

## Introduction

Definition of “self” is elusive, even if the concept is in daily use and taken for granted.

Different words mean roughly the same thing - e.g. identity and ego; but self is also used to mean many different things.

Chapter covers:

(a) The historical context of “self” terminology and binaries => disparity between concepts of self, originating from different theoretical perspectives.

(b) A phenomenological approach to self - rich description, ontological focus on experience and embodiment.

(c) Interview based and observation based social psychoanalytical methods

(d) Revisits the binaries; concludes knowledges of self are situated in time, place & methodology.

Self is covered by other disciplines too - e.g. philosophy, sociology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis.

### **Self-consciousness**

**Locke** (1694!) - First distinction between ‘personal identity’ and a religious ‘soul’. Personal identity as a natural phenomenon which can be observed. Self consciousness - two terms brought together for the first time to separate inner and outer actions - reflects ‘modern’ (Enlightenment) thought.

These ideas are challenged by ‘postmodern’ thinking:

- Criticism of the universal claims made for the self; instead, postmodern claims on self are situated in Western culture
- Third world cultures often emphasise family and other collectives

## SPM Chapter 5 - Self

These cultures run counter to the individualisation of the self (autonomous, freedom of choice, self-reflection) seen in the West; and the processes of individualisation are seen as running against obligations of kinship and gender inequalities of care burdens placed on women (**Beck and Beck-Gernsheim**)

Modern view of the self:

- Self-conscious
- Integrated
- Purposive
- Generalised

Postmodern view of the self:

- Situated
- Fragmented
- Ephemeral set of performances & positions
- ... incorporating social differences of class, race, gender etc.

“Self” becomes referred to as “identities”

### **Plural social selves**

**Locke** - definition of self = self-consciousness, not unselfconscious being and action. Therefore divides the self (identity?) into monitoring self and monitored self.

e.g. **Cooley** - looking glass self  
**Mead** - the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’

**SSP** - based on the idea of there being a social self, an observable self, and that there is a philosophical difference between knower/known; subject and object of consciousness.

Self => reflexiveness of mind; the ability to see ourselves as others see us.

Once self is divided into two in this way, it is a short step from seeing self as multiple - e.g. **James**, cited in **Danziger**.

Borges - writer - explores his two different selves - the public self and his private self. Not comfortable, one self feels more authentic than the other.

Similar to **Winnicott**’s distinction between the true and false self - the public self being more false.

However, Borges comments on the flow between the two selves => less of a looking glass self than multiples of “me”.

**Goffman** - three aspects of self:

- As performer
- As audience
- As the character performed

Self-consciousness means people are aware of what others think of them => pressure to conform to social norms.

**Goffman**’s dramaturgical analogy influential in how people are trained for service industry jobs - the idea being we can become more sensitive to others needs this way.

### **The individual self**

**PSP** - avoided study of the self as not amenable to scientific methods of inquiry.

However, **Allport** (1943) - argued several experimental studies lead to the conclusion that ‘ego involvement or its absence can make a critical difference in human behaviour.’

Recognition that the concept of self has to be central to a psychology which can understand behaviour. Argued unity and coherence characterise people’s behaviour and how they experience themselves.

### ***The self constituted in language and discourse***

Idea of a social self emerged from the concept of an observing self (which takes a view of others too) and observed self.

Discourse goes beyond “I” and “me” - discourses position people and so constitute selves. They represent a major challenge to the PSP view of the self:

Discourses constitute the self - they are not just pre-existing external influences on an already existing individual. In this view the self = the meaning systems exchanged between people.

Language and discourse were around before any particular individual was - language is intersubjective and so what takes place “in the space between people” then has an effect on them.

### ***The real me and the true or false self***

Binaries at issue in the social psychology of self:

- Integrated or fragmented
- Social or individual
- True or false
- Spontaneous or performed self-consciously
- Authentic or inauthentic

Issues of ‘real me’ seen in modern life - e.g. Jade in BB8.

**Rogers** - humanistic psychology - has the notion of a true self. Developed as a reaction in NA in 50s/60s to objectification of self through experiment & psychometrics. Wanted to strengthen the ego self in the face of what he regarded as distorting influences of social life.

Regards feelings as the gold standard of personhood. A Western pre-occupation with the self?

HP part of a wider critique of positivism has:

An epistemological principle - only by experience can we meaningfully know about people.

An ontological claim - we are who we are because of our experiences.

Shares this in common with phenomenological psychology - but only in the US did the two merge. In Europe, phenomenology allied with philosophy - interested in method and therapeutic self-discovery.

European phenomenology has a much bleaker view of humanity than HP.

**Winnicott** (psychoanalyst) - existence of a true self is a question for enquiry - not a starting assumption. Experience of ‘aliveness’ key - and cannot be assumed - e.g. problems in some children’s early caring environments robs them of this. If baby gestures are recognised, they develop a true sense of self; if misrecognised, they do not.

### ***The unconscious intersubjective self***

Concept appears in phenomenology, psychoanalysis, developmental and social psychology. Goes beyond the idea that the self is self-contained and essentially individual.

Psychoanalytic intersubjectivity: people made up of introjected parts of others. These flow dynamically between people. Consciousness is not the locus of self; motivation comes from the unconscious.

SP borrows from **Klein’s** “object relations”. This argues defences against anxiety are intersubjective. Processes of projection and introjection lead to splitting - separation of good from bad. Applies to objects and the ego - bad parts of this are split off through projection and assigned to an outsider.

Splitting of good from bad = paranoid-schizoid position

Emotional maturity leads to the acknowledgement that good and bad are present in all (objects, people) - the depressive position - enables the self to become more integrated.

Self is seen in dynamic tension - avoiding the dualism of fragmented or integrated self.

Depressive forces act towards integration; paranoid-schizoid forces towards fragmentation. Introjection can enlarge the self (ego). Processes are continuous throughout life.

### **The phenomenological self**

Phenomenology = investigation of what it is to be human through lived experience.

Avoids seeing people as isolated from their world. Two key concepts:

Dasein - ‘being in the world’

Lifeworld - the world in which our life is set in cannot be separated from our subjective experience of life

The self is active and is always making meaning from experience.

**Husserl** - someone can only know what they can experience - hence the methodological focus on lived experience.

Investigates subjective experience rather than objective reality.

**Husserl** - three methodological steps/rules:

1. Rule of epoché - bracketing (suspend) our own expectations / assumptions to enable the focus of inquiry to be on the data of experience. Involves not trying to place objects in time and space, simply to focus on the way we are currently experiencing something.

2. Focus on description and resist explanation - as hypothesising needs to be avoided if the focus is to be on lived experience.

3. Horizontalisation - the avoidance of prioritising one thing being described over another - everything should be treated as having the same significance at the beginning of our inquiries.

**Seierstad** - shopping in burkas example.

- Conveys the experience of shopping in a burka through the use of rich description - i.e. consistent with epoché.
- Avoids interpretation - focus is on the embodied aspects of experience.
- Is in a specific cultural and physical setting of an Afghan market.
- Conveys how individuality is lost when wearing a burka - the name of the wearer is not used until they open their veil to inspect something more closely.
- Also illustrates how the social constraints of the setting are not entirely successful at positioning the wearer - e.g. her individuality is seen in her specific movements / movements of the burka.

**Langdrige** - notes Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Buber, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are regarded as both existential philosophers and phenomenologists.

Self is approached through the concept of "existence"

Existence is:

- Unique (we all make our own meanings)
- Active (Sartre - to be is to do)
- Freely choosing (so anxious, guilty, responsibility for actions and authenticity)
- Situated - in time and in the world - Dasein

... which are all ways of describing the self.

### *Respecting the lifeworld of an Alzheimer's sufferer*

Challenge of turning phenomenological ideas into a research methods - this is an example by **Ashworth and Ashworth**.

Used the experience of caring for a relative with Alzheimer's and makes the case that the idea of a lifeworld is a useful tool and has implications for the way we care for sufferers.

Helps carers act respectfully, rather than treating the sufferer as beyond understanding - as the sufferer continues to experience a unique lifeworld.

Three intersubjective characteristics/rules to enable understanding of the sufferer:

- They are a subject in the world, with a mind, like the carer
- The world is intersubjective for both carer and sufferer - i.e. it is possible for both to share a common object of attention
- Perspective taking is a reciprocal activity - it is possible for the carer to take the perspective of the sufferer and vice-versa

Using these rules, a carer can reflect on talk or action to discover something about the lifeworld of the sufferer. Own tendencies to understand can be bracketed off - to use only those perspectives that seem to accurately reflect the sufferer's lifeworld.

e.g. bracketing off the question of whether something being experienced by the sufferer is 'real' or not - e.g. a sufferer talking about her husband 'loving a place' that did not exist when he was alive. The important thing is not that it is real or not, but what it reveals about how that couple were - e.g. sharing things together.

### *A phenomenology of working-class experience*

**Charlesworth** - uses this method to conduct work into working-class experience (he identifies himself as a working-class man).

Interest is in how experience can be "inscribed in their comportment and motility, the ways they have unconsciously learned to be in the world" - incarnate subjectivity.

- Transcription of interviews is done in a way to convey rhythm, tone & emotion in interviewee and his own speech.
- Conclusions are only drawn about situated working-class experience - not about named individuals.
- Argues experience of class is always from a world-defining context and that selves take shape in it - class is not about understanding the self through a role, but a locating of self by being in a particular social realm.

### The social psychoanalytic self

Principles of SP impact its methodology - i.e. its central claims of unconscious, hidden, unintentional influences on self and therefore on our actions and relationships.

SP methods are developments of psychoanalysis which:

- Include the person's social setting
- Understand the hidden aspects of self

### Vince's 'choice'

SP case study of a man who wanted to hold onto a job which was bad for him, but then had this choice taken away by a mystery illness - **Hollway and Jefferson**

Illustrates two aspects of SP:

#### 1. Methodology used

Free association narrative interview (FANI) - allows interviewee to determine the structure in which they tell their story; connections between ideas are through free associations. These show emotional meaningful connections in the interviewee's experiences of events.

Idea is this enables the researcher to go beyond self-conscious presentation and provide insight into their unconscious motivations.

#### 2. Ontological concern (understanding of agency)

Agency - seen in modernist concerns and approach to self. Assumption is an individual can consciously decide and make rational decisions to act. However, SP challenges - if the unconscious is dominant, it specifies present & past social settings which influence unconscious dynamics.

Case study identifies three key areas of Vince's life:

- Daily experience of his job
- It being a respectable job
- His relationship with his boss

Analysis of 2 x 90m interviews concludes that:

Vince being too sick to work elegantly resolves (through his body, not conscious thought) his dilemma of not wanting to quit his job - he feels he should work if he can - but at the same time not wanting to work. An unconscious resolution - not a conscious one - so self is in the unconscious.

Other forms of qualitative analysis of the interviews would reinforce Vince's assertions that he wants to work and has been stopped from doing so by illness. SP argues that you cannot reduce his 'self' to be located purely in consciousness.

Methodologically, **Hollway** claims that free association can lead to the conclusion about Vince's hidden self.

(i) Account of a panic attack over being coerced to give evidence in court that he can account for 5 months afterwards (in an interview about local crime) but can't make sense of why he felt the panic. Free association suggests his ability to move from a story about feeling ill to the court case - directly - indicates an emotional connection between both thoughts.

(ii) He goes off sick after the court case has been resolved (and everything is therefore ok) - which illustrates not a reaction of the rational self, but from a conflicting desire - suppressed in consciousness but expressed by his body in his symptoms - hence unconscious.

Case study illustrates:

- A close link between method and conclusions drawn
- Method informed by psychoanalytic principles of free association and unconscious conflict
- The conclusions drawn by **Hollway and Jefferson** in this case are not possible without a method that accounts for the unconscious.

#### Esther's self-worth

Previous case study relied on interviews and self-reports - so depends to some extent on self-knowledge. Observational methods can also be used from an SP perspective - e.g. observing children - emphasises the role of unconscious intersubjectivity in the development of self.

Method used was originally developed for training professionals how to work with parents (mothers) caring for babies.

Records minute, open-ended detail of actions and reactions of babies to carers and vice versa (**Rustin**).

So not a research method to start with - and similar to phenomenological methods - as has to use great sensitivity to how babies express themselves bodily (can't talk!)

SP takes this method and applies interpretation - to infer internalisation - i.e. introjection - an unconscious, intersubjective dynamic.

**Turp** - extracts from 2y.o. baby observation - Esther - (hour per week in baby's home). Exploration of responses of her parents and how they are internalised to produce good internal objects. Turp argues this process should result in a sense of self-worth. Strong developmental focus.

Incident of Esther bumping head; father intervening; praising her for showing him what happened; picks her up and comforts her; more happy interaction between the two.

Introjection concept - interpretation of pleased and proud responses of father by Esther introjects a good object.

Observation bypasses self-reports - makes it easier to notice non-linguistic and unselfconscious aspects of self.

## Summary

Many similarities between phen. and SP approaches to self - i.e.:

- Both go beyond the agency-structure and individual-society dualisms
- Self is situated, dynamically changing as meaning is made from experience
- Recognition of embodied and intersubjective nature of self
- Anxiety central to both, but
  - phenomenology sees it leading to conscious struggle against purposelessness
  - SP emphasises that unconscious defences take some actions away from our conscious selves

However, problem of consciousness is expressed in different ways: Phenomenology - degrees of consciousness - some reflective, others not (**Van Deuzen-Smith**).

SP observation shares with phen. an interest in going beyond words; is interested in descriptive embodied experience and brackets explanation to understand the details of experience.

## Conclusions

Many binaries in the history of approaches to self - i.e. does it reside in / can be conceptualised as:

- Thoughts or feelings
- Mind or body or language
- Consciousness or unconsciousness
- Existing before social interaction or produced by it
- Active (agency) or passive
- Within the individual or between people (intrapsychic vs intersubjective)
- Coherent or fragmented

- Produced in the instant or over time

We should replace either / or with both/and to better understand the self.

However, no current integrated account of the self exists today - a project for the future.

Empirical methods will always be partial in what kind of account of self they produce

Methods informed by theory and produce an image of self that reflects the starting theory.

Theory should inform methods and be modified by results.