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Interaction of Personal and Social Positioning in the Formation of the Dialogical Self : a Study of Australian Adults

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INTERACTION OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL POSITIONING IN THE FORMATION OF THE DIALOGICAL SELF: A STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN ADULTS

ABSTRACT

Positioning theory, popular in the analysis of discourse, has been invoked to account for the dynamics of conflict in a dialogical self. It is argued that conflicting I-positions may have origins "inside" in terms of personal dynamic conflicts (e.g., over esteem, agency, or communion needs), and "outside" in terms of social constructions (e.g., arising from role conflicts and from embedding in power and status hierarchies). The paper reports findings from a study of positioning that demonstrates interactions between personal and social positioning in the formation of the dialogical self. Gender differences in positioning are also examined. It is concluded that the self embodies the personal and the social simultaneously, and that to reduce the self to pure "social construction", or its reverse, an echoing, self-contained reflexivity, is to commit to a reductionist agenda that may ultimately limit inquiry.

Key words: dialogical self, positioning, conflict, social construction, gender

1. INTRODUCTION

The "dialogical self" is an evocative term because in one sweeping statement both the individual and the social dimensions of experience are represented. In the literature on the self, this is an important move because the area is plagued by dispute and division over the relative agency of the individual in relation to the forces of the social. Armed with a critical theory agenda opposing individualism, the social constructionists have mounted a concerted attack on the humanistic sovereignty of the self (Gergen, 1991; Sampson, 1993; Shotter, 1993). In response to this critique, I want to demonstrate that the dialogical self offers a means to observe individual agency and still recognise the fundamentally social origins of behaviour. I will return to this theme throughout the paper.

There are a variety of takes on the dialogical self but a common thread is the idea that the individual is never alone. Never alone in the ontological sense because selfhood is multi-voiced – there is really no privileged narrator with

a single coherent story to tell. Rather, we are "populated" by different voices with multiple origins that dialogue and sometimes compete for dominance. Hermans (2001b) uses the term "I-position" to express this idea about voice. We are also not alone in an epistemological sense because the voices of our lived worlds have social origins. They begin with our interactions with "others" – from individuals to ensembles to nation states. This is a departure from the enlightenment/romantic model of a hero on a lonely pathway. It also seeks to avoid a widespread tendency in studies of personality to de-contextualize individual experience (e.g., in trait research, and research on self-esteem).

Hermans (2001a), taking inspiration from Bakhtin (1984) and James (1890), defines the dialogical self as a dynamic multiplicity of several I-positions in a metaphoric "landscape" of potential positions. The question emerges as to how these I-positions are configured and constituted. The answer would seem to be that our self-talk comprises a bewildering potentiality for positions. There are those parts of ourselves that we can recognise and name, and that we like and don't like; there are the introjected and internalized voices of parents, partners, bosses, or religious leaders; and there are voices that come from social divisions and hierarchies, such as those related to gender, class, ethnicity or ideology (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). Note that the voices in this positioning talk potentially emerge from both "inside", in the reflexive world of self-talk, and "outside" in the social matrix that constitutes us.

How are we to understand the dynamics of positioning processes in a dialogical self? Positioning theory appears to have a natural fit with the dialogical self because I-positions are the emergent property theorised to constitute such a self. A look at current versions of positioning theory reveals that approaches differ in their emphasis on the agency of the person vs. the social matrix in the positioning process. Related to this there are different views as to whether positioning should be studied only within the dynamics of micro-social encounters, or whether positions can be viewed as more stable and enduring (e.g., Harre & Van Langenhove, 1992, Harre & Slocum, 2003, Hermans, 2001a; Raggatt, 2007; Wetherell, 2003; Taylor, Bougie & Couette, 2003). It is argued here that a dialogical self is constituted by both personal or reflexive and social forms of positioning. These issues will shortly be addressed at more length.

This study aims to analyse interactions between these two forms of positioning using (i) an established narrative-based method for assessing the dialogical self (Raggatt, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2006a, 2006b), in combination with (ii) a classification system for positioning developed in previous work by the author (Raggatt, 2007). The specific goals were to evaluate the positioning classification system to see how well it captured themes of conflict in the life narrative data, and to test for interactions between the personal/reflexive and social forms of positioning specified in the model. A subsidiary aim was to examine gender differences found in positioning.

It will be helpful first to briefly introduce readers to the method used to assess the dialogical self. It will assist to set the context for the discussion of positioning which follows.

If the dialogical self includes a multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions then one way to investigate this landscape would be to examine narrative identity, with a focus on competing storylines in the content of a person's life history material. This is the purpose of the "Personality Web Protocol" (PWP) (Raggatt, 2000a). The protocol facilitates self-exploration by asking participants to describe a series of 24 key attachments from their life histories. The attachments elicited include important life history events from childhood and adulthood, but also important people, places, objects and orientations to body image. Once the list of attachments is produced, the participant completes a sorting procedure in which the attachments are grouped into narrative and thematically-related clusters or components. A self-relevant descriptive label for each of these clusters is then elicited from the participant (e.g., "adventurous self", "creative self"). The logic of this approach is that the clusters of attachments are bound together by common narratives or story-lines about the self. It is these clusters that constitute I-positions in the PWP methodology. In the full version of the method, each participant is interviewed using the attachments as prompts, in order to explore I-positions in greater detail (see Raggatt, 2000a, 2002, 2006a, for sample case studies). For the present purposes the interview component of the PWP procedure was omitted while retaining the attachment generation and clustering procedures. This strategy has been used previously to study relations between narratives and trait measures (Raggatt, 2006b). For the present purposes, it will suffice for the reader to note here that the attachment sorting and labeling procedures just outlined, provided the focus for a content analysis of positioning across opposing attachment clusters. Hence, multiplicity in the thematic content of life history material will be examined in relation to the positioning of opposed components in that material.

2. POSITIONING THEORIES

There is no single theory of positioning, however, discourse analysts and social constructionists have had most to say the topic. In an approach to positioning which brings into focus the micro-social encounters of everyday life, Harre and his collaborators (Harre & Van Langenhoven, 1991, 1999; Harre & Moghaddam, 2003; Harre & Slocum, 2003) have defined a "position" as a place that a person occupies temporarily in a social encounter. Positioning involves the placement of individuals within the moral and social order of that encounter. That placement is engineered by social forces. Rights to speech, action and decision-making are either conferred or restricted depending on the subject positions "taken up" or imposed by individuals in the particular context. Thus one may be positioned in an exchange as dominant or submissive, dependent or independent, masculine or feminine and so on, according to the flux and flow of conversational dialogue and the context in which it is embedded. In terms of method, any encounter can be analysed using a triad of constituents – the positions taken up, the speech acts (discourse) of the participants, and the story-line which defines the action of the encounter.

Other researchers have emphasised the more enduring nature of some forms of positioning, such as that arising from gender and sexual orientation (Wilkinson &

Kitzinger, 2003). Still others point to "personal", "reflexive" or intrapersonal forms of positioning of the sort that might take place in a dialogical self (Hermans, 2001a, Moghaddam, 1999; Raggatt, 2007; Tan & Moghaddam, 1995; Taylor, Bougie & Couette, 2003). Tan & Moghaddam (1995) defined "reflexive" positioning as positioning in personal narratives that are told to oneself. Hence, reflexive positioning reveals how people construct and narrate their own lives in a moral framework, while social positioning reflects the force of cultural and institutional prescriptions that define and limit the boundaries of the self (e.g., gender, status, etc.).

In Herman's approach to positioning in the dialogical self, the internal and external worlds reciprocally interact, but positioning is understood to arise from the perspective of the individual him or herself (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992). Hermans conceptualizes the self as a multi-layered space defined by a variety of "internal positions" (e.g., I as adventurer, I as pessimist), and "external positions" (e.g., the imagined voice of my mother). These zones interact with each other and with the outside world. In Hermans (2001b) approach to method the participant produces a list of I-positions from a checklist of about 90 positions called the Personal Position Repertoire. While the method limits self-description by providing a long list of I-positions gathered from earlier studies, it produces a rich data set for clinical work (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004).

In previous work, as noted earlier, I have taken a narrative approach to assessment of positioning in the dialogical self. Positioning is inferred from conflicting stories about the self. This work demonstrates how certain dominant and opposing positions in the dialogical self often have their own internally coherent narrative accounts (see Raggatt, 2000a, 2002, 2006a, for case studies).

2.1. FORMS OF POSITIONING: A CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The concept of positioning is a flexible theoretical tool. It can be deployed at different levels of analysis (reflexive, social), in different settings, (individual, dyad, ensembled), and across strands of clinical, social and personality psychology. It would be useful, however, to try and bring these different strands together for both theoretical and empirical purposes. In a recent paper I proposed a classification system for "forms of positioning" specifically related to the dialogical self (Raggatt, 2007). In the system, the source of positioning is divided into the two primary domains discussed here – reflexive (or personal), and social (or indirect). Reflexive positioning, the term used henceforth here, arises from intra-individual dialogue. It involves agency and choice within the limits of each person's social embedding. Social positioning arises "outside", through the agency of other people, groups, institutions or the culture at large. Table 1 summarizes the elements of the classification system.

Table 1. Forms of Positioning in the Dialogical Self

(a) Expressive	
Narrative/Discursive	storied self, autobiography, narrative voice
Performative/Expressive	strategic presentation of self; role play; theatre
Embodied	non-verbal communication; body images and meanings, costume, fashion
(b) Reflexive	
Moral career	good self vs. bad self; hero vs. villain
Affect	happy self vs. sad self
Agency	control; independence; generativity & stagnation
Communion	love & loss; attachment & separation
(c) Social	
Occupation/Status	power hierarchies; work/status conflicts
Gender	patriarchy; masculinity – femininity; cross-gender conflicts
Class	upper vs. lower; class-based conflicts

Positioning is classified in the model by expressive modes, as well as by sources or origins. In the expressive domain, the narrative/discursive mode is fundamental to the telling of personal and public history, to conversation, and to storytelling and sense-making. It is the form of positioning found in autobiography, biography and literary fiction (Bruner & Kalmar, 1998; Freeman, 1993; Raggatt, 2006a). From the perspective of the dialogical self, we are all wrestling with alternative narrative versions of our lives (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Sarbin, 1986). But positioning is not just discursively rendered. It is also marked out by the medium of embodiment and by the performance of social actors (Goffman, 1959). We are positioned via embodiment in manifold ways. Inevitably, our physical endowments, our body shape, height, weight, skin colour, facial features, and so on, act as embodied cues for others to position us (e.g., as female). We also have the means to position ourselves through our grooming and our use of "costume". We can adorn, decorate and even disguise our physical selves, perhaps in the service of an alternative I-position. Components of body image can also signify character in subtle ways – a topic that I will take up in a later section. Judith Butler (1990) and Carol Gilligan (Gilligan, Brown & Rogers, 1990) have famously focused on the embodied and performed aspects of positioning in relation to gender. To be masculine or feminine means to present and perform oneself in sanctioned ways. Hence embodiment and performance become critical to processes of positioning when gender becomes a factor. Performance as a mode of expression incorporates the dramaturgical literature and the metaphor of life as stagecraft (Goffman, 1959). Included here are ideas about acting, scripting, role play, role-taking, strategic display and disguise, and impression management, framed within the context of everyday life. For Goffman, social life was all about strategic positioning through performance. That performance may be ephemeral, acted out for this person or that specific situation,

but it may also be manifested in quite specialized and stable forms of role-play performance (e.g., "father", "worker", "soldier", "terrorist").

Referring again to Table 1, reflexive positioning includes at least four important sources of dynamic conflict: esteem/moral career, affect, agency, and communion. These meta-concepts have emerged from a long history of reflection, observation and scholarship in the humanities and social sciences (Danzinger, 1997). "Esteem/moral career" involves positioning around the problem of living a good life, and of developing desired/good selves as opposed to undesired/bad ones. For many scholars in the Western tradition the construction of a self is fundamentally a moral project concerning what one values (Bruner & Kalmar, 1998; Danziger, 1997; Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1985; McIntyre, 1984; Taylor, 1989). In these terms then we can think of the dialogical self as being constituted by good and bad locations in opposing relationships.

While we are morally attuned to the good and the bad, our strivings are also directed towards at least three other fundamental motivational goal states: affective - to maximize pleasure and minimize pain; agentic - to act in the world as independent beings; and communion - to find intimacy, attachment and connection with the social world (Bakan, 1966; McAdams, 1993; Wiggins, 2003). These meta-concepts each provide additional problems and sources of conflict around which the dialogical self may be formed. The dynamic force behind agency is an existential need: By what consuming project or set of projects can a life take on meaning (Sartre, 1965)? How is power to be exercised? Communion, on the other hand, address the problem of how to find love and companionship in the world. Who can one care for and who can one trust? Agency and communion are sometimes treated as if they are opposites, but it is more correct to treat them as independent or orthogonal (Wiggins, 2003). They are widely used in the psychological literature, including in the psychoanalytic (Bakan, 1966; Freud, 1920/1955), personological (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; McAdams, 1985; McAdams et al., 1996; Murray, 1938) and social psychological traditions (Wiggins, 2003).

The third panel of Table 1 lists a selection of sources for social positioning. All kinds of (powerful) forces bear down on the subject from the "outside", to the extent that power, expressed for example in cultural institutions, has the capacity to shape the dialogical self (Foucault, 1979). In Table 1, I have included forms of social positioning that arise from the effects of power in three social hierarchies: occupational/status conflict, gender conflict, and class conflict. Their inclusion recognizes that social positioning is produced, often implicitly, by virtue of power differences in social dichotomies such as being male vs. female, or a boss vs. a subordinate.

This classification system acknowledges the necessity to understand positioning in terms of both individual and social coordinates. It admits of personal as well as social constructions, and allows us to understand personality and identity in terms of both change and continuity (Chandler, 2004; Chandler, Lalonde & Teucher, 2003; Valsiner, 1998). In the present study this system was used to develop a coding scheme for positioning that can be applied to the identity data

produced using the Personality Web Protocol. The initial analyses will focus on the utility and inclusiveness of the classification system, as well as on interactions between the reflexive and social forms of positioning coded from the dialogical self protocols. In order to code for positioning, pairs of opposing "I-positions" produced by participants in their protocols, will be selected out for analysis. The basic research question then revolves around the forms of reflexive and social positioning that occur and co-occur in these data. Note that the question invokes the theoretical dilemma posed at the outset of this paper. If the individual and the social are dialectically "in play", how do we capture this simultaneity? The approach taken here is to examine statistical interactions between the positioning codes across research participants.

2.2. GENDER AND POSITIONING

In addition to looking at the interaction of reflexive and social positioning, a subsidiary aim in this paper is to examine gender and positioning. Looking at sex differences is apposite here because gender was the initial context in which positioning theory was developed (Hollway, 1984). More directly, an analysis of sex differences will allow us to examine the interaction between reflexive and social forms of positioning in the context of an important individual difference variable. In terms of social positioning, one could expect to see differences between the sexes concerning the importance attached to gendered positioning, which should be more salient for women. Sex differences can readily be observed at the cultural level, e.g., in terms of a dominant patriarchy. At the individual level, there is evidence for some subtle differences in cognitive and motivational functioning. In the cognitive domain, women do better at verbal memory tasks while men have a small advantage in spatial skills (Luxen, 2007). Mirroring these differences, in the motivation literature, the research suggests that women are typically more attuned to communion and intimacy concerns (Bakian, 1966; Moskowitz, Jung Suh & Desaulniers, 1994; McAdams, 1989; 1993; McAdams et al., 1988; Stewart & Chester, 1982), while men are more overtly aggressive and power motivated (Winter, 1988).

Several predictions about sex differences in positioning follow from these observations. First, in terms of reflexive positioning, since women are more attuned to intimacy needs than men it is predicted that conflicts over intimacy and communion will be more evident in the dialogical selves of women. Second, for men, conflicts involving agency are predicted. Third, in terms of social positioning, it is predicted that cross-gender power conflicts will be more salient for women (who are more often the objects of oppression because of gender). Hence, gendered social positioning will be more salient in women's protocols.

To summarize, the empirical objectives of this study were (i) to evaluate the positioning classification system outlined earlier, (ii) to specifically examine interactions between the reflexive and social forms of positioning specified in the system, and (iii) to examine sex differences in positioning.

3. METHOD

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

The sample consisted of 109 "adult entry" students completing undergraduate courses at James Cook University. There were 33 males and 76 females. The sample ranged in age from 19 to 53 years (Mean = 30.1, S.D. = 9.1). The sample was predominantly white and middle class. Women in their late 20's to early 40's were strongly represented in the sample.

3.2. MATERIALS

3.2.1. MEASURE OF THE DIALOGICAL SELF: THE PERSONALITY WEB PROTOCOL

Participants completed a questionnaire version of the Personality Web Protocol in booklet form (PWP-Q) (Raggatt, 2000b). This strategy has been used successfully in previous research applications as noted earlier (Raggatt, 2006b). The original protocol was designed to accompany an interview for case study work. In the survey approach taken here, no interviews were conducted and participants completed an expanded series of guided writing tasks, as follows.

Eliciting Attachments on the PWP-Q

The PWP-Q begins by asking participants to list a series of life history attachments using four basic categories: important events, people, objects-in-the-world, and body orientations. Table 2 presents the taxonomy of attachments used to elicit the life history samples. The taxonomy was constructed with a view to capturing the informant's central life concerns in the social (people), physical/ environmental (objects), narrative/historical (events) and embodied (body image) domains. An affective dimension was also explored by eliciting attachments associated with both positive and negative emotional valency (see Table 2). In total, 24 key attachments are elicited, including 6 persons, 6 events, 8 objects and place attachments, and 4 aspects of body image (e.g., liked and disliked body parts). Along with a label and description for each attachment, participants were asked (a) to explain in a paragraph why the attachment was significant in the context of their self-understanding, and (b) to provide a list of the salient emotions that they associate with the attachment.

Table 2. Taxonomy of attachments comprising the "Personality Web Protocol"

	People		Objects-in-the-World		Life Events		Body Orientations
1	Liked Associate	1	Important Possession (i)	1	Childhood - Peak Experience	1	Liked Body Part
2	Liked Public Figure	2	Important Possession (ii)	2	Childhood - Nadir Experience	2	Disliked Body Part
3	Disliked Associate	3	Symbolic Object	3	Adolescence - Peak Experience	3	Strong Body Part

4	Disliked Public Figure	4	Place-in-the-World (i)	4	Adolescence - Nadir Experience	4	Weak Body Part
5	Other Important Associate (i)	5	Place-in-the-World (ii)	5	Adulthood - Peak Experience		
6	Other Important Associate (ii)	6	Clothing, Costume (i)	6	Adulthood - Nadir Experience		
		7	Clothing, Costume (ii)				
		8	Work of Art or Imagination				

To illustrate the data collection procedure, the following instructions were given on the PWP-Q to elicit positive (liked) figures (see Table 2):

> ”...I want you to identify two people who are positive figures in your life. Beyond merely being a role model, a positive figure is someone who has inspired you, occupied your thoughts, and guided your actions. The two figures must come from different dimensions of your experience: (1) A person you know, and (2): Either a public figure whom you have never met, or a fictional character from a story or other product of the imagination...”

The instructions for negative figures followed the same format. Negative figures were defined as "more than mere stereotypes of evil or human weakness", and as "people who have occupied your thoughts and influenced your actions, but with whom you associate strong negative thoughts and feelings". "Objects-in-the-world" were defined very broadly as "including your most private mementos, and your most important material possessions, as well as the important places and spaces in your life". Objects were divided into a further series of sub-categories (see Table 2). Events were broken up into "peak" and "nadir" experiences, respectively from childhood, adolescence and adulthood, following the method of McAdams (1993). For objects and events, participants were asked to "reflect on the associations and connections you draw from the object" (or event etc.). The instructions also asked for the temporal location of events and the time of acquisition of objects. Finally in the section under body image and orientation, participants were asked to "think about particular body parts that mean different things to you", and to "describe the meanings associated with four such parts" that were respectively "liked", "disliked", "strong" and "weak".

Sorting Attachments and Labeling Attachment Clusters
Following the attachment elicitation procedure, in the second part of the PWP-Q participants were asked to group their attachments into separate clusters or "self-relevant facets". Participants were instructed to form clusters based on "the degree of association you perceive between attachments in terms of your self-relevant thinking, feeling, acting and experiencing". The criteria for forming clusters were intentionally kept broad and non-specific so as to elicit the participant's

own constructions about the relations between attachments. A self-descriptive label for each cluster was then obtained from the participant (e.g., "dominant self"). Instructions to participants asked them to provide labels that "describe some aspect of who you are, of how you see yourself at the present time". As noted earlier, the rationale for this strategy was that by clustering and labeling the individual's most important attachments, a way is opened to examine I-positions in a dialogical self.

Participants were asked to try and limit the number of clusters they made to between two and six (in other words, to make large-broad, rather than small-specific clusters). In a final open-ended section at the end of the PWP-Q, participants were asked to make written commentaries on each of their attachment clusters under two headings: (1) the links between the attachments in each cluster; and (2) the overall meaningfulness of the cluster in the context of the person's life history.

A Sample PWP-Q Protocol

In order to illustrate the data provided by the PWP-Q procedure, Table 3 presents a summary of attachments and attachment clusters provided by one of the participants. The table includes a listing of the attachment clusters she created, as well as descriptions of the attachments and some of her commentary on them. In the analysis to be described shortly, these individual protocols were coded for positioning of opposed attachment clusters. In this example, it can be seen that the first two I-positions are opposing – the participant has called them respectively, "victim" and "independent self". Perusal of the table shows that these negative and positive I-positions are organised around a history of family abuse and cross-gender conflict, centring on an alcoholic father. The third I-position, "artistic self", had no clear opposite, and so it was not coded in the procedure described below.

Table 3. Sample PWP-Q data: Attachment clusters, descriptions and commentary from a female participant, aged 28

1. "Victim"	"I perceive myself as a victim. I was abused by my father throughout my childhood and teens."
Father	"He made my life a living hell. He was an alcoholic… Full of self-hate".
Ex Boyfriend	"He did not like anything about me. He tried to change me."
Mother assaulted	"My father was drunk and tried to cut my mother's throat. This event haunts me."
Seeing father in prison	"My dad was imprisoned as a result of my testimony. I was fearful of retribution."
Stomach	"Runs in my family. It is the first area of my body to put on weight."
Fingernails	"I can never get them to grow. They look awful." (unhappiness)

2. "Independent Self"	"I have become very independent. I do not like to be pigeon-holed."
Maternal grandfather	"A strong influence on my life, non-judgmental, fair… Opposite to my father"

Going to university	"I was proud of myself for having the courage to brave the unknown."
A favourite café	"I can be anything in this place. It is a magic source of escape."
Red & black dress	"It gives me courage, reminds me of the times in my life when I am fearless."
My hair	"My hair is long and nice. It gives me confidence."

3. "Artistic Self"	"These attachments display my thoughts and feelings."
Book of poems	"These are poems that I have written over the past 10 years to express my feelings."
Poem from my boyfriend	"This poem gives me hope and optimism."
Melbourne (city)	"Full of different people and cultures. A magical place with so much to see."
A favourite song	"Describes the bittersweet torment of relationships."

3.2.2. POSITIONING CODEBOOK: CODING THE PWP-Q PROTOCOLS FOR POSITIONING FORMS

In the PWP-Q participants list important attachments about the self using broad content criteria (people, events, objects, body images). Then they clustered these into associated groupings and gave each cluster a self-relevant label. We are calling these clusters and their associated label an I-position. Here, we are most interested in the opposing I-positions that emerge from this procedure.

We can address questions about the "forms of positioning" that define these opposing clusters by adapting a coding scheme from the positioning classification system described earlier (see Table 1). Table 4 summarizes the criteria used to code for forms of positioning, using presence/absence of the expressive, reflexive, and social forms of positioning described earlier. The codes for expression are relatively unambiguous, while the codes for reflexive and social positioning require more judgment based on assimilating and interpreting protocol content. Two independent coders were used. Both were blind to the study objectives, and both had postgraduate training in psychology. The coders were instructed to read all of the information on each protocol before completing the coding process. Hence, the exercise involved evaluating the attachment content of each I-position, and not just the self-relevant label for each cluster of attachments. The coders were instructed to make four judgments, in two phases. In the first phase, the presence of opposing I-positions in the protocols had to be coded. It emerged that for 95 (86.2%) of the sample there was at least one pair of opposing I-positions. The coefficient of inter-judge agreement for this task was high at .94. In the small number of cases where individual participants produced more than one pair of opposed positions, both were coded, but only the most elaborated pair, defined as the pair with the largest combined number of associated attachments, was used for this analysis. This simplified the procedure because only a small number of participants produced more than one pair of opposed clusters, and typically one of the pairs was not as well elaborated as the other in the protocols.

Table 4. Positioning codes used to analyze I-positions in the PWP-Q Data

(a) Expressive	
Narrative/Discursive	presence of narrative accounts linking opposed I-positions
Performative/Expressive	presence of role play (such as work roles) linking opposed I-positions
Embodied	presence of body image links among opposed I-positions

(b) Reflexive	
Esteem/Moral career	presence of good self/bad self positions
Agency	presence of strong self/weak self positions
Communion	presence of intimacy vs. separation-related positions
Affect	presence of happy self/sad self positions

(c) Social	
Occupation/Status	presence of power differential arising from work/status conflict
Gender	presence of power differential arising from cross-gender conflict
Social Class	presence of power differential arising from social class conflict

In the second phase of coding, the pairs of opposing I-positions were marked for the presence/absence of the reflexive, social and expressive forms of positioning discussed earlier. It is important to note that the codes within each group of positioning forms (e.g., agency and communion in the reflexive group) were not treated as mutually exclusive. Hence, pairs of opposed positions could be coded for both agency and communion, provided there was evidence in the protocols to support both interpretations and the judges agreed about this. In fact there was only limited overlap of coding within the reflexive forms of positioning (e.g., between esteem and communion) and none at all within the social forms. The overall co-efficient of inter-judge agreement for the second phase of the coding procedure was sound at 0.88. Disagreements were resolved or the code entry was not scored. The coding procedure created dichotomous presence/absence variables on the positioning codes which were amenable to chi-square (χ^2) and log-linear statistical analyses.

3.3. PROCEDURE

Participants completed data collection in small groups of between 4 and 8 persons using a large, well-lit teaching laboratory in which there was sufficient

space to spread out liberally and so allow privacy. Participants were told during recruiting that the study involved an examination of the relationship between "personality and constructions of the self" and that they would be required to write about their life stories. Testing took approximately two hours, was self-paced, and included ample time for rest and refreshment breaks.

4. RESULTS

The primary analytic objectives of the study were to evaluate the positioning classification system proposed earlier (Raggatt, 2007), and to test for interactions between the reflexive and social forms of positioning in the life history protocols. A subsidiary aim was to examine sex differences in positioning. The analyses reported here deal in turn with each of these objectives. Because the data were nominal codes, all statistical tests of association and interaction were carried out using the chi-square statistic (χ^2) and Hierarchical Log-linear Analysis (HLA). HLA was used to test for higher-order multivariate (three-way) interactions between the positioning forms.

4.1. FREQUENCIES AND ADEQUACY OF THE POSITIONING CODES

Table 5 shows frequencies for the positioning codes across the 109 participants. Table 6 shows examples of opposing pairs of I-positions that were coded for each positioning form. The frequencies in Table 5 allow us to examine how well the classification system for positioning is captured in the pairs of I-positions that were coded across the sample. Looking at the codes for reflexive and social positioning, most salient to this question, it can be seen that the reflexive codes for esteem/moral career and communion and the social code for cross-gender power conflict, are all well represented in the data (around 40% of the sample in each case). Bearing in mind that 14 participants reported no opposing I-positions, these codes accounted for roughly half of the I-position pairs obtained in the sample. The frequencies for the agency and affect forms of positioning were lower, at around 25% of the sample, but are nonetheless significant. Occupation/status (15%) and class conflicts (11%) were the least in evidence. Looking at the expressive codes, while life events and narratives were always present in the opposed I-position clusters, about half of the pairs contained references to body image, while the performance mode of expression was less frequently coded (20% of sample). Since the sample was split on presence vs. absence of the embodied and performance modes of expression, these two variables were analysed when looking at interactions between the positioning forms. The near ubiquity of narrative expression in the I-position pairs precluded such an analysis. Similarly, the low frequency for social class conflict in the positioning data set also precluded the use of this variable in subsequent data analyses.

4.2. OPPOSED I-POSITION PAIRS: EXAMPLES FROM THE DATA

The exemplars of I-position pairs shown in Table 6 give a picture of the range of oppositions that participants identified. The list is by no means exhaustive.

A number of opposed I-position pairs recurred in the protocols, most notably the oppositions "positive vs. negative" and "independent vs. victim". It was noteworthy that 10 women in the sample used the I-position "victim", while only one man did this. We will return to this finding when discussing gender differences.

Table 5. Sample pairs of opposed I-positions coded for positioning forms

Positioning Form	Opposed I-Positions
Esteem/Moral Career	positive – negative, esteemed – bad, success – failure, confident – weak
Agency	strong – weak, strong – oppressed, independent – dependent, competitive – dependent
Communion	loving – insecure, caring – insecure, compassionate – negative, nurturing – victim
Affect	happy – sad, happy – moody, happy – insecure, nostalgic – threatened
Occupational status conflict	powerful – victim, successful – vulnerable, angry – weak, aspiring – battler
Cross-gender power conflict	strong – oppressed, strong – victim, independent – victim, wife – humiliated

Table 6. Frequencies for positioning forms coded from opposed I-positions in the PWP-Q data

Codes	n	%
a. Expressive		
Narrative/Discursive	95	86.2
Embodied	46	42.2
Performative	22	20.2
b. Reflexive/Personal		
Esteem/Moral Career	41	37.6
Agency	26	23.9
Communion	49	45.0
Affect	27	24.8
c. Social		
Power differential – occupation/status conflicts	16	14.7
Power differential – cross-gender conflicts	42	38.5
Power differential – social class conflicts	12	11.0
N = 109		

4.3. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN POSITIONING CODES

If the reflexive and social forms of positioning interact, then we have evidence for the co-constitution of the dialogical self. Interactions between the positioning forms were explored using hierarchical log-linear analysis. Table 7 summarizes the higher-order interactions found between the positioning forms. There were two significant three-way interactions. The first was between esteem (reflexive), cross-gender power conflict (social), and embodied (expressive) positioning. The two-way interaction between esteem and cross-gender conflict was very strong in the model ($\chi^2 = 18.34$, p<.001). In this sample it would appear that conflicts about self esteem and power-related gender conflict converge in the dynamics of positioning the self. Embodied identity is also represented in this dynamic. The finding suggests that gendered conflicts may be important for well-being, particularly in women. Since two-thirds of the sample was female, the role of gender as a mediator in this effect will be addressed shortly.

Table 7. Hierarchical log-linear analysis: Significant interactions between the expressive, reflexive and social forms of positioning coded in the I-position data

Effects retained in the model	df	χ^2
1. Three-Way Effect		
Embodiment x Esteem/Moral Career x Cross-Gender Power Conflict	1	3.67*
Two-way Effects		
Embodiment x Esteem/Moral Career	1	6.63*
Embodiment x Cross-Gender Power Conflict	1	8.42**
Esteem x Cross-Gender Power Conflict	1	18.34***
2. Three-Way Effect		
Performance x Agency x Occupation/Status Conflict	1	4.73*
Two-way Effects		
Performance x Agency	1	7.08**
Performance x Occupation/Status Conflict	1	3.60*
Agency x Occupation/Status Conflict	1	4.09*
3. Other Two-Way Effect		
Communion x Cross-Gender Power Conflict	1	4.10*

N = 109
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

The second three-way interaction was between agency, occupation/status conflict and the performance expressive mode. The interaction suggests that reflexive concerns about agency and power are intertwined with social hierarchies relating to performance in the workplace or other competitive contexts. The configuration makes theoretical sense and provides additional empirical evidence for the interaction of reflexive and social positioning.

Table 8 shows frequencies by gender for the positioning codes, along with chi-square tests for sex differences. There were a number of significant differences. As predicted, in the reflexive positioning domain, women's I-position protocols were more often coded for communion-related conflicts, while men's protocols were coded for agency-related conflicts. Similarly, in the social positioning domain women were significantly more likely to describe cross-gender power conflicts in their protocols than the men – in fact at more than twice the rate (see Table 8). There were no differences between the sexes, however, on the embodiment or performance of opposing I-positions. About 42% of both sexes used body image referents in their opposed attachment clusters. An unanticipated finding was that women's protocols were coded for conflicts involving esteem/moral career nearly twice as often as were the men's (significant in a two-tailed test, $\chi^2 = 3.88$, p<.05). This finding suggests that the earlier identified link between reflexive concerns about self esteem and cross-gender conflict could be attributable to gender, or at least to the women in this study. To check this, a Log-Linear Analysis was conducted to check for a three-way interaction between, gender, esteem, and cross-gender conflict. The resulting χ^2 approached but did not reach significance ($\chi^2 = 2.17$, p>.05). The links between self-esteem and cross-gender conflict are no doubt complex and this analysis suggests they are not specific to the women participants in this study. Nonetheless, the data in Table 8 demonstrate strong gender effects on forms of positioning, consistent with the predictions and with findings from previous motivational studies (McAdams, 1993).

Table 8. Gender differences on the positioning codes

	Frequency (%)				
	Males	Females	df	Phi	χ^2
Gender x Positioning					
Embodiment	42.4	42.1	1	.01	0.01
Performance	27.3	17.1	1	.19	3.88*
Esteem/Moral Career	39.4	22.4	1	-.18	3.34*
Agency	24.2	48.7	1	.23	5.67**
Communion	21.2	26.3	1	.05	0.32
Occupation/Status Conflict	21.2	11.8	1	-.12	1.61
Cross-Gender Power Conflict	21.2	46.1	1	.24	5.99**
N = 109					
I) p<.05, ** p<.01; one-tailed significance tests for Agency, Communion and Cross-Gender					
II) Power Conflict. All others are two-tailed tests					

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. ON REFLEXIVE AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

We will return first to our initial inquiries about the co-constitution of a dialogical self. The paper began by referring to a recurring dilemma in the literature on the self. Morson (1986) pinpoints the dilemma in plain terms:

"Which is the fundamental unit, the individual or the group? Whichever you choose, you tend to resolve the other into it. One choice leads to an enormous underestimation of the role of individual action… the other, to an insufficient appreciation of the manifold social factors which… make us who we are." (p. 58)

How might theorists and researchers interested in the self approach this dilemma? In a recent and engaging review of the theoretical literature on the self, Elliott (2001) makes the following appeal, which resonates with the approach taken here. He writes:

"What we have to grasp is how social constructions of the self are also imaginings of the psyche. In breaking with the orthodox views which keep apart the social and the psyche, we have to grasp how social and cultural forms are given shape internally, which necessarily entails reflecting on how the self is constituted culturally as an expression of 'inner depth.'"(pp. 155-156)

Translating these ideas into empirical terms presents some significant challenges. One avenue involves the kind of approach taken here, in which positioning of a plural self is examined in relation to the sorting of life history material. In this approach, "reflexive" and "social" positioning were conceptualized as co-constitutive of the dialogical self. This was the proposition that was tested in the Log-Linear Analyses described earlier. The interactions reported between the reflexive, social, and expressive positioning codes support the basic premise of co-constitution. Two sets of three-way interactions across the positioning codes were obtained:
    * embodied expression x esteem/moral career x cross-gender power conflict
    * performance expression x agency x occupation/status conflict
    * communion x cross-gender power conflict
 The data suggests that particular configurations of I-positions have both specific personal/expressive components and social conditions and origins. In the case of personal agency the social forces are in the authoritarian and competitive worlds of work performance and the pursuit of status. In the case of moral career and communion concerns, for this predominantly female sample the data suggests gendered positioning is important for esteem and well-being.

The basic premise of interaction between reflexive and social positioning in the constitution of the dialogical self is supported by the analysis of life history material presented here. The take home message from this is a cautionary one.

The analyses suggest that the dialogical self is a product of complex interactions involving both individual dynamic and social coordinates. Valsiner (1998) has observed wryly that although the individual has both personal and social attributes that should be conceived together, it is common in psychological theories that one or the other is ontologically denied. Taking a similar view, Chandler (2004) has recently observed that the sharp divide often drawn between the "individual" and the "social", or between the "self" and "culture", is flawed. Selves and cultures are part of a common dialogue – the self embodies the personal and the social simultaneously, just as it also embodies change and permanence. This makes sense from the perspective of phenomenology, and none of this is antithetical to the dialogical approach. Ultimately, it may depend on the position of the observer as to whether one emphasises the personal over the social, or change over continuity. But to reduce the self to pure "social construction", or its reverse, a kind of echoing reflexivity, is to commit to a reductionist agenda that may ultimately limit inquiry.

5.2. ON GENDERED POSITIONING

There were some interesting patterns of gender difference found in the data, and these invite challenges for interpretation. Based on years of in-depth interviewing, Josselson (1994) has argued that women have more relational selves than do men, because they prioritize intimacy and connection when defining who they are. The gender differences found for positioning in this study seem consistent with Josselson's claims. The women in the sample were communion-oriented, identifying conflicts in relationships as a source of positioning more often than did the men, who described more agentic concerns. The findings fit with the existing literature which reports sex differences on the need for intimacy (McAdams, 1993; Stewart & Chester, 1982).

For this predominantly female sample the data suggests that gendered social positioning is important for esteem and well-being. Women reported conflicts over esteem (reporting a "good" self and a "bad" self) at twice the rate of men. Similarly, a much bigger proportion of women in the sample reported cross-gender trouble than did men. This is good evidence for the salience of gendered positioning in relationships for women. The overall pattern suggests a powerful social positioning effect based on the category of gender. The data highlights the importance of intimacy for women and the corresponding social (gendered) grounds for its expression or suppression. The fact that 10 of the women in the sample identified an I-position with the label "victim", while only one man did this, is telling in this regard. All of the "victim" I-positions, save one, were defined by cross-gender conflict with a spouse, ex-partner, or parent (see the example in Table 3). "Victim" in each of these examples invokes memories, experiences and images of powerlessness in relationships. Note here that it is the approach to assessment adopted - eliciting multiple I-positions coupled to a theory of positioning – that helps to illuminate not only gender differences, but also the dynamics of gender conflicts with links to issues of self-esteem and intimacy.

5.3. CLOSING REMARKS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF
POSITIONING AS A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

Positioning theory offers a new and potentially generative framework for life scientists to study the self situated in social and cultural context. It has this potential because of its dynamic properties – the concept of "position" allows us to make links between competing categories of understanding that have often been antagonists, e.g., debates about the relative integration vs. fragmentation of the self; about whether the self should be construed as autonomous agent or puppet of the social realm; and about the relative stability vs. changeability of subject positions within and across social encounters. Positioning theory can accommodate these binaries because positioning processes can be applied at different levels of analysis in the person x situation equation. The work presented here has set out to demonstrate one way to do research that takes into account the complexity of the self constitution. It is my view that the way forward in studies of the self is to seek to combine dynamic psychological and contextual social perspectives in our theoretical and empirical endeavours. The alliance of dialogical self theory with positioning theory outlined here is one avenue with a potential to advance this aim.

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