

"Star Wars" and the Question of Identity

[Scott Myers](#)

At the foundation of the *Star Wars* universe lies an existential challenge facing key characters posed by the question: *Who are you?*

I saw the original *Star Wars* in movie theaters when it was first released in the summer of 1977. I actually went three times that May because I was so enraptured by the spectacle and sheer fun of it.

I was also struck by the psychological journey Luke Skywalker went on. He began as a discontented young man slaving away on his uncle's moisture farm on the desert planet Tatooine at the edge of the galaxy.



He ends up a hero behind the controls of an X-wing fighter empowered by The Force to deliver a bomb which destroys the mighty Death Star.



Luke's storyline is a classic example of the Hero's Journey, a concept I was quite familiar with having read and analyzed Joseph Campbell's book 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' as part of my undergraduate honors program at the University of Virginia.

Luke's story is one of transformation. He is not a moisture farmer. He is a Jedi knight with that blood coursing through his veins and his innate ability to use The Force lying latent within from the very beginning of his journey.

Of course, the original *Star Wars* movie is just the first chapter in Luke's psychological journey as through years of training, he becomes a Jedi Master, then a Jedi Master-in-hiding, and as we saw at the end of *Episode VIII* — apparently — vanished into the void at one with The Force.

Thus even with all the pyrotechnics and interstellar politics

which run throughout the series, there lies at the very heart of the story universe an existential challenge facing not only Luke, but other key characters in which they have to respond to a question of identity: *Who are you?*

I noted this in a previous article (January 23, 2018) called [The Existential Questions of 'Star Wars'](#). Here is an excerpt:

The very **first words** of the trailer for *Star Wars: Episode VII — The Force Awakens* are: **Who are you?**

The **very last words** of the teaser trailer for *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* are: **What will you become?**

Both are questions directed at the story's Protagonists:



"Who are you?"



"What will you become?"

This is more than just an interesting coincidence as these are existential questions which speak to very essence of the Hero's Journey. Joseph Campbell asserted that the **entire point** of the heroine's adventures is to facilitate their transformation. They begin in an incomplete state, what I call Disunity, and end up in having changed toward a more actualized, authentic state, approaching what I call Unity.

Indeed on a psychological level, the entire point of the Light Side and the Dark Side of The Force is precisely about these questions: *Who are you? What will you become?*

The existential issue of self-identity continues to make its presence known in yet another *Star Wars* trailer. Check out the final ad for *Episode IX — The Rise of Skywalker*.

Right there at the 00:37 mark, Rey says this: "People keep

telling me they know me. No one does."

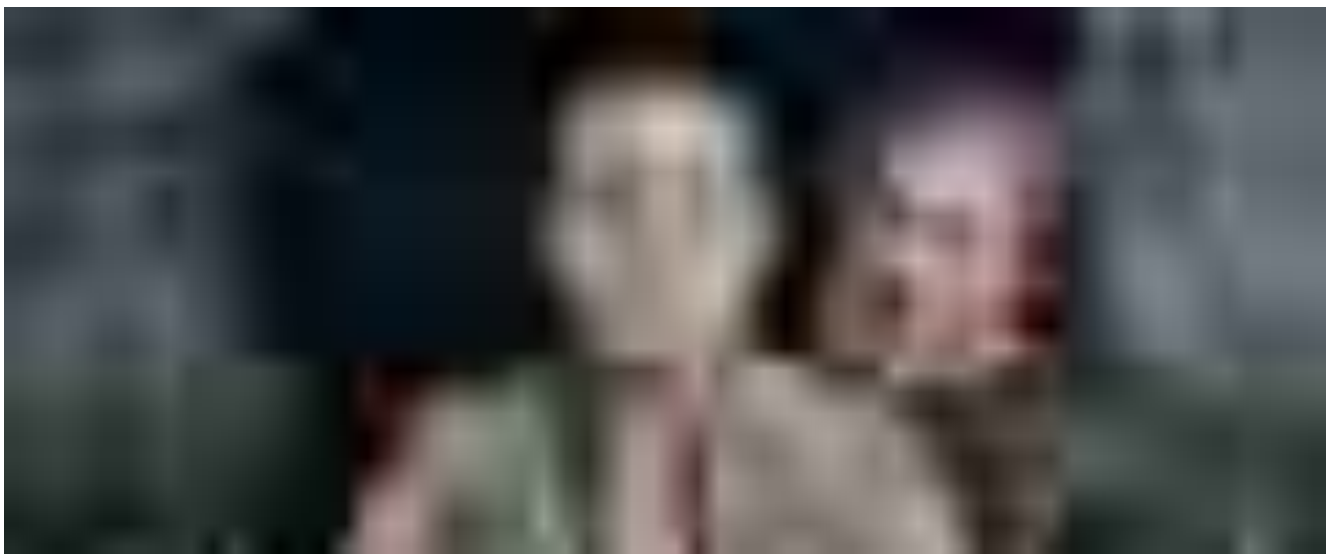
Sounds an awful lot like a character who (A) has been grappling with their identity and (B) has come to a determination about what their identity is.

In other words, Rey may have very well found the answer to the question: *Who are you?*

There's actually **another** existential question raised in the movie *Star Wars: Episode VIII — The Last Jedi*.

After Rey has traveled across the galaxy to find Luke, he asks her this: "Why are you here?"

When she starts to respond, explaining the reason she sought out Luke, he stops her and asks again with a notable change in emphasis: "Why are **YOU** here?"



"Why are YOU here?"

One *could* interpret this line of questioning merely at the text level: Luke inquiring why Rey is interrupting his

solitude. But then, why the **second** question? And why the specific emphasis on the word "**you**"?

I think it's fair to look at Luke's question at a more subtextual level, especially in light of other existential questions in the series, compelling Rey to consider her larger purpose in life.

Interestingly, I wonder if this question — Why are YOU here? — is actually something Luke is subconsciously posing for himself. Given the choice he makes at the end of the movie, fully embracing his Jedi nature before presumably vanishing into the Great Void, after he has spent a good portion of the movie cynically dismissing the Force and the Jedi, it's clear Luke ends up having a significant existential moment as well.

Who are you?

What will you become?

Why are you here?

The existential questions of the *Star Wars* universe speak to the core issue confronting the stories' Protagonists: What is the nature of their self-identity?

It's a dynamic present from the very beginning with Luke's transformation from farm boy to fighter pilot and throughout every single installment of the series.

So I encourage you to do this when you settle in this December to watch the final chapter in the original *Star*

Wars storyline. Beyond the action and spectacle, beyond the nostalgia and plot twists...

Consider Rey and her Protagonist's journey, how she confronts the question of identity and who she chooses to become.

Think about self-identity in relation to Finn, Poe Dameron, and, yes, even Kylo Ren.

That existential challenge confronts each of those characters and the choices they make... and the actions they take...

Are a reflection of who they have opted to become.