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The Selves of Educational Psychology: Conceptions, Contexts, and Critical
Considerations

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Abstract

This article begins with an interpretation and description of conceptions of selfhood that are assumed in educational psychologists' programs of theory, research, and practice in the area of student self-development. Three underlying conceptions of the self are considered: (1) the *expressive self* (found mostly in research and theory on self-esteem and self-concept), (2) the *managerial self* (found mostly in research and theory on self-regulation and self-efficacy), and (3) the *communal self* (found to some extent in sociocultural research and theory in educational psychology, but not typically emphasized or evident in studies of self-esteem, self-concept, self-regulation, and self-efficacy). This overview is followed by an interpretation of the sociocultural context (in Western societies and schools) within which these conceptions of selfhood have flourished. Three dimensions are especially helpful in interpreting the sociocultural and school contexts within which self-related studies in educational psychology are positioned: (1) a psychological dimension of *self-control versus self-fulfillment*, (2) a social political dimension of *individual freedom versus civic responsibility*, and (3) an educational dimension of *personal development versus institutional socialization*. A critical assessment of the current state of self-related studies in educational psychology then is undertaken that focuses on the relative absence of, and need for, more communal conceptions of selfhood in these areas of inquiry. Finally, possibilities for the development of viable conceptions of communal selfhood and agency are considered briefly.

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Considerations

Throughout the later half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, educational psychologists have produced a rather large literature that documents research, theory, and practical interventions in the area of students' self-development. Given the prevalence and considerable educational impact of these self-related studies, it is surprising that relatively little attention has been paid to conceptualizing the kinds of self that are assumed in this body of scholarly work, or to interpretations of the sociocultural and institutional contexts within which these conceptions have developed and flourished. The relative absence of such conceptual and interpretive work seems especially striking given the considerable attention that has been devoted to critical consideration and interpretation of psychologists' self-related studies in other areas of psychology (e.g., Ashmore & Jussim, 1997; Buss, 2001; Cushman, 1995; Gergen, 1991; Harré, 1998; Harter, 1999; Paranjpe, 1998).

This article begins with an interpretation and description of conceptions of selfhood that are assumed in educational psychologists' programs of theory, research, and practice in the area of student self-development (hereafter, referred to as the *self-related studies* or *self-related research* of educational psychologists). This conceptual analysis is followed by an interpretation of the sociocultural context (in Western societies and schools) within which these conceptions of selfhood have flourished. A critical assessment of the current state of self-related research in educational psychology then is conducted that decries the absence of more communal conceptions of selfhood and agency in these studies.

The overall purpose is to consider critically the extent to which educational psychologists have succeeded in conceptualizing the self as a communal agent capable of responding simultaneously to the often conflicting demands of contemporary Western societies for both the personal fulfillment and social productivity of their citizens. Although it is clear that this is the goal of much self-related research in educational psychology, it is much less clear the extent to which this goal has been met. By offering a critical perspective on what is still to be accomplished, it is hoped that this article will stimulate the kind of work that might advance us toward the goal of *educating the communal agent*. The article concludes with a brief consideration of some possible means to this end.

The rationale for the ordering of the text that follows is that it is necessary to know what conceptions of selfhood underlie the self-related studies of educational psychologists before it is possible to situate those conceptions and studies socioculturally. Further, the kind of critical consideration that is attempted in the later sections of the article, builds upon both the conceptual clarification and sociocultural contextualizing advanced in the earlier parts of the essay.

Programs of Self Study and Conceptions of Selfhood

Prior to the 1960's, studies in educational psychology that explicitly targeted the self, tended to emphasize forms of self-control and self-discipline of a kind intended to socialize the child's actions to conform with prevailing conceptions of proper conduct and good citizenship (e.g., Brooks, 1949; Hunt, 1959). More recently, many educational psychologists have become concerned about the relative lack of attention to social relations and cultural context that they perceive in much contemporary self theorizing and

research, and have once again made a variety of attempts to develop and promote more communal conceptions and programs of self study in educational settings (e.g., Goodenow, 1992; Salomon, 1995), but this time without the explicit emphasis on social conformity evident in many of the self studies that were reported prior to the 1960's. The extent to which the conceptions of selfhood evident in the self-related studies of educational psychologists succeed in striking a viable balance between the social, cultural and individual, personal development of students, which avoids passive social conformity on the one hand and unproductive self-absorption on the other, is a primary interpretive focus of what follows.

Although there are many ways in which the numerous self-related studies in educational psychology might be classified, for present purposes, a simple tripartite taxonomy, based on what might be regarded as underlying conceptions of the self, will suffice. The three conceptions of selfhood that constitute this simple taxonomy are (1) the *expressive self* (mostly, but not only, evident in studies of self-esteem and self-concept); (2) the *managerial self* (mostly, but not only, evident in studies of self-regulation and self-efficacy); and (3) the *communal self* (evident in certain formulations of selfhood contained in some work in the areas of situated learning, social cognition, learning communities, sociocultural psychology, hermeneutics, pragmatism, and critical theory, but rarely encountered in the self-related studies of educational psychologists per se).

The Expressive Self

In the 1950's and 1960's, humanistic psychologists like Abraham Maslow (1954) and Carl Rogers (1957) reacted against the prevailing behaviorism of the day, and spear-headed a renewed focus on internal processes, with an emphasis on individually unique,

affectively laden experiences. In educational psychology, numerous studies began to focus attention on the self-esteem and self-concept of school children, often in terms of congruency between self descriptions and self ideals (e.g., Long, Henderson, & Ziller, 1967; Soares & Soares, 1969). Others focused on relationships between measures of self-concept/self-esteem and academic achievement and motivation, a focus that continues into the present day (for reviews, see Kohn, 1994; Wigfield & Karpathian, 1991). What is perhaps most interesting about the vast literature concerning self-concept and self-esteem in school contexts is that although it was initiated by humanistic impulses to recognize the uniqueness and emotional experience of children in school settings, it quickly broadened its empirical and theoretical footing through mergers with more traditionally scientific forms of psychology and educational psychology.

One such merger was with psychometricians who developed numerous scales and subscales for the measurement of self-esteem and self-concept during the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's (e.g., Piers & Harris, 1964). A second merger occurred once the cognitive revolution in psychology and applied psychology had taken a firm hold in education by the late 1960's, and involved a new breed of cognitive psychologists interested in structures and operations of cognition in classroom settings that included motivational and affective components (e.g., Shavelson & Bolus, 1982).

By the dawn of the twenty-first century, approximately 3,000 studies of self-esteem and/or self-concept were listed in the ERIC database (Martin, 2004a). Many of these examined the factor structure and psychometric properties of an expanding array of measures and scales (e.g., Byrne & Shavelson, 1986; Winne & Walsh, 1980). Many also examined relationships among measures of self-esteem/self-concept, academic

achievement and motivation, and a number of other personality variables (e.g., Jordan, 1981; Ames & Felkner, 1979). The self experiences of learners that were described and rated in standard measures of self-esteem and self-concept such as *The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*, the *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory*, and the *Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale for Children* contained items (respectively) such as: “I feel that I do not have much to be proud of,” “All in all, I’m inclined to feel that I’m a failure,” and “I am good in my school work.”

In consideration of why educational psychologists and others are concerned about students’ self concept and self-esteem, it surely is insufficient to answer only that these self-related thoughts and feelings seem to be connected in a positive manner to students’ academic achievement. Indeed, a recent comprehensive review of empirical evidence concerning self-esteem and performance (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003) concluded that “The results do not support the view that self-esteem has a strong causal effect on school achievement. Indeed, most of the evidence suggests that self-esteem has no impact on subsequent academic achievement” (p. 13). Clearly, something more fundamental and powerful seems to propel our conviction that high levels of self-esteem and self-concept are worthy educational goals in themselves. What this something else might be is clearly indicated in the following quotation from one of the leaders of the self-concept and self-esteem movement in educational psychology in the 1960’s, Arthur Combs (1961).

It is a basic principle of democracy that “when men are free, they can find their own best ways” ... The kind of openness we seek in the free personality requires a trust in self, and this means, to me, we need to

change the situations we sometimes find in our teaching where the impression is given the student that all the answers worth having lie “out there.” I believe it is necessary to recognize that the only important answers are those which the individual has within himself, for these are the only ones that will ever show up in his behavior. (Combs, 1961, pp. 22-23)

Or, consider the following comments by contemporary educational psychologists working in the still popular area of self-concept.

Self-concept is valued as having a powerful mediating influence on human behavior. A positive self-concept is widely considered fundamental for psychological health, personal achievement, and positive relationships. Self-concept is thought to make such a difference, that people who think positively about themselves are healthier, happier, and more productive. Hence, enhancing self-concept is considered necessary to maximizing human potential, from early development and school achievement, to physical/mental health and well being, to gainful employment and other contributions to society. (Craven, Marsh, & Burnett, 2003, p. 96)

What Comb’s (1961) and Craven et al.’s (2003) remarks make clear is that our sense of the importance of self-related phenomena like self-concept and self-esteem stems from our deep attachment to the importance of *self-expression* as a basic right and obligation of individual members of society who bear a unique, and potentially valuable first-person perspective on the world and themselves. Feeling good about, and having positive conceptions of, our selves allows us to express our individuality in ways that

benefit both our selves and our societies. More recently, concerns that students' rights and opportunities for self-expression be protected have figured prominently in writings of educational psychologists concerned with issues of gender, ethnicity, race, and class. "Thus, efforts to encourage [all] adolescents ... to express themselves in ways that will be respectfully heard is a challenge that educators must face if we genuinely want to support the development of students' authentic selves" (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997, p. 171).

The expressive self that underlies much writing and research by educational psychologists, especially in areas such as self-esteem and self-concept, is a highly sensitive, reactive inner core of each person. This deep interior is fueled by a general and powerful tendency toward self-development in relation to a natural and social desire for expression. At the same time, children and adolescents often experience fragility in their legitimate efforts to locate, understand, and express their authentic inner selves to such an extent that teachers and parents must remain ever vigilant against experiences that might interact with such natural and socially desirable self-expressivity in anything less than optimally positive and encouraging ways. "Self-actualizing people see themselves in positive ways, and you do not get this from having failures" (Combs, 1961, p. 19).

The Managerial Self

Whereas measures of self-esteem and self-concept employed by educational psychologists broadly reflect humanistic concerns for unique individual expression and self-understanding, more recent research in educational psychology reflects a much more cognitive, rational, and instrumental perspective on selfhood. In the 1980's and 1990's, studies of self-efficacy and self-regulation in educational psychology increased

dramatically in both number and prominence to the point where they became as prevalent as research and intervention studies in the areas of self-esteem and self-concept (Martin, 2004). Whereas measures and research on self-esteem and self-concept focused on self-worth and self-understanding with a general sense of encouraging student self-expression and fulfillment as uniquely worthy human individuals, the new measures and research on self-efficacy and self-regulation focused primarily on the self's ability to monitor, manage, motivate, strategize, and reinforce itself with respect to the successful completion of specific academic tasks. Self-regulation is defined as a "learner's intentional monitoring and managing of cognitive and motivational strategies and the learning environment to advance toward goals of instructional tasks" (Winne & Perry, 1994, p. 213). Self-efficacy concerns "people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1993, p. 118).

Much research on self-regulation in school contexts examines the effects of interventions intended to enhance students' abilities to self-regulate (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). For example, Butler (1998) examined the effectiveness of an instructional approach intended to improve the self-regulatory capabilities of university students who were experiencing learning difficulties, and Zimmerman (1997) examined the effects of goal-setting and self-monitoring on female adolescents' performance of a motor task. Popular measures of self-regulation are the *Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire* (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990) and the *Learning and Study Strategies Inventory* (Weinstein, Goetz, & Alexander, 1988). Examples of items on each of these scales respectively include "When I study I put important ideas into my own words" and

“I make sample charts, diagrams, or tables to summarize material in my courses.” Most measures of self-regulation contain several subscales intended to measure components of self-regulation such as the use of cognitive strategies, motivation, information processing, and self-efficacy (e.g., “I expect to do very well in this class”).

Measures and studies of self-efficacy and self-regulation are devoted almost exclusively to goal-related activities within classroom learning tasks. In this work, the self is conceptualized as highly rational and strategic, making use of cognitive processes and operations to process information so that it can be meaningfully stored, recalled, and assembled when the learner is confronted with specific academic tasks. So popular has research on self-regulation and self-efficacy become that several edited volumes have appeared that summarize and promote the burgeoning numbers of research studies, and theoretical and practice-oriented articles, devoted to these topics (e.g., Bandura, 1995, 1997; Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000; Schunk & Pajares, 2004; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994, 1998; Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989). Very recently, there also have been explicit suggestions that research in the areas of self-regulation and self-efficacy not only can benefit learners in classrooms, but also will have more general applicability to life-long learning and social improvement.

Teachers who consider their students’ self-efficacy beliefs, goal setting, strategy use, and other forms of self-regulation in their instructional plans not only enhance students’ academic knowledge, but they also increase their students’ capability for self-directed learning throughout their life span. (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003, p. 452)

The conception of selfhood that underlies the work of educational psychologists in the areas of self-efficacy and self-regulation is that of the self as strategic manager. Students in classrooms and people in everyday life are pictured as highly rational and deliberate processors of information. The self of the self-regulated learner and person is constituted of specifically focused sets of executive skills and strategies attuned instrumentally to the accomplishment of specific academic and life tasks. The central concern is the development and promotion of a self-confident individual agent capable of simultaneous action and reflection on this action, much like a stereotypic scientist in close scrutiny and judgment of experimental phenomena of interest, albeit with a decidedly social conscience and concern for others. Having said this, it is by no means always clear that the highly scripted and externally imposed sequences of strategic activity and instruction evident in many studies and interventions in the area of students' self-regulated learning leave adequate room for the fostering of true self-determination with respect to students' choice and enactment of their learning and study practices (Martin, 2004b).

The Communal Self

Despite their obvious differences as detailed above, both the expressive and the managerial selves of educational psychology are united in being constituted predominately of interior processes and functions of individuals. Whether engaged in unique, creative expression or strategic, goal-oriented action, these selves operate at a highly personal, inner core of being. Both expressive and managerial selves are Cartesian selves isolated from, though highly interactive with, their surrounds. Both embrace Enlightenment and/or Modern forms of dualism marked by strong divides between inner

and outer, mind and world, and personal and social. The self that lies behind research on self-esteem/self-concept and self-regulation/self-efficacy is an inner bastion of individual experience and existence that surveys the exterior landscape for signs of affirmation and possibilities for expression on the one hand, and clues to strategic action on the other. Its most vital resources are located within itself, as it acts as final arbiter over whether or not its strategies are effective or its appraisals self-sustaining. Academic tasks and social experience both can be accomplished and controlled by this *masterful* self's attention to its own basic organismic tendencies and potentials, and/or its metacognitive, strategic ruminations. This is a self that already possesses, and is in command of, its own internal resources for managing itself, and requires only a facilitative grooming from teachers and others to become more fully socialized and intellectually engaged.

The historical development of psychology as the social scientific study of predominately *individual* behavior and experience undoubtedly is heavily implicated in the kind of selfhood just described (cf. Danziger, 1990; Rose, 1998). Nonetheless, toward the end of the twentieth century, several educational psychologists expressed dissatisfaction with their discipline's continuing embrace of a highly individualistic conception of selfhood. In particular, they voiced concerns about the relative exclusion of more social and cultural aspects of self constitution and functioning. "Our main ... focus needs to change from the study of isolated and decontextualized individuals, processes, states of mind, or interventions to their study within wider psychological, disciplinary, social, and cultural contexts" (Salomon, 1995, p. 106). Such calls for a more sociocultural conception of selfhood had been predated by studies of social and linguistic mediation of learning conducted by a small number of educational psychologists in the 1970's and

1980's, influenced by then newly available English translations of the works of Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1986) (see Martin, 2006 for a review). Nonetheless, for present purposes, it is instructive to note that most such work was not concerned primarily with selfhood per se. On the other hand, Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory attended explicitly to questions of selfhood and agency in a way that emphasized the immediate social context of the learner. However, Bandura and his followers, although highlighting the importance of social and contextual factors stopped well short of theorizing the kind of historical, sociocultural constitution of selves and learners that typified Vygotsky's thought (cf. Rohrkemper, 1989).

At any rate, Salomon's (1995) and others' (e.g., Goodnow, 1992) calls for a more communal, less individual conception of selfhood soon were realized in a growing body of work, in educational psychology in general, that was based not only on Vygotsky's sociocultural, historical activity theory (e.g., Das & Gindis, 1995; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Tappan, 1998), but also on Deweyan and Meadian pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Bredo, 1994; Prawat, 1995), culminating in a variety of socially-oriented research studies employing methods such as discourse analysis, microethnography, sociometry, group interviews, cultural ecology, and design experiments (see Anderman & Anderman, 2000; Sandoval & Bell, 2004; Wentzel & Berndt, 1999). The view of the learner evident in these undertakings clearly shifted away from that of the detached, inner-focused agent common to both the expressive and managerial selves discussed above. In particular, the underlying conception of selfhood evident in some relatively recent sociocultural theory and research in educational psychology (Martin, 2006; Packer & Gioechea, 2000) is that of a communal self, formed through interaction with others

in families, classrooms, and elsewhere. This communal self is always embedded in a co-constitutive self-other, self-societal dialectic. It is a self that is cut from the fabric of those sociocultural conventions and ways of life into which we are born as biophysical human beings, and come to exist and understand our selves as particular kinds of persons.

Nonetheless, there are considerable differences in the extent to which the various communal selves advanced in recent theory and research in educational psychology might be said to converge on a socially-constituted, deeply engaged idea of personhood. For example, many researchers in areas such as situated cognition (e.g., Kirshner & Whitson, 1997) and design-based research (e.g., Sandoval & Bell, 2004) retain a conception of the individual learner in which reflective cognition might still be said to have primacy over interpersonal activity, and in which classrooms are still seen primarily as collections of individuals. Greeno et al. (1998) perhaps come closest to a more balanced integration, and equal weighting, of cognitive and contextual perspectives on students' situated knowing and learning. Nonetheless, for the most part, the kinds of communal selves assumed in most work in educational psychology stop short of the more thoroughly collective conceptions of agency and selfhood found in much contemporary educational philosophy, sociology, and policy studies (e.g., Schutz, 2000) and in several other areas of psychology (e.g., Harré, 1998; Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003). In particular, the vast majority of self-related research and theory advanced by contemporary educational psychologists in the areas of self-esteem, self-concept, self-regulation, and self-efficacy retains a decidedly individualistic tone – for example, “Self-determination theory ... highlights people's inner motivational resources in explaining healthy personality, development, and autonomous self-regulation (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan,

2004, p. 33). As Jackson, Mackenzie, and Hobfoll (2000) note, even when “some theories of self-regulation, in particular social cognitive models ... do recognize social context as a component of self-directed behavior ... the impact of socially mediated factors often assumes a status that is far inferior to individually based components” (p. 280).

Recognizing this state of affairs should not be interpreted as advocating a strong form of social determinism in which human agency is reduced to social structures and processes. Clearly, any viable educational theory, psychological or otherwise, must contain resources capable of supporting human innovation and change at both collective and individual levels. Nonetheless, the tendency of many educational psychologists, even those who claim adherence to more social, communal forms of selfhood, to elevate individual, cognitive activity over interdependency and interactivity should not go unremarked. Productive participation with others in socially meaningful activities to achieve common goals requires forms of communal agency that go well beyond individual strategizing and problem solving. Moreover, as will be argued herein, there is good reason to understand individuals’ development as self-regulating agents as constituted within sociocultural practices of interactivity.

Unfortunately, at this writing, educational psychology has not endorsed a consistently communal form of selfhood to rival the consistency with which it continues to promote more individualistic expressive and managerial conceptions of the self. Moreover, although some sociocultural work in educational psychology that has adopted Vygotskian cultural historical (e.g., John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996) or American pragmatic (e.g., Bredo, 1994) thought has endorsed promising versions of communal selfhood, for the most part, these have yet to be incorporated into research in areas such as self-concept

and self-regulated learning (see Hickey & Granade, 2004; McCaslin, 2004; Rohrkemper, 1989 for some notable exceptions). It is thus reasonable to consider the communal self as a work in progress, at least in self-related programs of psychological research in education.

Sociocultural and Institutional Context

With the foregoing conceptions of selfhood in place, it now is possible to attempt to situate those conceptions within the broad sociocultural context in which they have been developed, especially in the United States, but also in other Western nations. By the early years of the twentieth century, the industrial revolution and the urbanization and social mobility that it fostered had created new bureaucratic demands for the counting, organization, and governance of individuals through newly formed scientific and social scientific techniques of surveying, recording, and statistical aggregation. Such methods and the attitudes and conceptions that accompanied them were not only of great value to officials and employers, but also suggested rigorous means of self-scrutiny, efficiency, and management to aspiring, ambitious workers and people in general (Rose, 1998). At the same time, the impact of Romantic, Victorian, and psychoanalytic conceptions of selfhood, which converged on the idea of a deeply interior, private individual center of personal experience and perspective, had become part of the Western social fabric and were widely reflected in popular literature, cinema, advertising, and everyday life (Baumeister, 1987). By the early nineteenth hundreds, conformity and individuality thus sat side by side in social and personal understandings and attitudes about the self (e.g., Pfister, 1997).

In many ways, the early twentieth-century tension between conformity and individuality reflected Classical and Enlightenment tensions between civic virtue and individual freedom that had been at the heart of both the Platonic, family state and the liberal assemblies of individuals diversely envisioned by the likes of Hobbes, Locke, and Mill (Gutmann, 1990). With the social ascendance of disciplinary and professional psychology during the twentieth century in Western nations, especially in the United States, a psychological rendering of a closely related struggle between self-control and self-fulfillment became apparent in much social scientific and popular literature and film (Baumeister, 1987; Pfister, 1997). To some extent, the individually experienced conflicts of modern persons between self-control and self-fulfillment may be understood as internalizations of the classic liberal, political antinomy between civic duty and individual freedom. However, the latter tension continues to manifest socially and culturally as well. Witness, for example, ongoing attempts of various officials and stakeholders to forge a functional compromise between the institutional mandates of schools for the intellectual, skilled, and social development of students as citizens and workers, with more recently formulated demands of an increasingly psychologized public for attention to the personal developmental needs of students as unique psychological individuals (see Olson, 2003 for a detailed discussion of such attempts throughout the twentieth century to the present day).

Figure 1 presents a schematic depiction of a sociocultural, psychological landscape demarcated by the biopolar, social psychological dimensions of individual freedom versus civic virtue, self-control versus self-fulfillment, and institutional socialization versus personal development. In the top right-hand portion of the diagram is

a multi-dimensional cluster (self-control, institutional socialization, and civic virtue) that represents a social-psychological niche conducive to a form of self-governance that respects and furthers existing sociocultural organizations and values. In the bottom left-hand portion of the diagram is a multidimensional cluster (self-fulfillment, personal development, and individual freedom) that represents a social-psychological niche conducive to a form of self-assertion that respects and furthers the actualization of free and self-determining individuals.

Early in the twentieth century, educational psychologists became widely acknowledged as experts in the psychology of learning and development, and in educational research and assessment/measurement (van Drunen & Jansz, 2004). Their claims to expertise concerning students and educational assessment and intervention put them in a unique position within North American and European societies that increasingly had come to value both academic/vocational and personal development, and to demand that their schools delivered on both of these fronts. The classic liberal tension between individual freedom and civic virtue manifested in twentieth century schools as a tension between individual psychological development and expression on the one hand, and academic and social grooming and accomplishment on the other. By the mid-twentieth century, Western societies wanted their children to be both psychologically healthy and academically accomplished in ways that would contribute to the good of both individuals and the broader society. As the leading social science of the century, with a burgeoning professional presence claiming to draw upon its social scientific accomplishments, psychology, in general, and educational psychology, in particular, promised a combination of humanistic concern and scientific wherewithal that seemed

ideally suited to newly emergent demands, such as those in schools, for reconciling the needs and rights of unique individual selves with the mandates and expectations of the broader society with respect to productive citizenship.

To see more precisely how the expressive and managerial selves of educational psychology combined to appeal to educational systems struggling with the conflicting demands just described, imagine the managerial self of educational psychology superimposed on the upper right-hand portion of Figure 1 (as indicated by the higher of the two dotted ovals in the Figure), and the expressive self of educational psychology superimposed on the lower left-hand portion of Figure 1 (as indicated by the lower of the two dotted ovals in the Figure). By effectively positioning its two main conceptions of selfhood in this way within the sociocultural, institutional, and psychological tensions depicted in Figure 1, disciplinary psychology effectively offered schools and the broader society a scientifically credible, yet individually sensitive, way of reconciling conflicting demands for the institutional socialization and personal development of children and adolescents through education. Of course, much ultimately would depend on how successfully the hybrid managerial-expressive self (constituted by a shuttling back and forth between the upper right and bottom left social, psychological niches in Figure 1) could accomplish its mission of reconciliation. In what follows, it is argued that the hybrid managerial-expressive self, referred to above as the masterful self, is unable to integrate personal and societal demands of schooling with respect to the formation of selves as communal agents. Consequently, it is important that more communal conceptions of selfhood with greater potential to achieve such integrative reconciliation

be developed, refined, and adopted more widely in the self-related research of educational psychologists.

Critical Consideration

Both the expressive and managerial selves that underlie the research and intervention practices of educational psychologists in the areas of self-esteem/self-concept and self-regulation/self-efficacy share a common emphasis on the interior processes and functions of individuals. In fact, it is precisely their claim to have specific expertise with respect to understanding, probing, and improving such processes and functions that warrants the professional involvement of educational psychologists in schools -- “The scientifically sound research methods of psychology constitute one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century and hold great promise for improving educational practice” (Mayer, 2001, p. 84). And, what distinguishes psychology from other social sciences of potential and actual relevance to education is nothing more nor less than psychology’s focus on individual experiences, thoughts, and actions. But, can such expertise concerning internal, psychological processes and functions speak adequately to the kinds of concerns and tensions discussed immediately above?

In a recent discussion of our contemporary commitment to authenticity as a desired personal characteristic and goal, Charles Guignon (2004) argues that a purely psychological approach to authenticity, in which it is understood as a description of a person who understands her own feelings and expresses them transparently in her actions, is inadequate. The personal and social value currently placed on authenticity cannot emanate only from its characterization in terms of emotional, psychological experience and expression. Authenticity also requires a commitment backed by reason, and such a

reasoned commitment only can arise in the context of shared practices and values, for reasons itself is based inevitably on the conventions and norms of social groups. This is not to say that the material world does not impose constraints on what is reasonable, but that sociocultural, linguistic practices are indispensable to our rational functioning.

Democracy works best when populated by persons who exercise discernment and judgment with respect to at least some common goals and beliefs. When someone fails to stand behind her beliefs when those beliefs are backed by reason, she imperils a democratic social system that is predicated on exactly that which she now fails to do. A free and democratic society requires that its members be committed to the unrestricted exchange of reasoned views. Furthermore, such exchange assumes that citizens are persons, guided by moral commitments and reasons, and knowledgeable about matters that confront them and their society. The role of education in such a society is to ensure minimally functional levels of knowing and understanding that go beyond our own interiors, and attend to the world in which we live with others and what we currently know about it (even if such knowledge is always being revised, and is never certain). Authentic selfhood or personhood is possible only in the context of shared traditions, practices, and ways of life with others. Psychological conceptions and models of self-esteem and self-regulation focused mostly on the feelings and strategies of individuals provide too narrow a venue for robust personal development or effective citizenship.

Many theorists (e.g., Mead, 1934; Vygotsky, 1986; Wittgenstein, 1953) have concluded that self-understanding would be impossible outside of a recognition and understanding of others gained by participating with them in joint social interactions. Historically established social practices, and the conventions and norms that accompany

them, provide criteria, concepts, and roles that define us as persons with first-person experiences and moral obligations. We comprehend ourselves as the authors of actions that are praiseworthy or not because of our participation from birth in social interactions with others that take place within ways and traditions of living permeated with values, goods, and injunctions. It is because we are first and foremost active in sociocultural contexts with others that we come to recognize and understand ourselves at all (Mead, 1934).

So, when educational psychologists encourage us to esteem and express ourselves, on the one hand, and to engage in strategic planning in pursuit of personal goals on the other, it is important to understand that such valuing, expression, and instrumental strategizing are available to us because we understand ourselves as persons in ways made possible by our communal relations with others. It is against criteria and conventions available in our communal lives and joint understandings that we can discern and judge our own efforts at creative accomplishment. This was the reason that both Rousseau (1979) and Locke (1989), albeit in very different ways, emphasized moral and political considerations in their famous treatises on education – emphases that are mostly ignored in contemporary psychological conceptualizations of self-esteem and self-regulation that otherwise bear an unmistakably Rousseauian and Lockean imprint respectively.

Turning to a deep, inner psychological core is not the answer to the search for self and other understanding. The ability to engage actively and thoughtfully with a diversity of perspectives would be impossible outside of a careful examination and consideration of the various perspectives in question, and these certainly do not all reside within us.

Yet, it is precisely such abilities that are so highly valued by many educational philosophers (Gutmann, 1990) as desired educational attainments of students who might become productive persons and citizens. It is through sustained, serious engagement with perspectives that differ from our own that we can function effectively in the social, political arena, and coincidentally expand our self-understanding (cf. Mead, 1934). Education is about expanding our horizons, not narrowing them by orienting primarily to our selves.

The hybrid expressive-managerial self (portrayed in Figure 1 as attempting to shuttle between personal, individual and social, institutional aims of education), although certainly not devoid of important qualities of selfhood and agency, is too focused on its own interior experience and motives to support the kind of ongoing integrative, conciliatory work of striking an appropriate balance between personal, individual and social, institutional aims of education. It is both too individualistic and too instrumentally attuned to anchor theoretically the education of communal agents, understood as learners capable of participating gladly and consistently in socially meaningful activities with others to achieve ends that are communally valued.

Possibilities for Communal Selfhood and Agency

Martin (2006) reviews three lines of sociocultural theory and research that offer more communal conceptions of selfhood and agency than those available in the majority of self-related studies in educational psychology. To date, one of these, the Vygotskian sociocultural line, has been adopted by a small number of researchers in self-regulation (e.g., Hickey & Granade, 2004; McCaslin, 2004; Rohrkemper, 1989). Another, the critical postmodern line, is reflected occasionally in calls for a less individualistic,

Western ethnocentric, and male-dominated approach to communal aspects of self-regulation and self-efficacy (e.g., Jackson, Mackenzie, and Hobfoll, 2000). Almost no empirical or theoretical inquiry on self-esteem or self-concept has adopted either Vygotskian or critical approaches to questions of selfhood and agency. Although there is considerable work on self-esteem and self-concept in different cultural settings (e.g., several chapters in Marsh, Craven, & McInerney, 2003, 2005), and much discussion of social factors and contexts in the recent writings of social cognitive, metacognitive, and self-determination theorists (e.g., several chapters in McInerney & Van Etten, 2004), very little of such work attempts to theorize the self or agent as constituted through social interactivity with others within historically established sociocultural, linguistic practices.

There is a large difference between saying that the self is influenced by social, cultural factors and contexts versus conceptualizing the self as forged within such communal contexts through relational practices in which others are indispensable (cf. Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Just because social, cultural context is considered does not mean that selfhood or agency is understood as a communal rather than a predominately individual achievement. Although ontogenesis equips communally spawned agents to act individually as well as collectively, the three sociocultural lines of inquiry documented by Martin (2006) all understand selfhood and agency to be communally forged, not simply influenced by their sociocultural contexts. Other than the limited uses of Vygotskian and critical conceptions of the communal self and agent noted immediately above, there is little evidence of such conceptions in the self-related research and theory of educational psychologists.

The one line of sociocultural theorizing noted by Martin (2006) that is almost completely absent from the extant literature of educational psychology that is concerned with self-esteem, self-concept, self-regulation, and self-efficacy is the Meadian pragmatic line. The absence of this particular conception of the communal agent in such self-related inquiries is particularly unfortunate because the American pragmatists developed very powerful conceptions of selfhood and agency that were grounded and constituted in both the biophysical and sociocultural world. Although the work of James and Dewey is well known to many educational psychologists (e.g., Bredo, 1994; Pajares, 2003; Prawat, 1995), it is the work of George Herbert Mead on the sociocultural evolution of selfhood and agency that may offer the greatest potential for conceptualizing the kind of communal agency capable of meeting the various social, institutional and personal, individual aims depicted in Figure 1. [It should be noted that some educational psychologists (e.g., Greeno et al., 1998) have drawn on Mead's work to emphasize the situativity of knowing and learning in classroom situations, but have not focused on students' self-esteem and self-regulation per se.]

According to Mead (1934), "Human society ... does not merely stamp the pattern of its organized social behavior upon any one of its individual members ... it also ... gives him a mind, as the means or ability of consciously conversing with himself in terms of the social attitudes which constitute the structure of his self and which embody the pattern of human society's organized behavior as reflected in that structure" (p. 263). Thus, for Mead and unlike most conceptualizations of the communal self evident in the self-related literature of educational psychology, both mind and selfhood are socially constituted. They do not exist prior to or outside of those sociocultural interactions and

practices within which they emerge. As several philosophers of education (e.g., Biesta, 1999; Renger, 1980) have noted, such a position has great significance for education and how it is understood. “The type of relationship between society and its individual members which Mead proposes in his general philosophy provides the model for the nature of the relationship between the school (as a social institution), and its individual membership” (Renger, p. 123). “Mead’s philosophy of education provides us with a perspective which reveals that meaning and thought are not individual possessions, but are first and foremost of a social and intersubjective nature” (Biesta, 1999, p. 490). However, Mead also emphasized that human beings, despite the social formation of their minds and selves, are other- and self-reactive in a manner that necessitates an understanding of education as a constantly creative and transformative process, with learning emerging within the intersubjective exchanges in classrooms. Consequently, the Meadian conception of selfhood is not marked by passivity and conformity, but by a socially engendered reactivity that displays an always present agentic quality.

To the extent that educational psychology, through its self-related inquiries, has made positive contributions to the enhancement of student learning, thinking, studying, and so forth, it certainly has contributed to the production of future citizens and persons who are equipped with such obviously necessary capabilities. It also can be argued that psychology’s general attempt to empower individual selves has not been without certain profound consequences with respect to the betterment of conditions for individuals and groups of individuals who might otherwise have remained in relatively passive and oppressed social positions and situations. As the historian of American psychology, Ellen Herman (1995) has pointed out, it is doubtful that major social changes in the twentieth

century such as civil rights guarantees for members of minority groups could have taken place without calls and expectations for a more participatory democracy based at least in part on psychological conceptions of selfhood that generated “a feeling of ‘somebodiness,’ and a personally meaningful civic life. These developments illustrated how politically enriching and liberating psychological perspectives could be and were” (p. 312). “The romance of American psychology in the postwar era is consequential not because it offers reassurance that freedom and control are entirely different things, but because it shows that they are not” (Herman, 1995, p. 315). Nonetheless, not all commentators within educational psychology are as sanguine about the effects of traditional forms of psychological selfhood on minorities. For example, Jackson, Mackenzie, and Hobfoll (2000) maintain that “Traditional models of self-regulation overlook and even negate the foundations on which the value systems for women and certain ethnic minority groups are based. In opposition to the perception of being self-contained, many women and ethnic minority groups tend to employ a sense of ensembled individualism or collectivism that characterizes a less demarcated boundary between self and others” (p. 283).

It therefore should come as no surprise that many recent attempts to reconfigure education in Western democracies with increasing multicultural citizenries take the form of advancing socially responsible forms of human agency that retain an emphasis on personal capability and direction, but within more collective, egalitarian social commitments and projects (e.g., Schutz, 2000). Clearly it would be overly simplistic to suggest that the psychological selves evident in education, and other contemporary Western institutions, are entirely without resources to support sociocultural

transformations that many psychologists and their critics view as highly desirable. And, it would probably be naïve in the extreme to suggest that such conceptions might or ought be expunged from our contemporary institutional and personal practices. Nonetheless, as should be apparent from what has been said herein, it also would be a mistake to assume that we educational psychologists cannot do more to confront the complex of social, political, and moral challenges that we face collectively at this stage in our natural and cultural evolution.

Whether or not educational psychology eventually might contribute something of great importance to the search for conceptions of selfhood and personhood that somehow speak to our freedom and creativity at the same time that they speak to our responsibility and duty remains to be seen. Certainly, the flurry of recent activity in educational psychology that is devoted to sociocultural perspectives on the education of persons (see Martin, 2006 for a review of such work; also see Packer & Goicoechea, 2000) suggests that such a contribution is actively being pursued by some educational psychologists. Hopefully, the future will witness sustained interest in refining those conceptions of communal agency currently available to us (such as the socially constituted, emergent selfhood theorized by George Herbert Mead), and creating others that may speak directly to the tensions and circumstances of contemporary education.

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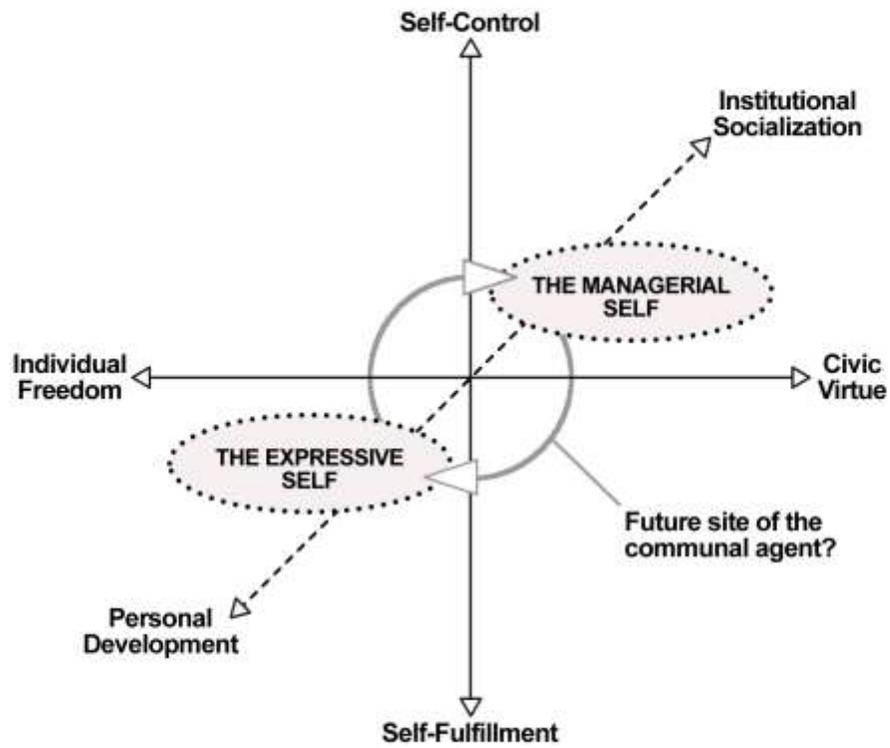


Figure 1: A sociocultural, psychological landscape of the selves of educational psychology