**Embodiment in the development of the self and personal identity**

In this paper, I defend the position that any reasonable philosophical theory about human beings must take into account our embodiment, which itself needs to be through the lens of the individual’s socio-cultural historical context. I do so by theorising about the embodied self and importance of the body in personal identity. I defend the view that our bodies are crucial to both our understanding of ourselves and to personal identity. But we are who we are because we interact with others and other aspects of the environment. We are shaped through our social space, with our bodies being infused with social meaning from the earliest moments of human life. I further argue that our bodies are fluid and multifaceted, as are our interactions (generally), not least because of the shifts in perspective between subject and object that necessarily occur in the social space. So there is an inherent ambiguity in our bodies and therefore our interactions and sense of self. I argue that with this ambiguity that is present, we constantly consciously or unconsciously negotiate between the exterior selves and how we perceive ourselves in attempting to arrive at a sense of self with which we can be happy. It may appear as if we are rejecting this ambiguity by developing ossified selves, but I argue that even in the process of this rejection, there is a recognition of the existing ambiguity.

In making my argument, I discuss how, as Oyewumi notes, the western philosophical tradition has generally supported the idea that “bodylessness” is a “precondition of rational thought” (1997, 3). Furthermore, western philosophy is replete with attempts to privilege the so-called interior rational self and separate it from the exterior context through which the self relates and develops, while placing the body in the exterior context. I then examine how the claim that we are truly our interior selves has been utilised as a tool of exclusion, such that “all those who are qualified for the label ‘different’ in varying historical epochs have been considered to be embodied, eliminated therefore by instinct and effect, reason being beyond them” (Oyewumi 1997, 3). Anyone who does not meet the paradigm of the physically and mentally able-bodied white cis-gendered male would generally be labelled as different and treated as such in normative contexts. This selective consideration of embodiment is forcefully highlighted Mills’ assertion that it is generally considered that the “mind is located in Europe and body in the Third World” (2010, 3486).

I further argue that an adequate theory of personal identity should take seriously sociocultural-historical contexts, and the social and normative aspects of persons and personal identity. We interact in these contexts as embodied beings who are not atomistic individuals, but members of particular groups, with embodied identities related to race, gender, physical capability, etc. – grounded in socio-cultural historical norms and values – help to shape personal identity. I consequently offer such a theoretical framework.

Keywords: Self; personal identity; embodied social identity; Caribbean philosophy

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