The Wired Self : An Evolution of Being

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Abstract: The advancement in different types of technology through the advent of Smartphone's, tablets, laptops and other digital devices of the sort have revolutionized the nature of society. This digital transformation seems to have brought about a radical shift in how an individual perceives himself with respect to the external world, having pervasive implications for his sense of self. The primary aim of this paper is to synthesize the evolution of the self over the years by borrowing key concepts from the psychodynamic, humanistic and existential approaches in psychology through the rather irresistible lens of technology and study their relevance in the 21ˢᵗ century. It is important to critically look into the varying approaches that have attempted to understand the self. The paper acknowledges the significant rise in the use of social media and consequently raises serious and urgent questions for mental health professionals confronting issues arising from constant networking and its inevitable impact on individuals which has no basis and parallel in history to cater to the pressing needs of the eleventh hour.

1. Introduction

The advancement in different types of technology through the advent of smart phone's, tablets, laptops and other digital devices of the sort have revolutionized the nature of society. This digital transformation seems to have brought about a radical shift in how an individual perceives himself with respect to the external world, having pervasive implications for his sense of self. This article attempts to map the journey of the self from the mid eighteenth century to the present day. This would shed light on the evolution of self from a technology-less environment to a world where different forms of technology govern and dominate an individual's daily life to an extent that was once unfathomable. The growing dependency of the individual on technology makes it extremely important to understand the effects that it has on the psyche of the individual, particularly the self.

Newer forms of online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc are being made available for social networking. This trend is creating opportunities for individuals to explore themselves, construct and reconstruct their identities as well as build social relations virtually. As anticipated, this trend is fast becoming the dominant and preferred form of interaction amongst individuals. As a result, these social networking behaviors and patterns are highlighting the likely factors that impact the conceptualization of self, with its basis in these online presentations and interactions.

The earliest formulation of the self in modern psychology derived from the distinction between the self as *I,* the subjective knower, and the self as *Me*, the object that is known. In other words, the self may be defined as the object that is being viewed or the subject, that is the one that is viewing. The "self" is the basis for our representation of our identities. The "self" as we know it, is influenced in its formation by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

When we talk about the intrinsic factors that influence the formation of the self, we are talking about the cognitive and affective components that impact our own conceptualization of the self, such as our thoughts, our beliefs, our own actions, our motivations and drives. The extrinsic factors that impact the formation of the self, on the other hand, are factors lying outside the locus of control of the individual, and encompass all the familial and social influences outside the individual that influence his conceptualization of self.

The *self* of an individual is the consolidated whole of many aspects such as *self-concept, self image, self esteem, self worth, and the ideal self.* Within the discipline of psychology, various theorists have explored this concept of the self, such as Heinz Kohut, an Austrian-American psychoanalyst, who is best known for his development of *self psychology.* Other psychologists, who have explored the concept of the self extensively include, Donald Winnicott who differentiated between the true self and the false self, Eric Berne credited for his development of Transactional Analysis in which he described the "Real self " as being largely fluid and being influenced by the personality's ego states (Parent,

child and adult), and Carl Jung who explored "the self" in his conceptualization of the archetypes.

Within the domain of Social Psychology, the study of the *self* has been taken up at various points by many psychologists, approaching it through varied lenses. For example, social psychologist Daryl Bem proposed the "Self-perception theory", which asserts that people develop their attitudes by observing their own behavior and concluding what attitudes must have caused it. Bem argued that people interpret their own behaviors rationally in the same way as they attempt to explain others' behaviors. In other words, the self becomes the object that is being viewed and the viewer is also the self. This interpretive analysis of one's attitude becomes the basis for identity formation and one's conceptualization of self.

Another name who deserved mention her would be George Herbert Mead, an American philosopher, psychologist and sociologist who was deeply interested in the study of the self, and has explored the concept within the objectivity of the world within the social realm. He proposed that the individual mind can exist only in relation to other minds with shared meanings. He explained this through his concept of *symbolic interactionism.* It is clear from Mead's study of the self that he believed that it is impossible to understand the self of an individual in isolation : the self has to be treated as an object of study within the social context as well. Hence a psycho-sociological approach to an understanding of the self becomes imperative.

Even though various approaches have theorized the self over the last few centuries, there is a dearth of literature that synthesizes and comprehensively views the entity that is the self, with respect to the traditional theories of psychology alongside the inescapable influence of technology and social networking. This serves as the rationale, setting the stage for the present discussion. The aim of this theoretical paper is to fill existing gaps in research about the relevance of the psychological basis of self in the digital age.

2. Theoretical Framework

The discussion attempts to create a platform for discourse so as to understanding how the conceptualization of self has evolved since the 18th century to the present day. The current paper borrows concepts from primarily three schools of thought. The psychodynamic, humanistic and existential paradigms in psychology seem most relevant for the present research. The paper tries to establish a relationship between the three schools of

thought and comprehensively reviews the concept of self and its dynamic nature in a technology savvy world.

The primary aim of this paper is to synthesize the evolution of the self over the years by borrowing key concepts from the psychodynamic, humanistic and existential approaches in psychology through the rather irresistible lens of technology and study their relevance in the 21st century. It is important to critically look into the varying approaches that have attempted to understand the self. Figure 1 below synthesizes the key concepts from relevant approaches of traditional psychology that have attempted to theorize *"the self"*.
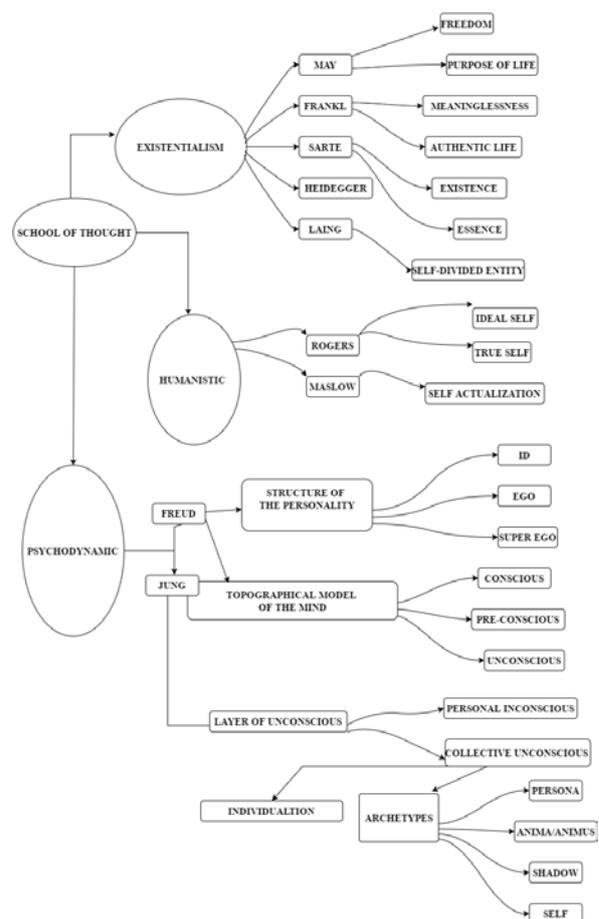

Figure 1: Psychological Basis of Self

2.1 The Psychodynamic Approach

The psychodynamic school of psychology which was founded by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the first approach to understanding human behavior and the mind. It laid emphasis on the internal processes of the individual and discovered the role of the "unconscious" as being utterly important to give context and meaning to an individual's behavior. Freud proposed a topographical model of the mind (1905) in which he presented the structure of the

mind in terms of *the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious*. Using the analogy of an iceberg, he described the "conscious" part of the mind as the tip of the iceberg, and included into this category all the mental processes of which an individual is aware. Next he described the preconscious, the part of the mind containing thoughts and feelings of which an individual may not be *currently* aware but can be easily brought into consciousness.

Finally, Freud describes the unconscious part of the mind which contains the mental processes which are inaccessible by consciousness. Freud proposed the structure of personality (1923) through his concepts of *id, ego, and superego*, where his ego was the balancing point between the internal world driven by the id and the external forces directed by the superego. This ego was considered by Freud as the most accurate version of the "socially accepted self". But an accurate representation of an individual's "self" could only be understood by delving into the unconscious. Freud proposed that a conflict between the id, ego and superego was the root cause of pathology and anxiety in an individual which manifested in the form of what he came to call *defense mechanisms (*1915).

The present research uses the concepts of structure of the mind, particularly the concept of unconscious, preconscious and conscious along with the structure of the personality (id, ego, superego) to understand the self in a wider framework. The modern day use of the word subconscious is synonymous with Freud's concept of the preconscious. In the iceberg analogy, this "preconscious" exists just below the level of consciousness. However, according to Freud, it is these very mental processes which serve as the primary source of human behavior. Expanding on the iceberg analogy, Freud claimed that like an iceberg, the most important part of the mind was the part that one cannot see.

While the focus of study in Freud's psychodynamic approach was the unconscious impulses that govern the self, it was Freud's disciple Carl Jung, known for his school of Analytical Psychology, who explored the unconscious and its contents for its impact and influence on the self. Jung further went on to expand on the unconscious and his publication *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido (Psychology of the Unconscious)* was the first time that Jung diverged from Freud's after a successful collaboration between both academicians, and introduced his concepts of *the ego, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious.*

Like Freud, Jung strongly believed in the crucial role the unconscious played in personality and behavior of an individual. While his conceptualization of the "personal unconscious" mirrored Freud's version of the unconscious, he went on to add another layer, "the collective unconscious" (1933). He proposed that both these layers of the unconscious impact and govern an individual's conceptualization of the self.

While the personal unconscious may contain "temporarily forgotten" information (Freud's preconscious), including repressed memories and "complexes" (1933) which largely influence an individual's personality, it is the collective unconscious that forms the layer of the unconscious which all individuals share with the rest of the human species. It involves latent memories from our ancestral and evolutionary past and these memories lead to innate predispositions and tendencies which influence the human mind which we are born with as a result of this evolutionary past.

These predispositions and tendencies are universal across cultures of the word, and an important concept he delved upon and introduced to provide an explanation for these tendencies was *"archetypes"*(1947) Jung explained archetypes to be thoughts and images which have universal meanings and interpretations across cultures of the world, and these tend to show up in our dreams, in literature, art or religion. Jung proposed that these archetypes which are inherent in each individual's collective unconscious become the basis for understanding the human mind and these archetypes are always at pay in directing and influencing an individual's present behavior.

While he identified and studied many archetypes, there are four archetypes that he laid special emphasis on: *the persona, the anima /animus, the shadow and* ***the self.*** Even though "the self" as conceptualized by Jung as an archetype was explained separately, each of the other three archetypes that he delved upon are commentaries on the self, describing each in terms of a comparative basis to the self, such as *the persona,* which Jung defines as the outward mask that individuals use to present themselves to the world, in a manner that often conceals their real self ; *the anima/ animus,* described as the mirror image of an individual's biological sex - the unconscious feminine tendencies of men and the masculine side of women*; the shadow,* which depicts the animal side of our personalities (similar to Freud's ID).

As is clearly visible from these explanations, Jung used these archetypal concepts to explain various facets of the self. He explained the archetype of *the self* in conjunction with his concept of *Individuation* which formed the basis of Jungian "analytical

psychology' and psychotherapy. Individuation is defined as the process of psychological integration, the process by which individuals are formed and differentiated from other fellow-human beings. For Jung, the ultimate goal for every individual was this "transformative" process of individuation which was facilitated by the achievement of a sense of "selfhood".

Jung believed individuation to be essential to the integration of the psyche, and this process basically involved bringing the personal and collective unconscious into consciousness through the means of dreams, active imagination, etc., hence uncovering the various aspects of *the self* understood through the archetypes that are presented and assimilating them into the whole personality. He believed these stages to follow a stepwise process, all eventually leading up to the uncovering of *the self.*

While the psychodynamic approach has been criticized for being utterly deterministic from time to time, it is interesting to consider this theory and use it as a methodical tool to understand the internal processes that could govern and impact the 21st century individual's representation of self through their attitudes and behaviors exhibited on social networking websites. It is crucial to highlight the contribution of the psychodynamic approach in the role that the subconscious and the unconscious play in impacting the behavior and attitude of an individual, which in turn could be used to understand the self through a feedback from these behaviors or could also be taken as behaviors which represent important aspects of the self, such as being a "defense mechanism"(as per Freud) or a "persona" (as per Jung).

When it comes to studying the self in the 21st century, it would be ignorant of us to not take into account the enormity of the role that social media and social networking play in influencing an individual's formation of his/her identity and the self. Borrowing from Freud's conceptualization of the subconscious, as well as Jung's concept of "persona", individuals are engaged in creating online self-presentations, which initially takes place with a need to conform to "group pressure". Stemming from an inherent and inescapable need to "fit in", a process that plays on our psyches possibly far more than we are consciously aware of, we find individuals spending most of their free time "online". This need to "fit in" is indicative of a deeper desire to be "liked (normative) by peers.

Using social media, people tend to create online presentations on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. which may or may not be in sharp contrast to their real life personalities and

beliefs. Often, these online presentations are internalized by individuals to such an extent that the person's "self" becomes immersed in the larger, collective group with an inability for the individual to differentiate between one's own thoughts versus those of the group. Internalization of these "virtual selves" involves public as well as private conformity, that is, the very process of identity formation and a formation of the self concept relies heavily on the feedback that their "online" or virtual" identities receive and the individual's automatic tendency to internalize this feedback into their real or "offline" identities. This in fact has been termed, by Man (1969), as a form of conformity called *Ingratiational Conformity,* a type of conformity where a person conforms to gain acceptance or favor from others. This becomes specifically pertinent to understand that on sites such as Facebook and Instagram which require viewers to "comment" or "like" the posts, become the very parameters which individuals subconsciously begin to use to evaluate themselves on the basis of "the number of likes" and the "number and type of comments" that their posts receive.

As is clear from an understanding of the psychodynamic approaches of Freud and Jung above, the self clearly played a much more central role in Jung's theorization as compared to Freud's. However, both clearly attributed a greater role to the internal forces as being determinants of the individual's conceptualization of the self. In the current modern day world which seems to be resistant to the pervasion of technology, specifically the invasion of *social networking and media*, it is interesting to view the modern man's conceptualization of self as being directed largely from external factors, implying the locus of control having shifted from internal factors to those outside of the individual. In other words, the external factors outside the individual seem to be playing the dominant role in the formation of identity and self.

2.2.The Humanistic Approach

The Humanistic approach to studying individuals and their behavior emphasizes the "whole person". Also sometimes called as the *phenomenological* school of psychology, it proposed that the best way to study human behavior is by focusing on the subjective experience of the individual. The center stage of the humanistic approach is the self. In other words, Carl Rogers (1959) argued for a shift in focus from the unconscious in understanding human behavior and mind to a focus on how the individual himself perceives and interprets events - Rogers was the first psychologist who redirected the study of psychology to the self.

Many consider humanism to have sprung up in rebellion against behavioristic and psychodynamic approaches which were primarily deterministic in nature. With a focus on studying the self, humanists proposed the concepts of *free will* and an individual's *sense of personal agency,* which is basically the choices that people make in their lives. These choices are intrinsically driven, towards, *actualization of the self*, a concept introduced by Abraham Maslow (1943), another pioneer in the field of humanism.

The approach driven by the work of stalwarts like Rogers and Maslow adopts an optimistic view of individuals with a belief that all humans are intrinsically good, and each person seeks to grow psychologically and continuously through enhancement of the self. The free will that Rogers talks about, which has been critiqued by psycho-social theorists for the inability to define or quantify, the degree of "freedom" that we may be able to attribute to free will, is an important point to consider in the contemporary world.

The need to be present on social networking websites with "online presentations" is driven from the socio-environmental interactions, the need to "fit in" to the majority. The free will is exercised in putting oneself on to these websites. However, all activities thereon tend to become directed by what posts and activities of the individual on these websites will be "approved" by their friends or peers. As a result, individuals can tend to become dominantly influenced by their need for appreciation by these very peers, causing them to present themselves in a manner which may be in sharp contrast to what their real self may be, leading, in turn to become a parameter for self evaluation for individuals.

For example, sites such as Facebook and Instagram, which allow photos to be posted and "liked" or "commented on " by friends, individuals begin to evaluate themselves on the basis of the number of likes their posts may have, or the number of friends they have on their lists, or the kind of comments they received. Many a times, "stalking behavior" becomes habitual whereby one is constantly engaging in viewing others' profiles, activities and posts. This can lead to a social comparison process that can in turn cause emotional distress. Based on these yardsticks, people tend to form ideas and beliefs about their "popularity" or how they are perceived by others, influencing their conceptualization of self.

With the amount of time that is spent on these websites, specially by the teenage and young adult population, increasing rapidly, it is interesting to see how individuals' interactions and activities on these sites have a direct and obvious impact on their self concept and self esteem. On the other hand, it is important to note that it also gives them lesser time to spend on self-reflection and to truly understand their own behaviors' and motives that guide their actions. While it is definitely true that social media must be credited for having created a unique space and platform for people to engage in interpersonal communications, voice their opinions on causes that matter as well an opportunity for self-expression, but it is also important to consider the psychological costs of the excessive time spent on these websites and the growing "collective" need of the masses to create "ideal online presentations".

In terms of identity development, according to a study conducted in 2006, by Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, the findings suggested that young users of social networking report increased self-esteem and general well-being following instances of positive feedback on social networking sites. Another study conducted by Gonzales and Hancock (2011) showed that several minutes of looking at one's own Facebook profile resulted in a significant self-esteem boost among participants. These social networking sites, by allowing users to selectively browse through and reflect on their "best" moments, can promote *self-affirmation, that is, awareness of one's own value.* Hence it would not be entirely incorrect to say that social networking sites can also have a positive impact, as by promoting self-expression, they could foster the preservation of self-worth.

2.3. The Existential Approach

Drawing from the humanistic approach, the existential approach arose with pioneers such as Rollo May (1958) and Victor Frankl (1938), who argued for the focus to be on philosophical concepts such as freedom, death, purpose of life and how these are dealt with by an individual. The existential approach argues for a full emphasis to be placed on the individual and the self, and how he or she answers the larger question of existence. Existentialists believed that each individual himself, and not the society at large, is responsible for seeking and finding meaning for his or her life, and in accordance to this meaning, living a more sincere and *authentic* life.

Jean Paul-Sartre (1946) was another pioneer of Existentialism, who stated that *existence precedes essence.* In other words, he proposed that individuals, through their own *consciousness,* create their own values and are able to determine a meaning to their life, a belief that received great support from theorists like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, who went

on to comment on these concepts of meaninglessness and the issue of existence.

Heidegger (1927) deserves a special mention for his contributions to existential philosophy, and in popularizing the idea of *Dasein,* which is a German word, literally translating to "being" or presence". Heidegger re-interpreted "Dasein" *as a way of being involved with the immediate world in which one lived, while always remaining aware of the contingent element of that involvement, of the priority of the world to self and of the evolving nature of the self itself.*

An important existentialist to mention, keeping in mind the current discussion of the *conceptualization of self in the world of social networking,* would be R.D. Laing (1960). He believed that the mind of the modern man is a divided entity, constantly divided between the *false self* and the *true self.* Laing specifically commented on the "modern man" and believed that modern social communication and interaction are very damaging, where he placed a special emphasis in this regard to family interactions. He felt that families tend to stifle an individual's true feelings, and to pursue meaningless goals. These goals are often formulated not by the individual but by the family (or parents) and this discourages authentic (real) behavior.

According to Laing, this is the source of the "meaninglessness" or "emptiness" that many report, resulting from a prolonged incongruence between their true selves and "false selves". This is the 'existential crisis' that many individuals experience, and can be most likely linked to Laing's concept of the divided self and the existential anxiety that is created as a result of it. The world is slowly being overtaken by technology, especially social networking and there is a growing need amongst individuals to present oneself on these online platforms in a particular way. The incongruence between these online presentations or "virtual selves" and the true self that is leading to an existential confusion, having serious implications for the psychological health of individuals globally.

Hence, it is clear that existentialists placed the dominant responsibility on the individual to make interpretations of his or her experiences and based on these interpretations, the individual was in turn able to use these interpretations to form a notion about the self. Considering this in the context of the current discussion, this problem gets greatly exaggerated when an individual specially hits adolescence, which is already a difficult phase but has become all the more overwhelming with the ever-expanding social-networking "mania" and the need for teenagers to "fit in" becomes aggravated. By the time we reach adulthood we are cut off from our true self. We might seem normal but we are really deeply impaired (Laing, 1967).

A major cause cum implication of the above discussion is the fact that the amount of time that individuals are spending on social media obviously reduces the time for them to spend with one another through a natural socialization process, almost urging us to re-define the very process of "Socialization" as it takes place today. The social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, to name a few are becoming the dominant platform for individuals to interact with one another socially, in turn making this interaction one of the most significant factors determining the conceptualization of the self.

This is the reason why this discussion needs to be taken seriously within the mental health fraternity because the very source of the formation of one's self concept predominantly seems to have shifted to completely newer domains in the extrinsic environment of the individual. Using the existential approach to understand the effects of social networking in the 21st century on the conceptualization of the self, it would be important to introduce the cross-disciplinary concept of *symbolic interactionism,* a concept that was introduced by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley. Mead basically argued that people's selves are social products, but that these selves are also creative and purposive.

In his book *Mind, Self and Society,* Mead (1934) has discussed attempted to establish the idea of the self, by distinguishing between "I" and the "me" , the active and socialized aspects of the self respectively. This "me" aspect as explained by Mead is similar to Cooley's (1902) proposition of the "looking-glass self", which states that a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others. In other words, the "looking-glass view" proposes that an individual views himself or herself through others' perceptions in society, and in turn gains identity. Hence the self is the result of the concept in which individuals learn to see themselves.

With online projections of the self in a socially determined manner, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the more the world of social networking is expanding, the greater is the importance that the society as a whole is placing on it in their lives, which ultimately trickles down to the individual. As a result, their sense of self is being derived primarily from a symbolic interactionism which is rooted in social networking. In other words, the self in the 21st century is a construction that is being driven from the

treatment that the "imagined" or "online self" receives on these social networking websites.

From the points and frameworks discussed above, it leads us into a further discussion, about the fact that the conceptualization of the self is a dynamic process, and the forces acting on it are changing from time to time, hence making it important for researchers to constantly update and re-evaluate the process of conceptualization of the self. In the 21st century, the most obvious and stark impact can be observed in terms of the advancement of technology and how this advancement seems to have influenced our daily lives. While technology is a much larger umbrella term, the current discussion is arguing the conceptualization of the self in light of the current social media and social networking hype.

While computers and laptops along with the onset of the Internet brought in a massive transformation in the way human beings interacted with one another, the impact seems to be minute when compared to the effects that social networking seem to have brought in. Social networking and the need to connect to others in a given manner on these social media websites has become so embedded in our psyches that it almost leads us to believe that the social networking "online presentations" of individuals are extensions of their "self", and the two are in a to-and-fro process of influencing each other. It becomes rather difficult to separate the two aspects of the individual, since networking with people on these virtual platforms as well as the manner in which this "networking' is carried out plays a major role in determining the conceptualization of the self in the individual.

These networking habits and patterns exhibited by an individual seem to have become not just an extension of the self but a very important tool in gaining better insight and understanding of the self. No matter which model of psychology is taken to study an individual, the pervasive effects of technology on our attitudes, behaviors' and cognitions and thoughts force researchers to include technology as a tool to gauge a better understanding of an individual.

It's crucial to understand the dynamic nature of self as a center point of social media. This comprehensive approach will aid our understanding of the changing nature of the self and what are the factors causing this change and why. It will also help us in the understanding of the very evolution of an individual's sense of "being"- the changing and evolving manifestations of the "unconscious defense mechanisms" that a 21st century individual is employing, the defense mechanism being the increasing number of hours spent on social media

and networking with others online rather than face to face; the evolving "ideal self" that an individual is constantly engaged in formulating based on the feedback received on their "online presentations" which is also giving them an opportunity to engage in exploring different aspects of themselves, and how this is leading to an ever expanding gap and incongruence with their real and actual self, eventually resulting in a self that may be a distorted version or representation of their real self.

This very distortion can be accused of becoming a serious cause of existential anxiety for many, leading up to a feeling of meaninglessness and the individual questioning his or her role and purpose in the world, his very "being-in-the-world" (Dasein). This has the potential of resulting in the individual experiencing a disturbing mental turbulence, having serious implications for his or her mental and psychological health. It would be safe to say that to understand an individual in the 21st century, it would be wise to take into account the individual's relationship with technology in his or her life. This would give us an ameliorated understanding of the individual's sense of self.

3. The Self in the 21st Century

There has been a significant increase in the amount of time that an average individual has been spending interacting with technology in some form or the other. With inadvertent proliferation of the internet around the globe and given the significant utilization of digital spaces to create personal and professional networks, there has been a growing concern among academics throughout the world deliberating the profound influence of social networking sites on younger generations. The realm of social media, especially networking sites, has become an interesting space to study the articulation of multiple identities, the changing trends in interpersonal interactions, self expression of desires and obtaining gratification, all accomplished through establishing and maintaining connections.

An interesting approach to the understanding of the self becomes necessary to mention keeping in mind the current discussion, which pertains to the conceptualization of the self in the 21st century, the century of social media and networking. Erving Goffman was a sociologist who wrote a seminal book, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday life,* which addresses the self in the face of human interaction and uses the imagery of theatre to do so. According to Goffman, when an individual comes into contact with other people, that individual attempts to, intentionally, control or guide the impression that others might make of him by

changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance and manner.

At the same time, the person the individual is interacting with is trying to form and obtain information about the individual. He believed that just like in theatre, where an actor puts on an act for the audiences when he is on stage, so does an individual tend to *put on an act* in his social interactions, as he is required to portray the positive aspects of the self where he attempts to highlight his desirability quotient. However, when the same actor is backstage, he is no longer in front of the audience and in this hidden and private space, he does not need the role or identity that he carries in society and can be himself more easily.

Goffman used *performance* as an adjective to describe the behavior of individuals when interacting with another, using *acting* as a metaphor. Considering the fact that social networking is fast becoming the dominant mode of interaction for individuals, Goffman's approach provides us with a perspective on the factors and processes that may be at play today. When we try to understand the *self-presentations* that individuals create for themselves on these online platforms, Goffman's metaphors of "acting" and performance become extremely relevant to understand how much of a role these online presentations play in conceptualizing the *self* of an individual.
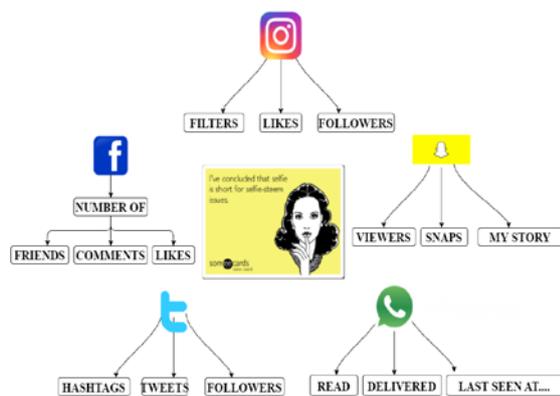

Figure 2: Self in the 21st Century

The current paper, however, uses the theoretical approaches of psychodynamic, humanistic and existential to approach the understanding of the self in the 21st century. Even though the psychodynamic, humanistic and existentialists have each had their separate approaches to understand, analyze and interpret the self, each of them have individually been criticized for one thing or another. In the present day scenario, where presence on social media and constant networking is pretty much an extension of the self, the role of building blocks of psychology such as the above mentioned schools of thought could be revisited for their relevance in the technology driven world.

What also becomes notably critical is how we relate these individual approaches, to holistically view the incessantly contested conceptualization of self. What if, we perceive the unconscious and preconscious of the individual as driving forces, influenced by the external world. This influence, which is known to exist outside the individual, as a result of interacting, networking and constantly connected would most likely, significantly impact the internal self. This influence could then consequently be further understood in terms of how it impacts the sense of self.

Self, in this context is being used as an entity, internal to an individual, contributing to the perception he or she has about oneself. This could be contingent upon a variety of factors which would obviously vary in their nature and extent, depending upon what an individual considers to be relevant, crucial and consequential for their own development. The central argument of this paper is, that the so called "locus of control" , external, that exists outside the individual will have an increasingly complex relationship with their presentation of self on social media platforms and in the manner in which people interact with one another.

The unconscious is constantly engaged in a dual two-way interaction with the external world of the individual. Put simply, the unconscious can be understood as driving the individual to present himself in a given way towards the external world, and the feedback that this presentation receives, in turn, impacts and influences the individual's version of the self. This socially determined self seems to be increasingly in conflict with the true self and the aspiration of the ideal self. It is this conflict that is largely determining the individual's sense of self.

Davis (2012) contends that even though social networking allows self expression, there are always potential dangers of confronting conflict both online and offline if an individual fails to balance and compartmentalize his or her multiple selves and this can have grave implications for perception of self and personality. Her idea of the online realm of social media being a testing ground for identity formation and understanding of self resonates with the aims of the present study (Davis 2012).

Interpersonal interactions of individuals have undergone a monumental transition, given the

astonishing celerity of computer mediated communication and social networking sites in particular. An interesting finding unequivocally denotes that more time spent on digital socializing significantly decreases one's offline interactions. This contributes to the understanding that the majority of socialization today undeniably occurs with omnipresent Smartphone's and computer screens (Pew Research Internet Project 2013).

The apace context of technology and socialization today has informed the present research. As of 2015, Facebook has 1.55 billion monthly active users, 894 million daily mobile active users, with 24 million in UK and a total number of 102 billion Facebook users in India (Digital Market Ramblings 2015). Substantial work has been carried out researching the expressions and manifestation of identities on social media.

Livingstone (2008) in her research accentuates a youth-centered social networks which is an inherent agency of managing, balancing identity and social relationships. Livingstone emphasizes that social networking sites are a flexible space that allows the youth to construct and experiment with themselves. These virtual spaces should be understood in terms of social positioning as compared to individual self-expression since presence and participation through online realms are associated more with place-markers than self-portrait (Livingstone 2008). The findings of her research can be further explored through the proposed study in terms of motivations to maintain online identities and if seeking validation influences on one's offline sense of self.

Much academic interest has been guided by the need to understand the intersection of internet use with an individual's personality. One such study by Tosun et al (2009) explored the differences of extrovert and introverts in relation to internet use. His findings revealed that increased introversion is associated with internet use as a substitute for social interactions, whereas increased extroversion was associated with perceiving digital space as an extension of social interaction instead of its substitute. Another interesting piece of literature found that personality type significantly contributes to individuals' perception of impression management and accordingly decisions about whether certain kinds of information should be presented or withheld from online spectators (Skues et al 2012).

The present theoretical paper has attempted to bridge the gap between varying comprehensions of the self by differing schools of thought in psychology through the lens of technology. Another aim of the theorization is has also been to apply an eclectic approach than the previously utilized disaggregated approach to understand the self and cater to an understanding which will be beneficial and relevant for present day practitioners

4. Conclusion & Implications

The aim of the paper was to synthesize the evolution of the self over the years by borrowing key concepts from the psychodynamic, humanistic and existential approaches in psychology, through the rather irresistible lens of technology, and study their relevance in the 21st century. The pervasive effects of social media and networking on both the individual as well as the society as a whole are undeniable. Social networking has become a tool for creative self-expression on the one hand, while also becoming the very basis for self-evaluation and judgment derived from feedback on this self-expression on the other hand. Social networking, thus, has become an intrinsic part of the daily life of every individual, across age groups. While it cannot be questioned that social networking has had a significant impact on social interaction, there remains doubt as to whether the nature of this impact is entirely positive.

Can we break through the rigid structures of the archaically grand and deterministic theories of psychology and flexibly utilize the fundamental blocks that could create a comprehensive, mended, and relevant approach and consequently contribute to our understanding of the self? The grandness of existing approaches in the field of psychology leave the reader so impressively enamored, that questioning, restructuring or utilizing them outside familiar and known boundaries would be adventurously dangerous to say the least.

As evident from the above discussion, the influence and impact of social networking and communication has drawn much academic interest in the recent past. Many of these researchers have contended that this form of communication is an impoverished version of conventional face-to-face social interactions, and therefore produce negative outcomes such as loneliness and depression for users who rely on social networking entirely. By engaging solely in online communication, interactions between communities, families, and other social groups are weakened, because of the ever-increasing time that an individual spends engaging on social media in the present day.

However, the impact, influence and the consequent implications of social networking on the constantly dynamic self largely remain ambiguous within academic discourses. This augments the problem for mental health professionals, specifically within the domain of psychotherapy, since there is no

consensual and normative view on how to help the client explore *the self* within the context of the social media representation of oneself, and the consequent impact that this representation has on the client's conceptualization of the self and the conflict thus created.

This area of research, hence, raises serious and urgent questions for healthcare professionals like counselors and clinical psychologists. Practice should be informed by research and while there seems to be a growing academic interest in the field, the practitioners will soon largely confront issues arising from the irresistible nature of technology, particularly social media and networking sites and its inevitable impact on individuals which have no basis and parallel in history of their clinical training to cater to the pressing needs of the eleventh hour.

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