

# The Self

## Introduction

- The idea that there's a "hidden self" is a fairly recent and modern innovation the last couple of centuries
- Compared to the rest of nature, the human self is unique
  - Can play different roles in different situations
  - Highly self aware, highly critical of itself and moderates itself; most animals just live in the present

## Our Unique Self

- Self knowledge seems readily available; no difficulty answering questions about ourselves
  - i.e. how are you feeling, what do you want
- Who or what makes the self? Multiple theories
  - Existentialism – one are defined by the decisions and actions that you make
  - Predispositions – born with certain predispositions or tendencies that influence who one becomes
  - Society – product of ones time and circumstances
  - Probably some combination of this is the answer rather than a single one
- Unlike animals, humans incorporate all sorts of abstract principles into choices
  - i.e. self sacrifice for a moral principle, mediating between past and future selves, logical reasoning, planning for the future, self regulation, organize complex sequences of actions across time, reputation management
  - Actively self-serving in our thoughts, feelings and deeds

## Self Knowledge

- Who knows you best?

- Privileged Access – the idea that you know yourself better than anyone else (can be biased/not true)
- Self-knowledge is not entirely accurate, often systematically distorted in a favorable manner
  - see 04 Self Knowledge, 1:25 for study on students rating themselves
- Positive illusions – where people overestimate the positivity of their lives
  - abilities – overrating abilities or success or/and downplaying faults/failures
  - control – overestimating control over life
  - optimism – being unrealistically optimistic
- Wishful thinking – something not true but exaggerated in a way that you like
- Self-serving bias – attributing success to self and failure to external cause
  - i.e. good outcome, that was me, bad outcome, that was bad luck, bad situation, etc
    - i.e. I did well on that exam, so it means I studied hard/I'm smart, I did poorly, must be the professor
  - we evaluate that we succeed more and fail less, so our self reflection is positive
  - usually not extremely exaggerated, self perception just slightly better than the facts
- Selective criticism – tendency to not notice and more quickly forget stimuli that cause emotional discomfort and contradict our prior beliefs
- Memory bias – forgetting bad things and remembering good things
  - dwell and rehearse the good things, file away the bad things and try not to think about it much

## Self Deception

- Humans have slippery definitions of success
- In general, when we think the news is going to be bad we put our defenses up
- Downward comparison – comparing self to someone worse to feel better about oneself
  - i.e. at least I don't have cancer!, at least I don't have both cancer a missing arm!, at least I don't have both cancer and all my limbs missing!, at least a nuke isn't being dropped on me right now!, etc

- False consensus – overestimating how many people are the same
  - i.e. opinions; “a lot of people agree with me”, but in general tend to hang out with people who agree with us so view is biased
- False uniqueness – overestimating how many people are the same
  - i.e. abilities; “I can play the piano so I am unique since not a lot of people play the piano”, but a lot of people play the piano
- In both of these, one can make themselves feel better by distorting how similar one is similar to another
  - high self-esteem people do this more often than low self-esteem people; they aren’t really better than anyone else, they just think they are
- (not named by video) – people measuring success or abilities using different criteria
  - we can always find something to focus or emphasize on; easy to see how we can think we are better than average
  - i.e. every kid thinks their dog is the coolest because they are all unique in some way
- Why does self deception happen?
  - Evolutionary theory - if I can convince myself I’m not lying when I tell it to you
  - We use biased deception on ourselves to reach more positive conclusions
  - Deception more than just manipulating the truth; also includes hiding it, avoiding it (depends on person)
    - easily do this to ourselves all the time, by avoiding truth, casting doubt on truth, only partially learning the truth, etc
      - i.e. not looking at the new flyer when theirs a sale for an item we bought at full price just yesterday
      - post-choice dissonance reduction – seeing a self choice in a more positive light than other chosen choices
      - ikea effect – suddenly has more value because we made it ourselves
      - search cognitive biases for more
  - Those that self deceive more often are better at deceiving others

## Self-esteem

- Self-esteem – how one evaluates themselves

- Mentally healthy people tend to have high self-esteem; tend to overestimate good traits and have positive illusions
  - seeing life more positively than realistically
- Depression correlated with low-self esteem
  - Depressed people actually tend to see life more realistically because they aren't overestimating or having many positive illusions
  - Correlation  $\neq$  causation; one doesn't necessarily indicate the other (but they still are related)
- Benefits of Self-esteem
  - Self-esteem seems to bolster initiative
    - Those with high self-esteem just think they're right – for better or worse
  - Self-esteem seems to bolster happiness
    - Those with low self-esteem are just devastated when something bad happens
    - Self-deception esque
- Why did we evolve to be so obsessed with self-esteem when the benefits are nothing major?
  - One theory is that it's an indicator of sorts, like a gas meter
  - Another is an internal measure of if others will like you
    - Evolutionarily relevant; lets one guess others thoughts
    - Self-deception related; fool others into liking you, present to others in a way that looks good
- We fool ourselves to fool others
- Low self-esteem people are more of a puzzle to psychologists; what do they want?
  - Confirm these negative views of self? Want to fail/fear success? Just not know what one wants?
  - Emerging consensus; people with low self-esteem pretty much want the same things as those with high self-esteem, just that they don't expect it
    - More focused on avoiding disaster than achieving success/more oriented towards protecting themselves from failure than towards trying to succeed
    - Those with high self-esteem assume success, kind of shocked if it doesn't happen, where as those with low self-esteem don't expect it
  - Self-concept confusion - people don't know themselves
    - High self-esteem is the presence of the belief that they are great

- Low self-esteem is not the presence of the belief they are terrible, rather just the absence of the belief they are great
- People with low self-esteem aren't calling themselves awful, they're just not sure, or good to some extent, partly, etc
- More of a garbled self-concept than a clear view of oneself as a bad person

## Self-control

- The real deal; this is more important to change than anything else in this section
  - Self-esteem secondary in many ways
- Some benefits of self-control
  - Success in school and work
  - Good relationships
  - Happiness and low stress – those with low self-control tend to make problems for themselves, act impulsively
  - Mental health
  - Physical health – those with good self-control live significantly longer
  - Good behavior
- 3 components of self control
  - Standards – Ideas of how one should be (i.e. goals, moral principles, ideals, norms, other peoples expectations, etc)
    - Unrealistic standards or conflicting goals will cause someone to not know what they want to do
  - Monitoring – keeping track of behavior
    - Difficult to regulate something if one cannot keep track of it
  - Willpower – the capacity to change
- Case study - Dieting
  - Dieting is largely unsuccessful; one often ends up gaining what they lost with interest
    - May even be healthier to just stay fat instead of fat thin fat thin, cause your body learns to resist the dieting
  - How do the components play into this?
    - Standards – unrealistic standards of how one should look
      - plays into the pathological eating habits

- Monitoring – people usually track a lot (good thing)
  - People tend to eat more when they don't keep track of what they're consuming
    - Be aware of natural fluctuations, look at the long term trend rather than the individual daily differences
    - Study where a wings restaurant cleared away wings bones and didn't; those with cleared wings tended to eat about 20% more because they couldn't monitor as well
  - Funny study where they asked "When do you know your dinner has ended?"
    - In France: "When the food doesn't taste quite as good" (acting on a natural response from the body)
    - In America: "When the TV show is over" (lol)
  - Monitoring is really effective!
- Willpower
  - Pretty complicated, wasn't covered much
  - Limited energy supply; lowness caused by resisting temptations or something else, then just don't have as much energy to resist