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PERSON PERCEPTION AND INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION

We have already noted, achieving a sense of self is an important achievement. A neonate may not be able to distinguish between self and others. Our self knowledge is peculiar in the sense that we are aware that we have a self. This kind of self consciousness is a major achievement.

It may be easily guessed that the knowledge of self does require some kind of social knowledge. In the beginning the infant lacks distinction between his and her world which includes other persons. The child is immersed in the social environment. From there, the child gradually attains an awareness of self.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- understand the salience of social environment for self growth and development;
- identify the factors that determine interpersonal attraction; and
- understand the role of interaction with significant others in self-perception.

22.1 PERCEPTION OF OTHERS

Toward the end of infancy children start constructing a representation of the self as an objective entity. The cognitive and linguistic development facilitates interaction with others. Others help defining our characteristics. We adjust our behaviours in



relation to their expectation. With some mastery over language children organize their self knowledge. It may be noted that recognizing or deciding that something is “mine” presupposes some differentiation of “me” from everything else. By the third year children tend to show various characteristics. They indicate existence of internal processes, appearance, opinions and volition. As the children grow their self concepts become more and more differentiated.

It may be noted that the development of self concept is primarily a social activity. The other persons present in the environment provide context and guidance to them. For instance, it is common to find parents approving or disapproving the actions of children. They suggest goals and encourage aspirations. They talk about various events and happenings in the child’s environment. All these situations help child to learn about ‘self’. In particular children learn about emotional regulation.

However, it would be inaccurate to view self merely something to be shaped by others. It is a complex social product in which child’s own experience also plays an important role.

While learning about self, children also develop an understanding that people are different from other things, they have certain characteristics and have independent psychological existence. Infants are very much interested in other persons. They are aware of differences between people and other things. It has been found that the understanding of others is related to understanding of the self. The children are aware of other’s internal processes like feelings, thoughts and intentions from an early age. The awareness grows and gets elaborated with advancing age. The school age children provide elaborated and complex descriptions of others. The children actively construct a social understanding. This involves finding out the similarities between child’s own psychological processes and those of others.

22.2 IMPRESSION FORMATION

Perceiving other persons is an important task in our every day life. When you meet a person you often form an impression. A glance, and a few uttered words are enough for this. When we perceive others we do not simply add various pieces of information. Rather we perceive the various traits in relation to others. We form a dynamic whole. We form an impression of the whole person. The traits do not remain in isolation. They interact with each other and form a new whole.

While forming impressions we rely on and give greater weightage to the sources we trust or admire. Similarly we often emphasize more the negative information. Also, we give more importance to unusual information. Finally, the first impressions are given more weightage than subsequent information.

It has been found that when we make judgments about others we recall examples

of their behaviours and base our judgments on them. We also use previously formed abstractions or representations in mind while forming impressions and making decisions.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.1

State whether True or False.

1. In the beginning the child cannot differentiate between self and other. (True/False)
2. As child grows older his self concept becomes fixed. (True/False)
3. People in the environment provide the necessary context and guidance to the developing person. (True/False)
4. While forming impressions we rely on sources we trust. (True/False)
5. From an early age children are sensitive to feelings of other people. (True/False)

22.3 DEALING WITH THE SOCIAL WORLD

Interpersonal Attraction

We live in a social world occupied by other persons. We frequently interact with them in family, school, market, almost every where. The self realizes itself while relating to other persons. In this way the processes taking place between persons or those technically known as interpersonal processes become central to our lives. Social psychologists have investigated these various processes in detail. Here we shall learn about two processes – attraction and long term relationship.

Attraction between persons is a common experience. It is present not only in the case of intimate people like wife and husband but also in case of friends and work place companions. One of the important things that we notice that we make efforts to spend time with people whom we like and avoid people whom we don't like. You may be interested in knowing how does attraction occur and what factors influence it? Let us try to understand these factors.

Physical Attractiveness: It has generally been found that we react more positively to people who are viewed as physically attractive. We often act more favourably towards attractive people.

Similarity and Complementarity: We like people who are similar to ourselves.





It is said that birds of a feather flock together. In other words people who share the same kind of attitudes and ideas are preferred and liked by us. Complimentarity is a situation in which we find that people who are different but complement each other, like to interact more with each other. This may explain attraction between a rich and a poor person.

Familiarity and Propinquity : Propinquity means nearness or physical proximity. It has been found that friendship often develops with people whom we see more often. Thus nearness and familiarity shape our attraction to other persons. Repeated interpersonal contacts often lead to interpersonal attraction.

Reciprocal Liking : Whether we like some one or not depends on the fact that whether the other person likes you or not. We often tend to avoid those who express negative views about ourselves and want to be with those who like us.

Affect: Affect refers to the feelings and emotions which vary in intensity and direction. Thus our feelings can be very intense or less intense and can be positive or negative. Studies indicate that a person who does something which triggers or arouses positive or negative affect is liked or disliked by us. Also, if someone is merely linked with positive or negative affect is liked or disliked by us.

Need for Affiliation: We spend a lot of our free time interacting with other persons, because affiliation improves the chances of survival. This has led the idea of stable affiliative trait or need. Also, situational characteristics may arouse this need.

Enduring Relationships: Many of our relationships continue for long periods of time. They may be life long like friendship, marriage etc. The relationships vary in many ways. For example they may vary in the degree of intimacy, commitment, and quality.

Many people think relationship as a type of social contract. We value relationships in term of rewards that we get while engaging in that relationship. The rewards in those areas in which we are inadequate are more valuable. However, in almost all kinds of close relationships interdependence happens to be the most common element. As person children are treated by mothers using a certain type of attachment. It can be secure, avoidant or ambivalent. Psychologists think that infants learn to trust and to love another person, to mistrust and avoid or a mixture of the two on the basis of the kind of attachment they are exposed to. It has been found that mothers contact with the infant (tactile, visual and verbal) and her awareness of and responsivity to infant's needs leads to secure attachment.

The pattern of interaction of children with parents and siblings plays important role in shaping the quality of love and affection in children. Their parental love is



determined by attraction towards parents and the personal virtues. Some of the virtues which are emphasized in the Indian society are given below.

Charity: Helping, forgiving and tolerating parents.

Justice: Fulfilling obligations to parents and respecting their rights.

Prudence: Using reason for their benefit.

Fortitude: undergoing hardships for their benefit.

Temperance: Controlling disruptive emotions and practicing self-discipline.

Close Friendship

Close relationship is found when friends spend a considerable amount of time together, interact in a number of settings, and provide emotional support to each other. During childhood children desire to share activities with friends which both parties tend to enjoy. The attachment style mentioned above influences the way children interact and, in turn, affect the quality of relationships. During adolescence and young adulthood friendship tends to become more intimate. It has been noted that women report having more close friends than men. Intimate relationship is expressed in a variety of behaviours including self-disclosing behaviour, emotional expression, giving and receiving support, experiencing trust, and feeling relaxed in the company of each other. Some people fail to develop close friendship and experience loneliness.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 22.2

Choose the correct alternative:

- When we consider similarity and interpersonal attraction:
 - We like people who are different from us in attitudes and ideas.
 - We like people who are similar to us in attitudes and ideas.
 - We like people who are attractive.
- We like long-term relationships:
 - Because we value relationships
 - Because interdependence is a common element in relationship.
 - Because we are attached to our loved ones.
 - All of the above.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Self perception is a complex social process where both the child's own experience and society play an important role.
- Child learns to differentiate from others and has an independent psychological existence.
- We form impressions about others by considering all the information.
- Interpersonal attraction is determined by a number of factors - physical attraction, familiarity, similarity etc.
- Significant others - parents, siblings, friends etc. play a role in self-perception.
- Long term relationships provide psychological and emotional support to the individual.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Discuss the role of perception of others in self development.
2. Explain the role of different factors in interpersonal attraction.
3. Identify the factors you think are important for long-term relationships.



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

22.1

1. True 2. False 3. True 4. True 5. True

22.2

1. (b) 2. (d)

HINTS TO TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Refer section 22.1
2. Refer section 22.3
3. Refer section 22.3