



How to Study Meta-intentionality: Looking for Access to Intra-psychological Intention Structures

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Abstract

In this article, I present the idea that it is possible to create research methods that are constructable based on theoretical questions, rather than the other way around. This is shown directly in relation to the study of the psychological phenomenon of *meta-intentionality*, which refers to the notion of “wanting the other to want what I want.” It is a sophisticated feature of interpersonal relationships that is based on the subjective bonding of the persons who want to affect the intentions of each other. Such meta-intentionality can be studied using qualitative vignettes that put the responder in a dilemma situation of proving to the other that the latter’s wanting something is convergent with the sincere desires of the respondent. Results of a pilot study showed that triggering different trajectories for such intra-psychological problem-solving was possible, but further elaboration of the method was undertaken. There is a need for methods which are useful for the study of the intra-psychological intention structures that operate under social and interpersonal guidance. To solve this problem, a new way of creating and analyzing vignettes is presented. Furthermore, the need for epistemological openness in the scientific field of psychology is discussed.

Keywords Semiotic meditation · Meaning · Meta-intentionality · Epistemology · Normativity

Introduction

Within psychology, there is a focus on studying the individuals’ wants and intentions. The concept of intentionality has a long history that reaches back thousands of years all the way to Aristotle, who made reference to the intentionality of thought. Furthermore, intentionality is a key term within the phenomenological tradition, and especially Brentano’s concept of intentionality is of relevance to this paper. Brentano argues that all psychological phenomena are intentional; he claims that to believe is to believe *something*. It is for the belief state, which is a particular kind of mental act, to intend whatever is believed, whether

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that is a belief in God or the belief that today is Tuesday. This also holds true for other psychological states, such as desire, hope, fear, and love. In its most basic form, Brentano's intentionality thesis describes an intentional relation projected from an act of thought to its intended object. This sets up the intentional relation as unidirectional. However, Brentano elaborated on his model through the notion that thought involves a double judgment and reflexive self-intending, meaning that while we are thinking about something, we are also aware of our thinking of it. Finally, Brentano holds that every psychological phenomenon contains something as an object within itself, although not always in the same way. In love *something* is loved, the intended object of love is thus contained immanently *in* the act of love. Thus, Brentano's concept of intentionality has an internal objectivity, which can be described as a relation to thought content that is contained within the psychological state (Jacquette, 2004).

However, there is an interesting gap in our knowledge—even if the intentionality of a person is considered, *the extension of that to the intentionality of another person* has been left out from the realm of phenomena that are investigated. There is a whole field open for investigation when it comes to investigating why individuals want others to want something. In everyday life, we often want somebody else to want what we desire at the moment. A mother wants her child to want to respect adults, a man wants his employer to want to raise his salary, a king wants his subjects to want to join his army to fight the army of the neighboring king, and so on. Yet psychological science has curiously overlooked such real-life phenomena, which means there is a lack of theories and methods which can explore them. The aim of this article is to open for the study of these phenomena and show how it can be possible to gain insight into them through constructable methods. Thus, perhaps a model that investigates these phenomena, while extending Brentano's concept of intentionality *and* including the extension of intentionality to another person, could look something like this (Fig. 1):

In this model, the act and content of the person's thought, their intentionality, is transferred to the other person's thoughts and then mirrored back to them in a shared intentionality, where the intentions of person A influence, or at least attempt to influence, the intentions of person B. Intentionality is human. Valsiner (2012) points out that the most important cultural invention of the human psyche is the claim "I want <X>!" which describes the will to gain something, from the environment or from within oneself. Despite this, it is also one of the least studied themes in contemporary psychology. Especially the "want" part of the claim is not often analyzed, except for cases of synthesis between European philosophical and psychological traditions (Valsiner, 2012).

An interesting way to analyze the want part could possibly be through the claim of "I want you to want <X>!". What is meant by this? In some situations, the person is not

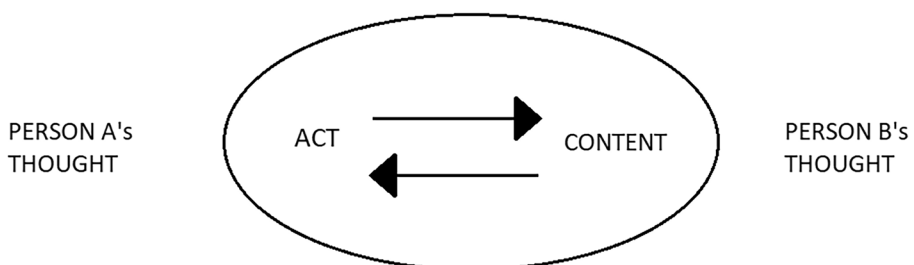


Fig. 1 Extension of Brentano's concept of intentionality

always satisfied with getting another person to do what they wanted them to do; they also want that person to want the same as them. This is a case of meta-intentionality; wanting the other to want what I do. For example, the wife does not want her husband to bring her flowers because she told him to. She wants him to *want* to bring her flowers. But how can this be verified? The same act—bringing flowers—can happen by following a convention. Or a habit—yet it can also happen because the flower-bringer deeply wants it.

Semiotic Regulation of Intra-psychological Functions

The example of the wife not wanting her husband to give her flowers because he is told to do so, but because he wants to do so, makes one wonder why it is so important *why* he gives her the flowers? Intuitively, one senses that yes, it does make a difference what the intention is behind the action, but why is it so important? A way to understand this phenomenon could be through the lens of semiotic mediation, or more specifically the need for controlling and/or changing the other's wants. Valsiner (1999) suggests that the need to control the social other is a way to mediate semiotic regulation of intra-psychological functions. Human beings can create and use signs as psychological tools, which can be used to create new possibilities for acting, or on the other hand, block the possibility for acting. Valsiner lays out a hierarchical system where the higher and lower levels control each other in a reciprocal manner, which creates a multi-level system of relative stability:

HIGHER LEVEL: I govern YOU (as my construction).

LOWER LEVEL: YOU should govern ME (as I have constructed you to do so).

If we take the previous example of the wife and husband, one could say that the wife has constructed an image of her husband that supports the regulation of her intra-psychological functions that looks like this:

HIGHER LEVEL: I govern YOU (the husband), as you are my construction. I construct you as a loving partner and that role requires that I know your wanting to do different appealing tasks for me (help, give true compliments and flowers).

LOWER LEVEL: YOU should govern ME, as I have constructed you to do so. You should make me feel loved, because I am your beloved wife whom you cherish, as you should believe, on your own free will.

In line with this view, it is possible to theorize that the reason behind why the wife wants her husband to want to bring her flowers is because then he would act congruently with her construction of him and thus help her regulate her own intra-psychological functions, which in this case may be an emotional regulatory need for feeling loved. Furthermore, this may also explain why such differences in wants can lead to serious issues in romantic relationships. As mentioned, the lower and higher levels of the system control each other in a reciprocal manner, but they are also vulnerable to disruption if the social other which acts as a regulator does not act as they have been constructed to do (Valsiner, 1999). Additionally, it can be argued that the wife wants him to bring her flowers without being asked to rule out that the act of bringing flowers is not merely a non-devotional fulfillment of duty. Many people see it as a duty to bring flowers for the woman in a relationship on Valentine's Day or wedding anniversaries, so imagine that the husband brought flowers for both his mother and wife on Valentine's Day. This would surely be a breach of the normative views of gifting flowers despite the indication of the love of the husband for two important women in his life. Thus, the wife may wish to make sure that the husband brings her flowers out of devotion, and not out of normative duty. Duty is good but performing the

same acts out of personal desire is better. The wife wants the latter, which brings forth a fitting quote from Kamala Das:

A woman in love is never satisfied if her lover remembers with only one part of his body. She wishes to grow like cancer within him, to fill him with awareness and pain. This is the special cruelty of love. (Das, 1993, p. 79)

This quote from Das is especially fitting when it comes to intentions in intimate relationships, the feeling that one cannot, but still feels the need to guide the other's intentions is important in romantic relationships, both in the mundane everyday tasks such as cleaning and running a household, as well as the more emotionally abstract and even spiritual aspects of a relationship.

Intentions and Actions of the Social Other

Valsiner's (1999) paper was based on a psychotherapeutic case study that looks at two therapists who outline a direction of analysis of psychotherapy that reaches beyond the realm of therapy and out into the basic processes of human cultural development. In the paper, there is an example of Alice (a psychotherapy client) and Thumper, where the social other invented as a psychotherapeutic tool (Thumper, whom Alice constructs as a guardian angel) is an intra-psychological construction who cannot act back, and thus Alice's system may be less vulnerable, as the lower level of the system always acts in accordance with the higher level. In a romantic relationship, the social other is their own person with their own wants and needs; this may lead to instability in the system if the romantic partner does not act as they have been constructed to (Valsiner, 1999).

An example of this could be a couple—a boyfriend and girlfriend—where the girlfriend always bakes a special chocolate cake for the boyfriend's birthday. She has done this for many years, and always uses the same recipe. Over the years, the boyfriend has taken the cake as a sign of his girlfriend's love and devotion for him. However, imagine that one year the girlfriend uses a new recipe for the chocolate cake because she has grown tired of baking the same cake again and again. She wants to have fun baking, and thus uses another recipe. In this scenario, this would be a breach of the boyfriend's construction of his girlfriend. He has constructed her to be a loving girlfriend when she makes this certain cake but starts doubting her when she has her own want (intention) of baking something that she would have fun trying, thus destabilizing the boyfriend's construction of her.

In the scenario with the husband and wife, it would mean that if the husband only buys flowers when he is told to do so, then he acts against the wife's construction of him and causes instability in the system. Depending on the situation and the severity, a disruption of the wife's construction may even lead to the end of the marriage. The husband must somehow convince the wife that he does in fact bring her flowers because he loves her and wants to show it; however, it may also be the case that he actually does not want to give her flowers and only does so out of obligation. In that case, it would seem that the husband does not love his wife in the way that she wants him to. In that situation, there are two possibilities: (1) The wife must reconstruct the higher level of her hierarchy if her husband will not act as she has constructed him to ("He is absent-minded and forgets to bring me flowers, but he loves me very much"), or she will end the relationship to find stability ("I cannot deal with him losing love for me as he fails to bring me flowers"), if she cannot find a convention strategy that restores her intra-psychological regulation. On the basis of these scenarios, it could be hypothesized that romantic relationships and other dynamic relationships to social others

are vulnerable to deconstruction and need to be continually renegotiated and re-constructed. Thus, Valsiner's model shows us that our expectations of how others act provide insight into our own intentions and how we wish others to adopt these intentions (meta-intentionality) as a semiotic regulation of our own intra-psychological functions; i.e., when the wife becomes upset that her husband does not bring her flowers without being asked, it reveals her meta-intentionality of wanting him to *want* to give her flowers, wherein the meta-intention serves as a semiotic regulator of her need for feeling loved by her husband.

Conflict and Meta-intentionality

As described, if there is instability in the system of semiotic regulation of the intra-psychological functions, it can lead to conflict within relationships. Lewin's (1940) considerations about conflict in marriage may help deepen the understanding of this occurrence. Lewin defines the social group as a fundamental determinant of the individual's life space. A marriage is a group situation, and thus shows the general characteristics of life in the group. Therefore, the conflicts that can arise in marriage should be viewed as arising from the relation between the individual and their group. Furthermore, the group can be seen as part of the life space in which the individual moves around. The person's status in their group and how much space of free movement they have within the group is crucial for determining the individual's life space, which is also why marriage has such central meaning to the life space. Since the marriage group is small, consisting of just two people, each member is sensitive to everything that is not in accord with their own needs. Lewin points out that conflicts in marriage usually do not become serious unless the life spaces of the partners are too divergent from each other. For example, young married couples sometimes face issues in relation to their families as they form a new family unit. The parents of the wife may have difficulty accepting that her new main family unit is her marriage and not their family. The possibility for this to result in conflict within the marriage is minimized if the husband and wife have a stronger sense of membership in the marriage group than in their respective memberships in their original family groups; thus, the intertwining of their life spaces is higher with each other than with their families (Lewin, 1940). This is crucial, as only intertwining of the life-spaces makes the notion of meta-intentionality and "I want you to want <X>!" possible. If the wife wants her husband to bring her flowers out of love, but he does not do this, it has a direct effect on her life space. Furthermore, the fact that he does not do as she hopes suggests that there might be a lack of intertwining of their life spaces, which, as Lewin states, causes their marriage to be in higher risk of long-term conflict. However, it can also be argued that conflict is necessary for the negotiation of intentions in relationships, and thus also meta-intentionality, as the rejection of the other's wants opens the possibility of discussion of each person's narratives about each other and the possibility of adjusting those narratives. For example, when the husband does not want to bring his wife flowers, it may not be because their life-spaces are not intertwined enough. Rather, it may just be that the husband finds the giving of flowers to be a superficial way of expressing love, whereas he prefers to express his love in a bodily and sensual manner. Thus, the husband knows his wife wants him to bring her flowers, but chooses not to do so, as perhaps he feels she does not care about his need for sensual expression of love either. The conflict has the possibility to be a source of innovation within the marriage, if it is directed appropriately and used as an opportunity to negotiate what the intertwined life-space should be going forward in the relationship.

Kantian Ethics and Meta-intentionality

Why do intentions matter? If the wife gets her flowers, does it really matter *why* the husband gave them to her? An answer to this question could perhaps be found in moral philosophy. Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics give some insight into the importance of intentions, especially notion of *good will*, which to Kant is an all-encompassing and all-important ethical concept (Ezedike, 2020). According to Kant, good will is the intention of doing good, and this is the only thing which can be good in and of itself. As he noted: "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a **good will**" (Kant, 1785/2012 p. 7).

Thus, to Kant, it is your intentions that matter and not your actions, and therefore, it does matter why the husband buys the flowers for his wife. If he buys her flowers to get her to stop nagging him about being an absentminded husband, he has not brought her the flowers from good will, he did not have good intentions, and therefore his actions were not morally good. This points towards *why* intentions are so important in social relations. It is important for your well-being to establish relationships with others who are good people that will not have ill will towards you. Therefore, the meaning and intention behind an act is not inconsequential, as it frames the moral and social meaning of the act itself, which is also why it is so important for individuals to gauge the other's intentions and perhaps even change them. It is important for the wife to know what her husband's intentions are, because in the end, his intentions reveal if he is a good man or not.

Methodological Approach

This study has been driven by an interest in finding ways to examine the important claim of

"I want you to want <X>!", and thereby how to gain access into intra-psychological intention structures. The method chosen was a qualitative vignette approach which consisted of three vignettes, each with their own narratives that explored meta-intentionality. Classically, vignettes as a method refer to stimuli that can be textual but also include images, films, or live acts performed in the presence of the research participants, which the research participants are then invited to respond to. Textual vignettes can take many forms ranging from being short written prompts to longer extended stories. Within this story, key moments that are expected to trigger thoughts in the reader are embedded. The thoughts of the participant are explicated and recorded in order to be analyzed (Finch, 1987; Hughes & Huby, 2004). Thus, the vignette method is a projective verbal method with meaning suggestions that are set up through oppositions in the flow of the narrative of the story.

The vignettes in this study were followed by a series of open-ended questions regarding how to solve the conflict of the narrative, as well as how they think each party of the conflict feels in the shape of sentence completion. In doing so, it was hoped that it would be possible to have the participants reflect upon each "person's" intention and how that person could convince others of their intentions. Furthermore, the vignettes were set up in a sequence of three moving from the ordinary everyday experience, then to concepts of love, and in the end spiritual devotion. In this way, the abstraction level rises with each vignette in the sequence. The first vignette had the theme of joint cleaning efforts, as the idea was to start with a concrete problem that would be relatable to many people (Fig. 2):

Vignette 1: Joint Cleaning Efforts

Imagine a couple that live together and one day the boyfriend and girlfriend are having an argument about cleaning the living room. The girlfriend is very tired because she had a long and busy week, and she wishes that her boyfriend would help her clean the living room. She asks him to help clean the living room, but the boyfriend does not want to clean the living room at first, and the following dialogue ensues:

Girlfriend: *"Will you help me clean the living room? I am very tired."*

Boyfriend: *"No, I am also tired, and I do not want to clean the living room right now. Let's do it tomorrow."*

Girlfriend: *"No, let's clean it together now, I do not like to live in a dirty home."*

Boyfriend: *"Fine, I will help you clean the damn living room."*

Girlfriend: *"You know what, no, I don't want your help anymore."*

Boyfriend: *"What? But I just said I would help you; I don't understand."*

Girlfriend: *"I don't just want you to help me, I want you to want to help me."*

Boyfriend: *"I do want to help you!"*

Girlfriend: *"I don't believe you, you just complained about cleaning the living room and now you say that you will help me, but you are only helping because I told you to, not because you want to."*

PLEASE GIVE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS SITUATION:

- If I were the girlfriend I would feel _____ but _____
- If I were the boyfriend I would feel _____ but _____
- **GENERAL QUESTION:** Can the boyfriend convince the girlfriend that he really does want to help her, and is not just doing it because she told him to do it? It is not enough if he says: "I am not just saying so", he must find some other way to resolve the conflict. How can he do that?

Fig. 2 Vignette 1: joint cleaning efforts

The second vignette had the theme proof of love, which is more abstract than the problem of wanting help with cleaning a shared living area (Fig. 3). As some of the respondents noted, you can try to prove that you want to help cleaning by doing it without being asked. However, it can be more difficult for the wife in the second vignette to

Vignette 2: Proof of Love

Imagine a married couple that has been together for 20 years, they have a house, two teenage children and a family dog. Lately, the husband has felt like there is something wrong and that his wife is not as affectionate as she used to be when they first met each other. One night after their children have gone to bed, they are watching a movie together in their living room and the following dialogue ensues:

Husband: *"Do you still love me?"*

Wife: *"Of course I love you! Why would you ask that?"*

Husband: *"Because I feel like you dont love me in the same way as when we first met"*

Wife: *"Oh, but we cannot be infatuated forever, it is natural to feel different after a long time together"*

Husband: *"See, you dont love me anymore!"*

Wife: *"Yes, I do love you!"*

Husband: *"Not in the way that I want you to love me..."*

Wife: *"And how is that?"*

Husband: *"I want you to love me like no one else, and to be attracted to me"*

Wife: *"I am attracted to you, and I love you in a special way, or I would not have married you. I love you and the life we have together"*

Husband: *"You are just saying that because you do not want hurt the children with a divorce"*

PLEASE GIVE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS SITUATION:

- If I were the wife I would
feel _____ but _____

- If I were the husband I would
feel _____ but _____

- GENERAL QUESTION: How can the wife in the story convince her husband that she does in fact love him, and is not just saying so because he asked? It is not enough if she says: "I am not just saying so", she must find some other way to resolve the conflict. How can she do that?

Fig. 3 Vignette 2: proof of love

prove her love for her husband, as love is a much more abstract concept than cleaning the living room.

The final vignette had the theme of religious faith, which goes even further in its level of abstraction than the concept of love (Fig. 4). A way this can be seen is in how the words themselves differ; love is both used as a noun and a verb and thus it is both a concept and an action. This notion of love being something you can do is important in the study of intention, as there seems to be an importance of showing intentions through actions. However, religious faith only exists as a noun, which perhaps is why it seems to be more difficult to prove faith.

Pilot Study

The vignettes were used in a pilot application to see if they would be useful for the study of meta-intentionality. The vignettes were assigned as homework to 25 Estonian psychology students; thus, the pilot data consist of their responses to the vignettes. The participants were anonymized and are referred to as P1, P2, etc. The vignette-responses vary in their length and level of detail, the shortest responses were in the range of 72 to 83 words, the midrange length of the responses was 103 to 204 words, and the longest responses were in the range of 234 to 438 words.

Upon reading the vignettes, three central themes stood out: blocking doubt, showing intentions through actions, and intentions as private information. Regarding blocking doubt, it was a reoccurring theme that the respondents expressed the notion that it is not possible to ever convince another person of one's intentions, especially if there have been manifested doubts about the intentions in the first place. For example, P1 notes both regarding vignette one and three that they do not believe it is possible to convince another person of one's intentions. As their response to the first vignette, P1 writes:

The situation is fairly common but a pretty difficult one. I think that it is basically impossible to convince the girlfriend that he really wants to help her, at least not when she is that emotional. So the first thing there has to be done is calming the situation. They both have to think rationally and trust each other's thoughts and feelings. But to be honest, I believe that the boyfriend doesn't actually have this deep wanting of helping her.

Here P1 explains that they think it is impossible for the boyfriend in the story to convince his girlfriend that he does in fact wish to help her clean; however, what is interesting to note is that P1 writes in the end that they do not believe the boyfriend has the intention of actually helping. This shows how powerful doubt about intentions can be, when even the respondents begin to doubt the honesty of the boyfriend's intentions.

Some of the respondents seem to think that a way to overcome the blocking doubt may be through action, rather than words; furthermore, they also have a focus on the importance of showing initiative. P12 wrote this in response to the first vignette:

Take the initiative **and show that you care about cleaning**. Remind her calmly about the times you showed affection to show her that this one incident is nothing serious. (Added boldface)

P12 emphasizes the importance of showing that you care about something by doing it and referring to past incidents that prove this. It may be difficult to prove in the current

Vignette 3: Religious Faith

Imagine a 15-year old boy who has been brought up by very religious Christian parents. It is very important to the parents that their son believes in God, because within the type of Christianity they follow, faith is the key to salvation in the afterlife and thus the parents are afraid that if their son does not believe in God he will not enter heaven. Since their son has become a teenager they are afraid that maybe he does not care so much about his faith and God anymore, therefore they try to make him prove that he still believes in God:

Parents: *Did you remember to say your nightly prayer yesterday?*

Son: *Yes, I did, as I usually do.*

Parents: *What did you pray about?*

Son: *Uh, I don't really remember...*

Parents: *How can you not remember what you prayed about? You can only forget if the prayer was not important to you!*

Son: *It was important, but I pray every night.. I can't remember everything.*

Parents: *We are not sure you still believe in God, you know your faith is important! It is not enough to just pray if you do not believe.*

Son: *I do believe in God!*

Parents: *We are still not sure...*

PLEASE GIVE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS SITUATION:

- If I were the son I would
feel _____ but _____

- If I were the parent I would
feel _____ but _____

- GENERAL QUESTION: How can the son in the story convince his parents that he does in fact have faith in God, and is not just saying so to please his parents? It is not enough if he says: "I am not just saying so", he must find some other way to resolve the conflict. How can he do that?

Fig. 4 Vignette 3: religious faith

situation what the boyfriend's intentions are, but if he refers to past events like this and he has consistently shown an intention of cleaning, perhaps it is possible for him to convince his girlfriend in this situation too. In this way, the boyfriend can address the girlfriend's

doubts of his intentions by referring to past actions that act as symbolic personal gestures which remind the girlfriend of his general devotion to her. By reminding her of past times where he has cleaned their living room, or other shared living spaces, the boyfriend is offering symbolic proof of his love and intentions. The notion of showing by doing is also seen in regard to the vignette about love, where P10 suggests that the wife has to show her love through actions:

I think that words are not enough here, she has to show it and probably the best way would be to invest time in their quality time together. Listen to her husband and try to understand why he is feeling this way and what are his needs behind this feeling.

“Showing by doing” can be viewed as an effort to impact the other’s intentions by pretending to not want to do it, and then attempting to align their goal-directed actions waiting for the “jump” of direction of wanting from one’s to the other’s (“we have been living together now so many years, now *I begin to want* the same you always implied *you* wanted”). Furthermore, showing by doing does not only have to take the form of doing something in there here and now, but can also take a symbolic form as mentioned above, where one refers to past acts of “doing.” Thus, the person is “showing” by referring to past representations of “doing.” Finally, there is the theme of intentions as private information. Some respondents argue that in some cases, a person’s intentions are their own private matter and that it is not acceptable for others to infringe upon them. This especially seems to be more prevalent with the vignette concerning religious faith, and not so much when it comes to the vignette about cleaning or the vignette about love. P13 thinks that it is the boy’s right to keep his faith, and thus keep his intentions behind praying, private from his parents:

In this situation I think that it would be the boy’s right to say that his faith is something intimate/private/personal and that the parents should never ask him to prove something so deep and true. That they should trust him and his faith and they should respect his privacy. **Religion isn’t like cleaning the common room – it should remain a personal matter.** (Added boldface)

This perspective brings us back to the Kantian ethics and their role concerning intentions. The first two vignettes relate directly to social others. Thus, it seems that the respondents think that it is perfectly fair for the girlfriend and husband to want to know their partners’ true intentions towards them in their relationship. As it was established, it is important to know the intentions of others in social relations, since intentions frame the moral and social meaning of an act. This becomes different in the case of the third vignette about religious faith, as it can be argued that the social other in the situation is God and not the parents—which is a hypergeneralization of the assumed agency. The intention of religious faith is directed to the realm of the God and not kept under the jurisdiction of the parents; therefore, a number of the respondents believe that the boy’s faith is a private matter (Fig. 5).

The notion of “private matter” is a semiotic block against the effort of one person’s direction of the other’s intention. Hence, it is a meta-intention: “I would like to guide your intention, **but I feel this is not appropriate**” (the semiotic regulator blocks it). This is one step further than what was showed in Valsiner (1999) wherein the deity was made and given omnipotence. In this example however, the interference in potency is blocked, so we see the active self-selection of the domains where “I want you to want <X>!” is present, and we also see when it is not open to this influence, such as when it is blocked by the notion of “private matter.” Thus, the idea of private matter is crucial to understanding how

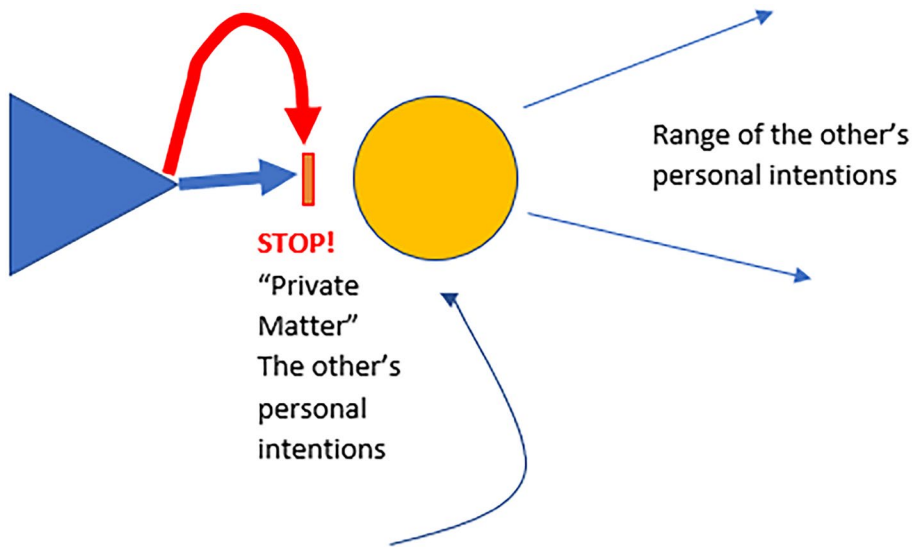


Fig. 5 Model of “private matter” acting as a semiotic blocker of meta-intentionality

meta-intentionality can be inhibited, in this case in relation to religious matters, but it could also be in relation to something else. For example, political opinions are another topic where private matter can act as a semiotic blocker, as it is another topic that is deemed intensely private, at least in most Western societies where it is not acceptable to want to control which political party or ideology others support. Therefore, the semiotic blocker serves an important function to block the social other’s influence over one’s own intentions in a way that is normatively accepted.

What Have the Pilot Data Told Us?

Considering the participants’ responses in the pilot application, the development of the vignettes has been successful to some degree. Their responses have given important insights into the notion of meta-intentionality in the form of the themes and perhaps especially the function of “private matter” as a semiotic blocker of one person’s influence on another’s intentions. However, there are also issues with the vignettes. Some participant’s responses to the vignettes give rich and insightful views on intention and the notion of how you can convince another person of your intentions. However, some responses do not focus on intentions at all; instead, they seem to be more focused on the conflict of the vignettes and how to solve the conflicts. For example, P20 writes this in response to the vignette about cleaning:

Communication is the key to a functional relationship and cohabitation as both partners may have varying ideas about how things should be organized or varying priorities. Therefore it is necessary to establish their common goals and come to an agreement on certain arrangements on how and when things must be done that’s accommodating to both their needs.

Fig. 6 Original version of the general question for vignette 2

3. GENERAL QUESTION: How can the wife in the story convince her husband that she does in fact love him, and is not just saying so because he asked? It is not enough if she says: "I am not just saying so", she must find some other way to resolve the conflict. How can she do that?

P20 focuses much more on the conflict and how to avoid conflict in general, rather than how the boyfriend can convince the girlfriend of his intentions when the conflict has arisen. This same issue is seen with P2, who also focuses on how to solve the conflict, and not how the boyfriend can convince his girlfriend of his intentions, which would lead to conflict resolution as well. They wrote:

I would say that they need to look at the division of labour and responsibilities around the household. The girlfriend seems to be upset at this point in time to be open to a rational conversation. He can resolve the conflict by letting things cool down by taking a 10-minute walk (giving a heads up to the gf) OR asking the gf "what do you need right now?". After they're calm they can sit down together and form a battle plan for similar situations in the future.

P2 and P20 both have similar views on the other vignettes as well, so it does not seem that it is the themes of the vignette stories that are an issue. Perhaps a way to solve this would be to make the focus of intentionality more explicit in the general question part of the vignette by mentioning that intentions are the focus of the vignette and in the vignette itself. In the pilot vignettes, the general question ends with the statement: "It is not enough if he says: 'I am not just saying so', he must find some other way to resolve the conflict. How can he do that?" It is possible that the part of the sentence which states that the conflict must be resolved in another way prompts some of the participants to abandon the notion of intentionality and instead focus completely on conflict resolution. The purpose of the sentence is to emphasize that you cannot simply convince others of your intentions by saying they are true, and some of the participants seem to understand this, whereas others abandon intentions and focus on the conflict. Thus, a revision of the general question based on the pilot data looks like this (Figs. 6 and 7):

In the above figures, this change has been applied to the second vignette; however, this same revision can be applied to the first and third vignettes as well. If we stay with the example of the second vignette, the revised version looks like this (Fig. 8):

When analyzing the revised vignettes, it should become apparent that it is possible for the basic understanding and framing of intentions ability to guide intention to be found within the participants responses.

Existing methods of analysis such as meaning coding, discursive, and rhetorical practices are not enough to capture this. This form of vignette does not fit the standard categories of phenomenological, narrative, discursive, or whatever else empirical method of analysis comes to mind. Instead, the analysis of the vignette needs to be based on the theoretical assumptions upon which the empirical method is constructed; i.e., in this paper, the theoretical assumptions are based upon meta-intentionality; thus, the empirical method should reflect this. In this way, the vignette method is not just a selectable one size fits all method, but instead constructable based on theoretical questions. Returning to the subject at hand, a possible way to analyze meta-intentionality within

Fig. 7 Revised version of the general question for vignette 2

3. GENERAL QUESTION: How can the wife in the story convince her husband that she does in fact love him, and is not just saying so because he asked? It is not enough if she says: "I am not just saying so", she must find some other way to convince her husband of her intentions. How can she do that?

Vignette 2: **Proof of Love**

Imagine a married couple that has been together for 20 years, they have a house, two teenage children and a family dog. Lately, the husband has felt like there is something wrong and that his wife is not as affectionate as she used to be when they first met each other. One night after their children have gone to bed, they are watching a movie together in their living room and the following dialogue ensues:

Husband: *"Do you still love me?"*

Wife: *"Of course I love you! Why would you ask that?"*

Husband: *"Because I feel like you don't love me in the same way as when we first met"*

Wife: *"Oh, but we cannot be infatuated forever, it is natural to feel different after a long time together"*

Husband: *"See, you don't love me anymore!"*

Wife: *"Yes, I do love you!"*

Husband: *"Not in the way that I want you to love me..."*

Wife: *"And how is that?"*

Husband: *"I want you to love me like no one else, and to be attracted to me"*

Wife: *"I am attracted to you, and I love you in a special way, or I would not have married you. I love you and the life we have together"*

Husband: *"You are just saying that because you do not want hurt the children with a divorce"*

PLEASE GIVE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS SITUATION:

1. If I were the wife I would feel _____ but _____
2. If I were the husband I would feel _____ but _____
3. GENERAL QUESTION: How can the wife in the story convince her husband that she does in fact love him, and is not just saying so because he asked? It is not enough if she says: "I am not just saying so", she must find some other way to convince her husband of her intentions. How can she do that?

Fig. 8 Full revised version of vignette 2

this methodology could be based upon the multi-level system of semiotic regulation of the intra-psychological functions previously, which it is now possible to expand with an additional top level:

HIGHEST LEVEL: May I attempt to insist upon you to align yourself with my intentions? (BORDER OF PRIVACY).

HIGHER LEVEL: I govern YOU (as my construction) so I want you to want what I do.

LOWER LEVEL: YOU should govern ME (as I have constructed you to do so) so you are expected to resist my efforts to guide your intentions.

This new and highest level of the model adds another level of regulation, the regulation of intentions. This level then attempts to cross the border of privacy and may therefore also

be rejected if the semiotic blocker of “private matter” is utilized. If we put this in the context of the revised vignette, we can create a hypothetical response to the vignette which can then be analyzed through this structure. A hypothetical response where the structure works could look like this:

The wife can try to convince her husband of her intentions and love for him by suggesting that they renew their marriage vows, however she should wait and suggest it to him later. If she suggests it now, he will think she is just saying it to please him. Right now, she should keep her opinion that she loves him, but that love also changes. Then at another time he can suggest the vow renewal and it will be more genuine.

This hypothetical response would then fit into the model like this:

HIGHEST LEVEL: May I attempt to insist upon you to align yourself with my intentions? (BORDER OF PRIVACY): “You **must accept** my intentions as your own **to truly love me**”.

HIGHER LEVEL: I govern YOU (the wife), as you are my construction: “I construct you as a loving partner and that role **requires that I know** your wanting to love me” (give true compliments, be attracted to me and in love with me).

LOWER LEVEL: YOU should govern ME, as I have constructed you to do so: “You should make me feel loved, because I am your beloved husband whom you cherish, as you should believe, on **your own free will**” (spontaneous renewal of vows as a symbol of continued love).

Since this hypothetical vignette response fits within the model, it suggests that the vignette has been successful in prompting a response which is centered around intentions and meta-intentionality. Of course, this is a hypothetical response which is modelled to show exactly this, so it is no surprise. An example from the pilot data that would also somewhat fit into this model is P12’s response to the vignette about cleaning which was mentioned earlier. Their response would fit into the model like this:

HIGHEST LEVEL: May I attempt to insist upon you to align yourself with my intentions? (BORDER OF PRIVACY): “You **must want to care about cleaning** and thereby accept my intentions as your own **to truly love me**”.

HIGHER LEVEL: I govern YOU (the boyfriend), as you are my construction: “I construct you as a loving partner and that role **requires that I know** your wanting to help me” (caring about our shared living spaces, maintaining a clean home).

LOWER LEVEL: YOU should govern ME, as I have constructed you to do so: “You should make me feel loved, because I am your beloved girlfriend whom you cherish, as you should believe, on **your own free will**” (Reminding her about past times he cleaned without being asked, taking the initiative to show that he cares about cleaning).

This example shows how some of the responses from the pilot data in fact does fit into this model of studying meta-intentionality which further highlights its usefulness. However, it is also possible that the vignette responses would not fit the model. If this was the case, it would mean that the vignettes are not centered around the study of intentions and meta-intentionality anymore, but rather about something else. For example, the vignette responses from the pilot data that focus more on the conflict are likely investigating conflict resolution, rather than meta-intentionality. Thus, it is necessary for the responses to be analyzed within this model, especially the highest level, for them to truly explore intentions. Furthermore, the hypothetical response shows the mutually intertwined nature of the personal (I want you to love me the right way) and interpersonal (you want to love me in your way) intentions through the superimposition of normativity (you should love me in

this normative way). This brings us back to the expansion of Brentano's concept of intentionality which includes the extension of intentionality of another person. As noted, in this model, the intentionality of one person is transferred to the other persons thoughts and then mirrored back to them in a shared intentionality, where the intentions of person A influences or at least attempts to influence the intentions of person B. Person A's want (their thought) is imposed onto person B's want (their thought) and in their shared intentionality, which includes the act and contents of their thoughts and want, lies their creation of "you should," which is either accepted or rejected as a normative structure.

The Need for Epistemological Openness in Psychology

As we have seen throughout this paper, the psychological phenomenon of meta-intentionality is highly complex, which is also why it calls for a variational mode of thinking. Psychological phenomena are open systems, as we have seen with Valsiner's hierarchical model of semiotic regulation of intra-psychological functions, which is a multi-level system of relative stability—thus, it is variational and not static. It is an open system, which is sensitive to and interacts with variation (Valsiner, 1984, 1999). If psychology concentrates only on the prototypical cases of a phenomenon, it will miss out on meaningful sources of knowledge. For example, if a person states they feel sad, a static psychology would be satisfied with putting a period to the statement, whereas a dynamic psychology would imply that there are many more aspects of this statement with full empirical justification. The feeling of sadness has consequences throughout the whole organism, in both its psychic and somatic aspects, aspects which a psychology without a variational and dynamic approach to science would miss (Maslow, 1970; Valsiner, 1984).

In line with this, psychology also needs to beware of scientific orthodoxy that leads to a means- or technique-centered approach to defining science. Means-centering tends to overvalue quantification indiscriminately as an end, and not as a tool to explore interesting questions. As a result of this, means-centered scientists tend to fit their problems to their methods rather than the opposite. Means centering also creates a hierarchy within science, where physics is considered more scientific than biology, and biology more scientific than psychology, and psychology as more scientific than sociology (Maslow, 1970). Brinkmann (2011) points to this tendency within psychology itself, representing the field of psychology as a metaphorical Janus head talking with two tongues. One face of the Janus head speaks a language with vivid accounts of personal change, development, and therapeutic narratives, which legitimatizes a psychology of human concerns. The other side of the Janus head speaks a language concentrated on statistics, questionnaires, and quantitative experiments, which legitimatizes psychology as a natural science. The two faces could also be said to represent a variational mode of thinking and a typological mode of thinking in Valsiner's terms, or a dynamic psychology and a means- and technique-centered psychology in Maslow's terms (Brinkmann, 2011; Maslow, 1970; Valsiner, 1984). The two faces of psychology seldomly confront each other, as they are dependent on each other despite of their differences. Furthermore, Hume's focus on method as the key to a science of the mind has been formative to psychology, and Brinkmann argues that method has been read into the constitution of the mind itself, which has contributed to shaping humans in light of a method-based psychology (Brinkmann, 2011).

A crucial issue with and danger of scientific orthodoxy is that it tends to limit the jurisdiction of science, as it not only blocks the development of new methodologies, but it also blocks the scientist from asking questions which cannot be answered through the means of

existing methods (Maslow, 1970). Thus, there needs to be room for the idea that methods can also be constructable based on theoretical questions. I have showed this in my own pilot study which this paper is centered around; the prototypical and classical vignette method and methods of analysis did not fit with the goal of in-depth study of the intra-psychological intention structures that operate under social and interpersonal guidance. To solve this issue, I have suggested that it is possible to create a new vignette technique that is centered around theoretical assumptions regarding meta-intentionality. Furthermore, by creating this suggestion for a new vignette method, it has been shown that it is in fact possible to anchor methods on ideas rather than anchoring ideas on methods, and thus opening for the possibility of creating new and better suited methods for the study of intra-psychological intention structures.

Conclusion

Meta-intentionality is an important social phenomenon which has a direct impact on social relationships. Firstly, it has been shown how Brentano's concept of intentionality can be extended into a notion of meta-intentionality. Building upon this, Valsiner's model of semiotic regulation of intra-psychological functions shows that meta-intentionality is crucial in social relations, as it influences interpersonal relationships directly, leaving them vulnerable to deconstruction and continuous renegotiation and re-construction. Kant's notion of good will builds upon this, as the intentions of others reveal the moral and social meaning of their actions. It is important for the individual to gauge other's intentions and perhaps even change them, as a way of protecting themselves. To get a better understanding of this, a pilot study investigating meta-intentionality was conducted. The study consisted of three qualitative vignettes that rose in abstraction level, from the mundane to spiritual, was created. The research participants were 25 Estonian psychology students, who gave written responses to the vignettes. From their responses, three main themes were found: blocking doubt, showing intentions through actions, and intentions as private information. However, some respondents focused on conflict resolution over meta-intentionality, which led to the discussion of how methods need to be constructable based on theoretical questions, rather than the other way around. This discussion was based on Valsiner's terms of variational and typological science, as well as Maslow's notion of a dynamic or means-centered approach to science, as well as his warning of how scientific orthodoxy blocks scientific development within psychology. These views were furthermore framed within Brinkmann's account of the historical and normative grounds for how these views on science are present within modern day psychological science. Thus, the main take away from this article is the importance of developing a constructable and flexible methodology to enable the study of intra-psychological intention structures such as meta-intentionality.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declares no competing interests.

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