Unity versus Multiplicity of Self: Where do we go from here?

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All science involves analysis and synthesis.
- Find simples
- Reconstruct original phenomena
  - (e.g. Pappas of Alexandria, Newton, Lavoisier)

For self.
- Start with human experience of self
- Find its simple causes
  - Theoretical reconstruction of our experience of self.

Have we done that? No.
From James to Late 20th Century on Self

- William James on consciousness and self in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890).
  - Started with conscious experience of selfhood
  - Using multiple interdisciplinary perspectives
  - He produced a complex model for a complex notion of self.

- In the 20th century progress on self got off track
  - Self was studied in conflicting ways in multiple disciplines and subdisciplines.
  - Analysis, without sufficient effort at synthesis was the name of the game for most of the century.

- In psychology
  - Self is very fragmented
  - Operational definitions of functional activities involving self
  - Little conceptual integration
“Self”, “Identity” & “Ego” in PsycINFO titles

Frequency of term in title per year

Proportion of term in titles of publications
Psychology’s Selves

Proportion of term in titles of publications

Proportion

ERA


“Self Esteem” “Self Concept” “Self Efficacy” “Self Regulation” “Self Disclosure” “Self Actualization” "Self"/10
Psychology’s Identities

Proportion of term in titles of publications

- "Ethnic Identity"
- "Social Identity"
- "Gender Identity"
- "Racial Identity"
- "Dissociative Identity Disorder"
- "Ego Identity"
- "Personal Identity"
- "Identity/10"

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Proportion

From *Handbook of Self and Identity* (Leary & Tangney, 2003)

- [T]he field is composed of a large number of pockets of self-contained research literatures that have yet to be adequately integrated. With few exceptions, behavioral and social scientists … have avoided large-scale theorizing in favor of limited-domain theories, leaving the big picture to philosophers of mind.

- Although philosophers have contributed many useful ideas and theoretical perspectives on the self (see Gallagher & Shear, 1999), they have generally not tied those ideas to the extensive empirical literature in psychology and sociology. As a result, social and behavioral scientists have not rushed to embrace those perspectives, to use them to interpret their own findings, or to base their research on them.

- The future of self research will depend in large measure on how successfully broad theoretical advances are able to link together specific bodies of research that deal with self and identity.
Interdisciplinary Events and Publications on Self

- 1974: The American Society for Philosophy and Psychology had its first meeting at MIT. (Danish SPP formed in 1926; European SPP in 1992)
- 1978: *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*: Target articles by scientists and philosophers, with commentaries and replies. EG. Dennett, Fodor, Searle, Premack, Gopnik, Tomasello, O’Keefe & Nadel
- 1988: Journal: *Philosophical Psychology.*
  - Neisser: ‘Five kinds of self-knowledge’
- 1994: Journal of Consciousness Studies
- 2002: Journal: *Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences*
- 2010: *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (S. Gallagher, ed.)
- 2010-2011: “Perspectives on the Self: Conversations on Identity and Consciousness” *New York Academy of Sciences*
A three dimensional framework for the study of self

- **Material**: How the organic individual, its life-history, its material nature gives basic unity to self both at a time and across time; structure of the brain; Biology, Social Cognitive Neuroscience; Physics & Chemistry. All organisms are selves in this sense.

- **Experiential**: How the organic individual experiences itself; its experience of embodiment; non-reflective self experience vs reflective self experience; conceiving and recognizing self as person and self; capacity to think of itself as extended in time; agentive self.

- **Social**: How social experience determines the structure and content of self-experience; reflective self-consciousness could not occur without others; interpersonal and relational self; social identity; situational selves, narrative self; moral self; life’s meaning.

¹(Barresi & Martin, 2010; Seigel, 2005; Wiggins, 1987)
“On becoming a person”¹

- Cyberiad and the material self
- Consciousness and the evolution of persons and selves
- Early development of human self: “theory of mind” and the “extended self”.
- Identity’s crisis: multiple personality and narrative self-identity
- Social Identity: Legal and moral persons and selves.
- Self/personhood as ideal

¹ Barresi, *Philosophical Psychology*, 1999
Where do we go from here?

- **Analysis:** Interdisciplinary work in search of essential simples of self
  - Conceptual and empirical analysis

- **Synthesis:** Model building of ‘persons’ and ‘selves’ that integrate knowledge from diverse sources
  - Multilevel theories, with bridge principles connecting levels.
  - First-person self theories mapped to third-person structures and mechanisms.

- **A science of individual selves:**
  - Concrete individuals
  - Not abstract generalizations of types of people or mechanisms based on statistical averages. (see Barresi & Juckes, 1997)
“The Identities of Malcolm X”

- Born into white hate and black pride
- “Surrendered identity”
- “Negative identity”
- Prison: “psychosocial moratorium”
- Minister Malcolm X
- El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz

1 Barresi, 2006. In, McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich (eds.) Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative
Malcolm’s Final Identity: Personal

- When asked if the ‘new’ Malcolm after his hajj was different from the Malcolm who spoke at the Oxford Union three months earlier, Malcolm replied:

- “I’m one and the same person, the son of a mother and father who were devoted Garveyites all their lives. ... I’m carrying on the work they started. ... Before they carted my mother off to a mental hospital and tore our family apart, she kept telling us that without an education we’d be like people blindfolded in a forest pockmarked with quicksand. I strayed from those teachings of hers for years, but I came back, didn’t I? My vision of the struggle has been broadened, that’s true, but my basic commitment is the same.” (Quoted in Carew, 1994)
Malcolm’s Final Identity: Racial

- “A race of people is like an individual man; until it uses its own talent, takes pride in its own history, expresses its own culture, affirms its own selfhood, it can never fulfill itself.” OAAU “Basic Aims” (1965/1994)

- “Our history and our culture were completely destroyed when we were brought to America in chains. And now it is important for us to know that our history did not begin with slavery. . . . .

- We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy. We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people. . . . This cultural revolution will be a journey to our rediscovery of ourselves. History is a people’s memory, and without memory man is demoted to the level of lower animals.” (Malcolm X, 1965/1970)
Conclusion

- In a poetic science of self, insights of individuals like Malcolm X, Dostoyevsky, Proust, and Virginia Woolf not only provide material on which to test theories, but also provide material with which to develop theory.
Thanks