The self as construct and dimensions of the self

Tomas Tjus
30 November 2010 Linköping

Content

- Self as a construct
- Self development in infancy
- Communicative, cognitive and emotional prerequisites
- Manifestations of an emergent self
- Dimensions of the self: Clinical examples and research

Self as construct has been studied out of:

- Cognitive development
  - So-called neo-Piagetians - normative changes
  - Case, Fischer, Harter

- Memory processes
  - Self is constructed out of narrative memories
    - Nelson, Snow

- Psychoanalytic theory
  - Socialisation
    - Blatt, Kernberg, Kohut, Winnicott

- Symbolic interaction \ Attachment theory
  - Interaction with caregiver (attachment) or significant other (symbolic interaction)
    - Baldwin, Cooley, Mead
    - Giddens, Braithwaite, Gassidy
Self according to W. James

**SELF**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject:</th>
<th>ME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Observed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Necessary related abilities: Perspective taking + impulse control

---

Functions of self

- Internal working models
- Goal making and emotional regulation
- Closeness with other
- Social rules

(Epstein & Moring, 1995)

---

Manifestation of self

- Dependent on:
  - interaction
  - language development
  - memory
Infant previously

- Unable to differentiate stimuli belonging to self or environment (Freud, Piaget)
- Unable to communicate and have to pass an autistic phase (Mahler)
- Unable to remember - “Infantile amnesia” (Piaget)
- Unable to feel pain due to undeveloped nervous system and brain (some medical doctors)

Infant as a social agent

- Infant is born with awareness specifically receptive to subjective states of other persons
  - Intrinsically motivated companionship
  - Communicative motivation
  - Self-other awareness
  - Protoconversation
  - Timing

Infant as a physical agent (2 months)

- Increased leg-kicking if result is contingent stimulus (mobile movement)
- Smiling and cooing towards the mobile that is contingent
- Moving head and blinking if perceiving an object approaching on a collision course
- Adjusting body and head posture in order to compensate for visual (but not real) loss of balance
Baillargeon’s tall- and short- object experiment
3 mths

Time

Tall O expected to be seen here

Short O expected to be seen here

Visual preference

Fixation time %

Certification: Tall

Certification: Straight

Certification: Short

Certification: Diagonal

Fixation Face

1 natural premise

2 natural premise
Observe and respond

Imitation

- Not only reproduction of other's behavior

Imitative responses occur at a moment in the stream of interaction where they can act as affirmations, acceptances, or commentaries with respect to accentuated displays of the other person.

(Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001; p. 7)
**Model of basic problems for children with autism**

- Problems in making specific representations of themselves (Inability to make specific representations)
- Development of sharing emotions affected
- Development of pretend play
- Development of pretend play
- Development of joint attention and pragmatics

**“Motherese”**

**Joint attention**

- Person-person-object consciousness
  
  (9mths-24 mths)

- When two people coordinate their attention towards object or event and are aware about this
Joint attention

- Infants understand others by their intentions
- Infants understand that others may have intentions that are different from their own
- Infants understand that others have intentions that do not correspond with current state (mistakes can happen)

Joint attention cont..

- Protoimperative communication i.e., pointing
- Referential communication develops; emotional state of parent is noticed
- This leads to increased/decreased declarative communication due to emotion of parent
- The most important "pathfinder" to the world of language
- Precursor to mentalizing (theory-of-mind)
Language develops

- Symbolization of "reality"
- Thinking develops
- Intentions and thoughts can be transferred
- Emotional regulation
- Conflict solving
- Prediction of use of words of mentalization (presume, think etc) towards infants (8 months) and mentalization when they became 5 years of age

Development of self as subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Ca months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest of mirror images: moves, smiles, vocalises. Cannot differentiate responses towards self and others in mirror or on video</td>
<td>5-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmic movements, waves, understand cause-effect about own body movements</td>
<td>9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses mirror to localise people/object e.g. turns to person instead of mirror image sig</td>
<td>12-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognises her/himself in mirror</td>
<td>18-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognises strange attributes in mirror (&quot;rouge experiment)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strange attributes on themselves seen on movie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Milestones

- MENTALISATION (THEORY OF MIND)
- PRETEND PLAY (SYMBOLIC UNDERSTANDING)
- JOINT ATTENTION
- Imitation
Manifestation of self

- Dependent on:
  - interaction
  - language development
  - memory

Basic thoughts

What am I????

How good am I????

Model of interaction

Internal working models are constructed by the Internal Reference System (IRS)
Stern: Five layers of self

Emerging 0-2 months
Chore 2-6 months
Subjective 7-15 months
Verbal 15-18 months
Narrative 3-4 years

Differentiation of self – preschool years

• Ca 15-18 months
  Differentiation between themself and others on pictures

• Ca 18-24 months
  Can use their name and correct personal pronoun

• Ca 3 years
  Begins to understand that their own thoughts can’t be read by other people

• Ca 4-5 years Mentalisation “theory-of-mind”

Theory of Mind

➢ The ability to understand that you and other people have mental and emotional states that regulate the behaviour in different situations

➢ The ability to perceive another person’s perspective
Level of empathy related to:

- familiarity
- similarity (e.g. gender, age, personality)
- Learning (implicit/explicit)
- Previous experience of negative condition
- Shallowness of stimuli
Related to

- Sensitivity to critics
- Popularity/Friends

**Normative changes of self representations 3-12 years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Manifest content</th>
<th>Structure/ organisation</th>
<th>Norms</th>
<th>Type of comparisons</th>
<th>Sensitivity for other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Concrete, manifest, simple, abilities, belongings, preferences</td>
<td>Isolated representations, lack of coherence</td>
<td>Unrealistic positivity, no differentiation ideal and real self</td>
<td>Vague</td>
<td>Adults' reactions, encouragement, critics, some awareness if they perform as other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>More developed attribution, focus on specific competences</td>
<td>Simple connections, adjusting, black/white thinking</td>
<td>Same or above</td>
<td>Transparent comparison between themselves, comparisons with peers of same age about fairness</td>
<td>Discover that other make judgments of the self, others' norms, peers, behaviors, regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>Character traits with focus on abilities, comparisons with peers of same age</td>
<td>Ability to integrate parts into generalisations, fusion possible</td>
<td>Both positive and negative norms, more realism</td>
<td>Interpersonalisation of opinions and norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FUNDAMENTAL CONSTRUCTS

- **Self-perception**: The awareness about his/her characteristics and similarities/differences with other people.
- **Self-esteem**: The value a person attributes to her/himself and her/his behaviour.
- **Self-efficacy**: The judgment of a person of her/his competence to perform actions in order to control forthcoming situations.
- **Locus of control**: Locus of control for performance of behaviour, internal or external.
- **Attribution**: A person’s explanations about successful/unsuccessful results.

Self-worth multidimensional and hierarchical (Harter)

Most important to peers?
Most important to parents?

IDEAL SELF

TRUE SELF

REJECTED SELF
James discrepancy model

- The importance of different domains is rated differently by different individuals.
- Those domains that are important will be of primary focus.
- Global self-worth is mainly dependent on this.
- Ex 1. You can be very close to your ideal in a domain which is the most important to you. You have a high global self-worth even if you are very far from your ideal in other domains but since they are not important they don’t have any impact.
- Ex 2. You are far away from your ideal in an important domain and it reduces your self-worth even if you are close to your ideal in many other domains but since they are unimportant they will not counterbalance the impact on global self-worth.

Self-efficacy

Ex 1
Rated capacity

Real capacity

Ex 2
Rated capacity

Outcome? Typical for age?
Typical for “personality”?

Self emotions – behavioural correlates

Pride
Wanting positive feedback, intimacy/closeness, positive emotions

Shame
Hiding, avoidance, distance from other, self-passive, frustration of yourself, depressive, hopeless

Guilt
Trying to find ways for confession and forgiveness, reparation, trying to get closer, anxiety and worried about the relation
Vem är jag?
Självrepresentationer 12-18 år
(Montemayor & Eisen, 1977)

- Ökning: yrkesroll, existentiellt själv, ideologiska- och trofrågor, hur man är i förhållande till andra och psykisk 'läggning'

- Minskar: 'Bymentalitet'/medborgarskap, ägodelar

Children with learning disabilities - locus of control and attribution

- Failures because of lack of capacity

- Good performance because of luck or favours from teacher

Children without learning disabilities

- Failures because they had not studied enough- not because of lack of capacity

- Good performance was well-deserved, since they had studied
Children with learning disabilities

- Rate their self-esteem lower when they are in a regular setting.
- Rate their self-esteem higher when they are in a group for special needs.

Ex attribution from trauma research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Best prognosis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Worst prognosis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Domain-specific evaluation according to gender from 13 samples (scale 1-4)

(Harter, 1999)
What determines self-esteem?

- Physical domain $r = .52-80$ (USA), .54-65 (other countries)
- From childhood to adulthood
- Equally high correlations regardless if children are high- or lowperformers in school

Average correlations domain competence/adequacy and global self-worth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical appearance</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholastic competence</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social acceptance</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral conduct</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic competence</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is most important?

- To be rated by others to be attractive?
- Or self-perception?
- Girls more unsatisfied than boys, starts about 8-9 years of age (maybe even earlier according to some studies)
- Before this age no gender difference according to attraction
Attraction (Harter, 1998)

- Girls’ self-esteem regarding attraction is reduced when getting older
- Already as young children perceive what is seen as attractive within the culture
- People interact differently with those who are perceived as attractive
- Girls tend to rely their self-esteem more on other’s opinion than boys

Perceptions of physical appearance among eating disordered and normative college women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anorectic</th>
<th>Bulimic</th>
<th>Normative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of appearance</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived appearance</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrepancy</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect/mood</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Danis & Harter (1996)

Global self-worth

Distribution of raw scores grade 1-9 (n=1200)“Jag tycker jag är”. All subscales peers, parents, scholastic, physical, behavior.
Depression and self-esteem

- High positive relation $r = .72-80$
- Which comes first—low self-esteem or depression?
- In interviews adolescents one half says low self-esteem, the other depression
- Conclusion: Low self-esteem can be a result of depression

Level of voice i.e. expressing thoughts and ideas among adolescents

- False-self behavior?
- "When I don’t say what I am thinking around particular persons I feel like I am not being the real me vs “…. I fell like I am being the real me”
- Approximately 75% of both genders indicated that failure to express their opinions did constitute false-self behavior
- 75% also reported being bothered by not saying what they really think

Transactional model
(Wenar, 1990)
Social sources of individual differences in self-evaluation

- Attachment
- Symbolic interactionism i.e. self is a social construct crafted through linguistic exchanges (James, Cooley & Mead)
- Who are the significant others? Self-worth/perceived support $r = .50 - .65$
- How do different types of support (e.g. approval, emotional support, instrumental support) and the manner it is communicated influence the internalization process?

  The relational self-worth??

Relational context of giving voice

- For both genders voice is highest with close friends followed by classmates of same gender
- Voice is constantly lower with classmates with opposite gender as well with parents and teachers

  (Johnson, 1995)

Baumeister’s model

- Goal
  - Self awareness
  - Perceived competence
- Global devaluation of self
- Depressive, moody
- To avoid the pain focus of attention is reduced and logical thinking is deconstructed
Harter's discrepancy model

How important is achievement of goal?

- Parents
- Peers

Perceived competence

Bartholomew’s model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive model of Others</th>
<th>Negative model of Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SECURE</td>
<td>FRIGHTENED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREOCCUPIED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVOIDANT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive model of Self

Negative model of Others