

Social Theories and Modern Understandings of The "Self"

Rizwan Akhtar

Lecturer at University of Swat at-rizwan@gmail.com

Jameel Sadam

Lecturer at University of Swat at-sadam@gmail.com

Abstract

Modern sociological viewpoints on the concept of "self" give great importance to social constructionism, authority, and reflexivity. Contemporary Foucaultian research has determined that power is essential for the development of the ego. This corpus of work provides a significant challenge to the dominant sociological viewpoints that have been influenced by symbolic interactionism and Mead. The field of sociology has been enriched by the contributions of various perspectives. Reflexivity, which is fundamental to the Meadian tradition, offers a comprehensive framework for comprehending political activity and agency. This specific component is noticeably lacking in the current and upcoming research projects. The prevailing trend in current empirical research is guided by the concept of social construction, which serves as a cohesive framework to combine modern and classic sociological viewpoints on the self. The inclination is driven by the theory of social construction. Promising future study directions involve examining the social context in which self-construction occurs, investigating the social resources used in this process, and evaluating the growing significance of non-human entities in the field of self-construction. This study also examines the constraints of research that overly prioritizes the psychological impacts of self-construction, as is the situation with this particular examination.

Keywords: identity, power, social creation, and reflexivity

Introduction

The concentration of modern social theory on the nature of the self, self-identity, and individual subjectivity is perhaps the single most illuminating indicator of the development of modern social theory. According to Elliot (2001, page 8), the discussion that has taken place in the social sciences and the humanities over the last two decades of the 20th century has focused mostly on the ideas of identity and the person. The development and growth of a number of academic fields, such as queer theory, feminism, cultural studies, poststructuralism, and feminism, are primarily responsible for the phenomena known as attention expansion.

However, it is essential to realize that societal forces beyond the sphere of academics have played a crucial part in the development of a growing interest with the idea of selfhood. This is because these cultural influences have contributed to the growth of this attraction. Customs and cultural presumptions have been devalued as a result of the ongoing processes of late-capitalist globalization, which has resulted to a variety of types of exposure for individuals. The aforementioned phenomenon is demonstrated by the growing trend of personalization in social interactions (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), the broadening of societal roles (Frank & Meyer, 2002), and

the emergence of "identity projects" (Giddens, 1991), in which individuals actively shape their social position and personal significance through deliberate decision-making and exertion. These are all examples of how individuals are actively shaping their social position and personal significance.

The present emphasis on self-centeredness has resulted in the development of a corpus of research that is interdisciplinary in nature, employs a variety of methodological approaches, and is dominated by a postmodern worldview. Several academic departments, including literary studies, anthropology, political science, history, and communications, have made significant progress in the analysis and understanding of the self in recent years. It is interesting to note that a substantial section of recent research has demonstrated a limited reliance on symbolic interactionism, which is often recognized as the preeminent sociological theoretical framework with regard to self-related phenomena. This is something that should be taken into consideration.

The following observation, which was made by Lemert in 1992 and used to further illustrate his position, can be found here. Symbolic interactionism, which is analogous to pragmatism in its more general definition, is constrained by the fact that it cannot be applied to the discourse that surrounds the postmodern situation in any meaningful way. Because of its prominent emphasis on language and pragmatism, as well as its unwavering commitment to understanding knowledge as intrinsically intertwined with the workings of the world, Social Interactionism (SI) can be considered as a logical extension of postmodern ideas. This is owing to SI's commitment to viewing knowledge as essentially connected with the workings of the world. This assumption, on the other hand, has not been supported by any evidence. The name Charles appears as the author of the work that was published by Lemert (1992), more notably on page eight.

The argument made by Lemert that pragmatism and postmodernism have certain similarities at the level of the surface is correct. In point of fact, there is a consensus that is widely acknowledged on the significance of language and communication, the questioning of symbols and objectivity, and the acknowledgment that identity is influenced by the social context in which one finds themselves. There has been a significant flow of ideas, in particular with regard to the idea of identity (Howard, 2000; Cerulo, 1997), ever since the evaluation that was carried out by Lemert (Denzin, 1992). Studies that use a limited viewpoint and are influenced by the concepts

of symbolic interactionism make up the majority of the body of study on the concept of self that is conducted within the field of American sociology. Gecas and Burke (1995), Gubrium and Holstein (2000), and Burke et al. (2003) are three notable instances of scientists who have contributed to this line of investigation.

The observed distinction may be a consequence of the influences of institutions as well as the elements associated with disciplines. It is possible, in the end, to trace the origins of postmodernism back to the fields of philosophy, art, and literary criticism as opposed to sociology. However, there are significant distinctions between symbolic interactionism and postmodernism that go beyond the rigid boundaries of the disciplines in which they are studied. It has been demonstrated that the presence of multiple conceptual frameworks and different epistemologies presents significant challenges to the process of mutual elaboration. It's possible that the pragmatist tradition and symbolic interactionism will be regarded as relics of modernist ideology when viewed through the lens of postmodernism. In direct contrast to the postmodern rejection of scientific discourse is the adherence of symbolic interactionism to the ideas of the Enlightenment, which encourage the use of reason and rationality. Symbolic interactionism promotes the application of reason and rationality. In point of fact, a sizeable amount of postmodern scholarship is predicated on the assumption of a strong anti-essentialism that vehemently opposes the philosophical concept of the self.

On the other hand, a large number of symbolic interactionists hold the view that postmodernism does not offer any important new insights or innovations that go beyond what has already been communicated employing the conceptual framework of interactionism. In his book of the same name, Maines (1996) makes the argument that postmodernism is of no use in the context of interactionist research since, at its core, it is really a simplistic duplication of pragmatic reasoning. The tendency of postmodernist interactionism to deconstruct itself based on its own epistemological arguments makes it unlikely that any theoretical convergence will take place, as stated by Maines (1996, page 335). This makes it unlikely that any theoretical convergence will take place. Within the context of interactionist theory, there is the possibility that the conventional view of the self can be deepened and broadened by the use of certain components that can be found in modern literature. On the other hand, it is essential to keep in mind that a perfect congruence between postmodernism and symbolic interactionism is extremely unlikely to take place.

In a similar vein, a comprehensive application of pragmatism may help to clarify unclear conceptual features that are related to modern research if it is used in the appropriate manner. Through the application of interactionist and postmodern theoretical frameworks, the purpose of this research is to investigate the progress that sociology has made in its understanding of the self. This emergent point of view is founded on a set of fundamental ideas that may be broken down into three key concepts: social constructionism, reflexivity, and power. In recent years, academic research have placed a substantial emphasis on analyzing the role that power dynamics play in the development of an individual's sense of self-identity. This line of investigation acts as an important correction to the mainstream sociological ideas advocated by Mead, Goffman, and symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is another position that is challenged by this line of inquiry.

The idea of reflexivity is central to the Meadian tradition and provides a conceptual framework for appreciating the roles of agency and political participation. This facet is conspicuously absent from a significant portion of the academic discourse that is being produced today. In conclusion, a sizeable proportion of the present empirical research is directed by the concept of social construction, which acts as a unifying framework for both contemporary and traditional sociological perspectives on the notion of the self.

POWER AND YOURSELF

One of the most notable ramifications of power pertains to the individual rather than the power per se. According to Foucault (1994, p. 214), For more than two decades, scholars in the fields of postmodernism and poststructuralism have been asserting the demise of the ego. According to the perspectives of Derrida, Laclau, and Baudrillard, the notion that individuals possess a core, rational, and distinct self, characterized by an inherent essence and autonomous consciousness, is essentially a political construction originating from the European Enlightenment. Foucault's contributions, as evidenced in his works from 1979, 1980, 1988, and 1994, have exerted a significant influence on the conceptualization of the ego, beyond the impact of any other scholar.

Foucault posits that the formation of the ego is intrinsically tied to power dynamics and can only be fully understood within the context of discourse systems that are distinctive to particular historical periods. Instead of merely exerting authority over a logical and limited individual, power systems shape the construction of the self by enforcing disciplinary standards on the physical body. Within various

institutional contexts such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and social service organizations, those in positions of authority, including technocrats, specialists, therapists, physicians, teachers, and officers, exert power by utilizing technologies that involve monitoring, measurement, assessment, and classification of the human body.

As a result, actions that are commonly portrayed as humanitarian behaviors aimed at enhancing community safety, health, and education might be understood as techniques employed to establish dominance. Consequently, the rejection of scientific knowledge, reason, and rationality as progressive methods of freedom occurs. On the contrary, it is widely posited that the Enlightenment values are perceived to function as the conceptual underpinning for the establishment of authority and regulation within contemporary society. Foucault posits that the emergence of the self occurs as a result of the functioning of discourse systems, wherein the subject is compelled to assume a self-regulating role rather than acting as an autonomous agent.

According to Stuart Hall (1996), who builds on the ideas of Foucault, the generation of self and identity occurs within discourse rather than existing outwardly. Therefore, there is no genuine self that is hidden "inside" or behind the constructed or externally observable self. Hence, the primary aim of analytical endeavors is the process of deconstructing rather than uncovering. Through the process of deconstructing the self, one can reveal the inherent reliance of the self on speech and question the underlying assumptions of essentialism. According to Hall, it is implied that research should prioritize the examination of the particular institutional and historical conditions surrounding the process of "discourse formation." In his work, Rose (1996) provides an analysis of the diverse methodological methods within the Foucauldian paradigm.

According to his perspective, the act of analyzing the ego does not yield an investigation into the intricacies of personality and social organization, which entails the examination of how individuals of varying ages manifest distinct psychological traits, feelings, beliefs, and diseases. The rationale for rejecting such assessments is that they assume a particular mode of thinking that is a product of historical development, specifically emerging during the nineteenth century (p. 129). Rose (year) suggests an alternative approach known as a "genealogy of subjectification." This approach emphasizes the localized efforts to establish significance, particularly in connection to specialized terminologies and the methodologies employed in governmental, scientific,

and occupational contexts. Cushman's (1995) scholarly analysis of the historical development of psychotherapy in the United States serves as an illustrative example of a similar approach. The author's work is based on the concept that the existence of a universal, timeless self is not supported, and instead, there are only individual selves that are specific to particular contexts.

Furthermore, the author argues that there is no overarching theory about the self that applies universally, but rather, there are only theories that are applicable within specific contexts. Despite this perspective, the author offers a compelling analysis of how institutional, political, and economic factors influence our societal perception of the self. The primary scholarly contribution is in the development of a connection between the utilization of power within historical contexts and the examination of individual identity. The aforementioned study has provided evidence of the manner in which the ego is influenced by power dynamics and is closely intertwined with systems of discourse and knowledge. This development holds considerable significance as it has opened up new areas for research pertaining to gender and sexuality-related identities. Nevertheless, it might be argued that the Foucauldian tradition exhibits a notable limitation. The rejection of Enlightenment ideals has resulted in the elimination of the assumption of an active and knowledgeable individual, as well as the basis of a universally applicable identity (Elliott, 2001).

The issue at hand presents a challenge as it hinders the recognition of the potential for liberation through coordinated resistance and political participation when individuals are perceived just as subjects of discussion. According to Best (1994, p. 46), the issue that arose from this radical antihumanism was the challenge of pursuing social change in the absence of individuals who are both free and actively engaged. Foucault's analysis might be characterized as a reduction of consciousness and identity formation to the process of coercive socialization. However, it can be argued that he did not fully comprehend the potential for individualization that is facilitated by modernity. Foucault and other postmodernists have been compelled by critics to provide a defense of the subject in the face of accusations of moral relativism (Levine 1992), neoconservatism (Habermas 1983), and political passivity (Gitlin 1995), notwithstanding the fact that they did not outrightly dismiss all assertions of truth or the potential for resistance.

According to Nicholson and Seidman (1995, p. 35), they argue that a social postmodernism can provide a resolution to the current political predicament. This

approach combines critical analysis with constructive avenues for action. It involves challenging the notion of fixed identities, shifting the focus away from individual subjects and society as central entities, and instead centering the analysis on power/knowledge regimes. These elements serve as valuable resources for critical analysis and the pursuit of democratic politics. According to Mouffe (1995), in line with this particular approach, the loss of coherence within feminism is not a necessary consequence when gender is deconstructed as an attribute of the individual.

The author suggests an alternative approach to politics that focuses on the formation of a collective identity as radical democratic citizens. This approach also advocates for the endorsement of political movements that are tied to identity, even though their nature may be unclear and influenced by speech. In order to achieve this substantial and imperative reconfiguration, it is essential to conceptualize the self as an embodied agent, possessing the ability to effectively address and resolve challenges, rather than as an ambiguous and undefined "subject position." Put simply, comprehending the reflexive process of the social self necessitates a grasp of the philosophical underpinnings of American pragmatism, which are lacking in current research.

What The Self is as a Social Building

The major objective of a great number of builders has been to create fresh and cheerier things from the existing ruins. In spite of the fact that postmodern concepts are significant, one ought to look at them more as a point of departure than as a conclusion to be reached for good. Rosenberg (1981) conducted an analysis of the sociological viewpoints on the self, and one of his hypotheses was that the self not only emerges as a result of social interactions, but also exerts influence as a social entity. Gergen (1999, page 30) cites this analysis, and he states that according to Rosenberg's research, the self not only emerges as a result of social interactions, but also exerts influence. The self is investigated as a pliable, deliberate, and innovative reply in the ensuing study, which contrasts with the previous inquiry, which focuses on the self as a limited and ordered entity.

The underlying idea of a socially created self, in which the self is an outcome obtained by collective efforts and is not totally predetermined at birth and is not solely influenced by the social setting, is the crux of the distinction. This core idea is where the distinction lies. Examining self-concepts, self-meanings, and self-understandings as crucial social outcomes has been the primary emphasis of research conducted within

the symbolic interactionist paradigm, which was described by Cooley and Mead. This has been the case for the majority of the time. The notion that an individual's personality is mostly the product of their social environment has become increasingly prominent. The concept of the public self, which refers to the element of an individual that is observable by other people and conforms to cultural notions of personhood, is affected by the social construction of selfhood.

The public self refers to the aspect of an individual that is observable by others and conforms to societal notions of personhood. This structure takes into account the many distinct meanings and significances that might be ascribed to the public self. Cahill (1998) gives a convincing argument for the adoption of the "sociology of the person" perspective, while simultaneously admitting the presence of bias within the current body of work. This is accomplished by providing a compelling rationale for the adoption of the "sociology of the person" perspective. Cahill makes a conceptual distinction between the terms "person," "self," and "individual," which has the potential to be beneficial but is not likely to overtake the already accepted usage. I will refer to Cahill by his public persona when I talk about his persona. The author proposes a theoretical framework that helps to enable a better understanding of the collective institutionalization of public self-concepts, the mechanisms involved in their creation, and the exercise of disciplinary power within this environment.

The scientific research of Durkheim, Goffman, and Foucault served as the inspiration for this paradigm. The research conducted by Cahill provides a crucial alternate viewpoint to approaches taken by social constructionists, which frequently have a tendency for psychologizing the topic being discussed. According to Cahill (1998), the development of an interpretive representation of an individual's distinct identity is impacted more by the social persona than by the individual's unique self (p. 131). Cahill comes to this conclusion by arguing that an individual's unique self is less important than the societal persona. This suggests that in order to completely appreciate self-meanings, self-images, and self-concepts, it is important to take into consideration the broader context in which these notions exist. This context includes things like family, culture, and society.

Going beyond the current circumstances and taking into consideration the historical and cultural contexts that form the implicit assumptions about an individual's inherent characteristics is required to accomplish this goal. These contexts affect the implicit assumptions about an individual's inherent qualities.

Nonhuman Objects as Tools for Self-Construction

Knorr Cetina (2001) presents an intellectually stimulating review essay that delves into the sociological ramifications of a postsocial milieu. This environment is characterized by the erosion of conventional social structures due to modernity's emphasis on individualization. However, it also opens up opportunities for the emergence of nonhuman social resources. As per her assertion, the contemporary disengagement of identities has been accompanied by a proliferation of object-centered contexts that, akin to past communities and families, serve to situate and establish one's sense of self and delineate individual identity (p. 525). Although there is a limited amount of empirical research available to substantiate this assertion, certain studies (e.g., Sliver, 1996) have explored the transformation of things into identity resources. Additionally, an increasing corpus of study investigates the impact of emerging communication technologies on the process of self-construction.

Cerulo (1997) posits that the construction of identity has been influenced by the increased accessibility of new communication technologies to a wider range of individuals, which has altered the context in which identity is formed (p. 397). Altheide (2000) provides a more comprehensive analysis of this subject, contending that the advent of "media communities" signifies the influence of technical apparatuses on our everyday physical and symbolic surroundings. Based on the available data, it can be observed that media apparatuses play a role in facilitating the formation of individual identities that are less tied to specific geographical locations and, as a result, less reliant on the contextual interpretation of circumstances (Meyrowitz, 1997). In his study, Waskul (2002) illustrates the capacity of new media technology to engender a sense of detachment, particularly in relation to the body, as observed in the context of video. Additionally, this technology has the ability to disassociate the body from the ego and effectively conceal it. Significant implications are observed in both scenarios with regards to self-construction. Some individuals opt to lead a "parallel life," as exemplified by those who dedicate a substantial amount of time engaging in online role-playing games (Turkle, 1996). In this virtual realm, they have the liberty to manifest many facets of their identity.

Furthermore, it has been seen that individuals who disclose personal information about themselves on specific talk shows, reaching a wide audience of millions, may encounter unforeseen emotions of empowerment and enhanced self-esteem (Priest, 1996). The utilization of novel communication technology does not yield advantages for the majority of individuals. The societal significance is in the way in which modern technology enables individuals to exercise self-discipline and exert control over their actions. This phenomenon holds true in the context of the increasing proliferation of surveillance technology, such as video monitoring, drug testing, and lie detectors, which are employed to promote self-regulation (Staples, 2000). The influence of mass media, namely commercial advertising, in shaping and altering identity representations to align with a conservative political agenda and the interests of the consumer economy is evident (Ewen & Ewen, 1992). Nevertheless, according to Milkie's (1999) research findings, there are individuals who possess the ability to withstand the impact of media portrayals, despite the fact that these portrayals can influence their self-perceptions through social comparisons and reflected evaluations.

Further investigation is necessary in order to ascertain the collective manifestation of this particular form of resistance. The concept of self-socialization refers to the process through which individuals acquire and internalize social norms, values, and behaviors without direct The extent to which contemporary society is progressing towards a cultural shift, as theorized by Baudrillard (1983) and other postmodern scholars, wherein online relationships and on-screen pictures are granted increased authority and validity, remains uncertain. Nevertheless, it is clear that understanding the role of nonhuman machineries in shaping one's sense of self is an emerging and essential area of study.

Conclusion

In spite of the most negative predictions made by postmodernists about the demise of the self, it is abundantly clear that the essential self has persisted through time by modifying its behavior in accordance with the nature of the contemporary social scene. According to Adler and Adler (1999, page 54), the chapter written by Adler and Adler describes a research study that was conducted on transitory resort employees who have managed to maintain a core sense of self-focus, despite living a distinctive and fragmented lifestyle characterised by temporary and superficial relationships. On the other hand, one could argue that evaluating the ego as a sociological construct might produce results that are comparable to those found when looking at its effectiveness.

In spite of the claims that have been made by a large number of poststructural and postmodern academics on the political, philosophical, and scientific obsolescence of the self, it continues to be a popular and relevant term within the sphere of academia, particularly in the discipline of sociology.

Even if its roots are in constructivism, its foundations are cultural and historical, and the acceptance of the self as a result of power dynamics, the self continues to exist as both an entity and a driving force inside society. This is despite the fact that all of these things have been acknowledged. The process of introspection and the universal human experience of self-objectification are the two primary factors that contribute to the formation of the idea of the self. Despite this, the self continues to act as a potent conceptual instrument, especially in terms of self-meanings, self-image, and self-concept, even when the intricate political, cultural, and historical dimensions of identification are revealed.

The idea of self has moved beyond the traditional confines of symbolic interactionism in a manner that is analogous to the acknowledgement of identification as an essential component in a variety of important concerns (Howard, 2000; Cerulo, 1997) [Howard, 2000; Cerulo, 1997]. In point of fact, the concept of the self has been subjected to a number of different types of revitalization. The revised manifestation of this concept demonstrates a higher level of comprehension of the intricate interplay between individual identity and communal engagement, as well as a more profound grasp of the historical, political, and sociological underpinnings that shape the construction of the self.

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