

**Article Info:**

Published Date: 14 Januari 2025

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## **Introspection of Childhood Memory Through Auto- Portraiture**

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**To cite this article (APA):** Abdul Rahman, A., & Mokhtar, E. S. (2025). Introspection of childhood memory through auto- portraiture. *KUPAS SENI: Jurnal Seni Dan Pendidikan Seni*, 13(1), 65–71. <https://doi.org/10.37134/kupasseni.vol13.1.7.2025>

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.37134/kupasseni.vol13.1.7.2025>

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the introspection of childhood memories through the lens of auto- portraiture, with the objective of identifying significant phases of childhood that shape personal identity. Focusing on the formative influence of a younger sibling, the study examines how early interactions impacted my identity and behavior. The problem statement reveals that the journey of introspection began in childhood, where the experience of playing with a younger brother created ambiguity around me. The methodology includes a proposed idea centred on personal introspection through artistic expression, supported by the use of personal archives and the collection of old photographs. These images serve as primary sources for reconstructing pivotal childhood moments, allowing for a deeper reflection on how memory and identity evolve over time. By translating these memories into auto-portraits, the study not only captures the visual elements of the past but also highlights the ongoing relationship between past and present in the shaping of myself. Through this approach, auto- portraiture becomes both a tool for introspection and a visual narrative that reflects the fluid nature of personal growth.

**Keywords:** introspection, childhood memory, auto-portraiture

### **INTRODUCTION**

Identify the profound connection between self-reflection and artistic expression, particularly in how I revisit and reinterpret my childhood memories through self-portraiture. This form of creative introspection allows artists to delve into the emotions, experiences, and identities shaped during their early years, offering a visual narrative that transcends mere likeness. By capturing moments of childhood memories becomes a powerful lens for understanding personal growth, identity formation, and emotional depth. Through this lens, the artist bridges the past and present, offering viewers a unique perspective on how memory shapes identity and my experience. The journey of identifying myself has started since childhood. The younger brother who became my playmate indirectly brought a strong influence for me to know myself to behave like a boy or a girl. The experience as a child led me to a process of deepening myself and translating it to the present through the art of photography. This study identifies important phases of childhood memories that are important to the elements of introspection through auto-portraiture.

This study begins with an introspection of childhood memories. Introspection entails examining one's own mind and articulating the states of consciousness identified therein. Introspection means examination of and attention to your own ideas, thoughts, and feelings; for example, in this study, I use photographic introspection as a medium to recall my childhood memories. From Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2024), the term "introspection," as it is used in modern philosophy of

mind, refers to the process of discovering one's own ongoing, perhaps very recent, mental processes or states. It constitutes an act of introspection (Spener, 2021). Statement from Dr. Maja Spener, Associate Professor in Philosophy from the University of Birmingham, brought a study that sheds light on the awareness that the mind is fundamental to reflecting on the past that a human being has to do. The process of recalling the past is a person's journey in gathering information about oneself that can be translated into the latest medium. This is supported by Dr. Geoff Bunn, senior lecturer in psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University, who says that introspection is characterised as a systematic examination of the mind that categorises conscious awareness into essential components comprising thoughts, images, and emotions (Bunn, 2017). This statement gives a more detailed framework of introspection when looking at the important components that consist of thoughts, images, and emotions in childhood memory.

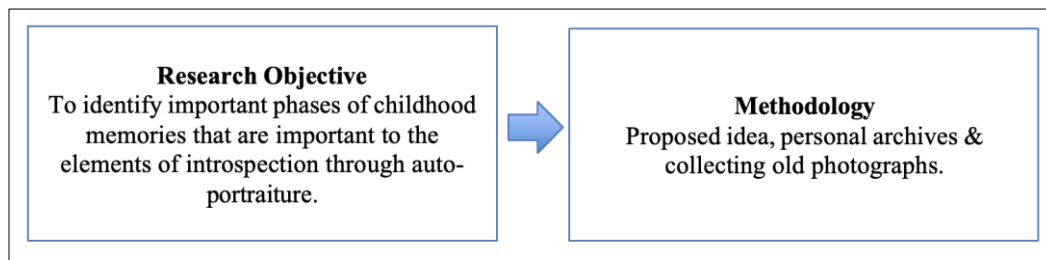
Leman (2012) explores how our childhood memories shape who we are and how understanding them can impact our present and future lives. It suggests that by examining our past experiences, we can uncover patterns in our behaviour and private logic, which is our unique perspective on the world. Our childhood memories can reveal deep truths about who we are, including our motivations and the lies we tell ourselves. Recognising and confronting these memories can lead to personal growth and better relationships (Leman, 2012). In the consciousness of life, bringing back past memories, especially childhood memories, is a process that a person has to go through in various ways. Childhood memories are recollections of past experiences and events that individuals have from their own childhood. Each memory can be positive or negative for the child (Gino & Desai, 2012). Francesca Gino, Professor of Business Administration at Harvard University, and Sreedhari Desai, Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour, both psychologists, assert that these memories can be either positive or negative and encompass a diverse array of experiences, including interactions with family, friends, or significant childhood events (Gino & Desai, 2012). Moreover, a psychologist by the name of Dr. Kelvin Leman, who published a book titled "What Your Childhood Say" in 2012, explained how our recollections from our childhood can disclose fundamental facts about who we are, including the lies that we tell ourselves and the reasons why we are motivated to do things. It is possible that acknowledging and confronting these experiences will result in personal development as well as improved relationships. According to Leman (2012), this exemplifies the significance of having self-awareness. Likewise, the discussion that is included in the book serves as an extra motivation for me to carry out this research.

Historically, self-portraiture originated in the early Renaissance, when painters like Albrecht Dürer (1471-1578) started portraying themselves in his artworks to demonstrate their skills and examine their own identities. The term "auto-portrait", which usually refers to a painting, drawing, or photographic self, is a word adapted from French that means self- portrait (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). According to Hall (2024), mentioned in the book *The Self-Portrait*, more so than a portrait, is primarily a product of memory and imagination. Self- portraits are excellent tools for expressing and recording complicated emotions. Over time, self-portraiture evolved from an expression of artistic skill to a more introspective and psychological form, with artists such as Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) utilising it to expose their inner conflicts, feelings, and life experiences. In modern art, auto-portraiture serves as an effective tool for self-exploration, allowing me to investigate my personal 'self' (Hall, 2014). Through the use of auto-portraiture as a visual and introspective medium, I am able to re- establish a connection with my childhood memories.

Auto-portraiture according to Liping Mao, a researcher from Nantong University in China, self-portraiture is a distinctive genre of portrait painting in which the artist depicts themselves. It goes beyond a simple depiction of the artist's outward appearance to convey profound elements of their identity (Mao, 2021). In addition, as noted by photographer and art counsellor Sisi Burn, photography serves as a potent medium of communication, and self- portraiture authentically reflects our identity now (Burn, 2019). This has also been explored in prior studies of the self-portrait, as described by John Suler, a Professor of Psychology from Rider University, who initiated the discussion by providing a concise explanation of the term. The original meaning of "portray" in Latin indicates that a self-portrait involves the act of "drawing forth" and "representing" oneself. When you capture a self-portrait, you are striving to extract and portray your true essence (Suler, 2015).

## METHODOLOGY

There are several levels of the research method that was implemented in order to accomplish the goal of this study, which is to determine the phase of childhood memories that is significant to the components of introspection through the use of self-portraits. Regarding the Diagram 1 provides an overview of the relationship that exists between the research questions, the research objectives, and the methods that will be utilised in order to make each of these goals a reality. While adhering to the primary objective of the study, which is to investigate introspection through the medium of auto-portraiture, this methodical approach implies that the study should be adequately addressed.



**Diagram 1.** A diagram of a child's development

### Proposed Ideas

My proposed ideas are based on Milestones in the Development of Self by McAdams et al. (2021). This milestone is focusing on different developmental periods of life, on stages like the "Second and third years of life," "Age 3-5," and "Grade School." (McAdams et al, 2021). The self-development is a dynamic process shaped by critical life stages, involving identity creation throughout childhood, life story establishment in development, and experience integration in later life. These milestones highlight the way in which individuals develop a sense of self through introspection and personal development (McAdams et al., 2021). The research makes use of these developmental insights by employing auto-portraiture as a reflective method for exploring childhood memories, personal narratives, and life transitions that I have experienced myself.

### Personal Archives

This method is supported by the claim of Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, which states that the ideas of memory and identity are interconnected, with archives playing an important part in forming and affecting our memories and self-image (Schwartz and Cook, 2002). Personal exploration begins by examining my personal archives, such old photographs from my childhood. This introspection involves capturing memories that develop when engaging with these photographs.

### Collecting Old Photographs

Utilizing the collection of old photographs as an approach to study entails the examination of visual artefacts to investigate history, memory, and culture. Photographs provide documentation of historical occurrences, cultural standards, and individual identities. By interpreting these pictures, I can record historical events, comprehend cultural changes, and explore the visual portrayals of memory and identity.

## RESULTS

By employing the technique of excavation from a personal collection and proposing ideas, I successfully created a nearly identical piece to demonstrate that the memory endures to this day. Comparisons are evident in my personal collection as well as my recent concepts.



**Figure 1:** Me wearing boy's attire, 1988

*Figure 1* portrays me as a child, dressed in boy's clothing, providing a clear representation of an important moment from my childhood. I chose this specific image as it clearly represents a significant aspect of my early self-expression. By reflecting on this recollection, I aim to explore the significant implications of this initial self-expression and use it as a basis for comprehending how these formative experiences have influenced my present identity. The photo's clarity and sincerity provide it an exemplary visual for auto-portraiture, facilitating a direct link between past and present in my continuous self-reflection journey.



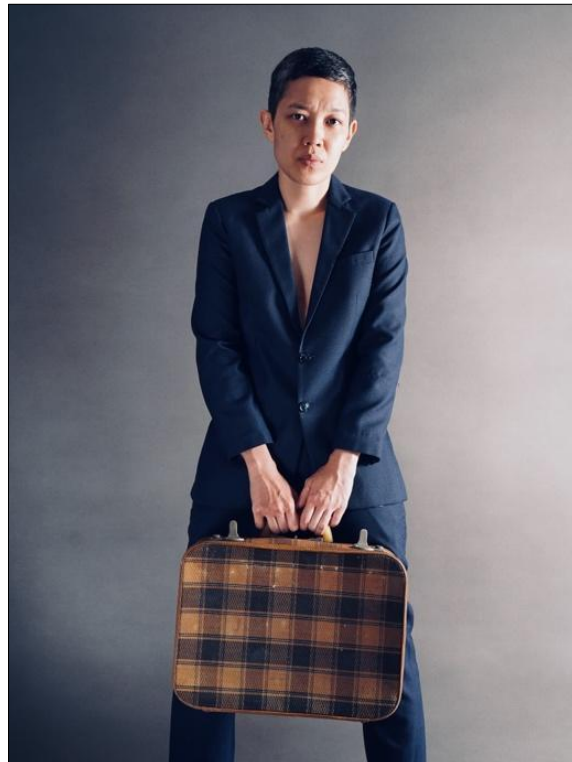
**Figure 2:** Foolish salute, 1988

The chosen image portrays a childhood moment in which I am performing a salute, a motion that, though rather clumsy and silly, definitely conveys my childhood aspiration of becoming a police officer. I chose this image as it concisely represents my childhood ambition to embody power and responsibility, despite the naive and rather imprudent execution of the salute. This artwork embodies a potent recollection of ambition and creativity, when I was whimsically interacting with the concepts of order and strength. This memory's clarity, conveyed through an innocent gesture, renders it an

exemplary subject for reflection, providing insight into the impact of early dreams and ambitions on self-perception.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates the significant impact that revisiting and reconstructing childhood memory can have on the present self. This study shows that childhood photographs, particularly those referring to *Figure 1*, featuring me in boy's attire, serve as significant tools for self-reflection. These photographs capture significant phases of personal history and function as a way to examine how early events influenced one's developing identity.



**Figure 3:** Me wearing male apparel, 2024

The recreation of childhood memories through auto-portraiture enhances the introspective process. By embodying and replicating these memories in the present, auto-portraiture serves as a means of not just reflecting on the past but also actively interacting with it. Recreating the childhood image of me wearing male apparel (refer to *Figure 3*) allows direct engagement with prior events and their influence on gender identity, self-expression, and personal narratives. This act of reconstruction might provoke emotions and insights that may have been neglected, establishing a visual dialogue between the past and present self. The process of recreating childhood memories facilitates the deconstruction of old identities and clarifies their influence on present perceptions. Auto-portraiture functions as both an artistic and psychological instrument, enabling an insightful exploration of how early events shape contemporary self-identity. The visual reconstruction of these memories emphasizes their persistent impact and illustrates how early experiences are crucial in forming our identities, emphasizing the idea that self-identity is a dynamic and ever-evolving process.



**Figure 4:** Becoming a police officer, 2024

This transition from photo in *Figure 2*, foolish salute to a fighter's gesture illustrates the evolution of early aspirations and symbols of authority into more profound, individualized interpretations of power and self-determination. Recreating childhood situations enables the present self to contemplate how prior desires and identity manifestations influence adult values, anxieties, and aspirations. The evolution from a simplistic childhood aspiration of becoming a police officer (refer to *Figure 4*) to a more abstract representation of a fighter illustrates the progression of identity while preserving ties to early inspirations.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the study reveals that auto-portraiture is a powerful medium for reconnecting with and understanding childhood memories. By using personal archives and collecting old photographs, significant phases of childhood that shaped my identity were revisited and reinterpreted. This introspective process, particularly influenced by early interactions with a younger sibling, uncovered the evolving nature of identity, including the exploration of myself. The auto-portraiture method not only captures these past experiences visually but also facilitates a deeper reflection on how childhood memories influence presents me. The findings suggest that auto-portraiture, through the recreation of childhood moments, provides an emotional and psychological bridge between past and present, highlighting the ongoing process of personal growth and identity formation.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The author wishes to thank Dr. Elis Syuhaila Mokhtar for facilitating the writing and publication as well as Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris for supporting this research.

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