# Small Group Research

## Self-Construction in a Small Group Setting: Journal Narratives

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*The interpretive, developmental process of refiguring the ego is examined as it occurs in the perceptions of self, mediated by the cultural milieu of a student group and concretized in the narrations of personal journal writings. Students kept journals for private use; thus the audience for the journal narrative is the self. Narratives were explored for modes or styles of communication. The purpose of this study was to demonstrate not only that self-understandings are concretized through speech acts but that people actively engage in ongoing construction of the self, in the presence of others and through the use of types of communication in everyday language.*

# SELF-CONSTRUCTION
# IN A SMALL GROUP SETTING
## Journal Narratives

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As **active, thinking, and feeling** beings, we have a naive, ongoing, experiential understanding of ourselves. We assign meaning to our cognitions, emotions, and activities and concretize these meanings through linguistic expression. In so doing, we engage in an ongoing construction and development of the self (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Bruner, 1986; Mead, 1934; Strauss, 1969; Zurcher, 1977).

Speech acts such as stories or narratives empower our experiences of self and world by the naming of them. Harre (1984) suggests that one's sense of self as a determining agent is strengthened by a set of supportive verbalizations or speech acts. He states

that " 'activation' is a complex of beliefs about one's own nature with a *repertoire of speech acts* to go with them" (p. 200, emphasis added). Being able to act involves beliefs about the self and speech that supports those beliefs. Polkinghorne (1988) furthers our understanding of the connection between thinking, feeling, and activity; the construction of meaning; and our speech acts. He states:

> Narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions. Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units. It provides a framework for understanding the past events in one's life and for planning future actions. It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful. Thus the study of human beings by the human sciences needs to focus on the realm of meaning in general and on narrative meaning in particular. (p. 11)

Ricoeur (1986) further elaborates the developmental process of interpreting the self. This process involves the relationship among the prereflective self, cultural mediation of "self-knowledge," and speech acts in the form of narratives, leading to what he terms the "refiguring of the ego."

> First, the refiguration [of the ego] effected by the narrative reveals an aspect of self-knowledge that goes far beyond the framework of the narrative, namely the fact that the self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of all sorts of cultural signs, which cause us to say that action is symbolically mediated. It is onto these symbolic mediations that those performed by the narrative are grafted. The narrative mediation thereby stresses the remarkable character of self-knowledge to be an interpretation of the self. The reader's appropriation of the identity of the fictive character is the privileged vehicle for this interpretation. What it provides is precisely the figure belonging to the character, whereby the self, interpreted narratively, reveals itself to be a figured ego, a self that *gives this or that figure of itself.* (pp. 10-11, emphasis added)

It is the purpose of this study to examine the interpretive, developmental process of refiguring the ego as it occurs in the perceptions of self, mediated by the cultural milieu of a student group and concretized in the narrations of personal journal writings.

## METHOD

Student journals created in the context of a small group and kept for private use can be conceived as developmental tools. They do not merely impart a skill, but facilitate, as Misgeld and Jardine (1989) suggest, a more important educational activity.

> It is the bringing forth and exploring of possibilities of understand-ing, possible places the traversing of which brings forth a sense of self, a sense of what is possible for us. . . . Only in dialogue with such possibilities does the self emerge. . . . One does not know where one is, what place one has, unless one develops a sense of the possibility of being elsewhere, of what else is possible. . . . [T]his brings with it the self-recognition that one's own place is *itself* a possibility among others, and not a fixed actuality. (p. 269)

Thus the journal narrative is an appropriate vehicle for self-development and provides appropriate data for process-oriented research in that area. There are several methods that can be used to approach this type of data, and every method involves a different researcher stance or concern. Researcher concerns guide inquiry and expose the data in particular ways. The interest that guided this particular research is a general concern about student development. The aim here is to present educators with the developmental use-fulness of student journal narratives.

One of the goals of hermeneutic inquiry, researcher understand-ing of a phenomenon, can be enhanced by researcher participation in the lived practices of students within the educational context. As the instructor of the small group that provided the data for this study, I was in such a position. A hermeneutic approach has been used here to analyze student narratives.

In the initial reading of data, stylistic variations in language were consistently noticed across the data. These variations were exam-ples of language modes presented by theorists from both commu-nications theory and critical theory. The power of language in self-development and social development has been well docu-mented (Clark & Holquist, 1984; Mead, 1934; Ricoeur, 1986), but very little research has examined the relationship between styles of self-speech, communicative action (Habermas, 1971), and the re-

figuring of the ego (Ricoeur, 1986). How we constitute ourselves privately and linguistically is examined in terms of the "patterns of ordinary language usage shared in everyday communicative interaction" (Pusey, 1987, p. 23).

In journals that are kept only for the self, the question becomes, Who is the audience? This research proposes that, in the case of private journal narratives, the audience is the *private self.* Here narratives are used by the self to communicate an intrapersonal story that clearly aids the self's adaptation to a new social situation or context, such as experienced by the students enrolled in this particular course.

## FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Theorists from such divergent backgrounds as communications theory (Lucaites and Condit, 1985) and critical theory (Habermas, 1971) stress the revelatory nature of language. Habermas, Lucaites, and Condit discuss very similar modes or styles of communication used in verbal interactions. Habermas refers to three modes of communication: cognitive, interactive, and expressive (Pusey, 1987).

Lucaites and Condit define two styles of communication that are similar to Habermas's modes of communication. These include the information-specific style (similar to Habermas's "cognitive" and "interactive") and the rhetorical (similar to Habermas's "expressive"). This research combines the communication theory of Lucaites and Condit with Habermas's theory of communicative action, formulating three linguistic modes of communication. Specifically, these are the (a) information-specific/cognitive, (b) information-specific/interactive, and (c) rhetorical/expressive modes. This methodological approach provides the integration of linguistics, sociology, and psychology in an interdisciplinary undertaking toward understanding self-configuration in private journal writing.

Journal entries were coded by me and an external rater for three specific modes: (a) information-specific/cognitive mode (preceded by one asterisk), (b) information-specific/interactive mode (pre-

ceded by two asterisks), and (c) rhetorical/expressive mode (preceded by three asterisks).

### DEFINITION OF MODES

*Information-specific/cognitive mode.* This mode appears as a straight report of facts without the writer expressing positive or negative feeling. The writer may report an interpretation of another person's emotions, but the writer does not express any personal emotion. The writer does not express any desires regarding what ought to happen or should have happened.

In the journals examined, the information-specific/cognitive mode appeared as close reports of "facts" as the student saw them. An example of this style is clearly presented in an excerpt from Cindy's first journal entry:

> *Began by discussing the books. Some really liked don Juan and hated *A Different Existence* while one who liked *A Different Existence* hated don Juan. Julia loved don Juan because she identified with it. Darlene told of intervening in an abuse case with a daughter's friend — and feeling good about it. . . . Everyone re-introduced themselves. (Cindy: October 5)

Cindy then proceeds, in her journal entry, to list group members and some piece of information about each from the introduction. Here, Cindy's journal narrative style or mode is a good example of what Lucaites and Condit (1985) refer to as "eyewitness testimonies, constrained [for the sake of internal consistency]," as a dialectical model of discourse, "represent[ing] empirically 'verifiable' phenomena" (p. 93). Habermas terms this mode cognitive: communication focused on the objective world of external nature that takes the speech form of a representation of facts (Pusey, 1987). When this form is employed, there is a marked absence of personal emotion or intentionality.

*Information-specific/interactive mode.* This mode appears as a factual report of social situations and personal feelings but also includes evaluative observations about the context and the charac-

ters of the situation. Subject matter concerns a shared social world and the writer's emotions about that shared social world: what is socially acceptable or unacceptable, what the writer is feeling and desiring in the particular situation. An example of this mode can be seen in the entry of Jessica, an older woman with hearing loss, as she describes the demographics of the group, comments on personalities and interactions, and makes evaluative observations about the immediate situation and characters as well as how one feels about the interaction. She interjects opinion, but seems to employ a more factual model of discourse as she describes her experience of the first session.

> **Kathleen . . . has a shy, diffident manner of speaking and speaks very softly. Nancy and Julia squared off over the due date on Task I. . . . Discussion became heated and almost rude. People who said they were new to seminar had little or no participation. There were various ethnic origins represented and one male, Sam . . . who is a handicapped person in a wheelchair. (Jessica: September 28)

Here, the narrative points to Habermas's interactive mode of communication. The journal entry, as private speech, is not interactive communication but the writer's communication about interactions within a shared, social world — thoughts that may precede and stand closely connected to the establishing of appropriate interpersonal relations revealed in the interactive modes of communication in public speech.

*Rhetorical/expressive mode.* This mode appears as a self-representation and the process of representation. In journal narratives, the writer's purpose is to represent oneself to oneself in a certain selective manner, to establish a coherent, integrated self-image for self and perceived others. The writer argues either explicitly or implicitly for a certain position (also explicit or implicit) by comparing and contrasting him- or herself with seemingly similar others, sometimes lining up evidence as proof. In this mode, the writer often reveals an appeal to authority, consequence, or values. An example of this mode is provided by the following journal excerpt.

***In comparison to other members I felt the quickness of my mind — its ability to grasp quickly and glean relevant information. That makes me feel special. . . . I resisted being the director on most occasions. . . . The group seemed unaware of those who were quiet. I brought Joyce and Martha briefly into one decision by asking their opinions. Others seemed to not even notice — or if they did notice, not to address — their lack of participation. Group was monopolized by Jessica. Julia seemed to set herself up as "Know-it-all." (Elizabeth: September 29)

## SUBJECTS

The subjects of this study were upper-division students enrolled in an undergraduate, interdisciplinary program in human development. Journal keeping is required of all students in this particular small group course.

There were 14 participants, 1 male and 13 female. Seven volunteered their journal writings. It is important to note here that students are not required to turn in their journals; thus journal narratives can represent private communication to the self.

## PROCEDURES

In any new educational setting, students strive to discover who they can be or become *in this particular social context*. They explore the variations of role and boundaries of self in a new cultural milieu. This is especially true in the group setting for this research. The struggle for self-development is a social process, and the developing group often becomes a powerful holding environment (Kegan, 1986), significantly influencing and influenced by the shape of that development.

Students enrolled in a 10-week, upper-division small group seminar course to meet to study their own group process while critically examining interdisciplinary faculty presentations made in a concurrently taken team-taught course. They were asked to keep a private journal of the group meetings that provided them with the raw data to write a final paper on group development, self-

development, and the dialectic influence of both on each. Journals were kept only for self-use.

Journals were solicited for research after the course was completed and grades submitted, thus ensuring that narratives would not be written with the researcher in mind. Dated journal entries provided the protocols for the narrative analysis. The content of each dated entry was explored for the uses of various communication forms (as defined above) in the construction of the self.

### RELIABILITY OF MEASURES

A linguist was trained in the method of analysis and coded the journal entries for the three language styles presented. The codings were compared. There were three instances of major discrepancy (Entries 2, 5, and 6) and one coding error (Entry 9). These were discussed and consensus reached.

# RESULTS

The narratives of two student journals, Elizabeth's and Nancy's, are coded for ongoing construction of the self through the use of modes of communication as defined above. These two subjects were chosen because of their consistent and lengthy journal entries throughout the quarter. These results reflect the analysis of both coders.

### ELIZABETH

Bennis (1976) points out that concerns about leadership and dependency often arise in the early stages of group development. This initial developmental struggle of the group provides the cultural milieu for Elizabeth's private communication with her self. Here, in a rhetorical\expressive mode, Elizabeth begins her membership role by establishing a sense of self as esteemed in this new

group setting, comparing herself to others and finding herself "special."

> (1) ***In comparison to other members I felt the quickness of my mind—its ability to grasp quickly and glean relevant information. That makes me feel special. . . . I felt impatience with the non-directiveness of the group. . . . I resisted being the director on most occasions. . . . The group seemed unaware of those who were quiet. I brought Joyce and Martha briefly into one decision by asking their opinions. Others seemed to not even notice—or if they did notice, not to address-their lack of participation. Group was monopolized by Jessica. Julia seemed to set herself up as "Know-it-all." (Elizabeth: September 29)

Here, not looking to the instructor for rescue, Elizabeth adopts a counterdependent stance (Bennis, 1976). Her ambivalence about leading is expressed in her "figuring" herself as reluctant leader of the group; stating, "impatience with the non-directiveness of the group. . . . [She] resisted being the director on most occasions." Yet she conveys the typical concerns of leaders as she discusses addressing the lack of participation of others and facilitating their involvement in the group. She also establishes herself as different from, more aware than, the others, *"others who seemed not to notice, or if they did notice, didn't address the issue of lack of participation."* Thus she presents herself as the only one with the concerns that usually occupy leaders. Others seem to be noted only comparatively as they figure into her representation of self as leader. She begins to evaluate and categorize other emerging characters: the "monopolizer," Jessica, and the "know-it-all," Julia, characters who usually challenge leadership.

Elizabeth's process of creating a self as different from others in this group context reflects a twist of Ricoeur's (1986) thinking on the role of imaginative variation in the construction of character. He states, "Appropriating oneself by the identification with a character is to submit oneself to the exercise of imaginative variations which then become imaginative variations of the self" (p. 11).

She mentions dissatisfaction with the nondirectiveness of the group yet resists "being the director," indicating her ambivalence

about the leadership role in general. This dissatisfaction and resis-
tance represents a formation of *negative identity* in which the
imaginative variation is to be identified with what is *not* represented
in the facilitator's style.

In her journal entry of October 12, Elizabeth communicates in a
rhetorical/expressive mode as she expresses her intentions and
needs in her attempt to establish a coherent self-image for self and
perceived others.

> (2) ***[I was] being responsible, but later when Louise missed an
> opportunity to speak and I noticed — I didn't point it out. Two things
> worked there. Not wanting to be responsible — I remember thinking
> — let her or someone else take care of it. Also I didn't want others
> to think I am trying to take over . . . be the big cheese. When [the
> instructor] called on Louise — I was glad. (Elizabeth: October 12)

On the same journal date, Elizabeth, *rhetorically,* declares her
position within the group as nonchalantly comfortable, exclusively
connected with a significant character in the group, and in control
of her attitude.

> (3) ***Myself — I felt more comfortable — relaxed in the group
> tonight. Didn't feel the need to share everything I thought but added
> where relevant. Slouched in chair — not worried about how I looked.
> I've connected with Julia — we laugh at things the other said but
> group at large misses. (Don't get — puns) Didn't feel as irritated as
> last week for 2 reasons. We got something done! I came in with
> different attitude — not expecting measurable progress or focus.
> (Elizabeth: October 12)

The next journal entry is written in the information-specific/
interactive mode, as Elizabeth comments on the interactions within
the group and the various personalities that participate.

> (4) **We have a vocal few who dominate. . . . Julia C. is very vocal
> but it's so honest it's never boring. Darlene is the opposite. Like her
> explanation last night of fearing the core subjects and Shirley
> MacLaine movie because "Satan" works through them. When she
> brought that up it broke my mood. I had to speak. It brought me
> back. It just occurred to me — Julia and Darlene are like mirrored
> opposites of one another. Interesting. . . . I see [instructor] looking
> around the group — I do also, but others focus on speaker or the floor,

etc. . . . Before class — tried to talk to Julia about her . . . concern —
was rejected. (Elizabeth: October 19)

Elizabeth's entries from the next session are again written in the
information-specific/interactive mode and reflect a shift in focus.
This meeting marks the half-way point in the life of the group.
Elizabeth begins to write that there is more eye contact, more seeing
others and seeing oneself being seen by others, yet many of her
comments are directed to how close, warm, and united the group is
with words such as *everyone, the group,* and *all.* However, the
struggle for balance between fusion and individuality can be noted
in Elizabeth's references to the group as both (a) a united entity with
an overpersonal orientation — all-for-one-and-one-for-all thinking
— and (b) a collection of individuals demonstrating more coun-
terpersonal positions. She declares her position and intention in a
short statement using the rhetorical/expressive mode. She states:

> (5) **The group seemed warm — comfortable tonight. There was
> friendly chatter several times. . . . At one point, when Kathleen
> shared [about her mother's death] . . . everyone seemed with her . . .
> all eyes focused on her. . . . Darlene and Cindy were moved to tears.
> Julia directed us to give her a group hug. Some did, but many
> remained in their seats. *I did not hug Kathleen, since I don't
> particularly like her.* . . . I noticed Joyce tonight. When I spoke, I
> purposely looked at her and she didn't look away as in the past.
> I often see [instructor] looking around the group and she sees I'm
> doing the same. There was humor and open laughter . . . trust has
> developed. (Elizabeth: November 2; italics indicate shift to rhetorical/
> expressive mode)

Here perspective taking seems to be more other centered, and the
narrative seems to concentrate on the internal world of the group,
using the information-specific\interactive mode. At one point, there
is a rhetorical appeal to values regarding a felt accusation. Elizabeth
records:

> (6) **Twice tonight I saw how anger is dealt with. Both times a per-
> son not involved distracted everyone with humor. . . . Immediately
> Julia cracked a joke. I then said . . . good comic relief . . . I looked
> at [instructor] and saw [her] agree. When pain is shared, everyone
> is there . . . but anger isn't being dealt with . . . it's withdrawn from.

> At one point Cindy mouthed "quit staring at me" to me. . . . *I felt wrongly accused . . . I said nothing — and avoided looking at her for the rest of class.* After break there were many conversations going on all around the circle at the same time. . . . At one point someone mentioned we only had three weeks left. . . . Ideas flew everywhere . . . people were talking over one another. . . . [Instructor] had us close our eyes and visualize the group since we came back from break . . . [some saw] breaking chains, birds taking off from a pond. (Elizabeth: November 9; italics indicate shift to rhetorical/expressive mode)

The felt fracturing of group life, as implied by the images of broken chains and birds taking flight, is reflected in the linguistic structure of Elizabeth's remaining entries for that date. She moves from the previous information-specific\interactive mode to an information-specific\cognitive mode as she shifts dramatically into a more factual, dialectical account of the actions of group members. Although the subject matter often concerns the shared world of the group, there is a sense of her own withdrawal from that shared world as we notice very little of herself or her feelings present in the text. She writes in short spurts that are mostly interpretations of others' emotions.

> (7) *Jessica was more talkative — about her involvement with animals.
>     Darlene must have felt trust, she talked personally.
>     Phyllis spoke up once — impassioned. Otherwise she acts like a zombie.
>     Sam nurtured Julia C. telling about his cat killing neighbor's rabbits.
>     Cindy and Nancy looked drained and down (eye circles)
>     Martha looked better this wk. Last week she was the one with circles under her eyes. (Elizabeth: November 9)

The next two entries, Elizabeth's final entries for the quarter, show that the group may have confronted the inevitable fact of its own forthcoming death and may have moved into a more resolved state of interdependency. Most of the entry is expressed in the information-specific\interactive mode and concerned with feelings that are occurring between members in the group: At one point, the narrative shifts to the rhetorical\expressive mode as Elizabeth conveys her own personal beliefs and intentions. She states:

(8) **Julia [tells] story of anger at others and how she didn't want it to ruin her warm group feelings. Nancy at one point mentioned she thought Julia was being overly sensitive. Julia reacted strongly saying she didn't think Nancy should make that judgment. Nancy mentioned we avoid uncomfortable feelings because we don't want to experience them. *I forcefully made the point a couple of times that I thought we were conditioned by society to not have anger, sexual arousal, etc. . . .* After a long intense discussion, Jessica made the transition by telling "chicken" story. She always speaks in the past — in the abstract. Never now/personal. Julia mentioned Joyce never talks. Said it forcefully — attacking. (Elizabeth: November 16; italics indicate shift to rhetorical/expressive mode)

The last entry in Elizabeth's journal is expressed in the information-specific\cognitive mode. Although appearing to start off as a report of group interaction, this segment is primarily a straightforward account of the verbal report of various members.

(9) *A real juicy meeting. Julia not present to dominate — more people participated. . . . Darlene began by saying we often got off the track. I mentioned I had withdrawn from that role [of directing] purposely. Cindy said she noticed it when it happened . . . several reassured me that my leadership had been helpful when I said I had been afraid of appearing controlling. . . . Jessica expressed the strong desire for rules . . . goals and objectives early on. Phyllis spoke up and said we all had responsibility to participate (Elizabeth: November 23)

### NANCY

In public speech, Lucaites and Condit (1985) suggest that "rhetoric typically operates in circumstances where there are conflicting and competing interests at stake" (p. 98). They further this thought by stating that "rhetorical narratives describe a set of relations contributing to a conflict or problem" (p. 100). In the private speech of Nancy's first journal entry, the use of the rhetorical\expressive mode conveys to the self the perceived conflicting and competing interests experienced by Nancy.

(10). ***Had such a good feeling being with people, felt energized and fulfilled. Have been lacking intellectual contact. Felt revital

ized. How I miss being around people. Felt very comfortable in
class. Felt threatened by Julia C. and Rita and the time table Julia C.
wanted for handling tasks. Felt Julia C. has a strong personality. . . .
[I] Like the instructor; she uses a quiet voice and is calming — seems
to want things to come from us. . . . Held back on sharing about my
own personal journal and seeing myself writing the same thing,
almost word for word two years later and how scary that was and
how I knew a change had to take place. Not sure I want to work with
Jessica. She seems to want to "take over". . . . Was glad I was able
to speak up about turning in papers same day as Hayward students,
but feel uneasy still about it. Went into class somewhat emotionally
drained after talking with attorney and came out with energy to
spare. (Nancy: September 28)

Nancy enjoys being with people, yet some counterdependent
feelings are noted in comments indicating a fear of being taken over
by members in the group. She expresses her personal and conflic-
tual needs alternately to hold back, speak up, and change. She
juxtaposes experiences of strong and forceful personalities, threat-
ening to take over, with expressed gladness at being able to speak
up for herself. She finds relief in the quiet voice and calming nature
of the instructor who "seems to want things to come from us."

Nancy's narrative of the first session tells of the beginning of a
personal myth of self, a figuring that will inform her actions in the
group. It is an intimate story of uneasy striving to find her voice,
her space, and need fulfillment in a new environment.

The narrator's core sense of self seems to be at the heart of the
striving. Within this group, will she become a controlled and
"threatened" self, or an "energized" and "revitalized" self? Out-
come is uncertain, and the call to the self is to speak up in the face
of personal uneasiness.

During the first month of classes, Nancy continues to strive
uneasily for her voice and her space. During the course of the
second meeting, she rhetorically expresses inner feelings and in-
tentions about speaking. She states:

(11) ***Felt like I was holding back or didn't want to say something
unless it was important. (Nancy: October 5)

Nancy continues to struggle rhetorically with ambivalence about speaking in the group, conveyed in the following entry.

(12) ***Wanted to relate about my being more open since critical thinking class and the mind parasite book and us limiting ourselves to "small" thing on what we could do . . . I talked some right at the beginning about _____ 's lecture and how I felt it fit in with our observation of an object. I think I hold back because of Julia C. and how dynamic she is — she seems to grab the whole seminar. Maybe we are just letting her do it. (Nancy: October 19)

Here, Nancy attributes her reticence to participate to Julia's dynamic presence in seminar. Between this entry and a short one the next day, Nancy again uses the rhetorical\expressive mode to come to terms with her reasons for not finding her voice in the group. She states:

(13) ***Don't think I interact because I am not sure of myself. Really want[ed] to say something interesting last night but didn't. Timing was off. [Instructor] went over how to do Task II. May be more complicated than it seems on paper. (Nancy: October 20)

Here, Nancy no longer sees herself victimized by Julia but, rather, victimized by her personal sense of timing and sureness. The blame, and therefore control, rests with her, not another, and therefore the responsibility for change becomes hers as well (Brickman, 1982, p. 369). Mentioning the unexpected difficulty of Task II at this point seems to appear as a disconnected statement, yet the primary purpose of this class assignment is awareness in communication with another. Task II looks simple enough on paper; however, the doing of this complicated task is an apt metaphor for Nancy's struggles with being heard, seen, and validated, as well as her difficulty with assumption of responsibility.

Nancy continues to work with her discomfort the following seminar as she comments:

(14) ***Was a lot more discussion tonight. . . . I felt I really wanted to say something but kept holding back because of feelings of being inadequate. Felt like everyone else had so much more to say. Better vocabulary and more sure, articulate. (Nancy: October 26)

Her struggle reaches a critical condition the following week:

(15) ***Angry because of Task II (done wrong). Angry at self and instructor. I had wondered [about what I had heard the assignment to be]. . . . For me there were really other questions as I was under a lot of stress and questioning my attorney about things he put in dissolution papers and now I am questioning myself and what I heard [here]. Very scary. Maybe he was right, and *here* I was so firmly otherwise about parts of the paper. (Nancy: November 2; emphasis in original)

Nancy questions her own capability of organizing her experiences in successful ways both in the group and in her life outside group. There seems to be a questioning of her ability to trust herself, ultimately to author herself, in both situations.

Nancy implicitly compares and contrasts herself with another group member as she describes a group interaction in which she tells the group that they *should* be reading and discussing the text.

(16) ***Elizabeth came over — hugged me after the break — asked me if everything was okay. Felt like everything thudded like a lead balloon when I said maybe we all should consider reading some of our book and then we'd be able to discuss it. . . . I feel insecure and a nothing. . . . Elizabeth talked about how she took over role as a leader. (Nancy: November 9)

In describing her felt insecurity and nothingness, Nancy briefly slips into a rhetorical\expressive mode that reveals more about her inner world. However, she continues in the interactive mode as she reports what she said to the group: "**I spoke up and said I'd really not known what to expect of this group — what it was." (Nancy: November 9)

Nancy's entry the next meeting examines her observations of another group member:

(17) ***Julia C. has a fragile psych and I am protecting her by not pushing or saying shut up. But at the same time I am doing myself in. . . . No one challenges her . . . she is domineering . . . I haven't spoken out in the group against her because my feelings are that the group likes (or is it tolerates her.) . . . I think when you see something so distasteful in someone else that you should look at that in yourself. Am I domineering — if so, not in group. It's like she's the

only one able to talk. I felt put down by her tonight. I'm not articulate the way she is and feel she needs approval at all times . . . I've had it up to the eyeballs with her. Her dominance makes me angry but am afraid to confront her and how I feel because I am not sure I'd do it without putting her down and I also don't want to look like the heavy in front of everyone. (Is this just me?) . . . Feel more closed off because of Julia C. (Nancy: November 16)

Here, Nancy's perspective taking and rhetorical\expressive reflections are used as she defines and further clarifies her sense of self, as well as her sense of personal agency. She prepares herself for verbal interaction with the group. At the next class session she goes to the group with a question about the group's response to her.

(18) ***I asked about the time that I asked about reading book and any discussion that was cut off by Julia C. [They said] my approach — wording was wrong. It was so hard for me to say anything in the first place, and then to have said it wrong really hurt. My asking . . . really pushed buttons. . . . Martha said something about [it was like] getting in trouble from her mother. . . . It was hard for me to speak up and I blew it. Phyllis didn't like what I said or the way I said it, Cindy also felt I had done it in a bad way and so did Elizabeth. It hurt . . . instead of getting any approval for trying to be task oriented, I got put down because of my wrong approach. I think it came out wrong then because I felt hurried and was afraid to talk in the group. I felt threatened because Julia C. and Elizabeth S. do a lot of the talking and seem to be clever. I feel it is sometimes hard to "cut" in with own thoughts. . . . Think I feel hurt at disapproval for me and approval for Julia C's entertaining. I am fed up with her entertaining. Guess I am comparing myself to her and [she] being liked — and me not — and it hurts. (Nancy: November 23)

The price paid for being outspoken, saying what is personally important, is very high for Nancy in this setting. She compares herself primarily to Julia, seeing herself as unable to express herself fully and clearly, threatened by others, disapproved of and unliked. For Nancy, to publicly own one's voice, to author one's own position (i.e., to be expressive or persuasive) may mean to become the target of anger and degradation, leading to an emotional response of alienation and isolation. Her last journal entry, also in rhetorical\expressive mode projects into the future and the next

group course, in which she sees herself in a group with Julia again. Nancy plants seeds of intention toward a future leadership position by declaring a perceived important duty of leaders:

> (19) ***If Julia starts out talking about herself I want to tell her that I have heard enough about her personal problems in the last seminar and want to move on. . . . Leaders have welfare of the whole group in mind. (Nancy: December 6)

## DISCUSSION

Ricoeur (1986) suggests that we can only know ourselves indirectly, interpretively through the "fictive character" figured in our narratives. Through the use of various modes or styles of autocommunication, we fashion ourselves and our worlds in the present. This is accomplished in a narrative form, giving continuity of meaning through referencing the contextualized past and creating avenues for change by imaging the self and others in the future.

Examining the private world of the journal narrative furthers understanding of the nature and complexity of construction of the self, including the role of various modes of autocommunication in that construction. In addition, it is clear that within the cultural milieu of small groups, the subject's emotion and action, along with cognition, greatly influence the refiguring of the self.

In an unfamiliar setting of a small, educational seminar, Elizabeth writes most of her early entries in the rhetorical\expressive mode. In contrast, she employs the information-specific\interactive mode — and to a lesser extent the information-specific\cognitive mode — toward the end of the quarter. The early use of rhetorical\expressive mode is thought to be important in her ability to quickly construct a comfortable self in this new situation, a self that then proceeds to develop, exhibiting an enhanced capacity for perspective taking of self, other, and group. This active figuring of the ego early in the narration appears to be a critical facilitating factor in a developmental process toward greater capacity for perspective taking.

Nancy, to the contrary, continuously perseveres to construct the self in this particular setting. Her narrative is almost always in the

rhetorical\expressive mode. The content is usually self-questioning and negatively evaluative; her perspective taking is most often in terms of herself rather than being externally focused. Language that expresses this evaluative position permeates her entries and includes phrases such as "feelings of being inadequate" (October 26), "angry at self" (November 2), "I feel insecure and a nothing" (November 9), "I am doing myself in" (November 16), "Am I domineering" (November 16), and "to have said it wrong really hurt" (November 23). The survival of her personal, inner world as well as integration of self and other as exemplified in her relationship with others in the group (in addition to the larger world) is the focus of her struggle in refiguring of the ego.

Both women engage in unique ways in their processes of refiguring of the self through the narrative interpretation of the self. The vehicle for their refiguring is autocommunication, speech acts directed to self as audience. These speech acts display various modes or styles of communication that importantly figure into the narrative interpretation of the self and, thus, the refiguring process.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study suggests that not only do we concretize our self-understandings through speech acts but we actively engage in ongoing construction of the self, through the vehicle of autocommunication, as we experience and make sense of being and becoming, in the presence of others and through the use of everyday language.

Further study of communication styles in the refiguring of the self in group settings should concentrate on the relationship between communication styles in narrativity and the development of self-knowledge, personal agency, and perspective taking. An understanding of the processes involved in refiguring of the self in community should be of interest to educators, as well as to researchers in various disciplines including sociology, psychology, and anthropology.

This study is limited in that (a) it is primarily based on journals of two members of one small group and did not reflect the entire group in terms of available data, and (b) the researcher is also the instructor of this small group. Nevertheless, it points to the importance of examining various forms of speech acts as they occur in personal journal writings and as they are used in the personal construction of the self. Also, the dual role of instructor-researcher may be an asset rather than liability in this type of research, in that it may provide the benefits of participant observation in the group setting.

The relationship between stages of group life and uses of certain styles of communication needs to be more fully explored to see what, if any, significant correlations may occur between types of speech acts, self-development, and group development.

In these ways, further research may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the uses of styles and modes of autocommunication as they occur within the narrative of the developing self as it is perceived in relationship to others.

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