The Self

Learning about the self

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The Self

- **The self:** symbol-using social being who reflects on own behavior:

- Two aspects to the self:
  - The "I": the active agent
  - The "Me": the object of attention of "I"

- How can you relate these 2 aspects to the objective and subjective selves?

The Self

- **self-concept**: the set of beliefs, thoughts, and feelings we hold about who we are.
- also includes **evaluations** about the self-concept → **self-esteem**
- self-esteem can be **implicit** or **explicit**
- **self-awareness**: the psychological state in which self becomes the object of attention
  - develops around 18 months
  - frontal lobe – anterior cingular cortex

The Self

- **private self-awareness**: temporary state of being aware of <u>private</u> aspects of self:
  - personal attitudes, current mood, beliefs
  - adherence to personal standards
- **public self-awareness**: temporary state of being aware of <u>public</u> aspects of self:
  - physical appearance, the way we talk, behave in public
  - adherence to social standards

The Self

- **self-consciousness**: habitual tendency to engage in self-awareness
  - public self-consciousness
  - private self-consciousness
  - distinct tendencies – either or both

Self-Regulation

- the most important function of self
- the ways in which we control and direct our own actions
- ability to delay immediate gratification small rewards to attain larger future ones
- e.g., turning down a party offer to study for your upcoming exam
- <u>working self-concept</u>: aspect of self-concept active at a given situation

Self-Regulation

cybernetic theory of self-regulation:

- core idea – feedback loop
  - self awareness → assess how we are doing in meeting our goals & ideals
  - adjust behavior until it meets the standard or give up the goal
- **self-efficacy:** specific expectations about our abilities to accomplish certain tasks
  - highly specific, control-related perceptions

Self-Regulation

- **self-discrepancies:**
- <u>actual</u> self versus <u>ideal</u> self – dejection related emotions
  - disappointment, frustration, depression
- <u>actual</u> self versus <u>ought</u> self – agitation related emotions
  - anxiety, guilt
  - ought self: what we feel we ought to posess

Self-Knowledge

Sources of self-knowledge:

- Socialization – acquire the rules, standards, values of family, group, culture

- feedback from others

- Reflected appraisals – self evaluation based on perceptions and evaluations of others

Self-knowledge

- self-perception and labeling arousal states
  - **self-perception theory:** infer attitudes from overt behavior (rather than from internal)
- environmental distinctiveness
- comparison of self and others
- **social identity:** part of self-concept that comes from membership in a social group

Self-Knowledge

self-schema: the cognitive structure that represents your knowledge about yourself in a particular domain

- organize your experiences in that domain
- aid memory & guide behavior in relevant situations
- influence decisions, judgments, & inferences
- schematic vs. aschematic individuals
- <u>possible selves</u> also part of self-schema

Self-Knowledge

self-complexity: the number of dimensions that people use to think about themselves

- simple: I am a college student
- complex: I am a student, daughter, girlfriend, member of DKSK, a math tutor
- simple self-conceptions vulnerable to failure

Self and culture

- Self-conceptions vary according to culture!
- Individualist (Western) cultures:
  - self-sufficiency, self-discipline, autonomy, uniqueness
  - closely linked to socioeconomic development
  - personal goals prior to group goals
  - identity selected by you rather than given by group
  - fosters the development of **independent selves**
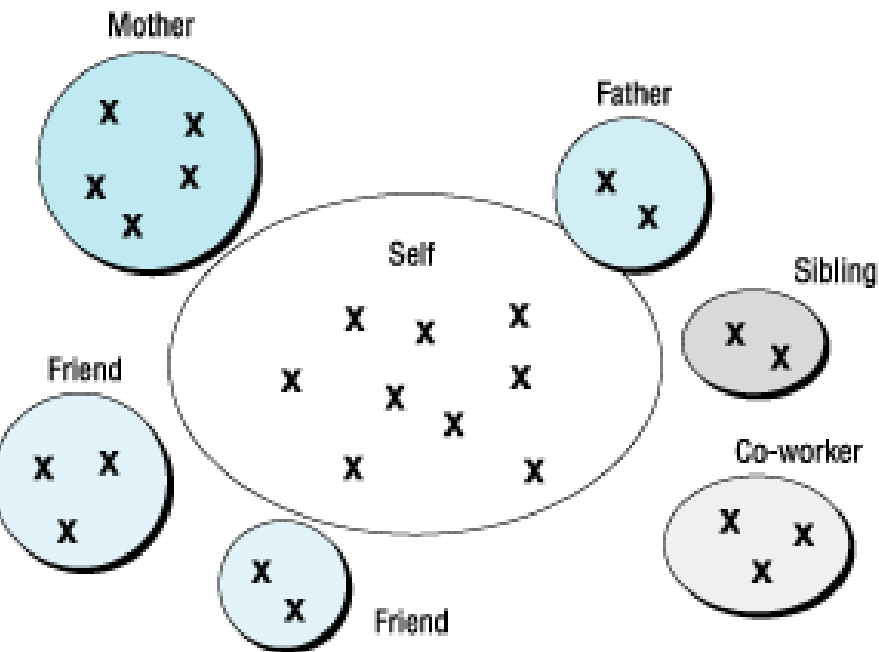
Self and culture

- Collectivistic (Eastern) cultures:
  - a more social self-description
  - similarity, conformity, cooperation, knowing one's place (rather than uniqueness and independence)
  - personal goals sacrificed for collective good
  - identity given by group rather than selected by you
  - fosters the development of **interdependent selves**
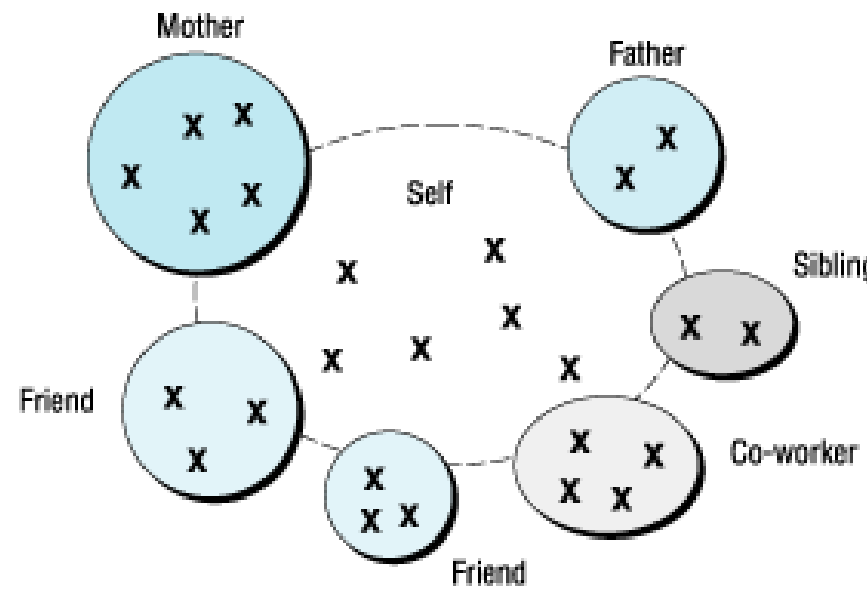
Self and culture

- Independent self:
  - A way of conceiving of the self in terms of unique, personal attributes and as a being that is separate and autonomous from the group.
- Interdependent self:
  - A way of conceiving of the self in terms of social roles and as a being that is embedded in and dependent on the group.

Self and culture

Self and culture

Western (individualist)

- independent self
- emphasize uniqueness
- separate from others
- stable across situations
- autonomous from the group
- ego-focused emotions: pride or frustration

Eastern (collectivist)

- interdependent self
- emphasize shared attributes
- embedded in social rel.s
- changing across situations
- dependent on the group
- other-focused emotions: *amae*

Motivation and self

- need an **accurate self-concept**:
  - seek most "diagnostic" information about own abilities
- need a **consistent self-concept**:
  - **self-verification**: seek out / interpret information that confirm one's self-concept
  - resist information that disconfirm
  - question: might culture play a role?

Motivation and self

- the desire and motivation to <u>improve</u> ourselves: **self-improvement**
  - often motivated by criticism
- the need to feel good about ourselves: **self-enhancement**:
  - seek out /interpret situations to feel good about one's self
  - especially after threat, failure, blows to self-esteem

Motivation and self

- Self-enhancing strategies
  - **positive illusions** are false, mildly positive perceptions about actual abilites, talents, skills
    - see yourself more positively than true,
    - feel more control than you actually have,
    - unrealistically optimistic about future
  - **self-affirmation** helps coping with specific threats by affirming unrelated aspects

Motivation and self

- **Self-evaluation maintenance model:** other people's performance reflects on our feelings about ourselves as a function of:
  - our own relative performance,
  - our closeness to the other,
  - the personal relevance of the domain
- someone <u>close</u> to us, performs <u>better</u> than us, in a domain that is <u>important</u> and <u>relevant</u> to us > ☹
- domain <u>not</u> relevant > we <u>B</u>ask <u>I</u>n the <u>R</u>eflected <u>G</u>lory of others (BIRG)

Motivation and self

- **Question**: Which do we prefer: self-enhancement or self-verification?
- When are we more realistic rather than self-enhancing?
  - about to receive feedback from others
  - making decisions about goals
  - depressed or have low self-esteem
- **Question:** how about the role of culture in self-verification or self-enhancement motives?

Social comparison

- Festinger (1954): Social Comparison Theory
  - drive to evaluate abilities and opinions accurately;
  - without objective standards, mainly by comparisons with others;
  - in general, prefer similar others to compare

Social comparison

Goals of social comparison:

- accurate self-evaluation
- self-enhancement
  - leads to **downward comparisons**
- self-improvement
  - leads to **upward comparisons**
- sense of communion
  - <u>contrast</u> effects and <u>assimilation</u> effects

Social comparison

- affects self-evaluations, moods, and responses to others
- unsolicited comparisons?
  - e.g., Mr. Clean and Mr. Dirty
- similar others –how much?
  - related-attributes similarity
  - when dimension unknown, compare to both worst and best

Self-presentation

self-presentation:

attempt to control the impressions we convey to others in order to obtain desired outcomes

- public s-p can influence private s-c

- could be <u>automatic</u> or <u>deliberate</u>

- need to take the role of the other to be successful

Self-presentation

- conform to the norms of the situation
- match behavior of other people
- self-promotion
- ingratiation (flattery)
- Modesty
- Independent s-c: self-promotion more likely, to reduce actual-ideal
- Interdependent s-c: preventive self-presentations, to reduce actual-ought

Self-presentation

- **self-handicapping**: creating obstacles to own performance

  – create excuse for prospective failure or enhance success

1. <u>verbal</u> (self-reported) handicapping

- complaining about illness or stress-induced ailments prior to engaging in a task.

  – an excuse for failure without hampering performance

  – can increase performance by lowering expectations, thus reducing anxiety

Self-presentation

2. <u>behavioral</u> self-handicapping

- not adequately preparing for a task or using drugs or alcohol to inhibit performance.
  - more by men than women
  - possible due to competitiveness
  - dangerous: being perceived as lazy and unmotivated

- Self-handicapping

Subject choose distracting music as an excuse for failure