THE SELF: Who am I?

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AGENDA

- The origins and nature of self-concept
- Functions of Self
- Self concept and Self esteem
- Objective (personality testing) and Subjective Ways of knowing the self (our thoughts and emotions, our behaviours, others' behaviours)

Self-Concept

The overall set of beliefs that people have about their personal attributes

Self-Concept

Self-recognition develops around the age of 18-24 months of age. As we grow, this rudimentary sense of self grows into a full-blown self concept

Self-Concept

Just to give you an idea of what changes:

Recall how you "introduced" yourself when you were a 5 year old to a 16 year and now- what changes came in your "introductions"

Self-Concept

Some observable changes that we see are:

- A child's self-concept is more concrete- focused on physical attributes

- An older adult's self-concept is more abstract or relies on psychological states- eg., I am a curious/moody/funny person. We focus a lot on how others will judge us

A very existential question

Who am I?

The Self

Knowing about ourselves serves these four broad functions:

-Self Knowledge : the way we understand who we are

- Self-control: the way we make plans and execute decisions

-Impression Management: the way we present ourselves to others and get them to see us the way we want them to see us

- Self-esteem: the way we try to maintain positive view of ourself

The Self : Who am I?

As we try to answer this question, it is important to understand how self concept and self esteem are related

Self concept is a knowledge representation that contains knowledge about us, including our beliefs about our personality traits, physical characteristics, abilities, values, goals, social groups affiliations (eg religion)- thus self concepts are self-schemas or ideas we have "believed" about ourselves

The Self : Who am I?

Self-esteem on the other hand are the feelings we have for ourselves. It can be positive feelings (high self-esteem) or negative feelings (low self esteem)

When we have high self esteem, we have a well developed self concept simply because thoughts-feelings are interlinked

The Self : Who am I?

Because self-concept is a self-schema- it is also prone to accessibility bias!

Or, in other words- the self-concept can vary in its current cognitive accessibility

Take a moment and think – what comes at the top of our mind when you think about yourself (currently) and why are you doing so?

The Self : Who am I?

So, what can help is improve access to our "self concept" (self schema)

The Self : Who am I?

The answer is self-awareness – refers to the extent to which we are currently fixing our attention on our own self concept (rem. selective attention?)

Self-awareness is not always a self-initiated process. It can also be induced by other people.

However, here is the catch:

We can start accessing our self-concept schema (also) because of our concerns about being observed or judged by others. At those instances, we experience a the other-induced self awareness known as self consciousness which can erode our self concept and esteem (this can also be positive!)

The Self : Who am I?

So, what's the link between self concept and self esteem?

1. Both affect each other : If one thinks that "I am a competent" person, they are more likely to feel positive about themselves.
2.   On the other hand, if we are valued and made to feel confident- that can help in developing a more positive self concept
3.   If we have to go through a lot of judgement- it can erode our self concept

The Self : Who am I?

- The events happening around us can activate certain aspects of self concept

- Our very aggravating emotions occur in large part because self-concept becomes highly accessible due to these emotions (eg., if you've to make a speech and it produces anxiety in you which embarrasses you- activates your "thoughts and feelings" about yourself)

Remember this question?

How often do you find yourself thinking about others?

Subjective ways of knowing the self

- As much as we think about others a lot, we do think about ourselves

- We employ introspection to do so- a commonly used subjective method to know the self

- Again, we can initiate introspection on our own – our thoughts go inwards or sometimes it is other-generated, i.e., external circumstances instigate that

"What" do we introspect?

1. Our own thoughts and emotions

- self awareness theory claims- that when people focus their attention on themselves, they evaluate and compare their behavior to their internal standards and values

- The main aim of introspection is to generate causal theories- theories about the causes of one's own feelings and behaviors

- Your introspection is generally influenced by external (e.g., culture) and internal factors (e.g., past experiences) as discussed in social cognition

*to know the self

"What" do we introspect?

In other words, we are generating explanations to gain clarity over our own thoughts and feelings

The end goal of getting this clarity is reasons-generated attitude change- attitude change resulting from thinking about the reasons for one's attitudes

However, many times this goes wrong because we do not really know why we feel a certain way and we accept whatever sounds more plausible (believable) to us**

*to know the self
** so complicated!!

Simple question

I know this is complicated, this will help:

What makes you happier- buying something you fancy for yourself or buying it for someone else?

Hint: Don't say both and, it depends.

Simple question

How did you arrive at this answer?

Answer

As it happens with Introspection:

- We usually do not have conscious access to the reasons of our behaviour (reasons generated attitude change)

- We generate logical/causal theories to explain our behaviour to ourselves

So, you didn't (most likely) know any answer- you created one!

Now Introspect :D

If we are just "creating answers" (that can potentially be wrong)- should we stay away from introspection? And, more importantly- can we?

Conclusion

In summary, introspection can be misleading. BUT, it can also be useful.

- If we have access to the reason of our choice- it can be fairly useful in reaching a conclusion

- If we are clouded by unconscious emotional factors that guide and drive us, it can lead us astray.

- Also, if we look at our choices and decisions in retrospect, we are more likely to find internal/dispositional/trait based causes for our behavior

"What" do we introspect?

2. Our own behaviors

Self perception theory states that when our attitudes and feelings are uncertain or ambiguous, we infer these states by observing our behavior and the situation in which it occurs

People judge whether their behavior really reflects if they acted in line with their preferences or it is just the situation that made them act a certain way. (it is similar to the way we make attributions about other people).

"What" do we introspect?

Can anyone point out the downsides of this (subjective) "method" of knowing ourselves?

"What" do we introspect?

Our behaviors are tied to both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Here, an *overjustification effect* plays out (tendency to view their behaviour as caused by compelling extrinsic reasons, making them underestimate the extent to which it was caused by intrinsic reasons)

Extrinsic: desire to engage in an activity because of an external reward (eg appreciation)

Intrinsic: desire to engage in an activity because of an internal reward (eg interest)

"What" do we introspect?

Example: You might have come to study because you intrinsically like studying.

However, when there are compelling external pressures or rewards (eg grades, or placements)- people assume (esp over a period of time as they analyze their and others' behaviors around them) that they are working for external rewards and not because they are genuinely interested in studying.

So, basically, overjustification effect actually is you misunderstanding your own behaviours (and hence yourself)

Fill in the blank

I am .... kind of person.

(Think of something that "really" defines you)/cardinal trait

Fill in the blank

I am ………………………… (kind of person) compared to my peers/class/batch mates

(Think of something that "really" defines you)/cardinal trait

Conclusion

- We make descriptions about ourselves in a certain way but the description can change when we compare ourselves to other (similar) group members

- You are describing contrast (about yourself) within your own group

- Therefore, description of self-identity is derived from comparison with similar group members (you vs peers)

Yes/No

Do you complain about infrastructure in our country? Or, even not find anything exciting in "Indian food"?

Yes/No

When I am travelling abroad/on social media, have you argued/explained the reasons to be proud of your country (eg diverse food, colours, weather, and more food of course!) and unique aspects about being an Indian (languages, that CEO of google* and many other companies is an Indian and so on)?

* This institute does it a bit too much

Conclusion

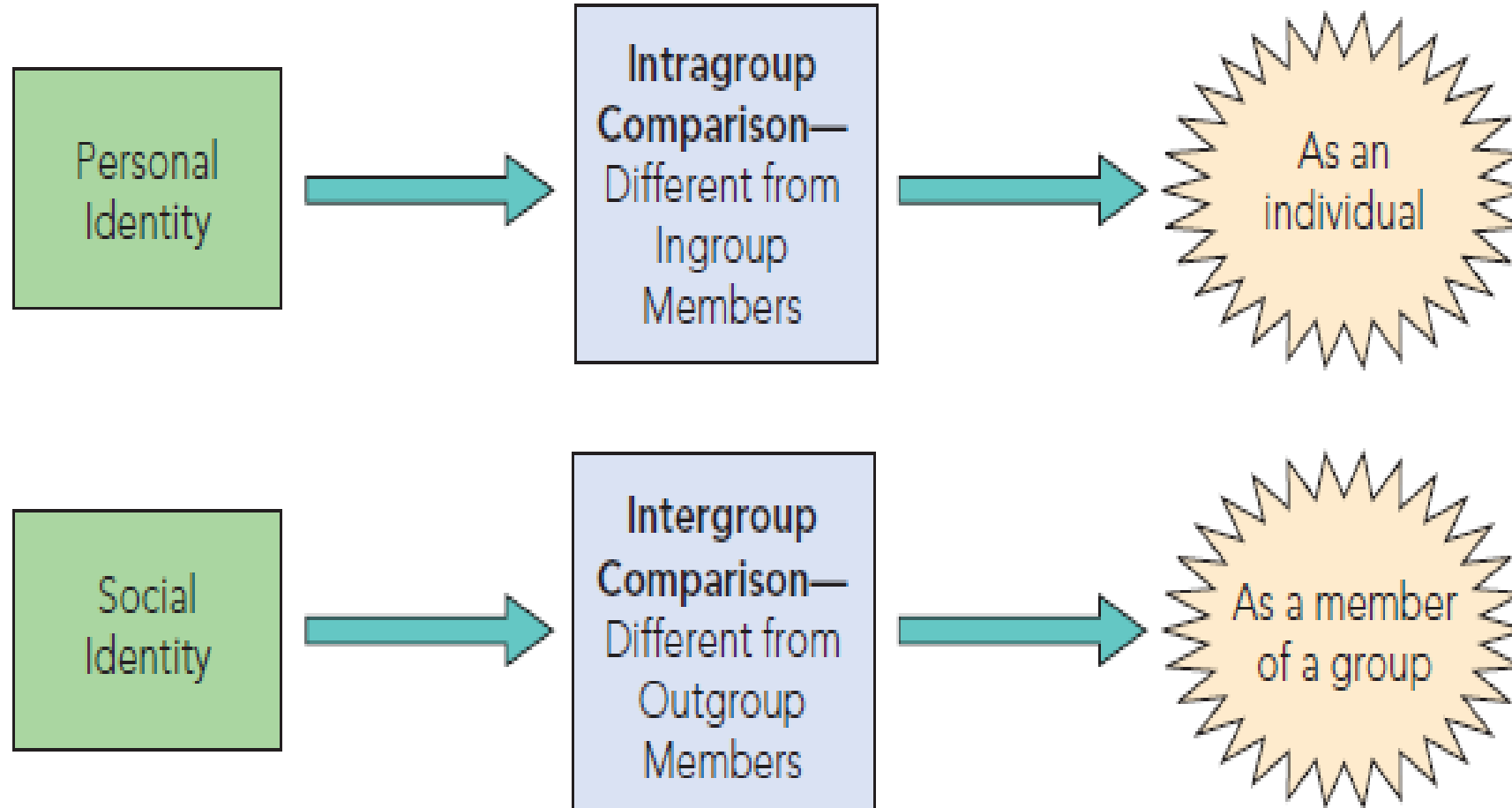We describe our identity by making a distinction between outgroup (the foreign land/person)

Conclusion

- We derive our identities in two ways- personal and social identities which are not separate entities but a continuum.

- When we are in the personal end, we are thinking about ourselves as an individual

- When we are on the social end, we are thinking about ourselves as a part of the large social group

How we categorize the self in relation to others		Nature of comparison made		*Experience of the Self*
Personal Identity	→	**Intragroup Comparison—** Different from Ingroup Members	→	As an individual
Social Identity	→	**Intergroup Comparison—** Different from Outgroup Members	→	As a member of a group

"What" do we introspect?

3. Other peoples' behaviours (to understand ourself)

Social Comparison Theory: The idea that we learn about our own abilities and attitudes by comparing ourselves to other people

These comparisons create "ideas of self" that later become identities.

"What" do we introspect?

3. Other peoples' behaviours (to understand ourself)

When it comes to personal identities, we engage in upward and downward comparisons

Upward Social Comparison: Comparing ourselves to people who are better than we are with regard to a particular trait or ability (we can get either inspired or jealous- your choice ;)

Downward Social Comparison: Comparing ourselves to people who are worse than we are with regard to a particular trait or ability (we can get either hope when we fail or just become insufferable- your choice again ;)

"What" do we introspect?

3. Other peoples' behaviours (to understand ourself)

What information can upward/downward comparisons can give us?

Nature of our goals determine who we compare ourselves to. If you are looking for, we compare ourselves with:

- An accurate self-assessment: similar people
- Where/what I can strive for: look upwards
- When I want to feel good about myself: look downwards (including our past selves ;-)

"What" do we introspect?

3. Other peoples' behaviours (to understand ourself)

When it comes to us understanding our own self using information from other people, we also engage in the following:

Social Tuning: The process whereby people adopt another person's attitudes. Social tuning can happen both consciously and unconsciously.

Affective Forecast: People's predictions about how they will feel in response to a future emotional event.

What is "Self" in East vs West?

- Social cognition and perception is influenced by the culture we live in

- Therefore, there are some very interesting cultural differences in the way the "self" develops

- Western philosophers emphasized on individuality, personal purpose and self ownership

What is "Self" in East vs West?

"I think; therefore I am."

~ Rene Descartes

"Become who you are!"

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche
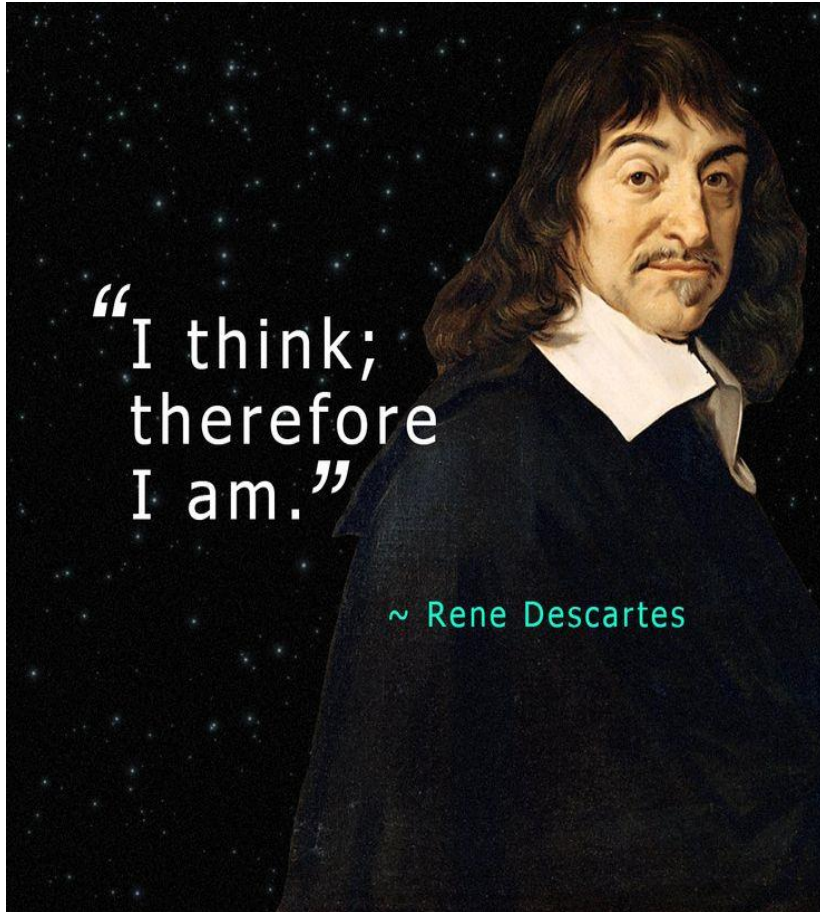
What is "Self" in East vs West?

Individualism : self is seen as **independent,** autonomous, and self-sufficient. Western thought, influenced by Enlightenment ideas, emphasizes personal freedom, uniqueness, and self-expression.

Collectivism: self is **interdependent**, defined in relation to others, particularly family and society. In many Eastern traditions, identity is shaped by social roles, harmony, and duty.

What is "Self" in East vs West?

As a result, "self" and what it does is highly influenced by these thoughts

West : The self is expected to assert itself, pursue personal goals, and sometimes challenge societal norms.

East: The self finds meaning in fulfilling social roles, maintaining harmony, and prioritizing the collective good (eg., reverence of elders and social hierarchy)

What is "Self" in East vs West?

Naomi Osaka after winning 2018 Grand Slam:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuRwyuzWr34

What is "Self" in East vs West?

- As you can see, Emotional Expression are also influenced:

- **West :** <mark>Emotions and personal opinions should be openly shared as part of self-authenticity.</mark>

- **East:** <mark>Restraint and context-based expression are valued to maintain social harmony.</mark>

How are the ideas of self reinforced through these emotional expressions?

What is "Self" in East vs West?

While in the far East, self is seen as an "illusion" (Buddhist philosophy), in India (in Hinduism to be precise)- self is seen as "eternal"

In here, the nature of self is "divine" as expressed in the following *mahavakya:*

"Tat Tvam Asi" (You are That) expresses this unity.

What is "Self" in East vs West?

In the West, the self is shaped by the external environment and free will (actions)

In Indian thought, self is shaped by actions (*karma*) but equally important are *dharma* (duty towards society) and past (lives) *karma.*

What is "Self" in East vs West?

Further, there is a lot of emphasis on context in the Indian thought-eg., self is understood as evolving, fluid identities (four *ashrams*)

The Western self is more stable, unique and independent individual.

What is "Self" in East vs West?

Conclusions?

How is our "self" shaped by our social world?

Pros and Cons of High Self Esteem

- High self esteem helps us in managing negative thoughts and feelings (that arise naturally from time to time) well

- It motivates us to persevere when the going gets rough by infusing hope and confidence about our own abilities

- It helps us exert ourselves better in relationships

1	**My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me.**
2	I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in.
3	It is important to me to respect decisions made by my group.
4	If my brother or sister fails, I feel responsible.
5	Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument.
6	I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or reward.
7	Being able to take care of myself is primary concern for me.
8	I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I've just met.
9	I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects.
10	My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me.

Rate on a scale of 1 to 7 : 1= Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree

Independent vs Interdependent View of Self

- **Independent View of the Self:** A way of defining oneself in terms of one's own internal thoughts, feelings, and actions and not in terms of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of other people

- **Interdependent View of the Self:** A way of defining oneself in terms of one's relationships to other people, recognizing that one's behavior is often determined by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others

Independent vs Interdependent View of Self

High self-esteem (or optimal self esteem) enables us to be flexible in terms of independent and interdependent selves

Such that, we understand that it is important to feel good about ourselves but also care about others to foster meaningful relationships.