Eleanor Roosevelt Declared, "No one can make you Feel Inferior without your Consent." Is she Right

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Introduction

Absolutely, for no one in this world has been bestowed with the power to make others feel inferior. The power solely lies in our minds. Imagine standing amid a throng, every one of them hurling an insult at you, saying something that instantly makes you feel like you can't breathe. Every voice caving into you, shrinking you, until the weight tramples you. Put it metaphorically; you are drowning in the sea, not of water but of opinions and judgment, pulling you deeper. It is only natural for a person to believe that they have no way out, that the load will eventually bury them. Now let us reimagine this scenario, amid the throng, their voices screaming, high-pitched echoes all around, but you have ur headphones on, blasting your favourite music, that quietens the chaos outside. And just as you are sinking in that sea of words, a raft appears, keeping you afloat.

Stepping back into reality, doesn't our world resemble that throng and sea of opinions? And just like that, amidst the noise, we learn to turn inward and trust our strength. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent". But is it truly that simple? To ignore the muffled voices that slip through the music? To trust that your raft will keep you aloft no matter how fierce the tide?

It is certainly not implausible, but it requires a great deal of energy to sustain.

Psychological and Cognitive Perspective

There is a widely held misconception about a person being either stoic, unaffected by the words of others, almost as if they are incapable of showing an emotion or reaction or being overly sensitive, those who are often told "don't take everything to your heart". People are not "born that way"; they have to cultivate the energy within their minds.

Psychology suggests that such traits are shaped by the mindsets, environment and experiences of a person. If this is the case, then indeed Roosevelt's words hold the truth. They aim to convince us that inferiority and insecurity are not feelings that one can foster and plant in our minds. Her words are supported by various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, neuroscience, cognitive science, and philosophy, among others. However, a core fact we must not overlook is that the ability to resist the words of others, as these studies show, is not a decision we can make overnight. It is almost like our mind is made up of a pillar of bricks, and we need to apply mortar to ensure its strength. How well and consistently you mix and apply the mortar will ultimately determine the strength of the building. Enough with the metaphors for a moment, now let's get real. A psychological theory to exemplify the argument is the Internal Locus of Control. This was introduced to the world by Julian B. Rotter in 1954. It suggests that people who have a strong Internal Locus of Control don't seem affected by the words, opinions or judgments of others. They believe that they are only responsible for the outcomes of their lives. So, suppose someone said something to them, they remind themselves that they have the option to accept the words and engrave them in their minds and continuously replay them until their brain is convinced that it is real, or simply reject them and never think about them again. Let's face it, though, critics will argue that an "External" Locus of Control also exists, which suggests that some people do believe that their lives are determined by outside factors. Yet we forget that Locus of Control is not a hereditary trait, rather it is malleable and is based on our experience, mindset and intentional efforts.

Research has shown that through therapies such as Cognitive - Behavioural Therapies (CBTS) and changes in self-perception, one can change their locus from external to

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internal, they just have to push and go the extra mile. After all, it benefits no one but them.

A Perception About our Perception

A crucial word to note here- perception. It is the noun for the action of perceiving. Simply put, it is how you view a scenario or circumstance and allow it to influence you. It isn't said often, but let me assure you, your perceptions shape your reality. Here is a view of perception from a more neuropsychological approach. Our perceptions pave the way to thoughts, which ultimately become physical entities composed of proteins and chemicals in our brain. At the centre of this concept lies neuroplasticity. In layperson's terms, neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to restructure itself by generating new neural connections throughout our lifetime. It allows us to change the way we think and feel, and adjust to events. This implies that our brains can rewire negative thought patterns, allowing us to gradually develop resilience and confidence, even if we have been made to feel inferior by outside criticism. This does mean that we don't have much control over our initial reactions, which are almost involuntary. At the same time, how we process and "perceive" the words or actions later has an important role. Consider two students who are being told, "You don't have what it takes, you will never make it with such kind of writing". The first has a strong internal locus and self-belief, while the second relies on external factors completely. Although both will initially feel hurt, insecure and inferior, they will choose different paths that will open the doors to drastically different results. One will make a conscious effort and accept these words as constructive criticism, replaying them in their mind as "you will never get where you want to be, unless you improve". This will ensure that the mind is calm, as the prefrontal cortex will override the response of the amygdala. (The amygdala causes us to feel stress, anger or sadness upon hearing an insult, and the prefrontal cortex keeps a check and decides whether this is worth stressing over, or is it a false alarm!) On the contrary, the other will continuously tell themselves, "You will never make it, I don't have what it takes". They will dive deep into a spiral of negative self-talk, returning from which is extremely painful. Two students hear the same hurtful words. One reframes it as motivation; the other spirals into self-doubt. The difference? Their inner narrative.

Neuroscience-backed research reveals that perception is not passive reception rather "an inferential capacity to interpret one's standing within a social group" (Albarracin et al., 2024). Thus, deduction does not happen in the outside world but in the Default Mode Network - a system that "plays a key role in internally directed or self-generated thought" (Andrews-Hanna, Smallwood, & Spreng, 2014). Thus, when inferiority is being inflicted upon us, it is filtered through the DMN, which ultimately holds the power to categorise the situation as inferiority. At the heart of this concept lies the Cortical Midline Structures (CMS), "the posterior cingulate and medial prefrontal (mPFC) cortices," which are "most associated with self-reflection" (Moran, Kelley, & Heatherton, 2013). These structures process the information not impartially but through a personal lens, taking into account memory, context and belief. Hence, it reaffirms that it is our inner interpretation that gives rise to inferiority.

Consent- Who Is In Control?

At this juncture, let us turn to an important keyword from Roosevelt's quote, "consent". This is almost like a physical entity that you hold in your hand, and it is up to you whether you wish to give it up or keep it safe. Every person has faced judgment and superiority in their lives, and if we had no control over it, then every single person today would be overwhelmed by inferiority. But that is not the case.Weseesomesink,whileothersriseabove. The difference is that one is ready to consent, which also erodes their self-worth, but the other is stronger or perhaps values themselves more highly than those around them. The psychobiological science behind this is the phenomenonofself-concealment.Self-concealment is perceived as a relatively stable personality trait in which individuals are consciously inclined to conceal painful memories, traumatic experiences, or negative emotions. This is directly linked to feelings of inferiority, as when individuals try to suppress their inner feelings and tragedies, somewhere they fail to accept themselves.

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When this happens, it becomes difficult for them to look at themselves eye to eye, fostering an inferiority of such a level that even a few words could bring their entire world crashing down. But if we flip the script and follow the path of self-acceptance, we have the opposite outcome. Here again, a crucial observation, as well as in the concepts mentioned above, we notice that all this time, it has just been us torturing ourselves. When Roosevelt said, "No one can make you feel inferior", there is an undertone that indicates that we are not being counted here. That's right, you have the power to make yourself feel inferior, but only you have this power. There is yet another psychological theory that supports the power of consent. I'm sure we've all come across the word "self-esteem" at some point. However, we will now understand this in depth. There are three types of self-esteem: personal self-esteem (how much you value yourself), relational self-esteem (how much you feel valued in close relationships) and collective self-esteem (how much worth you feel while being part of a group). Recent research by Du, King, & Chi (2017) empirically confirms that both relational and collective self-esteem impact well-being only through personal self-esteem. This finding transforms Roosevelt's statement into more than rhetoric; it becomes a psychological law. The feeling of inferiority does not take root from others' opinions, but from our decision to accept those views into how we see ourselves. Research in cognitive psychology shows that this process is not rigid. With the help of psychological and therapeutic methods, people can learn to distance themselves from relying on external validation and instead develop a stronger self-worth. This proves that feeling inferior is a choice, a mental habit that one can get rid of.

Conclusion

From all the insights gathered, we can infer that our Internal Locus of Control does help to shape our perception. Support from neurobiology and neuroscience strengthens the claims with the aforementioned studies related to the Default Mode Network, Self-Esteem, and the Prefrontal Cortex. Each of them is like a different language that translates to the same meaning – Roosevelt's words indeed hold the truth.

Here's a fact yet to be revealed to make sure you believe. The raft that appeared for your drowning self was not thrown in the sea by anyone. Just as you were sinking into those hurtful words, it was you who jumbled the letters to create a new story, where you thrive without external validation. Your headphones were playing your favourite song, known just to you, because it was you who dared to block those muffled voices. The choice has and always will be yours.

Inferiority is not given; it is taken. And the only one holding the permission slip is you.

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