

# The Analytical Tools of Transformation: Situating Self in Society and Transformation

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Understanding the self is a valuable addition to academic scholarship. There is a need to be able to use analytic tools to help us understand ourselves that can be reviewed with rigor. The self can be examined through social constructivism to give shape and meaning to the self. Exploring the borderlands of the self and our faculty and the mix of who we are is another way of self-examination. Being able to collect personal data and information about ourselves through self-quantification is another way of understanding the self.

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A primary purpose of scholarly and academic work is to provide change. In general, when a scholar is looking into a topic through an analysis of the literature or completing an experiment the purpose of the activity is to be able to supply information or make an argument about a topic. This process requires academic rigor and creativity. Another way this rigor and creativity could be described is through an understanding of the scholar's area of inquiry from both from a perspective of the heart and the head (Montuori, 2006, 2012; Montuori & Donnelly, 2013). One method that allows the scholar to go through this process of rigor and creativity is through taking a transdisciplinary approach. Montuori (2010) describes how transdisciplinarity is separate from multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary. He goes on to describe it is a different way of thinking, organizing knowledge and informing action that can assist them in coming to grips with the complexity of the world? (p. 123).

Addressing these complexities and causing changes in perspectives, scientific direction, and our understanding of the world through a transdisciplinary approach requires being able to see the world through many different lenses. Szotompka (1994) describes that the systems model has given rise to the concept of social change. That within the exploration of a system, the scholar must look both at the complexity of the whole and parts of the system. This model of a system implies that there are many ways in which a

system could be changed, including composition, structure, functions, boundaries, relationships of subsystems, and the environment.

To be able to analyze these points of change and to see it from a transdisciplinary framework, understanding and looking at a topic from some different analytic frameworks is one method of understanding and addressing this complexity. This paper will investigate how the self can be understood through some different frameworks. Firstly, we will look at the concept of social constructivism and how socially we create and understand our realities through the four proposals of social constructivism. Secondly, we will look at some of the borderlands and frontiers that can impact the self. Thirdly, we will consider how we quantify and understand ourselves.

## The Self and Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is described to be based on four foundational proposals. Gergen (2015) describes that there is no one way to describe the world or no one way in which we must describe the world. There are many ways we as a society have chosen to describe the world, it doesn't mean that it must be the only way we describe the world. This concept deconstructs the way we understand and think about the world and ourselves. Something as simple as a blade of grass has many ways in which it could be described and understood. One could talk about the color of the grass is green, but they could also talk about the species of the grass, its material composition, the height, the texture, the feeling a freshly cut lawn gives a person, or many other ways of conceptualizing grass.

Our relationship with the topic being discussed and the outcomes of that relationship is the second proposal of social constructivism. Our way of describing and understanding the world is based on our connection and relationship with the world (Gergen, 2015). Somebody that does lawncare for

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a golf course might have a different connection and relationship with grass than somebody who is from a desert climate that does not naturally provide grasses. This focus on the outcomes of the relationship we have with a topic helps us to gain meaning from that topic.

How we choose to describe the world is based on our relationship with that aspect of the world. This third proposal, that constructions gain their meaning from their social utility. Sometimes these relationships could be described or connected to the various disciplines that we understand them from (Gergen, 2015). Our description and understanding of grass would vary from person to person who might be describing it. A molecular biologist might be most interested in understanding the makeup of the grass based on its chemical makeup. A scholar trying to understand why so many American lawns are made up of grass might be most interested in the way grass makes people feel and their relationship with the grass.

There is an interconnected way we perceive the world and the values that we put on things. These values are created and sustained by its connection to all of us. Gergen (2015) described that the fourth proposal is "values are created and sustained within forms of life including science" (p. 11). This concept that "we relate" and is at the core of this proposal. As we are communicating about the grass, we produce a manner of speaking about it that we can all relate to and agree on.

Implementing this deconstruction and reconstruction socially is a skill, and the practice of that could be described as the practice of preforming the mind (Gergen, 2015). In a clinical setting, in working individually with a client a practitioner is focused on having a purposeful conversation with clients or developing skills. In the moment they must be attentive to the client, but also focused on their inner actions (is there countertransference, am I using reflective responding, am I using validating statements, etc.). Juggling our engagement with the client, using attentive listening skills, and implementing a specific therapeutic strategy is challenging. It is only through purposefully practicing these skills that a practitioner can be able to do all those tasks at the same time. This takes the practice of preforming the mind.

In another example of this, the same way that a sailor in training learns to tie a knot. When they are first learning to tie a particular knot, it might take concentration and focus to learn the motions, understand the ways that the rope can be positioned and effect the knot, or to have the fine motor control to perform the motions. After they have practiced and might be tying that knot thousands of times or doing it multiple times a day for years, there becomes a familiarity with the activity of tying the knot. The sailor's focus and concentration shift away from the activity of tying the knot, but they can be more aware and connected to their environment in which it is being tied.

One of the things that come up for me in some of social constructionism is that if there is a similar practice to be done in seeing the world in this socially constructive view, it becomes easier with practice and attention. Learning to be able to better flex this muscle of sorts would be helpful. Having a worldview that understands definitions of the world and how they affect us in our relationships, way of evaluating and analyzing life, and the way we grow and develop.

### The Borderlands of the Self

Similarly, this preforming the mind, understanding where our borderland is and developing our faculty of understanding is another way of understanding the self. This stretching that takes place in the self as we explore the edges of ourselves can be both empowering and challenging. One way this can be seen is through the tension and relationship between empirical knowledge and practice experience which has long been discussed. Klein, Waldo C. and Bloom, Martin (1995) describe a lens to evaluate and translate value-driven practice experience and the translation of scientific findings into practice principles which are interconnected via the bridge of practice wisdom and feedback loops. The idea of practice wisdom serves the practitioner to translate previous practice experience, empirical knowledge, and theoretical knowledge into interventions and activities. This idea of practice wisdom is how we develop the ability to see a phenomenon and know how to best respond based on all this accumulated knowledge.

Having the capacity to be able to reflect subtleties based on a situation can be a challenge to create. It takes sometimes being able to see a type of truth about a situation and what is going on in each situation. Anzaldúa (2012) describes *la facultad* (faculty) as "capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities. It is an instant 'sensing,' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning" (p. 60).

The concept of practice wisdom is mostly related to empirically collected data, theoretical frameworks, and some based on our experience. Anzaldúa (2012) describes the experience of *la facultad* as coming from adversity. That things that "thrust us into a less literal and more psych sense of reality increases awareness and *la facultad*" (p. 61). It would seem that both are true and could potentially be seen as similar facets of the same system.

Being able to understand our awareness and *la facultad* becomes a vital skill for understanding these boundaries that our self has. These concept around our perceptiveness is an interesting subject. I would argue to understand if the perceptions we develop, are laid on an appropriate foundation, we would need to have some sort of feedback loop to test and check our understanding against. This reflects the connection between emotions and intellect, or between their head and heart, or practice and theory (Montuori, 2006). There

is also a need to have a connection between la facultad and practice wisdom that we gain. While practice wisdom would focus more heavily on the empirical knowledge and la facultad would look more at the experiential aspects, it would seem there is a third way of learning and sensing can arise that is also related to both. That which is based on patterns and concepts that we find in nature or through our everyday lives.

Whether we are looking at our perceptiveness and the amount of it that should come from scientific inquiry versus experience, or as Moore (2005) discusses looking at double consciousness versus single consciousness related to how we process and deal with generations of abusive treatment that Black American's have gone through. His description of letting us start with self-reflection is relevant. To transform the ways that we think, "it is never too late to learn, but we must first develop the capacity to value learning. To paraphrase Fanon, we must not just know the world but change it" (p. 762).

As we self-reflect, we find many different mixes of ourselves. The concept of being *mita' y mita'* or half and half is foundational in Anzaldúa (2012) description of the new *mes-tiza* (A person of mixed racial ancestry, especially of mixed European and Native American ancestry). She describes this as "neither one nor the other but a strange doubling" (p. 41). While I cannot relate to this concept on a racial or ethnological level, I can relate to it in other aspects of my life. We all have so many distinct parts and sections of our lives. The way that we relate with our colleagues is different than our friends or family. The presentation that we give might be different in each group. One example of this in my life is my fascination and connection with technology. I find myself consistently interested in technology and listen to several podcasts about technology every week, along with reading about it. While, I have long been interested in the intersection between practice and technology (Campbell, 2014), usually my two worlds do not meet. If I talk about topics related to technology to people, I am close to or who I am usually around, I end up getting a deer in the headlight's kind of look.

When we have these multiple consciousnesses that we take on in our life it creates divides. This is especially true as Anzaldúa (2012) describes her different worldviews related to feminism, being a lesbian, living in the United States, and being Chicana. I found her description of the defense mechanisms that create based on this to be especially insightful. She described the *Nopal de Castilla* ("Prickly Pear Cactus"). She stated that "*Soy nopal de castilla* like the spineless and therefore defenseless cactus that Mamagrade Romana grew in back of her shed. I have no protection. So I cultivated needles, nettles, razor-sharp spikes to protect myself from others" (p. 67). This idea of how we develop and cultivate spines as a defense mechanism is so true for people. These defense strategies are to help us escape what she calls the

"agony of inadequacy." I would call these agonies as traumas that we experience and that we build defense mechanisms to address them.

From the description that Black (2007) gives of Fanon and DuBoisian, they went through many tribulations in their moving forward the work of scientific inquiry. He describes this double conscious as having two antagonistic identities. He goes on to state that "means that a lot of time and energy is spent negotiating and enduring the conflicts between who one is as a person and how one struggles to live with the misrepresentations of the outside world" (p. 394). Black goes on to describe how these assimilations and adaptations can lead to "harmful unilateral double consciousness" (p. 400). Sometimes as we move forward in our scholarly pursuits, we find that there is turmoil, but this adversity is a part of what shapes us to be who we are.

In looking into the concept of resilience, this is truly a place of opportunity, which includes challenges. Many different fields of practice have defined the concepts of resilience. Zolli and Healy (2012) describe definitions from engineering, emergency response, ecology, psychology, sociology, and others. It is also a newer field. While there are many resources around the concept of resilience, there are many new scholarly publications focused on the many different facets of resilience. Being able to take a step back in our work and both evaluating ourselves through our self-defined perspective, but also the perspective of others is a vital step (Black, 2007, p. 403).

### **The Connection Between Self Research and Transformation: The Quantified Self**

One way of understanding the borderlands we fall under is through self-research and self-quantification. There are many diverse levels of how much self-quantification they implement. Andy Warhol might be at an extreme of collecting information about himself, when he gathered six hundred filled boxes of correspondence and various materials, he gathered over his life to be preserved in his museum (Lupton, 2016). This amount might sound outlandish but to varying degrees, we all collect information about ourselves. I would classify myself as a bit of a digital packrat and somebody interested in quantifying myself. For many years I have been gathering data about myself, especially to be used as a tool. While I do track some things that might be extraneous, I find purpose in many of the points of data that I collect about myself. This collection of various information informs me as a researcher. I find that being able to gather useful data that is relevant to my career and life is a valuable endeavor and it helps to think about it in the way a researcher would.

Being able to have one system for collecting information is an important task for any researcher. Making that collection as easy as possible and in a format that can be used would seem to be an important activity. One type of data

that I have been collecting on myself for many years is a list of training that I have received. It started when I was in high school and filling out job applications, I created a document that listed my various work experience with the information that is necessary to complete an application for employment. Some applications ask for different pieces of information, and as I would look up that information and I would add it to the document. Much of this information was different than what I would need on a resume (and really at the time I did not have the experience to put together a resume). When I moved on to community college and later to my university, I kept this practice up. I adapted the document to also include a list of classes that I completed (including information about the instructor, course description, credits, and even my final grades).

While this document has split up some and undergone some changes in it, I still have it and find it useful. But this process is what also started me keeping track of the training I have completed over the years. I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker in Washington State. My licensure requires that I keep records regarding continuing education units that I receive (requiring every two years that I have received a certain amount and some with specific areas of knowledge). As well, I have my Educational Staff Associate certificate for working within school-based employment that I am required to track similar information but related to clock hours. While this document started as a word document that I would just add entries after various training, my system has expanded.

I wrote about my system that I created for tracking these entries on my blog (Campbell, 2014). While my system is a bit different now, it is the same basic idea. I have a text file that has the text of the who, what, where, when how much... etc. I also create an entry in a CSV file (something that could be opened in Excel or spreadsheet). As I was renewing my licensure this year, I wrote about how I use this information to verify that I'm on track, plan for the following year's continuing education, and generate a report that I could submit if I was ever audited (Campbell, 2019).

I find being able to gather this information, making it useful and practical for doing real-life activities is extremely helpful as a researcher. Following this form gives me a direct method to be able to change my behavior. Lupton (2016) describes the concept of assemblage, and it is used in socio-materialism literature. As I gather information, such as the detailed information from my training received database. It helps to show meaning and significance in the training I have completed. While her book is similar to a cross-sectional literature review on the quantified self, it seems that she is presenting a case for our ability to have personal data that we can review and make meaningful changes in our lives.

As we pursue our areas of inquiry, the self is important. Transformative inquiry looks at including the integrate the

inquirer into the inquiry (Montuori, 2010). That understanding of the self can be looked at as how do we understand and describe the world through social constructivism. The same way in which a scholar must understand the landscape of their inquiry, to understand ourselves we must be able to understand the borderlands of ourselves. Being able to quantify and gather personal data on ourselves helps us to be able to accomplish this increased understanding of the self.

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