

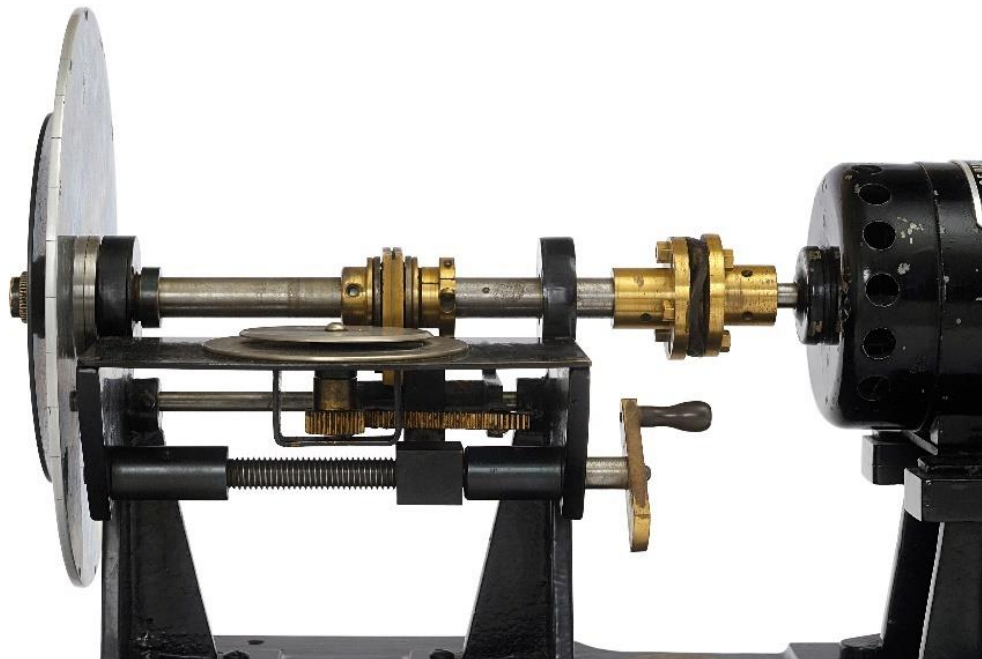
PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
XXVI SCIENTIFIC  
CONFERENCE

# EMPIRICAL STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

OCTOBER 15<sup>TH</sup> – 18<sup>TH</sup>, 2020

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

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INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY  
LABORATORY FOR EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY  
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

# EMPIRICAL STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

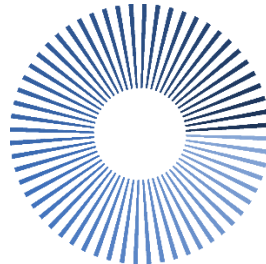
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Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade



Laboratory for Experimental Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

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Belgrade, 2020

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**Cover photo:**

**Color variator (detail), /C. F. Palmer, London/**

Mechanism for varying the relation between the sectors of Maxwell's discs in the course of their rotation.

Maxwell's discs Maxwell's discs with fixed relations of the sectors can be installed onto the inner disc of the apparatus while discs with sectors of different size are installed onto the outer of the two discs of the apparatus. The size of a sectors that can be read on a circular 3600-scale may be regulated in the course of the operation by means of a lever till colors in both discs are equalized. Rotation speed can be regulated with a rheostat.

*From the collection of the old scientific instruments curated by Laboratory for experimental psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade*

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# A proposal to consider a new model of the self and the methodology of its exploring and transforming

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## Abstract

The aim of this work is to present a new concept of the agonistic self as well as a new methodology for its exploring and transforming. Based on Foucault's analytics of power, but also constructivist metaphor of the community of self and the theory of polyphony we propose the self to be conceived as multiple and emerging from the dialogical encounter of the various positions of subjectivities unequalled in power. This theoretical model of the self explains the empirical findings suggesting that the sense of self is fragmented, contextualized, changeable and inconsistent. Further, inspired by the technique of the constructivist rologram, we developed a new approach to exploring and facilitating change in the agonistic self. The case study research on student's sense of self is conducted and the results were presented as the illustration of the methodology of the agonistic self.

**Keywords:** the multiple self, qualitative research, identity, power.

## The agonistic self

In this work I would like to consider a new concept of the agonistic self, the methodology for its exploring and transforming, and a case study as an illustration of the implementation of the proposed methodological approach. The model of the self and the proposed methodology are inspired by Foucault's (1978) analytics of power, Bakhtin's (1929/1984) polyphony, Mair's (1977) community of self and the dialogical self theory (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

The agonistic self might be conceived as a strategic situation of the encounter of multitude of the subjectivities struggling for prevalence. The self is a name for the temporary and dynamic relations of power between different positions of subjectivities which are voiced in individual consciousness. The main characteristic of its dynamics is that it rests on power relations. There is always a tension between domination and instances of resistance, which creates the possibility of a reversal and usurpation of power. The agonistic self is a complex multiple event, extended in time, social and personal, rather than an object. The subjectivities refer to the institutionalized power and its practices of subjectivization which create a field of numerous vacant places (Foucault, 1972). These are discursive positions of giving accounts, thought and action which may temporarily occupy individual bodies. That the self is temporary strategic situation means it refers to the momentary and changeable order of power on the 'stage' of the confronting perspectives, which provides some of them with the legitimacy to impose their arguments in the polyphonic sense of self. Finally, the positions of

subjectivities appear in the individual consciousness as voices that carry messages and enter into mutual dialogues.

## The agonistic self methodology

### The agonistic self interview

In order to explore the agonistic model of the self as well as to facilitate changes in its dynamics we developed a methodological approach consisting of the agonistic self interview and a set of interpretive categories for the analysis of the materials from the interviews. The agonistic self interview is inspired by the constructivist rologram (Stojnov & Pavlović, 2009; Stojnov & Procter, 2012). The procedure for its conducting involves the following steps: 1) the participants are encouraged to recognize in themselves different ways of thinking about or experiencing a researched phenomenon (for example, professional identity) and to perceive those various viewpoints as metaphoric voices, which could be in different mutual relationships; 2) this is followed by the elicitation of voices and their graphic presentation, whereby the participants name the voices and write down short narratives which reflected the ideologies of each one; 3) the participants are encouraged to "recognize" in some of their thoughts and messages the voices of significant others, such as those of their parents, colleagues and peers, and to complement their repertoire of subjectivities with them; 4) the participants describe the relationships between the elicited voices taking into consideration the dimensions of domination versus marginalization and cooperation versus conflict (the examples of the questions in this step: Which voice is particularly influential or the loudest?, Which voices oppose him/her most and how?, Can you describe the typical situation in which this voice regains or maintains his/her dominant position?, Which voices cooperate most? And which of them enter the conflict?).

### The procedure of analysis

Multiple-case and cross-case study designs (Yin, 1994/2014) are combined. For the data analysis within the case study a combined deductive-inductive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is used. We first started from the theoretical categories of domination, resistance, conflict and cooperation, to end with a series of inductive categories. Nevertheless, we have used interpretive concepts from the analytics of power (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Džinović, 2010; Foucault, 1978), discursive psychology (Davies & Harré, 1990), Bakhtin's (1929/1984) polyphony and the psychology of personal

constructs (Kelly, 1955) to name some inductive categories. The multi-iterated negotiations about the meanings of the categories were conducted as we implemented the standard of intersubjective agreement. The list of categories is given in the table of categorization below:

Table 1: Thematic analysis framework

Content	Labels and descriptions of the voices
Form	Functions of the voices
	Forms of exercising power
	Tactics
	Types of the relations
Form	Constellations

- Ideologue
- Facilitator
- Illegitimate facilitator
- Executor
- Process modifier
- Subsequent evaluator
- Domination
- Prevailment
- Resistance
- Legitimation
- Delegitimation
- Role relationship
- Referring to core argumentation
- Genre change
- Dissociation
- Conflict
- Productive tension
- Team work
- Cooperation
- Acceptance with critique
- Ventriloquism
- Team
- Intervention team
- Collaborators
- Productive tension
- Subsequent elaboration
- Clash of ideologies
- From cooperation or productive tension into conflict

The following case study of the third grade secondary school female student demonstrates the agonistic self as an explanatory model and the application of the new methodology. An extended report about the case study see in the analysis of the multiple self and dominance (Džinović, 2020). Her repertoire of voices consists of The Real Me, The Lazy Me, and The Angry Me as internal voices as well as The Voice of the Peers, The Parents' Voice, The Grandparents' Voice, and The Neighbors' Voice as external ones.

The most common constellation of the voices is a team which consists of The Parents' Voice and The Grandparents' Voice as dominant ideologues and The Real Me as the executor of their ideological positions. The Real Me is identifying with the narrative about the importance of education for success in life which belongs to the dominant ideologues. They provide the legitimation for The Real Me: *...who tell me that I shouldn't give up and that wakes me up and I start and keep going to the end.* On the basis of that legitimation The Real Me undertakes a series of maneuvers and tactics towards other voices in order to realize the dominant ideology of the worthiness of education.

One of the key ways to execute the dominant ideology is to struggle with the two antagonists personified in The Voice of the Peers and The Angry Me. The Real Me recognizes a threat to its position in The Voice of the Peers' message: *We don't have to study.* The Real Me struggles to maintain the prevailment over it by the following argument: *... I should finish school, and afterwards I should go further. You're really good friends to me, but you don't have much influence on me not to study... because that pays off in the end.*

The other key opponent is The Angry Me and when it prevails over The Real Me: *...she gives up and then she doesn't study, sometimes I really can't study for ten days.* However, in most cases The Real Me succeeds in the prevailing over The Angry Me by the tactics of delegitimizing it as unacceptable and of referring to core argumentation: *...because I want to have excellent grades... with some desire and persistence I defeat that Angry Me.* The Angry Me is also striving to resist the narrative of The Parents' Voice about the importance of studying: *I don't like to study, I don't want to study after all, I don't want to finish [this school].* In such a strategic situation The Real Me again establishes prevailment over The Angry Me with the arguments: *I know that I can't, they are my parents and then, of course, I have to do what they say, I have to study and thus defends the dominant position of The Parents' Voice as well.*

**The case study: "I like to study. That is, probably, strange now for you"**

## Conclusions

The presented case study shows how the sense of self might be conceived as the ongoing and temporary outcome of the clash between positions of subjectivities. The model of strategic situation including the tensions between the positions of dominance and resistance may be useful in explanation of how people construe their identities out of the everyday polyphony of social world. Also, the new developed methodology may help in further understanding of stability/change, coherence/incoherence and self-regulation in the dynamics of personality.

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