

Self: A Concept in Development

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Abstract: Many definitions for the self coexist in the psychological theory and praxis. This diversity is a result of epistemological basis from which different strategies are selected in order to approach, describe and limit the target object. This paper aims to provide a review on concepts concerning the self and a reflection on how this concept is articulated in different Psychology theoretical approaches. The impact of the central dilemmas of developmental Psychology to the concept of self is also discussed. Thus, this paper suggests a systematic approach in order to analyze each self definition: One should seek to answer how each theory has positioned itself in relation to the dicotomies of stability versus transformation, specific versus universal, and inner world versus external world.

Keywords: self psychology, epistemology, developmental psychology

Self: Um Conceito em Desenvolvimento

Resumo: Diversas definições de *self* coexistem nas teorias e práticas psicológicas. Essa variedade é resultante de bases epistemológicas a partir das quais se adotam estratégias diferentes para abordar e demarcar os limites do objeto em questão e descrevê-lo. Este estudo teve como objetivo oferecer uma revisão dos conceitos de *self* e uma reflexão sobre como esse conceito se articula nas diferentes abordagens teóricas da psicologia. Destaca-se que dilemas centrais à psicologia do desenvolvimento atravessam o conceito de *self*. Por essa razão, apresenta-se a tese de que, ao analisar cada definição de *self*, deve-se buscar responder como cada teoria colocou-se diante das dicotomias estabilidade versus transformação, específico versus universal e mundo interno versus mundo externo.

Palavras-chave: psicologia do *self*, epistemologia, psicologia do desenvolvimento

Self: Un Concepto en Desarrollo

Resumen: Diversas definiciones de *self* coexisten en las teorías y prácticas psicológicas. Esta diversidad resulta de bases epistemológicas donde diferentes estrategias son seleccionadas para aproximar, describir y limitar el objeto blanco. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo ofrecer una revisión de los conceptos de *self* y una reflexión sobre cómo este concepto se articula en diferentes enfoques teóricos de la psicología. El impacto de los dilemas centrales de la psicología de desarrollo en el concepto del *self* también son discutidos. Así, este artículo sugiere una aproximación sistemática para analizar cada definición del *self*: se debe intentar responder como cada teoría se posicionó delante de las dicotomías estabilidad versus transformación, específico versus universal y mundo interno versus mundo externo.

Palabras clave: psicología del *self*, epistemología, psicología del desarrollo

Right now, in the Asian Urals, boys of the tribes that are remnants of the Mongols are learning to make cabins with their parents, in the same way their ancestors have for hundreds of years. The traditions of the tribe show what the future holds for the next generations. In coexisting with the others, the children can learn all the roles that can be performed in community life. It can be easily seen that the self, which is constructed and transformed in this context, is different from that of a child of the same age born in any western urban center. The concept of self is therefore a complex issue.

There is no direct translation for the word self in many languages, however, there are words that naturally indicate the role that a self can assume (Strawson, 2005), although this may differ in each culture. In one succinct definition, self includes a physical body, thought processes and a conscious

experience that someone is unique and differs from the others, which involves the mental representation of personal experiences (Gazzaniga & Heatherton, 2003). This definition highlights permanent and universal characteristics and does not discriminate the changes that occur during development or among different cultures. In contrast, post-modern authors (Gergen, 1985; Shotter, 1997) question the existence of the access to a universal truth and of an individual perspective disengaged from a relational context. Shotter argues that minds, selves or psyches only exist as such when embedded in our discursive practices. Others take an intermediate position, such as that of Chandler (2000), who considers that to survive as possible objects of knowledge, without falling into incoherence, the selves of every age and cultural segment need to be understood as capable of change, preserving some characteristics which provide a sense of continuity. Currently, these diverse definitions of self, which have appeared at different historical moments, coexist.

The self concept is used in a general way in clinical practice and research, making it difficult to immediately

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recognize what the epistemological perspective adopted is when speaking of self. The theoretical approaches are based on different concepts to comprehend the human being, which have direct implications on the way to describe the self. Among the many dilemmas which the theories about the self face, Bamberg and Zielke (2007) highlight three that are highly interrelated: (1) the issue of identity and of feeling unaltered, that is, how it is possible to consider oneself the same faced with constant change; (2) the issue of feeling unique and the same, that is, if it is possible to consider oneself as unique despite being the same as any other (and vice versa); and (3) the question of what controls the construction, that is, if it is the person who constructs the world as it is or if the person is constructed by the way the world is. These questions must be answered dialectically, in accordance with the authors, verifying if the theories emphasize continuity or change; uniqueness/specificity, or generality/universality, and in which direction the construction of the self takes place, from the person to the world or from the world to the person. This last question is also proposed in other terms, as maturationism *versus* learning, innatism *versus* empiricism and heredity *versus* environmentalism. Bamberg (2008) asserts that it is not possible to support both opposing principles simultaneously and that a choice is required. However, as will be seen in this study, there are cases where opposing principles divide the primacy.

This study, therefore, aims to provide a review of the concepts of self and a reflection on how this concept is articulated in the different theoretical approaches of psychology. Bamberg (2008) and Bamberg and Zielke (2007) suggested a categorization for the critical position faced with the diversity of approaches to the concept, and this study provides, from an educational perspective, an analysis of the concept based on the analytical framework of Bamberg. We reviewed the theoretical and research articles produced over the previous 15 years and, as a prerequisite to review a theoretical concept, we have included various works that are considered classics in the literature on the subject. Searches were performed with the descriptor self in the portals *BVS - Psicologia* (Virtual Health Library - Psychology), SciELO (library of Brazilian journals and scientific articles) and PsycINFO of the APA (American Psychology Association). Finally, the crossing of the references was performed to verify which were most cited and, then, to access them.

The different comprehensions about the self, as fruits of the human reflective capacity, were influenced by the other movements in the production of knowledge of mankind. At first, important influences in the transformation of the ideas about the existence of a self are highlighted. Next, how each theory about the self is positioned in relation to the dilemma of the identity, to the dilemma of feeling oneself unique and the same, and to the dilemma of “who is in charge of the construction”, that is, whether the development of the self occurs in the direction of self-external world or external world-self. The theories about the

self are also classified according to the existence of clear boundaries between the internal world and the external world until the boundaries diffuse, or the idea that there is nothing stable within the individual.

Possible Origins of the Transformations in the Ideas about the Self

The definition of self is a relatively recent construction. However, since ancient times man has sought to understand this internal thing. The production of knowledge in philosophy, the history and the recent development of the Western culture and the recent studies, especially in neuroscience and developmental psychology, exert influences that cause transformations in the concept of self.

Regarding philosophy, the philosophical concepts about man that have emerged over time have influenced the comprehension of the self (Oliveira, 2006; Rasera, Guanaes, & Japur, 2004; Souza & Gomes, 2009). The ancient philosophers understood that the being was conceived at once, totally complete and perfect. For Chandler (2000), the most important concepts were: (1) Schlesinger’s man as the result of a system of essences; (2) Plato’s transcendent and immutable self; (3) Descartes’ the being who would live a dualism between the body and the spirit; (4) and the being that was equipped with universal categories in the mind, as theorized by Kant. For the author, there was a concern about a state of permanence and a certain disdain for change. Thus originated the idea of self as an entity or of the existence of an essentialist core, and the demand for some durable substance, such as the ego, the spirit or the soul. In psychology, the vision of self more often stems from the philosophical tradition that began with Descartes, passed through Kant and arrived at Piaget (Oliveira, 2006). It is of the self as “itself”, the development of an awareness of being an independent and autonomous entity in relation to the other. A rationalist vision of the psyche emphasizes an individualistic perspective, since it describes something that occurs within the subject.

With regard to cultural influence, Nelson (2003) argues that the position and the degree of differentiation of the self in the culture undergo transformations as a result of historical processes. Until the seventeenth century, the worldview in the West was of an enduring reality in which each life cycle was determined in terms of the position that the person occupied in society. Thus, in the majority of civilizations there was little demand for individuals to seek self-definitions for their own lives. For this reason the art and literature expressed the common narratives of the culture, and not the specific lives of individuals. The individuals had little incentive to compose an individualized past and a unique project of individual aspirations for the future. There was no demand to construct a history about the personal self. The situation changed from the 18th century, when an individualistic perspective for the human existence appeared, which would have repercussions in the origin of important psychological theories.

Gergen (1991) highlights some changes in the concept of the self over the past two centuries, integrating social, technological and philosophical influences. In the 19th century there was a romantic view of self that attributed personality, emotional, morality and creativity traits to each individual. In the twentieth century, the modernist view of the self gained strength, in which the ability of reasoning to solve problems and to develop ideas, opinions and conscious intentions was valued. These views influenced scientific thinking about mankind until the late twentieth century, when they collapsed primarily due to transformations brought about by the media technologies available for the immersion of individuals in the social world. Depending on the adherence of the society to this rapid pace of change, the very idea of the human need to recognize oneself as the same (the “sameness” of John Locke) is discussed (Casas, 2005).

For Gergen (1991), all these transformations led to the erosion of the identifiable self, a characteristic of postmodernity. The author explains that culture is constituted by a system of meanings, actions, artifacts and institutions that are recognizable and shared by a particular social group. Over time, this sharing creates a sense of submission or belonging, which helps the individuals to differentiate themselves as the members of one group and non-members of another. In times of globalization and the transmission of information at high speed and without physical borders, there is a constant construction of new meanings with which each individual has to deal, making it difficult to construct an identity and to determine the culture to which their way of life belongs.

Regarding the influence of research findings, it appears that different empirical and epistemological approaches have investigated the question of the origin and nature of the self. From the evolutionary perspective, human interactions create neural connections from which the mind emerges, as Oliiva, Dias and Reis (2009) explain. The studies focus on the role of the environment in configuring the synaptic circuits to explain how the experience of a self emerges. In this view, the construction of the self follows an ancestral evolutionary route, however, is dependent on the social and historical context in which this process occurs. It should be noted that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, Winnicott proposes self as a potential legacy that, in order to emerge, needs the experience gained through the relationship with the other (Galván & Amiralian, 2009; Winnicott, 1983). It is an approximation between distinct theoretical approaches.

From developmental psychology, Chandler (2000) investigated the perception of adolescents regarding changes and continuities that they perceived in themselves, discovering that their answers either emphasized the entity or relational aspect of the self. At one extreme, the configuration of synaptic circuits was examined and at the other, those involved were asked directly to describe how they experience themselves. These methodological differences may result from the fact that the self is taken as a natural object or something historically constructed (Páramo, 2008). However, despite the

theoretical and methodological differences, it can be seen that all these contributions can help to comprehend the self.

To examine the comprehension of self of the Greek philosophers, the postmodern reflections on the self and the culture, and the results of empirical research about the self allows the complexity of the self as an object of study in Psychological Science to be comprehended. Thus it was sought to identify when and where the different theoretical approaches to the *self* may have their explanation potential maximized, highlighting what is valued and what is disregarded in each proposal.

The Concept of Self in the Psychological Theories

The beginning of the scientific analysis of the self took place from 1890, with the publication of *The Principles of Psychology* by William James (Ashmore & Jussim, 1997), however, this remains a topic of interest. A search for the term self in *BVS Psicologia* produced 5813 results and in *PsycINFO* produced 641 results (searches performed on June 20th 2012).

The theoretical approaches that sought to define self or give it space are examined below. Firstly, perspectives are examined that highlight the subject in their world/environment or establish a space inside and another outside. Secondly, the origins of the ideas that permeate the new theories of the self are examined and perspectives are presented that locate the self in an internal individual space with permeable boundaries, as well as perspectives in which there is nothing like the internal world.

Perspectives that place clear borders between the internal and external world

According to the answers to the dilemmas of Bamberg and Zielke (2007) these theories can be classified into four subdivisions: (1) universality, continuity and direction of development of the self from the person to the world, (2) universality, continuity and direction of the development of the self from the world to the person, (3) unity, continuity and the development of the self in two directions: from the person to the world and from the world to the person; (4) universality, continuity and direction of the development of the self from the person to the world.

Universality, continuity and direction of development: from the person to the world

Among the concepts of self in use is the notion of self that implies the existence of internal and mental tendencies, as described in psychoanalysis. Guanaes and Japur (2003) examined the descriptions for the self of the major psychoanalytic theories: ego psychology, object relations theory and self psychology. The concept of self can have the sense of Ego, such as mental structure, and also indicate the self as an individual subjective experience of oneself. The Ego

construct is further explored and systematized in the theory. There is a concern with universal characteristics that are stable over time. The authors argue that these descriptions for the self are essentially dualistic regarding the constitution of the subjectivity and of the human psyche, since they presuppose an opposition between the internal world and the external world. They explain that duality is present even when the importance of the relationships experienced in the constitution of the self is defended, because the self is described in relation to something which is external and this relationship represents a link between two distinct poles. Thus, there are clear boundaries between the internal and external world, and the self is constituted as an specific entity in this relationship.

Universality, continuity and direction of the development: from the world to the person

At the other end of the polarity is the influence of the environment, where behaviorism arises, where the focus of attention is the behavior. This perspective rejects the study of the internal processes of the mind or of the self, by understanding that access to objective data about the mind is methodologically impossible. It was the first cognitive revolution that caused the attention to migrate from the behavior to the mental processes underlying what people say and do (Herman, 2007). It proposes a computational view of the brain, looking for specific processing rules or universal models (Correia, 2003) that are stable over time. However, information is not supplied regarding the interior of the “black box”, the singularity of the mind, or the existence of a self and the subjectivity of the human experience. Thus, there is an interest in the two poles, internal and external, although there remains a clear border between them. There is a second cognitive revolution in progress, in which the mind ceases to be something subjacent to the discourse, which only becomes comprehensible through it (Herman, 2007). This topic will be discussed later.

Unicity, continuity and direction of the development: from the person to the world and from the world to the person

Humanism appeared as a reaction to the excess of emphasis on the influence of the environment, the external pole, and, concomitantly, it presented a reaction to the determinism of the unconscious in psychoanalysis, the internal pole. In consonance with phenomenological and existentialist movements, the theoretical humanists made an effort to redirect the attention to the processes and interior experiences of individuals. Rogers presented an understanding of self as a basic element of the experience of the subject and a central aspect of the personality (Guimarães, 2005). It is a phenomenological concept of self, that is, a pattern of conscious perceptions that the individual experiences. A concept of self that emphasizes unique and specific aspects of character and that seeks stable patterns over time. However,

Rogers (1961/1995) also highlighted the quality of the self as a social product, which is developed in the interpersonal relationships. Thus, two routes for the development of the self are considered, interior-exterior direction and exterior-interior direction.

Universality, continuity and direction of the development: from the person to the world

The humanistic theories and theoretical concepts that emerged as a reaction to behaviorism renewed interest in the studies of the internal motivational forces and the affective processes, i.e. studies aimed at understanding the self as an opened “black box”. Gordon Allport (1897-1967) stands out as one of the pioneers in the search for descriptors of personality traits. His work influenced personality models such as the Big Five, proposed by Hans Eysenck (1916-1997) and widely cited in current literature. It is also in this context that studies of the constructs of self-esteem, self-concept, self-consideration and maintenance of a favorable view of oneself (self-enhancement) originate. Thus, there is a search for characteristics that are universal and stable over time, with the centrality of the self being assumed in the models of personality proposed by Allport and Eysenck and in the ones of the humanists, such as Rogers.

The theories that describe an internal and centralizing self have been criticized for their overemphasis on what occurs within the individual and the lack of interest in what happens around him. Taylor (1992), for example, comments that it may have the illusion that we have selves in the same way that we have eyes, hands or legs. Others say that the constitutive role of the cultural context and of the social processes in the formation of the self is minimized (Gergen, 1994; Richardson, Rogers, & McCarroll, 1998), obscuring the historical origins and nature dependent on the interpretation.

Perspectives in which the borders of the internal world are less delimited

Initially, theoretical contributions that arose many years ago and influence the current theories about the self are examined. The concept of self in which the internal and external worlds complement each other appears for the first time in William James’s work (1842-1910). He considered a bipartite self that is, in one part, an active subject of knowledge (I) and, in another part, a passive object of being known (me). James (1890/1990) argued that there was no purpose in the metaphysical theories regarding the composition of the “I”. The author defined self as something not only individual, but also social. Thus, the self involves everything that the man can call “his”, not only including his body and his psychic domains, but also his clothes, his house, his family, his friends, his ancestors, etc. (James, 1890/1990). Despite the focus on the internal processes, there is a relaxation of the boundaries separating the internal and external (social) world. This evolution, surely,

contributed to the posterior suggestion of a procedural and constructed nature for the self.

The complementarity between the internal and external world is also observed in other concepts of the self. Charles Cooley (1864-1929), for example, is the precursor to the understanding of the self as a result of social communications. Cooley (1902/1983) introduced the metaphor of the self that looks in the mirror, to illustrate the idea that the sense of individual self is initially formed from one's perceptions about how one is perceived by others. Thus, the reactions of the others function as reflections in a mirror, providing information that the individual uses to construct their sense of self. In a similar vein, in his book *Mind, Self and Society*, Mead (1934) proposes that the self is defined through the relationships with significant others, which allow the identity to emerge and change over time. The mind is the result of being able to think, to use symbols, to think about ones self and is a process that allows us to behave socially.

Symbolic interactionism, inspired by the ideas of Mead (Sabourin, 2006) and William James, proposes that the individual gains a direction for himself when he begins to act toward himself in the same way as he does with other people (McCall & Simmons, 1966). The self differentiates into two components, the *me* and the *I*: one reflects the emphasis on the level of the individual the other on the social level. The *me* contains all those perspectives regarding one's self that the subject learned from others. The *I* refers to the intimate forum, the internal conversation that is constantly occurring within the human organism (McCall & Simmons, 1966).

The concept of self as a discourse emerged in early 1980's, with the second cognitive revolution. However, according to Herman (2007), it is supported in: (1) the work of Lev Vygotsky, on the social roots of the human intelligence; (2) the approach of discourse analysis (also called conversational analysis) that originated in the ethnomethodological theories and focused on the participants of the sociologist Harold Garfinkel; (3) and in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who emphasized the importance of the suitability of the human practices of meaning making in the broader context of ways of living.

In these concepts regarding the self it is possible to see a relaxation of the boundaries between the internal world and the external world, and the role of relationships with others in the constitution of the self is established. The ideas of these scholars have influenced the theories that will be presented next, despite this origin not always being assumed. The theories are classified into three subdivisions, considering the answers to the dilemmas proposed by Bamberg and Zielke (2007), in the same way as in the previous section.

Universality, change and direction of the development: from the world to the person

In the course of the postmodern movement important theories have emerged such as constructionism, constructivism and the developments derived from these two positions.

Constructionism presents a critique of content and specific concept, in the form of the radical deconstruction and decentralization of the self. The self is not one more private and personal cognitive structure of the individual. To Gergen and Thatchenkery (1996), who are among the founders of social constructionism, the self is relational, a discourse constructed from the languages available in the public sphere. There is therefore an emphasis on what is shared and not on the specificity, on the unique character of the self. The authors explain that, from early on, the child begins to receive organized reports regarding human action through the telling of fairy tales, legends and family histories. Familiarity with the stories evolves throughout the development through novels, biographies and stories we read or watch on television, at the cinema or the theater. Finally, this intimate and prolonged acquaintanceship with the stories serves as a fundamental environment for us to become intelligible in the social world. Gergen and Thatchenkery use the term *self-narrative* to refer to the individual's report regarding the relationship between the events relevant for them over time. For the authors, by developing a self-narrative, we establish coherent connections between life events, and our identity is the natural result of this life story.

In a similar direction, the concept of self is encountered in the positioning theory proposed by Harré and Langenhove (1999). The individual can position himself, or be positioned in the discourse as a self with or without power, admirable or reprehensible, etc. It can also occur that a position determines how the contributions of the speaker should be placed in this or that polarity (positive or negative) in the context of the main story line, as explained by Herman (2007). Once the positions are selected by the participants in the discourse, acts of speech occur that designate positions and construct story lines that give meaning to what was designated. Reciprocally, the story lines provide a context in which the acts of speech can be constructed with the power to designate positions. However, these acts that position the self and the other do not always result from the will or intention of the participant. Herman exemplifies what it can be to innocently praise the punctuality of someone facing people who criticize the person for the obsessive character of his punctuality, which can lead to a misinterpretation of the praise. Thus, the psychological phenomena are no longer seen as expressions of an interior mental world and start to receive socially contextualized descriptions. The proposal of the self as discourse has received criticism regarding the suggestion of an empty self, without content, where there is no space for individual experience (Guanaes & Japur, 2003).

Unicity, change and direction of the development: from the world to the person

The dialogical self is a social constructionist perspective, which proposes a vision of self as an internal conversation between various voices or points of view. The dialogical self is constituted by internal characters (voices), which may

differ in terms of their evaluations and assume positions relative to one another: they dialogue with one another. This type of proposition, constructed on the notion of Vygotsky of internalized language, on the distinction I-me of James and on Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic self, was developed by theorists such as Hermans, Valsiner, and Wertsch (Bamberg, 2008). According to this perspective, becoming a self means to internalize the current dialogue around us. The self is not a point of consciousness and will, decontextualized from the environment in which it is inserted, nor something completely dispersed in the mundane totality (Richardson et al., 1998). The self is an instance of individual exclusivity, a body situated in time and space, possessor of a sense of agency and responsibility.

Davies and Harré (1990) summarize the characteristics of the dialogical social constructionist perspective of self in four points: (1) the interpretations made by the self, also called "story lines", are texts composed of socially learned and communicative categories; (2) the person identifies with certain types of story lines, that is, they define their self in story lines; (3) the person is constantly transforming and making use of their story lines in the interaction with the world, (4) the social relationships organize themselves repeatedly around the story lines that the person emphasizes. Thus, the self is permeated by alterity and has an agency of responsible action, which refers to the narrative comprehension of the subject.

However, there is a description of the dialogical self made by Hermans (2001) that questions the assumptions of uniqueness made by the Russian authors of the last century. The dialogical self of Hermans emphasizes the idea that there is not a central position of the I, but multiple positions of the I that can be occupied by the same person and that assume a certain narrative necessity (Santos & Gomes, 2010). The dialogical self of Hermans, however, received severe criticism in the literature (Michel & Wortham, 2002; Richardson et al., 1998, Souza & Gomes, 2009). In general, the critics argue that the Hermans' dialogical self presents difficulties in describing the influence of time and space on dialogic interaction, not offering an explanation for how the disagreement between divergent voices is resolved or harmonized. Thus, this self acquires the aspect of a cluster of fragmented discourses completely devoid of a sense of agency and responsibility on the part of the individual (Richardson et al., 1998).

Universality and unicity, continuity and change, and direction of the development: from the world (social relationship) to the person

The self as discourse or narrative self emphasizes the idea of self as a text in process, however, there are distinctions between these approaches, as explained by Gergen and Thatchenkery (1996). The term narrative self has also been used by theorists who seek universal cognitive processes, by constructivists who tend to emphasize the cultural contingency of various psychological states and by theorists that situate themselves between these two orientations.

The Bruner's theory of the self is situated between two orientations, maintaining the vision of the universal cognitive function (inheritance of cognitive psychology), while at the same time placing a strong emphasis on the systems of cultural meaning (Herman, 2007). Bruner shares the idea of a narrative self (Bruner, 1991) being a mental entity that organizes itself within a temporal perspective through the authorship of the history of the subject, that interconnects the past, present and future with other theoreticians and researchers (Fivush & Haden, 2003; Nelson, 2003). However, this mental entity is constituted by the use of the culture and carried out in it, that is, a self defined by the meanings constructed by the individual and by the culture where the individual is inserted (Bruner, 1986/1997). In this context, the narrative would be the currency of exchange between the self and the social world and, specifically, the narratives about the self constitute a longitudinal version of oneself (Bruner, 1986/1997). A position that emphasizes the continuity of the self, yet allows the transformations in the self as a result of the human experience to be glimpsed. Thus, neither continuity nor change take precedence. In the same way, this self, which originated in the social interaction, highlights general and specific aspects by proposing the constitution of the self based on the construction of meaning from the individual experience of the subject, especially through his narrative capacity.

Similarly, the work of Nelson (2003) is grounded in cognitive psychology and in the social interactionist theory of Vygotsky, with more than twenty years of research with adults and children on autobiographical memory. Nelson (2000) argues that the self emerges from the verbal exchanges in narrative and explanatory form, with significant others, from early childhood. During these verbal exchanges, lived experiences are shared or recovered, as well as histories and myths that underpin the culture. In this manner, a notion of continuity of the self throughout time is constructed from birth. Fivush and Haden (2003) explain that the narrative of life that each person creates is embedded in a sociocultural framework, which defines what is appropriate to remember as something that should be remembered and what it means to be a self with an autobiographical past. Nelson (2003) explains that the relative emphasis placed on the self in the different sociocultural contexts influences the form and function of the autobiographical memory and the need to develop a uniquely personal narrative of life. The narratives of culture intertwine with the development of an individual memory, directing the construction of the autobiographical memory in which to organize an awareness of oneself, a self.

Since the autobiographic memory functions as a base for the construction of the self, then, beyond the insertion in a historical-cultural context, it is necessary to consider the direct influence of the experiences lived in the past of the individual on the self, the important events of their personal history. Wilson and Ross (2003) argue that while nutritionists say "You are what you eat", psychologists more interested in cognition say: "You are what you can remember". Many years before the

empirical evidence confirming the relationship of dependency between the identity of the self and the autobiographical memories, William James (1890/1990) stated that if an individual were to wake up in the morning with all their personal memories erased, they would be a completely different person. Wilson and Ross (2003) propose that the visions of self and the current beliefs influence the reconstructions that a person makes of their past. And that, in turn, the impact of the past that is remembered affects the current self view. In this regard, Bruner (2003) explains that we are constantly constructing and reconstructing the self to cope with the situations we face, and we do this guided by our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future. These memories, explains Bamberg (2008), result from the stories we tell about ourselves, our autobiographies, as well as the stories that are told about us.

Among those who advocate a discursive version for the self, Herman (2007) also includes theorists whose work is based on phenomenology, existentialism and the theories of personality (such as McAdams). These theorists are also concerned with individual internal processes that are often referred to as experience. However, they prevent the cognitivist search by foreseeing and controlling individual behavior and they even substitute the emphasis in the determination of the culture, for the more humanist investment in self as the author or agent.

Final Considerations

To examine how the concepts of self are articulated in different psychological approaches not only reflects epistemological differences, but also leads to differences in the concepts about human development. It can be understood that the nuances of the different concepts can only be apprehended through the developmental concept that the psychological theory offers. The psychological theories about human development evolved broadening the initial focus centered on the interior of the individual, to include their relationships with others and with the environment, that is, the individual in a context.

By defining the self, each theoretical perspective presented in the text followed different paths that favored stability or transformation; the search for the unique and specific or for the universal; and that argued that human development occurs in the direction from the person to the social world or from the social world to the person. When seeking universal characteristics for the self, for example, generality is placed in the foreground and the specificities are left in the background.

The use of axes proposed by Bamberg and Zielke (2007) demonstrated that this debate about the self follows similar logic to the axes of analysis of developmental psychology. The dilemma of identity reveals to us innovations in the concept of self with the emergence of studies that relate the fields of developmental psychology and autobiographical memory. Regarding uniqueness, variations

are observed when the debate emerges around the concept of agency. The concept of self comes from a discussion of self-knowledge for a community construction, from the mechanism for the action, from the structure to the process (Gergen, 1985). The traditional debate that permeates the entire historical analysis of psychology is made present again in the analysis of the self (Hilgard, 1987), that is, there is a movement between the rigid demarcation of boundaries between the internal and external world and then a “blurring” of these boundaries. This fact, in turn, historically accompanies the debates about globalization in the face of the technological advances of humanity.

As a result of these transformations, the number of variables to be considered in the composition of the concept increases. To speak of the self of a woman of 2012, we can look at her past and see where she grew up and the history of her ancestors. Or she can also be situated as a middle class, urban, western, woman. Or even all the positions that she occupies, as a woman, a professional, a mother, a colleague and even her profile on a social networking site can be considered. That is, the diversity of contexts of observation of the self was given precisely by the emphasis in the communicational plan. The language occupies the position of “flagship” in the increase of the meanings for the self, as an object that can be conceptualized. By understanding the evolution of language in humans and its various forms of reflexivity as the apex of perfection while being a species that produces complex and articulated acts, the self is placed as one of these complex and articulated products.

This text offered a rhetorical exercise of discursive category construction that assists in the construction of differences between the approaches of the self, considering the implications of using one or other epistemology for the comprehension of the self. It is understood that the challenges for the field of studies regarding the self resemble the debate about the unification of psychology. This is because, whether they emphasize the need to focus on this phenomenon, whether along particular lines of one or other discipline, the debate remains between the different ontologies, in which the limits between the internal and external world vary depending on the lens that is used to observe them.

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