

Knowing me, myself and I: What psychology can contribute to self-knowledge

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How well do you know yourself? It's a question many of us struggle with, as we try to figure out how close we are to who we actually want to be. In a new report in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, psychologist Timothy D. Wilson from the University of Virginia describes theories behind self-knowledge (that is, how people form beliefs about themselves), cites challenges psychologists encounter while studying it, and offers ways we can get to know ourselves a little better.

The study of self-knowledge has tended to focus on how accurate we are at determining our own internal states, such as our emotions, personality, and attitudes. However, Wilson notes that self-knowledge can be broadened to include memory, like recalling how we felt in the past, and prospection, predicting how we will feel in the future.

Knowing who we were and who we will be are as important to self-knowledge as knowing who we are in the present. And while a number of researchers are conducting studies that are applicable to those various facets of self-knowledge, Wilson observes that there is not much communication between them, one reason this field is challenging to investigate.

Although it can be fairly simple to assess how people's attitudes change over time--that is, have them predict how they will feel at certain time and then actually measure their feelings at that time-- it is more difficult to measure people's current self-knowledge accurately. Some methods of

acquiring accurate information on a person's [feelings](#) or their [personality](#) are to compare reports from their peers and study their nonverbal behavior. However, Wilson has "great faith in the methodological creativity" of his "fellow social psychologists" and is confident that questions raised by these types of experiments will be answered in the next few years.

Although Wilson acknowledges all the interesting findings that have come out of new technologies, such as [fMRI](#), he cautions that those type of studies may not be very relevant to studying issues associated with self-knowledge.

There are a number of theories that aim to describe self-knowledge by a dual-process model, pitting the unconscious against the conscious. Wilson notes that these theories are pessimistic in that they view the unconscious as something that cannot be breached. However, he remarks that "self-knowledge is less a matter of careful introspection than of becoming an excellent observer of oneself."

Wilson suggests some ways that can help us learn more about ourselves, such as really attempting to be objective when considering our behaviors and trying to see ourselves through the eyes of other people. Another way of knowing ourselves better is to become more aware of findings from [psychological science](#). Wilson concludes, "Most of us pay attention to medical findings that inform us about our bodies (e.g., that smoking tobacco is harmful), and can learn about our psychological selves in the same way."

Source: Association for Psychological Science ([news](#) : [web](#))

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