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Acquired Relationship Deficiency Syndrome (ARDS)

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A pair of interdependent themes are proposed for understanding some human development processes. For convenience one is labelled "self", the other "relationship". These twin themes are effected through what is called the Socio-Genetic Milieu, which is itself a living dynamic having ongoing transactions with both past and future. It is proposed there is a natural tendency for each of them to grow and become harmonised during healthy development. Often, however, relationships are eclipsed by self. When this sort of take-over happens, secure bases are less available, attachment opportunities are restricted, and the upshot, is a pathological condition described as the Acquired Relationship Deficiency Syndrome. Both professionals and lay supporters can make important contributions toward reversing this trend.

Although many ideas contribute to this proposal there are no formal acknowledgements in this introductory essay. On this occasion a bare-bones approach is adopted as essential features are highlighted. My general aim is to turn back an overwhelming Western tide of "self" which has flooded many developmental considerations.

It is as if self has become a developmental epicentre; everything has become focussed upon this single impact location. Certainly "self" is one major theme deserving of our attention. According to the present proposal there is a second sun, another source of energy and life. This is called "relationships". Relationships exist in their own right and are to be approached with respect, unencumbered by self-made claims or propositions.

For this presentation the beginning is with what is called the Socio-Genetic Milieu (SGM). This is a pot pourri of influences, processes and mechanisms. It includes genetic, social and cultural histories of settings organisms experience. Also involved are biological conditions or predispositions, as well as action possibilities or decisions. The SGM simultaneously draws from the past and contributes to this history; it anticipates a future and is engaged in advancing the present. In essence this SGM is the historical now, a living dynamic (see Figure 1 for a schematic drawing).

As scholarly participants in this process ourselves one task is to reveal aspects of this dynamic which provide insights into its structure. That is, we wish to try and develop an epistemological architecture which will enable us to identify salient mechanisms which affect the ways in which such a dynamic is functioning and thereby

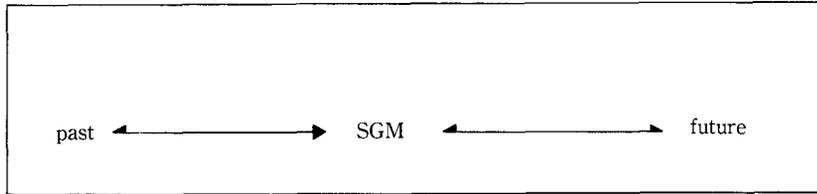


FIGURE 1 The Socio-Genetic Milieu (SGM) draws from the past significantly (double-headed arrow) and contributes to it (single arrow head) as well as anticipating a future and evolving toward that.

influences human development.

Here is an example. Imagine for a moment that it is a hot summer's day and you enter a room without air-conditioning and feel a pleasant draught from a table-mounted multi-blade electric fan. As an investigator your task is to design a means for identifying the number of blades, estimate rotational speed as well as general blade shape, all without switching it off. In all likelihood the techniques developed for investigating structural properties of one fan may be applied to others subsequently. With a motor still running it is difficult if not impossible to detect whether a blade is missing, another distorted, or any broken by merely using the unaided eye.

One solution to this puzzle is to use a strobe light in a partially-darkened room. By adjusting its frequency this light will freeze momentarily any ongoing dynamic without disturbing the dynamic itself. When this occurs any observer can "see" the underlying blade structure. As well, by noting the calibration of the strobe flicker frequency it is possible to estimate rotational speed. Those who like to tinker about with car engines have seen this effect when using a timing light. Many fingers have been bruised by those who trusted their eyes and reached into a moving fan blade. Applying a similar principle to another context, it does not take much imagination to foreshadow a disastrous scenario if strobe lights were used in saw mills.

The point is that by applying ideas generated from this analogy to SGM, we may be able to freeze-frame certain structural characteristics there too. From undertaking such an exercise, two primary ones are posited. One applies to and is captioned by the word "self" and the other to what is termed "relationship".

Consider first the generic notion of *self* which, in the West particularly, is often treated as both primary cause and product of developmental processes. There are numerous philosophical, theoretical, empirical and practical outcomes from such a self-dominated view. From North America we have brand name soft drinks and fast food outlets as well as major psycho-social exports such as "control" and "I/self" which have become established as contemporary hegemony. Evidence supporting this thesis is not hard to find: most professional journals and books mirror nicely a pre-occupation with *self* and control. In other words, the *self* has its own biological history and is optimised by selectively biasing the SGM. (See Figure 2)

Many social institutions are designed for and around individuals, the minimal working unit of *self*. This includes science, education, economics, politics, welfare, health, law, sport, and so on. Such institutions offer top prizes to those displaying tra-

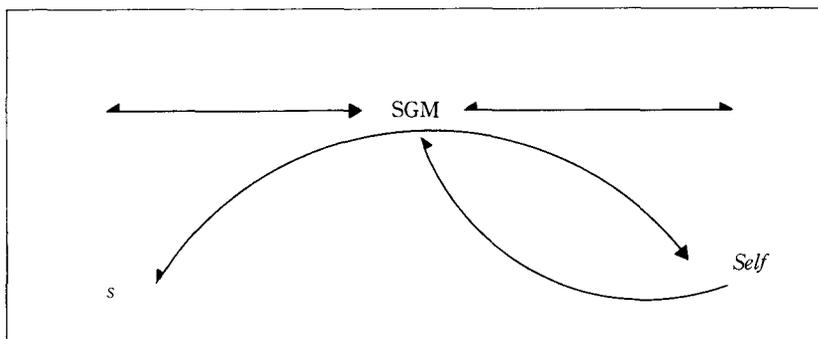


FIGURE 2 The *self* is one major theme presented through the SGM but arises from a biological condition (*s*). A single return arrowhead from *self* to SGM signifies their ongoing transaction.

ditional approaches, like competition, control, confrontation, consumerism and literalness. There is, it seems, a powerful stream of movement which transports the *self* from a biological catchment and propels it into a social pool via community interactions.

There is a predisposition for *self* to become expressed via the SGM. In more general terms, these expressions include spoken language, interaction, cognized emotions, systems and hierarchies, causes and consequences (mechanisms and logic), capitalised opportunities, knowledge, and represented events as memory. In short, words are the hard currency of *self*. (See Figure 3)

This is only half true. Several social commentators and critics have documented already some inadequacies arising from a dominant *self* ideology. These will not be repeated here although it may be noted co-operative reactions to sustained *self* pressures do occur, like "alternative" cultures which blossomed during the 1960's.

Relevant to the present proposal are those many scientific studies emphasising relationships in healthy developmental processes. Involving others can have positive effects on the development of future relationships. Under certain conditions and situations, responsibility, sensitivity, emotional warmth and support appear to be significant. In the "attachment" literature for instance, there is ample evidence that a secure base,

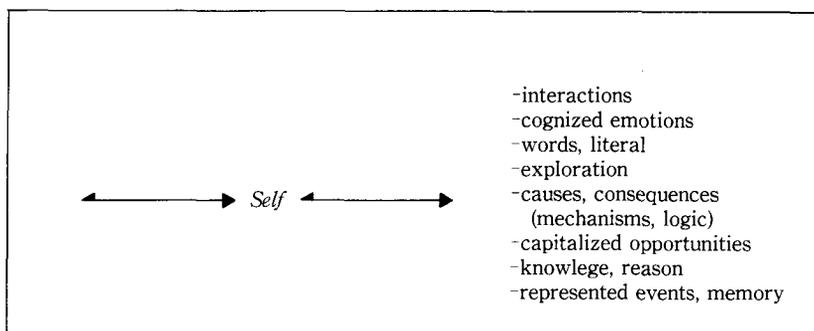


FIGURE 3 Some of the generative outcomes from *self* transactions with SGM.

involving others who are emotionally available, contributes to quite a different developmental prognosis than when a *self*-dominated theme is portrayed (as from parents who unwittingly create anxious-avoidant and anxious-resitant children).

My proposition is that there is a second life-force. Much conceptual and empirical muddle has resulted from trying to understand attachment relationships from an hegemonic *self*-philosophy. And this still occurs in spite of evidence accruing that there may well be another structural characteristic prototypical of humans: there is another biological condition or predisposition which is captioned by this word "relationship". These relationships are qualitatively different and distinct from what arises in *self*-premiered interactions. Relationships are not merely generalised from analyses of interactions though they may be picked up there. Relationships emerge from a quite separate underlying current and becomes a second stream. (See Figure 4)

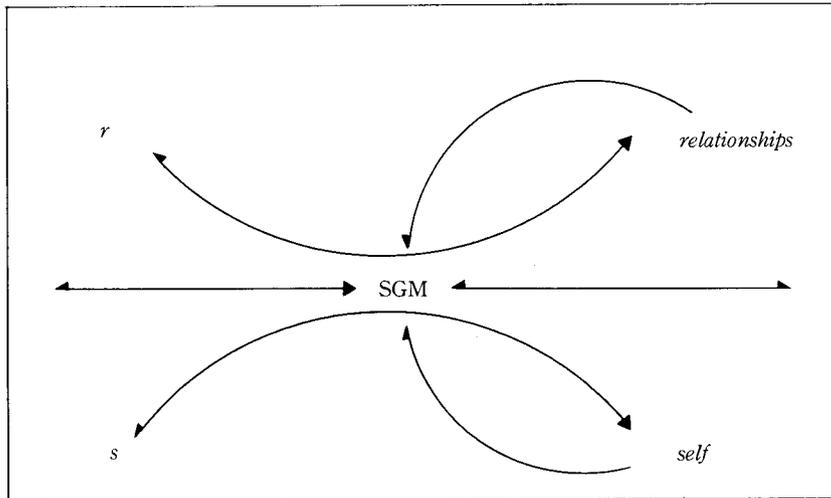


FIGURE 4 This duplex outline shows "relationships" as a second stream of events having a catchment in a biological condition(*r*), and effected through SGM.

This word "relationships" is being removed here from its usual lineage (synonymous with interactions but seem somehow as distinct from these) to mean something along the following lines. Such captions are rather rough and are intended to flavour emergent images. In the present context relationships: cannot be extrapolated easily from a *self* ethos or its associated interactions: involves sensing events as a positive dynamic of two-as-one producing feelings of intimacy, a history of belonging and a future of hope; are typified by harmony between those who feel good about being here because they share opportunities for continually navigating their mutual affordances; are common sense; are wordless, non-logical, non-rational; are anarchic; are spaced-out and timeless; are socially real; are holier than thou; are addictive, they fit into our basic tuning capacities; and create a rainbow of feelings which colour future engagements. (Some of these sentiments are shown as Figure 5)

In summary, the following observations may be made to complement the above mentioned examples. There are two distinct worlds involved, one of self and another

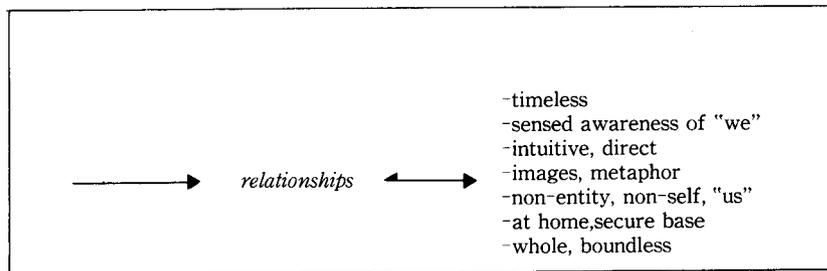


FIGURE 5 Some of the generative outcomes from relationship involvement, transactions via SGM.

of relationships. These worlds have entirely different language systems and alternative architectures. It is practically impossible to approach relationships using words as tools, especially literal ones which are the heady-stuff of *self*. This *self* is easily institutionalised and can easily eclipse relationships, especially by those promoting a *self* ideology which is conflict driven. There remains, nonetheless, a deep yearning for both relationships and an individualised self. Due to their implicit dynamic, when *self* makes demands upon relationships then, paradoxically, relationships shy away from *self*.

The current proposition is that when developmentally appropriate relationship-primed opportunities are ignored or lost then *self* will take up any slack and these actions minimise relationship emergence. This deflection to aggrandisement is called *Acquired Relationship Deficiency Syndrome* (ARDS). (See Figure 6)

Now for a brief cautionary comment. Alternatives to the currently dominating *self* ideology will be strongly resisted. One source of resistance will come from those who have never experienced a quiet calm of an ongoing relationship dynamic. Those who do not have a personal history of sensing relationships or who suffer anxieties

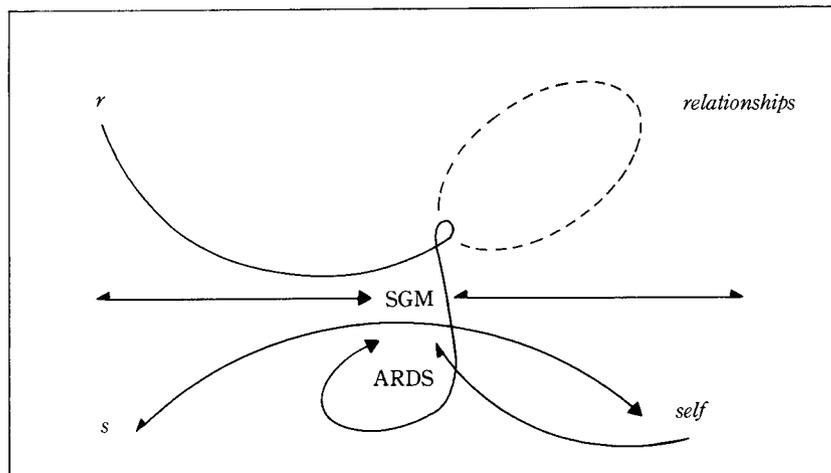


FIGURE 6 The Acquired Relationships Deficiency Syndrome (ARDS) occurs when *self* is encouraged to suck off natural *r* impulses. Nonetheless, there remains still an area of relationship potentialities (depicted by the dashed enclosure) which are accessible.

generated by the very thought of letting go, just will not understand though they may be but dimly aware of this dynamic.

It is my opinion that as scholars (as artists or as scientists) our collective task is to try and get a better handle on these complementary worlds of developmental influence. This includes conceptual analyses and attempts to caption relationship images as we attempt to understand how these dual life forces are modified by SGM and, eventually, relate to our involvement with others. From a relationship perspective there is no such thing as a baby; parents often sense their babies, relationship bound. In the beginning was their whole relationship; problems inflicted by a *self* world are our business and our concern, especially so when their selfish interactions become pathological.

From a theoretical perspective it may be helpful to offer two remarks about the dynamic of this relationship theme. One is that it can be distorted by inappropriate encounters, especially during childhood: relationships can become repressed as they are forced into a *self* world. For such cases trained professionals have much to offer through systematic observation and analyses. Second, even though atrophied or distorted, the relationship domain can still offer opportunities in any of many latent possibilities, especially when approached without threat. In such cases, it is as if there is a second chance, another window of opportunities for relationship involvement. There are, as it were, ready-available relationship sites that can be fairly quickly activated. (In the commercial world, this is done routinely with advertisements.) One speculation is that such relationship potentialities are associated with receptor sites, tailor-made for certain opiate-like chemicals which the body is capable of making if provided with appropriate opportunities. Now, as an aside, it may well be that these addictive qualities we are all so well prepared for in relationships are exactly those which are usurped by hard drugs. If this is so then this would be the epitome of individualism since the self can induce feelings of belonging by synthetic means. Others induce these sorts of relationship "highs" through jogging, or work, or meditation.

There are now two primary agenda items. One is to seek a better understanding of both processes and mechanisms regarding the duplex scheme proposed. This would involve a lot of mopping up, clarifying conflicting results that have accrued as a consequence of adopting a Westernised hegemonic *self* theme.

For the other agenda item, it would be helpful to share those ways people have already found helpful in their own practice and experience of relationships. Specifically, to find out the multiple approaches which have been reported as being healthy in different contexts. By presenting these involvements, the occasions when people have been invited and become active participants in relationship dynamics, then some basic working designs may become available for educational developmentalists.

In conclusion consider that analogy about the fan once again. Two points may be made. One is that professionals having a range of techniques for assessing structural malfunction have a knowledge base from which to talk about effects, mechanisms and processes. The second point is that many people are aware of how vast relationship potentialities may be. It is as if these people, whether professional or not, intuitively sense possibilities and are able to initiate a relationship dynamic easily and

effectively. Once activated such a dynamic has the power to harmonise ongoing engagements and heal. In either case, of the professional or the intuitive supporter who just senses relationship awareness and has the art of being there, their actions are humane because they touch an essential aspect of our existence.