

IDEAS &amp; PERSPECTIVES

## THE TWO HIGH LEVELS OF SELF- IDENTIFICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS TO CONSCIOUSNESS, SOCIAL MOTIVES AND BRAIN LATERALITY

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The goal of this article is to discuss the difference between the two highest forms of self-identification – Self-Concept and Self-Image and the relationships between both of these forms, their relations to consciousness and to social motivations as well as to the functions of left and right frontal lobe. I suggest that Self-Image being out of consciousness contains nevertheless conscious attitudes and represents Super-consciousness. However, I will start with the lower level of self-identification that represents a predisposition to the development of higher forms.

Key words: *Consciousness; Self-concept; Self-image; Super-consciousness*

### 1. INTRODUCTION- SELF-FEELING IS COMMON FOR ANIMALS AND HUMANS

The self-perception of humans passes few stages in the process of maturation (for details see Rochat, 2003). On the first months after birth baby can only feel himself as a physiological being. This corporal self-feeling does not differ from the self-feeling of animals. The evidence of this self-feeling is a different reaction of the new-born child on the occasional touch of his/ her face by the own hand and by the hand of another person. It means that already after the birth child is able to distinguish himself from any other objects of the outside world. However it is performed on the very primitive instinctive level when other objects and people are still not recognized as particular. This self-feeling remains in humans during the life however became in the process of maturation supplemented by new and highly differentiated forms of self-awareness.

An important stage of this process is the child's self recognition in the mirror. Some investigators suggest it to be the first sign of self-identification. However self-identification of the man means something more essential than the self-recognition – it includes the identification of the own personality with the own spiritual and mental life and all relationships with the world.

The self-recognition in the mirror in childhood does not differ human child from some high animals. This self-recognition is still based on the vital self-feeling combined with the additional visual impressions. Child, like a monkey, feels his own movements including also

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movements of the head and face (proprioceptive feeling), see these movements directly and at the same time see their reflection in the mirror and connect what he feel and see.

On the next stage, being 18 months old, child is able to recognize on his own face or head a mark (spot) that does not cause physical feelings (Rochat, 2003; Suddendorf, 2011). It means that he had to understand that the part of the face where is this mark belongs to him and that he see it in the mirror. However, not only child but also apes and dolphins are able to recognize the mark on the own head (Suddendorf & Whiten, 2001).

The recognition of the mark on the own head reflects the ability to distinguish and to analyze some details of the holistic image – of the image of the own head. It may be common in children and in high animals but in children it is combined with verbal communication. Relatives approach to the child by using his name, and child starts to differentiate himself from other persons not only according to the physical self-feeling and visual impressions but also according to the verbal nominations in contacts with other persons.

## **2. TWO BRAIN HEMISPHERES – ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES**

Verbal communication stimulates the development of the logical and analytical left-hemispheric way of thinking. On the first stages of maturation dominates the right hemisphere that provides subject with the holistic view on the surrounding environment (Saugstad 1998; see also Rotenberg, 2007). It is essential for the clear and simple distinguishing between objects and events that deserve approach vs. avoidance. Due to strong connections between the right cortex and limbic system such differentiation is supported by emotional reactions. This holistic view on the outside world is combined with the above-mentioned holistic self-feeling.

However the right hemisphere does not provide subject with skills of the logical analysis of the relationships between objects and events as well as with a cognitive distinguishing of the self from the surrounding environment. Child has only an intuitive and direct self-feeling, he has no idea who he is, is totally dissolved in the environment. In this position he is unable to perform the analysis of himself and his own behavior in different conditions. Without such ability subject cannot produce a flexible adaptive and goal directed volitional behavior that requires the distinguishing from the environment and the ability to view himself from the outside. It is the obligate condition for the development of the human personality and for the estimation of subject's intentions.

Consciousness is a reflective awareness of subject's own knowledge of the objective reality and of the self as a cognizing subject.

The conscious Self-awareness and the expression of this self-realization in the explicit verbal form provides subject with the ability to analyze own behavior and to understand own behavioral intentions. It goes in parallel with the perception of the behavior of other people that are not merged with the subject (like baby feel himself being merged with his/ her mother) but are in interrelationships with him and these interrelationships can be analyzed.

Self discrimination from the world and the development of the reflective self-estimation determine the particularity of human's social relationships that are crucial for the collaboration in the process of changing and improving the conditions of life. In contrast to social relationships in animals, social relationships in humans are based not on the inborn (innate) social instincts but on social motives. Social instincts do not require volitional behavior and self-estimation. Even emotional relationships in animals and their empathic behavior (for instance, towards humans) display ingenuousness and are not based on self-estimation and evaluation of the own behavior. This ingenuousness characterizes also social relationships of baby. However in children in the process of bringing up and education (what means social relationships and especially emotional relationships with parents and other people who are close to them), step by step develop social motives that need self-awareness and self estimation as well as the ability to recognize the estimation of their behavior by the

important others, as if looking on themselves from the outside. The appearance of social motives is by itself a sign of the development of new mechanisms of self-perception. It is the outcome of the interiorization of the view on subject from the position of others. In contrast to innate social instincts, social motives have to be formed in the process of maturation. For this reason in some definite conditions of bringing up they may not be formed (like in asocial psychopaths) although some persons may be aware about them as about formal concepts (it is generally known that these forms of behavior are correct, and other are not) but without self-identification with these concepts (like in social psychopaths that are trying to make face as if they are following social motivations). A man without social motivations may be even more dangerous than a wild animal being not restricted in his behavior by social instincts.

The absence of social motives does not mean, of course, the absence of self-consciousness and self-discrimination. It often means only the deficiency of the bringing up process. Self-discrimination is an obligate but not sufficient predisposition to the development of social motives. A crucial condition is the formation of the normal emotional relationships based on the right hemisphere skills. There are signs of the deficiency of the right hemisphere functions in psychopaths (Hecht, 2011).

### **3. SELF-CONCEPT AS A SIGN OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

On the basis of the left-hemispheric verbal-analytical way of thinking arises a special form of self-realization – Self-Concept. It is a logically organized and not contradictive system of the subject's self-representation towards himself and towards others. It is formed by the extraction of the selected relationships of the subject with the world and with other people and is available for definite explication as a monosemantic context (Rotenberg, 1979; 1982). Such monosemantic self-representation of the person and ability to see himself from outside is important for the estimation of the own personality and consequently for the responsibility and regulation of own behavior. One of the main function of consciousness is to make it possible for cognitive agents to exert flexible adaptive control over behavior. Self-consciousness is an awareness of being aware. By mean of the Self-Concept subject is able to determine his position in the present while taking into consideration his past and forecasting future. "I was going this way, I come to these results, probably my further way will bring this outcome".

Consciousness is broader than the left-hemispheric logical thinking (see later) although this way of thinking is its important part and represents its natural roots.

However, the process of distinguishing oneself from the world which is obligate for the Self-Concept and self-estimation "from outside" has a very important negative aspect. It can be easily transferred into the separation from the world, including the human society, and even into the confrontation with the world. In this case it became a source of emotional tension – subject has to feel himself as a part of the world that surrounds him, has to be in harmony with this world in order to feel well.

Left hemispheric mentality as a basis of the Self-Concept is the perception and selection of the monosemantic relationships between objects, events and people (Rotenberg, 1979; 1982; 2004, 2007). These relationships can be structuralized, understood in the process of their logical consideration and explicated in speech. But the real world, including the human relationships, does not correspond to this simplified and artificially organized system. Monosemantic relationships are only a part of reality and the monosemantic model of the world is artificially restricted in order to become an object of analysis. Not only numerous nuances but also very essential relationships that are important for the deep understanding of the world and of the human's personality are not covered by this impoverished model. When only this model represents the world in subject's consciousness while the natural sensitivity to the numerous polydimensional interrelations is not lost and is grasped by the right hemispheric structures, it is a reason of conflicts between the conscious view and direct although not totally realized feelings. Using the notions proposed by Kuhl (2001) these

feelings are based on the low level intuitive system as a function of the right hemisphere. This relatively low level intuition is responsible for activity in different domains (like music and art) that require a high sensitivity to the direct experiences stimulated by the polydimensional world but do not require a secondary analytical estimation.

#### **4. SELF-IMAGE AS SUPERCONSCIOUSNESS**

Humans right hemisphere after the development of the left-hemispheric Self-Concept has not lost its initial ability to grasp the polydimensional reality as a holistic entity typical for children on the early stages of maturation. Quite opposite, after the function of the structuralizing of the world is directed to the left hemisphere the right hemisphere became free for its own main function to reflect the complicated world with all its contradictions. However how subject can adapt himself to this complicated world if he is on the one hand separated from it and created a simple monosemantic concept of the world, and on the other hand at the same time directly perceives all contradictions and intuitively feels a deficiency of his conceptual view?

This contradiction is solved by the maturation of the frontal lobe of the right hemisphere. That is the last structure of the brain that is matured – later than the frontal lobe of the left hemisphere that is responsible for logical analytical thinking (Saugstad, 1998). The function of the frontal lobe of the right hemisphere is to compensate the restriction of the monosemantic view on the world. It is achieved by the creation of the polysemantic picture of the world that integrates in a very specific way numerous natural relationships between objects and events including all contradictory, from the logical point of view relationships on the one hand and those that are present in the monosemantic concept, on the other hand. The algorithm of this integration is not known. According to Kuhl (2001) it is the high-level intuitive system.

This polysemantic context allows person on the new level to feel himself being integrated in the real world, to feel a harmonic relationship with the world. If the right frontal lobe is functionally sufficient it performs this function.. And self representation on this new level displays itself in Self-Image (Rotenberg, 1982).

Self-Image is a polysemantic image of the Self in numerous connections with the world. From the formal logical point of view these connections may be in conflict with each other, in strong contradictions, they do not correspond to the monosemantic model. However the polysemantic context avoids all these contradictions.

Self-Image in opposite to Self-Concept cannot be totally realized by the subject but not because it is in an essential conflict with the consciousness (according to psychoanalytical approach) but just because it is too complicated to be reduced to the monosemantic and verbalized system.

When subject is stimulated to do something and his reaction is “No, it is not for me”, “No, it is unacceptable” and is unable to explain exhaustively why, it means that this situation and behavior is unacceptable for his Self-Image.

At the same time Self-Image by itself, being out of consciousness includes the conscious attitudes that are relevant to the Self-Concept. Polysemantic context built by the right frontal lobe integrates them with many other attitudes and representations that from the formal point of view can be even in opposition to the Self-Concept. Self-Image includes all advantages of self-awareness without disadvantages like a separation from the world. Subject's Self-Image is in fluent dynamic interrelationships with self-images of other people and with the virtual world of culture what makes these interrelationships unique for human being. It is possible to suggest that Self-Image represents not unconsciousness but super-consciousness (This term was suggested by professor P.V.Simonov, 1986, in a very similar meaning). Self-Concept does not differ principally from any other left-hemispheric concepts. Self-Image is unique as any polysemantic image, but it is even more unique because it includes also the advantages of the Self-Concept.

Thus, social relationships have three levels:

1. Self-feeling combined with the feeling of being dissolved in the social environment without discriminating self as an object of attention and relationships of others. It happens in childhood on the early stages of maturation and is based on the functions of the right hemisphere but not right frontal lobe.
2. Self discrimination with building monosemantic relationships between self and others (Self-Concept, left frontal lobe).
3. The secondary integration in the social world (Self-Image, right frontal lobe)

Self-Image includes the representation of consciousness in our unconsciousness. Right hemisphere receives information from all sensoric systems, from both visual fields (Weintraub & Mesulam, 1987) earlier than the left hemisphere (Kostandov & Genkina, 1976). Due to this process consciousness receives only acceptable information if the right frontal lobe functions are sufficient. The representation of consciousness in Self-Image contributes to the psychological defense mechanisms. The integrative function of the right frontal lobe as the basis of the Self-Image is the highest mental function.

According to Devinsky (2000) and Schore (2003) the function of the right hemisphere is to maintain a coherent, continuous and united sense of self. Identity of a corporal image of the Self and its relation to the environment distinguishes self from non-self, relate self to environmental reality and to the social group. But on the high level of maturation of the right frontal lobe it is not only the identity of the corporal image, it is Self-Image that determines subject's integration in the world in all dimensions.

Self-Image of the matured subject is different from the Self-Image of the child. Child also have a feeling of himself as a holistic entity, but this entity is not polysemantic, there are no predispositions towards inner conflicts that have to be solved by the mean of integration and it is no separation from the world that needs compensation.

If the task of the Self-Image is a harmonic integration in the world, it has also to provide skills for the subject's peace with himself, for integration different attitudes and intentions. Self-Image has not to be in a conflict with the realized conscious attitudes. These attitudes, as it was stressed, are represented in Self-Image. They have to be in harmony with Self-Image but it is not always achieved due to the insufficiency of the integrative functions of the right hemisphere frontal lobe. In such conditions subject may create some concepts that do not correspond to the essence of his Self, to Self-Image. He can suggest himself, as a zombie, with these concepts and belief that these concepts are relevant and reflect his real view. It happened with Raskolnikov, a person of Dostoyevsky. He identified himself, being frustrated, with his artificial concept that the old woman really deserves to be killed and that he can do it. It was a typical left-hemispheric concept. However, after he killed this woman (being in the altered state of consciousness) he found himself to fall in a strong inner conflict. His Self-Concept was a rationalization of his anger and was not relevant to his real Self representation in form of Self-Image.

Social motives and attitudes that developed in the process of maturation of the Self-Concept are incorporated in the Self-Image however Self-Image is more rich than the Self-Concept, due to numerous relationships of the Self-Image with the world. Self-Concept is relatively restricted and may be artificial. That's why it would be a mistake to believe that Self-Image includes Self-Concept as it is. But it includes social motives that are formed during the maturation of the person and Self-Concept plays an important role in their formation.

Social motives are formed due to the self-discrimination from the world and related to this discrimination ability to evaluate own intentions and behavior as if from outside. This self-discrimination is also a condition for the creation of the Self-Concept. However Self-Concept as any monosemantic concept can become false due to the traumatic experiences or due to the activation of motives and intentions that are not appropriate. Subject can create a false view on himself like it happened in the process of the psychological defense called rationalization, this view do not correspond to the subject's real essence however it helps to represent his own unacceptable motivations in an acceptable form.

Self-Image in any case implicitly includes natural social motives. They may be in balance with the unacceptable motives and intentions due to the successful integration or such integration may be not achieved and in this case defense mechanisms are used (like neurotic defense mechanisms).

Consciousness as an explicit knowledge about subject himself and his own mental life has a task to create a non-contradictive view on the world and on the subject himself in order to control and manage the integrated behavior. Every intentions and impressions that can cause the disintegration of behavior and disturbs Self-Concept are either repressed from the consciousness or altered in a way not to be dangerous by mean of other defense mechanisms (Rotenberg & Michailov, 1993). Such alteration may not correspond to the Self-Image that is not realized (how it happened with Raskolnikov). Our super-consciousness that is incorporated in Self-Image is more rich than our Self-Concept that we tend to identify with our consciousness.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

At the first glance it looks out as a paradox: the representation of our consciousness in our Self-Image is not realized. However, it can be explained: our Self-Image integrates our conscious view of the world and of ourselves in a more broad and holistic picture of the rich and polydimensional world. This enlarged view on subject himself being incorporated in the world is not realized. Self-Image contains attitudes that are not reflected although they are an outcome of reflection. Self-Image filters information in order to protect consciousness from information that may cause the disintegration of consciousness and consequently of holistic behavior. Self-Image may contain formally contradictive motivations, attitudes and intentions, according to the complicated world we are dealing with, and it is also a reason why this polydimensional Self-Image is not realized. However the right frontal lobe in healthy subjects – the location of the Self-Image – being functionally sufficient is able to integrate these motivations in a polysemantic context. It is important to emphasize that being located in the Self-Image that is not completely realized these conflicting motivations do not cause the disintegration of behavior and confusion of consciousness even if they are not integrated but in this condition they may cause neurotic and psychosomatic disorders.

This approach may be addictive to the classical psychoanalytical concept. I suggest that the inner conflict is actually in the domain of the polydimensional Self-Image that includes the representation of conscious motivations as well as attitudes that may be in conflict with consciousness unless being not integrated in the polysemantic context.

The presence of the two essences of personality – Self-Concept and Self-Image – may also help to explain the phenomenon of the multiple personality disorder as well as so called hidden observer (internal self-helper) (for review see Bob, 2008). It seems very reasonable to prescribe the integrative function of the internal self helper to Self-Image.

The integrative function of the right frontal lobe that includes Self-Image is very important for our mental and somatic health (Rotenberg, 1982, 2004, 2007).

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