



Understanding the Self

Self and Identity

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Lecture Outline

- Introduction to the self
- Types of self and debate about the '*self*'
- Self-concept
- Identity
- Self-awareness and self-esteem

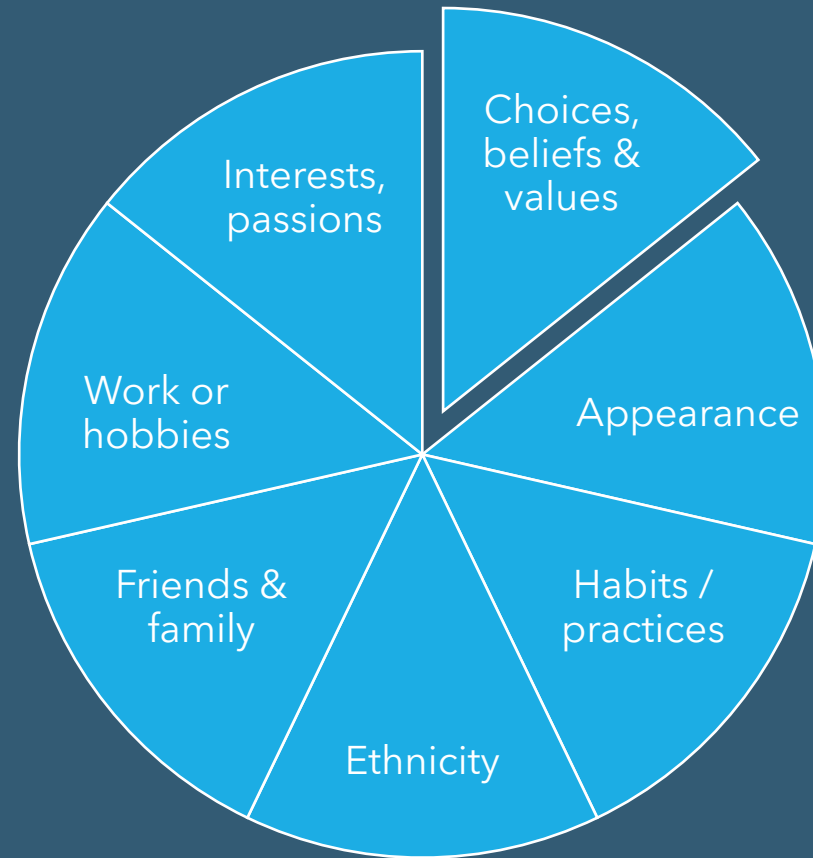
Introduction to the Self



- How do we describe our 'self'?
- What parts of our self do we consider to be relevant in describing ourselves?
- Is there **one** conceptualization of 'self'?

Describing the Self

Self
or
Identity



Early thinking: The nature of the Self

- Descartes (16th C)
 - "Cogito ergo sum"
 - "I think, therefore I am"
- Whenever I think, I exist
- Whatever I know, I know intuitively that I am

Early thinking: The nature of the Self

- James (1890)

- Self as object (empirical self)

- Me



- Self as subject (ego – the knower)

- I

- Self-awareness

Self

- The collection of beliefs that we hold about ourselves
e.g.

What are my important characteristics?

What am I good at?

What am I poor at?

What situations do I prefer/avoid?

What do I want to be?

What do I think I am?

The Self

Leary and Tangney

Self-awareness

Turning against the self

Self-talk

Self-schema

Self-actualisation

1. We determine that the term **self** does not mean the same thing in all phrases
2. We start to consider WHAT the term actually means in any of them

The Self

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1. Self as the total person

- Commonly synonymous with person – just that person
 - E.g.,
 - self-mutilation; person mutilates his/her own person
 - Self-monitoring; person monitors him/her self as a person
 - Self-defeating behaviour; person undermines his/her personal well-being
- Acceptable in everyday writing? But lacks reference to psychological construct that is of interest to researcher
- Psychological standpoint = don't think of person as a self, but rather that each person **has** a self (Olson, 1999)

The Self

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2. *Self as personality*

- Refer to all or part of an individual's personality
 - Tesser (2002, p.185) - the self is "a collection of abilities, temperament, goals, values, and preferences that distinguish one individual from another. . . ."
- Psychological standpoint = breeding confusion
 - If self is personality, are all personality researchers actually studying the self?
- Psychologically distinct = personality, not self

The Self

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3. *Self as experiencing subject*

- James (1890): two intertwined aspects of the self
 - Self as object
 - Self as a subject – “I”
 - Psychological process responsible for self-awareness and self-knowledge
 - Centre of a person’s experience
- Idea that most people sense there is a ‘thing’ that registers experiences; subjective sense of a conscious entity

The Self

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4. *Self as beliefs about oneself*

- James (1890):
 - Contrast to “self-as-known” – the ‘meself’
 - Who am I?
 - What am I like?
 - Fragmented self
 - Presume that individuals beliefs do not form a coherent whole
 - Self-disclose
 - Sharing information about themselves with other people

The Self

Leary and Tangney

5. Self as executive agent

- Self is a decision maker and doer
 - Regulator of behaviour
- Executive self conceptualised as a self control process

The Self

- Semantic confusion apparent
 - Which definition or general conceptualisation do we refer to?
- Self as person or personality ✗
- Self as subject, beliefs, executive agent
 - **REFLEXIVE THINKING** ✓



More recent conceptualisations of Self

- Self-concept
 - A collection of beliefs about oneself
 - E.g., gender roles, racial identity
- Self-awareness
 - Involves being aware of the different aspects of the self
 - Hull and Levy (1979) – SA involved in processing personally relevant information
- These two concepts are proposed to combine to form a coherent sense of **identity**.

Two key functions of Self

1. Organisational

- Self-schemas
 - Organise our knowledge about ourselves (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2003)
 - Structure our memories which support:
 - Our sense of self
 - How we notice and remember other people
- Self-reference effect: we remember information better when we relate it to ourselves (e.g., Kilstrom et al., 2003; Markus, 1977)

I am.....



I am a lecturer



I am a mother



I am determined

Please post your 'I am...' sentences to the forum on Moodle.

Two key functions of Self

2. Executive

- Regulates behaviour, choices and plans for the future
 - Higgins (1989, 2005); Leary, 2004)
- Humans are the only species with the ability to
 - Imagine events that have not yet occurred
 - Engage in long-term planning (Gilbert, 2006)
- Self-regulation – is this an easy thing to do?



How do we learn about
ourselves?



Sources of self-knowledge

- Socialisation
- Reflected appraisals
- Social Comparison
- Social Identity

Sources of self-knowledge

- Socialisation
 - Learning from others; experiences; parents, friends;
 - How a person acquires standards, rules, values, etc of family, group and/or culture
- Reflected appraisals
 - Self-evaluation based on perceptions and evaluations of others
 - We get information or feedback from others regarding what we are good/poor at
 - Cooley – “looking glass self”



Self-concept and identity

- Who am I?
 - Where do I belong?
 - How do I fit in?
- 



Sense of self: a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action



Identity: the distinctive characteristics belonging to any individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group

Identity

Dynamic nature of self and identity

Sense of self:

- Your experience of your own individuality
- 'Who am I?'
- Use of social categories

Identity:

- Recognition of a relevant social category
 - Student; school leaver; non-traditional student

Identity

Development of identity grounded in:

- **Cognitive development** – emergence of self-reflection on emotions and relationships
- **Experiences with peers and family** – changing roles, expectations and responsibilities
- **Experiences with culture at large** – changing expectations in autonomy and independence

James (1890); Two important aspects..

1. Multiple Selves – complexity of identity

- As many different selves as there are different others that recognize the individual
- Each position – own set of meanings and expectations – internalized as an identity

James (1890); Two important aspects..

2. Self-esteem

- The set of beliefs we hold about who we are is called the self-concept; while self-esteem is the evaluation we make of ourselves
- We have an overall sense of self-esteem as well as self-esteem in more specific domains
- Balance of successes and aspirations
 - If aspirations are higher than achievements, SE is lowered



Identity Formation

Social Comparison

- Comparing ourselves to others
- Use of group memberships to define ourselves

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954)

Innate drive to evaluate self, often in comparison to others

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954)

When an objective criterion for evaluating the self is missing, people turn to social comparison for evaluative standards



Upward social comparison:

Compare with others we believe are better than us

Inspiration to improve; Self-improvement



Downward social comparison:

Compare with others we believe are worse off than us

Feel better about ourselves – Self-enhancement

Individualism and Collectivism

(Triandis, 1990, 1995)

Individualism

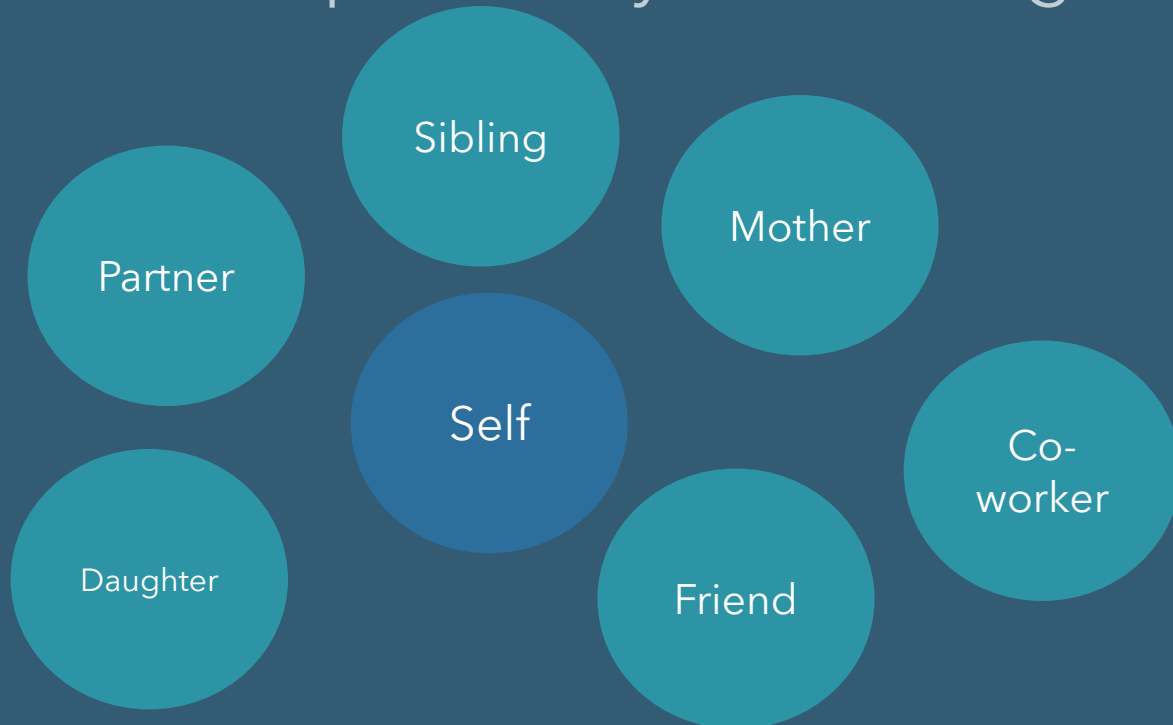
- Importance of personal independence
- Individual goals
- Sense of self based on individual attributes and accomplishments
- Cultural personality of Western Societies (USA, Europe)

Collectivism

- Loyalty to family
- Adherence to group norms
- Harmony of social relations with members of ones group
- Group goals take priority
- Seen in many African, Asian, and Latin American Countries

Independent Construal

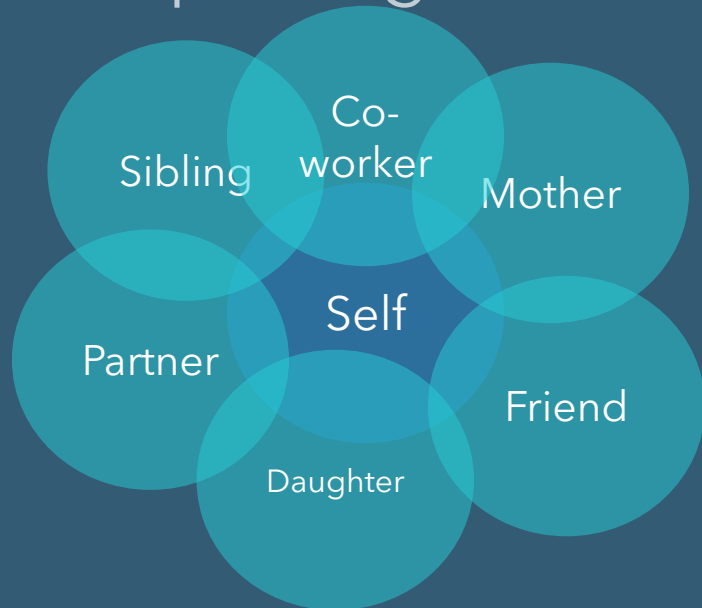
- The self seen as an independently functioning unit



- Define issues separate from social context
- Internal, private abilities, thoughts and feelings
- Unique, self expression
- Promote own goals

Interdependent Construal

- The self seen as part of an encompassing social relationship



- Use of social context to define
- External, public statuses, roles, relationships
- Belong, fit in, occupy ones place
- Promote goals of others
- Relationship with others defines the self

Self-Discrepancy Theory

- Higgins (1987)
- Actual self – how we currently are
- Ideal self – how we would like to be
- 'Ought' self – how we think we should be

Do we even know ourselves?

- Self-Perception Theory (Bem, 1967, 1972)
 - Inferring our attitudes from behaviours, not internal state
 - Argues that people sometimes analyse their own behaviour in the same way as they would analyse someone else's behaviour
 - E.g., he said [this], so he must be [like that]
- Observation of the situation and make an attribution about why we behaved that way

How do we use information about ourselves?

- The self and the public

- Carver and Scheier (1981) – self-awareness
- The **private** self – private thoughts, feelings and attitudes
- The **public** self – public image, how you present yourself to other people (a social object)
- Can be high or low in either, or both, private self-consciousness and/or public self-consciousness

Suggests the self is not a consistent, fixed entity

Adapting our presentation of self

- Self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974)
 - The extent to which people alter their behaviour according to different social contexts

- High self-monitors – shape behaviour/self to the environment
- Low self-monitors – more consistency across situations

Acquisitive:

- Acquire attention/approval from others

Protective:

- Protect from disapproval of others

Self-esteem and social feedback

- People seek self-verifying feedback
 - High self-esteem – seek positive and negative information as long as it is accurate information about ourselves
 - Low self-esteem – seek positive information even if it is non-verifying (Bernichon et al., 2003)
- Self-handicapping (Berglas & Jones, 1978) - defence mechanism (but poor)
 - Creating obstacles so that failure at a task can be attributed to the obstacle rather than the self
 - e.g. men found to withdraw practice effort more than women (McCrae, Hirt and Milner, 2008)

Summary

- Self and identity consider to be both distinct and overlapping
- Both self and identity difficult to define as fixed entities; evidence to suggest that context can have an impact in different situations
- Self-esteem is important in identity