

The Social Self and Emotional Development:  
A Preliminary Draft of Some Preliminary  
Thoughts

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## The Social Self and Emotional Development

### Introduction

Within symbolic interaction there has been a long standing concern with the development of the self, but Mead's notions of the self and its development shows a difficulty similar to Piaget's formulation of intellectual development. The difficulties that I have in mind are the overly cognitive approach to the question of development and the failure to extend the development into the adult stages of life. These two difficulties lead to an over-simplified notion of self development.

An overly cognitive approach leads to the neglect of emotions as an important part of the self. Such a neglect seems unreasonable in view the emotional nature of humans. The failure to extend the development of self throughout adulthood leads to a truncated notion of social self.

According to Mead a person acquires a social self when he/she is able to anticipate the reactions of others based on their roles and the relationship between the individual's and the others' role. The classic example given to demonstrate this is the ability to play a game of baseball. Thus it is not enough to be able to catch and hit a baseball that allows one to play the game. Rather one must know the various positions (social roles) and understand both the expectations others have of your performance as well as the ex-

pectations you may legitimately have of the others' performance. The actors must share a universe of discourse. A true social self then exists when the individual can anticipate the responses of others.

This example serves well to point out how cognitive and youthful the concept of social self is. We can see immediately the parallel between this conception and the notion of cognitive development by Piaget. For Piaget, cognitive development ends at the formal operational stage. This stage is usually accomplished in the age range of 11 to 15 years. A quick glance at a little league baseball game confirms a similar age range in terms of successfully playing the game as opposed to hitting and catching the ball. As symbolic interactionists, we can take advantage of the recent work in psychology.

In psychology, we now know that we cannot understand cognitive development without taking into account emotional development (Sroufe, 1979). Recent work in reflective judgment (Kitchener and King, 1981) shows that cognitive development extends well into the twenties and thirties. This leads me to the question of what is known about emotional development through adulthood.

A review of the literature on adult emotional development leads in several parallel directions. One most commonly known to sociologists is the work of Kohlberg on moral development. Concurrent with this is the work of Loevinger and Erickson in ego development. For me the work of Da-

browski in emotional development constitutes the most interesting line of thought (Dabrowski,1970 and Dabrowski and Fiechowski,1977). In each of these directions the importance of the joint effect of intellectual and emotional development is stressed.

For the purposes of this paper I wish to focus on the emotional side of development and bring some of this information to the attention of symbolic interaction. As a side note I might mention that many symbolic interactionists have noted the work of Harry Stack Sullivan and his work clearly represents a consonant attempt to blend emotional and social development.

#### What Are Emotions

First of all different types of emotions have been identified. There are primary discrete emotions which develop during the first two years of life. There are discrete emotions which develop in the fifth through eleventh years and there are complex emotions which develop from about eleven on. The primary emotions include distress, delight, anger, disgust, fear, elation and joy. They are cross-culturally recognized and provide both internal and social regulation. By internal regulation we mean that they motivate behavior with an external social signal attached. By external regulation we mean that given the attached signal the perceiver's response is determined. The discrete non-primary emotions include pride, shame, love and

guilt. They also serve to motivate behavior but there is no necessarily-cross-culturally-recognizable signals attached. The complex emotions are relational in nature and involve the mixing of discrete emotions into complex feeling states such as depression.

All emotions share three elements in common which go to make up the basic defining characteristics of emotions. First emotions motivate behavior while cognitions structure that behavior. Secondly, there is an internal feeling state associated with each emotion. Thirdly, there is always an external expression of the emotion, which is cross-culturally recognizable in the case of primary emotions and which is socializable in terms of both signification and suppression.

Complex emotions begin to emerge with the development of Mead's notion of the social self because they involve relationships with others and with the internalized other. At the lowest level of emotional development the individual is egocentric with regard to these relationships. At the highest level the individual is oriented away from specific others and takes on a relationship with humanity. At this point then I would like to explore the various levels of development and describe these in terms of Dabrowski's work.

#### Levels of Adult Emotional Development

The person at level one really views the world from his very own point of view. Such a view may be shared with many

others but the important point is that the view is from the individual and not others. Such a person may be very success oriented and successful both in their own eyes as well as others. They have a fixed and externalized set of values. Most importantly these values have no hierarchy. Some may have many more values than others in level one but the structure of those values is fixed, externalized and non-prioritized. Level one persons know what is right and what is wrong in no uncertain terms. Their behavior and values and dynamisms are well integrated. The constellation is set. While others may see inconsistencies in level one people, the egocentric nature of these people prevents them from seeing such inconsistencies. Many but not all of these people are defined as "good" people. Some at the very lowest of this level are psychopaths and sociopaths. While there is no reason to believe that most people by their nature are confined to this level, the majority of people are in fact level one individuals. Dabrowski calls this level "primary integration."

Level two is characterized by vacillation, the cross-fires and under-currents of others and the world control their reactions. Persons at level two we describe as having ambivalence and ambivalence. They are conformity- other-oriented in the sense of reciprocity and exchange. Their own position on issues and values is determined with reference to others and how they respond. Such persons take a general relativistic orientation toward their own and

other's values. They are concerned with rulemaking through consensus. Their values are not derived from an egocentric point of view but clearly from the view of others. As such there can be little integration over time of their dynamics. In its extreme form such people are called wishy-washy or group processors. Dabrowski calls this level "unilevel disintegration." While there are fewer people in this level than in level one this represents a large proportion of the population. Also notice the necessary lack of a hierarchy of values. For many this level represents a highly intellectualized stance because of the lack of ego- and ethno-centrism.

Level three is characterized by loss. Such words as puzzlement and uncertainty are the synonyms. The feeling engendered by the loss of something fits this characterization. Persons in this level can be quite unhappy but definitely have a real sense of disquietude. There is a recognition of a hierarchy of values but a lack of a clear conception of those values. Value domains of the physical and social worlds are separate and not integrate. There are deep feelings of disquietude with "what is" and a agonizing search for "what ought to be." There is a heightened sense of self and self-awareness. There is a strong identification with specific others that is truly empathic.

It is not unusual for persons at this level to be labeled psychoneurotic because they are experiencing what we term positive maladjustment. Characteristic of this so

called maladjustment is a real felt sense of moral failure. The person is frequently in conflict with the social environment as s/he attempts to develop an autonomous stance. The subject-object analysis of one's self is beginning in this level and there are frequent attempts to change one's self through many forms of autopsychotherapy. Dabrowski referred to this level as "Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration."

Level four is characterized by Maslow's term self-actualization. The level four person not only has a recognition of a hierarchical set of values but also a clear conception of that set in the three worlds: personal, social, and physical; but the prioritized set of values in each world is probably not integrated across worlds. There is a self-directed and organized movement to behave in accord with these values. A truly authentic self and autonomy are fully evident at this level. The authentic self is known to the person because of a strong operating subject-object in one's self; the self-analysis and auto-education of one's self as a true self and true to one's self. At level four the person is truly autonomous; selecting their own goals and values and assuming responsibility for others.

While rare in the general population, they may occur at about 1 in every 1000, in the college educated population (Loevinger, 1980:140). Dabrowski called this fourth level "Organized Multilevel Disintegration."



Level five may be characterized by the phrase ganz Wel-  
tanschuaung. Persons at this level have a recognition and  
total conception of a hierarchical set of values in the per-  
sonal, social, and physical world (a unified worldview).  
There is a complete integration of cognitions, emotions, and  
behavior. There is a universal empathy and identification  
with others. Dabrowski calls this level "Secondary Integra-  
tion."

At this level one sees the expression of those ultimate  
universal values which stand as the a priori synthetic judg-  
ments of Kant's practical wisdom.

Since each of these levels constitute fundamental  
differences in their organization the ways in which the  
discrete emotions will be felt and expressed will vary. In  
fact, as one moves from one level to another the discrete  
emotions will be more similar within a level than will the  
same discrete emotion between levels.

#### Summary

Returning to our defining characteristics of emotions,  
we can postulate that individuals at different levels of  
emotional development will have different motivations for  
behavior, different feeling states, and different expres-  
sions of emotions. Returning to our discussion of the so-  
cial self we can see that in fact the universe of discourse  
will necessarily be different for individuals operating at  
different levels of emotional development. The ability to

anticipate the behaviors and expectations of others will also be affected by the levels of emotional development. In effect, the whole concept of social self needs therefore to be elaborated to include the emotions of individuals. The impact of including emotions is to reverse the trend to think of the social self as a singular entity with changes only occurring in the self-conception of the individual. Instead, we need to see the changes in self-conception occurring with levels or types of social selves. We would predict that self-concept changes would be of a different type depending on the level of social self which needs to include both an emotional as well as a cognitive component.

There are many issues I have not discussed here such as: the factors that influence emotional development, the connections between cognitive and emotional development, the different types of social selves which could be anticipated based on the cognitive and emotional development, and the ways in which self-conceptions might change within the various levels. What I have attempted to present is the importance of building upon the work in adult emotional and cognitive development in understanding the development of the social self.

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