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## **Return to Self: The Interplay of Self and Others and its Effects on Mental Health**

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The role of others in an individual's sense of self is well established in literature through sociometric theory, gender theories, self-concept, and self-esteem. Literature suggests that others' norms and values are likely to participate in the context in which selves are created. The interaction between self and others indicates a tendency of returning to self in the form of influence on thinking and feeling about the self.

This paper presents the deep interconnection between self-identity, relational dynamics, and mental health, and a tendency to return to self. A study was conducted with five male participants experiencing relationship breakup. They processed it through autobiographical therapeutic performance (ATP) intervention. Data was collected in multiple forms including session notes, performance recordings, and post intervention interviews. A longitudinal IPA methodology was used to analyse the data.

It was found that participants' sense of self was shaped by their interactions with others that impacted their relationships, including romantic relationships and that again impacted their sense of self. This interplay influenced their mental health. Many participants reported that their self-perception was heavily influenced by how others viewed them, leading to emotional suppression and a lack of authenticity in relationships, which contributed to mental health challenges such as low self-esteem and anxiety.

Through the intervention, they began to recognise the importance of self-acceptance as a foundation for healthy relationships. Many experienced a blurring of self-identity within their romantic relationships, feeling incomplete without their partners and suffering a diminished sense of self-worth after breakups. Some participants noted that their masculinity clashed with their partners' expectations, while others compromised their needs due to low self-worth. As explored in the ATP intervention this interplay between self and others demonstrates a tendency of returning to self.



## Biography

**Praveen Jain** is a Dramatherapist and a PhD scholar at Kingston University London. His research explores relationship breakup trauma in heterosexual men using autobiographical therapeutic performance as an intervention with a focus on gender and masculinity and its impact on self-esteem and mental health. He has worked with children and adults with learning disabilities and mental health issues in school, social care, and the NHS in the UK. He has also worked with homeless men and women in India where he designed and implemented a holistic wellbeing programme that included play groups, music ensembles, process groups, individual and group dramatherapy.

## Recent publications & presentations

Jain, P. (2025) **Personal Theatre of the Broken Hearts: Processing Post-Breakup Trauma and Masculinity Through Therapeutic Performance**. *HSSCE PGR Conference*, Kingston University London, 24 June.

Jain, P. (2024) **Personal Theatre of the Broken Hearts: Processing Post-Breakup Trauma and Masculinity Through Therapeutic Performance**. *British Association of Dramatherapy Conference*, London, 17 October.

Jain, P., Gourlay, S., Bacon, I. and Harries, P. (accepted with revisions) **Autobiographical Performance and Dramatherapy: A Scoping Review**, *Dramatherapy Journal*