

Communication

Self in the Contemporary Context

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Introduction

“Self” is an act of address by an individual to the same individual. The reference is subjective, and it emphasizes that the self is a reference to a subject by the same subject. The philosophy of self defines it as the conditions of identity that make a subject’s experience distinct from the experience of all others. The physical and non-physical aspects of human functions led to the idea of consciousness, thought and knowledge, the idea of soul. Aristotle, following Plato, defined the soul as the core of a living being, but argued against its having a separate existence (Aristotle, 1987). For instance, if a knife had a soul, the act of cutting would be that soul, because ‘cutting’ is the essence of what it is to be a knife. Unlike Plato and the religious traditions, Aristotle did not consider the soul as some kind of a separate, ghostly occupant of the body (just as we cannot separate the activity of cutting from the knife) (Olszewsky, 1976). As the soul, in Aristotle’s view, is an activity of the body,

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it cannot be immortal (when a knife is destroyed, the cutting stops). More precisely, the soul is the “first activity” of a living body. This is a state, or a potential for actual, or ‘second’, activity. “Humans have an edge for cutting” was, for Aristotle, analogous to “humans have bodies for rational activity,” and the potential for rational activity thus constituted the essence of a human soul (Menn, 2002). Aristotle used his concept of the soul in many of his works; the *De Anima* (On the Soul) provides a good place to start to gain more understanding of his views (Polansky, 2007). Aristotle also believed that there were four sections of the soul: the calculative and scientific parts on the rational side used for making decisions, and the desiderative and vegetative parts on the irrational side responsible for identifying our needs (Sorabji, 2015).

Historical Perspective

DesCartes argued that it is not only the non-physical self but also the physical self that thinks too. “I think therefore I exist” (Ani, 2015). William James distinguished between “the self as the known, or the ‘me’, the ‘empirical ego’ “and “the self as knower, or the ‘I’, the ‘pure ego’”

(Valentine, 1991). Cooley (1902) published "Human Nature and the Social Order" in which it was suggested that 'self-conception grows out of social interaction' eg: child reflection of capacity on how others view him. He proposed the "looking glass self", a reflected appraisal based on others' imaged appraisal. Freud's treatment of the ego gives the central idea of "self". eg: ego invests libido in self-creating narcissism (Wolf, 2002). Erikson proposed that people form an ego identity during adolescence based on others' perception and their own perceptions compared to relevant others (Hamachek, 1990). Karen Horney emphasized neurotic trends like self-alienation and perfectionistic strivings to impede self-acceptance and the expression of true self (DeRobertis, 2006). Carl Jung emphasized the concept of self-actualization where self is an archetype and gradually becomes the center of personality (Rusu, 2019). Heinz Kohut dealt with the development of nuclear self, affected by parental treatment and their interaction with goals (Kohut, 2018). Gordon Allport worked on accounting of emergence of self as a concept central to understanding human development, individual personality, and social interaction (Allport, 1943). Nisbett and Borgida (1975) combined Ben's theory of self-perception with implications of Singer's work, suggesting that people rely on situational cues, and behavior of people to infer their own emotions giving right to self-attribution phenomena.

Self-Awareness

It is the ability to reflect one's own actions, thoughts, and emotions- simul-

taneously being the subject and object of one's attention. This has raised a few questions like: do we conceive of what we are not in the same way as we conceptualize what we are? Can self-deception (distortion in self-awareness) be healthy? McGuire and McGuire (1988) challenge this one-sided construction by investigating differences between subjects' perception of the affirmational self (What one thinks one is) with the negational self (What one thinks one is not). Taylor's cognitive adaptation theory contradicts that realistic self-awareness is synonymous with mental health and holds that "people view the world in general and events (negative) in particular, through a set of biases that represents themselves and the world more positively than may be justified" (Taylor, 1983). Gallup suggests that self-awareness is not uniquely human, both chimpanzees and orangutans also demonstrate the capacity to become the object of their own attention (Gallup, 1977).

Self-concept

One's self-concept (also called self-construction, self-identity, self-perspective or self-structure) is a collection of beliefs about oneself (Leflot et al., 2010). Generally, self-concept embodies the answer to "Who am I?" Self-concept is distinguishable from self-awareness, which refers to the extent to which self-knowledge is defined, consistent, and currently applicable to one's attitudes and dispositions. Self-concept also differs from self-esteem: self-concept is a cognitive or descrip-

tive component of one's self (e.g. "I am a fast runner"), while self-esteem is evaluative and opinionated (e.g. "I feel good about being a fast runner") (Kanagawa et al., 2001). Self-concept is made up of one's self-schemas; and interacts with self-esteem, self-knowledge, and the social self to form the self as a whole. It includes the past, present, and future selves, where future selves (or possible selves) represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, or what they are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves may function as incentives for certain behaviors. The perception people have about their past or future selves is related to the perception of their current selves. The temporal self-appraisal theory argues that people have a tendency to maintain a positive self-evaluation by distancing themselves from their negative self and paying more attention to their positive ones. In addition, people have a tendency to perceive the past-self less favorably (e.g. "I'm better than I used to be") and the future-self, more positively (e.g. "I will be better than I am now") (Ross & Wilson, 2002; Wilson, 2012). According to Rogers (1959), everyone strives to reach an "ideal self". Rogers also hypothesized that psychologically healthy people actively move away from roles created by others' expectations, and instead look within themselves for validation. On the other hand, neurotic people have "Self-concepts that do not match their experiences. They are afraid to accept their own experiences as valid, so they distort them, either to protect themselves

or to win approval from others." The self-categorization theory states that the self-concept consists of at least two "levels": a personal identity and a social one. In other words, one's self-evaluation relies on self-perceptions and how others perceive them. Self-concept can alternate rapidly between personal and social identity. Children and adolescents begin integrating social identity into their own self-concept in elementary school by assessing their position among peers. By age 5, acceptance from peers has a significant impact on children's self-concept, affecting their behavior and academic success (Turner & Onorato, 2014)

The self-concept is an internal model that uses self-assessments in order to define one's self-schemas. Features such as personality, skills and abilities, occupation and hobbies, physical characteristics, etc. are assessed and applied to self-schemas, which are ideas of oneself in a particular dimension (e.g., someone that considers himself a geek will associate "geek-like" qualities to themselves). A collection of self-schemas makes up one's overall self-concept. For example, the statement "I am lazy" is a self-assessment that contributes to self-concept. Statements such as "I am tired", however, would not be part of someone's self-concept, since being tired is a temporary state and therefore cannot become a part of a self-schema. A person's self-concept may change with time as reassessment occurs, which in extreme cases can lead to identity crises (Sassenberg & Vliek, 2019).

According to Carl Rogers (1959), the self-concept has three different components:

- a) The view you have of yourself (Self-image)
- b) How much value you place on yourself (Self-esteem or self-worth)
- c) What you wish you were really like (Ideal self)

Cultural Variation in the Self-concept:

People of different cultures can have different construals of self and others and their interdependence which shape their perception, cognition, emotion, and motivation. For example, eastern culture does not value the overt separation of individuals and insists on fundamental relatedness of human beings to each other. There are two construals of the self: interdependence and independence (Guimond et al., 2006). The independent construct has a de-conceptualized self that is separateness. This is a western characterization of self within individual desires which are called core concepts, salient identities or self-schemas. Here others are important but only as standards of social comparison. The interdependent construal considers self in relation to specific others (Myers & Twenge, 2019). What a person does is meaningful only in the context of a given social relation. Their attributes and abilities get less important in controlling auxiliary behavior that is not 'self-diagnostic'. Instead, self-knowledge guides behavior in a particular context. The divergent construal can

have consequences on social inferences: the Interdependence self will be more sensitive to others than the independent self (Toure-Tillery & Fishbach, 2015). It will result in greater cognitive elaboration of others among the interdependent selves. The two construals can be differentiated on the basis of the pattern of knowledge about self and other persons, the process, and retrieval. So, interdependence itself depends on the social situation of who is there and what is the status organized related to the actor (Cross et al., 2011). Interdependent selves are reluctant to form a trait judgment from observations of situationally specific behavior. This means the biases will be less prevalent amongst them.

The Relational Self:

Freudian theory never gained a hold on the cultural vision of "man" or on the imagination of clinical practitioners. Sullivan (1940) placed self directly within the interpersonal realm and the self was seen as constructed of "reflected appraisal". Kohut's (1977) concept of self-object also drives with others used as objects to perform some function for the self but still remains intrinsically and ideally separate. "The self" is seen as dissatisfying the existing models of female development and the "female self". Miller (1994) worked on a psychological cultural approach with the notion of self being in relation. Gilligan (1977) criticizes the prevailing theories of moral development where women appeared as defective moral selves. Chodorow (1978) re-examined that traditional theories fail to acknowledge the early and long-lasting

bond between the girl and her mother. Aristotle (1987) stated that “the female is female by virtue of lack of qualities and regarded her as natural defectiveness”. Therefore, all these theories of human development failed to appreciate the relational nature of women’s sense of themselves. Relational theories of ‘self’ stress on inter subjective and relationally emergent nature of human experience which has a “felt sense of self” and “interacting sense of self”. This mutual initiative is the ongoing central dynamics in women’s lives (all people’s). Empathy is the dynamic cognitive affective process of joining with another subjective experience, it challenges the concept of “separate self”, that is empathy blurs distinction between subject and object (Jordan, 1991). But the question arises of where lies the boundaries of self as a “separate” entity rather than “being” as contextual.

Critique

Though all the theories or the concepts about the ‘self’ give in-depth insights about the nature of self and how it develops, the attempt of theorists to have a boundary while defining “self” made them exclude many factors which go behind in the making and shaping of self. Their pursuit towards having a clear picture made them ignore many significant factors without which we get an incomplete picture of self. Also, the nature of human tendency to have the understanding in a clearer and concrete form makes the other side of self, which is very fluid, invisible. According to the author, “self” is a process which is determined by many

factors. The macro and the micro aspects of the culture, the demography and the clarity in the stature of society in our daily life, we have been brought up in, our family’s economic, emotional, psychological conditions and the interpersonal dynamics within the family. The level of education, the diverse set of experiences and our dreams and aspirations also play a very significant role in the sustenance, revision and maintenance of the self. However, all the theories focus on one part or the other. Also, none of the discussions focuses on the importance of the personal predisposition on the self. For example, mostly, identical twins are brought up in the same culture, in the same family, yet there are significant differences in the characteristics of the self. None of the theory ventures into such domains where self is partially determined by our individual predisposition towards the environment. The flexible and malleable nature of self is another domain which has not been discussed much in literature. People generally say, “What we were two-three years ago, but we are no longer the same. The motivation behind this change in self-concept or identity has not been discussed much. Also, what kind and at which age does this fluidity of “self” decrease or is there any concept called saturation of self where self takes a concrete form or is it an ever-going, never-lasting phenomena. These insights are lacking in the literature. Also, is not self heavily interdependent on context? The different facets of the self be it relational, cultural, independent or dependent depends upon the context we are in. In contemporary times, saying that women have more relational

self and self in the collective culture is highly interdependent would be a statement without evidence. These statements might have been true in the beginning of the 20th century but with the rapid rate of globalization, these statements need data to be substantiated.

Application of Theory

The self-awareness in one's life is one of the most significant factors which can define the quality of the life one is leading. As Roger (1959) put it, psychologically healthy people are deeply aware of oneself. Though, everyone's self has uniquely been shaped yet understanding of these theories can be applied in many situations. In clinical psychology, it can be used to make a patient understand the blind spot in their own issues. Many a times, people are unable to reflect on their past experiences or even if they reflect, due to their own biases and predispositions or in the self-threatening situation, unconsciously many insights are ignored which later leads to a very complex psyche. By using the theories of self, one can help such people in reflecting and solving their issues. In psychoanalysis, self is the patient and self is only used as a healer. With the help from the different techniques, deep seated issues are understood and then the patient is made to realize those issues and then they come out of the shackles of their unresolved psyche. In Indian psychology, self is the seer and self are the one which has the potential of getting enlightened (Paranjpe, 2010). All these insights can be used in counseling as well as in organizational behavior. In counseling, these

insights can help people in understanding their conflicts and where they are stuck. Self-awareness not only makes one understand one's own system well but also helps them in handling their natural tendencies and thereby, making their daily life easy. In organizational behavior, training on self-awareness, self-concept, self-identity, esteem, self-efficacy can help them in increasing their productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. In India, most of the working people have to juggle multiple roles and this is one of the conflicts which puts a great deal of toll on them. Training on how to contextualize themselves effectively, smoothly, and efficiently will help people in becoming a better version of themselves. By using different intellectual, physical, emotional and psychological exercises, a trainer can make people see the malleable nature of self and they can always aim towards a better self and not towards an ideal self.

Extension of Theory

These theories can be extended towards macro level of studies as well as micro level. For example, is there a common pattern between the selves of the people coming from the common culture and what aspects of the culture lead to those commonalities in the selves. These sorts of studies will not only help in understanding the degree to which the self is determined by the cultural background, it will also help in understanding the significance of culture while talking about self. At the micro level, one can do a quantitative study on the effect of personality in determining the extent to which

individual factors lead to the awareness of self. Also, rather than seeing “self” from theoretical angles only, one can do qualitative study to understand how the understanding of self differs in a different section. For example, how entrepreneurs view themselves and how that identity differs from someone who prefers to work for a nine to five job? Also, for an entrepreneur, how the same self becomes a motivator, a control mechanism, and an achiever in different phases of work can be an interesting study to pursue. Also, what kind of people prefer to have a stable concept of self and what kind of people believe in dynamic self or learning and evolving self and does that affect their self-efficacy and work performance. Such studies will give a granular insight into the term ‘self’ and help in understanding how the same term is understood and perceived by different people in different contexts.

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