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Acting Like an Individual versus Feeling Like an Individual

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One of the things that struck Alexis de Tocqueville most forcefully about nineteenth century America was how readily its citizens banded together to form groups. "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive" (de Tocqueville, 1840/1994, p. 106). Americans formed groups for any and all purposes – political, social, recreational, commercial, intellectual, and moral. "As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found one another out, they combine … Nothing, in my opinion, is more deserving of our attention" (pp. 109–110).

Although more recent observers have noted, and indeed lamented, the decline of civic associations in the United States (Putnam, 2000), de Tocqueville's observations still ring true, in America and throughout Western culture. Western societies are structured around groups and associations, most of them voluntary. Among these are colleges and universities, museums and environmental groups, churches, synagogues, and mosques, corporations and trade unions, charitable organizations and self-help groups, sports leagues and literary societies, sororities and fraternities, parent–teacher associations and day care cooperatives, and residential and professional associations. These groups play a central role in the lives of their members, structuring their everyday experience and defining their place in society. How can we reconcile the importance of these voluntary associations with another central feature of Western life: the powerful strain of individualism that members of Western societies embrace? This question is the focus of the present chapter.

My answer to this question will rest, in brief, on the distinction between acting like an individual and feeling like an individual. One acts like an individual when one's behavior is directed by individualistic goals, motives, and self-definitions. One feels like an individual when one experiences one's actions as autonomous and one's personal qualities as distinctive. I will argue that, in group contexts, Americans sometimes – perhaps often – act like individuals, but they almost always feel like individuals. As a consequence, group experiences typically function to affirm, rather than to threaten, their individuality. An understanding of this seemingly paradoxical outcome requires an analysis of the distinct processes of self-regulation and self-reflection.

Acting like an individual

How does the self regulate behavior in group contexts? Although there are many psychological theories of self-regulation, the ones best suited for answering this particular question find their roots in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and especially self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Originally focused on the role of the self in group phenomena, self-categorization theory has proven to be equally insightful about the role of the group in self-phenomena. Moreover, it has spawned several related theories that elaborate on its treatment of the pursuit of individualistic motives and self-conceptions in group contexts.

Self-categorization theory

Self-categorization theory proposes that the functioning of the self at any given moment depends on how one categorizes the self – specifically, on which people are seen as similar to self, and which as different. The process of self-categorization determines which aspects of the self become salient guides for behavior. Self-categorization theorists have distinguished broadly between two different levels of self-categorization: the collective level, which highlights similarities among group members, and the individual level, which highlights differences among group members.

The collective level of self-categorization is "based on social similarities and differences between human beings that define one as a member of certain social groups and not others (e.g., "American," "female," "black," "student," "working class")' (Turner et al., 1987, p. 45). People categorize at this level when their membership in a group is made salient, by their own motives and predilections and/or by the context in which they find themselves. When people self-categorize at the collective level, their self

becomes depersonalized, in self-categorization theory terminology, and they function as prototypical group members.

The concept of depersonalization is key to understanding collective self-categorization. Turner et al. (1987) described it as follows:

> *Depersonalization* refers to the process of "self-stereotyping" whereby people come to perceive themselves more as the interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual differences from others. (p. 50)

They were also clear about what depersonalization is *not*:

> Depersonalization, however, is not a loss of individual identity, nor a loss or submergence of the self in the group (as in the concept of de-individuation), nor any kind of regression to a more primitive or unconscious form of identity. It is the *change* from the personal to the social level of identity, a change in the nature and content of the self-concept corresponding to the functioning of self-perception at a more inclusive level of abstraction. (p. 51)

With this statement, Turner et al. (1987) were distancing themselves from the group mind idea, originally put forward by Le Bon (1896) and McDougall (1921) at the turn of the twentieth century to explain crowd behavior. Turner et al. took pains, in their original theory and elsewhere, to explain that depersonalization is not like a group mind, not an altered state of consciousness, in which the individual is lost and the collective takes over. It is simply a redefinition of identity in more inclusive terms.

The *individual level* of self-categorization is "the subordinate level of personal self-categorizations based on differentiations between oneself as a unique individual and other ingroup members that define one as a specific individual person (e.g., in terms of one's personality or other kinds of individual differences)" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 45). People categorize at this level when their status as a unique individual is made salient, again by their own motives and predilections and/or by the context in which they find themselves. When people self-categorize at the individual level, they think of themselves in terms of the qualities that differentiate them from other ingroup members. They think and act as unique individuals.

The individual level of self-categorization seems reassuringly familiar to most self researchers, especially as compared to the collective level; it reflects how Western psychologists (not to mention laypeople) typically think about self-functioning. However, the formulation offered by self-categorization theory diverges somewhat from the received view. Specifically, categorization at the individual level still involves viewing the self within a social context – that of one particular ingroup. One's relation to that ingroup determines the properties of the self that come to the fore. Therefore, just as one has many collective self-categories, for all the groups to which one belongs, one has many individual self-categories,

again for all the groups to which one belongs (Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, Chapter 2 in this volume).

Recently, Simon and his colleagues (Simon, 1997; Simon & Kampmeier, 2001) proposed an alternative conceptualization of the individual level of self-categorization. Specifically, they argued for a distinction between the individual self and the collective self based on the number of self-aspects that serve as a basis for self-interpretation. Collective self-interpretation is based on a single self-aspect that one shares with others; individual self-interpretation is based on a comprehensive set of non-redundant self-aspects. Thus, the individual and collective selves differ not in whether the attributes that make them up are shared or distinctive, but rather in their complexity. The collective self is simple, defined by a single attribute; the individual self is complex, defined by all of one's attributes. This alternative conceptualization of the individual self has greatly facilitated the study of individuality within a self-categorization framework.

Virtually all of the research inspired by self-categorization theory has focused on self-categorization at the collective and individual levels. However, in its original formulation, the theory included not two but three levels of self-categorization. Turner et al. (1987) defined the third level as "the superordinate level of the self as human being, self-categorizations based on one's identity as a human being, the common features shared with other members of the human species in contrast to other forms of life" (p. 45). This *human level* of self-categorization has received virtually no theoretical or empirical attention since the original formation (although see Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). However, one can speculate that people categorize at this level when their status as a human being is made salient, once again by their own motives and predilections and/or by the context in which they find themselves. Moreover, self-categorization at the human level should lead to depersonalization around the prototype of the human category.

In summary, self-categorization theory holds that behavior in group contexts depends critically on how one categorizes the self in that moment: as an individual or as a group member (or perhaps as a human being). This simple distinction between the self as an individual and the self as a group member has proven to be extremely useful for predicting and analyzing behavior in the laboratory, as well as in the real world. It has also given us some purchase on the relation between individuality and group involvement, at least at a behavioral level.

Individuality

Definitions and conceptualizations of individuality abound. For example, McAdams (1996) highlighted three levels at which individuality is

conceptualized: (1) as dispositional traits; (2) as a set of motives; and (3) as a life narrative. Within this framework, self-categorization theory qualifies as a mid-level, motivational approach, in which individuality is defined as an outgrowth of self-categorization at the individual level. As the basis for a program of empirical research, this definition has a couple of very positive features. It is elastic enough to encompass a wide range of individual needs, motives, values, and self-interpretations, all of which can be conceptualized as individual self-categories. In addition, it enables researchers to use the assumptions, concepts, and methodologies of self-categorization research to study the development and expression of individuality within group contexts. This approach has produced a number of major insights.

First, self-categorization theories have provided a new perspective on how individual, group, and cultural differences in individuality develop. Specifically, these theories explain variations in individuality as a by-product of normal self-categorization processes. A person is individualistic or is expressing her individuality when she self-categorizes at the individual level. Some people do this more often than others, either because individual-level self-categories are chronically more salient for them and/or because they often find themselves in ingroup contexts that promote this level of self-categorization (Hogg, 2001; Turner & Onorato, 1999). These differences in the salience of the individual level of self-categorization are responsible for differences across individuals, groups, and cultures in individuality. For example, the high levels of individuality in Western culture derive from the chronic salience of individual-level self-categories promoted by cultural values (Moghaddam, Chapter 9 in this volume). The high levels of individuality among members of majority (compared with minority) groups derive from the fact that majority group members spend most of their time in ingroup settings, which promote this level of self-categorization (Lorenzi-Cioldi, Chapter 6 in this volume). Highly individualistic people frequently self-categorize at the individual level, which promotes the chronic salience of self-categories at this level. And the form that individuality takes depends on how individual self-categories are defined within ingroup contexts. Although this account is better at explaining variations in individuality than at predicting them, it nonetheless specifies a set of mechanisms through which such differences are developed and maintained (Turner et al., Chapter 2 in this volume).

A second insight is that individuality is not unidimensional but instead has two major components: an independence component, which is based on freedom from the restrictions and constraints imposed by group membership, and a differentiation component, which is based on differences from other people (Kampmeier & Simon, 2001; Simon, 1997; Simon & Kampmeier, 2001). This distinction is important to the study of individuality

for at least two reasons. First, most researchers have adopted either an independence or a differentiation perspective on individuality; the articulation and empirical validation of a two-component model provide a way of reconciling their disparate findings and perspectives. Second, the two-component model has enabled investigators to make more nuanced and successful predictions about how individuality relates to group functioning.

A third insight to come from the self-categorization approach is that individuality is fully compatible with group membership, at least under some circumstances. For example, building on their two-component model of individuality, Kampmeier and Simon (2001; Simon & Kampmeier, 2001) sought to document some of those circumstances. They reasoned that compatibility between individuality and group membership should depend on which component of individuality is salient, as well as on properties of the group and the comparative context. Specifically, the two components of individuality – independence and differentiation – are compatible with different orientations toward the group. Independence is compatible with group membership when the focus is on ingroup dynamics, because this focus highlights variability within the group; this focus occurs more often for members of majority groups, who interact primarily with ingroup members, than for members of minority groups (see also Lorenzi-Cioldi, Chapter 6 in this volume). Differentiation is compatible with group membership when the focus is on intergroup dynamics, because this focus highlights differentiation from outgroup members; this focus occurs more often for members of minority groups, who interact frequently with outgroup members. The results of several studies supported these predictions, demonstrating that group identification and cohesiveness were stronger when the salience of independence was combined with an ingroup orientation and when the salience of differentiation was combined with an intergroup orientation. It is important to note that in these studies, Kampmeier and Simon (2001) manipulated the salience of independence and differentiation without reference to participants' own standing on those dimensions and observed no effects of the manipulation on participants' ratings of their own independence or differentiation.

Additional evidence that the compatibility of individuality and group membership depends on the type of group in question comes from research by Postmes and his colleagues (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002; Postmes, Spears, Novak, & Lee, 2004; see Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, in press, for a review). One set of studies examined individuality and group identification in groups with individualistic norms (Jetten et al., 2002). The investigators reasoned that membership in this type of group should be compatible with expressions of individuality, given that those

expressions are supported and reinforced by group membership. The results of several studies demonstrated that identification with such groups does indeed produce individualistic expressions, though not through self-categorization at the individual level. Instead, individuality results from depersonalization and self-stereotyping in terms of the (individualistic) prototype of the group.

A similar mechanism may operate at the human level of self-categorization to promote individuality in individualistic cultures (Halloran & Kashima, Chapter 8; Jetten & Postmes, Chapter 7; Moghaddam, Chapter 9 in this volume). In the earlier discussion of the human self-categorization, I suggested that it would lead to depersonalization around the prototype of the human category. What is the prototype of the human category? It is the representation of personhood provided by one's culture (D'Andrade, 1992; Sperber, 1985). Culture is a rich source of representations of human nature, representations that often differ across cultures but are consensually shared within a culture. For example, much research in recent years has focused on the sharply different construals of self held by members of North American and East Asian cultures (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Underlying these cultural self-construals are divergent representations of personhood, of what it means to be human and what human beings are like; these representations serve as prototypes of the human category. They differ from group prototypes that exist at the collective level primarily in their perceived universality. However, their effects on perception and behavior are similar to those of group proto-types. Thus, in individualistic cultures (e.g., North America, Western Europe), self-categorization at the human level should be a source of indi-viduality: it should lead to depersonalization around an independent human prototype and thereby to individualistic behavior.

A final set of studies by Postmes and his colleagues highlighted another feature of groups that makes them compatible with individuality: the basis for their formation. In these studies, Postmes et al. (2004) examined the relation between individuality and social influence processes – specifically, group polarization – in groups based on individual attachments (common-bond groups) versus those based on group attachments (common-identity groups) (see also Prentice, Miller, & Lightdale, 1994). Much previous research has shown that social influence is dependent on depersonaliza-tion, on group members self-categorizing at the collective level (Turner, 1991). Postmes et al. expected to find a very different basis for influence in groups based on interpersonal bonds. Consistent with this expectation, their studies demonstrated that social influence in common-bond groups depended not on depersonalization but on individuation, on making group members identifiable to each other. Additional research suggested

that common-bond and common-identity groups had very different dynamics: in the former type of group, influence occurred through diversity of opinion and disagreement, whereas in the latter type of group, influence occurred through coherence and consensus (Sassenberg & Postmes, 2002).

Taken together, the results of these studies begin to document the contingencies that determine whether group membership is compatible or incompatible with expressions of individuality. These contingencies include the norms and dynamics of the group, its relative size, the comparative context, and the component of individuality that is salient. Future research may well identify many more contingencies.

A final and related insight to come from self-categorization research concerns the perceptual and behavioral consequences of individuality. Self-categorization theories are, at their core, models of self-regulation. That is, they all share the premise that salient needs, motives, and self-interpretations guide perception and behavior. In that spirit, several investigations have examined how individualistic needs, motives, and self-interpretations relate to perceptions and behaviors in groups. For example, Brewer and Roccas (2001; Roccas & Brewer, 2002) explored the relation between the salience of the independence component of individuality, and various group-related perceptions and preferences. They assessed the salience of independence-related values using a standard values inventory. In line with Brewer's (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory, they reasoned that individuals who valued independence would have a comparatively low need for differentiation and a high need for inclusion; they would gravitate toward groups that are large in size and would care little about the distinctiveness of the group. Correlational evidence supported these predictions, showing a moderately strong positive relation between group identification and perceived group size and a weaker relation between group identification and perceived group distinctiveness for people with individualistic values. In addition, people with individualistic values held comparatively complex representations of their social identities, in that they represented their ingroups as relatively distinct, with low degrees of similarity and low overlap in membership (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

In our own research, my colleagues and I examined the behavioral correlates of individuality in everyday life (Prentice, Trail, & Cantor, 2004). We, too, focused on the independence component of individuality, operationalizing it as the extent to which college students placed a high priority on independence values and a low priority on security values. We then examined how these students chose, regulated, and experienced their membership in extracurricular campus groups. Consistent with our predictions, we found that the more students valued independence, the more extracurricular groups they joined, but the less embedded they were in any

one group. The more students valued independence, the more stress they experienced when they perceived their membership in a group as getting in the way of their academic commitments or making it difficult for them to manage their time. In addition, the more they valued independence, the less stress they experienced over not having the characteristics that were important for fitting into their group. These results again highlight the fact that individuality is by no means incompatible with group membership. On the contrary, independence-minded people may join more groups as a means of escaping dependence on any one and may interpret their portfolio of diverse group memberships as evidence for their individuality (see also Simon & Kampmeier, 2001).

Summary

In summary, self-categorization approaches have proven fruitful for understanding when and how people act like individuals in group settings. The salience of the independence and differentiation components of individuality, whether manipulated in the laboratory or measured with a values inventory, plays a critical role, predicting the number and type of groups with which people identify, the extent to which they identify, and the conditions under which they identify. The salience of individuality also predicts how people perceive their groups and the relations among these groups. In short, conceptualizing individuality in terms of the individual level of self-categorization tells us a lot about people's perceptions of group membership and their behavior in group contexts.

At the same time, this approach does not capture people's experiences of individuality in group contexts. That is, it does not tell us when and why people feel like individuals in a group. What is clear is that the subjective experience of individuality, and indeed of self, operates on very different principles than those articulated by self-categorization theories. Level of self-categorization may affect behavior, but it does not have the same effect on the interpretation of that behavior. Behavior feels self-authored regardless. This is important in the present context, because it is subjective experience that ultimately determines the compatibility of individuality and group membership. I turn now to an examination of relevant research on the psychology of feeling like an individual.

Feeling like an individual

Compared with the literature on the self-regulation of individuality, the literature on subjective experience lacks nuance. Virtually all studies, from a variety of research traditions, attest to the primacy of the individual level

of self-feeling, even in group contexts. People feel like individuals first and foremost, regardless of the forces acting on their behavior. This is not to say that they never feel at one with their fellow group members, but that feeling seems to be much more fleeting. And even when they act as group members – even when they conform to group norms or to direct pressure from group members – they construe that behavior in ways that emphasize their autonomy or uniqueness. Consider the following research findings.

Feeling threatened

People feel threat much more keenly and react to it more strongly when it is directed at them as individuals rather than as group members. Gaertner, Sedikides, and Graetz (1999) delivered positive, neutral, or negative feedback to participants about themselves as individuals (e.g., "you are excessively moody") or about their group (e.g., "women are excessively moody"). Across four investigations, Gaertner et al. found that a threat to the individual was considered more severe, produced a more negative mood and more anger, elicited stronger derogation of the source of the feedback, and produced larger shifts in self-definition than a threat to the group. These effects held even after controlling for the accessibility of the individual and collective selves, for the domain in which feedback was given, for the independence of feedback to the individual and the group, for participants' level of group identification, and for their cultural value orientation. The finding that participants still reacted more strongly to individual-level threats even when their collective identity was salient is especially striking. It suggests that people remain invested in their individuality, even when self-categorizing as a member of a group (see also Sedikides & Gaertner, 2001).

Feeling verified

In a related vein, people seek and profit from validation of their individuality, even when they are contributing to a group effort. Swann, Milton, and Polzer (2000) investigated the effects of self-verification on connection to the group and group performance in small study groups of MBA students. They defined self-verification as the degree to which other group members' appraisals moved closer to a target's initial self-views over time. Their results demonstrated that this process was associated with stronger connections to the study group and better group grades on creative (but not computational) tasks. That is, students felt closer to the group and performed better in the group to the extent that other group

members validated their individuality. A second study replicated and
extended these results, demonstrating that self-verification depended on
the extent to which initial impressions of group members were individu-
ated, which depended, in turn, on the diversity of the group and the posi-
tivity of initial impressions (Swann, Kwan, Polzer, & Milton, 2003). Note
that it is not clear whether or how initial individuation and self-verification
affected the ongoing dynamics of these groups. But what is important, in
the present context, is that self-verification would have made group mem-
bers feel like individuals – it would have validated their individuality –
and this feeling could account for why they felt more connected to and
identified with their group.

Feeling Independent

More direct evidence that people can simultaneously feel like individuals
and behave like group members comes from studies that assessed feelings
of autonomy in group settings. For example, in an empirical study of mem-
bership in campus groups, Sheldon and Bettencourt (2002) asked students
to choose one of their groups and to indicate, "How free and choiceful do
you feel as you participate in this group?", "How much do you feel whole-
hearted (as opposed to feeling controlled or pressured) as you do things for
this group?", and "To what extent does this group membership allow you
to express your authentic self?" The mean response across these three
items, on a five-point scale, was 3.67. Moreover, in this investigation, indi-
viduals who felt more autonomous also felt better: feelings of autonomy
were associated with more positive and less negative affect. However,
autonomy did not come at the expense of feelings of inclusion or of attach-
ment to the group – in fact, feelings of autonomy and inclusion were pos-
itively associated. In a similar investigation of social roles, Bettencourt and
Sheldon (2001) showed that these, too, provide individuals with a sense of
autonomy (and of relatedness), especially to the extent that the demands of
the roles match individuals' personal characteristics (Bettencourt, Molix,
Talley, & Sheldon, Chapter 11 in this volume).

Of course, given considerable evidence that people can choose their
groups and regulate their group involvements so as to retain their inde-
pendence, these high levels of perceived autonomy may come as no sur-
prise. However, additional research suggests that sometimes people *feel*
autonomous even when their behavior smacks of conformity. Pronin,
Berger, and Molouki (2004) compared how much people attributed their
own behavior to conformity and how much they attributed other people's
behavior to conformity. Even when the behavior of self and other was
manipulated to be identical, participants regarded conformity as a greater

influence on others than on the self. When both the self and another person bought the latest style of jeans, the other person was conforming, whereas the self just happened to like the jeans. When both the self and another person voted consistent with their political party, the other person was adopting the party line, whereas the self independently arrived at the same position (see also Cohen, 2003). Given pervasive evidence that people do, in fact, conform under many circumstances, it seems likely that these perceived self–other differences reflect an underestimation of conformity by the self rather than an overestimation of conformity by others.

Feeling unique

Perhaps the most striking examples of the primacy of individual self-experience come from situations in which people recognize they are conforming to group norms but feel unique in the process. Such situations are captured by a phenomenon known as pluralistic ignorance: the belief that one's private thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are different from those of others, even though one's public behavior is identical (Miller & McFarland, 1991). Pluralistic ignorance occurs when people conform to group norms that do not reflect their private beliefs and attitudes: when they drink to excess, even though they prefer more moderate levels of consumption (Prentice & Miller, 1993); when they fail to raise their hand in class, even though they have no idea what is going on (Miller & McFarland, 1987); when they fail to intervene in emergency situations, despite their private concerns for the welfare of the victims (Latane & Darley, 1970); or when they act in line with stereotypes, even though they harbor more egalitarian views (Prentice & Miller, 1996). When most or all of the members of a group exhibit this kind of conformity we find a divergence in the interpretations they give for their own and others' behavior: they recognize that their own behavior is not based on their private beliefs and sentiments, but they assume that all others are behaving more authentically.

One consequence of these divergent interpretations is that victims of pluralistic ignorance end up feeling alienated from each other and from the group. The empirical hallmark of pluralistic ignorance is a gap between ratings of one's own attitudes, beliefs, or sentiments and ratings of the attitudes, beliefs, or sentiments of the average member of the group, the typical member of the group, or most members of the group. Clearly, people interpret themselves to be, at the very least, atypical members of the group. But several additional pieces of evidence suggest that they actually experience this atypicality negatively. In our studies of pluralistic ignorance regarding alcohol use on campus, Dale Miller and I found that students who believed they held different attitudes toward alcohol use than

most students felt less attached to the university, holding constant the actual discrepancy between their own and others' attitudes (Prentice & Miller, 1993, Study 4). We also found that male students brought their own attitudes into line with their estimates of their peers' attitudes over the course of a semester on campus (Study 3). And in our study of the consequences of reducing pluralistic ignorance, Christine Schroeder and I found that informing students that others shared their misgivings produced less drinking among students high in fear of negative evaluation and greater comfort among students who did not drink alcohol (Schroeder & Prentice, 1998). All of these findings suggest that the alienation students profess to feel in cases of pluralistic ignorance is both real and painful.

Sources of experienced individuality

This heterogeneous collection of cases highlights a bias in subjective experience toward feelings of individuality, rather than feelings of collectivity. What gives rise to this bias? The psychological literature suggests a number of hypotheses.

First, certain levels of self-awareness highlight the boundaries of the individual. For example, people have an awareness of themselves as active agents in the immediate environment. They experience their own location and movement, what they are doing, and whether an action is their own or not. Neisser (1988) referred to this level of self-awareness as the ecological self, and argued that it is the first and most fundamental form of self-knowledge. As such, it may go some way toward explaining the individualistic bias in self-experience. For one's senses of embodiment and agency extend only to the boundaries of oneself as an individual, and thereby distinguish each person from all others. At this level, self-experience is highly individualizing.

Equally individualizing is the inner world of thoughts, images, sensations, dreams, and feelings. This level of self-awareness probably makes a very important contribution to the individuality bias in self-experience for two reasons: first, people believe themselves to be best defined and most authentically represented by their private thoughts and feelings (Andersen, 1984; Andersen & Ross, 1984); and second, they believe those private thoughts and feelings to differentiate them from other people in many respects. The former belief gives rise to feelings of autonomy and the latter to feelings of uniqueness.

As an illustration of the connection between introspection and feelings of autonomy, consider, once again, Pronin, Berger, and Molouki's (2004) studies of perceived conformity. These studies demonstrated that people saw conformity as less of an influence on their own behavior than on the

behavior of their peers. Additional evidence suggested that their comparatively low ratings of their own conformity resulted from their reliance on intro- spection to determine the causes of their own behavior. For example, when evaluating the extent to which an undergraduate panel influenced their votes on a set of campus policy proposals, participants reflected on introspective information – that is, on what they recalled thinking about the contents of the proposals. Naturally, this self-inference strategy turned up little evidence of conformity. When evaluating the extent to which the panel influenced their peers' votes, they simply looked at the behavioral data – how often did their peers vote with the panel? This behavioral assessment led to much higher ratings of conformity (Pronin, Berger, & Molouki, 2004, Study 3). Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross (2004) have recently argued that this tendency to rely on introspection plays an important part in people's failure to appre- ciate many of the forces that act on their behavior.

Of course, sometimes people do appreciate the forces that act on their behavior. Sometimes they recognize that they act out of a desire to be part of a group, to forward a group's agenda, or simply to adhere to the reality that a group provides. Sometimes introspection turns up evidence of con- formity, not autonomy. In these cases, illusory feelings of individuality result not from people's reliance on introspection to determine the causes of their own behavior but from their faulty assumptions about what under- lies other people's similar behavior. Consider, for example, a college student's experiences involving alcohol use on campus. Drinking is a strong norm on this student's campus, and he and his friends go out drink- ing at the eating clubs every weekend and many weekdays as well. He interprets his friends' behavior as evidence that they love getting drunk, that drinking is their preferred form of social activity. His own feelings about getting drunk are considerably less positive than that, but he goes out anyway in order to be cool, to be part of the group, and to be part of the social scene, such as it is. He recognizes these collectivistic motives in himself, but not in his friends. And as a consequence, when he reflects on his group experience, what stands out is not that everybody behaved sim- ilarly, but that he alone felt differently. Experienced individuality, in this case, resides not in a direct inference about the causes of his own behav- ior, but instead in a perceived difference between the internal states that direct his behavior and those that presumably direct his friends' behavior.

What gives rise to this belief that self and others are guided by different internal states? Dale Miller and I (1994) argued for the importance of two processes, both of which are manifestations of the privileged access people have to their own private thoughts and feelings and the lack of access they have to the thoughts and feelings of others. One, people assume that their private experiences differ from those of others. In their studies of pluralistic ignorance, Miller and McFarland (1987) found that participants believed

that they, more than other people, are characterized by traits that have internal referents – traits like sympathetic, self-critical, sensitive, hesitant, bashful, choosy, self-conscious, inhibited, indecisive, and preoccupied, whose recognition requires access to private thoughts and feelings. In other words, people seem to believe that their private worlds are more vivid and more conflicted than the private worlds that othes inhabit (see also McFarland & Miller, 1990). Subsequent studies have suggested that this belief underlies a great many social phenomena, including people's feelings that they, more than others, are inhibited from making a romantic overture by fear of rejection (Vorauer & Ratner, 1997), that they, more than others, refrain from approaching outgroup members because they fear a negative response (Shelton & Richeson, in press), and that they, more than others, drink alcohol in order to have friends (Schroeder & Prentice, 1998).

If people's access to their own private thoughts and feelings leads them to believe that they have richer internal lives, their lack of access to others' private thoughts and feelings leads them to fall back on implicit theories of human nature and motivation to account for others' behavior. As I noted in an earlier section of this chapter, cultures provide their members with theories and collective representations, including accounts of what motivates people and what ought to motivate people. The representations of American society, for example, emphasize individual agency, rationality, and autonomy: self-determination over social etiquette, self-preservation over social standing. Of course, behavior often violates these representations. People do things they know are wrong at the request of an authority figure. They risk danger to self and others in order to avoid embarrassment. They give social motives primacy. These circumstances are characterized by what Dale Miller and I (1994) termed a *motivational inversion*: a violation of what implicit theories of motivational potency prescribe. As people introspect on the causes of their behavior, they often recognize that they are violating these theories. But they do not generalize from that observation. Instead, they view themselves as a unique case: they assume that other people – others who are behaving similarly – must be acting out of a more appropriate, theory-consistent motivation (Miller & Prentice, 1994). Their momentary insight that they are acting out of social motives, acting as group members, simply leaves them feeling that they are the only ones in the group who are doing so.

Taken together, these results suggest that the tendency to introspect on the causes of behavior leads individuals to experience conformity as, alternately, either autonomy or uniqueness. When introspection turns up attitudes and beliefs that support their behavior, people feel autonomous, even when the behavior in question is common or uniform within the group. When introspection turns up social motives and anxieties that support their behavior, they feel unique, again even when the behavior in question is

uniform within the group. Of course, there are no doubt occasions on which introspection turns up evidence of group commitment, group identification, and attachment to group members – true feelings of collectivity. However, this outcome may require that individuals hold implicit theories that support a collectivistic interpretation of their behavior.

Individuality and the self

There is certainly nothing new in claiming a distinction between how the self acts and how it experiences and understands those actions. Many early theories of the self included some version of this distinction. William James (1890/1983), for example, distinguished the empirical self (or me) and the pure ego (or I). The empirical self is the self that directs action moment-to-moment, the one that perceives, thinks, feels, wants, strives, and behaves. This is equivalent to the behaving self that I have analyzed here in terms of self-categorization theories. The pure ego is the self that oversees and reflects on that experience, the one that constructs a concept and narrative of self. This is equivalent to the reflecting self that I have analyzed here in terms of theories of self- and social inference. More recent self theorists have followed in this tradition (e.g., Neisser, 1988).

The important point about these distinctions for the study of individuality is that they define two very different and largely independent, but equally valid, perspectives on the phenomenon. At a behavioral level, individuality is governed by self-categorization processes, which depend on the complex interplay of individual and contextual factors. Research inspired by self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) has given us an increasingly rich and nuanced understanding of how those processes work. At an experiential level, individuality is governed by self- and social inference processes, which tend to promote individualistic feelings of autonomy and uniqueness, regardless of the true sources of behavior. The disjunction between these two sets of processes is most apparent when self-categorization occurs at the collective level, and thus I have focused considerable attention on how people experience the behavior they enact as group members. The fact that that experience is often one of individuality, rather than collectivity, may provide some insight into why American social psychology gravitates toward individualistic theories of self, despite powerful evidence for collective self-definition.

Postscript

For Alexis de Tocqueville, Americans' preoccupation with individualism, on the one hand, and voluntary associations, on the other, was not paradoxical

at all. He viewed both of these tendencies as endemic to democracy and, in particular, to equality of condition, which promotes the idea that individuals should think and act for themselves and yet leaves them entirely dependent on one another for validation and effective action (de Tocqueville, 1840/1994). De Tocqueville's analysis is completely (and, indeed, impressively) consistent with current psychological theory. However, what it fails to capture are the psychological dynamics that enable these two apparently conflicting tendencies to coexist within individuals. As researchers continue to probe the distinct processes of self-regulation and self-reflection, an understanding of these psychological dynamics is now within reach.

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