

Going Into Me (i): Recognising Self-Rejection

VOL. 15 ISSUE 1 (2024)



The song popularised in the 1980s, 'I have never been to me' carries an interesting message. The narrator of the song is an unfulfilled woman talking to another who is discontented with her life as a mother and wife. She could tell that the latter is probably bored with her mundane life and dreams of pursuing a life of excitement and adventure. She tells the discontented woman that she has been there, done it but has not found the fulfilment that she thought she would and so suggests that the current one the latter is living is what will give her true fulfilment.

The question is; is she right? One suspects that she has probably made an assumption there. Is it a case of the grass on the other side always looking greener?

But she is at least right on this one thing. She has 'never been to me'. She has never gotten in touch with her emotional self, to be attentive and attuned to her inner being. She has never been on a self-discovery journey. She has not allowed herself to step back and self-reflect, to take a long hard look at her life and ask critical questions like, "Why do I have this nagging feeling that this is not the life I want?" "Why am I unhappy?" This surely is at the root of her unfulfillment.

The song is interesting because we can relate to her sentiments. The specifics of our life may be different. We can relate to her feeling that we are not living the life we are meant to have. We are not living out who we truly are on the inside.

There is hope yet for her. And there is for us too. She has come to the crossroads. She is stepping back to take stock. Yet maybe she has done this many times before. Each time she wants to call it quits, the fear of abandoning something she has gotten used to, something that offers her so much, frightens her. Then there are the inner voices of protest, "If you leave this life, what else are you good at?" "What do you think you are? You don't deserve any better!" "Just suck it up. Stop complaining!" And so she goes back and forth, riddled by self-doubt, self-judgement, self-criticism. How will she finally be able to get out of that rut, we wonder.

If she recognises that she has been stuck because she has 'never been to me', perhaps she now stands a chance of finally freeing herself, if she embarks on a journey of self-introspection. Perhaps she will talk to someone who can help her uncover the source of those inner voices of protests and criticism. Perhaps she will find the courage to stand up to whatever has been stopping her. Perhaps she will grow in greater self-awareness. She will discover ultimately that what she really is coming against is her own self rejection.

Connect-Point



The journey to becoming who you are meant to be starts with accepting who you truly are.
(Unknown)

Self-rejection is an elusive psychological phenomenon. It is hard to detect. It is hard for anyone to say "There is self-rejection in me" because it is embedded so deeply in our sub-conscious. We can identify it only by looking at whether we have engaged in self-rejection behaviours.

'Self-rejection is a silent saboteur, masquerading in the shadows of our subconscious. Unmasking its elusive nature requires a detective's eye and a therapist's toolkit' (generated by Chatgpt)

Self-rejection is indeed a silent saboteur. Where there is self-rejection, there is self-sabotage, an equally elusive psychological phenomenon. We say to ourselves, "I am a failure. I will risk being exposed. I had better keep to doing the same safe things." So we decline a promotion offer much against our desire for greater stimulation and growth. Or we may resort to perfectionism and set ourselves up for chronic stress and anxiety.

We say, "I don't deserve a good man." So we do or say something stupid to frighten away our suitor and live to regret it. We withdraw or isolate as a coping strategy to self-protect and deprive ourselves of what is needed for our psychological well-being; social connection, emotional support etc.

Self-rejection is actually rooted in our childhood experiences. We may have grown up in an environment where we are often rejected, whether perceived or real, criticised, shamed or abused. These experiences shape how we view ourselves. Repeated rejection or criticism can be internalized, leading us to believe there is something inherently wrong with us. We begin to see ourselves as unworthy or unlovable. Even after we have moved away from the toxic environment, our inner critic stays with us and continues to make us believe that we are inadequate, not approved of, not accepted, causing us to self-reject.

What other self-rejection behaviours do we engage in? We become prone to comparing ourselves with others, and end up feeling not being able to measure up. We self-loathe and self-doubt, allowing others' opinions to dictate our decisions and choices and even to define who we are.

As if it is not enough that self-rejection is itself too elusive to detect, something else further complicates recognition of self-rejection. It is emotional avoidance. This was perhaps the case of the song's narrator. She would have found it hard to face up to her feelings of shame, guilt, or worthlessness. And even harder for her to admit to herself that she has wrongly sought affirmation and validation from external sources; material possessions, status, worldly achievements and relationships to fill the void caused by others' rejection of her and her own self-rejection.

Now that she has come to the crossroads, her hope lies not in turning away from a wild hedonistic life to an ordinary domesticated one. Her hope of finding self-fulfilment and contentment lies in turning away from self-rejection to journeying towards more self-embracing and self-acceptance (to be elaborated more in future article). If she does not address the root cause of her discontentment caused by self-rejection, she may become a mother and a wife yet end up being as disillusioned and discontented as the woman she spoke with.

Turning away from self-rejection towards greater embracing of self is a transformative journey of healing and growth. It requires one to be intentional in building greater self-awareness. It calls for honesty and courage to challenge negative beliefs, develop healthier coping mechanisms by learning to banish the self-critic in us (next article).

Turning away from self-rejection to self-acceptance is easier for those who believe that there is a Creator and that this Creator creates us for a purpose. Nothing He creates is worthless, Hence, we have to be inherently worthy. That should make us re-evaluate our perception of our sense of self-worth. If we are His Beloved, if He accepts us wholly and unconditionally, how then can we reject ourselves?

This fundamental shift in self-perception is the critical first step towards liberating us from the cycle of self-rejection. Taking this first step will certainly move us towards self-acceptance, forming more fulfilling relationships with ourselves and others, ultimately finding contentment in life.

For past issues of our i-Connect newsletter, please visit bcare.org.sg