

Situating the self in interpersonal space

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From the social intelligence view of personality (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987, 1989; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1989), the *self* is defined as a person's mental representation of his or her own personality – what an individual's characteristic traits, motives, beliefs, attitudes, and values are: Thus:

We define the self as one's mental representation of oneself, no different in principle from mental representations that a person has concerning other ideas, objects, and events and their attributes and implications. (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984, p. 2)

And:

The self may be construed as a person's mental representation of his or her own personality. . . . Formed through both experience and thought, it is encoded in memory alongside mental representations of other objects, real and imagined, in the physical and social world. The mental representation of the self includes both abstract information about the person's attributes (semantic knowledge) and concrete information about the person's experiences, thoughts, and actions (episodic knowledge). (Kihlstrom et al., 1988, p. 146)

In principle, the self-concept is accessible to introspective phenomenal awareness. Examples of a subconscious self-concept may be found in cases of psychogenic fugue and multiple personality disorder (for a recent review, see Kihlstrom & Schacter, 1995); and even outside the clinic there are some people who seem to be remarkably obtuse about themselves. But as a rule, we assume that we know who we are and what we are like.

Although self-knowledge is generally concerned with the individual's psychosocial attributes, by which we mean his or her cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral characteristics, it should be clear that it also includes the person's physical characteristics. The self refers to body as well as to mind, so that we have an idea of what we look like, as well as what we think, feel, want, and do. In addition to this semantic (or generic) knowledge, the self also includes episodic or autobiographical knowledge about events in which the individual has participated (for more on the distinction between episodic and semantic memory, see Tulving, 1983). This episodic

knowledge comprises a record of the person's own actions and experiences, from his or her subjective point of view. Although the person's entire autobiographical record necessarily makes reference to the self (Kihlstrom, 1996), it is probably not the case that the self includes the person's entire autobiographical record: There is simply too much history to record. Still, it seems clear that part of our knowledge about ourselves is knowledge of salient events in our personal histories – events that, when remembered, remind us not just of what we have done and what has happened to us, but also who we are and who we have been.

Reflection on the autobiographical component of self-knowledge makes it clear that the self does not consist simply of knowledge about the person him- or herself, in isolation from other people, places, and things. When we remember something about ourselves, we also remember the people we have interacted with and the places where these exchanges have taken place. But other people and other places are important for semantic self-knowledge as well. Because personality is constructed through, and displayed in, social interaction, it is impossible to separate the intrapsychic from the interpersonal. Scientists cannot view the person as an abstract entity; nor do people view themselves in this manner. Thus, the self also represents the sociocultural matrix in which the person lives, as well as his or her internal attributes.

Within the social intelligence framework, Kihlstrom and Cantor (1984; Kihlstrom et al., 1988) described two principal alternative views of the self: as a memory structure, located at a node in an associative memory network representing declarative knowledge about all sorts of things, or as a conceptual structure, embedded in a hierarchy of concepts having to do with the physical and social world. The two construals are not mutually exclusive, of course, because concepts are encoded in declarative memory. A great deal of recent progress in understanding the self has come from studies construing the self as a memory structure (e.g., Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994; Klein & Loftus, 1992a,b). In this chapter, we provide a detailed examination of the self as a conceptual structure, with particular attention to the representation of the interpersonal context in which self-knowledge is embedded. For the most part, we will be guided by recent work on the structure of concepts in general (for reviews, see Medin, 1989; Medin & Smith, 1984; Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Neisser, 1987; Oden, 1987; Rosch & Lloyd, 1978; Ross & Spalding, 1995; Smith & Medin, 1981).

Views of the self-concept: Proper sets, prototypes, and exemplars

Treating the self as a concept is not merely a play on the idea of the *self-concept*. To the contrary, we think that to a great extent the self functions in

the same way as any other mental category, serving purposes of classification, inference, combination, and communication (Ross & Spalding, 1995).

One of the first achievements of cognitive and social development is to develop a boundary around the self, representing the primitive distinction between me and not-me (see, e.g., Damon & Hart, 1988; Eder, 1989; Lewis, 1990). This boundary is essential, of course, for distinguishing between self and other, but it also permits other varieties of classification. Consider, for example, the common apology for one's behavior: "I just wasn't myself last night." By such statements, people express their judgment that whatever offensive characteristics they may have displayed on the occasion in question, they were not their usual attributes. Such a statement can be made only if the person has a sense of what he or she is typically like.

Moreover, having a self-concept permits one to make inferences about oneself. Our self-concepts play a role in the judgments and decisions, both mundane and monumental, that we make in social and nonsocial domains. Advertisements, including political campaigns, are often constructed to appeal to certain types of people. Our responses to these messages depend on whether or not we recognize ourselves as belonging to the category being appealed to. Many social decisions, including decisions about whether to smoke (Chassin, Presson, Sherman, Corty, & Olshavsky, 1981) or where to live (Niedenthal, Cantor, & Kihlstrom, 1985), are influenced by the degree of match between one's concept of oneself and one's concept of the typical person who smokes or who is happy living in a particular setting. Faced with an unfamiliar situation, we may ask ourselves: "How would someone like me behave in this situation?" Once issues of being in love have been settled, the decision to marry may be framed as follows: "Can a person like me be happy with a person like her (or him)?"

The self-concept can also be combined with other concepts to form entirely new mental categories. When projecting ourselves into the future, we implicitly or explicitly combine our concept of ourselves with our concept of some other type of person. When, for example, a lifelong Democrat switches to the Republican Party, he or she has found the idea of self-as-Republican more appealing than self-as-Democrat. The experience of gay men and lesbians in first recognizing their own sexuality, and then announcing this discovery publicly (if indeed they ever do so), derives from a choice not between heterosexuality and homosexuality, but between self-identified-as-heterosexual versus self-identified-as-homosexual, or between self-as-homosexual-in-the-closet or self-as-homosexual-who-has-come-out. Money and Ehrhardt (1972) have written movingly of pseudohermaphroditic children who have actually made the choice between identifying themselves as boys or as girls; transsexual adults make the same kind of choice, which boils down to a judgment over which conceptual combination is more satisfactory: self-as-male or self-as-female.

Finally, the self-concept organizes our knowledge and beliefs about ourselves so that they can be communicated to other people. Consider the following personal advertisement, sampled randomly from a recent issue of the *New York Review of Books*:

SERIOUS BUT GENTLE AND LIGHT-HEARTED, family-oriented but loves to travel, SWF, 35, NYC, attorney for nonprofit, Catholic, attractive with Mediterranean looks, Anglophile, enjoys politics, hiking, history, and books, seeks Christian SWM under 50 who's caring, intelligent, well-educated, and interested in politics and social issues.

In this self-advertisement, the writer has presumably included those attributes, among hundreds or thousands of possibilities, that capture best what she is like – or, at least, how she wants to be perceived. And she has also listed those attributes, again among hundreds and thousands of possibilities, that are most important in a person with whom she is to have a romantic relationship. Both sets of attributes – which define the kind of person she believes herself to be and the kind of person she wants to be involved with – are important components of the writer's self-concept. And she has taken out the advertisement in the hope that someone like him will be interested in someone like her.

These functions of classification, inference, combination, and communication, shared between the self and other categories, permit us to be quite literal about the self-concept. In the remainder of this chapter, we ask what the self looks like from this perspective and how we can understand the manner in which the self relates to the interpersonal context in which it is situated.

The self as a classical proper set

Philosophers beginning with Aristotle, as well as psychologists working in the tradition of Hull (1920) and Bruner (Bruner, Goodnow, & Austin, 1956), generally viewed concepts as proper sets, or summary descriptions of entire classes of objects whose features are singly necessary and jointly sufficient to identify an object as an instance of a category. In the domain of personality, the classical, proper-set point of view is best represented by the classic fourfold typology offered by the Greek physician Hippocrates (460–377 B.C.E.), reaffirmed by the Roman physician Galen (C.E. 130–201), and revived by the German philosopher Kant (1798/1978). According to this view, there are only four types of people: melancholics, choleric, sanguines, and phlegmatics, each displaying a unique set of features. More recently, Jung (1921/1971) offered an eightfold classification of psychological types based on an individual's characteristic attitude (extraverted or introverted) and preferred mode of mental function (thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting).

The self, too, can be construed as belonging to a proper set. For example, a person could identify him- or herself as an example of a particular

personality category: a melancholic, or an intuiting extravert, or a viscerotonic. From the proper-set point of view, this would seem to imply that the person believes that he or she shares a set of singly necessary and jointly sufficient defining features that link him or her to all others of that type. We often categorize *other* people this way, even if we do not always use the technical jargon of personality types. Such behavior is called "stereotyping" (for a cognitive approach to stereotyping, see Hamilton, 1981).

On the other hand, it appears that we are more likely to stereotype other people than ourselves. After we divide the world into *us* and *them*, our social judgments tend to be governed by the outgroup homogeneity effect (Tajfel, 1969): While we tend to see members of other groups as all cut from the same cloth, we insist on the uniqueness of each individual in our own – and, among these, especially of ourselves. Perhaps, then, we categorize everyone *except* ourselves.

Anecdotal evidence for this proposition was provided by a *New York Times*/CBS News poll in which 1,136 adults were interviewed by telephone (Barron, 1995). Among other questions, they were asked to describe themselves using only a single word. Although 10% of the sample described themselves as "American," in general the respondents were reluctant to label themselves in terms of group membership.¹

If the self-concept is going to be structured like a proper set, it is going to have to be structured as a set of defining features that somehow represent the uniqueness of the individual. In some sense, of course, we appear to construe ourselves in terms of characteristics that we share with others. Humans are social animals, and it should not be surprising if our group memberships – Republican or Democrat, Hispanic or African-American, male or female, gay or straight, or whatever – are represented in our self-concepts (this may be particularly salient in members of outgroups; see, e.g., McGuire & McGuire, 1988). But our individuality has to be represented there as well. Accordingly, perhaps we each construe ourselves in terms of a set of features that are singly necessary and jointly sufficient to define ourselves as unique. In this way, the self-concept would consist of a set of features that is shared with no other person.

Consider the possibility that such defining features can be identified with the *central traits* discussed by Allport (1937). Allport proposed that each person possessed a unique combination of personal traits and that some five or ten of these were deemed to be of special importance. If we make the assumption that one's own central traits are accessible to conscious awareness, then they are excellent candidates for the singly necessary and jointly sufficient defining features of the self-concept. After all, if (as Allport argued) a person's package of central traits is what makes him or her uniquely different from everyone else, they also define a concept in which the self is the only member.

The self as a prototype

It is possible to construe the self as a proper set, but it is not clear that we would want to do so, because of the well-known problems with the proper-set view of categories. These problems have been summarized in compelling fashion by Smith and Medin (1981) and others. For present purposes, two problems are most salient. First, people have difficulty in specifying the singly necessary and jointly sufficient features of many (if not most) natural concepts. *Jazz* and *game* are particularly hard to define; the question of whether a tomato is a fruit or a vegetable was carried to the United States Supreme Court. This fact does not prevent people from using concepts sensibly in thought and communication, but the concepts they use are apparently not based on any list of defining features. Second, it turns out that many if not most concepts, even those that at least nominally appear to be defined as proper sets, have an internal structure that renders some instances more *typical* of the category than others. Robins and sparrows are more typical birds than chickens and penguins, and equilateral triangles are more typical triangles than isosceles triangles. Variations in typicality mean that there is more to classification than whether the attributes of an instance match the defining features of a target category.

In light of these sorts of problems, a number of theorists, particularly Eleanor Rosch (1975; Rosch, Mervis, Gray, Johnson, & Boyes-Brehm, 1976), offered what has come to be known as the "probabilistic view" of categories, which argues that the summary descriptions of category members take the form of some measure of their central tendency with respect to salient features. This central tendency is the *category prototype*, which is why the probabilistic view is also sometimes called the "prototype view." We prefer "probabilistic," however, because it better captures the essence of the view: that the features important to defining a category are not *necessarily* associated with category membership.

The probabilistic view of concept structure exists in at least two different versions (Smith & Medin, 1981). In the *featural version*, the central tendency or prototype of a category is represented by a list of features that are present in most members of that category and in relatively few members of alternative categories, even though these features may not be singly necessary or jointly sufficient to define the concept. Thus, the attribute *flies* is part of our prototype of the category *bird* even though there are some birds, like penguins, that do not fly and some nonbirds, like bats, that do fly. The category prototype is some instance, real or imagined, that has a large number of these typical features. According to the *dimensional version* of the probabilistic view, the features in question are represented as continuous dimensions, on which each object has a score. An average score on each dimension is computed for each category member, and the entire set

of central tendencies becomes the category prototype. In other words, each member is represented as a point in multidimensional space, and the category prototype will lie somewhere in the center of this distribution. The dimensional view is especially applicable to concepts that are defined in terms of attributes that may take a variety of values.

At least implicitly, the dimensional version of the prototype view has a long history in the psychology of personality – ever since Wundt (1873–1874) drew attention to two difficult problems posed by Kant's (1798/1978) categories. Some people only partially fit the criteria for melancholic, choleric, phlegmatic, and sanguine types, while others fit more than one type equally well. Wundt argued that a shift from discrete types to continuous traits would solve the problem, by permitting individuals to be located at points in multidimensional space rather than slotted into discrete categories. This solution proved enormously popular, with the result that many of the classic theories of personality are couched in terms of individual differences in a finite number of traits.

More recently, Cantor adapted Rosch's approach to the problem of both normal (Cantor & Mischel, 1978) and abnormal (Cantor & Genero, 1986) personality (for other work along these lines, see Lingle, Altom, & Medin, 1984; Morey & McNamara, 1987). In contrast to the biophysical approach of traditional theories of personality and assessment, which assumes that traits exist in measurable quantity, Cantor's biosocial approach was grounded in the traditions of social cognition. In essence, she was concerned with the structure of the categories that guide impression formation and argued that our concepts of persons are exemplified by ordinary-language terms like *wonk*, *nerd*, *preppie*, *hippie*, and *jock*, familiar in the everyday discourse of college students and others. Following Rosch's lead, Cantor argued that these categories were defined by fuzzy sets of features, each only probabilistically associated with category membership. Their constituent instances were linked by family resemblance rather than by defining features. And they were summarized by a category prototype imperfectly nested in a tangled hierarchy of subordinate and superordinate personality types. Cantor's research showed that people form impressions of others' personalities by matching the salient features of their targets to those of category prototypes stored in memory. They then classify the targets in terms of whichever prototype gives the best match.

In her research, Cantor was concerned with how we form impressions of other people – the traditional problem of person perception. Shortly after Cantor introduced the prototype approach to person perception, however, Rogers (1981) argued that the self was also structured as a cognitive prototype, consisting of some set of features that are more or less highly correlated with selfhood. Rogers's (1981) interpretation of the self led to a large number of novel and interesting experiments concerned with the problem

TABLE 8.1. Location of the "three faces" of Eve in semantic differential space

Alter ego	Semantic differential dimension		
	Evaluation ^a	Potency ^b	Activity ^c
Eve White	4.87	1.83	3.83
Eve Black	7.00	6.00	7.00
Jane	5.17	5.50	4.50

Note. Derived from Osgood and Luria (1954).

^aAverage of "valuable," "clean," and "tasty" (range = 1-7).

^bAverage of "large," "strong," and "deep."

^cAverage of "fast," "active," and "hot."

of self-reference in memory and the nature of judgments concerning the self. Nevertheless, his viewpoint seems to confuse the self as a concept with the self as an instance of a concept. According to the probabilistic view, concepts provide summary representations of entire classes of objects. If there is only a single self, what is the class from which a concept is to be extracted? Put another way, if the self is a prototype, what is the self a prototype of?

Taking seriously the probabilistic view of the self-concept forces us to recognize that, in some sense, there is more than one of each of us. This possibility is dramatically illustrated by *The Three Faces of Eve*, a classic case of multiple personality disorder (now called "dissociative identity disorder") described clinically by Thigpen and Cleckley (1954) and studied psychometrically by Osgood and Luria (1954).² Each of this patient's three alter egos – known to history as Eve White, Eve Black, and Jane – completed a 10-item version of the semantic differential in which she rated various concepts, including the concept *Me*. Table 8.1 shows the location of each alter ego in the three-dimensional space (evaluation, potency, and activity, each the average of three 7-point rating scales) covered by the semantic differential. As can be seen, Eve White and Eve Black have markedly different self-concepts. Eve Black has a much higher opinion of herself and sees herself as both stronger and more vigorous than does Eve White. Interestingly, Jane represents something of a compromise between the two Eves, because she falls somewhere in between them. Perhaps, then, Jane is a candidate for Eve's prototypical self. At the time, in fact, Thigpen and Cleckley (1954) viewed Jane as a positive development, perhaps representing an emerging fusion of Eve White and Eve Black. Based on their blind analysis of the case, however, Osgood and Luria (1954) suspected that Jane

was too good to be true. As it happened, Jane proved to be a ruse being played by Eve Black in order to foster the impression that therapy was succeeding.

Eve's three "selves" are not associated with any particular situational contexts, although it is probably true that Eve Black was fond of places into which Eve White would hesitate to venture. For the normal person, with a more intact identity, it seems likely that the self-prototype is abstracted from systematic observations of him- or herself in different situational contexts. At least since the classic study of Hartshorne and May (1928), it has been a central doctrine of social psychology that behavior is remarkably sensitive to the details of the social situation in which it occurs. People who are extraverted or conscientious in one situation may not be so in another, and the degree of similarity in behavior from one situation to another varies with the perceived similarity among the situations in question. Although this line of research has focused on the contextual variability in people's behavior, there is every reason to think that people represent these contingencies mentally. The representation of the situational variability of one's own behavior helps account for the self-other difference in causal attribution. Individuals tend to attribute other people's behavior to traits, but their own behavior to situational opportunities and constraints (Jones & Nisbett, 1972).

Accordingly, it seems likely that the mental representation of the self includes a representation of the variability of one's own behavior. Further, it seems likely that we each possess a large set of context-specific selves, in contrast to a monolithic, unitary self. If so, it also seems likely that as with any other natural concept, these context-specific selves are organized into a kind of hierarchy – perhaps a tangled hierarchy, but a hierarchy just the same – representing various levels of abstraction. An extremely abstract representation of the self, valid across many contexts but not particularly informative about what we are like in any particular situation, might reside at the very top of the hierarchy. Below this abstract self, the hierarchy would branch into various subsets and sub-subsets representing the self in ever more concrete situations. Perhaps there is some middle level in this scheme that functions as a kind of *basic level* for self-perception, optimizing the balance between the richness of the representation (informativeness) and the degree to which it is differentiated from other categories at the same level of the hierarchy (distinctiveness). This seems to be the case in other natural categories (Murphy & Brownell, 1985). If there is a basic level in self-categorization, it would seem to reflect the ways in which we prefer to think about ourselves, or think about ourselves most readily. If so, the basic level of the self-concept, not the self found at the superordinate level of the hierarchy of selves, is in some sense privileged.

The self as a set of exemplars

The probabilistic view solves many of the problems of the classical view, but it has problems of its own (for a summary, see Medin, 1989). For example, just as people engaged in categorization go beyond the singly necessary and jointly sufficient features of proper sets, it appears that they also use information that is not contained in category prototypes. In addition, a single category prototype cannot support the contextual variability that has been observed in experimental studies of classification behavior. For these and other reasons, Medin and Schaffer (1978) and others have suggested that concepts may not provide a summary representation of their members after all. Instead, they have proposed that concepts are represented by the instances themselves. In other words, they are defined by concrete exemplars rather than abstract prototypes. From this point of view, objects are categorized by matching their features to those of known category members, or narrow classes of category members, rather than to summaries of entire categories.

Perhaps because exemplars preserve more information than prototypes, formal comparisons of the prototype and exemplar views tend to favor the latter (Medin & Ross, 1989). Nevertheless, it is hard to accept the proposition that categories contain no summary information whatsoever, leading some theorists to suggest that concepts contain a mix of exemplar and prototype representations. For example, exemplars may be formed when category knowledge has been acquired directly, while prototypes may be formed when it has been acquired vicariously (Lingle et al., 1984). Alternatively, perhaps people shift from exemplar to summary representations as they acquire expertise in a domain (Homa, 1984). Or perhaps the basic level of categorization contains a blend of prototype and exemplar knowledge, with subordinate and superordinate levels tending toward exclusive reliance on one form of representation or the other (Ross & Spalding, 1995).

The shift to exemplars is also congruent with the idea of a context-specific self. As in the probabilistic view, the exemplars might represent the self as viewed in different situations. The difference is that, from the exemplar view, there is no longer any need for a prototype representing the self in the abstract; instead, there is just a grouping of particular instances. In fact, such a prototype can be misleading. If there is a great deal of heterogeneity among the instances of a concept, the prototype may represent the central tendency of the category in some abstract sense, without capturing what any particular concrete instance is like. Consider Eve, the case of multiple personality described earlier. Even setting aside the question of whether Jane was a genuine prototype, it is clear that the average of the three alter egos is a rather unremarkable "average person" and fails to

communicate what Eve White, Eve Black, and Jane are really like. For this purpose, it seems necessary for Eve White, Eve Black, and Jane to retain their integrity as exemplars.

A shift from prototypes to exemplars obviates questions about whether there is a basic level of self-categorization. Nor, for that matter, is there any need to consider a hierarchy of self-concepts, increasing in abstraction from subordinate to superordinate. But under these circumstances, would any context-specific selves have privileged status? Studies of concepts in other domains suggest that one factor that would create distinctions among exemplars of the self is frequency of use. Studies of priming effects in semantic memory show that knowledge structures that have been recently activated through perception and thought remain in a highly accessible state for some period of time (see, e.g., Meyer & Schvaneveldt, 1971). Similarly, multiple-trace theories of episodic memory (see, e.g., Hintzman, 1986) assume that each encounter with an object, no matter how similar it is to other encounters, leaves a separate trace in memory. Thus, frequently encountered objects are represented by multiple traces, and their sheer number makes it more likely that these knowledge structures, as opposed to others, will be accessed during perception and thought. This semipermanent (as opposed to temporary) state of increased accessibility is known in the social-cognition literature as "chronic accessibility" (Bargh, 1989; Higgins & King, 1981). Perhaps exemplars that have been recently or frequently activated become chronically accessible and, thus, acquire privileged status in the mental representation of the self.

Assessing the conceptual self in context

Given that the prototype and exemplar views permit a person to have a number of context-specific self-concepts, how can these different selves be revealed?³ Most assessments of the self-concept rely on some version of the adjective checklist or rating scale. Unfortunately, as Mischel (1968) has forcefully argued, checklists and rating scales tend to be rather Procrustean, in that they force people to characterize themselves in terms that are of interest to the researcher, regardless of whether these terms would be chosen as relevant by the people themselves. If subjects and investigators differ in their definitions of the attributes in question, the self can be both misrepresented and misperceived. But even if the attributes in question could be defined with a high degree of consensus, it seems unfair that in assessing the self-concept, people should be denied the opportunity to define themselves in their own terms. If any aspect of personality deserves ideographic assessment, it is the self-concept. Accordingly, some investigators have experimented with free-response procedures (e.g., McGuire & McGuire, 1988).

As part of a project supported by the Program on Conscious and Uncon-

scious Mental Processes of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (M. J. Horowitz, principal investigator), Kihlstrom and his colleagues (Kihlstrom & Cunningham, 1991; Kihlstrom & Olsen, 1992) developed PERSPACE, a microcomputer software system designed for the ideographic assessment of the context-specific self-concept. The program was originally inspired by Kelly's (1955) Role Construct Repertory Test (RCRT) for the assessment of personal constructs, as well as the work of others in the Kelly tradition (e.g., Gara & Rosenberg, 1979; Lehrer, 1985; Pervin, 1976; Rosenberg, 1977).

Following the general outline of the RCRT, the subject's interaction with PERSPACE follows a sequence of three stages: generating targets, generating descriptors, and rating targets. In order to provide a concrete example of PERSPACE in operation, we recruited a volunteer, whom we shall call Adele, to work through the program. Adele was a 30-year-old married woman with a postgraduate professional degree who lived and worked in a major city. Adele gave informed consent for this use of her data, and she was reimbursed for her participation.

In the target phase, Adele was asked to list the important people in her life. This exercise yielded 24 names (which have been changed to preserve anonymity), in the following order:

Lyndon	Husband
Elena	Friend
John	Brother
Caroline	Friend
Elizabeth	Friend
Anders	Former "significant other"
Joseph	Friend
Edward	Friend from professional school
Kathleen	Friend
William	Brother-in-law
Patricia	Sister-in-law
Peter	Father-in-law
Laurie	Mother-in-law
Julia	Husband's aunt
Howard	Husband's uncle
Christopher	Friend from professional school
Richard	Former boyfriend
Michael	Former boyfriend
Curtis	Former boyfriend and current friend
Joyce	Former boss and current friend
Annabelle	Friend
Charles	Friend
Christine	Aunt
Gertrude	Sister

In this case study, then, other people provide the context in which the self is experienced. Note that Adele named her husband first and did not list

either her mother or her father, although she did list her mother- and father-in-law. A procedure that forced her to include all of her relatives might well have distorted an important piece of data – who it is that *she herself* feels is important in her life.

These names, along with probes specifying Adele's actual, ideal, and ought selves, were then presented as targets for the descriptor phase, in which Adele was asked to describe what she is like when she is with each of these people. For example, she described herself:

With Lyndon, her husband, as "calm," "happy," "safe," and "where I want to be."

With Annabelle, a friend, as "friendly," "concerned for her well-being," "not anxious," "wonder what she's about," and "worry about her."

With Joseph, also a friend, as "concerned for him," "free," "easy-going," and "try not to make him feel bad."

With Christopher, a friend from professional school, as "friendly," "funny," "happy," "know he understands a lot," and "cautious."

With Laurie, her mother-in-law, as "hopeful," "talk too much," "concerned about what she thinks of me," "little anxious," and "wonder if she's evaluating me."

With Anders, a former significant other, as "connected," "amazed at so many differences," "sad," and "lonely."

A total of 95 different descriptors were collected in this manner. Note, too, that the self-descriptions vary widely from one person (context) to another. Adele with Lyndon is very different from Adele with Laurie or Anders.

After each target as well as Adele's actual, ideal, and ought selves (Higgins, 1987), was rated on each descriptor, the resulting 27×95 matrix was subjected to a cluster analysis, using BMDP Program 2M, in which the targets were treated as cases to be grouped into clusters based on the degree to which they received similar ratings. For demonstration purposes, the analysis employed a single-linkage algorithm applied to the Euclidean distances between targets. The resulting dendrogram is depicted in Figure 8.1.

Of course, the actual number of clusters recovered from this sort of data depends on the amalgamation distance chosen. On the basis of visual inspection, Figure 8.1 was tentatively divided into seven clusters:

Cluster 1	Lyndon Ideal self Charles Kathleen	Cluster 3	Joseph Elizabeth
Cluster 2	Annabelle Patricia Howard Elena William	Cluster 4	Christopher Edward Curtis John Joyce

Without attempting a full personological analysis, it is worth pointing out a few aspects of the way Adele situates herself in interpersonal space. First, note that Adele with Lyndon, her husband, and Adele with Anders, her former significant other, are as distant from each other as it is possible to get. Note, too, that while Adele's ideal self stands close to herself with Lyndon, her ought self stands close to herself with Anders. When queried, Adele replied that Cluster 1 represented "where I like to be, and would like to be all the time," whereas the individuals named in Cluster 7 "try to change me a lot." She further noted, "I don't live my life the way people say I should" and that she is "closer to my ideal self" when she is with the people included in Clusters 1-4. Cluster 5 consists of three of the four in-laws in her list. Cluster 7 contains Anders, the former significant other, and two of the three former boyfriends in Adele's list of targets.

This brief demonstration does not provide much interview data that might clarify the clustering solution, and of course it does not present any data that would bear on the validity of Adele's impressions of her self. However, the case does illustrate the potential of PERSPACE for revealing the conceptual self in context. Apparently, Adele has not one self-concept but several, each quite different from the others and each tied to the presence of specific people in her social circle.

Actual clinical data, of course, may be more complex than this. There are problems with cluster analysis, including where to partition the solution so as to produce a balance between the number of clusters and their homogeneity (and thus, ascertaining the basic level of the self-concept); the reliability of the solution, in terms of both internal consistency and test-retest stability; and the validity of the subject's self-perceptions (for a more complete discussion, see Andenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). Still, the program seems to have considerable promise, and we look forward to exploring it in both clinical and laboratory contexts.

Explaining the conceptual self in context: Toward theory-driven self-concepts

Both the prototype and exemplar views, like the classical view that preceded them, explain categorization on the basis of similarity between the features of the object to be categorized and those of the mental representation of the concept. The PERSPACE program also incorporates this principle, as the clustering analysis depends on the similarity between the various selves. Unfortunately, as Medin and his colleagues (Medin, 1989; Medin, Goldstone, & Gentner, 1993; Murphy & Medin, 1985) and others (e.g., Gelman & Markman, 1987) have forcefully argued, similarity cannot be the only principle involved in categorization. For one thing, similarity is both extremely flexible and rather arbitrary, and the perception (or calculation)

of similarity is distressingly unprincipled (Tversky, 1977). The perception of similarity changes with experience (experts notice differences between objects that novices miss) and varies with context (two objects may seem highly similar to each other under one set of circumstances, but quite different under another), including the goals of the person doing the categorizing. For example, Barsalou (1983) found that subjects readily grouped such disparate objects as children, money, and important papers together when asked to form the category *things to take from your home in case of a fire*. Another problem is that our concepts encode information about the *relations among features*, as well as about the features themselves (Armstrong, Gleitman, & Gleitman, 1983). Thus, rooms do not just have four walls, windows, a ceiling, and a floor; walls, windows, ceiling, and floor are also related to each other in particular ways.

Categorization may well be based on similarity, but similarity itself appears to involve much more than a mechanical separation of a fixed set of features into those that are shared and those that are not shared between subject and referent. Rather, the selection of features seems to be guided by the person's knowledge and theories pertaining to the domain in question. In an experiment conducted by Medin and Shoben (1988), subjects were presented with pictures of three clouds: black, white, and gray. When asked to indicate which two clouds were similar, they grouped the black and gray clouds together. But when presented with exactly the same shades of hair, they grouped white and gray together. Such a result cannot be explained by perceptual similarity, but it can be explained by assuming that subjects impose a theory (whether naive or sophisticated) on their judgment. For example, we know that there is something about moisture that makes clouds gray and black, while there is something about aging that turns hair gray or white. According to the theory- or knowledge-based approach to categorization (Carey, 1985; Keil, 1989; Murphy & Medin, 1985), categorization is guided by explicit or implicit theories that explain the relations among objects, their features, and the categories to which the objects belong.

The theory-based view of categorization has not yet been applied to the self-concept or, for that matter, any other aspect of social categorization, but there are some hints in the literature of what such a view would look like. For example, Epstein (1973, 1990) has identified the self-concept with our intuitive theories of ourselves:

The self-concept is a self-theory. It is a theory that the individual has unwittingly constructed about himself as an experiencing, functioning individual, and it is part of a broader theory which he holds with respect to his entire range of significant experience. (1973, p. 407)

According to Epstein, the self-theory is formulated, tested, and revised in a manner analogous to the treatment of formal scientific theories.

The self-concept as self-theory can be observed in certain aspects of contemporary popular culture, especially the various "recovery," "survivor," and "self-help" movements (see, e.g., Beattie, 1987, and Bradshaw, 1988; for a critique, see Kaminer, 1992). When a person labels him- or herself as a "codependent," an "adult child of alcoholics," or as suffering from a "wounded inner child," for example, the adopted label summarizes a set of characteristics that are assumed (by members of recovery, survivor, and self-help groups) to go together. Thus, according to Beattie (1987, pp. 38–45), codependents tend (among many other things) to "think and feel responsible for other people," "blame themselves for everything," "push their thoughts and feelings out of awareness," "feel terribly anxious about problems and people," "become afraid to let other people be who they are and allow events to happen naturally," "ignore problems or pretend they aren't happening," "not feel happy, content, or peaceful with themselves," "frequently blame and threaten others," "say they won't tolerate certain behaviors from other people," "not trust themselves," "feel very scared, hurt, and angry," "be caretakers in the bedroom," "be extremely responsible" or "be extremely irresponsible," and "feel lethargic." But codependency is not just a label for what certain people are like: It also stands for a theory about how they got that way. Thus, again according to Beattie (1987, pp. 38–45), codependents tend to "come from troubled, repressed, or dysfunctional families," "have lived through events and with people that were out of control, causing the codependents sorrow and disappointment," "latch onto whoever or whatever they think can provide happiness," and "become martyrs, sacrificing their happiness and that of others for causes that don't require sacrifice." According to Bradshaw (1988), addicts and their codependents (themselves often addicts as well, by his argument) are the way they are because of what happened to them as children.⁴

As suggested by the theory-based view of concepts in general, popular psychology reveals an aspect of the self that has not yet been fully appreciated by academic psychology: The self-concept does not just list the things that make us what we are and different from other people. It goes beyond description to entail a theory that we use to explain ourselves to ourselves (and to other people as well): "why we are what we are, think what we think, feel what we feel, want what we want, and do what we do" (Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994, p. 164). The conceptual self as theory is critical to the contextual self as well: In addition to a description of how we differ from place to place, we also need an account of *why* we do so. Like the theories that make gray hair similar to white hair but gray clouds similar to black clouds, as well as the theories that render children, money, and papers alike in the face of a house on fire, the theory that explains both what we are like and how we got that way, how we vary from one context to another and why we do so, may be the best candidate yet for a global, unitary self-concept.

Explicating the self-as-theory is the next step in understanding the conceptual self in context.

NOTES

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- 1 Commenting on the poll, Michael Kinsley, a political columnist, said, "I just think that's a stupid question." On the other hand, Suzanne Keller, a Princeton University sociologist, noted that "you cannot reduce yourself to one [word], it's too complicated. People really feel multiple. They have multiple poses and attitudes and roles and one is no more important than the next. If they're forced to choose between family and work and leisure roles, which are not even roles but personas, they can't really, because they live in a multifaceted, multitudinous life, not a single track."
- 2 This data was reanalyzed by Kroonenberg (1985). A similar analysis of a new case of multiple personality, Evelyn, was presented by Osgood, Luria, Jeans, and Smith (1976).
- 3 It should be noted that the proper-set view can accommodate contextual specificity, by the simple expedient of adding new features to an abstract self-concept to form subordinate self-concepts. However, all these context-specific selves would be homogeneous with respect to the features contained in the abstract, superordinate self. By contrast, the prototype and exemplar views permit wide heterogeneity among the context-specific selves.
- 4 In describing these popular theories of survival, recovery, and self-help, we take no position one way or the other on their validity. We cite them only as contemporary examples of the notion of the self as theory about the self.

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