

PSYCHOLOGY 305 / 305G
Social Psychology



The Social Self

2005

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Overview

- What is the "Self"?
- What is the "Social Self"?
- Self-Constructs (Operationalization)
- Evolutionary Functions
- Adaptational Functions
- Self-Complexity
- Social Comparison
- Social Feedback
- Strategic Self-Presentation
- Self-Monitoring & Self-Regulation

What is the "self"? - 1

- There are many, varied theories about 'self', from the arts to the sciences to religion to culture to history.
- Psychologically "self" is generally understood to be the collection of cognitively held beliefs that a person possesses about themselves
- Colloquially "self" includes physical self (body), plus psychologically meaningful personal possessions and personal space.

What is the “self”? - 2

- Traditionally, “self” was seen as stable, in a personality-type sense.
- More recently, “self” was understood to evolve during a lifetime. Partly stable, partly changing.
- Most recently, “self” has been further complexified and increasingly seen as:
 - Dynamic
 - Multiple / Plural
 - Changeable
 - Situationally & cognitively influenced
 - Multi-faceted
 - Hierarchical (top-down? bottom-up?)
 - Culturally constructed

What is the “self”? - 3

The psychological self includes:

- Attitudes
- Self-Beliefs
- Self-Concepts
- Emotions
- Possessions
- Self-Images
- Ideal / Imagined Selves
- Memories
- Social Self & Social Roles
- Group Memberships (Social Identity)

What is the “self”? - 4

To determine “What is self”, use diagnostic clues:

- Who am I?
- What are you prepared to defend?

What is the “social self”? - 1

- Humans are gregarious, group-based creatures.
- At least a significant portion of our ‘self’ is socially directed and influenced.
- Some argue that ‘self’ is entirely a function of the environment.
e.g., “Self” is seen as a function of post-industrial, capitalist society which promotes the free, conscious, choice-making ‘self’

What is the “social self”? - 2

- At least a significant portion of our ‘self’ is socially directed and influenced.
- Interpersonal Self or Social Self
part of self that engages face-to-face, in relation with others
- Social Roles -> Social Identity or Societal Self
can include ethnicity, gender, age, place of residence or any other social categorization that helps characterize a person’s identity.
- Some argue that ‘self’ is largely a function of the social environment.

Self-Constructs (Operationalization)

These sample operationalizations of Self-Esteem, Self-Concept, Self-Efficacy and Self-Congruence illustrate how social psychologists study people’s selves, in cognitive, affective, and behavioral terms.

Self-Esteem

- Global feelings of self-worth
- Value placed in & degree of liking of self.
- Often based on and closely related to social comparisons. (e.g., too thin, too fat)
- People are motivated to see their self as worthy/worthwhile (Fiske, 2004).
- Healthy to have a slightly inflated sense of self value (Taylor).
- Self-esteem serves as a sociometer for one's standing in a group (Fiske, 2004).
- Self-esteem has been overemphasized in Western society, to the detriment of actual skill (Baumeister)

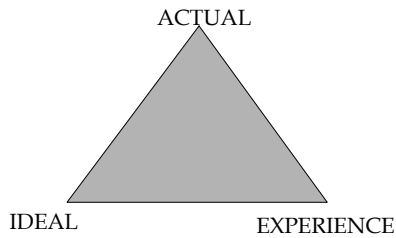
Self-Concept

- Cognitive representations of the self.
- Now commonly seen as a set of multi-dimensional and hierarchically organized domains of self-concept, e.g.,
 - Physical Self-Concept
 - Academic Self-Concept
 - Social Self-Concept
 - Same-Sex Relations
 - Opposite-Sex Relations
 - Parent Relations, etc.
- Top-down vs. bottom-up debate

Self-Efficacy

- Belief in one's capacity to succeed at a given task.
e.g. Public Speaking Self-Efficacy
- Bandura recommended specific rather than general measures of Self-Efficacy.
e.g. Social Self-Efficacy for Relating to Teachers
- 1. I can get along with most of my teachers.
 2. I can go and talk with most of my teachers.
 3. I can get my teachers to help me if I have problems with other students.
 4. I can explain what I think to most of my teachers.
 5. I ask the teacher to tell me how well I'm doing in class.(Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005)

Rogers: Self Congruence



Incongruence → Anxiety → Defense

Self has Evolutionary Functions

- Self-bias
e.g., access to resources
- Self-organization / Self-complexity
e.g., adaptability & self-insight/self-control
- Self-promotion
e.g., for increased likelihood of mating
- Social comparison
e.g., motivation to improve
- Social control
e.g., storage of social norms and rules

Self has Adaptational Functions

- “People’s selves allow them to regulate their own behavior, an advantage for both self and group.”
- “The self can serve various social psychological functions; having a self is not only knowing where your skin ends, but also how to get along in a group.” (Fiske, 2004, p. 176)

Self-Complexity

- People generally see themselves as more complex and others as less complex.
- There are individual variations in self-complexity, with self-complexity being advantageous e.g., less depressed, better able to handle stress, etc.
- Self-complexity includes having multiple possible selves.

Social Comparison

Everyone uses social comparison to:

- Understand how they are doing (through comparison with similar others)
- Feel better (through downward comparison)
- To improve (through upward comparison)

Social Feedback

- Symbolic Interactionism: All self perceptions are based on one's history of social interactions.
- Reflected Appraisal: One's sense of self is based on how one perceives that others perceives one.
- Spotlight Effect: People tend to think other people notice and evaluate them more than they actually do.
- Transparency Effect: People tend to think that their inner selves 'leak out' and is more obvious than it really is.

Self Discrepancies

- Actual-Ideal -> Promotion Focus
(failure -> Depression)
- Ideal-Ought -> Prevention Focus
(failure -> Anxiety)
- Self-Evaluation Maintenance Theory
 - More relevant the comparison, the more threat
 - Closer the person is, the more emotion (+ve or -ve)

Strategic Self Presentation

- Ingratiation
(being liked)
- Self-Promotion
(being competent)
- Intimidation
(being in control)
- Exemplification
(Worthy, saintly)
- Supplication
(Helpless)

Self-Monitoring & Self-Regulation

- High Self-Monitoring
(adjusts behavior to situation; monitors situation)
- Low Self-Monitoring
(principled attitudes guide behavior)
- Self-Regulation
(monitoring and controlling self-presentation and behavior uses up valuable self-regulatory resources)

Self-Awareness

- In general, people spend little time actually thinking about themselves
- But certain situations (mirrors, cameras, audiences) increase self-awareness, plus individual differences in self-consciousness
- Self-awareness causes us to notice self-discrepancies and can produce temporary reductions in self-esteem
- To cope, we either adjust our behavior to meet our standards or withdraw from self-focusing situations e.g., watch TV, play sport, alcohol

References

- Fiske, S. T. (2004). *The self: Social to the core*. In S. T. Fiske (2004). *Social beings: A core motives approach to social psychology*. (Ch 5, pp. 169 – 214). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., & Sandler, H.M. (2005). *Final Performance Report for OERI Grant # R305T010673: The Social Context of Parental Involvement: A Path to Enhanced Achievement*. Presented to Project Monitor, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, March 22, 2005.
