Exploring Roots Identity Personality... emerging thoughts

Roots Identity Personality

The background, indeed the roots to this workshop Roots Identity Personality are with my own sense of rootless-ness. There is significant research conducted on what are termed ‘Third Culture Kids’ meaning – initially – the children of US service personnel. Children who found themselves immersed in differing cultures and often with little connection to the traditional rootedness of home. As a child brought up in a RAF environment I had a cosmopolitan and rich childhood and lived in a community of like for like that was interspersed with mixing with civilian children depending on our postings.

This root for the workshop developed and grew as I explored roots and identity. As such there is a vastness to experiment and engage with so I suspect I will only be scratching the surface of Roots Identity and Personality for some time.

What follows are my notes that complement the workshop. The workshop itself will be focussed on each of our own rooted-ness that we will explore together with curiosity and openness.

Roots:

Roots inform and contextualise our Past - what Was, our Present - what Is, and Future – What (is to) Be:

So, Roots are Our “There and Then” to our “Here and Now” with our “Where and Next”.

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Roots refer to our anchors in our social enduring-ness over time, and this is our Personality.

Identity

Our roots refer to our being – our identity –

“People have a fundamental need for positive and lasting relationships. This need to belong is rooted in evolutionary history and gave rise to the development of traits that enable individuals to gain acceptance and to avoid rejection.” (DeWall et all 2011)

I want to draw attention to this relationship of Roots and Belonging, and to do so by hyphenation so instead of Belonging there is Be-Longing. In doing this I want to draw attention to the longing that exists for each of us is wanting ‘to Be’. The context here is the sense of searching and exploring through adolescence particularly to discover our identity of who we are in the world and more importantly over time the sense to Be, to Be myself, to ‘just Be.
ALSO

Belongingness also has a profound impact on adolescent mental heath and well-being. Intimate, supportive adolescent friendships can enhance adjustment, perceived competence, and self-esteem, … Belongingness becomes especially important to well-being as children enter adolescence. During this. (DeWall et al 2011)

Belonging is used in society to provide, to confirm and/or to establish Identity.

The Gestalt perspective, with the concept of figure/ground provides for Roots as ground is nourishment; and Roots as figure is stability.

Franscetti (2013) has written how PANIC is the removal of our ground that we suddenly are in a position of the Ground not being our surety. It’s like driving along and suddenly you realise there is no tarmac under you.

There is a vast amount of literature that supports the social need for identification with our heritage; how this provides the continuity of tradition and customs; of language and beliefs; and of family and loyalty. Yet, I question of all this … All I can say at this point is I have an uneasy sense of stuckness and rigidity – of conforming; being constrained. And how much of this is my own 'script' reactiveness, I don’t know.

Roots, Growth and Preservation

Perls et al (1951) remark … P372 An organism preserves itself only by growing. Self preserving and growing are polar

GROWTH | PRESERVATION

There seems a contradiction here preserving what is and growing. But what is intended here is not the preservation of a fixed be-ing, rather a preservation of a be-ing that in relational contact allows change and growth to occur; think of the preserved as being archived. Not forgotten or deleted but rather preserved for future consideration and value dependent of future situations.

For example, my religious root is Catholicism. I cannot exclude or deny my current values do not relate to this root however I would deny in this Here and Now I am not Catholic. The
change was a shift to reject aspects of Catholicism yet preserve the values of grace, kindness, acceptance, charity, … Thus my identity is, perhaps, Christian but more so my religious identity is not to have one, not least as the values of grace, kindness etc transcend such an identity.

And our Roots are utilised in providing / confirming / establishing our Identity. Must this be though?

**Gestalt Polarities**

The relational perspective of Gestalt [Therapy] theory has as the essential elements [of] belonging (and differentiation), identity (and evolution), and conservation (and change) (Wheeler 2015, loc1310)

Between belonging and divergence - as an equitable term to differentiation - an individual would 'sit' in middle mode seeking through their volition to belong and to differentiate. In this process the experiences complete, are whole (gestalten) and are healthy. In this sense healthy refers to the completion of experience that is the full meeting of the sensation that was brought about through the current situation.

**Awareness and Roots**

However, I believe there is an aspect of Roots and Identity and as a consequence Personality, to explore. To bring into awareness our Roots so that the Identity we hold and the Roots we nurture are assimilated, rather than introjected.

My thinking is that roots may bind us to the past more than release us to the present? This binding occurs when what we ‘have’ as roots is introjected; and when it is made familiar and sits as the ground we live on; in this our Roots become our Be-longing

To raise our awareness and to explore further I will begin with:

Our roots anchor and hold us with the past. (Does this answer a desire of be-longing?). Perhaps our roots might anchor us IN the past?

Some generic social identities:

- Nationality
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Religion
- Occupation
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Consider how you answer questions like Where are from? What do you do?

Experiment

The purpose of this experiment is to increase awareness of the acquired and taken for granted aspects of our roots – our belonging. And the questions being asked:

- How might I be preserving at the expense of growing?
- What is introjected rather than assimilated in this root, this belonging?
- What are the consequences of being like this?

Imagine you had no nationality to identify with

Imagine you have no ethnicity to identify with

Imagine you do not identify with gender

Imagine there is not a religious identification

Imagine not identifying with an occupation

What does it feel like to remove the nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious and occupational labels? Who remains …

Imagine you are with another now; try to bracket off roots similar to those expressed – gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality. What do you do now; how do you be with the other; what creates hesitation (if anything); … what are you afraid of (if anything); … what are you excited about (if anything); … anxious, apprehensive; … curious, intrigued; …

Self and Relation

Are we not edging our self towards a fundamental identity of who am I in this moment with this other? Well, actually what I am thinking is the possibility of edging towards a relational sense of being in an ever changing world; towards a sense of self that is required to open and available to be impacted and changed with and through the other(s) in our relatedness.

Relational Roots and Identity

My Roots exist yet I don’t have anyone to relate this to. No, that’s not true, I have no one to relate as a shared experience. What IS, for me, is an unshared past, thus unshared Roots. My Roots are not relate-able; at least that is how it seems to me. What I mean by this declares the identifier I have most often confronted with. Where are you from? Actually I never really know what this question means and will mostlyl want to first figure out what the quesationer is
really wanting to know by this. Historically this question is about what city, or town, or what country am I from. I have a rootless geography. I have a birth place, yes, yet I do not come from there, nor belong there. I have a place that I lived in; yet I was not raised there; I have a town I have moved from, yet I don’t come from there… I am what is termed – labelled – identified as – a ‘Third Culture Kid’

Rooted or Rootless? Third Culture Kids

For decades, Third Culture Kids of all stripes have been labeled “rootless”. That has always bothered me. Having grown up highly mobile myself, when I hear that just because I moved 7 times by the time I was 18 years old I have no roots, no real connections to a place - I raise my eyebrows and wonder if others really know what “connection” means.

When a person is geographically mobile there is a sense that indeed he may be challenged in geographical belonging, but it is important that he not be confused with not having a sense of rootedness. In a very real sense, the geographical rootless may have a relational rootedness that non-mobile people would never understand.

Nomadic peoples have been on the planet for centuries. Have you ever wondered if they had a sense of not belonging? Or do they feel like something is terribly wrong with them because their home is not tied to a permanent plot of land? There are 30 to 40 million of these nomads, most of whom have a strong sense of community and relational roots that run very deep.

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Stephens 2011

The societal (community) roots for me are missing… this is expressed by many Service Brats.

Levin and Levine (2012) say “The world and the person are in continuous relatedness and each is subject to influence, change and growth by the other”

Perhaps my upbringing connected me towards a more continuous relatedness that has helped ground me to the changing, withering and blossoming shoots of family, location, community, culture and schooling.
I don’t engage nor fully utilise my capacity for continuous relatedness; I will shut down too soon and revert to losing this contact and relegating this to the bin of history. I limit my connectedness.

Contact is an experience of difference that both separates and connects. The experience of difference is essential for connection. There is no sense of connectedness without a concomitant sense of difference. This touching of difference is called awareness in Gestalt-based therapy and the engagement of these differences is called contact. In other words, movement leads to difference which leads to awareness which leads to contact. Change and growth takes place in the contact.

Uniqueness of the Gestalt Self

The Gestalt philosophy of Being introduces an epistemology that challenges the prevailing mechanistic, technical and outcome-oriented approaches of the 20th century. In other words, “Gestalt therapy” was not only advanced for the 1950s – it is still advanced in the new millennium. (Levin and Levine)

I believe this is so; because of the sense of Self.

1. This concept [of self] is so significantly and so radically subversive of most psychological thinking that it has yet to be fully grasped and accepted, even by many Gestaltists. The concept is, in its simplest form, that self is contact.

2. And … Self is, rather, part of the world of process and time, discoverable only as experience; discoverable, that is, only in contact.

(McLeod 1993 P26)
References


Francesetti, G. 2007 Panic Attacks and Postmodernity: Gestalt Therapy Between Clinical ans Social Perspectives. FrancoAngeli, Milan


