To See Ourselves as Others See Us

• To know oneself is to study oneself in action with another person.
  • Bruce Lee

• I believe in knowing who you are but without limiting yourself to your own expectation of who you are.
  • Charlotte Eriksson
Know thyself.

Oracle at Delphi
The unexamined life is not worth living.

Socrates
• The self-actualized individual must “break through the defenses against his own self-knowledge, to recover himself, and to get to know himself.”

— Abraham Maslowe (1971)
How do we gain self-knowledge?

• Option A
  – Self-examination/introspection
How do we gain self-knowledge?

• Option B
  – Through the eyes of others

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2 possible sources of self knowledge

What we see in ourselves

Self Knowledge

What others see in us
Historically one of these sources has been favored; one has been largely neglected...
The Proximity Premise...

- Knowledge can be acquired by a suitable and complete study, no matter what the starting point is...What is nearest to us is man; and you are the nearest of all men to yourself. Begin with the study of yourself; remember the saying ‘Know thyself.’

- G.I. Gurdjieff
• Close proximity offers one perspective...

• Distance offers another perspective...
We are all sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life.

— Tennessee Williams
From “To a Louse”  
by Robert Burns

O would some Power the good Lord give us  
To see ourselves as others see us!  
It would from many a blunder free us,  
And foolish notion.
The Introspection Illusion

• Emily Pronin
  – Professor of Psychology at Princeton University

• Her research examines “natural asymmetries in the way we perceive ourselves versus the way we perceive others.”
WHAT ONE THINKS:
One’s thoughts, feelings, & intentions

WHAT ONE DOES:
One’s behaviors

View of self or others

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What information about self and others is MOST evident to us?</th>
<th>What information about self and others is LEAST evident to us?</th>
<th>Component of Illusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELF:</strong> Our own thoughts, feelings, and intentions</td>
<td><strong>SELF:</strong> Our behaviors</td>
<td><strong>Introspective weighting:</strong> Heavy weighting of introspections when assessing self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-other asymmetry:</strong> Absence of above when assessing others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHERS:</strong> Their behaviors</td>
<td><strong>OTHERS:</strong> Their thoughts, feelings, and intentions</td>
<td><strong>Behavioral disregard:</strong> Disregard of behavior when assessing self (but not when assessing others)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Our Sense of Self

Informed by our thoughts, feelings, & intentions

Uninformed by observations of our own behaviors

Our Sense of Others

Informed by our observations of their behaviors

Uninformed by others’ thoughts, feelings, & intentions

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Introspection Illusion

Self-enhancing assessments

Self-denigrating assessments
The Introspection Illusion
(Emily Pronin, 2009)

- The current theorizing raises the question of whether introspection truly is the path to self-knowledge. Studies reviewed herein show that people’s inclination to look to introspection for self-knowledge misleads them.
• When seeking knowledge of their own biases or of their prejudices, abilities, character traits, or potential, people may be misled by even the most concerted and well-intentioned efforts to look inward. From where, then, can true self-knowledge be derived?
• On occasion it may be best found through others’ knowledge of oneself. Rather than looking to one’s own introspections for self-knowledge, one may sometimes be better off looking to other’s perceptions of oneself. That possibility is supported by empirical results...
Two examples...

• Those who are close to an individual know better than the individual himself/herself how much time he/she spends talking to others one-on-one (Vazire & Mehl, 2008)

• A person’s college if at predicting how long his/her latest romantic relationship will last (MacDonald & Ross, 1999)
While we may be forever “confined within our own skins”, attempting to view ourselves through others’ eyes may provide the most objective view of self available to us.
Strengths Spotting versus Strengths Recognition

- **Strengths Spotting**
  - X observes Y using certain character strengths

- **Strengths Recognition**
  - X observes Y using certain strengths *and*
  - X shares his or her observations with Y (i.e. X tells Y what strengths he/she observed Y using)
**Strengths Spotting**

- Focus on the *observer*
  - What does the *observer* learn about character strengths?
  - What does the *observer* learn about the actor?

**Strengths Recognition**

- Focus on both the *observer* and *actor*
  - What does the *observer* learn about character strengths?
  - What does the *observer* learn about the actor?
  - What does the *actor* learn about character strengths?
  - What does the *actor* learn about himself?

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• Strengths recognition practices provide two distinct opportunities...

  – To help others to see their strengths *through your eyes*

  – See your strengths *through others’ eyes*
Benefits for Individual:

Seeing our own strengths through the eyes of others helps to...
Seeing our strengths through others' eyes...

• ...Corrects our own misconceptions and counters the negativity bias.
Seeing our strengths through others’ eyes...

• ...Promotes increased use of our character strengths.
Seeing our strengths through others' eyes...

- Provides affirmation that self-concept is aligned with what others see in us.
Seeing our strengths through others' eyes...

• ...Helps to **counter** strengths blindness.
Seeing our strengths through others' eyes...

• ...Serves to increase positive emotion and ennoble and uplift us.

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Case Study:
School-Wide VIA Strengths Initiative

- Newark Boys Chorus School (NBCS)
- Emphasis on reciprocal strengths recognition practices
The Evidence Base

• Qualitative study conducted by Jane Gillham and Clorinda Velez, of Swarthmore College

• 8 hours of filmed interviews with individual students and teachers (interviews filmed for use in documentary about the school’s character strengths initiative)
How does this example illustrate how strengths recognition...

• Corrects misconceptions?
• Promotes greater use of character strengths?
Example: Nadyi’s Love of Learning

Thinking that his love of learning might be not be appreciated by his peers, Nadyi attempts to hide the strength “under a bushel”.

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After receiving “love of learning” 6 times during the badge project...

• Now I’m not ashamed to show my love of learning. I’m always in the front of the class, raising my hand and answering questions without being afraid.

• Nadyi
Some of the boys didn’t think they had any friends in the school... They didn’t think their classmates would recognize strengths in them, but they did. You know [the badge activity] set a whole different tone, a whole different feeling about their classmates. And you know, that was really impressive.
How does this example illustrate how strengths recognition...

- Helps to **counter strengths blindness**?
How does this example illustrate how strengths recognition...

• Increases positive emotion and ennobles and uplifts us?
Benefits for Group:
Strengths recognition practices may help to...
Strengths recognition practices...

• ...Promotes increased awareness (and more nuanced understanding) of what is good in others.

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Strengths recognition practices...

• ...Expands our comfort zone and the scope of “what it’s okay to talk about.”
Strengths recognition practices...

• ...May foster stronger **social connections** and build a **sense of community**.
How does this example illustrate how strengths recognition...

• Promote increased awareness of what is good in others?
• Expand our comfort zone?
How does this example illustrate how strengths recognition...

• Promote *increased awareness* of what is good in others?
• Expand our *comfort zone*?
• Foster stronger *social connections* and build a sense of community?
The CSI program actually helped us with [building] that family type of atmosphere here. [It] helped us expand our idea of family more. It takes a village to raise the child and character strengths fed right into that idea of the village and the positive impact the village can have.

• NBCS Teacher
Newark Boys Chorus School (NBCS)
Character Strengths Initiative (CSI)

• [As a result of the badge project] all of the students are more connected because they had to look deep within each other to find character strengths. It has made us have a stronger bond.

• Nadyi (8th grader)

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Modeling Strengths Recognition
### Strengths Recognition “Booster Shot”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Strength</th>
<th>Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>You like being close to other people. You like giving love to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of Learning</td>
<td>You enjoy learning new information. You enjoy learning how to do things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>You are able to give other people good advice. You are able to see the “big picture.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>You finish what you start. You find ways to overcome obstacles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prudence</td>
<td>You enjoy completing tasks. You are careful in making decisions. You avoid doing or saying things that you later regret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control</td>
<td>You avoid “overdoing” things. You feel that you are here for a reason. You feel a sense of connection with something larger than yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Purpose</td>
<td>You know what to do to get along with different groups of people. You know what makes other people “tick”, you know why they do what they do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Intelligence</td>
<td>You are aware of other peoples’ thoughts and feelings. You always do your share of the work in a team or group. You are loyal to the groups or teams to which you belong. You do what you do with energy and excitement. You view life as an adventure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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