

Self, Social Interaction and Social Construction of Everyday Life

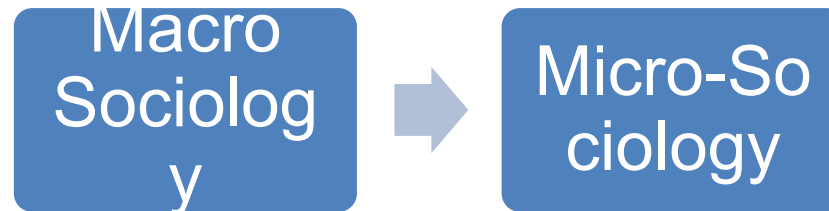
Feral Child – Genie (in pictures) & Anna



Takeaway from the story

- These stories are sad but instructive cases of what happens when human beings are isolated.
- Deprivation of social contact prevents development of capacity of thought, emotion and meaningful behaviour.
- In short, without social experience, an individual is not a social human being.
- Important questions that these cases raise:
 - How do we become fully human? How do we become social?
 - How are our identities formed? How do we live learn to live our everyday lives?

- Moving from:



- Up till now we were talking of the Big picture:
Big picture of (Society, Culture, Groups, Organizations)
Large scale social forces (Industrialisation, Urbanisation, Information Technology) have impacted people.
- Now we will move to micro building blocks of society – Individuals
Micro-sociology – The study of individuals in their everyday life.
 - Focus here will be on this idea of ‘self’
 - How self is connected to the the larger collectivity- the ‘social’
 - **We will see here how society makes us**

The answer lies in **Socialization**

- Socialization : A **lifelong** social experience by which individuals construct their **personal biography**, assemble **daily interaction rules** and come to terms with wider **cultural patterns**.
- General Example: We often use the phrase: “Oh, that’s human nature” – but what is this human nature really?
- Specific examples: People say things like “born criminal” , “women are naturally emotional”, “men are inherently more rational” – Sociologists would argue its not ‘natural’ !
- These are naturalistic explanations of behaviour!
- 20th century saw a period of attack on naturalistic explanations of behaviour.
- John B. Watson and rise of Behaviourism - specific behaviour patterns are not instinctive but learned

- Margaret Mead – Social Anthropologist
- Outspoken proponent of the **Nature vs Nurture debate** :



The difference between individuals who are members of different cultures, like the differences between individuals within a culture, are almost entirely to be laid to differences in conditioning, especially during early childhood, and this conditioning is culturally determined.

- It is not that genetics is not important – physical characteristics, intelligence, IQ have some genetic component.
- But whether a person develops an inherited potential depends on the opportunities associated with social position – Nurture is important in determining Human Behaviour.

us human and constructing human nature! – they give us a sense of self and identity!

- SIDE NOTE: - Dialectical nature of relationship between Individual and Society. The things that we created also makes us who we are! - (Example: Meanings we come to attach to money)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?hv=WGvTRd-48VI>

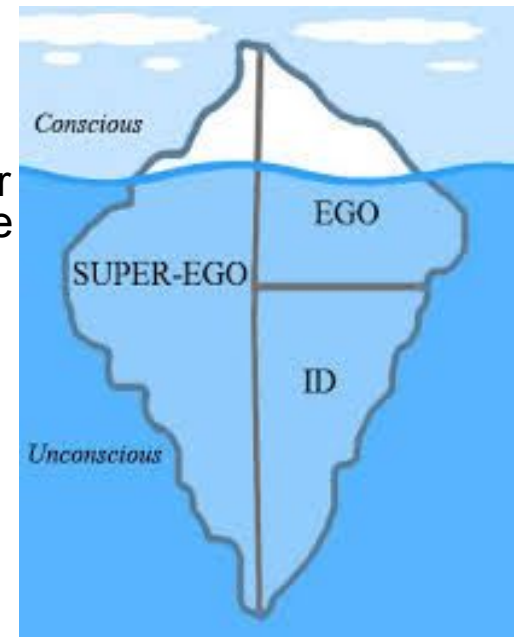
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PR-IZz9VhAc>

Theories of Socialisation and Social Construction of Identity

- Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality – Sigmund Freud
- Looking-glass self – Charles Horton Cooley
- Social Behaviourism – George Herbert Mead
- Dramaturgy – Erving Goffman

Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality

- Proposed by Sigmund Freud – (The Interpretation of Dreams (1955))
- Iceberg Metaphor: Conscious level of our awareness is just the tip of the iceberg. Just below it rests a greater area of mind – Unconscious.
- Unconscious mind: a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories.
- Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict – they are repressed because they are threatening.
- According to Freud, the unconscious continues to influence our behavior and experience even though we are unaware of these underlying influences.
- The unconscious, Freud believed, exerted the greatest influence over our personalities and behaviors.



Freud's 3 Components of Psyche/personality- Id, Ego and Superego

- **ID**

- Composed of biological drives.
- Source of instinctive, psychic energy
- Main Goal: To achieve pleasure at all costs
- It is the Selfish and Unrealistic part of the brain

- **EGO**

- It is the part that deals with the real world.
- It operates on the basis of reason.
- Helps to mediate and integrate demands of both id and superego

- **SUPEREGO**

- It keep us away from engaging in socially inappropriate behaviour
- Upholds our vision of who we ideally should be
- Develops as a result of parental guidance particularly we receive in the form of rewards and punishments we receive as children.
- It inhibits urges of id and encourages ego to find morally acceptable forms of behaviour.



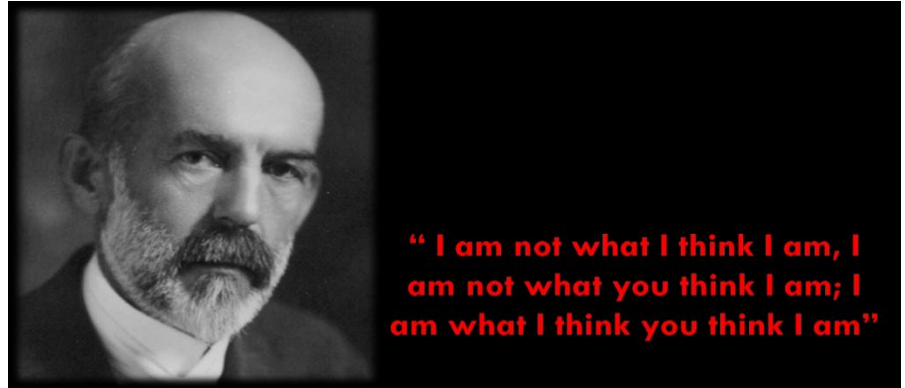
To summarize

- Humans when born have a basic need for pleasure, joy and bonding(ID). New-borns are a bundle of attention seekers., desire to have everything.
- But society cannot tolerate such self centred behaviour so ID faces resistance.
- To avoid frustration, children learn to approach world realistically and thus let EGO develops– in this, pleasure seeking is balanced with demands of society.
- Finally, SUPEREGO develops – which is operation of culture within the individual. With this development we come to see why we cant have everything that we want and thus define moral limits for ourselves. Culture operates to control human drives- a phenomenon Freud referred to as **Repression**
- In personality development, conflict between Id and Super-ego is ongoing, but in a well-adjusted person, these opposing forces are managed by the ego.

Looking-glass Self Theory



- Proposed by C.H.Cooley (Chicago School)
- Simple yet elegant way of conceptualizing about **how individual's gain a sense of self.**
- His theory was that in social life other people represent the mirror or looking-glass in which we perceive ourselves.
- People reflect back images of each other.
- The term looking-glass self refers to the image people have of themselves based on how they believe others perceive them.
- Whether we think of ourselves as funny, witty, coward, brave is dependent on what others think of us



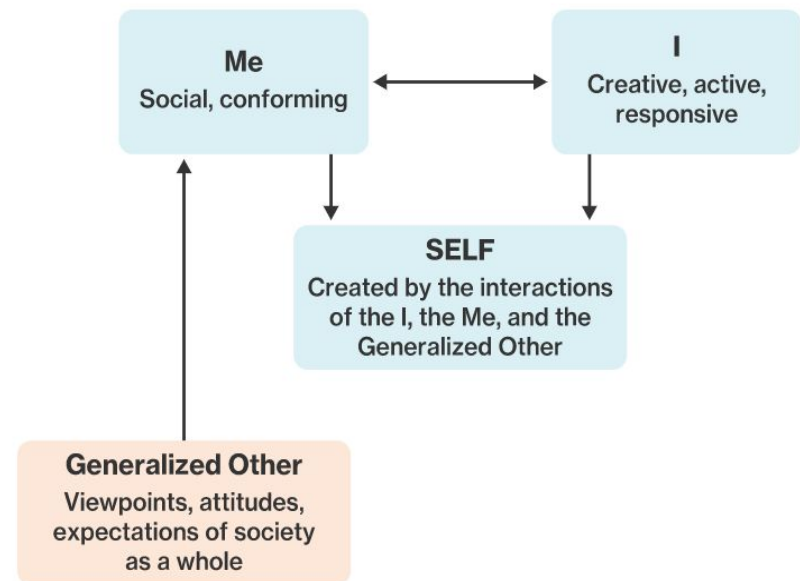
- This is done in 3 steps:
- 1) We imagine how we look to others – not just physical but **how we present ourselves** as funny, witty, friendly, hardworking.
- 2) We imagine what other's think about us – Do they think I am smart enough? Do they feel I am confident? Lazy? Boring? Not bright enough?
- 3) We experience feeling about ourselves based on our perception of other people's judgements – most of the time we assume these judgments that we believe others make about us, without really knowing for sure what they think!
- Other's thus become a mirror through which we see ourselves!we can develop both correct and incorrect perception of ourselves.
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Social Behaviourism

- George H. Mead proposed Social Behaviourism (Chicago School)
- Central concept: 'Self'- the human capacity to be reflexive and taken the role of others.
- 3 key points:
 1. Self emerges from Social Experience ; does not exist at birth – in absence of social interaction it will not emerge (think of feral children!)
 2. Social experience involves exchange and communication of symbols.
Ex: Dogs trained to do tasks but attach no meaning and interpretation- respond to rewards ; humans respond to what you have in mind.
 3. To understand intention you must imagine situation from other person's viewpoint. Ex: Imagine responding to “tell me something about yourself” (Taking role of the other- self is reflexive and reflective)

Dual nature of the self in Mead's Theory

- Self, in Mead's theory is both 'Subject' and a 'Object'
- What we refer to as 'I' is the subjective component of identity – The experience of inherently us, creative, spontaneous.
- 'Me' – self as object. It is more socialised, norm binding, conforming part of the self largely dependent on others' perception of us.
- The 'I' and 'Me' components are inseparable and united to form a single self in each of us.



- Mead argued that development of 'self' happens in 3 stages:
- 1) Preparatory/Imitation stage (<3 years): No sense of self; children simply imitate others.



- 2) Play Stage (3-4 years): Children start acting and thinking as another person would. Children assume roles of “doctor”, “mother”, “father”- they start internalizing expectations of those roles.



- 3) Game stage (4+ years): By this time, children start taking part in organised games. Group interaction starts happening. They start developing self-awareness by taking into account the roles of other players. In doing so they also start seeing themselves from the viewpoint of others.

Dramaturgy

- Erving Goffman – Canadian Social Psychologist -
- Saw Micro level, face to face interaction as the building block of all aspects of society
- Book- The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959)
- Studied- Interaction Order- What we do in immediate presence of others.
- Dramaturgical analysis is the idea that people's day to day lives can be understood as resembling performers in action on a theater stage.
- We are all actors putting up a performance based on our comprehension of the situation- 'presentation of self' – for **impression management** – Individual's act in certain ways to create specific impressions in the minds of others.

- In this dramaturgical social world, there is:
 1. **Front stage** – setting that conveys a meaning (Think of clinic setting, classroom setting...); designed to invoke desired reactions of others
 2. **Personal front**- manner, dress, props etc.
 3. **Backstage**- where we prepare our performance (We all behave differently outside the settings we are performing)
- Ex: Think of a regular visit to a Doctor's Clinic. What are the ways in which doctor's position of superiority and his ability to help you (control) is presented - guarded communication through receptionists, setting which symbolizes expertise ; dressing that conveys status; terminology that signals hierarchy

- Sometimes we are so used to performance in a certain setting so meeting same person outside in a different context throws us of the guard!
- Ex: Meeting people outside their familiar social contexts.
 - Imagining your reaction if you were to see your father as college ‘studs’ of their times
 - Seeing your school teachers perform *bhangra* in a random wedding you both are invited to (social media may have blurred some boundaries but continue to resurrect many others)
- In Goffman’s theory the key is to recognise impression management - we respond differently in different situations and these responses shape our sense of self.

- **Self is something that is invented in interaction with others – Social construction of Identity or self as a social construct**
- We may think of ourselves as “free individuals” but micro-sociology shows us how social is present in shaping us.
- Life-long socialisation helps us in becoming who we become and how we enter into relationships with others around us.
- Self is always created in interaction with others who share similar meanings to words, actions and responses.