

Egocentrism

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Egocentrism is characterized by preoccupation with one's own internal world. Egocentrics regard themselves and their own opinions or interests as being the most important or valid. Self-relevant information is seen to be more important in shaping one's judgments than do thoughts about others and other-relevant information (Windschitl, Rose, Stalkfleet & Smith, 2008). Egocentric people are unable to fully understand or to cope with other people's opinions and the fact that reality can be different from what they are ready to accept.

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In younger children

According to Butterworth and Harris (1994) during childhood, the child is unable to distinguish between what is subjective (things that are strictly personal or private) and objective (what is public knowledge). Essentially, children believe that those who have a different perception than their own are either considered false or nonexistent.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) claimed that young children are egocentric. Piaget was concerned with two aspects of egocentricity in children; language and morality (Fogiel, 1980). He believed that egocentric children use language primarily for communication with oneself. Piaget observed that children would talk to themselves during play, and that this egocentric speech was merely the child's thoughts (Junefelt, 2007). He believed that this speech had no special function; it was used as a way of accompanying and reinforcing the child's current activity. He theorised that as the child matures cognitively and socially the amount of egocentric speech used would be reduced (Junefelt, 2007). However, Vygotsky felt that egocentric speech has more meaning, as it allows the child's growth in social speech and high mental development (Junefelt, 2007). In addition to Piaget's theory, he believed that when communicating with others, the child believes that others know everything about the topic of discussion and become frustrated when asked to give further detail (Fogiel, 1980).

Piaget also believed that egocentrism affects the child's sense of morality (Fogiel, 1980). Due to egocentrism, the child is only concerned with the final outcome of an event rather than another's intentions. For example, if someone breaks the child's toy, the child would not forgive the other due to the child not being able to understand that the person who broke the toy did not intend to break it (Fogiel, 1980). This phenomena can also be backed by the evidence from the findings of the case study by Nelson, who studied the use of motives and outcomes by young children as aiding to form their moral judgements.

Piaget did a test to investigate egocentrism called the mountains study. He put children in front of a simple plaster mountain range and then asked them to pick from four pictures the view that he, Piaget, would see. Younger children before age seven, during the pre-operational stage of development, they picked the picture of

the view they themselves saw and were therefore found to lack the ability to appreciate a viewpoint different from their own. In other words, their way of reasoning was egocentric. Only when entering the concrete-operational stage of development at age 7–12, children became less egocentric and could appreciate viewpoints other than their own. In other words, they were capable of cognitive perspective-taking.

However, the mountains test has been criticized for judging only the child's visuo-spatial awareness, rather than egocentrism. A follow up study involving police dolls showed that even young children were able to correctly say what the interviewer would see (Hughes, 1975 as cited in Sammons, 2010). It is thought that Piaget overestimated the levels of egocentrism in children.

Egocentrism is thus the child's inability to see other people's viewpoints. The child at this stage of cognitive development assumes that their view of the world is the same as other peoples', *e.g.* a little girl does not see that taking another child's ball is wrong because she does not understand that taking the ball would hurt the other child's feelings.

In adolescence

Although most of the research completed on the topic of egocentrism is primarily focused on early childhood development it has been found to occur during adolescence (Goossens, Seiffge-Krenke & Marcoen, 1992). David Elkind was one of the first to discover the presence of egocentrism in adolescence and late adolescence. David Elkind argues that "the young adolescent, because of physiological metamorphosis he is undergoing, is primarily concerned with himself. Accordingly, since he fails to differentiate between what others are thinking about and his own mental preoccupations, he assumes that other people are obsessed with his behavior and appearance as he is himself."^[1] This shows that the adolescent is exhibiting egocentrism because they cannot clearly identify another person's perception.

Elkind also created terms to help describe the egocentric behaviors exhibited by the adolescent population such as what he calls an imaginary audience and personal fable. Imaginary audience refers to the idea that most adolescents believe that there is some audience that is constantly present that is overly interested in what the individual has to say or do. Personal fable refers to the idea that many teenagers believe that they are the only ones who are capable of feeling the way that they do.^[2] Egocentrism in adolescence is often viewed as a negative aspect of their thinking ability because adolescents become consumed with themselves and are unable to effectively function in society due to their skewed version of reality.

There are various reasons as to why adolescents experience egocentrism :

- Adolescents are often faced with new social environments (for example, starting secondary school) which require the adolescent to protect the self which may lead to egocentrism (Peterson & Roscoe, 1991).
- Development of the adolescent's identity may lead to the individual experiencing high levels of uniqueness which subsequently becomes egocentric – this manifests as the personal fable (O'Connor & Nikolic, 1990).
- Parental rejection may lead to the adolescents experiencing high levels of self-consciousness, which leads to egocentrism (Riley, Adams & Nielsen, 1984).

A study was completed on 163 undergraduate students to examine the adolescent egocentrism in college students. Students were asked to complete a self-report questionnaire to determine the level of egocentrism present. The questions simply asked for the reactions that students had to seemingly embarrassing situations. It was found that adolescent egocentrism was more prevalent in the female population than the male.^[3] This again exemplifies the idea that egocentrism is present in even late adolescence.

Results from other studies have come to the conclusion that egocentrism does not present itself in some of the same patterns as it was found originally. More recent studies have found that egocentrism is prevalent in later years of development unlike Piaget's original findings that suggested that egocentrism is only present in early childhood development.^[4]

In adulthood

The prevalence of egocentrism on the individual has been found to decrease between the age of 15 and 16 (Louw, 1998). However, adults are also susceptible to be egocentric or to have reactions or behaviors that can be categorized as egocentric (Tesch, Whitbourne & Nehrke, 1978).

Frankenberger (2000) tested adolescents (14-18 years old) and adults (20-89) on their levels of egocentrism and self-consciousness. It was found that egocentric tendencies had extended to early adulthood and was that these tendencies were also present in the middle adult years.

Baron and Hanna (1990) looked at 152 participants and tested to see how the presence of depression affected egocentrism. They tested adults between the ages of 18 and 25. It was found that the participants with depression showed higher levels of egocentrism. Therefore, this would suggest that a mentally healthy individual evolves out of most of his or her egocentric habits.

See also

- Attribution (psychology)
- Schema (psychology)
- Egotism
- Chronocentrism
- Narcissism
- Selfishness
- Spoiled child
- Intellectual virtues
- Epistemic virtue
- Solipsism
- amae
- personality disorder

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External links

- **The Human Mind Is Naturally Prone To the Following Egocentric Tendencies** (<http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/natural-egocentric.cfm>) by *Foundation for Critical Thinking*

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