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Social psychologists have conducted research from many perspectives in order to produce knowledge about the self. In order to explore the self in relation to social psychoanalytic and phenomenological findings, it is necessary to first consider historical beliefs about the self. Two main American schools of work emerged within social psychology in the twentieth century; sociological social psychology (SSP) and psychological social psychology (PSP). These two traditions of work developed different theories about what constitutes self.

SSP focused on social interactions in order to define the self, and PSP concentrated on the individual and their core desires and ego (Hollway, 2007). This led to an individual-society dualism which existed during the twentieth century due to the lack of cross-citation between the two schools (Wilson and Schafer, 1978). This was problematic and confusing as the two schools produced polar definitions of the self. I am going to argue that social psychologists acknowledged and dealt with this problem in the latter half of the twentieth century.

I will do this by examining phenomenological and social psychoanalytical philosophies, approaches and perspectives. I will also explore case studies which bridge dualistic ways of thinking in order to transcend individual-society dualisms. The SSP perspective on the self evolved from philosophical roots, and was initially explored in John Locke's essay entitled *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke (1694) regarded the self as something observable. The self could monitor and be monitored.

James (1890), Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) added that individuals have the capacity to imagine themselves from the perspective of others. They proposed that this reflexive ability brought about mortification or pride, and influenced an individual's actions. James concluded that identity was fluid and changeable depending on one's company. Borge (1970) wrote about this duality of self in terms of his own life experience. He felt that there were multiples of him; he had distinct personalities or selves.

Borge divided his true private self from the false, performing writer known to the public. Winnicott (1970) described this true self as being authentic, and the performer as being a false self. Goffman (1959) added another dimension to this description of self. Goffman depicted the self in terms of a performer, a spectator, and a character.

Goffman felt that one's capacity to observe oneself through the eyes of others pressurised individuals to conform to social norms (Hollway, 2007). Like other SSP psychologists, Goffman felt that there was there was a split between the I and the me of a person, where I represented agency and personal feelings, and me represented structure and social influences. The view that an individual's self depended largely on their social setting was not challenged during the first half of the twentieth century (Hollway, 2007). However, an individual PSP perspective was brought to the attention of the psychological community by Allport (1943) when he argued that the ego, or core individual desires of a person, influenced a person's behaviour and portrayal of self. He felt that the self was coherent, and vehemently disagreed with SSP researchers depiction of a multiple, fragmented portrayal

of the self. Allport felt that Rogers' (1942) studies had produced the true definition of self.

Rogers, a humanistic psychologist, used psychometrics and experiment to help patients to find their ego to produce a unitary true self which was not influenced by social pressures. These binaries of self were problematic because they gave polar definitions of self, and there was no overlap between SSP research findings and PSP experimentation (Wilson and Schafer, 1978). However, in the USA, the findings of humanistic psychologists became fused with phenomenological concepts in order to transcend the challenging individual-society dualism during the latter half of the twentieth century (Hollway, 2007). I will discuss how the phenomenological approach endeavoured to build a bridge between the individual and society.

Phenomenology originated in the work of Husserl, a philosopher who felt that "being-in-the-world" and "lifeworld" produced the self. Husserl argued that individuals continuously derived meaning from their own experience (Hollway, 2007). Husserl's approach advised the psychologist to use 'epoché' in order to withhold their own attitudes in favour of concentrating on the experiences of the individual. He directed the psychologist to concentrate on rich descriptions of experience as opposed to rationalisation and theories. Husserl used the word 'horizontalisation' to guide psychologists to give all descriptions equal value (Hollway, 2007).

Like Rogers (1942), Husserl concentrated on the individual and their subjective conscious emotions. However, Husserl did not see individuals as

agents who were detached from the social world. His approach transcended the individual-society dualism by exposing the individual, with distinct emotions and experiences, as a social being. The phenomenological methodology portrays a person as embodied in relation to others (Hollway, 2007).

Hollway (2007) drew on Husserl to show that the phenomenological approach transcends individual-social dualism by exploring the conscious experience, which is always practised with others. She demonstrated that the individual and social were constantly intertwined. Journalist Asne Seierstad used a phenomenological approach to portray an individual in a social setting. Descriptive passages in Seierstad's (2004) *The Bookseller of Kabul* give the reader a feeling for the experience of wearing a burka in Afghanistan. Her descriptions embodied the epochi?? approach advocated by Husserl, as she encouraged the reader to concentrate on the experience of being a burka-clad woman. At first the reader feels that the burka-wearers have no individuality as the women are communally described as "burka-women" (Seierstad, 2004, pp 89).

This gives the sense that these women have no unique self, they are a product of the society and culture into which they were born. Clearly, these women adhere to the regulations and pressures of society. Goffman (1959) suggested that as people conform to the rules of society, they are products of society. However, by the end of the passage, we see the individual emerge from the crowd of "burka-women".

Shakila, is given a name. We see her as a woman, and we realise that each of these “ burka-women” has a unique personality and individuality. Shakila smiles roguishly and laughs, she haggles, yes, she even flirts. She has been doing it all along [.

..] and the vendor can decipher the moods of a waving, nodding, billowing burka with ease. She can flirt with her little finger, with a foot, with the movement of a hand. ” (Seierstad, 2004, p90).

Initially we saw the women as a group, but the individual emerged from the crowd. It became clear that although the journalist found it difficult to distinguish one burka-woman from another, the market sellers could even decipher the moods of the women easily. The women flirted. This showed that the individual and the social were interrelated, the individual had experiences in society. Shakila showed that she was conscious of her own behaviour when she flirted and haggled, she was highlighting her unique personality.

I think that this example showed how the individual-society dualism became meaningless. Wearing a burka was an experience that had been dictated by society, but the true personality of the individual shone through despite conformity to social expectations. The individual and the social being were exposed. The agency and structure merged, and so dualisms about the self became insignificant. Other examples using a phenomenological approach also show a transcendence of the individual-society dualism. Ann and Peter Ashworth (2003) drew on Husserl’s phenomenological approach to study the lifeworld of a woman suffering from Alzheimer’s disease.

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Their research defined the self as a person in an intersubjective world, where people identify with other individuals. They sought to understand the Alzheimer sufferer's world, and recorded her descriptions of her experience. The woman described her deceased husband in terms that suggested that he continued to share her experiences (Ashworth and Ashworth 2003). This suggested that when she enjoyed herself, she felt that her deceased husband also took pleasure from the experience, as this was what happened when he was alive.

Ashworth and Ashworth (2003) argued that the woman continued to be a unique person with individual desires and emotions as opposed to a member of a group of Alzheimer's patients. She deserved respect, and she continued to experience a lifeworld which was filled with her own conscious experiences, though some of the descriptions of her experiences were inaccurate. However, she also sustained an existence where these experiences were shared with other people, namely her deceased husband. This shows that the phenomenological approach used by Ashworth and Ashworth (2003) succeeded in defining the self as an embodied self who lives in a social world. The individual and society were coextensively mediated. The two phenomenological approaches that I have outlined transcend the individual-social dualism by presenting the self as an individual with lived experience which concur with social interactions.

Each person takes their own unique meaning out of an experience, yet their experiences are always social (Hollway, 2007). Social psychoanalysis approached the self from a different perspective, however this approach also strove to diminish individual-society dualism. This tradition of research went <https://assignbuster.com/how-successful-have-the-social-psychoanalytic-and-phenomenological-perspectives-been-essay/>

beyond Husserl's conscious descriptions of experience to find an unconscious self. I will explore this perspective in order to show that this approach also transcends individual-society dualism, and that social psychology is presenting an enlightened definition of the self in the twenty-first century. Social psychoanalysis proposed that the unconscious was the locus of self, and that our inward desires and motivation come from this source. This dynamic unconscious entrains others, so that the individual and social are concurrently mediated (Hollway, 2007).

Original psychoanalytic perspectives were derived from the clinical work of Melanie Klein. Klein (1988) proposed that the self was integrated with the external social world, as people defend against their own personal anxiety through intersubjective means. Klein felt that the unconscious always involved others. Winnicott (1971), a psychoanalyst, felt that babies develop a true sense of self if their gestures are recognised and responded to accurately.

Furthermore, he felt that a false sense of self could develop if a baby's behaviour was not confirmed. This could lead the baby to conform with his parents desires as opposed to exploring his own unique preferences. Philips (1988) added that babies identify their own desires when these desires are acknowledged. This outlook shows that individuals develop their own sense of self at an early age, however, this sense of identity can be built upon or diminished depending on society's reaction to their behaviour.

This suggests an interrelated individual and society as opposed to a dualism. A social psychoanalytic perspective always places the unconscious unique

desires of the individual in a social setting, and uses clinical and psychotherapeutic research to understand agency within structure (Hollway, 2007). I will argue that social psychoanalysis reconciles individual-society dualism by using case studies which go beyond agency-structure dualism. Turp (2004) used the psychoanalytic approach to interpret a baby's bodily expressions. Turp studied baby Esther for two years, and found that Esther could express her emotions without using language.

Hollway (2007) suggested that Turp's study exposed the unselfconscious self, as Esther expressed herself by smiling and by rubbing her nose against her father's cheek. Her self-worth and self-belief could be observed and inferred using psychoanalytical methods. It would seem that baby Esther developed a secure sense of self due to her father's positive and understanding reaction to her movements. This confirms Philip's (1988) suggestion that babies develop their own desires when a parent acknowledges and responds to their needs. This psychoanalytic observation shows that individuals have unique desires and interpretations of their experiences, but that these happenings always occur in response to social interactions. Hollway and Jefferson (2005) interviewed a man named Vince in order to decipher why he had stopped working.

They used qualitative methods to gather information in an interview. Afterwards, they interpreted what was said as well as what was unsaid in order to understand the internal, unconscious world of his psyche using social psychoanalytic techniques (Hollway, 2007). They used free association to determine that Vince had developed depression due to work related stress, and although he consciously desired to work, his unconscious

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dynamic desires to leave his demanding job were expressed through panic attacks and depression which left him unfit for work. Hollway (2007) felt that this case study demonstrated how unconscious individual anxiety can interfere with an individual's conscious desires. Vince wanted to work, but his body would not let him. These individual desires are intertwined with society, as the anxiety related to others, namely Vince's difficult boss.

This shows that the social psychoanalytic perspective goes beyond individual-society dualism by showing that individual desires can be influenced by social setting (Hollway, 2007). The phenomenological and psychoanalytic perspectives of the self attempt to go beyond the individual-society dualism. They rely on qualitative research methods to obtain meaning from experience. Both approaches define the self as situated, yet dynamic, as the self derives meaning from lived social experiences.

The phenomenological method relies on conscious experiences and emotions, but the social psychoanalytic perspective interprets these conscious experiences to find hidden unconscious motivations.

Phenomenological and social psychoanalytic approaches use qualitative methods similar to those used in earlier SSP research. However, they have moved beyond the description of the self in exclusively social terms as proposed by James (1890), Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934). They have produced a modern definition of self which encompasses the individual and society.

Phenomenology and social psychoanalytic approaches also draw on earlier PSP research such as that of Rogers (1942) to examine individual desires.

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However, once again, phenomenology and social psychoanalysis always place the individual in society. Social psychology can present a coherent definition of self in the twenty-first century, as phenomenological and social psychoanalytic approaches continuously endeavour to present the self as a dynamic and integrated individual who responds to social experiences.