Athanasia Chalari

The SOCIOLOGY of the INDIVIDUAL

Relating Self and Society

The SOCIOLOGY of the INDIVIDUAL

To my Son, Husband and Father
who showed me new ways to consider
Life, Love and Loss

Athanasia Chalari

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Contents

About the Author xi
Introduction xii
Acknowledgements xviii

1 INTERACTION 1

Why is interaction important? 1
Example 2
What do we mean by interaction? 2
Sociological perspectives on interaction 2
What do we mean by intra-action? 3
Interaction and intra-action 4
Simmel's exploration of interaction 5
Defining interaction 5
Interaction and sociation (socialization) 5
Form and content of interaction 6
Domination and conflict in social interaction 7
Domination 7
Conflict 8
Additional approaches to interaction 8
Critical theory 9
Exchange theory 9
Structural functionalism 10
Feminist theory 10
Micro-sociology 11
Social networking 11
Geometry of interaction 12
Dyad 12
Triad 13
Group size 13
Interaction within and between groups 14
Sociological perspectives 14
Social psychological perspectives 15
Sociology and psychology 16

Summary 17
Concepts in Context 17
Self-reflective Questions 18
Possible ways of exploring the questions offered in this chapter and Further Readings 18

2 SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM 20

Why is symbolic interactionism important? 20
Example 21
What do we mean by symbolic interactionism? 21
Origins 21
Definition 22
Social interaction, thought socialization, meaning and symbols 23
Thinking 23
Socialization 24
Meaning 24
Symbols 25
Intra-action? 25
Psychological perspectives 26
Key sociological and psychological concepts in symbolic interactionism 28
The self 28
Mead's 'i', 'me' and the 'generalized other' 29
Goffman's concept of self: dramaturgy, performance and roles 30
Sociology of emotions 32
Methods and methodology of symbolic interactionism 33
Ethnomethodology 34
Summary 34
Concepts in Context 35
Self-reflective Questions 36
Possible ways of exploring the questions offered in this chapter and Further Readings 36

3 SOCIALIZATION 38

Why is socialization important? 38
Example 38
What do we mean by socialization? 39
Sociological perspectives on socialization 39
Socialization and internalization 41
Psychological perspectives on socialization 43
Connections between sociology and psychology 44

Socialization and intra-action 44
The context of socialization 45
Origins of socialization: childhood socialization 45
Models of childhood socialization 46
Effective childhood socialization 47
How does socialization take place? 48
The foundations of socialization 49
Parenting and family 50
School 51
Peers 52
Gender 53
Mass media and the new technologies 53
Socialization through the life course 54
Summary 55
Concepts in Context 55
Self-reflective Questions 56
Possible ways of exploring the questions offered in this chapter and Further Readings 56

4 IDENTITY 59

Why is identity important? 59
Example 60
What do we mean by identity? 60
Personal identity 62
Psychological perspectives 63
Social/relational identity 64
Psychological perspectives 65
Collective identity 66
Which level of identity analysis? 66
Identity and intra-action 67
Identity theories 67
Role identity theory 68
Identity theory 68
Affect control theory 69
Queer theory 70
Categorized identities 70
Stigmatized identity 70
Gender identity 71
Sexual identity 72
Race and ethnic identity 73
Summary 74

Concepts in Context 74
Self-reflective Questions 75
Possible ways of exploring the questions offered in this chapter and Further Readings 75

5 THE SELF 78
(Sociological and Psychological Definitions)

Why is the self important? 78
Example 79
Sociological approaches to the self 79
Classic social theory and the self 80
Georg Simmel 80
Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber 82
American Pragmatism and the self 83
William James (1842–1910) 84
Georg Herbert Mead (1863–1931) 85
John Dewey (1859–1952) 86
Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1919) 87
Symbolic interactionism, Erving Goffman and the self 87
Recent approaches to the self 89
Reflexive self 90
Psychological approaches to the self 91
Defining the self 91
The self-concept 93
Self-awareness and self-consciousness 96
Selfhood 98
Synthesized approaches to the self 99
Identity and self 99
Social cognition and the self 101
Self and intra-action 102
Summary 102
Concepts in Context 103
Self-reflective Questions 103
Possible ways of exploring the questions offered in this chapter and Further Readings 104

6 THE UNCONSCIOUS AND CONSCIOUS SELF 106
(Psychoanalytic and Psychotherapeutic Approaches)

Why is unconscious and conscious self important? 106
Example 107

Why psychoanalysis? 107
Defining the self through Freud's psychoanalysis 108
Neo-Freudian approaches to the self 110
The Frankfurt School approaches to the self 111
Post-Freudian approaches to the self 112
Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches to the self 113
Limitations 114
Why person-centred approach? 114
Defining the self through Rogers' theory 115
Self-related therapeutic techniques 116
Psychoanalytic psychotherapy 117
Person-centred psychotherapy 119
Comparison 120
Limitations: therapeutic discourse 120
Therapeutic techniques and intra-action 122
Summary 122
Concepts in Context 123
Self-reflective Questions 124
Possible ways of exploring the questions offered in this chapter and Further Readings 124

7 INTRA-ACTION 126

Why is intra-action important? 126
Example 127
What do we mean by intra-action? 127
Interaction and intra-action: a dualism 128
Interaction and intra-action: a duality 129
Origins of Intra-action 130
Georg Simmel 130
American Pragmatism 131
Vygotsky and Piaget 132
Current theories and applications 133
Dualism: intra-action in dialogical terms 134
Duality: intra-action through inner speech 135
Duality: intra-action as internal conversation and interaction as external conversation 140
Reflexivity: applied intra-action 143
Reflexivity as dualism 143
Reflexivity as duality 145
Applied intra-action through mediation 147

Summary 149
Concepts in Context 150
Self-reflective Questions 151
Possible ways of exploring the questions offered in this chapter and Further Readings 151

Conclusion 153
Bibliography 156
Index 181

About the Author

Dr Athanasia Chalari is a Principal Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Northampton and Research Associate at the Hellenic Observatory, LSE. She has worked as a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Manchester, as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Hellenic Observatory at LSE and as Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Worcester University. She has also conducted research at Harvard University as Visiting Fellow in Sociology and more recently at Toronto University, Canada as Visiting Professor. In Sociology her research focuses upon current and classic Social Theory and Modern Greek Society.

Introduction

Why the 'Sociology of the Individual'?

The title of this book might seem rather 'provocative', or maybe too ambitious, or perhaps even naïve. Why should and how could sociology be concerned with the individual? And perhaps more importantly, why should such an area of investigation merit a distinct place within sociology? If we could agree that sociology refers to the scientific study of human life, social groups, whole societies and the human world, then why should there be a separate concern about the sociological investigation of the individual? Shouldn't this be a psychological rather than sociological area of investigation?

Such questions are certainly legitimate and there is indeed valid ground for them to be raised. Inevitably the sociological exploration of the individual refers to the ongoing social-theoretical exploration of the relationship between the individual and society (or the relationship between structure and agency). It therefore seems that there is a fundamental need in current sociology to offer a distinct and well defined sociological 'space' to allow the novel exploration of what this book terms 'individual' or others may call 'self' or 'selfhood' or 'ego' or 'agency' or 'identity' or 'human being' or 'person' or 'subjectivity'.

Such exploration is by no means a new innovation. To the contrary, this book reveals in detail, how systematically, sociology (as well as psychology) has been concerned with the exploration, analysis and explanation of such terms and the ways they may be related to society. It seems though, that as far as sociology is concerned, there is some kind of restriction regarding 'how much' sociology should be involved in terms of the exploration of the individual as such. And perhaps this might be the fundamental criticism that this book may receive. Sociology is not about one 'individual'; rather it is about at least two related individuals. Therefore the minimum level of sociological analysis is a 'dyad' (in Simmel's terms). In fact, I couldn't agree more. Sociology is about at least two individuals relating to one another, or else, exchanging some short of action between them (interaction).

As accurate as this approach might be, this book is about to explain that sociological investigation is *also* about the ways (any) individual is relating to oneself. And for such relation to occur, the individual, or any form of human existence, should be in relation to someone else, as well as oneself. This book is written in an attempt to further support existing literature (primarily related to the exploration of the relationship between structure and agency) that promotes the urgency of continued

sociological exploration of the ways the individual exchanges action with oneself, or in other words, the sociological significance of intra-action.

Why Individual?

This book aims in exploring through a variety of relevant concepts views and ideas, what could be sociologically defined as 'individual'. The first question one would inevitably ask is why 'individual' and not 'self' or 'selfhood' or 'ego' or 'agency' or 'identity' or 'human being' or 'person' or 'subjectivity'?

The reason why this book was not titled 'The Sociology of the Self' or 'Self and Society', following similar attempts by distinguished colleagues (May, 2013; Elliott, 2009; Burkitt, 2008; Adams, 2007; Harre and Moghaddam, 2003; Hewitt, 1997), is because this book is not interested in exploring a rather abstract connection between society and the notion of 'self'. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss and explain why the idea of self cannot be a concept that enables the exploration of the relationship between the individual and society (or structure and agency). Self is supported to be an over-researched area of exploration by both sociology and psychology, but it still remains a vague and unclear concept which could be, and has been, used in a rather free and certainly not consistent way.

Similarly, associated terms, such as 'selfhood', 'subjectivity' and 'person' entail the exact same uncertainty. In the same vein, and as discussed in Chapter 4, the idea of 'identity' (often confused with the notion of self) involves a similarly rich and fruitful plurality of sociological and psychological approaches and views, that it becomes impossible to be restricted in a specific and concrete definition. The concept of 'ego' is certainly related to psychoanalytic explanations (discussed in Chapter 6) which would inevitably restrict the purpose of this book.

Equally, analogous limitations are related to the usage of the concepts 'human being' and 'agency'. The former was not used because, the systematic usage of the term 'human being' requires a sophisticated engagement with philosophical principles and theorizations which could alter the content of this book to a rather philosophical enterprise. The latter, 'agency', is certainly a pertinent and appropriate concept, and indeed several established scholars have used it systematically (Kogler, 2012; Elder-Vass, 2010; Archer, 2003; Bratman, 2007; Fleetwood, 2008; Wang, 2008; Hitlin and Elder, 2007; Apter and Garnsey, 1994). Agency is a term usually used in relation to structure as the core sociological question regarding the relationship between these two spheres of analysis remains a vivid sociological area of exploration. The reason why the concept of agency is not used in the title of this book is because this concept is primarily involved in this particular debate and although this book is profoundly engaged with this problematization, the term 'agency' might denote certain levels of theoretical argumentation that could prove to be beyond the purpose of this book.

However, the usage of the term 'individual' implies the involvement of a rather modest, ordinary and at the same time equally valid and intellectually relevant term which has not been extensively analysed or even used by sociological or psychological literature. In this sense, it might be appropriate to use this term as it allows some scope of novel sociological conceptualization.

The notion of the individual is then used as an umbrella term as it allows the parallel usage of two central conceptualizations that allow the examination of the relationship between structure and agency on a rather 'simplified' basis which could be viewed as the connection between interaction and intra-action. The 'Sociology of the Individual' can then be perceived as an attempt to open up to a wider public the opportunity to engage with a fundamental and continuous sociological discussion about the ways the individual is connected to society.

And the way this is done is by explaining how and why prominent sociological (as well as psychological) conceptualizations (interaction, symbolic interaction, socialization, identity, self, unconscious and conscious self) used repeatedly in literature could be viewed through (or in relation to) an additional perception which synthesizes characteristics of innovative social-theoretical and psychological theorizations: that of intra-action. Thus, this book reviews a certain range of sociological and psychological concepts, views, ideas and perceptions which have contributed towards the suggestion of this book, namely to explain the distinction (along with the connection) between interaction and what this book terms intra-action.

Sociological and Psychological Approaches

Although the title of this book clearly indicates its sociological content and purpose, a plurality of psychological approaches, theorizations and explanations have been incorporated. The reason is that the exploration of the idea of the individual (or any of the associated concepts mentioned above), cannot be examined in a holistic manner by excluding either of those disciplines (although admittedly, in this attempt even more disciplines could be added). Furthermore, the additional reason why both disciplines were involved relates to the anticipation that each of them can contribute distinct explanations and evaluations which should be brought together while trying to approach a more inclusive understanding of intra-action as well as interaction (and all supplementary terms and ideas discussed in the following chapters).

Various publications, particularly relating to the exploration of self or identity, follow explicit sociological or psychological approaches as there seems to be a hesitant tendency regarding synergies between the two disciplines. However, this book aims at bridging possible conflicting perspectives by the focusing of synthesizing rather than contradictory tendencies. There are various sections in certain chapters, where sociological and psychological perspectives are so closely interrelated that it

may become impossible to provide a clear distinction between them. This book is structured in a way to promote the prospect of fruitful interdisciplinary synergies that sociology and psychology could offer regarding the exploration of the individual.

What is the Purpose of this Book?

These are the main objectives of this book:

- This book aims at offering thorough, critical and simplified overviews of key sociological and psychological concepts related to the sociological exploration of the individual.
- To be able to explain the limitations related to each conceptualization regarding its ability to provide a concrete definition of what the individual is.
- To try to combine in a balanced way, sociological and psychological explanations of the approaches that will be employed, in a complementary rather than contradictory way.
- To offer a rather simplified opportunity to a wider public to get engaged with fairly complex sociological and psychological intellectual discussions regarding the ways the individual is connected to society.
- To inspire, through everyday examples, a more comprehensive understanding of applicable sociological and psychological theorizations related to the individual.
- To combine, in a critical and synthesized manner, sociological and psychological views towards the construction of a meaningful, comprehensible and applicable sociological theorization of intra-action.
- Finally, to make clear that the relationship between the individual and society or between structure and agency can be approached through the combined as well as distinct examination of the concepts of interaction and intra-action.

Structure of the Book

This book will try to meet the targets of this enterprise by using a wide variety of tailored everyday examples (at the beginning and end of each chapter) and by focusing on the following areas: Chapter 1 will introduce the initial definitions of the main concepts used in this book, namely those of interaction and intra-action. The sociological examination of the idea of interaction will be provided

by incorporating one of the first sociological approaches employed by Georg Simmel, who has been focusing on the study of the distinction between interaction and inner life. A number of associated theories and perspectives will be discussed whereas the size of interaction will be analysed according to Simmel's works (dyad, triad). Furthermore, contemporary sociological and psychological views on group interactions will also be discussed.

Chapter 2 introduces the school of thought of symbolic interactionism by providing an overview of its origins and the main concepts associated to its content (thinking, meaning, symbols and socialization). Intra-action is also discussed in relation to this theoretical perspective. Separate psychological views deriving from symbolic interactionism and related to the individual are also considered whereas distinct concepts promoted through this school of thought are also analysed (self, the 'I' and the 'Me' as well as dramaturgy). A brief discussion regarding the sociology of emotions is also presented as well as an indicative overview of the methods and methodology of symbolic interactionism.

Chapter 3 is involved with the concept of socialization as an ongoing form of interaction. Socialization is then defined through sociological classic and current theorizations whereas psychological perspectives are also discussed thoroughly. Furthermore, intra-action is discussed in relation to the process of socialization. Childhood socialization is extensively discussed through sociological and psychological perspectives whereas specific socialization processes are separately discussed (family, school, peers, gender, media, socialization through the life course).

The following three chapters of this book are devoted to two central and interrelated sociological and psychological notions directly related to the idea of the individual: that of identity and the self. Chapter 4 introduces identity by incorporating a plurality of sociological and psychological perspectives primarily focused on the aspects of personal, social/relational and collective identity. An attempt to bring the idea of intra-action closer to the notion of identity has also been incorporated. Certain identity theories have also been discussed thoroughly (role identity theory, identity theory, act control theory and queer theory). Also, certain forms of indicative as well as prevailed identities have been considered (stigmatized, gender, sexual, race and ethnic identity).

Chapter 5 explores sociological and psychological approaches of the self by focusing on classic social theory and the work of Simmel, the school of thought of American Pragmatism, symbolic interactionism as well as current approaches, including reflexive self. Psychological perspectives associated to self exploration are reviewed by providing a broad definition, followed by separate discussions regarding self-concept, self-awareness and self-consciousness as well as selfhood. Certain synthesized approaches are then considered, like those of the association between self and identity, social cognition and the self, and finally the association between intra-action and the self.

Chapter 6 further explores the notion of self, only this time primarily psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic views are used in relation to the ideas of conscious

and unconscious self. Self, if thus defined through Freudian psychoanalytic tradition, followed by neo-Freudian views, the Frankfurt school perspectives, post-Freudian evaluations and Lacanian psychoanalytic accounts regarding the idea of the self. The following section is related to person-centred perspectives of the self which are related to Rogers' relevant theory and practice. Pertinent psychotherapeutic techniques are then employed in the exploration of the notion of self by focusing on psychoanalytic psychotherapy and client-centred psychotherapy. Limitations of psychotherapeutic discourse are considered and intra-action is also evaluated in relation to the psychotherapeutic techniques discussed.

Finally, Chapter 7 investigates the concept of intra-action as a way to reveal a term that might be used as a concrete explanation of how the individual experiences exchange of action within oneself. The relationship between intra-action and interaction is initially defined as a dualism and then as a duality. The origins of intra-action are traced in the work of Simmel, the school of thought of American Pragmatism and the works of Vygotsky and Piaget. Intra-action is then further explained as a form dualism through theories and studies associated to dialogic perspectives. Following that, intra-action is defined as a form of duality through theories and applications associated to the idea of inner speech and internal conversation. External conversation is also discussed as a form of interaction. The concept of reflexivity (again through dualism and duality) is then analysed as an applied form of intra-action whereas applied intra-action is finally simplified through the idea of mediation.

Acknowledgements

This book was written in an attempt to explain possible ways individuals may relate to society while living their everyday lives. Such an attempt is by no means new, however, it might be one of the first endeavours to become an accessible companion to undergraduate and postgraduate sociology and social sciences students while they try to understand how people are connected to society, to other people but more importantly to oneself. The purpose of this book is to navigate through fundamental sociological and psychological concepts that could explain the ways people relate to one another, while they relate to themselves and how individuals exchange action between them, while they exchange action within oneself. To do that, a number of topical examples have been discussed while a rather creative side of sociological imagination has been employed.

This book is the outcome of endless silent conversations the author had within her mind with herself as well as a number of new and old colleagues, family members, close friends, loved ones who are no longer with us, treasured ones who were recently born, trusted ones who are no longer friends and strangers who became companions. Therefore, this book is about the life one can live inside her/his own mind while trying to share the same life with others. As will be explained in the pages of this book, this is not an easily maintained endeavour, but somehow most individuals end up 'finding their ways through the world',[1] partly privately and partly publically. Such an ongoing accomplishment remains constantly incomplete, unpredictably fragile and inevitably unstable. Therefore, it embodies a first class example of sociological investigation.

It would have been impossible to envision this book without reading and considering all the books and journal articles mentioned in it and without trying to expand on my previous monograph, which although it was published in 2009, has remained an unlimited source of unanswered questions. Equally, I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my PhD supervisor Professor Margaret Archer, who without realizing it, became one of my constant and continuing internal conversation partners. In mentioning her name I do not in any way presume upon her endorsement or willingness to underwrite the views and interpretations discussed in this book. To the contrary, as she knew nothing about this publication, I only wish to thank her for her support and guidance ever since I had the privilege of meeting her.

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Note

1 To use one of Archer's (2007) famous book titles.