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Social and Personal Selves: Vulnerabilities for Intelligence Case Officers and Agents?

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Title: Social and Personal Selves: Vulnerabilities for Intelligence Case Officers and Agents?

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Abstract. This article describes a basic aspect of self-representation that may present strengths and weaknesses for the personnel security management and operational effectiveness of intelligence case officers and agents

Psychological research suggests that individuals think about themselves in more than one way. In fact, individuals seem to think of themselves as if they constituted multiple selves, and the quantity and quality of these selves for each individual also seem to be at least somewhat different at different times. Moreover, individuals seem to differ among themselves not only as to the quantity and quality of selves, but as well to the relatedness of these selves.

Two of the most common selves of an individual are the personal and social. The former relates to thinking of oneself as a self-contained entity--at least relatively independent from others--although the degree of independence is itself a characteristic about which individuals differ. Moreover, one will use aspects of the personal self as a differentiator from others. Personal self attributes include personality dispositions and behavioral styles.

The latter self, the social self, relates to aspects of identity that often are shared with others and to various social group memberships. However, aspects of the social self may be integral to the personal self as well. For example, an individual may view the personal self as more social than another individual's personal or social selves. Examples of social self attributes might include ethnic and national memberships.

The difficulty in clearly separating the personal from the social self exemplifies the issue of the relatedness of selves. To recapitulate, each individual may differ through time, not only in the nature of these and other selves, but in the degree to which the two selves relate to each other--as well as differ from individuals as to nature and relatedness. Based on these inferences, intelligence managers might well explore the import of the degree of relatedness between an individual's personal and social selves. This import seems to involve potential strengths and weaknesses.

An almost complete divorce of the two selves--a virtual lack of relatedness or segregation status--might seem to be a personnel security vulnerability. An individual could more easily present an attractive social self as a cover for unattractive personal predilections noxious to the intelligence mission. On the other hand, an individual constituting islands of selves might more easily be able to comply with the requirements of compartmented information and the "need to know." Then again, perhaps, certain islands of selves would be more compatible with compartmentation and "need to know" while others would be antithetical.

An almost complete marriage of the two selves--an almost total relatedness or integration status--might seem to be an operational vulnerability. For example, the closeness of personal self and the social self presented as a "cover"--the taking over of the personal by the social--might facilitate the "turning" of an agent or even a case officer by hostile intelligence. On the other hand, the closeness of personal and

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social selves might facilitate the credibility of a cover and the successful completion of an intelligence mission.

In the context of strengths and weaknesses of relatively unrelated and related (segregated and integrated) selves, one might note the relevance of cognitive-behavior modification therapeutic strategies. Here, "play acting" with different cognitions and behaviors, can actually change the self--or a self or some selves of the self--for the better. Other relevant clinical psychological research areas are that of social learning theory and vicarious conditioning. Here stimuli that an individual observes and processes may well change aspects of the self. The same play acting and the same observation and processing of stimuli in intelligence and counterintelligence operations can similarly change the self or self or selves of the self--perhaps for the better, perhaps not.

Intelligence professionals might profitably note that the relatedness of personal and social selves is an issue that bears monitoring--both in the selection, training, control, and debriefing/decompression of participants in an intelligence operation and in the psychological literature as well. (See Hogg, M.A., & Abrams, D. (1988). *Social identifications*. NY: Routledge & Kegan; Reid, A., & Deaux, K. (1996). *Relationship between social and personal identities: Segregation or integration?* *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 1084-1091; Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press; Turner, J.C., Hogg, M.A., Oakes, P.J., Reicher, S.D., & Wetherell, M.S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.) (Keywords: Intelligence, Self.)