The Inner Essence of David as Primary Selection Criteria to be selected King of Israel: A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis of 1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Jim Schnell, Ph.D[a*]

a.   Department of Cultural Studies, University of Montana, USA

Abstract: This report offers an interpretation of the inner essence of David as being a primary selection criterion in his becoming King of Israel.   This topic is significant because it highlights how the subtle notion of essence can impact how we perceive others.   A symbolic interactionist sociological perspective is used to analyze 1 Samuel 16 1-13.   This approach allows for creative analysis and clear statements of findings.   1 Samuel 16 1-13 is rich with nuance and offers fertile text for interpretation.   My thesis statement stresses that the inner essence of David was a primary selection criterion when he was selected to be King of Israel, and that this phenomenon can be interpreted using a symbolic interactionist perspective.

Key Words: David, King of Israel; Samuel 16: 1-13; symbolic interactionism; essence[11]

1.   Introduction

In this report, I will be interpreting the inner essence of David as a primary selection criterion for being selected as the King of Israel.   In doing so, a symbolic interactionist sociological perspective will be used to analyze 1 Samuel 16 1-13.   This perspective allows for creative analysis, and it is within this framework that analysis will proceed.   1 Samuel 16 1-13 is rich with nuance and offers fertile text for interpretation.

My thesis statement is that the inner essence of David, as a primary criterion for being selected King of Israel, can be understood through the symbolic interactionist framework. This topic is significant because it highlights how the subtle notion of essence can impact how we perceive others.

Symbolic interactionism offers a robust foundation for interpretation.   This theoretical orientation has evolved in response to a continual stream of commentaries on its relevance. To stress a fundamental understanding of symbolic interactionism, I will ground it in the original definitions and clarifications from the years in which it was initially conceptualized.   Hence, the dates for the sources will range from the 1960s to the 1970s. It was a time rich with speculation about the relevance of symbolic interaction and related phenomena.

2.   Literature Review
2.1 David as Symbol

References for David are rich in nuance regarding who he was, what he represented, and the meanings associated with his ascension to the throne.   These and corresponding phenomena illustrate that emphasis should not be placed on who David was, but rather on the meanings assigned to him.

Focus centered on "David as the true king designated to replace Saul, who had been divinely chosen but then divinely rejected ([Metzger, 1993](#)). As such, his existence as a symbol can be more fully recognized.   It is through this lens that one can better employ symbolic interactionist foundations in interpreting David's being anointed King of Israel.

Corresponding email: ja**mes.schnell@ful**brightmail.org (Jim Schnell**,** Ph.D.)

2.2 Symbolic Interactionism:

George Mead is known to be the father of symbolic interactionism. In Mind, Self, and Society, Mead conveys that organisms are interpreted with reference to their background landscape, and that background is determined by the person's interpretation. There are four primary perspectives within symbolic interactionism: the Chicago, Iowa, Dramaturgical, and Ethnomethodological perspectives. The Chicago view, guided by the views of Herbert Blumer, is based on a qualitatively grounded and humanist position: the situation should be interpreted "through the eyes of the actor (Meltzer et al., 2020).

Blumer posited that human behavior is unpredictable. The self is governed by the orientations of the "I" and the "me." Within this perspective, the "I" is impulsive, and the "me" is a compilation of established attitudes. Perceptions are typically received through the "I," and then understood through the "me." Blumer's understanding of human behavior impacts his method. In using such an approach, Blumer's methodological view is more likely to experience modification as needed (Fukada & Asato, 2004).

The Dramaturgical view, based on Goffman's theories, emphasizes that social interaction is grounded in the management of impressions that are received. That is, we deliver presentations to each other. This view is exhibited in Goffman's books such as The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), Interaction Ritual (1967), and Encounters (1961). This Dramaturgical view is beneficial for interpreting the meanings associated with David.

2.3 The Perceived Essence of David

God's spirit inspires David, i.e., makes him qualified to rule when the time comes (Laymon, 1971)." This fulfillment of spirit in the form of David results in a supernatural understanding of David and what he represents. "Samuel anointed, privately, an unsuspecting young man to kingly office (Pillay, 2009) . This anointment, out of public view, added to the specter of David's elevation to the throne. It perpetuated an air of mystery and divine intervention.

The emphasis on "heart" is key to interpreting David's significance. Samuel learns that Israel "will have a king with a rightly committed heart. What is valued and sought is a right heart and not appearance and stature (Brueggemann, 2012). This conceptual emphasis on "heart" is abstract, but its relevance to Samuel's instruction is clear. Samuel receives the command to anoint him. So, he (David) was anointed, and the Spirit of Yahweh came upon David from that day onwards (Pinto, 2019). One can ascertain that for the relevance of David's "heart" to take hold, it must be recognized as uniquely meaningful and be interpreted in a similar manner across the varied constituencies.

It is in this interpretative process that one can understand how sociological framing is key to the unfolding events. David resonated with meaning not so much by his inherent qualities as by the meanings others ascribed to him. The meanings assigned to him needed to be consistent, relevant, and widely recognized, both descriptive and understandable. This is where the sociology of communication processes comes to the forefront for consideration.

3. Methodology

3.1 Symbolic Interactionist Foundations for Interpreting the Essence of David

Herbert Blumer developed the symbolic interactionism conceptual framework. In Symbolic Interactionism (1969), he offered three tenets of symbolic interactionism, which are widely accepted in the social sciences. The first tenet is that people respond to things based on the meanings they hold for them.

The second tenet is that the meaning of such phenomena is concluded from, or flows from, social interactions that we have with others. The third tenet is that these meanings are derived and adapted within an interpretive process applied by each individual when addressing the things he/she encounter (Blumer, 1969). Meanings are interpreted to be social products: stimulation, interpretation, and reaction.

Symbolic interactionism presents a broad understanding of the role of communication in social composition. It impacts many domains of communication theory, including role perspectives, reference group orientations, social and personal perception, self-theory, interpersonal orientations, and language and culture (Kuhn, 1964).

Manis and Meltzer provide six fundamental positions regarding symbolic interaction. First, the mind, self, and society are dynamic, stressing interpersonal interaction. Second, language is the main mode within the evolution of the mind and self. Third, the mind is the internalization of social processes maintained by the individual. Fourth, behaviors are developed by the person in the process of functioning. Fifth, a person's definition of the situation is a fundamental factor in human conduct. Sixth, the self is the result of societal definitions and correlated definitions (Greco & Stenner, 2013).

Thus, we are positioned to understand the "heart" of David as an abstraction that reflects considerable degrees of interpretation by all concerned. Samuel was acting not so much in accord with his own observations but more in line with the instructions he received. My reading of relevant texts is that he came to interpret David's "heart" as significant, but that this significance began with the instructions he received as divine guidance. This underscores how perception plays a key role in such a proclamation, but it also reveals how tenuous the consistency of such perceptions can be. This consistency of perception cannot be assumed or prematurely embraced.

4. Results:
4.1 Contradiction in the Appeal of David
The proclamation of David as King is not without contradiction. Samuel is informed about the "heart" of David and how this strength should not be confused with the physical attractiveness that others possess. "Samuel is warned—not to trust in appearances since 'it is not as a man sees that God sees (McCarter & Albright, 1980). However, with the anointing of David, they find that he too possesses physical appeal in addition to his spiritual appeal. Ralph Klein builds upon this when pointing out, "People, Samuel is reminded, are impressed by what is on the surface; Yahweh perceives what the person is really like (Elledge, 2015). This clarification makes sense insofar as Yahweh is omnipotent and can see into a person's soul.

But then Klein goes on to highlight what almost seems to be a contradiction. "David was ushered in, his good looks—despite what had been said—confirmed that he was Yahweh's choice (Schnell, 2022). This kind of contradiction creates the impression that our ability to comprehend developments such as the anointing of David is limited to our capacity to conceptualize, which may very well be confined to the historical period in which we are functioning. That is, an event must be understood in the context in which it occurred.

The scenarios are ripe for interpretation from a symbolic interactionist perspective. The varied characters interact with phenomena in their environment based on the meanings they associate with them. These meanings are developed via their interactions with others. Furthermore, these meanings change over time as additional developments and interpretations emerge. Thus, we see how abstract the development of meaning can be and how elusive a uniform consensus regarding its assignment is.

For instance, the idea of David becoming king because of his "heart" rests very much with an understanding of what "heart" means. A symbolic interactionist framework allows for clarifying "heart" in terms that varied constituencies might embrace, even when there are contradictions present regarding the relevance of physical beauty. That David is selected because of his inner beauty, as it aligns with "heart," and is concurrently blessed with physical beauty, creates a context open to varied interpretations.

4.2 The Challenge of Biblical Interpretation
Interpretations of the Bible are used to justify a wide range of perspectives across the political spectrum. "If the society were to engage in a disciplined reflection on the public dimensions and ethical implications of scholarly work, it would constitute a responsible scholarly citizenship that could be a significant participant in the global discourse seeking justice and well-being for all (Fiorenza, 1988). Clarity of focus and the fundamental tenets of discourse are essential if there is to be a uniformly recognized benefit from such interpretation. Often, if such attempts at interpretive explanation are to be embraced, they must be perceived as objective both in form and in content.

There are times when alignment with Biblical scriptures is associated with both ends of the political spectrum and can be interpreted as being against opposing positions on that political spectrum. "More frequent Bible

reading is associated with shifts in political and moral views (Franzen, 2013). When that happens, the social order is left scrambling for an orientation they can embrace and feel reinforced by. A result of such a phenomenon is that all concerned can end up perpetuating the fallacy that God stands in solidarity with them and against their opposition, even when it is fragmented into a variety of seemingly independent parts.

5.   Discussion

Notions of fragmentation can be recognized in the content and form as has happened in the digital age. "The Bible has become a fragmented book in its digital form that has profound implications for perceptions of its authority, content, and interpretation (Siker, 2020). When this happens, we are left wrestling with questions that go far beyond content, as the means of message conveyance can carry contextual framing influences that are inherently more difficult to decipher than literal content analysis. The new communication technologies present an ongoing challenge with such subtle (but steady) obstacles to well-grounded interpretation.

6.   Conclusion

In this report, I have interpreted David's inner essence as a primary criterion for his selection as King of Israel. In doing so, I have used a symbolic interactionist sociological perspective to analyze 1 Samuel 16 1-13.   The guidelines for this assignment encouraged students to exercise innovation and creativity in their analysis and to use this as an opportunity to venture into new directions.   1 Samuel 16 1-13 is brimming with nuance and is composed of ample text for interpretation.

My path with such analysis has been grounded in symbolic interactionism as a seasoned interpretive framework.   This theoretical foundation is rich in possibilities, enabling insightful analysis. My emphasis on the application of symbolic interactionism has been grounded in the original statements on its definition and relevance, necessitating sourcing from publications from the 1960s-1970s, when symbolic interactionism was initially established as a theoretical framework.   I proceeded with awareness of the social context that served as the landscape for the development of such an orientation.

References

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism* (Vol. 2). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Brueggemann, W. (2012). *First and second Samuel*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Elledge, E. R. (2015). The Illeism of Jesus and Yahweh: A Study of the Use of the Third-Person Self-Reference in the Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Its Implications for Christology.

Fiorenza, E. S. (1988). The ethics of biblical interpretation: Decentering biblical scholarship. *Journal of Biblical literature*, *107*(1), 3-17.

Franzen, A. B. (2013). Reading the Bible in America: The moral and political attitude effect. *Review of religious research*, *55*(3), 393-411.

Fukada, A., & Asato, N. (2004). Universal politeness theory: application to the use of Japanese honorifics. *Journal of pragmatics*, *36*(11), 1991-2002.

Greco, M., & Stenner, P. (2013). *Emotions: a social science reader*. Routledge.

Kuhn, M. H. (1964). Major trends in symbolic interaction theory in the past twenty-five years. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *5*(1), 61-84.

Laymon, C. M. (1971). The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible.

McCarter, P. K., & Albright, W. F. (1980). *1. Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. Doubleday.

Meltzer, B., Petras, J., & Reynolds, L. (2020). *Symbolic interactionism (RLE Social Theory): Genesis, varieties and criticism*. Routledge.

Metzger, B. M. (1993). Michael D. Coogan. In: The Oxford companion to the Bible, New York: Oxford University Press.

Pillay, S. M. (2009). *The Characterisation of David in the Samuel Narratives* University of Pretoria].

Pinto, L. P. d. S. (2019). Different literary editions in 2 Samuel 10-12: a comparative study of the Hebrew and Greek textual traditions.

Schnell, J. (2022). The Inner Essence of David as Primary Selection Criteria to be selected King of Israel: A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis of 1 Samuel 16: 1-13. *Journal of Social Sciences and Economics*, *1*(1), 37-41.

Siker, J. S. (2020). Bible as Book in the Digital Realm. *Hebrew Studies*, *61*(1), 173-196.