

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Definitions of social psychology
- ☰ Exploring the meanings of self and identity (continued...)
- ☰ Understanding 'self' through diverse paradigms of social psychology
- ☰ Conceptualizing identity and social identity

◀ Previous Next ▶

Definitions of social psychology

- To understand what self (and identity or social identity) means has been one of the most interesting but challenging human endeavours for centuries. As Anand C. Paranjpe (1998) has contended, conceptualizing 'self' has been made intellectually interesting but challenging because of the paradox of it being simultaneously perceived as same and changeable across time.
- Before we make an attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of self and identity, an attempt to conceptually distinguish these from other similar concepts such as 'person', 'personality' etc. merits some paying some attention.



Exploring the meanings of self and identity (continued...)

- According to Paranjpe (1998), the use of the term 'person' connotes an individual with rights and duties. However, 'personality' is usually associated with the outer or superficial appearance of the an individual as well as his/her persistent features or traits.
- Paranjpe notes that one common theme that runs across the diverse meanings of 'self' in social sciences is being a particular person contrasted with others in the relational or socio-historical context. In his book, *Self and Identity in Modern Psychology and Indian Thought*, however, he also provides the details of the ancient Indian philosophical traditions where self is also taken as a manifestation of or identified with one pure cosmic 'Self'. Such a contrast of the concepts of self with those of person and personality prepare the grounds to understand a comprehensive meaning of self and identity.

◀ Previous Next ▶

Understanding 'self' through diverse paradigms of social psychology

- As observed earlier, Paranjpe (1998) conceptualized self as a notion we use to contrast ourselves from others. However, as he noted, self is a dialectical concept in the sense that there is an implicit subjective, often uncertain, symbolic and “constructed” boundary between self and the non-self. such a conceptualization of self lends some insight into the roots of diverse perspectives on self as the understanding of the constructed boundary of self requires the knowledge of the ontological, epistemological and ethical standpoint of our inquiry
- For instance, Leary and Tangney (2003), in their review of the diverse meanings of self, endorsed the individualistic or psychologized understanding of self and it is apparent that the paradigmatic roots of such a conceptualization is positivism. They posited, “The self is a mental capacity that allows an animal to take itself as the object of its own attention and to think consciously about itself” (p. 8). From social constructionist standpoint or paradigm, psychologists like Markus and Kitayama (1991) have explored the socio-cultural construction of self.



Understanding 'self' through diverse paradigms of social psychology (continued...)

- Baumeister (1997) also concurred that “self and society shape each other” (p. 8). He did emphasize the role of culture in shaping human experiences in his conceptualization of self. however, he also provided insights into how certain experiences facilitate our gaining a sense of self. He outlined three such experiences :
 - Reflexive consciousness,
 - Interpersonal being, and
 - Executive function
- Reflexive consciousness pertains to the process involving how human consciousness becomes aware of its source. Interpersonal being refers to our existence essentially in the interpersonal relationships. Executive function is the active decision-making entity that initiates action and regulates the self. Thus, Baumeister’s perspective on how human beings gain a sense of self in their socio-cultural contexts, provides a meaningful perspective to understand the creative writers’ self processes and their relationship with the creative process.

Conceptualizing identity and social identity

- Paranjpe (1998) posit that identity refers to a condition or quality of being essentially the same and not something else in one's nature or characteristics. Baumeister (1986, 1997), similarly defines identity as a definition or an interpretation of the self that one tends to hold on to for a considerable period of time.
- Baumeister also emphasizes that one's identity is about *identifying with*
 - Outer contexts such as religion or society
 - Aspects of inner self

It is these outer contexts or social categories (e.g. religion, social group, caste, economic status) that is referred to as one's social identity