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THE SELF and INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Objectives

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

1. reflect upon the values or significance of self-introspection;
2. establish the connection between self-concept and intrapersonal communication; and
3. arrive at a keener understanding of one's self-communication prior to acquiring interpersonal communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout life you are constantly asked the question: “Who are you?” Often you reply in a stereotyped manner, saying: “I’m Anna Santos, 17 years old, a junior student of computer engineering.” It’s an inadequate answer, of course, and a cryptic one at that. We try to learn much about ourselves as we live along and yet often we are not fully aware or conscious of this “self.” We frequently depend or rely on others who perceive us, in the process receiving and responding to what or whom they say we are. The “self” is thus an elusive thing. Clues and artifacts abound to reveal to us who we are, but arriving at a self-view or self-concept is much more complicated than we think. Let us look at an interesting excerpt from Lewis Carroll’s “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland:”

“Who are you?” said the caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation.

Alice replied rather shyly, “I hardly know, sir, just at present – at least I knew who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then.”

If Alice’s remarks intrigue you, read on. Our self-view is formed and given shape in complex ways, but primarily communicated by you, the communicator, whose message is communicated back to you.

Jean M. Civikly (1981) says in her prefatory note to Morris Rosenberg’s article on self-concept formation (1979), “the ways in which we think about and describe ourselves (self-concept) and the degree to which we like those descriptions of ourselves (self-esteem) have an inevitable impact on our human interactions.” In this chapter on intrapersonal communication, therefore, you are strongly encouraged to introspect, to look into yourselves, and in the process recognize vital clues to your self-identity, self-concept, or self-image. A few basic questions can guide you, namely:

1. *“How do I see myself?”*
2. *“Do I like or not what I see?”*
3. *“How do I wish to see myself?” “How do I present myself to others?”*
4. *“Who do others say I am?” “What do I imagine others say about me?”*
5. *“How does this affect me?”*

With that as a backdrop to our discussion, we can now start with how self-concepts are formed.

SELF-CONCEPT FORMATION

1. *Reflected appraisals*

The ***first principle of direct reflections*** (Thorstein Veblen : 1934) holds that the self-concept is largely shaped by the responses of others. This principle means you are deeply influenced by people’s attitudes towards you. You are a social being who wants and needs to be with people. In the course of time, you come to view your “self” as you are viewed by others. According to Veblen, the usual basis of self-respect is the respect by one’s neighbors or fellows. Only individuals with dysfunctional temperaments can in the long run retain their self-esteem in the face of disesteem of their neighbors or colleagues.

In general, there must exist a healthy, reasonable correspondence between others’ views of us

and our own in order to be well-adjusted individuals. Difficulties that arise between discordant definitions of the self are too often familiar. For instance, an adolescent may see himself as a responsible, mature young adult while his mother persists with her view of an irresponsible child ["drink your milk; brush your teeth"]. If we are to have solid or firm basis for our behavior or actions, it is essential to know what we are like. Rosenberg (1979) states, "Because it is so difficult to arrive at self-knowledge, how others view us is of tremendous importance. We need a consensus from others in order to validate our own self-concepts."

A foremost social psychologist, George Herbert Mead (1934), stresses the importance of consensual validation. He points out that in social communication the individual "takes the role of the other" and his "self" slowly emerges as he interacts with and responds to the views of others, i.e., in his social group, home, community. By taking the attitudes and perceptions of other individuals towards us, we are more or less unconsciously seeing ourselves as others see us. Thus, our own self-evaluation is affected by others' evaluations of us.

The *second principle of perceived self* can be explained in terms of Cooley's (1912) "looking-glass self" although he claims it is not an entirely adequate term. We imagine our appearance to the other person and imagine his judgment of that appearance, as well as some self-feeling, such as pride or regret. The thing that moves us to pride or shame or regret is not merely a mechanical reflection of ourselves but an imputed sentiment—the imagined effect of such reflection upon another mind. Thus, the crucial question is *not* "What is the other person's attitude towards me?" but "What do I perceive to be his attitude towards me?"

The Reeder, Donohue, & Biblarz study in 1960 found a very strong relationship between self-concept and the perceived self. In the group of 54 military personnel, 46 fully believed the group rated them as they rated themselves in leadership characteristics, and slightly lower but still substantial in the good-worker characteristics (38 out of 54).

In the *third principle of the generalized other*, Mead stresses that the self arises out of social experience, particularly social interaction. The process of communication requires the individual to adopt the attitude of the other toward the self and to see himself from their perspective or standpoint. In any organized social interaction, if the individual has to play his role effectively he must internalize the attitudes of all those participating. A clergyman has to incorporate into himself the attitudes and beliefs of all his *confreres* if he is to stay a healthy and active member. A third baseman cannot play his role of a third baseman without internalizing the attitudes of the catcher, pitcher, second baseman, and so forth.

All the others' particular attitudes are crystallized in the "me," in the process giving rise to a single standpoint or attitude called the "*generalized other*." One could say, thus, your individual self-concept is shaped by applying to your "self" the attitudes of society as a whole.

2. *Social comparisons*

The principle of social comparison forms a major component of **social evaluation theory**. Pettigrew (1967) points out the basic tenet of social evaluation theory, thus: "Human beings learn about themselves by comparing themselves to others." The second tenet states that the process of social evaluation leads to self-ratings that may be positive, neutral, or negative in relation to the standards set by the individuals employed for comparison. If a low-achieving pupil compares himself to the lowest-scoring pupil in his class, he may find his self-esteem raised. But if he compares himself with a high-scoring or high-achieving classmate, he finds his self-esteem lowered. The key factor here is the **referent individual** or in case of groups, the **reference group**.

The referent individual or group becomes your standard.

Rosenberg (1979) distinguishes two useful comparisons, one social comparison that is criterion-based, i.e., excellence, virtue, or merit; another social comparison that is norm-based, i.e., deviance or conformity. The first marks or classifies individuals as *superior or inferior* to one another in terms of a criterion; the second marks or classifies individuals as *same or different*. Both types of social comparisons are said to incur significant consequences on self-esteem.

3. *Self-attribution: Attention, students!*

Anita E. Woolfolk (1998), in her book on Educational Psychology, clarifies that at the heart of attribution theory is the notion of individual perception. *At this point, do you recall our discussion of your perception of the other person's attitude towards you as being crucial?* If a student believes he lacks the ability to deal with higher mathematics, he will probably act on this belief even if his actual ability is well above average. And because he expects to do poorly in higher math, he will likely have very little motivation to tackle it. If students believe that failing means they are stupid, they are likely to adopt self-defeating strategies and defensive mechanisms. A student who exerts more than ordinary or minimal effort and persists at it will see these efforts pay off eventually. Students who attribute their success to their own effort (internal) rather than to luck or chance (external) are generally responsible for their learning and can cope with failure constructively. Teachers who tend to accept or condone excuses for failure/ mediocre performance because a student has problems outside of school are not helping at all. Objective assessment by teachers and counselors can go a long mile. Honest peer evaluation has its uses too.

1. *Self-values*

The fourth principle rests on the definition of self-concept as an organization, not an arbitrary collection, of parts, pieces, and components and that these are hierarchically organized and interrelated in complex ways. One important point deals with the significance of a given component, i.e., honesty, to global self-esteem (overall esteem of oneself). **What is important to an individual would relate to one's global self-esteem.** The Rosenberg study (1965) sampled a group of high school juniors and seniors and asked them how "likeable" they thought they were. As anticipated, those who considered themselves likeable were more likely to have high global self-esteem than those who believed they were not likeable. But the strength of this relationship depended upon the importance attached to being likeable. Among those who *cared* about being *likeable*, the relationship between self-estimate to global self-esteem was very strong, whereas among those subjects to whom this quality (*likability*) mattered little, the relationship was much weaker.

If you knew you were deficient in something, like not being a good mixer in a crowd, would that be an indication that your self-esteem is low? No, but you must know how much you value this quality. If a particular component is vital to one's feeling of worth, then negative attitudes concerning it may be personally devastating; but if the component or trait is trivial or unimportant, then the individual may acknowledge his inadequacy in that regard.

Another point worth stressing is that self-concept is *less competitive* than it appears. Although social comparisons point to the fact that our self-assessments are relative to others, it is true that individuals focus their sense of worth on different self-components so that the success of one person is not necessarily achieved at the expense of another. For example, one boy is a scholar, another a good athlete, the third, very handsome, the fourth a good musician. So long as each

focuses on the quality at which he excels, each is superior to the rest. At the same time, each may acknowledge the superiority of the others with regard to qualities to which he is relatively indifferent. It is therefore possible to emerge with a high level of self-respect and develop mutual respect as well.

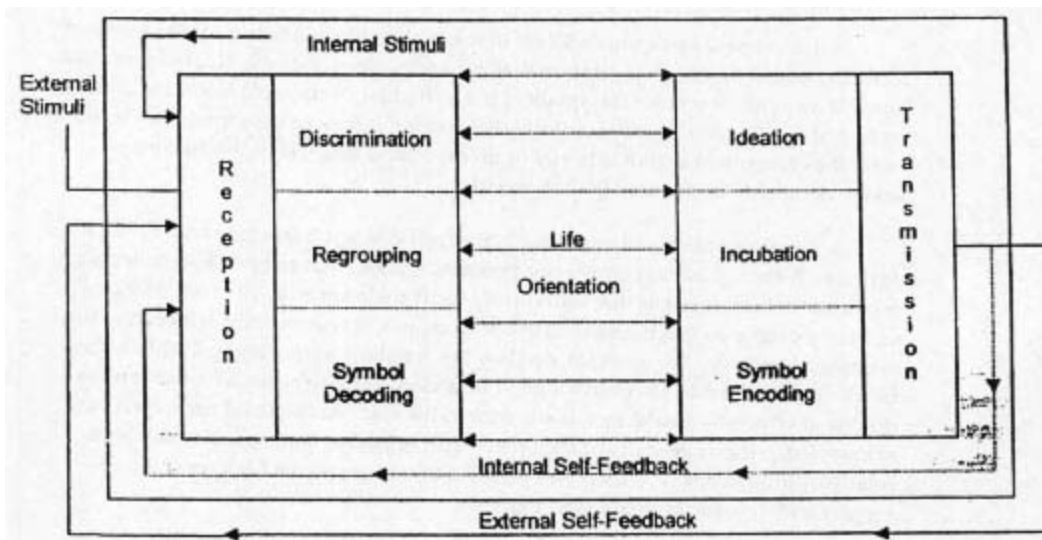
Finally, self-concept change may be difficult or easy depending on how a component or trait figures centrally (or peripherally) to an individual's system of self-values. All four principles enunciated above bear upon the way we see, wish to see, and present ourselves.

WISEMAN and BARKER MODEL

At this point, let's look at a model of intrapersonal communication, the Wiseman-Barker self-communication framework. But first, let's define the concept. According to Wiseman and Barker (1974), intrapersonal communication is the "creating, functioning, and evaluation of symbolic processes which operate within the originating or responding communicator."

In visualizing the process of intrapersonal communication, consider the entire rectangular area as representing the individual communicating to himself. Note that the center portion of the diagram is labeled **life orientation**. It plays a vital, underlying function because it affects the various stages as we evaluate and respond to stimuli. It determines how the messages are sent to and received by ourselves.

Life orientation is the "result of the sum total of social, hereditary and personal factors which have influenced your development as an individual." Since every individual is unique and without a clone, everyone's life orientation is different. These differences in life orientation often result in communication problems.



(Figure 1: Wiseman-Barker Model of Intrapersonal Communication)

We refer to the process which takes place in intrapersonal communication as *internal* because all the eight (8) stages take place within the individual, particularly, in his brain. The first four on the left margin of the rectangle involve evaluation of both external and internal stimuli while the last four on the opposite portion are stages that involve reaction to these stimuli.

The internal processes which take place when we self-communicate are triggered or initiated by two types of stimuli. Some are internal; others are external to the communicator.

Internal Stimuli

Internal stimuli are nerve impulses that are received by the brain. They make the self-communicator aware of the physiological and psychological conditions of his body. Often such stimuli trigger your prompt response. Let's say you're coming down with the flu. Your joints ache, your nose is stuffy, your temperature registers a fever, and on top of it all, you feel depressed. Your general bodily discomfort sends you rushing to the infirmary for a check-up. The internal stimuli in this example have resulted in what we call **intrapersonal communication**.

External Stimuli

External stimuli, on the other hand, come from outside your body, from your immediate or proximate environment. There are two types of external stimuli. Overt external stimuli are stimuli received at the conscious level. Our sense organs receive these and send them to the brain. Examples of overt external stimuli are the pizza commercial on TV and the aroma coming from your kitchen. Your sight sense and olfactory sense, processing such stimuli, may now prompt you to ask the question: "Ma, what's for supper?" Several stimuli usually try to compete for our attention at any one time. The result depends on such factors as "strength of the stimuli, familiarity with the stimuli, and the emotional connotations which the stimuli produce."

Covert external stimuli are external stimuli that are received at the preconscious or subconscious level. Imagine that you're getting dressed for school. Getting ready, you listen to a popular song being played on your favorite station. The reporter blares the morning news and next comes the weather report. You notice that your socks are mismatched and immediately find another pair. You hear the pattering of rain on your roof and grab your jacket. Checking your watch, you realize you have barely enough time to get to school. Although the volume of your radio was turned up, you cannot remember what was said in the news. This stimulus (announcement on the air) was received and stored in the brain. You were not consciously aware of what the announcer said. Covert stimuli are known to affect our communication behavior. Other examples of this type include subliminal communication, background music played in a movie, unnoticed traffic noises, and frequent spots (visuals only) of television advertisers.

Reception

When the body first receives stimuli that is when intrapersonal communication actually starts. Receiving can take place singly or in combination of any of the five senses: sight sound, smell, touch, and taste. External and internal receptors in the five sensory organs receive stimuli which are transformed into nerve impulses and subsequently transmitted to the brain. External receptors are found on or near the surface of the body. These receptors react to physical, chemical, and mechanical stimuli. Internal receptors such as nerve endings provide information about your internal state such as an empty stomach or an itchy throat.

Discrimination

There are countless stimuli that reach you simultaneously. You cannot very well attend to all of them. Imagine that you are in the Social Science class listening to a guest lecturer. In a moment you feel the draft coming in through the door, you hear the voice of a student over a megaphone urging you to join a rally, you hear the drone of a ceiling fan just above you, you see the lecturer up front, the visual aids plastered on the board, and you smell your seatmate's cologne. In addition, you are reliving an argument you had with your boyfriend over the telephone last night. There's a p.s. to it.

You have a faint headache.

Discrimination “determines what stimuli are allowed to stimulate thought.” It screens out the less significant or weaker stimuli. Thus, in the example earlier cited, the strongest stimuli could be the lecturer’s words or message, your brewing headache, and the student’s rallying shouts over the megaphone. You are not fully aware of this filtering process because discrimination occurs below the conscious level. In short, this stage allows you to attend to *only* those stimuli you consider significant.

Regrouping

During this stage the strongest and most important stimuli previously selected are arranged in a meaningful sequence. Although previously “screened” the diverse stimuli are not received in a predetermined ranking. Thus the chosen stimuli surface to the conscious level so that the person can act upon the strongest and most significant stimulus first, the medium stimulus next, and the weaker or less important ones last. In the example earlier cited, you are now aware of the lecturer’s words and the student’s call to join the rally.

Ideation

Ideation is the stage where the messages are thought out, planned and organized. This stage draws mainly on the individual’s storehouse of knowledge and experience which may include previous associations with the topic, readings, observations and conversation. All information coming from these sources impinge on the proposed message in process. The length of time for ideation depends on the availability of other sources of information and the bounds of time within which to develop the ideas. Ideation may occur briefly as in a conversation. Or it may take place for an extended period in which case ideation becomes a significant part of the total intrapersonal process. If time permits, one does research on the topic or message. The depth of thinking, planning, and organizing depends on material and time availability.

Incubation

Incubation is the process of allowing your ideas to grow and develop further. It is often referred to as a “jelling or hatching period.” Incubating allows you the time to weigh, evaluate, reorganize, and reflect on your messages. Often you commit the mistake of submitting your initial draft to get the requirement over with. What you can do is to let your paper “sit” awhile so ideas can assume a better shape, crystallizing your thoughts in the process. Then when you feel good about your paper, give it to your teacher.

Symbol Encoding

It is during this stage that the symbols of thought are transformed into words and gestures or actions. It is the last stage prior to transmittal of a message.

Transmission

The destination is the communicator himself. The origin or point of initiation is likewise the communicator himself. The self-communicator’s message composed of words and gestures are thus transmitted via air or light waves. If the messages are received by the self, then they travel from the nervous system to the muscles which are responsible for movements and actions.

Feedback

Feedback is often perceived as response to a message coming from an external source, someone other than the speaker. Feedback to intrapersonal communication is called self-feedback. You send a message to yourself, and then you respond to it accordingly. There are two kinds:

External self-feedback is the self-communicator's response through airwaves. You hear yourself commit an error of pronunciation and this prompts you to correct it.

Internal self-feedback is felt through bone conduction and muscular movement. These two types of self-feedback provide the self-communicator with the opportunity to adjust his messages or ideas if they are unclear, vague, or difficult.

INCREASING SELF-AWARENESS: Towards a clearer self

The earlier question, "Who are you?" resurfaces in the form of "How well do I know myself?" We all need to increase awareness of ourselves because hard as we try, we will never get to the optimum point. One concept of self-awareness is explained by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham in the so-called **Johari Window**, which shows how intrapersonal or self-communication is a function of our different selves. The self is analogous to a window composed of four (4) panes or quadrants, namely: 1) the open quadrant, 2) the blind area, 3) the hidden quadrant, and 4) the unknown area. In today's setting, one is an open window; the second is a window tinted dark from within; the third is a window camouflaged not to look like a window; and fourth, a window the self hardly touches or opens. Each of these quadrants, however, contains a different self, not separate and distinct but rather, interacting selves.

	Known to Self	Not Known to Self
Known to others	OPEN	BLIND
Not known to others	HIDDEN	UNKNOWN

(Figure 2: The Johari Window)

Let us see what these four quadrants represent. First, the **open self** represents various types of information or knowledge known to the self and known to others or that which you are willing to divulge to or share with others. This would include your name, student number and course, sex, age, perhaps your height and weight and social affiliations. Luft and Ingham emphasize that since communication is dependent on the degree to which we open ourselves to others and to ourselves, then we may learn how to enlarge the open quadrant. If the open area or proportion is small, communication between individuals could suffer. The size of an open quadrant varies according to a number of factors (De Vito). These may include the nature of individuals you associate with, the degree of your closeness to them, or role-related factors.

Second, the **blind self** is that quadrant that represents information which is known to others but

unknown to self. Others can see your mannerisms like saying “bale, bale ba” or “actually/ basically” prior to every sentence, but you don’t see this. Matters such as even body odor or halitosis (bad breath) may seem unnoticed by you but not by others. Some people have large blind areas, others have small blind areas. If effective communication depends on individuals who are willing to open up, blind areas will make communication difficult. Although blind areas cannot be totally eliminated, decreasing the size of the blind quadrant can enhance interpersonal relationships. To decrease the size of the blind quadrant, you could seek out information from family, friends, and intimates, especially on “gray areas” of your “self.” Ask questions and learn to positively respond to others’ perceptions of you.

Third, the **hidden self** represents things or information known to self but unknown to others. Personal secrets, “skeletons in the family closet,” intimate details and the like are included in this quadrant. Different people vary in the size of their hidden windows. Some individuals reveal everything. Their lives are an “open book” for everyone to peruse. They are sometimes referred to as “over disclosers.”

Family matters, finances, problems and insecurities, personal goals, failures and successes form the gamut of their disclosures. Under disclosers on the other hand have large hidden quadrants. They keep to themselves and tell nothing. Fear of rejection, reprisal, discrimination or lack of trust may trigger such communication behavior. “Selective disclosers” are those who screen the information they reveal to certain people, they tell only that which they think other people need to know, keeping the rest to themselves. They carefully weigh the pros and cons of their disclosure.

Fourth and last, the **unknown self** represents information unknown both to you and to others. Indeed, there are “uncharted areas” of ourselves that we are not aware of. You may not know why one situation triggers in you such strong emotions, while others similarly situated do not react intensely. You may sometimes not understand why you’re in a bad mood when things started well that day. Time will tell, reveal, and disclose to the self what some of these areas are. For example, a newspaper man of so many years never knew he could learn the violin and play it rather well until he tried it! Hidden talents, untapped abilities and giftedness can come out in the open through time.

In the space that follows, an ideal Johari window is drawn according to standards of effective communication.

	Known to Self	Not Known to Self
Known to others	OPEN	BLIND
Not known to others	HIDDEN	UNKNOWN

There other devices such as personality tests (i.e., Myers-Briggs Test), personality inventory, inkblot tests, enneagrams, E.O. Tests (emotional quotient) and the like that can help you increase your

self-awareness. So now that we have a deeper understanding of how self-awareness can come about, let us learn some things about the notion called “self-presentation.”

Knowing ourselves can be very tricky indeed. Often the good things about us make us “beautifully wrapped packages.” But the not-so-nice things make us go out of our way to present ourselves attractively to others. We seldom wish to be known as “nasty, hot-tempered, unkind, or even ugly.” Young people especially are sensitive about the public images they present. Peer acceptance is paramount during the teenage years and early adulthood. Kenneth J. Gergen (1971) in his book, *The Concept of Self*, writes that until we define ourselves and who we are to others, they cannot identify us and therefore cannot know how to behave toward us. To present oneself as “a borrower of money who forgets to pay back” will earn you displeasure or outright avoidance from others. To present oneself as a gracious host will merit praise and pleasure from others.

Factors that influence our self-presentation are: the *other, situation or interaction environment, and motivation*.

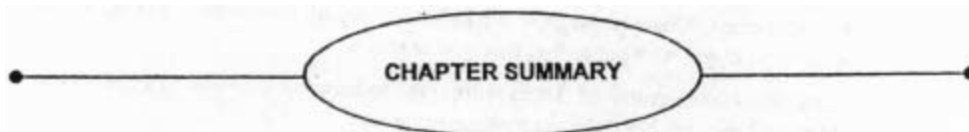
Others determine the way we present ourselves. For instance, you would present yourself in differing ways to your professor, mother, and intimate chum. You would show respect for one, childlikeness for another, and casualness for your friend. You may be a happy, go-lucky person with your friends but a conscientious student to your teachers. As William James (1892) once said, a man has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares.”

Those around us are constantly telling us who we are. Others have differing images of us and depending upon these images they treat us as a particular kind of person. Weinstein (1967) calls this *altercasting*, because we are cast into different but specific roles or identities by those around us.

Another determining factor is the *situation or interaction environment*. In determining the self that we present, the environment where the encounter or interaction takes place matters. We would not likely identify ourselves in the same way at a formal dinner as we do at the bowling alley. Different situations bring about shifts in identity primarily because they offer cues for maximization of reward. For instance, at a church service we are expected to behave with proper decorum. At informal parties, we crack jokes and are humorous.

The third factor is *motivation*. Motives of the self in undertaking a relationship determine self-presentation. If a person wishes people to defer to him (show respect) his demeanor may be characterized by superiority and authoritativeness. If he wishes to be trusted, he may behave consistently, not erratically. People in general want and need to be liked. They manage their self-identities in such ways as to gain the acceptance and approval of others.

In sum, therefore, self-communication or intrapersonal communication is not an uncomplicated process. But the self can stand to profit if the individual practices openness to learn more about himself, a willingness to listen to others’ perceptions, and communicate these back to himself through reflection and introspection. Self-concept formation is a dynamic, ongoing thing operating in a process of “becoming.” It is a prerequisite to intrapersonal or self-communication.

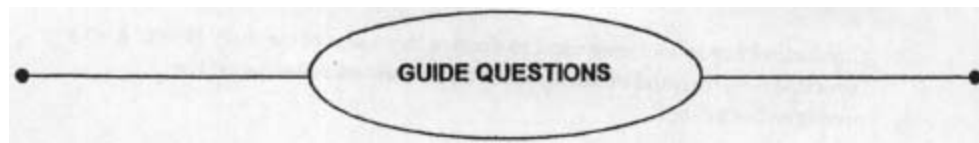


Intrapersonal communication is the most basic level of communication. It involves communication

with the self, where the sending and receiving of messages happen within one individual. The Wiseman-Barker Model describes eight internal processes in communication with the self: 1) reception, 2) discrimination, 3) regrouping, 4) symbol decoding, 5) ideation, 6) incubation, 7) symbol encoding and 8) transmission. All these stages are affected or influenced by an overarching factor called life orientation.

Self-concept formation is governed by three principles, namely: direct reflections, perceived self, and generalized other. It is worthwhile to understand the process of how the individual arrives at self-perception because this conceptual self shapes his behavior. Devices such as the Johari window, enneagrams, personality tests contribute to a better understanding of the *self*.

Self-attribution is a phenomenon deserving of scrutiny because often misconceptions among students and the general public thrive for lack of understanding of self processes. Self-attribution can spell the difference between determination and resignation, between success and failure in life's pursuits.

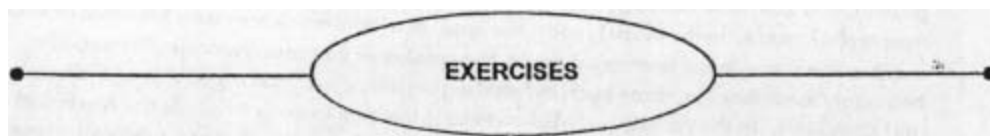


1. Explain what role life orientation plays in intrapersonal communication and eventually in interpersonal communication.
2. Cite examples of a possible breakdown occurring in each of the eight internal processes as we communicate with ourselves. How can these hamper self-communication?
3. Suggest ways by which the open window can be expanded in order to improve interpersonal communication.

Note: Keep nos. 4-6 in your journal

4. What effect does a positive self-concept have on your communication with others? A negative self-concept?
5. Think of how many times you have compared yourself with others. Did it help or not help you? Explain by recalling instances in the recent or not so recent past.
6. List down areas of your life where you think you are doing “well, super, poorly.” Why? To what do you attribute such “ratings” of yourself? Explain.

Example:	Well	Super	Poor
	Academics	relationships	figure /dieting



1. Divide a sheet of paper into two (vertically). In the left portion draw your Johari window at the point or stage of your initial/early interaction with a classmate. How do you suppose your window would look like at semester's end? Draw this second window on the right portion. How will the proportions of the square change? Next draw a Johari window for an intimate friend or for a parent.

2. What is this next exercise all about? Pass a sizable piece of paper around and let your classmates write down what they think of you. *You could do this once at the early outset of the semester and once more before the semester ends.*
3. Make a collage of yourself by clipping pictures of symbols, images, etc. Elaborate on the reasons for your selection. Do you now have a clearer picture of who you are?
4. Work in dyads while playing the Larry Barker's "Who are you?" game. Student A starts by asking Student B: "Who are you?" Student B should respond with brief, spontaneous answers, i.e. I am a UP student. Then upon hearing the reply, Student A repeats the question and this goes on for about five minutes. Afterwards the roles are reversed, this time with Student B asking the question. Learn what your partner and others perceive of you as you learn about yourself. Are these positive or negative? How do these affect your communication? (Barker 1996).
5. Jot down various kinds of feedback (positive, neutral, negative) that you get from others during a 2 hr. period. How do these feedbacks from others affect/influence you? How do you normally respond to negative feedback? Why so?



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