



The • Social SELF

**By
Robert C. Ziller, Ph. D.**

Pergamon General Psychology Series ■

PERGAMON GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY SERIES

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The Social Self

PGPS-18

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PERGAMON PRESS INC.

New York · Toronto · Oxford · Sydney · Braunschweig

PERGAMON PRESS INC.
Maxwell House, Fairview Park, Elmsford, N.Y. 10523

PERGAMON OF CANADA LTD.
207 Queen's Quay West, Toronto 117, Ontario

PERGAMON PRESS LTD.
Headington Hill Hall, Oxford

PERGAMON PRESS (AUST.) PTY. LTD.
Rushcutters Bay, Sydney, N.S.W.

VIEWEG & SOHN GmbH
Burgplatz 1, Braunschweig

Copyright © 1973, Pergamon Press Inc.
Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 72-77402

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Printed in the United States of America
0-08-017030 7 (H)
0-08-017250 4 (S)

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Preface

To see others as others see themselves is the quest of those who study the self concept. The study of the self concept has enjoyed a rebirth in the last decade (Wylie, 1961; Diggory, 1966; Coopersmith, 1967; Manis & Meltzer, 1967; Gordon & Gergen, 1968). In part, the renewed interest may stem from the recent emphasis on humanism in the social sciences. Humanism stresses the significance of the individual as an individual rather than as a member of a collective. Humanism also emphasizes a personal frame of reference rather than group norms as guides to behavior. The question asked repeatedly is "Who am I?"

A second impetus to the study of the self concept may be a reconsideration of the cognitive as opposed to the behavioral approach to the study of human experience. The behavioral view emphasizes the direct association of stimulus and response. For the behaviorist the self concept is an unnecessary complication, a will-o'-the-wisp. In the cognitive view, on the other hand, the self concept obtrudes between the stimulus and response. The stimulus is translated in terms of the self concept, and the individual's behavior is associated with the person's view of himself. In the cognitive approach, human behavior is viewed as determined, in part, by the prism effect of the individual on the stimulus.

Unfortunately, the reviews of the literature already cited are subject to severe limitations and criticism because of the limitations of earlier measurements of the self concept. The measures used throughout are based on verbal self reports. The person is asked directly how he evaluates himself. Can the individual, in fact, tell us who he is, using the usual methods of communication?

It is proposed here that the inherent shortcoming of self reports is that they are subject to distortion by the individual. In order to avoid this, the present approach is based upon non-verbal measures of the self concept. The individual is asked to locate himself in relation to a field of significant others, represented in a variety of geometric arrangements using symbols of the self and others (*see* Appendix A).

Also, in contrast to most earlier work, a multifaceted analysis of the self concept is presented. Earlier analyses were concerned largely with self-esteem. Here self-esteem is considered along with self-centrality, self-complexity, social interest, identification, power, marginality, openness, and majority identification.

As already indicated, the social nature of the self is assumed. Humanists are concerned with the question, "Who am I?" Social psychologists concerned with interpersonal perception ask, "Who are they?" In the present approach, these two questions are combined and we ask, "Who am I in relation to them?"

Finally, from these new directions, a new theoretical framework evolves which addresses the yang and yin of the social sciences, stability, and change. On the one hand, stability in interpersonal relationships makes for predictability and satisfaction of mutual expectations. On the other hand, change is inherent in social relations. The control of this inherent conflict is a demand of any self-other system. A large body of literature, in the areas of personality and social psychology dealing with the confluence of the individual and the group under conditions of change is organized by the Theory of Self-Other Orientation and the Helical Theory of Personal Change.

The work is intended for all students of social psychology, personality, sociology, and education regardless of academic level who are interested in a new look at the self concept, its measurement, and theoretical considerations. The content evolves from a description of some of the basic components of the self system including self-esteem, social interest, and marginality. The text moves toward more complex analyses including the alienation syndrome and the political personality which involves two or more of the components of the social self. A third section describes the development of the self concept and examines such variables as socio-economic background and the history of geographic mobility of the child.

As already indicated, in the final section a reintegration is proposed of earlier self theories which deal with the classic dilemma of personal stability and change. The book ends with the presentation of a "Helical Theory of Personal Change." This framework combines theories of attitude and

value change, behavior modification, role theory, and the self concept into an open ended theoretical statement of the change-stability cycle.

This book may be used as a text or a supplement to a text. It is used most effectively, however, if it is combined with experience in using the accompanying devices in the study of interpersonal perception, following up ideas presented in the text, or examining numerous ideas which will occur to the students.

This book is the result of happy and productive associations with my students and friends: Drs. Barbara H. Long, Edmund H. Henderson, Lynn Hunt Monahan, Beal M. Mossman, Mary Dell Smith, Joan Hagey, Bobbi Jo Stark, and Dalia C. Leslie. Dr. Barbara H. Long, in particular, was instrumental in developing several of the core studies.

The work was begun under a contract with the Veterans Administration Hospital of Elsmere, Delaware, with the gracious help of Dr. Searles A. Grossman. Later, a research program was supported by the National Science Foundation. The book was initially encouraged by Dr. Theodore M. Newcomb. The organization of the material was greatly improved through his gracious criticisms and adroit suggestions.

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