



POSTMODERN VIEW OF THE SELF

(Sociological Perspective)

Postmodern View of the Self

What is Postmodern?

- As defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary, postmodern means of, relating to, or being an era after a modern one. Postmodern just means 'coming after' modernism. The term is used to refer to a period in history, but it is also used to refer to a set of ideas that 'go with' this period in history.

What is Postmodernism?

- According to Britannica, Postmodernism in Western Philosophy, is a late 20th century movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power.
- Postmodernism is largely a reaction against the intellectual assumptions and values of the modern period in the history of the Western Philosophy. Indeed, many of the doctrines characteristically associated with postmodernism fairly be described as **the straightforward denial of general philosophical viewpoints that were taken for granted** during the 18th century Enlightenment, though they were not unique to that period. The most important of these viewpoints are the following:
 - There is no objective reality.
 - There is no scientific or historical truth (objective truth).
 - Science and technology even reason and logic are not vehicles of human progress but suspect instruments of established power.
 - Reason and logic are not universally valid.
 - There is no such thing as human nature (human behavior and psychology are socially determined or constructed).
 - Language does not refer to a reality outside itself.
 - There is no certain knowledge.
 - No general theory of the natural or social world can be valid or true (all are illegitimate "metanarratives").

The viewpoints mentioned above were made possible by two 'big ideas', which, very briefly, are as follows:

- First, is the idea of people as rational, autonomous individuals or 'selves', who think and act independently of other selves.
- The second 'big idea' of modernism is the notion of reason and scientific knowledge as the route to human freedom and happiness.

These ideas have long been criticized by people from groups who are marginalized by them. So basically, Postmodernism is a critique of these ideas.

In modern thought people are separate, coherent individuals – or ‘selves’ – who think and act independently from all other individuals. While this idea seems obvious and natural to those of us encultured and educated in the Western European system, it is being questioned in postmodernism.

In the everyday world, the modern idea of individuality was replaced long ago. People have more than one way of being, and they have relationships and connections with one another. They are also made up of many, often conflicting, parts. As they move in and out of different contexts, cultures, and sets of ideas, they think differently, and behave differently in relation to others. They know that there are different rules of conduct in different contexts, that they are constructed—and can construct themselves—differently in these different contexts, and that they perform better in some contexts than in others.

The postmodern person is thus a hybrid. They have, not one core, permanent self, but many selves. Their self—and their identity—are not fixed, but continually in process, as the boundaries between themselves and others, and between the different parts of themselves are negotiated. In postmodern the self is displaced as a central presence in experience and reappropriated as yet another personal signifier.

Philosophical Postmodernism, to some extent, criticizes the attitude that human is capable to apprehend the quality of the objects of the universe in their essence by employing his own natural powers and in this way attain truth.

Durkheim on the Sacredness of Self

“What is moral is everything that is a source of solidarity.”

Emile Durkheim was a French Sociologist who rose to prominence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chief among his claims is that society is a **sui generis reality**, or a reality unique to itself and irreducible to its composing parts.

Norms, beliefs, and values make up a collective consciousness that creates social integration. But as society changes Durkheim worried that modernity might herald the disintegration of society so there comes a need for a new collective conscience. The value of this new collective conscience is centered on the worth of the individual or known as individualism.

The individual was considered vitally important and even sacred in organic solidarity wherein the individual became the focus of rights, responsibilities, and the center of public and private rituals holding the society together – a function of religion before modernity.

Durkheim saw religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices that recognizes the sacred. To him sacred are things that set apart from society as extraordinary, inspiring awe, and deserving of reverence. To him recognizing something as sacred wasn't about between good and evil, instead it was about seeing symbols—a certain place, object, or experience as special that create markers and separate it from the profane. He stated that it is through ritual investment and emotional social interaction we develop the “sacred self”. This interaction provides social cohesion to help maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs.

Rituals may be performed in groups or in private. Private rituals are the result of focusing one's own attention and emotion on a group membership symbol. The group symbol still maintains its emotional and moral infusion from prior group interactions and may be used by an individual in private to recall and re-experience those interactions and emotion. A simple example of private ritual is an individual in prayer or worship “centered on the Word of God”. The Word of God having been sacred and emotionally infused in public worship calls out the same response in the individual in private.

Self then is created through group interaction and may be understood as a type of group symbol. Thus, in general—the greater the complexity of differentiation within a society, the greater the tendency for that society to adopt individualism as a central value. The greater the acceptance of individualism as a central value, the greater the tendency for the individual self to be recognized and valued. The greater the tendency for the individual self to be recognized and valued, the greater the tendency for groups to define self as a type of group symbol.

Under these conditions: the more an individual's interaction is restricted to situations of high ritual density, the greater the degree of ritualism. The greater the ritualism in an individual's life, the greater the tendency to experience self as a sacred object invested with high emotionality and clear boundaries. The greater the experience of self as sacred with high emotional investment, and clear boundaries, the greater the tendency to believe in and protect the boundaries defining self. The greater the tendency to believe in and protect the boundaries defining self, the more likely self will be experienced as core and trans-situational.

Example.

- Durkheim's Sacredness of Self can be seen in breaking family traditions in modern setting. Like fixed marriages, the self cannot transcend and actively do its role in society because someone is bound to marry at a young age to another being without having to experience what life is at a young age. Who to marry is our choice and fixed marriage is becoming a prison. The responsibility of becoming a spouse without wanting it in the first place for the sake of family honor is heavy. Young people, even adults, who are bound to fixed marriage are supposed to enjoy life and allot time to themselves. While we're young, we are bound to engage in activities where we'll develop, define and value ourselves more, so when the time comes, we are ready to take on greater responsibilities. Advices from other people who share the same dilemma might include emotional investment to have clearer vision of choices to make. That's the time we value ourselves more and that's the time we become sacred as Durkheim's claims.
- On the contrary, individualism and organic solidarity can also result to a crueler place for an individual. If things go well, individual takes full credit but if things go bad, there is no one else to blame but the individual itself.

Goffman and the Fragmented Self

His view of the self has been interpreted as a precursor to postmodernism sociology and Goffman can be considered as theorist par excellence of the situated self. Generally, Goffman theorized a self that is created in an encounter. Goffman argues that self awaits individuals in every situation is a multi-situated activity system that means that we display a series of masks to others in acting roles like self is like an actor performing on a stage. This concept is expanded in Frame Analysis, argues that people classify their experience according to guiding frames of reference. For example, a car advertisement might seek to frame driving as an essentially pleasurable activity by associating it with recognizable symbols of play and leisure (in the target culture) such as a beach.

On his view there is no true self and no identifiable performer behind the roles, the roles just are the performer. The same social processes that have been able to account for the construction of the self in the past can explain the fragmented self. I have argued that the concept of the postmodern self that consist only of images are based in an assumption that divorces social interaction from the production of symbols.

In Stigma (1963), Goffman proposes a three-fold typology of identity: the social identity, the personal identity, and the ego identity. The social identity is comprised of social

categories imputed to the individual by self and others in defined situations. Each category has a complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of a particular category. The category and the attributes form anticipations in given social settings. These social settings establish the categories and attributes that are likely to be anticipated of an individual. People in an encounter lean on these anticipations, transform them into normative expectations and righteously presented demands. A personal identity has more-or-less, abiding characteristics that are a unique combination of life history events that come to be attached to an individual with the help of an identity peg, e.g. name or social security number. The social and personal identities are primarily other persons' concerns and definitions regarding an individual. These concerns and identities are what Collins has termed reputations' cultural capital and circulates among people other than the individual.

In the *Presentation of Self*, there is a self that he refers to it as ego or personality. Goffman conceives of the ego self as one of three different levels of "social reality," each of which is affected by a performance gone awry, the other two levels are the social interaction and society. Social interaction is treated as a dialog between two teams and society as the colleague-groupings of the actor or larger establishments. The ego is seen as distinct from the part an actor may be playing. Goffman appears to conceptualize the ego as synonymous with the personality that is built around the individual's self-conceptions.

In *Interaction Ritual* Goffman presents a two-fold image of self, the sacred self and self-as-player. The self-as-player is one who participates in a ritual game and performs honorably or dishonorably. Interaction is pictured as a ritual performance during which participants must present a face in keeping with approved social attributes. Interactants may be said to maintain face when the line he/she effectively takes is supported by the judgments of those present and is confirmed by evidence given through impersonal agencies.

Mead on the Social Construction of Self

One of the most noteworthy contribute of George Herbert Mead, or also known as Mead, is that human's anticipatory experiences are fundamental, or vital to the development of language. The ability to place ourselves in the position of others—to anticipate their responses—regarding our linguistic gestures. This ability is crucial for the development of the self and self-consciousness. For Mead, as for Hegel, the self is fundamentally social and cognitive. It should be distinguished from the individual, who also has non-cognitive attributes.

The process whereby the self originates otherwise is the cognitive/linguistic development of the individual through role taking; the individual learns to distinguish self as one of the objects in the environment that must be taken into consideration for action. In Meadian terms self is a linguistic object. As such, it ought to vary by the type of symbol system one is socialized in and uses frequently. The more complex the individual's classification system, the more likely are the syntactical elements that are used to organize meaning to be extensive and complex. Individuals with a complex classification system will tend to see objects in terms of multiple levels of meaning and to classify them abstractly. This linguistic system brings sensitivity to the structure of an object, it is the learned ability to respond to an object in terms of its matrix of relationships. Individuals with this classification system will have a propensity to categorize and to abstract.

For one socialized to use a simple classification system, self will have a low order of abstractness and tend to be understood in terms of its boundaries and functions. The following propositions may be derived:

- The greater an individual's socialization in and use of a low order classification system, the greater the tendency to understand an object in concrete terms and the greater the sensitivity to the boundaries and content of an object.
- The greater the tendency to understand objects in concrete terms, boundaries, and content, the greater the tendency to perceive self as an obdurate reality with clear and definable boundaries.
- The greater the tendency to perceive self as an obdurate reality with clear and definable boundaries, the more likely self will be experienced as core and trans-situational.

According also to Mead, if we were simply to take the roles of others, we would never develop selves or self-consciousness. We would have a nascent form of self-consciousness that parallels the sort of reflexive awareness that is required for the use of significant symbols. A role-taking (self) consciousness of this sort makes possible what might be called a proto-self, but not a self, because it doesn't have the complexity necessary to give rise to a self.

Examples.

- Children who play a role of a doctor and a patient, naturally if they don't have a general knowledge about them, they wouldn't try to choose that as their role-model. Because of the anticipatory experiences and the knowledge through watching either on the televisions or movies, they perform their role perfectly. Continuing and performing different roles can lead to a definitive goal in life. Through a trial-and-error, young ones can explore what lies ahead of them.

- Another less complex example is that you don't have to touch a hot kettle just to say that it is hot, right? By thinking other's experience and looking for the scientific signs, you can tell that you should not touch the hot kettle, or you will get burn. Just like in our self, you do not have to go through what other's have been through just to experience life and to fully understand yourself. You have the basic knowledge of the reality and your own cognitive mind to understand how you want to live your life.

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