

STUDIES ON THE MULTIPLE SELF, 2026, 1(4)
ISSN: 3070-6742

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MATIAS GAY'S EXISTENTIAL NETWORK AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR A MULTIPLE SELF THEORY

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Matias Gay (2026) has presented what he has described as “Integrating narrative identity in suicidology,” and he began by presenting a framework for understanding the individual: *The Existential Network of Suicidal Identity (ENSI)*. However, the network can be seen as relevant for understanding all behavior and not solely suicidal behavior.

Gay proposed five layers of identity.

1. The primal layer of identity (the proto-self) focuses on survival, how to maintain control over threats to oneself and achieve a sense of security.
2. The emotional layer of identity (the embodied self) focuses on the need for safety, but it also involves the regulation of emotional experience
3. The cognitive layer of identity (the narrative self) focuses on self-worth which is based on coherence in one's life experiences
4. The social layer of identity (the relational self) focuses on the need for connection and belonging to others through one's relationships
5. The existential layer of identity (the core self) focuses on the purpose, finding a role in life that provides a sense of purpose or meaning.

Of course, these five layers are similar, although not identical, to Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs.

Gay is interested in understanding the suicidal individual and the ways in which a psychotherapist might approach counseling this person. However, his ENSI, which more generally might be abbreviated as EN, might also provide us with a way of examining our multiple selves. The question is whether all five layers, or selves, function at the same time, or does one layer of self dominate the mind at each instant. If the latter is true, then the EN provides a way that individuals might label their multiple selves (see Lester, 2010, 2015) for a thorough exploration of a multiple self theory of personality [or the mind]

There are two theorists whose approaches might mesh with EN.

John Rowan: Subpersonalities

Rowan's (1990) preference is for the term subpersonality, and he defines it as "a semi-permanent and semi-autonomous region of the personality capable of acting as a person" (p. 8). Rowan noted that it is necessary, on the one hand, to reify subpersonalities, but on the other hand, to remember that we are not talking about things but about processes that are fluid and in change.

In discussing the origin of subpersonalities, Rowan suggested that roles could bring out accompanying subpersonalities. Internal conflicts, in which two or more sides argue within us, also can lead to the formation of subpersonalities. Our bodies can also participate in these conflicts and act antagonistically to our mind. Thus, the body, or parts of the body, can also be regarded as a subpersonality, and this resembles Gay's proto-self to some extent. Identification with heroes or heroines can sometimes lead to the person taking on the identity of the hero. Subpersonalities can also derive from the Freudian personal unconscious and the Jungian collective unconscious.

In a simple study of subpersonalities, Rowan asked the members of a group he led to describe their subpersonalities. The number described ranged from 0 to 18 with a mean of 6.5. Rowan felt that 4 to 8 was the normal range. Some participants felt comfortable giving names or labels to their subpersonalities, whereas others did not. However, Gay's EN framework might provide names or labels for the subpersonalities of some individuals.

The next question addressed by Rowan was whether some subpersonalities might be held in common by many people. Answering this question is by no means easy. Classic theories of personality and psychotherapy provide abstract labels for subpersonalities held in common, such as Fritz Perls's top dog/bottom dog or Eric Berne's Parent, Adult, and Child ego states. Gay's five layers or selves might provide a basis for the commonalities of the multiple selves of people.

Rowan urged research into such issues as the number, type, and common qualities of the subpersonalities held by people and their structure (egalitarian or hierarchical, communes or committees, etc.). As Rowan (1990) and Lester (1992) found, the labeling of subselves differs from person to person, and each of us might find it difficult to use the labels proposed by someone else.

Rita Carter

Carter (2008) is a science writer who has written a general introduction to the idea of multiple selves and, in addition, has developed some interesting hypotheses and a set of exercises in order to explore our multiple selves.

Carter accepts the existence of multiple selves, defined in the same way that others, such as Rowan and Lester, have defined them, but she introduced the division of multiple selves into *major* and *minor* selves and a number of fragmentary *micros*. A *major* is a “fully fleshed out character with thoughts, desires, intentions, emotions, ambitions and beliefs” (p. 23). *Minors* are less complex than majors and come out in particular situations. A minor may be no more than a small collection of responses, just enough to deal with a particular situation, such as a compulsion to argue with certain people or smoking in certain situations. *Micros* are “the building blocks of personalities – individual responses, thoughts, ideas, habit” (p. 24), as small as a physical or vocal tic or a repeated intrusive thought or emotion. *Micros* combine to form minors which in turn can coalesce into majors. Gay’s five selves described in this five layers might be minor selves.

How do we develop a sense of self if we have so many selves? Carter suggests that we identify with one of our majors and feel or call that our *self*. But if we cannot do this, then we often embark on a quest for our *real self* or, as some individuals say, “I need to take some time off in order to find myself.”

Carter next goes on to describe various possibilities for multiple selves:

1. A single major
2. A double major
3. A major plus a minor
4. Several majors and minors
5. Multiple minors

Carter also proposed a typology of selves (pp. 160-161).

1. Defenders: Protect and guard us against threats, both real and imagined
2. Controllers: Drive and steer our behavior
3. Punishers: Controllers or Defenders whose energy has become misdirected
4. Role players: Personalities created for a particular situation or purpose
5. Relics: Old minors that no longer have a useful function
6. Creatives: Originate new ideas, aims, visions

Carter provides examples for each of these types. Defenders include guardians, worriers, pleasers and fighters. Controllers include wise friends, drivers and organizers. Punishers include critics, bullies, and martyrs. Role players includes successes, professionals, bosses and clowns. Relics include the abandoned child and mules, while Creatives include artists and dreamers.

Comment

Matias Gay did not subscribe to a multiple self theory of the mind. However, in his discussion of his existential network, he did attach a *self* to each of his five proposed layers: a proto-self, an embodied self, a narrative self, a relational self, and a core self. These five selves, if we grant their existence, might take over control of the mind in specific situations, for example, when under threat, when extremely emotionally aroused or when in an existential crisis. They might, therefore, provide a useful set of labels for our multiple selves.

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RITA CARTER'S CONCEPT OF MULTIPLICITY**David Lester & Rita Carter**

Carter (2008) presented a multiple self theory of the mind along with a self-report inventory which was intended to measure whether individuals have the traits associated with a multiple self. Carter developed a scale to measure the multiplicity of the mind, and the present study was designed to explore its psychometric properties and correlates. We hypothesized that positive correlations will be found between scores on Carter's Multiplicity Scale and Altrocchi's (1999) Plural Self Scale and that scores on these scales will be associated with scores on the abbreviated Big 5 inventory (Furnham & McManus, 2004) and on the Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (McClain, 1993). The latter predictions are based on the idea that individuals who perceive themselves as having multiple selves have to live with ambiguity in their lives as their multiple selves might have different attitudes, emotions and aspirations. Furthermore, a trait such as openness in the Big 5 typology, might be necessary to view oneself as having a multiple self.

Method**Participants**

67 undergraduate students (17 men, 50 women; mean age = 20.6 years, SD = 2.3) participated in the study. The participants were enrolled in a psychology course at a rural state college. The questionnaire was administered anonymously, and the participants were not recompensed. The study followed the rules established by the Institutional Review Board.

Measures

All participants completed the following four self-report scales:

(i) Carter's (2008) Multiplicity Scale. This is a 20-item inventory that measures the multiplicity of the self with items such as: "Do you talk to yourself?" and "Do friends and acquaintances refer to events they claim to have shared with you which you cannot recall?" Items are answered on a 3-point scale::never (0), sometimes (1), or all the time (2). An examination of the item-total correlations indicated that two items did not correlate significantly with the total score, so these two items were discarded, leaving an 18-item scale (see

Appendix) with a possible range of scores 0-36. These 18 items had item-total correlations ranging from 0.32 to 0.71 (median 0.52). No previous reliability or validity studies of this scale have been carried out.

(ii) Altrocchi's (1999) Plural Self Scale. It is a 10-item inventory answered true/false, with a possible range of scores 0-10. Typical items are: "People who know me well would say I'm pretty predictable" (reversed scored) and "I sometimes have conflicts over whether to be one kind of person or a different kind." Altrocchi reported good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.90) and test-retest reliability after a year of 0.84.

(iii) The abbreviated Big 5 inventory (McManus & Furnham, 2006). This scale has three items for each of the five traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism, answered on a five-point scale with anchors strongly agree (5) and strongly disagree (1). Possible scores range from 3 to 15. McManus and Furnham did not report validity studies of the inventory, and Cronbach alphas calculated by McManus and Furnham were only modest (0.52 to 0.54).

(iv) McLain's Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (McLain, 1993). It is a 22-item scale, answered on a 6-point scale with anchors strongly agree (6) to strongly disagree (1), with a range of possible scores 22-132. A typical item is: "I try to avoid situations which are ambiguous." McClain reported good concurrent validity with other measures of this construct and good internal reliability (Cronbach alpha). No test-retest reliability was reported.

Results

Means, SDs, ranges of scores and Cronbach alphas are presented in Table 1. The matrix of correlations between the scale scores is also shown in Table 1. The Pearson correlation between scores on Carter's Multiplicity Scale and Altrocchi's Plural Self Scale was 0.23 ($df = 62$, one-tailed $p = .03$, Cohen's $d = 0.47$), indicating that, although significantly associated, the two scales may be tapping different psychological traits. Scores on both of these scales were not significantly associated with the age or gender of the students.

For the Big 5 inventory, scores on Carter's Multiplicity Scale were significantly associated with neuroticism ($r = 0.35$, $df = 64$, two-tailed $p = .005$, Cohen's $d = 0.75$), while scores on Altrocchi's Plural Self Scale were significantly associated with neuroticism ($r = 0.29$, $df = 64$, two-tailed $p = .02$, Cohen's $d = 0.61$) and openness ($r = 0.27$, $df = 64$, two-tailed $p = .03$, Cohen's $d = 0.56$). Scores on Carter's Multiplicity Scale and Altrocchi's Plural Self Scale

were not associated with tolerance for ambiguity scores ($r_s = 0.04$ and -0.09 , respectively).

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that the 18-item Carter Multiplicity Scale has good internal consistency. Our hypothesis, however, was only partially supported since scores on Carter's scale had only a weak association with scores on Altrocchi's Plural Self Scale which purportedly measures a similar concept. This finding suggests that there may be several dimensions to the concept of a multiple self and that different scales to measure this trait may emphasize different dimensions. There is a need, therefore, for a study of a large pool of possible items in a large sample of participants in order to identify these dimensions.

Interestingly, the trait of tolerance for ambiguity was not associated with scores on Carter's and on Altrocchi's scales. Thus, having a multiple self does not appear to be associated with this personality trait. However, scores on both Carter's and Altrocchi's scales were positively associated with neuroticism scores, indicating that having a multiple self may not be conducive to psychological health. On the other hand, the association of scores on Altrocchi's scale with openness, as predicted, indicates some possible benefits of having a multiple self.

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Appendix: Carter's Multiplicity Scale

1. Does your handwriting change noticeably at different times?
2. Do your personal memories sometimes feel like a film you have seen, rather than something that actually happened to you?
3. Are you called by a number of different names or nicknames and/or do you think of yourself by different names?
4. Are you ever gripped with enthusiasm for a while by a hobby or pastime (gymnastics, gardening) that you find utterly boring at other times?
5. Do you ever find yourself uttering the phrase "what on earth made me do that?" (or words to that effect)?
6. Do you talk to yourself?
7. Do you have "binges" - of food, cigarettes, or alcohol?
8. Is your behavior chameleon-like, e.g., do you find yourself adopting the accent or intonation of the person you are talking to, or putting on a "telephone voice"?
9. Do you swing suddenly from one mood to another for no apparent reason?
10. Do certain circumstances trigger skills or knowledge that is not usually available to you, e.g., in a foreign country do you find yourself speaking the language better than you thought possible?
11. Do your tastes – in food, music, films, literature – differ widely from time to time?
12. When you look in your wardrobe do you see clothes that you cannot imagine wearing and wonder why you bought them?
13. Do vague acquaintances treat you as though they know you far better than you would expect?
14. Do friends and acquaintances refer to events they claim to have shared with you which you cannot recall?
15. Do people you would regard as trustworthy claim you have told them things which you cannot believe you would have said?
16. If you come across something you wrote a while ago - an unposted letter from you to a friend, perhaps, or an old diary or notebook, do you sometimes fail to realize at first that the author is you?
17. Do you find yourself laughing or crying, to your own surprise, for no reason you can think of?
18. Does your level of self-esteem/self-love go up and down regardless of others' expressed opinion of you?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the scale scores and the correlation matrix

	Cronbach alpha	Mean	SD	Plural self	Tolerance of ambiguity	O	C	E	A	N
Multiplicity Scale	0.82	12.5	5.8	+0.23	-0.09	-0.05	-0.10	+0.08	-0.10	+0.35**
Plural Self Scale	0.77	3.3	2.6		+0.04	+0.27*		-0.18	-0.14	+0.29*
Tolerance of Ambiguity	0.88	81.6	12.2			+0.23	+0.22	+0.31*		+0.22 -0.12
Big 5 inventory										
Openness	0.66	10.4	2.3				-0.22	-0.02	+0.34**	+0.07
Conscientiousness	0.59	11.3	2.2					+0.15	+0.22	-0.21
Extraversion	0.73	10.1	2.1						+0.23	-0.06
Agreeableness	0.73		12.4	1.5						-0.08
Neuroticism	0.55	9.4	2.2							

* two-tailed $p < .05$ ** two-tailed $p < .01$

THE DESIRE TO LOSE ONE'S IDENTITY**David Lester**

Laing (1969) proposed that a psychologically person has a sense of presence in the world as a real, alive, whole person rooted in a physiological body. Recently, Lester and Thinschmidt (1988) devised a scale to measure this belief. And found that doubts about one's existence were associated with the level of neuroticism

Maslow's (1970) discussion of the concept of the self-actualized person suggests, in contrast, that some individuals, while having a secure sense of self, occasionally seek to lose their identity. This may be achieved in various ways. Some individuals inhibit their own desires to achieve and obtain gratification from the achievements of those close to them (for example, a spouse or a child). Others have the fantasy of merging identities with their lover, so that the two become one.

The present study sought to devise a scale to measure these desires and to explore with what personality traits they were associated. Items were written to tap five areas: aversion to physical closeness with another, resentment of others having an influence over you, aversion to merging minds with another, disliking identification with the achievements of others, and unsociability. Eight items were written to tape each of these five areas.

Method

A questionnaire containing the items was administered to 36 men and 48 women aged 18-25 (mean age 21.1 years, SD=1.6) enrolled in undergraduate courses. The items were placed in a Likert-type format, scored for aversion. The students also completed the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck, Eysenck & Barrett, 1985) which measures neuroticism, extraversion and psychoticism.

Results and Discussion

Cronbach's alphas for the five scales were: aversion to physical closeness 0.54; resenting the influence of others 0.46; aversion to merging with others 0.70; aversion to identification with the achievements of others 0.55; and unsociability 0.57.

The dimensions measured by the scales did not appear to be pathological (see Table 1). Psychoticism scores correlated with aversion to physical closeness (Pearson $r = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$), aversion to merging ($r = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$), and aversion to identification with the achievements of others ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), but not significantly with resentment of others having an influence over oneself or with unsociability ($r_s = 0.01$ and -0.20).

The aversion to merging with others was negatively associated with neuroticism scores ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that those with higher neuroticism scores had less aversion to merging with others. As expected, extraversion was negatively correlated with unsociability ($r = -0.70$, $p < 0.001$).

To explore the correlations between the five dimensions, the scores were subjected to a factor analysis using SPSSX, with a principal components extraction and a varimax rotation. Two factors were extracted (see Table 1), the first of which, accounting for 39.2% of the variance, with loadings from physical closeness, merging and identification with others, correlated significantly with psychoticism ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). Factor II, accounting for 21.1% of the variance, with loadings from physical closeness and unsociability, was associated with extraversion ($r = -0.56$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 1: The correlations between scale scores and results of the factor analysis

	Factor					
Aversion to	P	E	N	L	I	II
Physical closeness	+0.25*		-0.09	-0.11	-0.02	+0.55#
Influence from others	+0.01	+0.10	-0.17	+0.07	-0.30	-0.35
Merging with others	+0.26*		-0.06	-0.22"	-0.10	+0.81#
Identification with others		+0.30**		-0.11	-0.06	-0.09
Sociability	-0.20	-0.70**		+0.15	+0.20	-0.12
Percent of variance						
Psychoticism (P)					+0.39**	-0.13
Extraversion (E)					+0.06	-0.56**
Neuroticism (N)					-0.18	+0.12
Lie (L)					-0.16	+0.15

high loading.

*two-tailed $p < 0.05$; **two-tailed $p < 0.01$.

It can be seen that the desire to merge identities with an intimate partner is not a severely pathological desire. Rather it is related to other social desires, such as the desire to be physically close to others and to identify with the achievements of others.

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APPENDIX

The Scale Items (Some items are phrased negatively)

Physical closeness

1. 1 avoid physical contact with casual acquaintances
2. I like to sleep close to my partner in a double bed
3. I hate to do things without my partner
4. I often hug my friends when I meet them after an absence
5. I feel-uncomfortable, when others embrace me
6. I like the feeling of being intertwined during lovemaking
7. When I'm upset I like to be hugged and held
8. I like holding hands when I walk with my partner

Others' influence

1. I resent being told by other people how I ought to feel
2. As a child I used to sometimes fear that my parents could read my mind
3. I enjoy being exactly who I am
4. Friends and family often accuse me of being stubborn
5. I hate changing myself in order to make my partner happy

6. I refuse to change my beliefs to please others
7. I am easily influenced by others
8. I resent it when others are trying to influence the way I think

Merging

1. I like it when the person I feel close to seems to know what I am going to say and can even finish my sentences for me
2. I can never let myself get really intimate with someone else
3. I have occasionally wished I could be inside my lover's mind and he/she in mine so that we would each know how the other feels
4. The ultimate in intimacy is when my partner understands my thoughts and feelings
5. I have never truly emotionally 'meshed' with anyone
6. I feel uneasy when my partner seems to understand me too well
7. It upsets me to feel that there is any barrier between me and my partner
8. I don't ever want to be really close to someone else.

Identification with others

1. It upsets me emotionally to see other people suffer
2. I derive a great deal of satisfaction from the successes of my partner
3. I enjoy my family's accomplishments as much as my own
4. I resent the amount of time demanded of me by my family obligations
5. I get emotionally upset by tragic situations elsewhere in the world
6. I would feel that my life was incomplete if I never had any children of my own
7. I sometimes resent it when a member of my family is successful at something
8. I resent it when I am introduced as someone else's brother or wife or friend etc.

Sociability

1. I get more enjoyment from my material possessions than from my relationships with others
2. I feel anxious in crowds
3. I feel uncomfortable at large parties
4. I would rather be in a group than spend time alone
5. I get a lot of satisfaction from my relationships with others
6. I find it easy to be the "life and soul" of the party
7. I like to be the center of attention of people
8. In groups of people I prefer to listen to and watch the others than to be very active

AN ONTOLOGICAL INSECURITY SCALE**David Lester & Jeffrey Thinschmidt**

R. D. Laing (1967, 1969) proposed that a psychologically healthy person has a sense of presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and temporally continuous person. Two common splits to this holist self can occur. First the mind can be felt as disembodied, with no sense of being biologically alive. Second, the real self can erect a false pseudo self behind which to hide from others.

Laing presented the case of Mrs. R. who never convinced herself that she was somebody. She was frightened lest she look in the mirror and see no one there. She had to be with people who knew her. In crowds where she was not known to anyone, she panicked. Her greatest joy was taking care of her widowed father (at least he noticed her) and in being the model for her lover, a sculptor.

The present study tried to operationally measure Laing's concept of ontological insecurity. Analysis of his writings suggested four components: a doubt that one really exists, a desire to be noticed and to be the center of attention, a desire to live on in people's memory after one's death and a belief that the soul or mind is not firmly rooted in the body. Items were written for each of these components and scores on the four scales correlated with measures of extraversion and neuroticism.

Method

The 24-item ontological insecurity scale was administered along with the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1973) to 31 male and 36 female college students enrolled in courses (mean age = 24.4, SD = 8.4). The ontological insecurity items were presented with a 5-point answering scale ranging from very true for me (5 points) to not at all true for me (1 point). The items are shown in the Appendix.

Results

A factor analysis using SPSSX, Principal Component extraction with a varimax rotation, identified three factors (see Table 1). Factor I accounted for 32%

of the variance and had loadings from seeking attention (0.83) and extraversion (0.84). Factor II accounted for another 22% of the variance and had loadings from doubting one's existence (0.83) and neuroticism (0.81). Factor III accounted for a further 19% of the variance and had loadings from the desire to remain in people's memory (0.72) and a belief in the ease of separation of the mind and the body (0.87),

A doubt in one's own existence was significantly correlated with the desire to be the center of attention (Pearson $r = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$), a belief that the mind and the body are easily separated ($r = 0.38$, $p < .09$), and neuroticism scores ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$).

Discussion

The present study operationalized four possible dimensions of Laing's concept of ontological insecurity. It was found that the four components did not correlate very highly with one another and, in a factor analysis with two personality scores, formed three factors.

Table 1: Factor analysis of the components of ontological insecurity and extraversion/neuroticism

	Factor		
	I	II	III
Mind/body separation	-0.10	+0.23	+0.87#
To live on in memory	+0.35	-0.16	+0.72#
Doubts about existence	+0.04	+0.83#	+0.27
Desire to be noticed	+0.83#	+0.22	+0.10
Neuroticism	+0.09	+0.81#	-0.14
Extraversion	+0.84#	-0.05	+0.04
Percent of variance	32.0%	22.3%	19.2%
# high loading			

Doubts in one's own existence were found to be related to a belief in the ease of separation of mind and body and to neuroticism scores. This suggests that doubts in one's own existence can be a component of neurotic anxiety.

The present study suggests that Laing's concept, of ontological insecurity can be measured and that those who are ontologically insecure may have higher levels of neuroticism.

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Appendix

Doubts about one's existence:

1. I have occasionally wondered whether I really exist.
2. I have wondered whether I am part of someone else's dream, and when he/she wakes up I will no longer exist.
3. I used to wonder sometimes whether I would go to sleep and never wake up again.
4. It is incomprehensible to me that I could one day stop existing.
5. I have wondered whether I might look in a mirror and not see my reflection.
6. I have always wanted to be a model for an artist, sculptor, or photographer.

The desire to be noticed:

1. When I'm in a large crowd, I like to be noticed.
2. I like being the center of attention.
3. I avoid catching sight of myself in the mirror.
4. I like to be late to social gatherings so that I can be noticed when I arrive.
5. I am concerned with my physical appearance.
6. I don't feel that I am really complete unless I am involved with someone romantically.

The desire to be remembered after death:

1. It is important to me that my family name be carried on.
2. I will live on through my children and their children.
3. I would like to leave my mark on the world so that people will remember me.

4. If I died today, people would soon forget me.
5. I usually write my name on things I own (like books, etc) or create (like drawings, etc).
6. When I die I want to be buried and have a headstone for my grave.

Mind and body separation:

1. I believe in life after death.
2. I believe in reincarnation, that is, that we all have had previous lives and will have future lives.
3. Sometimes I have felt that my spirit or soul has left my body.
4. I am not concerned too much with my body since it is my mind, spirit, or soul which is the essence of my existence.
5. I believe that there is a heaven.
6. I believe that the mind has the power to cure bodily illnesses.

DOES THE PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY OF OBJECT RELATIONS HAVE RELEVANCE FOR THE MULTIPLE SELF?

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Prelude

It was suggested to me that *Object Relations*, a topic in psychoanalytic theory, might be of relevance to my multiple self theory of the mind. This raises immediate problems for me because I long ago rejected the validity and usefulness of psychoanalytic theory. When I found out that the terms of the theory are the result of the translation by James Strachey of Freudian texts from the German (the result of Strachey's years of learning Latin in high school, as I did) I was further alienated. The use of the Latin terms makes these concepts seem more like structures in the brain paralleling real structures such as the thalamus and hypothalamus. The German terms are less likely to lead to this misapprehension.

Then I took a course with an Austrian psychoanalyst, Walter Toman (Toman, 1960) which changed my views (Lester, 2019; www.drdauidlester.net; see next essay in this issue). Unfortunately, Toman's version of the theory is very different from traditional versions, and Toman is not cited in the book by Greenberg and Mitchell (1983). Let me, therefore, present the first few sentences of my article on Toman's version.

There are three basic assumptions in Freudian theory.

1. All behaviors are determined; specifically, all behaviors satisfy desires – the principle of psychic determinism.
2. Almost all behaviors (observable and internal) satisfy many desires.
3. Some of the desires motivating human behavior are unconscious.

The basic elements of psychoanalytic theory are desires (or wishes). A more neutral term would be psychological forces. Freud distinguished three *subsets* of wishes: the id, the ego, and the superego. This is an important statement. The id, ego, and superego are not objects or structures. They do

not exist. They are labels, hypothetical constructs. Ideally, they should be used only as adjectives. This is an id wish. That is a superego wish

In Toman's version, ego, id and superego (the das Ich [Me], das Es [It] and the das Uber-Ich [Over-me]) are not used to be used as nouns. They are not objects, but rather subsets of desires. As a physicist and mathematician before becoming a psychologist, the notion of subsets was startling (prime numbers, Fibonacci numbers, etc.)! Once you have three subsets, there is no reason why one cannot have additional subsets. There is no death instinct or death instinct, but there may be subsets of death-oriented desires and life-oriented desires. The result is that I am now comfortable with Freudian psychoanalytic theory – Walter Toman's version.¹

Of course, the experiences of the individual in infancy and childhood are critical for understanding that individual's mind as an adult. However, another problem with psychoanalytic theory is that one can propose processes that occur in the child's mind, but they are hypotheses that cannot be validated. Furthermore, because psychoanalysts are typically involved as psychotherapists with patients, they are preoccupied with psychopathology rather than the normal mind.

The result, therefore, is that I am setting out biased against what I am about to read. I did first check with Wikipedia.

Relational psychoanalysis is a school of psychoanalysis in the United States that emphasizes the role of real and imagined relationships with others in mental disorder and psychotherapy. Relational psychoanalysis is a relatively new and evolving school of psychoanalytic thought considered by its founders to represent a "paradigm shift" in psychoanalysis.

An important difference between relational theory and traditional psychoanalytic thought is in its theory of motivation, which would assign primary importance to real interpersonal relations, rather than to instinctual drives. Freudian theory, with a few exceptions, proposes that human beings are motivated by sexual and aggressive drives. These drives are biologically rooted and innate. They are ultimately not shaped by experience.

¹ Were Freud still alive, he would probably throw Toman out of his circle as he did Alfred Adler and Carl Jung.

Relationalists, on the other hand, argue that the primary motivation of the psyche is to be in relationships with others. As a consequence, early relationships, usually with primary caregivers, shape one's expectations about the way in which one's needs are met. Therefore, desires and urges cannot be separated from the relational contexts in which they arise; motivation is then seen as being determined by the systemic interaction of a person and their relational world. Individuals attempt to re-create these early learned relationships in ongoing relationships that may have little or nothing to do with those early relationships. This re-creation of relational patterns serves to satisfy the individuals' needs in a way that conforms with what they learned as infants. This re-creation is called an enactment.

This primed me for Greenberg and Mitchell's book. The rejection of Freud's narrow drive proposal is fine with me, as it has been with many others, ranging from Abraham Maslow to Viktor Frankl.

Greenberg and Mitchell

Harry Stack Sullivan

G&M noted that Sullivan proposed that *personality* is made manifest in interpersonal relations and is a temporary phenomenon and changes over time. People are motivated by needs for satisfaction and need for security. We need food, warmth and oxygen and also emotional contact with others, as well as exercising our abilities and capacities. The needs for security involve avoiding or reducing anxiety. We might note here that Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs captured attention much better than Sullivan's ideas.

G&M noted that, for Sullivan, one's *personality* is what one is. One's *self* is what one takes oneself to be. The self is created by reflected appraisals. Experiences consistent with appraisals of significant others are organized into the self. Experiences incongruent with the appraisals of significant others remain in an *extra-self*, unrecognized and unacknowledged. Later, Sullivan viewed the self as a complex organization of experience which began with the child's interactions with others. Sullivan sometimes viewed the self as consisting of content (beliefs, images and ideas) and sometimes as a set of processes that establish and protect the content.

Sullivan thought that the person can invoke *fictitious others*, but that most likely results from work with patients in counseling. The self can also shelter us from questioning and criticism. The need for security causes us to bolster and protest this *cherished self*. Finally, G&M note that personality for Sullivan (or the patterning of interpersonal situations) develops from and is composed of relations with others.

Comment

Many of Sullivan's ideas as described by G&M fit with Lester's multiple self theory of the mind. In Lester's theory, interpersonal relationships are critical because the people develop several selves that they adopt for particular relationships, such as with their child, their parents, or their spouse. Sullivan's notion of the self as what one takes oneself to be hints at the concept of a core self which for Lester is the self that controls the mind when one is alone, except that Lester would accept the proposal that we have several core selves (when we are alone and depressed, for example, versus when we are alone and excited). Sullivan's notion of the cherished self implies that it may not be based on reality, but distorted to make us feel safe, which may apply to one or more of Lester's core selves.

Sullivan sees the self-system as originating in childhood and adolescence which is true. We project past relationships onto our present relationships. G&M note that Sullivan's ideas lack a framework for the non-pathological mind and that Sullivan is vague about what is the ideal state of the mind should be. The needs for satisfaction and for security are limited and certainly lack Maslow's highest need in his hierarchy, the need for self-actualization.

Perhaps Lester should have postulates and corollaries about the core self and about the possibility that the content of some selves may be in conflict with reality.

Eric Fromm

There is little relevant in the writings of Eric Fromm for Lester's multiple self theory of the mind except that G&M noted that Fromm argued that our aloneness and helplessness force us to accept roles offered by societies (and roles imply multiple selves). I would argue that we accept roles not usually out of aloneness and helplessness but simply because the society demands a particular role. I choose to spend 44 years of my academic life at a state university in New Jersey that I helped start in 1971 at the age of 29. I became a tenured Full Professor

at the age of 34. Thereafter, I had freedom. I wore jeans, had my students call me David (as do my children and grandchildren), and published in scholarly journals with low prestige. Had I taken a position at an Ivy League university, a suit and tie would be demanded, as would be publishing in only the top journals, and being addressed as Dr. or Professor. I had a choice of where to be an academic and which role (or self) to develop and adopt.

Ronald Fairbairn

G&M's chapter on Fairbairn illustrates the problem with traditional psychoanalysis. Fairbairn "envision[s] a unitary, integral ego with its own libidinal energy, seeking relations with real internal objects. If these relations are satisfactory, the ego remains integral and whole. Unsatisfactory relations with natural external objects necessitate the establishment by the ego of compensatory internal objects. The splitting of the ego is a consequence of this proliferation of internal objects." (G&M, p. 163)

This raises several problems. The first is that psychologists have not talked about energy for more than 75 years. People behave. The question is why this behavior rather than that, and energy does not explain this choice. The second problem is that the *ego* is treated as a real object. It seeks and it splits. The question for the present essay is whether Fairbairn's concepts have relevance for a multiple self.

The problem gets worse. Fairbairn proposes that the infant has three experiences in its relationship with its mother: gratifying mother, enticing mother and depriving mother. Then, as the real relationship with the mother becomes unsatisfactory, it is internalized into three internal objects corresponding to these three aspects of the real relationship. There is a *central ego* which deals with relations with real people. As noted above, psychoanalysts love to talk about what is going in the mind of the infant without any evidence to support their assertions.

Google defines an internal object as: "an unconscious mental and emotional representation of a person or caregiver that an individual has "taken inside" and internalized." This sounds like a *thought* rather than an *object*. Just as a subset of wishes does not constitute an id (Toman), neither do a set of thoughts constitute an object.

Heinz Hartmann

I admit to tiring as I read on. In G&M's discussion of Heinz Hartmann's ideas, I saw hope. "The idea that the ego is composed of a number of functional units, each connected in its own way with external reality, serves the theoretical purpose of strengthening the impact of the system on the overall functioning of the psychic apparatus" (G&M, p, 256). Maybe the mind is made up of multiple selves?

But psychoanalysts are lost in their fictional world, just as priests and imams are lost in their fictional world of gods, heavens and the afterlife. Psychoanalysts assert and disagree at a very abstract level about concepts and structures that they propose and for which they have no evidence. Some of these concepts (such as energy) have been rejected by mainstream psychology. Psychoanalysts are fixated on the early years of life which of course have a tremendous impact on adult behavior but, as I have said, they hypothesize *ad nauseam* about what is going on in the infant's mind just as religious adherents hypothesize about what god and heaven are really like. Internalized objects in psychoanalysis remind me of angels in Christianity.

And then I was referred to Jody Davies

Jody Messler Davies

The psychoanalyst who comes closest to a multiple self theory of the mind is Jody Messler Davies (1996), although Davies is still stuck to some extent with classic psychoanalysis and a focus on the psychopathological self including the dissociative version. Davies suggests that, in his early writings, Freud was not averse to a multiple self model of the mind but soon turned away from "a model of mind that emphasized the dynamic interplay of multiply organized centers of awareness and agency" (p. 556).

Davies's view of Pierre Janet's (1887) approach suggests that Janet's *schemas* are close to Lester's *subselves* (or multiple selves).

Janet came to believe that the memory processes, the usual typical schemas for integrating new incoming information, provided the essential organizing mental systems. When operating smoothly, most of these processes went on out of awareness. These schemas are flexible, and there is a constant oscillation between the effect of new information in changing the internal structure of organizing schemas and the individual's reliance on

these schemas in order to create mental order and internal organization. Thus, schemas affect the way in which each individual views reality, and reality affects the ongoing structural nuances of schemas. (Davies, 1996, p. 557)

Davies suggests that development implies a movement to states of increasingly elaborated multiple self-experiences. She saw this as compatible with Fairbairn's idea that the multiplicity of ego states represented dynamically interacting representations of self in relation to the internalized significant others of childhood, a view still mired in traditional psychoanalytic thought about psychopathology.

Davies sees these ideas as related to those of Fast's and Aron who “implicitly bring together an emphasis on multiple self-states and internalized object relations with the pre-Freudian writings on organizing mental schemata that were so fundamental to psychological thought at the end of the nineteenth century” (Davies, 1996, p. 560). Davies suggested that we have “multiple levels of consciousness and unconsciousness - a multiply organized, associationally linked network of meaning attribution and understanding. Within such an interactive, dynamic system, past experience infuses the present, and present experience evokes state-dependent memories of formative interactive representations (p. 562). In addition:

Within this framework, each representational system includes a self-representation, an object-representation, a predominant affective tone, an experience of somatic body-self, and a level of cognitive organization in keeping with the age and developmental sophistication of the internalized self-other dyad. Such representational schemata, developmentally structured, become the filters through which all new experience is viewed, the system through which it will be organized, and the preexisting structure into which it must ultimately be integrated. (p.562)

This view of the “relational unconscious” suggests, then, a dissociatively based system of averagable and irreconcilable mental representations of self in ongoing relationship with a complementary system of averagable and irreconcilable representations of significant others. (p. 563)

Although Davies still includes the unconscious, she asserts that the organization of self and of the multiple selves comprise the mind. There is, therefore, at least one psychoanalyst whose views are consistent with Lester's

multiple self theory of the mind, although her views do not suggest new postulates and corollaries to add to the formal presentation of Lester's multiple self theory of the mind.

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Studies on the Multiple Self, 2026, 1(4), 27-31

A Rational Version of Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

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Note: This essay is presented because here because it was referred to in the previous article in this issue of *Studies on the Multiple Self*.

Freud's theory was the first major modern theory of personality. Many later theories were developed by modifying some aspect of Freud's theory or by rejecting one feature and proposing a new theory that set up a dialectic with Freud's theory. As such, Freud's theory is the seminal theory of personality.

However, there are flaws in the way that the theory was presented by Freud. He used the concept of energy, but Hebb (1949) argued forcefully that the concept of energy was unnecessary for understanding human behavior. There are problems in the translation of Freud's German writings, as pointed out by Bettelheim (1962), which resulted in misunderstandings of Freudian concepts. For example, Freud did not use the terms, ego, id, and superego. He used the German words for me, it and over-me (the das Ich [Me], das Es [It] and the das Uber-Ich [Over-me])

A modern version of Freudian theory has been proposed by Walter Toman (1920–2003), an Austrian psychoanalyst, who purposely tried to make Freud's theory rational from a modern point of view. He redefined the terms in a way that did not change their essential meaning so much as change the implications of the terms. The following sections present Toman's (1960) version of psychoanalytic theory.

The Basic Assumptions

There are three basic assumptions in Freudian theory.

1. All behaviors are determined; specifically, all behaviors satisfy desires – the principle of psychic determinism.
2. Almost all behaviors (observable and internal) satisfy many desires.
3. Some of the desires motivating human behavior are unconscious.

The Id, Ego, and Superego

The basic elements of psychoanalytic theory are desires (or wishes). A more neutral term would be psychological forces. Freud distinguished three *subsets* of wishes: the id, the ego, and the superego. This is an important statement. The id, ego, and superego are not objects or structures. They do not exist. They are labels, hypothetical constructs. Ideally, they should be used only as adjectives. This is an id wish. That is a superego wish.

Id wishes are those that you had as an infant and child and that often were punished and forbidden. Some of them, although not all, are unconscious. Superego desires are those taken over from important figures in our lives, mainly our parents, but also our siblings, relatives, friends, and heroes. We have introjected most of the desires others had for us. Ego desires are the desires of the mature and rational adult, and they are often compromises between the id desires and the superego desires.

Traditionally, psychoanalysts saw the id subset of wishes as present from birth, with the ego subset developing after a few months and the superego subset of desires after a year or two. However, for a baby, id desires and ego desires are the same. It is only from an adult perspective that we label certain of our desires as id desires because they are those we had as infants and children. Furthermore, the baby can do little or nothing without the parents deciding that it is permissible to do so. The baby wants food, and the parents decide that the baby ought to have food when they give the baby the bottle. Therefore, id/ego desires and external desires both get satisfied when the baby feeds. Toman argued that it makes sense to assume that the desires in all three subsets of desires (the id, ego, and superego subsets) begin to develop at birth, although perhaps not necessarily at the same rate.

Development

What are the essential features of psychological development? There are two components. First, we form derivative desires. For example, babies initially drink only mother's milk (or formula from a bottle); small children will accept several liquids; and adults will drink perhaps hundreds of different liquids in the course of a year. All of these desires (for cola, tea, cocktails, spring water, etc.) derive from the first, single desire one had as a baby.

Forming derivative desires gives us control. If we desire only one or two liquids, then not to have either leads to great distress. Forming derivative desires enables us to deal with loss (temporary or permanent) of the object of a desire. In the example above, we now can choose from dozens of possible drinks. Forming derivative desires involves cathexis. Toman defined cathexis as the process of learning about an object or a desire, learning to like it and appreciate it, perhaps learning to love it. We become connoisseurs of what we cathect.

The second way in which we develop is that we gain control over the conditions under which our desires can be gratified. As hungry babies, all we could do was cry and hope that someone fed us. As children, we can open the refrigerator and get something to eat.

Anxiety

There are two sources of anxiety in Freudian theory. First, anxiety is aroused whenever desires are deprived. With some exceptions (such as extreme starvation), the greater the deprivation, the greater the anxiety. Since unconscious desires cannot be consciously gratified, unconscious desires result in anxiety.

Second, we become anxious whenever an unconscious desire is stimulated and in danger of becoming conscious. We become anxious because we cannot tolerate the knowledge of this desire, knowledge in both an intellectual and an emotional sense.

This double source of anxiety is the essence of Freud's theory of personality, in essence a *system principle*. The basic motivation for human existence is to keep our anxiety level at a minimum. To do this, we have to satisfy our unconscious desires (to keep our anxiety level low) while remaining unconscious of the desires (to keep our anxiety level low).

Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms are common ways in which people solve this dilemma about anxiety. Each mechanism involves leaving the original desire unconscious, a process called repression, while substituting a different desire or different object. For example, in displacement and sublimation, we change the object of the desire. In reaction formation, the desire that becomes conscious is the opposite of the unconscious desire. Love becomes hate or hate becomes love.

All defense mechanisms involve cathecting the new desire and avoiding situations that might stimulate the unconscious desire – mini-phobias.

Psychosexual Stages

In order to describe development at the abstract level, Freud made an obvious and unobjectionable proposition: the desires that are noteworthy to the psychologist, salient to the person, and interesting to the observer change with age. As is well known, the first three stages were labeled by Freud as oral, anal, and phallic.

Rate of Psychological Functioning

The hypotheses that (i) the mind has an optimal rate of functioning and (ii) that this optimal rate may be different for each of us has a long history (e.g., Berlyne, 1960; Fiske and Maddi, 1961). In psychoanalytic theory, the concept appears as the rate of cathexis. The rate of cathexis is the rate with which we learn about and learn to appreciate new objects and new desires, and this rate determines how quickly we form derivative desires. If our rate of cathexis is high, we will develop more derivative desires and develop them sooner. This in turn will facilitate coping with loss since such a person will have more substitute objects and desires with which to replace the lost ones. This person will be more psychologically resilient.

Although we each have a characteristic rate of cathexis throughout our life, transient fluctuations occur from moment to moment, day to day. These transient fluctuations are caused by deprivation of our desires. The more generally deprived we are at any particular moment, the lower our current rate of cathexis.

Disturbed Behavior

Disturbed behavior can be described in various ways using psychoanalytic theory. For example, the strength of the id, ego, and superego subsets of desires can be used to describe various disorders. Those with depressive disorders may have too strong and extensive a superego subset of desires, and those who show criminal behavior without shame, guilt, or remorse (the so-called psychopath or person with an antisocial personality disorder) may have too weak and small a superego subset of desires.

The only causal explanation of disturbed behavior is that frustration and deprivation of desires has occurred in the first six years of life. This may be labeled trauma, but what makes the events traumatic is that objects of desires are lost or that the desires are forbidden satisfaction. Some deprivation of desires is inevitable. Children have to be weaned, toilet-trained, and socialized in many kinds of ways. But some children experience severe trauma.

There are two general rules for how severe the later disturbed behavior will be:

1. The earlier in life the trauma occurs, the more severe the later psychiatric disorder. Loss of a mother at age 2 is more traumatic than loss of her at the age of 5.
2. The more severe the loss involved, the more severe the later psychiatric disorder. Loss of a mother at age 2 is probably more traumatic than loss of a sibling, at least in the traditional family.

All intrapsychic theories of personality agree that early trauma is the major causal factor in the development of disturbed behavior. The theories differ, however, in the kind of trauma on which they focus.

Comment

Toman made several important changes to Freudian theory. He redefined the concepts of id, ego, and superego as subsets of desires. He also eliminated the concept of energy from the theory. He redefined cathexis as the rate of learning (or information processing), and he made resolution of the inevitable anxiety as the core process of the theory

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EVIDENCE FOR A TWO SELF THEORY OF SUICIDE

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Abstract: A brief review of research and proposals that support Lester's two-self theory of suicide.

Lester (2021, 2026) proposed a two-self theory of suicide, with formal postulates and corollaries, in which there is a suicidal subself and life-oriented subself that have executive power over the mind at different times. One subself may take over for periods of hours, days or more, while, at other times, they may engage in an internal debate.

Harris, et al. (2010) noted that the notion of an internal debate about suicide can be found in the writings of several suicidologists. Shneidman (1964) documented this in interviews with patients and in suicide notes, and Stengel (1964) also observed this internal debate in suicidal individuals. Neuringer and Lettieri (1971) argued that this debate may be the most important feature of the suicidal mind, and Evans and Farberow (1988) agreed.

Kovacs and Beck (1977) interviewed a sample (n=106) of attempted suicides and asked them about their wish to live and their wish to die at the time of their attempt on a scale of 0 to 8. Fifty percent (n=53) of the sample experienced internal debates over death and life, 40% wanted to die, and 9% wanted to live. Of the 53 reporting an internal debate, 12 (23%) had identical scores for their wish to die and their wish to live. Those reporting an internal debate obtained lower scores on Beck's Suicide Intent Scale.

Harris, et al. (2010) obtained 1,016 participants from 40 countries using an online survey. The participants were asked "Have you ever had an internal debate (in your head) about whether to live or die?" to be answered on a scale ranging from 1 = Never to 7 = Frequently. The answer to this question on the frequency of an internal debate was associated positively with scores for depression, their current wish to die (and negatively with their current wish to live), going online to

search for reasons to live and to die, and scores on the Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire.

Harris, et al. found that two-thirds of the total sample indicated at least one occurrence of debating within themselves to live or die, especially the most suicidal people (94.5% of these reported an internal debate) with 37.6% of the most suicidal people reporting *often* engaging in the debate. In a multiple regression to predict scores on the Suicide Behaviors Questionnaire, the significant predictors were the internal debate, the wish to live, the wish to die and depression scores.

The two empirical research studies, however, did not report examples of the internal debate.

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Studies on the Multiple Self, 2026, 1(4), 34-36

FAITH HARKEY'S VERSION OF A SUBSELF THEORY

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Faith Harkey is beginning to explore the multiple self using the concepts of complexes and Jungian archetypes. "Within the world of our psyches, which we so often perceive as a unity under our egoic control, exist the complexes" (Harkey, 2022a, p.2). Harkey (2002) noted that Carl Jung proposed the existence of ego-complexes, fragmentary personalities and splinter psyches, and Harkey saw the similarity of these proposed structures to subpersonalities. In her earlier article, Harkey saw complexes as autonomous experiences that may appear for a single dialogue as well as being more permanent. Indeed, some complexes may become *steadfast*.

Harkey (2002) discussed whether complexes are rigid or whether they can be changed over time, spontaneously as we have more experiences or with the aid of a therapist. If we welcome our complexes, they can free themselves and grow and change. This can be encouraged if we allow our complexes to have dialogues. In this way, complexes can become more robust and their form "appears with greater sharpness" (p.160). Harkey suggested that we should facilitate their development. Indeed, she noted that Johnson (1986) argued that we have a duty to our subselves.

Later, Harkey suggested that complexes have a *shell* that provide its appearance, that is, they are more like a structure than energy. In some cases, a complex can take possession of the mind, in Lester's words, have executive power, which Harkey sees as similar to possession. Harkey (2022a) in her discussion of Joan of Arc, sees Joan's savior complex as *commandeering* her mind. In others, a complex can result in a state of dissociation, an altered state of consciousness, as in Dissociative Identity Disorder. (The problem of using Joan of Arc as an example is that we know little or nothing about her minute-to-minute life. Did her savior complex control her mind continuously? We do not know.)

Harkey follows Rowan in seeing subpersonalities developing out of trauma but, eventually, we develop different subpersonalities to present to others – façade selves – and Harkey labels the subpersonality that has executive control – "the driver of the car" with the other subpersonalities as passengers. Harkey describes

an interesting phenomenon in which we “act and speak in ways *that do not seem like us* (p. 4).” It is as if one subself takes over executive control while other subselves observe with disapproval. However, Harkey views our complexes as more than just one of many subselves. Complexes have special qualities, the *marvels* of our psyche (Harkey, 2022b).

Harkey proposes that complexes are, indeed, complex. “A complex is not just the clothing for one particular archetype ... but an agglomerate of the actions of several archetypal patterns, imbued with personal experience and affect” (Harkey, 2022b, p.4). Harkey proposes that archetypes and complexes seek out and observe experiences that validate them. “[A]rchetypes will draw things to them which are similar to their nature (p. 5).” In addition, complexes can seek and create experiences that reinforce the assumptions, thought and emotions that make up the complex.

However, in Harkey’s view, complexes are not in control of the mind all of the time in the way that subselves are. In subself theory, one subself or another has executive control continuously. For Harkey: “When we are under stress or discomfort, when we behave in ways that don’t ‘seem like ourselves,’ there is a good chance a complex is active (Harkey, 2022c, p. 1). For example, Harkey gives an example of a complex affecting our lives for the worse. “We hear ourselves saying things that we regret (p. 1). In Lester’s multiple self theory of the mind, the we that hears is one subself, and the we that regrets is another subself.

When I was a physics major, the atom was made up of three basic particles: protons, neutrons and electrons. In later physics, protons and neutrons are both made of smaller fundamental particles called *up quarks* and *down quarks*. At one point, Harkey raises an interesting question. What is the structure of subselves? Are there *sub-subselves*? (Not a good term.) This is an issue to be explored.

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RESPONSE TO “FAITH HARKEY’S VERSION OF A SUBSELF THEORY”

FAITH HARKEY

I am grateful to David Lester for his overview of my work to date, “Faith Harkey’s Version of a Subself Theory.” It is no small task to succinctly and intelligently synthesize the material in a collection of disparate journal and website articles. That Dr. Lester -- himself at the vanguard of the field of subpersonality studies -- has taken time to encapsulate the work of an early-career researcher, effectively receiving me into the circle of writers and theorists on the subself, is more than flattering -- it is a real honor. And, of course, the invitation to respond to his article is a call I am delighted to answer.

My own initiation into the reality of the subself arose some fifteen years ago as I sat at my writing desk, penning children’s novels -- my profession before I was converted to the joys of scholarly research. I discovered early in my authorship journey that, at the core of fiction writing, there exists a very real mystery. A collection of inner places and persons arise -- apparently spontaneously and autonomously -- conjoining to form the fictional work. *But who or what are these characters which arrive with such strong voices, ready to rattle off scenes, chapters, or even entire life stories?*

It was not until I encountered C.G. Jung’s work on the complex (Jung 1960; Jung, 1969a) that I was able to glimpse the kernel at the heart of the fiction-writing mystery. Through Jung’s lens, I began to understand my characters as *autonomous complexes* with lives and perspectives of their own.

The complex is Jung’s version of the autonomous inner figure that John Rowan calls the *subpersonality* (1990), Richard Schwartz designates as the *part* (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2020), and which Dr. Lester, of course, terms the *subself* (2010). Following Rowan (1990, p. 115), I take each of these accounts as descriptive of a single phenomenon, spoken in a variety of ‘languages’ which might be assembled into a “Rosetta Stone” of the subpersonality, revealing the commonalities of apparently differing theoretical orientations.

My work at present specializes in the phenomenology and implications of the personal complex, particularly in the areas giftedness and talent, arts and authorship (2024a, 2027). Jung is my theoretical touchstone; my work is unashamedly a creative exegesis of his theories. That said, I approach Jung with a flexibility and a willingness to grow beyond him. This is appropriate, I think, especially considering that it was Jung himself who **a)** thanked God that he was Jung, and not a Jungian, and **b)** described psychological theories as the “subjective confession[s]” of their formulators (Hannah, 1976, p. 78; Jung, 1967, para.774). A theory is a model, not a shackle, and its concepts should become neither dogmas nor regulations.

All that said, and at the risk of issuing my own subjective confession, I offer these points which are central to my own adapted understanding of the Jungian complex:

1) The complex is the foundational unit of psyche (Jung, 1976, para. 151). We might imagine psyche as a collection of living ‘legos,’ an assemblage of complexes which stack and restack, constellating and deconstellating in response to outer and inner life events. Importantly, the complex is an expression of dissociative processes, but need not be considered pathological (Krieger, 2026; Harkey, 2026).

2) The ego is, itself, a complex (Jung, 1969b, para. 582; Dieckmann, year, p. 1). In that sense, the person we each understand as ‘I’ holds “no special status” in psyche (Harkey, 2027). We are members of a larger community. This ego-complex, however, seldom stands alone, “blending” as it frequently does with its neighbor complexes (Goulding & Schwartz, 2002, p. 98). Jung called this complex-tinged ego the “affect ego” (Jung, 1960, para. 86, fn 9).

3) Complexes can grow and change...under certain circumstances (Harkey, 2022b). Following Freud, who believed that conditions in the subconscious are timeless (1989, p. 582), I contend that complexes in their unconscious state (and even when blending with an *unaware* ego) are uninvolved with the passage of time. Perhaps this is why, in our lived-experience, we tend to perceive the complex as a ‘stuckness,’ and why it seems to recreate certain scenarios over and over again. But when we approach the complex with conscious awareness and/or intention -- as in Jungian active imaginal dialogue or art-making (Jung, 1997; Johnson, 1986) -- we expose the complex to linear time. This exposure, I suggest, shifts the complex out of timelessness. An introduction to linearity, in turn, enables it to grow and change.

4) Nothing in psyche, or in our lives, moves forward without the complex (see especially Meier, 1990, pp. 180-181). Through its autonomous behavior and the vortex of its fixations -- which may manifest as problems or challenges -- our attention and life direction are shaped. Our growth depends almost wholly on our interactions with our complexes, and this is not a bad thing.

5) Our connections with our own creativity and talents, and with the Sacred (however we define that) are mediated by the complex (Harkey 2024a; Harkey 2027).

But perhaps the most essential points of my approach to the complex, and the subself more generally, are these:

6) Jung's work points to a creative starting point for *partnering* with the complex. His active imagination techniques (Jung 1997; Johnson 1986), which I adapt into a practice of encountering and welcoming complexes home, is central to the important work of getting to know one's complexes and inviting them into the linear, narrative journey which characterizes consciousness. Active imagination dovetails, in turn, with the often dreamy world-building practices of many fiction writers such as myself -- hence the connection of the complex to authorship (Harkey, 2027).

7) Just as we have an ethical obligation to the people around us, we have an ethical responsibility to the subselves within us (Jung & Jaffe, 1989, p 193; Harkey, 2022a, Harkey, 2022b, Harkey, 2027). As carriers of the affects and images arising from our traumas, conflicts, and even our constructive confusions (Jung, 1969a, para. 204; Harkey, 2024b), complexes are awash in unfinished business and unexpressed creative impulses. Without the help of a materially and temporally engaged egoic self, the complexes stand little chance of flourishing. Not only do complexes have *needs* -- they need *from us*.

Here, then, is my initial offering to the Rosetta Stone on the subpersonality, the subself. I certainly never expected any of my own work to be etched on that splendid rock.

Contributor Biography

Faith 'Fey' Harkey is a doctoral candidate at the University of Essex, Colchester, UK. She is also the author of two middle-grade novels, including

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THE WISH TO DIE AND THE WISH TO LIVE

David Lester
Stockton University

Lester (2021, 2026) proposed a two-self theory of suicide in which it is proposed that many individuals have a life-oriented subself and death-oriented subself, a proposal which stemmed from his multiple self theory of the mind (Lester, 2015). In line with this proposal, some theorists have suggested that the suicidal person experiences an internal debate, a "struggle" between the desire for death and the desire for life rather than a simple choice by the suicidal person to die (Shneidman 1964; Stengel, 1964).

One of the first research studies to explore this possibility of an internal debate was by Kovacs and Beck (1977). In a sample of attempted suicides, they presented them with two sliding scales ranging from 0 to 8 for the wish to die and the wish to live. They had each individual move an arrow to indicate the strength of each wish. The individuals also complete Beck's Suicidal Intent Scale (Beck, et al., 1974). Fifty-three (50%) of the 106 attempters indicated that they had both wishes at the time of their attempt, forty-three attempters said that they had no wish to live while ten said that they had no wish to die.

The four groups differed significantly on their suicidal intent:

<u>Wish to die</u>	<u>Wish to live</u>	<u>Mean suicidal intent</u>
high	low	15.2
high	high	11.7
low	low	10.1
low	high	8.9

It can be seen that the relative strength of the two wishes predicted the level of suicidal intent. The correlation between the scores for the wish to die and the wish to live was -0.57, only moderate in strength

Brown, et al. (2005) gave 5,814 psychiatric outpatients a suicidal ideation scale which had one item on the wish to die and one item on the wish to live. Scores on these two items were subtracted giving scores ranging from -2 to +2,

with higher score indicating a stronger wish to die. The patients were followed up for an average (median) of ten years, and 44 had died by suicide. The suicides had significantly higher scores for the wish to die/wish to live at the time of admission.

In a sample of elderly (>60) medical patients, Bonnewyn, et al. (2017) used the same system for measuring the wishes to die and to live, but categorized them as wishing to die, ambivalent, and wishing to live. Those with a stronger wish to die had less satisfaction with life, a higher depression score and less social support.

Kochanski, et al. (2018) used the same measure and found that those who had made multiple suicide attempts obtained high wish to die scores than those making a single attempt., as well as higher scores for depression and hopelessness.

In a study of undergraduate students with suicidal ideation, who were asked several times a day for ten days what their wishes to die and to live, Oakey-Frost, et al. (2023) found that the wish to die showed much more variability than the wish to live, but both wishes were associated with suicidal desires. Bryan, et al. (2025) showed obtained similar results with a sample of veterans with PTSD who were asked to rate these wishes four times a day for 14 days. In a similar design Ernst, et al. (2024) found that the wish to die and the wish to live were negatively associated in a sample of psychosomatic and psychiatric inpatients, but the wish to die had a stronger association with suicidal desire. In acutely suicidal active duty Army personnel who had attempted suicide, Bryan, et al. (2016) found brief cognitive behavioral therapy impacted the wish to live but not the wish to die.

Harris, et al. (2010) asked an internet survey sample directly: Have you ever had an internal debate (in your head) about whether to live or die? A positive answer to this question was associated with scores for depression, past suicidal behavior and the wish to die and the wish to live. Further research on this topic has been conducted by Corona, et al. (2013) and O'Connor, et al. (2012).

Comment

This research on the wish to die and the wish to live has been stimulated by the use of simple questions, like most research on suicidal behavior. However, the research misses the fact that these two wishes do not exist in isolation. Rather, they are associated with subselves of the personality, systems of thought, emotions and behaviors as proposed by Lester's two-self theory of suicide with its postulates and

corollaries. However, it is welcome to see that this research is ongoing and supports, Lester's two-self theory of suicidal behavior.

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THE VIEWS OF RALUCA SOREANU

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Raluca Soreanu has written a re-working of Sándor Ferenczi's theory. I first asked Google AI to summarize the book.

AI Summary of the Book

Let me see what the main points of the document are.

The Psychic Life of Fragments argues that trauma does not merely break the psyche apart: its fragments retain forms of life, memory, creativity, and potential reconstruction.

Central argument

Raluca Soreanu reworks Sándor Ferenczi's trauma theory to develop a "**minor psychoanalysis**" of fragmentation. Rather than treating dissociation, splitting, and traumatic residues as inert damage to be overcome through a return to wholeness, she treats them as active psychic formations with distinct voices, temporalities, and survival functions. Analysis therefore works **with fragments**, assembling partial connections rather than imposing integration.

Trauma, memory, and fragmentation

- Trauma is an **asymmetric encounter**: a vulnerable child meets an overpowering adult, followed by a further injury when another adult denies or fails to recognise the experience. This is Ferenczi's "confusion of tongues."
- Traumatic shock can produce fractures, atomisation, paralysis, dissociation, and identification with the aggressor. Yet it can also generate protective formations, heightened capacities, and new forms of psychic organisation.
- Memory is conceived as **scar-tissue**: traumatic wounds can become the material from which ego and memory are formed. The book distinguishes conscious, narratable ego-memory from bodily and affective id-memory, which may return through symptoms, dreams, regression, and reliving.

- Fragments are not simply defective pieces of a prior whole. They can be deadened or alive, isolated or connected, and may carry different times that clash within the person.

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Four forms of “minor psychoanalysis”

Soreanu’s approach is composed of four overlapping modes:

- **Psychoanalysis of scars:** attends to wounds, scars, and the persistence of traumatic marks without assuming they can be fully erased.
- **Psychoanalysis of organs:** treats the body and organs as meaningful, plastic participants in psychic life. Symptoms may be material expressions of conflict, survival, and creativity rather than mere bodily effects of mental processes.
- **Eventful psychoanalysis:** sees trauma as a catastrophic event that is both destructive and generative, producing new arrangements of psychic fragments.
- **Blue psychoanalysis:** draws on Ferenczi’s marine imagery to think about adaptation, survival, fragmentation, and forms of life that resist narratives of mastery, progress, or conquest.

Revisions to psychoanalytic theory

The book places Ferenczi in a critical dialogue with Freud and Melanie Klein.

- It challenges the tendency to link repetition chiefly to the death drive. Ferenczi’s idea of **reliving** supports a reconstructive repetition through which traumatic experience can become more connected to memory and thought.
- It argues that Freud left the ego-preservative instincts underdeveloped after *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In response, Soreanu foregrounds survival, care, conciliation, sharing, and the life drive.
- It distinguishes ordinary or “mundane” splitting from **eventful splitting**: severe trauma can split the ego into enduring, semi-autonomous fragments rather than merely divide good and bad objects.
- It rethinks passivity, femininity, sexuality, and the drives. Ferenczi’s “feminine principle” is read not as weakness but as a capacity for adaptation, self-limitation, endurance, and relation to others. The book also rejects linear, genital-centred accounts of sexuality in favour of plural and mixed eroticisms.

Orpha and traumatic survival

A central contribution is the discussion of **Orpha**, Ferenczi's name for a psychic formation developed with his patient Elizabeth Severn. Soreanu interprets Orpha as a fourth psychic agency alongside id, ego, and superego. Orpha emerges when external care fails: one part of the self becomes a "guardian angel" that watches over, anaesthetises, and preserves another suffering part. It enables improbable survival and can produce hyper-attunement, precocious maturity, and "hyper-faculties." But it can also create omnipotence, self-overexertion, an "eternal present," and harsh alliances with a punitive superego.

The analytic relationship

The book argues for an analyst who does not occupy a rigid parental, authoritative, or detached position. Instead, the analyst should be flexible, tactful, and capable of **reconstructive recognition**: where traumatic denial occurred, the analyst recognises the magnitude and structure of the patient's suffering. This requires attention to transference and countertransference, limits on analyst authority, and a willingness to acknowledge mistakes rather than deny them. The goal is not full repair or unified identity, but partial reconstruction: helping fragments become more connected, livable, and capable of entering new relations.

Time and politics

Time is a major concern throughout. Trauma creates asynchronous psychic times: some fragments remain frozen, some relive the past, and others live in an omnipotent eternal present. The analyst's task is to restore a **polyphony of times** rather than reduce the person to a single linear developmental story. Soreanu also links this to feminist, queer, decolonial, and anti-racist critique. She challenges normative timelines of development and progress, and argues for a psychoanalysis attentive to marginalised lives, racialised suffering, non-normative genders and sexualities, and the institutional harms psychoanalysis can reproduce.

Overall

The book presents psychoanalysis as a practice of montage: gathering scars, bodily symptoms, dreams, memories, objects, and fragments into new configurations. Its core claim is that catastrophic fragmentation is real and painful,

but fragments can still carry capacities for survival, relation, imagination, and partial renewal.

David Lester's Thoughts on *The Psychic Life of Fragments*

It seems to me that psychoanalysts focus solely on psychopathology. They are fascinated by traumas in infancy and childhood and the impacts of these traumas on our mind. These impacts are typically viewed as bad. The use of the word *fragments* implies that something, in this case the mind, has been broken and shattered.

It may well be that no infant or child can avoid trauma even though, obviously, the magnitude of the trauma can vary in magnitude. The experience of major trauma can result in psychiatric disorders later in life and, in my field of suicidology, suicidal behavior. However, the vast majority of us experience minor traumas in our early years which impact our mind and our later lives, but which create no psychopathology.

My interpretation of psychoanalytic theories is colored by my experience with Walter Toman (1960) and his rational version of psychoanalytic theory. Toman rejects the use of the words ego, id and superego, viewing them as *subsets of desires*. The three terms should be used only as adjectives and not as nouns.

Soreanu does not view fragments in a totally negative way.

If the psyche presents itself as a kind of mosaic of parts, some of which are alive and some of which are deadened (de-libidinised), then what does it mean to say that some form of reconstruction is possible, and what does such a reconstruction rest upon? (Soreanu, 2026, p. 114)

She suggests that: "In other words, we could say that fragments of the psyche become re-arranged in an enduring manner." (p. 49). She also suggests that one goal might be to integrate the fragments into a single coherent identity. (p. 77)

In discussing Ferenczi's thoughts on fragments, Soreanu says:

- Fragments have lives of their own: they 'speak' in a different voice (p. 6)
- The fragments speak, suffer, or are in dialogue with one another. (p. 10-11)
-if we envision the various fragments resulting from splitting as having a psychic 'life' of their own. (p. 39)

- The implication is that psychic fragments have lives of their own. This means, for instance, that they are characterised by different temporalities of the psyche, and they also have singular dynamic relations with other fragments. (p. 43)
- Sometimes splitting is so profound, and results in such stable psychic fragments, that the psychoanalytic process is more accurately described as one of re-libidination of ‘deadened’ parts of the psyche. (p. 50)

Soreanu sees the goal of psychoanalytic therapy as: There are moments of re-arrangement of fragments or even of re-fashioning a new (partial) unit from debris and shattered pieces. There are moments of attempting to link up the fragments, so that they don’t exist in complete isolation from one another. I read all these acts as *oblique* acts.” (p. 81) “The psychic fragments resulting from this radical splitting acquire ‘lives’ of their own – they are enduring psychic formations. They have their own voices, their own associated defence mechanisms. They are enduring structures. (p. 84) “In other words, the times of some fragments attack, displace, or negate the times of other fragments.” (p. 120)

I have quoted directly from Soreanu so that I do not distort what she is saying. However, if you read my theory of multiple selves (Lester, 2015), you can see that my theory covers most of the features of fragments but in a non-pathological manner.

However, Soreanu and Ferenczi do raise the issue for Lester’s theory of how do multiple selves originate and form. More work is needed on Lester’s theory on this formation process.

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