

Extending Self-Esteem Theory and Research

Sociological and Psychological Currents

This book is an in-depth examination of self-esteem – people's positive and negative evaluation of themselves as a person. Beginning with self-esteem's conceptualization and measurement, this book carefully examines the role of self-esteem in society and within and across various domains and contexts of the human experience. Inspired by the seminal work on self-esteem carried out by American social psychologist Morris Rosenberg, the book serves as a comprehensive statement on self-esteem theory and research in the late 20th century, with an eye toward the direction it will take in the next century.

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To Manny Rosenberg – colleague, mentor, peer, friend

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1 The Future of Self-Esteem

An Introduction

Timothy J. Owens and Sheldon Stryker

THE IMPORTANCE OF A MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISAPPROPRIATED CONCEPT

The hypothesized link between the self-concept and various social problems has commanded a long-standing place in social and psychological theory as well as public discourse. Nowhere is this notion more strongly held than in the presumed relationship between self-esteem and various social and emotional difficulties, especially – though certainly not exclusively – with regard to youth problems (Smelser, 1989). It is not uncommon to hear parents, educators, politicians, and religious leaders blame school failure, delinquency, risky sexual behavior, impudence, drug and alcohol abuse, and more on children's diminished self-esteem (California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, 1990; Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989). Indeed, shortly after President Clinton's reelection, *USA Today* reported Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala as saying that, if she remained in the president's cabinet, she would work to raise the self-esteem of the nation's children.

The typical discourse on the relationship between self-esteem and various social and emotional problems is twofold. Self-esteem, it is argued, safeguards people against the ill effects stemming from many of life's problems. This premise assumes that people with high self-esteem, in contrast to those with low self-esteem, will behave in more socially acceptable and responsible ways, will somehow be more resilient to life's vicissitudes, will generally display higher achievement in conventional pursuits, and will ultimately possess greater socioemotional well-being (Burns, 1979; Covington, 1992). This rationalist view of high self-esteem is deeply embedded in Western culture, but especially American. Why, the essential rationalist argument goes, would anyone who loves an object not want to see it protected and enhanced, much less bear to see it harmed? The same goes for the self. If one loves or at least

likes oneself, the rational person should do everything in his or her power to protect it, grow it, and advance its best interests. To do anything less is, the logic goes, plainly irrational and inexplicable. Enter low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem, on the other hand, is said to open people to an array of social and psychological problems because low self-esteem people are presumed to be more susceptible to negative influences from their social and psychological environments. Low self-esteem has also been theorized as priming people to seek status and recognition in deviant pursuits, resulting in stigmatizing labels and secondary deviance (Lemert, 1951). It is arguable that people will try to confirm their sense of self (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992), so that a person who feels "bad" will be inclined to do bad things (Heise & Smith-Lovin, 1981). Low self-esteem people may, in general, be at higher risk of various problems because of their presumed heightened vulnerability to corrosive influences (Burns, 1979; Mecca et al., 1989; Rosenberg & Owens, this volume) and because of their generally pessimistic outlooks toward self and society (Owens, 1993; Rosenberg & Owens, this volume). Still, some of the linkages that have been made between self-esteem and behavior need better clarification. For instance, for young people, low self-esteem is frequently invoked as an explanation for poor school performance, although the empirical evidence is inconclusive (Covington, this volume).

Sources of the Controversy

Beyond the rhetoric and beliefs surrounding self-esteem lies a construct with a mixed record that is causing a fissure among some academics regarding the importance, if not relevance, of the concept. We will touch briefly on three sources of this controversy. First, many researchers with both applied and basic orientations commonly "toss self-esteem in" their research as a control or explanatory variable and then find it coming up short. The question becomes: "Why?" Is self-esteem in fact a weak predictor? Is it an outcome variable of little significance? Then again, the problem may be rooted in a misunderstanding of the concept that leads to the naïve misapplication of self-esteem theory and methods. Considerable evidence leads us to conclude the latter (e.g., Baumeister, 1993; Mecca et al., 1989; Rosenberg, 1979; Swann, 1996). In our view, the indiscriminate and superficial application of this complicated concept, greased perhaps by the informal communication researchers often engage in with each other as they conduct their research and analyze their data, has diminished its reputation in some quarters. Yet when it comes to an intuitively appealing concept like self-esteem, which permeates our culture (Hewitt, 1998), misinformation is easily propagated, especially among relatively disinterested people with only a passing knowledge of this concept and its proper application.

Over the past 30 years, articles and books employing self-esteem as a key variable or concept literally number in the thousands, with no slowdown in sight (as judged by the official journals and annual programs of the American Sociological Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychological Society, and the relatively new International Society for Self and Identity). Ironically, the disinterest in self-esteem among some scholars is partly a function of its very popularity. Not only are there a great many self-esteem scales to choose from (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991; Wylie, 1989), but there is considerable argument about such matters as: (1) how self-esteem should be employed, (2) how many and what kinds of dimensions it rightfully possesses, (3) how necessary and useful each of these is, and (4) whether one should employ general or role-specific conceptions of self-esteem. Because of its pervasiveness within the social sciences, some scholars have come to view self-esteem as almost *passé*, resulting in a concept too easily taken for granted, inappropriately ignored, or employed willy-nilly.

Finally, and perhaps most insidiously, self-esteem is such a ubiquitous concept, especially in the cultures of Western, industrialized societies, that many people – academics and nonacademics alike – assume that, because they have heard about self-esteem, are aware of their own sense of self-esteem, and may have formulated strong thoughts and feelings about its course and effect, that they are *de facto* self-esteem experts. This point can be illustrated by the following example. While doing research for an article on self-esteem for the science section of the *New York Times* (Johnson, 1998), a reporter contacted T. Owens and announced, rather matter-of-factly and without a hint of self-consciousness, that academics are abandoning the concept of self-esteem and that the public is growing indifferent to it. A key source for his conclusion was a rhetorician at a prestigious West Coast university who was prepared to make such a pronouncement about a concept she apparently knew little or nothing about, save perhaps her experience with her own self-esteem and the impressions she formed of the concept from her “reading” of the broader culture. Self-esteem as a topic of conversation is of seeming inherent interest to many people, suggested by the fact that it has spurred both a mythology and a large cottage industry of self-help books, tapes, videos, testimonials, and magazine articles on how to improve one’s own or another’s self-esteem (see Hewitt, 1998, for a cultural analysis of beliefs about self-esteem). Many of these works are written or produced by thoughtful people, others by charlatans and wags pontificating on an aspect of the human condition – the self – that has real and imagined consequences for social functioning and mental health. The accumulated effect of the circumstances outlined above is, perhaps, an unjustifiably “weakened” and misunderstood concept that deserves healthy skepticism (as do all theories and constructs) along with elaboration, extension, and refinement.

PURPOSE OF THIS VOLUME

This volume seeks to examine the current state of self-esteem, identify some of its weaknesses, but, more important, explain it, extend it, and expand it. We do this through a unique device. Although many thousands of works utilizing self-esteem in whole or part have been published since James (1890) first outlined the concept over a century ago, and several people have since emerged as major theorists of the self and self-esteem (e.g., Bandura, Coopersmith, Gergen, Wylie), Morris Rosenberg has left arguably the most indelible contemporary mark on the field. Support for this claim comes from the immense and ongoing utilization of the self-esteem scales he invented 35 years ago (commonly known as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale). Researchers have employed that ostensibly simple 10-item global self-esteem measurement instrument across an enormous array of academic and professional disciplines (e.g., medicine and nursing, virtually all the social sciences, business administration, and education) and languages (e.g., Spanish, Polish, Mandarin Chinese, and phonetic Hmong). Moreover, his numerous books and articles on self-esteem, beginning with his classic *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image* (1965) and his comprehensive masterwork *Conceiving the Self* (1979), have helped shape an entire and flourishing field of study as well as several generations of researchers and students of the self. For these reasons, we have elected to orient this volume around his self-esteem theory and methodology. (In addition, all royalty income from this book is being donated to a fund in Dr. Rosenberg's name at the sociology department at the University of Maryland.) This volume is not, nor has it even been, intended as a static or strictly laudatory tribute to one man's lifework. Nor is it a Festschrift as the term is commonly used. Rather, each author has been instructed to initially orient his or her chapter around some aspect of Rosenberg's ideas, empirical findings, or self-esteem scale, and then extend, criticize, rebut, or rethink the theoretical, methodological, and substantive usefulness and future of self-esteem. Rosenberg, therefore, is the springboard, though not the exclusive focus of the volume. By using this device, we hope to have produced a unified and cohesive volume that digs deeply and critically into the phenomenology, methodology, theory, and application of self-esteem and thereby sets a course for future self-esteem research in a new century. In a phrase, we are honoring one of the field's pioneers by critically examining self-esteem, striving to improve people's understanding of it, and reduce its misappropriation.

Volume Structure

The volume includes 17 chapters organized under five sections or themes. Section One, The Frame, includes the present chapter and "The Self as Social Product and Social Force: Morris Rosenberg and the Elaboration of a

Deceptively Simple Effect,” by Gregory C. Elliott. In the latter chapter, the reader is given an in-depth look at the career of what the author calls “arguably the most important self-esteem theorist since William James.” Examining his training and career is instructive because through it one gets a deeper, more fundamental understanding of the historical and intellectual context from which his theories of the self-concept in general and self-esteem in particular arose.

Section Two, Conceptual and Methodological Issues, consists of four chapters. Chapter 3, “Theorizing the Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Identity” by Laurie H. Ervin and Sheldon Stryker, examines the theoretical and predictive importance in linking self-esteem research and identity theory. The authors argue that juxtaposing identity and self-esteem in a common framework of role choice behavior can serve the larger contemporary purpose of viewing social behavior as a product of jointly operating cognitive (identity) and affective (self-esteem) variables. They attempt this linkage by drawing on a set of conceptual developments and refinements in both the self-esteem and identity theory literatures that may reveal linkages between aspects of self-esteem and aspects of identity theory that have previously gone unnoticed. Chapter 4, “Measuring Self-Esteem: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Considered” by Timothy J. Owens and Adam B. King, examines and compares unidimensional and bidimensional self-esteem measurement models among a national sample of 12th grade black, white, and Hispanic boys and girls. Concluding that a bidimensional model fits the data best, the authors go on to examine the discriminating power of self-deprecation and self-worth among an array of social and psychological variables across male and female whites and blacks. Chapter 5, “The Self as a Social Force” by Viktor Gecas, argues the importance of self-esteem as a causal agent in human society. Picking up on this underdeveloped theme in Rosenberg’s work and in the work of self-concept scholars in general, the author argues that, when examining the self as a social force, researchers need to not only consider the nature of self-reflexivity, self-objectification processes, and the motivational significance of emotions, but particularly the nature and types of self-motives. Chapter 6, “Self-Certainty and Self-Esteem” by Ron Wright, argues that in order to understand people’s psychological experiences and predict their responses requires knowledge not only of their level of self-esteem (however multifaceted), but also the certainty, clarity, consistency, and stability of their self-image. He does this by distinguishing one’s cognitive representation of oneself (self-schema) and one’s evaluation of oneself (self-esteem). Acknowledging these distinctions is important because uncertainty in either of these two domains leads to different consequences.

Section Three, Social and Life Course Contexts of Self-Esteem, includes four chapters. Chapter 7, “Self-Esteem of Children and Adolescents” by David H. Demo, takes its lead from Rosenberg’s work on the dynamics, cor-

relates, and consequences of children's self-concept. Accepting the challenge, the author reviews and assesses what we know and what we do not know about how children see themselves, and suggests some important directions for extending and refining the study of children's self-concepts to include not only self-esteem but other dimensions of the self as well. Chapter 8, "Failure of the Dream: Notes for a Research Program on Self-Esteem and Failed Identity in Adulthood" by Norman Goodman, outlines the broad parameters of a nascent research program focused on understanding how failure to achieve or succeed in a central personal identity is incorporated into a person's sense of self, particularly her or his level of self-esteem, and how the person copes with this situation. Chapter 9, "Self-Esteem and Work Across the Life Course" by Carmi Schooler and Gary Oates, examines the empirical relation of self-esteem and work by positing a causal relationship between self-esteem and occupational conditions as people age. Using longitudinal data spanning three decades, the authors find that the causal role of self-esteem in shaping the nature of one's adult work is not very predictable, while reporting the intriguing, though apparently counterintuitive, finding that being self-deprecating leads to doing substantively complex work. Chapter 10, "Comfort with the Self" by the late Roberta G. Simmons, extends her concept of "arenas of comfort" by defining comfort with one's self, linking it to the literature on emotional states tied to self, and addressing two key research questions: (1) What particular aspects of the self-picture are related to being comfortable or uncomfortable with oneself? (2) How does the social and cultural context alter the likelihood that individuals experience comfort or discomfort with the self?

Section Four, *Self-Esteem and Social Inequalities*, consists of five articles dealing with a variety of inequality and social stratification issues surrounding self-esteem. Chapter 11, "Self-Esteem and Race" by Pamela Braboy Jackson and Sonia P. Lassiter, examines the current state of research on race and self-esteem. The authors conclude that too little specific attention has been focused on some of the fundamental assumptions underlying this research tradition, including self-esteem development among ethnic minorities. Calling for a more social definition of the self, the authors not only hope to bring the research on race and self-esteem more in line with broader self-concept theory, but also draw attention to the disproportionate theoretical and empirical work devoted to black-white differences in self-esteem. Chapter 12, "Gender and Self-Esteem: Narrative and Efficacy in the Negotiation of Structural Factors" by Anne Statham and Katherine Rhoades, employs feminist identity theories and two unique datasets (one of women currently or recently receiving public assistance and the other of Native American men and women) to address two key research questions. First, how do social expectations surrounding the norms "individualism" or "The American Dream" (which are differentially available to and absorbed by var-

ious social groups) function in the complex interweave of factors shaping self-esteem? Second, what factors, if any, prevent or impede certain individuals from incorporating such basic expectations of American life? Chapter 13, "Bereavement and the Loss of Mattering" by Leonard I. Pearlin and Allen J. LeBlanc, looks at the family caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease. Operating under the supposition that the shift away from a two-way relationship between the caregiver and the cared for to a much more one-sided relationship directed almost exclusively at the person with Alzheimer's is easier to accept and less detrimental to the caregiver when reciprocated mattering (e.g., feeling needed by and significant to the other) had been embedded in the history of the relationship. The analyses are framed around two concerns: One, looking for the circumstances and conditions underlying differences in a caregiver's perceived loss of mattering to the cared for, and (2), examining some of the possible consequences of loss of mattering. Chapter 14, "Self-Esteem and Social Inequality" by L. Edward Wells, notes the many competing, contradictory, and inconsistent findings and conclusions in the literature on self-esteem and stratificational bases of social inequality (e.g., socioeconomic class, race, gender, and ethnicity). Rather than throw our hands up in despair, he argues for researchers to exercise modesty and caution in their analytical aspirations and theoretical pretensions, and offers two noteworthy cautions. First, scholars need to avoid oversimplified, unidirectional, mechanically causal, and overly deterministic models of self-evaluation. The empirical research reveals the complexity and nonlinearity of the self. The second caveat entails the need to avoid decontextualized accounts of self-evaluation. Self-awareness and self-evaluation are variable aspects of ongoing behavioral processes that occur within specific social contexts (e.g., social settings, occasions, relationships, and role-identities). They are not simply in people's heads. Failure to acknowledge this leaves us with a pale abstraction with weak predictive and explanatory utility for real experiences and behaviors. Chapter 15, "Self-Evaluation and Stratification Beliefs" by Matthew O. Hunt, explores the empirical relation of self-esteem and mastery to ideological beliefs about the causes of poverty. Using a sample of African Americans, Latinos, and whites, he addresses three essential questions. First, does a relationship between self-evaluation and stratification beliefs exist? Two, do any such relationships exist net of the effects of race/ethnicity and other sociodemographic variables? Three, are there differences in the relationships between self-evaluations and stratification beliefs among African Americans, Latinos, and whites?

Finally, Section Five, Self-Esteem and Social Problems, consists of three chapters. Chapter 16, "The Science and Politics of Self-Esteem: Schools Caught in the Middle" by Martin V. Covington, argues that the current and ongoing debate regarding self-esteem and success in school has misguided the American public and policymakers alike for two fundamental reasons.

First, the basic target of public concern should not be school achievement per se. Student achievement flourishes to the extent that the reasons for striving in school are taken into account. This, he argues, is the essential and proper message of the self-esteem perspective. Second, not only is increased achievement the wrong goal, but so too are many of the proposed means to achieve it. Attempts by pro-esteem advocates to encourage self-pride in students solely by reason of their uniqueness as human beings, for instance, will fail if feelings of well-being are not accompanied by well-doing. Chapter 17, "Self-Esteem and Deviant Behavior: A Critical Review and Theoretical Integration" by Howard B. Kaplan, acknowledges that inherent appeal of linking self-esteem issues with deviant (especially delinquent) behavior. Unfortunately, however, the empirical literature on the relationship is rife with contradictory or weak findings. The author attempts to remedy this problem by drawing on the extant literature and posing a theoretical framework that is both coherent and inclusive. Chapter 18, "Low Self-Esteem People: A Collective Portrait" by the late Morris Rosenberg and Timothy J. Owens, examines the pernicious effect that persistent low self-esteem has on people's lives. Combining a literature review with empirical findings, the authors show the complex social, psychological, emotional, and behavior correlates engendered in the low self-esteem syndrome.

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2 The Self as Social Product and Social Force

*Morris Rosenberg and the Elaboration of a
Deceptively Simple Effect*

Gregory C. Elliott

INTRODUCTION

Among sociologists and other behavioral and social scientists, Morris Rosenberg is most widely known for his comprehensive and theoretically rich work on the self-concept. Indeed, Rosenberg is arguably the most important self-esteem theorist since William James. *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*, the seminal contribution to the field, shared the American Association for the Advancement of Science Sociopsychological Prize in 1963; *Black and White Self-Esteem: The Urban School Child* (1972) resolved an anomaly that had vexed researchers of self-esteem for years; and *Conceiving the Self* (1979) earned him the Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship Award from the American Sociological Association in 1981.

Therefore, to understand contemporary work on self-esteem and the self-concept in general, one has to have some understanding of the context from which Rosenberg's theories of the self-concept have arisen; hence, a look at his training and career is highly instructive.

But Morris Rosenberg's bequest to the discipline of sociology is much broader and deeper. In particular, a close reading of his theoretical and empirical studies reveals that his singular contribution to our fuller understanding of society is his ability to construct connections between sometimes apparently unlinked elements of our discipline.

I will focus on three important examples of synthesis. First, within microsociology, his study of the self has combined two distinct paradigms: cognitive social psychology and symbolic interactionism; his ability to see the

My deepest thanks go to Florence Rosenberg for providing me with unpublished material from Manny's files and personal insights into his sociological imagination. Her conversations with me were simultaneously informative, insightful, and amusing. David Segal provided constructive suggestions on an earlier draft, and I am indebted to him for his insights. Any errors or distortions that remain are my responsibility.

self as both an entity and a process has enriched our understanding of the social development of the individual.

Second, Rosenberg was not only interested in intra- and interpersonal issues for the self; he was committed to an understanding of the reciprocal connection between what happened to the individual and the structure of society. In this vein, he sought to blend issues of micro- and macrosociology.

Third, Morris Rosenberg's contribution to the literature of research methods was equally impressive. His appreciation of the conceptual complexities was informed and matched by his appreciation of sophisticated analytical techniques. Indeed, his research is a textbook example of the effective interplay of theory and empirical analysis.

GENESIS: GRADUATE STUDIES AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

In the aftermath of World War II, Columbia University became a vibrant center of theoretical and methodological growth in sociology. Crothers (1990, p. 6) identified three major dimensions of the "Columbia tradition": a focus on key issues in the discipline, with a careful concern to link theory and methods; a focus on the importance of social structure; and an integration of domains of study into wider frameworks for understanding society. These aims were pursued under the complementary leadership of Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld, the former most renowned for his contributions to social theory and the latter for a focus on methodological issues.

The atmosphere of the department was both invigorating and intimidating. Lipset (1976, p. 2) notes: "What made the Columbia department so exciting in the early days of the Lazarsfeld-Merton era was the sense the students had that they were in on the ground floor of an enterprise that believed it was about to remake social science if not the world." At the same time, the high standards set for graduate student performance made the learning experience very intense and occasionally discomfiting. Those who survived tended to be those who asserted their considerable talents to gain the attention of the relatively small faculty.

It was in this heady atmosphere that Rosenberg developed his orientations to and an expertise in sociology. After spending a year at the New School for Social Research, he began graduate studies at Columbia in 1947. In commenting on his matriculation, he was characteristically self-effacing: "Why was I accepted? Well, I think it was the patriotic fervor that prevailed at the time, that a grateful society couldn't do enough for its returning veterans [of World War II]. I had three years in the army, so it was simply the patriotic thing to do to allow any veteran in" (Rosenberg, n.d. 2, p. 1). Be that as it may, he immersed himself in the rigors of department study.

At the time, required course work for the Ph.D. could be completed in two years, and all that remained before undertaking the dissertation were the oral

examinations: "The great trial by fire ... a two hour oral examination by people of incredible eminence and general lack of sympathy" (Rosenberg, n.d. 2, p. 7). Although failure was not uncommon, he passed them on his first effort. Through it all, his affection for the discipline grew: "I've never had a moment's regret about the decision [to pursue a graduate degree in sociology], and that extends over a long period of time" (Rosenberg, n.d. 2, p. 2).

For financial reasons, most dissertators did not stay around the department and sought employment elsewhere. Rosenberg's experience was different. In 1949, Paul Lazarsfeld organized the Bureau of Applied Social Research at American University and sent a protégé, a colleague at Columbia, to direct operations. Someone was desperately needed to fill in the courses left vacant by the departure, and, largely on the strength of his oral examinations performance, Rosenberg was hired to teach them. He was not Lazarsfeld's first choice for the job, "but you've been chosen; we'll make a deal. I'll teach you mathematics, and you can teach me Merton" (Rosenberg, n.d. 2, p. 4).

So began a long and productive association with Paul Lazarsfeld. Rosenberg was hired for a summer position at the Bureau of Applied Social Research. During the academic year, he was appointed assistant to Lazarsfeld, who had just become chair of the department. This experience culminated in the collaboration on a reader in research methods published as *The Language of Social Research* (1955).

Many people assume that Morris Rosenberg's professional socialization and graduate training was due almost entirely to his association with Paul Lazarsfeld. In fact, he had a working relationship with several of the department's shining lights. His master's thesis, a study of white-collar workers, was written under the direction of C. Wright Mills. Mills's contribution to Rosenberg's theoretical development was extensive: "It was from Mills that I first heard about George Herbert Mead, and it was an influence that lasted till this day" (Rosenberg, n.d. 1, p. 5). In addition, his dissertation defense was chaired by Robert Merton, who impressed upon him the importance of social structures that transcend everyday personal experience and yet shape it. These diverse perspectives on social reality became the foundation for his unique and powerful insights into the nature of the self and the relationship of the self to society.

A VISION OF THE SELF: BLENDING COGNITIVE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Morris Rosenberg's singular contribution to sociology has been the development of a comprehensive analysis of the self. Most would identify the notion of the self-concept as the centerpiece of this analysis, and, indeed, his contributions to an understanding of the self as entity mark him as the leading theorist and researcher in this domain. But Rosenberg's approach also included

an understanding of the self as a process, a way of being. His true contribution to a sociological analysis of the self came from blending the perspectives of the self as an entity and as a process into a single, coherent, and unified understanding.

The Self As an Entity: Cognitive Social Psychology

Thinking of the self as an entity means viewing the self as an organization of “the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself [or herself] as an object” (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). The self-concept is a product of socialization, constructed from infancy and throughout the life course; further, it is the source of personal motivations that exert a powerful influence on social behavior. This view of the self is a reflection of the Cognitive Social Psychology paradigm.

In social psychology, paradigms are distinguished by their assumptions about the essence of the unit of analysis, that is, what it means to be a human being. Cognitive social psychologists see human beings as information processors who glean the meaning of the stimuli in their environment and act according to their understanding of this meaning. What makes life (and the study of human behavior) interesting is the fact that our human frailties make us less than perfect information processors; issues such as selective perception, error, distortion, and bias become important in accounting for variation in human social behavior.

It soon became apparent that one could process information about the self in much the same way that one processes information about the surrounding environment. Assisted by Bem’s (1965, 1972) theory of self-attribution, cognitive social psychologists began a focus on the by-product of such self-scrutiny: the development of the self-concept. The myriad of understandings of the self were not discrete but took the form of a schema, a structure of the process of cognition that operates as a framework for organizing and interpreting information about the self (cf. Markus, 1977).

Although others have made major contributions to the field (e.g., Gergen, 1971; Wylie, 1974, 1979), Morris Rosenberg’s gift was to articulate in great detail the nature of the self-concept as a schema. As his career progressed, his work demonstrated an increasing understanding of the structure of the self-concept that organized the elements into a coherent whole and therefore made possible a better understanding of the effects of the self-concept on personal development and social interaction.

The first step in Rosenberg’s development of theories about the self-concept is best represented by his award-winning *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image* (1965/1989). Based on analysis of questionnaire responses of over 5,000 high school juniors and seniors from 10 schools in New York state, the study was the first large-scale effort to investigate what Rosenberg then called the self-image. “This study takes as its point of departure the

assumption that the self-image is central to the subjective life of the individual, largely determining his [or her] thoughts, feelings, and behavior" (Rosenberg, 1965, p. vii). Further, reflecting his training at Columbia, Rosenberg recognized that one's self-portrait is not created in a vacuum. He was careful to focus on the importance of social structure (family, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status) in the development of a self-image. "These social groupings impose on the child a characteristic style of life, set of values, and system of beliefs and ideals which covertly, imperceptibly, unintentionally, but no less powerfully, provide the bases for self-judgment. With a different background the child would *be* different and would see himself [or herself] differently" (Rosenberg, 1965, pp. vii–viii; emphasis in the original).

The book offers a wide range of ways in which the self-esteem is central to the life experiences of adolescents. Self-esteem is affected by family disruption (but only if the divorce occurs when the mother is relatively young) and birth order and family structure (younger boys in a family of mostly girls have higher levels of self-esteem, apparently because they feel an unconditional self-acceptance encouraged by parents' special relationship to them). In addition, low self-esteem was found to be related to an unstable self-concept, psychosomatic symptoms of anxiety, interpersonal vulnerability and awkwardness, reduced faith in people, and docility.

This seminal effort laid the groundwork for many issues that followed in Rosenberg's investigation of the self-concept. For example, his chapter on "Parental Interest" is the earliest indication of his interest in *matte*ring, the self-perceived extent to which one makes a difference in the lives of others. He found that students who believed that their parents lacked interest in them (as evinced by parents' interest in their friendships, their academic performance, and their contributions to dinnertime conversation) had much lower levels of self-esteem than students who perceived their parents to be interested in them. "Of course, it is probably not interest *per se* which accounts for the observed relationships. ... But whatever other kinds of parental behavior may be reflected in these indicators, they probably at least reflect the idea that the child is important to someone else, that others consider him [or her] of worth, of value, of concern. The feeling that one is important to a significant other is probably essential to the development of a feeling of self-worth" (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 146).

Rosenberg returned to the concept of *matte*ring in greater detail later (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). He distinguished among three forms of *matte*ring: attention (one is simply noticed by others), importance (others invest in one's welfare), and dependence (one is needed by others). In a focus on the relationships with parents, the data from several surveys of school-children (Baltimore, New York, East Chicago, and a nationwide sample) suggest that *matte*ring was an important factor in self-esteem, depression, and

delinquency; further, these children believed they matter to the extent that they considered their parents a significant part of their own lives.

The study of mattering is in its infancy, and it holds much promise as a motivational element of the self-concept. Unfortunately, Morris Rosenberg died before he could give it his full attention again. It remains for others to follow the promising lead that he has given us.

As Rosenberg's research in the self-concept continued, his theoretical understanding of its structure and processes deepened. In studying self-concept development, he followed the cognitive social psychology credo that people learn how to be human beings. In this view, very little of "human nature" is innate; rather, through socialization people build an understanding of who they are and where they fit into the social system. Two important processes in this construction are reflected appraisals (Sullivan, 1947), in which people internalize an understanding of themselves that is communicated to them by significant others, and social comparisons (Festinger, 1954), in which people compare themselves to significant others on self-concept characteristics when no objective standards are available.

Rosenberg's important insight into this process also derived from the cognitive social psychology paradigm. A person is bombarded with a myriad of stimuli in any social situation, and it is literally impossible to attend to all of them; therefore, we engage in selective perception, that is, we focus on some stimuli to the exclusion of others. Although some selective perception may be situationally induced (we are likely not to ignore the speeding automobile bearing down on us), cognitive social psychologists have discovered that we often focus our attention in particular domains through the influence of motivations internal to ourselves.

He used this understanding of motivated selective perception to explain an interesting phenomenon in self-concept development: some people, whose significant others provide them with negative reflected appraisals and social comparisons, do not, in fact, develop low self-esteem. They avoid self-condemnation by being very selective about the information they process to understand themselves. Rosenberg (1967) identified five forms of selectivity that can protect an individual from invidious reflected appraisals and social comparisons: self-values (people focus on personal characteristics that are positive); interpretation (people put the best "spin" on facts that cannot be avoided); standards (people set goals that are easily attainable); relationships (people associate with those who think well of them); and situations (people select situations that show themselves to their best advantage).

Rosenberg pointed out that this selectivity works both ways: for example, we may not only choose significant others because of their favorable evaluations of us; we may also pay particular attention to the opinions of others who have earned our respect or affection. "It turns out that if we are deeply concerned about particular others' opinions of us or if we trust their judg-

ment, then our views of what they think of us will clearly be related to what we think of ourselves; but if we do not value their good will or trust their judgment, then the effect on our self-concept is almost invariably smaller. Not only the attitudes *of* others, but also the attitudes *toward* others, affect our self-concept" (Rosenberg, 1973, p. 857; emphasis in the original).

One focus of special interest involves the vulnerability of a person's self-image. Despite the motivational aspects that lead one to seek high self-esteem and stability in the self-concept, research suggests that many find self-appraisal a burden and a source of great anxiety.

To understand the processes by which the sense of self is threatened, Rosenberg recognized that it would be most fruitful to study adolescents. Researchers from every perspective recognize adolescence as a period of great disturbance in the course of personal growth. In their analysis of data from the sample of children taken from Baltimore city schools, Simmons, Rosenberg, and Rosenberg (1971) found that early adolescents (12 to 13 year olds) were much more likely than younger children to exhibit high self-consciousness, lower self-esteem, poorer reflected appraisals, and less stable self-concepts. Further, there seemed to be a structural component to this difference, in that children in early adolescence were much more likely to suffer these consequences if they were in junior high school than if they were still in elementary school.

Rosenberg continued to explore the deleterious consequences of a damaged self-concept. I was fortunate to collaborate with him on a study of transient depersonalization, the temporary feeling of being estranged from oneself. "When in the grip of transient depersonalization, individuals do not recognize themselves, are unsure of who they are" (Elliott, Rosenberg, & Wagner, 1984, p. 115). In examining the internal sources for variations in transient depersonalization, we found that low self-esteem and highly unstable self-concepts are conducive to its recurrence. Further, more than half of the effect of self-esteem was mediated by other dimensions of the self-concept (stability, the tendency to fantasize, and the tendency to engage in fabricated self-presentations). With each investigation, he discovered more of the critical importance of a healthy understanding of the self, both for personal growth and for interpersonal relationships.

Morris Rosenberg long had a special interest in the psychological well-being of the individual. His theory of the operation of the self-concept told him that a sense of the self as somehow deficient would have a profound impact on psychological functioning and mental health. A review of his and others' research (Rosenberg, 1981) illustrates the variety of effects: low self-esteem people are more depressed and unhappy; they have greater levels of anxiety, on both somatic and attitudinal indicators; they show greater impulse to aggression, irritability, and resentment; they suffer a sense of anomie and a lack of satisfaction with life in general. Those with low self-

esteem have greater vulnerability to criticism, less self-concept stability, and greater social anxiety (cf. Elliott, 1984, 1986).

The culmination of Rosenberg's investigation of the self-concept was the publication of *Conceiving the Self*. It was the most ambitious attempt to synthesize what was then known about the self-concept into a single, coherent understanding. It begins with a discussion of the basic nature of the self-concept, an elaboration of the content and the processes of its development. As a cognitive social psychologist, Rosenberg believed that in learning how to be a human being, one develops an understanding of who one is. In *Conceiving the Self*, he works from the axiom that becoming human is a social process, not a biological one. He discusses the building blocks that are put together to build the self-concept and how those building blocks are shaped through the processes of reflected appraisals and social comparison.

He also elucidated a comprehensive understanding of the self as a developing thing, begun in infancy but continuing through the life course. He combined the disparate approaches of developmental and clinical psychology with the sociological focus on the importance of social structure to give a more complete picture of the bumpy road that is self-concept development.

I want to argue, however, that another major but sometimes overlooked contribution of that book was a coherent and theoretically meaningful description of the structure of the self-concept. He was able to take the myriad components of the self-concept and fit them together in ways that gave a fuller understanding of their importance.

And his development of that structure grew ever deeper. At a lecture given in 1982 at the University of Maryland, Morris Rosenberg presented the following picture of the self-concept:

- Content: the elements of the self
 - Social identity: defined by one's position in the social structure
 - Dispositions: tendencies to respond to stimuli
- Structure: the place of elements of the self
 - Salience: atypical elements of the self, those that make the individual stand out from others
 - Centrality: self-defining elements, characteristics that make up the self-perceived essence of the individual
 - Consistency: coherence among the components
- Dimensions: continua of experience of the self on which individuals find themselves, including self-esteem, stability, self-confidence
- Focus of attention: the appraisal of the self
 - Self-consciousness: chronic tendency to focus inward on one's personal characteristics or one's status as an object of others' attention
 - Self-awareness: situationally induced inward focus

- Regions: areas of the self
 - Conscious versus Unconscious
 - Interior versus Exterior
 - Intrapersonal (contained within the physical self) versus Extrapersonal (ego-extensions)
- Planes: levels on which the self can be experienced
 - Perceived real: the self as objectively experienced
 - Potential: the self as a possibility to be realized
 - Fantasy: the self of the imagination, never to be realized
 - Normative: the morally obligated self, who one *should* be
 - Presentation: the self one allows others to see
- Motivations: the impelling components of the self, including self-esteem, self-concept stability, and self-consistency.

Although there has been some question about the importance of the self-concept, especially its most-researched dimension of self-esteem (cf. Hewitt, 1998; Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989), Rosenberg's research reveals otherwise. He demonstrated that the bearing of the self-concept on personal development and social interaction was complex and sometimes counterintuitive, but substantial (cf. Rosenberg, 1989). For example, he embraced the application of structural equation models as a technique for examining the structural relationships among self-concept components and behavior; these techniques allowed a more elaborated and processual understanding of the motivational properties of the self-concept. In addition, he understood that the development of the self-concept followed patterns that were a complex function of the social context of the individual. I will return to these issues in more detail later. Suffice it to say at this point that part of the genius of Morris Rosenberg's theory of the self was his ability to develop sophisticated and complex patterns of relationships both of elements within the self-concept and between those elements and behavior.

The Self as Process: Symbolic Interactionism

A very different approach to the self is offered by the Symbolic Interactionism paradigm. From this perspective, the human being is seen as more than a *perceiver* of meaning (the focus of cognitive social psychology); rather, the human being is a *creator* of meaning through the construction and application of symbols to the elements of everyday life. In particular, meaning is not inherent in a thing, a person, or a gesture, but must be socially negotiated by the participants in a social interaction.

The ability to deal in symbols is possible because of the self; but here the self is understood to be a process, a way of being, and not an entity. Mead (1934) first articulated the notion of the self as a process in his description of the conversation between the "I" and the "Me."

The “I” consists of the impulses lying within the person, supplying energy and motivation for behavior; it is diffuse and unorganized in its action. In contrast, the “Me” is the generalized other to which behavior is directed; it tells the person the meaning that others would attach to one’s own behavior. The conversation between the “I” and the “Me” reveals the two phases of the self. The impulse to act (“I”) occurs when a stimulus impinges on a person’s awareness; that impulse can be satisfied by any of a number of behaviors in a person’s repertoire. The “Me” provides the meaning that reasonable others might attach to each of these behavioral options, thereby allowing the person to select the behavior that is most in line with one’s own goals in the encounter. As Meltzer (1972, p. 7, emphasis in the original) put it: “The ‘I’ thus gives *propulsion* while the ‘Me’ gives *direction* to the act.”

As previously mentioned, Rosenberg’s appreciation for symbolic interactionism began during his graduate studies, with his master’s thesis work directed by C. Wright Mills. He recognized the importance of the processual nature of the self, even as he worked on the self as an entity. In *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*, he began to blend these two perspectives, choosing as the focal point Mead’s notion that the self is reflexive. Seizing on Mead’s distinction between the “I” and the “Me,” he claimed that the study of the self was unique: “Among all the attitudes which might be studied, then, self-attitudes are unique in this regard – the person holding the attitude and the object toward whom the attitude is held are the same” (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 10). The image of the self emerges as a by-product of taking the role of the other.

Further, Rosenberg used Mead’s notion of the gradual development of the self to argue that this by-product could eventually attain some stability of meaning, even if symbolic interactionists would argue that all meaning (including the meaning of the self) is socially negotiated and therefore subject to continual modification. In the early stage of self-development (the “play” stage) the child can only take the role of particular others; the child is not sufficiently cognitively developed to synthesize each of these perspectives into a unitary standpoint from which to view the self. As a consequence, the child forms a series of discrete and fragmented images of the self. The limitations of the self as a process result in the primitive self-concept found in the younger child: capable of dealing with only the concrete and tangible, the child’s self-concept consists almost entirely of exterior components, such as physical characteristics, observable behaviors, specific abilities or achievements.

As the child cognitively matures, it enters the “game” stage of the self, characterized by the newfound ability to take the role of the *generalized* other. The child learns to synthesize the perspective on itself from a multitude of other people because it has gained the ability to deal with abstractions. The important implication of this fact is a greater sense of continuity

and stability in its experiences. Although the self-concept is still subject to redefinition at any time, the child's own ability to create a single perspective on itself, coupled with the efforts of its significant others to foster a unitary self-image, acts to preserve a continuous and stable sense of self.

Morris Rosenberg's more recent directions in the application of symbolic interactionism can be found in his study of self-objectification. Springing directly from the reflexive nature of the self, self-objectification "refers to all those processes that involve the self as an object to itself" (Rosenberg, 1988, p. 549). He makes the bold argument that self-objectification is one of the major factors contributing to the survival of the species: "The evolutionary significance of this ability is that it enables humans to construct the kinds of behaviors that are better adapted to meet the demands of the environment" (Rosenberg, 1988, p. 551). In addition, it helps make possible human society, both in the adherence to rules ("The individual may hold organismic impulses up to the light of his or her scrutiny and evaluation before making an action decision" [Rosenberg, 1988, p. 553]) and appropriate role performance ("It is the unique capacity of the human organism for self-construction that brings into being the human product that ultimately serves society's needs" [Rosenberg, 1988, p. 556]).

Self-objectification is not without its dangers. As with all human capabilities, it can bring sorrow as well as satisfaction. Rosenberg recognized self-objectification as the source of such personal problems as self-estrangement, awareness of mortality, suicide, and low self-esteem. They are the price we pay for a sophisticated humanity and a resultant complex society.

In a manuscript written as the first chapter of a planned book, Rosenberg underscored the importance of self-objectification because of its pervasiveness in human experience. "I believe that the most constant feature of human consciousness is an awareness of self. ... Admittedly, there are times when we succeed in driving it almost completely out of our awareness for a time. For most of our experience, however, it is largely inescapable. It does not even leave us completely in sleep" (Rosenberg, n.d. 3, pp. 13–14). Self-objectification is motivated behavior; we spend so much time keeping ourselves under our own scrutiny because we have learned to expect certain things of ourselves and we utilize our self-awareness to attain these goals. In making this assertion, he connects the process of the self to its entity counterpart in cognitive social psychology.

Further, Rosenberg borrowed from Charles Horton Cooley's (1922, p. 184) notion of the "looking-glass self": "A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his [or her] judgment of that appearance; and some sort of feeling, such as pride or mortification." In emphasizing the evaluative nature of the self-attitude, he noted: "The point is that these emotions – pride and mortification – are aroused only with regard to the self or ego-

involved objects. ... This is one reason why the study of self-attitudes has greater significance for mental health than does the study of most other attitudes" (Rosenberg, 1965, pp. 10–11).

It was a natural transition to the study of emotions. In his address to the American Sociological Association on being presented the Cooley-Mead award in 1989, Morris Rosenberg used his symbolic interactionism to add to the burgeoning literature on the sociology of emotions. "The central message of this paper is that reflexivity works a fundamental change in the nature of human emotions. Once the internal state of arousal comes to be 'worked over' by these reflexive processes, they acquire a totally different character" (Rosenberg, 1990, p. 3). Reflexivity makes possible the identification of emotions, in that physiological arousal must be labeled before a particular emotion is felt (cf. Schachter & Singer, 1962); it facilitates emotional display, in that to convey an emotion to others, we need to view our attempts from the others' perspective; and reflexivity is what makes possible the creation of emotional experiences, in that people may try to control their exposure to stimuli that bring on particular emotions. In all these instances, the symbolic interactionist notion of taking the role of the other lies at the heart of emotional experience.

Perhaps Rosenberg's most insightful use of symbolic interactionism came from his analysis of mental illness (Rosenberg, 1984, 1996). Locating insanity in the process of social interaction, rather than entirely within the individual, he argued, "What makes behavior insane (or psychotic) is the inability of the observer to take the role of, or understand the viewpoint of, the actor" (Rosenberg, 1984, p. 291). He did not deny that biochemical or neurological malfunctions were involved in mental illness; rather, he asserted that one of its additional essential features is interpersonal. "Mental illness represents a radical rupture of the bond connecting human beings to one another. It takes two to make a psychotic – an actor and an observer" (Rosenberg, 1992). Just as Goffman (1963) noted that a stigma was a relationship between an attribute and a stereotype, so Rosenberg recognized that mental illness is a result of a severely damaged relationship between one person and others.

Normal human relationships, from a symbolic interactionist point of view, depend on the ability of people to connect with each other at the level of the mind. Because we cannot do so directly, we must make inferences about what others are thinking and feeling. The foundation for these inferences is our ability to take the role of the other, to see matters from the other's vantage point. Although empathy may be a by-product of such a process, the true value of taking the role of the other is to understand how the other assigns meaning to stimuli in one's everyday world. Rosenberg articulated five significant benefits that follow from the ability to take the role of the other: predictability in social interaction, comprehension of otherwise puzzling behaviors, effective communication, deep and nuanced interpersonal relationships, and control of others.

Diagnosis of mental illness involves social consensus; the inability of one person to understand the thoughts, feelings, or behaviors of another will not do, if no one else shares this problem. But when the definition of the situation held by all others cannot be shared by only one person, and this inability recurs from one situation to the next, we are more ready to judge the outlier as mentally ill.

Rosenberg's deep use of the Symbolic Interactionist paradigm took the paradigm beyond the "labeling theory" approach (Scheff, 1974), in which a diagnosis of mental illness followed when an aberrant behavior could not be classified in any of the "well-defined" categories of deviance (crime, drug abuse, sexual perversion), and reconciled it with the more clinical approach. Whereas physical symptoms are usually context-free in their meaning, the meaning of mental dysfunction symptoms may depend on the context in which they occur.¹ And the wide variety of treatments prescribed for mental symptoms share one objective that becomes more meaningful when the Symbolic Interactionist paradigm is applied to them: to eliminate the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that other people cannot understand and replace them with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that they can (Rosenberg, 1992, p. 109).

SELF AND SOCIETY: LINKING MICRO- AND MACROSOCIOLOGY

Morris Rosenberg's professional socialization at Columbia would not allow his theory of the self to focus solely on intrapersonal and interpersonal levels; he explicitly placed the development of the self and its relation to social behavior in the context of the social structures that surround a person's everyday doings. Further, he did not see social structure simply as a backdrop against which the travails of personal growth and interpersonal behavior worked themselves out; rather, he recognized that elements of structure were deeply involved in the life experiences of people.

The connection between social structure and the individual is best exemplified in the theory of contextual dissonance. Rosenberg united structural and personal issues when he asserted, "It is not simply the individual's social characteristics nor the social characteristics of the neighborhood in which he [or she] lives which are crucial, but the *relationship* between the two – their concordance or discordance – which is of central significance" (Rosenberg, 1962, 1; emphasis in the original).

Application of this theory allowed him to resolve an anomaly that had long puzzled researchers of the self-concept. As he put it in the ground-

¹ In *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller, Yossarian could not really be crazy if he acted crazy in order to avoid flying further missions. Thanks to David Segal for this example.

breaking *Black and White Self-Esteem* (1972), "In the past two decades, at least, one assumption generally accepted virtually as an article of faith in both the popular and scientific literature is that blacks are more likely to have lower self-esteem than are whites" (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972, p. 1). From both reflected appraisals and social comparisons, blacks would receive the message loud and clear that they were, in so many ways, inferior to whites; it would be difficult not to internalize a message so frequently and consistently communicated, and so blacks would suffer damage to their self-concepts and have difficulty carrying on in the world.

The hypothesis seemed self-evident. There was only one problem: it had little, if any, support in the myriad of studies that contrasted the self-esteem levels of whites and blacks. In citing 12 studies conducted up to that time, Rosenberg and Simmons (1972, pp. 6–7) concluded that the vast majority revealed either no difference in self-esteem or a higher self-esteem among blacks; in those few in which whites enjoyed greater self-esteem, the difference was much smaller than would have been expected by the theory.

Rosenberg's theory of contextual dissonance resolved the anomaly by providing a basis from which to conduct a more elaborate investigation of the issue. In his sample of children from Baltimore, he noticed that about 90% of the blacks and an even higher percentage of whites lived in racially segregated neighborhoods and, to a large extent, attended racially segregated schools. This segregated experience acts as a buffer for black children, insulating them from the negative reflected appraisals and social comparisons that would lower their self-esteem. "It is, in fact, only when black children are integrated that they learn directly what it means personally to be a member of the minority; for them an integrated environment constitutes a 'dissonant racial context.' It is segregation that represents a 'consonant racial context' for the black child" (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972, p. 26).

Morris Rosenberg was never satisfied when a basic result emerged, even when it resolved a serious problem. He pursued the mechanisms and processes by which the result came to be; he was only satisfied when he had some sense of the *how* and the *why* of the phenomenon (Rosenberg, 1975, 1977). For example, Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) reported that blacks in a dissonant racial context are more exposed to racial prejudice, perceive their race's standing in society as lower, and were more affected by growing up in a broken family.

Contextual arguments also helped explain why there is little association between self-esteem and socioeconomic status (SES) among children, whereas among adults there is a strong positive association. As Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978, p. 59) pointed out, "The special relevance of social class for self-esteem obviously rests in the comparison of one's prestige with that of other people." Because their neighborhoods and schools tend to be homoge-

neous with respect to SES, no meaningful comparisons are possible, and so no one suffers. But as children grow up, they become more aware of the status hierarchy that in fact exists in our society; invidious contrasts become possible, and the self-esteem of children is likely to suffer. Indeed, Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978, p. 71) found that among the youngest children in their sample, SES and self-esteem were virtually unrelated; in the 12–14 age group, a modest positive association emerged; and among the children 15 or older, the association was as strong as that found among adults. Once again, a consonant social context protects the individual from any negative assessments from society at large, whereas a dissonant context makes those assessments a part of one's everyday experience.

The source of Rosenberg's insightful integration of the individual and social structure reveals still another way in which he synthesized perspectives in sociology. Turning to phenomenology (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966), he recognized that the objective reality known as society is a social construction, created and maintained in the everyday doings of individuals. At the same time, phenomenologists acknowledge that society becomes a subjective reality to individuals only as it is mediated by socializing agents, such as the family, peers, and school.

Whereas other researchers were assuming that the existence of prejudiced people and institutions of necessity meant lower self-esteem for the targets of that prejudice, Rosenberg argued that the phenomenological world of the young child might serve as a barrier that would protect him or her from such damage. He warned against the "veridicality fallacy. ... The fallacy here lies in assuming that the *existence* of a structural condition corresponds to *exposure* to that structural condition. That something exists does not mean that it exists for me. If an objective condition is going to have subjective consequences, it must enter the individual's experience in some way (Rosenberg, n.d. 4, p. 2; emphasis in the original).

Rosenberg pressed the phenomenological point: "The individual's location in the social structure does not have meaning as such; rather, it is given meaning by the society. ... But if the meaning of a social category derives from its interpretation by society, then it can be expected to have different meanings in different contexts" (Rosenberg, n.d. 4, p. 37). We cannot personally experience all of society; the positions we occupy in the social order, and the roles incumbent to them, are the way that we connect to society. In short, our understanding of what society is like is a product of the contexts in which we learn about and experience society; what we internalize as a subjective reality is primarily a result of the significant individuals and institutions that are part of our daily lives. As he put it, "As such, social structure has no psychological meaning; it is only as it is translated into social *experience* of one or another type that it conditions the way we think, feel, and behave" (Rosenberg, n.d. 4, p. 55; emphasis in the original).

THEORY AND METHODS: FORGING A SYNERGISTIC LINK

Morris Rosenberg's experience at Columbia was fortunate, in that it provided a firm foundation in both abstract theory and research methods. Paul Lazarsfeld was the mentor most responsible for the latter development; when Lazarsfeld became chair of the department and hired him as his assistant, Rosenberg was in a singular position to take advantage of the opportunities for intellectual growth – whether he wanted to or not: “Now, once you were involved with Lazarsfeld, you were entwined in his tentacles, and he immediately co-opted you, and so he integrated me. ... During that fall [1950], Lazarsfeld told me I was going to be working with him on a reader in methodology. He didn't ask me. He told me” (Rosenberg, n.d. 2, pp. 4–5).

The upshot of being drafted was *The Language of Social Research* (1955), a collection of presentations of methodological techniques and empirical studies exemplifying their use. It was one of the first attempts to address comprehensively the question of *how* one answers the important questions derived from theory. In the introduction, Lazarsfeld and Rosenberg ponder the issue in the frame of philosophy of science; in the end, by distinguishing between “critique” and theory, they decide on the term “methodology.” “It implies that concrete studies are being scrutinized as to the procedures they use, the underlying assumptions they make, the modes of explanation they consider as satisfactory. Methodological analysis in this sense provides the elements from which a future philosophy of the social sciences may be built” (Lazarsfeld & Rosenberg, 1955, p. 4).

Their introduction to the volume reveals a deep awareness of and respect for the interplay between abstract theory and empirical discovery: “At one time or another, almost every social scientist has played a game by arraying against each other the contradictory statements about social behavior which can be found in our fund of proverbial knowledge. It is at this point that methodology becomes useful. We must sort out this knowledge and organize it in some manageable form; we must reformulate common sense statements so that they can be subjected to empirical test; we must locate the gaps so that further investigations are oriented in useful directions. In other words, the embarrassment of riches with which modern social sciences start forces them to develop organizing principles at a very early age” (Lazarsfeld & Rosenberg, 1955, p. 11).

Morris Rosenberg came into his own as a methodologist with the publication of *The Logic of Survey Analysis* (1968). His focus was on the interpretation of survey data; in explicating the procedures that will help with interpretation, he sought to encourage the more sophisticated analysis of relationships by asking how an association between two variables might be better understood by introducing a third variable in the analysis. The proce-

ture was known as elaboration, and Rosenberg's use of it in this work anticipated the development of log-linear analysis of multiway contingency tables (cf. Bishop, Feinberg, & Holland, 1975).

Rosenberg systematically distinguished among several possibilities when more than two variables are involved: indirect relationships, through the operation of intervening variables; spurious associations, when two variables are related only because they each share a relationship with a third; suppressed relationships, in which the association between two variables is dampened by their relation to a third. In calling for the examination of conditional relationships between variables, he was also calling for more complex theories to help specify the exact form of these elaborated relationships.

With the advent of structural equation models (cf. Duncan, 1975; Heise, 1975), Rosenberg found a more sophisticated way to approach multivariate analysis. His collaborations with others showed an appreciation for the intricacies of the technique, as he embraced the notion of latent variable analysis (Elliott et al., 1984) and nonrecursive models (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989). In each case, he found a way to address theoretical issues that he had only been able to answer obliquely in his earlier work; further, these increasingly sophisticated analytical techniques led him to equally sophisticated theories about the self.

CONCLUSION

The legacy of Morris Rosenberg is not only the rich theory and empirical research that he left. It is also the directions in which these contributions point us. He has encouraged us to think about the self in new ways, with an increased level of sophistication and a willingness to cast a wide net among sociological and psychological theories. He would not let himself be boxed in by reliance on a single paradigm or a fixation with one level of focus. There was a method to his eclecticism that produced not a mere agglomeration, but a synthesis into a consistent, coherent, and comprehensive understanding of the self. His ability to surmount the boundaries that separate paradigms and levels of analysis made it possible for him – and us – to know the self, the subject of his lifelong passion, more deeply and more completely; this encouragement by example is his greatest gift to sociologists. Perhaps his own words express his understanding of the beauty and power of sociology best: “I just found Sociology to be congenial to my style, to my way of thinking. It's not too exact; it's not too rigid. It doesn't have clear, sharp boundaries. It suits me perfectly” (Rosenberg, n.d. 2, p. 2).

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SECTION TWO. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

3 Theorizing the Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Identity

Laurie H. Ervin and Sheldon Stryker

What is the relationship between self-esteem and identity? More specifically, how, if at all, does self-esteem impact the concepts and processes that lie at the heart of identity theory: role performances, identity salience, and social network commitments premised on the role-identity?¹ Conversely, how, if at all, is self-esteem impacted by the identity theory processes? It is the purpose of this chapter to address these questions in theoretical terms.

THE IMPORT OF THE QUESTIONS RAISED

The questions raised are interesting and potentially important from several points of view. From the standpoint of a social psychology that places the concept of “self” at the center of its concerns (and there is no concept more central to today’s social psychology, either sociological or psychological, than “self”), successfully relating self-esteem and identity theory is a step in achieving some degree of theoretical integration over a significant portion of the domain of social psychology. From the standpoint of those interested in understanding the sources and the consequences of self-esteem, there is the possibility of extending self-esteem theory by showing how self-esteem is responsive to social structure in more ways than has been previously shown. That is, prior work on the social structural sources of self-esteem has largely focused on stratification variables – social class, gender, race, ethnicity. Identity theory incorporates another order of structural variables, those taking the form of social networks premised on role-relationships, that may be of particular import to self-esteem. For example, linking self-esteem and

¹ The term “identity” is currently used variously, from a subjective sense of sameness and continuity (Erikson, 1968) to a person’s conceptions of who they are tied to social roles (Stryker, 1980). Comparably, “identity theory” is now applied to a range of ideas and concepts having little in common except use of the term. Our use of “identity” and “identity theory” is specifically that of Stryker (see Stryker, 1968, 1980, 1987a; Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

identity theory may enable greater understanding of the "anomaly" (if viewed in purely stratification terms) of the frequent research finding that blacks tend to exhibit higher self-esteem than comparably situated whites (Bachman & O'Malley, 1984; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972).²

Further, there is the possibility of extending self-esteem theory by showing that self-esteem is socially consequential in ways other than its link to psychological health (Baumeister, 1990; Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart, & Halfon 1996; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995),³ or its presumptive but elusive impact on social deviance in the form of delinquency, drug use, and so on (Kaplan, 1980; Matsueda, 1992; McCarthy & Hoge, 1984; Scheff, Retzinger, & Ryan, 1989; Stryker & Craft, 1982; Wells & Rankin, 1983). This extension can occur because identity theory integrates the immediate social environment into the general process of developing, maintaining, and changing the structure of the self and it specifies the impact of the structure of self on role behavior.

From the standpoint of those interested in identity, relating identity theory to self-esteem offers the possibility of extending the explanatory power of the theory. Identity theory was initially formulated as a "minimal" theory (Stryker, 1968); it sought to account for variation in role-behavior by referencing just two variables (i.e., social commitments and identity salience). The intention was to push those variables as far as they could be pushed and to increment its conceptual repertoire as research results indicated the need to do so. Although identity theory has proven its utility in these terms, its explanatory power is hardly complete. Self-esteem is a variable that should, logically, fit into the identity theory formulation; it thus becomes a prime candidate for incorporation into the theory in an attempt to extend the theory's explanatory power.

Finally, and more generally, a major thrust in recent years in sociological and social psychological thinking has been bringing emotion into what have

² Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) show that black primary school children have higher self-esteem than equivalent whites. This difference diminishes in secondary school. Attributing this difference to greater racial homogeneity in primary school classrooms, they move toward an identity theoretical account without achieving its generality (Rosenberg, 1979b; Simmons & Rosenberg, 1975).

³ We note that, depending on the measures used, there may be measurement overlap between self-esteem and depression that would make this relationship tautological. However, they are usually conceptualized quite differently, with depression being characterized by a sense of hopelessness and by physiological symptoms that are not associated with self-esteem. Depression may be accompanied by low self-esteem, but it is not necessarily so. Self-esteem is conceptualized as feelings of self-worth, value, efficacy, and acceptance. Those who are low in self-esteem are not necessarily depressed. Thus, although the concepts are related, they are nonetheless distinct. The problems with measurement argue for care in analysis and interpretation of findings.

been primarily, even entirely, cognitive accounts – many of which have been based on the rational man metaphor – of social behavior. This thrust seeks to counter an extended period of the dominance of purely cognitive emphases. Specifically, work in psychological social psychology emphasizing self, perhaps with the exception of some work in clinically oriented social psychology (e.g., Higgins, 1989; Moretti & Higgins, 1990) has reflected this cognitive emphasis. While avoiding the excesses of a rational man approach, the preeminence of George Herbert Mead (1934) as a source of the symbolic interactionist perspective has meant that cognitive processes received major attention while emotion was neglected in work from this perspective. Identity, in any of its various usages, is a cognitive variable. On the other hand, self-esteem by definition refers to the affect attached to self. Juxtaposing identity and self-esteem in a common framework of role choice behavior thus serves the larger contemporary purpose of viewing social behavior as a product of jointly operating cognitive and affective variables.⁴

In light of these considerations, it seems strange that greater effort has not been made by social psychologists to explore the interrelations between identity and self-esteem in either theoretical or empirical terms. One reason for this relative neglect may be that, while there has not been much work produced along these lines, the existing empirical examinations of the interrelations have produced results that are often negative and at best inconclusive. (See the discussion on global and role-specific self-esteem.)

If prior work does not strongly support the aspirations of the present effort, why believe that something better can result from it? At bottom, we seek to encourage renewed theoretical and empirical interest in relating self-esteem to identity theory. Is doing so worth the trouble?

IS RELATING SELF-ESTEEM AND IDENTITY THEORY REASONABLE?

There are at least three reasons for believing that an attempt to theorize the relationship of self-esteem to identity theory is a reasonable undertaking.

1. Intuitively, it seems clear there *must be* mutual impact of the affective variable of self-esteem and the cognitive variable of identity. The contemporary literature of social psychology (Lazarus, 1984; Scheff, 1985; Zajonc, 1984) strongly argues the interdependence of cognition and affect in general; surely that interdependence cannot be absent from, and must be consequential for,

⁴ While comparatively rare, work bridging cognitive and affective variables exists: for example, see Linville (1985), Thoits (1985), and Higgins (1989). A particularly relevant citation is Roberts and Bengtson (1993), precisely because it uses an identity theory formulation to predict variation in self-esteem across the life course.

self-related phenomena (e.g., Heise, 1989; Higgins, 1989; Moretti & Higgins, 1990; Stryker, 1987b).

2. Meta-theoretical considerations provide an additional basis for believing self-esteem and identity ought to interrelate. Virtually all contemporary work on self effectively implies the differentiated yet *systemic* character of self. Identities are cognitive representations persons hold of themselves, of who they are and what they seek to become (Markus, 1977; Markus & Nurius, 1987; Reid & Deaux, 1996; Stryker, 1994). Self-esteem has to do with persons' affective responses to themselves, their evaluations of who they are (Rosenberg, 1979a; Rosenberg et al., 1995). In short, both identity and self-esteem are aspects of self. If self is a system, a set of differentiated and inter-related aspects or parts, the two must relate to one another. Stryker, in a paper initially outlining identity theory, referred to three major "modalities" of self – cognitive, cathectic, and conative (Stryker, 1968). He then paid attention only to the first, in order to focus his theoretical effort. That strategic decision, however useful at the time, can hold only temporarily; if the cognitive and cathectic aspects of self intertwine, more fully exploiting theoretically the first (identity) must involve invoking the second (self-esteem), and vice versa.

3. Perhaps more directly pertinent to the question being raised – the promise of theoretical payoff in a new consideration of the relationship of self-esteem to identity theory – is a set of conceptual developments and refinements in both the self-esteem and the identity theory literatures that may reveal linkages between aspects of self-esteem and those of identity theory variables that were invisible previously.

The following sections describe these theoretical developments that provide the basis for our integration of identity and self-esteem theory. On the identity theory side, these developments include expanding the concept of social network commitments to reflect both the extent of interaction (interactional commitment) and the affect attached to those relationships (affective commitment). The concept of identity salience, which refers to the probability that a given identity will be invoked, has been augmented by the addition of the concept of psychological centrality, which reflects the subjective value and importance the person attaches to an identity. On the self-esteem side, there has been a growing awareness of different levels of specificity in self-esteem, namely, global and role-specific self-esteem. There has also been theoretical development in the concept of self-esteem such that it is no longer simply a unidimensional construct, even on the global level. The two-dimensional conceptualization of self-esteem that we utilize includes (1) esteem composed of feelings of self-worth based primarily on reflected appraisals and (2) esteem composed of feelings of efficacy based on observations of the effects of one's own actions and on social

comparisons. These two aspects of self-esteem have particular consequences for bringing self-esteem and identity theory together.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENTS AND REFINEMENTS IN IDENTITY THEORY

Identity theory derives from a structural symbolic interactionist theoretical framework (Stryker, 1980). As does traditional symbolic interactionism, that framework ascribes causal importance in the construction and production of social behavior to a “self” – in Mead’s (1934) terms, to that which, as a consequence of a person’s reflexive responses to his or her “self,” becomes an object to itself. The first principle of the framework is that selves reflect society; the self is emergent from social interaction and reflects the character and structure of the society in which the interaction occurs. What, then, is the character and structure of the society within which the self emerges? Contemporary sociology describes modern society as highly differentiated: a complex congeries of multiple parts – role relationships, social networks, groups, organizations, institutions, communities – some related and some unrelated, some conflicting and others not. It follows from applying this first principle that selves in such a society must also be highly differentiated; they must also be complex congeries of multiple parts. Rather than a conception of a unitary self as utilized in personality theory (Allport, 1937), clinical thought (Lecky, 1945; Rogers, 1951), and early sociological theory (Mead, 1934; Parsons, 1951), that principle requires a differentiated conception of self. Identity theory meets that requirement in part by conceiving of self as having multiple modalities – cognitive, cathectic, and conative. More pertinent to the present effort, it goes on to conceive of the cognitive modality of self as consisting of multiple identities, with as many identities as the person holds distinct roles in networks of social relationships.⁵

Building on this reconceptualization of the concept of identity, identity theory⁶ in its initial (and basic) formulation consisted of a three-variable proposition: commitment impacts identity salience impacts role-related behaviors. Role-related behaviors, the object of explanation of the theory, are exemplified by the prototypic question raised by the theory: Why is it that

⁵ There is an obvious connection between the identity theory conception of self as, in part, composed of multiple identities and William James’ (1890/1950) vision of an empirical self incorporating “as many social selves as there are persons who recognize him” or, in more practical terms, as many selves as there are distinct groups of persons who recognize him and about whose opinion he cares.

⁶ For more complete exegeses of identity theory (as it is used in the present chapter), see Stryker (1980, 1994).

one person chooses to spend free time with friends on the golf course, another to spend free time with children at the zoo? Such choices are seen as a consequence of identity salience. Identities are taken to be cognitive schema, internalized role designations, and associated expectations that constitute the self. Identities held by persons are presumed to be organized in a hierarchy defined by the probability of their invocation in or across social situations. Identity salience refers to the location in that hierarchy of the identities composing the self. In turn, identity salience is seen as a consequence of commitment: the strength of ties to social networks to which persons relate as a consequence of occupying positions in organized structures of social relationships and playing roles associated with those positions.

The direction of impacts indicated by this description of identity theory can be defended on the traditional symbolic interactionist grounds that self reflects society and guides social behavior; on the observation that every human is born into an ongoing society; and on the presumption that cognitive (self) variables are more easily altered than are interaction-based (commitment) variables. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that the relationships asserted in the basic identity theory proposition are nonrecursive. We argue, that is, that the predominant direction of the relationship is commitment to salience to role-related choices. At the same time we recognize that these relationships are reciprocal over time.

Two important conceptual elaborations of the theory have been introduced since its initial formulation. The first distinguishes between interactional commitment and affective commitment. Interactional commitment is defined by the extensivity (the number of persons as well as the amount of time, energy, and resources involved) of the social network to which one relates by virtue of having an identity. Affective commitment is the emotional significance of the others implicated with one in a given social network. Interactional and affective commitment, while related, are nevertheless theoretically and empirically independent (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

A second conceptual elaboration involves the recognition that identity salience and psychological centrality (or importance)⁷ are different phenomena that are substantially independent, albeit related. Salience is the likelihood that an identity will be invoked. It is strongly influenced by social network and other structural constraints on the individual's behavior. Importance is defined by the personal value individuals place on an identity. It taps into subjective feelings of what is central to individuals' conceptions

⁷ Rosenberg (1979a; Gecas & Seff, 1990; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995) and others use the term "psychological centrality" to describe the individual's assessment of the personal value placed on an identity. Other self-esteem authors use the term "importance" (Marsh, 1986, 1990). In this chapter, we will use the simpler term "importance" for this concept.

of themselves. Both are linked to role-related choices and, at least for some roles, are empirically distinguishable (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). These two concepts reflect, in different ways, the amount of influence a particular role has in an individual's life. Although they are often very similar, it is when they disagree that their usefulness becomes particularly apparent. Their distinction provides insight into why people continue to perform roles that they personally dislike and it permits more refined hypotheses concerning the relationship between role-specific and global self-esteem. (See the discussion on global and role-specific self-esteem.)

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENTS AND REFINEMENTS IN SELF-ESTEEM THEORY

Contemporary self-esteem theory largely flows from the writings of William James (1890/1950). Perhaps more clearly and coherently than anyone before him, James recognized and stressed the motivational power of self-esteem. Several general principles of the self as motivational system (evolved from James and those who followed him) enter, however obliquely, into our discussion. The initial principle is that, in general, people want to feel good about themselves; they are motivated to increase their self-esteem if it is low and to maintain it if it is high (Gergen, 1971; James, 1890/1950; Kaplan, 1975; Rosenberg, 1979a). A second principle is that people are motivated to maintain a consistent view of self (Festinger, 1957; Lecky, 1945; Rosenberg, 1979a) and some will seek consistency even if doing so means maintaining a negative view of self (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992).⁸ A third, more recently recognized principle is that cognitions of self and affective responses to self are intertwined. Indeed, no cognition is likely to be empty of affect nor any affective state empty of cognitions. These principles, as suggested, find their way into our subsequent discussion.

That discussion must begin with the work of Morris Rosenberg. As a consequence of Rosenberg's emphasis on the import of self-esteem attached to the person as a "unitary" object and his construction of a scale to measure global self-esteem, the focus of most self-esteem research has been on general or global self-esteem. Conceiving of self in an identity theory fashion, as a hierarchical structure consisting of multiple identities, calls for a parallel shift in the focus of the concept of self-esteem away from the unitary person

⁸ This last observation introduces something of a contradiction between the principle of self-esteem enhancement and the principle of self-consistency, a contradiction whose resolution has been the focus of work by William Swann and his students (Swann, 1990; Swann, de la Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). See also Taylor, Neter, and Wayment (1995). Although this apparent contradiction has not been resolved, it seems to be the case that both operate under various conditions; a question remains as to how these processes jointly operate.

to what has been termed a role-specific conception that attaches a specific self-esteem to each of the identities and underlying roles held by a person. Indeed, this shift appears important, perhaps necessary, if an integration of identity theory and self theory is to occur.

That shift is now increasingly represented in social psychological work on self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1994; Marsh, 1990; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Owens, 1992; Rosenberg et al., 1995) and it presents a relatively unexploited opportunity to link self-esteem and identity theoretically.

Nevertheless, interest in a more traditional view of self-esteem attached to the "whole" person continues alongside that shift, as well it should. Identity theory does suggest an altered focus but does not deny the continued utility of global assessments of self-esteem.⁹ Calling for the altered focus does not imply that a concept of global self-esteem ought be abandoned either generally or specifically in relation to identity theory. Anticipating our later discussion, we can note now that Rosenberg et al. (1995) and Craft (1982) convincingly demonstrate that global esteem and specific esteems are different (though related) concepts. In particular, global self-esteem is shown to relate to overall psychological well-being, role-specific esteem more directly to behavior (Rosenberg et al., 1995).

The controversy that has developed over the self-esteem scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) also provides another area of theoretical development that we incorporate into this chapter. Rosenberg conceived of self-esteem as a unidimensional construct, but there has been a long running discussion of the observed bidimensionality in the Rosenberg measure and the possible meanings of such dimensions. Although there have been many other measures that have been designed to tap into self-esteem in a variety of spheres such as body image, social skills, intelligence, and so on (Coopersmith, 1967; Fleming & Courtney, 1984; Fleming & Watts, 1980; Marsh, 1986; Marsh, 1990; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), Rosenberg's measure was designed to capture global self-esteem that was not tied to any specific area. The fact that this measure is not unitary has generated efforts to explain this unexpected but consistent finding. In this chapter we bring together theorists who suggest that self-esteem does not simply consist of positive or negative affect attached to self, but also includes feelings of efficacy or inefficacy (Erikson, 1968; Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; Harter, 1985) with empirical and theoretical work on the dimensionality of the Rosenberg measure of self-esteem (Kaplan & Pokorny, 1969; Owens, 1993; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). Again, there is evidence that these two types of esteem, while intertwined, have somewhat different consequences in

⁹ See the attempt to accommodate both the "singularity" and the "multiplicity" aspects of self within identity theory in Stryker (1989).

terms of behavior and psychological well-being (Kaplan & Pokorny, 1969; Owens, 1993; Owens, 1994; Rosenberg et al., 1995; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995).

Global and Role-Specific Self-Esteem

Many theorists and researchers, from the early writings of James (1890/1950) to the present (Gecas & Seff, 1990; Hoelter, 1985; Hoge & McCarthy, 1984; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Marsh, 1986; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Rosenberg et al., 1995), have asserted that overall feelings of self-esteem are differentially impacted by various aspects of self. They have argued that the most salient or important identities can be expected to be most influential for global self-esteem while less salient or unimportant identities should have little or no impact. This conceptualization suggests that people have distinct feelings of esteem regarding each role or identity they hold and that these role-specific feelings of self-esteem influence global self-esteem in proportion to the relative importance or salience of the specific identity or role.

Empirical studies using different methods of incorporating importance or salience into this relationship have had mixed results. Many theorists have used importance or salience as a weight for role-specific self-esteem. Craft (1982) reasoned that weighting role-specific self-esteem by the salience of the identity would better represent the actual effect of role-specific self-esteem on global esteem. Her findings, however, did not support that reasoning. She also reasoned that weighting the salience of an identity by the role-specific esteem attached to it would improve the observed relationship between salience and role performance. Again, her findings were negative. Hoge and McCarthy (1984) also used this weighting method in a study of junior high and high school students. They found little evidence that weighting the evaluations of self in various dimensions by the importance attached to the dimension improved the relationships between dimension-specific evaluations and global self-esteem. In a related study, Thoits (1992) found little or no evidence that weighting the stress experienced in a particular role by the importance of that role resulted in any improvement in the relationship between role-specific stress and global symptoms of stress.

Marsh (1986) provides an example that shows the potential methodological problems in using a simple cross product as a weight, the method used by Craft, Thoits, and others. Both self-esteem and importance are usually measured on scales that go from low to high. That is, poor self-esteem is typically not numerically negative but is simply on the low end of a scale. (And even "low" self-esteem is not all that low, as the distribution of self-esteem in noninstitutionalized populations is typically skewed toward the high end.) If one person has very high self-esteem in a role that is very unimportant, the cross product is HIGH Esteem $\times$ LOW Importance. Theoretically, we would expect this role to have a small, but positive, impact on global esteem. If another person has very poor self-esteem in a role that is very important, the

cross product is LOW Esteem $\times$ HIGH Importance. In this situation, we would expect this role to have a large, detrimental impact on global self-esteem. However, because of the way esteem and importance are measured, the cross products are the same: (low $\times$ high) = (high $\times$ low). This consequence clearly does not represent the desired theoretical specification of the interactive effect of importance and role-specific self-esteem and it explains the lack of expected findings in studies that use this method.

Marsh (1986) suggests transforming role-specific self-esteem measures into z-scores, creating a measure of esteem that has both a positive and a negative pole. He calculates a summary measure that is an average of the transformed role-specific self-esteem items weighted by their importance. However, using the transformed measure weighted by importance only slightly improved the correlation between role-specific and global self-esteem. Pelham and Swann (1989) produced similar findings.

Researchers who have utilized other methods of examining the role of importance or salience with regard to separate identities have more clearly demonstrated the expected effects. Hoelter (1985), looking at several roles separately, divided his subjects into high and low salient groups and then examined the correlations between role-specific evaluations and global evaluations. For all seven roles, he found larger correlations for the high salient groups than the low salient groups. Rosenberg et al. (1995) divide their sample into those who value academic performance and those who do not. They find that academic self-esteem and global self-esteem are only related for those who value academic performance.

Roberts and Donahue (1994) offer another method of assessing this relationship. They compute a set of coefficients for each individual that represent the distances of their global self-esteem from each role-specific self-esteem. They then compute a within-subjects correlation between the set of distance coefficients and the importance the individual attaches to each role. They find that the more important the role the smaller the distance (i.e., the greater the similarity) between role-specific and global evaluations.

These findings are important because they offer confirmation of the conceptualization of James (1890/1950) that has been an underlying assumption of most work on self-esteem since his time: Overall feelings of self-esteem are related to role-specific self-esteem and this relationship is mediated in some way by the importance or salience of each role. More problematic has been specifying just how importance or salience links role-specific esteem to global esteem. Yet, there are studies showing the expected relationship and, as we have already observed, methodological grounds for thinking some studies using the cross-product method were flawed. However, even the studies that use appropriate measures in the cross products produce only very small improvements in the relationship between role-specific and global esteem (Marsh, 1986; Pelham & Swann, 1989). Why should this be if the

process works as James hypothesized and if methods other than the cross products are producing the expected results? The studies that had the best results divided subjects up into high and low importance/salience. This suggests that we need to focus more attention on analyzing the effects of importance and salience.

Although the cross product seems to be a simple way of expressing the theoretical interactions we desire, it actually makes some strong assertions about the linear nature of that interaction. We have no theoretical guidance for the metric, functional form or potential threshold effects of importance and/or salience. New analysis strategies are necessary in order to explore, in detail, the way importance and salience work to link role-specific and global esteem.

To date most studies have focused on types of identities (e.g., spouse, worker, student, etc.). Then, for a sample population, they have examined the relationship between role-specific and global self-esteem for each type of identity. An alternative strategy that shifts the focus to importance/salience is to order the identities of each individual according to importance or salience. Then, for a sample population, all the most important (or salient) identities could be examined together, independent of type, and then the second most important identities could be examined, and so on. This avoids using weighting strategies that may be inappropriate and could provide more information on the nature of the importance/salience linkage between role-specific and global self-esteem.

As noted earlier, the conceptual distinctions between salience and importance (Stryker & Serpe, 1994) also permit a more nuanced hypothesis concerning the relation of role-specific and global esteem. As defined above, a salient identity can be of low importance and vice versa. Even though a particular identity has little importance to a person, it may be that her immediate social structure requires her to continue the role (e.g., children are required to go to school, most adults are required to work either in or out of the home, people with some stigmatized statuses are never allowed to completely exit the role). This suggests that importance and salience may be partially differentiated in terms of their antecedents and, when they are not in agreement, may have conflicting effects on behavior and on global self-esteem. That is, there appears to be reason to hypothesize that identity salience is, to a greater extent, a function of performance, interactional commitments, and affective commitments. Identity importance, while also a function of role performance, is to a greater extent a function of interests, subjective values, role-specific self-esteem. A person who has a role with negative self-esteem attached to it is likely to devalue that role in terms of importance and yet, if that role is also highly salient, it may impact global self-esteem potently and negatively. Indeed, it is likely that this combination underlies (at least in part)

Swann's (1992; Swann et al., 1992) findings indicating that persons with low self-esteem often engage in behaviors that serve to confirm their negative self-esteem.

Global Esteem – Unitary or Multidimensional Construct?

There are other developments and refinements in self-esteem conceptualization relevant to the goal of effectively relating self-esteem to identity theory. As noted earlier, Rosenberg (1979a) developed his self-esteem scale – which has become the most frequently used scale in research – to measure global self-esteem as a unitary construct. In recent years, interrelated methodological and conceptual critiques of his scale have been offered. Repeated exploratory as well as confirmatory factor analyses (Kaplan & Pokorny, 1969; Kohn & Schooler, 1969; Owens, 1993) have reasonably demonstrated that there are two independent dimensions. The original 10-item Rosenberg scale contains an equal number of positively (“On the whole I am satisfied with myself”) and negatively (“I wish I could have more respect for myself”) phrased items. Most of the positive items consistently appear on one dimension and most of the negative items consistently appear on the other. The question arises whether this demonstration reflects a methodological artifact, as some (e.g., Carmines & Zeller, 1974; Hensley & Roberts, 1976) have argued, or whether it reflects the existence of two substantively distinct evaluational dimensions. The emergent consensus appears to be the latter, although there is less agreement on the meaning of these dimensions.

Owens (1993) labels the positive items “self-confidence” and the negative items “self-deprecation,” and argues that the positive/negative characteristic of the dimensions is itself the important distinction.¹⁰ Kaplan (1980; also, Kaplan & Pokorny, 1969) terms the negative dimension of Rosenberg’s scale “self-derogation” and builds his theory of delinquency around this form of self-esteem. A somewhat different tack is taken by Tafarodi and Swann (1995) who argue for a view of global self-esteem as being composed of two distinct, albeit related, dimensions they call “self-liking” and “self-competency.” Although they begin with the observed positive/negative dimensionality of the Rosenberg scale, they suggest these dimensions only happen to align with the directionality of Rosenberg’s items. Their “self-liking” (measured by the negative Rosenberg items) is the product of persons experiencing themselves as globally acceptable or unacceptable. Their “self-competency” (measured by the positive Rosenberg items) is the product of experiencing themselves as generally capable or incapable. They create a set of items, similar to Rosenberg’s, that are

¹⁰ In a subsequent paper, Owens (1994) changes his terminology from “self-confidence” to “positive self-worth.” His new terminology is somewhat confusing in the context of our chapter since we equate his self-confidence (or positive self-worth) concept with our self-efficacy concept and his self-deprecation concept with our self-worth concept.

specifically designed with an equal number of positive and negative items for each of these two facets of self-esteem.

The distinctions drawn between "self-liking" and "self-competency" are intimately related to conception of self-esteem described by Viktor Gecas and his coauthors (Gecas, 1989; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; see also Franks & Marolla, 1976). Sociological self theory in general, and self-esteem theory in particular, have drawn on Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902) to argue that self is a product of reflected appraisals, a looking-glass process in which the determinant of self views, including self-esteem, is the perceived responses of others to the person. While accepting that proposition with respect to the part of self-concept that is made up of self-evaluation and worth, Gecas has championed an argument that says that there is another aspect of self-concept, in which the person is an active participant in the creation of self. Specifically, Gecas asserts that while a part of one's self-esteem is based on the feedback (and the perceptions of this feedback) received from others, a part is also based on observing the impact of our own actions in the world and noticing whether these actions are (or are seen by others as) efficacious. Harter (1985) also posits that feelings of competency and perceptions of internal control over successful outcomes are important components of self-esteem.

Tafarodi and Swann (1995) relate their "self-liking" concept to feedback received from others and "self-competency" to efficacious action. Similarly, Owens theorizes that "self-confidence," while partially a function of reflected appraisals, is primarily a function of observing the efficacy of one's own actions and he suggests that "negative self-deprecation" results essentially from reflected appraisals¹¹ (Owens, 1993; see also Owens, Mortimer, & Finch, 1996). Given the apparent similarity or relatedness of the theoretical derivations of these variously named dimensions of self-esteem, we can reasonably simplify our aim of integrating self-esteem into identity theory by assimilating them into two dimensions for which we will henceforth use the labels "self-efficacy" and "self-worth."

Our emphasis has been on the analytic and empirical distinctiveness of dimensions of self-esteem. The distinctiveness of these subtypes, however, does not require believing they are independent of one another. We anticipate a reciprocal relation between self-efficacy and self-worth at both the role-specific and the global levels of esteem. We expect self-worth, premised

¹¹ Because Owens (1993) is arguing for a positive/negative interpretation of these dimensions, he focuses on how, in developing self-confidence, people selectively focus on their abilities, competencies, and efficacy while ignoring instances of inefficacy. In the development of negative self-deprecation, he focuses on how and why individuals with negative self-concepts might seek out negative appraisals while ignoring positive appraisals. Nevertheless, his arguments for the sources of these two types of self-esteem parallel ours, except in their emphasis on the valence.

largely on the responses of significant others, to reinforce the individual's perception of achievement and we expect feelings of efficacy to reinforce the individual's sense of self-worth. Given the cultural emphasis on success as a basis for self-worth in Western societies, the reflected appraisals that others provide will, in part, be based on their perception of the individual's efficacy. For this reason, we expect that efficacy-based esteem may have greater impact on self-worth than the reverse.

LINKING SELF-ESTEEM AND IDENTITY THEORY

We are now in position to address the questions motivating this chapter: How, if at all, does self-esteem relate to identity theory; and, how, if at all, does the reciprocal impact occur? We do so with an enriched conceptual repertoire. On the self-esteem side, this enriched repertoire includes both global and role-specific self-esteem, and the dimensions of self-worth and self-efficacy. On the identity theory side, the enriched repertoire includes interactional and affective commitment, identity salience, and importance. We proceed by suggesting the relationships we expect to find between the self-esteem and the identity theory concepts, providing the theoretical bases for these expectations and empirical evidence when it exists.

A visual summary of the relationships we will discuss is depicted in Figure 3.1. We take as our starting point the validity of the basic identity theory proposition. That is, we assume that interactional and affective commitments impact identity salience and identity importance which in their turn influence role performance. Following self-esteem theory, we assume that self-esteem influences performance and we assume that role-specific self-esteem influences global self-esteem. We treat both global and role-related self-esteem as having two dimensions: self-worth and self-efficacy. From these basic assumptions, we begin to elaborate.

We introduce the concept of "generalized performance," in part as a summary measure for all role behavior, but more important to recognize that there is a class of performances that do not attach to specific roles but are still relevant to social life. One important example of this class of performances is the set of behaviors commonly indexed by measures of psychological health. The other is the set of behaviors summarized by the concept of "social participation." Generalized social participation includes such things as civic activities, attending cultural events, social activism, and the myriad of activities that people try out in passing (one example might even be deviance) that are not yet, and may never be, part of a role-identity. Generalized social participation can be conceived of as a summary measure of all role-related and nonrole-related behaviors. Thus, it is a global indicator of overall social activity that is at the same level of specificity as global self-esteem.

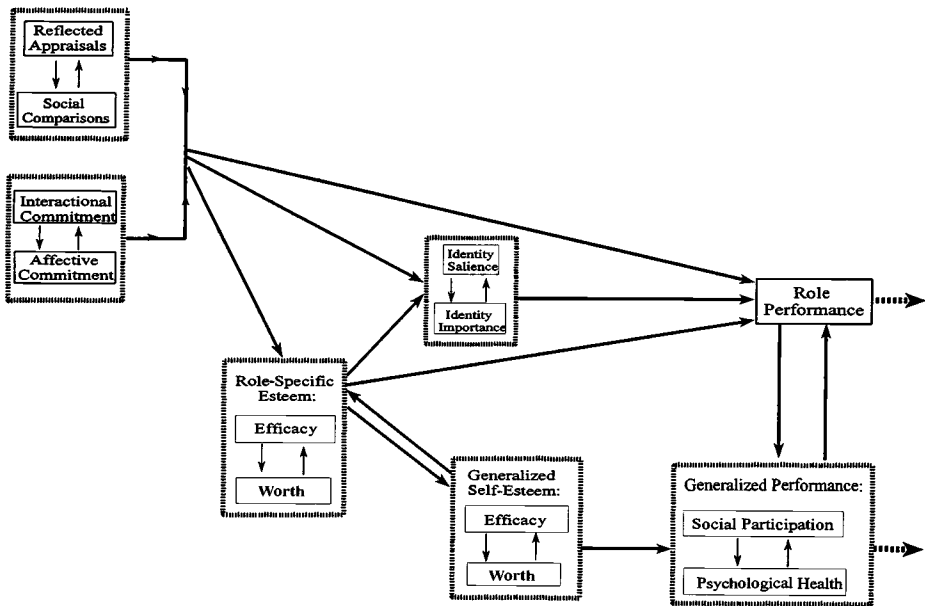


Figure 3.1. General model of self-esteem and identity processes. *Note:* This diagram illustrates one segment of a process that we hypothesize is ongoing and cyclical. The hypothesized mediating effect of salience/importance on the relationship from role-specific to generalized self-esteem is not shown. The diagram summarizes a variety of relationships between reflected appraisals (RA), social comparisons (SC), interactional commitments (IC), and affective commitments (AC) on the one hand and role-specific esteem, salience/importance, and role performance on the other. In the interest of clarity, only three paths from the entire group (RA, SC, IC, and AC) are shown. Both direct and interactive effects of these variables are expected in some cases. See the text for discussions.

The relationship going from role performance to generalized performances is based purely on the summary nature of generalized performance measure. However, we propose that generalized performances will impact role performances in two ways. First, psychological health and depression have been shown to impact performance in many areas of life (Weissman, Paykel, Siegel, & Klerman, 1971; Beach, Martin, Blum, & Roman, 1993). Second, people take the social skills and abilities acquired in the multitude of activities they already perform and utilize those in each new role they take on. As actual experience in a particular role increases, the influence of generalized social participation on role performance will likely decrease.

It is also important to make clear that the model in Figure 3.1 is truncated and, for the sake of clarity, does not try to depict all relevant interactions and paths. For the example, we have not diagrammed the moderating effect of

identity salience and importance on the relationship between role-specific and global self-esteems, though we postulate this is crucial in understanding the linkage between them. Because they often work together, we have grouped together reflected appraisals, social comparisons, interactional commitments, and affective commitments and show only three paths coming from this group. However, we do not mean to imply that there are no direct effects from each of these variables individually. In the text, we discuss both the direct and the interactive effects of these variables.

In addition, this schematic portrays one segment of an ongoing process. We anticipate that both role-specific performances and generalized performances will impact reflected appraisals, social comparisons, social network commitments, and role-specific and global self-esteem in a continuing cyclical process.

Identity, Self-Esteem, and Role Performance

Self-esteem has long been presumed to be related to role performance. Indeed, when self-esteem is measured in an undifferentiated manner, people with high self-esteem do better in school (Covington, 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1995), work (Goh & Mealiea, 1984), and in a variety of other roles (Headey & Wearing, 1988; Rosenberg, 1965).¹² Conversely, those with low self-esteem tend to perform more poorly in relevant conventional activities or, if they do perform well, they attribute it to luck or other outside factors so they do not derive any psychological benefits from their success nor do they have any expectation that they will be able to maintain such performances in the future (Covington, 1989).

The distinction between global and role-specific self-esteem becomes particularly important when considering the relationships between self-esteem, identity, and behavior. Identity theory is role-specific. That is, its variables – commitments, salience, and role performance – are defined in relation to specific roles or role-related identities. Consequently, identity theory leads us to anticipate that if self-esteem impacts these variables or the processes linking them, it is role-specific rather than global self-esteem that will do so. Indeed, the only impact we expect global self-esteem to have on role-specific behavior and the identity theory process is indirect, through generalized performance and its subsequent cyclical impact on social network commitments. Somewhat similarly, the only impact we expect role-specific self-esteem to have on generalized performance is indirect, through generalized self-esteem.

However, there is also another reason for focusing on role-specific self-esteem in understanding role performances. One consistent research finding

¹² By “do better” we mean that people with high self-esteem meet the expectations for their roles and/or they are judged more successful by the criteria specified by role expectations.

is that more specific measures of attitudes predict specific behaviors to a greater degree than do global constructs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Hampson, John, & Goldberg, 1986; Heberlein & Black, 1976). Not surprisingly, since self-esteem is an attitude toward oneself, several studies have shown this to be the case with self-esteem as well (Moreland & Sweeney, 1984; Rosenberg et al., 1995; Wylie, 1979). These studies focus almost exclusively on academic self-esteem. There is almost nothing known through research about how role-specific self-esteem relates to performance in other roles. However, it seems likely that this theory of specificity should apply to other roles as well.

The utility of the two subtypes of self-esteem, self-worth and self-efficacy, also becomes apparent when examining performance. We hypothesize that the two types of self-esteem will influence performance in quite different ways. This is illustrated on the global level by the differentiation in the relationships between the subtypes of global self-esteem and psychological health and social participation. Tafarodi and Swann (1995) create a composite measure of social performance with an average of subjective performance ratings across four roles. Their results indicate that, on the global level at least, self-worth has no relationship to a summary performance rating while self-efficacy has a strong relationship. On the other hand, self-worth has a stronger relationship with depression than self-efficacy (Ervin, unpublished data; Owens, 1994; Tafarodi & Swann, 1995).

We also hypothesize that role-specific efficacy is especially likely to have a direct impact on the quality of role performances¹³ and to be more closely related to role performance than global efficacy. However, global efficacy may be related to performance in roles when there has been little prior role experience. Prior participation in a role creates an opportunity for observing one's own performance and making social comparisons with others. This provides information that can then be used to generate a role-specific self-concept. Without this specific information, individuals may rely much more on their global self-efficacy. Thus, a high global efficacy may increase confidence, aspirations, and, through these, performance outcomes in a new role, but, in familiar roles, role-specific self-efficacy is expected to have a greater impact on role performance.

¹³ People whose sense of self-efficacy is low tend to experience high levels of emotional arousal, worry about their personal deficiencies, and focus on potential difficulties, all of which undermine their ability to perform as well as they might (Bandura, 1977, 1982). Those who are low in self-efficacy may also decrease their expectations for future success and engage in handicapping behaviors as protective measures. These operate by providing explanations, other than ability, for failures and they are part of a larger process whereby individuals attempt to claim that the role is not important to them (Covington, 1989; McCrea & Hirt, unpublished data). The studies on handicapping have examined these mechanisms with regard to a unidimensional self-esteem, but it seems likely that the same processes would operate with self-efficacy.

We hypothesize that role-specific self-worth is likely to have a smaller influence on role performance than self-efficacy. Franks and Marolla (1976) found little or no relationship between self-worth and role performance while there is a clear relationship between self-efficacy and role performance. Owens (1994) found both types of esteem were related to performance in school, although the effects of efficacy-based esteem were slightly stronger. However, an asymmetry characterized these studies – they use global esteem and looked at behavior in particular roles so the lack of consistent findings regarding self-worth is not necessarily conclusive. Given the theory of specificity, role-specific self-worth could have an impact on role performance that is hidden when global esteem measures are used. In any case, if role-specific self-worth does impact role performance, we expect that its influence will be smaller than role-specific self-efficacy.

However, role-specific self-worth may have an indirect influence on performance through its effect on global self-worth and the subsequent effect on psychological health. Depression has been shown to impact performances in interpersonal and domestic roles (Beach et al., 1993; Weissman et al., 1971). Although both self-worth and self-efficacy are related to feelings of depression, in most cases self-worth shows a significantly stronger relationship to depression (Ervin, unpublished data; Owens, 1994; Tafari & Swann, 1995). Thus, while the direct effect of self-worth on role performance may be weaker than that of self-efficacy, it may have an indirect effect on role performance via its impact on overall psychological health.

Self-Esteem, Salience, Importance, and Commitments

Worth further exploration is the distinctiveness of the relationship between self-esteem and identity salience and self-esteem and identity importance. We have already discussed the value of these two identity concepts in linking global and role-specific self-esteem. Now we turn to their joint effects on performance. To repeat, salience is defined in terms of an assessment of the likelihood of enacting a role. On the other hand, importance taps into the subjective, evaluative assessment of the centrality of a role to the individual's sense of herself. Both appear to work as identity theory predicts with regard to role performance (Curry & Weaner, 1987; Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991; Serpe, 1987; Serpe & Stryker, 1987; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992; Stryker & Serpe, 1982) and appear, at least for some roles, to be distinguishable (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Is there reason to think that introducing self-esteem into the equation will strengthen this finding?

We have argued that role-specific self-efficacy will affect role performance directly. Role-specific self-efficacy and self-worth may also work indirectly through salience or importance in impacting performance. If people view themselves as competent and worthy in a role, they are likely to give that role greater importance on the assumption that people prefer to think well of

themselves. This implies that role-specific self-esteem is likely to have a strong influence on importance. However, salience is, to a greater extent than importance, a function of micro social structural forces. Thus, it seems likely that self-esteem will have a smaller influence on salience.

Interactional and affective commitments have additional implications for the self-esteem tied to a role. Simply having a role that is embedded in a large social network does not necessarily imply that interactions with members of that network will be positive, but a larger number of interaction partners presents greater opportunities for discounting some sources and for using selective perception on feedback that is received. The more one interacts with and values given role-partners, the more likely one will evaluate those partners highly and generalize that high evaluation to self (Homans, 1961). Individuals generally like and feel close (i.e., have stronger affective attachment) to people who respond to them favorably and, if role partners respond to them favorably, individuals are likely to think more highly of themselves (Cooley, 1902). People also feel close to those who are similar and similarity may be based on social comparisons that reveal comparable abilities. Thus, greater interactional commitment and stronger affective commitment to role network members is likely to be associated with better role-specific self-esteem.

However, the situation is clearly not as simple as this discussion of a single role implies, for two reasons: (1) there is overlap in network members across roles and (2) persons are likely to be closest to those individuals they interact with in a variety of roles. Because of these two facts, close affective ties do not imply that the feedback received in any particular role will be positive even if responses from close network members are very positive in other roles. (An example: the parent who conveys overall approval of a child but clearly expresses disapproval of a particular friend or activity.) Indeed, close relationships develop over a period of time and may eventually become either positive or negative in their tone. Thus, interactional and affective commitments to role-specific social networks actually influence self-esteem via reflected appraisals and social comparisons. And more positive reflected appraisals and social comparisons are frequently, but not uniformly, associated with greater interactional and affective commitments.

Reciprocities and Other Complexities

As we have had occasion to remark several times, the relationships between self-esteem and role performance, self-esteem and salience or importance, and role commitments and self-esteem are not unidirectional. We expect a cyclical process in which role-related behaviors impact the social network surrounding the role, the processes of self-reflection and social comparison, and role-specific self-esteem. The impact of role performance and commitments on role-specific self-esteem is expected to be greater than on global esteem, essentially

for reasons of specificity as argued earlier. Observations of one's role performance may influence both self-worth and self-efficacy, but it seems likely that the effect of role performance on self-efficacy will be larger and more direct. Much of the effect of performance on self-worth could be indirect through the previously hypothesized influence of self-efficacy on self-worth.

Rosenberg (1979a; see also Lewicki, 1983) has hypothesized that people are selective in which roles, which aspects of a role, and which qualities relevant to a role they emphasize. Their selectivity operates to cast them in a more favorable light. Because of affective and cognitive generalization processes, the more salient and important an identity, the more the esteem attached to that identity is likely to be actively reinforced and defended. But the question remains: Do people value what they are good at or are they good at what they value? Although the answer clearly could be that both directional processes operate, there is theoretical justification for expecting performance to have a larger impact on identity importance than vice versa; it is much more difficult to change one's ability than to change one's thoughts. In the same way, role-specific self-efficacy and self-worth are expected to have a greater impact on importance than the reverse. That is, although self-efficacy and self-worth are subjective, psychological concepts, they are derived from performance and social interaction within the role. Individuals have less control over the responses of others to their role behaviors than they have over the import they attach to a particular identity.

Although people do attempt to improve their performance and gain favorable responses from others, especially with respect to identities that are highly valued, they cannot always achieve this goal, nor is it always necessary. Instead, threats to self in one area may result in efforts to establish a positive self-concept in another (James, 1890/1950). The consistency motive (Lecky, 1945; Rosenberg, 1979a) underlies the hypothesis that when a particular self-concept is threatened, people will act to repair the impression of that facet of self. Steele (1975) suggests that evidence for the consistency motive from past experimental research may be an artifact of experimentally imposed restrictions on other possible means of repairing self-worth. In the real world, people may respond to a threat in one area with a response in another. After threat to an important self concept, the individual's primary goal may be to reaffirm the general integrity of the self, not repair the particular area threatened. In a series of experiments, Steele (1988) found that the apparent cognitive need for consistency is actually the need to affirm one's own sense of efficacy and worth. Subjects who were able to affirm other aspects of self showed a much lower tendency to change the aspect of self that had been the subject of the dissonance-arousing threat than those who had no such opportunities for self-affirmation.

Based on this research it seems likely that when self-efficacy, self-worth, or performance in a particular area are poor, individuals will seek to

improve their overall self-esteem by shifting the value they place on particular roles. This goal of maintaining a relatively high overall sense of self-esteem motivates individuals to explore and enter new roles. Which area they choose to emphasize is likely to depend on their interests, skills, and the opportunities and barriers their social networks provide. These factors also determine how much of a shift they are able to achieve. It is likely that this process of shifting emphasis and the formation of new identities results in the weak and somewhat inconclusive findings regarding global self-esteem and deviant behavior (McCarthy & Hoge, 1984; Stryker & Craft, 1982; Wells & Rankin, 1983). For most people, deviant behaviors may simply be part of generalized social participation. That is, they are somewhat sporadic behaviors that are not part of an integrated identity or a social network specific to those behaviors. As such, they may well be a reflection of low overall self-esteem and represent a search process for some arena that can provide feelings of belonging, efficacy, and esteem. Most people do not find these in deviant activities or else the associated costs are too high and, after a few forays into deviant activity, they continue their search for identity and self-validation in other areas. For others, however, deviant behaviors may represent the development of a deviant identity. Such an identity, situated in a social network of peers, can provide positive reinforcement for the behaviors and contribute to a high role-specific self-esteem. High role-specific self-esteem attached to a deviant identity, then, contributes to a high global self-esteem.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

The larger, underlying aim of this chapter has been to stimulate renewed research interest in the relationship between self-esteem theory and identity theory. Social psychology of the self has generated these two substantial and significant topics that have produced largely independent, unrelated literatures. While there has been some effort expended to link these two topics in the past, that effort has foundered on research findings that were often negative or inconclusive. We have argued that a renewed interest is warranted despite the lack of payoff in earlier efforts because the potential gain is great: The integration of self-esteem theory and identity theory would bring a good deal of social psychology under one roof, and could add considerably to the explanatory power of both theories. We have also argued that a renewed effort is justified by conceptual developments

¹⁴ This hypothesized process may explain the linkages between self-esteem and deviant behavior that is the focus of Kaplan's (1980) theory of self-esteem and deviance. This process may also provide the theoretical rationale for applied programs to involve at-risk youth in alternative activities that can provide viable nondeviant identities.

within each and by the realization that the negative or inconclusive findings of past work relating self-esteem and identity may reflect flawed methodological procedures.

We have sought to achieve our aim by developing a set of hypotheses relating self-esteem concepts and identity theory concepts that could serve to make research more fruitful and more coherent (whatever its success in integrating self-esteem theory and identity theory). Differentiating between global and role-specific self-esteem, we have identified self-efficacy and self-worth as two subtypes of self-esteem. We have also distinguished between role-specific and global performance. Identity theory concepts have expanded to include both salience and importance, as well as affective and interactional commitments. We have hypothesized relations between or among each of these, sketching the theoretical rationales for the linkages hypothesized.

It is important to recognize – as we certainly do – that what we have done in this chapter will be worth little unless our larger, underlying aim is achieved. In an empirical social science, any achievement on the theoretical level remains a barren exercise unless it is followed by research that empirically examines the hypotheses developing from theoretical considerations. In short, the value of what may have been accomplished in this chapter is not and cannot be assessable until the next years unfold. We look forward to seeing just what those next years bring.

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4 Measuring Self-Esteem

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Considered

Timothy J. Owens and Adam B. King

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the conceptualization and structure of global self-esteem (hereafter SE): that is, SE not tied to any particular societal context, personal attribute, social activity, or role (e.g., spouse and blues guitarist, physical appearance and intelligence, or school and work, respectively). Although there are several possible approaches to conceptualizing SE,¹ we focus our examination on *SE as an attitude people take toward their self* à la Rokeach's (1968) widely accepted definition of attitude.² Even though a multitude of SE measures exist (see Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991; Wylie, 1979), we limit our comments and analyses primarily to Rosenberg's (1965) oft cited and employed SE construct. We focus on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (hereafter RSES) because of its preeminence among social scientists and other students of SE.

Our chapter has three specific, though interrelated, goals: a clarification, an expansion, and an analysis of the meaning, measurement, and structure of global SE. Our clarification revolves around three chief aims. First, we explore in detail how Rosenberg (1965) actually conceptualized SE. Oddly, despite a plethora of ink devoted each year to the topic, this has not been thoroughly addressed. As we shall show, a careful look at Rosenberg's original Guttman scaling instructions for SE reveals a rather surprising and counterintuitive idea of what it means to be a high SE person. Second, we hope to bring terminological unity and clarity to some SE

¹ For example, Sniderman (1975, pp. 36–45) identifies three general ways to conceptualize SE: as a *need* for esteem (e.g., the Maslowian 1970 tradition), as a *ratio* between one's achievements and one's aspirations (e.g., the Jamesian 1890 tradition), and as an *attitude* toward the self as an object.

² Rokeach (1968, p. 112) defines an attitude as “a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or a situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner.”

terms and offer corrections for some past imprecision. Third, we reevaluate and strengthen the theoretical reasoning behind our claim that global SE might legitimately and fruitfully be divided into general self-denigration and general self-worth subdimensions, or positive SE and negative SE, respectively.³

Our expansion goal follows directly from the clarification. Here we take some of our published works (especially Owens, 1993, 1994, and Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000), and extend them by asking whether a bidimensional view of general SE (hereafter termed simply bidimensional SE) pertains as much to women, African Americans, and Latinos as it apparently does to white males. Reluctantly, we must defer discussion of other racial and ethnic groups since our data do not contain them in sufficient numbers to make valid generalizations. Moreover, while there is merit in looking at the structure of SE in other periods of the life course, especially among the rarely addressed topic of middle and older adults, we will largely confine ourselves to the mid- to late teens. (An exception is some work recently completed on the SEs of adult mental patients that we report later.) We do this not only because our data are focused on young people, but also because the vast majority of published research on SE is devoted to children and youths. Finally, our analytical goal is to provide an empirical justification for our claims by estimating and comparing the fit of several measurement models across gender and ethnic categories.

BACKGROUND

Issues of the Conceptualization of Global Self-Esteem

Although SE has been the central concept in several important books (e.g., Rosenberg, 1965, 1979; Coopersmith, 1967; Sniderman, 1975; Wylie, 1974, 1979) and literally thousands of journal articles and chapters, little has been written on what it actually means to speak of high or low SE. (Rosenberg and Owens, in this volume, discuss the consequences of low SE but generally not its meaning.) The above literatures and others are replete with conceptual definitions of SE (e.g., “a positive or negative evaluation of the self” – Rosenberg, 1979, p. 31) and reviews of scales purporting to measure it (see especially Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991, Burns, 1979, and Wylie, 1989). However, an examination of the operational definitions underlying SE rarely seems to be of foremost concern. This is especially unfortunate in an era of growing criticism of SE’s relevance to social science research and public policy (see Johnson, 1998; Hewitt, 1998; Scheff, Retzinger, & Ryan, 1989; Office for

³ Indeed, reflecting on the Guttman procedures provides additional reason for dividing global SE into its positive and negative dimensions.

Substance Abuse Prevention, 1992).⁴ A closer examination of Rosenberg's (1965) original Guttman scaling procedures is helpful in not only clarifying the meaning of high and low SE and the dimensions of global SE to which they related, but also to the operational definitions underlying them. We begin by reviewing his key assumptions with respect to the creation of the RSES (Rosenberg, 1965, pp. 16–17).

First, Rosenberg wanted a scale that was *easy to administer*, especially in survey situations. This was particularly important because he specifically designed his scale for use with large samples and when multivariate analyses were planned. Administering a complex, clinically oriented instrument would place needless burdens on subjects and research staff alike.

Second, and related to the first issue, the scale was to *use time economically and efficiently*. This was a crucial property for a scale designed for administration in a single school period and in conjunction with many other measures and scales. Moreover, from our experience administering the scale in a wide variety of settings, this economy also helps ameliorate problems associated with short attention spans and disinterested, and sometimes even hostile, respondents. In addition, while there is merit in understanding the phenomenology of engaging a highly self-revealing instrument such as the RSES (especially in a normal population), little is actually known about what people are *thinking* and *feeling* when completing the scale. This oversight seems all the more noteworthy because most people do not routinely reflect on the nature of their selves, especially their negative features (Taylor, 1989). (The exception might be clinical populations; however, the RSES was not particularly designed with such subjects in mind.) A brief, focused instrument would seem especially appropriate under these circumstances.

Third, he wanted an instrument with high *face validity*. Unfortunately, we were not able to uncover any evidence of a wider pool of questions or statements from which the final 10-item scale was distilled, even in Rosenberg's own published work.⁵ Regardless, he selected them because they "openly and

⁴ Self-esteem has also faced sporadic attacks from the religious and political right, particularly since the 1980s, when some tried to associate it with "bleeding heart" liberalism. The right's chief complaint can be reduced to two main concerns. First, they have picked up on some of the misguided or exaggerated claims made by SE zealots who see improved SE as a panacea for many social ills (e.g., delinquency, teenage pregnancy, dropping out of high school). Their tough on crime stance and preference for values-based arguments directly contradicts the SE zealot's "softer" approach. Second, and to make matters worse for the right, if the legion of SEers – advocates and consumers alike – is not bad enough, their advocacy for public programs and policies to achieve improved SE is downright maddening. The California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, founded by State Senator John Vasconcellos, is an especially poignant example.

⁵ We also made inquiries among several of Rosenberg's former colleagues. Wylie (1989) also reports finding no mention of a preliminary pool of items, even though she consulted Rosenberg while preparing her book.

directly dealt with the dimension [SE] under consideration" (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 17). This combination of logic and intuition resulted in sufficient discriminant validity to make Rosenberg (and many others) confident that his scale actually measured SE.

Finally, the scale was designed to be *unidimensional*. This meant it was not intended to be a mere additive scale; rather, it was supposed to rate and distinguish people along a single continuum from very high SE to very low SE. This was perhaps the most difficult goal and, as we shall see momentarily, the source of continuing debate. Rosenberg attempted to achieve unidimensionality through Guttman scaling and its concomitant scalogram analysis.⁶ Later, in the 1970s, he abandoned Guttman scaling and turned instead to structural equation modeling (and measurement modeling) through LISREL-type methods. Although he had to forgo the scalar assumptions encompassed in the Guttman method, along with the purposeful weights it gave specific items in his scale, structural equation modeling offered distinct advantages, especially when dealing with latent variables.⁷ This technique is not only useful with cross-sectional data, but is especially valuable when dealing with longitudinal data where cross-time correlated errors can substantially impact latent variables. In short, measurement modeling results in a more precise estimation of the latent SE variable, shorn of unreliability, than normally attained by other methods. However, the growth of structural equation modeling coupled with the ongoing use of more rudimentary additive scaling techniques (the norm among the majority of people using this SE construct) either sidestepped the dimensionality issue or, in the case of the latter, simply ignored it altogether. As we have seen time and again (Owens, 1993, 1994; Owens, Mortimer, & Finch, 1996; Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000), and as we will demonstrate later in this chapter, when a bidimensional measurement

⁶ Briefly, scalogram analysis arranges question items in ascending order such that responding in a previously designated ("positive") way on an item at one level assumes a positive response to all items at lower or less intense levels. A Guttman scale on capital punishment, for example, might be predicted on a question regarding circumstances when capital punishment should be legal: (1) first-degree murder, (2) rape, (3) kidnapping, (4) negligent homicide. Presumably, the vast majority of people's answers will form a scalar pattern: people affirming #4 will likely affirm #3, #2, and #1; those affirming #3 will also affirm #2 and #1, but not necessarily #4; and so forth.

⁷ Perhaps the chief advantage of the new procedure is being able to simultaneously incorporate measurement models in an overall structural equation model. Measurement modeling is also highly recommended on the grounds that it provides the opportunity to include a priori specifications of the relationships between a latent variable and its observed indicators (i.e., items), an essential aspect in creating a purposeful and theoretically driven construct that can also be tested against one's observed data. In addition, measurement models make it possible to take measurement error into consideration by specifying linkages in the residual variance error terms.

model of SE is explicitly compared to a unidimensional model, the former nearly always shows a better fit to the data than the later.

Closely examining Rosenberg's original Guttman scaling procedures illuminates the way he initially conceptualized SE (1965, pp. 305–307) and, as we will show, gives additional credence to our bidimensional view of global SE. His foremost assumption seems to be that although some people hold no positive opinions about themselves (i.e., those with the lowest SE), even people with very high SE may nevertheless hold some negative opinions about themselves. The essential question becomes: How much negativity is there? The less *negativity*, it seems, the higher the SE. Thus, a high SE person is not necessarily someone who acknowledges the largest amount of *positive attributes*; rather, a high SE person is someone who expresses the least potent negativity about him or herself. Significantly, this notion of negativity being embedded in all categories of SE comports well with the widely accepted notion among SE scholars that high SE is not equivalent to feelings of superiority or overweening pride in oneself.

To illustrate, Rosenberg's Guttman SE scale, which is derived from his 10 statements, ranges from 0 (very high SE) to 6 (very low SE).⁸ Despite the response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree, the magnitude of the sentiments are ignored by collapsing the poles into two overall categories: agree or disagree. (In the discussion that follows, when we speak of a person who agrees or disagrees with a statement, he or she may also strongly agree or strongly disagree.)

Scale Item I constrains the remainder of the scale, and tacitly represents those with the highest SE. Placement in Scale Item I is reserved only for people who answered 1 out of 3 or 0 out of 3 of the following statements by: (a) agreeing with "I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others"; (b) agreeing with "I have a number of good qualities"; or (c) disagreeing with "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure." That is, they have few or no negative self-feelings as expressed by agreeing with negative self-statements or disagreeing with positive ones. People rejected for inclusion in Scale Item I remain eligible for later categorization, while those meeting the inclusion criteria are no longer candidates for further categorization.

Progression through the subsequent categories means that the people so categorized increasingly either express more negative attitudes about themselves or reject more positive ones. People who end up in the two lowest SE categories (Scale Items V and VI, respectively) feel sufficiently negative about themselves so as to acknowledge a rather loathsome opinion of who they are (a conclusion bolstered by the fact that they did not meet any of the foregoing criteria for placement in a more favorable SE category). As such, Scale

⁸ The 0 category has symbolic importance, since it represents the relative *absence* of self-disparagement, as expressed on the scale. Movement up the scale, however, connotes increased layering of negative attitudes toward the self.

Table 4.1. Approximate Percent of 11th and 12th Grade Students in Each Self-Esteem Category (N = 3,117)

	Self-Esteem Categories						
	High		Medium			Low	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Scale %	16.6	28.0	25.2	16.3	8.6	4.0	1.2
Category %	44.6		41.5			5.3	

Note: These are the closest approximations we could make based on existing published data. Although Rosenberg reports a total of 5,024 subjects (p. 32), tabular data were only available on 3,117 (p. 24). Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Rosenberg (1965).

Item V consists of people who agree that “I wish I could have more respect for myself,” while those in Scale Item VI agree that “I certainly feel useless at times” and/or “At times I think I am no good at all.” See Table 4.1 for a breakdown in SE categorization. Of particular note is the very small percent of people falling in the low SE category (5.3%) while nearly half the sample (44.6%) is categorized as high SE people.

With respect to the dimensionality issue, once this Guttman scaling is abandoned⁹ and replaced with various additive methods (including assorted weighting schemes), the question of the scale’s constituent parts must be re-addressed on substantive and theoretical grounds.¹⁰ We take up that issue now. The social and psychological literature is split into two camps with respect to global or general SE. One camp views global SE as a unidimensional phenomenon best reflected by incorporating positive and negative self-evaluations in one summary measure. Thus conceived, global SE is a type of general SE defined as a “positive *or* negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self” (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 30, emphasis added). When a person’s global SE is high, that person has self-respect and a feeling of worthiness while also acknowledging personal faults and shortcomings. A low SE person, on the other hand, sees only his weaknesses and consequently lacks self-respect and considers himself “unworthy, inadequate, or otherwise seri-

⁹ Abandoning the use of Guttman scaling was no doubt reasonable as well because establishing and then ordering the positiveness or the negativeness of 10 self-statements seems quite subjective.

¹⁰ Morris Rosenberg apparently began to recognize this as well. While serving as the president at a roundtable on the self-concept and SE at the 1991 American Sociological Association annual meetings in Cincinnati, Ohio, Professor Rosenberg commented after my (Owens’s) paper presentation on the discriminant validity of bidimensional SE that he too needed to look into the matter. Sadly, his passing less than six months later deprived us of his assessment.

ously deficient as a person" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 54). Proponents of this view tend to defend unidimensionality on methodological grounds, for example, trying to deal with possible response bias (Carmines & Zeller, 1974, 1979) or on the bases of reliability analysis of the full construct only (Fleming & Courtney, 1984). Others combine a methodological rationale with the inchoate theoretical assumption that high SE and low SE represent opposite poles along a continuum (e.g., Bachman & O'Malley, 1984; Rosenberg, Schooler & Schoenbach, 1989). The most egregious and probably most frequent reason for supporting this approach is neither methodology nor theoretical, but mere custom.

In the other position, the bidimensional approach, global SE is separated into its positive and negative components (e.g., Goldsmith, 1986; Kaplan & Pokorny, 1969; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Owens, 1993, 1994; Wright et al., 2000). This implies that global SE may actually consist of general self-denigrating and general self-confirming subscales, or critical self-deprecation *and* positive self-worth components (Kohn, 1977; Kohn & Schooler, 1983). This division, although theoretically meaningful (as we will argue shortly), also helps to neutralize the criticism that researchers too often think solely in terms of global or fixed levels of SE, a view that may militate against a more precise and meaningful examination of the self and SE (Harter, 1985; Simmons, 1987). Harter (1985), for example, urges us to isolate specific domains and dimensions of SE and treat them separately so as to avoid unnecessary conceptual heterogeneity and ambiguity. She suggests that a Rosenberg-type global SE may be particularly useful in this regard precisely because its worth and derogation subscales are not situationally dependent. In a somewhat different vein, and speaking nearly three decades ago, Gergen (1971, p. 37) seems to concur: "Unfortunately researchers have tended to think solely in terms of global or fixed levels of SE; that is, they have tended to view people as if some felt they were 'inferior' and others felt 'superior'" Distinguishing self-worth and self-deprecation from one another recognizes that many hold negative *and* positive self-evaluations simultaneously.¹¹ However, just as the old Guttman

¹¹ Bradburn (1969) and Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) make parallel arguments in their respective conceptualizations of happiness and job satisfaction as two-dimensional constructs differentiated by positive and negative affect. According to Bradburn (1969) and Bradburn and Caplovitz (1965), positive and negative affect operate independently in the maintenance of overall well-being; simultaneous feelings of happiness and unhappiness are held because each responds to different events. Consequently, one may be happy about dining out at a good restaurant while also being unhappy over a quarrel with one's dinner companion. As shown in Herzberg's et al. (1959) research on job satisfaction, as extrinsic work conditions deteriorate (e.g., low pay, dirty or noisy conditions), job dissatisfaction may increase; but the absence of these conditions will not necessarily result in job *satisfaction*. Similarly, intrinsic job qualities (e.g., interesting work, work that helps others) may increase job satisfaction; but, again, their absence *does not* necessarily result in job dissatisfaction.

scaling methods resulted in a large number of people sorted in the highest SE categories, treating SE as a unidimensional or fixed entity makes it extremely difficult to assess the role of *negative* self-evaluations in otherwise high SE people, which is no small problem in the literature and in our understanding of SE.

Terminological Clarity

Up to this point we have been referring to the positive and negative dimensions of SE as self-worth and self-deprecation, respectively. In another paper engaging the dimensionality issue, Owens (1993) referred to the positive component of general SE as self-confidence (as, e.g., do Kohn, 1977, and Kohn & Schooler, 1983). This was a mistake. If one is concerned about the difference between facet-specific SE (e.g., social SE, academic SE) and global SE, then one must be equally selective in the terms used to discern global SE's dimension. To our way of thinking, while self-confidence also leans toward the general, unlike SE, it connotes "anticipation of successfully mastering challenges or overcoming obstacles," under the general belief that one "can make things happen in accord with inner wishes" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 31). If that is true, self-confidence, while undoubtedly an important aspect of the self-concept, is probably closer to mastery (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) or even locus of control than it is to SE. Consequently, we encourage using self-worth when referring to the positive dimension of global SE.

STRENGTHENING THEORETICAL REASONING

Although recognition of the empirical merits of dividing global SE into its self-worth and self-deprecation subdimensions is growing, an important stumbling block in wider acceptance of the bidimensional view lies in the incipient need for a clearer theoretical rationale. We address that issue now.

Negative Feelings about the Self

According to self-concept theory, two motives are central to the protection and maintenance of one's self-picture: SE and self-consistency (see Rosenberg, 1979). The SE motivation impels people to think well of themselves (see, e.g., Allport, 1961; Kaplan, 1975; Rosenberg, 1979) or at least to strive to attain or conserve a minimum degree of self-regard. In fact, many self-theorists regard this as a universally dominant human motive (see Kaplan, 1975). The self-consistency motive (Lecky, 1945), on the other hand, asserts that people struggle to validate their self-images, even when their images are negative.

The individual sees the world from his own viewpoint, with himself as the center. Any value entering the [value] system which is inconsistent with the individ-

ual's valuation of himself cannot be assimilated; it meets with resistance and is, unless a general reorganization occurs, to be rejected (Lecky, 1945, p. 153).

These seemingly incompatible motives can be reconciled with reference to self-verification theory and theories based on positive strivings. Both suggest that some individuals may sometimes benefit from or at least prefer negative self-concepts. Drawing on research in cognitive psychology and symbolic interactionism, Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992) propose self-verification theory as a corrective to self-consistency theory's insistence that a consistent self-concept is an end in itself. In their view, negative self-conceptions can help maintain a viable self-system and predictable if not orderly social relations. Self-verification theory holds that (Swann et al., 1992, pp. 392–93): (a) striving to confirm one's self-conceptions serves to bolster one's perceptions of prediction and control (see Pittman & Heller, 1987, for a general discussion; and Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, and Greenwald, 1980, for a related discussion of the effectance motivation). (b) The key to successful social relations is the ability to recognize how others perceive you (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). (c) People understand the necessity of having a stable self-concept in order to successfully negotiate social reality, and thus prefer reflected appraisals that confirm their self-images over those that do not even when the appraisals are *negative* (Swann et al., 1992; Taylor & Brown, 1988). (d) Fear of disharmonious interpersonal relations and misunderstandings may arise when individuals sense a disjuncture between their self-concept and the feedback they receive from others.

Theories based on positivity strivings, which are akin to the SE motive, acknowledge that while everyone may want positive reflected appraisals, those who offer negative appraisals to people with negative self-concepts may actually satisfy the target's positivity strivings. This seeming contradiction, however, is reconcilable (Swann et al., 1992). First, as an exercise in *self-improvement*, people with poor self-images may actually seek negative feedback from others in order to identify and remedy problematic behaviors. Second, by attempting to *win converts*, self-deprecating people can take a page from self-attribution theory (e.g., Kelley, 1971) and seek associates who devalue them in the hope that winning them over may actually prove their worth after all. Third, in a manner consistent with Heider's (1958) balance theory, *perceived similarities* may drive some people with negative self-concepts to choose contacts who appraise them unfavorably in an effort to validate their poor self-image. Finally, through *perceived perceptiveness* a negative SE person may see benefits in having a friend who gives them negative feedback in the paradoxically rewarding belief that at least they have intelligent and perceptive associates.

As viewed here, theories of SE, self-verification, and positive strivings strongly point to the theoretical merit in isolating and dealing with the negative dimension of SE embodied in self-deprecation. Indeed, we might

expect increased self-deprecation to be associated with poorer psychological well-being (as Owens, 1994, and Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000, have found), coupled with more realistic or unforgiving – though distressing – self-orientations than those with positive feelings of worth (see Taylor & Brown, 1988, for a review).

Positive Feelings about the Self

Another basic human motivation besides SE is self-efficacy. It has been hypothesized that this “effectance motivation” leads people to varying degrees of awareness and concern for how competent and efficacious or inept and ineffectual they judge themselves to be in the tasks and situations of everyday life (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). By extension, the development of self-worth might be closely associated with an awareness of or concern for self-efficacy, while parallel development of self-deprecation may follow from an awareness of those personal actions self-rated as inept, ineffectual or unsuccessful.¹² The effectance motivation may also impel people to focus more on their varying degrees of ability, competence, and virtue (self-worth attributes) rather than their inefficacy and the resulting self-deprecation (Greenwald, 1980).¹³ Moreover, theorists of the self tend to agree that in the interest of maintaining a viable and effective self-system, there is a strong motivation and inclination for individuals to construe their self-conceptions and their self-evaluations positively by manipulating or casting self-attributions, social comparisons, reflected appraisals, behaviors, and intentions in the best light possible (for an extensive discussion see Markus & Wurf, 1987). In addition, several studies have shown that through the motive of self-enhancement, people selectively interpret and remember events positively, thus highlighting successes while modifying recall in order to support favorable self-concepts (see Markus & Wurf, 1987, and Greenwald, 1980).

This idea is quite consistent with SE theory, whereby people are motivated to protect and enhance their SE. Indeed, the principle of psychological centrality holds that the self is an interrelated system of hierarchically organized components with some self-identities and attributes more important to the

¹² Indeed, three positive SE items in the Rosenberg scale suggest aspects of self-confidence (“I feel I have a number of good qualities”; “I am able to do things as well as most people”; “I feel I do not have much to be proud of”) while three negative SE items suggest a lack of confidence in one’s self or one’s capacities (“All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure”; “I wish I could have more respect for myself”; “I certainly feel useless at times”).

¹³ Whereas Gecas (1982, 1989), Gecas and Schwalbe (1983), and others (e.g., Bandura, 1977, 1981; Harter, 1985) have distinguished SE and self-efficacy, both orientations are reflected in the Rosenberg scale. For example, the SE items reported in Table 4.2 can be grouped into two general SE classes as described by Gecas (1982): (1) moral worth/virtue or self-worth (e.g., having a sense of virtue, justice, reciprocity, and honor) and self-efficacy (e.g., having a sense of competence, power, and human agency). Items 1, 5, 8, and 10 and to a lesser extent degree 6 and 7, reflect a sense of self-worth, while items 3, 4, 6, and 9 reflect a sense of self-efficacy.

self than others. In essence, psychological centrality helps protect SE by pushing potentially damaging attributes and identities to the periphery of the self system, while holding enhancing ones closer to the center (see Rosenberg, 1979, pp. 73–76). However, this also reintroduces self-verification and its role in negative perceptions of self. Although the principle of psychological centrality is usually associated with maintaining a positive self-concept, it seems quite reasonable that it also covaries with beliefs in one's faults and shortcomings. Consequently, owing up to or even embracing negative features of one's self – such as being a poor speller, having a tendency to hold grudges, or being a klutz – may actually be tolerable since they may serve a self-verification function.

To summarize, although much attention has been paid to global SE and positive SE, very little research has focused on negative SE. Indeed, it is not uncommon to refer to positive SE (composed solely of affirming self-statements) simply as SE (e.g., Kanouse et al., 1980; O'Malley & Bachman, 1983), which is suggestive of the short shrift often given to the negative dimension of global SE. Yet just as negative self-conceptions sometimes serve as a catalyst for change in the self (Markus & Wurf, 1987), negative self-evaluations, though discomfiting and frequently difficult for people to acknowledge, can serve a parallel function. Beck (1967), for example, implicates negative self-evaluations with increased depression, which accords well with cognitive consistency theory. Still, while work on the negative side of SE is mounting, more theory and research is needed on this painful and sometimes debilitating aspect of the self (see the chapter by Rosenberg and Owens in this volume for a detailed examination of the syndrome of low SE). We can conclude, however, that the preponderance of researchers' thoughts and energy has been devoted to explicating the positive dimension of SE at the expense of a better understanding of the course and effect of negative SE. A unidimensional construction of global SE only exacerbates the problem by folding negative self-attitudes into positive ones, thereby overwhelming the former and inadvertently focusing on and emphasizing the positive dimension of SE. Including SE in social research significantly furthers our understanding and appreciation of the dynamic relationship between self and society. However, a better understanding and appreciation of the course and effect of this important concept are stifled by an overreliance on a unidimensional conceptualization.

METHODS

Data

Our data come from the 1993–1995 editions of Johnston, Bachman, and O'Malley's ongoing Monitoring the Future (MtF) project, based at the University of Michigan. MtF, begun in 1975, is a nationally representative

annual survey of approximately 16,000 seniors attending 130 public and private schools throughout the United States. Each year's survey contains nearly 2,000 variables on such wide-ranging subjects as drug use and views, delinquency and victimization, social and mental well-being, work and dating experiences, and post-high school plans and aspirations. Because of the broad subject matter, the data are collected across six different forms constituting six subsets of respondents. Consequently, 2,500 to 3,000 students answer each form's questions: no one, however, answers questions on all six forms. In order to assess the structure and validity of SE, we chose to use Form 5 data from three survey periods – 1993, 1994, and 1995.

Including three contiguous data collection years was necessitated by our desire to represent racial and ethnic minorities in sufficient numbers to complete valid subgroup analyses, especially when race and ethnic groups are further broken down by gender. We confine our attention here to those students identifying themselves as white non-Hispanic, black or African-American non-Hispanic, or Hispanic. To assess the specific impacts of race, ethnicity, and gender on our key variables of interest (self-worth and self-deprecation), combining the three samples yields a total sample of 6,920 students: 5,249 are white, 975 are black, and 696 are Hispanic, while 3,202 are male and 3,718 are female (see Table 4.2). Their ages range from approximately 15 to 22, with the majority falling in the traditional 17 to 18-year range.

The U.S. Department of Education (1997) estimated that approximately 30% of school-age Hispanics dropped out of high school in 1994, the middle year of our study (see Table 4.3). This number is over twice the rate of blacks and nearly four times that of whites. Consequently, particular caution must be exercised when interpreting the data associated with the Hispanic subjects. Indeed, the MtF investigators, who provided us with the Hispanic identifiers not normally released through the ICPSR distributed datasets, insisted that we confine our analyses of the Hispanic subjects to the measurement models. As a result, although we evaluate the structure of SE among the Hispanic boys and girls in the sample we do not extend those analyses to

Table 4.2. Monitoring the Future (Form 5, 1993–1995)

Gender	Ethnicity			Total
	Black Non-Hispanic	Hispanic Origin	White Non-Hispanic	
Female	528	360	2,830	3,718
Male	447	336	2,419	3,202
TOTAL	975	696	5,249	6,920

our construct validation assessments. To do so would invariably involve generalizations beyond those agreed on when securing the Hispanic identifiers. (It was decided that because of the high level of abstractness in the structure of SE, those findings should be relatively free of bias stemming from a truncated sample. The same argument cannot easily be made for assessing the relationship between SE and our various outcome measures when nearly one-third of the normal Hispanic population is missing from the sample.)

Analysis Strategy

We employ two broad strategies in our analysis of global SE's dimensionality across race/ethnic and gender lines. First, we examine two competing SE models via confirmatory factor analysis: a unidimensional (or one-factor) SE construct consisting of positive and negative self items in a single measure versus a bidimensional (or two-factor) SE constructed positing two latent dimensions corresponding to self-deprecation and self-worth. Such a procedure will allow us for the first time to look explicitly at the empirical merits of employing a unidimensional or bidimensional construction of SE in particular subgroups. Second, we use the results of the first set of analyses in a detailed test of discriminant validity. Specifically, we assess the degree to which self-worth and self-deprecation are differentially associated with a number of other variables and constructs hypothesized to be associated with SE. Like the confirmatory factor analyses, the discriminant validity assessments are carried out within racial and gender categories. (Hispanics are dropped from the latter analyses for the reasons discussed earlier.)

Measures

The MtF dataset includes eight SE items, six of which correspond to items from the Rosenberg scale (1965) with two others from a scale developed by Cobb et al. (1966). To maintain consistency with prior work, we include only the Rosenberg items in the discriminant validity analyses. Of the six Rosenberg items, four are positively worded and promote or affirm one's self while two are negatively worded and denigrate it (see Table 4.4). Both of the Cobb et al. items connote denigration. All the items are general SE statements free of specific contexts or situational references, such as peer or work relations, or academic or social esteem.

The discriminant validity variables deal with attitudes toward and use of cigarettes and alcohol, community and social attitudes and affiliations, and social and psychological well-being. Some are single-item measures; others are scales created with the assistance of principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The discriminant validity variables are addressed in more detail in the results section.

Table 4.3. Percent of High School Dropouts Among Persons 16 to 24 Years Old by Gender and Race/Ethnicity (October 1994)^a

Race/Ethnicity	Gender		
	Both Genders	Females	Males
Black, non-Hispanic	12.6	11.3	14.1
Hispanic origin	30.0	28.1	31.6
White, non-Hispanic	7.7	7.5	8.0
TOTAL	11.5	10.6	12.6

^a These figures represent “status dropouts.” That is, persons not enrolled in school and not high school graduates. GED recipients are counted as graduates. All data are based on October counts and come from sample surveys of the civilian noninstitutional population.

Source: U.S. Department of Education. (1997). *Dropout rates in the United States 1960–1996*. National Center for Education Statistics.

Table 4.4. Self-Esteem, Self-Worth, and Self-Denigration Indicators and Response Alternatives^a

Evaluative Direction	Wording
W1.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.
W2.	I feel I am a person of worth, on an equal plane with others.
W3.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.
W4.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
D5.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
D6.	Sometimes I think I am no good at all.
D7. ^b	I feel that I can’t do anything right.
D8. ^b	I feel that my life is not very useful

^a W denotes self-worth (i.e., positive evaluations of the self) and D denotes self-deprecation (i.e., negative self-evaluations). Response options are: 1 = disagree, 2 = mostly disagree, 3 = neither, 4 = mostly agree, 5 = mostly disagree. The negative items were reverse coded when forming the self-deprecation scale.

^b Denotes non-Rosenberg self-esteem items.

RESULTS

Measurement Model Findings

As mentioned earlier, we performed several contrasts and comparisons of unidimensional and bidimensional SE measurement models across race/ethnicity and gender categories via confirmatory factor analysis. Specifically, we tested whether a one-factor (unidimensional) model, with all the SE items forced to load on a single construct, fit the data better than a two-factor (bidimensional) model, with the positive and negative items forced to load on separate constructs corresponding to self-worth and self-deprecation, respectively. LISREL 8.30 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1999) was used to estimate parameters and test each model's overall fit after imposing theoretically informed constraints on the data. Three fit statistics are used: (1) the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), (2) the root mean square residual (RMSR), and (3) the chi-square/degrees-of-freedom difference test.

The AGFI, like the GFI, assesses how much better a given theoretical model fits in comparison to a null model in which all parameters are zero. Although neither the AGFI nor the GFI are explicitly dependent on sample size, they are nevertheless, like every fit measure, influenced to some degree by N . However, the AGFI adjusts the GFI for degrees of freedom, thus providing a statistic less influenced by N than the GFI. Values range from 0 to 1, with those above about .9 indicating a reasonably well-fitting model. However, no clear consensus on the cutoff level exists (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1989). The RMSR is a measure of the square root of the mean of the squared discrepancies between the input data matrix and the data matrix reproduced by the theoretical model. The closer a value gets to 0 the better the model fits the data. Finally, the chi-square/degrees of freedom difference test (hereafter "difference test") allows us to assess whether competing measurement models are significantly different from each other or whether one model improves on the other. The differences are tested by subtracting the chi-square and the degrees of freedom of a two-factor (nested) model from a one-factor model and then determining whether the resulting chi-square is significant given its associated degrees of freedom.

To keep the models as general as possible, we did not include correlated error terms among the SE indicators. This seems quite reasonable under the circumstances: (1) Little would be gained from doing so, (2) the difference tests would become problematic due to the inevitable application of nonuniform correlated error terms across models, (3) there are no persuasive theoretical arguments for including them, and (4) we are not making longitudinal estimates.

Turning first to the unidimensional models, we see that in every category examined, the model fits the data either poorly or very poorly (see Table 4.5). The average AGFI across all categories is .82, far below the conventional 0.9 cutoff, while the average RMSR is a relatively high .074. Males, especially

Table 4.5. Unidimensional and Bidimensional Self-Esteem Measurement Models Compared by Race and Gender: Rosenberg Items Only

		Both Genders				Females				Males			
		Unidimen- sional	Bidimen- sional	Difference	Sig.	Unidimen- sional	Bidimen- sional	Difference	Sig.	Unidimen- sional	Bidimen- sional	Difference	Sig.
All Races	DF	9	8	1		9	8	1		9	8	1	
	χ^2	1016.71	274.41	742.30	.001	662.31	127.45	534.86	.001	556.57	107.13	449.47	.001
	AGFI	.83	.94			.80	.95			.80	.95		
	RMSR	.072	.034			.083	.026			.083	.030		
	N	4,370				2,306				1,938			
Blacks	DF	9	8	1		9	8	1		9	8	1	
	χ^2	403.50	70.76	332.74	.001	181.19	57.21	123.98	.001	211.85	32.15	179.10	.001
	AGFI	.83	.96			.85	.94			.79	.96		
	RMSR	.084	.036			.069	.030			.097	.028		
	N	1,627				896				671			
Hispanics	DF	9	8	1		9	8	1		9	8	1	
	χ^2	254.28	87.56	166.72	.001	111.95	51.81	60.14	.001	127.23	31.10	96.13	.001
	AGFI	.85	.93			.87	.93			.83	.95		
	RMSR	.070	.033			.063	.040			.077	.030		
	N	1,212				637				539			
Whites	DF	9	8	1		9	8	1		9	8	1	
	χ^2	404.55	186.39	218.16	.001	144.04	79.51	64.53	.001	292.07	126.47	165.60	.001
	AGFI	.81	.89			.86	.91			.73	.85		
	RMSR	.059	.033			.046	.029			.074	.040		
	N	1,531				773				728			

whites, appear to have the poorest overall fit when a unidimensional model is specified.

Quite a different picture emerges when a bidimensional structure is applied to the data. Here the AGFI's show a consistently good fit to the data, with the possible exception again of white males. Their AGFI is a lower than desired .85, but their RMSR is a relatively acceptable .040. The average AGFI across all the groups, however, is a respectable .93 while the average RMSR is a low .032. Taken together, the fit statistics suggest that a bidimensional model is preferable to a unidimensional one.

Comparing the AGFIs and the RMSRs across groups and model types is not a particularly accurate method of assessing one model's merits over another's. For this we must look at the chi-square/degrees-of-freedom difference tests. In every single instance, the bidimensional model is a substantial improvement over the unidimensional model. The difference test for each group tested in Table 4.5 is an unmistakably significant $p < .001$. One can only conclude that on empirical merits alone, the bidimensional SE model is superior to the unidimensional model.

Interestingly, as Table 4.6 shows, when the models were reestimated to include the two non-Rosenberg items from MtF's full SE scale, the overall fit of the unidimensional construct took a substantial plunge while the bidimensional models tended to improve, including the model for white males (which went from an AGFI of .85 to one of .91). The average AGFI for the unidimensional model became a dismal .65 and the RMSR a high .10. On the other hand, the average AGFI for the bidimensional model increased slightly to .95 while the RMSR decreased slightly to .031. Although the AGFI and RMSR data are encouraging, restraint must be exercised in making too much of the differences in these measures. Fortunately, since the Rosenberg-only and the mixed SE item models are nested, the difference test can also be applied for a more conclusive test of the significance of model improvements, if any. In each case except white males, the bidimensional mixed SE model is a significant improvement in fit over the Rosenberg-only bidimensional model. And while the unidimensional models continued to fit the data poorly, the difference test suggests that the Rosenberg-only unidimensional model is superior in psychometric properties than its mixed-item counterpart.

Construct Validity Findings

In this section we compare the differential association of self-worth (SW) and self-deprecation (SD) with several variables and constructs to discern whether examining SE in its bifurcated form yields meaningful insights.¹⁴

¹⁴ Although it would be nice to perform a multitrait-multimethods matrix analysis with the positive and negative SE items, calling the differently worded items different *methods* is quite dubious.

Table 4.6. Unidimensional and Bidimensional Self-Esteem Measurement Models Compared by Race and Gender: Rosenberg and Cobb et al. Item Combined

		Both Genders				Females				Males			
		Unidimen- sional	Bidimen- sional	Difference	Sig.	Unidimen- sional	Bidimen- sional	Difference	Sig.	Unidimen- sional	Bidimen- sional	Difference	Sig.
All Races	DF	20	19	1		20	19	1		20	19	1	
	χ^2	3069.94	389.51	2680.43	.001	1192.95	263.74	929.21	.001	1603.34	144.23	1459.11	.001
	AGFI	.63	.96			.74	.94			.57	.96		
	RMSR	.099	.034			.078	.032			.11	.026		
	N	4,294				2,267				1,904			
Blacks	DF	20	19	1		20	19	1		20	19	1	
	χ^2	1254.70	116.01	1138.69	.001	449.70	98.49	351.21	.001	633.37	53.63	579.74	.001
	AGFI	.59	.97			.75	.95			.54	.96		
	RMSR	.12	.027			.085	.035			.14	.028		
	N	1,586				877				652			
Hispanics	DF	20	19	1		20	19	1		20	19	1	
	χ^2	836.25	129.42	706.83	.001	335.86	84.45	251.41	.001	651.84	66.23	685.51	.001
	AGFI	.64	.95			.74	.94			.59	.94		
	RMSR	.13	.032			.083	.038			.12	.032		
	N	1,191				623				532			
Whites	DF	20	19	1		20	19	1		20	19	1	
	χ^2	1020.47	226.70	793.77	.001	440.37	111.68	328.69	.001	601.59	142.75	458.84	.001
	AGFI	.67	.93			.72	.93			.60	.91		
	RMSR	.078	.029			.066	.027			.090	.034		
	N	1,517				767				720			

The construct validity analyses revolve around three sets of variables: socioeconomic well-being, prosocial attitudes and behaviors, and health attitudes and behaviors. Looking first at the relation of SE and socioeconomic well-being, we see substantial differences in SD's and SW's differential association with the five criteria variables under this category (see Table 4.7). Overall, SD is more highly associated with economic insecurity, fatalism, and feeling socially isolated. Interestingly, while being economically insecure impacts SD more than it does SW across nearly all demographic categories, it is particularly hard on the SD of black males, as registered on their feelings of SD ($r = .41$). Unlike everyone else, however, economic insecurity does not have a significant effect on the SW of black males. Having a fatalistic attitude toward life in general, and one's prospects for success and happiness in particular, is much more highly associated with increased SD than with decreased SW, especially among blacks. Feeling socially isolated, while both depressing SW and elevating SD, has a clearly disproportionate association with SD across all groups. Finally, the two positive dimensions of socioeconomic well-being, planful confidence and religiosity, are more highly associated with SW than SD. In addition, being confident in one's planfulness appears to have a disproportionately higher association with blacks' SW than their SD. Interestingly, in nearly every group, religious importance is more highly associated with SW than SD, except among black females, where religiosity appears unrelated to SW but positively associated with SD.

Turning to the prosocial attitudes and behaviors, SW is noticeably (and positively) associated only with an expressed desire to contribute to nonprofit, charitable, or philanthropic organizations. In no group examined is nonprofit giving associated with SD, a clear indication that giving is a tool of self-expression and enhancement, not protection (e.g., Schervish, 1992). A similar pattern emerges for a sense of injustice. Although indignation is positively associated with SW in every demographic group examined (sometimes quite meagerly, especially among whites), it is especially pronounced among blacks. A sense of injustice, in short, appears to dwell in the positive region of the self. Among black males, moreover, their self – and thus their SE – seems to be particularly affected by their sense of unfairness, with a moderately positive association with SW ($r = .35$) coupled, unlike the other groups, with a small though significantly negative association with SD ($r = -.12$). That is, expressing or acknowledging emotional distress when seeing others treated unfairly has a particularly salutary impact on black males' SEs by undercutting their feelings of SD while enhancing their perceptions of SW.

Turning finally to the health attitudes and behaviors findings, a somewhat mixed picture is revealed. First, there is little differential association between the two dimensions of SE and the frequency with which one drinks enough alcohol to "feel pretty high," except among blacks. Additionally, everyone except white males apparently feels at least a little bad about themselves for getting "drunk." However, even for that group getting tipsy is not a positive

Table 4.7. Zero-Order Correlations of Self-Deprecation (SD) and Self-Worth (SW) with Socioeconomic Well-Being, Prosocial Attitudes and Behaviors, and Health Attitudes and Behaviors

	Gender and Race																	
	All		Male		Female		White		Black		White Male		Black Male		White Female		Black Female	
	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SW</u>
Socioeconomic well-being																		
Economic insecurity	31	-20	31	-18	31	-23	31	-23	34	-14	29	-20	41	ns	32	-25	25	-18
Fatalism	41	-24	39	-18	44	-33	42	-28	33	ns	40	-22	35	ns	47	-36	31	-15
Planful confidence	-39	53	-38	57	-43	51	-41	54	-28	51	-40	57	-26	56	-45	52	-31	43
Social isolate	58	-38	58	-33	58	-43	60	-42	52	-20	59	-36	53	-19	60	-46	51	-28
Religiosity	-05	12	-06	13	-07	12	-06	11	ns	13	05	11	ns	17	08	11	10	ns
Prosocial attitudes and behaviors																		
Nonprofit giving	ns	18	ns	19	ns	16	ns	13	ns	28	ns	15	ns	35	ns	14	ns	ns
Upset by unfairness	ns	07	ns	11	ns	05	ns	04	ns	23	ns	07	-12	35	ns	05	ns	10
Health attitudes and behaviors																		
Drank and got high	10	-10	06	-05	14	-17	09	-09	11	-10	ns	ns	18	ns	14	-14	ns	-12
Drank & had car accident	ns	-07	ns	ns	ns	-07	ns	ns	ns	-34	ns	ns	ns	-40	ns	ns	ns	ns
Risk using hard drugs	-05	13	-08	20	ns	06	-06	12	ns	20	-06	18	-21	28	-07	08	ns	ns

Note: All reported correlations significant at $p < .05$ (two-tailed test). Correlation pairs that are **bold** represent statistically significant differences in the correlations of SD or SW and the specified criterion variables at $p < .05$ per Blalock (1979, pp. 423–25). Decimal points excluded. See Appendix for item wording.

self-experience, but rather a neutral one. Looking at blacks across gender categories reveals countervailing influences between SE and drinking that would go undetected if a unidimensional SE scale were used or gender was ignored. For black males, getting intoxicated is modestly though significantly associated with increased SD, while having no apparent association with SW. The reverse is true for black females; becoming intoxicated is associated with reduced SW while having no apparent association with SD. Even though getting drunk and into an automobile accident is certainly not a common adolescent experience nor, presumably, a positive one, when black males are involved in such accidents their SW is substantially reduced while their SD appears unaltered. No such dynamic appears among whites or black females. Finally, the perceived risk of regular hard drug use (LSD, heroin, amphetamines, cocaine) tends to be more highly associated with SW than SD, an indication of the prophylactic effect of SW in this area. Moreover, this prophylactic effect appears stronger among males than females (no relation was found between drug risk and SE among black females). Unlike the other demographic groups, however, perceived drug risk has a stronger association with both dimensions of SE among black males ($SW\ r = .28$ and $SD\ r = -.21$).

DISCUSSION

We found strong theoretical, methodological, and substantive support for a general bidimensional measure of global SE over a unidimensional one. Here “bidimensional” referred to partitioning SE into its separate – though related – positive and negative self-evaluative components; “general” referred to SE constructs not specifically linked to a particular context or referent, such as academic, social, or body SE. We term these general positive and negative SE measures self-worth and self-deprecation, respectively. The confirmatory factor analyses – comparing blacks, Hispanics, and whites across gender categories – supported a bidimensional SE measure in every instance tested. That is, when the structural coherence of unidimensional SE (where its positive and negative components combined in a single, summary measure) was directly compared to its bidimensional form, the bidimensional construct’s psychometric properties were clearly superior. Moreover, even though the unidimensional models fit the data poorly, tests examining structural differences between a unidimensional model composed of only Rosenberg items fit the data better than one that mixed Rosenberg items with those from another scale. These measurement model comparisons suggest that those who are intent on employing a unidimensional SE construct take extra precautions when mixing Rosenberg scale items with those from other SE scales.

The construct validity analyses support the factor analyses. Separating SE into its SW and SD subcomponents provides valuable insights into the differential association and nuances of SD and SW with our key domain vari-

ables, particularly when race and gender comparisons were included. In the realm of socioeconomic well-being (including the lack thereof), SD clearly had a stronger link to the underbelly of well-being (economic insecurity, fatalism, and social isolation) than did SW. Moreover, feelings of SD among blacks as a group tended to be more highly associated with economic insecurity and fatalism than among whites. And even more significant, black males' feelings of SD appeared especially responsive to economic insecurity and fatalism. Social isolation's biggest impact was on the SD dimension (mean $r = .56$) while also playing a smaller though significant role in SW (mean $r = -.33$). Unlike the other indicators of well-being, the patterns of association were comparatively similar across all the groups examined. Religiosity, on the other hand, showed a mixed pattern warranting further study. Although the associations between being religious and SW and SD were significantly different from each other for the subjects as a whole, it was stronger (and positive) for SW. Interestingly, however, the associations were diametrically opposite when black women were compared to black men. For the black females, increased religiosity was associated with increased SD ($r = .10$) while there was no apparent relation to their SW. The reverse seems true for late adolescent black males; religiosity was positively associated with SW ($r = .17$), but had no apparent association to their feelings of SD. Planful confidence, a construct similar to Clausen's (1991) and one he has linked on the whole to overall happiness, well-being, and success across the life course (Clausen, 1993) had a higher differential association to SW (mean $r = .53$) than to SD (mean $r = -.37$).

In the domain of prosocial attitudes and behaviors, the desire to give to nonprofits and charities is almost universally associated with SW but not SD. This is noteworthy because as theory would predict, and as previous empirical investigations have borne out, people who feel good about themselves are more likely to engage in civic and community affairs (Owens & Aronson, 2000). Also, as argued elsewhere primarily on theoretical grounds, a sense of injustice should be more highly associated with SW than SD (Owens & Aronson, 2000). The reasoning is that the perception of injustice often gets translated into a feeling of indignation that in turn acts on one's positive self-feeling. Our data show this to be generally, though quite modestly, true. In every instance except among black males, only SW was positively associated with being upset by unfairness toward others. For black males, an especially stigmatized group historically and contemporarily, issues of injustice appear particularly salient to both dimensions of the self under study here. Indignation not only had a moderate and significant ($p < .05$) association with black males' SW ($r = .35$), but also unlike the other groups examined, it was modestly though significantly associated with their SD ($r = -.12$).

Within the health attitudes and behaviors domain, another contradictory pattern arose among black males versus black females. Getting drunk is not

a positive experience for either groups' sense of esteem, but for black males the frequency of such behavior was significantly associated with increased SD ($r = .18$) while for black females in their late teens, its primary effect was to depress their SW ($r = -.12$). Oddly, when examined in isolation, the frequency with which white males got drunk had no significant impact on either dimension of the SE. Drinking and getting into an automobile accident had a particularly deleterious effect on black males' SW ($r = -.41$), the results perhaps of social norms governing self-control in public and the specter of a negative encounter with the police.

CONCLUSION

It is not uncommon for researchers to employ the positive dimension SE and refer to it simply as self-esteem. Part of the problem is that unidimensional and bidimensional SE are too often employed uncritically, without considering the construct's empirical and theoretical dimensions. This atheoretical and methodologically naïve use of SE appears to stem from implicit assumptions about SE and simple custom. Our measurement model comparisons and construct validity assessments will we hope spur others to use global SE, whether in its unidimensional or bidimensional form, more thoughtfully and discriminately. A case in point are the measurement model comparisons that suggest that those who are intent on employing a unidimensional SE construct take extra precautions when mixing Rosenberg scale items with those from other SE scales.

Our central point is that since it is quite conceivable for one to feel simultaneously self-worthy *and* self-deprecating in varying degrees and proportions, the two self-attitudes should be treated separately, just as happiness and unhappiness or job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are. Indeed, attention to the negative dimension of SE is increasing (Mortimer, Finch, Shanahan, & Ryu, 1992; Owens & Aronson, 2000; Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000). Owens (1994), for example, shows that the reciprocal relation of SE and depressive affect is quite marked when a bidimensional SE construct is used. Wright, Gronfein, and Owens (2000) show that among recently deinstitutionalized mental patients, their feelings of self-deprecation were in considerable flux during the first year following their release from a state mental hospital after which it stabilized. Their self-worth, on the other hand, remained quite unstable over the two-year follow-up period. In an analysis of the effect of work on the psychological well-being of teenage boys, Mortimer et al. (1992, p. 40) show that work stress and the likelihood of early high school employment increases SD but are not significantly related to positive SE.

Overall, viewed bidimensionally, SW and SD reveal differences in both the intensity and the direction of their association with various social and psychological variables, particularly when viewed across race and ethnic cate-

gories. In contrast to SW, SD is especially associated with poor social functioning and pessimism. SD is also more highly associated with feeling socially isolated, economically insecure, and believing that one's future is going to be difficult to manage successfully. Together, these findings describe people in conflict or at variance with themselves and others. This comports with psychoanalytic theory, where the lowest in self-esteem people experience the most alienation and conflict between their real self and the perceived selves associated with the various roles they play (Horney, 1950). Or as Rosenberg has written (1981, p. 614):

The importance of a healthy self-concept for mental health can scarcely be exaggerated. It is clear that self-esteem is characteristically deeply implicated in the neurotic (though not necessarily the psychotic) process. Whether the research has been essentially clinical or quantitative, the results demonstrate clear and consistent relationships of low self-esteem to psychological depression, anxiety, somatic symptoms, impulse to aggression, vulnerability, negative affect states, and other neurotic symptoms.

SW, on the other hand, is more closely associated with proactivity, prosocial attitudes and behaviors, and issues of justice and civic involvement. High or adequate SW frees one to look outside the self, see obstacles as challenges, setbacks as possibly temporary, and the world and the self as worthy of mutual support and coexistence. Freed to a degree from the sometimes overwhelming social, psychological, and emotional burdens associated with an overabundance of SD, the higher SW person is more attractive to self and others than the high SD person (see the Rosenberg and Owens chapter in this volume).

This examination of SE, primarily through the Rosenberg SE Scale, sheds light not only on the usefulness of self-esteem as an essential barometer of society's well-being and functioning, but on the substantive and theoretical importance of a bidimensional conceptualization and employment of the construct. We initiated a direct examination of the role of SE in gender, race, and ethnicity – something rarely done. Yet much work remains, especially in understanding the dynamic relation of self (and self-esteem) and society among racial and ethnic minorities, across cultures, and among the poor and vulnerable whose voice is too often left out or muted by the theories and methods that seem to work for majority groups, but that result in high attrition and spotty compliance among nonmajority groups.

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APPENDIX. ITEM WORDING FOR CONSTRUCT VALIDITY MEASURES**Socioeconomic Well-Being***Economic Insecurity*

1. I get very concerned about how I am going to be able to pay my next bills.
2. I worry whether I will have any job at all in a few months.
3. I worry about getting fired or laid-off from my job.

Response options: never, seldom, sometimes, often, always.

Fatalism (Fatalistic attitude toward life)

1. Good luck is more important than hard work for success.
2. Every time I try to get ahead, something or somebody stops me.
3. Planning only makes a person unhappy since plans hardly ever work out anyway.
4. People who accept their condition in life are happier than those who try to change things.
5. People like me don't have much of a chance to be successful in life.

Response options: disagree, mostly disagree, neither, mostly agree, agree.

Social Isolate

1. A lot of times I feel lonely.
2. I often feel left out of things.
3. I often wish I had more good friends.

Response options: disagree, mostly disagree, neither, mostly agree, agree.

Planful Confidence

1. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.
2. There is always someone I can turn to if I need help.
3. I believe a person is master of his/her own fate.
4. There is usually someone I can talk to, if I need to.
5. Planning ahead makes things turn out better.
6. I usually have a few friends around that I can get together with.

Response options: disagree, mostly disagree, neither, mostly agree, agree.

Religiosity

1. How important is religion in your life?

Response options: not important, a little important, pretty important, very important

Prosocial Attitudes and Behaviors

Nonprofit Giving

Question: If you have at least an average income in the future, how likely is it that you will contribute money to the following organizations?

1. The United Fund or other community charities?
2. International relief organizations?
3. Minority group organizations?
4. Church or religious organizations?
5. Political parties or organizations?
6. Citizen lobbies?
7. Charities to help fight diseases?
8. Organizations concerned with population problems?
9. Organizations concerned with environmental problems?

Response options: definitely not, probably not, don't know, probably will, definitely will, already have.

Upset by Unfairness

1. I get very upset when I see other people treated unfairly.

Response options: disagree, mostly disagree, neither, mostly agree, agree.

Health Attitudes and Behaviors

Drank and Got High

1. On the occasions that you drink alcoholic beverages, how often do you drink enough to feel pretty high?

Response options: never, seldom, sometimes, often, always.

Drank and had Auto Accident

1. During the LAST 12 MONTHS, how many driving accidents have you had after you were drinking alcoholic beverages? (Paraphrased)

Risk of Using Hard Drugs

Question: How much do you think people risk harming themselves if they...

1. Take LSD regularly?
2. Take heroin regularly?
3. Take amphetamines regularly?
4. Take cocaine regularly?

Response options: No risk, Slight risk, Moderate risk, Great risk, Can't say, drug unfamiliar.

5 The Self as a Social Force

Viktor Gecas

Most of our attention in studying the self has been on the self-concept as a *product* of social forces and influences. This is understandable since the self and self-concept *are* products of the social environment. People are not born with selves. Rather, selves emerge out of social and symbolic interaction. And it is important to understand the social processes and factors involved in the development of the self and its various components. In fact, Morris Rosenberg has been a major contributor to this focus, adding substantially to our understanding of the principles of self-concept formation and revealing their operation within various social contexts.

Yet Rosenberg also urged us to go beyond our predominant concern with the antecedents of self-concept, toward greater consideration of the self as a social *force* in its environment. He observed that “one reason for past neglect (of viewing the self as a social force) ... is that students of social structure and personality have focused overwhelmingly on the impact of society on personality and neglected the impact of personality on society” (Rosenberg, 1981, p. 623). This neglect is also a function of the related tendency within sociology (and much of social psychology) to look for external causes of individual experience and behavior – in the social situation, social institutions, or more distant social structures and cultural systems. We are much less likely to look to the self as a source of agency and motivation, affecting its environment as well as contributing to its own development.

The aim of this chapter is to pick up on this less developed theme in Rosenberg’s work and in the work of self-concept scholars in general. In examining the self as a social force we will need to consider the nature of self-reflexivity, the motivational significance of emotions and (especially) the nature and types of self-motives. Rosenberg has provided insightful observations on a number of these topics, particularly on the self-esteem motive and its influence on perceptual and cognitive distortions, on self-objectification processes, and on the interrelations between self and emotions. I will review

and try to expand on some of these contributions to our understanding of the self as a social force.

AGENCY, REFLEXIVITY, AND SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

The self as a source of agency and volition is a prominent feature of the symbolic interactionist perspective from which Rosenberg drew much of his theoretical inspiration. The view of the self as an active and creative agent in its environment – making decisions, exerting control, negotiating, evaluating, manipulating, and, in short, constructing its world – is, in Blumer's (1969) terminology, one of the "root images" of symbolic interactionism. This view of the self is not unique to symbolic interactionism, of course. In very similar terms, but from the perspective of cognitive psychology, Baumeister (1997, p. 34) discusses the "executive function" of the self: "The self makes decisions, initiates actions, and in other ways exerts control over both self and environment. ... Without this executive function, the self would be merely a passive spectator, aware of itself and related to others, but unable to do anything except perceive and interpret the flow of events." Most of our behavior is habitual and does not involve much of this executive function of the self. But, as Baumeister (1997) points out and much earlier Mead (1934) and the pragmatists have stressed, the willful, agentive self engaged by environmental challenges and problematic situations may constitute only a minority of our actions, but they are the most important and consequential actions for self and environment.

Reflexivity, the defining characteristic of the self, is also a significant source of agency. Reflexivity refers to the capacity of humans to be both subjects and objects to themselves, to reflect on themselves and act toward themselves as objects. The basis of this reflexivity, as described by Mead (1934) and others mostly associated with the symbolic interactionist tradition, is the dialectical relationship between the "I" and the "me," the "knower" and "known" aspects of the self. The "I" reflects back on the "me" that sets constraints on the actions of the "I". This remarkable process is, among other things, an important source of personal agency – directed toward shaping oneself.

Reflexivity enables a wide range of what Rosenberg (1988) calls self-objectification processes, such as self-motivation, self-evaluation, self-attributions, and self-control. That is, by virtue of being reflexive creatures, we can motivate ourselves, evaluate ourselves, attribute qualities to ourselves, and exercise control over ourselves. Without the ability to self-objectify, human society would not be possible. We would not be able to engage in role taking, to live by the rules we create, to exercise self-control over our impulses, to judge our conduct and that of others, and so on. Human society is based on self-objectification and being human, for that matter, depends essentially on

this capacity. Self-objectification is our evolutionary advantage over other species on earth. But, as Rosenberg (1988) points out, it comes with a price: "The great majority of psychological problems among human beings ... are self-objectification problems – problems from which [other] species are blessedly free" (1988, pp. 559–60). We are the only creature in nature aware of our mortality, anxious about the future or regretful about the past, who experience self-alienation, contemplate suicide, and suffer the agonies of self-contempt, remorse, and guilt. These problems of self-objectification are a large part of what we mean by the human condition. Self-objectification, therefore, is both a blessing and a curse: it is a powerful capability enabling the range of human achievements, but it also makes us painfully aware of our limitations and insecurities.

SELF-MOTIVES

The self-concept is not only a complex cognitive and affective structure developing from our self-reflexive processes, it is also a motivational system. The self-concept as a motivational system speaks most directly to the issue of the self as a social force.

In discussions of the motivational significance of the self, two self-motives are most frequently invoked: the self-esteem motive and the self-consistency motive. The self-esteem motive refers to the motivation to maintain and enhance a positive or favorable evaluation of oneself. It refers to our desire to think well of ourselves. The self-consistency motive refers to the motivation to maintain a stable or consistent conception of ourselves (Rosenberg, 1979, chapter 2). By virtue of having a self-concept, individuals are motivated to evaluate it favorably and to view it as consistent and coherent.

Both these self-motives are prominent in the social psychological literature on the self, but not equally so. Self-esteem has received the lion's share of attention. It is the motivational basis for numerous theories in social psychology, such as Kaplan's (1975) theory of delinquent behavior; Rokeach's (1984) theory of value change; Duvall and Wicklund's (1972) self-awareness theory; Alexander and Wiley's (1981) situated identity theory; and is evident in much of Goffman's (1959) work on self-presentation and impression management (for more extensive reviews of these theories, see Baumeister, 1997; Gecas & Burke, 1995). Some even consider self-esteem to be the master motive in personal and interpersonal relations (Solomon et al., 1991). These self-theories suggest that people may go to great lengths to maintain a favorable view of themselves, enhance their self-evaluation, or avoid an unfavorable self-evaluation. This may occur through increased efforts at self-improvement (most "New Year's resolutions" would qualify), or through efforts to change our environment to make it more favorable to our self-views (e.g., choosing our friends or our arenas for competition), or through

various self-serving cognitive processes (e.g., selective perceptions, selective memory, selective attributions, and various forms of self-delusion).

Rosenberg maintained that the self's defenses in the service of self-esteem protection are formidable. He and others (e.g., Murphy, 1947) have convincingly argued that Freud's "ego defense mechanisms" are better understood as *self-defense mechanisms* because they are employed largely in the service of self-esteem protection and enhancement. Rosenberg (1979, p. 55) deftly converts these ego-defense mechanisms into self-defense mechanisms as follows:

Rationalization involves finding a socially acceptable or admirable explanation of our behavior that might otherwise be condemned. *Compensation* represents an effort to overcome the damage inflicted on self-esteem as a consequence of failure in one area by extraordinary achievement in that of another area. *Projection* involves attributing to others certain undesirable characteristics or wishes which in fact characterize the self, but which, if recognized, would be offensive to self-esteem. A well-known manifestation of *displacement* is scapegoating, used by people who, frustrated and humiliated by those more powerful, seek to boost their own self-esteem by asserting their superiority over others. *Reaction formation* involves emphasizing feelings or characteristics which are precisely the reverse of certain undesirable characteristics of the actual self. ... *Repression* involves thrusting into the unconscious libidinal or aggressive impulses which, if recognized, would offend self-esteem. ... To a substantial extent, these mechanisms have as their objective the protection of self-esteem.

But even more important as a self-defense mechanism than those suggested by Freud, is the process of selectivity. Rosenberg (1979, chapter 11) discusses at some length the importance of selectivity in the service of the self-esteem motive. It is manifest in most of our cognitive and behavioral processes, such as selective perception, memory, attention, interpretation, and interaction. Rosenberg (1979) demonstrates how selectivity even affects the major principles of self-concept formation: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attributions, and psychological centrality. Reflected appraisals are affected through selective interaction (e.g., we are more likely to choose as friends people who like us), selective imputation (e.g., the tendency to impute more favorable views of us than others actually hold), and selective valuation and credibility (e.g., we consider some reflected appraisals as more significant and credible). Also, social comparison processes are affected by our selection of standards of comparison and comparison groups that are more favorable to our self-esteem. Self-attribution processes are shaped by the selective interpretation of facts, selective attention to facts, and the making of selective causal attributions (depending on the success or failure of outcomes). Regarding psychological centrality, we are more likely to value and elevate in centrality those qualities and capacities at which we are good and devalue those at which we are bad. Consequently, the structure of the self-concept as a hierarchical organization of traits and identities is

largely the product of selective processes operating to protect self-esteem. A common sequence of self-defense through selectivity can be described as follows: Information threatening to self-esteem is not seen; if seen, it does not register; if registered, it is misinterpreted; if correctly interpreted, it is forgotten; if remembered, its significance is diminished or rationalized, etc. (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 276). The self-esteem motive is a powerful and ubiquitous force, protecting self-esteem by providing a distorted or biased view of the self and its world. "Only a motive of enormous power could explain the wide range of devices ... marshaled by individuals ... in defense of self-esteem" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 56).

But are these defenses and distortions in the service of a good cause? Is self-esteem an unequivocal good? Rosenberg thought so, and the prevailing popular and academic views reflect this positive conception of self-esteem. For that matter, Rosenberg's influential work undoubtedly helped shape the popular view of self-esteem as a major indicator of, and contributor to, individual well-being and a source of positive motivation. But whether we view self-esteem as an unequivocal good for the individual and for society depends in large part on how we conceptualize it. Rosenberg's (1979, p. 54) conceptualization is heavily slanted toward a positive view:

self-esteem signifies a positive or negative orientation toward [oneself]. When we characterize a person as having high self-esteem, we are not referring to feelings of superiority, in the sense of arrogance, conceit, contempt for others, overweening pride; we mean, rather that he (sic) has self-respect, considers himself a person of worth. Appreciating his own merits, he nonetheless recognizes his faults, faults which he hopes and expects to overcome. The person with high self-esteem has *philotimo*, not *hubris*; he does not necessarily consider himself better than most others, but neither does he consider himself worse.

It would be nice if self-esteem consisted of this admirable mix of self-respect and humility, that it were characterized more by *philotimo* than by *hubris*. But I am skeptical that this is the case, especially in American society. In my view, self-esteem is morally neutral, since it simply refers to a positive or negative attitude toward oneself. We can only speak of it as morally good or bad *when it is combined with other virtues, personal qualities, or values*. Rosenberg tries to associate self-esteem with such other qualities of personality or self-concept as recognition of one's faults, humility, and respect for others. But there is no necessary or inherent connection between self-esteem and these virtues. High self-esteem could also be associated with negative qualities, such as those mentioned by Rosenberg (e.g., arrogance, conceit, overweening pride, and contempt). Some social psychological theories [e.g., Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, and Turner's (1985) self-categorization theory] even maintain that self-esteem is often attained at the expense of others. Ruthless dictators, for example, may have high self-esteem, but not of

the admirable kind. Furthermore, our measures of self-esteem, Rosenberg's included, do not distinguish between *philotimo* and *hubris*. A person scoring high on Rosenberg's self-esteem scale could just as easily be arrogant and prideful as modest and respectful of others. All the score tells us is how positive or negative one's self-evaluation is, not how morally or socially acceptable it is.

So in answer to the question: Is self-esteem, as typically conceptualized and measured, an unequivocal good? I would have to say no: It depends on the larger personal and cultural contexts within which it exists and that provide self-esteem with the necessary moral qualifiers and normative constraints that make it a positive value, but which, lacking these qualifiers, could make it a very negative value.

American culture has provided a fertile and problematic ground for self-esteem, with its ethos of individualism, personal worth, and happiness. Our contemporary obsession with self-esteem, as Hewitt (1998) argues, reflects some of our central American values: "It underscores our belief that the individual is the center and the measure of all things." Hewitt examines how our obsession with the merits of self-esteem has given rise to a whole host of promoters, "retailers," and "conceptual entrepreneurs" praising the virtues of self-esteem as the solution to most of our personal and social ills. This was certainly the theme of the California Commission to Promote Self-Esteem (1990, p. 4), which concluded its report with the statement: "Self-esteem is the likeliest candidate for a social vaccine, something that empowers us to have responsibility and that inoculates us against the lures of crime, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, chronic welfare dependency, and educational failure. The lack of self-esteem is central to most personal and social ills plaguing our state and nation." The tenacity of this view is evidenced by its persistence in the face of weak and inconclusive scientific evidence for most of these claims.

Not everyone shares this view, of course. John Hewitt is one of the skeptics. In a culture that he sees as already too individualistic, too self-preoccupied, and too inclined to "look out for number one," the emphasis on self-esteem contributes to even more self-centeredness and selfishness. He is especially critical of the "culture of self-esteem" in the form of self-esteem enhancement programs in our public schools, which have some ironic unintended consequences:

The child ... is encouraged [through these self-enhancement techniques] to believe that it is acceptable and desirable to be preoccupied with oneself, to praise oneself, to disassociate self-esteem from behavior or group membership, and to regard acceptance by self and others as a basic human right (1998, p. 166).

Within such a cultural climate of individualism and self-centeredness it may well be difficult to also develop such virtues as humility, modesty, self-sacri-

fice, and altruism that could temper the potentially negative consequences of excessive self-esteem. We would also expect the various self-esteem defense mechanisms, discussed previously, to be more effective and more frequently utilized within such a cultural climate. So, although a case can be made for the salutary consequences of self-esteem, as Rosenberg and others have done, the claims can easily be overstated, especially by promoters outside of academia. We should at least be aware of the potentially dark side of self-esteem, the cultural context within which the emphasis on self-esteem occurs, and some of the potential unintended consequences of this emphasis on self-esteem enhancement.

Self-consistency as a motive has not had the popularity that self-esteem has had, neither among social psychologists nor the public at large. It doesn't have "promoters" and "conceptual entrepreneurs"; there is no "culture of self-consistency"; and it would be hard to find a "self-help group" or an educational program based on this motive. Compared to self-esteem, it is a dull motive, and with its emphasis on constancy, stability, and continuity it seems less congruent with the core values of American culture. Yet its advocates (e.g. Antonovsky, 1979; Epstein, 1980; Lecky, 1945) have persuasively argued that people have a need for coherence, for a meaningful and predictable conception of themselves and their world, that enables effective action and contributes to a sense of ontological security. Self-consistency links directly to these ontological and practical needs, yet it has languished for much of its history in social psychology, taking a back seat to self-esteem.

However, in the 1980s, the self-consistency motive reappeared in several new forms, giving new life to this self-motive (see Gecas & Burke, 1995, for a review). A number of self-theories emerged that are based on some form of consistency or congruency as a central dynamic in processing information, organizing knowledge, or motivating individuals. Swann's *self-verification theory* (1983; Swann et al., 1987) is based on the premise that people are motivated to verify or confirm currently held views of their self-conceptions as a means of bolstering their perception that the world is predictable and controllable. Swann's theory suggests that people prefer self-confirming feedback even when the self-view that is being confirmed is not a positive self-view. Although this argument seems to conflict with theories based on self-esteem, Swann et al. (1987) suggest that consistency processes operate primarily at the cognitive level of the self, whereas self-esteem processes operate more on the affective level.

Similar to self-verification theory is Higgins' (Higgins, 1987, 1989) *self-discrepancy theory*, which deals with the consequences of the failure of self-verification. According to this theory and the research supporting it, inconsistencies or discrepancies between the actual self (those attributes one believes to possess) and the ideal self (those attributes one desires), or between the actual self and the ought self (those attributes one feels obliged

to be or have) produce emotional responses and a strong motivation to reduce the discrepancy. The type of emotional response depends on the type of discrepancy experienced: actual/ought discrepancies produce social anxiety and guilt, while actual/ideal discrepancies produce depression. An important feature of Higgins' theory is that it brings emotions into self-theorizing, providing an important connection between cognitive and affective processes.

Another manifestation of consistency processes is found in theories emphasizing self-schemas. Markus (1977) suggests that the substance of one's self-concept resides in relatively enduring self-schemas. A self-schema is a cognitive structure consisting of organized beliefs about the self. These cognitive structures or self-schemas are used to organize, interpret, process, and act on self-relevant information. Self-schemas determine whether information is attended to, how it is structured, how much importance is attached to it, and what happens to it subsequently. An interesting variation of self-schema is Markus and Nurius's (1986) concept of "possible selves," the representation of oneself in future states or circumstances – what one would like to become, or what one is afraid of becoming, or what one could become. Possible selves serve as active guides or standards for behavior aimed at realizing, or avoiding, some future condition. They are important mechanisms by which we try to shape ourselves.

Consistency and congruency may operate not only at the level of cognitive organization, but also at the level of interpersonal relations. Backman's (1985, 1988) *interpersonal congruency theory* maintains that people seek out social relationships that are congruent with, and help maintain, their self-conceptions.

Perhaps the most novel manifestation of the self-consistency motive is found in the concept of "authenticity." From its philosophical roots in existentialism, the concept draws our attention to the problem of "realness" and "falseness" in ourselves, and to the psychological imperative to "be true to oneself." When one is living "authentically," one is acting in accordance with one's core values and in congruence with one's core identities. Such action is an affirmation of self contributing to one's sense of meaning, purpose, and well-being. Inauthenticity, by contrast, is characterized by feelings of meaninglessness, self-estrangement, and anomie – conditions that individuals try to avoid.

But the quest for authenticity is increasingly difficult in modern times (as I have argued elsewhere, Gecas, 1994). Authenticity is largely a function of commitment to systems of meanings in society, particularly to various identities embedded in systems of values and beliefs. Urbanization, industrialization, and the sheer rapidity of social change have undermined the social and cultural moorings of the self. The pervasive themes of modernist writers on the self are fragmentation, ambivalence, confusion, and alienation – condi-

tions detrimental to the maintenance of authenticity. From alienating work conditions (see Hochschild, 1983) and increasingly transient personal relations to the pervasiveness of images in the electronic age, modern societies make it difficult for their citizens to maintain a sense of authenticity. Yet by virtue of having a self, a person is motivated to experience it as meaningful and real. People will try to protect their sense of "real self," resist threats to it, seek out new sources of meaning and self-authentication, and engage in self-deception.

Along with self-esteem and self-consistency (in its various forms) a good case can be made for the importance of self-efficacy as a self-motive (Gecas, 1989). Self-efficacy may be the most direct expression of the self as a social force. It refers to the perception of oneself as a causal agent in one's environment, as having control and being able to control one's circumstances. Individuals with high self-efficacy think of themselves as competent, effective, and able to change themselves and to bring about change in their worlds. Those low on self-efficacy are more likely to feel powerless, helpless, or fatalistic. Since the experience of high self-efficacy is preferable to that of low self-efficacy, people typically seek to enhance their perceptions and expressions of self as efficacious.

Support for the existence and significance of this self-motive comes from a wide range of sources: from Deci's (1975) work on intrinsic motivation in developmental psychology; from attribution theory via Rotter's (1966) work on locus of control; from Marx's (1844) theory of alienation; from Mead's (1934) pragmatic theory of the self; and from Bandura's (1977, 1982) social learning theory (see Gecas, 1989, for a review).

A large body of evidence has accumulated on the beneficial consequences of self-efficacy for individual functioning and well-being, much of it provided by Bandura and his colleagues. Bandura has found that self-efficacy beliefs have therapeutic effects on a wide range of health conditions, such as overcoming various addictions, phobias, anxieties, and eating disorders, and recovery from illness or injury (Bandura, 1986; O'Leary, 1985). One reason for these positive effects is that individuals who believe they are efficacious in a particular domain (e.g., their health) are more likely to engage in behavior aimed at improving or correcting or overcoming problems associated with that aspect of their lives. Even more interesting is the possibility that self-efficacy beliefs may have an impact on the immune system. Bandura and his colleagues have turned to examining the physiological processes affected by self-efficacy that would account for its therapeutic qualities (see Wiedenfeld et al., 1990).

Self-efficacy has also been found to affect depression. Much of this research is based on Seligman's (1975) theory of "learned helplessness," which proposed that depression is likely to occur when one comes to believe that one's actions have no effect on changing one's unfavorable circumstances. In

most of this research, self-efficacy serves a mediating or buffering function between some type of stress (e.g., economic strain, physical injury or disability) and depression (Pearlin et al., 1981). Because self-efficacy beliefs have beneficial consequences (whether they are based on reality or not), people may engage in distortions of reality and operate under the illusion of greater personal control and efficacy than they really have (Langer, 1983).

The self-efficacy motive is not only relevant to personal change, it is also relevant to social change. When faced with a social problem or perceived injustice, persons with a high sense of self-efficacy are more likely to engage in actions aimed at correcting it. Research on political activism finds that high self-efficacy combined with perceptions of system unresponsiveness or low trust in the political system generates efforts at political change (see Snow & Oliver, 1995, for review). Concerted political action may also depend on perceptions of the group's or movement's efficacy, or what Bandura calls "collective efficacy" (1986, pp. 449–522), that is, members' judgments about their group's capabilities to engage in successful political action. Participation in political activism may itself increase feelings of personal and collective efficacy, especially if the actions are successful. Self-efficacy beliefs are important qualities of the leadership of a social movement. Leaders, especially charismatic leaders (Shamir et al., 1993), need to perceive themselves, and be perceived by their followers, as efficacious in order to be effective. The most effective leaders are able to increase the self-efficacy of group members by their own displays of efficacy, high performance expectations, and determination.

As a final comment on self-efficacy, it should be noted that the concept may be even more congruent with American culture than is the concept of self-esteem. Self-efficacy fits very well with such core American values as self-reliance, mastery, and independence. Also, like self-esteem, it has generated a subculture and various "promoters" – typically not under its own label, but under the guise of "empowerment." A currently popular remedy for improving the condition of various individuals or groups perceived as "disadvantaged" is to "empower" them, that is, to increase their self-efficacy and control over their fates. The idea has merit, if it involves social structural as well as personal change.

REFLEXIVE EMOTIONS

The motivational significance of emotions is obvious. They provide the passion and the energy for much of our conduct. Fear, rage, joy, compassion, love, envy, and so on have motivational consequences, either in their behavioral expression or their suppression. How is the self relevant to this domain? For Rosenberg (1990, p. 3) "reflexive processes ... pervade virtually every important aspect of human emotions." It is the self's capacity for reflexivity

that grants privileged knowledge to the individual concerning his or her cognitions, emotions, sensations, and wishes. The self's reflexivity also enables an individual to observe, regulate, and change these internal features. The foundation of emotions may be physiological, but it is the human capacity for reflexivity that underlies emotional (and self) control (Rosenberg, 1991).

In principle, all emotions are self-relevant, as Denzin (1984) suggests, since we can define ourselves in terms of our emotions (e.g., I am sentimental), use emotions as indicators of who we *really* are (Hochschild, 1983), and use our reflexive processes to generate, suppress, control, and express just about any emotion. Although all emotions have some relevance to the self, some emotions are of central importance to the self. These can only be experienced *because* of the self, that is, because of the ability of humans to be self-reflexive. Shott (1979) calls these emotions *reflexive role-taking emotions* or reflexive emotions for short. This label describes those emotions that are directed toward oneself, and include the emotions of shame, guilt, pride, embarrassment, and mortification. Shott (1979) distinguishes these from empathic role-taking emotions, which are evoked when the focus is on some other person. The latter are experienced as sympathy or pity. Reflexive role-taking emotions are also contrasted with the primary emotions of fear, surprise, sorrow, anger, and happiness (Thoits, 1989). Unlike other emotions, role-taking emotions cannot occur without putting yourself in another's position and taking that person's perspective.

Although both reflexive and empathic emotions are significant motivators of normative and moral conduct, reflexive emotions are the foundation for social control that is based on self-control. Feelings of guilt and shame check and punish deviant behavior, making the individual him or herself an ever-present critic and censor of his or her own behavior. Shott (1979) underscores their importance by arguing that society could not exist without these emotions because "no one except ourselves can make us ashamed, guilty, or embarrassed; and without our capacity to experience these sentiments, society as we know it would surely be impossible" (Shott, 1979, p. 1326).

Shame and Guilt

Of the reflexive emotions, guilt and shame have received the most attention because of their importance to socialization, social control, and their relevance to self-motives, especially self-esteem. They are important components of the self as a social force. Guilt is the feeling associated with moral self-condemnation. It arises when one commits a transgression against internalized rules and values, and then judges oneself to be morally inadequate. The concept of guilt has been prominent within the psychoanalytic tradition. Freud discussed it in connection with the internalization of parental values by the child and the development of the superego. Self-censure for moral transgressions of these internalized values is the basis for feelings of guilt. Guilt leads

to questions about one's moral adequacy, yet it also implies the existence of a moral self. The experience of guilt requires the existence of a conscience and a self that can distinguish between what is right and wrong, a self that is part of a moral order. Were guilt to be absent following a moral transgression, such as injury to another, one would be viewed as lacking adequate socialization. A person without a conscience is viewed as a sociopath.

The motivational consequences of guilt are generally constructive. They involve the desire for atonement, for reparation, for making amends and for righting the wrong or injury that has been done. Guilt is an emotion that motivates individuals to confess, express sorrow for what they have done, seek forgiveness, and attempt to repair the damage. Guilt motivates individuals to repair damaged relationships and to conform to the moral order (Tangney, 1991).

Shame, by contrast, is typically conceptualized as a self-feeling resulting from a perceived loss of esteem or respect in the eyes of others. The experience of shame has a more external locus – the perceived condemnation, ridicule, or scorn of others (Gecas, 1986). Lynd (1958) considers shame a more complicated emotion than guilt, and one having more pervasive consequences for one's self. She views shame as “a wound to one's self-esteem, a painful feeling of degradation [resulting] from the consciousness of having done something unworthy of one's previous idea of one's own excellence” (p. 24). Lynd emphasizes the association of shame with personal failure or inadequacy. There is a tendency to associate guilt with feelings of wrongdoing, and shame with feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, although this distinction is not always clear in the academic literature on these emotions (Abell & Gecas, 1997).

Scheff (1988) considers shame to be the primary or master reflexive emotion, generated by the virtually constant monitoring of the self in relation to others. Drawing on Cooley's (1902) concept of the “looking-glass self,” Scheff argues that low visibility shame deriving from our constant concern of how we appear to others is ubiquitous and the major basis for social conformity. This may be an overstatement, even if shame is one of the most important bases of conformity to social norms and conventions.

But shame is also more than just a “low visibility” emotion monitoring our interpersonal relations. It can also be experienced quite intensely as acute humiliation, mortification, loss of face or honor or pride. In these more intense shame experiences, the behavioral consequences are typically different from social conformity. Two common responses to acute shame are withdrawal (e.g., hiding one's face, becoming invisible, and, in the extreme case, suicide); and aggression (the desire to lash out at the source of one's shame). Both of these reactions to shame are socially destructive, especially the latter. Scheff (1994) identifies it as the shame-rage reaction, and considers it the cause of a great deal of interpersonal and intergroup conflict, from gang wars and family feuds (e.g., the Hatfields and McCoys)

to international wars where national honor/pride are perceived to be at stake. Such vendettas may become spirals of reciprocity increasing in intensity and severity – the perceived offense to one's self-esteem, pride, or honor generating a response in kind against the perpetrator that in turn elicits increasingly severe retaliations. Gottman (1994) and Retzinger (1991) found such patterns of escalating conflict to characterize problem marriages. But even in marriages that are not "in trouble," Gottman found negative behavior of spouses toward each other (e.g., criticisms, put-downs) more likely to be reciprocated than positive behavior (e.g., compliments, courtesies), probably because the self-esteem motive via shame is more strongly aroused when it is threatened than when it receives positive feedback. Except for the low visibility shame associated with social conformity, the motivational consequences of shame are generally more destructive than are those of guilt.

Although both guilt and shame are important reflexive emotions, consequential for socialization, social control, and the quality of interpersonal relations, the attention that one or the other has received has varied considerably. In the heyday of psychoanalytic theory (from the 1940s to the 1960s), guilt was considered the premier reflexive emotion and shame was hardly considered worthy of discussion. Since the 1970s, the relative visibility of these emotions has reversed. Shame is now ubiquitous in the professional *and* popular literatures, and guilt is hard to find. A recent issue of *Newsweek* (February 6, 1995) had a feature article entitled "The Return of Shame." Part of this shift may be due to the decline of the moral domain as a frame of reference for self-definition: We are less likely to think of our failings as sins (generating feelings of guilt), and more likely to see them as inadequacies in the eyes of others (evoking shame). Part of it may also be due to the increased focus on self-image, impression management, and on self-esteem (previously discussed). Our social psychological concepts, particularly those dealing with the self, reflect the culture of our time, as others have also noted (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

CLOSING COMMENTS

It is certainly true that the self is a product of social influences, as most of our social psychological theories maintain and our research affirms. But it is also true that the self is a force acting on its environment and on itself. Morris Rosenberg, who was a major contributor to our understanding of the self as a product of social forces, also strongly urged us to examine the self as a social force and identified several lines of inquiry for such a focus. That has been the theme of this chapter. I have tried to make the case for the self as a source of agency by considering reflexivity and self-objectification processes, self-motives, and reflexive emotions. These are not the only sources of the self's agency, but they are major means by which the self constitutes a social

force. We are, to a large extent, agents of our own creation and the creation of our environments. However, it is also important to remember Marx's pithy observation: We make our own history, but typically not under conditions of our own choosing, nor with the consequences intended.

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6 Self-Certainty and Self-Esteem

Ron Wright

If, however, a person has unclear, unstable, uncertain opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of himself – if he simply is not sure what he is like – then he is deprived of his most valuable frame of reference.

(Rosenberg, 1989, p. 153)

Many social phenomena – reactions to positive and negative feedback, avoidance of evaluative circumstances – are presumed to reflect individual differences in self-esteem. Discussions of these phenomena often assume that an individual's esteem-relevant thoughts and behaviors can be predicted based on a single number, namely, the individual's level of self-esteem. Some approaches have gone beyond this “point estimate” to a multifaceted conceptualization, measuring self-esteem separately in various domains (e.g., Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995; reviewed by Harter, 1996). Still, the level of self-esteem in each specific area is a single number. Research reviewed in this chapter suggests that understanding people's psychological experiences and predicting their responses requires knowledge not only of their level of self-esteem, but also of the certainty, clarity, consistency, and stability of the self-image.

From his extensive study of adolescents, Rosenberg (1989) concluded that difficulties experienced by low self-esteem individuals often resulted not from low self-esteem per se, but from concomitant self-image disturbances. He viewed self-esteem as one part of a multi-aspect self-image. Self-esteem is reflected in the direction – “whether he [*sic*] has a favorable or unfavorable

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opinion of himself” – and intensity – “how strongly favorable or unfavorable these feelings are” – aspects of the self-image (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 24).

This chapter considers other aspects of the self-image in relation to self-esteem. Specifically, I focus on how *self-certainty* – taken as an omnibus term including certainty, stability, clarity, and consistency of the self-image – is related to self-esteem and esteem-related social functioning. Because low self-esteem individuals are often low in self-certainty, some researchers have investigated self-uncertainty as a concomitant of low self-esteem in hopes of better understanding the experience of low self-esteem individuals. Other researchers have viewed self-certainty as a moderating construct and studied how self-certainty interacts with self-esteem in affecting experience and behavior for both low and high self-esteem persons. Both the concomitant and the interactive approaches are considered in this chapter. Various ways of conceiving and measuring self-certainty are reviewed, key empirical findings are surveyed, and a distributional view of certainty is proposed as an integrative model. The chapter concludes with an agenda for future research.

The Importance of Self-Certainty In Understanding Esteem-Related Phenomena

Why a chapter on self-certainty in a book on self-esteem? This section provides a quick sampling of findings illustrating the connections among self-esteem, self-certainty, personal experience, and social behavior. Detailed findings are provided in the empirical approaches section.

An intimate connection between self-esteem and certainty is suggested by the near equivalence of self-confidence and high self-esteem in ordinary discourse. Similarly, being unsure of oneself and having self-doubts are taken as synonyms for low self-esteem. In accordance with these everyday expectations, one line of research finds that high self-esteem individuals tend to be more certain of themselves. Rosenberg (1979) noted that self-esteem instability and unclarity correlated with low self-esteem, unhappiness, and anxiety. Campbell (1990) found that low self-esteem correlated with slower “me”/“not me” responses to trait adjectives, with lower subjective confidence in one’s own trait ratings, and with less stability in assessments of one’s own traits over a two-month period. Such research falls within the “concomitants” tradition and offers a fuller understanding of the experiences and responses of low self-esteem individuals.

Research in the “interactive” tradition has shown that self-esteem alone cannot explain some important esteem-relevant behaviors. For example, consistency theory predicts that low self-esteem individuals should avoid success that clashes with their preexisting self-image. Marecek and Mettee (1972) found, however, that only those who were certain of their low self-worth avoided success. Similarly, Kernis, Grannemann, and Barclay (1989) found that those most likely to respond to threat with anger and hostility

were not low self-esteem individuals, but individuals with generally high, but unstable self-esteem.

Pelham and Swann (1994) found that how one is viewed by others depends on one's self-rating and on one's certainty concerning that rating: Reflected appraisals tended to match self-appraisals for those qualities of which an individual was relatively certain, but less so for qualities of which the individual was less certain.

These sample findings suggest that self-esteem is intertwined with the certainty, stability, and clarity of the self-image and that various important social phenomenon reflect the joint effects of self-esteem and self-certainty. To better understand these phenomena, it is useful to better understand self-certainty. The next section begins a detailed look at the multifaceted self-certainty construct.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

This section introduces distinctions that help organize the phenomenon of self-certainty and approaches to studying it. (Some conceptual issues are more fruitfully discussed in the context of empirical data and are addressed in the section on key empirical approaches.) A component of this conceptual clarification is establishing a suitable vocabulary. Technical terms are used differently by various researchers (cf. Hattie, 1992, p. viii). This section establishes the terms I use and their definitions.

Certain About What? Self-Esteem and the Self-Schema

When one is sure of oneself, what is one sure of? Possibilities include being sure of one's physical characteristics, physical attractiveness, attitudes, likes and dislikes, worth as a person, traits and response tendencies, evaluation by others, role in life, and ability to handle life's situations. Certainty or uncertainty in any of these areas can have important effects on social cognition and interpersonal interaction. The focus in this chapter, and in the self-certainty literature, is on two general types of certainty: certainty concerning one's *evaluation* of oneself and certainty concerning one's *cognitive representation* of oneself.

Self-image and *self-view* are used here as omnibus terms incorporating both one's self-representation and one's evaluation thereof. I use two terms for self-evaluation: From the individual's perspective, it is *self-worth*; from the observer's perspective, it is *self-esteem*.

For one's cognitive representation of oneself, I use *self-schema*, by which I mean a single, hierarchically arranged cognitive structure containing all of one's cognitions about oneself. This usage differs from Beck et al.'s (1979) usage to mean any stable cognitive pattern (e.g., "I am a failure"), and from Markus's (1977) usage in which one is "schematic" or "aschematic" about some aspect

of the self. I reserve the term self-schema here for qualities experienced as inherent in the self; uncertainty concerning one's schema of oneself as a social object remains relatively unexplored.

Although the self-schema may contain *representations* of one's evaluations ("I love lasagna"), with my definition, one cannot "have a negative self-schema"; rather, one (a) judges oneself to have characteristic *X* and (b) judges *X* as bad. In real life, these judgments typically co-occur, but being certain one has *X* has cognitive consequences irrespective of evaluation. Evaluation adds affective consequences that are sometimes at odds with cognition. Terms appearing to be cognitive, but that are unflinchingly preceded by evaluative terms such as "negative" and "positive," blur the distinction between what one sees in oneself and how one evaluates what one sees. For example, for some authors "self-concept" is a cognitive representation, whereas for others it is an evaluation; too often, it is defined one way, but used indiscriminately.

The distinction between the self-schema and self-esteem is not the same as the distinction between global and specific self-esteem. For example, academic self-esteem and social self-esteem are still evaluative orientations and hence part of self-esteem. A dispassionate evaluation of one's academic ability or social skills is part of one's self-schema, but the feeling toward oneself within these domains is not.

What Is Certainty and How Is It Assessed?

Certainty is a subjective judgment by the individual. Gross, Holtz and Miller (1995, p. 215, adapted from Festinger) defined certainty as the "subjective sense of conviction or validity about one's attitude or opinion." This definition can be applied to either one's attitude toward oneself (i.e., self-esteem) or to aspects of the self-schema.

The subjective sense of conviction/validity can be assessed directly in two ways: categorically or dimensionally. The *categorical* approach offers a statement and respondents indicate (1) the extent to which they agree with the statement and (2) their degree of certainty concerning this judgment, often on a scale from "very unsure" to "very sure." The *dimensional* approach provides respondents with a set of statements chosen to represent the full spectrum of positions along some dimension. Respondents indicate which statements might be true, and uncertainty is assessed by the number of positions considered credible. Dimensional assessments reviewed here typically present respondents with a line segment on which each point represents a position intermediate between two extremes; the width of the range of positions considered credible serves as the measure of uncertainty.

The *distributional* approach, discussed in the integration section, combines the categorical and distributional approaches. In this model, positions

along a dimension are assigned a degree of credibility rather than merely being assessed as credible or not.

A final approach is *statistical*. Since variability across multiple self-esteem measurements can be seen as a reflection of uncertainty, the intra-individual standard deviation of self-esteem scores can serve as an indirect measure of uncertainty.

Self-Esteem and Self-Schema as Mental Hierarchies

Both the self-schema and self-esteem can be thought of as hierarchies. The top of the self-schema hierarchy is a single node representing the whole self. Beneath this node are the primary aspects of the self, perhaps roles (father, worker, friend) or contexts (at a party, in the morning). Beneath these are general characteristics exhibited in each of these roles/contexts ("gentle"), beneath these specific aspects of those characteristics ("physically affectionate"), and so on.

Hierarchical models of self-esteem (e.g., Marsh & Hattie, 1996, Fig. 2.2) place global self-esteem at the top of the hierarchy. Under it are nodes representing various aspects of self-esteem, such as academic or social. Under academic come mathematics, English, history. Subspecification can be taken as far as is useful, but eventually loses the sense of "self-esteem": Although one might agree that it is meaningful to speak of athletic self-esteem as distinct from academic self-esteem, is there a football self-esteem that is distinct from tennis self-esteem? Lower-level self-evaluations may, however, be useful in predicting responses to specific events or addressing questions about the overall structure of self-esteem, for example, how self-evaluation at one node relates to the self-evaluation at nodes above or below it.

For both self-esteem and the self-schema, in moving down the hierarchy one goes from abstract and general to concrete and specific. Uncertainty can occur at any level of either hierarchy. Considering certainty can give fresh perspective and added depth to questions concerning the self-esteem and self-schema hierarchies. For example, the question of how specific self-esteem relates to global self-esteem can be refined by considering certainty (Marsh, 1993): Does uncertainty in specific self-esteem lessen the impact of that specific self-esteem component on global self-esteem? Similarly, one might ask whether discrepant specific self-esteem levels lead to uncertainty at the global level.

Viewing self-esteem and the self-schema as hierarchies suggests questions concerning the overall structure of these hierarchies. How many nodes occur at the first level (cf. "self-complexity," e.g., Linville, 1985)? How intricately interwoven are different aspects? Is "gentle" a sub-aspect of both the "parent" and "friend" nodes in the self-schema? An important structural property of the self-schema in the present context is the general clarity of the self-schema, including what the nodes are and the clarity of one's standing on

each node. This structural property is the focus of Campbell's self-concept clarity discussed in the empirical approaches section.

Viewed differently, both hierarchies are schemas for the structure of the self. The self-esteem hierarchy is a nomothetic schema devised by researchers, whereas the self-schema is an idiographic schema the individual uses to represent him or herself. Seen in this way, both hierarchies are devoid of valuation. Measured self-esteem is the individual's valuation of the self based on the nomothetic hierarchy: How favorably does the individual evaluate the self overall? In the academic arena? An alternative approach is to study an individual's valuation of himself on his own representation of himself. This idiographic approach might better capture the individual's experience of his own self-worth. On the other hand, standard self-esteem assessments may capture sentiments influencing social interaction, but to which the individual has limited introspective access. Both approaches may be useful. At present, no self-certainty research program utilizes this distinction, and in this chapter I use self-esteem to refer to the conventional evaluative hierarchy.

Consistency, Ambivalence, and Stability

Asking whether inconsistency between, say, social and academic self-esteem leads to uncertain global self-esteem raises the general question of the relationship between consistency and certainty. Two things are consistent if they are in some sense similar or compatible. But how is similarity/compatibility determined? Paralleling the distinction between self-esteem and the self-schema, there are two kinds of consistency: evaluative consistency and content consistency. *Evaluative consistency* is relatively unproblematic, because evaluation involves a single dimension. One type of evaluative inconsistency is ambivalence (Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995), in which the same object is given two distinctly different valuations at the same time. Etymologically, one has "both valences" toward the object. This often arises from having a positive evaluation of one aspect of the object (say, the academic self) and a negative evaluation of another aspect (the social self). Evaluations can also be inconsistent from one setting to another (cross-situational inconsistency) or from one time to another (temporal instability). The inconsistency is a property of the evaluations, not the objects being evaluated.

Content consistency is more complex, because there are many content dimensions. Inconsistency means distinctly different ratings of an object on a given dimension. These conflicting ratings might occur at the same time ("Her approach was assertive in some ways, but wimpy in others"), across situations ("I worry when I'm at work, but seldom when I'm home"), or across time ("One day he seems friendly, but the next day he's not"). Again, inconsistency is a property of ratings on a given dimension,

not in the actions being rated. To the extent that two observers agree on what actions constitute aggressive behavior, they will agree on whether the target is consistently aggressive. To the extent that two observers agree on the relationship between two content dimensions, they will agree on whether a rating on one dimension is consistent with a rating on the other. Although there might be general agreement that "conforming" and "rebellious" are inconsistent, are "lesbian" and "Republican" inconsistent? They are if sexual orientation and party affiliation are seen as aspects of conservativeness. Judgments of content consistency, then, depend on the schema the judge uses to translate observed behaviors into a rating on a given dimension, or to relate one dimension to another.

Even when there is agreement on what constitutes consistency, perceived inconsistency can result from two sources. First, since individuals differ in consistency regarding specific traits (Bem & Allen, 1974), one might correctly perceive inconsistent behavior resulting in *ontologic uncertainty* concerning this trait. Second, one might misperceive existing consistency or simply not know whether one is consistent, resulting in *epistemic uncertainty*. Bem recently argued (1992) that individuals tend to be more consistent on some traits than others, and to view themselves through the lens of traits on which they *are* consistent. Assessing certainty on idiographically elicited traits that individuals use to describe themselves may reveal phenomenal certainty obscured by nomothetic measures using prespecified traits (the "provided-construct approach," e.g., Adams-Webber, 1970). A disturbing hint in this direction is offered by Miller's (1994) interviews with patients with borderline personality disorder. The idiographic self-descriptions revealed not the impaired sense of self attributed to these individuals by clinicians, but a consistent sense of self as impaired. Results using idiographic and nomothetic measures of uncertainty need to be compared with each other and with substantive variables of interest. None of the research reported here elicits self-descriptive traits from participants and assesses certainty on those traits.

Perceived consistency is important because of the *consistency motive* postulated by consistency theory, which argues that experienced inconsistencies are troublesome and therefore avoided when possible. The self-consistency motive leads one to seek information/feedback (including perceptions of one's own behavior) that reinforces one's already held self-evaluation and self-schema. Swann's (e.g., 1992) *self-verification* motive is similar but more specific: The desire for feedback reinforcing one's core self-views, not merely to be consistent, but because these form the basis for how one runs one's life, the "frame of reference" in the Rosenberg opening quote.

Consistency/verification motives lead one to avoid information clearly at variance with one's self-view. The more uncertain a self-view is, however, the fewer things are clearly at variance with it. A recurrent hypothesis, therefore,

is that the consistency/verification motive is primarily activated when a self-view is held with relative certainty. Or, equivalently, it is hard to be inconsistent with fuzzy ideas.

Certainty and Extremity

Self-esteem is one's attitude (i.e., evaluative orientation, Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) toward oneself. Attitude certainty is one aspect of attitude strength (Petty & Krosnick, 1995); extremity is another. In their chapter reviewing attitude certainty, Gross, Holtz, and Miller (1995) argued that extreme attitudes are necessarily certain, but middling attitudes may or may not be certain. In most studies, high self-esteem individuals score at the upper end of self-esteem scales and therefore have extreme self-evaluations; low self-esteem individuals, on the other hand, at least in college-student samples, typically score in the middle of the scale, often slightly above the conceptual midpoint, and therefore have non-extreme self-evaluations (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Wright, 1993, Study 5). If extremity entails certainty, then, in line with everyday expectations, high self-esteem individuals should be certain of their self-worth. Low self-esteem individuals might or might not be certain. Campbell and Lavalley (1993) extended this claim:

Whereas people with high self-esteem have positive, well-articulated views of the self, the prototypical person low in self-esteem does not, in contrast, have a well-defined negative view of the self. The self-views of low self-esteem individuals are in fact evaluatively neutral and, more importantly, are characterized by high levels of uncertainty, instability, and inconsistency (p. 4).

In addition to arguing against the likelihood of certainty among low self-esteem individuals, the extended claim reaches beyond the attitudinal dimension itself: Extreme self-esteem leads to certainty, and non-extreme self-esteem leads to uncertainty, concerning the self-schema, even for nonvalenced dimensions. Within a given self-schema dimension, of course, the extremity-implies-certainty reasoning applies directly: On a bounded scale, if all credible statements are extreme, they must lie within a restricted range.

Empirically, the relationship between extremity and certainty regarding the self has proven difficult to pin down. Some studies show modest to strong correlations between self-esteem and self-certainty, others show none. (See the empirical approaches section.) Studies assessing certainty dimensionally often find correlations, particularly between self-esteem and ratings on valenced traits. Categorically assessed certainty is less likely to correlate with self-esteem. The previous argument for the connection between extremity and certainty is based on a dimensional conceptualization of certainty. Conceptualized categorically, it seems less obvious that belief in an extreme statement must be coupled with certainty. For now, the question of how one might be extreme, but uncertain, remains open. The

“thin tails” in the distributional model discussed in the integration section offers one potential resolution.

FOUR KEY EMPIRICAL APPROACHES

The conceptual distinctions in the previous section provide the framework for understanding the literature on self-certainty. This section surveys four research traditions offering quite different vantage points, yet each extending our understanding of self-certainty in important ways.

Assessing Certainty Categorically: Self-Esteem Certainty

Consistency theory maintains that individuals adjust behavior and cognitions so as to maintain preexisting views. In particular, low self-esteem individuals should avoid success, since success conflicts with preexisting views of unworthiness. Marecek and Mettee (1972) argued that this should apply only to individuals certain of their low self-worth. They administered the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, then had participants indicate for each item how sure they were of each initial response. This categorically assessed certainty was averaged across items to yield overall *self-esteem certainty*. Self-esteem certainty was unrelated to extremity (viz., correlated an unreliable $-.13$ with self-esteem). As predicted, self-esteem certainty interacted with self-esteem such that (1) success feedback concerning the first half of a task was followed by improvements of approximately equal magnitude for high self-esteem participants and low self-esteem participants who were uncertain of their self-worth, but (2) low-self-esteem participants who were certain of their (low) self-worth showed no improvement. The behavior of the uncertain, low self-esteem group in this early, yet prototypic study reflects the perennial refrain: It is difficult to be inconsistent with an uncertain self-image. Uncertainty weakens the consistency motive, leaving room for other influences on behavior, for example, the motive to succeed.

Self-Verification

Numerous self-verification studies have assessed self-certainty using a similar categorical methodology. The self-verification motive is hypothesized to be strongest when the corresponding self-view is certain. This hypothesis has been tested for both self-esteem and self-schema dimensions, and at various levels of the respective hierarchies.

Of interest, for example, is the relationship of self-esteem to reactions to evaluative feedback. Since negative evaluations are also potentially unpleasant, the motive to self-verify conflicts with the motive to obtain favorable feedback (i.e., to self-enhance) for those with low self-esteem. Typical findings reflect this motivational conflict: Although those with high self-esteem prefer positive feedback, those with low self-esteem are more accepting of

negative feedback (e.g., Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990). Similar results have been obtained for intraindividual differences in specific self-esteem. For example, Swann, Pelham and Krull (1989, Study 1) had participants rate themselves in specific areas. When offered feedback concerning their strengths and weaknesses in various areas (supposedly from a computer analysis of earlier responses), participants chose to receive information concerning their strengths on their best attributes, but information concerning their weaknesses on their worst attributes. (Morling & Epstein, 1997, provide an enlightening discussion of the interplay between enhancement and verification. This topic is revisited later in the context of the distributional model.)

Whether evaluating global or specific self-esteem, self-certainty plays a pivotal role in balancing self-enhancement and self-verification. For example, people prefer feedback that is consistent with their own views when they are certain of those views, but they prefer positive feedback when those views are less confidently held (Pelham, 1991). Generally, when certainty is high, self-verification tends to predominate; when certainty is low, self-enhancement tends to predominate.

Self-certainty also relates to how one is viewed by others. If you view yourself in one way and a novel interactant expects you to be another way, the interactant's ultimate view of you depends on how certain each of you is. Swann and Ely (1984) used a categorical assessment method to study certainty about the self-schema, specifically, introversion–extraversion. They found that participants who were certain of their standing tended to convince others to see them as they saw themselves, regardless of preinteraction expectancies. When participants were uncertain, however, others given high-certainty expectations beforehand tended to see what they expected. Pelham and Swann (1994) extended this work from perceptions by strangers to perceptions by known others. Again, self-views matched other's views more strongly when the self-views were relatively certain. This held for self-esteem relevant evaluative dimensions (e.g., social skills, physical attractiveness) and for nonevaluative self-schema dimensions (e.g., "persistent"), for new and old friends, and for mothers of the participants.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the pull to be consistent with one's self-view – whether self-esteem or the self-schema, whether at a global or specific level, whether in reactions to feedback or influencing other's views – is stronger when those self-views are more certain.

Self-Handicapping

Self-esteem certainty has also proven useful in understanding *self-handicapping*, the creation of circumstances that may inhibit performance, yet decrease the likelihood that poor performance will be attributed to lack of ability (Arkin & Oleson, 1998; Riggs, 1992). Berglas and Jones (1978) gave participants success feedback regarding performance on either soluble (contin-

gent success) or insoluble (noncontingent success) problems. Participants then chose either a performance-inhibiting or performance-enhancing drug in anticipation of a second set of similar problems. Noncontingent success, where repeated success was uncertain, led some 70% of the male¹ participants to choose the inhibiting drug, whereas only 13% chose this option after contingent success. Berglas and Jones argued that, although their participants generally had high self-esteem, some were uncertain of this high standing. The uncertainty induced by noncontingent success feedback led these participants to concerns over appearing incompetent; they avoided this risk by providing themselves with a handicap to serve as an attributional lightning rod.

Berglas and Jones's (1978) explanation of their results was that overall self-uncertainty led to doubt in the specific situation, which led to concerns about how one will be evaluated (by oneself or others), and hence to self-handicapping. The hypothesized mechanism has been examined in subsequent studies that assessed self-esteem certainty explicitly. For example, using a categorical certainty measure, Harris and Snyder (1986) found that, regardless of self-esteem level, (male) participants uncertain of their self-esteem were more likely to self-handicap by low preparation for an upcoming test. This is a main effect for self-esteem certainty, not the interaction with self-esteem found by Marecek and Mettee (1972).² Tice (1991) found, however, that reasons for self-handicapping varied with self-esteem: Low self-esteem was associated with destigmatization of failure, whereas high self-esteem was associated with augmentation of success (good performance despite handicap). If "the motivational basis for self-handicapping is the presence of feelings of self-doubt" (Arkin & Oleson, 1998, p. 317), and if low self-esteem individuals self-handicap in some situations and high self-esteem individuals in others, then self-certainty and self-esteem interact in determining self-handicapping.

Can self-schema uncertainty lead to self-handicapping? If "handicap" implies a valenced dimension and if the goal is to avoid poor evaluations by others or oneself, then self-schema uncertainty, absent evaluative implications, could not lead to self-handicapping. Nevertheless, it seems likely that a parallel process occurs, not based on the need to self-enhance, but on the need to self-verify (to uphold one's own view or maintain one's identity in a social group). An individual might create a situation to discourage dispositional attributions incompatible with his or her self-image; such behavior would seem more likely if she is uncertain as to whether she can behave in a

¹ Sometimes sex differences are found and sometimes not. See Riggs (1992) and Arkin and Oleson (1998) for useful discussions.

² Moreover, the individuals who interfered with their potential success were those who were uncertain, not those who were certain: Predicting who will avoid success requires an assessment of the specific situation.

way that ensures dispositional attributions coinciding with the to-be-verified self-image.

Self-Esteem Stability: Assessing Certainty Indirectly?

Self-esteem has been typically taken to be a relatively stable individual difference. This *chronic* or *trait self-esteem* is the “average tone of self-feeling each one of us carries about” (James, 1890, p. 306). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale measures this on-average self-evaluation. In contrast, *state self-esteem* is one’s in-the-moment self-evaluation, how worthy one feels as a human being (or in some subdomain) at a particular time. State self-esteem can be measured by instruments specifically designed for this task (e.g., Heatherton & Polivy, 1991, which includes theoretical discussion) or by adapting trait measures (Kernis & Waschull, 1995; Wells, 1988). It is the degree to which state self-esteem is variable that is of interest to those studying self-esteem stability.³

Rosenberg (e.g., 1979, 1986) noted the correlation between self-esteem instability and negative affect, unhappiness, and somatic symptoms of anxiety. He maintained that certainty and stability were inherently interrelated: “The person whose self-attitude changes from moment-to-moment can scarcely develop a firm assurance about what he or she is like. Conversely, the person uncertain about a self-concept element is apt to find it varying in different situations” (quoted by Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1992, p. 627).

Rosenberg included in his study of the adolescent self-image the Stability of Self Scale (1979, pp. 296–97; 1989, pp. 328–29), a self-report measure of the subjective sense of stability of the self-image, with items tapping both self-esteem and self-schema aspects. For example, “Some days I have a very good opinion of myself; other days I have a very poor opinion of myself,” and “I have noticed that my ideas about myself seem to change very quickly.” Rosenberg found that high self-esteem tended to co-occur with a stable self-image (1989, Table 5-1, p. 152).

Statistical Assessment

Stability has been pursued by various researchers, but most systematically by Kernis and his colleagues (see Kernis & Waschull, 1995, for an extensive review). Whereas items on Rosenberg’s stability scale ask for a respondent’s introspective appraisal of stability of the self-image, Kernis assesses variability in state self-esteem over time: The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, with instructions adapted to measure one’s current rather than one’s typical

³ Although self-esteem may vary from one domain to another, state versus trait self-esteem differs from global versus specific self-esteem: Any specific self-esteem will also have trait and state versions.

assessment of one's worth, is given on a number of occasions (typically 8–10) and the standard deviation of these measurements is used to indicate the degree of instability.

Kernis and colleagues have used their measure of self-esteem stability to clarify unexplained reactions to esteem-related events. For example, although common sense might follow Rosenberg's (1989) suggestion that the individual with low self-esteem should be "inordinately sensitive to any evidence in the experience of his daily life which testified to his inadequacy, incompetence or worthlessness" (p. 157), data suggest that it is the individual with high, but unstable self-esteem who is most likely to respond to ego threats defensively (Kernis & Waschull, 1995). Those with high, stable self-esteem are the least likely to respond defensively to negative events. Low self-esteem individuals, stable or unstable, fall between these extremes.

The general question of how extremity relates to certainty arises in this context as well. Self-esteem stability is modestly correlated with self-esteem (.17 in Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry & Harlow, 1993; .26 in Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1992). One might anticipate that, when each is represented by a single point, trait self-esteem would be the average value of state self-esteem. To the extent that mean state self-esteem does coincide with trait self-esteem, self-esteem stability and extremity are necessarily related, at least on bounded dimensions: Because the mean is the middle of the sampled scores, a large standard deviation pushes the mean away from the extreme ends. (See, however, the discussion of highly skewed distributions in the integration section that follows.) Wells (1988) found, however, that trait self-esteem correlated only .6 with the mean of state values, suggesting overlapping but distinct constructs. Apparently, asking for an overall sense of self-worth taps different processes than do state assessments. Perhaps some states are not readily recalled, or are not part of the pre-stored schema from which trait responses are derived.

Kernis' self-esteem stability differs from Rosenberg's Stability of Self and from categorically assessed self-esteem certainty, despite the intuition that uncertainty should lead to instability (r 's = $-.13$ and $-.18$, respectively, in Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1992). Furthermore, while self-esteem stability was related to excuse making in an interpretable way, self-esteem certainty had a complex pattern of weaker correlations that those authors were unable to decipher. Kernis, Grannemann, and Barclay speculated that self-certainty may reflect the phenomenal experience of a tenuous self-concept, whereas self-esteem stability may reflect actual variability in state self-esteem to which individuals have limited introspective access. The Kernis measure may, therefore, assess aspects of certainty that cannot be reached via a categorical, self-report methodology, and may therefore represent a measure of self-certainty that is indirect, but has higher predictive validity.

Self-Concept (Self-Schema) Clarity

The tenuous self-concept proposed to underlie self-esteem uncertainty has been studied most intensely by Campbell and her associates. This research differs from the research discussed in previous sections in three important ways. First, distinguishing explicitly (Campbell & Lavalley, 1993) between self-evaluation and self-knowledge (self-schema), the primary concern is with uncertainty in the self-schema rather than uncertainty regarding self-esteem. Second, the central construct is the clarity of an individual's self-schema as an overall cognitive structure, and as such it is neither a categorical nor a dimensional approach. Third, finding a stronger association between low self-esteem and unclarity than previously discussed research, an important goal is to more fully understand the experience of those with low self-esteem by studying their typically concomitant unclarity, rather than exploring how clarity interacts with self-esteem in affecting social behavior as was of interest regarding self-esteem certainty and self-esteem stability.

Campbell's approach builds on Rosenberg's (1989) notion that clarity, stability, and certainty play important and intertwined roles in people's lives. Indeed, an unclear, unstable, uncertain self-image was part of what Rosenberg saw as the curse of low self-esteem. Campbell (1990) began by assembling evidence for a connection between the evaluative and knowledge components of the self. Specifically, low self-esteem was associated with various indicators of a tenuous self-schema. For example, she found that compared to high self-esteem individuals, those with low self-esteem reported less confidence in rating their traits, more fluctuation in trait ratings over a two-month period, more inconsistencies in their self-descriptions (e.g., saying yes to both conventional and unconventional), and longer reaction times in making "me"/"not me" judgments.

From these beginnings – and borrowing language from Rosenberg's Stability of Self Scale – Campbell and colleagues designed a 12-item self-report measure, the *Self-Concept Clarity Scale*, to assess overall clarity, consistency, and stability of the self-schema (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavalley, & Lehman, 1996). Scale items include: "In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am," "My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another" (reverse scored), and "My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently" (reverse scored). The scale represents a single factor with Cronbach's alpha around .85 and test-retest reliability around .75 after several months (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavalley, & Lehman, 1996). Wright (1993, Study 5) found a test-retest reliability of .87 after several days, even with a conversion of format from pen and paper to computer administration.

Given the data assembled by Campbell (1990) in support of the connection between self-esteem and self-clarity, it is not surprising that the Self-Concept Clarity Scale correlates fairly strongly with self-esteem (.65 with

Rosenberg Self-Esteem in Wright, 1993, Study 5). Self-concept clarity also correlated with low neuroticism, high conscientiousness, and low rumination (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavalley, & Lehman, 1996), as well as with high impression management (.30) and high self-deceptive enhancement (.52) (Wright, 1993, Study 5). The wide variety of correlates of self-concept clarity is perhaps to be anticipated, given the heterogeneous nature of the scale items. Yet the scale hangs together empirically, suggesting, as Campbell and her associates have argued, that in real life these conceptually different constructs (clarity, stability, consistency) tend to co-occur and color the lives of individuals with high and low self-concept clarity in decidedly different ways.

Assessing Certainty Dimensionally: Self-Certainty as Latitudes

Social Judgment Theory and the Self

The final empirical approach to self-certainty that I consider in detail conceptualizes and measures certainty dimensionally, and can be applied to either self-esteem or the self-schema. The conceptual framework for this approach was developed by Sherif and colleagues (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965) in the context of social judgment theory. This theory of attitude change holds that knowing someone's attitude as a point estimate does not give sufficient information to predict attitude change; rather, we must also know what alternative attitudinal positions the individual finds acceptable. An attitudinal dimension is represented by an ordered set of statements concerning an attitude object, ranging from extremely favorable, through neutral, to extremely unfavorable. For present purposes, I take this to be a continuum. Participants indicate their attitude by identifying (1) their *preferred position* (i.e., the single position they believe most accurately represents their attitude), (2) alternative positions they find acceptable (*latitude of acceptance*), and (3) alternative positions they find objectionable (*latitude of rejection*). Any remaining statements fall in the latitude of noncommitment, which I ignore in this discussion.

The latitudes model provides a useful assessment method when applied to one's attitude toward oneself, that is, self-esteem. Presented with a line representing different levels of self-esteem, respondents identify the point that best represents their overall sense of self-worth. Respondents then identify other positions that describe their sense of self-worth acceptably well. The length of the line segment corresponding to acceptable positions serves as an index of certainty. Confusion arises, however, because "acceptable" can mean either "thinkably true" (cognitively acceptable) or "not unpleasant to believe" (affectively acceptable). To cleanly distinguish evaluation from cognitive representation, I use *latitude of credibility* to refer to the set of plausibly true positions and *latitude of desirability* to refer to the set of affectively favorable positions. The respective latitudes of rejection are the *latitude of incredibility*

and the *latitude of undesirability*. Self-uncertainty is reflected in the width of the latitude of credibility. (There is no direct connection between *self-certainty* and the latitude of desirability, but desirability, together with credibility, plays an important role in the enhancement–verification tradeoff, as discussed later in detail.) Since “preferred position” also confounds credibility and desirability, I use the term *best estimate* to refer to the most cognitively acceptable position.

Carryover Effects

Rhodewalt (1986, 1998) adapted the latitudes model to explain reactions to self-relevant feedback, particularly reactions to observing one’s own behavior. In place of the best estimate, Rhodewalt proposed the *phenomenal self*, the currently experienced (state) position. The latitude of credibility (“acceptance” in Rhodewalt’s usage) is the range of positions associated with existing self-views, whether or not currently in awareness. Positions not associated with self-views constitute the latitude of incredibility (“rejection”). Rhodewalt argues that if behavior indicates a position different from the phenomenal self, one of two things can occur. If the position indicated by behavior falls within the latitude of credibility, a self-view more congruent with the behavior will be retrieved from memory, resulting in a temporary shift in the phenomenal self; if the indicated position is in the latitude of incredibility – and if the behavior cannot be explained away as externally caused – then cognitive dissonance will lead to a more permanent change in the self-view.⁴

Using this model, Rhodewalt and Agustsdottir (1986) compared mildly depressed and nondepressed participants, assuming that a self-enhancing (respectively, self-deprecating) performance will be in the latitude of credibility (incredibility) for nondepressed persons and in the latitude of incredibility (credibility) for depressed persons. These latitudes of credibility in relation to self-enhancing and self-deprecating self-presentations are depicted in Figure 6.1, (a) and (b). To examine the underlying mechanism, Rhodewalt and Agustsdottir manipulated two aspects of the self-presentations. First, presentations were either self-relevant (“think of yourself on a good (bad) day”) or not (mimic a yoked participant). Second, participants were led to experience the presentation as freely chosen (internally caused,

⁴ One notes here a substantive difference in the explanations and predictions offered by Rhodewalt (and the distributional model discussed below) vs. by social judgment theory, albeit in different contexts: For Rhodewalt, temporary shifts in the phenomenal self occur when information perceived about the self is in the latitude of acceptance, and permanent change occurs when the information is in the latitude of rejection; for social judgment theory, attitude change occurs when the perceived message is in the latitude of acceptance, whereas a perceived message in the latitude of rejection results in no attitude change or even change away from the message content. Compare Swann, Pelham and Chidester (1988).

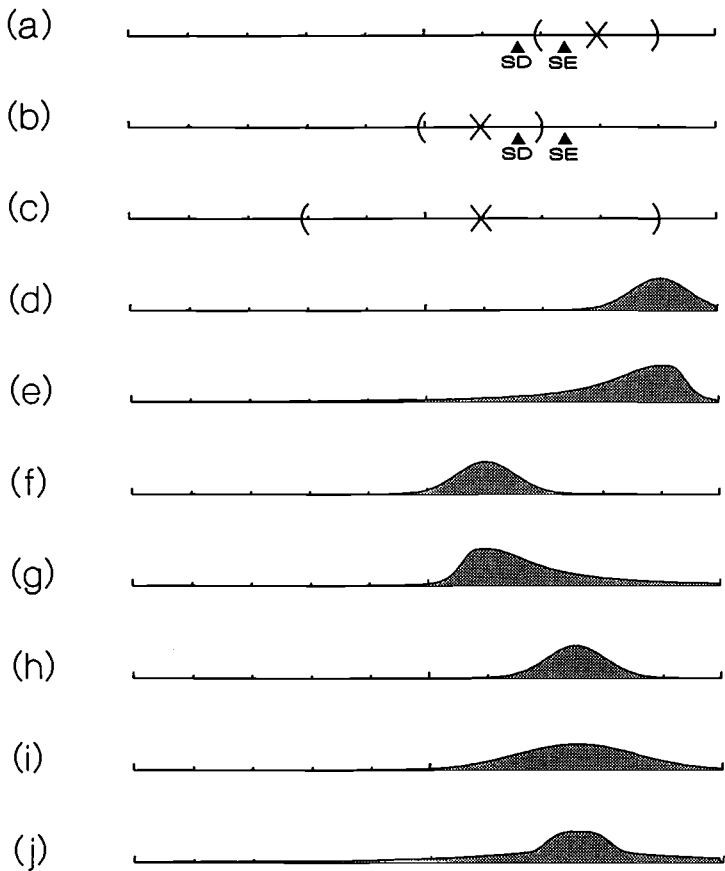


Figure 6.1. Dimensional self-esteem certainty for hypothetical individuals, as depicted in the latitudes (a–c) and distributional (d–j) models. (a) The latitude of credibility of a non-depressed individual. (b) The latitude of credibility of a depressed individual. X represents the phenomenal self; SD indicates the self-esteem level corresponding to a self-deprecating self-presentation; SE indicates the self-esteem level corresponding to a self-enhancing self-presentation. (c) The latitude of credibility of a depressed but uncertain individual. (d) The credibility distribution of a high certainty, high self-esteem individual. (e) The credibility distribution of a high self-esteem individual with a “fear tail” (see text). (f) The credibility distribution of a high certainty, low self-esteem individual. (g) The credibility distribution of a low self-esteem individual with a “dare tail” (see text). (h) The credibility distribution of a high certainty, middle self-esteem individual. (i) The credibility distribution of a low certainty, middle self-esteem individual. (j) The credibility distribution of a middle self-esteem individual with both fear and dare tails. *Note:* All distributions are portrayed as at or above the conceptual midpoint in accord with existing data; see text.

therefore dissonance arousing) or forced. Self-presentation led to *carryover effects* on subsequent self-esteem consistent with the proposed mechanisms: Self-relevance mattered for presentations in the latitude of credibility, but choice did not; choice mattered for presentation in the latitude of incredibility, but self-relevance did not.

The Rhodewalt and Agustsdottir (1986) study is a clear example of Rosenberg's notion that the self serves as a frame of reference, but it is not explicitly about self-certainty. The essence of their model, however, is that one's response to perceiving one's own behavior depends on whether the observed behavior falls within one's latitude of credibility. Whether a given point falls within the latitude of credibility depends on both the location (presumably high for nondepressed, lower for depressed) and the width of that latitude. Compare the hypothetical mildly depressed but uncertain individual depicted in Figure 6.1 (c). Although the self-deprecating self-presentation remains credibly self-descriptive, the broad latitude of credibility means the self-enhancing self-presentation is also credible. Since location reflects self-esteem and width reflects certainty, the model implicitly predicts an interaction between self-esteem and certainty in affecting responses to feedback.

Latitudes and the Self-Schema

Although Rhodewalt has applied this model primarily to self-esteem, others have studied how self-presentations affect specific dimensions of the self-schema and have measured certainty explicitly (Rhodewalt, 1998). Latitudes models have also been used in studies of self-certainty beyond carryover effects. For example, Baumgardner (1990) examined the relationship of self-esteem to latitudes of credibility for various trait dimensions. For each trait, she presented participants with a visual analog scale representing population percentiles. A participant's response to a given trait was recorded in two steps. First, the participant placed an X on the scale at the percentile point representing the best estimate of his or her overall standing. Second, the participant indicated which other points were plausible, and the width of this latitude of credibility served as the measure of the participant's uncertainty concerning this trait.

Baumgardner (1990) goes beyond postulating a correlation between self-esteem and self-certainty and argues for a causal connection, entitling her paper "To know oneself is to like oneself." In addition to finding that low self-esteem participants used wider latitudes than high self-esteem participants, Baumgardner manipulated certainty explicitly (Study 4). She provided participants with self-verifying feedback (based on their own earlier responses) that was framed as very certain or very uncertain. The feedback was associated with improved self-affect (although no control group was used), and the certain feedback had a marginally larger effect than the uncertain feedback.

What remains unclear is the mechanism proposed for this effect. Presumably, certainty in the feedback led to state self-certainty, which led to improved state self-affect. Although the hypothesis that state self-uncertainty leads to negative self-affect is quite plausible, it was not tested directly. Furthermore, what are the relationships among feedback certainty, state self-certainty, and trait self-certainty? Between state self-affect and trait self-esteem? Although the results are intriguing, this work needs replication with a tighter conceptual model for the relationships among these variables, better controls, and more statistical power.

Limitations in Baumgardner's (1990) implementation of the latitudes model further lessen the persuasiveness of her conclusions. Most troublesome for present purposes is Baumgardner's selection of adjectives: persistent, able, enterprising, logical, intellectual, talented, bright, smart, clever, likable, humorous, happy, intelligent; incapable, incompetent, bossy, overconfident, reckless, unindustrious, unpopular. About a quarter of these adjectives reflect intellectual functioning, with others reflecting abstract abilities rather than specific personality traits, making generalization difficult. Still more problematic is the valenced nature of these adjectives. To the extent that these dimensions represent self-evaluations rather than cognitive self-assessments, Baumgardner's latitude widths measure self-esteem certainty, not self-schema certainty. Based only on these valenced traits, we cannot know whether self-esteem correlates with self-certainty generally or only with certainty that one has good characteristics and does not have bad ones.

Wright (1993, Study 5) applied Baumgardner's method to a set of 60 trait adjectives evenly spread across the desirability spectrum. A participant's average latitude width correlated marginally ($r(62) = -.25, p = .055$) with Rosenberg Self-Esteem. Correlations between self-esteem and latitude width for individual traits varied from $-.37$ to $+.09$, with a mean of $-.18$. Regressing a trait's correlation with self-esteem on the trait's Anderson likability, however, yields a reliable quadratic component and an estimated correlation of $-.14$ for neutral adjectives and $-.25$ for the most valenced adjectives. Thus, correlations between self-esteem and latitude width for specific traits are modest and largest for valenced traits.

A further interpretive complication concerns impression management. Wright (1993, Study 5) found that, although mean latitude width was independent of self-deception, it correlated $-.35$ with impression management, therefore high impression management corresponded to narrow latitudes. When impression management was partialled out, the correlation between self-esteem and latitude width changed from $-.25$ to $-.15$ ($p = .24$). This appears contrary to Baumgardner's (1990, Study 2a) rejection of impression management as an explanatory variable relating self-esteem and certainty, based on null findings concerning the prediction that low self-esteem participants would use wider latitudes in public than in private. Yet, in her data

(Table 3, p. 1065) there were reliable differences in widths between the public and private conditions for both low and high self-esteem participants: In public compared to private, high self-esteem participants used longer ranges, whereas low self-esteem participants used shorter ranges. The conclusion would seem to be, therefore, not that impression management plays no role, but that the theoretical model of how impression management affects reported latitudes is inadequately developed.

Wright (1993, Study 5) also found that mean latitude width correlated moderately with self-concept clarity ($-.34$). The correlation between latitude width and self-concept clarity remains marginally reliable when either self-esteem or impression management is partialled out. Partialling out self-concept clarity renders the correlation between self-esteem and latitude width unreliable, but impression management continues to add predictive power.

Summary and Limitations

The latitudes approach provides information not only on the degree of uncertainty, but also on specifically what is considered possible. By choosing dimensions judiciously, latitudes models can be used to study self-esteem or self-schema aspects at global or specific levels. A potential limitation of this measurement approach is the artifactual confounding of self-esteem and certainty: Extreme best estimates are expected from high self-esteem individuals on valenced traits, but extreme best estimates bound latitudes on the extreme side, thereby decreasing measured uncertainty. Using Wright (1993) Study 5 data, best estimate (quadratic regression) accounted for about 10% of the variance in latitude width. Removing this variance did not fundamentally alter other analyses, so this theoretical problem may not have large empirical consequences, although vigilance is recommended.

Key Empirical Approaches: Recap

The four research traditions described in this section approach self-certainty in fundamentally different ways, describe their work using different words, focus on different questions, and come to at least somewhat different conclusions. Campbell uses a global level, trait measure and the construct of clarity to study the phenomenal world of those with low self-esteem, whereas Kernis uses a statistic derived from multiple state measures and the construct of stability to explain defensive reactions by those with high self-esteem. These approaches are not, of course, incompatible, and methods or concepts from one tradition can fruitfully be applied in another. For example, although the stability approach has focused on global self-esteem stability, the method is readily applicable to other dimensions, and relationships between self-schema stability and self-esteem stability would be of interest theoretically. Similarly, although self-concept clarity has been used primarily to understand prototypic low self-esteem individuals, it could be examined as a moderator variable in interaction with self-esteem.

One question that has proven difficult to resolve is the relationship of extremity to certainty, that is, of self-esteem to self-certainty. Correlations were found ranging from $-.13$ to $+.65$ across the studies reported above, partly reflecting nonequivalent measures. There is a general trend for researchers in the certainty-as-concomitant-of-self-esteem tradition to report larger correlations than those in the interactive tradition. Again, this reflects in part the measures chosen within those traditions, but highlights the importance of understanding the interrelationships among these measures.

INTEGRATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The foregoing conceptual analysis and empirical results lead me to conclude, with Rosenberg and many before and after him, that understanding esteem-relevant phenomena requires more than knowing the overall favorability of one's self-evaluation. It requires understanding the stability, clarity, and certainty of that self-evaluation, as well as the stability, clarity, and certainty of one's self-schema. Existing measures of certainty include several useful, but nonequivalent constructs. Some of these are global person variables – Marecek and Mettee's self-esteem certainty, Kernis's self-esteem stability, Campbell's self-concept clarity – and we are beginning to understand some consequences of being high and low on these dimensions. Other measures focus on concrete levels and find effects on specific aspects of self-esteem and the self-schema. Still missing is an overall understanding of how these variables interrelate (Does uncertainty lead to instability?) and how they relate to self-esteem and interact with it to produce behaviors and experiences (Does knowing one's traits with certainty lead to self-liking? Does certainty differentiate true high self-esteem from defensive high self-esteem?). In this final section I examine some conundrums from the field as it stands, describe a distributional model that combines the categorical and dimensional approaches, and suggest key areas in need of theoretical and empirical clarification.

Modeling States and Traits: Some Detailed Questions

The work of Kernis and colleagues on self-esteem stability demonstrates the utility of distinguishing trait self-esteem from state self-esteem, and Rosenberg (1986) stressed the distinction between "baseline" changes in trait self-esteem versus "barometric" changes in state self-esteem. Despite the usefulness of this distinction, several aspects remain unclear. For example, social judgment theory represents self-esteem, like any other attitude, as a best (point) estimate plus a latitude of credibility; both are aspects of trait self-esteem. Is state self-esteem also to be represented by a point and an interval? Vernacular expressions such as "recent events have shaken my confidence" and experimental manipulations of certainty (e.g., Baumgardner, 1990, Study 4; Berglas & Jones, 1978), suggest that state certainty exists in addition to trait certainty. Indeed, Soder and Riggs (1986, cited by Riggs, 1992) found that

misleading feedback about one's state of arousal led to self-handicapping, presumably mediated by the induced state uncertainty. Yet in Rhodewalt's latitudes model of self-esteem, the phenomenal self would appear to represent state self-esteem as a single point, while the latitude of acceptance represents trait self-esteem as an interval without reference to a trait preferred position. If the phenomenal self is a single point, where is state uncertainty? Best-estimate-plus-latitude is, of course, a *model* for an attitude. Simple models may suffice in some situations, whereas other situations may require more complex models. Perhaps a point representation of state self-esteem and a latitude representation for trait self-esteem is adequate for understanding some situations, but we need data regarding which models adequately represent which situations, and researchers need to indicate explicitly the model employed.

A second question involves the relationship between state and trait self-esteem. In Rhodewalt's formulation the phenomenal self varies among accessible preexisting self-views or, in my words, state self-esteem varies within the trait latitude of credibility. Wide trait latitudes should therefore lead to greater state variation. Yet, Kernis, Grannemann, and Barclay (1992) found no reliable correlation between self-esteem stability and categorically assessed self-esteem certainty. Would self-esteem stability be better predicted by a dimensionally assessed certainty? In the discussion of stability and extremity, I noted that trait self-esteem and mean state self-esteem correlated less than expected, again suggesting the relationship of trait self-esteem to state self-esteem is complex, even when both are treated as point estimates.

Furthermore, trait self-esteem uncertainty may lead to differential reliability in trait self-esteem measures, hence to lower correlations between trait self-esteem and other variables – including mean state self-esteem – for individuals who are uncertain, complicating the assessment of self-esteem. Worse yet, Arkin and Oleson (1998) suggested that trait uncertainty might make state uncertainty easier to arouse, so state uncertainty is an interactive function of person and situation variables.

The state-trait distinction is also viable and important with respect to the self-schema. Not all of one's thoughts about oneself can be held in working memory at a given time. Corresponding to state self-esteem is the *active* or *working self-schema* (e.g., Hinkley & Andersen, 1996; Markus & Wurf, 1987): the thoughts about oneself in mind at a particular moment.⁵ Corresponding to trait self-esteem is the *latent* or *reflective self-schema*: one's overall thoughts about oneself, even if not in mind at the moment. The same questions can be asked of the self-schema as were asked regarding self-esteem: Are both the

⁵ In Rhodewalt's recent thinking (1998), the phenomenal self is viewed as the working self-schema, hence state self-esteem is the valuation by the individual of the active self-view; compare the discussion above of valuation functions on the self-schema hierarchy.

active and the latent schemas best represented as a hierarchy of latitudes and point estimates? What is the relationship of the active schema to the latent schema? Are trait ratings differentially reliable for individuals varying in certainty? Initial data (Campbell, 1990) suggest that trait ratings, even on neutral traits, may be more reliable for those high in self-esteem, so trait effects on state values may even cross the evaluative-cognitive divide.

This discussion has examined how trait self-esteem (or a self-schema rating) affects state values, but influence in the reverse direction is also likely. Long-term fluctuations in state self-esteem, for example, might be expected to increase trait self-esteem uncertainty. Furthermore, in Rhodewalt's model, perceiving oneself as behaving outside one's latitude of credibility results in cognitive dissonance and potentially permanent change in the self. Is this to say a change in the trait latitude of credibility? If so, it would seem dissonance-induced carryover effects could only extend the latitude of credibility, never reduce it.

We are left, then, with a spate of questions regarding states, traits, and their relationships. How are trait and state point estimates related? How does trait uncertainty relate to state variability (both directions)? To state uncertainty? What model for state and trait proves to be an adequate representation for what purposes?

Distributional Models and the Thin Tail Hypothesis

Both categorical and dimensional conceptualization of certainty have proven useful, the former asking "How credible is this statement?," the latter asking "Which positions are credible?" Within the latitude of credibility, however, it is unlikely that each point is *equally* credible. A *credibility distribution* (cf. prior credibilities in Bayesian inference) combines categorical and dimensional aspects by retaining the underlying dimension, but specifying the subjective probability of each point on the dimension. Given the credibility distribution for some dimension, one can "reconstitute" a categorical assessment of a single point's credibility, a best estimate (mean, median, or mode of the distribution), or the latitude of credibility (points with probability above some threshold). Distributional models thus provide added information, while retaining the information of categorical and dimensional models.

Distributional models provide graded conceptualizations of situations typically viewed dichotomously, and thereby offer explanations for puzzling findings. For instance, with all-or-nothing latitudes it is unclear how an uncertain rating can be extreme, since a wide latitude forces the middle away from the poles (Figure 6.1 (a)–(c)). A distributional model, however, has no difficulty explaining how this can occur. Compare the individual whose self-esteem credibility is represented by the symmetrical distribution in Figure 6.1 (d), to the individual corresponding to the highly skewed distribution (e). The means of these distributions are nearly identical, yet the standard deviations differ substantially. If reported overall self-esteem reflects the center of

the distribution, whereas uncertainty reflects the standard deviation, then the puzzle is solved.

An initial investigation using a distributional model was undertaken by Chang (1997). Six aspects of self-esteem were assessed. Each dimension was represented by seven boxes labeled from "Doing extremely poorly" to "Doing extremely well." Participants assigned a weight to each box depending on how often they believed it to be true. Chang used the standard deviation of these weights to index uncertainty and found correlations of $-.3$ to $-.4$ with self-concept clarity, $-.2$ to $-.4$ with Rosenberg self-esteem, and $.4$ with self-esteem stability.

Taking full advantage of a distributional approach will require moving beyond the standard deviation – or any single number – as characterizing the distribution, and examining the distribution itself. Of particular interest are improbable points, which individuals may routinely ignore in everyday life. I define the *routine self* as who one habitually takes oneself to be, and through which one mindlessly relates to others. I define the *recognized self* as that which one accepts as (at least partially) self-descriptive when queried.⁶ The distribution corresponding to the routine self reflects the fluidity with which self-views are accessed. The distribution corresponding to the recognized self reflects the self-descriptiveness of self-views that can be activated by a suitable event. Many points identified as plausible but improbable in the recognized self distribution are likely omitted from the routine self because they are difficult to access. A recognized self like Figure 6.1 (e) might correspond, for example, to the routine self of Figure 6.1 (d). If the routine self is a simplification of the recognized self, and if responses to trait measures are based on the routine self, whereas state self-ratings follow the recognized self distribution, then trait and mean state assessments should be related, but not identical, in agreement with available evidence.

The distinction between the routine and recognized selves suggests a refinement of the model relating trait credibility to the phenomenal self. Per Rhodewalt, positions that are credible with respect to the routine self are accepted without question and the phenomenal self shifts toward that position; positions that are incredible with respect to the recognized self will not be accepted initially, and dissonance will be aroused if the behavior cannot be written off as externally caused. If, however, an event indicates a position recognized as credible, but that is not part of the routine self, then the indi-

⁶ What one recalls about the self can be enhanced or inhibited in numerous ways. Attentional demands of ordinary life may limit recall to aspects of the routine self; conversely, inducing self-awareness may extend recall to aspects of the recognized self. Recognition is also affected by situational factors, for example, the "payoff matrix," suggesting a line of research examining the influence of favorability on recognition. As used here, however, recognition is taken as a primitive term indicating the extent to which an offered self-view is experienced as self-descriptive.

vidual's routine is interrupted by a claim that cannot be dismissed. This leads to a temporary affective disturbance (Mandler, 1980) and increased state uncertainty due to awareness of normally ignored possibilities.

The distributional model, together with the possibility of asymmetrical distributions with long, thin tails such as Figure 6.1 (e), leads to the following *thin tail hypothesis*: Some individuals have recognized self distributions with thin tails of low, but nonzero probability. The individual is only vaguely or intermittently aware of these improbable points, and consequently they are not represented in the routine self. When an event indicates a point in the tail, the individual is presented with a jarring interruption of daily life by a credible claim. The further the point is from the routine self, the more unpleasant the cognitive reaction and the greater the induced uncertainty; the less credible the point, the more easily it is dismissed. The unpleasantness of this disrupted state motivates people to avoid situations likely to activate self-views corresponding to their tail region. This motive for consistency with the routine self is similar to the self-verification motive in that it leads one to reaffirm the identity one lives; it differs from the self-verification motive, however, in that self-views are avoided not because they are experienced as "unlike me," but because they are experienced as "could be me"; the clash is between the recognized self and the routine self, rather than between "me" and "not me." Note, also, that thin tails leave one vulnerable to the induction of state uncertainty (cf. Arkin & Oleson, 1998).

Whatever the conceptual merits of distributional models, if individuals are not typically aware of unlikely possibilities, then recognized self distributions cannot be reported accurately. This would necessitate an indirect assessment. If individuals can report their current state self-esteem accurately, an initial approach would be to use the observed distribution of state values as an approximation to the recognized self distribution. Similarly, retrospective reconstructions of state self-esteem may approximate the routine self distribution. More sophisticated and direct cognitive or electrophysiologic assessments await development.

Enhancement and Verification: Fear, Dare, and Plausible Compliments

Women who are either indisputably beautiful, or indisputably ugly, are best flattered upon the score of their understandings; but those who are in a state of mediocrity are best flattered upon their beauty.

Lord Chesterfield

Arguments over whether self-enhancement or self-verification wins out have largely given way to investigating how self-enhancement and self-verification interplay and interact (e.g., Morling & Epstein, 1997; Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987; Swann & Schroeder, 1995). Distributional models

provide graded credibilities and hence a graded version of self-verification: Feedback at a given level is self-verifying in direct relation to the credibility of that point (or perhaps in indirect relation to the mean “error” at that point). For evaluative dimensions, a credibility distribution can be combined with a function giving the favorability of each point to provide a model for a graded trade-off between enhancement and verification, yielding an overall cognitive-affective desirability of each point on the dimension.

On an evaluative dimension, the mean favorability of one’s routine self will reflect one’s workaday self-esteem. Reciprocally, favorability may play a role in determining which aspects of the recognized self are incorporated into the routine self. For instance, favorability might lower the probability threshold for a point to be included in the routine self, while unfavorability might raise the threshold.

The thin tail hypothesis from the previous section takes on added dimensions in connection with favorability. In addition to the cognitively based response to interrupting one’s routine, activating a negatively valenced point will unleash a direct affective response due to the unfavorability itself. Suppose the dimensions in Figure 6.1 represent global self-esteem, and consider two individuals whose recognized self distributions are depicted in (d) and (e). These individuals are likely to have similar routine selves, and might both “live the life of a high self-esteem individual” in their own thoughts and in interactions with others. Yet the latter individual will occasionally experience events that are both incongruous with her routine self-view and inherently distasteful, leaving her routine self fragile, and constantly needing reassurance: “This world is in need of validation, perhaps precisely because of the ever-present glimmer of suspicion” (Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 4) of its cognitive manufacture. A distribution such as Figure 6.1 (e) could therefore explain the defensive responses observed by Kernis and colleagues among those with high but unstable self-esteem: They find ego threats credible, but disrupting of their normal identity and inherently unpalatable. This model also fits the description Berglas and Jones (1978) offered of the original self-handicapping participants who thought well of themselves generally, but still worried they might be wrong. I call a thin tail on the negative side of the recognized self distribution a *fear tail*.

Thin tails can also occur on the positive side of a distribution, with important consequences. In this case, however, the upsetting cognitively based response predicted by the thin tail hypothesis is counteracted in part by the positivity of the activated self-view. The individual may be more attentive to events suggesting points in the tail given this positive valence, yet be thrown into a cognitive tailspin if such an event is perceived. Some years ago I had a therapy client who was depressed and claimed improvement was impossible, suggesting a self-esteem distribution such as Figure 6.1 (f). Yet she came to therapy, implying on some level that she did believe improvement was possible. Events giving her a moment of hope led to great upheaval. This is, how-

ever, what one would predict if her recognized self-distribution regarding self-worth resembled Figure 6.1 (g), even though her routine self-distribution resembled (f). I call a thin tail on the positive side of the recognized self distribution a *dare tail*.

Predicting reactions to evaluative events requires, consequently, that one know of the existence and placement of thin tails for the individual. A person with a fear tail spends life energy shoring up the routine self and avoiding situations that might activate corresponding self-views; when a threat occurs, the response is defensive anger. A person with a dare tail spends life energy stabilizing the routine self by tamping down troublesome dreams of maybe being OK; when a positive view is activated, the result is an ambivalent jumble of longing and disorientation. Perhaps the most precarious life of all is the person whose self-esteem distribution contains both fear and dare tails (Figure 6.1 (j)): Every insult bites deeply and every compliment unleashes jolting fantasies of hope. Compare this existence to that of a resigned middle self-esteem person (Figure 6.1 (h)), or even the middle self-esteem person whose uncertainty is palpably large (Figure 6.1 (i)), and who is therefore seldom surprised.

This understanding of the interplay of favorability and credibility has useful implications beyond the extreme cases of individuals with thin tails. Lord Chesterfield intuitively presaged these developments in the quaintly sexist advice offered above. He understood that people prefer plausible compliments, generous but not absurdly positive interpretations. Favorable, but credible, reflected appraisals allow one to feel seen and appreciated for who one “really is,” that is, as one takes oneself to be. To craft an effective compliment – or insult – one must have some knowledge of the target’s credibility distribution, favorability function, and credibility–favorability trade-off equation. At the present stage, one can only begin to imagine the form of such trade-off equations. Indeed, recent research (Swann & Schroeder, 1995) suggests that the trade-off may depend on situational factors such as the availability of cognitive resources.

Finally, an expanding literature compares the enhancement and verification motives with others, such as the motive to accurately perceive oneself (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Self-certainty is a frequent theme in discussions involving verification/consistency. Distributional models present credibility as a graded variable on a par with favorability and accuracy, and may allow us to see more clearly the role that certainty plays.

Theoretical and Empirical Tasks for Future Research

A main goal of this chapter has been to identify conceptual distinctions to organize existing research and facilitate the design of future research. I have stressed, for example, the distinction between one’s cognitive representation of oneself (self-schema) and one’s evaluation of oneself (self-esteem). This distinction is important, not because real judgments can be neatly classified

as one or the other – they cannot – but because uncertainty in these two provinces leads to different consequences. Uncertainty regarding one's self-worth may lead to defensive hostility. Classic consistency and maintain-the-routine motives may be active on any schema dimension, but only for valenced dimensions is self-enhancement, and consequently the trade-off between these variables, an issue. Uncertainty concerning a neutral trait makes choosing appropriate situations difficult, but does not have direct self-esteem implications. Perhaps most importantly, only if one distinguishes between self-schema uncertainty and self-esteem uncertainty, can one ask how these are related.

Careful use of language is an important component to maintaining conceptual distinctions. Many common terms invite us to blur distinctions. "Phenomenal self" as activated self-view suggests a state-trait distinction without stating it specifically. "Self-concept," "latitude of acceptance," and "preferred position" all invite the confounding of evaluation with representation. Some vernacular verbiage may be inevitable (e.g., my use of "self-view"), but "negative self-evaluation" is clearer than "negative self-concept" or (horrors) "negative self-schema." Terms suggested here, such as "latitude of credibility," add complexity, but encourage more careful thinking.

Not enough is known about most certainty constructs and measures. Measures discussed here are largely measurement approaches, not specific measures. The Self-Concept Clarity Scale is the only fully defined measure, and happily, its psychometrics have been studied and reported. The reliability and validity of categorical, statistical, dimensional, and distributional measures need to be evaluated for self-esteem versus the self-schema, for abstract versus specific self-views, and for particular content dimensions varying in importance, centrality, and so on. Which constructs can be validly assessed using self-report measures, and what assessment techniques are available for those that cannot be? In particular, can respondents accurately provide the subjective probabilities required in distributional models? How can the routine and recognized selves be operationalized, and is this distinction empirically viable?

The relationships among the various self-certainty measures also need clarification, empirically and theoretically. For example, how does the trait latitude of credibility or the credibility distribution relate to state variability? What is the theoretical model for this and what data support that model? Assessing these measures requires, as begun by Kernis and colleagues, not only studying how the measures relate to one another, but how they jointly relate to dependent variables of interest, including feedback seeking, reactions to reflected appraisals, reactions to success and failure, reactions to one's own self-presentation, excuse making, anxiety, self-affect, resignation, and making effective social choices. Which measures best predict which effects? Which measures add to the predictive power of which others?

Indeed: Is it good to be self-certain? In which contexts, on which measures, by what criteria?

Beyond the consequences of uncertainty, it would be interesting to know how certainty develops and changes over time. Jones and Berglas (1978) and Kernis and Waschull (1995) have offered thoughtful speculations for how uncertainty and instability might arise, for example, from a history of inconsistent reinforcement, but few data are available. Both Rhodewalt's model and the thin tail hypothesis assert that events may lead to dissonance-mediated shifts, but it remains unspecified how the latitude or distribution changes as a result. Moreover, the graded credibility analysis proposed here requires one to rethink the discrete switch in mechanism (from self-perception to cognitive dissonance) that seemed plausible based on all-or-nothing latitudes.

This chapter has focused on self-certainty, specifically regarding self-esteem and the self-schema, but many other aspects of certainty or uncertainty are relevant to the self and to self-esteem. A sampling of important questions includes: How does the uncertainty of reflected appraisals (the other's uncertainty or our uncertainty of the other's opinion) impact their effect? How does uncertainty in the evaluation of a characteristic or behavior influence the enhancement-verification trade-off? How does uncertainty of a partner's dependability relate to trust? How does general uncertainty about the dependability of others relate to attachment style? How do uncertainty about the dangerousness of the world and about one's ability to handle life's challenges (self-efficacy) relate to the potential for depression? Rhodewalt's proposal that the latitude of credibility corresponds to existing self-views suggests a link to the research on possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986): Does uncertainty as to which self one "really is" (or in what proportion) give new insights into uncertainty or the favorability-credibility trade-off? Does a more complex self (Linville, 1985) equate with more uncertainty?

Theoretical understanding of the strategic uses of certainty and uncertainty should be sought. For instance, one might foster self-uncertainty on a specific trait to avoid the need to reconcile conflicting appraisals. Publicly, one might feign uncertainty in a trait to avoid appearing conceited, or to avoid a claim one might have to live up to. Self-handicapping has been portrayed as a consequence of uncertainty, but it can also be seen as strategic manipulation of uncertainty: I make the cause of my performance uncertain, to you and to me. Given the frequent correlation of certainty measures with measures of impression management and self-deception, strategic uses of uncertainty seem likely to occur in real situations. Although relationships between certainty measures and strategic motivations are a nuisance in measuring certainty, they represent important content domains for understanding the functioning of certainty in social contexts.

The concomitant and interactive approaches adopted by researchers have led them to ask different questions and to focus on different ends of the self-esteem spectrum. Although empirical evidence is still conflicting, there appears to be at least a modest correlation (depending on definitions) between self-esteem and self-certainty. Concentrating on the relationship of self-certainty to self-esteem helps us to understand the experience of prototypic individuals. Still, even if the correlation between self-esteem and self-certainty is .6, about one-third of low self-esteem individuals will be high in self-certainty and one-third of high self-esteem individuals will be low in self-certainty. (Empirically, compare Rosenberg, 1989, Table 5-1.) Focus on prototypic individuals misses the experiences of a noticeable minority of atypical individuals. The interactive approach helps us understand how experiences and responses vary within a given self-esteem group, depending on self-certainty.

Perhaps the most fundamental question is which theoretical model best represents self-assessments. This chapter has argued that a point estimate of self-esteem is inadequate, if our goal is to understand the full range of esteem-relevant phenomena. But what model should replace this point estimate? A point plus a latitude? A distribution? Is the best conceptual model also the best measurement model? Is the best model for self-esteem also best for self-schema dimensions? Is the best model for the recognized self also the best model for the routine self? Does the best model vary with specificity? Is the best model for trait values also the best model for state values? There are few data, or even explicit theorizing, on these key questions.

Preliminarily, I propose that distributional models represent complex and detailed models that can be simplified to fit the needs of a particular context. Chang's use of the standard deviation, together with the mean, reduces the distribution to a two-parameter model that will suffice for many contexts. Choosing a credibility above a certain threshold to define a latitude of credibility delivers the two-parameter trait model that Rhodewalt found sufficient to explain carryover effects. For situations in which thin tails are likely to have effects, more details of the distribution will need to be included in the model. As we move from trait to state (a continuous transition, not the dichotomy the words imply), a more simplified model may be adequate. For example, in a given context a full distributional model may be needed to model thin tails in the trait distribution, while only the mean of the state distribution is needed.

Self-certainty is a new field, not so much in its ideas, but in the crystallization of disparate contributions into a single field. We are still struggling to conceptualize the issues clearly. It is hoped that this chapter might provide some of that clarity and an impetus to further development.

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SECTION THREE. SOCIAL AND LIFE COURSE CONTEXTS OF SELF-ESTEEM

7 Self-Esteem of Children and Adolescents

David H. Demo

The study of children's and adolescents' self-esteem is indebted to the pioneering social psychologist to whom this book is dedicated, Morris Rosenberg. Perhaps no one contributed more to our understanding of the dynamics, correlates, and consequences of children's self-concept. Rosenberg elucidated the mechanisms by which the evaluations of some referent others are more important than others in shaping self-concept, clarified the social contexts in which social comparisons operate, and demonstrated that self-concept is characterized by a complex hierarchical structure of traits, values, and identities, the psychological ordering and salience of which varies from one individual to the next. In this chapter, I briefly review and assess Rosenberg's lasting theoretical contributions to the field, summarize what we know and what we don't know about how children see themselves, and suggest important directions for extending and refining the study of children's self-concept.

Arguably, Rosenberg's most important contributions were theoretical, extending in valuable ways the seminal work of Charles Horton Cooley (1902) and George Herbert Mead (1934) and demonstrating that significant others are not equally significant in their impact on self-concept. Throughout a career spanning three decades of research on the structure and correlates of self-concept, Rosenberg carefully and systematically used theory to guide and explain the proximate social processes bearing on an individual's feelings and attitudes toward oneself. In conceptualizing, designing, and interpreting his research, he skillfully and rigorously applied, tested, and refined four theories of self-formation: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-perception, and psychological centrality.

Building on an intellectual tradition pioneered by Cooley and Mead, Rosenberg (1979, chap. 11) clarified that reflected appraisals (i.e., our perceptions of others' views of us) are affected by a variety of selectivity mech-

anisms that promote a positive self-view. Thus, self-concept is not merely a passive product of what we think others think of us; instead, we are actively and aggressively involved in a variety of social and psychological processes that protect and bolster our self-images. For example, Rosenberg demonstrated that selective interaction benefits self-esteem: We choose to interact more often with others who see us positively (or, more precisely, those who we *think* see us positively) and we minimize contact with (or avoid altogether) those whom we think see us in less favorable, or even negative terms. Similarly, we respect and value the opinions of some people more than others, a process Rosenberg termed selective valuation and credibility. By choosing to pay more attention to the views of those who (we think) see us favorably and ignoring or downplaying the opinions of those who (we think) see us less favorably, our self-image is enhanced. A third mechanism, selective imputation, supports self-esteem in that we attribute to others a kinder image of us than they actually have. Where Mead (1934, p. 68) had described the reflected appraisals process as operating in relatively straightforward terms, such that we are more or less unconsciously seeing ourselves as others see us, Rosenberg (1979, p. 97) demonstrated a far more complex and self-activated process: We are more or less unconsciously seeing ourselves as we think others who are important to us and whose opinion we trust see us.

One of the reasons Rosenberg's work has had such a significant impact is that he applied and integrated a variety of theories to explain the social structural and interpersonal dynamics shaping self-concept. He illustrated, for example, that the influence of selectivity mechanisms extends beyond reflected appraisals to social comparison processes and to the more psychological processes of self-attribution and psychological centrality. Regarding social comparison processes, individuals are selective in choosing their referent others and in setting goals or standards to which they aspire. This has implications for self-esteem because when people compare their own characteristics and abilities with those of other people, the vast majority of individuals rate themselves above average. Self-attribution is selective in that individuals are more likely to attribute their accomplishments to personal merit and their failures to bad luck or lack of effort; they pay particular attention to actions, roles, or characteristics that are likely to generate positive conclusions about the self; and there is a tendency to interpret and describe one's actions using the kindest or most complimentary terms. Further, individuals protect and enhance their self-esteem by attaching greater value to things they think they do well and devaluing things they do not think they do well. Collectively, these processes illuminate the sheer power of the self-esteem motive, that is, the desire to view oneself as a good person and worthy of respect.

DIMENSIONS OF CHILDREN'S AND ADOLESCENTS' SELF-CONCEPTS

The structure and organization of self-concept in early and middle childhood has not been widely studied and thus is not well understood. But as early as age 5 or 6, children's role-taking abilities are sufficiently developed to enable them to consider the perceived judgments and reactions of others. This helps them to assess their positive and negative qualities and develop a somewhat coherent and hierarchically organized self-concept (Demo, 1992). This emerging self-theory is tentative and mutable, however, because social comparisons are fairly indiscriminate during middle childhood (Suls & Mullen, 1982). Children's limited cognitive abilities at this stage inhibit their active involvement in two critical processes that shape self-development. First, they are unable to make sophisticated social comparisons, and, second, they are hindered in determining and processing accurate perceptions of reflected appraisals at least until ages 7 or 8 (Ruble, Boggiano, Feldman, & Loebl, 1980). Thus, young children's self-attitudes are formed largely on the basis of observations and evaluations of their own behavior, abilities, and characteristics. It is common at this age for self-attributions to be based on comparisons of recent performances with earlier ones (Suls & Mullen, 1982).

Still, there is an identifiable and multifaceted structure characterizing self-concept as children enter formal schooling, and this structure becomes increasingly differentiated with age. Generally, the self-portrait consists of a social exterior at this stage, as children are inclined to judge themselves on their abilities and achievements (Damon & Hart, 1982; Rosenberg, 1986). Shavelson and Marsh (1986) found that among second through fifth graders, self-concept is characterized by seven interrelated yet distinct dimensions: physical appearance, physical abilities, peer relations, parent relations, reading, mathematics, and school subjects. More recently, Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, and Weinstein (1990) provided further evidence for a multidimensional view of self-concept in middle childhood by following a panel of Baltimore school children from first grade through fourth grade. Their data support a five-dimensional structure (character, personal responsibility, academic, appearance, and athletic) that generalizes across age, gender, race, and SES subsamples. Although the development and organization of self-concept in the elementary school years is not widely researched, these studies provide corroborating evidence that children make finer distinctions of themselves and their competence in different domains as they mature and move through the early grades. Advancing inductive reasoning skills in later childhood enable children to understand multiple causes for behavior, facilitating new and reorganized ways of thinking about oneself, and more sophisticated and refined abilities for making social comparisons.

Much more attention has been devoted to exploring the growing and changing nature of self-concept during adolescence. During the second decade of life, individuals confront enormous physiological, social, and psychological change, one consequence of which is that adolescents tend to be highly introspective and self-conscious. In general, and in contrast to childhood, self-concept during adolescence is dominated by a psychological interior of private thoughts, desires, fears, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations (Damon & Hart, 1982; Rosenberg, 1979, 1986). Harter and Monsour (1992) studied the organization of self-concept among seventh, ninth, and eleventh graders and found, consistent with other studies, that the self is characterized by increasing differentiation into multiple selves with age. There is also important developmental continuity in another sense, as continuing maturation and increasingly sophisticated cognitive abilities generate reorganized and reintegrated self-theories that stabilize the self and generally give rise to increasing self-esteem through the adolescent years (Demo, 1992).

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

There are dramatic differences across children in how they view themselves, and even children and adolescents living within the same social locations view themselves very differently. Some youth (like some adults) are high self-monitors while others are low self-monitors; the self-concepts of some children are remarkably stable while others are more likely to shift and fluctuate from one situation to the next; and there are different developmental trajectories through childhood and adolescence (Block & Robins, 1993; Hirsch & DuBois, 1991; Savin-Williams & Demo, 1984).

In support of Rosenberg's (1979) contention that self-concept is context-dependent, research demonstrates that, for most adolescents, self-perceptions are characterized by both stability and malleability. The self-consistency motive dictates a tendency for individuals to think of themselves in generally established, predictable, and uniform terms across contexts and relationships, yet some situational characteristics overpower established self-perceptions. Recognizing these opposing forces, self-concept researchers have distinguished between the baseline or core set of self-conceptions and the situation-specific snapshot or working self-concept (Burke, 1980; Demo, 1992; Markus & Kunda, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987). The relatively stable and durable baseline or core self-concept facilitates predictability and self-consistency across situations, while the working self-concept enables flexibility, change, and situationally appropriate actions.

Although the preponderance of self-esteem research has employed one-shot measures, repeated measurements are necessary to capture the temporal and dynamic aspects of self-concept. Rosenberg and Turner (1981, p. xix) offered this challenge: "The investigator who observes behavior intimately, at

length, and repeatedly in its natural setting should come closer to grasping the valid meanings of the acts in question.” In an effort to assess stability and change in adolescent self-feelings, one study employed paging devices to signal participants at random times in naturalistic contexts (Savin-Williams & Demo, 1983). Once signaled, participants described their self-feelings at that moment, and this procedure was repeated several times per day over a one-week period. Each individual’s self-feeling scores for the week were regressed on each other to assess their stability. Results indicated that adolescents fell into three groups: unpredictable, stable, and oscillating. The majority of adolescents (60%) had self-feelings that were unpredictable in that they fluctuated mildly around a baseline. These individuals fit no predictable pattern: They would feel self-confident, secure, and proud of themselves one day, but feel frustrated, tense, or inhibited the next day. Or they would report positive self-feelings for part of a day, and then shift to weaker or more critical self-feelings later that day. A second group (29%) had stable self-feelings, meaning there was a pattern whereby positive self-feelings were sustained over several successive measurements, or negative self-feelings persisted over a variety of situations. A third group, comprising only 11% of adolescents, had self-feelings that were predictably unstable or oscillating. For these individuals, positive self-feelings in one situation predicted negative self-feelings in the following situation. Several other studies (Deihl, Vicary, & Deike, 1997; Hill, 1980; Hirsch & DuBois, 1991; Offer & Offer, 1975) report a similar percentage of adolescents who fit the profile of storm and stress described by Hall (1904) and A. Freud (1958). For the vast majority of adolescents, however, self-regard is characterized as either stable or as fluctuating mildly around a baseline level.

Developmental Trajectories

Owing partly to the influence of psychoanalytic theories that painted a picture of adolescence as a period of *sturm und drang*, or storm and stress (Blos, 1962; A. Freud, 1958; Hall, 1904), a number of studies have examined the degree to which adolescents’ self-feelings are stable from one year to the next. Of course, any investigation of continuity (or stability) and change (or instability) will yield evidence of both continuity and change. More fruitful questions to ask are: (1) what is the magnitude of observed stability and change, and (2) what are the social and psychological correlates or precursors of developmental stability and change in self-concept?

In an interesting and rare longitudinal study, Hirsch and DuBois (1991) monitored a group of early adolescents as they made the transition from elementary school to junior high school, collecting data at four points in time over a two-year period. They found considerable variation in the degree to which self-esteem could be characterized as stable, and identified four clearly distinguishable self-esteem trajectories. Over a period spanning the end of

sixth grade to the end of eighth grade, more than one-third (35%) of adolescents had consistently high global self-esteem. The second largest group (31%) experienced reasonably high self-esteem and a modest gain in feelings of self-worth over the two-year period. One-fifth (21%) reported a steep decline in self-esteem after entering junior high school, and the smallest group (13%) consisted of individuals with chronically low self-esteem throughout early adolescence. Not surprisingly, individuals with consistently high self-esteem reported the fewest psychological symptoms, maintained strong academic records, and enjoyed substantial peer support, while those with declining self-esteem suffered diminished peer support and increased depressive symptomatology.

Similar trajectories are observed throughout the junior high school and high school years (Deihl et al., 1997; Demo & Savin-Williams, 1992). Following their panel of boys and girls from seventh to twelfth grade, Demo and Savin-Williams found stability in self-feelings and gradual growth in self-esteem over the six-year period. Many other studies report increases in self-esteem during the teenage years (for reviews, see Demo, 1992; Harter, 1990), supporting a view of adolescence as a period of developmental growth, maturation, increased cognitive sophistication, improved reasoning skills, broadened self-understanding, and rising self-acceptance. But the course, slope, and linearity of this growth vary. Savin-Williams and Demo (1984) used the paging methodology described above to monitor participants' self-feelings for one-week periods in seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. They found that three groups (stable, baseline, and oscillating) could be distinguished each year, but there were interesting changes in the distributions over time. From seventh to tenth grade, the percentage of adolescents whose self-feelings were stable from one naturalistic setting to the next increased; the percentage with baseline (or mildly fluctuating) self-feelings decreased, although in all four years this was the largest group; and the proportion with oscillating self-feelings (which peaked at 16% in ninth grade), dropped to 3% by tenth grade. This suggests that as individuals move through adolescence, self-feelings are characterized by greater stability, fewer disruptions, and milder fluctuations.

The accumulated evidence is thus consistent that most adolescents are more content and satisfied with themselves than is commonly thought. Indeed, Offer et al. (1981, pp. 83–84) conclude that the typical American teenager feels confident, happy, and self-satisfied. These findings challenge the popular belief – one held by many parents and amazingly resistant to change – that adolescence is characterized by intense social pressures, turbulence, rebellion, dramatic mood swings, vacillating self-feelings, and declining self-esteem. Twenty years ago, Coleman (1978) called attention to the contradictions between empirical reality and adolescent theory, arguing that such factors as researchers' reliance on clinical samples and the media's obsession with sensational adolescent behavior were responsi-

ble for perpetuating the stereotype. But although I have argued it is a mistake to exaggerate the degree of instability and self-doubt characterizing adolescents' thoughts and feelings about themselves, it is equally important that we not exaggerate the degree of self-stability or the extent of growth in self-esteem during the second decade of life. We must recognize the variability in self-regard during adolescence, the different pathways that teenagers negotiate in coming to understand and accept themselves, and the need to be aware of and sensitive to the minority of adolescents whose self-esteem is chronically low or wildly fluctuating. Further, it is important to recognize that for the small percentage of adolescents with poor and/or unstable self-images, it is likely that experiences in childhood, including lingering self-doubts and low self-esteem, contributed to the vulnerability they feel in adolescence. Without substantially more research on self-esteem trajectories prior to and long after adolescence, this hypothesis remains speculative.

To this point, I have suggested that for most individuals, self-esteem improves gradually from middle childhood through middle adolescence. Does the developmental course of self-esteem change as individuals move through the later stages of adolescence, exit adolescence, and enter early adulthood? Block and Robins (1993) examined developmental change and stability in self-esteem by following a group of boys and girls from early adolescence (age 14), through late adolescence (age 18), and into early adulthood (age 23). Following James (1890) and Rosenberg (1965), they conceptualize self-esteem in terms of a self/ideal self discrepancy, defining it as the extent to which one perceives oneself as relatively close to being the person one wants to be and/or as relatively distant from being the kind of person one does not want to be, with respect to person-qualities one positively and negatively values (p. 911). Using traditional criteria – comparisons of group means over time, and examination of rank-ordering within groups – they find little change in self-esteem from age 14 to 23, and substantial longitudinal consistency, or within group stability, from early to late adolescence, from late adolescence to early adulthood, and over the entire nine-year period. In these respects, the findings are consistent with other studies (Bachman, O'Malley, & Johnston, 1978; Mortimer & Lorence, 1981; Owens, Mortimer, & Finch, 1996), suggesting that self-esteem stability extends through adolescence and into early adulthood, an impressive feat considering that established ways of thinking about oneself are challenged by multiple role changes and diverse life experiences over this period spanning nearly a decade. In Dusek and Flaherty's (1981, p. 39) words, adolescence is not a time of upheaval in the self-concept. The person who enters adolescence is basically the same as [the one] who exits it.

In another respect, however, Block and Robins's data sound an alarm to those who are ready to conclude that individuals enjoy increasing levels of self-approval from early adolescence through early adulthood. The overall

pattern of group means showed little change over this period, and analyses by gender revealed profound changes. For most (more than 60%) of the sample, individual self-esteem scores changed by more than one-half a standard deviation. For males, self-esteem generally increased and, for females, self-esteem generally declined. Other studies provide corroborating evidence that white females experience losses in global self-esteem during the transition to junior high school, that white males and blacks of both sexes gain self-approval during this transition, and that disadvantages for girls persist through adolescence (e.g., Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983; Rosenberg, 1979, Simmons & Blyth, 1987). However, the focus in these studies on global self-esteem oversimplifies the dynamics of self-concept development (Owens, 1993; 1994), and examination of overall gender differences masks within-gender patterns. For example, Block and Robins (1993) observe decreases in self-esteem for one-third (34%) of the boys and increases for 43% of the girls.

Although the cumulative evidence suggests some interesting longitudinal patterns of self-esteem growth and stability, some cautions are in order. Most studies examining self-concept stability and change have concentrated on one dimension – usually global self-esteem – and have relied on measurements obtained over one-year or two-year time periods. Without observations over longer periods of time, and without examinations of self-esteem trajectories prior to and subsequent to adolescence, we must be careful in drawing conclusions about the nature of self-concept stability. For example, although the accumulated evidence suggests profiles of consistently high, chronically low, and, for a minority, steeply declining self-esteem during early adolescence (Hirsch & DuBois, 1991), we do not know whether observed one-year or two-year trajectories generalize to longer periods of the life course or whether they represent deviations from preceding and subsequent developmental profiles. To illustrate, some individuals whose self-esteem declines markedly in the early adolescent years may have histories of low self-esteem during childhood (prior to a short-term increase in late childhood) and may suffer lingering self-doubts throughout adulthood. Viewed from a life course perspective, self-esteem in late childhood is an aberration for these individuals – a spike or blip of self-respect in a lifespan otherwise characterized by self-rejection. Thus, we may misrepresent such individuals if we portray their self-development as steeply declining on the basis of snapshots taken at a few points in time. Further, until self-development at other points in the life course is more fully examined, there is reason to question the claim that there are greater challenges to and disruptions in self-concept at ages 12 and 13 than at any other stage of the life course (Demo, 1992; Rosenberg, 1979; Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, & Bush, 1979).

FAMILY RELATIONS AND CHILDREN'S SELF-CONCEPT

Most of the research linking family relations and children's self-esteem has examined parenting or childrearing behaviors, documenting the importance of parental support and parental control. In this section I discuss the impact of these and related parent-child interaction processes, and suggest that considerably more attention should be given to children's active role in these processes, the role of parents' relations with each other, and the dire consequences of economic hardship on parents' ability to provide optimal socialization experiences for their children.

Parental Support

Consistent with formulations of self-esteem development emphasizing the importance of reflected appraisals, there is persuasive evidence that parental approval, encouragement, responsiveness, warmth, nurturance, support, and affection are related to children's and adolescents' self-esteem, as well as to other aspects of their social, emotional, and academic adjustment (for excellent reviews, see Gecas & Seff, 1990; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Rollins, 1987). For both theoretical and methodological reasons, it is important to note that children's self-esteem correlates more strongly with children's perceptions of parental behaviors than with parents' perceptions (Demo, Small, & Savin-Williams, 1987; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). As Rosenberg argued, children's perceptions are likely to be biased in a manner promoting their self-esteem. For example, children often do not recognize how much parents know, and it is likely that children mistakenly think their parents are not aware of some of their misbehaviors, faults, or shortcomings; in these and other respects, selective imputation enhances their self-esteem. Clearly, parents are significant others in children's lives. Most children and adolescents respect and value their parents, identify with them, and feel close to them (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 1987; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). It is also difficult for children, especially when they are young, to avoid their parents, rendering parents – and children's perceptions of parents' evaluations – very influential in the formation of children's self-esteem. But selective interaction and valuation operate in intricate and subtle ways, as children and adolescents may choose to spend more time with one parent than another (most likely favoring the parent who, at least at that moment, they perceive as acting more favorably toward them and holding a higher opinion of them), and they are likely to attach less significance to the evaluations of the less favorable parent. In the United States at least, the likely consequence is that mothers are more influential for children's self-esteem, as mothers tend to be much more involved in children's lives than fathers are; children and adolescents report their relationships with their mothers to be closer and warmer than those with their fathers; and both sons and daugh-

ters confide more in their mothers than their fathers (Larson & Richards, 1994; Thompson & Walker, 1990). Unfortunately, however, few empirical studies distinguish parental influences on children's self-esteem by parents' and children's gender.

Parental support has been conceptualized and operationalized in a variety of ways, with studies demonstrating benefits for children's and adolescents' self-esteem when parents show interest in their children, accept them, spend time with them and do things with them, talk with them, listen to them, touch and hug them, play with them, encourage them, and compliment and praise them. Of course, children often resist, discourage, challenge, and undermine parental attempts to be responsive and supportive (Ambert, 1997; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992), and the appropriateness and importance of specific parental behaviors for children's self-esteem vary across situations and developmental stages. But it appears that what matters most for children's self-esteem is that they feel they matter to their parents (Rosenberg, 1985; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981), that is, that their parents think they are important and care about what happens to them.

Some studies have suggested that parental acceptance during childhood has long-term advantages for self-esteem and psychological well-being, extending at least into early adulthood (Roberts & Bengtson, 1993). The importance of close family relations for children's self-esteem generalizes to European-American, African-American, and Hispanic-American populations, although the magnitude of the relationship is stronger for European-American and Hispanic-American children (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1993). Conversely, studies suggest a clear tendency for children and adolescents to think less of themselves when their mothers or fathers are verbally aggressive toward them, neglect them, reject them (Burnett, 1993; DuBois, Eitel, & Felner, 1994; O'Hagan, 1993) or physically or sexually abuse them (Conte & Schuerman, 1987; Martin, 1976). The advantages for children's self-esteem of reliable and consistent parental support, warmth, and affection thus cannot be overstated.

Parental Control

A second dimension of parenting behaviors with profound consequences for children's and adolescents' self-esteem is parental control. Like parental support, parental control is multidimensional, but the type of control that parents exercise is critical. Studies indicate that authoritative control, emphasizing inductive reasoning and explanation, parental supervision, monitoring, and restrictiveness are related to more positive self-concepts among children, but authoritarian control, involving coercion, threats, and greater use of physical punishment, has deleterious consequences for children's self-evaluations (Gecas & Seff, 1990; Peterson & Rollins, 1987). Kurdek and Fine (1994) observed that among fifth through seventh graders, both

family acceptance and family control are positively related to psychosocial competence (an index including self-esteem and self-efficacy). The authors operationalized family control as parental monitoring activities: making sure that the adolescent's homework is done, knowing where the adolescent is and what he or she is doing, and keeping a close eye on the adolescent. Importantly, Kurdek and Fine found there was no threshold for control, suggesting that the more parents monitor their children, the greater the benefits for children's self-appraisals. One likely explanation for such findings is that parents' vigilant surveillance is a daily reminder to children that their parents care about them or, to paraphrase Rosenberg (1985), that children matter.

Children and adolescents are not merely passive recipients of parental behavior, however. In contrast to the *tabula rasa* view suggested by social mold theories, it is common for children and adolescents to actively and creatively defy, resist, and thwart parents' efforts to monitor and discipline, inviting their parents to give in, to withdraw, and to be permissive and tolerant (Patterson et al., 1992). This situation is exacerbated among difficult, antisocial, and rebellious youth (Ambert, 1997). With personalities of their own, and with many extrafamilial influences shaping their actions, adolescents interfere with parental monitoring and control in a variety of ways: Adolescents can refuse to cooperate with their parents, can choose to disobey as parents try to supervise and discipline them, can disregard advice, and can arrive home in a very bad mood; they can badmouth, insult, harass, and even assault their parents (Ambert, 1995, p. 292). To the degree that such behaviors reduce parents' involvement with, support of, and positive evaluations of adolescents, adolescents are responsible in denying themselves greater self-esteem.

Interparental Relations

Another salient component of children's family environment with implications for their self-esteem is the nature of their parents' relationship with each other. High rates of marital unhappiness, divorce, single parenthood, and remarriage raise concerns about the stability and continuity of parent-child bonds and the provision of necessary social, emotional, and economic resources for children's well-being. Studies find that high levels of marital and interparental conflict adversely affect children's and adolescents' self-esteem, but family structure (the number and marital status of parents living in the household) is not a significant influence in shaping children's self-esteem (Cashion, 1984; Demo & Acock, 1988; Fine & Kurdek, 1992). Frequent, intense, and unresolved marital conflict is harmful to children's views of themselves in several ways. First, younger children, in particular, are likely to blame themselves for negative interactions between parents (Hammen, 1992). Children are often drawn into marital disputes, feel caught between parents (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991), and are pres-

sured to take sides. During and following intense marital conflict, parents are less responsive to children's emotional needs, and sibling conflict heightens (Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992). Marital discord often precipitates other destructive family processes, including interspousal aggression and violence, parent-child conflict, and parental aggression and violence directed toward children (Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987). In these circumstances, children's thoughts of their families and of themselves are inevitably preoccupied with negativity and criticism (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Again, though, it is important to recognize the bidirectional nature of parent-child relations, with children often being the sources of, contributing to, or escalating interparental conflict, creating a cycle of problematic family experiences that dampen children's (as well as parents') self-evaluations.

Economic Hardship

Chronic financial stress is associated with diminished marital happiness and parental support, directly and indirectly reducing adolescents' feelings of self-worth (Ho, Lempers, & Clark-Lempers, 1995). Economically stressed parents tend to be more inconsistent, harsh, and rejecting in their disciplining, and they express less warmth, nurturance, acceptance, interest, and support toward their children (Elder, Nguyen, & Caspi, 1985; Lemper, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989; McLoyd, 1990; Whitbeck, Simons, Conger, Lorenz, Huck, & Elder, 1991). In a study of single African-American mothers and their seventh- and eighth-grade children, McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, and Borquez (1994) found that maternal unemployment and work interruption were related to diminished maternal well-being, less effective parenting, and lower adolescent self-esteem. These findings can be interpreted in terms of two prominent self theories described earlier. Diminished parental support, warmth, and interest are likely to translate into less favorable reflected appraisals from highly valued and respected sources. Social comparison processes provide a second explanation, as family financial hardship may prevent adolescents from doing and buying things that are valued by their peers, such as wearing stylish clothes and attending concerts (McLoyd et al., 1994; Whitbeck et al., 1991). Deprivation of economic resources thus strains marital and parent-child relationships, inhibits adolescents' ability to fit in within a materialistic peer culture, and weakens adolescent self-esteem.

PEER RELATIONS AND CHILDREN'S AND ADOLESCENTS' SELF-CONCEPT

The size, composition, structure, and role of social support change as children mature and their involvement in extrafamilial contexts increases. In general, children's social networks (including peers, family, and others) increase in size in middle and late childhood and increase further in early

adolescence, the proportion of peers increases in relation to adults, and peer support intensifies as parental support diminishes (Cauce, Reid, Landesman, & Gonzales, 1990; Feiring & Lewis, 1991a, 1991b; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). These patterns obtain for boys and girls and for Anglo/European-American, Hispanic-American, and African-American children and adolescents (Levitt et al., 1993). Further, the quality and meaning of friendships shift in adolescence from providing acquaintances and companionship to providing close friendships, support, and intimacy (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Importantly, such social support has implications for children's self-esteem. Levitt et al. (1993) found that social support from friends predicted social self-concept, but only in the oldest age group they studied (early adolescents); the relationship was not significant among children in grades one to two nor among those in grades four to five. Further, the influence of friend support was strongest among African-American adolescents, consistent with Coates's (1985) observation that self-esteem among African-American adolescents is related to the number of close friends they have, the frequency of contact with friends, and the length of time they have known their friends. Thus, although few studies have examined the relative impact of family and friends on children's and adolescents' self-esteem, there is mounting empirical evidence that relations with and support from immediate and extended family are more influential during middle and late childhood, and that beginning in early adolescence the influence of extended family diminishes and the frequency and closeness of friendship relations assume much greater significance for self-evaluation (Levitt et al., 1993).

As previously discussed, children and adolescents are differentially dependent on the evaluations of others in forming judgments of themselves. During the transition into adolescence, peer involvement increases and the need for peer support and approval intensify (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). And, as Rosenberg (1981) amply demonstrated, self-concept is both a social product and a social force. One clear illustration of this is that adolescents (like adults) select their friends, choose to interact more often with some than with others, and in the process choose friends who are more likely to enhance their self-picture:

Friendship is the purest illustration of picking one's own propaganda, for it is characteristic of a friend that not only do we like him but he likes us. To some extent, at least, it is probably that we like him because he likes us. Indeed, it is well-nigh impossible to be friends with someone who dislikes us, not only because we would have no taste for such a friendship but also because he would not allow the friendship to exist. (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 261)

Harter, Stocker, and Robinson (1996) studied samples of young adolescents and identified three orientations characterizing the relation between peer approval and self-worth. In the first group, peer approval precedes self-

worth. Adolescents in this category report that they make judgments about personal worthiness based on peers' evaluations. A second group is composed of adolescents whose self-worth precedes peer approval. These adolescents think that how much one likes oneself as a person will determine how much approval one will receive from peers. A third group of adolescents reports there is no connection between peer approval and self-worth; for this group, self-judgments are independent of approval from peers.

Importantly, Harter et al. (1996) observed individual characteristics associated with each of the self-orientations: Early adolescents in the approval to self-worth group are more likely to focus on peers' negative reactions, whereas their counterparts whose feelings of self-worth generally precede approval by peers are more attentive to peers' positive evaluations. Not surprisingly, adolescents in the former group are much more likely to be preoccupied with peer approval, while those in the latter group tend to report more positive feelings of self-worth.

GENDER INFLUENCES

The gendered nature of social relationships and of society in general is quite evident in young children's evaluations of themselves. By the end of first grade and throughout elementary school, girls judge their athletic abilities to be inferior to those of boys (Harter, 1985; Marsh & Smith, 1987; Pallas et al., 1990). Further, beginning in fourth grade and lasting throughout adolescence, girls have significantly worse images of their bodies and overall physical appearance (Harter, 1985; Marsh & Smith, 1987; Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1981; Pallas et al., 1990; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). However, in comparison to boys, girls rate themselves as having higher academic self-concept, stronger personal character, and being more responsible (Marsh & Smith, 1987; Pallas et al., 1990). To a large degree, such views represent accurate reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-attribution processes in that girls generally outperform boys academically and exhibit lower rates of antisocial and delinquent behavior during adolescence.

There are interesting but not yet well understood gender differences in the processes associated with developmental stability and change in adolescent self-esteem. In Block and Robins's (1993) study following a panel through adolescence, the personality profile of females with high self-esteem was remarkably similar at ages 14, 18, and 23: interpersonally skilled, socially poised, assertive, cheerful, talkative, sociable, and gregarious. In contrast, the characteristics of males with a strong sense of self-regard changed substantially from early adolescence to young adulthood. Boys with high self-esteem at age 14 were described by observers as stern, meticulous, humorless, unexpressive individuals lacking in warmth (p. 920).

Some interesting insights into the social and psychological processes influencing self-esteem growth or deterioration during adolescence are suggested by the personality profiles of early adolescent boys and girls. Block and Robins (1993) argue that for males, self-esteem development is dependent on a self-orientation that controls and minimizes social anxiety, and for females increasing self-appreciation is dependent on an other-orientation characterized by warm, nurturing, positive interpersonal qualities. In support of this view, they found that boys who were characterized by observers as calm, socially at ease, and satisfied with themselves at age 14 tended to experience increases in self-esteem, whereas boys who were anxious, self-defensive, and preoccupied in early adolescence tended to think less favorably of themselves at ages 18 and 23. Females at age 14 whom researchers described as moralistic, sympathetic, considerate, and sought out by friends for advice and reassurance reported gains in self-esteem at ages 18 and 23, while those described as critical, moody, irritable, hostile, and condescending suffered losses to self-approval.

It seems plainly evident that males and females view themselves differently, but the reasons for this are not well understood. Differential socialization by gender contributes to processes whereby boys and girls aspire to different goals and standards, they use different criteria to judge themselves, and they choose different referent others for their most valued social comparisons and reflected appraisals. But we lack adequate empirical examinations and theoretical explanations of these processes. For example, it is unclear whether, as Rosenberg and Simmons (1975) suggested, reflected appraisals during adolescence are more important to girls than to boys. Hoelter (1984) found that reflected appraisals were equally important to the self-evaluations of boys and girls in their senior year of high school, but there were gender differences in whose opinions were considered most important: the perceived evaluations of friends were more important for girls and the perceived judgments of parents were more consequential for boys. There may be an advantage for both girls' and boys' self-esteem in attaching unequal significance to peers' evaluations. Harter et al. (1996) found that among sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, girls judged themselves more favorably on classmate approval than did boys. The size and composition of boys' and girls' social networks also vary, and Levitt et al. (1993) report that females tend to take advantage of broader networks, including extended family support, in maintaining personal well-being. To more fully understand gender-related similarities and differences in self-formation, however, considerably more attention must be devoted to theoretically guided investigations of gendered social interaction processes.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have tried to summarize what we know and what we don't know about children's and adolescents' self-esteem development, focusing to a large degree on what we have learned by extending the seminal theoretical insights of Morris Rosenberg. It should be clear that there were important limitations to Rosenberg's research and thus there are limitations to understanding the self using his paradigm. Perhaps most important, Rosenberg was not able to translate some of the important things he knew about self-concept into his research design, notably that self-concept is dynamic, temporal, and malleable, with self-images shifting and vacillating from one situation to the next. Still, his vast contributions to our knowledge of self-dynamics distinguishes him in an elite group of eminent self-theorists that includes James, Cooley, and Mead, and his work is recognized as exemplary in linking social structure and personality (House, 1981).

Much work remains to be done, however, if we are to understand how macrostructural arrangements and microsocial interactions shape how children and adolescents view themselves. Despite thousands of empirical studies on self-esteem, how much do we really know about how self-concept differs by race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation? Although a substantial amount of research has investigated self-esteem among children and adolescents, and many of these studies have examined gender *differences* in aspects of self-evaluation, very little attention has been devoted to understanding the gendered nature of the social *processes* shaping girls' and boys' self-concepts. Similarly, a significant (but smaller) number of studies have examined race differences in self-esteem (usually based on samples of European-American and African-American college students and adults), but we know very little about the socialization processes shaping the self-concepts of African-American, Latino, Asian-American, and other ethnic minority youth. Socioeconomic status is a third social structural force impinging on children's self-evaluations, with particularly deleterious consequences for the 20% of U.S. children age 18 and younger who are living in poverty (Rank, 2000). Fourth, sexual orientation (of adolescents as well as parents) is unquestionably the least researched aspect of social stratification as it relates to self-esteem, yet it profoundly influences children's relationships with each other, with parents, and with significant others, thus shaping children's opinions and judgments of themselves.

A necessary and very promising direction for future research is systematic examination of contextual diversity and its influences on children's self-perceptions. It is clear that children's relationships with family members are

proximate influences on their views and evaluations of themselves, and that these processes remain influential throughout adolescence (Deihl et al., 1997). Although many theories of adolescent socialization and development suggest a diminishing role of family relations as adolescents distance themselves from family members, especially parents (Bell, 1981; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), the evidence reviewed here confirms the sustained importance of parental involvement, support, and authoritative control for adolescents' self-esteem. Future investigations must be cautioned against adopting too narrow a view of adolescent socialization.

Other contexts that are influential, but have received far less attention, include close friends, peer groups, educational settings, and employment conditions. Beginning in middle childhood, peer groups expand and peer support heightens, but opportunities for peer rejection, ridicule, and ostracism also increase. We know relatively little about the magnitude or duration of such effects on children's and adolescents' self-esteem, or how these experiences are influenced by other variables such as the size and intensity of the peer network, the compensatory role played by other friends and parents when peer rejection occurs, or the power of other competencies and self-attributions (such as personal efficacy) in negotiating through situations in which self-approval is threatened. To explore other contexts and to complement the disproportionate amount of self-concept research that focuses on (often oversimplified) models of reflected appraisals and social comparisons, Owens et al. (1996) direct researchers' attention to the challenges for adolescents offered by schoolwork and employment tasks, and they document significant advantages for self-esteem when adolescents have opportunities to engage in interesting, challenging, problem-solving tasks, particularly when these opportunities occur across multiple contexts (e.g., family, school, and employment).

Slowly, self-concept researchers have been heeding Rosenberg's (1979) advice to look beyond self-esteem. Some scholars have been quite emphatic that self-esteem is not everything (Demo, 1992; Gecas & Burke, 1995). Although both important and influential, self-esteem is only one dimension of self-concept. Yet the vast majority of research on self-concept continues to rely on measures of global self-esteem, precluding a fuller, richer, and nuanced understanding of qualities such as authenticity, personal efficacy, self-confidence, and self-deprecation (Owens, 1993, 1994). It is valuable to know that most children and adolescents have fairly stable and respectable self-esteem, that there is contextual variation and developmental continuity, and that their global self-evaluations are closely tied to patterned characteristics of family and peer contexts. The next step is for researchers to accept the challenge of studying multiple aspects of children's and adolescents' views of themselves in context and over time.

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8 Failure of the Dream

Notes for a Research Program on Self-Esteem and Failed Identity in Adulthood

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The title of this volume, the reader will recall, is *Extending Self-Esteem Theory and Research: Sociological and Psychological Currents*. In this chapter, I hope to foster that theme by outlining the elements of a nascent research program on self-esteem and failure to achieve or to be successful in realizing a central adult identity. In doing so, I will draw on psychological and sociological concepts and perspectives, giving special attention to important and relevant facets of the social context that I believe are useful to research on this generally neglected aspect of adult life.

The idea for this research program emerged as I was watching ballet at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. I noticed that several women in the *corps de ballet* were somewhat older than my conception of the typical ballerina. It struck me that most (if not all) of them started in ballet when they were much younger, and they probably saw themselves (their Dream) becoming a Principal Dancer. It seemed obvious, at least to me, that at their present age they were unlikely to be a Principal Dancer and would most likely continue in the *corps de ballet* until the end of their career. I wondered how they incorporated that change in their likely self-image into their identity and what effect it had on their self-esteem. I then thought of other social roles for which this issue would be relevant, and I mention some of these later in this chapter. This line of thinking led me to the issue of coping with failure in a significant identity, the subject of this chapter.

I will not attempt here a comprehensive review of the relevant literature; that would be beyond the scope of this chapter. I wish only to spell out my

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general conceptual and analytic framework that draws on and extends some relevant approaches to the issue of failure to achieve or to be successful in realizing a central identity in adulthood.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROGRAM

Overview

Any social psychological study of failure must inevitably come to grips with the issue of identity and a sense of self; and, even more particularly, with the issue of self-esteem. As Gurin and Brim (1984, p. 299) have pointed out, "The importance of feeling competent, effective, and in control of one's life has widely been regarded as basic to the self." Nothing is more likely to make a person feel incompetent than to have failed to achieve her or his central goal in life, which has almost always been tied to an occupation or career. For men, this typically has involved activities outside of the home, while for women it has generally involved their family role. However, today we are witnessing a substantial change in how many women conceive their identity. An increasing number of women join men in linking a significant aspect of their identity to their occupational role outside of the family.

When identity is conceived of in occupational or career terms, failure in it is often defined by someone other than oneself (a supervisor, a boss), and generally requires substantial changes in one's life. One consequence of this fact is that it tends to highlight the lack of control that many people actually have over important aspects of their existence, and thus is likely to threaten their sense of self-worth and self-esteem. In essence, the study of the "failure of the Dream" is inevitably a study of identity and, even more specifically, a study of self-esteem.

Given the likely definition of one's central identity in occupational terms, it is important to note that the American ethos assumes that generally the individual is responsible for her or his own economic fate; and we tend to subscribe to the view that "failure can only be due to limited ability or defects in character" (Chinoy, 1955, p. 123). Consequently, as Albrecht and Goft (1975, p. 243) indicate, "Most members of American society are socialized to succeed or to achieve, or at least not to fail." How then do individuals who fail to achieve their dream or successfully realize it interpret this failure? How do they incorporate it into their sense of self? What implications does it have for their conception of self-worth or self-esteem? How, specifically, does it affect their identity as a competent person or a competent player of a specific social role? How do they cope with this experience of failure? What coping mechanisms do they employ, with what effect? How is the choice of coping mechanisms, and their use, influenced by the social and personal characteristics of the individual and the social context in which the experience is embedded (e.g., the particular role or identity involved, the public or private nature of

the failure, the manner in which and by whom the failure is defined, and how the person's significant others react to the knowledge of that failure, etc.)? These are among the key questions that a sociologically oriented social psychological approach to the study of failure in an adult central identity needs to explore. They involve objective and subjective definitions of failure, the context in which failure occurs, and the coping mechanisms the person uses.

The Issue of Identity

The focus of the current research program is failure to attain or to succeed in a central identity. Thus, initial attention needs to be given to the idea that the person has a number of identities and selves, and that some are more "psychologically central" (Rosenberg, 1979), "prominent" (McCall & Simmons, 1966/78), or "salient" (Stryker & Serpe, 1982) than others.

Multiple Selves/Identities

At least since William James's (1915, pp. 179–80) insightful and oft-used formulation that "*a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind ... [and] distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares*" (emphasis in the original), it has been clear that identity and self are not singular concepts and that it would be more appropriate to talk about identities and selves. It is also evident that some of these identities or selves are likely to be more important than others, and their importance will vary by the situation the person is in and/or the role the person is playing. Because the issue of the relative importance of a person's identities or self-components plays a critical role in the issues explored in this chapter, I wish to briefly highlight the views of a few selected psychologists and sociologists who have dealt with this issue.

A Central Identity (the Dream)

In his key book, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Levinson (1978), building on the work of Erikson's (1959, 1963) concept of an epigenetic cycle (the "eight ages of man"), delineates a theory of adult development in terms of a series of "eras," "stages," "structures," and "transitions." The utility of this approach, especially its methodology, has been questioned by some (see, e.g., the review of the book by Cain, 1979). However, I believe that it is useful to consider Levinson's point that one of the major developmental tasks of adulthood is to form what he calls THE DREAM. Levinson (1978, p.91) argues that "many young men have a Dream [he always capitalizes it to highlight his usage of the term] of the kind of life they want to lead as adults. The vicissitudes and fate of the Dream have fundamental consequences for adult development." The Dream, for Levinson, is another way of describing a person's conception of what they would like to be and do in the future, their key identity; and throughout adulthood, he indicates, men reevaluate and reappraise their life

and try "to understand and evaluate the place of the Dream in it" (Levinson, 1978, p. 245). The Dream is typically linked in some fashion to men's occupational status or aspirations, which for them are central to their sense of self and constantly reworked to take account of reality and growth. [Interestingly, the Dream is given somewhat less prominence (and drops its capital letter) in Levinson's (1996) study of the development of adulthood in women (*The Seasons of a Woman's Life*).] Following Levinson's line of argument, it is clear that fulfilling the Dream (a central identity) plays a significant role in a man's sense of self-worth, his self-esteem – a formulation that echoes William James's famous formula that self-esteem is the ratio of one's success to one's pretensions.

Somewhat similar to Levinson's Dream is the concept of "possible selves" of Hazel Markus and her colleagues (e.g., Markus & Nurius, 1986). "Possible selves," Markus and Nurius (1986, p. 954) suggest, "are the ideal selves we would very much like to become ... [b]ut they are also the selves we are afraid of becoming." The two concepts differ in that the Dream tends primarily to be a positive goal for the person whereas possible selves can be either desirable ends to strive toward or negative ones to avoid. In either case, however, both serve as a motivating force and a link between present and future behavior.

Three types of "desired self-images" identified by Rosenberg (1979, pp. 38–45) serve a similar function in his analytical model of the self. The "idealized image," adapted from the work of the psychoanalyst, Karen Horney (1945), refers to what the person would like to be, an imaginative construction of a desired future identity that is not necessarily constrained by reality and is, in Rosenberg's (1979, p. 40) engaging phrase, a "pleasure to contemplate." But there is also a "committed image" that the person takes more seriously and is somewhat more realistic. Finally, there is the "moral image" of what we believe we *should* be. The Dream, possible selves, and the desired self-images are seen as having relevance to motivation, animating a person's current behavior and, as indicated earlier, serving as a link between the present and the future. Levinson considers the Dream as central to a person's conception of self and Markus makes a similar point when she argues that some self-conceptions (including possible selves) are especially significant; she calls these particular self-conceptions "self-schemas," and considers them part of a "core" self (Markus, 1977; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

So, too, can Rosenberg's concept of the desired selves be linked to another facet of his theoretical scheme, self-esteem, through the concept of "psychological centrality" as one of his four principles of self-concept formation. In discussing self-esteem, Rosenberg (1979, p. 18) argues that "the significance of a particular component [of the self] depends on its location in the self-concept structure – whether it is central or peripheral, cardinal or secondary, a major or minor part of the self. ... In other words, a person's global self-

esteem is based not solely on an assessment of his constituent qualities but on an assessment of the qualities that *count*" (emphasis in the original). Or, put differently (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 73), the principle holds that "the self-concept is not a collection but an organization of parts, pieces, and components and that these are hierarchically organized and interrelated in complex ways." Again, the self-concept is viewed as consisting of a variety of elements that are not equally important and, consequently, are likely to have differential implications for a person's self-esteem.

Although not identical, Rosenberg's treatment of psychological centrality resonates with some of the work carried out by Stryker and colleagues (see, e.g., Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994) on identity hierarchies, defined as "a readiness to act out an identity as a consequence of the identity's properties as a cognitive structure or schema" (Stryker & Serpe, 1994, p. 17). In both Rosenberg's and Stryker's scheme, different elements of the self-concept/identities have differing degrees of salience based, presumably, on their centrality for a specific situation. In an empirical study designed to explore the relationship between identity salience and psychological centrality in the context of several specific social roles, Stryker and Serpe (1994) find a complex relationship between the two concepts. In some cases, they are relatively independent of one another (e.g., in academic and friendship roles) while in others there is substantial overlap between the two (e.g., athletic/recreational and extracurricular roles). However, in both theoretical schemes, self-esteem would be expected to vary depending on which element(s) of the self-concept is (are) involved and its (their) degree of centrality or salience. The same would apply to the differing selves that contribute to a person's sense of identity.

The Midlife Crisis

Although not always the case, reviewing and reassessing one's life (raising the possibility of seeing oneself as failing to achieve, or being a failure in, a central identity) has been viewed as typically occurring in adulthood and constituting a "midlife crisis." In fact, considerable ink has been spilled and a great deal of concern manifested over this so-called midlife crisis. Although the first use of this phrase is generally attributed to Jaques (1965), its diffusion into popular discourse was undoubtedly facilitated by the writings of Erikson (1963) and Levinson (1978), among others. In Levinson's (1978) widely read analysis of men's development through adulthood, he points out that "as [a man] enters the Mid-Life Transition [roughly between the ages of 40 and 45], he is likely to review his life ... [and] must deal directly with the disparity between what he is and what he dreamed of becoming" (p. 30). This period of assessment is essentially the midlife crisis faced by men (and women: see Sheehy, 1974, 1995; Levinson, 1996). The term crisis is viewed as appropriate by Levinson both for those individuals who believe that they

have accomplished what they set out to do and have fulfilled their Dream and those who haven't. For many of the former (those who have tasted success), there is still the question, Levinson avers, as to the meaning and significance of that accomplishment. However, it is often those who have not accomplished their Dream (those who have drunk from the bitter cup of failure) who have captured the attention of the mass media, and consequently the general public, and have generated the most research by scholars.

I wish to make it clear, however, that this foray into the social context of failure to achieve one's Dream, central life goal, central identity, salient identity, or important desired possible self is not limited to the midlife period – however that period is defined. Such failure is possible at any point in time. In fact, one issue to be explored is precisely that: the extent to which age plays a role in defining and coping with failure.

A Brief Review of Relevant Theoretical Perspectives

Several theoretical perspectives offer useful concepts and approaches to deal with the problem at hand. Some of them have already been mentioned in abbreviated form: Morris Rosenberg's theories of the self, Sheldon Stryker's identity theory, and Hazel Markus's studies of possible selves. Each will require somewhat more elaboration to draw out those aspects of these conceptual schemes that are relevant to the present project. In addition, the work of Erving Goffman on "spoiled identities" and "cooling the mark out" as well as the conceptual scheme of the British social psychologist Glynis M. Breakwell will round out the main theoretical orientation to be used in the present work.

Morris Rosenberg has been perhaps the central figure in the study of self-esteem. His self-esteem scale is probably the most widely used instrument for this purpose. His 1979 volume, *Conceiving the Self*, brought many of his ideas together into a detailed coherent theoretical model of the self, and his later chapter on the self (Rosenberg, 1981) elaborated his views on the self as both a "social product" and a "social force." One of his many significant contributions to the study of the self-concept was to define it as an "attitude," with the person being both perceiver and perceived, the object of his or her own attitude. In his words, "When we use the term 'self-concept,' we shall mean *the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object*" (Rosenberg, 1979 p. 7, emphasis in the original) Considering the self-concept as an attitude permitted Rosenberg to tap into the vast literature on the structure, components, and consequences of attitudes and adapt them to the study of the self-concept. However, his use of the concept of self-as-attitude was sufficiently sophisticated to allow for the significant differences between attitudes toward the self and attitudes toward any other object. Thus, in Rosenberg's work, it was clear that the self-concept was similar but not identical to other kinds of attitudes. Because the object of the attitude

was the person holding the attitude, self-attitudes had certain characteristics that other attitudes lacked: These self-attitudes were *always* important, reflexive, being assessed and evaluated, a product of often “incommunicable information,” and giving rise to emotions (such as pride or shame).

In Rosenberg’s scheme, self-esteem is one of two key “motives” of the self. Rosenberg accepts William James’s (1890) notion that “self-seeking” and “self-preservation” are central to motivation. But he points out that there are actually two distinct motives involved: self-esteem and self-consistency. The first signifies the positive or negative value a person places on her or himself, which should be considered a continuum rather than a dichotomy; that is, there are levels of self-esteem. The second, self-consistency, refers to the desire to “protect the self-concept against change or to maintain one’s self-picture” (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 53). Both are powerful motives that do not often conflict with one another. More important, he posits that these are not “passive” motives; individuals *actively* seek to maintain a positive and stable image of themselves. As Rosenberg (1979, p. 57) puts it for self-esteem, “A major determinative of human thought and behavior and a prime motive in human striving, then, is the drive to protect and enhance one’s self-esteem.”

Rosenberg’s view of the self-concept as an attitude a person takes toward her or himself, and self-esteem as a powerful motivating force in human thought and action, is central to the present project. In most cases, failure threatens self-esteem. There are occasions, however, when failure confirms the low self-image a person may hold and contributes to the drive for self-consistency. The relationship between the need to see oneself in a positive light (high self-esteem) and the need to maintain a relatively stable and consistent image of oneself (striving to maintain self-consistency) is something to be explored in the present program.

Rosenberg’s introduction of the principle of psychological centrality into his analysis of the self-concept highlights his sophisticated view that the self-concept is composed of a variety of components (different selves) that are differentially valued. Thus, any analysis of the effect of failure must take into account the extent to which the affected self-component is important to the individual. That view is also integral to the work of Sheldon Stryker.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, there is considerable similarity in the views of Rosenberg and Stryker. Both are symbolic interactionists who recognize the importance that social structure plays in the formation, maintenance, and structure of identity; this shared approach places them closer to the Iowa School than to the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism (for the distinction between the two anchor points of what is essentially a continuum of variations in symbolic interaction as a theoretical perspective, see, e.g., Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975, pp. 55–67; Stryker, 1980, pp. 86–135). In fact, in his 1980 book, *Symbolic Interactionism*, Stryker uses the subtitle, *A Social Structural Version*, to emphasize his view of the direction that symbolic

interaction should take. This approach allows both Rosenberg and Stryker to link the complex and differentiated structure of the self directly to the complex and differentiated nature of society.

In his earliest formulation of identity theory, Stryker (1968, p. 560) employs the accepted notion of multiple identities and selves to postulate, further, "that the discrete identities that comprise the self exist in a hierarchy of salience such that other things being equal one can expect behavioral products to the degree that a given identity ranks high in this hierarchy." (This view is similar to McCall & Simmon's, 1966/78, concept of "prominence hierarchies"; for a comparison of these two concepts, see Thoits & Virshup, 1997, pp. 115–16). Although present in this earlier formulation, the importance of "commitment" to the salience of a particular identity is further delineated and explored theoretically and empirically in later work (Stryker, 1987; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Commitment refers to the number ("extensiveness") and importance ("intensiveness") of the ties individuals have to others as a consequence of playing a particular role and thus having a specific identity. The first, Stryker calls "interactional commitment" and the second, "affective commitment"; the relationship between these two types of commitment is complex. In some cases they may be positively related, as when we play a role with many role partners with whom we have pleasant and enjoyable relations – for example, in the family role with a pleasant and loving spouse and children. On the other hand, sometimes people are locked into roles with a number of interactional partners with whom they have unpleasant relations, as, for example, in an occupational role with an excessively demanding boss and uncooperative or unsociable co-workers. Stryker points out that the relationship of interactive and affective commitment is complex and various combinations of these two types of commitment will likely have differing implications for the salience of the relevant identity. In a related empirical study, Serpe (1985) finds that the impact of commitment on identity salience is considerably greater than the other way round. These analyses suggest the importance of determining in the current project the degree of both types of commitment to the identity under threat.

The work of Hazel Markus is useful in highlighting the fact that self-conceptions are not limited to how people see themselves in the present and immediate context. Their view of themselves in the future, their possible selves, serves as a potent source of motivation for present behavior. Moreover, Markus and Nurius (1987) point out that the delineation of possible selves (which include ideas about what a person might become, would like to become, and what he or she might be afraid of becoming) may be useful in improving the ability of researchers to link aspects of the self (usually the current or working self) to specific behavioral outcomes. Markus and Nurius (1987, p. 160) point to work by Nuttin (1984) as an

example of the fact that “the majority of one’s daily activities appear to be regulated by goals that are linked not to one’s current view of self but instead to views of what might be possible for the self in the fairly distant future.” Clearly, then, failure can involve not only unsuccessful performance in a current role (with its corresponding self-conception), but can result from not achieving a desired and important possible self. Any study of failure should include both possibilities. But the research must ascertain not only what are desired possible selves, but also their importance to the individual – their psychological centrality in Rosenberg’s terms or their place in Stryker’s hierarchy of identity salience.

Markus and Nurius (1986, 1987) also suggest and explore some hypotheses for the link between possible selves and behavior based on age, what they call “self-schemas” (and others have called personality traits like independence and shyness), being a delinquent, and so on. In each case, some support was evident for the view that links between possible selves and behavior will vary by these (and presumably still other) social and personal characteristics.

The British social psychologist, Glynis M Breakwell (1983, 1986) has developed a detailed model of identity that incorporates many elements of other theories of self and identity but organizes them into a coherent and useful whole. Briefly, her model involves the “structure,” “processes,” “principles,” and “social context” of identity. The *structure* is composed of a “content” dimension (the characteristics that a person believes describes her or his personal and social identity), a “value” dimension (the value attached to the identity components; these may vary by situation and time) and a “temporal” dimension (that takes into account what Luckmann, 1983, called “inner time,” “intersubjective time,” and “biographical time”). The *processes* of identity are believed to be universal and involve “assimilation-accommodation” (to allow for reinterpretation of current facets of identity and the addition of new elements) and “evaluation” (the allocation of meaning and value to the content of the identity). The *principles* of identity are viewed as probably temporally and historically relative, as are their priorities or salience. They include “continuity” (the perceived tendency of identity content to remain stable across time and situation; similar to Lecky’s, 1945, view of self-consistency), “distinctiveness” (the value that people place on being unique, different from others), and “self-esteem” (the importance of feelings of personal worth and social value). There is also the social context out of which identity forms and is maintained. This *social context* is composed of “interpersonal networks,” “group and social category membership,” and “intergroup relationships.”

As previously indicated, many elements of Breakwell’s scheme have been described and used by other investigators. However, the way she weaves them into a coherent and comprehensive theory makes them especially useful. Equally important for the present project is her focus on threats to identity

and coping strategies. Breakwell (1986, pp. 46–47) indicates that “a threat to identity occurs when the processes of identity, assimilation-accommodation and evaluation are, for some reason, unable to comply with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem, which habitually guide their operation.” The *origin* of the threat can be either internal (when the individual seeks to change some element of her/his relationship to the social context) or external (when the social context is itself changing). Typically, threats are aversive; people seek to avoid them. Breakwell also stresses that the conscious perception of threat is necessary to evoke action.

Especially likely to be quite useful is Breakwell’s analysis of *coping strategies* in dealing with threat. There are “intrapsychic” and “interpersonal” strategies of coping. The former involve “deflection” (e.g., many of the psychodynamic mechanisms of defense), “acceptance” (“creative” adaptations of redefinition and reattribution), and “reevaluation” (of existing or prospective identity content). The latter, interpersonal strategies, include “isolation” (the person attempts to minimize the threat by isolating her or himself from others), “negativism” (an active mode of confronting those posing the threat to identity), “passing” (the person removes her or himself from the threatened position/identity), and “compliance.”

Breakwell also discusses the factors that influence the choice of coping strategies: the type of threat, the nature of the social context, the identity structure, and the cognitive resources available to the person. She uses her model to study two types of threats to identity, unemployment and being employed in a gender-atypical position (1986, pp. 52–75) and, additionally, she has edited a volume (1983) in which a number of scholars explore threats to the individual’s identity, to the individual’s identity as a group member, and to the identity of groups.

This complex though comprehensive model of identity, and especially its view of coping strategies, is extremely useful to the present project of exploring the effect on self-esteem of failure to achieve or successfully realize a central identity. Its utility is heightened by the way in which Breakwell weaves together psychological and sociological concepts in pursuit of understanding identity and coping strategies for dealing with threats to it.

Another social psychologist who has dealt with failed identity and coping strategies, one whose work is more well known in the United States than Breakwell’s, is Erving Goffman. Although most of Goffman’s writings are useful in any analysis of identity, two stand out as most relevant to the present task: his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963) and even more important, his article “Cooling the Mark Out” (1952). His concept of stigma highlights social responses to a failed (or some type of “spoiled”) identity. He also makes a distinction between a “discredited” and a “discreditable” social identity; the former involves a “differentness” that is

either already known or immediately evident. In the latter case, the difference is neither known nor immediately evident. This distinction will be useful in exploring effects of a failed identity that is publicly known and that which is relatively private. Goffman's discussions of how spoiled identity is managed will also play a role in this project.

Goffman's major contribution to the present project results from his analysis of "cooling the mark out." In that work, he explores the situation of an involuntary loss of a person's social position and describes the "cooling out" process for the mark (the victim) as an "adjustment to an impossible situation" (Goffman, 1952, p. 456). Interestingly, Goffman looks at the cooling out process from the point of view of both the "cooler" (the person doing the cooling out) and the "mark" (the object of the cooling out process). From the cooler's point of view, the essential task is to tell the mark that he or she has failed in a way that reduces the negative consequences for the organization, the person, or other relevant role incumbents. To accomplish this task, Goffman argues, the cooler has certain techniques available. In one, the mark may be supplied with a new set of apologies for the failure, a new frame for judging what happened (e.g., the mark is told that the position was eliminated; it wasn't the role performance that was inadequate). For another, the mark might be provided with an acceptable alternative position/status/identity (some examples Goffman, 1952, p. 457), provides for this are "[a] lover may be asked to become a friend; a student of medicine may be asked to switch to the study of dentistry; a boxer may become trainer"). Another alternative is to allow the mark another chance to prove her or himself (in major league professional baseball, e.g., the athlete could be sent down to the minor leagues to show that he can improve and be worthy of being returned to the majors). The mark could be allowed to vent, break down, create a scene – at least temporarily – as an immediate catharsis that will then reduce the possibility of further negative action on the mark's part with possibly more serious effect. Given the difficulty of the task, the cooler may stall in providing definitive word of failure (giving hints along the way) in hopes that the mark will "get the message" and have time to get familiar with and even accept the new identity before it needs to become a reality. Finally, the cooler and the mark may reach a tacit understanding to save face for the mark (e.g., letting a person resign rather than be fired).

The mark is not a passive partner in this process, as the last-mentioned technique suggests. The mark also can engage in a range of strategies to protect her or himself against failure or, at least, mitigate the consequences of failure. The mark can engage in "hedging" by not completely committing to the status/position/identity. Or the mark can keep her or his level of commitment "secret." In a variant of the previous two strategies, the mark can

maintain, at least publicly, a “joking or unserious relationship” to her or his commitment to the status/position/identity. Having several options, what Goffman calls “keeping multiple irons in the fire,” is another possible strategy for the mark. As a reciprocal of the last two strategies discussed for the cooler, the mark could be sensitive to subtle cues and quickly take the hints of failure so as to cooperate in attempts to “save face.” Finally, the mark could play it safe from the very beginning by adopting a position/status/identity that is generally secure, with little chance of failure (e.g., taking a civil service position with strict tenure protections).

In sum, I will draw on and expand the rich theoretical models of the self and identity provided by Rosenberg, Stryker, Markus, and Breakwell. Their conceptions about the nature and structure of self and identity are essential. I will seek to integrate many of these elements in a way that allows me to focus on the goal of the research program: understanding how failure to achieve or succeed in a central identity is incorporated into a person’s sense of self, particularly her or his level of self-esteem, and how the person copes with this situation. In this manner, I intend to operate in the best traditions of social psychology by integrating and providing a focused usage of extant concepts and perspectives in both psychology and sociology for an analysis of a key facet of adult identity. In particular, I will use the ideas of multiple selves and identities that have complex relations with one another and are organized in hierarchies of importance or salience to constitute the core notions of this research. Levinson’s notion of the Dream as an organizing force for a person’s perception of her or his life’s work accords very well with the understanding that one or more of the multiple identities or selves (current or possible) may serve the same function. Without committing undue violence to Hughes’s (1945) concept of “master status,” only a slight reconceptualization of it as a central identity would allow the Dream, a future possible self, a salient or important self/identity to play the same role that is typically ascribed to gender for women or race for African Americans – an organizing principle for their life’s activities. How people incorporate a threat to it into their sense of self, their view of their own self-worth or self-esteem, is one of the issues for this project.

Two other important issues are the social context of failure (how and by whom failure is defined) and the coping mechanisms people use to deal with the threat to their central identity. In that sense, Goffman’s analysis of cooling the mark out becomes relevant. The strategies adopted by the cooler can be viewed as part of the social context in which failure in a central identity occurs, while the actions of the mark are part of the possible coping strategies a person might use to deal with the consequences of this failure. I will also blend this with the coping strategies described by Breakwell to round out this part of the analysis.

Key Variables

Some of the standard sociological characteristics of the individual (e.g., age, gender, social class, race/ethnicity, level of education) are useful to this as to many other projects. However, there are a number of other factors less frequently used in studies of identity that I believe are essential to this research program that I wish to highlight as well. The organizational structure in which the position/status in which a person fails is enmeshed, the nature of the position, its degree of bureaucratic structure, its links to other organizational structures are some of the factors that need to be included. Also, the career trajectories and the career stage when failure occurs appear to be important considerations. The availability of acceptable alternative routes for success is stressed by the studies described below. Certainly important is the context in which failure is defined: Who defines it? For what reason(s)? Who knows about the failure? Does it involve status degradation or cooling out?

Three interesting research studies in the sociology of sport (Ball, 1976; Faulkner, 1975; Harris & Eitzen, 1978) have used one or more of these variables and I will briefly describe their relevant aspects to highlight the utility of these variables for the present research. Robert Faulkner (1975) carried out a fascinating study that compared the career contingencies of two seemingly disparate professions: professional hockey players and professional symphony musicians. Part of a three-year comparative study of career socialization and mobility patterns in professional sport and the performing arts, the article reports on analyses that "derive mainly from long unstructured interviews with 60 symphony players in two organizations ranked in the middle strata of the orchestral hierarchy, and from 38 hockey players on two teams in the highest minor league level of professional hockey" (Faulkner, 1975, p. 529). Although the structure and context of these two professions have clearly changed since the 1970s (when Faulkner conducted his research), the analysis suggests a number of important factors that any study of identity failure must take into account.

Faulkner highlights the importance of age as a factor in the difference in the two professions between "making it" or not. Hockey players have a short window of opportunity and necessary physical attributes to be successful, which means being signed to a team in the National Hockey League (NHL), compared with symphony musicians. "Thirty-two percent (86) of those on the active rosters [of an NHL team] in 1971-72 were promoted into the elite strata in their first or second year of hockey ... [and] 60% (163) had arrived in the top strata from the minor leagues before they were 24 years of age" (Faulkner, 1975, p. 533). On the other hand, "[m]ajor league orchestras are by and large reluctant to hire people in their forties and even late thirties" (Faulkner, 1975, p. 536). Thus, a musician can still "make it" into an elite orchestra in her or his thirties (perhaps in some cases even into

their forties), while that is virtually impossible for professional hockey players.

But age is not the only factor. Hockey players are involved in a tight organizational network set of major and subsidiary minor league teams with a sharp distinction between the two. Symphony musicians, on the other hand, have a much looser organizational network set, which gives them more flexibility and mobility, and thus more opportunities to succeed. Faulkner provides a more detailed analysis of the organizational network set of professional hockey players and symphony musicians and uses these distinctions to understand the differential career contingencies of the two professions. It is not necessary to review this level of detail in Faulkner's study; the brief summary of his work provides some useful insights and suggests some specific variables that are relevant to a study of the context of failed adult identity.

A second useful study is provided by the work of Donald Ball (1976), who studied the difference between failure in professional baseball and professional football. Drawing on the work of Garfinkel (1956) and Goffman (1952), he uses their concepts of "status degradation" and "cooling the mark out," respectively, to analyze failure in these two professional sports. Ball argues that those who fail in professional baseball are typically subjected to what amounts to the experience of status degradation, while in football it is more likely that the failed athlete will be cooled out. Ball explains the difference between the two in terms of the organizational structure of the two sports. Baseball, like hockey in the analysis by Faulkner (1975) but unlike professional football, consists of a tight organizational set of major and minor league teams in which the sharp status differences between the two levels contributes to the sense of "death" (and thus degradation) on being sent down. Ball uses the terms "deadman" or "non-personage" to describe how the failed baseball player is typically treated by his current and soon-to-be-former teammates. Professional football, on the other hand, "lacks a hierarchy of interrelated teams" at different status levels (Ball, 1976, p. 734) so that failure has different consequences. Ball also argues that failed baseball players are likely to have fewer other skills and fewer available alternative opportunities should they fail than professional football players. Since professional football relies on colleges and universities as the equivalent of the minor league training ground for young, budding athletes, most professional football players have attended institutions of higher education. Consequently, they are likely to have developed skills and interpersonal contacts (e.g., with alumni) that allow for the possibility of a reasonable alternative career line should they fail in professional football.

Ball, like Faulkner, also provides a more detailed analysis of the specific nature of the organizational structure of these professional sports to explain

the failure than has been described. However, once more, that level of detail is not necessary here.

Finally, Harris and Eitzen (1978) provide a useful foray into the issue of failure in sports from both an organizational and individual view. They, too, discuss the organizational context of failing in terms of whether it is a process of degradation, cooling out, or shutting out – and how these may differ depending upon the particular sport and its organizational structure. They are concerned with the issue of when failure occurs in a person's career (e.g., before the career can get started, early in the career, at some point later in the career) and what difference that makes. Moreover, Harris and Eitzen suggest the importance of ascertaining why the failure occurred; for example, was it a consequence of skill failure, interpersonal failure, structural failure, or unrealistically high goals and what effect if any this has on how the person copes with the failure. They also invoke standard sociological concepts in inquiring as to whether how a person responds to failure is affected by age, gender, social class, race, ethnicity, educational level, and so on. Finally, they use the concepts of "relict" (or abandoned) identities and "reserve" (or not abandoned) identities – the latter may be seen as comparable though not identical with Markus' notion of possible selves – to assist in understanding how individuals respond to failure.

Strategic Target Populations

Earlier in this chapter, I pointed out that my interest in the issue of failed adult identity emerged as I watched a ballet at the Metropolitan Opera House. Afterward, I began to think of other kinds of populations for whom the possibility of not attaining their desired possible self, a salient or psychologically central identity, was a distinct possibility. These would be strategic targets for a research program on failed adult identity. Some populations and statuses came easily to mind.

Aspiring professional athletes are clearly a reasonable population to study. They start with the possibility of failure as to whether they can make it to the majors. Once there, they typically are concerned with whether they can maintain their position and for how long. The possibility of injury, skill failure, a better prospect coming along and challenging them for a position on the team, changes in management, financial considerations (e.g., the effects of the team salary structure and cap), and a variety of interpersonal factors suggest the constant presence of the possibility of failure.

Field grade military officers and business executives are also an interesting population to study. For the former, most hope to attain the rank of general or admiral, yet most will not. Similarly, many if not most business executives hope to attain a higher position (for many, to become the chief executive officer or a functional equivalent); again, few will actually do so. Is not attaining

these top-level positions considered a failure? With what consequences? How does the person cope?

Freelance artists, writers, musicians, actors, dancers are other populations for whom failure is an ever-present possibility. Similarly, research scientists find themselves in the same boat. In each case, there are some external criteria by means of which the person or others can judge success (the artist who sells her or his paintings or has a prestigious exhibition, the writer whose work receives critical praise, the scientist who continues to get research grants and whose work is respected by peers). But, also, individuals in these fields can view their career as a success or failure despite possibly contrary external definitions.

The union organizer who wishes to become the shop steward or president of the local chapter of the union, the assembly-line worker who would like to move into an office job, the employee who would like to own a business are other examples of populations that exhibit a Dream and run the risk of failing to attain it or to succeed in it. Clergy who wish to rise higher in the church hierarchy or individuals seeking political office are other potentially fruitful target populations.

Finally, men and women who dream of being parents but have fertility problems that threaten their goal are another group that could be studied. Graduate students who want a doctorate, young faculty members who want to attain or gain tenure in a position in a respectable college or university are other possible strategic populations.

Certainly, there are other populations/statuses/identities that could be identified as strategic research targets, and may emerge as the program develops.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Any reader of the volume in which this chapter appears is likely to agree with Rosenberg's (1979, p. 57) view that "a major determinant of human thought and behavior and a prime motive in human striving ... is the drive to protect and enhance one's self-esteem." Nor would there be any substantial disagreement with him, I suspect, when he writes that "most of the empirical research ... it should be noted, focuses on the self-concepts [and, I would add, self-esteem] of children and adolescents. [While] there are good reasons for this emphasis ... it is important to bear in mind that conclusions drawn from studies of children cannot necessarily be generalized to adults" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. x). To date, we still know less about the self-concept and self-esteem of adults than of children and adolescents. Yet we are not entirely bereft of such knowledge. An inquiry into one major university library listed over 100,000 articles, chapters, and books on the topic of adulthood, though only a small fraction of them dealt with adult self-esteem. And most of these studies use college students as their adult population (e.g., Brown & Gallagher,

1992; Kernis, Brockner, & Frankel, 1989). Only a handful of research studies have used adults who are beyond the college years and who are centrally involved in the world of work (e.g., Gurin & Brim, 1984; Levinson, 1978, 1996; Petrovsky & Gleeson, 1997; Wells & Stryker, 1988).

Typically, this line of inquiry, whether using college students or older adults, has been carried out by psychologists. These studies, quite understandably, have adopted a psychological perspective and used psychological variables in their explanatory framework. Some of these studies (e.g., Brown & Gallagher, 1993, p. 17; Levinson, 1980, p. 270), reveal a greater sensitivity to the importance of the social context in understanding the nature of adult identity than others. For example, Levinson (1980, p. 270), a psychologist, asserts that "we cannot learn much about personality development in adulthood as long as we operate within a purely psychological framework. Our thinking must become more sociological if we are to study adult personality more effectively. We must take account not only of the person but also of the person's engagement in society." However, there is often little delineation of the specific elements of the social context nor, again understandably, is there an effective use of a sociological framework of analysis. Without minimizing the importance of using a psychological perspective to explore the nature of adult identity and self-esteem, it is fair to say that inclusion of a sociologically oriented social psychological framework can continue to contribute to our growing understanding of this area of human experience. The proposed research program intends to play that role.

In this chapter, I have outlined a research program that inquires into the nature of failure to attain or succeed in a central adult identity and its consequences for self-esteem. I need to be clear that this is a focused research program. It would only involve individuals who in fact have a Dream, a salient and psychologically central identity or desired possible self, and are sufficiently aware of it so that it influences their behavior. Further, the research needs to be sensitive to the fact that conceptions of success or failure are fluid and often subjectively defined.

Research of the kind being proposed needs to be seen as a program rather than a single project since the results may well vary depending on the population studied and, as life course analysts (e.g., Elder, 1984) usefully remind us, the social and historical context. Finally, there needs to be a longitudinal dimension to this research program. Because of the vagaries of retrospective memory, the research program would have to identify target individuals prior to the possibility of experiencing failure to achieve or succeed in a central identity to get some baseline measures of self and identity as well as standard modes of behavior; these individuals would then have to be studied shortly after experiencing failure and then again at some point after that. Clearly there needs to be a measure of sensitivity when dealing with self-con-

ceptions of those undergoing the experience of failure. In short, what is being proposed is a longitudinal study of strategic target populations around the experience and consequences of failure to achieve or successfully realize a central adult identity.

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9 Self-Esteem and Work Across the Life Course

Carmi Schooler and Gary Oates

In this chapter, we examine the nature of the causal relationship between self-esteem and occupational conditions as individuals age. Our new empirical analyses are based on data from the third wave, collected in 1994–95, of a long-term longitudinal study of the effects of occupational conditions on psychological functioning. The first two waves were collected in 1964 and 1974 (Kohn & Schooler, 1983).

As is appropriate with most examinations of self-esteem, our conceptualization of the issues starts with Morris Rosenberg. Throughout his career, in both his theoretical explorations and his empirical research, Manny was deeply concerned with the ways in which self-esteem may be affected by experiences that are potentially linked to social structural location. He saw self-esteem as being enhanced when individuals compare themselves favorably with others, receive positive reflected appraisals, stake themselves on identities at which they excel, and justifiably attribute success to dispositional factors and failure to situational ones (Rosenberg, 1986, pp. 62–77). In collaboration with Leonard Pearlin, he also provided compelling evidence suggesting that the degree to which such experiences prove relevant to self-esteem may depend on one's age (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1982). Their research shows that the impact of social class on self-esteem rises from trivial to significantly positive as individuals progress from childhood to adulthood.¹

¹ The term social class has a variety of meanings and definitions. These can, however, be divided into two broad types. One type of usage refers to aggregates of individuals who occupy broadly similar positions in a hierarchy of power, privilege, and prestige. The second general usage is specifically Marxian and refers to a group defined in terms of its relationship to ownership and control of the means of production. The distinction between the two uses has taken on increasing importance in the series of studies deriving from the Kohn-Schooler occupational study program (cf. Kohn & Schooler, 1969; Kohn & Schooler, 1983, p. 6; Kohn et al., 1990). Within this series of studies the term social class has come to be reserved primarily

(continues)

Thus, the *meaning* of location in the social structure may vary as individuals age. This raises more general questions about the relationship between location in the social structure and self-esteem throughout the life course. Among these is whether the causal relationship between self-esteem and social structurally determined environmental characteristics closely linked to social class may similarly vary with age.

Occupational conditions are social structurally determined environmental characteristics that have been particularly closely related to social class. In terms of their co-occurrence empirically, higher social class is strongly linked to better and generally more desirable occupational conditions. Furthermore, a whole series of studies strongly suggests that social class (for relevant analyses and an extended discussion see Kohn et al., 1990) and social stratification position (for a review see Schooler, 1996) have their psychological effects in large part through the occupational conditions with which they are linked. This emphasis on the effects of social-structurally determined occupational conditions varies systematically with the more common approach to social structural position that directly examines the effects of achievement and hierarchical ranking in society and concentrates on variables such as income, education, and socioeconomic status. It differs from the more usual approach by viewing social hierarchically determined differences in occupational conditions as a major mechanism through which social stratification differences in psychological functioning occur (Kohn & Schooler, 1983, p. 21; Mortimer & Finch, 1986, p. 218).

"Occupational self-direction ... the keystone of the job structure" (Kohn & Schooler, 1983, p. 153) is central among the occupational conditions that have been shown to account for much of the relationship between social stratification position and psychological functioning. It is a primary cause of social class and social stratification differences in orientations to self and others, values for oneself and one's children, and even cognitive functioning. Occupational self-direction would thus seem to be a logical starting point for examining the effects of occupational conditions on self-esteem throughout the life course. Occupational self-direction denotes the degree to which initiative, thought, and independent judgment are used in work (Kohn &

(footnote continued)

for the Marxian usage, while the term social stratification position has been used for the more general hierarchical conceptualization. Nevertheless, the distinction is not all that germane to the present chapter, in which the basic conceptual concern is how position in the social structure, a term that subsumes both usages (Schooler, 1994), affects self-esteem by affecting job conditions. Consequently, the distinctions among such terms as social structural position, position in the social hierarchy, social stratification position, and social class will not be strictly maintained. Instead, while guarding against any egregious misapplication according to the formal definitions given in Kohn and Schooler (1983), Kohn et al. (1995), and Schooler (1994), we will use the terms interchangeably, reflecting the varying usages of the authors to whose work we are referring.

Schooler, 1982, p. 1259). Occupations facilitate self-direction to the extent that they are free of close supervision and involve tasks that are substantively complex (i.e., requiring initiative, thought, and independent judgment) and nonroutine (i.e., not repetitive and predictable, but allowing instead for a variety of approaches) (Kohn & Schooler, 1982).

We explore the relationship between self-esteem and all three facets of occupational self-direction – *closeness of supervision*, *substantive complexity*, and *routinization* – as individuals age. We not only examine the degree to which each of these facets of occupational self-direction may affect self-esteem, we also examine the possibility of causal influence in the opposite direction.

Each of the three facets of occupational self-direction plausibly has the capacity to both influence and be influenced by self-esteem as individuals age. This notion of a reciprocal causal relationship between self-esteem and occupational self-direction represents a view of the self as “simultaneously individual and social” and of social systems as “simultaneously the media and the product of individual and social action” (Wells & Stryker, 1988, p. 201).

Previous studies of occupational self-direction based on the Kohn-Schooler paradigm have generally hypothesized that the different dimensions exert their effects on attitudinal and cognitive variables through the process of learning-generalization: the direct translation of lessons learned on the job to nonoccupational realms of life. The learning-generalization process is “integral to a number of psychological theories” – invoking concepts such as “generalized response” in reinforcement theory, “generalized imitation” in social learning theory, and “generalized psychological pattern” in cognitive dissonance theory. These concepts posit a tendency for knowledge and perspectives obtained in a given situation to be transferred to others (Miller, Slomczynski, & Kohn, 1987, p. 177). Learning-generalization may involve all four social processes deemed by Rosenberg as central to the genesis of self-esteem. Inasmuch as incumbency in self-directed occupations elicits relatively favorable reflected appraisals and positive comparisons to others, a salutary effect on self-esteem is likely. Similarly, the (successful) performance of self-directed work may boost self-esteem by raising the likelihood of individuals attributing competence to themselves, and by elevating the place of work within the hierarchy of identities.²

Just as we hypothesize learning generalization to be the process underlying the effect of occupational self-direction on self-esteem, we see “selectivity in recruitment and retention” (Kohn & Schooler, 1983, p. 69) as the

² In effect, the individual values self-directed work because he or she is seemingly competent at performing it. The implicit salience of this “work” identity imbues it with considerable potential to influence self-esteem.

overall process through which self-esteem may affect the different dimensions of occupational self-direction. This process may operate at both the social and the individual level. At the social level, it would involve employers deeming high self-esteem a prerequisite for coping with the demands of self-directed work and thus granting preference to individuals with high self-esteem during the hiring and retention process. At the individual level, it would involve persons with high self-esteem either seeking out self-directed occupations in the belief that such jobs offer more opportunities for self-esteem maintenance or molding their current jobs as much as possible to render them commensurate with their high level of self-esteem. This process squares amicably with Wells and Stryker's "view of human behavior as agentic" – a perspective acknowledging that lives are not simply "something that individuals *have* but rather that which they *do*" (Wells & Stryker, 1988, p. 200).

Different theoretical orientations seem to posit quite different effects of aging on the connotation of both work and self-esteem for individuals. These differences lead to often contradictory expectations about the nature of the causal relationships between occupational self-directedness and self-esteem as workers grow older. If we first consider how job conditions may affect self-esteem, one possibility is that "aging stability" may prevail – with the self-esteem of individuals becoming progressively less volatile and responsive to social structural factors such as job conditions as they age (Glenn, 1980; Mortimer & Finch, 1986). The aging stability thesis hinges on the assumption that the more recent the role acquisition, the more susceptible the role's incumbent to the effects of environmental forces (Van Maanen & Schien, 1979). This perspective implies that the dimensions of occupational self-direction should have a more pronounced effect on self-esteem at earlier stages of workers' careers when they are younger. Alternatively, "encountering the same job conditions over time" might "engender an increasing and cumulative psychological effect" (Mortimer & Finch, 1986, p. 230). This view is consistent with an increase in the psychological centrality of work as individuals age and implies a concomitant strengthening of the effect of occupational self-directedness on self-esteem over time. Set against all these theoretical positions that posit changing effects of occupational self-direction on self-esteem as people age is the possibility that such effects do not change with age. Such a possibility implies that the "lessons" people learn about themselves from the work that they do are unaffected by how old they are.

If we consider how self-esteem may affect the self-directedness of work as individuals grow older, one possibility is that aging involves a "maturational" process in which "ego concerns gradually decline" and individuals become less preoccupied with their own needs and "more focussed on the needs and

concerns of others" (Gove, Ortega, & Style, 1989, p. 1123). If this is the case, then self-esteem enhancement would figure less prominently among the motives determining the choice of occupations over time. A decline in the impact of self-esteem on occupational self-directedness as individuals age would be consistent with such a process. If, on the other hand, the individual's natural inclination to "transform the world and to derive self-esteem from this experience" (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983, p. 86) represents an unwavering feature of the life course, then such "efficacy-based" self-esteem would exert a consistent effect on occupational conditions over time. An increasing effect of self-esteem on occupational self-directedness over the life course is also quite plausible – because aging may lead to rising job security and an associated enhanced capacity to shape one's job (Miller, Slomczynski, & Kohn 1987) to meet one's self-esteem needs

DATA

The data we analyze come from the third wave of the original Kohn-Schooler longitudinal occupation study carried out by Schooler in 1994–95. They are derived from a subset of questions from a much larger interview based on earlier Kohn-Schooler surveys and other sources such as Pearlin's research on coping mechanisms (e.g., Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). The fieldwork was carried out by National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and the Cygnus Corporation, on a contract funded generously by the National Institute on Aging. It took an average 3.5 hours to do an interview. Respondents were paid \$50.

The male respondents are a subsample, interviewed in 1974, of a nationally representative sample of employed men first interviewed in 1964 for the Kohn and Schooler (1983) study of the psychological effects of occupational conditions. The 1964 sample was an area probability sample, drawn by NORC, of males over 16 years of age then currently employed at least 25 hours per week in nonmilitary occupations. In 1974, NORC, in carrying out the follow-up survey for Kohn and Schooler, interviewed a representative sample of approximately one-fourth of the 1964 respondents who were less than 65 years old at that time. In 1974, the attempt was also made to interview the wife of every male respondent who was then married. Interviews were conducted with 555 women, 90% of the 617 eligible. They ranged in age from 26 to 65 years.

In preparation for the 1994–95 follow-up, 95% (650) of the 687 households that took part in the 1974 survey were successfully located, through a contract let to the Equifax Co. The present study centers on those 230 men and women interviewed who were working in both 1974 and 1994–95. Our best estimate is that this represents 88% of those in our 1974 sample who we might expect to have been working in 1994–95.

MEASUREMENT OF SELF-ESTEEM AND OCCUPATIONAL SELF-DIRECTION

Our measure of self-esteem (Table 9.1) is based on responses to the 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1986). We bifurcate self-esteem into a positive *self-confidence* dimension and a negative *self-deprecation* dimension. Self-confidence taps the degree to which individuals are confident of their own capabilities; self-deprecation gauges the degree to which individuals are prone to disparage themselves. This distinction acknowledges the potential for one to be simultaneously confident of one's abilities yet critical of oneself (Kohn & Schooler, 1983). Although Rosenberg generally considered self-esteem a single factor, the SEM measurement models in the Kohn and Schooler studies consistently showed that a two-factor model of self-esteem that distinguished between self-confidence and self-deprecation fit the data better. The same conclusion was reached by Owens (1993), who provides an extensive empirical, methodological, and theoretical discussion of the issue.

The *substantive complexity* index of *occupational self-direction* (Table 9.1) is based on each respondent's detailed accounts of the extent to which he or she works with things, with data (or ideas), and with people. These responses yield seven indicators of substantive complexity.³ The *closeness of supervision* dimension is based on four items and *routinization* on a single item, focusing on whether the respondent's work involves "doing the same thing in the same way" (most routine), doing "the same thing different kinds of ways," or "different kinds of things" (least routine).

A CAUSAL MODEL OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM OCCUPATIONAL SELF-DIRECTION OVER THE LIFE COURSE

The "lagged nonrecursive" model (Figure 9.1) is the baseline model that we estimate to assess (1) the degree to which each dimension of occupational self-direction (substantive complexity, closeness of supervision, and routinization) influences the two dimensions of self-esteem (self-confidence and self-deprecation), (2) the degree to which each dimension of self-esteem influences the dimensions of occupational self-direction, and (3) the degree to which these effects remain stable over one's life course. This structural equation model is estimated using LISREL8 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996).

³ We exclude all respondents who do not work with things from the computations of correlations involving complexity of work with things, on the rationale that not working with things is qualitatively different from working with things at a low level of complexity. Concretely, we treat not working with things as if it were missing data and use pairwise deletion in computing the correlations (for a full discussion see Kohn & Schooler, 1983, pp. 109–10).

Table 9.1. Standardized Loadings for Indicators of Self-Esteem and Occupational Self-Direction^a among Younger and Older Individuals^b

	1974	1995
Self-Confidence		
I take a positive attitude toward myself	.717	.924(.476)
I feel I am a person of worth, at least on equal plane with others	.466	.518
I am able to do most things as well as other people can	.390	.392
I generally have confidence that when I make plans I will be able to carry them out	.485	.636(.353)
Self-Deprecation		
I wish I could have more respect for myself	.653	.772
At times I think I am no good at all	.667	.710
I feel useless at times	.535	.654
I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be	.531	.586
There are very few things about which I'm absolutely certain	.336	.337
Substantive Complexity		
Complexity of work with things	.082	.008
Complexity of work with data	.790	.673
Complexity of work with people	.601	.584
Overall complexity of work	.589	.545(.891)
Hours of work with things	-.448	-.374
Hours of work with data	.494	.319
Hours of work with people	.412	.294
Closeness of Supervision		
How closely is R supervised	.465	.408
Does supervisor tell R what to	.782	.378
Importance of doing as told	.172	.279(.486)
Is R free to disagree with R	-.502	-.324(-.727)

RMSEA = .052 (self-confidence and self-deprecation model) and .087 (substantive complexity and closeness of supervision model).

^a Self-confidence and self-deprecation are estimated in a separate measurement model from substantive complexity and closeness of supervision.

^b The loadings for the younger and older subsamples are constrained to be equal in our multipopulation measurement model. In instances in which modification indexes suggest that the equality constraint should be lifted, the coefficient for older persons is listed in parentheses next to the corresponding loading for younger persons.

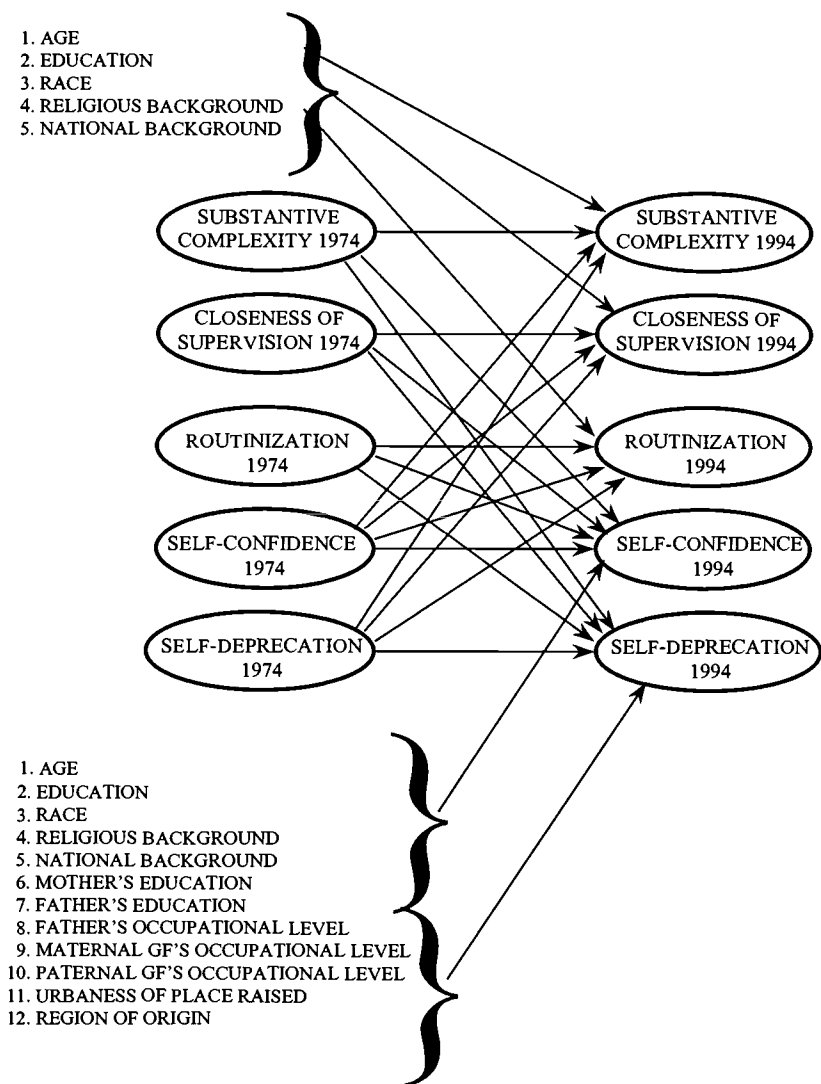


Figure 9.1. Lag-reciprocal effects model: self-esteem and occupational conditions. (*Note.* Paths for the intercorrelations among the exogenous concepts are not shown.)

LISREL combines structural equation and measurement modeling, and adjusts for imprecision in the measurement of latent variables – in this case, the 1974 and 1994–95 measures of self-confidence, self-deprecation, substantive complexity, and closeness of supervision.

We initially specified a causal model that, in addition to the paths displayed in Figure 9.1, included “contemporaneous” paths symbolizing the effects of substantive complexity, closeness of supervision, and routinization of work in 1994–95 on self-confidence and self-deprecation in 1994–95 as well as the reverse effects of self-confidence and self-deprecation in 1994–95 on substantive complexity, closeness of supervision, and routinization of work in 1994–95. Unfortunately however, severe collinearity problems prevented us from successfully estimating this model. These collinearity problems also confronted us in a second variation of this contemporaneous model – one in which the cross-lag paths depicted in Figure 9.1 (from the 1974 dimensions of occupational self-direction to the 1994–95 dimensions of self-esteem, and from the 1974 self-esteem dimensions to the 1994–95 occupational self-direction dimensions) were excluded and used to identify the contemporaneous (1994–95) effects of the dimensions of self-esteem and occupational self-direction on each other. We are thus unable to provide data that speak directly to the question of how self-esteem and occupational self-direction influence each other contemporaneously.

The “cross-lag” paths in Figure 9.1 from substantive complexity, closeness of supervision, and routinization in 1974 to self-confidence and self-deprecation in 1994–95 indicate how much occupational self-direction influences self-esteem over time, controlling for prior self-esteem. Similarly, the cross-lag paths from self-confidence and self-deprecation in 1974 to substantive complexity, closeness of supervision, and routinization in 1994–95 directly address the question of how much self-esteem influences occupational self-directedness over time, net of prior occupational self-direction. The control for prior self-esteem is represented by the “stability” paths from 1974 self-confidence and self-deprecation to the corresponding variables in 1994–95, while the control for prior occupational self-direction is symbolized by stability paths from substantive complexity, closeness of supervision, and routinization in 1974 to the corresponding measures in 1994–95.

The model also includes a series of exogenous socioeconomic background variables that prior research suggests have the capacity to be significant predictors of self-esteem and/or occupational self-direction (Kohn & Schooler, 1983). These variables are the respondent’s own age, race, level of education, national background, religious background, and the urbanness and region of the country of the primary place where the respondent was raised, as well as the respondent’s mother’s and father’s level of education, his or her father’s occupational level, and his or her maternal and paternal grandfather’s occupational levels. As in the earlier Kohn and Schooler analyses (1983), we posit that all the socioeconomic background variables potentially affect the endogenous (1994–95) dimensions of self-esteem, while only a subset (specifically education, race, age, national background, and religious background) directly influence the corresponding (1994–95) dimensions of occupational

self-direction). Although the remaining background variables (urbanness and region of the primary place raised, mother's and father's education, father's occupational level, and paternal grandfather's occupational level) may very likely have affected early job place placement, their direct impact on occupational self-directedness when men and women are well into their work-careers (i.e., at least 20 years) ought to be negligible.

The causal paths in the model depicted in Figure 9.1 are estimated using input-covariance matrices from "older" and "younger" subsamples. "Younger" respondents are either 57 years of age or younger – 57 being the median age in 1994–95 for 230 respondents who held jobs in both 1974 and 1994–95. "Older" respondents exceed this median age.⁴ In the baseline multi-population model that we estimate, all causal paths in Figure 9.1 are constrained to be the same for both groups – with the error-terms for the five endogenous variables of course allowed to vary. We then alter this model in incremental stages by allowing theoretically appropriate causal effects to be different for the older and younger groups. A given path is freed if modification indexes suggest that removing the equality constraint would yield a better fit for the overall model.

We used a similar method to estimate the latent variables that are included in the causal model presented in Figure 9.1 (i.e., self-confidence, self-deprecation, substantive complexity, and closeness of supervision in 1974 and 1994–95). We start with measurement-models that assume the loadings for the indicators of each latent variable to be the same for younger and older persons. We then allow particular loadings to differ across the two subsamples (i.e., "free" the given loading) in instances in which modification indexes point to between-group differences. The estimates for the final measurement models are presented in Table 9.1. With a single exception in both years – the paltry loading of "complexity of work with things" on the substantive complexity factor in 1974 and 1994–95 – the loadings presented in Table 9.1 are all statistically significant.

As best we can tell, the present study is the first to use longitudinal data to simultaneously assess the lagged reciprocal causal relationship between different dimensions of self-esteem and occupational self-direction, and the degree to which these effects remain stable over one's life course. The limited body of directly relevant prior empirical work, which has tended to focus solely on the causal relationship between self-esteem and occupational self-direction (and not on the question of stability of this causal relationship over the life course), provides solid empirical grounds for anticipating significant relationships between the different dimensions of both variables. Mortimer and Finch (1986) find "work autonomy" to be the "sole attainment construct" to exert a significant effect on self-esteem among a national longitudinal

⁴ The age range for the combined sample is 41–83.

sample of young men interviewed relatively early into their work careers. Some evidence of “selectivity” in the relationship between self-esteem and work autonomy is also uncovered – with prior self-esteem shown to exert a significant positive impact on work autonomy. In the case of this salutary effect of self-esteem on work autonomy however, prior work autonomy is not controlled for. Johnson (1992) reports that “job complexity” significantly enhances self-esteem among a cross-sectional sample of hospital workers in “a major metropolitan hospital” in the western United States. The impact of self-esteem on job complexity is, however, not addressed. Al-Bakr (1990) reports a significantly positive effect of occupational self-direction on self-esteem among a random cross-sectional sample of individuals drawn from “two census tracts representing stable upper-middle and working-class residential areas in Lansing, Michigan.” The impact of self-esteem on the job conditions variable also goes unaddressed in this study. Finally, structural equation models based on prior (i.e., 1964–1974) waves of the longitudinal survey on which the present study relies (Kohn & Schooler, 1983) revealed a substantial negative contemporaneous path ($-.25$) from substantive complexity to self-deprecation as well as a significant cross-lagged path ($-.14$) from closeness of supervision to self-confidence.⁵ These earlier analyses, however, revealed no significant reverse effects, either contemporaneous or cross-lagged, from either dimension of self-esteem to any of the three dimensions of occupational self-direction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The estimates for the basic model (Table 9.2) show that, controlling for other theoretically relevant variables, specific dimensions of occupational self-direction and self-esteem significantly influence each other as people age. These findings are simultaneously consistent with the view of social structure as critical to people’s orientations – with individuals in this instance apparently generalizing from characteristics of their work to affective dispositions toward themselves, and with the view of the self as “agentic” – that is, congruent with the notion of lives being not simply “something that people *have* but rather that which they *do*” (Wells & Stryker, 1988). The case for agency, it

⁵ These significant examples of learning generalization were obtained controlling on other job conditions, the 1964 level of the dimension in question, and all the background variables included in the present model. Sample-size limitations in the latest wave of the survey (particularly when the number of individuals still employed in the paid labor force is taken into account) precludes inclusion of other job condition variables in the present model. Significant effects of other immediate job conditions on self-esteem were a .10 contemporaneous path from time pressure to self-confidence and a $-.07$ lagged path from bureaucratization to self-deprecation. In the reciprocal direction, self-confidence had a .10 lagged path to hours worked and a $-.06$ lagged path to dirtiness of work.

Table 9.2. Standardized Coefficients from Final Lagged Reciprocal Effects Multipopulation Model: Self-Esteem and Occupational Conditions Among Younger (first row) and Older (second row) Individuals^{a,b}

Endogenous Variables	Substantive Complexity 1995	Closeness of Supervision 1995	Routinization 1995	Self-Confidence 1995	Self-Deprecation 1995
Substantive complexity, 1974	.74***	—	—	.18	-.25**
	.74***	—	—	.18	-.25**
Closeness of supervision, 1974	—	.53***	—	-.08	.18*
	—	.90***	—	-.08	.18*
Routinization, 1974	—	—	.26**	-.02	-.11
	—	—	.26**	-.02	-.11
Self-confidence, 1974	.21**	.00	.16	.31***	—
	.21**	.00	.16	.31***	—
Self-deprecation, 1974	.23**	.41***	-.03	—	.57***
	.23**	.07	-.03	—	.57***
Education	.04	.03	-.14	-.12	.12*
	.04	.03	-.14	-.12	.16*
Race (black)	.02	-.12*	-.08	.01	-.13
	.02	-.12*	-.08	.01	-.13
Age	-.03	-.01	.04	-.02	.03
	-.03	-.01	.04	.02	.03
Region of origin	—	—	—	-.11	-.03
	—	—	—	-.11	-.03
Urbanness of place raised	—	—	—	.16	-.18**
	—	-.26***	—	.16	-.18**
Mother's education	—	—	—	.00	-.02
	—	-.31	—	.00	-.02
Father's education	—	—	—	.06	.08
	—	.29	—	.06	.08
Father's occupation	—	—	—	.05	-.01
	—	—	—	.05	-.01
Maternal grandfather's occupation	—	—	—	.13	-.02
	—	—	—	.13	-.02
Paternal grandfather's occupation	—	—	—	.13	.09
	—	—	—	-.25*	.09
Ethnicity	.08	-.05	-.00	-.10	-.00
	.08	-.05	-.00	-.10	-.00
Religious background	-.04	-.26	-.03	.02	-.00
	-.04	-.26	-.03	.02	-.00

X^2 (129 df) = 518; GFI = .89.

N = 118 (younger)/112 (older).

^a Coefficients in bold print signify causal effects differ significantly among younger and older individuals. These are the paths that the modification indexes indicate should be freed (i.e., allowed to differ across the two groups so as to obtain a better fit for the overall model). Where a coefficient is displayed for one group and not for another, it indicates that the particular path was freed for one group only (as dictated by the modification indexes).

^b The modification indexes dictated that the error-correlations between substantive complexity and closeness of supervision in 1994–95, and between self-confidence and self-deprecation in 1994–95 be freed for the older subsample. Both correlations (–.11 between substantive complexity and closeness of supervision in 1994–95, and –.19 between self-confidence and self-deprecation in 1994–95) were significant for this group.

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

should be noted, exists to the extent that the impact of self-esteem on occupational self-direction represents individuals either actively seeking jobs that are consistent with their level of self-esteem or shaping their current jobs as much as possible to achieve such consonance. As noted earlier, the impact of self-esteem on occupational self-direction could also be attributable to employers using self-esteem as a criterion for recruitment and retention of workers. This alternate possibility would represent the effects of social structure rather than agency. Our data do not allow us to provide an estimate of the proportion of the observed effect of self-esteem on occupational self-direction that reflects either the "agentic" or "structural" explanation.

Substantive complexity both influences, and is influenced by, a dimension of self-esteem over time. Doing substantively complex work at one time-point (1974) diminishes the likelihood of an individual feeling negatively about him or herself subsequently (1994–95). This significant path from substantive complexity in 1974 to self-deprecation in 1994–95 is the same ($-.25$) for both younger and older individuals. The likelihood of doing substantively complex work is itself affected by prior self-confidence (the positive dimension of self-esteem). Being self-confident to begin with raises the likelihood of both younger and older individuals doing substantively complex work later on – as the significant effect of self-confidence in 1974 on substantive complexity in 1994–95 within both groups ($.21$) underscores.

Closeness of supervision, like substantive complexity, wields significant influence on the likelihood of having self-deprecating feelings. Working under the watchful eye of a supervisor seemingly increases the propensity to disparage the self, as indicated by the significantly positive ($.18$) effect of self-deprecation in 1974 on self-deprecation in 1994–95 among both younger and older individuals. The reverse effect of self-deprecation (in 1974) on closeness of supervision (in 1994–95) is significant for younger, but not for older individuals. Younger persons who start out with self-deprecating tendencies appear significantly more likely to subsequently hold jobs that are closely supervised – the impact of self-deprecation in 1974 on closeness of supervision in 1994–95 being $.47$ for this group. Older persons exhibit no such propensity – the corresponding coefficient being a nonsignificant $.07$ for this group.

Although the direction of the causal paths noted so far all makes sense, there is a puzzling finding (Table 9.2) of a tendency for prior self-deprecation to *induce* substantively complex work among younger and older individuals (the path from self-deprecation in 1974 to substantive complexity in 1994–95 being a significant $.23$ for both groups). We subjected this path to a long series of multicollinearity diagnostics that involved specification of hypothetical alternate models. In no case was evidence of multicollinearity uncovered. We frankly remain puzzled about the meaning of this appar-

ently real effect. This effect also runs counter to the direction of the modest (negative) correlation between self-deprecation in 1974 and substantive complexity in 1995 ($-.05$ among younger persons and $-.04$ among older persons).⁶

Contrary to the predictions of various theories, our results point to stability in the effect of occupational self-direction on self-esteem as people age. These findings are very much consistent with the notion of "continuity of learning-generalization through the life span" (Miller, Slomczynski, & Kohn, 1987). The two significant effects of job conditions on self-esteem that we observe – the tendency for substantively complex work to lessen feelings of self-deprecation and for closeness of supervision to have the opposite effect – are equally intense among our younger and older subsamples. Thus, to the degree that the nature of the work that people do predisposes them to like/dislike themselves, this "translation of lessons" appears to be a stable feature of the life course.

Our results suggest a combination of stability and change with regard to the question of how the aging process influences the effect of prior self-esteem on occupational self-direction. Two of the three significant effects of dimensions of self-esteem on dimensions of occupational self-direction that we observe (i.e., the tendency for self-confident persons to hold substantively complex jobs later on, and the puzzling tendency for self-deprecating persons to end up doing similar work) exist with equal magnitude among younger and older persons. The third effect – the tendency for self-deprecating persons to end up with jobs that are closely supervised (even though many of these same jobs may be nonetheless substantively complex given the positive effect of self-deprecation on substantive complexity) – is apparent among younger (but not older) persons. This finding squares amicably with the notion that ego concerns decline as individuals age (Gove, Ortega, & Style, 1989), thereby diminishing the perceived need to find jobs that are compatible with one's level of self-esteem.

With the notable exception of the salutary effect of self-deprecation on substantive complexity within both age groups, our key findings all make intuitive sense whether taken individually or collectively. These findings are also well within the range of what one might expect given the results of prior studies that have addressed the causal relationship between self-esteem and occupational self-direction (e.g., Al-Bakr, 1980; Johnson, 1992; Mortimer & Finch, 1986).

⁶ Had we been able to estimate a model that included a contemporaneous effect of self-deprecation in 1995 on substantive complexity in 1995 – either in addition to or instead of the lagged effect that we did estimate – we suspect that this effect would be in the negative direction that one might predict. This is because self-deprecation and substantive complexity have a decidedly negative correlation in 1995 ($-.20$ among younger persons and $-.16$ among older persons' direction).

The only findings that might be seen as not fully consistent with our present findings come from analyses based on earlier waves of the same longitudinal dataset that we rely on (Kohn & Schooler, 1983). The specific findings from that study that we have in mind are the significant lagged effect of closeness of supervision on self-confidence – as opposed to self-deprecation in the current model, and the absence in the earlier analyses of any significant path from a self-esteem dimension to a dimension of occupational self-direction – in contrast to the three such paths that we currently observe (i.e., the path from self-deprecation to closeness of supervision among younger persons, the path from self-confidence to substantive complexity among both groups, and the baffling path from self-deprecation to substantive complexity among both groups).

In evaluating the meaning of these differences, several issues should be borne in mind: (1) these Kohn and Schooler findings were based on data from men only, while the current findings rely on data from men and women – with attrition-induced sample-size limitations precluding estimation of a “men-only” model, (2) the earlier Kohn-Schooler models controlled the effects of ten other job conditions not directly indicative of occupational self-direction, while the reduced size of the current sample prevents us from including these additional variables in our model, (3) as opposed to the present model that estimates only lagged effects, the Kohn-Schooler analyses included both lagged and contemporaneous effects, and (4) no age interaction was tested for in the earlier Kohn and Schooler models. Any of these modeling or sampling differences may underlie the apparent discrepancies between the earlier and present analyses.

On the other hand, there are compelling reasons to believe these differences may reflect substantive reality. The tendency for closeness of supervision to predict self-confidence in the earlier models but self-deprecation in the current models may be attributable to two factors: (1) possible differences in the meaning to the respondents of being closely supervised relatively early in their careers when they are younger (the period captured by the Kohn-Schooler models), as opposed to later in their work careers when they are older (the period captured by the current models); and (2) the fact that self-confidence and self-deprecation are conceptually *different*, rather than mere converses of each other.

Close supervision – while probably not likely to be *yearned for* by working adults at any time – is probably more likely to be considered appropriate and acceptable at earlier stages of one's work career and less appropriate and acceptable later on. Early on in one's work career (when freedom from close supervision may be more likely to be seen as the exception than as the rule) being closely supervised may not be particularly belittling. At that stage, the aspect of self-esteem that is more likely to benefit from such freedom is the positive self-confidence dimension, which taps the individual's faith in his or

her own abilities. This positive dimension arguably captures the belief that one is capable of accomplishing the unusual much more so than does the negative self-deprecation dimension – which signifies the presence/absence of a tendency to denigrate oneself. If close supervision persists relatively late into one's work career, however (by which time many contemporaries may have managed to escape it), the negative self-deprecation (self-denigrating) dimension may be more susceptible to a significant job effect than the positive self-confidence dimension.

The fact that significant effects of self-esteem dimensions on dimensions of occupational self-direction are observed in the current model but not in the earlier Kohn-Schooler models may also be attributable to the different stages of the respondents' involvement in the paid labor force that the two studies capture.

To the extent that individuals are of the mind to shape the nature of their jobs so as to render them commensurate with their level of self-esteem, we suspect that they are in a much stronger position to do so later on in their work careers (the period captured by the current model) – given the earlier-noted increased job security that they are likely to have (Miller, Slomczynski, & Kohn, 1987). Thus, individuals at this more advanced stage of their careers captured by our model are in a more favorable position to realistically translate self-confidence into substantively complex work and self-deprecation into work that is closely supervised.⁷

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The public policy implications of our findings depend on whether our concern is with self-esteem as a goal in itself, or as a tool with which to achieve other goals. As an end in itself it would seem worthwhile that as many people as possible have as high a self-esteem as possible. Since humans differ from computers in that they sentiently hold subjective views of themselves, it would not require too many ethical assumptions to conclude that having as many people as possible think well of themselves is an admirable societal goal. Although our findings provide no proof that any dimension of occupational self-direction makes people feel more *positively* about themselves, they do show that doing substantively complex work and being free from close supervision shield people from *negative* self-feelings. Thus, altering the structure of jobs would at least protect people from denigrating themselves.

On the other hand, our society's track record for making and sustaining such purposeful changes in the social structure has not been particularly

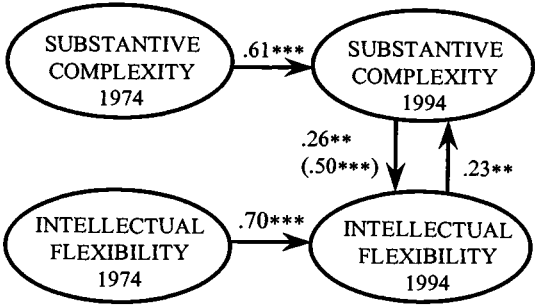
⁷ They would also of course be in a better position to translate self-deprecating tendencies into substantively complex work – as our perplexing finding of a positive effect of self-deprecation on substantive complexity suggests that they are also wont to do.

good. Furthermore, the magnitude of the effects we have found suggests that the payoff for trying to improve the general level of self-esteem through increasing occupational self-direction might not be worth the effort. This becomes particularly clear when we compare the magnitude of the effects on self-esteem of the three components of occupational self-direction that we have examined (substantive complexity, closeness of supervision, and routinization) with the effect of substantive complexity alone on what many would also consider a worthwhile societal goal for the individual – effective cognitive functioning.

Using the data from the same subjects as in the present self-esteem analyses, together with Mesfin Mulatu, we have been able to estimate total reciprocal effects models indicating how much substantively complex work and intellectual functioning affect each other (Schooler, Mulatu, & Oates, 1999). As can be seen from Figure 9.2, the effect of substantively complex work on intellectual functioning is markedly higher than the effects of any of the components of occupational self-direction on either self-confidence or self-deprecation. This is true whether we measure intellectual functioning using the old Kohn-Schooler Intellectual Flexibility SEM measure or our newly derived SEM measure of Standard Cognitive Functioning, based on six cognitive tasks standardly used as indicators of effective cognitive functioning. Thus, if we are going to try to socially engineer the structure of work to benefit individuals psychologically, we are more likely to do better by aiming to change their intellectual effectiveness rather than their self-esteem.

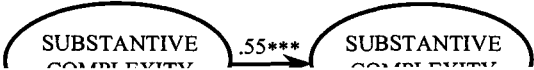
Taken together with findings from other self-esteem analyses that either of us has carried out (Oates, 1997; Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989), the present results suggest that the odds against success are also high in planning to manipulate self-esteem – particularly global self-esteem – as a tool for changing either individual behaviors such as teenage pregnancy and school performance, or psychological characteristics such as depression. Granted, our present analyses do yield findings of moderate magnitudes that, over time, being self-confident leads to doing substantively complex work and that not being self-deprecating leads younger persons to avoid closely supervised work. Nonetheless, the effects of one's self-esteem on the nature of the work one ends up doing are not always readily predictable. We have the puzzling, but apparently not artifactual finding, that being self-deprecating leads to doing substantively complex work. Furthermore, assuming that it is socially desirable to try to change the nature of work carried out in a society by changing the psychological characteristics of its members, it is not clear that improving global self-esteem (*if we knew how to readily do so*) would be a particularly effective or efficient way to achieve such a goal. As Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, and Rosenberg (1995) note, if the goal is to change behavior in a particular area (e.g., school performance), focusing on changing the specific type of self-esteem associated with that area (e.g., academic self-esteem) is more likely to

(Intercorrelations of exogenous variables not shown.)



Note. $\chi^2 (219) = 142.20, p = 1.00; \chi^2/\text{d.f.} = .65; \text{RMSEA} = .00; \text{CFI} = 1.00.$

(res not shown.)



vide are some new facts that both theorists and social planners should take into account.

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10 Comfort with the Self

Roberta G. Simmons*

Affect frequently serves a cueing function for the individual (Hochschild, 1983; Stryker, 1987). Emotions tell whether one's world is satisfactory or some response is needed. Sudden anxiety alerts us to action. Feelings of shame suggest a need to repair the picture of the self, for self or others. Emotions following a sudden insult motivate us to protect the self; the emotion of pride informs us that the self is healthy and flourishing. This chapter focuses on being comfortable or uncomfortable with the self, linked to the cueing function of emotion. Individuals who feel comfortable with who they are and the world that allows them to enact that self are being told their situation requires no major alteration of direction. Individuals who feel uncomfortable with themselves are cued to the possibility of change in self or environment, with the alternative a continuing unhappy emotional state.

We first define comfort and discuss what the concept adds to the more specific and well-researched emotional states tied to self. Then we ask: What particular aspects of the self-picture are related to being comfortable or uncomfortable with oneself? How does the social and cultural context alter the likelihood that individuals experience comfort or discomfort with the self?

DEFINITION OF COMFORT WITH SELF

Relation to Other Emotions

Many emotions cause distress and discomfort with the self; it is in their absence that one feels comfortable. Comfort with self is an umbrella term, referring to

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feeling at ease with one's picture of the self or not. There may be various emotional concomitants of not feeling at ease with oneself: depression, anxiety, shame, embarrassment. Discomfort has a strong emotional component, because one's self-picture has such importance; discomfort with that picture is difficult to adjust to, difficult to live with. However, comfort is not a new emotional state, but a state of contentment and well-being created by the absence of distress and associated emotional states when one views the self.

Comfort refers not just to the absence of negative emotions about the self, although that is one aspect of the definition. A second aspect involves feeling familiar, at ease, at home, when one thinks about the self (see Berlyne, 1960; Pineau, 1982; Rheingold, 1985). A third aspect refers to level of arousal (Berlyne, 1960). To be "comfortable" does not imply experiencing a high level of arousal when thinking about oneself. Comfort occurs when one is at ease, not when one experiences negative or highly arousing positive emotions. However, very low arousal in the waking state for any substantial period of time is also likely to be uncomfortable, perceived as boring, or lead to high uncomfortable arousal such as agitation (Berlyne, 1960; Zuckerman, 1979). For some, lack of life change may lead to negative and uncomfortable states. Zuckerman (1979) notes that there are strong individual differences in toleration of low arousal or need for high arousal (also see Ely, 1986; Johnson & Sarason, 1979). Although the issue is complex, in general, comfort occurs in the waking state when arousal is neither very high or very low.

There are thus three elements to the definition of comfort: the absence of negative or distressing emotional states, a feeling of familiarity, and a moderate/low level of arousal.

Comfort and Time

Comfort is time-bounded. It can be unstable, in part due to the arousal issue. What is a comfortable level of arousal can become boring after a time. Being too comfortable early may increase discomfort with the self later. For optimal self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the ability to cope over the long run, the individual probably cannot be too comfortable in any life period: Boys or girls have to leave the security of childhood and enter adolescence (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Although discomfort with the self at any given time has emotional costs, too much comfort and stability may have long-term costs of failure to grow to one's full potential and acceptance of unnecessary restrictions and dependencies.

Thus, comfort mainly refers to a particular state that can change at any time. However, there are individuals who never feel comfortable with themselves, always finding it difficult to live with their pictures of themselves. We will note aspects of the self picture that are associated with longer periods of comfort or discomfort, and aspects that are associated with situations and shorter periods.

Expectations and Comfort

Discomfort arises when self expectations are violated. If one behaves in an unusual manner, or others treat one as a different type of person than one expects, discomfort with self is likely to emerge. If the violation is flattering, there may be less discomfort than if it is unflattering, and comfort may even increase in some situations. Nevertheless, one is likely to feel less at ease with self when central self-expectations are violated (Swann, 1985).

Fit (Compatibility) and Comfort

The perceived fit between one's view of and desires for self and those of powerful others in the environment is highly relevant. Also relevant is the perceived compatibility or consistency among key aspects of the self. When there is adequate fit, one is likely to feel comfortable with self; when there is substantial discordance, one is likely to experience discomfort. For example, too much consistency may have negative effects while a multiplicity of environmental contexts allows some inconsistency to be comfortable.

Summary

There are three underlying dimensions of comfort/discomfort with self: (1) absence or presence of positive or negative cognitions or emotions about the self; (2) feelings of familiarity concerning the self; and (3) level of arousal. One is uncomfortable in the presence of negative situations or emotions about the self, whether or not familiarity and arousal are present or absent. As Table 10.1 illustrates, one is *comfortable* when the *presence of positive self-*

Table 10.1. Definition of Comfort (Typology Based on Three Dimensions)

	PRESENCE OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS		ABSENCE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS		PRESENCE OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	
	Familiar		Familiar		Familiar	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Arousal High		SU		U	U	VU
Arousal Moderate	C		C		U	U
Arousal Low	C		C		U	U
Arousal Very Low	SU	SU	SU	U	U	U

C = Comfortable

U = Uncomfortable

SU = Somewhat Uncomfortable

VU = Very Uncomfortable

views coincides with feelings of familiarity and moderate or perhaps low arousal. When *both positive and negative stimuli are absent*, but familiarity is high and arousal moderate to low, the individual will be comfortable. For other permutations of these dimensions, level of comfort will be between clear comfort and clear discomfort. The three dimensions defining the state of comfort are basically orthogonal, although there may be mutual influence under certain situations or at certain levels.

Thus, comfort/discomfort must be distinguished from other well-accepted concepts *related* to comfort. The closest concepts are level of *well-being* and *satisfaction* (Rybczynski, 1986). However, one can be high in well-being whether or not level of arousal is high or low and whether or not one experiences feelings of unfamiliarity or familiarity. Comfort equates to well-being only when it occurs with feelings of familiarity and when arousal is not high. Although satisfaction, like comfort, implies a nonhigh arousal level, it does not refer to familiarity. Similar distinctions can be made between *happiness* and comfort. There is overlap, but not coincidence. Happiness combined with high arousal (exhilaration) is not the same as comfort. A *positive self-evaluation* also does not imply low arousal or high familiarity and therefore is not identical to comfort.

Negative emotions about the self imply discomfort whether the negative emotions concern *anxiety*, *depression*, a *distress* reaction concerning the self, or a *low self-picture*. One is not at ease with the self, one is not comfortable, one does not have feelings of well-being in the presence of such negatives.

SELF-PICTURE DIMENSIONS AND BEING COMFORTABLE WITH THE SELF

Rosenberg (1979, 1989) has characterized the self-picture as an attitude with various dimensions. Utilizing dimensions identified by Rosenberg and those emphasized by others, we discuss different ways of being uncomfortable with oneself. Some types of discomfort are long-enduring while others are transitory, a distinction central to our analysis.

Longer-term Comfort and Discomfort

Two key dimensions of the self-picture are relevant here: (1) the "content of the self" or self-identities and (2) self-esteem.

Identity

To Rosenberg (1979), identity refers to the collection of traits and dispositions according to which one characterizes oneself. Erikson (1959) has emphasized the importance to the individual of finding a compatible identity, one in which the roles, traits, and dispositions individuals select as char-

acteristic of themselves actually fit with their underlying talents and tendencies. Thus, compatibility and fit are central here.

If there is substantial discord between actual and perceived traits, or between aspirations and talents, individuals will feel uncomfortable with themselves. In Erikson's terms, identity-foreclosure results when individuals too quickly select identities without heed to actual desires and talents. Discomfort from identity-foreclosure may not be experienced when goals are formulated, but when they are attained and act as unwelcome constraints on the true nature of the individual.

In Erikson's view, not all self-discomfort arises from identity-foreclosure. The search for a compatible identity can create uncertainty, crisis, and doubt. Those persons who opt out of the search and select no identity are described as experiencing "identity diffusion," also a period of misery and discomfort. The Eriksonian view involves a search for a true picture of the self (Waterman, 1982). Until individuals discover their "true selves" and orient themselves toward its actualization, some discomfort with self will result. A person can also be conceptualized as a set of potentialities that could be actualized; instead of a "true self" to be found, there are viable possibilities, any of which will engender self-comfort.

Individuals have multiple identities (Stryker, 1989; Thoits, 1983) and not all are equally relevant to general feelings of comfort or discomfort with self. The non-athlete may feel uncomfortable and out of synchrony with him or herself if forced to participate in an athletic contest. However, that individual will generally avoid athletic activities, thus avoiding behavior inconsistent with both self-image and abilities and thereby minimizing self-discomfort.

Many writers, beginning with James (1950), emphasize that performance in all identities is not equally important to individuals. Those traits and identities the individual values more highly have greater impact (Rosenberg, 1979). For individuals to feel comfortable with themselves, it is important that identities they value most highly be compatible with their abilities and predilections. Stryker (1980) and Stryker and Serpe (1993) discuss salient role identities (those identities in a hierarchy of identities most likely to be invoked) and important identities (those the individual reports as most significant). We can hypothesize that persons will feel more comfortable if their salient and important identities feel compatible and unconstraining.

Extension of the Self. One's home, clothes, close relatives – what Rosenberg (1978) has described as "extensions of self" – all engender self-feelings of shame or pride. The question is whether such extensions of the self fit identities that the individual believes are most important and whether they are compatible with the person's "true underlying nature." If these extensions do not seem compatible, individuals may experience self-discomfort. Discomfort may intensify as others identify them with external symbols; but, even without others, individuals may feel uncomfortable in a home that

violates their underlying personality, as with a gay youth living in a homophobic home.

Stability of Self-Identities. A key dimension of self-attitudes is stability. Lecky (1945) and Swann (1985) have emphasized the importance of stable self-pictures to a sense of well-being. If individuals are unsure of their identities, the type of person they are, the goals and roles most important in their lives, they are unlikely to feel comfortable with themselves. Although some instability may be experienced as exciting, the unstable individual lacks a necessary anchor, and comfort is gone.

There are individual differences in the extent to which individuals can tolerate instability of the self-picture. Some individuals value risk-taking and not only tolerate some self-instability but flourish when self-options are open (Zuckerman, 1979). Low-risk individuals may experience extreme self-discomfort in the same situation.

Identity and Comfort. Dimensions of self-image have both cognitive and emotional aspects, the former frequently impacting the latter. The nature of the reaction may be comfort (if positive emotions, feelings of familiarity, and low/moderate arousal are involved) or discomfort (if negative emotions, unfamiliarity, and/or high arousal are involved).

We have emphasized the different values placed on various identities. Opinions about the import of identities are cognitive in nature, although emotional attachment is also involved. The value placed on an identity juxtaposed with an individual's current situation may affect his or her sense of familiarity and fit and so self-comfort. Most likely, the situation of those who place a low value on athletics but find themselves in a competitive athletic contest would produce a cognitive discrepancy, which would lead to a negative emotional reaction and, by definition, discomfort.

Evaluation of the Self: Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy

Another key dimension of self-attitude is evaluative – the extent to which the self is regarded positively or negatively. Although one can evaluate oneself in specific terms, here we are concerned with global self-esteem, overall positive or negative evaluation of self. Although some doubt that a global orientation beyond more specific evaluations exists (Bandura, 1978), the consensus appears to be that both specific and global evaluations are operative.

Whether in terms of self-esteem or self-efficacy, low self-evaluation will be associated with great discomfort with self, particularly if self-evaluation is global and persistent. It becomes hard to “live with the self” and the individual may verbalize a wish to escape from self. Studies show moderately high correlations of low self-esteem with both anxiety and depression (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972). [See also Rosenberg chapter in this volume.] Ineffectiveness, sometimes termed “learned helplessness,” has also been linked to depression (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). In contrast, a

person characterized by high self-esteem and self-efficacy should experience self-comfort.

It is possible to experience greater positive emotions than comfort when one evaluates self. If an unexpected occurrence reinforces high self-evaluations, or one performs with special excellence, the individual may experience arousal, joy, and pleasure beyond mere comfort.

Persons with high self-esteem and self-efficacy are likely to feel comfortable with their world, and usually able to structure an environment that better and more positively fits their identities. Persons are not passive receptacles for fate, but can alter and change the environment (Lerner & Busch-Ross Nagle, 1981). It is the already self-efficacious who can enhance the comfort of the environment and further increase comfort with themselves and their important identities.

Judgment about oneself constitutes the cognitive element of evaluation. These evaluations, in turn, produce emotional reactions that, if negative, by definition mean that the individual is uncomfortable with the self.

Self-Guides and Discrepancies

In general, comfort and discomfort are dependent on expectations. When expectations are violated, discomfort should occur. When more important expectations are involved, discomfort should be longer-enduring. Higgins (1987) thoroughly discusses the nature of self-expectations. Individuals develop "self-guides," expectations for self associated with key others' expectations for them or with their own central views for self. Some self-guides are more central than others – in Higgins' terms they are more easily accessible to the individual; in Stryker's thinking, some will assume more significance (salience) in a hierarchy of self-guides. For more accessible or more highly ranked and important self-guides, negative discrepancies between cognitively perceived actuality and relevant self-guides will have long-lasting negative emotional consequences. Whatever the exact emotional consequence, individuals will lack comfort with self when important negative discrepancies exist between crucial self-guides and perceived actualities of the self.

Shorter-Term Comfort and Discomfort

Whatever the long-term level of comfort with self, there are short-term episodes of discomfort that are related to different dimensions of the self-picture. Rosenberg (Elliott, Rosenberg & Michael, 1984; Rosenberg, 1987) has described "episodic or transient depersonalization," a temporary and dramatic loss of identity, when individuals are not sure who, or what type of person, they are. Transient depersonalization involves a cognitive loss of familiarity that often produces substantial discomfort. "Self-consciousness," the momentary salience of the self to the self, is also relevant to short-term discomfort (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972; Simmons, Blyth, Van Cleave, &

Bush, 1979). Particularly in front of others, one can become so conscious of self and the impression being made that one cannot concentrate on tasks at hand. Arousal is high and one becomes embarrassed, uncomfortably "self-conscious." Again this dimension of the self-picture has both cognitive and emotional elements. Cognitively, there is intense focus on self and on imagined judgments of others. These cognitions produce embarrassment and therefore discomfort. Although episodes of self-consciousness can occur at any age, adolescence is a period in which this type of self-discomfort is more frequent (Simmons et al., 1973).

Another dimension of the self-picture related to short-term comfort or discomfort with the self involves the "backstage" versus "onstage" self (Goffman, 1959). Individuals require time when they are not presenting a self for other's approval. They require time to "let their hair down," reduce arousal, and not worry about impressions they make on others or the possibility of failure. The backstage self is not necessarily more "real" than the onstage self (Turner, 1976); however, it may allow for expressing a wider range of identities than any particular onstage self.

Persons require time when they can be unconditionally accepted, blemishes and all. For some, such time occurs only when they are alone and they themselves are the unconditional acceptors. In any case, when backstage, the individual is at some level cognitively aware that he or she will not be judged, and this situation may lead to low arousal, feelings of familiarity, and comfort. Our hypothesis is that if the individual is always onstage without any backstage time, feelings of discomfort with the self will result.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AND SELF-COMFORT

We turn now to how interpersonal relationships may increase or decrease discomfort. We distinguish between (1) interpersonal relationships in the individual's proximate environment and (2) the context created by the larger social structure and culture. Larger social structure and culture affect the small, intimate social environment in which individuals find themselves. However, it is the small, intimate social environment that is likely to have the strongest, most direct effect on individuals.

The Roles of Others in the Proximate Environment

This section examines the many ways others in one's proximate environment can provide one comfort.

The Confirmatory Role of Others

First, others play both active and passive confirmatory roles for key identities. Simply by occupying and enacting counterroles, others confirm individuals in their roles and the identities embedded in those roles. However,

others can be active in supporting individuals' views of themselves in various role-identities: a boss can praise those occupational traits an employee believes he or she possesses, thereby confirming the self-identity of a good and conscientious worker. When another confirms key role-identities and self-ascribed traits, it makes the target feel more comfortable; there is concordance between self-pictures and feedback from others about the self. Individuals tend to send cues making it more likely they will receive confirmation from others (Swann, 1985). If confirmation is received, especially when positive or neutral in tone, individuals feel more comfortable with their self-pictures. If feedback is discordant, the individual may experience discomfort and can be expected to seek change. It is sometimes possible to find significant others who provide more concordant feedback; in other cases, there is pressure to alter the content of the self-picture or change opinions of the original others. Because persons have multiple identities, others may cue the enactment of one of those identities and thus provide confirmation.

From our point of view, discrepancies in feedback constitute failures of self-verification. Self-comfort is likely to be absent, depending on the importance of the significant others and the identity at stake, and the positive or negative nature of the disconfirmation (see the following discussion).

Intimate others not only verify identities and roles central to the individual's self-definition, but can be key in shaping these identities. Confirmation of resultant identities is easy. Parents are likely to be motivated to shape aspects of their offsprings' identities, and, given young children's comparative powerlessness, often succeed. Shaping attempts may encourage actual talents and proclivities and may be experienced as comfortable, growth-inducing, and fitting an underlying self-picture. Alternatively, they may be experienced as constraining, incompatible, and uncomfortable. Acceding to discomfort and accepting an incompatible identity (or rejecting it) depends on one's life-course period. Power in and ability to disengage from relationships is crucial. It also depends on position in the larger social structure, an issue we will discuss.

Others' Evaluative Role

Not only do others verify and shape one's self-picture, they evaluate it. Insofar as one can select evaluators, evaluations are likely to be relatively positive (Rosenberg, 1967, 1979). When selection is not possible, others frequently protect one's face and bias their communication in a positive direction. Thus, others often provide comfort by bolstering and supporting one's self-esteem.

Nevertheless, individuals receive negative evaluations from others about whom they care. When negative evaluation is compatible with individuals' prior self-evaluation, individuals in their desire for a stable self-picture cre-

ate the situations in which they receive confirmatory negative evaluations (Swann, 1985). Nonconfirmatory communication and negative evaluation by others represent different sources of self-discomfort. It may be uncomfortable to receive nonconfirmatory feedback even when that feedback is positive, especially if one believes that positive evaluation is likely to be lost in the future (Higgins, 1987). Apart from confirmatory or nonconfirmatory evaluation by others, however, negative feedback itself does not increase comfort with self and often increases self-discomfort. The individual in this situation, cued that something is wrong, is motivated toward change, especially if negative evaluation does not confirm prior attitudes. Possible avenues of change or coping include devaluing the evaluator, devaluing the evidence for the evaluation, devaluing the traits being evaluated, altering one's view of one-self, or attempting to alter the characteristics at issue (Crocker & Major, 1989; Rosenberg, 1967). In such cases, the individual is motivated to protect and enhance self-esteem. When none of these avenues is possible, discomfort with the self-picture is likely to persist.

Some individuals seek neither confirmatory nor positive evaluation from others, but accurate evaluation (Weinberger & McClelland, 1990). "Accurate" negative evaluation allows the individual to cope or change in the manners just described. However, before change occurs, we expect self-discomfort to result from negative, nonconfirming evaluation. How long self-discomfort lasts depends on the coping process.

Others' Support of the Backstage Self

Ideal intimate others support the backstage self. They provide a warm, nonjudgmental social environment, unconditional acceptance, and predictability of support and response. Frequently, when this occurs, it involves the family – the "haven in a heartless world" (Lasch, 1977).

At first glance, it appears that it is in such a context that others can know and understand the total self, all one's component roles. Backstage partners may know and understand one historically at present and over the life course. In fact, it is possible that individuals privy to one's backstage self do not know well the onstage self, or do not comprehend the way one behaves in more formal, segmental roles. It is also possible to have no adequate backstage partners; that others who customarily play that role (e.g., family members) are harsh judges rather than supporters. In such cases one has no "haven in a heartless world" (Gass, 1986; Lasch, 1977), and we therefore predict less self-comfort and more emotional distress.

Others as Extension of Identity

Other persons are extensions of the self and thereby impact self-comfort. One basks in reflected glory when these individuals do well (Rosenberg, 1979); one feels acute discomfort and sometimes shame when they do badly.

Perhaps more important for the self-picture is the likelihood that having others who are dependent on one increases one's own sense of importance. If one matters in this world, one can be comfortable with oneself and one's life (Rosenberg, 1985; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Being linked to others through an identity may lead to a warm and comfortable symbiosis. This may provide one with someone else with whom one can "feel at home." When one "feels at home," one experiences comfort both with self and with the present environment.

Others' Comforting Role

Others can make one feel comfortable, and may do so deliberately by, for example, providing solace in times of difficulty. The social support literature testifies to the importance of access to significant others in the presence of stressors (Wethington & Kessler, 1986; Kessler, House, Anspach, & Williams, 1995). The mechanisms by which social support protects the individual's self-picture have not been clearly identified. However, the fact that persons who care about an individual will exert effort to protect and comfort him or her may increase the sense that one matters and decrease any sense of meaninglessness and futility in one's life.

Multiplicity of Proximate Contexts

Persons operate in multiple contexts. Our question now is, in what ways do multiple contexts affect the sense of comfort and discomfort with self? Thoits (1983) and Linville (1985) posit that having a greater number of contexts and role-identities is beneficial for mental health and the overall self-picture. The basic argument is that individuals are safer if all their eggs are not in one basket.

Individuals are not simply passive reactors to multiple contexts, but can choose many (though not all) of their contexts. Contexts will be selected in line with their importance to the individual and in terms of their effects on comfort and discomfort. Although there are limits to individuals' power to shape their environment, to some extent individuals can make decisions that protect feelings of comfort with self and world.

Alternation and Pacing of Contexts

Individuals can manipulate the alternation and pacing of contexts. Although our emphasis is on individuals' need for comfort, they also have needs for growth and challenge. These opposing needs can be met through alternation between contexts that provide challenge and those that provide solace, between those that demand onstage behavior and those that allow the backstage self to emerge, between contexts of excitement and those of comfort, between environments encouraging growth and those encouraging "being as you are." One context can provide a haven against the stresses of

more demanding contexts. Home is often a haven after a stressful period at school or work. Where home is a hostile environment, work can provide a source of comfort. Similarly, school can provide comfort for the child, especially if there is a supportive adult there to whom he or she can turn.

Changes in the Comfort of Multiple Contexts

The extent to which multiple, proximate contexts provide comfort may change over time. For example, those at home may not understand a self that is changing and growing and attempt to constrain the individual to old patterns of behavior and desire. Home may become less comfortable with a changing self-picture, while work, school, or peer contexts become more comfortable (Hochschild, 1997).

When there is a major problem or loss related to one role-identity or aspect of self in one environmental context, as in divorce or work failure, individuals who have previously invested themselves in other aspects of self or role-identity will have other proximate environments on which to turn. Presumably these environments involve other important interpersonal relations. For example, the professional woman going through a divorce can throw herself into work and intensify relationships with co-workers. Role-identities that remain intact may assume greater importance to the individual, as may role-partners available in these other contexts.

If alternate self-aspects or contexts are not available, individuals experience greater emotional vulnerability (Linville, 1985). Thoits (1983) reasons that the greater the number of discrete role-identities a person possesses, the stronger one's sense of meaning and life-direction and the less the chances of social isolation. The greater the number of identities, the less the stake one has in a particular identity and the more other involvements buffer life's blows in one area. Her data indicate that individuals who possess numerous identities report less psychological distress. However, her analyses of individuals who lose identities over time do not support the buffering hypotheses. It is only where role-identities are segregated that we would expect one role-identity to buffer the problems of another.

Linville (1985) focuses on the substantive complexity of cognitive representations of the self. She posits that individuals who maintain distinctions among various aspects of the self can maintain positive feelings about some aspects that serve to buffer negative happenings in other aspects. She hypothesizes that individuals lower in self-complexity are more vulnerable to changes in self-aspects and so experience greater swings in affect and self-appraisal depending on personal success and failure. From our point of view, failure causes more global self-discomfort among such persons. Two small studies of Linville (1985) support these hypotheses. Too much compatibility among aspects of the self-picture may have negative effects, as may too little compatibility.

Negative Consequences and Multiple Contexts

There are situations in which the availability of multiple contexts may exacerbate individuals' self-problems. Discomfort experienced in one context may spill over to another context. One reason for such spillover may be emotional generalizability. Persons who fail in one area may react with lower global self-esteem, lower self-efficacy, emotional turmoil, and/or identity confusion that leads them to play all life roles badly.

Another disadvantage of multiple roles and multiple contexts is the possibility of role conflict and conflict in the status set (Merton, 1957, 1968; Stryker & Macke, 1978; Thoits, 1983). Overload and conflict among roles can cause stress in general and discomfort with the self in particular. Role partners in different contexts may place competing and heavy demands on time and energy. Types of behavior required may conflict at some basic level. Individuals behaving differently in different role relationships may question whether they have a consistent, core self. Such inconsistency or lack of compatibility may cause acute discomfort with the self-picture. Too, role conflict involving different behaviors in different roles may lead to self-consciousness or transient depersonalization. If role partners associated with different identities fail to see one's difficulties, they may create problems with high demands rather than provide solace. In such a situation, time and effort required to repair problems in one life role may make adequate performance in other life roles more difficult. Self-comfort may therefore decrease everywhere in one's life.

If role performances are not invisible across roles, there may be negative spillover from one context to another for a very different reason. Significant others may lower evaluations of individuals if they fail in another life role, or if they lose the resources provided by that other life role. The loss of marital power of the unemployed husband is well documented (Kelvin & Jarrett, 1985).

The issue is not simply how many different role-identities or key aspects of the self one has, but to what extent role segregation exists. At one extreme, it is possible that role partners attached to different roles or social positions are distinct, unaware of one another and of the demands of the other roles in which one is involved. At the other extreme, one may be in a situation of "network embeddedness" – one's role partners for various identities may be the same people (Stryker & Serpe, 1983; Thoits, 1983). In between these extremes, the persons with whom one interacts in various roles and statuses are different from each other, but they may be able to observe how one does in alternate roles. The greater the network embeddedness and visibility from one role to another, the more failures in one role should impact on other roles. The impact may be comforting or stressful. In the face of high demands or failure in roles, partners from other roles who can observe the situation may provide solace and reduce their

own demands. In a less benign situation, observing failure may lead to more spillover of negative evaluation: role partners, instead of providing solace, may increase their negative evaluation.

Finally, individuals behaving differently in different situations may feel comfortable with themselves only if they can segregate audiences. What is comfortable with one role partner may cause acute discomfort with another. Need for segregation may relate to developmental period: As some youngsters reach adolescence and change their views of themselves, it may be more comfortable to isolate parents from peers. It may be embarrassing to reveal to peers dependency on parents; it may be embarrassing if parents are allowed to view peer nonconformities (Snyder, 1987). Incompatibility of behavior does not always induce self-consciousness or self-discomfort; self-discomfort is less likely when audiences for different behaviors can be segregated.

Cumulative Change and an "Arena of Comfort"

Youngsters are more likely to experience self-concept problems when many adolescent changes occur simultaneously; that is, if many context changes cumulate. Particularly for girls, self-esteem drops when life transitions (movement into junior high school, recent pubertal change, onset of dating behavior, movement into a new neighborhood, and change in parents' marital status) coincide (Simmons et al., 1986, 1987). The life-events literature, although focused less on normal developmental change and more on negative unscheduled life changes, also indicates more negative effects on well-being the greater the number of recent life-event changes (Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981).

Simmons et al. (1986, 1987) emphasize what remains after the individual experiences several major life transitions, asking: Is there an arena of comfort left? Is there a proximate, important environmental context that remains comfortable (see Gass, 1986)? If change occurs suddenly and in too many areas of life at once, there may not be an arena of comfort left and individuals are then likely to experience discomfort with self and the world, not feeling at one with themselves or at home in their changing social environments.

If the individual is comfortable in some environments, life arenas, and role relationships, it may be possible to tolerate or master discomfort in another arena. Again, we turn to the idea of the alternation and pacing of contexts to suggest the importance of a place to which the individual can withdraw and become reinvigorated before facing the challenge of other, less stable contexts. Successful coping with change has properties of the dialectic. A balance or synthesis of opposites seems optimal – between tension arousal and tension reduction, between over- and understimulation, between being challenged and being comfortable, between too many and too few demands, between growth and stability.

For optimal self-esteem, coping, and growth in the long run, persons *cannot* be totally comfortable. They have to leave the serenities of one period in the life cycle and enter the next period, just as children have to exit the comforts of childhood for adolescence with all its new opportunities and demands. Coping with change necessarily involves some degree of discomfort, even if nonnormative and less desirable changes are absent. The timing and pacing of change are involved. Gradual rather than sudden changes, changes that are spread out and dealt with in turn rather than simultaneously, are optimal.

The Larger Social Structure

The proximate, more intimate environmental context directly affects the self-picture and degree of emotional comfort individuals feel in relation to the self-picture. However, the larger social structure affects the proximate environments in which individuals are likely to find themselves. That is, there are links between processes in the larger social structure and the proximate environments we have identified as important for the self-picture.

Rates and Timing of Social Change

Massive historical events like war and depression disrupt individuals' proximate contexts throughout a society. Such disruption can be expected to increase feelings of self-image instability and incompatibility and feelings of transient depersonalization because individuals who usually confirm identities, provide solace, make one feel important, and support the "backstage" self are more likely to be absent. Self-image discomfort may thus increase, but so may freedom to alter the self and the self-picture. In an economic depression, many are likely to find evaluations of them by key others in their proximate environment decline, as they become less efficacious in dealing with life events. These lower evaluations are likely to lead to lower self-esteem, self-efficacy, and greater self-discomfort.

Societies also vary in how they structure the social timing of life-course transitions. In some societies, for example, adolescence is a period of gradual, disaggregated transitions, while in our society it tends to be a period of cumulative and sudden changes (Benedict, 1954; Simmons et al., 1987). Retirement in our society, unlike others, appears to be another sudden, massive transition characterized by the cumulation of change in many life spheres. Giving up one's job, particularly for those with lifelong careers, spills over into other life arenas and therefore greatly impacts global self-image (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978).

Discomfort accompanying life transitions may increase if individuals are off-time in experiencing these transitions (Marini, 1984). If an entire cohort accompanies one through a societal life transition, it may be easier to adjust one's self-picture than if one goes through the change alone. Societies and

historical periods differ in rates that affect loss and gain of identities, roles, and role partners (Thoits, 1983). Death rates, divorce rates, and marriage rates all affect the extent to which one's key intimate contexts are stable or change suddenly (Clausen, 1993).

Geographical mobility in a society also affects intimate environments in fundamental ways. In societies with low rates of geographical mobility, individuals more likely are surrounded by people who know them as total persons rather than in isolated role-identities, and more likely are known and understood historically. It is perhaps more likely that they can find contexts in which they can reveal backstage selves and contexts that function as arenas of comfort. Geographical mobility frequently disrupts role-identities and customary environmental contexts. Thus, individuals in societies with high rates of movement are more likely to experience abrupt and cumulative change and consequently self-image discomfort.

Community and Organizational Size and Role Segregation

In small communities, one may have several different role-identities, but partners for one role are likely to be partners for other roles as well. Even where this network embeddedness does not exist, behavior in all roles is likely to be visible to key partners regardless of the role in which they are partners. In larger communities, particularly metropolises, role-segregation and invisibility of performance among roles are more likely.

Large bureaucratic contexts confront persons with strangers, anonymity, and impersonality. Role partners are likely to know one segmentally, not as a total person with a historical past. For comfort with the self, balance is likely ideal. Many have described the tyranny imposed by small, intimate communities that label an individual from early childhood, observe all behavior, and fail to allow growth, change, and exploration (Simmel, 1950). Selection of compatible life identities may be more difficult in such communities, particularly for individuals who find they do not fit community labels and opportunities. In larger, more anonymous settings, attempts to find new compatible identities may be easier, as may acting out different aspects of the self not totally consistent with one another. On the other hand, it can be difficult in larger, more impersonal settings to find stable contexts of intimacy and places in which one is both comfortable and comforted. To provide balance, some large organizations (and certainly some larger communities) provide smaller, more intimate subenvironments within the larger impersonal context.

Power and Comfort

Power affects the extent to which one can create contexts of comfort and role-identities with which one feels comfortable. Persons with higher societal power, rank, and resources have an edge on power in their more intimate

relationships as well, including the home (Berger et al., 1980). For those with little power in the larger society, contexts like the home may not function well as arenas of comfort, and partners in intimate relationships may not easily allow desired identities to be forged.

Further, societies structure the extent to which certain types of people have power and therefore are able to construct compatible identities. Minorities and members of lower classes are as bombarded as more advantaged societal members with messages about occupational and life-style identities considered desirable in society. Yet these identities are out of reach, potentially leaving the individual feeling inefficacious and uncomfortable with role-identities that can be attained, and therefore uncomfortable with the self.

Whether or not members of groups denigrated in the larger society suffer from lower self-esteem is complex (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972). Many mechanisms can protect the self-esteem of such persons. Self-esteem is affected by invidious comparison and by the perceived opinion of the judgments of important others (Rosenberg, 1979). Thus, if most people important to one are also minority members or in the lower classes, neither comparison nor perceived judgment by others will lead to perceiving oneself as inferior. If one is well-loved and appreciated by those who matter, self-esteem is likely to be protected.

The lower power of women in most societies points to another case in which an entire group is less able to construct compatible identities and less likely to feel efficacious. The question has been raised as to whether the greater tendency of women to experience depression is a result of "learned helplessness," of having been taught they are supposed to be ineffective and powerless in coping with life problems (Abramson et al., 1978). Roles of women vary across societies. Particularly interesting are differences in the way societies define which women have power in the home. If a society is organized so that a mother-in-law lives in the home as an authority-figure, a wife may not experience home as a place of comfort; home may instead be a place where behavior is constrained in ways incompatible with desired identities and priorities.

Culture and Havens

Larger cultural values also play a role in the way the various dimensions of the self are enacted.

Valuation of Privacy and the Backstage Self

Societies vary in their emphasis on privacy, intimacy, and personal space (Deaux & Wrightsman, 1988, ch. 17). Sweden, a scarcely populated country, places great value on privacy and personal space, while crowded India does not (Insel & Lindgren, 1978). The distinction between "backstage" and

“onstage” self may occur only in societies highly valuing privacy and adequate personal space. The greatest discomfort ought to occur among individuals who lack access to private, personal space in a culture that places high values on privacy. When privacy has little value, crowding and lack of privacy may not produce discomfort. Individuals may feel less need for a special place to relax and reveal themselves, with the backstage self having little meaning in such cultures.

Culture and Identity Search

Societies and cultures vary in their emphasis on identity search. Some cultures, like ours, place high value on achieved statuses and on searching for compatible occupational and other life identities. Other cultures emphasize ascribed statuses; it is assumed from birth which occupational roles are available and self-exploration has little or no value. Both situations can produce self-discomfort. An open identity-search may be experienced as a crisis until compatible identities are found (Erikson, 1968). On the other hand, a society with little individual choice may lead to an uncomfortable lack of fit between personality and role for some of its members.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have analyzed the link between affect and self in terms of individuals' feelings of comfort or discomfort with the self-picture. Comfort is an umbrella term referring to the absence of significant emotional discomfort upon contemplation of the self and a sense of familiarity with the self. Although a negative opinion of the self is likely to be associated with emotional discomfort, a positive attitude is not necessarily synonymous with comfort. A state of comfort occurs at medium/low levels of arousal rather than at high levels, even if high levels are positive. Exhilaration is not the same as comfort, any more than misery. *Comfort is a balanced state.* Comfort is also associated with a feeling of fit or compatibility between self and important aspects of one's environment and/or between one's self-picture and key self-expectations. When there is such compatibility, as well as familiarity, individuals are likely to feel “at home” with themselves.

Self-comfort can be thought of in both longer and shorter terms. Individuals may vary over the long term in the degree of comfort they feel with themselves; some may be generally comfortable with themselves throughout their lives and some may never feel comfortable with themselves. However, in addition to this long-term orientation, self-comfort can change over the short-term. What feels comfortable at one moment can feel uncomfortable later either because boredom sets in, or because circumstances or expectations change.

If the self-image is regarded as an attitude, it can be conceptualized as consisting of various dimensions: the content of the self-picture (or identity); the stability of the self-picture; the evaluation of the self (self-esteem and self-efficacy); the momentary salience of the self-picture (or self-consciousness); the level of discrepancy among aspects of the self-picture; and backstage versus onstage self. These dimensions of the self-image are related to feelings of self-comfort over the long and short term. Persons are likely to experience long-term emotional discomfort with the self-picture (1) if they do not yet arrive at identities they regard as important to themselves, that do not conflict with one another, or if their identities seem incompatible with inner proclivities or outer expectations; (2) if key self-identities are unstable; (3) if they have low self-esteem and/or low feelings of self-efficacy; and (4) if their view of self is discrepant or does not fit with their key expectations for themselves.

Whatever the long-term level of comfort or discomfort with the self, a customary state can change temporarily. Over the short term, self-discomfort can increase due to temporary feelings of identity loss (transient depersonalization), short-term increases in self-consciousness (intense embarrassment about oneself), and the absence of enough time to "let one's hair down" and indulge a backstage rather than onstage self.

Self-dimensions contain both cognitive and emotional elements. Furthermore, the cognitive element affects emotional reactions, and these reactions often involve self-comfort or discomfort. Self-dimensions, as well as concurrent levels of self-comfort, are affected by the interpersonal environment of the individual. In general, the larger social structure and cultural values affect the nature of more proximate interpersonal relationships and these interpersonal relationships influence the self-picture and the associated level of comfort or discomfort. Others in one's interpersonal, proximate relationships perform several functions in regard to the self-image. Most important, they confirm or fail to confirm established key identities. In addition, others may try to shape or constrict the choice of these identities. From a different angle, certain others may be regarded as extensions of one's identity, as integral parts of the self. Interpersonal relationships also have a major influence on self-evaluation. Others evaluate the individual, and the perception of these evaluations is likely to affect self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy. Too, others may or may not support the "backstage" self. Finally, others may play a comforting and supportive role in the face of challenge to the self-picture.

It is important for understanding the effects of others on the self-picture to remember that persons move in multiple contexts. It has been hypothesized that distress and discomfort will be less if individuals circulate in multiple, independent interpersonal contexts and commit themselves to multiple, independent self-identities. Then, if a loss threatening the self-

image occurs in one context, it can be buffered through support received in other interpersonal contexts and intensified attachment to other relationships.

On the other hand, involvements in multiple interpersonal contexts can have negative and discomforting effects. The classic case is role conflict: individuals can feel overloaded by demands made on them, and can feel uncomfortable as they act inconsistently in different contexts. Instead of losses being counteracted by other sets of significant relationships, there can be negative spillover. Due to new feelings of distress or a decrease in self-esteem, an individual who experiences loss in one life arena may be unable to operate effectively in any arena. Alternatively, partners in other life arenas viewing the loss may react in a malignant rather than comforting fashion and evaluate the individual more unfavorably on all identities. With spillover, decreases in self-esteem and self-efficacy should be particularly sharp.

The effects of multiple contexts can be expected to vary depending on the degree to which partners in one context can view performance and difficulties in other contexts. Only when they know these difficulties can they perceive the need for support or make more global adverse evaluations. Too, the effects of multiple contexts are likely to be more favorable (1) if the same partners are not involved in all contexts (if there is role segregation rather than network embeddedness) and (2) if change, particularly negative change, does not occur simultaneously in many different contexts. We proposed the benefit of an arena of comfort, of at least one stable key life arena in which individuals feel comfortable with themselves and re-invigoration can occur.

The extent to which one's proximate interpersonal relationships are changing or stable, the extent to which one confronts the same versus different individuals in one's life tasks, and the likelihood of experiencing important losses or gains increasing self-comfort or discomfort are all affected by the larger social structure. Societies vary among themselves and over time in the degree of cataclysmic change and in rates of disruptive change. When there are high rates of change (e.g. high divorce rates, high rates of geographical mobility), interpersonal networks are likely to be disrupted, and other persons may be absent who in the past confirmed one's identities, provided positive evaluations, supported the backstage self, gave solace, and made one feel important. Societies also vary in the abruptness with which life transitions are structured and in the extent to which change in all life arenas occurs simultaneously. In our society, adolescence and retirement bring abrupt and widespread changes that have been hypothesized to increase self-image discomfort, as many new identities must be established and old identities and social relationships relinquished.

Within and across societies, communities vary in size and nature. In small, traditional communities, interpersonal networks are likely to be stable and one is likely to meet the same partners in many life arenas. Identities and

evaluations are also likely to be more stable and, in many cases, constricting and incompatible with underlying proclivities. In large, anonymous communities, there is likely more change, invisibility of performance from one role to another, and experience with distinct interpersonal networks. Here, the source of discomfort is likely to be anonymity, and the loss of self-anchors and partners who make one feel one "matters."

Subgroups within societies differ systematically in their level of power. Those with more power are likely to experience greater feelings of self-efficacy, choice of identity, and choice of social networks. The larger culture in which interpersonal networks exist also impacts self-comfort and discomfort. Cultural values vary among societies and affect the self-image and concurrent self-comfort and discomfort. Cultures vary in their valuation of privacy and therefore in the extent to which a distinction between the backstage and onstage self is meaningful. Further, cultures vary in their emphasis on the need for identity search and choice of identities. In some societies, the individual is relatively free to seek compatible identities; in other societies, at the extreme, one's lifetime identities and roles are assigned at birth. The source of self-discomfort is likely to vary accordingly, with societies that value identity-search producing "identity crises," while societies that value identity-ascription produce feelings of constraint and incompatibility between one's view of underlying proclivities and one's allowed role.

We have emphasized ways the larger social structure and larger social values impact close, interpersonal relations, and the ways interpersonal relationships in turn affect various dimensions of the self-image and therefore the level of emotional comfort or discomfort one experiences on regarding the self. Two other themes have been stressed. First, individuals are not passive receptacles of influence, but within certain constraints can exert choice. They can select identities and interpersonal contexts that enhance the self-picture. The extent to which behavior is hidden or made visible to persons in other social contexts is often also a matter of choice. Although choices are limited by power and ability to migrate, individuals in our society can select small intimate communities or large, anonymous centers in which to live. Among other motivations, the desire to enhance the self-picture and increase self-comfort is likely to play a significant part in these decisions.

A second theme is the benefit of a balance between comfort and challenge. We assume too little comfort with the self-picture is associated with generally high levels of emotional distress. However, too much comfort at one point in time may prevent growth, leading to discomfort later with a self that has failed to respond to challenge. In general, we have emphasized the need over the long term for balance and alternation. Ideally, there should be balance between too much and too little comfort, low and high arousal, too integrated and too inconsistent a set of identities, and too little and too much distinction among the individuals with whom one interacts in various life roles. Alternation of

different contexts allows for some of this balance. In brief, individuals may benefit most from alternating between contexts that provide challenge and excitement and those that provide relaxation and comfort.

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SECTION FOUR. SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

11 Self-Esteem and Race

Pamela Braboy Jackson and Sonia P. Lassiter

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Maya Angelou

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the current state of research on race and self-esteem. In tracing the development of this line of work, we discuss the ways in which this literature speaks to self-esteem theory, as expounded by Rosenberg and his colleagues (1965, 1972, 1973, 1979, 1985, 1986). Although many scholars have provided a fertile foundation for further research on this topic, there has been little care taken to address some of the fundamental assumptions underlying this research tradition. There has been even less appreciation for related areas of work that speak directly to the issue of self-esteem development among ethnic minorities. Embracing a more social definition of the self would help bring the research on race and self-esteem in line with the broader theory of the self-concept. We conclude by discussing the implications of the disproportionate theoretical and empirical work devoted to black-white differences in self-esteem.

The literature on minority self-esteem is much too extensive to attempt to summarize in this chapter (see Cross, 1981; Imani, 1996; Porter & Washington, 1979, 1989, 1993; Smith, 1979; Wylie, 1974, 1978, 1979 for reviews). Various empirical and theoretical pieces are selected to represent and/or shed light on some of the issues that will be discussed. As such, this chapter is organized around two broad themes: (1) black self-esteem and (2) cross-ethnic research on personal self-esteem. Within each of these areas we review

what we know and provide suggestions for the direction of future work in the area of minority self-development.

Before engaging in this discussion, we should note that the separate section on black self-esteem does not, in any way, represent some higher importance placed on the black experience compared to the experiences of other ethnic minorities in the United States. There are three reasons why we begin with black self-esteem. First, the majority of the research on minority self-esteem has concentrated on how African Americans differ from European Americans. Thus, the sheer mass of studies allows for a clearer picture of this line of research.¹ Second, many of the theoretical positions on minority self-development derive from expectations for differences between blacks and whites (e.g., see Grossman, Wirt, & Davids, 1985). Even when investigators adopt culturally sensitive measures, the hypotheses generated still stem from the basic principles of American social psychology (e.g., see Pang, Mizokawa, Morishima, & Olstad, 1985). And third, although there is growing dissatisfaction among social scientists interested in the area of minority self-development, most of the criticisms of this literature and suggestions for future research are directed toward discussion of the black self-concept (see Baldwin, Brown, & Hopkins, 1991; Barnes, 1991; Nobles, 1991). Given these factors, we feel that a description of the black self-esteem literature is an appropriate starting point.

In general, the concept of race is loosely adopted in the self-esteem literature (see Jones, 1991, for a discussion of this issue). Most social psychologists seem to interpret racial differences in self-development as social, rather than biological, phenomena (Porter & Washington, 1993). There is ample evidence that race is a social construct that developed out of certain historical circumstances (see Banton, 1977; Ignatiev, 1995; Takaki, 1995; Williams, 1997). We can add little to the scholarly discussion about race. This chapter is, therefore, confined to the relevance of the race concept to our understanding and interpretation of race differences in research on self-esteem.

BLACK SELF-ESTEEM

Theory

The social psychological theory underlying personal self-esteem development among ethnic minorities, especially African Americans, has been specified by many investigators (e.g., see Baldwin, 1979; Foster & Perry, 1982; Hoelter, 1982; Hughes & Demo, 1989; Hulbary, 1975; Porter & Washington, 1989; Rosenberg, 1979; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972; Wyne, White, & Coop,

¹ Although we believe there is more to race than black and white, it would be difficult to convince an outsider of this point if you were to survey the bulk of the studies conducted by social psychologists on this topic.

1974). Very briefly, because ethnic minorities are (and have been) relegated to inferior social positions, they should internalize a negative self-image that expresses itself in low feelings of self-worth (self-evaluation theory). The major principles that have been identified in this psychological process are *reflected appraisals* and *social comparisons*. Reflected appraisals refer to perceptions of others' views toward self. Social comparisons occur when individuals come to know themselves by comparing self to others. As stated by Rosenberg and Simmons (1972, p. 1):

It has been assumed that self-esteem will suffer seriously in a minority group which consistently ranks lowest in the society's prestige structure; whose members, for the most part, are located at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder; who consequently experience low occupational prestige, severe poverty, and powerlessness; many of whose physical characteristics are deemed unattractive by the larger society; [and] who are subjected to widespread prejudice and massive discrimination.

Historical Overview

This minority self-esteem hypothesis was succinctly stated *after* the initial body of personality research on African Americans. Most of the early work on self-development among blacks utilized doll tests and related paradigms, demonstrating that black children showed a preference for white (see Baldwin, 1979; Gopaul-McNicol, 1995; Imani, 1996; Porter & Washington, 1993, for reviews). Many investigators interpreted these findings as evidence of black self-hatred.² Using clinical assessments of psychiatric patients, Kardiner and Ovesey (1951) similarly suggested that African American adults suffer from the "mark of oppression." Much psychiatric work soon adopted this model of pathology and low self-esteem was assumed to be a fundamental component of the black personality. Thus, the minority self-esteem hypothesis described by Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) served as a viable post hoc explanation for earlier work in the field since it was grounded in self-concept theory and consistent with some of the early work on the black personality.

Later studies, however, challenged much of the research on black personality development. Some argued that there were too many conflicting findings in this literature to confirm own-group rejection in African American children (see Banks, 1976; Banks, McQuater, & Ross, 1979). Others questioned the validity of certain constructs utilized in the doll test studies, emphasizing the distinction between group identity/esteem (as presumably indicated by preference for one ethnic group over another) and personal identity/esteem

² The results from this body of work were especially embraced during the volatile social climate of the 1960s when the argument was made that school segregation served as a major source for this negative self-perception (see Kvaraceus et al. 1965).

(Burnett & Sisson, 1995; Cross, 1991; Imani, 1996; Porter, 1971; Wright, 1985). Burnett (1987) even argued that preference for one color or ethnicity is not the same as an outright rejection of the (opposing) other (also see Goodman, 1964). Preferences for white dolls may simply reflect what is valued by the larger society (Whaley, 1993).

The theoretical model that emerges from this literature is depicted in Figure 11.1. The concerns raised by investigators in this field are quite reasonable. However, little work has addressed the initial assumption of preference studies – that preference for white (among nonwhites) is somehow related to poor psychological adjustment (see Burnett, 1987, for an exception). Even though something seems inherently unsettling about minority children preferring to play with a white doll, this particular preference should not be presumed deleterious over the long run. We believe that an important, but currently missing, component in the preference model is *socialization to race* – that is, the formation of a racial identity through the process of socialization. Minority parents often act as buffers between their children and society – making them aware of the presence of racism and discrimination in society and teaching them strategies for positive self-development (see Thornton, 1997). As such, more consideration should be paid to the impact socialization has on self-development. We return to this issue later in this section.

Besides the fact that this model has yet to be empirically validated among a representative sample of respondents, there are several caveats that should be underscored. To begin with, early research rarely provided direct assessments of ethnic group esteem. Many investigators simply relied on findings from doll preferences as an indication of racial attitudes (see Cross, 1981, for a discussion of this issue). As such, the link between racial preference and ethnic group esteem has yet to be rigorously explored (arrow #1 in Figure 11.1). This enterprise may seem relatively simple but could actually be a daunting task. Why? Because ethnic group esteem has since been conceptualized in a variety of ways. For example, ethnic group esteem has been measured by stages of black identity development (Cross, 1971; Munford, 1994; Parham & Helms, 1981), stereotypes held about other blacks (Hughes & Demo, 1989; Rosenberg, 1979), degree of closeness to other blacks (Broman, Neighbors, & Jackson, 1988; Harris 1995), involvement or identification with other blacks (Toomer, 1975; Wright, 1985), and racial militancy (see Porter & Washington, 1979, for a review). And some scholars incorporate multiple dimensions of black identity into their theoretical models, aptly acknowledging the complexity of the black self-concept (Demo & Hughes, 1990).

Given the diversity in the conceptualization of ethnic group esteem, it should not be too surprising to find a potpourri of patterns relating ethnic group esteem to personal self-esteem (arrow #2) (see Anderson & Cromwell, 1977; Cross, 1991; Hughes & Demo, 1989; Munford, 1994; Porter, 1971; Porter

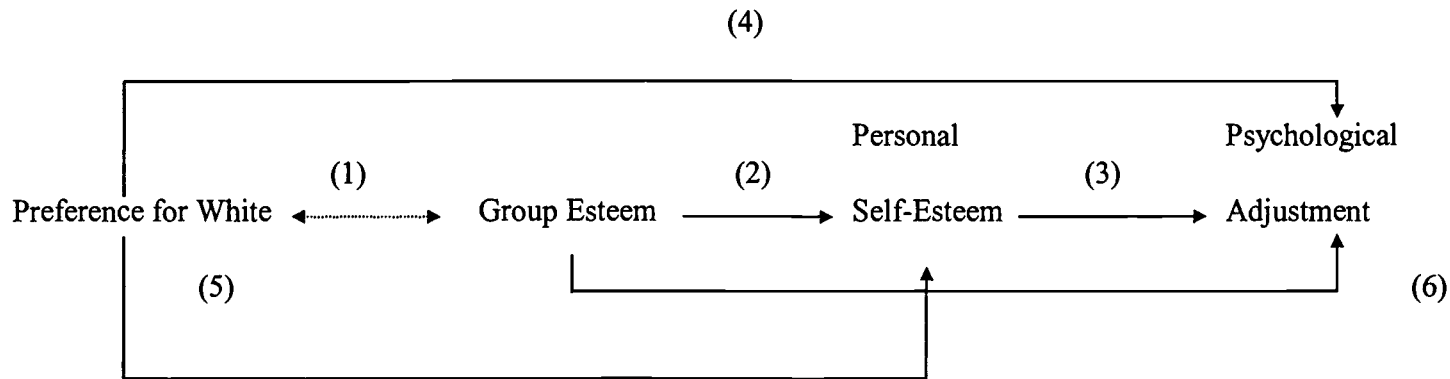


Figure 11.1. Implied theoretical model of preference studies. (Note: The double-ended arrow (1) indicates the lack of clarity in the proposed *direction* of the relationship between preference for white and group esteem. The dashed line is used to suggest that preference for white has been assumed indicative of some level of group esteem. These two constructs are separated here to represent the directions in which this research has moved – that is, attempting to measure these constructs separately and assessing the different pathways through which preference for white and group esteem may impact psychological adjustment.)

& Washington, 1979, 1989; Speight, Vera, & Derrickson, 1996; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1978). In general, those at the more advanced stages of identity development, who hold positive stereotypes about blacks, are involved or identify with other blacks, and express strong militant attitudes have higher personal self-esteem than their counterparts. Feeling close to other members of your ethnic group does not appear to be related to self-evaluations (see Hughes & Demo, 1992).

The relationship between personal esteem and psychological adjustment has been integrated into a variety of paradigms (arrow #3). Much of this work explores self-esteem as a coping resource during periods of high stress (e.g., see Thoits, 1994) or when issues related to identity development emerge (e.g., see Roberts & Bengtson, 1993). In general, high self-esteem is associated with psychological well-being (or generalized distress) among African Americans (Foster & Perry, 1982; Munford, 1994; Rosenberg, 1965; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972).

Despite some discussion about the relationship between racial preferences and psychological adjustment (arrow #4), very little empirical work is devoted to this topic (see Whaley, 1993). This is not too surprising given the criticisms aimed at racial preference studies. There is no consistent evidence that a *preference* for white dolls is related to psychological distress. And the few studies that have addressed the relationship between preference and self-esteem indicate that preference for white is not associated with personal self-esteem among children (arrow #5) (see Porter, 1971; Spencer, 1982). Interestingly, much of the recent work on racial preferences and psychological adjustment has shifted from the arena of child studies (where there is an inferred relationship) to attitudes among adults about their skin color.³

Investigators have long considered skin tone a relevant factor in preference studies. Skin tone has been incorporated into the preference model in two ways. The first emphasizes *actual* skin tone. Clark and Clark (1940), for example, noted that skin tone was an important determinant of racial identification in their doll studies. They found that light-skinned children showed a stronger preference for white dolls than children with darker skin.⁴ Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) explored the relationship between actual skin tone and personal self-esteem. These investigators found no association between children's skin color and personal self-esteem. Currently, there is

³ A related line of research examines the relationship between actual skin tone and stereotypes held about blacks. Williams and Chung (1997), for example, found no relationship between skin tone and internalized racism in the National Survey of Black Americans. Also see a piece by Baldwin, Brown, and Hopkins (1991) discussing the link between the literature on black self-hatred and the focus on skin tone.

⁴ As such, light-skin children who select a white doll may simply be identifying with the doll that is actually closer to their own skin tone. These children are not, necessarily, confused about their own self-image.

mixed evidence that skin tone is related to personal self-esteem among adults (see Ellison, 1993; Foster & Perry, 1982).

Although dark-skinned children who demonstrate a strong preference for white dolls may have internalized the negative standards held by society toward black people, social factors may also explain the relationship between skin tone and self-esteem. An assumption underlying the growing body of work on skin tone is that skin tone somehow translates into more social resources (e.g., self-esteem, SES) because of preferential treatment afforded the lighter-skin minority, by minority and majority group members (Bond & Cash, 1992). Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) implicate the discriminatory practices of individuals and social institutions (e.g., mass media) in determining the psychological well-being of minority members (as indicated by self-worth or mental health). Only recently has perceived discrimination been given serious consideration in our understanding of minority mental health.

The second way in which skin tone is proposed to be related to the self-concept is through the idealized self. In exploring the relationship between *ideal* skin tone and body image among a sample of black college students, Bond and Cash (1992) found that some black women expressed a desire to be lighter than their actual skin tone (also see Robinson & Ward, 1995). In this sense, idealizing a lighter skin tone may be a logical proxy for preference toward white, although this inference has not been validated. To the extent that there is a discrepancy between the actual and the ideal, individuals are expected to exhibit a poor self-image. In fact, women who are dissatisfied with their skin tone report negative evaluations of their physical appearance (Bond & Cash, 1992). However, it is not clear if ideal skin tone is related to general self-esteem. Because the idealized image is but one component of the desired self, ideal skin tone may not be very relevant for global self-esteem (McDonald & Gynther, 1965; Rosenberg, 1979).

And finally, the relationship between ethnic group esteem (or racial esteem) and psychological adjustment has been considered by a few investigators (arrow #6). Munford (1994) found, among a sample of black college students, that those at the early stages of identity development reported high depression (e.g., see Munford, 1994). When esteem is assessed by indicators of ethnic evaluation, there is mixed evidence. On one hand, Burnett (1987) found no association between stereotypes held toward one's ethnic group and psychological adjustment (i.e., abasement, aggression, defensiveness) in a convenience sample of African-American adults in North Carolina. On the other hand, a relationship between negative stereotypes toward other blacks and depression has been established in a national sample of black adults (see Williams & Chung, 1997). This disparity may be due to differences in sampling, the assessment of stereotypes, and/or the psychological outcomes that were measured.

Important Research Questions

As it stands, some unanswered questions in the preference study model include: (1) What is the direction of the relationship between preference for white and ethnic group esteem; (2) What are the most important factors that determine a preference for white; (3) Does a preference for white lead to poor psychological adjustment or are individuals who have psychological problems more likely to show a preference for white; and (4) What is the relative contribution of these various factors to personal self-esteem? Many of these issues have been raised by investigators in this field, including the need for consideration of other relevant factors, such as social class standing (see Porter & Washington, 1979).

As suggested by this brief review, the relevance of the findings from the initial doll test studies have yet to be clearly demonstrated. Those interested in pulling this disparate literature under a single umbrella should begin with a systematic study of the critical components of this model. Given the proliferation of longitudinal data sets that include multiple psychological measures and oversampling of minority populations, it is now possible to address many of these issues (e.g., see Jackson & Torres, 1996; Telles & Murguia, 1990).

Consideration should also be given to certain forms of behavior by members of the majority culture that could undermine the preference-for-white ideology. For example, the increase in the adaptation of urban culture (e.g., dress, music, speech, role models) by nonblack youth suggests that minority self-esteem may be affected by the general acceptance of black culture. One can peruse any shopping mall and find young people from a variety of ethnic groups wearing baggy clothing and mimicking their favorite rap artists (usually African American). What then are the implications of this urban culture on the psychological development of nonblack youth? What are nonblack parents telling their preschoolers when the children say, "I want to be black when I grow up?" Some may believe that such actions reduce black culture to a fad. As such, it belittles the plight of the urban poor, especially since nonminority youth will continue to benefit from the unequal opportunity structure long after they discard their urban persona. Others may see this behavior as conducive to identification with those who are culturally different. These same cultural elements may then unite this particular cohort of youth. To disentangle these issues, investigators would need to adopt a variety of research strategies. But careful research on this topic could inform the broader area of minority self-development if we focus on the ways in which African-American youth interpret these phenomena.

Other Relevant Areas of Research

In addition to benefiting from richer sources of data, the self-esteem literature can be informed by yet another emerging area of research. Many scholars have turned their attention to the psychological consequences of

discrimination (Ren, Amick, & Levine, 1997; Williams et al., 1997). Even though the minority self-esteem hypothesis (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972) included the concept of discrimination, it has not been seriously considered in research designs (see Jensen, White, & Galliher, 1982, for an exception). Many investigators assume that blacks identify themselves as an oppressed minority – that is, they have encountered racism and interpreted racist acts as such. Instead, we need to be more cognizant of the perceived experience of prejudice and discrimination that are often assumed to be captured by a self-reported or self-imposed racial category. Relative to the psychological impact of discrimination, the constructs of race and skin tone explain a relatively small percentage of the variance in most of our statistical models predicting self-esteem (Hoelter, 1982; Hulbary, 1975; Kohr, Coldiron, Skiffington, Masters, & Blust, 1988) and psychological distress (Ren, Amick, & Levine, 1997; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997), respectively.

More important, future studies must be more sensitive to the impact socialization has on this entire process. There is ample evidence that preference for white decreases with age (see Baldwin, 1979, for a review). And both ethnic group and personal esteem develop over the life course, with some fluctuations occurring during the adolescent period (Gecas & Mortimer, 1987; Hulbary, 1975; Lefley, 1976; Rosenberg, 1986; Simmons, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg, 1973). Several sources of information regarding ethnic identity have been identified, including the family as the primary agent (Peters, 1985; Thornton, 1997), exposure to the media (Allen & Thornton, 1992), and interracial contact (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Hughes & Demo, 1989). The extent and timing of exposure to these agents of socialization has been linked to a sense of ethnic pride and identity (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Harris, 1995).

Because the process of socialization continues into adulthood, investigators should also be more attentive to the influence other institutions have on self-development over the life course (Gecas, 1981). Although engaging in primary social roles (e.g., worker, spouse, parent) enhances overall well-being among blacks, some secondary roles are also important, especially churchgoer (Jackson, 1997). In fact, there is a growing body of literature demonstrating the importance of religion in the lives of African Americans. Socialization experiences promote a religious worldview among blacks (Chatters, Levin, & Taylor, 1992). The positive effects of religious participation have been repeatedly demonstrated and are consistent across the life course (e.g., see Chatters & Taylor, 1982; Krause & Tran, 1989; Levin, Chatters, & Taylor, 1995). Religious devotion and prayer are effective coping mechanisms against daily stressors (Ellison & Taylor, 1997). The impact other institutions have on self-development should continue to be diligently studied.

In general, the context in which self-esteem develops in black populations has been largely ignored. Many scholars have commented on the need to move the body of work on black self-esteem in the direction of understanding how children acquire, and adults maintain, positive self-esteem in lieu of low social standing and experiences with discrimination (Adam, 1978; Foster & Perry, 1982; Hayles, 1991; McLoyd, 1991). The growing body of work on the *content* of socialization messages about race received from *multiple agents* represents a promising move in this direction (e.g., see Stevenson, 1994, 1995; Thompson, 1994; Thornton, 1997). As noted by Barnes (1991, p. 667),

those of us who are black cannot think of our children without thinking about our families. We cannot think about black children and black families without thinking about black communities. We cannot think about black children, black families, and black communities without, at the same time, realizing that this entire configuration of blackness is surrounded by a white racist society.

Moreover, it is difficult to think about black children, black families, or the black community without some image of the "black church" (which often serves as an extended family). The black church was established in response to fundamental disagreements about the compatibility of slavery and the belief in the equality of humankind (see Blackwell, 1991). This particular institution helped to define the reality of race relations. Black religion, in fact, assumes what the racist idea denies – that race matters. This worldview is evident in sermons delivered by black ministers and the direction of most community efforts (Bynum, 1997). Social scientists interested in the area of black self-development must embrace this more wholistic model of black life in an effort to liberate the work on self-esteem from its current strongholds of psychological reductionism and empirical redundancy.

In general, there is no consistent evidence that African Americans suffer (or have ever suffered) from self-hatred or lower self-esteem than whites (Baldwin, 1979; Foster & Perry, 1982; Porter & Washington, 1989). Research conducted in the 1930s, on which subsequent work was based, may, at best, have tapped other important dimensions of the self-concept: ethnic group pride, ethnic identity, or racial self-esteem (see Broman, Neighbors, & Jackson, 1988; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Imani, 1996). Although there was some initial confusion about what was being measured in preference studies, this more recent emphasis on black identity/esteem is now the most prolific area of research on the black personality.

Rosenberg and Colleagues

Many of the concerns regarding the validity of early work on black self-development emerged at a time when there was a general need for social scientists to apply more rigorous methodologies (sampling and scale construction) to the study of social phenomenon (Blalock, 1960; Borgatta &

Bohrnstedt, 1969). Later studies then sought to more clearly specify the self-concept, select representative samples, and adopt more standardized measures. Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) brought all this sophistication to bear on their work on black-white differences in self-esteem among a sample of 2,600 Baltimore school children (age 3–12). On one hand, this work stimulated more systematic research in the area of black self-esteem. On the other, this research increased the amount of controversy in the field of black self-esteem. During this phase of the literature, however, the issue was not blacks possibly having lower self-esteem than whites (as suggested by self theory and controversial evidence from doll tests and psychiatric evaluations), but the repeated finding of *positive* black self-esteem.

Of course, there are many studies that report no significant difference between blacks and whites in self-esteem (see Guterma, 1972; Porter & Washington, 1979, 1989, 1993, for reviews). When no racial differences are found in reports of self-esteem, however, investigators simply refer to other studies that report the same pattern (e.g., see Bowler, Rauch, & Schwarzer, 1986; House, Durfee, & Bryan, 1979). There are very few attempts at posthoc explanations within this body of work (see Barnes, 1991, for a broader discussion of this issue).

Rosenberg (1979) offers the most extensive theoretical discussion of why blacks may not exhibit lower self-esteem than whites. In particular, he suggests that the theory of reflected appraisals is not operable among blacks to the extent that the following assumptions are violated: (1) awareness; (2) agreement; (3) personal relevance; and (4) significance. Those who are interested in more rigorously pursuing the anomaly of positive black self-esteem may find them especially useful guides for future work.

First, ethnic minorities may be *unaware* of the low ranking of their group. Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) found, in fact, that young black children (those between the ages of 8 and 11) were less aware of society's ranking system of African Americans than white children. The awareness explanation, however, is not very parsimonious when applied to adolescents and adults (Hoelter, 1982). Many investigators then refer to characteristics of the setting that may enhance self-esteem or a set of devices that may be utilized to protect self-esteem. For example, a consonant context is often viewed as a protective environment in which the self-esteem of individuals in a minority group is less threatened by negative images since the comparison group becomes other youth of one's own ethnicity. Although Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) found some evidence that racial context was important for self-evaluations among Baltimore school children, a later piece by Simmons and colleagues (1978) and Jensen and colleagues (1982) failed to find support for the consonant context argument. Regardless of the percentage of blacks in the school, black students had higher self-esteem than their white peers.

Some investigators also refer to certain defensive mechanisms to explain the lack of differences in (or higher) self-esteem among older blacks. Individuals may protect themselves from awareness of negative group appraisals by adopting the self-esteem or self-consistency motives (Rosenberg, 1979). Although it is the case that people adopt self-protective cognitive strategies (Kaplan, 1975), it is assumed that minorities rely on these strategies more than majority group members, an assumption that requires empirical verification.

Second, even if individuals are aware of their ranking in society, they may not agree with the majority culture. Ethnic minorities are, by definition, engaged in an antagonistic relationship with majority group members. There is little reason to believe that members of a minority group would, therefore, accept the negative images constructed by those who have historically engaged in discriminatory practices. Of course, the subtle use of racist language in everyday life probably has some negative impact on the self-image of African Americans (Moore, 1995).

A third assumption described by Rosenberg (1979) is one of *personal relevance*. Even in cases where a minority group member agrees with a negative stereotype, they may not incorporate these negative images into their own self-concepts because they are not viewed as personally relevant (Hunt, 1996). However, several investigators have found an association between stereotypes held about blacks and personal self-esteem among black adults (e.g., see Clark, 1985; Demo & Hughes, 1989). Thus, the robust relationship between interethnic attitudes and personal esteem suggests that level of agreement and personal relevance are critical factors in understanding minority self-development.

And finally, it is not clear how *significant* negative appraisals are for the general self-concept. Rosenberg and Simmons (1973) adopt the concept of psychological centrality to explain why, for example, they found a poor association between group esteem and personal self-esteem among their sample of Baltimore school children. Appraisals by others may not be an important source of information for self-development. And when they are, certain characteristics of the person providing the information may make a difference in the impact of that appraisal. Thus, Rosenberg (1979) raises the issue of the level of trust we place on certain people's opinions. In other words, is the person who is providing the evaluation a credible source of information? The importance of considering trust between parties when discussing reflected appraisals cannot be overstated. African Americans are, on average, distrustful of others, especially whites (DeMaris & Yang, 1994). As noted by Rosenberg (1979, p. 97), "We can ... amend Mead's statement to read: We are more or less unconsciously seeing ourselves as we think others who are important to us and whose opinion we trust see us."

Hoelter (1982) augments Rosenberg's discussion of selective credulity by examining whether black-white differences in self-esteem among adolescents can be better understood if we consider the human tendency to have stronger faith in the opinions of individuals who provide positive evaluations of us rather than those who emphasize our weaknesses. Using a sample of eleventh and twelfth grade high school students, Hoelter (1982) found mixed evidence for this proposed theory. Although the African-American students had higher self-esteem than the white students in the sample, differences in self-esteem among the males was due to black males' reporting of more positive perceived appraisals by others compared to white males. Self-esteem differences between black and white females, however, was attributed to the relative impact of positive evaluations (also see Burbach & Bridgemen, 1976). Although there were few differences found across the various sources of appraisal (e.g., teachers, parents, friends), this study makes an important contribution because it moves this body of literature in the direction of explaining higher self-esteem among blacks.

Other theorists argue that the concept of social comparison requires revision in the minority self-esteem hypothesis. One of the primary theoretical advances made by researchers in this field is specifying "which significant others are significant for whom and how significant they are" (Hare, 1977a, p. 143). As such, some have attempted to explain the finding of higher self-esteem among blacks (rather than why blacks do not have lower self-esteem) by expanding on the notion of social comparisons (see Barnes, 1972; Nobles, 1973; Rosenberg, 1973; Taylor & Walsh, 1979; Wyne, White, & Coop, 1974). The general stance is that family and peer evaluations are more important for self-esteem among blacks than evaluations from teachers (or society). The design of most studies do not allow us to make any conclusions regarding this position (see Hoelter, 1982, for an exception).

Given the myriad of factors in self-evaluation theory, there are several possible explanations for a lack of differences in black-white self-esteem but fewer interpretations of higher self-esteem among blacks (Taylor & Walsh, 1979). Because many of the theoretical ideas discussed in Rosenberg's work have yet to be empirically explored, this topic remains a fruitful area for future research.

Additional Surgery Performed on the Finding of Positive Black Self-Esteem

The finding of positive black self-esteem has also been challenged on *methodological* grounds. Some have focused on the lack of precision in defining the self-concept (Hare, 1977a; Loudon, 1981). It has been argued that the self-concept consists of many dimensions, including the evaluation of various identities. Much work has then been devoted to distinguishing between different components of the self-concept. Investigators, for example, note

that traits may be more important for the general self-concept than group identification (or social identity), especially in dissonant social contexts (see Beglis & Sheikh, 1974; McGuire et al., 1978; Thoits, 1992). These studies, however, do not expand on the notion of the relative importance of different identity components for global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979). Although adequate measurement tools have been developed to assess trait components of the self (e.g., Twenty Statements Test), little work has moved in this direction.

It would be interesting to note the extent to which racial or ethnic categories are used as descriptives on the Twenty Statements Test (TST) or Who Are You (WAY) Test (Bugental & Zelen, 1950; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954) in a large, ethnically diverse sample (e.g., see Bond & Cheung, 1983). This technique usually involves the investigator asking respondents to list as many as 20 words to describe "Who You Are." In previous studies, ascribed characteristics have been reported as separate personal features (McGuire et al., 1978; Thoits, 1992), but they can also be used as adjectives to roles – so that, for instance, a doctor may not simply see her or himself as a doctor but as an African-American doctor. What then does this mean for one's perception of others' appraisals in social interaction? Are those who attach ascribed characteristics to roles more self-conscious about their ascribed status? If so, does this place them at a psychological advantage or disadvantage? Predictions are plausible in either direction. The relationship between the perceived self and other components of the self-concept deserve further attention, especially the degree of complexity in the self-concept across racial/ethnic populations (Linville, 1987).

The multidimensional aspects of the self were studied early in the history of self-concept research (see Battle & Rotter, 1963; Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965). A stream of thought that runs through many studies is that race differences may be more pronounced in area-specific self-esteem than has been found in general measures of self-esteem. Some find that black preadolescent students have lower academic esteem (also referred to as school esteem or student self-esteem) but higher self-evaluations related to physical attractiveness (Chang, 1975; Hare, 1977b) and interpersonal relations (i.e., school, home, and peers) (Castenell, 1983) than whites. Many then reach the conclusion that the physical, rather than the academic, component of the self-concept is more important for self-esteem among blacks. While there is some evidence that the physical self is an important predictor of social competence among blacks (Comer, Haynes, Hamilton-Lee, Boger, & Rollock, 1986), there is little consideration of the relative impact of various areas of self-definition on global self-esteem (see Richman, Clark, & Brown, 1985; Rosenberg et al., 1995; Tashakkori & Thompson, 1991, for exceptions), thus making this assertion tentative, at best. Even when differences are found, investigators must acknowledge the fact that the areas of self-worth that are important for global self-esteem change over the life course.

Other methodological limitations described in self-concept research include weak construct validity (Hoelter, 1983) and underidentification in statistical models (Hare, 1977b; Richman, Clark, & Brown, 1985). Some have even raised the concern that much of the work conducted after the 1960s lacked objectivity or may be tainted by researcher bias (e.g., see Adam, 1978). In other words, many find it hard to believe that blacks have higher self-esteem than whites.

Where Is the "African" in the African American?

A contingent of scholars seem more receptive to the finding of positive black self-esteem. These social scientists argue that current conceptualizations of the black self fail to consider "the nature and character of the African referent in African American self-concept formation" (Baldwin, Brown, & Hopkins, 1991, p. 160). The notion of an extended self has thus been offered as a more appropriate paradigm from which to come to understand black self-development (Nobles, 1991). If one readily adopts the view that white America is not the looking glass self for black America, then it should not be too difficult to envision members of the enslaved community (family and friends) serving as the African's source of self-reflection. The question, however, is whether the African character was broken (Elkins, 1959; Frazier, 1949) or remained intact during slavery (Blassingame, 1972; Gutman, 1976). Of course, we cannot settle any controversy surrounding slavery in this chapter but it is worthy of note that the birthdate of the black "self" has often been assumed to be around the year 1600. This time frame corresponds with the institutionalization of southern slavery in the United States, even though only a fraction (6%) of Africans taken into captivity actually came to the United States (Howard, 1980). The majority of Africans were transported to Brazil and the Caribbean (Johnson & Campbell, 1981) and yet there is a dearth of information on the self-concept among blacks in the Diaspora.

Furthermore, although a large portion of the black community are descendants from Africa, there has been a steady flow of black immigrants into the United States since that time. The extent to which these individuals identify with the "black experience" remains an important consideration in studies of minority self-development (Woldemikael, 1989). For example, Mazumdar (1989) argues that black people from South Asia who currently reside in the United States hold racist beliefs about U.S. blacks. Similarly, Sorenson (1991) highlights the discrimination faced by Ethiopians in Canada but the likelihood that Ethiopians in Canada will identify with the black experience in America is very low since many Ethiopians hold their own racist attitudes about dark-skinned blacks.

The four features of the African ethos that have been identified as critical to an understanding of black self-development are: *the value of unity, cooperative effort, collective responsibility, and concern for the community* (see

Nobles, 1991, for an elaboration of these values). In general, the concepts of *kinship*, *religion*, and *culture* have been emphasized as helping Africans in the New World cope with enslavement and subsequent generations of African Americans deal with discrimination. An interesting note here is that these same factors are embraced by investigators who emphasize the successful assimilation of other ethnic groups in America (e.g., see Gil & Vega, 1996; Valenzuela, & Dornbusch, 1996). These concepts may represent the keys to the positive advancement of all ethnic groups. Of course, the extent to which diversity in the United States is interpreted as a cultural strength will determine how these elements are defined (see McAdoo, 1993; Parrillo, 1996).

It is our position that the self-concept of the African American remains grounded in the collective (McCombs, 1985) and may be more precisely represented as dual in nature (DuBois, 1903). African Americans are, in fact, Americanized Africans (Nobles, 1991). It is in this context that a consideration of racial socialization becomes critical for "contextualizing" the preference study paradigm (depicted earlier). As noted by other social scientists, this perspective lends itself to a variety of questions regarding minority self-development, such as: (1) how do African-American parents teach their children to resist a preference for white; (2) what cultural practices lead to the development of positive self-esteem; and (3) how is general psychological well-being maintained by ethnic minorities in the face of individual and structural discrimination? It is equally important to note, however, that although there may be some underlying worldview (which may stem from African values and customs) that is psychologically protective, there are probably some deleterious effects of the psychological negotiation between the "African" and "American" self-concept.

The scant bit of evidence on self-esteem among other Africans indicates little impact of discrimination on self-concept development. Heaven and Nieuwoudt (1981) found no significant difference in personal self-esteem between South Africans and white Afrikaners. In fact, South Africans reported higher self-esteem than the white English-speaking and Indian students. Instead of pursuing a cultural explanation for the findings, however, these investigators assumed that the Black Consciousness Movement in the United States altered patterns in self-esteem among the respondents. Like the bulk of literature preceding it, these authors assume that widespread discriminatory practices, including apartheid, had to devastate minority self-image. Only a mass movement could help recover the damaged ego brought about by massive discrimination.

A broader discussion of the global impact of colonialism should also be incorporated in this research area (Howard, 1980; Kitahara, 1987). One of the ways in which European colonialism has impacted minority populations across the globe is through skin color stratification. For instance, in a study assessing self-esteem among a sample of high school girls in Jamaica, Miller

(1973) found that whites reported the highest scores followed by girls who were designated as brown (mulatto) and black, respectively. This scale tapped various dimensions of competence (e.g., I do well in school) and popularity (e.g., I have many friends) rather than general self-worth.⁵ Nonetheless, the findings suggest that the degree of imposition of white preference (or strong socialization to white) may override any African values that we assume are still prevalent in the Diaspora.

In essence, a critical piece to the puzzle of black self-esteem is still missing. In order to better understand the complexity of self-development in *blacks*, we must retrace our steps to the fundamental issue of the African identity (especially before European colonization). The extent to which the African self has been traumatized (or divided) across the Diaspora will probably depend on the degree to which the Anglo-Saxon core (culture, values, institutions) has been imposed on the native population (and the degree of receptivity to this imposition). One would not expect to find strong African ethos in societies where African values have been discarded or in communities that lack a consistency in transmitting these values to its residents (via its institutions). Addressing these types of issues could lead to a more systematic consideration of the conditions under which we would expect to find the "African" in the African American (or Africans in other Diasporan communities).

CROSS-ETHNIC RESEARCH ON PERSONAL SELF-ESTEEM

The major implication of the disproportionate attention paid to black-white differences in self-esteem is that the minority self-esteem hypothesis is applicable to all ethnic minorities. Notwithstanding, there are many notable consequences of this overemphasis on African Americans. On one hand, there is a growing appreciation for the complexity of the minority self-concept. Social psychologists assess (or at least acknowledge) the various components of the self, have become more sensitive to the importance of macro-level phenomena on self-development (e.g., Civil Rights Movement), and continue to emphasize the ethnic component of ethnic minority membership. There is, in fact renewed interest in the resiliency of the self in the face of changing life circumstances (Lifton, 1993). On the other hand, the paucity of research on personal self-development among nonblack ethnic minorities is astounding, especially when we consider the long line of work on ethnic identity (e.g., see Bonacich, 1980; Geertz, 1963).

⁵ This study, like many others in this field however, failed to control for social class. In fact, the author considered social class in a separate set of analyses demonstrating the same pattern of results as those reported for race/skin color, calling into question the main effect of race.

Various components of the preference model (Figure 11.1) have been examined among other ethnic minorities. Unfortunately, the inconsistencies reported in the black self-esteem literature also permeate this body of work, especially the work on white preference (e.g., Rice, Ruiz, & Padilla 1974; Rohrer, 1977; Weiland & Coughlin, 1979) and reports of personal self-esteem (e.g., see Bowler, Rauch, & Schwarzer, 1986; Grossman, Wirt, & Davids, 1985; Henkin & Nguyen, 1984; Rotheram-Borus, 1989; Samuels & Griffore, 1979). Many of the issues related to the complexity of ethnic identification (see Hurtado, Gurin, & Peng, 1994), racial/ethnic differences in different components of the self-concept (e.g., see Pang et al., 1985), the importance of ethnic socialization (e.g., see Knight et al., 1993; Phinney & Chavira, 1995), developmental changes in self-concept (e.g., see Fu, Hinkle, & Korslund, 1983), the relationship between personal esteem and psychological adjustment (Higbee & Roberts, 1994; Noh & Avison, 1996; Shin, 1994; Tran, 1996), and discrimination and well-being (Pak, Dion, & Dion, 1991) have also been explored among nonblack minorities.

While it may appear that this body of work is extensive enough to provide a more detailed discussion of findings, as previously elaborated for black self-esteem, the variety of ethnic groups compared, instruments adopted to assess personal self-esteem, and variation in level of rigor of analysis impedes any such attempt. A much more fascinating characteristic of this literature is the tendency to rely on another mechanism to explain low personal self-esteem among nonblack minorities in the United States – English language proficiency. The adoption of such an explanatory mechanism, however, crosses the tenuous boundary between micro-level and macro-level explanations for self-development.

Socialization/Acculturation

In many studies, socialization for nonblack minorities is embodied in descriptions of the process of acculturation. Acculturation refers to the adoption of the values, language, and norms of the dominant group and often precedes structural assimilation (Yinger, 1985). The disparity in theoretical approaches used to explain personal self-esteem among African American and other ethnic minority populations has been previously discussed (see Porter & Washington, 1993). An important outcome of the use of a variety of theoretical approaches across ethnic groups is that the minority self-esteem hypothesis may need to be expanded to include the experiences of immigrants who undergo socialization due to “voluntary” contact with the host culture.

The minority self-esteem hypothesis, as stated by Rosenberg and Simmons (1972), actually outlines an important set of scope conditions for a more general understanding of the minority self-concept. Scope conditions refer to “a set of universal statements that define the domain of applicability

of a knowledge claim" (Cohen, 1980, p. 83). Any contextualized model that emerges from this enterprise is considered valid as long as the cultures involved satisfy the scope conditions. To date, the minority self-esteem hypothesis has been applied haphazardly to a range of ethnic groups, both within the United States and in other countries. We will not review the vast number of studies that examine personal self-esteem among nonblack minorities (see Porter & Washington, 1993) but our goal is to highlight some relevant themes relating to positive self-development. We will restrict this discussion to nonblack minorities in the United States.

We should note that many ethnic groups in the United States face discrimination in education, employment, income, housing, and the political arena (Aguirre & Turner, 1998; Bean & Tienda, 1987; Chan, 1991). There is some evidence that many consider their physical characteristics, including skin tone, to be unattractive compared to the white norm (Chen & Yang, 1986; Hall, 1994; Pang et al., 1985) and there are many stereotypes assigned to other ethnic groups (Aguirre & Turner, 1998). As such, most ethnic minorities meet the established theoretical criteria for poor self-development. So let's take a moment to examine the ingredients to the recipe for positive self-development among ethnic minorities.

The Ingredients

A long-standing tenet in ethnic studies is that *recency of [voluntary] immigration* determines level of assimilation.⁶ This position has been adopted to explain why Anglo-Americans have the highest structural assimilation (i.e., educational attainment, occupational prestige, earnings) and Koreans and Vietnamese immigrants the lowest (Jiobu, 1988). However, this perspective does not find much support when we consider intraethnic differences in structural assimilation. For example, the Chinese have a longer history in the United States than the Japanese but the Japanese are not differentiated socioeconomically from whites while the Chinese are somewhat less socioeconomically assimilated (Jiobu, 1988). Similarly, Cuban Americans are more recent immigrants to the United States than other Hispanic groups, yet have a higher socioeconomic status than Mexicans and Puerto Ricans (Aguirre & Turner, 1998).

The generality of the recency of immigration position is also called into question when we consider differences between the native-born and their peers who are recent immigrants. Although there is some evidence that Asian immigrants have higher self-esteem than their younger counterparts (see

⁶ In fact, many believe that the lack of differences in self-esteem between African Americans and whites can be understood in terms of the length of time African Americans have resided in the United States. An assimilation perspective would predict few differences in self-development.

Padilla, Wagatsuma, & Lindholm, 1985), native-born Mexican Americans report more mental health problems than Mexican immigrants (e.g., see Shrout et al., 1992). In fact, studies that demonstrate lower self-concepts among immigrants compared to their counterparts in their native land suggest that mere contact with a host culture can be stressful. Thus, more refined explanations for differences in assimilation within Asian and Hispanic groups emphasize, among other things, the amount of *cultural capital* a group possesses on entry into the United States, the adoption of favorable *governmental policies*, and *group size* (see Aguirre & Turner, 1998; Chan, 1991).

Proficiency in the English language has been upheld as especially important for positive self-development among ethnic minorities. Besides being a prerequisite for naturalization status in the United States, adoption of English facilitates integration into the broader community and demonstrates a certain level of commitment to the majority culture. The poor socioeconomic standing of Mexican Americans is typically offered as evidence of the consequences of not supporting English-only policies.

However, language proficiency may be a double-edged sword for some ethnic minorities. Powers and Sanchez (1982) found a positive correlation between the degree to which English is spoken at home (or upon entry into the United States) and self-esteem among a sample of Mexican junior high school students. A study by Florsheim (1997), however, suggests that an incongruity between the host language and native values may subvert the benefits of English proficiency among some Chinese. Chinese adolescents who preferred to use English rather than their native language had more adjustment problems than their peers. A strong English preference was negatively related to a sense of collectivism that was consequently related to low psychological adjustment. Youngman and Sadongei (1974) similarly argue that differences in values between Native-American culture and the dominant culture often result in poor self-concept in Native-American children (Native Americans are dissimilar from many of the ethnic groups described in this section because they were not "voluntary" immigrants but members of conquered nations).

English language ability may also be overstated in cases in which ethnic groups develop a strong ethnic enclave. In these communities (e.g., Chinatown or Little Cuba), the native language dominates interaction. To the extent that the minority group does not rely on the host culture for economic sustenance, adoption of the English language may not be a necessary component to successful assimilation. Some scholars even argue that although one's primary language may be lost in the assimilation process, the retention of other features of one's culture can help protect self-esteem. A strong sense of *familism* remains an important component of Mexican culture, regardless of level of structural assimilation (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1996). A similar argument undergirds the model minority hypothesis. Many believe that the high socioeconomic sta-

tus of some Asian groups (Japanese and Chinese) is evidence of their native *values of hard work* and commitment. There is little information on the link between these values and self-esteem across ethnic populations.

But an important consideration in the discussion of language proficiency is the message received by the minority group about their native language. Is the native language deemphasized because it is viewed as inferior or because it is considered a barrier to successful assimilation? How is the discussion about multiculturalism being phrased (Wardle, 1996)? We also need more systematic research on the messages being relayed to nonblack minorities about their ethnic group (via the family, community, society) and the ways in which negative images are combatted. How do nonblack minorities negotiate their "dual" ethnic identities?

These questions seem especially important to address among Native-American populations. Although the amount of coverage given to the study of self-esteem across ethnic groups varies a great deal, it is safe to say that American Indians have been woefully neglected (see Luftig, 1983, for a review). And, unlike the research on other nonblack minorities, a rather consistent finding is that Native Americans have lower self-concepts than their white peers. This pattern of results has come to be understood in terms of many of the issues raised here, especially interventions that may actually reinforce (rather than contest) negative self-images. Assimilation arguments are also called into question by research that finds more acculturated groups to have lower self-esteem than members of Native-American tribes that are more traditional in orientation (e.g., see Howard, 1980; Lefley, 1976, for reviews).

In essence, there are several factors that define the immigrant experience. Investigators in this field must avoid adopting too simplistic an approach to minority self-development. Even after careful consideration of these factors, there must be a general sensitivity to macro-structural factors that guide self-perceptions, such as *labor market dynamics*, *intervention by outside governments*, and *immigration waves*. The many ways in which these *ingredients* can form distinct recipes culminating into successful assimilation pose a challenge for those interested in understanding minority self-development. We, therefore, suggest that a focus on racial socialization serve as the unifying theme for this body of research.

CONCLUSION

If we consider socialization to race an acceptable springboard from which to begin our quest for a better understanding of minority self-development, we should be led to then consider issues such as the type, level, and/or form of anticipatory socialization to the racial/ethnic identity; the perceived desirability of the transition; and the changes encountered during the process

(Bush & Simmons, 1981). Personal self-esteem and group-esteem can be affected by each of these factors. For example, young people may resent being forced to think of themselves in terms of a racial/ethnic category (Chang, 1973). This identity may be imposed following a negative incident, such as the lynching of a black doll on a predominantly white college campus. Events that occur at particular stages of the life course may also encourage the development of a racial/ethnic identity. The period of adolescence may be the most susceptible to the stresses of racial identity formation.

As evidenced by the wide array of journals that span the coverage of research on self-concept and ethnic group membership (see the references), the literature on race and self-esteem is clearly in need of a unifying perspective. In our view, the self should be deemed adaptable to changing life circumstances. As suggested throughout this chapter, the life course paradigm seems most appropriate. A life course perspective shifts the focus from self-esteem as an outcome of individual processes to a focus on people's lives, with a strong emphasis on the impact of social structure. It encourages a more dynamic approach to the study of the self. Although this framework requires the use of longitudinal data to capture the degree of change and stability in the self, it would allow the investigator to consider both the immediate and long-term consequences of racial socialization.

A life course perspective also considers normative expectations and role transitions as important factors for self-development. Variation across ethnic populations is embraced by those who adhere to a cultural approach to the life course (Meyer, 1988). This view is rather important when we consider that normative expectations may vary across racial/ethnic groups. For instance, a study of college students in North Carolina found that black students perceive fewer negative sanctions (by significant others and society) for never marrying than their white counterparts (Jackson, 1996, unpublished data). This finding may help explain why African Americans who have never married do not report higher psychological distress than the married, while there is a significant difference in reports of distress between these marital groups in white (non-Hispanic) samples (Jackson, 1997). In other words, as long as African Americans are the comparison group for their peers, then one would not expect deleterious effects of deviating from the societal norm of getting married.

More important, a life course perspective is an appropriate framework for the study of self-esteem because to assimilate and acculturate is an unfolding process (like a life) that is affected by structural factors (e.g., size of group, presence of ethnic enclaves). These processes create *contexts* in which minority group members live. These contexts may make negative views of the minority group (from whites) more or less personally relevant and accepted, thus affecting some components of self-esteem (Thoits, 1998, personal communication). This type of approach has been used in attempts to under-

stand, for example, why many black immigrants (e.g., those of Caribbean origin and Haitians in Miami) fare better economically than U.S.-born blacks. Much of the evidence for this trend implicates selective immigration policies, household structure, and rotating credit clubs that are only available to immigrants (Aguirre & Turner, 1998).

The advantages of first-generation immigrants, however, dissipate for subsequent generations (Waters, 1994). Upward mobility among third-generation West Indian students is often undermined by forces in American society. Those who assimilate into American culture fare worse than those immigrants who retain elements of their culture. It appears that once black immigrants become "American blacks" they face the widespread discrimination experienced by the descendants of American slaves, especially those who self-identify as a black American (Waters, 1994). Thus, there may be cohort differences in personal self-esteem that can more readily be illustrated in a life-course model of self-development both across immigrant populations and within the population of U.S.-born ethnic minorities. A focus on these issues could lead to more elaborated and dynamic research on race/ethnicity and self-esteem in which families (across generations) can be queried about their views of race (including socialization experiences and ethnic identity), adaptations to racial dilemmas, and reports of personal self-esteem (see Waters, 1994, for this type of approach).

In conclusion, because the self-concept has many components (Rosenberg, 1979), the particular area that is most relevant for personal self-esteem may depend on the historical circumstances faced by particular ethnic groups and the ways in which members of the group have since negotiated their status in that society. Thus, Maya Angelou's pronouncement that "Still I Rise" can be understood as either an inherent condition of resiliency or an effective coping mechanism against oppression and subjugation. As such, the very title of this chapter is a misnomer – a more appropriate label would be self-esteem and *racism* (Wilkins, 1997, personal communication). Racial categories have historically reflected racism. Racism created a set of norms that required the differential treatment (discrimination) of nonwhite groups in America (Williams, 1996, 1997). We are, therefore left to conclude that **race explains nothing, but it helps us understand everything.**

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12 Gender and Self-Esteem

Narrative and Efficacy in the Negotiation of Structural Factors

Anne Statham and Katherine Rhoades

INTRODUCTION

Morris Rosenberg provided us with a powerful model of the relationship between self and society, emphasizing the role of feelings about the self in the overall dynamic. Especially important for him were structural expectations, as they impacted variables such as self-esteem and, ultimately, individual behavior. In his early work (1965), he argued that self-concept is the intervening variable that had often been overlooked in the much researched relationship between social characteristics (social class is one he would return to over and over) and the individual's attitudes and behaviors. As he defined it later (1979), self-concept consisted of "the totality of thoughts and feelings one has about the self." Even then, he grappled with fairly complex processes through which structural factors wound their way into these self-feelings.

For example, a perennial issue has been why certain negative social statuses, such as holding socially undesirable jobs, do not necessarily result in lower levels of measured self-esteem. Rosenberg (1965) called on the notion of "self-values" to explain such apparent inconsistencies, a concept later elaborated as "the compensation process" by Gecas and Seff (1990). In essence, it is argued (and shown) that much negative social feedback will only significantly impact factors such as self-esteem if the characteristics in question are truly important to the individual. These concepts have much in common with other symbolic interactionist notions such as the "situational context" of identities (Burke, 1988) and "salience" (Stryker & Serpe, 1982), which also point to the tendency of individuals to selectively focus on different aspects of their immediate surroundings.

Applications to Gender

Although Rosenberg focused a great deal on adolescents and differences between racial groups, he also looked at gender differences, since many of

these concepts also apply to differences between men and women. For him, gender was one of the important aspects of self and self-feelings created out of the process of interaction: "Sex does not inform self concept; being treated as ... a man or woman does" (1970, p. xiv).

Since Rosenberg began this line of research, there has been added, concerted effort to expand and apply his concepts to women and girls. This is seen most clearly in the work on adolescent girls, which suggests dramatic drops in self-esteem during puberty (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Subsequent looks at teenage girls' situations suggest that they encounter a myriad of self-esteem threatening problems not nearly so prominent during Rosenberg's early years of research, including obsession with body image and resulting eating disorders, sexual harassment in schools and peer groups, aggressive and insensitive treatment by boys, pressures toward alcohol and drug use, pressures toward earlier and sometimes unwanted sexual activity, isolation and alienation from parents, emotional stress, rising suicide rates, and self-mutilation (Carlip, 1995; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994). Large-scale studies clearly show that rates of these problems are much higher among adolescent girls than boys – and much higher among pubescent than younger girls (cf. Harris, Blum, & Resnick, 1991). Pipher (1994) observes in her clinical practice that much of the distress these young girls experience results from being forced to play out a socially mandated "false self" that directly contradicts the strengths they displayed earlier in their lives when they were living out their "true self." The tendency to be seen as a "sexual object" loomed large in descriptions of these difficulties. Donna Eder (1995) shows how discourse among adolescents proves limiting to both genders, but ultimately much more so for females. The ambiguity she finds in the messages given to young girls is echoed for adult women as well (Macke, Bohrnstedt, & Bernstein, 1979). In short, this literature suggests that reactions to social constraints or expectations can end up reducing (or heightening) levels of self-esteem.

Although much of this literature stresses the fact that problems seem to be especially severe for adolescent girls, recent evidence suggests that some of the same issues may also arise for women as they enter older age. Gore and Kunder (1996), for example, found that 46% of the women over age 50 in their sample had feelings of low self-esteem, revolving around such issues as body image, self-worth, and family and work roles. However, the evidence is mixed about how consistent these gender differences are throughout the life cycle. Many of the studies done with adults find no consistent gender differences in levels of self-esteem (Diedrick, 1991; Siegler, George, & Cath, 1983), especially among older adults, when women's self-esteem levels may become more indistinguishable from men's as they age (Reitzes, Mutran, & Fernandez, 1994). The differences that do appear can be accounted for in part by marital status (Macke, Bohrnstedt, & Bernstein, 1979), attempts to maintain congruence with traditional gender role expectations (Orr & Ben-

Eliahu, 1993; Stein, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1992), the gender-appropriateness of the subject or setting (Basow & Medcalf, 1988), or the type of measure used (McRae, 1991). Tarvis (1993) argues that higher levels of felt powerlessness and self-blame and lower levels of confidence thought to be true of women are actually true of both men and women who lack power.

Despite discrepancies in findings about gender differences in levels of self-esteem, consistent evidence shows that gender differences in *determinants* of self-esteem do persist into adulthood. Rosenberg showed in his 1965 book on adolescence and self-esteem that girls and boys have very different sets of self-values. For boys, the emphasis was more on mastery, for girls more on relationship building, foreshadowing the "ethic of justice" and "ethic of care" differences emphasized by researchers such as Gilligan (1982). These different self-values would presumably impact how much certain experiences affect self-esteem. Gecas and Seff's notion of compensation process could also be applied to gender differences, where "failure" or less success in certain areas may be written off by the individual as unimportant. For example, even though women may find it more difficult to be successful in the labor market (as measured by income and status position), traditional gender role definitions suggest that they may tend to underemphasize that type of success in its value to them. Whether or not this is actually true is open to question.

Following Gilligan's emphasis on the importance of connection for females versus the importance of autonomy for males, this literature shows support of one's family, peer support, reflected appraisals, and family relationships to be more important determinants of self-esteem for females of all ages, while such things as feelings of mastery, self-actualization, and academic performance are more important for males (Eskilson & Wiley, 1987; Orr & Dinur, 1995; Schwalbe & Staples, 1991; Stein, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1992; Zuckerman, 1989; Walker & Greene, 1986). These differences may even be true of preschoolers (Cramer & Skidd, 1992). One large study of Minnesota teenagers especially stresses the important role parental support or family connectedness plays for girls (Harris, Blum, & Resnick, 1991). That is not to say that success in the work or school worlds is not important for females, simply that the order of impact or the way they impact self-esteem may differ, and that social support seems to be even more important for females (cf. Hart, 1995). In fact, for certain groups of women, such as Asian-American women, self-esteem seems to go hand-in-hand with satisfaction with work, especially for androgenous women (Chow, 1987). Several of these gender differences have been found to be true in other countries as well, including the importance of emotional support from parents for girls in Belgium (Brutsaert, 1988, 1990), the importance of academic achievement for boys in Hong Kong (Cheung, 1986), and the importance of gender-appropriate self-images for both boys and girls in Israel (Orr & Ben-Eliahu, 1993).

The Importance of Structure and Agency

Gender differences in self-esteem – in levels *and* in the ways it interacts with other factors in the lives of males and females in our society – can be tied directly to the notion of structural imperatives. Certainly, males and females face very different structural expectations in certain areas of their lives. In other areas, they experience similar sets of expectations but differential access to resources that make living up to those expectations possible. One can easily make the argument that women ought to have lower levels of self-esteem, given their disadvantaged access to valued societal resources such as income and the often more negative notion of “femininity” compared to “masculinity” (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970). However, one could also argue this to be true of disadvantaged racial groups, yet it is not always the case. One can also easily argue that determinants of self-esteem ought to be very different for females and males.

The existence of different determinants of self-esteem for men and women suggests differences in both structural factors encountered *and* differences in how those factors are negotiated. We are especially interested in how individuals respond to the structure they encounter, experienced as both expectations and as constraints or barriers to meeting those expectations. Giddens (1991) emphasized that “identity” (by which he seems to also mean self-feelings) are maintained by the individual’s capacity to “keep a narrative going,” one that puts what is happening to him or her in a particular light. The success of these narratives is vitally important in determining self-esteem. Tarvis (1993) argued that the narratives or stories men and women tell about what happens to them mediate much of the impact we might presume of structural positions of disadvantage.

An important part of these narratives concerns attributions, especially the extent to which individuals believe they personally can have some impact on the situation. Gecas and Schwalbe (1983) have written about the importance of “agency” in the process of determining self-esteem. They talk about an “efficacy-based self-esteem,” arguing that it is intertwined with the concepts of agency, having control, making an impact, a sense of volition – going considerably beyond the more passive idea normally referenced by Cooley’s “looking glass self.” Gecas and Seff later (1989) showed that perceived self-worth and efficacy have important impacts on self-esteem, mediating much of the potential impact of occupational status factors among men. In a related vein, Meyers (1986) lays out the parameters of “self-respect,” arguing that it has to do with “envisaging and fulfillment of one’s own life plans” (p. 83).

Similar ideas are seen elsewhere in a complementary literature to that of the self-esteem literature, the feminist literature on self and self-feelings, which talks quite extensively about how women are impacted by societal expectations and how they might negotiate those expectations. Examples from that literature include standpoint perspectives (e.g., Smith, 1987, and

Hartsock, 1987), which seem to pick up from the interactionist's notion of subjective perceptions in their use of "relative realities." In this view, one's notion of (and feelings about) self would be dependent on one's immediate social surroundings, and one is fully capable of crafting active response to those surroundings. Anderson (1996) reconceptualizes structure as process to allow her to locate the agency displayed by women in various situations, when they work against the "matrix of domination" delineated by Collins (1990). Alternatively, Blee (1996) finds women in racist groups using their experiences there to advance their struggle to give coherence to a sense of self in the face of a self-perceived "weak, distorted, ignorant, directionless, and naive self and the construction of an all-knowing, committed, impassioned self" (p. 689). Deaux and Major (1990) emphasize the importance of interpreting the messages given to individuals, with an eye to women's concerns about self-verification and self-preservation in this interpretive process. Fiene (1991) shows how women living in an economically disadvantaged area (Appalachia) work hard and successfully to retain the ideal of wives and mothers and attempt to fulfill the same family ethic as women in other social classes. For them, the focus is on protecting and providing for their children. They construct their self-appraisals in terms of things they can actually accomplish. "They conceptualize their role as a succession of caretaking tasks related to the physical well-being of the children, and they believe this role is a lifelong responsibility" (p. 51). They are fiercely proud of their success in doing this in the face of often very great odds.

In pursuing these questions, we use "feminist practice theory," an approach developed by Rhoades (1996) to explain the relationship between powerful social systems that shape the lives of individuals and the diverse responses individuals make to those forces. This theory asserts that, as meaning is construed in the management of the tension between individual and structural-level influences, improvisations and strategies of subversive repetition are developed that eventually constitute new identities and related feelings about the self.

We test these ideas with two datasets. In doing so, we focus particularly on the social expectations surrounding the norm of individual accomplishment, which we phrase "individualism" or "the American dream." We ask how these expectations, absorbed by most members of society but differentially available to certain groups, function in the complex interweave of factors that give rise to self-esteem. We ask if there are factors that would prevent certain individuals from incorporating such basic expectations of American life.

We examine issues around self-esteem in two distinct samples. First, we consider this process among a group of women who currently find their life situations to be under siege – women currently or recently receiving public assistance. We trace their self-reported strivings to achieve their dreams, noting possible assaults on their levels of self-esteem and their active maneuvering to assuage those attacks. We also look at a group of Native-American men

and women, examining the impact of cultural precepts to mitigate the norms we accept in the first place. For this group, ideas about self and gender differ significantly from what is found in the mainstream culture. How then, does process differ for these individuals as they actively work to construct their self-feelings?

Model Proposed for Self Esteem

Using Giddens (1991) and feminist identity theorists, we extend Rosenberg's model for the maintenance of self-image and self-feelings to argue that the crucial activity here is the ability to keep a particular narrative going, regardless of assaults to that narrative from the external world.

We argue that the sequencing of factors is thus: (1) structure is encountered in the form of expectations communicated from those around us *and* in the form of barriers to realizing those expectations; (2) the individual responds, partly through the narratives one constructs and partly through the actions one takes, with the sense of efficacy being especially important here, as Gecas and Seff (1989) have found; (3) feminist practice theory (Rhoades, 1996) suggests an extension of the narrative-making and action-taking process by locating the ability of individuals to seize difficult cultural imperatives and, rather than reject them, embrace them as a vestige of hope from an alternative base; (4) self-feelings, including self-esteem, arise from the complex interplay of encountering structural imperatives and constraints and the individual's active maneuvering in the face of the resulting difficulties. Our data allow us to look particularly at the second and third steps of this process, although we also provide some suggestive looks at the other two.

METHOD

First, we analyze data collected from 740 individuals between August and October 1996 who were being impacted by welfare reform. Here, we see most clearly the impact of limited access to key societal resources. Respondents lived in ten communities in Wisconsin: Madison, Eau Claire, Appleton, La Crosse, Racine, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Stevens Point, Beloit, Janesville, and several contiguous far northwestern counties of the state. The purpose of the research was to ascertain the experiences of individuals being impacted by changes in current welfare policies in Wisconsin. We drew representative samples from each community, using census and state information about the demographics of both the low-wage/poverty *and* the AFDC populations. Our aim was to obtain a sample with characteristics midway between those two populations, as the work requirements of the state's new welfare programs were quickly blurring the distinction between the two. Comparisons of our sample with what is known about those two populations suggest that we were successful with our sampling strategy, for the most part. Table 12.1 shows that in terms of urban/rural distribution, earnings, and educational

Table 12.1. Comparison of the Poverty Community and AFDC Population in Wisconsin and Our Sample

	Race					
	White	Black	Am. Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Other
Poverty Community ^a	77%	15%	2%	4%	(Included in White)	2%
AFDC Community ^b	49%	41%	2%	1%	6%	1%
Sample	34%	56%	1%	1%	7%	1%
Urban vs. Rural Population						
	Urban	Urban/Rural	Rural/Urban	Rural		
Poverty Community	45%	13%	14%	28%		
AFDC Community	66%	11%	10%	14%		
Sample	60%	19%	18%	3%		
Educational Levels						
	< H.S.	H.S.	> H.S.	B.S./B.A.		
Wisconsin (whole) ^c	21%	37%	17%	25%		
AFDC Community	41%	43%	15%	1%		
Sample	36%	32%	27%	5%		
Earnings						
Poverty Level (3 Persons) ^d	\$12,278					
AFDC Population	\$4,440					
Sample	\$7,680					

^a Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Summary Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics in Wisconsin, 1989, Table 10, p. 248.

^b Source: National Integrated Quality Control System (QC) database of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as presented in Cancian, Maria and Meyer, Daniel, 1995, A Profile of the AFDC Caseload in Wisconsin: Implications for a Work-Based Welfare Reform Strategy. Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Interim Report.

^c Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 U.S. Census Data, Database: C90STF3A for Wisconsin.

^d Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Income and Poverty: 1995 Poverty Thresholds, Poverty Thresholds in 1995, by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years.

levels, our sample is positioned between the two comparison samples of the AFDC population and the entire poverty population, except that we have a higher proportion of those with post-secondary education. In terms of race, we had oversampled African Americans living in the city of Milwaukee, as this group was of widespread concern around the state.

The survey included structured questions about demographics, reasons for being in poverty, barriers to self-sufficiency, educational and work background, and income and expenses. We also included several open-ended questions about perceived needs to achieve self-sufficiency, current experiences and concerns about changing programs, and hopes for the future. In several communities, we also did focus group sessions with women to gain more depth information. With a triangulation of these data, we can see in some detail what their experiences and reactions were. These individuals, in the throes of maintaining a threadbare existence for themselves and their children against what they perceive to be increasing odds, were no doubt struggling explicitly with issues of self, self-esteem, and self-image. We note the centrality of expectations about "the American dream" as a factor in this process.

We then use a second dataset, collected from focused interviews with 29 American Indians in Wisconsin (most of them from the 11 federally recognized Indian groups in the state) to explore their construction of self and self-esteem in the context of a strikingly different set of cultural constraints around gender and difference. Beginning in the summer of 1993, the first author and a Native-American student assistant began traveling around Wisconsin, interviewing Native Americans about their notions (and experiences) of leadership. We spent much of our time visiting the reservations in the far northern part of the state and interviewing those who would be considered leaders from both a Native-American viewpoint (elders, healers, etc.), as well as those with leadership positions recognized by the outside society (directors of university centers and tribal programs, members of tribal councils, etc.). This was a purposive sample in which we obtained a mix of Indian people, representing what we knew to be important demographic variations in the group as a whole – those currently living on reservations and those living in the urban centers of the state, representatives of 7 of the 11 groups in the state (Ho-Chunk, Potawatomi, Menominee, Oneida, Ojibwe), those in various leadership positions. We also interviewed Indian people who belonged to nations not in the state – Navaho, Abanakee, Yurok, and Seminole. Table 12.2 shows that these individuals had experienced levels of marriage and divorce typical of U. S. society, had either large families or no children, represented a broad spectrum of age ranges, were very mixed in terms of level of education, and were equally likely to be working within tribal situations as without.

This was a depth interview study that focused on life views, achievement, workplace and leadership experiences, and problems encountered.

Table 12.2. Native Americans in Wisconsin

Marital Status	Men	Women
Married	58.3%	35.3%
Divorced	16.7%	35.3%
Never Married	16.7%	11.8%
Remarried	8.3%	5.9%
Widowed	0%	11.8%
Number of Children		
0	25%	11.8%
1		17.6%
3	41.7%	35.3%
4	16.7%	0%
5	0%	0%
6+	8.3%	11.8%
Age		
25–29	8.3%	5.7%
30–34	0%	5.7%
35–39	0%	11.8%
40–44	16.7%	17.6%
45–49	41.7%	29.4%
50–54	16.7%	5.7%
55–59	0%	0%
60–64	0%	11.8%
65–69	0%	5.7%
70+	16.7%	5.7%
Education		
High School	8.3%	5.7%
Associate Degree	25.0%	5.7%
Some College	8.3%	11.8%
College Degree	8.3%	35.3%
Graduate/Professional Degree	50.0%	35.3%
Type of Position		
University/Outside Program	50.0%	23.5%
Tribal Program	50.0%	64.7%
Traditional Tribal Role (not mutually exclusive)	16.7%	11.8%

Individuals were asked about many aspects of their lives related to their cultural experiences – childhood experiences, family and work involvement, leadership experiences and philosophy, relationships between their traditional cultures and that of the surrounding, mainstream society. In using these data, we focus in part on the import of the “relative gender economic power” posited by Blumberg (1991, p. 122) as a critical support of gender systems as they exist from culture to culture. (She cites the example of the Iroquois as an alternative model to what exists in our culture.) In addition to marked differences in perceptions of male and female relations and resources, a cultural difference around the importance, indeed desirability, of individualistic striving often supported the ability to ward off what might be devastating consequences for such things as self-esteem.

RESULTS: WOMEN NEGOTIATE THE WELFARE SYSTEM

Structural Constraints

The barriers the first group faced resulted from a complex interweave of gender and class. The feminization of poverty is hardly a new concept; U.S. women, on average, have always occupied the lower rungs on society’s socioeconomic ladder, although proportional numbers of single mothers living in poverty have increased significantly over the last several decades. Although the reasons for women’s disadvantaged economic position relative to men in this society are varied, they appear to be rooted at least in part in society’s expectation that women serve as the primary caretakers of children. Attempting to both fulfill their nurturing role *and* achieve success in the labor market can be complicated and difficult. This is particularly true for single mothers who cannot depend on partners to assist with child care or help the family attain economic self-sufficiency. A very high proportion of them end up living in poverty, often turning to public assistance for at least certain portions of their time as single mothers.

The stigma experienced by those on public assistance has been highlighted by a variety of social scientists (cf. Giddens, 1991, and Gordon, 1994). This stigma and its erosive effects on self-esteem may have heightened recently as public rhetoric about and actual strategies designed to drastically alter the welfare system have gained momentum. Such a system (Wisconsin Works or W-2) was coming into being in Wisconsin as these surveys were being administered, and, as with all instances of intense social change, common understandings that are normally part of the taken-for-granted background had come into high relief in the consciousness of these women. Hence, we were provided an excellent opportunity to see more clearly the ways in which structure, individual maneuvering, and resulting self-feelings are influenced by such pressures.

The barriers these women experienced are varied. First are the *stereotypes* they faced. As Gordon shows, throughout much of welfare’s history in this

country, mothers who received its benefits have been negatively characterized as lazy, immoral, and lacking in maternal commitment and skill. As Gilman (1985) explains, through stereotyping we project our own feelings onto a category of individuals, institutions, or ideas. Gradually these projected feelings become naturalized to the extent that incredible suppositions become transformed into rigidly defined and commonly embraced “truths.” Although these stereotypes were rarely mentioned explicitly by the women we surveyed, they seemed to underlie much of what was said.

The women did speak directly to other barriers they encountered. As is typical of single women trying to support children in this society, they often found themselves *lacking in material support*. Table 12.3 shows that these women believed problems with wages, job preparation, and access to child-care were the most formidable barriers preventing their movement out of poverty. Figure 12.1 shows that the jobs they have had have been very low paying and short lasting. Thus, they have not found the resources they felt they needed to support their families and move permanently into economic self-sufficiency.

Quite a few of these women mentioned problems paying bills as a major difficulty for them, “I just have a big problem paying my rent,” “I have to make the choice of whether to have a house with no gas or light or have gas & lights credit with no home to live,” and “Can’t pay my bills on time.” One woman said in exasperation, “I can’t afford *anything*!” Problems with wages were seen as the underlying problem, “I need a job that will include insurance and a decent wage.” Their sentiments are perhaps best summed up by the following statement, “I need all the support I can get because it’s hard out there in the world.”

Most of their comments to the open-ended questions related to material needs for (1) meaningful employment with an adequate wage to support a family; (2) child care that is safe, affordable, and dependable; (3) and education and training to facilitate self-sufficiency. One respondent put it suc-

Table 12.3. Factors Preventing Economic Security

Wages too low	52%	Not able to keep wages when working and receiving AFDC	28%
Do not have required job or education skills for higher wage employment	48	Ineligible for services	12
Lack of safe and affordable child care	46	Abusive relationship	11
No medical insurance	44	Disability	0
Inadequate or no child support	29	Other	0

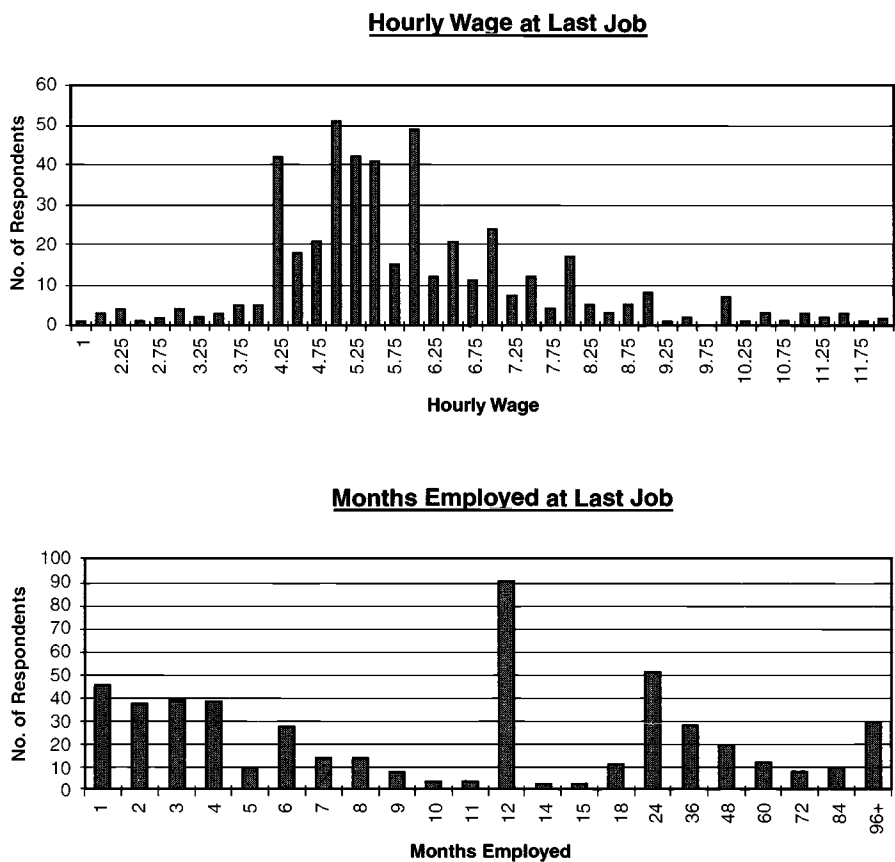


Figure 12.1. Hourly wages and months employed at last job of low-income women.

cinctly, “We need more financial aid for education and we need adequate low paying day care, and we need better high quality paying jobs.” The consistency of these themes is remarkable given substantive differences among the research participants in terms of race, ethnicity, geographic location, age, and level of health to mention only a few variables. This is not to suggest that individual differences do not matter. Rather, it is to argue that despite vast individual differences among and between these women, their narratives reflecting self-esteem and self-feelings share many features.

Finally, other barriers these women face involve difficulties begun in adolescence, that may well have carryover into adulthood. For example, Table 12.4 shows that the majority of these women first found themselves being forced into poverty when they had a child while single. As the literature sug-

Table 12.4. Circumstances Originally Forced Them into Poverty

Had child while single	54%	Illness of self	10%
Cannot find job	27	Disability	9
Divorce/separation	21	Illness of family member	6
Lost job	17	Death of wage earner	2
Forced to leave work	12	Other	2
Job ending	31		
Pregnancy	15		
Medical reason	15		

gests, much of this early sexual activity is not entirely consensual, with a number of these pregnancies occurring during the adolescent period when it appears young girls' self-esteem is under heavy attack. It is not clear how such pregnancies impact or result from levels of self-esteem, but the mix of problems young girls face suggest complex and ongoing implications that may last long into the future.

Expectations

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of these findings is the very low tendency for these women to reject dominant societal expectations they seem to not be living up to. Classic self-esteem theory might lead us to predict that they would do so, adopting countercultural sets of expectations as a way of preserving their sense of self. Actually, the opposite seemed to be the case. The stories of self we heard from them borrowed from, and in many instances replicated, what we came to call the drama of the American Dream, even though it was a dream that remained distant for most of them.

It is important to contextualize the American Dream as a familiar and revered rhetorical convention that defines and supports much of the success ideology in Euroamerican society. The American Dream, fueled by the notion that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed, dictates that if you go to school, stay out of trouble, and work hard, then you will achieve economic and personal success. What remains unstated in this imperative is the difficulty some members of our society experience in gaining access to the substance of success because of society's hierarchical structure that privileges some groups over others. Because this structure remains hidden, society's playing field – where we all assemble as participants in making and remaking society – is commonly perceived as level when it is actually favorably tilted in the direction of individuals who most closely fit society's ideal (i.e. white, male, Christian, middle class, young, heterosexual, etc.). These women, as a group, seemed to definitely embrace the common per-

ception, believing in the end that they would be successful if they just worked hard enough. They had set their sights on obtaining many of the material means of support that had so far eluded them. One respondent summed up these dreams by stating, "I want a living wage, job, driver's license, nice house, fenced yard, a man, decent neighborhood, a good education for my children."

Our society's strong belief in the possibility of individual achievement also operates to blame the individual for society's failing, and this belief is often at the root of the negative stereotypes used to categorize disadvantaged people. One survey respondent seemed to be seeing this when she said: "Something needs to be done to help the women on welfare to better themselves as opposed to punishing them. We need better alternatives." But many of these women, while fearing that they will always be excluded from the American Dream, simultaneously embraced its tenets. For example, one survey respondent explained: "I am a bit confused. Because I know I have to make it for my kids' sake and at times I feel that I'm not going to make it." She then answered her own concerns by evoking aspects of the American Dream when she concluded, "If I could finish school and start my continuing education in being a Register (*sic*) nurse I will be on the road to success."

Ascribing to the American Dream seems to involve individualistic notions of responsibility for success. These women seemed to be accepting the idea that it was pretty much up to them to succeed for themselves and their families. However, there was also an element of social responsibility in their perspectives. Several asked for "help in keeping my goal" or "community support," and for "government agencies that are to help people ... regardless of the restrictions." One woman, apparently believing a social contract was being violated in the new welfare policies, asked, "If trying – why not help?"

Another strong societal prescription these women ascribed to was the importance for mothers to adequately provide for and raise children. This framed many of their concerns about the new policies. One woman observed: "I worry about how difficult it will be to have children, since it seems almost impossible to raise kids and keep a household running effectively." And another worried more generally that "children are currently being put too low on the priority list with the nation's government."

Narratives

In dealing with their current circumstances, these women devised narratives that showed them as motivated, hard working and taking care of their children. For example, they worked hard to function as good parents, to find adequate, safe, affordable child care, and/or to find a way to remain at home with their children by starting their own business. One survey respondent described her situation this way:

I have to sacrifice the time I have for my children for work and education. (F)inding good child care still doesn't make up for the care that a mother can give so I'm working towards becoming self-employed so I can spend more time with my children.

Another mother expressed similar ambivalence about leaving a young child while she worked "(P)lease give me time to get my children off to a headstart." These women faced a double bind as they were required to enter the workforce when they considered their children too young to be left in the care of someone else or did not have suitable options for child care. Like many mothers of young children, these women preferred to care for their children so they could give them the "headstart" they needed, and they struggled to realize these goals despite the new work requirements. In one of the focus groups a concerned mother explained that "I don't want my kids to end up on the streets. I don't want them to end up going around feeling angry and distrusting of people. Now my kids don't trust me because they don't think I'm coming home." Another mother added, "If I were staying home with my kids, it wouldn't be considered valuable."

For most – if not all – research respondents, the realization of dreams are inextricably linked to their need for economic stability for themselves and their families. Welfare reform was complicating the efforts of this woman:

I am grateful to AFDC/WIC system that has enabled me to leave a domestic violence situation and allowed me time with my first and last child (I am 45 and he is now 3). I'm also able to help my ill elderly parents. In return, I am attending [college] to become a teacher in an inner city school and repay my debt to society at large. However, I was told a few weeks ago that I will not be funded past next June. I was told I could attend a two-year program. Such confusion and upset! Contradictions everywhere it seems.

Another survey respondent also noted these contradictions as she described how her hopes for her children are inextricably linked to education and economic comfort:

I went to college so that I can earn a living wage for my children and me. I want my children to play safely and have an opportunity to be educated. I want to raise socially responsible, morally responsible and psychologically sound children who are capable of coping and dealing with society with all its ills. They must have a mother who isn't stressed out over every penny so that when clothes are accidentally ruined I don't flip out over how I am going to provide for that expense and rip unjustly on the unfortunate child. This comes with a livable income.

The willingness to work hard was consistently a part of the narratives they constructed for themselves:

I don't mind working, but I don't want to be demeaned just because I have used the welfare system. I just would like to work a job I enjoy doing and not some-

thing they say I have to. I don't mind finding work at all or furthering my education.

Others stressed their insistence for situations that would maintain their dignity: "I want a job where the employer will treat me with respect and a job that is going to pay enough to support a family," and "I need a decent job. I don't want to depend on public assistance."

Self-Efficacy and Stories of Self

Most of the women in this study created stories of self to mediate the effects of morally transgressive stereotypes and position themselves as having some control over their and their children's lives. They not only spoke of their willingness to work hard, but these comments are also replete with instances in which they actually *were* working very hard toward their goals. Many of them were already working hard to find a job. One enterprising respondent even used the survey as a way: "I need a job right now. Can you help?" Other activities were also mentioned, "These changes are making me work harder," and "Feel better working" (even though many women were unhappy with the quality of their work assignments). Many of them were doing several things at once:

I'm working on my GED & will be taking clerical classes & I'm also certified through family services (nurturing certificate).

I work but need to continue my college career.

It's hard to work and go to school.

I refuse to work and not get paid. I am in school and will be starting my clinicals next semester, but they are trying to pull me out of school.

Self-Esteem as a Result

Both Rosenberg's (1965) original model of self-esteem and Gecas and Seff's (1990) more recent formulations allow for processes such as the "compensation process" to mediate the impact of negative social feedback. According to Gecas and Seff (1989, p. 356) "our self-evaluations of our virtue or moral worth on the one hand, and our competence or efficacy on the other" ultimately have the greatest direct impact on self-esteem. And we have seen that these women created masterful narratives to keep in place some aspect of efficacy and control and self-worth. So, how do they end up feeling about themselves?

Negative Reactions

The data present a kaleidoscope of feelings and concerns as these women stand on the shifting ground of welfare reform. Many did describe feeling dazed, confused, or depressed in light of the degree of changes in their daily lives and the rapidity with which these changes are being implemented. Here are some examples:

It's very stressful, it takes a lot out of a person to do what they want them to and try to keep up.

No sleep. Don't eat as much, lost weight, less patience. Keep me from going Bible studies.

We worry each and every day about how we're going to make it if they just cut out welfare. With it being no good paying job for us.

It's causing me to be stressed all the time. I can't concentrate, it's too hard.

Devastating.

Hard impact, can't keep wages when I work, depressing struggling everyday.

Others expressed hopelessness, such as the woman who described her situation as "looking bleak." A similar hopelessness emerged when they described their hopes and dreams for the future in the following ways:

It would do no good for me to have hopes and dreams.

I can't afford to have dreams.

If I had a dream, it would not come true.

When asked to comment on the new welfare changes, one survey respondent wrote, "It's like a dark box." In a similar vein, a focus group member commented that she felt like "a shadow on a wall" and another survey respondent wrote, "I am worth more dead than alive. When dead I'm not making any expenses." These comments eloquently capture the depth of despair and the loss of control some of these women are experiencing.

These expressions of hopelessness were interspersed by occasional statements of anger. The following response typifies how this anger was expressed:

I would like to tell you that right now I feel angry and degraded by the system. I guess I do not have any dreams for the future as of yet. Any type of dream I have had has been shot down by Human Services. I hope to become self sufficient to be able to support my family and not to rely on the welfare system.

Another woman said, "I hope that I won't never have to deal with this nonsense again once I get a job ... I have been played with too long and I'M NOT GONNA TAKE IT ANYMORE!"

Given the depth and extent of the changes required by the new welfare reforms and the feelings of powerlessness that many of these women experience over the processes that are reframing their lives, one might logically expect more responses that connote outrage and despair. But the data reveal a much more complex contour of responses.

These women were also concerned about living up to the expectations they had accepted for themselves. Being good mothers was foremost among

these expectations. One mother reflected on the erosion of family life she and her children are experiencing now that she must participate in the workforce to retain some public assistance benefits:

It is ten times more difficult for me to have a relationship with my kids now than it was before. Six nights a week they are tucked into bed by someone else. ... The new programs are destroying what family values are. They are destroying what people need to go on. They destroy your morale and self-esteem.

And another mother put it even more simply, "It's taking time away from my baby and making me feel like a no one."

Overriding concerns for their children who represent much of their perceived cultural capital and who also embody their hopes for a better future constitute a major factor influencing how these women are able to experience some sense of control over their lives. This finding is consistent with Fiene's (1991) observation that Appalachian women living with economic disadvantages worked hard and successfully to retain the ideal of wives and mothers as they attempted to fulfill the same family ethic as women in other social classes. These women also cited protecting and providing for their children as a central component of their self-esteem, although they mostly hoped to do this by being successful in the labor market as well as by being a nurturing mother. Many in our sample held out tentative, guarded hope for their children. One noted, "I hope that my kids won't inherit my poverty, they deserve much more."

These women might also be feeling confused about the messages they are receiving about the importance of child rearing. A trend is suggested, for example, in countless features in popular women's magazines about how middle-class women are gladly leaving their careers for "all the comforts of home." It is ironic that against the backdrop of this middle-class social landscape, women in poverty are being required to leave their young children for the sake of employment.

Hopes for the Future

Some women remained hopeful through spiritual beliefs and showed this by thanking God, praising Jesus, or referring to a higher power as the guiding force helping them endure their circumstances. Others, however, showed confidence in their own abilities. Despite their considerable concern about their situation, many of these women remained hopeful that they could accomplish their goals. One woman summarized these goals well by stating, "I need a good paying job and someone I can trust to watch my children." Here are just a few of the hopeful projections they made:

I hope to become my own boss one day real soon. To have a business that I could leave to my children as well as have investments into a reputable company. Also some properties and land. I would like to finish school, get a nice job and get off

of welfare so that I can be a independent person and own my own business and raise my children.

To succeed for myself and my children.

I hope I can get a good paying job to support my family the right way and forget about welfare.

I hope that I can count on myself to provide for my family. ... I want to get my apprenticeship in brick-laying which will take me 3 yrs...

Be off welfare have a good job and a nice car and house.

I hope to find a adequate job to support my family, which is the most important asset in the world.

Would like to finish school to become a police office, and not be pressured to get off AFDC to work.

In the future I would like to have a successful job and a beautiful home. I would like to work for what I want.

Summary

The stigmatized situation these women contended with arose largely from their disadvantaged position as women in a mostly low-wage market. Gender heightened these difficulties by making economic success more difficult *and* by the sexual stigmas and innuendos they also faced. They used both traditional gender norms (the good mother), as well as more basic cultural norms (the American Dream) to bolster their sense of self and keep their confidence and sense of worth on a more even keel than one might otherwise expect. This next sample gives an interesting contrast, by showing the process through which mainstream cultural expectations can be rejected, in large part by rejecting the notion of hierarchical gender relations.

INSIGHTS FROM NATIVE-AMERICAN CULTURES

Barriers

The Native-American individuals we interviewed faced many of the same barriers encountered by the women living in poverty. Many of them had actually experienced poverty themselves – at least during part of their lives – because this is disproportionately true of Native Americans in general in our society. Although many currently held professional positions, they often recalled these times, saying, “After that office job terminated I lived on the street,” “Part of my life was spent on skid row,” or “I grew up in extreme poverty and alcoholism in the home.” And many were still dealing with some level of economic insecurity.

Discrimination and stigmatization were also issues. They recalled being mistreated at school (being called a “dirty Indian” or automatically placed in

“shop track”), denied housing, or refused service in restaurants. One woman told this story:

I remember going into ... a restaurant to eat ... I was sitting at the counter with my girlfriend ... this real elderly lady came in with a little girl about four and she sat down at the counter and they went up to her and told her “I’m sorry but we don’t serve Indians here.” ... She just got up ... and started to walk out, and I said “What did you say?” and she said, “We don’t serve Indians here.” I said, “Well, what do you think I am?” and she said, “Oh, well you’re a Menominee Indian, you’re not a Chippewa.”

And several of the men recalled brutal treatment on the part of specific teachers. Forced attendance at Indian boarding schools had been especially problematic. While at these schools, they had not been allowed to speak their own language, dress traditionally, or maintain other cultural traditions, leading many to proclaim that “through boarding schools ... a lot of our culture was destroyed.”

Traditional culture had also been undermined by other forms of mainstream government interference into the internal workings of these groups. Through a series of constantly changing policies toward Indian nations, the federal government had dictated critical changes in their internal governing structure:

All tribal communities ... had a government structure. ... The one that started ... during the history of Indian government relations ... back in 1934 when they had the Indian Reorganization Act and asked tribes to adopt the “federal form of government” ... the Menominees argued about that ... and at first told them they were not going to do that because, if I remember the words of some of the leaders, “Why should we change our form of government; it’s worked for us for thousands of years.” ... Early on the Menominee tribe ... had their structure of government that was actually interweaved with the social structure and the religious structure and everything of the community.

In the end, many of these issues went to the very heart of our interest in this chapter. Tribal or cultural identity, the sense of self that, as we will see, proved to be so important to these individuals, was an issue open for constant negotiation. In many situations, they had to handle contested identities, working to restore them to full functioning. Here is one example:

“Are you an Indian or not an Indian?” ... “Is it a political ... economic ... spiritual thing?” ... Here it’s ¼ and if you’re not ¼ you’re out, that’s it, forget it, doesn’t matter you were born ... raised here.

Expectations

Despite the major problems confronted by many of these individuals – poverty, assaults on their cultural base for identity, prejudice, and discrimination – a remarkably consistent and intact picture of Native-American cul-

tural expectations emerged from these interviews. In this case, mainstream cultural imperatives such as the American Dream were *not* embraced; in fact, they were quite clearly rejected. However, their own cultural imperatives were held to quite strongly, even in the face of obstacles that made it very difficult to fully live them out.

Sense of Self

For one thing, these individuals tended to construct the self in much different terms – not in an individualistic sense, but in a more fully social and connected sense. Here is how one woman framed her considerable success at attaining a PhD:

My family and I talked about the “I” and the “we,” all the pressure there was when I was going to school to be this “I,” to climb the old ladder, claw your way up to success. ... I’m a part of a “we” and I’ve never lost sight of that ... Because of the “we,” this community and my family, I can do all of this...

Others talked about the importance of working well as a group and steps they took in their own leadership positions to nurture a sense of collective effort. This was often discussed in terms of specific cultural practices:

Every Monday morning ... we use the talking circle because ... it helps us if there’s any problems with each other ... we’re connected with each other.

This connected approach reveals an underlying perspective that one exists in a web of movement, that the individual is not the prime mover. Hence, there were also comments concerning the notion of “going with the flow,” mentioned by quite a few of these individuals, rather than “making things happen,” the more mainstream notion of efficacy and effectiveness. With these individuals, it was important to discover one’s place in the total weave of things and play that part well. As one man put it, “It’s just ... acceptance ... as part of a process, you’re in balance with the world around you, rocks, trees.”

Serving Others

Given this heightened sense of self as connected and a lower priority on an individualistic self, reasons for behavior, in this case doing leadership, revolved much more around the good one could do for others.

What ... I’ve been taught and ... observed in the Indian community is that when you do something you’re doing it for the common good of everybody ... knowing that ... you’re doing your best to serve other people ... that’s the best role that you can hope to play, to serve other people well, not to serve yourself.

The importance of being of service rested largely on the notion of inherent equality of all things:

All things are of equal importance ... every experience that I have ... is important to me. ... I am not better than a squirrel or a blade of grass; I am given the gift of life by the Great Spirit in the same way...

Proper Treatment of Others

From these comments emerged a clear code of conduct with respect to how others should be treated. One major imperative was the use of *consensus*. All people deserved to have their opinions considered.

it's important for everybody to feel good by having their ideas valued. ... Leadership doesn't belong to one person, it belongs to all the people who are in the circle.

a school administrator said to me once when we were in big chaos, "the thing I've noticed about your people ... it doesn't matter who's talking, everybody listens ... the guy might be a total idiot, nobody tells him to sit down and shut up, they let him have his piece and when he's done he sits down and the next person talks. "Why do you put up with that ... letting this idiot talk?" and I said, "Everyone has the right to their opinion and we respect that."

This sensibility appeared to be deeply rooted in traditional cultural practice. Many of these individuals referred to a tradition in which "everything was consensual ... everyone had a voice." Several men and women said this tradition could still be seen in tribal council meetings, despite mainstream pressure for them to adopt a more bureaucratic, "Roberts Rules of Order" approach:

even though ... our Council ... that was forced upon us ... federal policy ... modeled after government of the larger society ... in fact ... you really still have some real strong traditional practices which means forget Roberts Rules of Order ... if somebody from the community has issues, they can interrupt whether it's the agenda item or not ... they can speak as long as they choose to speak ... so there's some real democratic practices that are still going on.

The notion of giving everyone a voice was, in turn, based on the norm that everyone ought to be *treated with respect*. This respect was emphasized in the prescribed way one "ought" to work with others; as one woman put it, "just a genuine caring about people, a respect for people ... a focus on helping them find their strength ... [an] element of equality as opposed to status differences."

The importance of allowing autonomy for people to develop and events to unfold as they might was mentioned by quite a few of these individuals. A man and a woman said this:

Your job is to nurture ... that particular animal ... flower ... tree ... individual. ... If you will nurture them, they'll grow to their fullest capacity of what they're meant to be on this earth. ... It's when you interfere with them that causes the

problems. ... We do that with children ... we don't allow them to naturally grow to their own ... potential. We're always trying to impose some ... of our little twists and bends on them.

...you have a Native American style of things ... allowing kids to try things, experiment, skin their knees, fall out of a tree, make mistakes, not getting too upset about it ... letting people learn the lessons by doing it and being there and being supportive. ... It's very different than having lots and lots of rules.

Gender Balance

Another significant cultural difference in this situation was the tendency for women to be accorded very high respect. Partly from the notion that balance, in general, was a worthy goal to pursue, women and men together were seen as integrally important for society's functioning.

Everything has to be in order, everything has to go in harmony – nature and man, man and man, man and a woman – everybody has to go together.

Traditional gender systems within these cultural groups were essentially seen as balanced, rather than hierarchical. One woman said:

the other thing that's different in our culture ... is we've always had this understanding. ... It comes through in the stories ... that for men and women there's an equal balance ... a complementary ... understanding that we ... couldn't be without each other.

Male and female roles were both deemed essential to the healthy functioning of the group. One woman and man said these things:

Men ... especially the ones who have been more traditionally oriented, are heavily influenced by women. ... The women will do a lot of things to make sure that the man looks good. ... He's representing the tribe, the family ... at the same time, a male needs to ... respect the women's roles and always will.

...I think Indian women that come from the traditional perspective ... if they are walking in that position in their own community ... are held in usually very high regard. ... I simply cannot talk back to an Indian woman. ... The acknowledgment is there, their power to give life men don't have, it's just there, it's innate within them ... I respond ... that way.

Many respondents also commented on Indian women's decision-making power. Several women said this:

The backbone of our government system down here is really women. ... Oh, men have an office but it's really women. ... There might be a man in charge of the ... program. ... There's men working in the tribal office, but primarily it's women, especially in the more important programs. ... Women have always been looked on as leaders ... regarded as being very special. ... In the Iroquois way, you probably know, the women select the chiefs and also can impeach them.

Contrasts with Dominant Culture

These individuals totally embraced these cultural imperatives of equality, treating others with respect, giving voice to all, honoring women's role. The expectations they encountered within their own group stand in marked contrast to many of those encountered by the women living in poverty. Unlike that group, this group did *not* embrace dominant cultural imperatives. In fact, they were often quite clear in rejecting them. Many of their comments drew distinct contrasts between their own and mainstream culture, and they were especially critical of the rule-oriented, exploitative society they perceived to exist around them. Here are just a few of those comments:

Dominant leadership tends to be still a feudal type of mentality ... the kings and the aristocracy on top of the pyramids ... the masses on the bottom and so most of the resources are confined to the people on the top ... and then it's ... doled out incrementally...

You take the industry or the military concept of leadership ... to a lesser degree, in university. ... Micro-management sort of style ... to an extreme ... to a point where it's oppressive, not healthy for the individual. ... Very highly ... bureaucratic.

It's a different world. ... There's something in me ... that ... rebels ... Everything has to be defined in a certain way that will be acceptable within the university environment. ... I think the university is male-dominated ... majority-culture dominated.

With Native groups it's not as rigid ... structured. ... In non-Indian groups ... it's very structured and you end up with people in leadership positions that have no business being in leadership positions ... that authority ego stuff.

Principles of consensus and equality were also evident in these comments specifically about leadership:

I think what's different for American Indian people is that leadership is considered a burden ... because you have responsibility for all these people so the pyramid gets switched upside down ... you're a leader at the point, up at the apex of it, the rest of it is all sitting on your shoulders as opposed to switching the other way around.

This idea of equality was put in terms of the circle, sometimes explicitly opposed to a pyramid or hierarchy. A woman said:

When I think of the value systems, I think of the difference between a hierarchy and a circle. ... In a circle all things are a part of the same thing ... each point on that circle is important. ... To me ... the hierarchy means ... some people are considered better than others because they have one thing or another. ... I think you do have to make choices about which value system you're going to live by. ... That hierarchy value system that I'm talking about is sort of a lie.

Culture as Empowering/Giving Efficacy

Embracing cultural principles had also enabled this group to maintain a sense of control or efficacy. Many respondents believed that using these principles had enabled them to create structures and programs that achieved valued goals. One woman created an entire curriculum this way:

My specialty is ... cultural based curriculum ... [I] did a case study on the Iroquois ... all focusing around corn ... showing how you could use corn as a ... focus and teach about whole culture ... so it was an exciting dissertation.

She believed its use by the tribal school would greatly enhance community life. Another created an award-winning, nationally recognized alcohol and drug curriculum:

That was real interesting ... using the culture as a strength to build upon ... when I started 10 years ago ... we ... thought ... alcohol was a problem but what are we gonna do, we've tried everything there is to try as far as the non-Indian way ... well ... let's bring it back ... that's what keeps the people together.

Gaming had provided another opportunity to feel efficacious:

Oh, we're in whirlwind state right now ... it's the first time we've had an economy since ... 1700s. ... It's enabled us to do many things. ... People can't come and shove stuff down our throat anymore ... What we're about is the business of ... empowering Indian people.

Efficacy Redefined

Because the individual was seen in such social terms, efficacy took on a totally different meaning. Doing was not only individually located; it also involved finding one's place, "going with the flow," *allowing* things to happen. Blending various elements together was also admired. One woman got this feedback from one of her students:

One of our students came in and she said, "You've shown me that you can be who you are as a traditional person and also that you can do work that is an essence of who you are, so you're living that all together" and she said, "How do you do that?" She says, "I wanna know how to do that with my life."

How They End Up Feeling about Themselves

Several of these individuals focused on the low levels of self-esteem they believed this group had, in general, saying things like, "Most of them didn't feel very good about themselves." Most of them, however, seemed to have within-group efficacy. Many also seemed to now feel very good about themselves personally as they recounted success stories, often around obtaining education, something many of the women in poverty had not been in a position to do. Unlike the women in poverty, this group is still receiving support from the government to go to school.

20 years ago when I started out ... in teaching ... I established two goals for myself, one was to come back here and run a school like I'm doing now, so I fulfilled that one. ... The other one I had was to eventually finish up some advanced degrees and ... try to teach at the university or college level either in history or education so that's one ... I'm still working on.

I quit school for a while to have the baby but then I decided I was gonna go back to school and I was gonna do it no matter what and show everybody. ... Maybe it was stubbornness or wanting to show people I can do it. ... When the master's program came up I hadn't really thought about going on but ... it just sounded so good ... get a master's in 12 months instead of two years and then the scholarship was available and I got accepted so ... I went for it.

[My daughter] was the one who urged me to go back and try it once I got a little better. ... I said, "No ... I don't wanna go through that." ... I had put in two years, she said, "Well, you can quit if you want to, Mom." ... I said... "I don't wanna." ... She kept after me 'till finally I said, "Okay, I will" but I hate to fail at things. ... So I went back, well then I was grateful 'cause I did make those two years, got my degree. ... The first three weeks of school, every day I came home I said, "I'm gonna quit ... what are they talking about notes. ... I don't even know if I'm taking the right kind ... whatever they call notes" ...but I had to try it.

But, perhaps more important, positive self-feelings were often seen to arise from finding and maintaining one's identity as an American Indian and practicing cultural precepts.

I'm grateful, around here you got the woods, that's gotta be preserved ... being Indian is more than just basket-making or dancing or whatever ... it's being fully alive ... knowing who you are because you do have a fairly good culture.

I researched all these Native American legends and won an award for the paper and my mother was very proud of me and very happy so she said, "Well I guess I should tell you, you're Indian" and I was just overwhelmed, I was just so happy. It made such a difference in my life to have that identity. ... 'cause that's our identity ... and that's what helped me through my life that I have that belief system, I believed in the Creator ... the Spirits and there's strength in there.

Actually *doing* the ceremonies and knowing the traditions resulted in feelings of self-worth:

I had the opportunity once to meet Wilma Mankiller ... you feel her strength and she'll tell you ... why she's so strong is because she believes in the ways ... the ceremonies, that helps her, it keeps her clear mind.

I identify as an Oneida person, I try to live my life in the Native American values as much as I can ... I get up in the morning – every morning – and say the opening prayer in the Oneida language.

As a Native woman who is trying to recover as much of the traditional practices I can, I'm someone who I believe has held the traditional values in my heart forever ... we have sage and cedar here and when I come in in the morning I

burn the sage and try to cleanse myself so I'm real clear for the day ... I really just pray that I do everything in a good way.

Being away from these things could be troubling. A woman and man talked about this:

I sometimes feel very isolated ... because I'm not with Native people anymore ... you have to have something that feeds your soul ... I really feel the isolation ... when you're around Native people they start laughing and they joke and they do all these things that develop camaraderie.

I was happy then ... to wake up in the morning and greet the sun ... to walk out of my own home and not be afraid of having to experience anything like what's going on in the cities, like drive-by shootings, all this discrimination. ... I didn't have any of that ... some Native Americans ... who have become street people in the cities, I'd run into some of them and that was just enough to ... tell me to "go home, this isn't for you, look at them" so I'd go home ... I'd be happy ... cities were too depressing for me ... I'd rather have it this way than that way, more secure and you feel more at ease, more comfortable.

Both men and women made these comments, although women often talked at greater length about them. The absence of a gender hierarchy, in general, seemed to lead to similar experiences for men and women, opening up the space for men and women to mutually support each other in a way that was rarely mentioned by the women living in poverty.

DISCUSSION

These results suggest ways that gender may enter into the process individuals use to construct narratives that mediate between structural constraints and expectations and, eventually, to impact self-esteem. Findings from women negotiating changes in the welfare system show how difficult-to-achieve cultural expectations may actually be embraced, rather than rejected by those in danger of not achieving them. Working hard to achieve those goals, against difficult odds, appears to become a source for bolstering self-esteem. This hard work seems to provide some of the energy this stigmatized group of women needs to "keep on with the struggle." The importance of caring for children, a peculiarly feminine task in our society, forms a good part of the base for this effort. Commitment to caring for children, even in trying economic circumstances, seems to take on almost religious fervor. However, these women focus most strongly on the need to provide economically for themselves and their children. Overall, their success is seen to rest largely on their own doing, even though several do mention support from families.

The results from the Native Americans show the importance of examining underlying assumptions in our models for these processes. For these

individuals, most aspects of life are cast in more connected terms. They do not see their eventual success as resting on their own efforts, but credit the group or community effort necessary in all things. Neither do they assess their own efficacy in terms of individual effort, but rather in terms of their ability to ascertain their proper place in a process, and to "go with the flow." Largely because they reject a hierarchal arrangement of gender, but rather construct one based on the notion of gender balance, men and women seem able to more effectively support one another in their attempts to maintain acceptable levels of self-esteem.

Both sets of data show the importance of norms and expectations accepted by the individual in determining how one will come to feel about oneself. They also show how gender enters into many of our mainstream societal notions to produce downward pressures on women's sense of self and self-feelings that are only resisted with a great deal of effort. But most important, they illuminate some of the ways in which narratives are constructed to produce feelings of efficacy, even in very trying circumstances, and ultimately bolster levels of self-esteem. Cultural supports work in very different ways for the two groups included here, but they function to produce very similar results. These patterns help us understand why groups we might expect to have relatively low levels of self esteem, in fact think very well of themselves.

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13 Bereavement and the Loss of Mattering

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INTRODUCTION

Mattering is an important, albeit overlooked, component of self-concept. First specified by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981), it is potentially a powerful analytic tool. Rosenberg and McCullough viewed it as having multiple dimensions. First, it is based on one's understanding that he or she is the object of another's attentions. Individuals are not likely to harbor a sense of mattering to a person if they are not an object on whom that person focuses at least some attention. Moreover, in order for attention to contribute to the sense of mattering, the attention must be of a certain quality; specifically, it needs to convey the understanding that one is a valued and important object to the other. The sense of mattering is thus based on the individual's conviction that what he or she thinks, wants, or does is of salient concern to others.

A third dimension of mattering, central to the analysis presented in this chapter, is one's perception that others depend on her or him for something needed or wanted. The recognition that another person depends on us can be, according to Rosenberg and McCullough, a powerful reinforcement of mattering. As we will detail, the sense of mattering that stems from the knowledge that the satisfaction of the vital needs of another person depends on our assistance is a pivotal source of mattering in the population being studied here. We will show that the loss of that source can have deleterious consequences.

Of course, not everyone who is attentive to us or regards us as being important and a person on whom they depend will leave us with a sense of mattering. Individuals on whom our sense of mattering rests must be significant others. For us to matter to them typically requires that they are of mattering significance to us. Thus mattering is a result of being both a donor of

needed supportive attention to significant others and of being the perceived recipient of such attention. Although Rosenberg and McCullough did not directly discuss the reciprocal exchange of *mattering* in social relationships, it seems to be implicitly embedded in the very nature of the construct.

Mattering is one of those rare constructs that immediately resonates with intuitive sense. Some hint of the power and significance of the construct emerges when we consider what the inner lives of people would be like if they were void of any sense of *mattering*. One can only guess at the overwhelming feeling of insignificance harbored by the hypothetical person who *matters* little or not at all. At worst, the person would regard him or herself as utterly invisible to others or, at best, as being noticed by others but with utter indifference. It is patently understandable that one cannot be without a sense of *mattering* and, at the same time, enjoy a state of well-being. *Mattering*, we submit, is one of the foundation blocks of psychological well-being.

It can also be underscored that *mattering* is closely interrelated to other self-concepts, self-esteem in particular. Indeed, it is its relationship to self-esteem that probably initially drew Rosenberg's attention to the *mattering* construct. As in the case of its general significance to mental health, the association of *mattering* and self-esteem requires no elaborate interpretation. As we empirically indicate later in this chapter, the worth that one places on one's self is contingent to an appreciable extent on one's perceived importance and worth to others. From this perspective, we would expect that a keen sense of *mattering* and an elevated self-esteem would be close companions.

Despite its appeal, however, and unlike the massive research into self-esteem, the notion of *mattering* has not been incorporated to an appreciable extent into social psychological studies. It certainly has a potentially useful place in research into psychosocial stress and its effects on well-being, an area of study with which the authors of this chapter are actively familiar. Here we use the construct to help illuminate the aftermath of long-term caregiving, a typically difficult and often stressful situation that can put people's commitments to others to severe test.

One of the features we have observed in situations of sustained caregiving is an encroaching asymmetry in the caregiver-care recipient relationship. That is, expectations, obligations, and the provision of assistance come to fall more heavily on the shoulders of the caregiver. This emerges both in our study of family members providing care to a relative with Alzheimer's disease and of lovers, friends, and relatives caring for people with AIDS. As cognitive impairment or physical disabilities progress in these kinds of situations, the care recipient is decreasingly able to reciprocate in kind. Indeed, in the late stages of Alzheimer's disease the persona of the recipient may be so transformed that he or she is no longer able to recognize the donor, and certainly not acknowledge the support being received from that person.

It is striking that under these extreme and unusual circumstances people frequently continue to provide assistance indefinitely, often at considerable cost to their own well-being as the stress of caregiving continues to bear down on them (Aneshensel, Pearlin, Mullan, Zarit, & Whitlatch, 1995; Baumgarten, 1989; LeBlanc, Aneshensel, & Wight, 1995; LeBlanc, London, & Aneshensel, 1997; Schulz, Visintainer, & Williamson, 1990; Wright, Clipp, & George, 1993; Wight, LeBlanc, & Aneshensel, 1998). This kind of a situation understandably prompts the question as to what keeps the caregiving going. In the absence of apparent reciprocities, what motivates caregivers – what do they get out of a relationship that seems to be manifestly lacking any equity?

There are several answers to this query, each having some possible validity. Thus, asymmetrical exchange in a long-lasting relationship has been likened to withdrawals from a bank account whose currency has accumulated over past years. In this metaphor, the person providing support draws on the credits previously established by the impaired person. Judgments of reciprocity are based not on ongoing interactions but on the magnitude of past contributions to the account made by the nonreciprocating person (Antonucci, 1990; Beckman, 1981; Rook, 1987; Gouldner, 1960; Horwitz, Reinhard, & Howell-White, 1996; Ingersoll-Dayton & Antonucci, 1988; Pearlin, Aneshensel, Mullan, & Whitlatch, 1995; Sahlin, 1965; Walker, Pratt, & Oppy, 1992). A second explanation, this one on a different plane, is that reciprocity becomes less important than the maintenance of solidarity (George, 1986). That is, sustaining a close relationship expresses a value of higher order than that of maintaining equity.

Still a third explanation is that reciprocity is based not on what people actually do but on the recognition that each person does what he or she is *able* to do, which in the case of Alzheimer's patients may be virtually nothing. Underlying these three explanations is the notion of the sick role, which legitimizes the exemption of one of the parties from the norms that ordinarily guide and govern relationships (Parsons, 1964).

In this chapter, we offer *mattering* as still another condition that buttresses seemingly asymmetrical relationships. Under ordinary social circumstances it is likely that mattering is rooted both in being able to contribute to the welfare of another and in having the other contribute to one's own welfare. In the case of many of the caregivers we have followed, there is an illness-driven shift in the balance of this give-and-take, such that the source of mattering may come to rest exclusively on catering to the needs of a significant other. It is our supposition that such a shift can be more easily accepted and sustained in instances in which reciprocated mattering had been embedded in the history of the relationship. This is certainly an accurate description of many of the people in our studies of informal caregivers to an impaired relative, friend, or loved one.

We turn now to a more detailed description of the study on which the following analyses are based, this one involving spouses and adult children caring for relatives with Alzheimer's disease.

METHODS

Sample and Analytic Design

The primary purpose of the study from which the data of this chapter are drawn was to identify the hardships and stressors associated with assisting spouses and parents impaired by Alzheimer's disease, observe how these stressors proliferated to domains of life beyond caregiving, and assess how the total array of stressors affects health and well-being. A total of 555 caregivers were interviewed at baseline. All subjects were living in either Los Angeles County or the San Francisco Bay area. This research project and sample are described in detail elsewhere (Aneshensel et al., 1995).

At the time of the first interview all study participants were providing residential care. Most of the caregivers were reinterviewed on six occasions at yearly intervals and, understandably, over this span many had eventually placed their impaired relatives in institutional facilities and/or experienced the death of their relatives. Beginning with the second interview, therefore, the initial sample began to be divided into three subsamples: those continuing care at home, those whose relatives were in a care facility, and those who were bereaved. Each subgroup was interviewed with an instrument appropriately tailored to its continuing or changed circumstances.

Our measure of "the loss of mattering" (LOM), which is presented later, was not introduced until the fourth interview; that is, three years after the initiation of data collection. At that time, a large number of the Alzheimer's patients had died, some close to three years previously and others as recently as weeks or days prior to the fourth interview. The analysis presented here is limited to these 188 caregivers who completed a bereavement interview at T4.

There is both uniformity and diversity in the social and economic composition of the bereaved subsample. A slight majority were spouses of the deceased AD patient (56.9%), with the remainder being adult children. Eighty-one percent are or were married, either to the care recipient, in the case of spouses, or, in the case of adult children, to someone else. More than two-thirds (82%) are women and the mean age for the sample is 63 years. This sample of bereaved caregivers is also predominantly white: ethnic minorities constitute less than one-fifth of the subsample. The mean annual household income is \$32,420, with a range from poverty levels to affluence. On average they have completed about 12 years of formal education (i.e., completed high school). Retirees account for over a third of the sample, but full-time homemakers (27%) and part or full-time workers (34%) are also

well represented. Only 14% have no children and, in cases with children, the mean age of the youngest child is 32 years, ranging from 2 to 58 years. This bereaved T4 subsample is somewhat younger and possesses greater income than the entire sample at T1; in other respects, however, it closely resembles the baseline sample.

In searching for the antecedents of LOM, we are able to use information gathered at interviews that preceded the demise of the impaired relative (T1–T3) and the first assessment of LOM at T4. Correspondingly, in identifying the effects of LOM, it is possible to use information gathered at interviews following the death of the relative (T5–T6). This temporal separation of the precursors and consequences of LOM helps to bolster confidence in the causal relationships that are indicated by our findings.

Additionally, we note that since the length of bereavement might bear some influence on the experience of loss of mattering, we controlled for time between the death of the care recipient and our assessment of LOM. Interestingly, the length of time since death proved unrelated to loss of mattering.

Measurement of the Loss of Mattering

Our assessment of LOM is closely influenced by the conceptual specification given it by Rosenberg and McCullough. However, there is a major difference in its use here. In contrast to Rosenberg and McCullough, who were primarily concerned with the *presence* of a sense of mattering in people's understanding of themselves as they transacted with others, we are interested in what happens to this understanding when a relationship to which it was linked is terminated by death. Our measure reflects this orientation in two ways. First, it considers mattering not as a global element of self but as it was embedded in a specific relationship, a type of relationship that typically entails the extreme dependency of one person on the assistance of another. As noted, Rosenberg and McCullough viewed being depended on as a critical source of the sense of mattering. Second, our measure is not one of the presence of mattering; instead, it essentially assesses the extent to which individuals experience the *loss* of mattering once they are no longer depended on in a caregiving relationship that has been involuntarily terminated.

The measure is made up of answers to this query: Caregivers may find themselves missing different things about their (deceased) relative. How much do you miss having someone: (a) to whom you were important; (b) who really needed you; (c) to whom you mattered a great deal; (d) who appreciated your help, even if s/he could not show it. The response categories for the four items were "very much," "somewhat," "just a little," and "not at all." They were scored in Likert fashion and form a highly reliable scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

Several additional measures entering into this analysis require some description, and these will be provided in the course of presenting our findings.

RESULTS

The Correlates of the Loss of Mattering

Our analysis is divided into two parts, one looking for the circumstances and conditions underlying differences in LOM and the other examining some of the possible consequences of LOM. We consider first the factors contributing to it.

Our thinking about the theoretically meaningful precursors of LOM traverses several levels, including the social and economic characteristics of the bereaved caregivers, whether or not they were spouses or adult children of the impaired relative, their incumbency in roles other than caregiving, their immersion in caregiving activities prior to the death of their relatives, the quality of their past relationship with the deceased relative, and the availability of appropriate support.

Table 13.1 shows the bivariate correlations of each of these conditions with LOM. Clearly, a host of factors from different domains is related to LOM. An overview of the table reveals, for example, greater LOM among older caregivers, women, and those with less income and educational attainment. These relationships suggest that the less people matter in the context of socially stratified statuses, the more likely they are to feel a keen loss with the ending of an interpersonal relationship in which they probably mattered a great deal. Not surprisingly, it can be further seen that spousal caregivers tend to be higher than adult children on LOM.

On the assumption that involvement in other roles and statuses would provide compensatory sources of mattering, we expected to find that participation in major roles outside of caregiving would be inversely related to LOM. To test this assumption, we examined the correlations of incumbency in three statuses with LOM – employment, marital, and parental statuses. Our expectation is only partially confirmed, with outside employment alone being negatively associated with LOM. By contrast, people's sense of loss is found to be unaffected by whether or not they have children or, in the case of adult children, whether they are married. However, although being a parent by itself is unrelated to LOM, the age of the caregivers' youngest child is related. Specifically, the positive sign of the correlation indicates that as the age of the youngest child decreases, so do the chances of a high score on the LOM measure. This, in turn, warrants the speculation that having children of an age of dependence blunts the loss of mattering when caregiving is ended by death.

Table 13.1. Bivariate Associations: Loss of Mattering at T4 with Antecedent Variables (N = 188)^a

Antecedent Variables	Loss of Mattering (T4) Correlation Coefficient
Sociodemographics	
Age (in years) ^b	.16*
Gender (1 = man)	-.24***
Cared for a spouse (1 = yes) ^c	.21**
Income (in thousands)	-.30***
Education (in years)	-.16*
Employment status (1 = employed)	-.23**
Parent (1 = no children)	-.01
Age youngest/only child (no children = missing)	.18*
Immersion in Caregiving Role	
Length of caregiving (in yrs)	-.12
Role overload, (T3) (1-4)	.18*
Loss of self, (T3) (1-4)	.33***
Past Relationship with Care Recipient	
History of closeness (1-4)	.30***
Social Supports	
Emotional support, (T3) (1-4)	-.15*
Confidant offers encouraging support, (T3) (1-4)	.24**

^a 188 caregivers were bereaved at T4. N varies across variables due to missing data.
^b If not otherwise noted, measure taken at T1.
^c Reference group = cared for a parent.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

We further sought to learn whether the ways in which caregivers enacted their caregiving roles were related to LOM following the cessation of the role. Three features of role experience stand out in this regard: the duration of caregiving, role overload, and loss of self. Duration was established by asking respondents how long they had been providing assistance with activities their impaired relatives could no longer do by themselves. Overload refers to the extent to which people’s investment in the role brought them to a state of exhaustion and depletion. It is assessed by answers to three items (alpha = .80): Here are some statements about your energy level and the time it takes to do the things you have to do. How much does each statement describe you

(completely; quite a bit; somewhat; not at all)? (1) You are exhausted when you go to bed at night; (2) You have more things to do than you can handle; (3) You don't have time just for yourself. Next, loss of self is a two-item indicator ($\alpha = .76$) of the absorption of one's self into the role. It asks: Caregivers sometimes feel that they lose important things in life because of their relative's illness. To what extent do you feel that you have lost the following (completely; quite a bit; somewhat; not at all)? (1) A sense of who you are; (2) An important part of yourself.

It can be seen in Table 13.1 that the length of time one has been a caregiver is unrelated to LOM. However, both overload and loss of self are positively correlated with LOM. The interpretation of these correlations rests on the recognition that both of these measures stand as indicators of *immersion in the role*, the extent to which caregivers devoted themselves to assisting their relatives, even at the expense of their own energies and self-identities. The correlations suggest that the more people had been absorbed into the caregiver role, the greater was their sense of loss when the role was terminated.

We further anticipated that the *quality* of the caregiver-care recipient relationship prior to the onset of Alzheimer's disease is also associated with the LOM following the death of the impaired relative. One such quality concerns the extent to which closeness marked the history of the relationship. Closeness was evaluated by a single item: Relationships often go through ups and downs over time; thinking of your relationship with your (impaired relative) before his or her illness ever began, how close or distant were you? Very distant; somewhat distant, somewhat close; very close. It can be seen that there is a significant correlation between the closeness of the relationship and LOM, with those reporting the most closeness also tending to harbor the greatest sense of LOM.

The final measures included in Table 13.1 concern social support. One measure, composed of seven items ($\alpha = .83$), is of perceived emotional or expressive support. This scale has been presented in other publications (Aneshensel et al., 1995) and will not be reproduced here. Essentially, it evaluates the presence of others who are caring, trustworthy, and understanding. It was our supposition that access to emotionally supportive others would diminish LOM because such others would tend to constitute alternative sources of mattering. Precisely as discussed earlier, those whose welfare is supported by significant others are likely to enjoy a sense of mattering as an additional benefit of the support. Furthermore, the increment to mattering that is derived from emotional support may offset the loss of mattering that can no longer stem from being a source of support to another person. And, indeed, our speculation that the sense of mattering can result both from being an object of support as well as a source of support is modestly borne out by the negative correlation of perceived emotional support and LOM.

In addition to its general emotional uplift, there is another aspect of social support that we have evaluated. It concerns the transactions that occur in the course of effective support; that is, it attempts to identify what people actually do when they attempt to help others. Sixteen items were presented in our efforts to identify these elements of effective support and answers to them fall into three distinct analytic factors: providing encouragement, distraction, and insight. Only the first of these is presented, since of the three it is the sole factor related to LOM.

Its assessment is introduced by the following statement: Friends and relatives give different kinds of help and support to caregivers. Think now of a person you talk to about your problems and experiences as a caregiver. How often does that person try to help by (1) just listening; (2) sharing a laugh; (3) telling you everything will be OK; (4) telling you you're handling things well; (5) talking about the bright side of things; (6) giving you a hug; (7) letting you know they respect you. Each query was answered by indicating that it happened very often, fairly often, once in a while, or never. The alpha of the "encouragement" scale is .81.

Contrary to the general measure of emotional support, and somewhat to our surprise, this component is positively related to LOM. That is, the more encouragement of their caregiving activities that people receive from others, the greater is their sense of loss when these activities are ended. Perhaps this association should not be surprising. What it apparently bespeaks is that caregiving activities can be legitimated and rewarded by individuals' support systems. When the role ends, so do the rewards and the tacit approval that attached to the role, thus resulting in a heightened LOM.

These, then, are some of the conditions that are associated with LOM in theoretically meaningful ways and some that we thought would be associated but are not. However, because several of the correlates are related to other correlates, it is not clear which of them has an independent and stable causal relationship to LOM. A multivariate analysis is required to discern these kinds of relationships. It is to this type of analysis that we now turn.

Antecedents and Causes of LOM

The regression analyses presented in Table 13.2 identify some of the pathways leading to a susceptibility to the loss of mattering. Trimming the regression models to the conditions shown to have significant bivariate relationships to LOM, the table is designed to reveal the incremental contributions made by different types of precursors to LOM. The first model of the table highlights the various social status characteristics of caregivers, with other types of conditions cumulatively added to each of the succeeding models.

Model 1 in Table 13.2 reveals three status characteristics of caregivers that are related to the extent to which they experience LOM: gender, being a

Table 13.2. OLS Regression of Loss of Mattering at T4 (*N* = 188)^a

Independent Variables	Model 1: Sociodemographics			Model 2: Sociodemographics, role immersion			Model 3: Sociodemographics, role immersion, past relationship			Model 4: Sociodemographics, role immersion, past relationship, social supports		
	b	(SE)	β	b	(SE)	β	b	(SE)	β	b	(SE)	β
Sociodemographics												
Age (in years) ^b	.00	(.01)	.01	.01	(.01)	.07	.00	(.01)	.03	.00	(.01)	.02
Gender (1 = man)	-.77	(.18)	-.33***	-.73	(.17)	-.31***	-.73	(.17)	-.31***	-.66	(.18)	-.29***
Cared for a spouse (1 = yes) ^c	.55	(.22)	.26*	.48	(.22)	.23*	.44	(.21)	.21*	.37	(.22)	.18 [†]
Income (in thousands)	-.01	(.00)	-.17*	-.00	(.00)	-.10	-.00	(.00)	-.10	-.00	(.00)	-.08
Education (in years)	-.02	(.01)	-.13	-.03	(.01)	-.17*	-.03	(.01)	-.16*	-.03	(.01)	-.15*
Employment status (1 = employed)	-.20	(.17)	-.09	-.15	(.17)	-.07	-.09	(.16)	-.04	-.15	(.17)	-.07
Has children, youngest 18 or under ^d	-.13	(.26)	-.04	-.03	(.25)	-.01	.01	(.25)	.00	.10	(.25)	.03
Has children, youngest 18 to 40 ^d	-.19	(.20)	-.09	-.17	(.20)	-.08	-.10	(.19)	-.05	.03	(.20)	.02
Has children, youngest 40 or over ^d	-.22	(.27)	-.08	-.13	(.26)	-.05	-.10	(.25)	-.04	.09	(.26)	.04
Immersion in Caregiving Role												
Role overload, (T3) (1–4)	n/a			.14	(.08)	.12 [†]	.14	(.08)	.12 [†]	.11	(.08)	.10
Loss of self, (T3) (1–4)	n/a			.32	(.10)	.23**	.29	(.10)	.20**	.23	(.10)	.16*
Past Relationship with Care Recipient												
History of closeness (1–4)	n/a			n/a			.29	(.10)	.20**	.25	(.10)	.17*
Social Supports												
Emotional support, (T3) (1–4)	n/a			n/a			n/a			-.48	(.18)	-.20*
Confidant offers encouraging support, (T3) (1–4)	n/a			n/a			n/a			.27	(.13)	.15*
R-square	.22***			.30***			.33***			.37***		
F	5.61			6.57			7.01			6.52		

^a 188 caregivers bereaved at T4. *N* varies across models due to missing data.

^b If not otherwise noted, measure taken at T1.

^c Reference group = cared for a parent.

^d Reference group = caregiver has no children.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

[†] $p \leq .10$.

spouse of the deceased relative in distinction to an adult child, and the level of caregivers' incomes. The age and employment status of caregivers, previously shown to have significant bivariate associations with LOM, fall short of significance in this multivariate model. Women and spouses, however, remain considerably more likely than men and adult children to be high on the measure of LOM. Finally, as the income levels of caregivers decrease, a significant increase in LOM can be detected. Clearly, these findings indicate that the key statuses of individuals have a potent influence on how the death of a close relative affects a pivotal component of self-concept.

The second model of Table 13.2 folds into the analyses our two indicators of immersion in the caregiver role: role overload and self-loss, the extent to which caregivers' identities have been absorbed into the role. Status characteristics continue to be significant determinants of LOM in this model, although education replaces income as a significant factor. Overload falls slightly short of having an effect at an acceptable level of significance, leaving only self-loss as a precursor of LOM. Net of other factors, then, the more of one's self that is invested in the role, the greater will be the LOM when the role is ended by death.

The closeness of the caregiver-care recipient relationship prior to the onset of illness is added to the regression equation in the next model. In this model it can be observed that those who had experienced the most closeness are also most likely to experience the greatest LOM. Regardless of caregivers' statuses or their self-immersion in the role, therefore, the quality of the past relationship to the deceased relative contributes appreciably to LOM.

Components of social support, finally, are incorporated into the equation in the fourth model. Having access to emotionally supportive others remains an appreciable barrier to LOM. That is, as access to such support is elevated, the LOM that caregivers experience is likely to decrease. The support that was in the form of encouragement of the caregiver, which was previously shown to have a moderately close bivariate correlation with LOM, emerges as only marginally influential in this multivariate context. Still, some suggestion remains that the more encouragement people receive for their caregiving activities, the greater is the increment to their loss of mattering when they are no longer engaged in those activities.

The Consequences of the Loss of Mattering

The identification of the causes of LOM makes sense only if mattering can be shown to matter. As we previously suggested, to be separated from the social sources of mattering could be devastating to well-being. Indeed, it is rather grim simply to contemplate the existential barrenness of being surrounded by people but being the object of attention and caring of none. This kind of experience, we posit, should have an impact that can be discerned across a broad swath of elements reflecting well-being.

In looking at the consequences of LOM, we employ a different analytic dataset than that used to identify its possible causes and antecedents. For the latter purpose we employ a subsample composed of all those who were bereaved at the fourth interview, three years after the initiation of the study. It was at this interview with bereaved subjects that we first asked questions concerning the loss of mattering. Information about the antecedents and causes of LOM was drawn from the baseline and T3 interviews with those bereaved by time four. By contrast, in considering possible consequences of LOM – our present focus – we draw our information from time five. Just as we were able to temporally separate causal factors from LOM, we are similarly able to separate LOM as initially measured from its later consequences. Because of the cross-lagged temporal ordering of these conditions, it is possible to speak of causes and consequences with greater confidence.

As previously suggested, the sense of mattering is sufficiently pivotal to people's selves that its loss exerts an array of effects. We are able here to examine the bearing of LOM on four of these. They include self-esteem and mastery; like mattering itself, of course, these also represent components of self-concept. Self-esteem is measured by the Rosenberg scale (Rosenberg, 1965), and mastery, which refers to the extent that one feels in control over the important forces of one's life, is assessed by the seven-item Pearlin scale (for the scale, see Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). In this population of bereaved caregivers it has an alpha of .84, about the same as in other studies that have employed the measure. To the extent that dimensions of self are not present in a haphazard order but, instead, have a structure in the inner lives of individuals, we should find that changes in one dimension – in this case the sense of mattering – will act as a lever in changing those that are structurally inter-related. From this perspective, we can posit that LOM will alter the levels of both self-esteem and mastery.

Second, we also consider depression as a consequence of LOM. It can be reasoned that the loss of something as critical as the sense of mattering cannot leave people in a state of emotional indifference. To the contrary, we would expect to find that LOM leads to distress and psychological disorder. Finally, we believe that LOM can interfere with the establishment of new social relationships. We suggest that LOM may have the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy, such that the loss of mattering can come to inhibit seeking other relationships from which the person may possibly regain it. To test this notion, we observe whether LOM is related to the creation of new intimate relationships following the demise of the impaired relative.

Although self-esteem, mastery, depression, and the formation of new relationships are independent constructs, there is reason to predict that they are related to one another. And, indeed, Table 13.3 shows that each has a signifi-

Table 13.3. Bivariate Associations: Loss of Mattering at T4 with Select Outcomes at T5 ($N = 175$)^a

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Self-esteem (T5)	1.0				
2. Sense of Mastery (T5)	.70***	1.0			
3. Depression (T5)	-.45***	-.57***	1.0		
4. Remarried or dating (1 = yes) (T5) ^b	.25*	.31**	-.30**	1.0	
5. Loss of Mattering (T4)	-.16*	-.24*	.31***	-.41***	1.0

^a 175 caregivers bereaved at T4 also completed the bereavement interview at T5. N varies across variables due to missing data.

^b $n = 107$; pertains only to spousal caregivers, question not asked of adult-child caregivers.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

cant bivariate correlation with the others. For example, self-esteem and mastery are appreciably related, not surprising given the fact that they are both important elements in the organization of self-concept. Self-esteem and mastery, in turn, are each negatively associated with depression and positively associated with the establishment of new close relationships.

Of principal interest, of course, is not how these constructs are connected to each other, but how they may be affected by a reduction in the sense of mattering. These relationships can be observed across the bottom line of the table. Here it can be seen that the greater the LOM assessed at one point in time, the lower the level of self-esteem and mastery and the higher the level of depression observed a year later. The chances that the caregivers are in new close relationships are also associated with the prior LOM. That is, the caregivers who had remarried or were in intimate relationships at T5 – all of whom had been spousal caregivers – were likely to have expressed little LOM at T4. Although these cross-lagged associations cannot be construed as unchallengeable evidence of causal connections between LOM and the outcomes we considered, they certainly support the observation that the sense of mattering and its loss are linked to a broad array of consequences. Included among the possible consequences of LOM are important dimensions of self-concept, the level of negative affect that is experienced, and the ability to restructure social life. Clearly, to lose a sense of importantly mattering to the well-being of a significant other can have a bearing on one's understanding of self, on the distress and emotional disorder that one lives with, and on the kinds of relationships that are forged.

DISCUSSION

It seems abundantly evident that the notion of mattering draws attention to a fundamental ingredient in the interactions among people engaged in sustained social relationships. One of the goals of this chapter is to kindle greater interest in the concept by mobilizing some data that modestly suggest its potential richness and power. In doing this, we have departed somewhat from mattering as it was originally conceived. The perspectives of research into social stress and mental health, which generally guide our work, provide the starting point for the treatment of mattering presented here. In particular, we view mattering to be of considerable relevance to the exchange of social support. There is a large body of evidence, of course, that social support has a vital role in cushioning the harmful impact of difficult life conditions.

However, more is known about the benefits derived from social support by its recipients than the reasons individuals provide long-run support under conditions that are manifestly unreciprocal. The assumption underlying this chapter is that the sense of mattering is a possible latent reward enjoyed by the donors of support under such conditions. Mattering in this context represents an effort to define a role vis à vis another person in a manner that is consistent with a commonly, perhaps universally, desired self-concept – namely, being a person who matters to a significant other. Indeed, we would argue that mattering may be present even when it cannot be acknowledged by the significant other, such as with someone suffering from Alzheimer's disease, but is symbolically constructed by the donor. This is more than self-sacrificing altruism on the part of the donor; it is a self-knowledge on which individuals stake their own mental health. Its importance is apparent when we consider the desolateness of being devoid of a sense of mattering to another.

The analysis presented here was unfolded against these perspectives and assumptions. It essentially asked what happens to one's sense of mattering when a strong commitment to the welfare of a significant other is terminated by the death of the other. Is there a loss of mattering under these circumstances, who experiences it most keenly, and what are the consequences of such loss? The sample used here of spouses and adult children providing care for their husbands, wives, or parents is very appropriate to seeking answers to these questions. This sample represents a population that typically is involved in responding to the relentless needs and demands of relatives incapable of reciprocating. It is also a sample composed of people who, because of the advanced ages of their relatives, are likely to find themselves stripped of a role from which many undoubtedly had drawn a heightened sense of mattering.

It was demonstrated that the extent to which former caregivers experience a loss of mattering depends on a number of factors. Thus, LOM is more

intense among people of lower socioeconomic status, suggesting that those in higher positions are more likely to have multiple or alternative sources of mattering. Women more than men are also apt to experience an elevated LOM, perhaps reflecting gender differences in the degree to which the sense of mattering is linked to nurturant activities. We further find that LOM varies with whether the caregiver is a spouse or adult child, the degree to which their lives had been immersed in the caregiving role, the history of closeness of the caregiver-care recipient relationship, and access to and nature of caregivers' social support.

If the possession of a sense of mattering contributes to well-being, its loss is not likely to be inconsequential. And just as the antecedents of LOM are broad and varied, so, too, are its likely consequences. Among its consequences are other components of self-concept, specifically self-esteem and mastery. These relationships, perhaps, indicate that changes in one key element of self-concept may impact on the total organization of the self. Still another consequence of LOM is depression, an entirely predictable effect. Obviously, one cannot experience the attrition of a prized element of self-concept without also experiencing an adverse emotional outcome. Finally, it is interesting that those who experienced the greatest LOM are the least likely to have established new close relationships at a later time. This finding prompts the speculation that LOM inhibits people from risking the chances of repeated and painful loss.

The study of bereavement processes can benefit by taking mattering into consideration. We do know that the duration and intensity of bereavement cannot be calculated solely from the loss of a loved one. Death can bring many losses in its wake: the loss of status and resources, the loss of one who shared the past and visions of the future, the loss of a sexual partner, or the loss of a practical helper (Mullan, Pearlin, & Skaff, 1995). To these kinds of losses, we submit, should be added decrements to valued elements of self-concept, the view of one's self as person who matters being prominent among such elements. The extent and intensity of the losses of all types and the barriers to replacing them or finding substitutes for them all make a potential contribution to grief and bereavement. We believe, however, that one of the severest losses a person can suffer is that of mattering.

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14 Self-Esteem and Social Inequality

L. Edward Wells

SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND SELF-ESTEEM

The relationship between social inequality and self-esteem is an issue of great concern in a society that embraces egalitarian ideals. The issue reflects a troubling question about whether societal systems of inequality and hierarchy subvert valued assumptions that, although considerable differences in ability, appearance, resources, and social station will exist in every society, people are nonetheless equal in the pursuit of happiness and personal well-being. Because the connection between self-esteem and psychological well-being seems both intuitively and empirically well grounded (e.g., Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989; Mruk, 1995; Rosenberg, 1979; Wylie, 1979), the impact of social stratification on self-esteem becomes a central concern. Seemingly, if social inequalities strongly shape an individual's sense of self-identity and self-regard, and do so in ways that are derogatory, then the egalitarian assumption is invalid, and democratic systems of social and political organization based on it become deceptions or delusions – a very disquieting prospect.

Correspondingly, over the past half century, we have accumulated a considerable amount of empirical research and scholarly analysis concerning the relationship between social inequality and self-esteem. This includes hundreds, if not thousands, of publications, a number that continues to grow up through the present time. What then does this body of research and scholarship reveal about the critical relationship between self-esteem and social inequality? Does it confirm that the social structures of status and privilege determine the individual's self-identify, self-regard, and prospects for success and happiness? Can we systematically and empirically answer this troubling question? Drawing from the results of several systematic reviews and summaries of the research on the effects of social stratification on self-concept (e.g., Mruk, 1995; Porter & Washington, 1979;

Rosenberg, 1979, 1981; Wylie, 1979), the answer is inconclusive. This is surprising, because the prevailing theories of self-evaluation (representing a variety of theoretical orientations) would seem to predict a simple, direct, and strong causal effect of social inequality on self-evaluation. However, the data suggest otherwise. The multitude of studies report a variety of patterns, correlations, and differences that do not add up to or point to a simple overall conclusion. They seem to indicate a variety of competing or contradictory conclusions, and this pattern of inconsistency seems to hold for all the major stratificational bases of social inequality, including socioeconomic class, race, gender, and ethnicity. What sense can we make of this confusing and frustrating mixture of findings? How can we account for the apparent inconsistencies and disagreements that characterize this body of collected knowledge?

Undoubtedly much of the inconsistency reflects methodological considerations and variations. Research has employed a wide variety of different measurements of self-esteem, involving literally hundreds of different scales and instruments among which validity and comparability are unknown but highly variable – a situation referred to as an operational Tower of Babel (Scheff, Retzinger, & Ryan, 1989). At the same time, these studies have been carried out on a variety of different populations or categories of respondents – from very young children to aging adults – drawn from very different geographic locations often using conveniently available samples. Because virtually no study has used a randomly selected, geographically broad sample of the general population (and most have employed small selective local samples with a narrow range of respondent characteristics), we expect a considerable amount of heterogeneity in the findings just as a simple result of the extreme sampling variations involved.

And yet, for all the methodological “noise” in the research on inequality and self-esteem, a significant part of the disagreement and confusion would seem to be conceptual or theoretical, rather than methodological artifact. The difficulty here is a tendency to oversimplify what self-esteem involves or to abbreviate the causal dynamics by which self-esteem is developed and experienced in social behavior. Thus, a major difficulty in analyzing what seems like a simple empirical question is that the topic is not as straightforward as it may seem and as it is commonly treated in self-esteem research. Several important theoretical elaborations arise to modify this simple-appearing picture. One concerns an adequate account of the complexity of the self-esteem as a global summary of a variety of more specific processes of self-conception and self-evaluation. A second concern is with heeding House’s (1981) theoretical recommendations about research that purports to trace the effects of social structures and social stratification systems in terms of interpersonal and individual level events.

CONCEPTUALIZING SELF-ESTEEM

The first complication is that self-esteem, although conceptually viewable as a general global construct measured by a single unidimensional variable, actually reflects a much more complex, multidimensional, dynamic process of self-evaluation. Reducing this process to a single self-esteem score, which appears as the dependent variable in a unidirectional causal model with social stratification as the independent variable, would seem to obscure as much as it might reveal about the social dynamics of self-evaluation. In elaborating self-esteem as a more complex process of self-evaluation, we draw on several important insights discussed in the self literature. These are: (a) the *multiplexity* of the self; (b) different *modes* of self-regard; (c) multiple *sources* for self-evaluation; (d) multiple *motivations* shaping self-evaluations; and (e) the *contextual* nature of self-evaluation.

Multiplexity of Self-Concept

The multiplexity of the self entails the observation that, while we find it convenient to talk about *the self* as if it were a single, enduring entity possessing objective existence, this is misleading. Rather than a thing, the self refers to a process in social behavior in which people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior are reflexive. Not all behavior is self-conscious; self-awareness is a variable feature of human behavior and experience. Because people's social lives are invariably subdivided into distinct and differing domains of social activity (e.g., work, family, education, recreation, community) involving different social identities and abilities, their self-concepts are subdivided into component selves. These are "subselves" that correspond to different social spheres, roles, identities, and activities. Strictly speaking, people have many different self-perceptions, self-identities, and self-evaluations that are specific and distinct.

Thus, rather than only a single, unitary sense of self-esteem, self-evaluation involves many different images, perceptions, identities, and cognitions that vary across situations. Some of these will be experienced very positively while others are evaluated not so positively; none of these by themselves strictly determines or predicts the person's overall level of self-esteem (commonly depicted as a generalized, global summary of all these experiences). How (and if) these diverse self-experiences may be meaningfully combined into a single global level of self-esteem remains an open theoretical question. It is clear, however, that a focus on *the* level of self-esteem reflects a theoretical decision to shift the analysis away from the psychological experiences of self (which are specific, situated, and multiple) to the abstract generalized reconstructions of self (as higher-order schemata of cognitions and memories). In the latter, self-esteem is a selective summary impression or recollection of how people feel about themselves "on average" or "most of the time."

Paying attention to the multiplexity of the self also highlights the variable salience of different self-evaluations, as well as the hierarchies in which these self-evaluations are organized. Some performances, attributes, or identities are simply more central and important to people's sense of who they really are or wish to be. Evaluative information received from social interaction will be differentially weighted by its personal relevance, "psychological centrality" (Rosenberg, 1979), or "identity salience" (Stryker, 1980). Evaluations on central dimensions or identities will be more strongly felt and will have more impact on the people's characteristic feelings of self-regard. In contrast, evaluations on attributes that are unimportant or psychologically peripheral will have negligible effect on self-esteem. Each person will be exposed to a myriad of social experiences and interactions that carry evaluative valence, but only some of these will have a significant impact on people's general sense of self-esteem. This centrality may reflect social commitments (important social relationships that depend on those attributes or identities), personal aspirations (the persons they hope to be), or personal anxieties (the kinds of persons they are afraid they might become).

Modes of Self-Regard

Modes of self-regard involve the different ways in which people may experience positive or negative feelings or thoughts about themselves. Rather than a single unitary experience, self-esteem researchers distinguish among several different ways in which people experience themselves in evaluative (good–bad) terms. Gecas (1991) distinguished three principal modes of experiencing self-esteem: (1) *agency* (involving a person's sense of efficacy, achievement, success, and possession of instrumentally useful skills); (2) *acceptance* (involving a sense of personal worthiness, moral value, or being loved and appreciated); and (3) *authenticity* (involving an existential sense of being real, substantial, genuine, and meaningful). Although each of these may contribute to an overall sense of self-esteem (as the global summary of people's good–bad feelings or thoughts about themselves), the self-esteem modes are nonetheless analytically separate dimensions of human experience and may vary quite independently of each other. They seem to reflect different experiential bases and different cognitive and affective systems of self-representation, perhaps even with different physiological substrates (Epstein, 1990).

Recognizing different experiential modes of self-esteem is important because discussions usually limit self-esteem to just one of the various senses. However, they disagree about which mode of self-regard should theoretically define self-esteem. Ability-focused analyses of self-esteem (e.g., focusing on the dynamics of self-evaluation in different domains of social performance, such as school, work, athletics, social interaction) invariably conceptualize it in agentic terms. Social adjustment-focused analyses of self-esteem (e.g.,

focusing on how people's attitudes and feelings about themselves shape their social functioning and personal well-being) seem to favor an acceptance-oriented definition. And analyses about the problematic development of personal identity in a rapidly changing social world seem to conceptualize the essence of self-esteem in terms of self-authenticity – for example, Zurcher's (1977) "mutable self," Turner's (1976, 1981) "real self," or Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) sense of "mattering." Thus, self-esteem must be viewed as entailing several distinctive experiential processes, rather than just one.

Beyond concerns about the theoretical incompleteness of recognizing only one mode of self-esteem is the common problem of researchers "talking past each other" – that is, using the same analytical terms but with different theoretical meanings, applications, and operationalizations – and generating noncomparable research findings. Correspondingly, self-esteem scales primarily measuring self-acceptance correlate only moderately with self-efficacy measures. Thus, different modes of self-esteem must be viewed as both theoretically and empirically distinctive; they are related somewhat but far from identical or interchangeable.

Multiple Sources of Self-Evaluation

In accounting for the specific behavioral dynamics through which self-esteem develops, social psychologists have described various processes through which external social events and experiences are incorporated into people's self-conceptions and self-feelings. First, and most basic, is the idea of *reflected appraisals*, in which people learn who they are and how well they are doing through the social responses of others to them. Through the process of communication, they discover how they are viewed by other people. Cooley's (1902) idea of the "looking glass self" metaphorically describes the essential features of this process in which people come to see themselves mirrored in the social reactions of other persons. Over time, people develop self-awareness and an enduring sense of self-evaluation that embodies these social appraisals and incorporates them into a generalized sense of self-evaluation. However, the reflected appraisal process is not a mechanical determinate stamping of other people's judgments into the self-concept. It is a much more dynamic open-ended process subject to the interpretations and selectivity of the receiver, as well as by the importance and credibility of the evaluation sources and the subtleties of interpersonal communications in which messages (even multiple conflicting messages) are sent by several communications channels simultaneously.

A second important source of self-esteem is the process of *social comparison*, initially described by Festinger (1954). Beyond direct communication of personal identities and appraisals, other people also provide important reference sources for calibrating social reality and anchoring self-appraisals. Social skills, attributes, and identities lack absolute value and a clear evalua-

tive metric. Thus, other people serve as essential reference points for deciding what is normal and what is good, providing external standards by which persons can comparatively assess their own merit or value. This too is an indeterminate, dynamic process because there are an unlimited number and variety of comparison others who could be used in self-evaluation. The process by which other people are selected and how they are used in self-evaluation is highly variable, dependent on which self-esteem-related motivations are active in that particular situation.

The third source of self-evaluation, *self-attribution*, refers to the process by which people make observations and attributions of their own behavior and features unmediated by outside observers. With the development of self-conception, people acquire the ability to be observers and judges of their own behaviors, attributes, and performances, independently of the feedback they receive from others (Bem, 1972). In Mead's (1934) terms, they can adopt the role of the "generalized other," see themselves in semi-objective terms and form interpretations of their own attributes and activities. In this sense, self-perception is just like social perception, except that *self-related* perceptions and evaluations will have a stronger psychological valence (e.g., prompting stronger emotions and more readily accessed memories).

A fourth process by which social information is included in people's self-esteem is through *identifications* in which the self-concept is defined or conceptualized to include highly evaluated others. Rosenberg (1979, 1981) referred to these as "ego extensions," which may be groups (e.g., identification with championship sport teams, membership in high status social cliques, identification with racial or ethnic group) or individuals (e.g., children who imaginatively become their heroes or role models, parents who personally identify with their children's accomplishments). For example: the phenomenon of "basking in reflected glory" (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976) shows the self-enhancing value of group identifications; the analysis of male-female differences in self-esteem by Josephs, Markus, and Tafarodi (1992) emphasizes the "connectedness" of the self in social relationships and memberships as a significant source of positive self-regard, especially for women. Such ego extensions may even include inanimate objects (e.g., expensive sports cars, unique and valuable art collections; designer clothing items), which become especially relevant for self-evaluation in materialistic cultures in which high social status and images of personhood are defined by property ownership.

Self-Esteem Motivation

The strong theoretical interest in self-esteem as a social psychological construct derives from its "motivational" (drive or incentive) potential. That is, as self-awareness and self-identity develop, they acquire motivational force. The experience of self-esteem provides a motivational influence on how

social experiences are sought, perceived, and incorporated into the self-concept, along with shaping subsequent social choices and behaviors. Although many discussions refer simply to *the* self-esteem motive, psychologists and sociologists have posited a variety of different drives, motivations, or needs related to self-esteem. All are related to the psychological dynamics of self-evaluation, yet they vary considerably in the direction and content of the motivational incentive involved.

Self-enhancement is the most commonly cited and familiar motivational principle associated with self-esteem. Indeed, when many social researchers talk simply about the self-esteem motive, they usually mean self-enhancement as a universal self-serving drive impelling people to seek the most favorable levels of self-esteem possible. The underlying premise is that feelings of high self-esteem are hedonically preferred, and people as hedonistic beings seek to maximize the amount they feel. It derives from the well-known “pleasure principle.” According to psychologists, this motive not only compels people to seek out social activities and relations in which they will fare the best, but also biases people’s perceptions and cognitions to achieve the most favorable self-perceptions and the highest possible self-evaluations.

Self-consistency provides the second most familiar motivational model, often favored by cognitive psychologists who postulate that people have a psychological need for coherence that prompts them to try to organize their experiences, feelings, and cognitions into psychologically consistent structures. This presumes the “consistency principle” or “unity principles” associated with gestalt psychology (Epstein, 1990). It argues that new experiences and information that are consistent with prior knowledge are preferred, while inconsistent ones are uncomfortable. Thus, people should be motivated to seek out self-evaluations that match or confirm their existing self-perceptions and feelings of self-esteem. Familiar advocates of this view include Lecky’s (1945) self-consistency theory, Aronson’s (1969; Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992) version of cognitive dissonance theory, and Tesser’s (1988) self-evaluation maintenance model. In some situations, self-consistency will contradict the motivational direction of self-enhancement. When people’s self-esteem is high, this consistency-seeking motive provides a self-enhancing impulse; but when self-esteem levels are low, self-consistency motivation would direct them to seek non-enhancing (even derogating) evaluations that confirm their prior perceptions and feelings.

Self-verification provides a third, less commonly cited, but equally compelling, motivational model for self-esteem. Rather than positing a drive for maximal self-feeling or a psychological preference of cognitive coherence, this motivation derives from the “reality principle” – that is, that people seek veracity in their perceptions and evaluations rather than maximal consistency or hedonic sensations (Epstein, 1990). Swann’s (1983) self-verification theory was developed on the premise that “people like to feel that their social

world is knowable and controllable, that their hunches concerning the nature of the world are accurate and reliable" (1983, p. 34). Thus, people seek realistic and valid information about themselves, rather than favorably biased or cognitively congruent information, even if that information may be negative because realism is ultimately more useful and satisfying.

Self-realization represents a fourth, distinctly alternative, view of human motivation, suggesting a model for self-esteem that emphasizes growth and improvement as a fundamental dimension of human behavior and positing a "unidirectional drive upward" (Festinger, 1954) or a natural drive toward "self-actualization" (Maslow, 1968). Banaji and Prentice (1994, p. 299) described this as a "need for self-improvement" that "refers to the desire to bring oneself closer to what one should or would ideally like to be." Markus and Nurius's (1986) analysis of "potential selves" as referential and motivational features of self-schemata, and Higgins's (1989) self-discrepancy theory (emphasizing the motivational effects of "ideal selves" and "ought selves" on behavioral choices) provide persuasive accounts of this motivational model of self-esteem.

Acknowledging the variety of self-related motives means that analysis of self-esteem dynamics cannot be a matter of invoking a single dominant universal self-esteem motive. Indeed, the futility of presuming "simple sovereign theories" of motivation (to use Gordon Allport's classic phrase) has been amply demonstrated. Rather, it means that human behavior represents the confluence of a number of different, often competing, motivational dynamics. The theoretical task is to identify the situational and personal conditions that will activate one motive more strongly than the others. Some systematic approaches to this task have already been provided by Epstein (1990), Gecas (1991), Higgins (1988), and Swann (1986).

Contextuality of Self-Evaluation

Most analyses of self-conception and self-esteem use what Rosenberg (1981) called the "biographical approach" – that is, an analytical perspective that "views the self-concept as a stable, enduring feature of personality" (1981, p. 593). That approach is appealing because it provides a theoretically meaningful way to describe the structure, consistency, and coherence within people's behaviors and experiences across a multitude of occasions. This approach has several theoretical liabilities. One is that treating behaviors as enduring objects carries an implicit tendency toward reification – that is, when self-identity and self-esteem are regarded as entities that people "have" or possess, rather than as activities that people "do" or experience. A second liability is that most self-esteem analyses depict the processes of self-conception and self-evaluation as if they were disembodied, decontextualized psychological events – phenomena existing "inside people's minds" and thus disconnected or isolated from concrete social settings, situations, and rela-

tionships. Viewing self-esteem and self-concept as stable dispositional traits (that transcend specific moments or settings) is an analytically useful approach and entirely consistent with a long tradition in psychology of personality theory and research. However, such a view of self-esteem renders it rather abstract and removed from the personal content of actual self-evaluations. Because situational factors function largely as noise or residual variance in such global, generalized descriptions, their measurements do not correlate very highly with specific behavioral indicators nor are they very predictive of behavioral outcomes in specific situations. For these reasons, Jordan and Merrifield (1981) argued that situation-specific models of self-evaluation have been more successful (than global abstract models) both in empirical research and clinical interventions.

Analysis of self-esteem must retain some explicit recognition of its inherently contextual content. Strictly speaking, self-conception and self-evaluation always occur as aspects of reflexive behavior taking place within actual social interactions or situations, rather than as independently existing objects. Self-esteem is always, to some degree, grounded in the social contexts and behaviors where the experience of evaluation occurs. To decontextualize the analysis and measurement of self-esteem does not eliminate "situational noise" but rather theoretically meaningful content.

CONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL STRUCTURE

A second source of attenuation and inconsistency in research on social inequality and self-esteem is the common tendency to oversimplify social structural phenomena – that is, to reduce them down to simple, readily measured person-level variables that can be analyzed merely as additional individual attributes often treated as "control variables." Very little attention has been paid to how social structural variables reflect more complex social distributional and interactional patterns or how their conceptualizations (and valid operationalizations) are subject to considerable disagreement and debate. Such an oversight is understandable, since most self-esteem researchers are psychologists or social psychologists, whose analytical (and methodological) focus is the individual person, rather than the social aggregate or collectivity. However, this also means that considerable unexplained variance can result from lack of analytic attention to differences in the substantive contents of exogenous variables and to variations in their empirical measurements.

According to House (1981), the theoretical task of providing "an even minimally adequate conceptual and empirical analysis of how and why a social structure, position, or system could affect the individual" involves several fundamental analytical principles. Beyond calculating correlations between individual scores on structural and psychological variables, we must be able

to specify *what* particular contents of the social structure are relevant and *how* these phenomena (as macro-level “social facts”) impinge on the interactions and experiences of particular individuals (as “personal facts”). The *components* principle directs that we be able to explicate social structures as multidimensional phenomena that include a variety of component events and processes through which people are differentiated and by which the material and cultural conditions of their lives are organized.

For example, social stratification is commonly conceptualized and measured as a single unidimensional “status” variable on which people can be simply ordered. However, social life in most societies is stratified and ordered by a myriad of different classifications and status hierarchies, including: wealth, occupation, ethnicity, gender, age, family structure, physical appearance, property, intelligence, organizational membership, health status, residence, religion, citizenship, lifestyle, ideology, recreational achievements, and so on. The causal relevance of each of these will vary considerably across persons and social contexts; moreover, they may vary separately and quite independently of each other. Clearly, social stratification is a multifaceted process with diverse and complex effects on social evaluation. To analyze how social equality affects self-esteem, we need to be more explicit about which specific dimensions of stratification are important, what their particular contents are, and how they may operate separately as components of social differentiation and evaluation.

House’s (1981) *proximity* principle acknowledges that social structures as macro-level patterns of collective events are causally distant from the micro-level and psychological events in which self-evaluation is experienced. Adequate analysis requires explication of the intervening social processes and interactional variables that bridge the gap between macro-level and individual-level phenomena. House (1981, p. 540) argued that this means specifying how complex macro-social structures “affect the smaller structures and patterns of intimate interpersonal interaction or communication that constitute the *proximate* social experiences and stimuli in a person’s life.” Rather than assuming that social structures are automatically stamped onto individual lives, this means showing how structural factors actually affect conditions within specific situations and interactions, as well as the interactional processes through which these influence personal experiences. This also means recognizing the *contextuality* of social structure as it operates as a causal factor in individual lives – that is, it always “takes place” within particular social situations as unique configurations of meanings and relationships. In describing social structures as macro-level phenomena, such situation-specific variations are aggregated or averaged out (as individual-level noise); but in describing structural effects on individual experiences, they are causally important and must be explicitly included in the analysis.

Although systematic structures of social inequality are numerous and diverse, two particular forms of stratification have been very prominent in the analysis of self-esteem – social class and race. Because they seem so pervasive and socially universal, the impact of race and social class stratification has seemed particularly strong as well as ideologically important. In the remaining sections, we examine how extant research has informed us about the effects of these two structural sources of inequality on self-esteem.

SOCIAL CLASS AND SELF-ESTEEM

Social class is arguably the most familiar and widely cited concept for studying the impact of social structure on personality. In many analyses, social structure is merely equated with the idea of social class, with occasional recognition of race and gender as additional sources of stratification. In most of these analyses, the social structure of inequality and self-esteem is generally studied by looking at the correlation between self-esteem scores and standard measures of social class (such as the Hollingshead status index or the Duncan SEI score). As noted in the introduction, this approach has yielded a meager and uninformative set of findings. One difficulty is that while social class may be operationalized and analyzed in simple, unitary quantitative terms, this apparent simplicity masks a much more complex, theoretically diverse sociological issue.

The idea of social class broadly and variably refers to the unequal distribution of social advantages, resources, opportunities, power, and esteem across categories of people (or families) according to their location in the economic structure of a society. However, within the broad outlines of this description, a variety of different conceptualizations and measurements of social class are possible. The traditional Weberian view of social class focuses on where people are located within multidimensional social structures of wealth, power, and prestige. A Marxian view focuses more on the conditions and relations of work as the defining features of social class, with employment in the labor force and the type of employment as critical dimensions. The status attainment view of social class focuses on the prestige or social esteem collectively assigned to people's material achievements (in work, education, and wealth). A cultural (or lifestyle) view of social class focuses more on the social conditions and settings within which people live – housing, possessions, values and ideologies, lifestyles, opportunities, neighborhood composition. Although these views are interrelated, they entail distinctly different conceptual issues, different theoretical models of social structure, and very different ways of measuring social class through empirical indicators. This has been overlooked by most social psychological research on self-esteem development.

The tendency to oversimplify the conceptualization, measurement, and analysis of social class effects seems to be a common trend in social science research generally, rather than a unique limitation of self-esteem research. Nonetheless, it clearly limits the development of a very detailed and precise understanding of how social class affects the development of self-esteem. It exemplifies the critical relevance of House's (1981) components and proximity principles for analyzing how social structures connect to personal selves and lives. Without specifying and measuring the important contents and dimensions of social class in more detail, we are left with inconsistent and puzzling collections of correlation coefficients (and path coefficients) that reveal little about the causal effects of social structures of inequality on people's feelings of self-esteem.

Most of the research on social class differences in self-esteem merely reports overall bivariate correlations between simple summary indexes of social class and global self-esteem scores, which show a weak and inconsistent pattern of association. However, there are some notable research efforts that provide more insight and detail into this relationship. An early analysis by Kaplan (1971) examined differences in global self-esteem by social class, but also considers how this association may be contextually limited – that is, conditional on situational factors that make dimensions of social class more or less salient for self-evaluation. These include personal (biographical) factors as well as family and neighborhood-related contingencies. Overall, Kaplan (1971) reported a nonsignificant bivariate association between self-esteem and social class categories using a local random sample of adults. However, when control variables for personal and situational salience of class differentiation were included, the association was significant for all comparisons. The data showed a clear effect of social class when relative social position is evaluatively relevant but no effect otherwise (even a reverse effect in a few instances). Although this study is not usually cited in reviews of research on social class effects, it does provide an early statement of the importance of evaluative context in conditioning social stratification effects on individual self-esteem.

The most important analysis of social class and self-esteem, which has defined the general agenda for subsequent research on this topic, was carried out by Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978). This study began by reviewing the bewildering array of different findings and conclusions generated by prior research on what ought to be a simple, direct, and substantial relationship. In seeking to discern some orderly patterns amid the disorder, Rosenberg and Pearlin argued that individual experiences of self-evaluation are conditioned by both psychological and situational considerations. In particular, "The pattern of relationships ... has been obscured by failing to take account of the factor of age, and hence, by overlooking the fact that a social structural variable, such as social class, may signify radically different sets of social experi-

ences and may be endowed with entirely different psychological meanings for individuals of unequal maturity" (Rosenberg & Perlin, 1978, p. 54). Thus, the variability may reflect the differential meaning and changing relevance of social class for persons at different ages.

Using a sample of school children in grades 3 through 12, Rosenberg and Pearlin documented how the association between family social class (using the Hollingshead index) and child's overall self-esteem is stronger among older children than in younger children. Social class has little personal meaning or relevance for younger children and little impact on how they perceive and evaluate themselves. However, social class becomes somewhat more salient for adolescents, since social comparisons and status orders are more relevant bases of evaluation at this age. Here the correlation found between family social class position and self-esteem was modest but consistently positive. Using an independent sample of several thousand urban adults, for whom social status is a more personally relevant and achieved attribute, the correlation was even stronger, especially for the income component of social class.

In assessing the theoretical importance of the varying strength of the correlation between social class and self-esteem, Rosenberg and Pearlin provided a detailed analysis of how social class is differentially relevant to self-evaluation in specific contexts and how this differential relevance affects the processes of reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-attributions through which self-esteem is developed. Their analysis systematically documents that: (a) the personal meaning of social class and its evaluative salience varies for people in different stages of the life course; (b) the relevance of social class position depends on the social composition and heterogeneity of the settings in which people evaluate themselves; and (c) social class position has some direct effect on the distribution of events by which people directly judge and evaluate themselves.

Of special interest is the *contextuality* of social and self-evaluations. This means that individuals' experiences of social structures always occur within specific interactional contexts that condition and give meaning to the experiences there. In young children, whose experiences largely take place within homogeneous status contexts, socioeconomic status is mostly irrelevant to personal evaluations because it is not a distinguishing attribute. In adults whose experiences occur in more heterogeneous status contexts, especially work settings with institutionalized status hierarchies, social class differences are a more salient feature of interpersonal contacts and comparisons. In addition to contextual contingencies, *psychological centrality* also plays a important part in moderating the impact of social class and status on self-esteem. Acknowledging the complexity and multiplexity of the self-concept, Rosenberg and Pearlin noted that the impact of any personal or social attribute on self-esteem will depend on its importance for the individual's cogni-

tive structure; and they document the ways that "social status is more psychologically central to the adult than to the child" (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978, p. 68). Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978, p. 75) concluded that "one cannot understand the significance of a social structural variable for the individual without learning how this variable enters his actual experience and is processed within his own phenomenal field. As both the phenomenologists and symbolic interactionists remind us, facts must be interpreted within their 'meaning contexts.'"

Although they only considered global indexes of social class and self-esteem, the systematic way in which Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) examined conditional variations in the relationship between these variables has provided an analytical guide for subsequent research on this topic. Since Rosenberg and Pearlin, several studies have replicated and extended their analysis using alternative operationalizations of self-esteem and social class. Demo and Savin-Williams (1983) replicated the finding of a stronger association between social class and self-esteem in adolescent than in pre-adolescent children, using a variety of alternative self-esteem scales (all of which were global measures of general self-esteem). They confirmed that the different correlations reflected a greater personal awareness of social class among older children and the greater salience of social comparisons of social status for adolescents. They did not confirm Rosenberg and Pearlin's finding that the correlation is stronger in more class-heterogeneous settings in which the greater contextual variation in social status would make it a more informative factor for social comparison.

Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, and Weinstein (1990), using multiple domain-specific measures of self-esteem, demonstrated that the dimensional structure of self-esteem is consistent across social class categories (as well as gender and race). However, they do find differences in level of self-esteem across social class categories, at least for some dimensions of self-evaluation (e.g., moral character and academic domains).

Wiltfang and Scarbecz (1990) replicated Rosenberg and Pearlin's analysis using alternative "nontraditional" measures of social class – reflecting unemployment and welfare status of family, as well as neighborhood status characteristics. They argued that such indicators of class are potentially more stigmatizing and personally meaningful for adolescents than traditional measures of father's occupation or education (such as the Hollingshead Index). Wiltfang and Scarbecz found negligible or very weak effects of traditional parental occupational and education variables on adolescent self-esteem. Alternative measures of family class standing (using unemployment and welfare status) also had only modest effects. However, the social class of the neighborhood (rather than the family), as reflected in neighborhood unemployment rate, was more strongly related to adolescent self-esteem. Wiltfang and Scarbecz confirmed also that more proximate and personally

achieved experiences of evaluation – namely, academic success and social popularity – have a much stronger association with adolescent self-esteem than social class indicators based on parents' achievements. Considered together, such studies underline the importance of replicating even landmark analyses, in the process extending their contributions by examining how variations in the conditions and experiences of social class may affect differing aspects of self-evaluation.

Another group of studies have extended Rosenberg and Pearlin by focusing on adults rather than children and by using an alternative conceptualization of social class – a more Marxian influenced view that explicates how social class is situationally embodied in the conditions and social dynamics of the workplace. These studies embody all three of House's components, proximity, and psychological principles by focusing on specific occupational components of social class (rather than general status or prestige ratings), by focusing on the micro-social processes through which social stratification conditions the experiences of evaluation in people's work, and by distinguishing among aspects of self-esteem that are differentially responsive to occupational conditions. Staples, Schwalbe, and Gecas (1984) conceptualized social class in terms of the social organization of work (rather than a conventional Weberian focus on occupational prestige or economic status) and analyze how class position shapes the working conditions in which people labor and evaluate themselves. Also differentiating between efficacy-based and acceptance-based experiences of self-esteem, they argued that the class-based effects of occupation are mediated through the social requirements of work, and these affect self-esteem through evaluations of personal job-related efficacy. Their analysis confirms the theoretical importance of distinguishing between different dimensions of social stratification and different modes of experiencing self-esteem, as well as in explicating the terms of occupational contexts in which class position actually shapes evaluative experiences. Using this approach, they found a substantial class effect on self-esteem, but one entirely mediated through the social conditions of work. They also confirmed that the effect of failing to recognize the distinction between self-efficacy and self-worth (as distinctive processes of self-evaluation) "is to reduce the explanatory power of the model to insignificance" (Staples et al., 1984, p. 101). Schwalbe (1985) developed a fuller theoretical model of the dynamics involved in occupation-based self-evaluation.

In subsequent analysis, Gecas and Seff (1989, 1990) further qualified the self-evaluative impact of occupation by noting that work contexts are not equally relevant to workers' self-esteem. The effects of work are contingent on personal configurations of self-concept relevance – that is, Rosenberg's (1979, 1981) idea of "psychological centrality," also termed "identity salience" (Stryker, 1980, 1991) or "self-investment" (Faunce, 1984). Gecas and Seff (1990) confirmed that the self-evaluative effects of occupational conditions

and performances will largely be through efficacy-based self-esteem; the impact on value-based or acceptance-based self-esteem seems to be negligible.

In sum, recent research, building on the research agenda established by Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978), has clarified the ostensibly simple finding that there is no appreciable correlation between social class and self-esteem, concluding that "it depends." It depends on the form of self-evaluation by which self-esteem is being measured and analyzed. Global indices of overall self-regard do not consistently correlate with indicators of self-regard; however, some components of self-evaluation (such as achievement-based or efficacy-based evaluations) do relate more directly with social class positions where those bases of evaluation are more directly implicated. It also depends on how social class is conceptualized, measured, and analyzed. Traditional status attainment measures of general occupational status rankings do not seem to correlate well or consistently with general self-esteem and do not predict specific self-evaluations very well. More specific components of social class, such as the conditions and relations of work or the social conditions of neighborhoods, seem to be more theoretically meaningful and empirically predictive. However, they are also more limited in their application because they apply to only a portion of the population.

The correlation between social class and self-esteem also depends on the social contexts in which people live and make judgments about themselves. "Consonant contexts," in which significant others are similar in social class or indifferent to social class, seem to render social class irrelevant as a source of social differentiation and self-evaluation. "Dissonant contexts," when low status persons must deal with higher status persons in regular meaningful interactions, generally yield a measurable correlation between social class rank or status and levels of self-esteem. In such contexts, social position or rank becomes a more relevant piece of external information about self-performance and self-worth. Equally important, the correlation also depends on individuals' own personal values and priorities as these influence the "psychological centrality" of social class components. Social status may be evaluatively relevant for some people but not for others. For some persons, who have high personal investment in work as a source of personal identity, the status characteristics of occupational achievements will be highly relevant for self-evaluation. For others, who have high personal investment in family accomplishments and communal activities, and for whom a job is just a way to pay the bills, the status characteristics of work are mostly irrelevant to self-evaluation. As Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) noted, the relevance of social class for self-evaluation varies over the life course as people's connections, interests, and priorities change. Thus, trying to draw conclusions from simple correlations between general social status and general self-esteem measures, analyzed as decon-

textualized individual traits or personal attributes, will be a mostly uninformative venture.

RACIAL INEQUALITY AND SELF-ESTEEM

When it comes to social determinants of self-esteem, few variables seem as obvious and important as race. Numerous well established social scientific theories, as well as popular folk wisdom, point unequivocally to the same conclusion – that racial prejudice leads to low self-esteem. Sociologists favoring an *interactionist* approach cite the Mead–Cooley hypothesis of reflected appraisal and reference group theory, both of which argue that how people regard themselves and feel about themselves is a product of their social environments. Through interaction within the culture that communicates disvalue and derogation, minority group members will come to define themselves in these terms. Sociologists favoring a social *structural* approach posit a more cumulative process, based in the stratification system and culminating in a social “tangle of pathology.” Systematic conditions of disadvantage and degradation lead to low performances in instrumental social roles, lack of positive role models, incomplete and dysfunctional families, subcultures of poverty and learned helplessness, and eventually to low self-esteem. Psychologists and psychiatrists focusing on the *socialization of personality* posit that people acquire their identities and personalities by internalizing the values, categories, and standards present in their cultural environment. For disvalued racial minorities, this internalization involves introjecting the “mark of oppression” and results in self-rejection and self-devaluation, as argued by numerous psychological luminaries such as Kurt Lewin (1948), Kenneth Clark (1965), Erik Erikson (1966), Kardiner and Ovesy (1962), and Grier and Cobbs (1968).

Thus, many theories, diverse in theoretical content and perspective, converge on a common conclusion: that experiences of inferiority and disadvantage due to racial inequality lead invariably to racial hatred and personal self-derogation. Given this theoretical consensus, the conclusion was largely regarded as an unquestioned (and mostly untested) truism of social science through about 1970. The little empirical research that was available, using selected case studies and very indirect, inferential indicators of self-esteem, merely served to confirm the obvious.

However, numerous survey studies done in the late 1960s and early 1970s (with the development of more systematic and direct measures of self-esteem) raised doubts about the traditional wisdom regarding race and self-esteem. Also, more critical analyses of minority group experiences and perceptions began to question the simple logic behind this conclusion. By the late 1970s, a substantial amount of disconfirming research seemed to be available, calling for a reevaluation of traditional ideas. Banks (1972), Porter and Washington

(1979), and Wylie (1979) provided detailed and comprehensive reviews of this literature, documenting the changing pattern of empirical findings as the research shifted from early reliance on studying small, selective clinical samples using projective measurements (e.g., doll play, picture-drawing, and storytelling methods) to more direct, objective measurements of self-perceptions and self-feelings from broader survey samples. These reviews revealed that the empirical correlation between racial status and self-esteem is not what prior theory and conventional wisdom has predicted. Although the correlation is rather inconsistent across studies, very few showed evidence of a clear self-esteem deficit in racial minorities and a substantial number report finding higher levels of self-esteem among racial minorities. The latter finding – directly opposite to well-established theoretical predictions – presented an uncomfortable puzzle for social psychologists to solve.

A variety of explanations were suggested for the poor fit between theory and data, mostly aimed at showing that the inconsistency was more illusional or misleading. One important possibility is that the measurements of self-esteem were invalid when applied to minorities, reflecting defensive distortion and self-presentation rather than true self-esteem (e.g., Adam, 1978; Bachman & O'Malley, 1984). An alternative explanation was that the higher levels of black self-esteem were a recent historical anomaly, resulting from political movements in the late 1960s and 1970s that promoted "black pride" and generated a new subculture of African-American socialization.

In fact, Rosenberg and Simmons (1972), by making a closer analysis of these findings, showed insightfully that the empirical data actually *confirm* the original propositions (about reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-attributions). In the process, they explicated the idea that the fundamental processes of appraisal, comparison, and attribution are indeed universal features of human self-conception, but they yield different outcomes in different social circumstances.

In this context, the most effective and systematic analysis of racial effects on self-esteem remains the study by Rosenberg and Simmons (1972) from their 1968 survey of children in Baltimore schools. Noting that their empirical findings (like most similar studies) clearly contradicted conventional psychological and sociological propositions regarding the racial dynamics of self-esteem, they considered the possibility that these results may be due to invalid or biased data, especially the measurements of self-esteem. Rosenberg and Simmons reported that their self-esteem scores were unaffected by the race of the interviewer (ruling out racial self-presentation effects) and that no indications of differential validity of self-esteem measurement by race (using systematic construct validation criteria) were detectable. Thus, concluding that the empirical findings regarding racial self-esteem patterns are both real and reliable, they examined closely how those variables that would seem most directly related to self-esteem in black children (e.g., skin-color

preferences and stereotypes, family structures and social status, lower school achievements, etc.) might actually correlate with self-esteem scores. They found that objective measurements or ratings of children's characteristics do not necessarily correlate with the psychological meaning or importance of those characteristics.

Rosenberg and Simmons' data showed that black children do clearly evidence cultural stereotypes about skin color, rating lighter as more attractive. Yet black children were just as satisfied with their looks as white children were, and black children's own skin color (as rated by interviewers) was uncorrelated with their self-esteem. Children whose skin was rated as very dark tended to rate themselves as "somewhat dark" and to regard skin color as a less central dimension of attractiveness. Although black children in the sample were on average more socially disadvantaged than white children, they were equally likely to believe that their families "have done well and are socially respected." This occurred both for economic indicators, such as employment and income, and for social prestige variables, such as non-intact or unconventional family structures. In school performance, grades of black children were significantly lower (on average) than those of white children. And yet, even though black children valued academic achievement, the correlation between academic success and self-esteem for black children was negligible.

In making sense of these seemingly paradoxical patterns, Rosenberg and Simmons identified and carefully explicated two important aspects of self-evaluation as a social psychological process: (1) contextual buffering, and (2) perceptual selectivity. By "contextual buffering," Rosenberg and Simmons emphasized that self-evaluation takes place within specific local interactional settings involving specific other persons with whom the person has meaningful face-to-face contact. Although larger social structures and cultural categories may be derogatory, what matters are the actual experiences, communications, and people within the person's own daily interactions when the social comparisons and reflected appraisals available to people are relatively positive and benign. Rosenberg and Simmons pointed to the idea of *consonant contexts* of evaluation, in which persons are surrounded by people who are similar to them (and with whom social comparisons will be favorable or nondistinguishing) and who are favorably related to them (thus providing positive and supportive social appraisals). Such contexts tend to be low in negative information that would lead to derogatory self-evaluations. By contrast, *dissonant* contexts are those settings in which people are surrounded by a wide variety of comparison others (many of whom are noticeably higher on evaluative criteria) and by many people who communicate more hostile or critical evaluations.

In such terms, societal patterns of racial segregation that reflect the operation of widespread racism and prejudice may nonetheless have some benign

personal consequences; social changes that are made to reduce such conditions may not always have uniformly positive results. Despite the fact that prejudice and discrimination are widespread, children tend to be buffered from them by their immediate environment that is the direct source of most of the information they have about themselves. Their environments are racially homogenous and contain less racially negative communication or feedback, especially at younger ages when self-esteem seems more vulnerable. One effect of racial integration is to expose minority persons to more potentially negative social interactions. In Rosenberg and Simmons' Baltimore data, black children in racially integrated schools (where a substantial percentage of the students are white) generally reported more negative race-related experiences and lower self-esteem than did black children in mostly black schools. Although this pattern has not appeared in all studies on the impact of school integration, it has been frequently reported by other studies, both of racial integration and of mainstreaming persons with stigmatizing disabilities (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Interactional contexts also provide some degree of informational filtering from outside informational sources. General cultural evaluations and stereotypes of racial minorities may not have very much influence on children's self-evaluations because children are often not well informed about broader cultural patterns of prejudice and denigration. Lacking this information, Rosenberg and Simmons found that younger children feel that most people rate their group favorably; certainly most people that they interact with every day think this way. This effect is even stronger for black children in racially homogeneous environments. This innocence declines as children get older and become more experienced in social contexts outside their own local personal setting. However, children's self-esteem levels remain uncorrelated with their perception of how "most people" rate their racial group, since "most people" is a vague abstraction, not an immediate, concrete, and personally "significant other."

The other important social psychological process to help explain the positive self-esteem of racially disadvantaged children is *psychological selectivity*. This is the recognition that self-conception is an *active*, constructive process going on within social interaction that seeks out, creates, and recreates experiences in social interaction, rather than a passive, reactive process of merely processing external information input from the environment. It draws on Mead's depiction of the self as an active I-Me dialogue in which impulse, creativity, and indeterminacy are essential elements of self-construction. The idea of psychological selectivity also acknowledges that self-awareness is a *subjective* process in which psychological reality is the result of searching for, perceiving, interpreting, categorizing, and making sense of information. What matters is not what may be true in some external objective sense but rather what people "construe" or think is true.

In analyzing how children perceive and evaluate themselves, Rosenberg and Simmons identified several distinctive forms of selectivity. *Selective awareness* means that people are differentially aware of information that may be available in their social environments. They cannot acknowledge every one of the almost infinite multitude of stimuli present in the situation but must select what is psychologically meaningful. They look for, notice, and remember those phenomena that are more personally relevant, credible, and sensible, a process influenced by the self-motives and self-interests that are active. Lots of negative information is present in the racial stereotypes contained within the larger culture of white-dominated society, but this information is mostly part of the "noise-laden" cultural background; it is not part of the "signal-rich" foreground of daily social interaction. Because it lacks the phenomenal impact and perceptual salience of more immediate information, it tends not to be noticed with any detail or sense of realism. As Rosenberg and Simmons (1972, p. 40) described it: "Consider racial stereotypes which characterize all members of a group in derogatory terms and see them as all alike. The experience of each individual in his environment makes it virtually impossible for him to agree with the appraisal, for he personally has seen the actual heterogeneity of his people. Only someone at great physical or social distance from a group can hold to the sweeping views of homogeneity implied by racial stereotypes."

Selective interpretation means that people respond to what things "mean" rather than what they "are." Rosenberg and Simmons noted that black children value achievements in school, but that school grades do not correlate with their self-esteem because black children tend to see grades as less indicative of their real intelligence. Their self-evaluations of being smart are based on a variety of other social performances unrelated to academic achievement. It is important to note that selective interpretation does not necessarily imply distortion or defensive error. Rather, it means that interpretation and judgment are inherently subjective processes, subject to the influence of people's interests, motives, and experiences. To remove subjective considerations from the process of evaluation is to render it "meaning-less."

Value selectivity refers to the observation that self-esteem as each person's overall sense of worth and competence does not weight all evaluations and experiences equally. Some attributes and abilities are more important or salient to people's sense of who they really are, reflecting Rosenberg's (1965, 1979) concept of "psychological centrality." Thus, people seem to value more highly those qualities that are positive and accord less salience to those qualities that have negative implications for self-appraisal. As Rosenberg and Simmons noted, children with very dark skin tend to assign less importance to skin color as an important dimension of physical attractiveness and put less emphasis on physical attractiveness as a determinant of social and personal worth. In similar terms, children with poorer school grades tend to

assign lower importance to academic achievement as an indicator of how good they are as children.

Reference selectivity means that while people develop their self-concepts based on appraisals from and comparisons with other persons, not all others are "significant others." The people with whom a person has contact or interactions vary considerably in how relevant they are as sources of self-evaluation. The significance of others is a function of how much contact or interaction the person has with them, how much the person cares about the others, the social commitments the person has to specific other people, and how credible the others are as sources of information and judgments. Although black children may seem to be disadvantaged by reference to other groups of children (e.g., white children), their reference for social comparison is not all other children, but rather those children who are nearby, similar in attributes, and in comparable circumstances – mostly other black children. Similarly, their significant others for meaningful reflected appraisals are those who are close to them and who know them as persons (not as categories). "In other words, there is little reason to believe that black mothers love their children any less than white mothers do or that the black child's friends, of whatever social class, think any less well of him than the white child's friends do" (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972, p. 139). Indeed, "these are the influences which really count for the black children and which so effectively serve to protect their self-esteem" (1972, p. 144).

Rosenberg and Simmons's (1972) study was done nearly three decades ago. Since then, how has subsequent research and analysis extended or modified their findings? We can notice that although research on racial patterns in self-esteem has continued, the frequency and intensity have gradually decreased from the strong surge in research in the 1970s – which is summarized in Porter and Washington (1979) and Wylie (1979). Additional studies to test, sharpen, and extend the analyses provided by Rosenberg and Simmons have continued, especially using more elaborate multivariate statistical methods and more complex measurements of self-esteem. However, there seemed to be far fewer of these in the 1990s, suggesting a shared perception of diminishing returns.

Most important follow-ups to Rosenberg and Simmons have involved going beyond global self-esteem and analyzing dimensions or subsets of overall self-regard. These show that different components or domains of self-evaluation may show different patterns of racial differences. Specifically, Hughes and Demo (1989) – following Gecas (1982) – subdivided global self-esteem into self-acceptance (personal worth) and self-efficacy (instrumental effectiveness) components, noting that the Rosenberg and Simmons' measure of self-esteem essentially reflects the first component, which is more strongly a product of reflected appraisals from immediate significant others. For this aspect of self-esteem, the racial buffering of consonant social con-

texts is very effective. However, evaluation of personal efficacy is often affected by external opportunities and tasks that are outside the control of people's local reference groups – that is, institutionalized contexts of activity and evaluation that reflect societal macro-structures of opportunity and advantage. Because their sample includes only black adults, Hughes and Demo (1989) could not assess black–white differences. However, their analysis confirms and extends the findings of Rosenberg and Simmons in important ways because they analyze a large national sample of black adults (in contrast to Rosenberg and Simmons' local sample of school children) and they use separate efficacy and acceptance measures of self-esteem.

Hughes and Demo confirmed that among African Americans, the sense of self-acceptance is largely shaped by reflected appraisals from family, friends, and others in their immediate community; these are the significant others for self-assessments of personal worth. Such feelings are unrelated to comparisons or contacts with nonminorities or the wider social world of institutionalized inequality and cultural prejudice. In contrast, perceptions of self-efficacy among African Americans *are* affected by institutionalized experiences and people's statuses within a wider system of cultural categories and occupational roles. On this dimension, black self-evaluations may be more vulnerable to lowered levels, a finding pattern noted by some other studies – for example, Gordon (1969); Heiss and Owens (1972); and Hunt and Hunt (1977). For developing feelings of self-efficacy, the structure of opportunities and the institutionalized allocation of status seems to have a larger impact than the positive appraisals from people's personal interaction groups. Thus, societal structures of racial inequality should have a more negative effect on this component of self-esteem, even though their effects on self-acceptance are negligible. Separating out the components of overall self-esteem shows that contextual buffering is variable across evaluative domains or processes. The efficacy/competence domain is less insulated than the personal worth/acceptance domain because it is more dependent on realistic self-appraisals and its contexts of evaluation may occur outside black community settings in which larger white-dominated society may impose external norms and “measuring rods.”

The division of self-esteem into component self-feelings should allow for additional resolution of the mixture of findings on racial patterns of self-evaluations. As Rosenberg (1985) noted, the most important theoretical development in recent self-concept research has been recognition of the complex, multifaceted character of self-appraisal. A corresponding trend has been the measurement of self-esteem in multidimensional or multidomain terms, rather than as a single global self-esteem score. Despite their clear relevance, such multidimensional models of self-esteem have not been fully explicated or applied to racial differences in self-evaluation. However, a factor analytic study of a large mixed-race sample of elementary school children

(Pallas et al., 1990) found that the dimensional structure of self-esteem is rather stable across age, race, gender, and socioeconomic class categories, even though there are consistent racial differences in the personal relevance of different domains and black children score higher than white children in all domains except academic ability (where they are comparable). In sum, application of multidimensional self-evaluation analyses for Rosenberg's global self-esteem analysis does not appreciably change the findings nor does it modify the basic theoretical description of the social dynamics by which self-evaluation occurs.

A valuable postscript to Rosenberg and Simmons' (1972) landmark analysis was provided by Crocker and Major's (1989) extensive review of research on self-esteem dynamics among "stigmatized and oppressed" persons. Crocker and Major's review focused on a very broad range of social identities or groups that are characterized by widely held negative attitudes and cultural stereotypes, as well as to systematic patterns of discrimination and disadvantage, directed against members of those categories – for example, racial or ethnic groups, persons with physical disabilities or disfigurements, those with mental disabilities or disorders, persons in other "deviant" or "abnormal" social categories. Crocker and Major noted that most theories clearly predict self-derogation, self-rejection, and low self-esteem for stigmatized and socially disadvantaged persons. And yet, a substantial and diverse body of empirical research "leads to the surprising conclusion that prejudice against members of stigmatized or oppressed groups generally does *not* result in lowered self-esteem for members of these groups" (Crocker & Major, 1989, p. 611). They are as likely to accept themselves and feel competent or worthwhile as "normal" people do, despite possessing socially disvalued attributes, receiving personally negative communication from others, and being at a disadvantage in participating in many common social activities. In seeking to explain this surprising pattern, Crocker and Major surveyed a wide variety of correlational and experimental research done in a number of social science fields. Although they relied on a very different research base, their conclusions were thoroughly consistent with Rosenberg and Simmons (1972). Crocker and Major noted the importance of the *contextual* setting in which evaluative experiences occur – that is, comparison with others who are similar and proximal – along with the psychological *selectivity* by which people differentially value attributes on which evaluations are positive (rather than negative and stigmatizing) and by which they discredit negative appraisals from reference others who are perceived as distant, insensitive, and bigoted (thus, not credible).

In sum, looking back over three decades of subsequent research and analysis, the analytic insights provided by Rosenberg and Simmons not only stand up very well (without appreciable modification), but they have been shown to have remarkable theoretical scope, extending to include a broad

range of social inequalities and providing an insightful glimpse of fundamental, universal features of human experience.

DISCUSSION

The theoretical motivation for this review comes from a theoretical puzzle. The first part of the puzzle is the observation that the self as a distinctively personal phenomenon is nonetheless a social product. In Rosenberg's (1981, p. 593) terms:

the self-concept achieves its particular shape and form in the matrix of a given culture, social structure, and institutional system. Although the individual's view of himself may be internal, what he sees and feels when he thinks of himself is largely the product of social life.

The second part of the puzzle is the equally simple observation that social stratification and inequality are ubiquitous features of social life and organization, which leads easily to the conclusion that social stratification will shape the development of self-esteem.

Since such stratifications command unequal social esteem, social scientists have tended to take it for granted that those ranking lower in the various status hierarchies would have lower self-esteem than more favored members of society (Rosenberg, 1981, p. 603).

However, the final part of the puzzle is that a substantial body of research on the social correlates of self-esteem accumulated over the past half-century has disconfirmed this assumption. The seemingly simple direct relation between social inequality and self-esteem turns out to be much more complex and interesting than common intuition would indicate. And exploring the complexities of the link between social stratification and self-esteem reveals much about the self as a dynamic social and psychological process.

The general implications to which this review points are both affirmations of and qualifications of traditionally received theories about the development of self-esteem. They affirm the fundamental wisdom of theoretical descriptions of the social dynamics of self-perception and self-evaluation as explicated by Rosenberg and others. But they disconfirm the common tendency to treat these as simple, sovereign theories of linear deterministic processes. Rather the theories provide generalized, approximate accounts of basic patterns and processes that occur frequently but not invariably.

The lack of finality, certainty, and decimal-point precision should not be interpreted as confirming the failure of prior research or as showing the futility of the enterprise (of applying scientific analysis to the fleeting phenomena of human experiences). It should, however, engender a sense of modesty and caution in our analytical aspirations and theoretical pretensions. Two

qualifications seem particularly salient. One is the need to avoid oversimplified, unidirectional, mechanically causal, deterministic models of self-evaluation. Conventional research frameworks condition us to look for effects of social structure on personal lives and psychological functioning that are simple, direct, linear, and strongly determinate. However, we should not confuse the implicit features of our analytical models with the intrinsic properties of the phenomena we are trying to analyze. Careful review of empirical research reveals the complexity and nonlinearity of the self. That is, self-conception is an active, constructive, subjective, multidimensional, multimotive process that has a poor fit to such models. Thus, they cannot provide very complete accounts of how self-evaluation works in diverse individual biographies and social settings.

The second caveat entails the need to avoid decontextualized accounts of self-evaluation. The common tendency in social psychological analysis is to conceptualize self-concept and self-esteem as if they occurred entirely inside people's heads (or minds) and existed there as permanent independent features of the individual. Self-awareness and self-evaluation are variable aspects of ongoing behavioral processes that occur within specific social contexts. As such, they always take place within particular social settings, occasions, relationships, and role-identities. They cannot be abstracted from the particulars of the contexts without reducing self-evaluation to a pale abstraction having very weak predictive and explanatory utility for real experiences and behaviors.

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15 Self-Evaluation and Stratification Beliefs

Matthew O. Hunt

It is my thesis that attitudes toward equality rest in the first instance upon one's attitude towards one's own status. Like a large number of social beliefs, attitudes towards equality take their direction from beliefs about the self, the status of the self, one's self-esteem or lack thereof.

(Lane, 1959, p. 37)

INTRODUCTION

This study explores relationships between self-evaluation (i.e., self-esteem and mastery) and ideological beliefs about the causes of poverty (i.e., "stratification beliefs" or "stratification ideology"). While there has been a good deal of research into the antecedents and consequences of self-concept variables (Gecas & Burke, 1995; Rosenberg, 1979, 1981) and stratification beliefs (Kluegel & Smith, 1986), scant theoretical or empirical research has focused on relationships between these two phenomena.¹ This study addresses this gap in the social psychological literature by examining relationships between self-evaluation and "individualistic" and "structuralist" beliefs about the causes of poverty (Feagin, 1972, 1975; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). In addition, self-evaluation/stratification beliefs relationships are examined *separately* for African Americans, Latinos, and whites, in an effort to critically examine an

¹ One justification and motivation for this study can be found by merely substituting the word "inequality" for "equality" in Lane's passage quoted at the outset.

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“assumption of race/ethnic similarity” regarding social psychological processes (Hunt et al., 2000).

Three basic research questions guide this study: (1) Are there relationships between self-evaluation and stratification beliefs? (2) Do any such relationships exist net of the effects of race and other sociodemographic variables? (3) Do African Americans, Latinos, and whites differ in relationships between self-evaluation and stratification beliefs? I answer these questions using a sample of southern Californians ($n = 2,628$) collected in 1993. Before doing so, however, some general background on stratification beliefs and self-evaluation is offered.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Stratification Beliefs

The study of “stratification beliefs,” according to Kluegel and Smith (1986), involves an attempt to understand “what people believe about who gets what and why.” Past research suggests that beliefs about poverty are of two basic types: “individualistic” and “structuralist.”² Individualistic beliefs locate the causes of poverty within poor persons themselves (e.g., lack of ability, lack of effort), and are understood to reflect the dominant ideology of individualism in the United States (Huber & Form, 1973). In contrast, structuralist beliefs locate the causes of poverty in the social and economic system (e.g., lack of jobs, discrimination) in which poor persons live. As such, they represent a “system challenging” belief, existing alongside the ideology of individualism in American culture (Bobo, 1991; Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

Virtually all past research on stratification beliefs in the United States has found that individualistic beliefs predominate (Feagin, 1975; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Nilson, 1981).³ This fact is generally attributed to the strength of individualism as a broad, pervasive ideology that is thought to shape the beliefs of Americans from all groups and social locations. In contrast, adherence to structuralist beliefs has been found to be more variable – depending on prevailing social and historical conditions, persons’ social group memberships, and personal experiences. As such, structuralist beliefs are generally thought to be “layered on” to, rather than replacing of, individualistic beliefs (Hunt, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

Structuralist beliefs have been found to be especially popular among relatively disadvantaged strata – a pattern consistent with an “underdog thesis”

² Although past research has looked at beliefs about poverty, wealth, race, gender, opportunity, and other inequality-related issues, beliefs about poverty represent the most commonly used measure of “stratification ideology.”

³ For an exception, see Hunt (1996). Some caution should be exercised in generalizing from this study, however, as the database was limited to southern Californians.

(Robinson & Bell, 1978) holding that groups with relatively low status and power are more likely to embrace system-challenging ideologies and to reject system-legitimizing ideologies. For example, past research has found blacks to support structuralist beliefs at greater rates than whites. Although this “underdog” logic may seem obvious, there are also studies showing that relatively disadvantaged groups do not always protest their subordination, and in some cases support the status quo at equal or higher rates than the better off (Hochschild, 1981; Lane, 1962; Sennett & Cobb, 1972) – a scenario indicating equal or greater “legitimation” of inequalities among the disadvantaged.

There are two basic routes to the legitimation of inequalities among the disadvantaged: consensus and domination. “Consensus” involves roughly equal support for various ideologies across strata of unequal status and/or power. For example, studies suggest that blacks often do not differ from whites on support for the dominant ideology in the United States (e.g., “individualistic” explanations of inequality) (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). “Domination” refers to the situation in which lower status groups support ideologies that justify the status quo (or reject system-challenging ideas) at *greater* rates than their more advantaged counterparts. For example, Hunt (2000) finds that persons with low SES (education and income) are more likely to believe in a “just world” than are persons with higher SES.

Self-Evaluation

The causes and consequences of variation in the self-concept (e.g., self-esteem and mastery) have been widely researched (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Rosenberg, 1965, 1979, 1981; Rosenberg & Kaplan, 1982; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972), yet there exists no scholarly consensus regarding the relationship between self-evaluation and ideological beliefs concerning the legitimacy of inequality. There are, however, some theoretical speculations on this issue.

Della Fave’s (1980) “self-evaluation theory” of the legitimation process suggests that, in stable stratification systems (i.e., legitimated ones), a basic normative consensus on “who gets what and why” cuts across major structural lines of inequality. According to Della Fave, this normative consensus on distributive justice (or “equity” principles) produces an unequal distribution of self-evaluations that mirrors the unequal distribution of power and resources in the broader society. Thus, the key to the legitimation of inequality lies in the fact that self-evaluations are distributed in the same way as “primary resources” (e.g., wealth, power). Following this logic, because of the internalization of basic “equity” principles, low-status persons do not protest their subordination because they think little of themselves (from the standpoint of their ability to control the larger sociopolitical environment), internalize responsibility for their plight, and are impressed by their “betters” who are more positively evaluated and seen as deserving of their greater share of

esteem and primary resources given the widespread perception of their "greater contributions" to society. In short, because of consensus regarding the justice of the processes producing inequality, as well as the norms governing these processes (e.g., agreement on the idea of individual responsibility for personal positions), a basic across-strata consensus exists supporting the assertion that existing inequalities in control over primary resources (and in self-evaluations) are basically right and reasonable.

Following these arguments, *what I term a "subjective legitimization" perspective predicts no relationship between self-evaluation and perceived legitimacy* – that is, those who think little of themselves, and who perceive little personal control over their lives, should not differ significantly from their high self-evaluation counterparts regarding the perceived legitimacy of the status quo.

Della Fave's theory posits an isomorphism between objective rank and self-evaluation owing to a general ideological consensus in society. In contrast to this view, much scholarship suggests that both system-legitimizing and system-challenging ideologies exist in the cultures of industrial societies (Bobo, 1991; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Mann, 1970). For example, in a recent study of justice beliefs in twelve nations, Kluegel, Mason, and Wegener (1995) report that all the societies studied have a "primary" (i.e., "dominant") ideology that is widely adhered to across classes and groups (e.g., "individualism" in the United States), as well as a "secondary" ideology that is especially popular among strata not favored by the "primary" ideology (e.g., the role played by "structuralist" beliefs among the disadvantaged in the United States). Della Fave's theory relies heavily on the assumption of a normative consensus on a "primary ideology" (i.e., an ideology of individualism and personal responsibility), and downplays the possibility of dual ideologies, operating in a differentiated system, offering challenges to the status quo. Two additional perspectives on the relationship between self-evaluation and legitimacy arise from a consideration of the possibility that a normative consensus is not the primary feature of society.

One alternative to the "subjective legitimization" perspective suggests that there is a subjective component to the "underdog thesis" in the sense that "individuals who feel that they are deprived, even if they are not objectively deprived, will perceive more inequality than individuals who do not feel so deprived" (Robinson, 1983, p. 352). Translated to the issue of self-evaluation, a "subjective underdog" thesis holds that persons with low self-evaluations will be *less* likely to support basic tenets of the dominant ideology (and will be more likely to support system-challenging ideologies), while persons with high self-evaluations will be more likely to judge the status quo and its inequalities (e.g., poverty) to be legitimate. Following this logic, lower self-evaluations should increase the likelihood of rejecting the dominant ideology and of accepting system-challenging ideas. *Thus, observation of a positive*

relationship between self-evaluation and perceived legitimacy supports this “subjective underdog” perspective.

A second alternative to the “subjective legitimization” perspective *expects an inverse relationship between self-evaluation and perceived legitimacy – a view I term a “subjective domination” perspective* – that is, persons with low self-evaluations will support dominant ideologies (and reject system-challenging ideas) at greater rates than persons with higher self-evaluations. Why might we expect such a pattern? One possibility is a need for ontological security or order among persons with low senses of self-worth and/or perceived control over their lives. That is, having low self-esteem and/or mastery may correspond with a need to see the world as a just and fair place where the poor deserve their fate – a theme reminiscent of Lerner’s “just world” hypothesis (1980).⁴ Following this logic, higher self-evaluations are conducive to a more critical view of the status quo and its inequalities (e.g., a more compassionate view of the poor) that validates the moral claims of the underdog, while low self-evaluations increase the likelihood of seeing the status quo as legitimate (e.g., “blaming the individual” for poverty).

Table 15.1 summarizes the predictions of the three perspectives on the relationship between self-evaluation and stratification ideology.

The Assumption of Race/Ethnic Similarity

The third main research question of this study concerns whether African-Americans, Latinos, and whites differ in self-evaluation/stratification beliefs relationships. Most social psychological research has neglected the issue of race/ethnic differences in social psychological processes – generally assuming that no compelling evidence exists to suggest that the determinants of beliefs and attitudes should vary across race/ethnic lines (Hunt et al., 2000).⁵

I test this implied null hypothesis, guided by the assumption that groups with different historical experiences and material conditions of existence, may vary in how beliefs and values are shaped (Kohn, 1959). The historical

⁴ Lerner (1980) argues for the existence of a “belief in a just world” whose logic holds that people “get what they deserve, and deserve what they get.” One consequence of such a viewpoint is that people in unfortunate circumstances (e.g., the poor) are derogated and held personally responsible for their plight. Regarding low self-esteem, Swann (1996) and Rosenberg and Owens (2001) argue that low self-esteem people tend to internalize their problems more than higher-self esteem people.

⁵ Several studies examining the beliefs and attitudes of nonwhite race/ethnic groups have appeared in recent years, most of which focus on various race/ethnic group differences in *adherence* to particular beliefs and attitudes (e.g., Booth-Kewley, Rosenfeld, & Edward, 1992; Guarnaccia, Angel, & Worobey, 1991; Smith, 1990; Welch & Sigelman, 1993). Despite these developments, studies that compare race/ethnic groups on the *determinants* of beliefs and attitudes are still a rarity. It is the dearth of studies examining group differences in the determinants of beliefs and attitudes that underlies the “assumption of race/ethnic similarity.”

Table 15.1. Predictions of Three Perspectives on the Relationship between Self-Evaluation and Stratification Ideology

<i>A. Subjective Legitimation</i>		
1. Self-evaluation	————— ns —————>	Individualistic beliefs
2. Self-evaluation	————— ns —————>	Structuralist beliefs
<i>B. Subjective Underdog</i>		
1. Self-evaluation	————— + —————>	Individualistic beliefs
2. Self-evaluation	————— - —————>	Structuralist beliefs
<i>C. Subjective Domination</i>		
1. Self-evaluation	————— - —————>	Individualistic beliefs
2. Self-evaluation	————— + —————>	Structuralist beliefs

Note: ns, nonsignificant.

oppression and continued segregation of blacks is an obvious source of group distinction (Massey & Denton, 1993). At a more social psychological level, Steele (1994), Cose (1993), and others argue that even relatively successful blacks – who are on par with middle-class whites from the standpoint of socioeconomic status – still must cope with the reality of race-based discrimination as a force influencing self and fellow group members, in forming an ideological orientation toward American society.⁶ Among Latinos in southern California, the relatively recent migration of many members of this ethnic group from Mexico and Central America (Donato, 1994) differentiates them from most blacks and non-Hispanic whites in the region. Thus, blacks and Latinos have distinct histories and experiences that likely carry implications for how members of these groups perceive themselves, others, and inequalities in American society.

Another factor contributing to the origin and perpetuation of the “assumption of race/ethnic similarity” is the lack of sufficient numbers of minority respondents in past sample surveys to carry out the type of statistical analyses necessary for comparing the determinants of beliefs and attitudes. In contrast to past research, the database I employ contains sizeable subsamples of blacks and Latinos, allowing for statistical subgroup comparisons that directly examine the validity of the assumption of race/ethnic similarity.

A final factor motivating critical examination of the “assumption of race/ethnic similarity” is evidence from recent studies documenting

⁶ See Kluegel and Smith (1986) for a discussion of blacks’ lower levels of support for the belief in the availability of equal opportunity in American society.

race/ethnic differences in social psychological processes. For example, Hunt (1996) finds differences between whites and both blacks and Latinos regarding the relationship between "self-explanations" and beliefs about the causes of poverty; Steelman and Powell (1993) show that minority parents are more likely than their white counterparts to simultaneously balance collectivist attitudes with individualist ones; Schnittker, Freese, and Powell (2000) demonstrate that blacks' and whites' beliefs about the causes of mental illness do not cluster in a similar fashion; and Jackson (1997) shows that several commonly held views about the mental health implications of role accumulation, role status, and role combinations do not apply as well to blacks, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans as they do to non-Hispanic whites. In light of these examples, along with the general neglect of race/ethnicity in social psychology (Hunt et al., 2000), examination of possible race/ethnic differences in the relationship between self-evaluation and stratification ideology is clearly warranted.

DATA

The data used in this investigation were gathered between January and March 1993 at the Social Science Research Center at the California State University at Fullerton through random-digit-dialing and telephone interviews of persons 18 years or older residing in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. The overall response rate was just above 70%. Of the 2,854 interviews completed, 1,245 were with whites, 737 with Latinos, 646 with African Americans, 148 with Asians, and 62 with "others" (16 people refused to answer the race self-identification question).⁷ Given the extreme cultural heterogeneity of the Asian category, I elected to exclude Asians from this study in order to focus on a comparison of the three other major race/ethnic groups in the region ($n = 2,628$). The survey purposely oversampled blacks, resulting in a sample in which whites represent 47.4%, blacks represent 24.6%, and Latinos 28% of respondents. This race/ethnic mix was achieved by oversampling telephone exchanges in 1990 census tracts in which the black population was greater than 30%.

⁷ "Race/ethnicity" is based on respondents' self-reports. The survey item read: "What race do you consider yourself to be?" Response options included: White, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or Other. In the southern California region where the data for this study were collected, Latinos are approximately 85% Mexican American (or "Chicano"). Thus, criticisms of the use of the term "Latino" or "Hispanic" that point to the diversity of groups making up this category in the United States (e.g., Chicanos, Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans), are largely avoided in this research.

Comparisons with 1990 census data confirm the representativeness of the current sample in terms of basic sociodemographic characteristics, and a weighting correction adjusts the sample to mirror existing race/ethnicity and gender population proportions according to census information. This weighting procedure changes the race/ethnic percentages to: whites = 60.2%, blacks = 8.7%, and Latinos = 31.1%. The weighted sample is used to calculate means and standard deviations for the total sample, but the correlation and regression models use the unweighted sample following Winship and Radbill (1994). Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish according to the respondent's wishes. Back-translation was used to maximize the equivalence of the two versions of the survey.

MEASURES

Beliefs About Poverty

The two dependent variables examined in this study measure the importance attributed to individualistic and structuralist reasons for poverty.⁸ The items used in these measures were taken, with slight modification, from Feagin's (1972) and Kluegel and Smith's (1986) surveys of stratification beliefs. A principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation) performed on these items reveals two underlying dimensions that are interpreted as individualistic and structuralist reasons for poverty. Identical factor analyses performed within each race/ethnic subgroup revealed the same two underlying dimensions.

Individualistic beliefs about poverty are measured with a scale ($\alpha = .67$) composed of the following items: "Personal irresponsibility, lack of discipline among those who are poor," "Lack of effort by those who are poor," "Lack of thrift and personal money management," and "Lack of ability and talent among those who are poor." Structuralist beliefs about poverty are measured with a scale ($\alpha = .70$) composed of the following items: "Low wages in some businesses and industries," "Failure of society to provide good schools for many Americans," "Prejudice and discrimination," and "Failure of private industry to provide enough good jobs." Respondents were asked whether they thought that each reason was "very important" (coded 4), "somewhat important" (coded 3), "not very important" (coded 2), or "not at all important" (coded 1), as a reason for poverty. Thus, higher values indicate greater perceived importance as a cause of poverty.

⁸ The precise wording of these items, and all other variables in these analyses, appear in the Appendix.

Self-Evaluation

I use two constructs to measure “self-evaluation” – self-esteem and mastery. Self-esteem is measured with a scale ($\alpha = .63$) composed of four items drawn from Rosenberg’s (1965) self-esteem scale. Mastery is measured with a scale ($\alpha = .80$) using seven items from Pearlin and Schooler (1978). Scales are coded such that higher values indicate higher self-esteem and perceived mastery.⁹

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 15.2 shows means and standard deviations of variables for the whole sample and by race/ethnic subgroup. First, the southern Californians in our sample see both individualistic (mean = 3.19) and structuralist (mean = 3.35) beliefs as important. This is consistent with research on stratification beliefs that finds that these beliefs are not opposite ends of a single continuum and may in fact be combined in peoples’ thinking about inequality (Hunt, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986, Lee, Jones, & Lewis, 1990). The means of the race subgroups show that all three race/ethnic groups differ significantly on individualistic beliefs, with Latinos being the most individualistic, followed by blacks, and whites the least. Regarding structuralist beliefs, blacks and Latinos are quite similar to each other, but are significantly more structuralist than whites.

Although the self-evaluations of the overall sample are moderately high, blacks and whites report significantly higher self-esteem than Latinos (though blacks and whites do not differ from one another). Regarding mastery, all three groups differ significantly, with whites having the highest sense of mastery, followed by blacks, and then Latinos. The pattern of blacks having roughly equal self-esteem, but lower mastery, compared with whites is consistent with past research (Porter & Washington, 1991). The Latino findings are new, and demonstrate that members of this race/ethnic group have significantly lower self-evaluations than both their African-American and white counterparts in southern California. Regarding income and education, whites have the highest levels, and Latinos the lowest; the black subsample is significantly more female than the white or Latino subsamples; and whites are oldest on average (42.54), followed by blacks (40.67), with Latinos averaging a full nine years younger than blacks (31.65).

⁹ Della Fave (1986) has criticized the use of self-esteem scales to operationalize “self-evaluation” (as he conceptualizes it). This criticism is acknowledged; however, I maintain that the use of “mastery” in combination with self-esteem represents an improvement over previous attempts to empirically study the role of self-evaluation in legitimization processes.

Table 15.2. Selected Descriptive Statistics for All Study Variables for the Total Sample (Weighted), and by Race/Ethnic Group

	Total Sample		Whites		Blacks		Latinos	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Individualism	3.19	.60	3.07 ^{a,b}	.57	3.25 ^{a,c}	.60	3.40 ^{b,c}	.58
Structuralism	3.35	.58	3.20 ^{a,b}	.59	3.59 ^a	.45	3.60 ^b	.47
Self-Esteem	3.00	.46	3.08 ^b	.46	3.06 ^c	.46	2.81 ^{b,c}	.42
Mastery	2.99	.46	3.08 ^{a,b}	.44	3.02 ^{a,c}	.45	2.80 ^{b,c}	.44
Income	4.47	3.42	5.09 ^{a,b}	3.29	4.14 ^{a,c}	2.86	2.70 ^{b,c}	2.23
Education	13.55	3.73	14.83 ^{a,b}	2.80	14.02 ^{a,c}	2.60	10.65 ^{b,c}	3.99
Female	.50	.50	.58 ^a	.49	.66 ^{a,c}	.47	.58 ^c	.49
Age	38.84	15.28	42.54 ^{a,b}	16.05	40.67 ^{a,c}	15.69	31.65 ^{b,c}	10.58
Black	.09	.28						
Latino	.31	.46						

Note: a, white vs. black means significantly different ($p < .05$); b, white vs. Latino means significantly different ($p < .05$); c, black vs. Latino means significantly different ($p < .05$).

Question 1: Are There Relationships Between Self-Evaluation and Stratification Beliefs?

Table 15.3 provides an answer to the first research question: self-esteem and mastery are both negatively related to individualistic and structuralist beliefs about poverty.¹⁰ Models 1 and 2 show the impact of self-esteem and mastery entered separately, while Model 3 shows that, net of the effect of the other component of self-evaluation, both self-esteem and mastery are inversely related to support for both beliefs about poverty.

These patterns suggest support for both the “subjective domination” and “subjective underdog” perspectives on the relationship between self-evaluation and stratification ideology. First, the fact that people with low self-esteem and mastery tend to endorse the dominant ideology of poverty lends support for the subjective domination perspective (Table 15.1C). That is, persons with the lowest self-evaluations (i.e., persons with the least “subjective resources”) are most likely to “blame the individual” for poverty. On the

¹⁰ Although questions of causality between attitudes about self and attitudes about inequality may be raised, I argue that it is reasonable to ask whether the way that people think about their own societal positions affects how they think about other peoples’ positions in society (e.g., the poor). As a safeguard, models were run each way (i.e., with self-esteem and mastery as independent variables and the poverty beliefs as outcomes, and vice versa) to ensure that the patterns of effects are similar each way. Results demonstrate that the patterns of effects are the same.

Table 15.3. OLS Regression of Individualistic and Structuralist Beliefs about Poverty on Self-Concept Variable without (Models 1-3) and with (Models 4-6) Sociodemographic Controls (*N* = 2133)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Individualism	Structuralism	Individualism	Structuralism	Individualism	Structuralism
Self-esteem	-.204*** (.027)	-.180*** (.025)			-.120*** (.036)	-.080* (.034)
Mastery			-.207*** (.027)	-.205*** (.025)	-.126*** (.037)	-.151*** (.034)
Constant	3.831***	3.960***	3.841***	4.034***	3.957***	4.112***
R-squared	.03	.02	.03	.03	.03	.03
	Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Individualism	Structuralism	Individualism	Structuralism	Individualism	Structuralism
Self-esteem	-.059* (.028)	-.074** (.026)			-.060+ (.035)	-.037 (.032)
Mastery			-.035 (.029)	-.087*** (.027)	.002 (.037)	-.063+ (.033)
Other controls						
Black	.168*** (.030)	.343*** (.028)	.166*** (.030)	.339*** (.028)	.168*** (.030)	.341*** (.028)
Latino	.221*** (.034)	.315*** (.031)	.222*** (.034)	.311*** (.031)	.221*** (.034)	.311*** (.031)
Income	-.000 (.005)	-.014*** (.004)	-.001 (.005)	-.014*** (.004)	-.000 (.005)	-.013** (.004)
Education	-.038*** (.004)	-.005 (.004)	-.038*** (.004)	-.005 (.004)	-.038*** (.004)	-.004 (.004)
Female	-.008 (.025)	.119*** (.023)	-.008 (.026)	.120*** (.023)	-.008 (.026)	.120*** (.023)
Age	.003*** (.000)	-.000 (.000)	.003*** (.000)	-.001 (.000)	.003*** (.000)	-.001 (.001)
Constant	3.682***	3.554***	3.624***	3.593***	3.679***	3.627***
R-squared	.12	.16	.12	.16	.12	.16

Note: Unstandardized coefficients reported. Standard errors in parentheses. + = $p < .10$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$.

other hand, the fact that low self-evaluations are conducive to greater support for the system-challenging, structuralist view of poverty, supports the “subjective underdog” viewpoint (Table 15.1B). Seen another way, people with higher self-evaluations appear to reject blaming either the individual or the system for poverty. Thus, on first examination, there appears to be little support for the “subjective legitimization” prediction (Table 15.1A) of no relationship between self-evaluation and stratification ideology.

Question 2: Do Any Self-Evaluation/Stratification Beliefs Relationships Exist Net of the Effects of Race and Other Sociodemographic Variables?

Models 4 through 6 in Table 15.3 repeat the prior analyses (Models 1 through 3), with the addition of race and other sociodemographic variables as controls. Model 4 shows that, even when controlling for these other variables, self-esteem is inversely related to both beliefs about poverty. The magnitude of the coefficients, however, is reduced: in the case of individualistic beliefs by approximately 75%, while for structuralist beliefs, the coefficient is reduced by over one-half. Model 5 demonstrates that when race and other sociodemographics are controlled, the effect of mastery on individualistic beliefs becomes nonsignificant, while the effect of mastery on structuralist beliefs remains significant, though it is reduced by over 50%.

Model 6 shows that, when both components of self-evaluation are entered simultaneously, only the effect of self-esteem on individualistic beliefs remains significant ($p < .10$), while only mastery's relationship to structuralist beliefs remains significant ($p < .10$). The self-esteem pattern demonstrates that low self-esteem (net of the effect of mastery and other variables) increases the tendency to see poverty in dominant ideology terms, while higher self-esteem fosters a more compassionate view of the poor. This greater tendency to blame the individual for poverty among persons with lower self-esteem could serve a “scapegoating” function in the service of maintaining or enhancing one's own self-identity under threatening circumstances (Lewis, 1978). In contrast, low mastery (net of the effect of self-esteem and other variables) increases the tendency to blame the system for poverty – a finding that could be due to persons with low levels of perceived control over their own lives having had more experience with structural barriers in society (thus making such barriers more salient in general, and as a reason for poverty).

In sum, Table 15.3 suggests that low self-esteem is the best predictor of the dominant ideology view of poverty, while low mastery is the best predictor of the structuralist explanation of why people are poor. Although the subjective domination and subjective underdog perspectives are still supported in Models 4 through 6, the nonsignificant effects of self-esteem and mastery in these models suggest some support for the “subjective legitimization” prediction of consensus on stratification ideology across levels of self-evaluation.

Next the race/ethnic subgroup analyses are explored to see if whites, blacks, and Latinos differ regarding the patterns documented in Table 15.3.

Question 3: Do African Americans, Latinos, and Whites Differ in Any Relationships Between Self-Evaluation and Stratification Beliefs?

Table 15.4 reports the results of the race/ethnic subgroup analyses (essentially Model 6 without the race/ethnicity dummy variables). The significance of race/ethnic group differences in the impact of self-esteem and mastery on poverty beliefs is assessed using a “difference of slope” formula, comparable to testing the interaction of self-esteem and mastery with race/ethnicity (Kmenta, 1971, pp. 419–23).

Looking first at individualistic beliefs about poverty, only Latinos’ perceptions of mastery significantly correspond with individualistic beliefs. Specifically, mastery shows the significant inverse relationship with individualistic beliefs seen among the whole sample in Model 2 of Table 15.3. Thus, regarding support for the dominant ideology view of the poor, it is only Latinos for whom mastery is a significant predictor – an effect that is significantly stronger than among whites and blacks. One possible explanation is the immigration experience. Although only 6% of whites and African Americans in our sample are “first generation” (i.e., foreign born) Americans, fully 69% of Latinos are. Entering a linear control for generational status (first through fifth generation) in the regression models suggests that, for Latinos, the more recent the arrival to southern California, the more individualistic the thinking on poverty, but entering this variable does not significantly alter the results reported in the tables. Future research should further explore whether issues of generational status, assimilation, and/or acculturation, affect self-evaluation, stratification ideology, and/or relationships between the two.

Whereas Latinos are distinctive regarding individualistic beliefs, African Americans are the locus of unique effects regarding structuralist beliefs about poverty. First, to summarize the significant effects of self-esteem and mastery, only blacks evidence the previously observed inverse effect of self-esteem, while only whites and Latinos show the previously observed inverse effect of mastery. Further, African Americans show a previously unobserved *positive* correspondence between mastery and structuralist beliefs. Regarding slope differences by race/ethnicity, blacks are significantly different from both whites and Latinos in the impact of both self-esteem and mastery on structuralist beliefs.

From the standpoint of the perspectives summarized in Table 15.1, blacks show a unique “subjective underdog” (Table 15.1B) effect of self-esteem – that is, blacks with the lowest self-esteem are the most likely to adopt the system-challenging, structuralist view of poverty. Further, blacks show a unique “subjective domination” (Table 15.1C) effect for mastery – that is, blacks with

Table 15.4. OLS Regression of Beliefs about Poverty on Self-Concept and Sociodemographic Variables (Model 6) by Race/Ethnic Group

	Whites		Blacks		Latinos	
	Individualism	Structuralism	Individualism	Structuralism	Individualism	Structuralism
Self-esteem	-.032 (.051)	-.012 ^a (.052)	-.117 (.074)	-.128 ^{*a,c} (.057)	-.054 (.065)	-.014 ^c (.055)
Mastery	.021 ^b (.054)	-.136 ^{*a} (.055)	.090 ^c (.078)	.116 ^{*a,c} (.060)	-.136 ^{*b,c} (.063)	-.122 ^{*c} (.053)
Income	.002 (.006)	-.011+ (.006)	-.021* (.010)	-.017* (.008)	.023* (.011)	-.004 (.009)
Education	-.043*** (.007)	-.013+ (.007)	-.014 (.012)	.009 (.009)	-.043*** (.006)	-.003 (.005)
Female	-.000 (.038)	.192*** (.039)	-.064 (.054)	.038 (.042)	.045 (.043)	.087* (.036)
Age	.005*** (.001)	-.002+ (.001)	.003+ (.002)	-.001 (.001)	-.004* (.002)	-.000 (.002)
Constant	3.508***	3.896***	3.546***	3.551***	4.477***	3.990***
R-squared	.06	.07	.03	.02	.13	.04
N	982		538		613	

Note: Unstandardized coefficients reported. Standard errors in parentheses. + = $p < .10$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$. For self-esteem and mastery:

^a White versus black slopes different at $p < .05$.

^b White versus Latino slopes different at $p < .05$.

^c Black versus Latino slopes different at $p < .05$.

the lowest mastery are *least* likely to blame the system for poverty. Seen another way, among blacks, those persons with the highest self-esteem are *least* likely to system-blame, while those with the highest mastery are *most* likely to system-blame.

The unique self-esteem/structuralism link among blacks suggests that African Americans are especially likely to system-blame when they have low self-esteem (an ideological orientation produced by low mastery for whites and Latinos). This pattern conflicts with speculation in the literature that "system-blaming" may enhance (or help maintain) self-esteem for African Americans (Porter & Washington, 1979). This may be because previous researchers were focusing on "system-blaming" for racial inequality and discrimination, and/or on the issue of "self versus system-blaming" for personal outcomes, rather than ideological beliefs about poverty (Porter & Washington, 1979). Nonetheless, no support is found in these data for the hypothesis that a system-blaming orientation is positively associated with self-esteem among race/ethnic minorities.

Such evidence *is* seen with regard to mastery, however. One explanation for the positive mastery/structuralism connection among African Americans may be found in the ideas of Cose (1996). Cose argues that higher-status African Americans (i.e., the "middle class") are more alienated, more distrustful of "the system," and more critical of current social arrangements than lower-status blacks (and other Americans). He suggests that this is because higher-status African Americans have personally experienced the structural blockages, "glass ceilings," and other barriers to reaching the top ranks of various social and organizational hierarchies, despite going through the same preparations as their white counterparts. Thus, according to Cose, while lower-status persons certainly have cause to be angry and alienated, it is members of the relatively *successful* portion of the African-American community who are *most* frustrated by the structural sources (e.g., racial discrimination) of their failure to advance as far as members of other groups.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined the connection between self-evaluation and ideological beliefs about poverty. Several conclusions may be drawn. First, self-esteem and mastery both significantly correspond with individualistic and structuralist beliefs about poverty. Once the other self-evaluation variable, race/ethnicity, and other sociodemographics are controlled, it is self-esteem that significantly corresponds with individualistic beliefs, and mastery that significantly corresponds with structuralist beliefs. The inverse relationship observed between self-esteem and individualistic beliefs supports a "subjective domination" perspective, while the inverse correspondence between mastery and structuralist beliefs supports a "subjective underdog" perspec-

tive. The nonsignificant relationships between self-evaluation and stratification beliefs represent support for the “subjective legitimization” prediction of a rough consensus on ideological beliefs about inequality across levels of self-evaluation.

The fact that low self-esteem predicts support for the dominant ideology view of poverty (for the total sample only) may reflect the need for order, ontological security, and/or a “scapegoat” among persons with low self-worth. That is, owing to the “self-esteem motive” (Rosenberg, 1981), persons with few “subjective resources” in the form of self-worth may point to the poor as a convenient reference group whom they may feel superior to by highlighting individual or characterological reasons for poverty. Lewis (1978) and others (Anderson, 1990; Lane, 1959, 1962) document the tendency of certain “vulnerable strata” to scapegoat the poor to highlight their own limited successes and “salvage the self” (Lewis, 1978). Correspondingly, higher self-esteem is associated with a lessened tendency to “blame the poor” as those persons with more subjective resources (i.e., more global self-worth in this case) may have less of a need to feel superior to another group and thus are more supportive of the moral claims of the underdog.

That low mastery is the predictor of structuralist beliefs about poverty (among the whole sample, as well as for whites and Latinos) follows from the “subjective underdog” logic outlined above. Thus, persons with few “subjective resources” (in this case, in the form of perceived control over their lives) are more sympathetic to the poor, perhaps because of personal experience with structural barriers in society.

I also find several race/ethnic differences in self-evaluation/stratification beliefs relationships – differences that require some elaboration and specification of the effects documented for the total sample. First, the inverse correspondence between self-esteem and individualistic beliefs seen among the total sample does not appear for any of the race/ethnic subgroups. What *does* appear is a significant inverse relationship between self-esteem and structuralist beliefs for African Americans – who are unique in this effect.

Further, the inverse relationship between mastery and structuralist beliefs seen for the total sample holds only for whites and Latinos in Table 15.4 (who are significantly different from blacks in this regard). Thus, we again see a unique relationship between self-evaluation and structuralist beliefs for blacks. In this case it is *higher* mastery that is predictive of structuralist beliefs among African Americans. Apparently those blacks with greatest perceived control over their own lives are most sympathetic to the structuralist explanation of poverty. This could reflect the fact that blacks who have “made it” from the standpoint of objective and subjective resources (i.e., those who sense that “I control my destiny”) feel this way precisely because structural barriers had to be overcome – a conclusion that fits with my earlier (Hunt, 1996) finding that “internal self-explanations” (attributions to ability and

effort for personal outcomes) correspond with *structuralist* beliefs among nonwhites (whereas internal self-explanations correspond with individualistic beliefs among whites). I speculated that for race/ethnic minorities, having a sense that “I made it because of me” is *not* incompatible with a structuralist consciousness. Rather, such a consciousness may be enhanced by having struggled against structural barriers.

Another conclusion that may be drawn from this study is that – across the three race/ethnic groups examined – mastery is more closely connected to stratification ideology (particularly structuralist beliefs) than is self-esteem. This is consistent with the general theme from past research suggesting that self-concept variables such as personal mastery or self-efficacy are more strongly shaped by stratification-based experiences in public institutions such as work, whereas self-esteem is more likely to be rooted in the less hierarchically organized, more private worlds of family and community (Hughes & Demo, 1989). What the current findings show is that stratification *beliefs* (in addition to stratification-based *experiences*) may also be more closely connected to mastery than to self-esteem.

Future research should focus on the relationship between self-evaluation and a wider variety of stratification beliefs, such as beliefs about wealth (Kluegel & Smith, 1986), different types of poverty (Wilson, 1996), gender inequality (Kane, 1995), and racial inequality (Robinson, 1983). Further, future research should focus on the migration experiences of Latinos as a possible explanation for their distinctive self-evaluations and ideological beliefs. Such research will be helpful in our effort to understand the fastest growing minority population in the United States; and, knowledge of differences based on generational status *within* an ethnic group could provide further evidence challenging an “assumption of similarity” regarding basic social psychological processes.

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APPENDIX: ITEMS AND CODING USED IN VARIABLE CONSTRUCTION

Dependent Variables

Interviewer statement: The following statements refer to possible reasons for poverty in America. For each of the reasons, please tell me whether you think it is very important (coded 4), somewhat important (3), not very important (2), or not at all important (1) as a reason for poverty.

Individualistic Beliefs about Poverty (alpha = .67)

1. Personal irresponsibility, lack of discipline among those who are poor.
2. Lack of effort by those who are poor.
3. Lack of thrift and personal money management.
4. Lack of ability and talent among those who are poor.

Structuralist Beliefs about Poverty (alpha = .70)

1. Low wages in some businesses and industries.
2. Failure of society to provide good schools for many Americans.
3. Prejudice and discrimination.
4. Failure of private industry to provide enough jobs.

Self-Concept Variables

Self-Esteem (alpha = .63)

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. (**item reverse coded**)
2. I certainly feel useless at times.
3. I feel I have a number of good qualities. (**item reverse coded**)
4. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

Mastery (alpha = .80)

1. I have little control over the things that happen to me.
 2. There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have.
 3. There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.
 4. I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems in my life.
 5. Sometimes I feel that I am being pushed around in my life.
 6. What happens to me mostly depends on me. (**item reverse coded**)
 7. I can do just about anything I set my mind to. (**item reverse coded**)
- Coded:* (4) strongly disagree (3) disagree (2) agree (1) strongly agree.

Other Control Variables

Race/Ethnicity: Black = 1, Other = 0
Latino = 1, Other = 0

Gender: Female = 1, Male = 0

Personal Income

1. less than \$9,999
2. between \$10,000 and \$14,999
3. between \$15,000 and \$19,999
4. between \$20,000 and \$24,999
5. between \$25,000 and \$29,999
6. between \$30,000 and \$34,999
7. between \$35,000 and \$39,999
8. between \$40,000 and \$49,999
9. between \$50,000 and \$59,999
10. between \$60,000 and \$74,999
11. above \$75,000

Education: measured in years.

Age: measured in years.

16 The Science and Politics of Self-Esteem

Schools Caught in the Middle

Martin V. Covington

PTA Board Member: You teach in the public schools? What subject?

Teacher: Creative mathematics. When a student adds 2 & 2 and gets 7, I ask him why he came to that conclusion. If he tells me he chose the answer because it raises his self-esteem ... I give him an A+.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of self-esteem is one of the most influential notions of our time, and certainly one of the most controversial, especially in its implications for schooling and school policy. Much has been written about the wisdom of making self-enhancement a prime goal of schools: stated in starkly contrasting terms, whether students should become good learners or feel good about themselves. Alfie Kohn (1994) comments that “by now this topic has become sufficiently polarized that the vast majority of people who address themselves to it stand in one of two camps: The pro-self-esteemers, mostly educators, who can scarcely believe that anyone would question the importance of trying to improve children’s perceptions of their own worth; and the critics, who dismiss such efforts as ineffective and nonsensical distractions from academics” (p. 272).

This debate is far more complex than it appears at first glance. A careful consideration of the issues reveals a nested set of interlocking claims, assumptions, and counterclaims by both sides. First comes the pro-esteem argument that fostering feelings of positive self-regard will automatically increase school achievement. Surely, these advocates argue, students who regard themselves favorably ought to be able to learn and work more effectively. Critics counter by pointing to the meager empirical support for a positive association between self-esteem, on the one hand, and school achievement on the other (see Kohn, 1994). It would appear that even such intuitively compelling arguments such as people with high self-esteem are

more likely to be the better achievers are difficult to sustain empirically. Undaunted by such potential empirical embarrassments, some members of the self-esteem movement continue to seek the moral high ground in the debate, disbelieving that anyone would doubt the importance of trying to improve children's perceptions of their own worth, and offer a spate of prepackaged instructional materials designed to focus attention on the unique attributes of each individual child. These materials include sentence-starter exercises that begin with "I am special because..." (Kohn, 1994) as well as the practice of "Getting students to chant 'I'm special!'" (p. 277) "or to read a similar perfunctory message" (p. 276). Critics (e.g., Krauthammer, 1990) complain that such tactics are meaningless because judgments of true worth are based only on real accomplishments of which the owner can be rightly proud, not on artificial inducements.

Then there is the issue of deservedness, which puts an ideological spin on the debate. Critics assert that basically self-esteem is a reward for doing well, not simply a gift to which all persons are entitled as human beings, irrespective of their actions and accomplishments, and that the gravest injustice that schools could inflict would be to encourage children to be happy without their having earned it. Moreover, one may wonder if by fostering good feelings alone, many of the traditional reasons for learning will evaporate, including dissatisfaction with one's present circumstances. In effect, feeling too good about oneself may give little impetus to do better. Other concerns involve the possibility that by encouraging youngsters to feel good about themselves we may create a generation of self-absorbed, "inward-turning," narcissistic individuals at a time when the more important priority may be the need to establish a sense of community and belonging, not of rampant individualism.

Clearly, we are in the midst of an ideological shooting war over the merits of self-esteem as a legitimate goal of schooling. Although few would deny the importance of a sense of worth and personal value, the debate continues over the very nature of esteem itself – is it best thought of as a gift or as a reward, and, in either case, can or should it be promoted directly as an educational goal? Fortunately, several developments of relatively recent origin allow us to place this polemic in a more constructive perspective. First, in 1990, the California Task Force on Self-Esteem and Social Responsibility was convened; to date, it still represents the most significant attempt by any public body to focus specifically on self-esteem and debate its merits as a socially desirable goal (California State Department of Education, 1990). John Vasconcellos (1989), the prime mover behind the Task Force, described it as "a bipartisan pioneering effort ... [that] has demonstrated that self-esteem may well be the unifying concept to reframe American problem-solving" (p. vii). In retrospect, Vasconcellos's hopes for such a unifying presence were overly optimistic and by a wide margin. Yet in the partisan rhetoric and con-

tentiousness that marked the committee's deliberations, we can glimpse something of the social and political issues that attach themselves to the concept of self-esteem. Second, the past decade or so has witnessed a quantum leap in the quality and abundance of research dealing with the topic of self-esteem and its role in the achievement process, as well as the potential implications of a sense of personal worth and value for wider issues of psychological well-being. It is now time to review these research developments in order to infuse the debate generated by the California Task Force with the steady presence of empirical certainties.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the politics of self-esteem, identify the contested values that face policymakers, and provide a perspective on decision making that follows uniquely from empirical research. I will start with some basic definitions, then turn to a review of what is currently known and knowable about self-esteem and school achievement from the perspective of scientific inquiry. Finally, in a concluding section I hope to distill the implications of these inquiries for educational reforms that follow uniquely from a self-esteem perspective.

However, before proceeding, it is appropriate to pause momentarily and place the entire scientific inquiry into the nature of self-esteem in a more personal perspective. This writer and all other investigators who study self processes stand deeply in the debt of Morris Rosenberg for his pioneering research in this area. Rosenberg's contributions to the literature on self-esteem can scarcely be overstated. Over the years, scores of studies have been conducted by Rosenberg, his associates, and others using his venerable self-esteem scale to establish reliable relationships between a common core of self-referenced, value statements and a range of psychological constructs. Moreover, in addition to his empirical contributions to the field, Rosenberg stands as an incomparable theoretician and inspired mentor. And so it is that I hope to honor him here by reporting on research and ideas that have been influenced by him.

Definitions

Any consideration of issues related to the concept of self must acknowledge that the literature on self-concept and self-esteem has now reached truly stupefying proportions. Literally millions of pages have been devoted to the topic and more can be expected. Fortunately, my task is made somewhat easier by limiting attention to that aspect of the literature that pertains to the question of whether or not self-esteem and the deliberate modification of self-processes by teachers and educators can act to enhance academic achievement. Nonetheless, the task is still substantial – all the more reason to be careful in adopting some basic definitions. For the present I accept Nathaniel Branden's definition of self-concept (1987) as "who and what we think we are ... our physical and psychological traits, our assets and liabili-

ties, and, above all, our self-esteem. Self-esteem is the *evaluative* component of self-concept" (p. 6). I will use the term *self-worth* interchangeably with that of *self-esteem* to represent Branden's evaluative component, that is, referring to the individual's personal judgments as to whether he or she is good or bad, valued or not, loveable or reprehensible. As we will soon note, these assessments of one's worth depend closely, as Branden correctly asserts, on judgments of one's self-perceived mental and personal assets and limitations, both real and imaginary. In school, these strengths and shortcomings typically translate into judgments about one's ability (or inability) to meet the academic challenges set for students by others. To anticipate, I will argue that millions of young people believe that they are only as good as their ability to achieve, especially in competitive terms.

A Brief Review

Now what about the arguments catalogued in the beginning of this essay regarding the role of self-esteem in the process of school achievement? And how should we regard such contentiously posed choices as to whether students should become good learners or feel good about themselves? More specifically, what are we to make of the assertion that there is little if any demonstrated association between self-esteem variables and school achievement? How, one might ask, can pro-esteem advocates offer self-esteem as a corrective to declining achievement scores in the absence of a convincing demonstration that achievement and esteem are related? It is the apparent unwillingness of pro-esteem advocates to address this question that represents one of the most hotly contested aspects of the debate.

Actually, a number of studies over the years have shown a *positive* association between self-esteem variables and academic achievement – that is, as measured self-esteem increases, so do achievement scores; and, conversely, as self-esteem indexes decline, so does achievement (e.g., Butcher, 1968; Marx & Winne, 1980; Mintz & Muller, 1977). However, and this is where critics make their point, the most disquieting feature of these studies is the generally low magnitude of this association. For example, in one comprehensive survey conducted by West, Fish, and Stevens (1980) that covered some 300 earlier studies, the correlations reported between school achievement and various self-concept measures ranged between .11 and .50, with the average being .18. Similarly, Hansford and Hattie (1982) reported in their review of 20 studies, representing some 40,000 subjects, that the average correlation between measures of achievement and indexes of self-description was .16. If we assume a causal interpretation of this latter statistic, only 4% of the variation in school achievement was accounted for by variations in student self-concept! In a similar vein, Sandige (in Covington, 1989, p. 79) added a measure of self-esteem to a multiple prediction of school achievement that already included factors such as social class and intelligence. The self-esteem meas-

ure accounted for only an additional 3% of the explained variance in achievement performance, above and beyond these other predictors. This means that virtually all the explained variation in achievement scores observed in schools – 97% of it, according to Sandige's study – can be accounted for by influences other than those traditionally associated with the concept of self-esteem.

This pattern of findings confronts those who would advocate the importance of self-esteem with a considerable dilemma: If positive self-regard is so crucial to achievement, then why is the demonstrated relationship between self-esteem and academic performance so uniformly low? And worse yet, as Alfie Kohn (1994) rightly points out, even if a substantial relationship between school achievement and self-esteem were to be established, such findings lend no greater plausibility to the theory that high self-esteem *causes* improved school performance than the alternative possibility that it is increased achievement that causes gains in self-respect. Indeed, some reviewers are quite pessimistic about the causal role of self-esteem in this regard, not that the hypothesis is implausible but only that simple correlational data favoring it appear to range from sparse to nonexistent. As Scheier and Kraut (1979) have observed, "empirical evidence validating the causal role of self-concept has lagged behind its incorporation into theory and educational interventions" (p. 132). Moreover, only a few research studies are relevant to the issue of causation and, even so, some of these are limited to a demonstration that changes in achievement follow from artificially induced manipulations of self-esteem levels (e.g., Aronson & Mettee, 1968; Steele, 1975; Webster & Sobieszek, 1974). Although these later studies are helpful in establishing the plausibility of a causal role for self-esteem, the artificial nature of these predominantly laboratory procedures renders this work of questionable value for informing larger issues of social and educational policy. Moreover, as a group, the results of these studies tend to be somewhat contradictory and the effects of manipulation short-lived (Steele, 1975). Perhaps it was Morris Rosenberg himself who sounded the most pessimistic note when he observed that "global self-esteem appears to have little or no effect in enhancing academic performance" (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989).

What are we to make of this apparent lack of evidence that self-esteem and achievement covary, let alone that enhanced self-esteem can make a difference in the academic life of students? Should educators be advised to abandon their commitment to encouraging school achievement via self-esteem mechanisms? No, at least not yet, and certainly not on the grounds that research cannot offer valuable insights into the issues. Actually, we are far better informed about the nature of the relationship between self-esteem and school achievement than either critics or advocates seem prepared to acknowledge or that most of the previous research allows. The

problem is that both sides continue arguing over outmoded research wrongly conceived and in some cases flawed in its execution. If we can judge from the vanguard of new studies that have recently made their way into the literature, there is plenty that the research community has to say. But more about this later.

Meanwhile, what is it about the previous research that renders much of it pointless? First, the bulk of earlier research embraced a static view of self-change in which researchers seemed content merely to establish a simple, one-to-one association between self-esteem and school achievement. Yet this presumption of a uniformly positive correspondence is almost certainly mistaken. Common sense proclaims as much. Feelings of well-being and enhanced academic achievement do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Witness, for example, Jake, a high school dropout who enjoys a high sense of self-regard as a valued member of his street gang ("on the whole I am satisfied with my myself"), even though Jake is a failure in everything else, including his school record, which is made up largely of Ds and Fs. In Jake's case, self-esteem advocates are confronted not just with a negation, but with an apparent reversal of their expectations: someone who does poorly in school despite possessing high self-esteem! A second example concerns Amanda, a junior high school student who, because she harbors doubts about her worth, seeks to overturn these feelings of uncertainty in a positive direction by striving to do exceptionally well in school. Thus, in this case, rather than interfering with achievement, a sense of personal inadequacy actually goads an individual to higher accomplishments.

These and other counterexamples attenuate the expected positive correspondence between measured self-esteem and school achievement. And, as a result, not only is the role of esteem in the achievement process likely to be discounted, despite its obvious importance even in these counterexamples, but the meager empirical yield may convince many that further investigation would be futile.

Jake and Amanda demonstrate two potential shortcomings often associated with a simple correlational approach. The first concerns the fact that global measures of esteem ("On the whole I am satisfied with myself") are too diffused to capture the more precise ways in which self-esteem interacts with the achievement process. Second, a simple correlational approach is essentially atheoretical and for this reason provides no particular guidance for dealing with complexities such as those posed by Jake and Amanda.

Static Approach

Alfie Kohn (1994) neatly summarizes the first of these shortcomings when he states that "in order to find any meaningful relationship with how well students perform, it is necessary to look not at some 'global' measure of self-esteem (how positively they feel about themselves in general), but at something more specific like academic self-esteem or even self-esteem

regarding the ability to succeed at a particular subject" (p. 275). Jake is a case in point. Because academic success is little valued by Jake, failure in this realm does nothing to denigrate his overall feelings of self-pride, which depend on a quite different compensatory source of worth: his peer-group affiliation. Thus, to understand more about why Jake is failing in school and the potential role played by self-esteem in this potential tragedy, we need to assess more than Jake's general sense of worth. We also need to know, for example, how much he values school and, according to Branden, more specifically, how capable Jake perceives himself to be in an academic context. Jake may be failing academically, not necessarily because he is disinterested in the lessons to be learned in school, but perhaps because he lacks the confidence needed to do well. A global, diffused measurement of self-esteem is of little value in penetrating these complexities; neither is the largely atheoretical stance that has characterized most earlier research.

Atheoretical Approach

The assumption of a uniformly positive correspondence between self-esteem and school achievement is based largely on intuitive, yet superficial considerations, and on highly selected confirmatory examples. But common sense cannot easily entertain the kinds of contradictions and exceptions represented by Jake and Amanda. Whenever common-sense hypotheses are disconfirmed there is often nowhere else to turn except, as witnessed by the present case, to accept at face value the possibility that self-esteem and achievement are essentially unrelated. In contrast, theory building thrives on contradictions and exceptions, and often it is the exception that eventually proves the larger rule. Consider Amanda, whose brilliant academic record in the face of gnawing self-doubts suggests a deeper process at work, one that mediates the presumed linkage between feelings of worth, on the one hand, and school achievement, on the other.

What are these mediators? They are theory-driven, empirically testable assertions. One such set of assertions that we have been investigating at Berkeley in recent years involves the *reasons or motives for learning* (Covington, 1992, 1998). Amanda's reason for learning is to overcome an impending sense of failure as a person. Jake's alleged reason for learning (actually, not learning) is that he and others like him may see schoolwork as meaningless in the struggle to survive the urban ghettos of America. By infusing the concept of self-esteem with a motivational component (reasons for learning), its explanatory reach can be extended to account for these counterintuitive instances. Moreover, ideally we will also be in a better position to make inquiries that eventually may lead us in the proper directions for proposing meaningful educational reform. For example, we may ask what is it about the process of schooling that robs Amanda of her sense of dignity, despite her successes? And what can be done to make the lessons of school more relevant to the real-life concerns of Jake and countless youngsters like him?

In sum, researchers must seek to uncover and verify the underlying dynamics that implicate self-esteem in the larger achievement process before the claims and counterclaims of advocates and distractors alike can be placed in the proper perspective. This quest depends on active theory building, not merely the search for static correlates between self-esteem measures and various achievement indexes. It is to this task that we now turn.

SELF-WORTH THEORY

The guiding theoretical model of the Berkeley Teaching/Learning Project is the self-worth theory of achievement motivation (Covington, 1993; Covington & Beery, 1976). This theory assumes that individuals are engaged in a promethean, life-spanning struggle to establish and maintain a sense of worth and belonging in a society that largely values competency and doing well. In effect, individuals in our society are widely considered to be only as worthy as their ability to achieve. In schools this test of one's worthiness typically translates into doing well measured by a competitive yardstick in which the most rewards go to those who perform best or learn fastest. In such a competitive mentality, ability is perceived by teachers and youngsters alike as the paramount ingredient to success. And because the top grades, by definition, can be earned by only a few youngsters, grades become valued for their scarcity because they imply high ability. For this reason many students confuse ability with worth, which leads to a potentially disastrous equation: $\text{Grades} = \text{Ability} = \text{Worth}$ (after Beery, 1975) – disastrous, because schools, like the rest of life, cannot always guarantee success, especially when success is defined by doing better than others.

In earlier research, we verified this equation as standing at the core of self-worth dynamics in academic settings (Covington & Omelich, 1984). College undergraduates were asked to select any course of their choosing in which they were previously enrolled. They then rated, retrospectively, how hard they had worked in the course and how intellectually capable they felt. They also indicated the grade they received and estimated the degree to which they valued themselves as a student in the course. A multiple-regression analysis of these data revealed a fascinating pattern with respect to those factors that were most strongly associated with a sense of personal worth as a student. First, the data confirmed a strong dependency of feelings of personal worth on the grade received, irrespective of how the grade was attained, either by dint of effort or reason of brilliance. Yet, even though feelings of worth depend heavily on the grade attained, with greater feelings of worth associated with better grades, the most important factor of all (accounting for more than half of the variance in feelings of self-regard) was self-perceptions of ability. Finally, although the degree to which students worked hard also exerted a positive influence on their feelings of worth, its effect was only marginal. It would appear that trying hard alone is little reason for self-pride

even in success, and that the sheer brilliance demonstrated by having to work little for one's successes is the defining characteristic of personal worth at least among college students.

Yet those students who tie their sense of worth to their ability status take a risky step because schools as presently structured can too easily threaten a belief in one's ability because they typically provide insufficient rewards for all students to strive for success. Instead, too many youngsters must struggle simply to avoid failure and its implication that they are incompetent. This reason for achieving is essentially defensive in nature, with rewards being largely defined in negative terms – that is, the payoff being the absence of failure, which in terms of feelings can at best involve only relief, rarely pride. This is scarcely the proper emotional basis for establishing a firm foundation in beliefs about one's worth.

Failure-Avoiding Students

As a next step in this larger self-worth analysis, we can ask what are the various reasons for learning associated with failure-avoiding students? This question can be answered most readily by simply correlating measures of failure-avoiding tendencies with self-ratings of various reasons for learning. Some 300 Berkeley undergraduates were administered the Approach/Avoidance Achievement Questionnaire (Covington & Omelich, 1991) along with a series of questions designed to assess reasons for learning as part of a larger study of coping and adaptation at the undergraduate level (Covington & Roberts, 1994). The avoidance portion of the Approach/Avoidance Questionnaire reflects the degree to which students equate ability status *per se* with their worth ("Being smart is the best way to prove I am a worthwhile person"). Correlational data associated with this measure of worth are found in the left-hand column of Table 16.1. The findings are straightforward and require little by way of explanatory interpretation.

If we are to judge from those reasons for learning on which failure-avoiding individuals load highest, these students are best described in terms of a cluster of potentially self-defeating reasons that combine a sense of obligation to achieve, akin to an overweening family expectation ("I would have disappointed my family if I had not gone to college") with a strongly expressed need to prove oneself better than others by reason of ability or unique talent ("I work hard to show that I am smarter than others"). These reasons for learning are extrinsic in nature because they are basically irrelevant to the act of learning itself. Once the threat of failure is removed (say, when grades are no longer a consideration), there is no particular reason for such students to perform, let alone learn.

Failure-avoiding tendencies are also linked to a confection of negative emotions, beliefs, and self-defeating thoughts. As to emotions, failure-avoiders worry that they may not be bright enough to prove their superiority and that others are better prepared academically.

Table 16.1. Correlations Between Approach and Avoidance Tendencies and Selected Measures

	Avoiding Failure	Approaching Success
Reasons for Learning		
Obliged	.48**	.05
Prove my ability	.38**	-.08
Develop intellect	-.06	.46**
Intellectual stimulation	-.05	.41**
Accomplish something worthwhile	.00	.49**
Achievement Worry	.69**	-.09
Meaning of Grades		
Grades as motivator	.33**	.11
Interfering/enjoyment	.34**	-.15*
Interfering/performance	.39**	-.07
Discounting grades	.32**	-.03
Grades as feedback	.19**	.45**

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$.

Not surprisingly, defining one's worth in terms of the ability to outperform others is also related to the meaning students attach to grades (Covington & Martorana, 1996). Failure-avoiding students see grades as the surest way to motivate individuals, themselves included ("If I weren't graded, I'd probably would not do much in school"). Yet, ironically for these students, the very presence of grades is believed to interfere with learning ("knowing that I will be graded keeps me from performing at my best") as well as interfering with the enjoyment of learning ("grades keep me from enjoying the things that interest me about an assignment"). In the meanwhile, failure-avoiding students appear busy distancing themselves from the possibility that poor grades might reflect negatively on their competency by entertaining various excuses in the face of failure ("I think a main reason for poor grades is unfair tests").

Success-Oriented Students

Naturally, not all students accept competitive superiority via ability as the final arbiter of their worth. We have identified other students who value ability, too, not so much as a measure of worth, however, but as a tool or resource to achieve personally meaningful goals. As part of the same correlational study we also administered the approach portion of the Approach/Avoidance Questionnaire, a scale intended to identify those students whom we have

labeled as "success-oriented" (after Atkinson, 1964). Those data indicating the strength of association found between variations in the approach tendency and selected outcomes measures are presented in the right-hand column of Table 16.1.

Here, too, if we can judge from those reasons-for-learning scales on which success-oriented individuals load highest, they are best described as achieving for the sake of intellectual development and to produce something worthwhile. Here arousal is equated, not so much with anxiety or worry as in the case of failure-avoiders, but rather with exhilaration and optimism – "of being stimulated through thought-provoking discussions" or "experiencing the excitement one feels when communicating ideas to others in a convincing manner" (stimulation scale). Nowhere among these success-oriented data do we find much evidence of a sense of being obligated to perform or of the need to demonstrate that one is worthy. These reasons are the domain of failure-avoiders.

However, perceptions of grades, too, like those of failure-avoiders are highly salient for success-oriented students. But, once again, for quite different reasons. For one thing, grades do not hold the same threat for success-oriented students because high marks are not necessarily taken as evidence of ability ("grades do not necessarily reflect on my ability"). Grades are instead seen as providing feedback for how to improve and helping one to concentrate ("knowing that I will be graded actually helps me concentrate on my studies"). Moreover, because success-oriented students strive for other reasons than high marks alone, being graded is often seen as unnecessary, sometimes even irrelevant, to learning ("I actually try harder when the grade is not that important").

Although only simple correlations, the data presented in Table 16.1 are nonetheless useful in helping us begin to sort out the debate over the role of self-esteem in the achievement process. First, in one critical respect, at least, the arguments of pro-esteem advocates appear correct. Self-esteem is clearly implicated in the achievement process. When defined in terms of the meaning one attributes to one's ability – either as a test of worth or as an instrumental resource, variations in self-esteem are closely related to different reasons for learning, and these reasons are linked in turn to various achievement-related behaviors that bode good or ill for academic success, including how students perceive the meaning of grades and their emotional reactions to the prospects of learning.

On the other hand, there is nothing in these data to suggest that, as many pro-esteem advocates maintain, feelings of personal worth actually reflect an unconditional acceptance of self, irrespective of the quality or number of one's achievements. Quite to the contrary, our data strongly imply that feelings of academic self-esteem depend heavily on how well one performs. Successful achievement is the unmistakable coin of the realm by which stu-

dents judge their worth in school, and it appears to occur in equal measure for both success-oriented and failure-avoiding students. Yet although being successful is a shared value, differences in how one defines success are the all-important factors by which self-esteem mechanisms likely operate. As already noted, for failure-avoiding students worth is measured in terms of successfully demonstrating one's superiority over others by reason of unique talent or ability; for success-oriented individuals, the yardstick of success is counted in terms of becoming the best one can be, irrespective of the accomplishments of others. As a consequence, self-esteem critics appear correct in asserting that a sense of worth, at least as bestowed and withheld in schools, is better likened to a reward (for achievement) than a gift to which we are all entitled merely by reason of our existence. Also, if the metaphor of a gift is misplaced, then so is the notion of the unearned gift that some pro-esteem teachers attempt to grant by having children chant, "I am special." From the self-worth perspective, these practices are simply wide of the mark and sufficiently silly to embarrass even staunch pro-esteem advocates like Robert Reasoner (1992), one-time president of the International Council for Self-Esteem, whose thoughtful perspective has led him to a similar conclusion: "Efforts limited to making students 'feel good' are apt to have little lasting effect because they fail to strengthen the internal sources of self-esteem related to integrity, responsibility, and achievement" (p. 24).

But, by viewing self-esteem exclusively as a reward, critics have, in their turn, also misread a larger reality for purposes of their own philosophical agenda. It is not simply that, as critics have argued, we must make full use of our gifts to be worthy. There is more. Feelings of worth also depend on the right reasons for learning, and when these reasons are self-destructive, the foundation on which one's worth is built remains tenuous, a circumstance that a high GPA can do little to correct. In effect, high grades are no guarantee of personal fulfillment. This we know from the continuing self-doubts experienced by Amanda, our highly successful yet failure-avoiding student.

In summary, motivationally speaking, the most important consideration for encouraging the simultaneous growth of well-being and well-doing has been largely overlooked by critics and pro-esteem advocates alike. More important than noteworthy achievement per se or even assurances of one's uniqueness are the reasons that prompt students to learn in the first place.

MAKING CAUSAL CONNECTIONS

For many the presumption of a causal reciprocity between gains in self-esteem, on the one hand, and increasingly noteworthy accomplishments, on the other, has become an article of faith, but not necessarily a demonstrated fact. Recall that correlations like those reported in Table 16.1 do not in themselves establish causation. As useful as such data may be for establishing the

plausibility of a case for causation, we can no longer content ourselves merely to establish simple associations between variables taken two at a time using cross-sectional methods. Any proper causal analysis of school achievement must seek to identify the individual and joint contributions of a number of factors operating simultaneously as they influence learning among the same persons over extended periods of time. Such complex investigations require organizing models for how and when such influences occur. One simple but serviceable model is portrayed in Figure 16.1.

This model is composed of a time-ordered cycle of three achievement stages in their simplest form. In the first, or appraisal, stage, students assess the likelihood of either succeeding or failing at an upcoming examination. When these judgments are transformed into emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, they exert a forward-reaching influence on the quality and amount of study found in the second, or test preparation, stage. According to this model, it is the adequacy of study (also not forgetting the reasons for studying) that in turn ultimately influences the quality of performance during the final, test-taking stage. This free-running cycle can vary in duration from only a few hours, at its briefest, to weeks or even months. Moreover, the entire sequence is recursive. It repeats itself every time there is an achievement task to be undertaken.

In recent years researchers have begun to trace out and verify the kinds of dynamics implied in Figure 16.1 (for a review, see Covington, 1992, 1998; Skaalvik & Hagtvet, 1990). As a group, these studies feature a variety of school tasks and subject matter. They also employ somewhat different operational definitions and measures for essentially the same concepts and they sample students across a variety of settings and at different grade levels, ranging from the middle-school years to high school and college. Moreover, several different methodological approaches are featured including path analysis, cross-lagged panel correlations, and structural-equation modeling. Overall, however, despite these many specific variations, several general findings have emerged, collectively, regarding the place of self-worth dynamics in the achievement process.

Many of these generalities are well reflected in the results of a single prototypic study that involved 400 Berkeley undergraduates enrolled in an

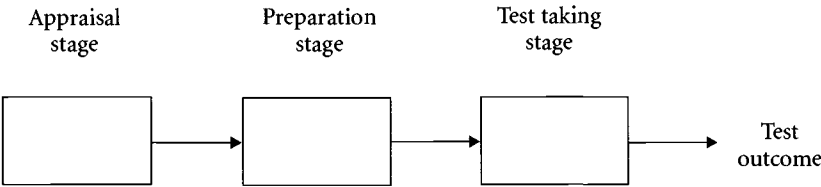


Figure 16.1. A time-ordered cycle of achievement dynamics.

Introductory Psychology course who were tracked over several successive examinations (Covington & Omelich, 1988). At the beginning of this semester-long study, students were administered a series of self-report measures designed to assess their perceptions of course demands as well as judgments about their ability to cope (appraisal stage). Then several times during the week preceding the first examination (preparation stage), students were once again canvassed, this time regarding the quality and quantity of their ongoing study efforts as well as self-reported frequencies of various thoughts, feelings, and physical reactions that accompanied their study. Finally, immediately preceding and following the test itself (test-taking stage) students were administered a further series of questions concerning pre-test anxiety levels and perceived reasons for anxiety, as well as retrospective reactions to their test-taking experience.

These data were subjected to a path-analytic interpretation of multiple regression, a procedure that allowed us to estimate the relative importance of various factors and their interactions as they affected performance. When the magnitude and direction of such potential pathways of influence are predicted in advance, as was done in this case, path analyses allow researchers to assume unidirectional causality. Naturally, path analysis cannot demonstrate causality. Rather it is a procedure by which researchers can assess whether a predicted system of relationships is consistent with the assumption of causality.

The results of this analysis for failure-avoiding students are presented in Figure 16.2. Only the most prominent pathways of direct and indirect influence on performance are shown here via unidirectional arrows.

The present research and that of others (Carver & Scheier, 1988; Laux & Glanzmann, 1987; Hagtvet, 1984) makes clear that failure-avoiding students enter the appraisal stage reluctantly, largely out of obligation – emotionally aroused, vigilant, and, above all, preoccupied with fearsome thoughts, particularly exaggerated worries about being inadequately prepared and intellectually unequal to the task of doing at least as well as others.

The evidence is equally clear that these formless fears cascade through time and eventually impair directly the quality of study during the test preparation stage (incompetency fears → poor study). According to Figure 16.2, these recurring self-doubts about ability break one's study concentration in at least two additional ways. First, self-doubts trigger a host of defensive thoughts – all of which, according to our data, act to disrupt study even further (incompetency fears → defensiveness → poor study). In this connection, failure-avoiding students frequently indulge in blame projection ("If I had a better teacher I might do better") and wishful thinking ("I wish the test would somehow go away"). These students also experience considerable relief by minimizing the importance of what they are studying ("This course is less important than I originally thought"). Second, and, finally, just to close the ring of fear that converges on the test preparation stage, feelings of ten-

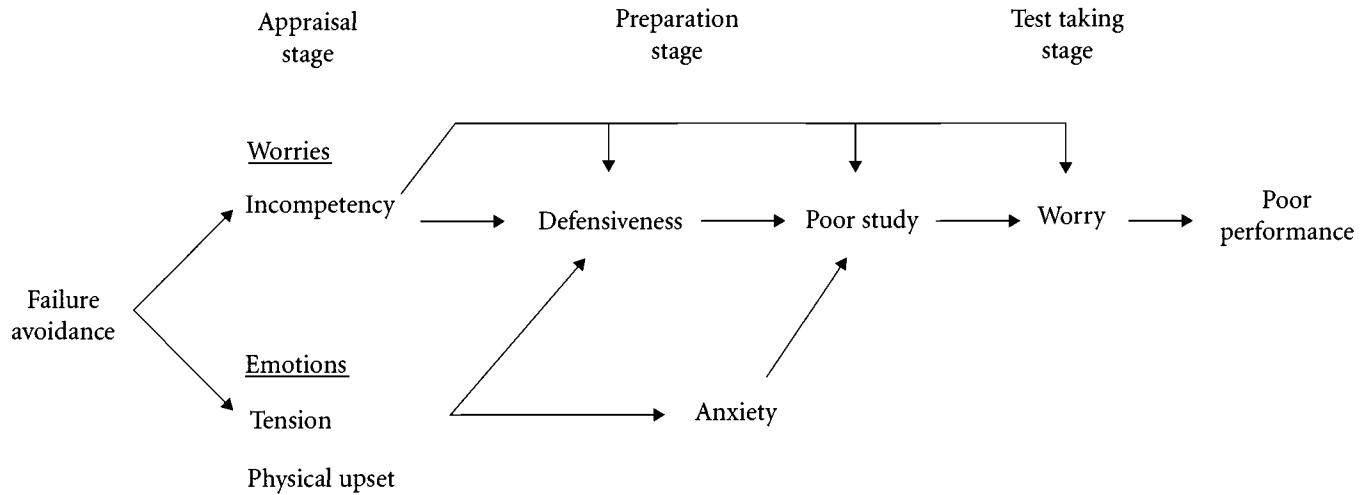


Figure 16.2. A path analysis of failure-avoiding dynamics in school achievement.

sion and occasional nausea further disrupt attempts to concentrate (emotions → anxiety → poor study).

This drama ends badly as failure-avoiding students begin test taking. During this time they are assaulted by another wave of worry. They may glance continually around the room wondering why so many students are leaving early – perhaps the test is easier than they think. They must be really dumb! These worries interfere with their ability to recall whatever they did learn or thought they had learned earlier (worry → poor performance). Failure-avoiders often find themselves unable to think, forgetting many of the basic facts and sometimes not even understanding the questions.

What drives these divisive dynamics? It is plain from the accumulated research that the fear of being judged as unworthy by reason of stupidity propels some students to study harder (but ineffectually) the next time, and others to study little or not at all in a forlorn attempt to avoid the implications of failure: that they lack ability and hence are unworthy.

As a group, the studies described here illuminate the causal dynamics of the self-worth/achievement process in far more convincing detail than the earlier, tentative cross-sectional studies cited previously that merely established simple associations between a few variables without the organizing benefits of theory. It now seems clear (Liu, Kaplan, & Risser, 1992) that self-esteem exerts its influence on achievement through motivationally toned moderators (largely reasons for learning). Moreover, some of these reasons act to reverse the positive relationship between self-esteem and achievement in which self-doubts can unexpectedly trigger increases, not decreases, in achievement. More specifically, we have identified a hybrid group of failure-threatened students (high approach/high avoidance) who attempt to avoid failure by succeeding (Covington & Omelich, 1987). We have referred to students who employ this defensive strategy as “overstrivers.” Amanda is a member of this subgroup of failure-avoiders. Instead of impairing the quality of their test preparation, as it does for most failure-avoiders, the fear of failure experienced by overstrivers actually mobilizes their considerable intellectual capacity for work which typically takes the form of meticulous, even slavish, attention to detail. It is this overpreparation that eventually leads to high test scores, despite the lingering doubts of these students about their ability to achieve perfection. The phenomenon of overstriving adds further weight to my contention that high accomplishment is no guarantee of self-confidence and feelings of well-being, and that for confidence and competency to grow apace in mutually reinforcing ways, the reasons for learning must be positive.

The phenomenon of the overstriver also helps explain a puzzling aspect of the achievement process: Why should it be that a single failure can devastate the resolve to learn among students who otherwise have an unblemished record of successes? Should not one's accumulated past successes count for

more than one isolated failure? Not necessarily, particularly when it may take only one failure to convince students of what they have fearfully suspected all along: that they are not really bright enough to achieve perfection.

The dynamics portrayed in Figure 16.2 also illustrate yet another reason why earlier, naïve expectations of a direct and substantial correspondence between self-esteem and achievement were doomed to be disappointed. The motive to avoid failure represents a latent disposition that lies dormant until circumstances trigger a flood of thoughts, actions, and feelings that in turn control the quality of one's achievements. In effect, self-esteem (i.e., tests of worth) is itself not the culminating event in the achievement process but rather the instigator of critical events. Does this mean that self-esteem factors are insignificant? No. By analogy we would not dismiss as unimportant the nudge that sends the boulder crashing down the hill simply because subsequent events proved to be so much more dramatic. Our research confirms this bit of wisdom and places in perspective the criticism that self-esteem measures are of dubious value because by themselves they do a relatively poor job of predicting achievement. Now we see this as no criticism at all. Instead this fact should be taken as a reminder that the influence of motives on achievement is largely indirect, but not to say unimportant, and must be traced through a number of intervening pathways.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This analysis permits us to recast the entire self-esteem debate in a new, and I believe, more constructive way. In essence, the current debate is misguided for two fundamental reasons. First, the basic target of public concern should not be school achievement per se. Student achievement will flourish only to the extent that we take into account the reasons that students strive. This is the essential and proper message of the self-esteem perspective. When we fail to consider motives and feelings, individuals may strive successfully, but for the wrong reasons – with the result that the benefits of these successes are largely illusory. We must first set right the motives, or reasons, for learning, then achievement will follow and likely thrive.

Second, not only is increased achievement the wrong goal, but so too are many of the proposed means to this end. Attempts by pro-esteem advocates to encourage self-pride in students solely by reason of their uniqueness as human beings will fail if feelings of well-being are not accompanied by well-doing. It is only when students engage in personally meaningful endeavors for which they can be justifiably proud that self-confidence grows, and it is this growing self-assurance that in turn triggers further achievement. It is this reciprocal relationship that many self-esteem advocates have forgotten. Ironically, critics, too, have largely disregarded the same truth by focusing solely on increasing performance (competency) to the relative neglect of self-

confidence. Self-confidence and the continued will to learn are not simply the inevitable by-products of doing well. Recall our example of Amanda.

These lessons are not yet widely appreciated if we are to judge from those misguided reform proposals that I have described elsewhere as a policy of intensification (Covington, 1996). As proposed at the recent National Education Summit (1996) convened by a number of leading American industrialists and politicians, intensification strategy focuses on increasing achievement by imposing tougher achievement standards on schools, that is, simply continuing to do what has been done for years, but more of it – lengthening the school day, requiring more homework, and the like. Obviously, holding high standards is critical to improved achievement; if we expect little of our students, little is what we will get. But, by itself, this proposal is insufficient. The answer cannot be as easy as simply raising academic standards. If students cannot now measure up to old, presumably less demanding standards, then increased demands would seem pointless. And, worse yet, the means by which these advocates would arouse greater student effort involves rewarding students on a competitive basis and threatening punishments if students do not comply.

When learning become a competitive game in which too many students compete for too few rewards (high grades), most everyone must scramble to avoid failure rather than approach success (Covington & Teel, 1996). This demand inevitably leads to declines in achievement. There are several reasons for this. For one thing, in a competitive climate, hard work and diligence actually become a threat to one's self-worth. This occurs because if students study hard and fail anyway, the implied cause of failure goes to low ability (Covington & Omelich, 1979). And, as argued earlier, in our society, one's perceived worth depends largely on the ability to achieve competitively. Thus, by not trying, or trying only halfheartedly with potential excuses available in the event of failure, students can discount the threatening implication that they are incompetent and hence unworthy. But in the process of protecting one's self, learning falters, and students create the very failures they are attempting to avoid.

For another thing, achievement declines because some students resist playing the competitive learning game altogether, particularly disadvantaged minority students who see school as irrelevant to their lives, and view grades as meaningless in the struggle for survival. Recall the plight of Jake. Yet students of color are as highly motivated to learn as any youngsters, but often for different reasons – achieving for the sake of one's family, learning in order to care better for others, and for the sake of neighborhood tradition – reasons that focus more on cooperation than on competition (Suarez-Orozco, 1989). It is positive reasons like these that lie largely outside the traditional realm of academics and will likely remain so if a climate of intensification continues.

Now that we have considered some of the institutional causes of educational failure from a self-esteem perspective, we enter into the realm of advocacy. What changes in educational policy suggest themselves? One central point stands out in my analysis of self-esteem dynamics and achievement. It is that the reasons for learning and, more particularly, the tests of worth by which individuals interpret the meaning of their achievements that control the quality and durability of student learning. If schools, as presently structured, unwittingly encourage outperforming others as the ultimate test of one's worth, then perhaps the frequency, and even the meaning, of failure can be altered by changing the goals of the learning game, from being competitive to being individualized. In effect, from a self-worth perspective, the path to effective educational change lies in the direction of changing the motives for learning from failure-avoiding to success-oriented, and also widening the circle of legitimate reasons for learning as well as the permissible means for learning including cooperation and sharing. Basic to such a transformation is the need to redefine the meaning of success and failure in terms of individual striving. Success (and ultimately one's test of worth) must come to depend on the individual's exceeding his or her own aspirations on meaningful tasks so that failure, if it occurs, becomes a matter of falling short of one's goals, not feeling that one has fallen short as a person. It is in the context of individual striving that more positive reasons for learning will emerge – not learning as a means to enhance one's ability status, but learning as a means to satisfy one's curiosity and propagate a sense of wonder; learning to help others or, more broadly stated, committing oneself to helping solve society's problems; and for the ends of mastery and self-improvement, that is, becoming the best one can be. The available research suggests that it is these goals, and not those concerned with outperforming others for the sake of personal aggrandizement, that are associated with greater satisfaction in school, better grades, and the intention to continue one's education (Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985). Moreover, much recent classroom research indicates not only the practical steps that lead to this transformation, but also convincingly documents the value of these changes for both increasing feelings of student well-being and well-doing (Covington & Teel, 1996; Weinstein & Donohue, 1997).

THE PITFALLS OF ADVOCACY

In closing, I return to the California Task Force on Self-Esteem mentioned at the outset of this chapter. As part of its mandate, the Task Force commissioned a book, *The Importance of Self-Esteem* (Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989), with the goal of placing "concern for self-esteem at the center of our social science research agenda" (Vasconcellos, 1989, p. xix). The book consists of a series of reviews written by social scientists in their respec-

tive fields documenting the potential connection that might exist between self-esteem factors and various pressing social problems, including alcoholism, child abuse, violence, and teenage pregnancy, and suggests policy guidelines by which enhanced self-esteem might serve as a "social vaccine" against these social ills. I contributed a chapter considering these propositions as they related to educational failure (Covington, 1989). The policy recommendations I made then were essentially the same as the ones made here, except that with the passage of time, my arguments have been substantially strengthened by the weight of new evidence. However, the most important difference between these two documents lies in the hindsight afforded by the reactions of the Task Force to my original recommendations. According to Joseph Kahne (1996), an educational policy expert at the University of Illinois, these reactions provide a unique opportunity to view the interaction of political processes with research and rhetoric regarding self-esteem in framing public policy.

What were the reactions of the Task Force? In essence, the Task Force backed away from advocating the kinds of changes in educational policy I recommended and for one basic reason. According to Kahne (1996), "no one questioned Covington's claim that his educational method promotes academic goals more successfully than mainstream competitive models. Covington's model was rejected because its commitment to insuring that all individuals maintain their sense of self-esteem regardless of how they compare with others conflicted with the competitive and meritocratic orientation of mainstream institutions" (p. 17).

Another, aspect of this rejection concerns the status of self-esteem either as a means to an end, or alternately, as an end in itself. Treating self-esteem, as I do, as a socially desirable goal in its own right was clearly at odds with the role of self-esteem as a means to an end adopted by the Task Force when it assumed that a healthy self-regard would act as a deterrent (i.e., social vaccine) to problems of abuse, homelessness, racism, and school failure. If, according to my arguments, cutthroat competition limits the growth of personal well-being in a vast segment of our society (schoolchildren), then policymakers need to find ways to address society's excessive reliance on competition as the ultimate measure of worth. But if enhancing feelings of self-esteem and worthiness are seen as a means to promoting "socially desirable" behavior, then educational policymakers can focus instead on raising the self-esteem of learners without necessarily addressing the root causes of both low-esteem and impoverished performance.

Admittedly, the distinction between *means* and *ends* and its potential consequences for policy reform is subtle. Moreover, when means and ends become simplistically linked in the mind of the public with *causes* and *effects*, respectively, the distinction becomes even more blurred and arbitrary. In reality, self-esteem and school achievement appear to be two sides of the

same behavioral coin – cause and effect become fused. In this connection some of the best evidence indicates that self-esteem and achievement act reciprocally as both instigator and benefactor (see Byrne, 1984, for a review).

Nonetheless, what becomes singled out as the principal cause of pressing social problems has immensely important consequences. To the extent that it is deficiencies in self-esteem that are seen as causal – something that requires a “social vaccine” – then we risk holding children responsible for poor achievement by reason of *their* deficiencies, not those of the system. This narrow view of the problem of educational failure is, in the words of Kahne (1996), “both counterproductive and unfair ... to tell all those that are below average that their status is a result of their [poor] self-esteem when in fact it is the result of our competitively oriented system of evaluation. (Half of all students will always be below average on any competitive measure)” (p. 16). By legitimizing the idea that individuals are to blame, the Task Force undercut its ability to argue for legislation that might respond to some of the underlying structural causes of poor achievement.

Moreover, when the manipulation of self-esteem is viewed as a policy matter, then educators will likely define worth narrowly in terms of an abundance of those traits associated with efficiency and productivity, such as assertiveness, punctuality, and compliance. But these qualities of selfhood are given different expressions in different cultures and groups. Not everyone values assertiveness. Also, what is to become of other dimensions of human worth “whether they involve personal identification with a given culture, athletic accomplishments, chastity, a work ethic, or any number of other traits?” (Kahne, 1996). And, perhaps most important, what about the promotion of self-acceptance and forgiveness as a social good, irrespective of one’s academic achievements? Amanda cannot forgive herself even the slightest imperfections, and Jake cannot forgive his alleged victimizers. Without the capacity for forgiveness, society cannot fully realize its potential for good.

Ultimately, then, is not the basic question one of whether or not self-esteem has any legitimacy beyond its potential for providing cost-effective solutions to particular social ills? Kahne’s characterization of the Task Force as having failed to reconcile, let alone address, this question seems close to the mark. In the end its recommendations were bland, vacuous, and largely symbolic, and merely reaffirmed the value of “believing in oneself” without any particular guidance as to how to foster mutual respect and esteem. Kahne concludes his analysis on a pessimistic note, despairing of the possibility that self-esteem might ever become, in the words of John Vasconcellos (1990), “a unifying concept around which to frame American problem solving” (p. vii). Kahne laments, “Specification and promotion of a particular meaning of self-esteem raises a set of hotly contested normative issues – issues which neither empirical analysis, logical argument, nor shared cultural values seems able to resolve. The consensus surrounding the importance of self-esteem

appears to be largely dependent on the lack of consensus and lack of discussion regarding the meaning of the term. The concept is thereby likely to be referenced, promoted, even cherished, but rarely defined, monitored, or used to guide educational policy" (p. 18).

But, having noted these reservations, the question remains: Does the concept of self-esteem contribute something unique to any debate concerning the public good? I believe it does. It challenges us to be more fully human. In addition to being an observable set of behaviors, self-esteem is above all a metaphor, a symbol that can ignite visions of what we as a people might become. Perhaps only for the sake of self-esteem and for the well-being of our children would we carry out policy recommendations that seriously question and even overturn two of our most cherished beliefs: the cult of achievement at all costs and an unquestioning commitment to competition.

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17 Self-Esteem and Deviant Behavior

A Critical Review and Theoretical Integration

Howard B. Kaplan

The relationship between self-esteem and delinquency is arguably one of the most attractive subjects for speculation and empirical investigation and at the same time one of the least understood relationships in the social psychological and sociological literature.

INTRODUCTION

Smelser (1989, p. 18) concludes in his overview of a volume considering the relationships between self-esteem and a variety of social problems, that

the social-psychological variable of self-esteem is simultaneously one of the most central and one of the most elusive factors in understanding and explaining the behaviors that constitute major social problems. It is central because it is the omnipresent variable that intervenes between personal and institutional histories of individuals with productive, responsible, and self-realizing behavior, on the one hand, and deviant, self-defeating, socially costly behavior, on the other. ... The variable of self-esteem is elusive, however, because its precise role in the drama of self-realization is difficult to pinpoint scientifically; by using the conventional kinds of scientific methods we possess, it is difficult to arrive at strong associations between self-esteem and its supposed causes, on the one hand, and self-esteem and its supposed outcomes, on the other. Or, to put the matter more simply, the scientific efforts to establish those connections that we are able to acknowledge and generate from an intuitive point of view do not reproduce those relations.

The intuitively appealing nature of at least one specification of the relationship, the inverse relationship between self-esteem and deviant outcomes, is apparent in the central role played by this relationship in some theories

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(Kaplan, 1984, 1985, 1995, 1996) and in quotidian observations. It is, for example, an intuitively appealing hypothesis that individuals characterized by negative self-feelings will tend

to withdrawal from performance into passivity; to seek some ready way to pick ourselves up or to have someone else do so; to seek out some activity that will make us feel better about ourselves, at least in the short-run. As often as not, that kind of behavior is likely to be antisocial and deviant from some point of view: we take several drinks too many; we find a way to get high; we quit work; we drop out of school; we take our depression or hostility out on someone else; or we thrash around for some momentary impulse gratification, whatever that might be (Smelser, 1989, p. 6).

The attractiveness of the hypothesis that self-esteem is profoundly implicated in the process leading to deviant adaptations (and, perhaps, that deviant adaptations influence self-esteem) is evident in the frequent attempts, often in the absence of any empirical basis for doing so, to intervene in ways that are expected to improve self-esteem or ameliorate the conditions that lead to poor self-esteem. As Wells (1989, p. 227) observes,

Numerous programs for prevention and treatment of juvenile delinquency are based on the premise that deviant and antisocial behaviors are products of disvalued selves; successful intervention involves rebuilding the person's sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect.

The intuitive appeal of the notion that self-esteem and deviance are causally related, however, does not appear to be warranted by the empirical literature. Six general reviews of the literature on the correlates of self-esteem conclude that generally there are few if any significant findings regarding the antecedents and consequences of self-esteem (Scheff, Retzinger, & Ryan, 1989). Smelser, reviewing the reports regarding the relationship between self-esteem and social problems (Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989), observes:

One of the disappointing aspects of every chapter in this volume ... is how low the association between self-esteem and its consequences are in research to date. ... The news most consistently reported ... is that the association between self-esteem and its expected consequences are mixed, insignificant, or absent. This nonrelationship holds between self-esteem and teenage pregnancy, self-esteem and child abuse, self-esteem and most cases of alcohol and drug abuse (Smelser, 1989, p. 15).

Some observers focus on the consequences of self-esteem for deviance, others focus on the consequences of deviance for self-esteem, and still others hypothesize a reciprocal relationship between self-esteem and deviance. Particularly in the context of labeling frameworks, self-concept is used as both an antecedent and a consequence of deviant behavior (Wells, 1978, p. 192):

self-concept is at once both a cause and an effect of deviation, self-concept change (a) being an effect of initial deviation as mediated by social control events, and (b) being also an important precondition of secondary deviation.

Even where self-esteem is examined as one or the other – as a consequence rather than as a cause, for example – apparently contradictory findings are reported. Thus, for Smelser (1989), the observed relationships between having alcoholic parents, being abused by parents, and school failure, on the one hand, and low self-esteem, on the other, are to be expected. However, the observed positive effect of psychoactive drugs on self-esteem is “counterintuitive.”

In short, the reciprocal nature of the relationships between self-esteem and deviant behavior (whether self-esteem influences deviance and/or deviance influences self-esteem), the direction of the relationships (positive or negative), and the strength of the relationship between deviant behavior and self-esteem are problematic, leading researchers to address such questions as the degree to which self-esteem, on the one hand, and outcomes such as delinquent behavior and depression, on the other hand, influence each other.

Although some writers (e.g., Kaplan, 1980) have provided evidence that self-esteem and delinquency do affect one another, the aim of this article is to go beyond such findings to ask: Which variable has the more powerful effect on the other, what is the direction of this effect, and what is its strength? (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989, p. 1007).

Weak and inconsistent results in some measure might be accounted for in part by terms of methodological variability and inadequacy. Regarding methodological variability, differences in findings may be due in part to differences in subject characteristics. For example, among other differences in research design, Bynner, O'Malley, and Bachman (1981) and Wells and Rankin (1983) used the same dataset, a national sample of high school sophomore boys, while Kaplan collected data (1980) from junior high school boys and girls in one large school district. Such variability may account for differences reported in these studies regarding the relationship between self-attitudes and deviant behavior.

Weak results often are the result of methodological flaws. For example, in cross-sectional designs countervailing processes cancel out moderately strong relationships. Self-rejection leads to deviant outcomes, and deviant outcomes have self-enhancing consequences (Kaplan, 1975). Thus,

a teenage girl, plagued by feelings of low self-esteem and loneliness, may engage in sexual behavior (and even become pregnant) because she needs love and affection at any cost. But through the mechanisms of reinforcement and anticipatory association, she may experience feelings of increased self-esteem from the sexual relationship or the pregnancy. ... Through the vicious cycle of shame, guilt, and self-disgust, an individual may strike out in rage at an intimate, but the tempo-

rary relief experienced may generate stronger feelings of self-worth and self-realization. In all these cases, the causal priority is reversed, and the positive association is washed out by the negative one (Smelser, 1989, p. 16).

Another case in point relates to the measurement of deviant behavior. We have argued elsewhere (Kaplan, Martin, & Johnson, 1986) that low self-esteem (high self-rejection) motivates deviant adaptations that may take any of a number of mutually equivalent forms. It is expected that the magnitude of association between self-derogation and any particular manifestation of deviant dispositions would be relatively low. The prediction is not that self-derogation would lead to particular forms of deviance but rather would lead to any of several equivalent forms of deviance. As Smelser (1989, p. 16), based on these considerations and others, observed:

Self-esteem is represented as a global, dispositional variable with a great many possible behavioral outcomes, including substance abuse, crime and violence, compulsive seeking for social support, and a variety of withdrawal behaviors, including dropping out of school and quitting work. Because there are multiple consequences, it stands to reason that self-esteem will be correlated with many outcomes, but that correlation will be weak in any given case. From a state of self-esteem alone, in other words, it is not plausible to expect a high correlation with any of these consequences.

Although methodological flaws and variability in some measure might account for inconsistent and weak findings regarding the relationship between self-esteem and deviance, a more profound explanation of this circumstance lies in the absence of an inclusive and coherent guiding theoretical framework. Indeed, the presence of such a theoretical statement would have precluded making inappropriate methodological decisions such as those alluded to previously. In any case, much of the confusion in the results of investigations of the relationship between self-attitudes and deviant behavior stems from the failure to specify the theoretical basis of hypotheses regarding the relationship between self-esteem and deviance. On what basis should we expect self-attitudes to influence subsequent deviance, and deviance to influence subsequent self-attitudes? On what grounds, in each case, should the effect be expected to be positive or negative, or are both positive and negative contingent on specified circumstances?

The fact that in different studies self-derogation has variously been modeled and observed to be an antecedent or consequence of deviant behavior, and that in different studies these relationships have been observed at different times to be positive or negative, does not testify necessarily to either the absence of the relationships or inconsistency of the relationships. Rather, all four relationships may be comfortably included, and in fact have been so included, within the same theoretical framework. These various observations reflect the operation of different theoretical mediating mechanisms and the

prevalence of different theoretical conditions that moderate the relationships. Good theoretical justification may be offered for hypothesizing that self-esteem will be positively and inversely related to later deviance, and for hypothesizing that deviance will be positively and inversely related to later self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem may be expected to lead to later deviance because self-esteem increases one's confidence in being able to engage in risky behaviors without devastating consequences for one's self. Self-esteem may be expected to be inversely related to deviant behavior insofar as low self-esteem is thought to lead to deviance as a way of reducing or forestalling the experience of low self-esteem.

Deviance may be expected to be positively related to later self-esteem on the understanding that deviance has self-enhancing consequences through the adoption of alternative value systems or the attainment of licit goals through illicit means; and deviance may be expected to reduce self-esteem by virtue of the fact that the deviant behaviors lead to negative self-evaluations because of the violation of normative expectations. The strength of each of these relationships will depend on the various theoretically indicated circumstances that moderate the reciprocal influence of self-esteem and deviance.

The apparent lack of coherence and contradictory findings that characterize the empirical literature on the relationship between self-esteem and deviance, then, is attributable to the absence of a coherent and inclusive theoretical framework. Depending on circumstances, self-esteem is sometimes observed to have a positive effect, sometimes a negative effect, and sometimes no effect (because the positive and negative effects cancel each other) on deviant behavior; and, deviant behavior is sometimes observed to have a positive effect, sometimes an inverse effect, and sometimes no effect (because the positive and negative effects cancel each other) on self-esteem. If all four effects were tested for simultaneously, with the theoretically indicated mediating and moderating variables specified, all four processes would be observed. Because, in the absence of a coherent theoretical framework, all four effects are not estimated simultaneously, various effects are observed depending on the circumstances under which the empirical analysis is carried out.

In the following pages I systematically consider the theoretical and empirical literature relating to each of these four effects – the positive and negative effects of self-esteem on deviant behavior, and the positive and negative effects of deviant behavior on self-esteem. I specify the theoretically indicated intervening variables in the relationship and the contingencies that moderate the relationship. In the process I place all four relationships in the context of a single accommodating theoretical framework in an attempt to lend coherence to a literature that is frequently reviewed as a mass of contradictions.

CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EARLIER SELF-ESTEEM AND LATER DEVIANCE

On theoretical grounds, low self-esteem should both predispose an individual to engage in deviant behavior and inhibit participation in deviant behavior. The predisposition to engage in deviant behavior is a consequence of low self-esteem individuals being more in need of self-enhancing experiences and more vulnerable to further expressions of rejection or experiences of failure. Hence, low self-esteem individuals would be more upset when experiencing failure and rejection and would be more prone to adopt deviant patterns that promise to reduce feelings of self-rejection. On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem would be inhibited from acting out deviant impulses by virtue of having low feelings of efficacy and being motivated to evoke positive responses from others through conforming to their expectations. Consistent with the expectation of these countervailing effects of low self-esteem were reports by Rosenbaum and deCharms (1962) that subjects characterized by low self-esteem were more sensitive to and angered by verbal attacks than were those individuals characterized by high self-esteem, while at the same time low self-esteem subjects appeared to be more inhibited in expressing aggressive impulses. The countervailing effects were observed also in our own work (Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1986). Self-derogation was positively and indirectly related to deviant behavior via the effect of self-rejection on disposition to deviance; and self-derogation was inversely related to deviant behavior, presumably due to associated feelings of inefficacy and an increased need to conform to normative standards in order to evoke positive responses from self and others. The experience of negative self-feelings suggests that the individual continues to need positive responses from others and that the person has internalized the normative standards that forbid deviant behaviors. That is, the inhibiting effect of negative self-feelings on deviant behaviors is moderated by the internalization of normative standards.

I consider the positive and negative effects of self-esteem on deviant behavior in greater detail by providing theoretical and empirical support for each, and elaborating the relationships by specifying variables that intervene in and moderate the relationship.

Effects of Low Self-Esteem on Later Deviance

On theoretical grounds, self-rejection is hypothesized to exercise a positive effect on deviance (Kaplan, 1972, 1975, 1980, 1986, 1995, 1996). This effect is mediated by the effect of self-rejection on disposition to deviance. Disposition to deviance is conceptualized as the loss of motivation to conform to conventional patterns, and the acquisition of motivation to deviate from these patterns. Theoretical premises underlying this prediction rest on the postulate of the self-esteem motive. That is, people characteristically

behave so as to minimize the experience of self-rejecting attitudes and maximize the experience of positive self-attitudes. Attitudes of self-rejection are the end result of a history of membership group experiences in which the person was unable to defend against, adapt to, or cope with circumstances having self-devaluing implications. These circumstances include disvalued attributes and behaviors, and negative evaluations of the person by valued others. Because self-devaluing experiences and membership groups in fact affect the development of intrinsically distressful negative self-attitudes, the individual comes to associate in his or her own mind these experiences with the development of derogatory self-attitudes. Consequently, the person loses motivation to conform to the normative patterns that in the past were ineffective in facilitating the achievement of valued attributes and the performance of valued behaviors, and in mitigating the resultant experience of self-rejecting attitudes. Further, because these and other related normative patterns are subjectively associated with the genesis of the emotionally distressful self-rejecting attitudes, these patterns come to be experienced as highly distressing in their own right. To continue to conform to these patterns would be to continue to engage in activities that were not only unrewarding in the past, but also are now intrinsically distressing. The individual not only loses motivation to conform to normative expectations, but also becomes motivated to deviate from these distressful patterns. Concurrent with these processes, the individual becomes increasingly motivated to behave in ways that minimize the experience of negative self-attitudes and maximize the experience of positive self-attitudes. Continued exposure to the same normative environment that led to self-derogating attitudes leads to the exacerbation of the self-esteem motive. Because normative patterns are no longer motivationally acceptable responses, deviant patterns represent alternative responses by which the person can act effectively to serve the intensified self-esteem motive.

Given the motivation to deviate from the normative expectations of the individual's membership groups and the need to find alternative patterns that will enhance self-esteem, the person is increasingly likely to become aware of and adopt any of a range of deviant patterns. Which particular patterns are adopted is a function of situational opportunities and indications of potential self-enhancing/self-devaluing outcomes of the deviant behavior.

Rosenberg and associates (1989, p. 1006) noted the congruence between Kaplan's theoretical statement of the relationship between self-esteem and delinquency and his own statement of the principles of self-esteem formation (Rosenberg, 1979), particularly with regard to appraisal, social comparison, and self-attribution.

Kaplan (1980) contends that youngsters with low self-esteem have frequently undergone unsatisfactory experiences in the conventional society – experiences that have created painful feelings of doubt about their self-worth. Seeking to alle-

viate these feelings, many turn to the delinquent reference group to enhance their self-esteem. The delinquent group provides more favorable reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-attributions. First, it replaces the frequently negative reflected appraisals of the conventional society with the positive reflected appraisals of the delinquent group. In addition, as Gold (1978) notes, the brazen defiance of authority in the school is often played out before an appreciative audience, yielding positive reflected appraisals from classmates. Second, the delinquent group may provide more favorable social comparisons. The youngster may compare more favorably with delinquent peers in terms of delinquent activities (for example, stealing, fighting, vandalizing) than he does with straight peers in conventional activities (for example, excelling at schoolwork, getting on the honor roll). Third, the youngster may anticipate that he can make more positive self-attributions by observing the success of his efforts at delinquent activities than by judging himself in terms of the valued standards of the conventional society. Self-enhancement theory thus suggests that low self-esteem youngsters may turn to delinquency in order to strengthen their feeling of self-worth.

Kaplan's (1980, p. 24) data are consistent with this view. In his large-scale study of junior high school pupils, he found that non-delinquents in the seventh grade with low self-esteem were significantly more likely than those with high self-esteem to become delinquent by the eighth grade (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989, pp. 1006-1007).

Although Kaplan's theory is generally viewed as effectively integrative insofar as it incorporates aspects of a broad range of other theories (Akers, 1997; Kaplan, 1980, 1982), other observers see it as an exemplar of a particular perspective. Thus, Gibbons and Krohn (1991, p. 109) characterize Kaplan's theory as a social control theory:

Self-rejection or self-derogation theory begins the assumption that people behave so as to minimize negative self-attitudes while maximizing positive ones. Devaluing experiences may occur in interaction in membership groups. If they do and if persons are unable to cope with feelings related to these devaluing experiences, they will develop attitudes of self-rejection or derogation. ... These attitudes may result in a loss of motivation to conform to the normative patterns represented by the membership group. Kaplan suggests that individuals may also be motivated to deviate from those normative patterns. The premise the individuals may be motivated to deviate falls outside of the assumptive parameters of a pure social control model. However, his emphasis on how self-concept releases individuals from normative constraints makes it appropriate to review the perspective as a social control theory.

Still other behavioral scientists, while apparently not informed by this particular theory, employ the same general principles to account for deviant behavior in different institutional settings. Covington (1989), for example, asserts that a major reason for achievement in school is to protect a sense of self-worth, particularly in competitive situations. When achievement is problematic, the person will avoid failure through the use of any of a num-

ber of strategies, and sometimes at the cost of achievement itself. Students will avoid failure by cheating, lowering their goals so that risk of failure is minimized, and handicapping themselves by procrastination or otherwise so that self-blame for failure may be mitigated by the existence of the handicaps. For the adoption of self-defeating tactics the student is able to assuage feelings of failure by recognizing that the failure is not the result of ineffective effort. Because they did not try to succeed the failure need not imply a lack of ability.

Empirical support for the position that low self-esteem (or self-derogation) anticipates deviant behavior via specified intervening variables is apparent in a number of studies over the years. Wells (1989, pp. 229–30), a co-author of one of the earlier papers reporting the lack of support for the hypothesized effect of low self-esteem on later deviant behavior, has observed that respecification of the model using more elaborate methodological innovations and specifications that more closely approximate the theoretical framework results in conclusions that are more congruent with the theoretical model:

In several recent papers, Kaplan (Kaplan, Martin, & Johnson, 1986; Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1986) has respecified the causal structure of the self-derogation model and has reestimated the elements of the model using more elaborate multivariate, latent-variable (LISREL) procedures. These analyses incorporate several corrections of the earlier studies. For one, the latent-variable approach allows for explicitly including the effects of measurement errors in the analysis (which undoubtedly attenuated the estimates of causal effects and the conclusions in earlier studies). For another, the respecification of the model to fit the demands of latent-variable analysis has clarified (or modified) its causal structure. In the new model, self-esteem (self-derogation) does not directly predict delinquent behavior. Rather, low self-esteem causes delinquent *dispositions* or motivations; these in turn cause delinquent behavior in conjunction with other social situational variables. According to the findings in Kaplan, Johnson, and Bailey (1986) and in Kaplan, Martin, and Johnson (1986), self-esteem is strongly linked to delinquent dispositions; these motivations in turn are causally linked to delinquent behavior. However, the overall association between self-esteem and delinquency does not look large because the causal relationship between them is complex, multipath, and varies according to the effects of other variables (such as prior involvement in delinquency, relations with peers, and so on). These analyses significantly clarify the causal impact of self-attitudes on delinquent behavior. They argue that self-esteem does have a substantial and very strong motivational effect on delinquency, a finding obscured in earlier analyses that used models that were inappropriate and too simple.

Perhaps the most important of the contemporary studies informed by Kaplan's theory and body of work is the replication and elaboration of the model by Vega and his associates (1996). Arguing that explanatory theories are needed that can organize the relationship between drug use and its

antecedent causes including low self-esteem, these investigators note that one of the few theoretical approaches put forward for empirical verification is the esteem-enhancement theory of Kaplan and his associates. In the context of the three-wave panel study carried out 20 years after the original study by Kaplan and with a different social environment (Dade county) and a different ethnic-racial sample composition, Vega and his associates concluded:

Findings from our longitudinal study suggest an adequate replication of the Kaplan, Johnson, and Bailey esteem-enhancement model. There are both direct and indirect effects of early adolescent drug use on later drug use in mid-adolescence, indicating that early drug use may be sustained net of other reinforcing social experiences in the model, but the effects of early drug use are far more likely to be mediated by subsequent social experiences such as social sanctions that produce feelings of negative self-worth, development of attitudes favoring nonconventional behavior, and convergence with drug-using peers. These represent multiple pathways to drug use consistent with a general theory of deviance. The total variance explained for later adolescent drug use is similar and substantial (0.45 and 0.42) in both studies (Vega et al., 1996, p. 141).

In addition to earlier studies that observed influences of low self-esteem on later deviant behavior (Bynner, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1981; Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1979) other studies in the last decade found support for the relationship. For example, Dukes and Lorch (1989) found support for a model in which low self-esteem and self-confidence predicted lack of purpose in life and poor academic performance, which in turn affected various forms of deviance. Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenbach (1989) concluded that their findings corresponded most closely to those reported by Kaplan (1980). Owens (1994, p. 403) reports results "which suggests that negative beliefs about the self play a somewhat stronger role in the draw toward delinquency than does an erosion of positive self-attitudes, as Kaplan's (1975, 1980) delinquency theory suggests." More recently, low levels of self-esteem have been associated with problem gambling (Volberg, Reitzes, & Boles, 1997).

It is often ignored that theoretical conditions have been specified that should be operative if low self-esteem is to eventuate in deviant adaptations. For example,

although the individual may be motivated to disassociate himself from the perceived source of his distressful self-rejecting feelings and may seek deviant alternatives that will fulfill his need for self-acceptance, he cannot easily completely disassociate himself from the normative world. Having been socialized in a society, the individual has internalized a sense of identification and commitment to the society. A range of quotidian needs depends on the responses of the adults in his environment. To act out dispositions to deviate from normative expectations would threaten the person's sense of identity and commitment to the normative order, as well as the satisfaction of the needs that depend on the positive attitudes of the adults in the person's environment. The greater the projected deviation

from normative expectations, the greater the inhibitory threat to the sense of identity and commitment. Both forces (the disposition to deviate, and the threat to one's sense of commitment and identity) are simultaneously operative (Kaplan, 1986, p. 173).

In view of the observation, Kaplan (1986, p. 174) summarizes some of the conditions under which deviant patterns will be adopted in response to severe and pervasive self-derogation as follows:

The devaluation of conventional self-protective patterns and the adoption of deviant patterns are most likely to overcome personal constraints, in the form of devaluation of the deviant patterns, under the related conditions whereby the person (1) avoids self-perceptions of violating self-values by performing deviant behaviors either by redefining the behavior as valued or under circumstances that permit ignoring personal responsibility (as when deindividuation loosens inhibitions against aggressive response), (2) perceives that the self-devaluing costs of remaining committed to the normative order are far greater than any potential threats to the self that may result from contravening the normative expectations defining the conventional order, and (3) perceives that deviant responses may be expected to have self-protective or self-enhancing consequences, whether measured against preexisting conventional or newly acquired deviant self-values.

Because Kaplan and his associates (Kaplan & Fukurai, 1992; Kaplan & Johnson, 1991; Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1988) observed that the positive effect of self-rejection on later deviant behavior is mediated by punitive social responses and their sequelae in the form of alienation from the conventional environment and decreased self-esteem, it seems reasonable to conclude that attenuation of emotional ties with a normative environment would facilitate negative self-feelings having the consequence of increased deviant behavior.

Findings reported in the literature support assertions of the conditional nature of the relationship between low self-esteem and subsequent deviance. The finding that the positive relationship between self-derogation and deviance may only hold for whites but not for blacks and Hispanics may suggest such conditional variables.

Kaplan (1975) has argued that behaviors that are defined as deviant by other groups, but are regarded as compatible with the normative expectations of one's membership/referent group, would pose an exception for the theory. In a similar vein, Geis (1974) and Kadish (1963) have used the term "avocational crime" to describe delinquent behavior committed by someone who experiences little moral indignation or disapproval from peers in committing these acts. Thus, we may argue that for the subculture of Blacks and Hispanics samples in the study, the delinquent acts included in the analyses may not be perceived as counter-normative and causing disapproval and moral indignation from their referent groups. If this is the case, no relation between self-esteem and these delinquent acts should be expected (Leung & Drasgow, 1986, p. 163).

Similarly, on theoretical grounds, socioeconomic status may be expected to moderate the effect of self-esteem on delinquency such that inverse relationship should be stronger in the higher than in the lower socioeconomic status group. This prediction is predicated on the observation that in the lower class, participation in delinquent activities is more likely to occur because of conformity to group standards rather than because of a need to enhance self-esteem. In the higher class, participation in delinquent activities would be more likely to reflect a need to enhance self-esteem rather to conform to group norms. In fact, this prediction was supported (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989).

The fact that low self-esteem is not always observed to have deviant behavior as a consequence, or that the effect is not strong, may be accounted for by the failure to determine that the theoretical conditions for the relationship are in fact operative. Presumably, under those conditions, the effect of low self-esteem on subsequent deviant behavior will be more strongly and consistently observed.

Effects of Low Self-Esteem on Decreased Deviance

Just as, on theoretical grounds, low self-esteem is expected to increase the probability of later deviant behavior, on other theoretical grounds is low self-esteem expected to decrease the probability of subsequent deviance and high self-esteem is expected to increase deviant behavior. The negative effect of self-rejection (the positive effect of self-esteem) on later deviant behavior is hypothesized on three theoretical grounds. These relate variously to the need to conform to group standards, internalized constraints against acting out deviant impulses, and self-attributions of inefficacy (Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1986).

Regarding the need to conform to group standards, overlapping the period during which the person loses motivation to conform to and acquires motivation to deviate from normative expectations is a time during which the person experiences an intensification of the need to conform to the expectations that others hold of the individual. Individuals who experience self-derogation associated with perceptions of failure and rejection in the conventional environment are expected to be motivated to behave so as to evoke positive responses from the group members and to approximate standards held by these individuals. After all, if the person were not motivated to so behave, the perceived failure to evoke positive responses and approximate group standards would not be associated with derogatory self-attitudes. Individuals who perceive themselves as more distant from these goals would be more highly motivated to behave in ways to achieve these goals. The need to approximate conventional standards would preclude the acting out of deviant impulses. The need to evoke positive responses from other group members and to approximate their expect-

tations would lead to attempts to conform rather than deviate. To deviate would be to risk evoking negative sanctions and of distancing one's self further from valued standards. Consistent with this position, Covington (1989, p. 83) observes that:

we know that some people who hold themselves in low esteem are nonetheless highly creative members of society (Ghiselin, 1955). It is as if these individuals are trying to convince themselves that they are acceptable by achieving in extraordinary ways (Coopersmith, 1967).

Regarding internalized constraints, just as a person learns to value being the object of positive attitudes from socializing agents and approximating their expectations, so does the person learn to disvalue those behaviors that the membership group labels as deviant. The experience of self-derogating attitudes in conjunction with self-perceptions of devaluing membership group experiences presumes effective socialization and the internalization of group standards, including those that proscribe the performance of acts labeled as deviant. These internalized proscriptions inhibit the acting out of deviant impulses. Over the period during which the individual experiences self-rejection and the intensification of the need to enhance self-attitudes, the inhibition against expressing deviant impulses would be strongest.

Regarding self-attributions of inefficacy, the expectation that self-derogation in conjunction with self-perceptions of self-devaluing membership group experiences will inhibit deviant behavior is based also on the assumed mediating influence of generalized feelings of inefficacy or powerlessness. The person's self-perceived persistent inability to forestall self-devaluing experiences or foster self-enhancing outcomes in the context of conventional membership group experiences influences self-perceptions of being ineffective, powerless, or lacking in control over his or her own destiny. The person thus ceases to engage in purposive behavior. The sense of helplessness initially associated with the futility of conventional behavior generalizes to deviant responses as well. Anticipating that the deviant responses will also fail to evoke desirable outcomes, and indeed may have adverse consequences, the person chooses not to respond with purposive behavior, deviant or otherwise. Passive resignation to unwelcome circumstances becomes the substitute for efficacious action.

A good deal of evidence exists that, under certain conditions, self-rejecting feelings (low self-esteem) inhibit deviant behavior. As noted earlier, at the same time that subjects characterized by low self-esteem were more sensitive to and angered by verbal attacks than were those individuals characterized by high self-esteem, low self-esteem subjects appeared to be more inhibited in expressing aggressive impulses (Rosenbaum & deCharms, 1962). Similarly, we observed that while self-derogation was positively and indirectly related to deviant behavior via the effect of self-rejection on disposition to deviance,

self-derogation was inversely related to deviant behavior, presumably due to associated feelings of inefficacy and an increased need to conform to normative standards in order to evoke positive responses from self and others (Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1986).

The inhibiting effects of low self-esteem on deviant behavior is contingent on a number of factors including those cited above as moderating the effect of low self-esteem on increased deviance. For example, the experience of negative self-feelings suggests that the individual continues to need positive responses from others and that the person has internalized the normative standards that forbid deviant behaviors. That is, the inhibiting effect of negative self-feelings on deviant behaviors is moderated by the internalization of normative standards.

Another variable that moderates the relationship between experiences of rejection and failure on the one hand and a deviant/conventional adaptation on the other relates to self-attribution regarding the causes of failure (Covington, 1989). If an individual attributes experiences of failure to lack of personal ability, then the individual will experience shame and lowered expectations of future success and will therefore be unmotivated to improve performance. In contrast, the self-ascription of lack of effort as a cause of failure may increase one's sense of guilt and raise one's expectation for future performance, and eventuate in future improvement in performance. To impute failure to lack of effort is to imply that one is capable of improving performance.

Just as low self-esteem inhibits deviance so does high self-esteem lead to the performance of deviant behaviors where the maintenance of self-esteem is contingent on engaging in behaviors that are congruent with salient self-evaluative criteria. When deviant behaviors reflect such criteria, the need for self-esteem will eventuate in deviant behaviors, as when breaking the law is an example of risk-taking behavior that is highly valued by youths. High self-esteem leads to deviance where engaging in deviant behavior is compatible with the values of one's positive reference groups that serve as the source of one's self-evaluative standards. Self-esteem decreases the likelihood of engaging in deviant behavior, however, where the basis of one's self-esteem is the acceptance of the person by conventional positive reference groups.

Thus, I hypothesize countervailing effects of self-derogation on deviant behavior. On the one hand, self-rejection should lead to an increased disposition to engage in deviant behaviors and the expression of that disposition; on the other hand, self-derogation may be expected to inhibit the acting out of deviant impulses. In fact, numerous analyses have suggested that the countervailing inhibiting effect of self-rejection on deviant behavior does indeed hold (Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1986) and I have suggested the conditions under which each relationship will be observed.

CAUSAL EFFECTS OF EARLY DEVIANCE ON LATER SELF-ESTEEM

Just as self-rejection is expected to have countervailing effects on later deviance, so is early deviance expected to have countervailing effects on later self-rejection. Under some conditions deviance will decrease feelings of self-rejection (increase self-esteem) while under other conditions deviant behavior will increase self-rejection (decrease self-esteem). I consider each of these consequences in turn.

Effects of Early Deviance on Increased Self-Esteem

On theoretical grounds deviant behavior is expected to increase self-esteem under specified circumstances. Deviant acts may satisfy the need for enhanced self-attitudes in any of three ways (Kaplan, 1975, 1980, 1982, 1995, 1996). First, avoidance of self-devaluing experiences as a result of deviant acts might occur through the enforced avoidance of the negative responses of people in the conventional environment. Insofar as the person spends more time with deviant peers, is incarcerated, or is otherwise excluded from interacting with conventional others, the person will necessarily avoid the negative reactions that he or she has experienced in the conventional environment in the past. Second, deviant acts may have self-enhancing consequences through attacks on the values according to which the individual was judged to have failed. Deprived of self-acceptance by being unable to approximate conventional standards, and, consequently, earn group approval, the person would find rejection of the standards and of the group that rejected him to be gratifying. The deviant behavior would signify that he considers the standards by which he formerly rejected himself to be invalid.

Third, deviant acts provide new routes to positive self-evaluation. The deviant activity may involve associating with a group that endorses standards that are more easily attainable than those endorsed in the conventional environment. The individual thus gains gratification from achieving new standards. Further, sometimes rejection by others in conventional groups stimulates the need to be accepted by others. Toward the goal of being accepted in the group the person behaves in ways that she perceives her group as endorsing. Conformity to deviant group norms may result in acceptance by the group and will positively reinforce the value of the deviant behavior that earned the acceptance. In addition to the gratification that stems from conformity to the standards of deviant associates, the deviant behavior may be self-enhancing as a result of other consequences of the substitution of deviant sources of gratification for conventional ones. Thus, deviant activities may give the individual a new sense of power or control over her environment that leads the person to think of herself as a more effective individual.

Such self-enhancing consequences are to be expected, however, only under certain conditions. For example, deviance will have self-enhancing effects (i.e., will increase self-esteem) under circumstances in which deviance is defined as an acceptable response and can be justified in the context of positive reference groups. Deviance will have self-enhancing effects insofar as the person's relationship with conventional socializing agents is attenuated whether by virtue of the deviant behavior or other circumstances.

Another moderating variable is the nature of the deviant pattern in question. The deviant pattern will have self-enhancing effects when it offers immediate gratification rather than delayed gratification. The immediate satisfaction of the need for self-enhancement will reinforce the expectation of similar self-enhancing effects in the future. Thus, although substance abuse may have long-term debilitating effects, the immediate gratification of a sense of potency, or the masking of humiliation or negative self-feelings, will have an immediate positive reinforcing effect.

When the person has experienced severe and prolonged failure and rejection in conventional membership groups, the person will come to lose motivation to conform to and become motivated to deviate from the normative expectations according to which the person was judged to be a failure and worthy of social rejection. Under that condition the person will be less likely to judge himself harshly for having violated conventional expectations. Further, the person will be less likely to attach emotional significance to punitive responses from representatives of the conventional social system. In the absence of adverse personal and social responses, other concomitants of deviant behavior (the deviant behavior symbolizing rejection of the standards according to which the person was judged to be a failure and worthy of rejection, distancing from the conventional social order, attaining conventional goals through illegitimate means) will be more likely to have self-enhancing consequences (i.e., increase self-esteem).

The empirical literature, in general, supports the assertion that the self-enhancing effect of deviance is a conditional one, and that these and other specified variables moderate the relationship. Inconsistent findings have been reported regarding the hypothesized self-enhancing effects of deviant behavior. Although analyses based on longitudinal data reported by Bynner, O'Malley, and Bachman (1981) and McCarthy and Hoge (1984) found support for the putative self-enhancing effects of deviant behavior, in support of earlier findings by Kaplan (1980), Wells and Rankin (1983) conclude that such support does not exist. Wells (1989) concurs with Kaplan that the inconsistent findings suggest that the relationship is a conditional one.

Using a spectrum of deviant responses, Kaplan (1978) examined the conditions under which deviant responses were related to subsequent decreases in self-derogation among initially high-self-derogation subjects. He concluded (Kaplan, 1980) that highly self-rejecting subjects who are unable to

utilize normative patterns to reduce feelings of self-rejection and are least likely to be vulnerable to adverse consequences of adopting alternative deviant patterns in the service of the self-esteem motive (i.e., high-defenselessness males) were reasonably consistent in displaying an association between antecedent performance of deviant responses and subsequent reduction in self-rejecting attitudes. Similarly, highly self-rejecting subjects who could be expected to define the acts under consideration as deviant and who are less likely to be vulnerable to negative sanctions from self and others because they had adopted deviant patterns in the service of the self-esteem motive (i.e., males who perceived the self-enhancing potential of the normative environment as high) were reasonably consistent in displaying an association between antecedent deviant responses and later reduction in self-derogation.

On theoretical grounds, socioeconomic status (as an indicator of social definition of deviance) may be expected to moderate the effect of delinquent behavior on self-esteem such that the self-enhancing effects of delinquency would be less likely to be observed in the higher class than in the lower class. Thus,

if higher-class youngsters are more apt to have been socialized to consider delinquent behavior to be wrong, to be more severely condemned by most peers and parents for such behavior, and to recognize the potential damage to their future life prospects that a delinquent life style may lead to, then these influences might partly nullify the generally positive self-esteem effects of delinquent behavior. In this event, we would expect delinquency to have a less positive effect on self-esteem in the higher than in the lower class (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989, p. 1011).

As predicted, Rosenberg and his associates (1989) observe that the effect of delinquency on enhanced self-esteem is significant only in the low socioeconomic status grouping.

Another moderating variable is the immediacy of the self-enhancing effect that is variably associated with particular forms of deviance. For example, substance abuse appears to have short-term effects of reducing self-derogation and depression, although it seems to have long-term effects of increasing these states (Bentler, 1987; Newcomb & Bentler 1988). Perhaps substance abuse as a coping device provides short-term gratification of assuaging negative self-feelings, but over the long term forestalls the development of socially acceptable and effective coping mechanisms. The end result is that the individual maintains or exacerbates chronic self-rejecting feelings. The momentary experiences of gratification could be sufficient to blind the person to the long-term consequences of the deviant adaptation. Indeed, at first, consequences such as social stigmatization may increase the need for momentary reduction of negative self-feelings.

In any case, observed self-enhancing consequences of deviant patterns appear to be conditional on any of a number of circumstances. Thus, for alcoholics, in particular, intoxication appears to represent a favored technique for enhancing self-esteem or defending against self-rejection. A comparison of self-attitudes scores in sober and intoxicating condition revealed that the alcoholic when intoxicated showed more favorable and less derogatory self-concepts than when sober. However, the self-enhancing effects were observed only for those who had a history of heavy drinking and a dependence on alcohol. For social drinkers, intoxication had an adverse effect on self-attitudes (Berg, 1971). Kaplan and Pokorny (1978) reported that the relationship between alcohol use and self-enhancing consequences depended on the interaction of gender and socioeconomic status and is interpretable in terms of increased feelings of power that assuage threats to the masculine self-images among subjects (primarily higher socioeconomic status adolescent males) who are particularly vulnerable to such threats.

Among the more salient conditions under which delinquency should be associated with later self-enhancement is the initial level of self-esteem. Citing Kaplan's (1980) observation that the relationship between deviant behavior and self-enhancement is conditional on any of several factors including the nature of the delinquent act and the strength of the self-esteem motive, Wells (1989) focuses on Kaplan's prediction that deviant performance is associated with positive self-evaluations when the person is most highly motivated to satisfy the self-esteem motive due to the experience of distressful negative self-feelings.

Enhancement is predicted only for persons who initially have self-derogating attitudes (low self-esteem) and who subsequently engage in delinquent behaviors. The prediction does not hold for persons who have high self-esteem or for persons who are already involved in delinquency. For such persons, delinquency will have negative effects on self-attitudes, leading to self-deprecation rather than enhancement. In these terms, enhancement is *contingent* upon initial level of self-esteem and upon consequent adoption of delinquent behavior. Thus while the motivational hypothesis in the self-derogation model is a prediction of a *main effect*, the enhancement hypothesis leads to a prediction about *interaction effects* (Wells, 1989, p. 231).

Wells (1989, p. 249) reported findings in support of the conditional relationship between delinquency and self-enhancing attitudes. He observed that the self-enhancing effect of deviance was observed most consistently in those individuals with extremely low self-esteem.

Given its extremity, this probably reflects *pathological* low levels of self-esteem, corresponding perhaps to "clinically extreme" levels of self-derogation. For most other levels of self-esteem, corresponding to a normal, nonclinical range of scores, engaging in delinquent behavior is not enhancing and may even be

derogatory, particularly for persons with moderately positive self-attitudes. This suggests that self-enhancement through delinquent behavior may be viable only for persons whose self-esteem needs are extremely strong. Such persons have less to lose by getting involved in socially disapproved deviance and a lot to gain psychologically, since their self-esteem cannot get much lower.

Wells also observed the self-enhancement effect among those with the very highest self-esteem scores. However, the effects were not as strong or consistent as the effects observed for the lowest self-esteem grouping. Perhaps the high self-esteem category represents individuals whose self-confidence precludes expectations of disapproval following delinquent acts, and for whom delinquent acts are interpreted as confirming values such as daring and efficacy that composed the basis for one's self-evaluations.

In general, self-enhancing outcomes of deviant behavior are contingent on a number of social-psychological conditions. In the absence of these conditions, or under mutually exclusive circumstances, deviant behavior may lead to low self-esteem.

Effects of Early Deviance on Low Self-Esteem

Although Kaplan's theoretical statement regarding the self-enhancing effects of deviant behavior (Kaplan, 1980) has been given greater attention, in fact he has hypothesized countervailing effects of deviant behavior as well, such that the adoption of deviant patterns has adverse consequences for a person's self-attitudes. Wells (1989) notes that both Hewitt (1970) and Gold (1978) also assert that delinquency will have self-devaluing consequences by virtue of circumstances including social derogation of deviant acts, loss of intrapersonal resources associated with low self-esteem, and social rejection even by members of deviant membership groups.

Deviance is hypothesized to lead to low self-esteem also because it is contrary to the normative expectations that the person has internalized in the course of socialization in conventional membership groups. The internalized standards are used by the person to evaluate himself. Insofar as the individual has failed to approximate self-evaluative standards by behaving in a deviant fashion, the individual will experience negative self-evaluation and concomitant self-rejecting feelings. Thus, deviant behavior influences increased self-rejection (low self-esteem) both directly (via failure to conform to self-evaluative standards) and indirectly (via evoking punitive responses from significant others in the environment)(Kaplan & Johnson, 1991).

Wells (1989) notes that prior studies suggest those enhancement effects of deviant behavior when estimated for general samples tend to be small in magnitude and in fact are negative in sign, suggesting that participation in delinquency tends to have derogatory effects on self-attitudes. However, when subsamples' restricted low self-esteem scores are examined, the effect changes from negative to positive, indicating that self-derogating individuals

experience self-enhancement as a result of deviant activity. In short, the self-devaluing effects of deviant behavior are conditional ones.

The effect of engaging in deviant behaviors on inducing negative self-feelings is mediated by the effect of the deviant acts on negative self-evaluations and rejecting feelings by significant others in the conventional environment. These effects, however, should be observed only where the individual has internalized self-evaluative standards in conventional membership groups in the course of the socialization process that define the behaviors in question as deviant. If the individual has not internalized proscriptive norms regarding these behaviors, or if the behaviors in question are defined as deviant in the context of the person's membership groups, then engaging in those deviant behaviors should not evoke negative self-evaluations and concomitant negative self-feelings. Indeed, if the behaviors in question are approved by the person's membership groups (although rejected by the normative systems of other more conventional groups) engaging in the "deviant" behaviors may even evoke positive self-evaluations and concomitant positive self-feelings. When the person does not regard his or her behavior as deviant, or is able to justify the deviant behavior, the person will be less likely to experience lower self-esteem as a result of the deviant behavior. When the individual has come to reject conventional normative standards or has never respected the normative standards and the people who represent those standards, the person will be less likely to experience negative self-feelings as a result of the deviant behavior.

These conditions in large measure are summarized by Rosenberg (1979) in his discussion of the conditions under which self-esteem will be lowered among members of socially devalued minority groups. As Stager, Chassin, and Young (1983, p. 4) interpret these conditions:

First, the individual must be aware that the larger society has negative views of his or her group (awareness) and the individual must agree with these negative views (agreement). Moreover, the individual must believe that these negative societal views apply to the self (personal relevance). Finally, the individual must be concerned with the views of the larger society (significance).

Applying these ideas for the socially labeled deviant, Stager and her associates hypothesized and observed that low self-esteem among labeled deviants occurs particularly when the individual perceives the label as personally relevant and also has a negative evaluation of that label. Labeled deviants who positively evaluate the personally relevant label do not display low self-esteem. Citing Kaplan's (1975) distinction between voluntary and involuntary deviance, Stager and her associates (1983) speculate that the determinants of low self-esteem among labeled deviant populations might vary depending on the kind of deviance in question. In any case, the effect of deviance on increased self-derogation (decreased self-esteem) appears to be a conditional one.

CONCLUSION

The seemingly inconsistent and weak findings that characterize the large body of work on the relationship between self-esteem and deviant behavior in great measure are accounted for by the failure to consider the relationship in the context of an inclusive and well-developed theory that specifies hypothesized positive and negative effects of self-esteem on deviant behavior, and positive and negative effects of deviant behavior on self-esteem. In the context of a well-developed theory these relationships no longer appear contradictory. I have alluded to and in part described a theoretical structure in which the apparently contradictory relationships are comfortably accommodated by specifying the conditions under which self-esteem positively and negatively influences and is influenced by deviant behavior and by specifying the variables that intervene in these relationships. To our knowledge, our theoretical statement and reported findings represent the only theoretical orientation and program of study that has predicted and observed all four processes occurring. Self-rejection is both positively and inversely related to deviant behavior; and deviant behavior is both positively and negatively related to self-rejecting attitudes.

The guiding theoretical framework in its emergent form generally has been well received. Scheff, Retzinger, and Ryan (1989, p. 170) state:

The most comprehensive theoretical elaboration of the relationship between self-esteem and criminal behavior – and the most convincing empirical investigation thus far – is based on Kaplan's (1975, 1980) "esteem-enhancement" model of deviance.

Wells (1989, pp. 227–28) observes that, while a number of researchers have suggested models implicating the relationship between self-esteem and deviance, Kaplan's self-derogation theory "provides the fullest, most explicit, and most testable version of this perspective" and also offers an explicit statement of the causal relationships through which self-evaluation and deviance are related:

Widely cited as the most complete and compelling account of the contribution of self-concept to social control, the self-derogation model also seems consistent with a large amount of prior research on the correlates of deviant, delinquent, and criminal behavior (Wells, 1989, pp. 227–28).

Our early work "provides a carefully constructed, detailed examination of the component causal links within the esteem-enhancement model" (Wells & Rankin, 1983, p. 14). Our later work offers a systematic series of tests that simultaneously test for these linkages in more inclusive models (Kaplan & Johnson, 1991; Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1986; Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1987; Kaplan, Martin, & Johnson, 1986; Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1988).

Related to the absence of an integrative theory are the methodological inadequacies that characterize much of the work on self-esteem and deviant

behavior. Regarding methodological inadequacy, Smelser (1989, p. 17) summarizes the conclusions of several contributors to a volume on the relationship between self-esteem and social problems (Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989):

As each author indicates, most of the research on which the findings and interpretations are based has been done with small samples, with relatively simple psychological measures of self-esteem held against some outcome, with simple correlational methods, with no control groups or control variables taken into account, and with temporal priority of variables not taken into account.

The study on which our conclusions are based may not justifiably be accused of such shortcomings because it is a longitudinal study based on quite large representative samples, and estimates theoretically informed models using structural equation techniques with latent variables. The theoretically informed models specify both factors that are antecedent to and presumably influences on the development of self-derogation as well as the multiple behavioral outcomes of self-attitudes. Models specify variables that intervene in the process and moderate these relationships.

As others (Wells & Rankin, 1983) have noted, Kaplan's delinquency-as-esteem-enhancement model has implications for the selection of appropriate methodology to estimate the model. First, because it is a developmental model that projects causal processes extending over time such that self-esteem is initially inversely related to delinquency by virtue of the motivational effects of self-derogation, and subsequently delinquent behavior is associated (under certain conditions) with enhancement of self-attitudes, cross-sectional research is inappropriate in testing the validity of the model because the opposing influences of the relationships might cancel each other and spuriously indicate the absence of significant relationships between self-esteem and deviant behavior. Second, self-esteem is specified as a mediating variable in the linkage between other antecedents and consequences of deviant behavior. Therefore, the model must be estimated in a multivariate context. Third, correct specification of the theory will reflect that self-derogation motivates deviant behavior but is not sufficient to evoke deviant behavioral responses. Among the moderating variables that determine the relationship between self-derogation and deviant outcomes are the ability to reject conventional values and norms, perception of deviant opportunities, the presence of external constraints and monitoring, prior experiences with the outcomes of delinquent activities, and the presence of supportive social groups. Appropriate tests of the model, then, would specify these contingencies. Wells and Rankin (1983) correctly note that these contingencies serve to integrate the esteem-enhancement model with several other theoretical frameworks such as differential association theory, social control theory, and opportunity theory.

One may react to the conclusion that the relationship between self-attitudes and deviant behavior is not a simple one, and that the nature of the relationship is contingent on a number of specifiable moderating variables in at least two ways. On the one hand, one may bemoan the lessening of the practical usefulness of the insights of the esteem-enhancement model "leaving us awash in a sea of conditional probabilities" (Scheff, Retzinger, & Ryan, 1989, p. 175). On the other hand, one may recognize that the specification of moderating variables provides needed detail that has both theoretical and practical implications. The theoretical implication is that reality is more effectively modeled when one understands the contingencies and intervening variables underlying any particular relationship such as the relationship between self-attitudes and deviant behavior. The practical implication is that the effectiveness of programs based on implementation of self-enhancing strategies depends on intervening in ways and under the conditions implied by the theoretical framework. In any case, the full development of a guiding theoretical statement and the estimation of the theoretically informed models using appropriate data and analytic technique are prerequisite to understanding the complexities of the relationship between self-esteem and deviant behavior.

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18 Low Self-Esteem People

A Collective Portrait

Morris Rosenberg* and Timothy J. Owens

The aim of this chapter is to paint a collective portrait of the low self-esteem person. Our cumulative portrait draws on data from a number of survey and experimental studies that have included self-esteem as a critical or implicated variable. Although this approach differs from the familiar case study method, a great deal can be learned about the low self-esteem phenomenon by searching for general findings that appear across a broad range of cases. It is for this reason that we speak of a *collective*, not an individual, portrait of people with low self-esteem (hereafter LSE).

We utilize several data sources to paint our portrait, with particular focus on three large-scale studies of adolescents: (1) a study of 5,024 high school juniors and seniors in New York State (hereafter NYSS), (2) a study of 815 students from grades 7 to 12 in the Baltimore public schools (hereafter BCS), and (3) a study of 2,300 tenth grade pupils in eighty-seven high schools throughout the contiguous forty-eight states (the Youth in Transition Study,

* This is Morris Rosenberg's final, unpublished manuscript. He was working on it shortly before his untimely death on January 26, 1992. It was originally a much longer treatise on low self-esteem, apparently geared toward eventual publication as a monograph. While editing it for this volume it became increasingly clear that it was a long way from completion and would require more than simple copyediting as originally anticipated. In fact, it became literally impossible for me to keep my voice out of the revision since I frequently found it necessary to insert my thoughts, assessments, and "spin" on underdeveloped themes and ideas; add new material since much has happened in the field since the first draft; and update and expand references. In short, I was acting more as a junior author than an editor. This being the case, my coeditors, Florence Rosenberg (Manny's wife), and I decided that it would be fairer to Manny and the readers to indicate my involvement in developing and writing the chapter by adding my name as junior author so that I share some of the responsibility for what is said in the chapter. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the 2000 annual meetings of the American Sociological Association in Washington, DC. Thanks are given to K. Jill Kiecolt, the discussant, for valuable feedback.

hereafter YIT). These data are supplemented by other published findings, especially from adult populations.

Our sketch has two major components: (1) a discussion of LSE and high self-esteem self-concepts (self-esteem, it must be stressed, is only one feature of the self-concept), and (2) consideration of LSE peoples' emotional and cognitive dispositions. Concerning the first component, the self-concept is a much broader entity than self-esteem: *It is the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings about the self.* Although we know that LSE and high self-esteem (hereafter HSE) people differ in their *levels* of self-esteem, the important issue addressed here is whether they also differ in other aspects, elements, or dimensions of the self-concept. Insofar as they are related to self-esteem, they represent important and interesting features of the LSE person's collective portrait. The aspects of the self-concept we focus on, important though not exhaustive, are: hypersensitivity, stability, self-consciousness, self-confidence, and self-actualization.

We address four questions regarding the emotional and cognitive dispositions of LSE people.

- Q1. Does the emotional life of the LSE person tend to differ from other peoples'? If so, in what ways?
- Q2. Do their cognitions also differ? If so, do they hold different attitudes, values, and beliefs and display different ways of thinking than HSE people?
- Q3. Do LSE and HSE people adopt different strategies for dealing with life's problems? Every organism, faced with threats or difficulties, attempts to devise characteristic ways of coping with problems. What is the central strategy adopted by LSE people? How does this strategy come to pervade and dominate their lives?
- Q4. What are the consequences of these dispositions and strategies for LSE peoples' lives? For example, how does it affect their interpersonal relations, effectiveness in achieving their life goals, aspirations, level of success, outlook on life, and so on?

As one might expect, most of these outcomes are unfortunate, but that is not invariably the case; there are certain instances in which the result may even be positive.

When speaking of LSE versus HSE people we will for the most part be comparing people actually grouped in the lowest and highest SE categories, not simple LSE people versus all others. This is especially true when drawing on Rosenberg's own SE data, which were predicated on Guttman scaling (see Owens and King in this volume for a detailed analysis). Briefly, Rosenberg used a seven-point Guttman scale that labeled LSE people (approximately 5% of the population) as those falling in the two lowest SE categories and

HSE people (approximately 45% of the population) as those in the two highest SE categories. Other authors use other criteria and cut-off points, such as quartiles, median splits, and so on.

THE SELF-CONCEPT: SELECTED FEATURES

The LSE person is not alone in facing threats to his or her self-esteem. The danger always lurks that we will make a mistake, use poor judgment, do something embarrassing, expose ourselves to ridicule, behave immorally or contemptibly. Life, in all its variety, poses an ongoing threat to the self-esteem of everyone. The main source of danger to self-esteem is probably other people. They may criticize us, attack us, derogate us, scorn us, belittle us, ridicule us, snub us, patronize us, or point out our faults, flaws, and deficiencies. The number of ways that people, intentionally or inadvertently, can potentially strike a blow against our self-esteem seems limitless. However, threats to our self-esteem can come from another source as well, including ourselves. As observers of our own behavior, thoughts, and feelings, we not only register these phenomena in consciousness but also pass judgment on them. Thus, we may be our most severe critic, berating ourselves mercilessly when we find ourselves making an error in judgment, forgetting what we should remember, expressing ourselves awkwardly, breaking our most sacred promises to ourselves, losing our self-control, acting childishly – in short, behaving in ways that we regret and may deplore. Our reactions to these everyday experiences may be chagrin, shame, remorse, guilt, regret, self-contempt, and so on. How and why self-esteem is implicated in these threats and challenges to the self may best be understood through the five aspects of the self-concept mentioned earlier. We discuss each in turn.

Hypersensitivity

Although no one is immune to self-esteem threats, everyone reacts to the assaults differently. An event that plunges one person into a state of profound depression is accepted by another with equanimity. It is reasonable to characterize the former group as hypersensitive. To these people the self appears to be a tender and delicate object – or a raw nerve, sensitive to the slightest touch. Other people may undergo the identical experiences but be relatively unaffected by them. These people appear able to shrug off these blows to their self-esteem, take them in stride, and laugh them off. Although certainly not happy about such events, they nevertheless appear able to accept them without intense pain (Roberts & Monroe, 1994). If one were to characterize these two extreme types in polar terms, one might describe the latter as “tough” or “thick-skinned” and the former as “tender” or “thin-skinned.”

With respect to hypersensitivity, the question is: Are LSE people more or less sensitive than others to events or experiences that damage, or threaten

to damage, their self-esteem? The evidence points to the affirmative. In contrast to HSE youngsters, data from both NYSS and BCS show that LSE teens are much more likely to report being highly sensitive to criticism and "deeply disturbed" if others berate, scold, laugh at, or ridicule them. When asked "How much does it bother you to find that someone has a poor opinion of you?" LSE youngsters are much more likely to reply that it "Bothers me very much." In addition, LSE people are more likely to report that they are "deeply disturbed" if they do poorly on some task they have undertaken. (This, as we shall see, has implications for LSE peoples' workplace behavior.) Finally, LSE people are more likely to say that they are "disturbed" when they become aware of some fault or inadequacy in themselves. Other findings are consistent with these results. When Coopersmith (1967, p. 67) asked subjects to rate themselves on a scale ranging from extremely sensitive to extremely insensitive, LSE subjects were three times as likely as those with HSE to describe themselves as either extremely or quite sensitive. In a study of retired men, Luck and Heiss (1972) show that LSE men are more likely to report having their feelings easily hurt, being more sensitive to criticism, and more concerned about what other people really think of them (pp. 74-75).

Experimental studies are consistent with these survey findings. When Kingsbury (1978) presented normal subjects with a highly insulting letter directed at them and then gave them an opportunity to administer an electric shock to the supposed author, LSE subjects were significantly more likely than HSE subjects to administer a severe shock. (The shock's severity was taken as a measure of the depth of their feelings produced by this experience.) Furthermore, this difference did not simply reflect chronic differences between the groups because these shocks were stronger than those of equally LSE subjects who had not received the insulting letters. More recently, Brown and Dutton (1995) show that LSE people not only have more severe emotional reactions to failure than HSE people, in part because LSE people tend to overgeneralize the negative implications of failure, but because they are also more easily affected by emotions directly implicating the self (e.g., pride and humiliation).

There seems to be something paradoxical about the LSE person's reaction to self-esteem danger. On the one hand, the evidence clearly shows they are more deeply pained by information that is damaging to their self-esteem. This is particularly the case if other people impart the message, but it seems to be true of other life experiences as well. They thus have a strong incentive to avoid people or circumstances that reflect negatively on their feelings of self-worth or to interpret events in this way. On the other hand, they appear to be acutely sensitive to information that may cast them in a bad light. They are, for example, more likely to interpret an innocent remark as a criticism (Schlenker, 1980) and to magnify an event's (negative) meaning (Brown &

Dutton, 1995). Not only are LSE people hypersensitive, they also appear to be hypervigilant and hyperalert to signs of rejection, inadequacy, and rebuff.

What accounts for this puzzling behavior? The usual explanation would be that they are driven by the self-consistency motive, which, in turn, leads them to utilize the device of "self-verification." According to self-verification theory, the reason LSE people are so aware of this negative information about themselves is that they are eager to find evidence that will confirm their opinions of themselves, even if these opinions are negative (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). Without denying that self-consistency may play a role, we suggest that something more is implicated: hypersensitivity, or its cousins, hypervigilance and hyperalertness.

Take the analogy of the person who has experienced prolonged back pain that finally disappears. How will the person likely respond to a recurrence? Will the person make special efforts to ignore or dismiss it or devote inordinate attention to it? We think that in most cases attention will focus more rather than less on the original site of the pain. The upshot is to bring to the individual's attention precisely those stimuli that arouse the maximum discomfort.

This is often true of LSE people as well. Having experienced more intense pain as a result of self-esteem damaging events, the LSE individual concentrates *more* rather than *less* attention on its sources. These people may see signs of derogation or rejection that may not actually exist or that would, at least, tend to pass the notice of other people. Because of their hypersensitivity, however, LSE people, in contrast to HSE people, tend to adopt a characteristic strategy for dealing with life that is protective and defensive. The cost to the individual in terms of human self-realization is incalculable. Moreover, it is not the actual severity of the blow to self-esteem that results in devastating emotional consequences for the LSE person; rather it is the intensity of the LSE person's reaction to it.

Although this fragility is particularly apparent in the realm of interpersonal interaction, data suggest that LSE people are more sensitive to other kinds of life stresses as well. Pearlin and Radabaugh's (1976) study of financial stresses and alcohol consumption shows that LSE men who experienced severe financial stresses were more likely than their HSE counterparts to use alcohol to escape from their worries. In another study examining four recurrent sources of social stress in daily life (marriage, parenting, work, and finances), Pearlin and Schooler (1978) found that people experiencing high levels of stress in these areas tended to feel corresponding levels of distress or strain. Self-esteem, however, moderated the effects of these relationships. HSE people, whether under high or low reported stress, did not differ appreciatively in distress or strain. Among LSE people, however, the higher the stress, the greater the experienced distress. LSE people are thus not only more likely to experience stress, they are also more likely to be negatively affected

by the stresses they do experience. Given their hypersensitivity, hypervigilance, and fragility, it is easy to understand why LSE people experience such a high level of psychological distress in their daily lives. And although hypersensitivity is suggestive of a self-concept disorder, hyposensitivity *is not* indicative of self-concept health. A person with a healthy level of sensitivity is not one who has developed artificial stratagems, such as cultivating a “thick skin.” Such stratagems are defensive and have other damaging consequences. But the person who can face up to evidence of personal faults, who can accept with equanimity the fact that plans sometimes go awry, who can shrug off minor criticism without undue difficulty – this person is certain to be less anxious and depressed.

Stability

The idea of self-concept stability (or volatility) is quite complex, in part because there is no uniform definition of stability (see Mortimer, Finch, & Kumka, 1982) and because it relies on how one views the self. To some, especially some symbolic interactionists, the self is so variable, mutable, and situation-dependent that it is scarcely meaningful to think of a stable self-concept at all. Gergen (1988), for instance, claims that the happy, healthy personality has multiple selves that vary in accordance with social norms or situational requirements. Markus and Nurius (1987, p. 162) comment on:

how one can reflect on and experience one's self as mature, forthright, competent, and confident in the work setting yet feel all of 10 years old when in the company of a favored sibling during a visit with the family, and close to 110 when discovering that the next oldest person in the room was born when you were in high school.

In these writers' views, the self-concept varies with the context. One has certain thoughts and feelings about the self in one situation, different thoughts and feelings in another. James, Mead, Goffman, and others have remarked on this phenomenon, and contemporary research has amply demonstrated its truth.

One might thus be disposed to concur with Gergen's (1981) conclusion that the idea of a stable self-concept is an illusion, that how people see and feel about themselves is totally governed by situational events or influences. Still, empirical data consistently show that, in normal populations, a person's global self-esteem remains impressively stable over time. Owens (1992), for example, shows that self-esteem stability over eight years, beginning in tenth grade, exhibits considerable stability, especially considering the many developmental and contextual challenges during this period of the life course. McLeod and Owens (1999) find similar stability in self-worth from age nine to thirteen. Among adults, self-esteem stability appears to be even stronger. In their study of a sample of successful college men, Lorence and Mortimer

(1981) found an annual stability coefficient of .91 over a ten-year period. There is thus persuasive evidence to show that attitudes toward the self are highly variable and equally persuasive evidence to show that they are highly stable. The question is: Which is correct?

The answer, obviously, is both. As has so often happened in this field, William James (1890) provided the answer before other people raised the question. On one hand, he observed that "we ourselves know how the barometer of our self-esteem and confidence rises and falls from one day to another through causes that seem to be visceral and organic rather than rational, and which certainly answer to no corresponding variations in the esteem in which we are held by friends" (p. 307). On the other hand, he also noted that "there is a certain average tone of self-feeling which each of us carries about with him, and which is independent of the objective reasons we may have for satisfaction or discontent" (p. 306). Murphy (1947) agreed, holding that "the individual has an attitude toward his own person that is comparable to his attitude toward music: it is general and also specific, varying in generality from one person to another but also varying from day to day, hour to hour, in the same person" (p. 487).

When we speak of stability, two types of self-concepts must be differentiated: *barometric* and *baseline*. The barometric self-concept refers to the individual's tendency to experience rapid shifts and fluctuations of self-attitudes from moment to moment. At a given instant, a person's self-respect may be high, but in the following moment an unkind word or a slight setback may cause it to plunge sharply. Such fluctuations are inevitably characterized by uncertainty, doubts about the self, or, to use Erikson's (1959) term, identity diffusion. Baseline stability, in contrast, refers to self-concept change taking place slowly and over an extended period of time. It is possible for the barometric self-concept to fluctuate greatly, even if the baseline self-concept shows little change. (See Jackson & Paunonen, 1980; Mortimer, Finch, & Kumka, 1982.)

The first author's studies of adolescents tended to focus on barometric stability and cross-sectional data, while the second author has focused primarily on baseline stability and longitudinal data. The NYSS and BCS studies included "stability of self" scales that gauged the degree to which respondents' opinions of themselves constantly changed or remained the same from day-to-day and situation-to-situation – issues of barometric stability. The data clearly show that LSE youngsters are substantially more likely to exhibit volatile self-concepts than are others. Whether this is also true of long-term (baseline) instability is unclear, although Owens (1993) and Owens and King (in this volume) suggest it is.

We outline four possible accounts for the barometric fluctuation character of the LSE person's self-concept. First, LSE people have a high degree of *reactivity* to external sources of information about the self (i.e., plasticity). A mild criticism, minor snub, or trivial failure may plunge the LSE person into

a state of depression. Events or stimuli that may be dismissed as trivial by HSE people are magnified in significance in the eyes of LSE people. People keenly responsive to these varying daily events must inevitably find their feelings about the self rising and falling in rapid succession. Second, stability is likely to be affected by the *source* of the self-judgment. Some people's thoughts about themselves are more likely to be dependent on external events whereas others base their conclusions about themselves on their own, internal, assessments. As Hales (1985, p. 265) writes:

People differ in their reliance on the internal versus external source of information and thus will differ in the stability of their self-esteem. Self-esteem, which is largely based on an internal source of evaluation, will be more stable than self-esteem based on the evaluation of others. Internal self-evaluation is based on a set of standards that generally remain intact from one context to the next. Self-esteem based on external evaluations may be situationally subject to inconsistent, prejudiced, or unrealistically high or low standards. Self-esteem may be high or low, but it will be more stable if the source is internal.

Third, the *self-esteem motive* is implicated in LSE people's unstable self-concepts. We agree with writers such as Kaplan (1975) and James (1890) who hold that the wish for high rather than LSE is central to the individual's motivational system, although some of the evidence we present later suggests otherwise. If true, wouldn't LSE people be motivated to change their self-esteem while HSE people would resist it? This appears to be what happens over time, as Kaplan (1986) has shown in his research on adolescents. The instability of the self-concept of LSE people may thus be due in part to their ongoing struggle to improve their self-esteem, whereas the stability of the HSE person's self-concept may be driven by their wish to maintain their HSE. Finally, the instability or volatility of the LSE person's self-concepts may be due in part to their lower *confidence* in their own judgments and opinions—including their ideas about themselves.

To say that a stable self-concept is desirable does not imply that mentally healthy people never have doubts about what they are like or are completely resistant to self-concept change. Rather, a healthy self-concept is sure and stable in its essential and central features, but may be changeable regarding its peripheral elements. Furthermore, many features of the self are held as working assumptions that are subject to revision in the light of new evidence (Markus & Nurius, 1987). Finally, in a number of cases people seek to change in the direction of a more desirable or possible self (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989).

Self-Consciousness

For our purposes, distinguishing three facets of self-consciousness (Buss, 1980) is useful. First, private self-consciousness refers to the degree to which people focus on their internal mental and emotional events. People with high

private self-consciousness are usually considered introspective. Second, public self-consciousness, the most common form, refers to a focus on the self as an object of others' observations. It is akin to the principle of reflected appraisals. People with high public self-consciousness focus attention on how others see them and on the impressions they make. Third, social anxiety, a particular manifestation of public self-consciousness, is characterized by the emotional discomfort resulting from making a *bad* impression on others, which naturally depends on a high level of awareness of how one appears in others' eyes. Hence all socially anxious people are high on public self-consciousness but not all publicly self-conscious people are high on social anxiety (Buss, 1980).

The NYSS and BCS data show that LSE people are much more likely to be characterized by a high level of public self-consciousness or, more generally, social anxiety. It appears to be an inevitable consequence of their hypersensitivity to the negative reactions of other people. If they are so pained by and hence fearful of scorn, ridicule or embarrassment from other people individually, how much more frightened must they be at the prospect of facing other people collectively? This high level of public self-consciousness is not only stressful in itself; it also significantly affects how LSE people interact with other people in life.

Self-Confidence

While the terms "self-esteem" and "self-confidence" are often used interchangeably, they should be viewed as distinct concepts. When Bandura speaks of "self-efficacy" (a particular type of self-confidence), he is referring to the conviction that one can successfully *perform* some task or *master* some challenge. This is not the same as self-esteem. In Bandura's (1997) view, self-efficacy deals with enactive mastery whereas self-esteem refers to moral worth.

Although self-esteem and self-confidence are conceptually distinct, they are empirically associated. First, youngsters with LSE are far more likely than those with HSE to say that they lack self-confidence and are unsure of themselves. One reason self-efficacy contributes to self-esteem is that it contributes to successful performance, which, in turn, enhances self-esteem. The principles of reflected appraisals, social comparison, and self-attribution all point to this conclusion. Successful performers are more likely to feel that others think highly of their abilities (positive reflected appraisals) and this assumption (undoubtedly correct) will support and enhance their self-esteem. Juxtaposed with unsuccessful performers, their achievements will be highlighted by favorable social comparisons, further contributing to their HSE. Finally, attribution theory suggests that successful performers will be more likely to attribute their successful outcomes to internal characteristics rather than external influences. LSE people are also more likely than HSE

people to feel awkward, shy, conspicuous, and unable to adequately express themselves when interacting with others. In short, they have low interpersonal self-confidence. Low interpersonal self-confidence must inevitably reduce interpersonal success, which, in turn, generates negative reflected appraisals resulting in damaged global self-esteem.

Self-Actualization

There is a radical difference between LSE and HSE people's orientation toward their personal growth, development, improvement, and the exercise of their powers. Contrary to what one might expect of a person who is basically satisfied with his or her self, the HSE person does not look at the self, proclaim it good, and rest content with it. HSE people seek growth, development, and improvement by pushing themselves to the limits in order to discover – and exercise – their capabilities. It is only in this way that the individual comes most fully alive. The interests of LSE people are quite different. Their attention is focused on protecting their self against threat. Self-actualization yields priority to concerns with safety.

Some of these differences between HSE and LSE people are not necessarily visible to the external observer. We might, for example, find both HSE and LSE people striving to improve themselves, but their underlying motives and inherent gratifications might be quite different. For the LSE person, it may be the *deficiency motivation* that is the spur; for the HSE person, the *growth motivation*. People directed by the deficiency motivation see self-improvement as a means to an end; those inspired by the growth motivation see self-improvement as an end in itself. For the HSE person, it is the process of using oneself, of stretching oneself, of discovering how well one can do and how far one can go that is the chief source of gratification. It is the intrinsic satisfaction rather than the extrinsic reward that chiefly spurs the HSE person's efforts. This is reversed for the LSE person. This person seeks more to protect the self rather than expand it, to focus on *not* making mistakes and glimpsing the fleeting rewards such an orientation inures.

LOW SELF-ESTEEM AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

A prime reason for the widespread interest in self-esteem is the ubiquitous awareness of its powerful effect on people's emotional lives. In a nutshell, to have LSE is to live a life of misery. This does not mean mentally disordered. LSE is not a mental illness; if it were, our mental wards would be far more crammed than they are. But LSE is related to certain unpleasant or painful emotional experiences that generally fall under what is now frequently referred to as "psychological distress." According to Mirowsky and Ross (1989), psychological distress is characterized by the unpleasant subjective states of depression (e.g., feeling sad and lonely, suicidal ideation, crying, and

feeling everything is an effort) and anxiety (e.g., being tense, restless, worried, irritable, and afraid) that have both emotional and physiological manifestations. We would expand this definition to include certain related psychological dispositions, such as dissatisfaction with life, resentment, enmity, and suspicion.

Depression

When painting a portrait of LSE people, we are clearly describing someone with a general and pervasive feeling of depression. And regardless of the population or the kinds of questions asked, if self-esteem is low, depression tends to be high. This is found even at the elementary school level. The BCS data show a significant inverse relationship between self-esteem and depression for every level beyond the third grade. This relationship persists among high school students. In NYSS, LSE youngsters were much more likely to say that they felt unhappy, generally low in spirits, and that they often felt downcast and dejected. They were also more likely to disagree with the statement that they got a lot of fun out of life. The YIT study yielded similar results (Owens, 1994) as did McLeod and Owens's (1999) examination of youngsters undergoing the transition to adolescence.

Such relationships extend to other periods of the life course as well. Pearlin and Lieberman's (1981) study of Chicago-area adults found that LSE people were more likely to report a variety of depressive symptoms (e.g., poor appetite, loneliness, boredom, hopeless, loss of sexual interest, or suicidal ideation). Kaplan and Pokorny's (1969) study of 500 adults support this. Additionally, Luck and Heiss (1972, p. 74) reported that LSE retired men were more likely to report having experienced "prolonged spells of depression." This finding is especially interesting. One might have anticipated, for example, that with the passage of time people would come to terms with their LSE, that it would lose its power to depress them. Not so. Whatever the age of the sample under investigation, we find no exception to the generalization that LSE people are more likely to be characterized by feelings of depression.

The effect of LSE on depression is not one-sided. Depression can also cause LSE. Indeed, each strengthens and reinforces the other (see Owens, 1994; Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1995.) The reason is clear. If self-esteem is a fundamental human need, then its deprivation must inevitably be experienced as depressing. But depression also contributes to LSE, in part, because of the negative cognitive patterns characteristic of depressed people (Angyal, 1941), which understandably extends to the self. For example, depressed persons not only remember more negative than positive information about themselves, but more depressive adjectives about themselves as well (Martin, Ward, & Clark, 1983).

Anxiety

Regardless of how it is measured, anxiety, like depression, is inversely related to self-esteem. The YIT data show that LSE teens are decidedly more likely than others to report such feelings as being nervous, jumpy, and on edge. These data also show that LSE youngsters are more likely to experience apprehension and foreboding, to worry about how their bodies are growing, and about getting hurt in an accident. They were also more likely to say they felt "anxious about something or someone all the time" and at times have been "worried beyond reason about something that did not matter." Kaplan and Pokorny (1969) and Pearlin and Lieberman (1981) came to similar conclusions regarding LSE adults.

The association between self-esteem and anxiety raises the question of whether or not it is reciprocal. Horney (1950) believes it is. She argued that anxiety sets in motion a complex chain of psychological events that produce, among other consequences, self-hatred and self-contempt while anxiety also tends to generate LSE. But there are also a number of features of the LSE syndrome that may produce anxiety. One is the LSE person's hypersensitivity. If, as suggested earlier, negative self-esteem experiences are so painful for these people – and if, as appears evident, the normal course of daily life is so rife with threats to self-esteem – then it is no wonder that the LSE person should live in a constant state of anxiety. Danger lurks every time an LSE person has a test or makes a decision. The problem is exacerbated by their hypervigilance to signs of failure, rebuff, rejection, and so on, which may cause them to detect dangers where none may exist. We can readily understand why Snygg and Combs (1949) refer to the LSE person as a "threatened personality." LSE peoples' inordinately unstable or volatile self-concepts also contribute to their anxiety. Because LSE people generally lack coherent self-schemas (Woolfolk et al., 1995), they are deprived of a most valuable framework for viewing the world. Inevitably, the foundations on which the LSE person's world rests become shaky, leading to indecision about what to do, what tasks to undertake, and how to react to events. It is hard to see how the effect can be other than anxiety-provoking.

LSE people are also more likely to feel that they are not honest and genuine in their dealings with others. They are more likely to say that they put on a "front" or an act. This too provokes anxiety. To act cheerful when sad, sympathetic when indifferent, or friendly when hostile causes stress and strain. Such individuals are aware that they may make a false step, reveal some inconsistency, let the guise slip. In such instances, the damage to self-esteem may be well nigh devastating.

Thus far we have treated psychological distress and self-esteem as dispositions or general response tendencies. But self-esteem and psychological distress can also be states or momentary experiences. Self-esteem, for example,

may go up or down depending on events, and so too may depression or anxiety. The question is: Do self-esteem and psychological distress continue to show these relationships when we consider them as states rather than traits? Epstein's (1981) research suggests the answer is yes. Looking at people's emotional responses to events that raised or lowered their self-esteem at certain times of the day, he found:

When self-esteem was raised, high levels were reported for happiness, security, affection, energy availability, alertness, calmness, clear-mindedness, singleness of purpose, lack of restraint, and spontaneity. When self-esteem was lowered, high levels were reported for unhappiness, anger, feelings of threat, weariness, withdrawal, nervousness, disorganization, conflict, feelings of restraint and self-consciousness. (p. 21).

Whether considered as general dispositions or as momentary feelings, self-esteem and psychological distress show a strong and consistent inverse relationship.

SELF-ESTEEM AND COGNITIONS

Although some of the LSE person's feelings differ from those of most other people, their thinking may also differ. When speaking of cognition, it is useful to distinguish between *content* (what people think) and *process* (how people think). LSE and HSE people, we believe, display certain differences in both aspects of cognition. And while the differences may not be great, they are significant. Here we address several contents of thought (pessimism, cynicism, negative institutional orientation, negative attitudes toward others, and negative perceived selves) and several processes of thought (uncertain thinking, unconstructive thinking, slow thinking, and depersonalized thinking).

Cognitive Contents

Pessimism is probably the most familiar negative cognitive disposition. It is the idea and expectation that future events and things will work out badly. Although it is reminiscent of the flip side of self-confidence discussed earlier, pessimism differs from self-confidence in that the former speaks essentially to perceptions of what the future holds in store while the latter taps into one's beliefs in his or her ability to master challenges and overcome obstacles. One could conceivably be fairly confident in one's own abilities, but simply believe that malevolent forces operate to unfairly undermine one's best intentions.

In NYSS, LSE youngsters were three times as likely as those with HSE to report "average" or "below average" expectations of being successful at their adult work. LSE youngsters were also substantially more likely than those

with HSE to believe that they would not get as far ahead in life as they would like. LSE BCS youths were similarly pessimistic about their occupational futures, while LSE teens in YIT were more likely to be pessimistic about the state of the world than HSE people. (The YIT data were also collected in the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s.)

Cynicism is another familiar type of negative cognition. It is characterized by a large gap between ideal and reality, a deep suspicion of human motives, a conviction that the world is filled with lies and deception, that injustice prevails, and that people do not get what they deserve (see Hunt, this volume). Sniderman's (1975, p. 193) study of political cynicism showed that LSE people were much more likely than those with HSE to score high on both political cynicism (e.g., politicians are hypocritical) and political suspiciousness (e.g., politicians are dishonest). The political cynicism of LSE people is equally evident among adolescents. LSE YIT respondents were more likely to give cynical answers to questions regarding taxes, trust in the federal government "to do what is right," and believing that the government is run by smart and competent people.

Negative institutional orientations characterize LSE peoples' attitudes toward the institutions in which they are involved. We have already discussed orientation toward political institutions, and now consider orientation toward educational institutions. The YIT study included a fifteen-item measure labeled "positive school attitudes" (e.g., valuing education, feeling that school makes a difference in life, enjoying school) and an eight-item measure reflecting "negative school attitudes" (e.g., believing school is boring or a waste of time and whether one would like to quit school). HSE youngsters are much less likely than those with LSE to score high on positive school attitudes, while LSE youngsters are much more likely to express negative school attitudes.

Negative attitudes toward other people and groups, according to Wylie's (1979, p. 450) extensive literature review, tend to correlate positively with self-regard. That is, people who hold negative attitudes toward themselves are more likely than those with positive self-attitudes to hold negative attitudes toward specific other people (e.g., parent, other student, person in standard photograph). Furthermore, several experimental studies show that when investigators intentionally lower someone's self-esteem, that person's attitude toward other people tends to become more negative (Wylie, 1979, p. 483). Given these findings, it is difficult to disagree with Sniderman's (1975) conclusion that "Those who think poorly of themselves think poorly of others" (p. 189).

It is not surprising that LSE people are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward others. Probably the most important reason is simply the fact that they are more likely to believe that others hold negative attitudes toward them. However, it doesn't stop there; LSE people generally feel

greater interpersonal hostility as well. YIT data show that LSE respondents are more likely than others to say that they often feel like swearing, that they often feel like losing their tempers at their teachers (or other people), that they often feel like being a little rude to their teachers (or other people), and that they often feel like picking a fight or arguing with their parents. This presents a seeming paradox: LSE people appear more likely to both acknowledge aggressive impulses and inhibit their expression. How can this be? The answer is that, on one hand, they begin with a higher level of aggression in the first place. When HSE people express little aggression, it is not because they inhibit it but because they are less likely to begin with strong feelings of hostility. And an important reason why they begin with little hostility is that other people have done little to damage their self-esteem. In addition, one should not assume that the LSE person, by expressing his or her aggression, thereby gets rid of it. It is by now quite clear that this Freudian theory of catharsis is misguided. Tavris (1982), for example, notes that when people express their anger, they tend to search their memories for events that will justify it, thus amplifying their hostility. Furthermore, the expression of anger tends to elicit anger from others, thereby enhancing the original anger. To the extent that LSE people express hostility, they are more likely to increase than to decrease the feelings of hostility. On the other hand, since LSE people are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward people and be suspicious of and hostile toward others, they may try to avoid aggressive or hostile displays to reduce the likelihood of a painful swipe or criticism. The paradox, then, leads inevitably to one of the key states of emotional distress in LSE people – anxiety.

Having negative perceived selves seems almost a matter of definition for LSE people – and the evidence is overwhelming (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Wylie, 1979, pp. 465–488). When NYSS respondents were asked: “What do you think most people think of you?” HSE people were over four times as likely as those with LSE to say that most people thought well of them. BCS data show that HSE children were more likely than LSE children to say that their teachers, mothers, and classmates thought they were a “wonderful person”; LSE children, in contrast, were more likely to say that these others thought they were “not such a nice person.” In addition, when asked to describe what teachers, mothers, and classmates would say about them to other people, the LSE respondents were more likely to cite unfavorable characteristics.

The consequences of negative perceived selves for people’s lives are far from trivial. First, this belief clearly affects interpersonal behavior. If we think that others hate and despise us, we are strongly inclined to avoid contact with them and possibly even hurt them. On the other hand, if we believe others like and respect us, we are likely to seek their company and be disposed to help them. Thus, the nature and degree to which we interact with others is

strongly influenced by these perceived selves, regardless of their accuracy. Indeed, our perceived selves represent one of the most important foundations on which our interpersonal behavior rests. Second, it is firmly established that what we believe others think of us – their reflected appraisals – exercises a major influence on our own self-esteem. Although, in time, our self-respect may become less dependent on other people's judgments and more upon our own, the perceived self continues to have a major impact on self-esteem throughout the life course. People who can continue to respect themselves while simultaneously believing that everyone else despises them are certainly a rarity.

Cognitive Processes

Although differences in the cognitive processes of LSE and HSE people may not be major, several are worth noting because they help paint a complete portrait of the LSE person. We discuss four: uncertainty, unconstructive thinking, slowness of response, and depersonalization.

Uncertainty, or weakness of conviction, has both emotional and behavioral effects on individuals. Not knowing what one thinks makes it very difficult for effectively responding to the events of daily life. Emotionally, uncertainty can generate agonies of indecision and inner conflict. The person lacking conviction is constantly confronted with such questions as: Should I or shouldn't I? Am I for or against? What stand should I take? The net result is an ongoing experience of inner turmoil. The effects of uncertainty on behavior may be no less devastating. If one does not know what one wants or believes, one may be immobilized or suffer from halfhearted effort. Several indications suggest that LSE people are more likely than others to experience uncertainty, particularly regarding their self-concepts and moral beliefs (see Newman & Wadas, 1997). This is borne out by survey data. For example, with respect to moral certainty (i.e., possessing and adhering to a set of moral convictions that serve as fundamental frameworks for evaluating whether one is right or wrong or something is good or bad) the BCS data show that LSE adolescents are more likely than other people to say that they have difficulty making such moral decisions. The YIT data reveal another aspect of moral uncertainty. Although LSE and HSE youngsters both endorse mainstream moral values (i.e., never lying, being socially responsible, reciprocating help), LSE youngsters report weaker and less intense attachment to them. Their moral convictions appeared to be more tepid, less intense, and to rest on a bed of sand.

There are several reasons why LSE people seem to harbor these moral doubts. First, they have lower confidence in the soundness of their own judgments, (i.e., judgmental self-confidence). For example, they are more likely to feel that other people's political judgments are superior to their own, even while, paradoxically, they remain deeply suspicious of political leaders

(Sniderman, 1975). Lacking respect for their own opinions or judgments, it is inevitable that their beliefs or convictions should be more shaky and unstable. Second, although contradictory instances occur, LSE people, like HSE people, prefer to think well of themselves (Swann et al.'s self-verification arguments notwithstanding). LSE people are thus motivated to discover evidence *undermining* their negative views of themselves whereas HSE people are motivated to *discover* evidence confirming it. This motivational factor thus works to strengthen the HSE person's self-concept while it weakens the LSE person's. Finally, having convictions, especially definite ones, means one must be prepared, at some level, to defend them and act in terms of them. Such defense and action poses special threats to LSE individuals since they may be attacked by those with opposing views, and being unable or unwilling to defend their position, "shown" to be stupid, inept, or downright wrong. Strong views thus carry with them threats to self-esteem and interpersonal harmony. Uncertainty provides a margin of safety. If one is not sure what one thinks, then it is easier to withdraw from one's position when confronted with opposition. In this sense, uncertainty can be a form of self-handicapping.

Unconstructive thinking is nerve-racking and counterproductive. It is also characteristic of LSE people. Addressing its antonym, Epstein and Meier (1989) identify several key features of constructive thinking. (1) A low level of anxiety and worry. High anxiety can disorganize thought processes and undermine the effective use of intelligence. (2) The ability to set goals and make plans for achieving them. Brilliance without organization inevitably fails to produce effective solutions. (3) Avoidance of categorical thinking. The tendency to place people in pigeonholes and ignore their individuality interferes with communication, interpersonal relations, and the enjoyment of diversity. (4) The absence of mysticism or superstitious thinking. (5) The absence of negative thinking – emphasizing difficulties or anticipating failure – may actually bring it on. LSE people are less likely to exhibit or avoid these features of constructive thinking. As previously noted, LSE people are much more likely to experience high levels of worry, anxiety, and depression than HSE people. Depressed people are also more likely to be characterized by categorical thinking (i.e., psychological rigidity). According to Taylor (1989), depressed people tend to show less complex thought processes and "use fewer categories to make sense of information than non-depressed people, and the categories they do use tend to be quite simple ones, such as good and bad, black and white" (p. 217). Kohn and Schooler (1983) found that LSE is significantly associated with a cognitive pattern they label "intellectual inflexibility." Sniderman (1975), on the other hand, shows that LSE adults are much more likely to be characterized by "psychological rigidity" and "intolerance of ambiguity" (p. 149). He also reports that his LSE respondents scored high on a measure of "mysticism" (e.g., believing that "the occult is a key that will

unlock the future”), which is closely allied with superstition and signals a lack of confidence in reason (pp. 160–161). Finally, while the relation of self-esteem to setting goals and making plans is not yet well understood, Heatherton and Ambady (1993, pp. 132–133) suggest that LSE interferes with “future goal setting and goal attainment” by reducing self-regulatory capacities (e.g., underestimating one’s skills and abilities). In a somewhat similar vein, Clausen (1993) argues that a key component of “planful competence” (e.g., setting and pursuing ambitious goals, perseverance and proactivity) is self-confidence, a close relative of self-esteem.

Slowness of response denotes a general lack of speed and decisiveness in daily actions. Although the evidence is indirect, it apparently characterizes LSE people. First, uncertainty and weakness of conviction mark LSE people, making it more difficult for them to make up their minds. Second, LSE people’s response times are slowed because of their generally depressed moods. According to Argyle (1972, p. 139), “People in good moods tackle problems in a different way from those in neutral or sad moods. They move more quickly, adopt the simplest strategy, and accept the first solution they find.” Third, self-confidence also affects response time. Isen and Means (1983) showed that subjects with higher levels of self-confidence performed assigned tasks faster than those with lower levels of self-confidence. The latter, it seems, checked things more carefully to make sure they were right before acting. Finally, the effect of self-esteem on reaction time seems especially powerful after the experience of failure. According to Cruz Perez (1973), after HSE and LSE experimental subjects were told that they had failed a perceptual differentiation test, they moved on to a series of intellectual capacity tests with the instruction that speed was essential for success. The HSE subjects subsequently increased their speed while the LSE subjects decreased theirs. Apparently, when LSE people were told that they had failed, they were inclined to proceed more cautiously, to check twice, to be sure to avoid mistakes. The upshot was that it took them longer to perform a given task.

Depersonalization in our usage refers to the loss of a sense of personal identity coupled with feelings of unreality, or, in James’s (1890) schema, a loss of personal sameness. Depersonalized people may experience themselves as separated from themselves or as detached onlookers of their own actions. In speaking of depersonalization, it is essential to distinguish what DSM-IV (1994) identifies as the depersonalization disorder (a serious and often disabling psychopathological condition) from symptomatic, episodic, or transient depersonalization. This latter, transient, type of depersonalization experience was explored in BCS. The scale was constructed from five items gauging various thoughts and feelings in social interaction (e.g., feeling like the interaction really isn’t happening, feeling like one is in a dream). LSE respondents were significantly more likely to score high on this index than others, but the exact reason is unclear. One factor is their highly unstable self-

concepts, which coincides with a loss of a sense of personal sameness. People whose thoughts and feelings about the self tend to shift from moment-to-moment or day-to-day obviously experience a threat to their personal sameness. Indeed, when the instability of the self-concept is statistically controlled, the relationship between self-esteem and depersonalization is substantially reduced (see Elliot, Rosenberg, & Wagner, 1984). Another factor is the LSE person's general belief that the self they present to others in the course of social interaction is their "real self." Because they dislike and distrust themselves, they are disposed to try to conceal their real feelings while putting on an act or show. However, as self-styled inept fakes and frauds, pulling off this charade is probably also doomed to perceived failure. It is thus understandable that LSE people, occasionally reflecting on their words and acts, should have fleeting feelings of doubt and wonder about who this actor they are observing actually is. Feelings of this sort constitute the substance of transient depersonalization.

In sum, LSE and HSE people tend to differ in terms of their feelings and certain ways of thought. However, these cognitive differences mustn't be exaggerated. The data on cognitive differences are much less clear than those on emotional differences. With the exception of negative thoughts, LSE and HSE thought processes do not appear to differ radically or pervasively.

GENERAL APPROACHES TO LIFE

Just as the LSE person's thoughts and feelings differ from the HSE person's, so do his or her general approaches to life. We address two prominent strategies LSE people tend to employ in the course of their daily lives – avoiding risk and the moat mentality – and then discuss some of the consequences they have on the LSE person.

Avoiding Risk

Perhaps the most salient feature of LSE people is their approach to life. That is, the characteristic stance, posture, or strategy they adopt in facing the world, the way they deal with the problems that arise in the course of daily living. More than other people, LSE people are disposed to view life as dangerous and threatening, which puts them in a defensive mode. However, saying that LSE people are more likely to experience threat does not mean they are necessarily exposed to greater external dangers or subject to more serious attacks. Objectively, these dangers may actually be fewer and less serious; the key is that LSE people *feel* more threatened by them.

First, LSE people's heightened sense of threat stems from their hypersensitivity and fragility. They are more deeply pained, and more easily shattered, by rejection, snub, and criticism. Second, any organism is more likely to feel threatened if it is alert and sensitized to danger than if it is relatively obli-

ous to it. LSE people, like those with an avoidant personality, are extremely sensitive to signs of censure and derision (Millon, 1991) and the dangers they presumably entail. Third, LSE people are more likely to *experience* interpersonal threat because they believe that other people hold negative opinions of them and come to expect, in varying degrees, to be despised, snubbed, and rejected. Fourth, the LSE person's sense of danger and threat is exacerbated by the frightening realization that he or she is much more likely than others to have to face the world alone and unaided. This is frightening to nearly everyone. It is important to recall that the LSE person is no tower of strength to begin with and is precisely the kind of person who needs the social support that others can provide. And yet LSE people are the least apt to have the emotional, informational, and material resources that other people can provide available to them. Consequently, LSE people are more likely to adopt a protective orientation in their daily affairs over an acquisitive one.

A "protective" style focuses on avoiding damage to one's feeling of self-worth by engendering disapproval rather than garnering approval (Arkin, 1987). An "acquisitive" style, on the other hand, is attuned to enhancing self-esteem rather than ensuring that no harm comes to it. Although protectives also want to enhance their self-esteem and acquisitives to protect it, their chief foci are protection and acquisition, respectively. When LSE people encounter various life situations, their automatic reaction is to think: How does this person or situation threaten me and my sense of self-worth and how can I deal with or forestall the threat?

One general coping strategy is to "play it safe" and avoid taking chances. Uncertain about how other people will respond to them, or assuming the worst, LSE people are apt to avoid approaching other people altogether or to say little or nothing. This protective orientation naturally leads to social and psychological isolation. A number of different threads of evidence point to this. One indication is the fact that, among NYSS adolescents, LSE people are less likely to say, "Generally speaking, I would rather try something and fail than not try at all." LSE youngsters are also more likely to say, "I do not like to put my abilities to the test." Similarly, Sniderman (1975) reported that adults who scored high on a measure of "personal unworthiness" were more likely to agree that "I never try to do more than I can, for fear of failure" (p. 75). The NYSS data also suggest that LSE adolescents, in contrast to those with HSE, are more likely to avoid leadership opportunities, competition on the job, and responsible yet highly rewarding occupations. Although leadership may enhance self-esteem through positive reflected appraisals, positive social comparisons, and favorable self-attributions, thus appealing to acquisitives, it also represents a threat to self-esteem for protectives. Leadership brings the risk of making mistakes and antagonizing people, of exposing oneself to attack and criticism. To cite Harry Truman's famous aphorism: "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." Yet like so many of the other

protective and avoidant strategies designed to protect self-esteem, they eventually damage it. At the very least they never allow such people to realize their full potential. As Bandura (1997) has convincingly demonstrated, nothing can more effectively convince us that we can do something than the actual experience of having done it. The LSE person's psychological depression also reduces his or her tendency to take risks. Taylor (1989, p. 72) observes: "As the maxim, 'nothing ventured, nothing gained' suggests, risk taking is another skill that influences whether motivation and creativity will lead to success. A good mood increases the willingness to take risks, perhaps by reducing the awareness of what can go wrong."

Accepting positive feedback is a more subtle kind of risk, indeed not ordinarily thought of as risk at all. For example, assume that an LSE boy has made a good impression on a girl. His self-esteem is boosted and he contemplates the possibility that he may actually be more attractive than he originally assumed. But such a conclusion poses a danger to him. If he actually is so attractive, then he has no reason not to approach other girls as well, yet doing so engenders the possibility of rejection. To accept positive information about the self can thus be dangerous to LSE people because it may force them into competition and risks they are loathe to undertake. So long as our LSE boy can assume he is not attractive, then he cannot be rejected because he makes no attempt to be accepted. Epstein (1973) suggests that this may be one reason why LSE people may often hesitate to accept self-enhancing information. It is not because LSE people do not enjoy boosts in self-esteem; they may actually enjoy it more than others. Nor is it because they have a need for self-consistency – a need to maintain their negative self-concepts against the threat of change. Instead, a sudden drop in self-esteem is more distressing than a chronically low level of self-esteem. If true, people who anticipate having their self-esteem lowered by others will tend to chronically devalue themselves in order to prevent a greater discomfort: having their self-esteem lowered even further.

The Moat Mentality

Although the risk of failure or defeat can stem from many sources, for LSE people the main risks are interpersonal: being ridiculed, derogated, rejected, or upbraided. And even if such experiences are unpleasant for everyone, for the hypersensitive LSE person, they are massive. One way of dealing with such attacks is by erecting barriers between oneself and others, as if to hole up inside an inner castle. We call this orientation a "moat mentality" and discuss five ways in which it manifests itself: interaction restriction, "marginalization," reticence and inhibition, concealment, and dissemblment.

Interaction restriction is the most obvious way of dealing with the threat of attack from other people; one simply avoids them. However, this creates a fundamental dilemma for the LSE person because no one can live in society

without interacting with other people and, like everyone else, LSE people want to be close to others, want to be loved and accepted by them. In NYSS, LSE people are four times as likely as HSE people to agree to the statement: "I prefer to pass by school friends, or people I know but have not seen for a long time, unless they speak to me first." LSE high schoolers are also more likely to avoid participation in extracurricular activities. Although these activities are open to all, HSE youngsters are three times more likely to participate in regular extracurricular activities than their LSE peers. In addition, LSE youngsters are much more likely to belong to no clubs at all.

Marginalization involves being a member of the group but remaining on its fringes. The NYSS data also show that LSE people are less likely than others to contribute to group discussions or express their views. Shy persons, who are usually characterized by LSE as well, often exhibit this pattern. According to Arkin, Lake, and Baumgardner (1986, pp. 192–193) shy persons migrate to the fringes of social interaction, where they are better able to regulate its course and therefore its outcome. Shy people can be safe and avoid the social limelight by engaging in "back-channel" responses, such as murmuring "un-huh," smiling, nodding, or otherwise appearing attentive while not actually speaking (Arkin et al., 1986). Dykman and Reis (1979) found that students scoring high on feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy [read hypersensitivity and LSE] tended to occupy seats near the rear and far sides of the classroom. From this vantage point they could remain withdrawn and safe when uncertain, yet able to enter into the flow of classroom activity whenever they felt more competent. Finally, LSE subjects were much less likely than those with HSE to be named by their classmates as people who actively participate in class discussions.

Reticence and inhibition characterize the desire of LSE people to keep their thoughts and emotions about other people – which are frequently negative, suspicious, and hostile – from being detected. Consequently, interpersonal interaction is treated as a minefield to be negotiated with the greatest possible caution, since LSE people are cognizant of the fact that if they reveal their hostility to others, others will retaliate. Avoiding this frightening peril requires LSE people to keep their negative thoughts and feelings toward others tightly capped. And while no one likes negative reactions, HSE people seem more willing to say unpopular things because they lack LSE people's hypersensitivity, are less frightened by others' negative reactions to them, and do not feel the pressure that LSE people do to conceal their negative feelings toward others in the first place. Hence, HSE people are much freer to be frank and say what they really think while also having less need to control and repress their hostility because they do not feel hostile.

Avoiding threat is not the only reason for LSE people's reticence. The low level of confidence in their own judgments also significantly curtails their interest and motivation in offering their opinion (Rosenberg, 1965).

Moreover, they also tend to believe that others do not want to hear what they have to say. These factors, coupled with their high level of public self-consciousness, inevitably cause LSE people to pause longer while deciding whether or not to express their ideas to others. The upshot is that conversational passivity, hesitation, and meekness come to characterize the LSE person's interpersonal behavior.

Concealment is characterized by an inclination to conceal one's inner thoughts and feelings from others and sometimes even oneself. The obvious motivation is to avoid other people's negative reflected appraisals. Sniderman (1975) describes this strategy as "defensive withdrawal." He notes that LSE appears to encourage people to be suspicious of others, particularly of efforts they might make to establish a close personal relationship. This need to fend others off, for inviolacy, can be expressed many ways, such as an insistence on privacy, a resistance to making one's own beliefs and failings public, or an opposition to dealing with other persons. Whatever the specific tactics, the fundamental objective is the same – to find protection from others – and the basic strategy is the same – to put maximum distance between oneself and others (Sniderman, 1975, pp. 95, 97).

Dissemblance is the act of putting up a front or pretense. Everyone does it. It occurs when we look sad at a funeral but aren't, laugh at the boss' joke when it isn't funny, feign interest in a lecture when bored to tears, and in the innumerable other ways we try to act properly in a given situation. Although we may be insincere or even "dishonest" in how we appear and what we actually think and feel, when most people do this they usually do not define such actions as dishonest or venal. However, this does not appear to be the case for LSE people. They are not necessarily more false or dishonest than HSE people, but they *feel* more false or dishonest, reflecting, in part, their fragility.

This speaks in part to the concept of authenticity. Erickson (1995), for example, defines authenticity as a sense of living up to one's core self, the self that one really is. Although people are generally motivated to feel authentic, LSE people may have particular problems with authenticity. First, LSE people are less sure what their core self is. Second, LSE people regard their core self less favorably. Last, LSE people are less apt to express their core selves in interaction, to be authentic with other people. (Going back to our discussion of self-confidence, inauthenticity could help maintain LSE and low self-efficacy.) Emotion management may also be more problematic among people with LSE than others. Erickson and Wharton (1997), for instance, suggest that LSE people dissemble more than others, implying that they do more "surface acting." As previously noted, this can lead to feelings of inauthenticity. It might also cause some of the anguish LSE people feel in social interaction because they know that they're choosing to dissemble.

LSE adolescents in NYSS were more likely to agree with the statements: "I often find myself 'putting on an act' to impress people," and "I tend to put up

a 'front' to people." When these two items are combined to form a score, the LSE adolescents are nearly six times more likely than HSE teens to agree with both statements (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 156). In two interviews with the first author, a LSE boy and girl discussed their dissemblance. An LSE boy revealed:

Nobody knows what I'm like, really, except my parents. Mostly I'm just sort of happy-go-lucky. Just recently I went on a blind date with this girl. She was a lot of fun, had a terrific sense of humor, and could talk about anything you wanted to talk about ... and we just hit it off so great. Then she said, when we were dancing: "You know, Dick, you're not so happy-go-lucky, really. Deep down inside you're very serious."

A LSE girl disclosed:

I don't know why, but I have always tried to hide – I've never said anything outright that would give people my real feelings – that I was unhappy. And being as I'm not usually happy, I'm deceiving people in that point.

The boy expressed this pose of cheerfulness, too: "I don't say that much. Most of the time I'm just joking. And most of the people think that is what I do all the time." A reanalysis of Snyder's self-monitoring scale by Briggs, Cheek, and Buss (1980) supports these qualitative data. Of three factors identified – *acting* (e.g., being good at and liking to speak and entertain), *extraversion* (e.g., being outgoing in social situations), and *other-directedness* (e.g., being willing to change one's behavior to suit other people) – the last was highly correlated to LSE (p. 683).

LSE people are also more likely than others to feel that their behavior is phony or false. Probably the key factor in explaining why is the motivation underlying the behavior. If the behavior is motivated by the wish to conform to social demands or adapt appropriately to the situation, then it is not considered dishonest; rather, it is deemed appropriate and polite behavior. If, on the other hand, the motivation is to *mislead* other persons about one's self and create a false impression, then it is likely to be experienced as artificial or inauthentic. Deep down LSE people know it to be cowardly behavior, predicated on feelings of fear and inadequacy. Yet LSE people, like others, respect frankness, openness, honesty, and genuineness. When they see such phoniness in themselves, they are moved to condemn themselves as shams and frauds. Such feelings radically undermine self-esteem. The effort to protect self-esteem by presenting an artificial or inauthentic self is, like most such stratagems, self-defeating.

Consequences of the Self-Protective Strategy

As a result of these pervasive defensive strategies, LSE people gradually develop a fairly stable and consistent personality structure, even though the parts sometimes appear to be inconsistent. The common theme running

through the LSE personality is skirting, avoiding, sidestepping, or mitigating the pain that real or imagined assaults on the self inflict on such hypersensitive and fragile people. Once adopted, these strategies have profound consequences for the individual's life that are often unintended and undesired. We discuss six consequences of the LSE person's adoption of the protective strategy next: spontaneity, passivity, loneliness, shyness, interpersonal ineptitude, and alienation.¹

Spontaneous people express their thoughts and feelings immediately and directly, with little preparation and rehearsal beforehand. Virtually every feature of the LSE personality undercuts spontaneity. And though this lack of spontaneity has similarities to reticence and inhibition, it is distinct enough to merit special attention. For instance, LSE people's self-consciousness makes them excessively concerned with the impression they make on others, while their low self-confidence causes them to doubt whether they have anything worthwhile to say. Additionally, their negative perception of self convinces them that other people are likely to be unreceptive to or unimpressed by their views, while their hypersensitivity and fragility makes them fearful of arousing other's ire, scorn, or ridicule. All these inhibitions to directness and spontaneity damage the quality of their interpersonal relations further, for people who are artificial and overly cautious tend to be dull, make others uncomfortable, and seldom bring joy to their companions.

One reason LSE people lack spontaneity is because their interactions with others tend to be dominated by "strategic planning." Before expressing their thoughts, they are more apt to go through a silent, internal process of imaginative rehearsal in the hope of warding off or forestalling danger of ridicule or rebuff stemming from a miscue or mistake. Will the listener find their ideas ridiculous? Annoying? Offensive? Boring? Contemptible? If so, how can they reformulate their messages to avoid these outcomes? While thinking before speaking is not necessarily a bad practice (caution is, after all, the better part of valor), it is a time-consuming one that can seriously interrupt the flow of interaction. And the more concerned one is in avoiding potentially damaging expressions, the more one is apt to edit and even re-edit oneself in advance, thus seriously impeding spontaneity. The LSE person's secretive-ness, concealment, and dissemblance are also fatal to spontaneity since they affect immediacy and directness. When people must carefully consider which thoughts to conceal and which to reveal, they obviously cannot be expressing what immediately comes to mind.

¹ It should be noted that many of these self-protective strategies may also be viewed as *ways* of interacting in addition to *consequences* of adopting self-protective strategies. We choose to discuss them here as discrete manifestations of the LSE syndrome. This seems especially warranted in light of our essential premise that LSE people may be effectively distinguished from HSE people by the former's overriding concern with protecting the self from an overly harsh and insensitive social world.

Passivity or unassertive is a consistent and unified pattern LSE persons adopt to protect themselves from the threat of humiliation or hostility. Assertive people put themselves forward, try to affect the course of events, and strive to influence people – in short, they dare to make waves. LSE people are typically the opposite. We have already seen the LSE person's inordinate reticence in group activities or situations. Their unassertiveness is shown by a tendency to remain at the fringe of the group, to occupy the side or back seats in the classrooms, and to demure through “back channel” responses.

Several factors congeal to produce backward, retiring, inconspicuous social behavior on the part of LSE personalities. The first and primary factors are their hypersensitivity and hypervigilance to negative reflected appraisals. The best way to avert social danger is to be inconspicuous, neutral, and non-committal. A second factor is the weaker confidence LSE people have in their own judgment. In NYSS, for example, LSE youngsters were more likely to say that they thought other people's opinions on public affairs were better than their own. They were also more likely to say that they often had ideas about public affairs that they would like to express but were too unsure of themselves to do so. Third, they may desist from advancing their views because of their sense of inefficacy, which leaves them more likely to doubt that what they say will have much effect on others, so why bother in the first place?

Loneliness is an often excruciating consequence of the LSE person's predicament. The reason is that the LSE person longs to be close to people, but is assailed with the feeling of standing alone in a dangerous, unforgiving, and threatening world. Both adolescent and adult studies reveal that LSE people are especially likely to experience feelings of loneliness. NYSS data show that without exception, the lower the self-esteem, the larger the proportion who describe themselves as afflicted with pangs of loneliness (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 163). In YIT, LSE adolescents were much more likely than others to agree with the statement “I feel lonesome.” In Sniderman's (1975, p. 99) study, LSE adults were more likely than those with HSE to agree with the following statements: “I must admit that I often feel lonely.” “I may not show it but deep down I am often quite a lonely person.” “I wish there were more people I could really talk to.” “It seems to me that I am often left out of things that other people are doing.”

This pervasive feeling of loneliness among LSE people stems in large part from three contributing deficiencies. First, most human beings have a strong need to feel that they belong, that they are a part of things, that they are united with some collective entity. Fromm (1956) stressed this need for belongingness in his explanations of social movements and Maslow (1970) identified it as one of his prepotent human motives. It is almost inevitable that people who feel routinely left out should be more likely to experience keen feelings of loneliness. The YIT and Sniderman data bear this out with

respect to LSE. In YIT, LSE youngsters are more likely to say that "These days I get the feeling that I'm just not a part of things." Sniderman (1975, p. 99) reports that LSE adults are more likely to agree, "It seems to me that I am often left out of the things that other people are doing." Second, loneliness is certainly exacerbated by believing that others do not understand one's inner torments and conflicts. The NYSS supports this contention. Eighty-four percent of LSE respondents said most people do not understand what goes on underneath them, whereas this was true of only 36% of those with HSE (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 162). Finally, feelings of loneliness are apt to be acute among people who feel that they stand alone, that they have no one to lean on, to call upon for help. In YIT, the LSE youngsters are more likely to say that no one cares about them or wants them, while being less likely to say that they are loved, and that they can turn to their parents for help. Such feelings accentuate the LSE individual's loneliness and compel the person, weak and ineffectual as he or she is, to face a threatening world alone and unaided.

Shyness, as a syndrome (e.g., Jones, Cheek, & Briggs, 1986; Zimbardo, 1977), bears striking similarity to that of LSE people. According to Briggs et al. (1986, p. 4), shyness is an "excessive and nervous attention to the self in social settings resulting in timid and often inappropriate overt behavior (e.g., silence) as well as emotional and cognitive distress (e.g., anxiety, poor self-regard, etc.)." Indeed, they report that correlations of global self-esteem and shyness routinely exceed $-.50$ and further conclude: "Shyness appears to be ... strongly related to negative self-evaluation and anxious self-preoccupation as well as self-derogating judgments of one's own interpersonal performance" (p. 8). Hansson's (1986) study of chronically unemployed adults found that the shy ones (as measured by the Social Reticence Scale) also had significantly lower self-esteem scores. It may be that shyness is largely an outgrowth of people's efforts to cope with their self-esteem problems.

Interpersonal ineptitude is an almost inevitable outcome of the LSE person's characteristic problems and coping strategies. Their inordinate secretiveness and dissemblance make them obsessively concerned with concealing their precious inner lives from others, which makes it very difficult for them to move with the ebb and flow of daily social interaction. When interacting with others, LSE people do not focus on saying what they think; they focus on saying what is safe. These strategies inevitably backfire and make it impossible for them to be relaxed, genuine, and spontaneous. The end result is that LSE leads to multiple interpersonal problems (see Kahle, Kulko, & Kingel, 1980).

Data from NYSS support the interpersonal ineptitude contention. For example, only one-third of the LSE people compared to a little less than three-fourths of HSE people said that "I find it easy to make talk when I meet new people." In addition, 74% of LSE people versus just 12% HSE people said,

"I prefer to pass by school friends, or people I know but have not seen for a long time, unless they speak to me first" (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 174). When asked to characterize themselves on a number of traits, LSE people in NYSS were much less likely to believe they have the characteristics that make for interpersonal success (e.g., easy to get along with, well-respected and looked up to by others, pleasant, likeable, popular, friendly and sociable). These reactions to others are not restricted to adolescents. Sniderman (1975) found that LSE adults were more likely to report trouble thinking of the right things to talk about in a group (p. 101) and feeling awkward and out of place (p. 99). As a whole, then, LSE people are less likely than others to see their interpersonal relationships as easy, smooth, fluid, and spontaneous. In some cases they withdraw from the relationships. In other cases they avoid making contact with others.

Alienation in the LSE person is manifested by how he or she characteristically stands barricaded, alone, and isolated from other people. In this sense, alienation has close parallels to feelings and perceptions of social isolation. To illustrate the alienating effects of the protective orientation, consider the strategy of concealment discussed earlier. It functions to alienate adherents from others resulting in a pervasive belief among concealers that others cannot understand them. In NYSS (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 162), students with LSE were over twice as likely as those with HSE to report that others do not really know them and what goes on underneath them (36% versus 79%, respectively). The antithesis of concealment is self-disclosure – the willingness to share one's deepest thoughts and feelings with one another. And because intimacy breeds intimacy, when LSE people conceal their inner thoughts from others, others are likely to conceal theirs from them. It is thus no surprise to find, as Kessler and Essex (1982) do, that people with LSE are less likely to establish strong bonds of intimacy with others, whether married or not. Being fearful that frankness, intimacy, and openness may alienate other people sets in motion a sequence of events that is circular and mutually reinforcing. Such secrecy erects an insuperable barrier to intimacy, further alienating LSE people from others.

It would be foolish to assume that the protective strategies devised by LSE people are categorically ineffective; on some level they work or else the individual would not continue them. However, this begs the question: Why do LSE people engage in such counterproductive defense strategies? An answer can be found in Millon's (1986) discussion of the avoidant personality, with whom we believe LSE people share many common features. The avoidant (and LSE) personality "has found it to be effective in warding off the painful humiliation experienced at the hands of others. Discomfiting as social alienation may be, it is less distressing than the anguish involved in extending oneself to others, only to be rebuffed and ridiculed. Distance assures safety; trust invites disillusion" (p. 238).

MITIGATING EFFECTS OF LSE

The picture painted of LSE people thus far is certainly very bleak. However, leaving it that way provides an unbalanced portrait. The fact that some outcomes are not good does not necessarily mean they are unequivocally bad. Take the question of other people's reactions to LSE people. Although it is true that others are not overly fond of LSE people, that does not necessarily mean that they *strongly* dislike them.² Braggarts, bullies, whiners, complainers, and killjoys are probably more disliked. Instead, the LSE person's protective strategies are precisely designed to avoid strongly negative, hostile, derogatory reactions from others. LSE people will go to great pains to avoid offending others, contradicting them, or otherwise eliciting their ire. Others are apt to experience the LSE person as aloof, withdrawn, and distant; they may also feel that it is hard to get to know them. But this experience is unlikely to arouse powerful feelings of hatred, revulsion, or anger as much as indifference toward these often inscrutable people.

Consider the question of occupational success or failure. While LSE people are generally less likely than those with HSE to be occupationally or socioeconomically successful, the difference is not very big. Still, James's (1890, pp. 197–199) century-old idea that people who have been economically unsuccessful should have lower self-esteem appears obvious:

One may say ... that the normal *provocative* of self-feeling is one's actual success or failure, and the good or bad actual position one holds in the world. ... A man with a broadly extended empirical Ego, with powers which have uniformly brought him success, with place and wealth and friends and fame, is not likely to be visited by the morbid diffidences and doubts about himself which he had when he was a boy. ... Whereas he who has made one blunder after another, and still lies in middle life among the failures at the foot of the hill, is liable to grow all sicklied o'er with self-distrust, and to shrink from trials with which his powers can really cope.

Contemporary evidence supports James's argument. Data from Pearlin's Chicago study produced associations between self-esteem and education (controlling for race) of .197; between occupational prestige of .160; and between income of .233 (reported in Rosenberg, 1979, pp. 129–131). Unpublished data from Middleton's study of 900 adult men showed the following correlations with self-esteem: education, .359; occupational status, .366; and income, .378 (reported in Rosenberg, 1979, p. 131). Finally, a nationwide study of 3,101 working men conducted by Kohn and Schooler (1983) produced an r of .19 ($p < .05$) between socioeconomic status and self-esteem (p. 131).

² It is interesting to note that one of the effects of the new protease inhibitors (e.g., Prozac) is a reduction in negative self-thoughts concomitant with an increase in self-confidence, resulting in a more likeable person (Kramer, 1993).

Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, and Mullen (1981) show that socioeconomic problems such as job disruptions (e.g., being fired, downgraded) significantly reduce self-esteem. And when economic strain is factored in, the decrement more than doubles (p. 344). In addition, Owens (1992) showed that boys who entered the full-time labor force after high school (in contrast to those who entered the military or completed college) had a small but significant decline in their self-esteem between twelfth grade and five years after high school. Most of these workers were employed in low-level service and manual positions. In sum, available evidence suggests virtually no association between social class and self-esteem among pre-adolescents, a modest association among teenagers, and a moderate association among adults.

That socioeconomic difficulties should be associated with LSE is hardly surprising. People's self-esteem depends largely on reflected appraisals, social comparison, self-attribution, and the psychological centrality of an attribute or identity. Because successful people generally command greater respect than unsuccessful ones, economically unsuccessful people would on average be exposed to more negative self-experiences than successful people. As such, the latter would be more apt to attribute their success to their own abilities and efforts, thus garnering more positive self-attributions than economically unsuccessful people. *What is really surprising, however, is that the relationship is not more powerful than it is.* This suggests that there may be certain features of the LSE syndrome that mitigate the damaging effects of LSE on occupational outcomes. The specification of these mitigators awaits – and deserves – further research.

Still, the matter of self-esteem's relationship to socioeconomic status warrants additional discussion here. We do this by posing two questions. First, what factors govern success or failure in the world of work? Second, assuming that performance affects success, what factors influence performance? The latter question is considered first. In a major review of the literature, Tharenou (1979) reached the surprising conclusion that no consistent relationship could be found between global self-esteem and job performance. But why should this be? In Tharenou's view, with which we agree, occupational performance is much more heavily influenced by *specific* self-esteem than by *global* self-esteem. Bandura's (1997) research on self-efficacy clearly demonstrates that, at equivalent levels of ability, people who are confident that they can perform at a given level are much more likely to prove successful in their efforts than those with strong self-doubts. Research among adolescents shows that this is also true in the academic realm. Wylie and associates (1979) and others show that the relationship between school marks and academic self-esteem is substantially stronger than the relationship between school marks and global self-esteem (Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995).

It is thus perfectly possible for an individual's global self-esteem to be low while his or her occupational skills are high because of strong feelings of self-efficacy in a specific area. Conversely, someone may have high global self-esteem despite the feeling that he or she has little talent for the work being done. For example, Cox and Bauer (1964) examined global self-esteem and middle-aged women's ability to judge the quality of hosiery. Some women, though low in global self-esteem, had high confidence in their ability to judge hosiery and acted accordingly. Hochschild's (1997) analysis of the interplay of home and work bears indirectly on this as well. If it is true that many people prefer their work-life to their home-life – find more joy and satisfaction at work than at home – then LSE people may have reasonable occupational self-esteem yet low global self-esteem. The essential point is that, in general, occupational performance tends to be specific and there is little reason to think that people with LSE are deficient in ability. Bandura's research indicates that such specific self-esteem is likely to be closely bound to performance. In essence, there is no inconsistency between having LSE and being good at one's work or having high global self-esteem and being poor at it. (See Covington's chapter in this volume on the sometimes paradoxical relation of LSE to striving for and attaining high marks in school.)

Turning to the second question (success in the workplace) requires acknowledging that in Western industrialized societies most work takes place within organizations. Consequently, the question becomes: What determines whether or not one gets ahead within an organization? Given the hierarchical nature of contemporary organizations, a major determinant of level of success is the judgment of one's superiors. However, if our foregoing arguments are correct, LSE people probably do not make very favorable impressions. They tend to be reticent, secretive, inhibited, unassertive, passive, and artificial. They are also not very adept at or interested in self-promotion. Surprisingly, however, research reported by Weiss (1977, 1978) found that when supervisors were asked to rate the performance of their supervisees, they were more likely to assign favorable ratings to those with LSE rather than HSE. Moreover, he found that LSE employees were more likely to imitate their supervisor's behavior. Presumably, LSE workers are more likely to follow their supervisor's guidance, try to please him or her, observe the rules, and take extra care to avoid mistakes for which they could be blamed. Under these conditions it is not surprising that supervisors tend to assign more favorable ratings to their LSE subordinates.

Perhaps even more consequential, experimental research has shown that LSE managers as opposed to those with HSE tend to perform better on "optimizing" tasks (i.e., tasks requiring identifying a best or optimal solution from alternatives). It seems that their LSE, and concomitant lower self-confidence, impels them to gather more information while completing the task, resulting in more alternative solutions and better overall performance (Knight & Nadel, 1986). Weiss and Knight (1980) dub this phenomenon the "utility of

humility." HSE people, on the other hand, tend to perform "better on tasks with obvious solutions, strict time constraints, or where information search is costly" (Knight & Nadel, 1986, p. 197) since they tend to shun negative feedback, harbor fewer self-doubts, and seek less information before committing to a solution.

This does not mean, of course, that in many instances HSE may not be conducive to occupational excellence. Weiss and Knight (1980, p. 217) note that "a substantial number of studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between self-esteem and task performance." In certain instances, however, the reverse may be the case. Organizational behavior is complex and multifaceted. Sometimes quick and decisive action is necessary and functional, whereas doubts, hesitancy, and excessive caution may be dysfunctional. However, if a job demands caution, strict adherence to rules, and careful avoidance of mistakes, the LSE person's protective strategies and dominating concerns may place him or her at a distinct advantage over more self-confident people. This may be one of the factors accounting for the highly imperfect relationship between occupational achievement and global self-esteem (see Brockner, 1988, for discussion).

CONCLUSION

Our portrait of LSE people has tended to focus on the pure or extreme cases – ideal types, if you will. A vivid expression of this type of person would be the avoidant personality. But most of the features described are actually continua. Many people suffer from weak or shaky self-esteem, not from LSE as it appears in this portrait. LSE people may not be devoid of self-confidence, but do suffer from a dearth of it. They may not be terrified of rejection or criticism, but are unduly affected by it. They may not be completely devoid of certainty, but are inordinately insecure in their views. They may not be totally lacking in interpersonal courage, but suffer from a deficiency of this characteristic.

The features of the LSE personality are generally not qualitatively different from those of most other people; they are largely an *accentuation* of characteristics that appear among many other people. Self-esteem problems, it must be emphasized, are not restricted to a tiny, clinically significant segment of the population, as is characteristic of many other mental disorders. On the contrary, the problems are much more widespread, even if less debilitating. Many people with self-esteem problems are able to function reasonably well in life, even while their self-esteem problems cause pain, difficulty, failure, and worry. It would be an overstatement to say that these problems *blight* LSE people's lives but it would be no exaggeration to say that it *damages* their lives in many ways. One of the significant ways this happens is through the LSE person's characteristic reactive stance toward life, in contrast to the HSE person's more proactive stance.

It may seem somewhat strange and contradictory to note the orientations of LSE and HSE people toward the self. One might surmise that HSE people, contented with the selves they observe, would be satisfied to rest on their laurels, to lack motivation to change and improve. One might expect LSE people, disappointed in the selves they observe, to be most interested in self-improvement, in converting the selves they dislike and mistrust into selves they can respect. It is they who should be most motivated to grow and improve, to strive for self-actualization. In fact, however, precisely the reverse appears to be the case. From a motivational deficiency viewpoint, LSE people might be expected to have higher aspirations in order to find opportunities to prop up the feeling of worth that they lack. The paradox is that HSE people, having less psychological incentive to achieve success in order to gain a feeling of self-respect and worth, are actually more likely to end up objectively successful. But their intent is not to provide them with a desperately needed feeling of self-worth; rather it supplies them with opportunities to confront challenges and exercise their abilities. In short, HSE people tend to have an acquisitive orientation.

If LSE people are less concerned with discovering and using their inherent potential, what are they concerned with? The answer comes back to safety or the protective orientation. They want to avoid danger and threats to the self. Or as Millon (1986, p. 280), in reference to the avoidant personality expresses it:

In contrast to other personalities, the avoidant coping style is essentially negative. Rather than venturing outward or drawing on what aptitudes they possess, they retreat defensively and become increasingly remote from others and removed from sources of potential growth.

When the LSE person encounters various life situations, the automatic reaction is to think: How does this person or situation threaten me and my sense of self-worth? And how can I deal with or forestall the threat? Barring perfection, however, the only way to avoid failure is to restrict one's activities to those in which success is assured. Because such occasions are rare, the person obsessed with avoiding failure lives a restricted and cramped existence. As Sniderman (1975) reports, adults who scored high on "personal unworthiness" were more likely to agree, "I never try to do more than I can, for fear of failure." Or as Epstein (1973) argues, the LSE person's lower aspirations, greater fear of failure, and ambivalent desires for self-enhancement are predicated on the belief that a sudden drop in self-esteem is more distressing than a chronically low level of self-esteem.³

³ One must, of course, consider the possibility that LSE people simply do not care about being successful or are uninterested in enhancing their self-esteem. On the contrary, according to Wylie (1979, p. 490), LSE people show stronger needs for self-enhancement. For example, they hold more positive feelings than others toward people who praise them. At the same time they may be more cautious about accepting positive information that may get their hopes up, only to have them crushed by subsequent events.

The damaging consequences of the failure of nerve both for self-esteem and self-actualization are evident. If LSE people are more apt to avoid failure, they are also more likely to avoid success. However, in doing so, a wide range of experiences that might enhance the individual's self-esteem are precluded because human beings are more apt to discover their potential in action than in reflection. We can never find out what we can do or be by gazing at our navels. A person who refuses to write for fear of rejection slips will never get published. The boy who never asks for a date will never learn that his wit and intelligence can elicit the admiration of girls. Self-discovery and self-realization can never come through reflection and self-examination alone, through focusing one's attention inward. It is through action that self-discovery is gained. People who, because of their hypersensitivity to failure, fragility, dismemberment, and so forth refuse to try are never able to discover what they can do or be. Therein lies the crux of the LSE paradox – viewed through our collective portrait – and the resulting individual pain and loss of human potential.

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