

# [The self by george herbert mead sociology essay](https://assignbuster.com/the-self-by-george-herbert-mead-sociology-essay/)

The reading which I have read is titled “ The Self” by George Herbert Mead. I will first summarize the reading, and then illustrate how Mead’s article helps me to understand the nature and formation of the self. Next, I will demonstrate how my self-identity varies according to my characteristics.

Mead first identified the differences between self and the body. The self is something which has a development and arises in the process of social experience and activity; while the body is inborn. We can lose parts of the body without serious damage of the self. For example, disabled people may lose their sensory organs or limbs, but they can still maintain a complete self. The self can be both a subject and an object; which is surrounded by things and acts. The object of self is different from other objects that it is related to the conscious experience. Mead mentioned that: “ to be object to oneself, one must be in a reflexive sense”. There are experiences that the self does not enter into a person; the example used in the reading is when a person is running away from something, he has no consciousness of self. In situations when people are having an interview, they sometimes miss out important things, or give out false information; Mead considered these cases as individuals are not themselves. Furthermore, social experience determines the amount of self is given out in the communication.

Mead said it is normal to have multiple personalities. When we come across with different people, we have different selves to meet various social reactions. The unity and structure of the complete self reflects the whole social structure; and the elementary selves reflect various aspects of the social structure.

According to Mead, there are two stages for the full development of self. The first stage is the organization of viewpoints of others towards the person. The second stage is the organization of viewpoints of the social group which a person belongs to.

Self-consciousness requires an ‘ objective, non-affective attitude’ towards itself. It is possible to gain self-consciousness as when an individual views himself from the standpoint from the others. When we talk to others, we are continually following up our own words and controlling what we are going to say by observing the others’ reactions. Individual thinks before act, we think what others are thinking of us. A person sometimes separates his actual thoughts from what he speaks.

Mead listed three forms of activities, language, play and the game, which are crucial to the formation of self. Mead described language as the ‘ significant symbols’ that one gets to know the viewpoints of the others towards him. Children take different roles in a play, and imaginary companions allow them to gain experiences. Through the process of role-playing, children call for responses from the others, and this helps them to generate self-consciousness. In the game, individual is required to know the roles and attitudes of all the others who are involved in the game, as well as the rules of the game. The “ generalized other” refers to the attitudes and expectations of the society. Self-consciousness is achieved when an individual can view himself from the standpoint of the generalized other.

Mead concluded by saying that each of us is different from the others, but there is a common structure in which a self is formed. To be ourselves, we have to be members of the community which have common attitudes. Own self and the self of others are related. Finally, the structure of self reflects the general behavior pattern of the social group.

Mead’s article helps me to understand the nature and formation of self by clearly listing out the characteristics of self and then providing details of how self is formed. I have known that the self has an objective side which is developed through social experiences. Mead’s article makes me reflect on my daily activities and relationships with the others, indeed each of us have multiple selves when facing different people. Some interesting examples including the self does not enter into a person and the person is not himself makes me understand the nature of self in different situations that is related to self-consciousness. I came to realize that the formation of self is an on-going process in life and there are ways to achieve a full self. I originally thought that language contributes the most in formation of self, but Mead brought new ideas that games and play are also contributing. Last but not least, Mead’s article allows me to relate myself to the broader sense like the social groups and the society. In fact each of us constitutes the society, and what we do reflects the situation in the society.

My self-identity varies according to my characteristics, and I have multiple identities. My gender identity is a feminine woman; my age identity is 18 years old and I am now a teenager. I consider myself as a member of the middle class based on my living environment and my household income. Regarding my education identity, I am now a university student studying Social Sciences studying at the University of Hong Kong. Moreover, I am a Chinese since I am born in Hong Kong. My self-identity changes because I have different roles in different stages of life. Using the example of my education identity, I began my education since kindergarten, followed by primary and secondary education, and I am studying in the university at the moment. This corresponds to Mead that my self-identity has a development and arises in the process of social experience and activity.

Mead mentioned that attitudes and behaviors of selves reflect the general pattern of the social group. One of the personal examples is that when I was in secondary school, I remembered that teachers always remind us to behave ourselves after dismissal. This is because while we are wearing our uniform, we represent the school, and our every act and the way we talk affects how the public think of our school. If I behave indecently, people will have a bad impression on the whole school. One of the examples in the society level is that some of the Legislative Council members do radical acts such as hurling bananas and yelling their slogans during the meetings, which their acts destroyed the order. Their behaviors are reflecting the style and way used to express opinions by their political party. Political radicals like Wong Yuk-man and Leung Kwok-hung represent People Power and the League of Social Democrats respectively, and their actions reflect the general behavior pattern of their social groups. Our self and identity develop from our affiliations and our behavior represents the whole group.

In conclusion, I have known the characteristics and formation of self from Mead, and I have deeper understanding towards the relationship between human and the society. By knowing how people think and interact, it is easier for us to communicate and gain acceptance in the society. By knowing our own identities and our roles, we can fulfill our responsibilities and turn our society into a better place.