



Growing up as an only child in a home shattered like glass, I learned early that my "self" was not a finished story but a draft I kept editing. When my parents split at eight, love became like a confusing programming problem with no clear solution. My mother's remarriage was a plot twist I never saw coming. As an IT student at FEU, coding became my way of rebuilding myself, designing my path pixel by pixel. Each phase of my life was a line of code—sometimes crashing, sometimes loading, but always running.

As the only son in a Filipino household, my social self was tangled in the ropes of tradition. Marcel Mauss' *personne* assigned me demands that I be the supporting pillar of the family, where I needed to be strong, practical, and bound to duty. I remembered what my uncle said to me, "*Ikaw ang mag-aahon sa pamilya mo.*" Every day meant helping my mother with household chores, not because I enjoyed it, but because "*Panganay ka, dapat marunong ka sa ganyan.*" I was socialized early, where toys were trucks and robots, my clothes were always blue, and my tears were met with "*Lalaki ka, huwag iyakin.*"

When I turned 17, I had always known I was straight, but figuring out what that truly meant took time. I dated someone bisexual. She'd tease, "You're my exception to the rule," and I'd laugh, but her words stuck with me. I realized my straightness



wasn't a trap, just one way of loving in a world full of possibilities. A non-binary friend, unfazed by my pronoun mistakes, simply said, "Just treat me like a person." Their calmness taught me more than any lecture. I was still the man who nodded when my uncles ranted about being real men, but I was also the guy who could say "Not cool" when someone used hurtful words against other gender identities.

My father's 1,000-peso financial support arrived like raindrops—never enough to water a garden but still a relief in small droughts. It barely covered my school and personal materials, but I saw his effort. Meanwhile, my mother's sacrifices were the roots of why I had a good life and was able to study at a university. Her economical and practical approach to money shaped my mindset. Because of her, I learned that money wasn't about having the newest things—it was about making smart choices. While my classmates flaunted expensive gadgets, I took pride in my old laptop. It was slow, but it let me code and study. My FEU ID was my most valuable "material" because it was proof of her hard work.

For me, spirituality wasn't about grand rituals or strict doctrines. It was in small moments that I felt connected to something bigger, whether God or the quiet strength of people around me. My mother's faith was the anchor of mine. Every morning,



she lit a candle, streamed Mass online, and whispered prayers while folding laundry. I didn't pray like she did, but my spirituality was in moments like when my old laptop finally ran a code after hours of errors, and I muttered, "Thank you." But Mom's devotion taught me that faith wasn't just belief—it was action, showing up for others, and trusting that small acts of kindness, like lines of code, could build something meaningful.

Being Filipino meant facing a system that felt rigged against the poor. My political views weren't shaped by theories but by real life—like tricycle drivers stretching ₱50 for meals and mothers bartering *ukay* clothes for school fees. As an IT student, I saw fake news spread faster than flood warnings and corruption starving classrooms while politicians flaunted luxury cars. When relatives defended leaders who stole public funds, I refused to stay silent and asked, "*Ano'ng pinagkaiba nila sa magnanakaw sa palengke?*" It wasn't about being an activist but about refusing to normalize theft that kept families struggling.

My online self balanced the responsible eldest son my family saw and the advocate I was becoming. My digital presence wasn't about privilege but about making the most of what I had. The looking-glass self-theory felt real when relatives praised my academic achievements, while classmates responded with sarcasm.



The lesson on “oversharing vs. authenticity” reshaped how I posted. After sharing a strong opinion on the ICC case against Duterte, relatives warned me to be careful. From then on, I chose my words wisely, avoiding unnecessary conflict. My Instagram stayed light with thrifted outfits and school highlights, while I used Reddit to help students budget for coding. Authenticity wasn’t about saying everything—it was about knowing when and where my voice mattered most.

I am a story still being written, shaped by experiences, challenges, and growth. My self is not a single entity, but a collection of experiences shaped by family, tradition, struggle, and growth. As I reflect on everything that has shaped me, I ask myself, “Who am I?”. I am the eldest son bound by duty yet determined to redefine what responsibility means. I am a man who honors his roots but refuses to be confined by expectations. I am an IT student who sees the world as a system—sometimes flawed, sometimes fair, but always evolving. My self exists in both the tangible and intangible, from the faded FEU ID I carry to the principles that guide my choices. With every challenge, I continue to grow. Whether in the digital space or real life, I am learning, adapting, and, most importantly, becoming.