

Lacan's mirror theory and self-cognition

Han YAN

King's College, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3FX, UK

Abstract: Lacan's mirror theory is a profound and enlightening theory. It not only reveals the complex psychological process of individuals in forming self-identity, but also shows the instability and diversity of self-identity. At the same time, the theory also provides important insights and methodological guidance for psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. In today's society, with the enhancement of self-consciousness and the increase of mental health problems, Lacan's mirror theory will receive more and more attention and importance. The present study explores multiple explorations of self-cognition with respect to Lacan's mirror theory, and proposes the impact of the theory on the development of self-cognition.

Key words: Lacan; mirror theory; self-cognition

1 Introduction

Lacan's theory of mirroring, also known as the mirror stage, is an important theory proposed by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in the early 20th century. This theory focuses on the role of mirroring in the process of an individual's psychological development, especially in the formation of self-identity. In Lacan's theory, the mirror stage occurs when infants are 6-18 months old, at which point they begin to be able to recognize and interact with their mirror image. This mirror image is not the real self, but rather a self-image, a projection of self-perception. Through interaction with the mirror image, the infant begins to recognize his or her own existence and begins to develop a sense of self [1]. However, this sense of self is not entirely real because infants in the mirror stage are not yet able to fully distinguish between reality and fantasy.

Lacan's mirror theory was formed on the basis of criticizing and inheriting Freud's psychoanalysis. Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, believed that the psychological trauma and repression experienced by individuals in early childhood were the main causes of psychological problems in adulthood. Lacan, on the other hand, believed that the self-identity formed by an individual in the mirror stage has a more important influence on psychological development. Therefore, Lacan's mirror theory pays more attention to the psychological process and mechanism of individuals in the process of forming self-identity [2]. Lacan's mirror theory was also influenced by the philosophical thinking of the time. At the beginning of the 20th century, the phenomenological school represented by Husserl and Heidegger appeared in European philosophy. Phenomenology emphasizes the direct observation and description of individual experience and consciousness, and believes that individuals know the world through perception and experience. This philosophical thought had a profound influence on Lacan's mirror theory, making him pay more attention to the perception and experience of individuals in the process of forming self-identity. At the beginning of the 20th century, European society experienced significant changes, including the development of science and technology, the advancement of industrialization, and the

transformation of culture and art.

To summarize, Lacan's mirror theory was formed on the basis of criticizing and inheriting Freud's psychoanalysis, influenced by the philosophical thought of the time and closely related to the cultural atmosphere and social background of the time. It reveals the complex psychological process of individuals in the process of forming self-identity, and is of great significance to the understanding of human psychology and behavior.

2 Mirror theory

Lacan's mirror theory is of great significance in understanding human psychology and behavior. It reveals the role and influence of mirroring in the process of forming self-identity of an individual. At the same time, it also emphasizes the complex relationship between rationality and emotion, reality and fantasy in the process of individuals' understanding of themselves and the world. This theory has had a profound impact not only in the field of psychoanalysis, but also in a wide range of fields such as philosophy, psychology, literature and sociology [3].

In mirror theory, it is not only the face of the baby that is reflected in the mirror, but also the "others" such as parents, family and friends. The faces and gazes of "others" such as parents, family members, friends, also appear in the mirror. The image in the mirror causes the infant to experience a sense of bodily integrity.

Goldberg (1984) emphasized that mirrors may have a certain influence on people's self-cognition and conception; Japan's Taihei Fukuhara's work *Lacanian Mirror Stage* (translated by Wang Xiaofeng and Li Zuofan, Hebei Education Press, 2002) and Tsuneo Yumizu's work *The Magic of Mirrors* (translated by Sun Dongxu, Shanghai Bookstore Press, 2004) are two works that are different from both Western philosophers and our literary critics in terms of their unique views of the mirror. These two works provide an informative introduction and unique interpretation of Lacan's mirror theory from a unique point of view that is different from both Western philosophers and Chinese literary critics [4]. The study of Lacan in Russia is much later than in Europe and America, and it was not until the 90s of the last century that some works on Lacan appeared in Russia one after another. The boom in Russian research on Lacan's works occurred in the first 15 years of the 21st century, and this period was rich in research results. The Russian philosopher and psychoanalyst Mazin published the book *Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage* in 2005, which provides a more complete and detailed explanation of Lacan's mirror theory; in addition, "Introduction to Lacan" introduces Lacan's philosophical thought and provides unique insights into it; "Lacan and the Universe" is devoted to the study of discourse and topology in Lacan's theories; and "Lacan in the Cinema" utilizes Lacan's psychoanalytic theories to examine individual films and explore the application of Lacan's theories to cinema [4]. Lacan and his main theoretical ideas, including mirror theory, are described in relation to Lacan in the first post-Soviet encyclopedia of philosophy, *The New Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, written by the renowned philosopher and historian Aftonomova in 2010. In recent years, most of the research on mirror theory in Russia has been based on empirical studies, while philosophical analyses and interpretations of mirror theory have been less frequent.

In practice, Lacan's theory of mirroring can help us better understand human psychology and behavior, and help us better understand ourselves and others. It reminds us to be aware of the instability of self-identity, not to be limited by a set self-concept, and to dare to accept our own changes and diversity. At the same time, it reminds us to respect the process of identification of others and not to impose our own views and values on others. In addition, Lacan's theory of mirroring provides important insights into psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. In the process of therapy, psychoanalysts can help individuals to better understand and accept themselves by helping them to re-examine and adjust their self-identity, thus improving their mental health [5]. Meanwhile, this theory also reminds us that psychotherapy is not simply about helping

individuals change their behavior or thinking patterns, but rather about reaching into the depths of the individuals' heart and helping them to reconstruct the process of self-identity.

3 Self-awareness as shown by Lacan's mirror theory

3.1 Mirror consciousness is the foundation of recognizing self

Mirror consciousness, as the foundation of cognitive self, plays a crucial role in the development process of individuals [6]. It is the starting point for individuals to begin to recognize themselves and form self-awareness. Through observing the image in the mirror, individuals gradually realize their own existence and image, and begin to recognize the distinction between themselves and the outside world. This mirror consciousness is not only the individual's cognition of his own image, but also an awakening of self-awareness.

Individuals may be overly concerned with their external image and neglect their internal needs and emotions. At the same time, mirror consciousness is also prone to lead to self-identity alienation, i.e., the individual sees the self in the mirror image as the real self, resulting in self-alienation.

In order to overcome the limitations of mirror consciousness, individuals need to constantly reflect on and scrutinize themselves. By thinking deeply about their inner needs and emotions, individuals can know themselves better and avoid being bound by their outer image. At the same time, individuals also need to realize the instability of self-identity and constantly adjust and change their identity to adapt to changes in environment and experience.

In conclusion, mirror consciousness, as the basis for recognizing the self, is an indispensable part of the individual's development process despite its limitations. By gaining a deeper understanding of the role and impact of mirror consciousness, we can better recognize ourselves, better cope with mental health problems and develop our personal identity. At the same time, we should also realize that self-awareness does not stop at the surface image, but also focuses on the inner needs and emotions in order to achieve true self-awareness and growth.

3.2 Alienation and subjectivity as key to the discovery of the self

Alienation and subjectivity have an important role in Lacan's mirror consciousness. Alienation is a necessary path for the awakening of individual self-consciousness and a precondition for the birth of individual subjectivity. Through alienation, individuals are able to realize their own existence and image, begin to think about their identity and sense of belonging, and gradually possess their own subjectivity.

First of all, alienation is a necessary path for the awakening of individual self-consciousness. In the mirror stage, individuals recognize themselves by observing the image in the mirror, thus forming self-awareness. This alienation is a necessary path for the awakening of the individual's self-consciousness, which prompts the individual to become aware of his or her own existence and image, and to begin to think about his or her own identity and sense of belonging.

Secondly, alienation is also a precondition for the birth of individual subjectivity. In the process of alienation, individuals begin to realize their independent existence and autonomy, and begin to have their own subjectivity. This subjectivity is the individual's independence and autonomy in the face of the outside world, and is the individual's control and choice of self-identity. Individuals with subjectivity are able to think independently, act autonomously, and take responsibility for their own lives. Therefore, alienation is not only a necessary path for the awakening of individual self-consciousness, but also a precondition for the birth of individual subjectivity.

However, alienation and the discovery of subjectivity are also accompanied by pain and struggle. In the process of pursuing subjectivity, individuals need to constantly interact and collide with the outside world, and need to constantly reflect on and adjust their identity. Such a process may trigger anxiety and uneasiness in the individual, requiring the individual to possess sufficient courage and determination to face them.

3.3 Time is a focus for reinforcing self-perception

Time is a focus of reinforcing self-perception in Lacan's mirror theory. Through the passage of time, individuals not only realize their existence and history, but also cherish the present moment more. This perception and awareness of time further strengthens the individual's sense of self and identity. Therefore, in the process of self-awareness, we need to realize the importance of time, cherish the present moment, and constantly review our own growth history in order to better understand ourselves and develop ourselves.

In Lacan's mirror theory, time is a very important concept that reinforces the process of self-perception. Time is a prerequisite for human cognition, and individuals gradually recognize their own existence and history through the passage of time. This perception and realization of time further strengthens the individual's self-awareness and identity. First, the passage of time prompts individuals to realize their own existence. In front of the mirror, the individual observes his or her image change over time and begins to realize his or her own growth and change. This perception of existence makes the individual more aware of his or her identity and position, which strengthens self-awareness. Secondly, time also makes individuals aware of their own history. By recalling past events and experiences, individuals are able to better understand their own growth process and journey. This awareness of history not only allows individuals to understand themselves more deeply, but also allows them to be more clear about their goals and directions. Finally, the passage of time also reminds individuals to cherish the present. In front of the mirror, individuals not only observe their past and future, but also realize the point in time they are in. This perception of the present moment makes individuals cherish what is in front of them and pay more attention to the experience and feelings of the present moment.

4 Conclusion

Lacan's mirror theory is a profound theory of self-cognition. It not only reveals the complex psychological process of individuals in forming self-identity, but also reminds us to realize the instability of self-identity. Through a deeper understanding of Lacan's mirror theory, we can better understand the nature and process of self-perception so that we can better cope with mental health problems and develop personal identity. At the same time, we also need to realize that self-identity is an ongoing process that requires constant reflection and adjustment to changing circumstances and experiences. Only in this way can we truly know ourselves, develop ourselves, and become better versions of ourselves.

Lacan's mirror theory is of great significance in understanding human psychology and behavior. It reveals the complex psychological process of individuals in forming self-identity and reminds us to be aware of the instability of self-identity. At the same time, the theory also emphasizes the importance of time as a prerequisite for human cognition. Through the passage of time, individuals gradually recognize their own existence and history, which strengthens their self-awareness.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- [1] Xiao YC. 2021. Psychoanalysis and philosophy of life under the aesthetics of oriental films--Taking the film *Love Letter* as an example. *Journalism Research Guide*, 12(20): 227-229.
- [2] Wang H. 2022. Mirror image theory and the humanistic care in *Great! Youth*. *Movie Literature*, 7:139-142
- [3] Wang Z. 2021. To analyze the generation of tragedy in *The Great Gatsby* with the mirror image theory. *Today's Ancient Literature Creation*, 40: 22-23+39.
- [4] Cheng YR. 2021. Behind the popularity of Godzilla films: the audience's self-identity. *Theatre House*, 36:161-162.
- [5] Zhang YF. 2015. Different "visual" world-on "identity/self-identification" in suspense movies from the

perspective of mirror image theory. *Beauty and Times (second)*, 6:112-117.

[6] Li YR. 2019. The road to self-pursuit by breaking a cocoon into a butterfly -- interpreting the film *Fairy Tales of the Years* with Lacan's mirror image theory. *Drama House*, 27:110.

About the author

Yan Han (1994.06-) male, Han nationality, Shandong Rizhao, Master's degree in Aberdeen University. Research Direction: psychoanalysis.