



SELF AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

The Nature of the Self: Early thinking

- ▶ Rene Descartes (16th century): dualism - 'I think therefore I am'
(*'Cogito ergo sum'*)

Whenever I think, I exist

Whatever I know, I know intuitively that I am

- ▶ Kant (18th century): self as object (empirical self) and as subject (ego)
- ▶ James (19th century): the 'known' (me) and the knower (I)

The Nature of the Self

More recent conceptualising

- ▶ **Self-concept** - the known aspect of the self
- ▶ **Self-awareness** – the aspect of thinking about ourselves
- ▶ Combine to form a coherent sense of **identity**
- ▶ Humans not the only species to have a sense of self

Gallup (1970; 1997) – Primates

Reiss and Marino (2001) – Dolphins

Humans – rudimentary self recognition develops at approx. age 2 years

(e.g. Lewis and Ramsay, 2004)

Write some quick sentences in answer to the question.....

Children – typically describe self in terms of concrete, observable characteristics

e.g.

I am a boy.

I have blond hair.

I have green eyes.

I live in a big house.



Adults – more emphasis on psychological states (thoughts/feelings)

e.g.

I am an optimistic person.

I am a sociable person.

I am a Christian.

I am ambitious.

The Self

The collection of beliefs that we hold about ourselves

What are our important characteristics?

What are we good at?

What are we poor at?

What situations do we prefer/avoid?

What do we want to be?



The Self – two key functions: Organisational and Executive

Organizational

Self-schemas organize our knowledge about ourselves

(e.g. Oyserman et al, 2003)

Structure our memories which support our sense of self

- and also how we notice and remember other people

Self-reference effect – we remember information better when we relate it to ourselves

(e.g. Markus, 1977; Kihlstrom, Beer and Klein, 2003)

Executive

Regulates our behaviour, choices and plans for the future (e.g. Higgins, 1989, 2005; Leary, 2004)

Humans the only species to

- imagine events that have not yet occurred
- engage in long term planning

(Gilbert, 2006)

How easy is self-regulation?

Self-regulatory resource model (Baumeister and Hetherington, 1996)

- Limited resources for self-control
- distraction, stress, tiredness etc.

How do we learn about ourselves?

► Early socialisation

Parents; experiences - e.g., being taken to church may instil a self-concept of being religious



► Feedback from others

Information from others regarding what we are good/bad at

Reflected appraisal – Cooley's 'looking-glass self' –
the perception of how people react to us



Social comparison

Comparing ourselves to others

Use of group membership to define ourselves

► **Social comparison theory** (Festinger, 1954)

In absence of an objective criterion, people turn to social comparison for evaluative standards - to gain social consensus

Need for an accurate self-evaluation

We seem to prefer objective feedback - test scores etc. – seen as less biased

► Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979) - meta-analysis of 62 studies

People do not rate/see themselves as others see them

They rate/see themselves according to how they **think** others see them

Group memberships

- ▶ **Social Identity Theory** (Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel and Turner, 1986)
 - ▶ Personal identity – qualities and characteristics which are strictly individual
 - ▶ Social identity - that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from:
 - his/her knowledge of his/her membership of a social group (or groups)
 - the value and emotional significance of that membership
 - ▶ Our self-concept partly depends on how we evaluate the ingroup relative to other groups
 - ▶ The self as a group member - may result in multiple selves
- ▶ **Social Categorisation Theory** (Turner, 1984; Tajfel and Turner, 1986)
 - ▶ Superordinate, Intermediate, Subordinate - higher order categories include lower ones
 - ▶ Personal and social identities represent different levels of self-categorization



Individualism versus 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)

“The squeaky wheel gets the grease”
(USA)

Different ‘ways of being’

■ Collectivism

- Loyalty to family
- Adherence to group norms
- Harmony of social relations with members of one’s group
- Group goals take priority over individual goals
- Seen in many African, Asian, and Latin American countries

“The nail that stands out gets pounded down” (Japan)

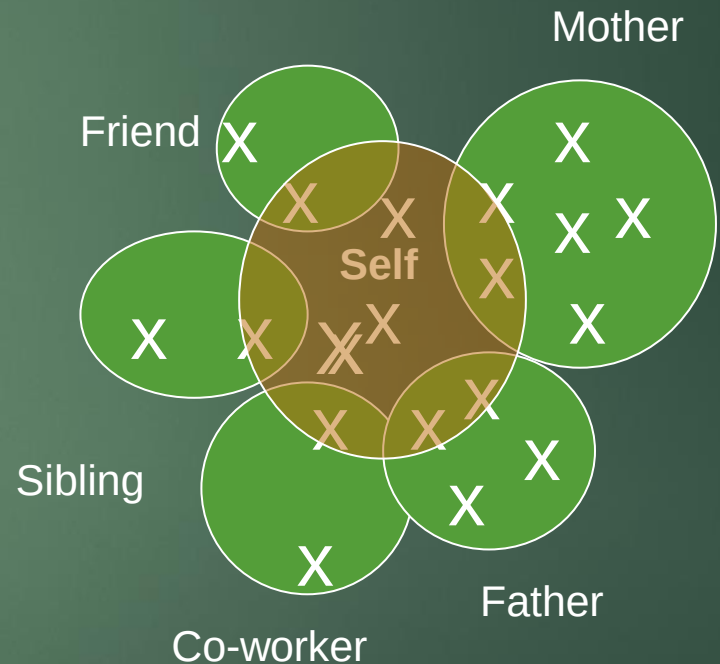
Independent Construal

The self as an independently functioning unit



Interdependent Construal

The self as part of an encompassing social relationship



(Markus & Kitayama, 1991)

Independent v Interdependent Self

Independent

- ▶ Define issues separate from social context
- ▶ Internal, private abilities, thoughts and feelings
- ▶ Be unique
- ▶ Express self
- ▶ Promote own goals
- ▶ Self defined through others help to provide appraisal through social comparison
- ▶ Ability to express self

(e.g. Kitayama and Ukida, 2005; Markus and Kitayama, 1991, 2001; Triandis, 1995)

Interdependent

- ▶ Use social context to define
- ▶ External, public statuses, roles, relationships
- ▶ Belong, fit in
- ▶ Occupy one's (proper) place
- ▶ Promote goals of others
- ▶ Relationships with others defines the self
- ▶ Ability to adjust and restrain self to maintain harmony within the social context

▶ **Self-discrepancy theory** (Higgins, 1987)

- ▶ Actual self - how we are currently
- ▶ Ideal self - how we would like to be
- ▶ 'Ought' self - how we think we should be

Large discrepancies, particularly between actual and ought self, can be damaging

▶ **Self-awareness theory** (Duval and Wicklund, 1972)

When we become a focus of our own attention (e.g. video footage):

- ▶ 'Self-consciousness' – we become objective judgemental observers of ourselves
- ▶ Evaluate and compare our current behaviour to internal standards and values

Do we even know about ourselves?

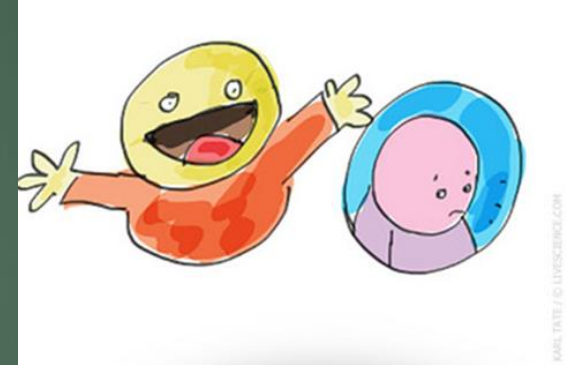


Self-perception theory (Bem, 1967, 1972)

- ▶ Inferring our attitudes from our behaviours – not from our internal state
- ▶ Particularly for aspects of the self that are not central to our self-concept
- ▶ Lepper et al (1973)
 - ▶ Two groups of children drew pictures
 - one group for a reward, the other group for no reward
 - ▶ Later - children who drew pictures for no reward spent twice as much time drawing as the rewarded group
 - ▶ Drawing had become part of their self-concept?

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



Coffee break



10 minutes

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
- ▶ High self-monitors – more extroverted
- ▶ Low self-monitors – more introverted



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- ▶ Terror management theory (Greenberg, Solomon and Pyszczynski, 1986)
 - ▶ Human self-awareness magnifies the tendency for anxiety
 - ▶ The inevitability of death is terrifying
 - ▶ To defend against this threat, we need strong self-esteem and a strong self-concept
 - ▶ Increased self-esteem leads to lower physiological arousal to threat and lower anxiety (Greenberg et al, 1992)
 - ▶ Research supports correlation between higher self-esteem and reductions in death anxiety (e.g. Greenberg et al, 1993; Schmeichel and Martens, 2005)

Motivation and the self

- ▶ People are motivated to seek an accurate, stable and positive self-concept
- ▶ We often seek out situations or behave in ways that promote our self-concept
- ▶ Motivation for accuracy of self-concept
 - ▶ Trope (1983) – 'Diagnostic tasks'

e.g., we test ourselves at appropriate levels - confirmation

Consistency/Stability

- ▶ Motivation for **consistency**

- ▶ Self-verification theory (Swann and Read, 1981)

Students given evaluations of themselves

Told would be either consistent or inconsistent with their own self-image

Spent significantly more time viewing the consistent information

Thus – we gravitate to those who confirm our sense of self

- ▶ Motivation to present a **stable self-concept**

- ▶ Likely to wear symbols that fit with important aspects of our self-concept

(e.g., wearing an athletics logo if we are athletic; Swann, 1983)



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)

Social Representations Theory

(Moscovici, 1984)

Social representations can range from hegemonic structures that are shared by a society or nation, to differentiated knowledge structures that are shared by subgroups within a collective (Moscovici, 1988)

e.g. notions of **identity**; how we are able to understand and recognize others; how others are able to understand and recognize us

The term 'social representations' designates both....

- ▶ The **structures** that allow communication to take place through inter-subjective shared meanings

And

- ▶ The **process** whereby shared meanings are created

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- ▶ 'Social representations are not simply *given*, but are produced by individuals in social contexts or groups in a transformative process of interpretation and inscription of meaning'

(Flick, 1998, p.50, italics original)

e.g. 'hard working', 'scrounger', 'intelligent', 'chav', 'respectable' etc....

- ▶ A re-presented, simplified version that becomes part of the social stock of knowledge and understanding – **used to understand people, objects and events**
- ▶ The cores of social representations are organised around antimonies, or **oppositions** (Markova, 2003, p.179)
- ▶ Social representations enable individuals to make sense during periods of uncertainty
- ▶ At times of traumatic disruption people are more likely to appropriate the dominant social representations and recognize their core elements

Anchoring and Objectification

Anchoring

Process by which the unfamiliar is drawn into the familiar

Ways of making sense that were previously available are no longer adequate

Cognitive unease neutralised - tension arising from the unfamiliar is masked

Objectification

The moment when a representation is emancipated from the immediate context and projected into the world

Once set free - a social representation is made concrete - cannot be changed by individuals

Meanings take hold - provide the basis for communication

The two processes are complimentary

Reading

- ▶ Hewstone, M., Stroebe, W. and Jonas, K. (2012). *An Introduction to Social Psychology (fourth edition)*. Chichester; BPS Blackwell (Chapter 5)
- ▶ Hogg, M. A., & Vaughan, G. M. (2008). *Social Psychology*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Prentice Hall. (Chapter 4)
- ▶ Kassin, S., Fein, S., & Markus, H. R. (2011). *Social psychology* (8th Edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. (Chapter 3)
- ▶ Plus your own literature search