 1989:1) The Christian teacher has yet another function here: to be an example to the student, through the help of the Holy Spirit, through his teaching and his character - a view of God.

Robert Schuller, a foremost propagator of the self-esteem movement, is optimistic. "Once a person believes he is an 'unworthy sinner', it is doubtful if he can honestly accept the saving grace God offers in Christ", but he focuses on "the sacred right of every person to self-esteem." This basic right then permeates all spheres of life. "A theology of self-esteem also produces a theology ... of social ethics, and a theology of economics; and these produce a theology of government. It all rises from one foundation: the dignity of the person who was created in the image of God." (Adams:1986:21,22)

Both the Old and the New Testament contain numerous components of true Christ-like self-concepts. "In the redemptive process, ..., the image of God in man, which was perverted through the Fall, is being progressively renewed." (Hoekema:1986:106) The truths of the Psalms and the wisdom of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are essential renewal reminders for us today. (Ps 8:3-5; Prov 3:3)

The New Testament also speaks for itself. "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. (Rom 8:10) "Through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgement, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." (Rom 12:3) "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

It is this love for ourselves before love for others that causes the problem. Carl Rogers put it this way: "The central core of difficulty in people as I have come to know them ... is that in the great majority of cases they despise themselves, regard themselves as worthless and unlovable." (Hoekema:1986:105) Many humans have a problem with "things" that they think they need. Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' can serve as a basic example.

Higher or Self-Actualization Needs:	Self-actualization
Lower or Deprivation Needs:	Esteem
	Belongingness and Love
	Safety
	Physiological

Yet in Matthew 6 Jesus contrasts the "Gentile" philosophy of life with the Christian approach. "...,Jesus turns everything around and stands Maslow's pyramid on its apex: Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matt 6:33) (Adams:1986:45,46) The Christian

approach only asks a searching, genuine faith. If God is placed in the centre, both the lower and the higher needs are put into context.

Jesus' parables are other Biblical examples that present further clues to the puzzle of a Christian self-concept. The parable of the generous employer (Matt 20:1-16); the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30); the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37); and the parable of the forgiving father/prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) (Ryken:1974:300-311) The parables' simple, every-day realism provide valuable information for a seeking Christian trying to find the puzzle pieces of his fragmented self-concept. "All this implies that the Christian believer may have - and should have - a self-image that is primarily positive." "It involves giving God all the praise for what he by his grace has done and is still doing within us and through us." "Our self-image as Christians therefore must not be static but dynamic. The believer may never be satisfied with himself or herself. He or she must always be pressing on, in the strength of Christ, toward the good of Christian perfection. Christians should see themselves as new persons who are being progressively renewed by the Holy Spirit." (Hoekema:1986:110,111)

Roger Dudley's "*Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance*" study clearly shows that our young people need a better appreciation of their worth. He quotes a valuable statement from Ellen White: "The Lord is disappointed when His people place a low estimate upon themselves. He desires His chosen heritage to value themselves according to the price He has placed upon them. God wanted them else He would not have sent His Son on such an expensive errand to redeem them." (DA:668) (Dudley:1992:142)

By using Fowler's definition of faith, it becomes clear how "tangled" our belief in God and our self-concepts are.

> "People's evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others and world (as they construct them) as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence (as they construct them) and of shaping their lives' purposes and meanings, trusts and loyalties, in the light of the character of being, value and power determining the ultimate conditions of existence (as grasped in their operative images - conscious and unconscious of them)". (1981:92,93)

The following quote from Goethe sketches a very Christian principle: "Who takes another as he is makes him worse than he is. Who on the contrary treats another as if he already is what he ought to be, has activated him and inspired him to become what he ought to be." (Du Plooy, Griessel & Oberholzer:1983:56) "The best in modern psychology confirms the simple yet profound words of Jesus: But seek *first* his kingdom and his righteousness and *all these things* will be given to you as well. (Matt 6:33) (Mason:199?:9)

SOME COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY SELF-CONCEPT

The influence of the Christian teacher on the development of the student's self-concept is evident. Information is needed to be able to distinguish between the positive and the negative - some structure is needed to enable us to make more objective and realistic contributions based on a balanced, Christian "model".

This must be done by the "self" of the teacher. The expectations are high. We must be warm, loving and acceptant; demand academic perfection (to fit the potential of course) and good behaviour; show respect; allow for individual expression; refine and enforce limits, and most important - we must have high self-esteem ourselves! (Papalia & Olds:1992:279) In the area of self-concept we cannot help somebody in trouble if we are in trouble ourselves.

The teacher must help himself and his students to love themselves better. Meier, Minirth & Wichern states that children must have a healthy self-love, be given strategies to deal with guilt, and their importance to God must be stressed. (1982:153-157)

Modern, "non-Biblical" man has also recognized the necessity of a healthy self-concept. "Whether we want to value, accept, or change our bodies, we need first to change our minds. We have to redeem how we observe ourselves. Instead of searching for flaws, we must attempt to see ourselves objectively." (Rodin:1992:60)

Attwater makes the following suggestions for the attainment of healthy self-concept growth:

> * Visualize the self you'd like to be;
> * Change your perception of your social self:
>   - view it as a valuable source of new information to be evaluated objectively;
>   - put the emotional energy aroused by criticism to work for you, not against you;
>   - take positive steps to put the needed changes into action.
> * Achieve greater self-direction:
>   - become open to your own experience;
>   - become more accepting of others;
>   - be willing to recognize that one's self is always in a process of becoming.

(1990:160-167)

A Christian profile could be initiated using the following components suggested by Lawrence Crabb Jr., combining Biblical and psychological self-concept factors:

> 1. Responsibility for behaviour (Acts 5:1-11);
> 2. Thinking influences our behaviour and feelings (Rom 12:2);
> 3. Need for meaning and hope (Acts 17:22-34);
> 4. Need for love and social relationship (Rom 8:35-39);
> 5. Most things we do move toward a goal (Matt 11:28);
> 6. How we function in groups usually is based on our (unmet) needs for acceptance (Gal 2:11-13);
> 7. People basically are out for themselves but hate to admit that to themselves or others (Jer 17:5-10);
> 8. Personal authenticity: be who you are (Rom 12:6);
> 9. We are subject to environmental influence (Gen 1: 17-19,28)

(1977:52-55)

If the following characteristics of the self-actualizing person, as suggested by Humanist Abraham Maslow, could be "Christianized", we would have a very useful description of what some components of a healthy self-concept should be; and what the Christian teacher could cultivate in his students:

1. Self-acceptance, accepting others and human nature;
2. Spontaneity, simplicity and naturalness;
3. Task involvement;
4. The need for privacy;
5. Autonomy: being independent of culture and environment;
6. Consistent renewal of appreciation;
7. Peak experiences;
8. Social feeling;
9. Interpersonal relationships;
10. Discrimination between means and goals, and between good and evil;
11. A philosophical, benevolent sense of humour;
12. Creativity;

(Meyer, Moore & Viljoen:1989:364-367)

The following "theological" profile about the self, (Provonsha: 1988: 10), contains essential truths.

- The self is created by God into His image.
- The self is self-conscious and also conscious of other selves and God.
- To be a self is to exist in the community of selves.
- Selfhood is God's highest gift to humans.
- The human self to be subject to God's will and plan.
- Selfishness reflects a false self.
- Self needs to be humbled and brought under control of the Holy Spirit.
- The self grows better if it is extended to serve others.

Only if the self is "...humbled and brought under the control of the Holy Spirit" (White:1958:81), do we start approaching a healthy, congruent self-concept. "Only by such communion - the communion of mind with mind and heart with heart, of the human with the divine - can be communicated that vitalizing energy which it is the work of true education to impart. It is only life that begets life." (White:1952:84) The Christian teacher could be part of begetting this new life in his student.

CONCLUSION

"Only if Christians like (us) become concerned to do more than shake (our) heads over what is happening can we turn the tide." (Adams:1986:138) We, as Christian teachers, must be responsible in sensitively reacting to our students' needs; to quickly detect the multiple selves", and to suggest ways of achieving a unified, healthy self-concept.

We are in God's heart, and we must have the transforming power of Christ in our hearts. By using our understanding of humanity we can change weak into strong. We must use love, enthusiasm, simplicity, appreciation and encouragement to achieve radical results. Christian teachers must merge their personal interests into a unity of feeling, thought and action in order to convey to the uniquely developing student the essentials of education.

Christ, the Master Teacher and Psychologist, through His teaching "embraced the world". "Never can there be a circumstance of life, a crisis of human experience, which has not been anticipated in His teaching, and for which it's principles have not a lesson. The Prince of teachers, His words will be found a guide to His co-workers till the end of time." (White:1952:81,82)

In this instance - the development of a healthy self-concept - the partnership of God and his Holy Word and the best of Psychology could be, and is, an unconquerable force.
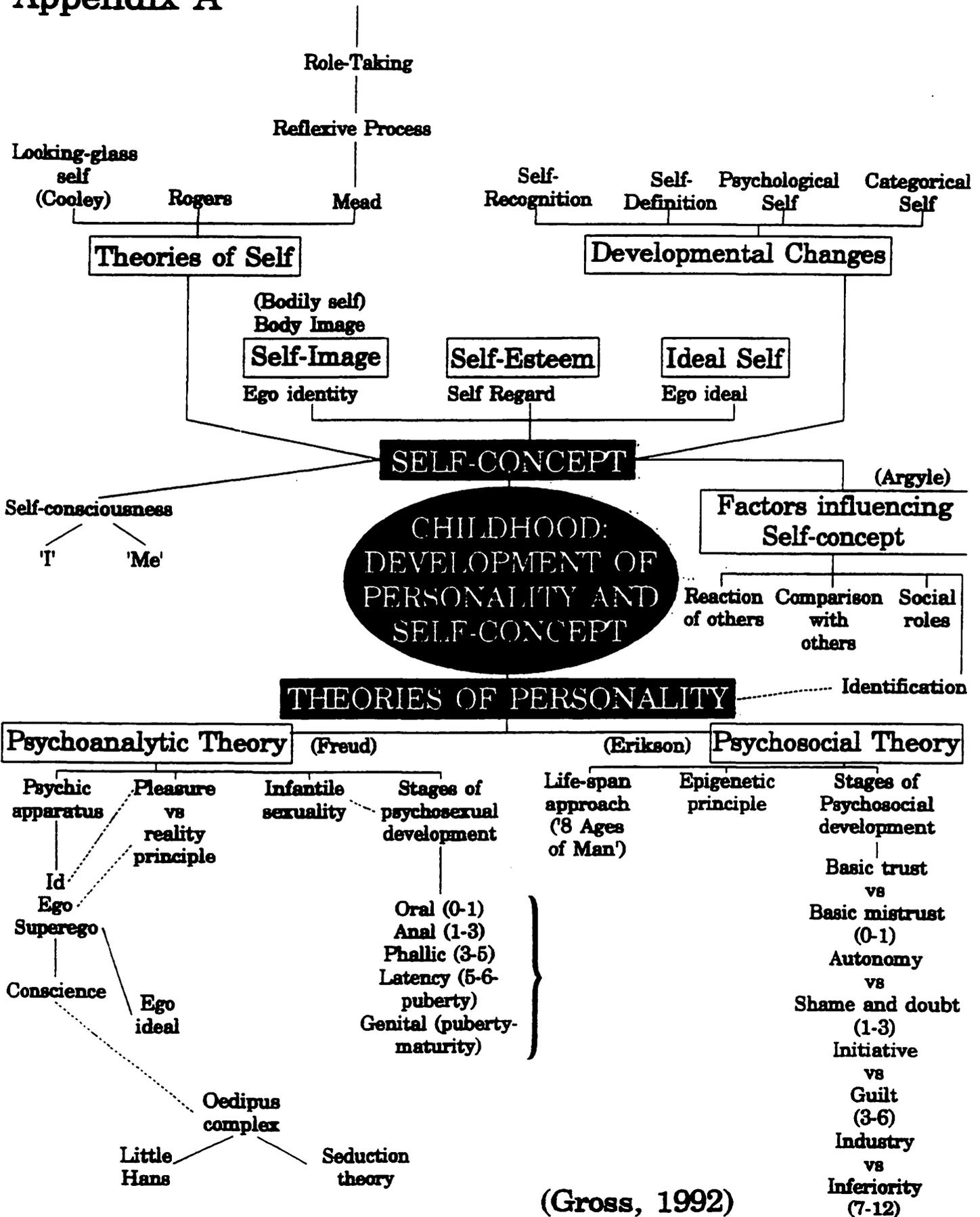
> "May the great God of Glory, who alone is 'worthy ... to receive glory and honour and power' ... equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to who be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (Rev 4:11, Heb 13:21)

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Appendix A

Generalized other —— Play vs Games

Role-Taking

Reflexive Process

Looking-glass
self
(Cooley)   Rogers   Mead

Self-   Self-   Psychological   Categorical
Recognition Definition   Self   Self

Theories of Self

Developmental Changes

(Bodily self)
Body Image

Self-Image   **Self-Esteem**   **Ideal Self**

Ego identity   Self Regard   Ego ideal

SELF-CONCEPT

(Argyle)

**Factors influencing
Self-concept**

Self-consciousness

CHILDHOOD:
DEVELOPMENT OF
PERSONALITY AND
SELF-CONCEPT

'I'   'Me'

Reaction   Comparison   Social
of others   with   roles
             others

THEORIES OF PERSONALITY ——————— Identification

Psychoanalytic Theory (Freud)   (Erikson) **Psychosocial Theory**

Psychic   Pleasure   Infantile   Stages of   Life-span   Epigenetic   Stages of
apparatus   vs   sexuality   psychosexual   approach   principle   Psychosocial
             reality   development   ('8 Ages   development
             principle   of Man')
Id   Basic trust
Ego   vs
Superego   Oral (0-1)   Basic mistrust
                                      Anal (1-3)   (0-1)
Conscience   Phallic (3-5)   Autonomy
               Ego   Latency (5-6-   vs
               ideal   puberty)   Shame and doubt
                                      Genital (puberty-   (1-3)
                                        maturity)   Initiative
                                                                                     vs
                Oedipus   Guilt
                complex   (3-6)
Little   Seduction   Industry
Hans   theory   vs
                                                                                   Inferiority
                                    (Gross, 1992)   (7-12)

Appendix B

Bulimia

Anorexia
nervosa

Body image

**CHANGES IN
SELF-CONCEPT**

**ADOLESCENCE:
DEVELOPMENT OF
PERSONALITY AND
SELF-CONCEPT**

THEORIES

Psychoanalytic	Psychosocial (Erikson)	Recapitulation theory (Hall)	Cultural relativism (Mead Benedict)	Classical theory	Focal theory (Coleman)

Freud   Anna Freud   Blos

Intellectualization   Disengagement

Asceticism

Inner
emptiness

Affect and
object
hunger

Identity
vs
role
confusion
(12-18)

Moratorium

Normative
(identity)
crisis

Psychopathology
of everyday
adolescence

Storm
and
stress

Continuity
vs
discontinuity

Storm
and
stress

Identity
crisis

Generation
gap