

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Exploring social identity
- ☰ Formation of Social identity
- ☰ Functions of social identity
- ☰ Providing a definition of self
- ☰ Compensating for the problems of personal identity
- ☰ Contributing to self-esteem

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Exploring social identity

- As learnt in an earlier lecture, Paranjpe (1998) and Baumeister (1986, 1997) have conceptualized social identity as one of the components of identity. If a person seeks or creates one's identity by adhering to a set of qualities to have a feeling of being essentially the same and not something else, social identity becomes a part of this process. As Baumeister also emphasizes that one's identity is about identifying with not only the aspects of inner self but also the outer contexts or social categories (e.g. religion, social group, caste, economic status). Let us learn how social identity gets formed or changes through the course of one's life.

Formation of Social identity

- Usually, socialization during early childhood is taken to be a key factor influencing the formation of social identity. In terms of psychological concepts, it is learnt through social learning. Social learning is about following and imitating what our models stand for. Furthermore, as Latika Gupta (2008) showed through her ethnographic work among Hindu and Muslim children of Daryganj area of Delhi to explore the development of religious identity among them, it is not only social learning but also the use of avoidance training (doing something to avoid the wrath a person such as parents or other family members), that might affect the development of social or religious identity. These psychological processes underlying the process of socialization may play pivotal role in the formation of or a shift in social identity across life span.

Formation of Social identity (continued...)

- With the help of a series of experiments, Henri Tajfel (1978) and his associates illustrated that a 'trivial' categorization of people into different groups leads to a feeling of in-group positive and out-group negative bias. His results are of substantial importance to understand social identity and its development. As learnt earlier, Baumeister (1986, 1997) highlighted the importance of identifying with outer contexts or social categories in the development of identity. As per Tajfel, mere trivial categorization of people into different groups affects their inter-group emotions because one's self-esteem is attached to the group membership. The social categories of class, caste and religion etc. into which we are born and socialized may exert influence on us to identify with these to gain self-esteem. Thus, social or mere trial categorization may play a significant role in our developing or changing our social identity.

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Functions of social identity

- Social psychologists have outlined the following functions that social identity serves to a person:
 - Providing a definition of self
 - Compensating for the problems of personal identity
 - Contributing to self-esteem

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Providing a definition of self

- Let us recall the definition of identity given by Paranjpe (1998) and Baumeister (1986, 1997). Identity is a condition or quality of being essentially the same and not something else in one's nature or characteristics. Thus, identity provides a definition or an interpretation of the self that one tends to hold on to for a considerable period of time. Social identity, that is, identifying with out contexts or social categories, contributes developing a definition or an interpretation of self that is intricately linked with one's self-esteem.

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Compensating for the problems of personal identity

- It is often observed that a demoralized person or a person facing social discrimination is not able to create a meaning for one's self through identifying with one's inner self, that is battered by atrocious social conditions. It is then, as social psychologists such as Crocker et. al., 1994) point out, that identify with one's own social group may provide better self-esteem to the person as it provide a meaning or definition to the self.

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Contributing to self-esteem

- In general, one of the biggest contributions of social identity for a person's life is enhancing the self-esteem of the person. Bat-Chava (1994) illustrated this with the help of a study among the deaf individuals. It was found that the deaf persons who identified with fellow deaf persons (communicating in sign language and attending the school for deaf), had a better self-esteem than those deaf persons who identified with non-deaf people in their social lives.