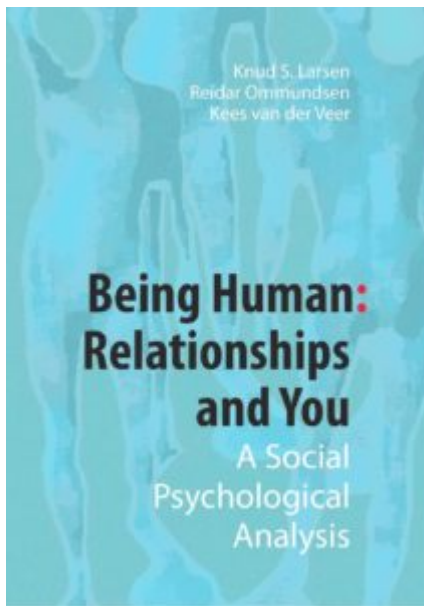


# Being Human. Chapter 2. Cultural And Social Dimensions Of The Self



A group of international students is sitting around the dinner table discussing the television menu for the evening. A Norwegian woman student says, “let’s watch the soap, exciting things are happening to the relationships in the show”. A student from Asia disagrees since soaps “show disrespect for social values and relationships”. Someone from the States suggests watching a boxing match since that “demonstrates personal courage and achievement of the up and coming athletes”. The Asian student replies that rather than boxing, watching a team sport like soccer is more interesting. Another

supporter of the soap option however, suggests that soap dramas are much more exciting as they deal with relationships, and “that is all there really is to life”.

Cultural and gender stereotypes that are parodied above are addressed in this chapter. Our social selves are partially defined by gender and cultural values, and much else. How do we come to be who we are? How is the self formed and what function does it play in the psychological economy of the individual? Are we motivated to behave in certain ways depending on our social selves? What is the route to well-being; does it help to have illusions about life? Why do we spend so much time and effort trying to impress others, and is impression management adaptable? These and many other issues are discussed in this chapter.

Who we are and where we come from has engaged the attention of philosophers and psychologists for generations. In more recent times the methods of experimental social psychology have been employed in the quest to understand the self and its dominant attributes. The self is defined as a set of beliefs we hold about our attributes and ourselves. We think of ourselves in terms of important personal characteristics like our career choice, our level of competence, and our plans for the future. The latter defines our possible selves. The continuity we feel in life is due to the self-concept. Similarity in personality with siblings, and especially identical twins, is based on common biological heritability that also

contributes to self-hood.

Everything important about our lives, our family relationships, our development, the cultural and social context of our lives, all contribute to the topic of this chapter. Self-knowledge provides direction and order in our lives. Since we all fall short in goal attainment, there is a balance between flaws and self-efficacy. These discrepancies directly impact how we feel about ourselves, our self-esteem. Since feelings of self-esteem are also bound up with how others think about us, we perform in the great theater that is life, playing out roles of self-presentation. We want to convince others of our positive qualities and therefore have strong motives to manage the impression we make. We know how to react appropriately to varying situational demands because culture creates the parameters of appropriate conduct.

### *1. The beginnings of the social self*

Self-awareness begins early in life. By about nine months of age the average child begins to differentiate the self from others (Harter, 1983). At the age of 18 months the typical child will have a developed sense of self-awareness such as reacting more to pictures of themselves than to those of unrelated people. Gradually as our self-knowledge grows, the primitive sense of self takes on other attributes. Our environment may nurture positive self-attributes leading to feelings of competence or self-efficacy. Others not so fortunate live in restrictive environments that place early limits on what is considered possible, and therefore affect plans for career and development. We are not the only species to demonstrate self-awareness (Gallup, 1977; 1997). The experimenter initially placed a mirror in the cage of chimpanzees until it became a familiar object. Afterwards the experimenter placed an odorless red dye on the animals' ear or brow. The animals recognized that something had changed and responded with immediately touching the area dyed. Studies with dolphins and other animals demonstrate a similar pattern of self-recognition (Mitchell, 2003).

#### *1.1 Self-knowledge*

Using similar techniques with toddlers, researchers found that self-recognition is present at around age two (Lewis, 1997; Povinelli, Landau, & Perrilloux, 1996). Over time the child begins to incorporate psychological attributes including more complex feelings and thoughts. Our social self is inseparable from how we are evaluated by others (Hart & Damon, 1986). As we develop more complex beliefs and feelings about the self, we also begin to project ourselves to some degree into

the future. From these initial experiences with the family, educational system, and the broader culture the social self gradually emerges. The self-concept is the knowledge we have of ourselves, that we exist separately from others, and have our own unique properties. As part of our self-knowledge we develop a belief system that governs behavior. Do we live in a world of chaos or order? Do we believe we can accomplish important goals? Can other people be trusted? Is it a dog-eats-dog world, or are there valid altruistic behaviors. This complex web of beliefs in turn contributes to whether we approach or avoid others, our feelings of self-esteem, and whether we have a concept of what we could become in the future, a possible self. In this process of maturation children gradually place less emphasis on concrete physical descriptions of the self, and place more emphasis on complex psychological states including thoughts, feelings, and the evaluations of others (Harter, 2003; Hart & Damon, 1986).

### *1.2 Self-esteem*

The second aspect of the self-concept consists of our self-evaluations or self-esteem. Self-esteem is evaluative based on very basic judgments of personal morality, and whether in our own eyes we are satisfied or dissatisfied with our performance. Global self-esteem can be measured by surveys and is related to our need for approval (e.g. Larsen, 1969). The lower our self-esteem the more we have a need for affirmation and approval by others and society. High self-esteem on the other hand is associated with setting appropriate goals, using feedback from others to progress, and enjoying positive experiences to the fullest extent possible (Wood, Heimpel, Michel, 2003). When experiencing rejection or frustration, those with high self-esteem will find a silver lining. High self-esteem is adaptable and is associated with goal persistence and the ability when frustrated to envision alternative goals (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002). High self-esteem people will look at the past through rose-colored glasses, and this selective positive memory bias may in turn support higher self-esteem (Christensen, Wood, & Barrett, 2003).

On the other hand those people with low self-esteem not only think poorly of themselves, but the negative self-conceptions have other unfortunate consequences. Low self-esteem persons are more pessimistic about the future, tend to obsess about their negative moods, are more concerned about the opinions of others, and have higher needs for approval (Heimpel, Wood, Marshall, & Brown, 2002). Low self-esteem is also reflected in negative estimations of

competence or self-efficacy, and in self-loathing. On the other hand, those with positive feelings toward the self, like themselves and have feelings of competence (Tafarodi, Marshall, & Milne, 2003). As we shall see throughout this chapter and what follows, the cultural context matters. Members of Asian cultures, for example, are less self-enhancing in explicit ways, but enhance more in implicit ways (Koole, Dijksterhuis, & Van Knippenberg, 2001).

## *2. Building blocks of the emerging self*

Children are not truly a tabula rasa when entering the world. Scientists have for some time found traits that seem to be universal in all cultures. Traits typically describe cross-situational consistency; i.e., the consistent way people act, think or feel despite changing circumstances. Researchers point to five traits as basic to our self-understanding. These characteristics include relative openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, also known as the Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 1995; John & Srivastava, 1999).

People use these basic traits in describing themselves, and in judging other people. The descriptions of others tend to be accurate in the sense that they match self-descriptions (Funder, 1995; John & Robins, 1993; Watson, 1989). Many psychologists believe that the Big Five traits are the basic building blocks of personality. Is there a biological basis for these fundamental traits? The evidence is pointing in that direction since people from a variety of countries and cultures use these same traits in describing the self and other people (Buss, 1999).

### *2.1 The heritability of personality traits*

Evidence has been produced that supports at least the partial heritability of personality traits (Plomin & Caspi, 1998). Studies of identical and fraternal twins show conclusively that trait similarity is based on shared genes. For example, studies of the personalities of identical twins show a greater similarity in traits compared to fraternal twins. Those trait similarities are reliable even when identical twins are reared apart, strongly suggesting a genetic component to some aspects of personality (Loehlin, 1992).

Often traits found early in development are consistent over the lifespan. Longitudinal studies have shown that children identified as shy at nine months develop elevated levels of stress hormone cortisol associated with fear (Kagan, 1989). Neuroticism is associated with a heightened activation of the autonomic nervous system involved in subjective stress (Zuckerman, 1996). On the positive

side extraversion is related to higher levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine that is in turn predictive of approach related behaviors (DePue, 1995). Clearly the self cannot be understood apart from our biological inheritance. People react consistently to the varying manifestations of these traits. These reactions in turn play a significant role in how we develop as persons and how we develop more complex self-identities (Malatesta, 1990).

## *2.2 Genetics and social behavior*

The relationship of genetics to complex social behavior is an exciting new frontier. Social behavior is complex and both genes and the social environment play a role. Some genes require specific environments to have an effect on behavior so interactions matter. In a study on violence (Caspi, McClay, Moffitt, Mill, Martin, & Craig, 2002) the researchers tested for the presence of the Monoamine oxidase A gene responsible for metabolizing neurotransmitters in the brain, and for promoting smooth communication between the neurons. The absence of the gene by itself had little effect. However, when combined with abuse and maltreatment the men in the study were three times as likely to have been convicted of violent crimes by age 26. Low levels or absence of the MAOA gene combined with maltreatment developed anti-social behavior in 85 percent of the boys. As we begin to see the complex interaction between our biological inheritance and complexities of the social context the interdependence of both is clear. Many of these traits were adaptive in response to evolutionary requirements. As society has also evolved many of these traits are no longer functional. Being a little fearful and neurotic might have been very functional in the days of saber tooth tigers, but create interpersonal problems for those who have inherited an excess of these traits today.

## *3. The nature of the self-concept: the hard and easy problem*

William James (1890) is today recognized as a founder of American Psychology. In his early writings he described the essential duality of the self-concept. The first aspect of the self-concept is composed of all the thoughts and beliefs we hold about our self, also called the "known self" or "me". The second component of the self is the "knower". The "knower" refers to the observatory function of the self, or now more commonly called self-awareness. We come to know who we are by becoming aware and thinking about ourselves.

Today the aspect of the self defined as the self-concept or "me" is gradually being understood through experimentation. The self-concept and its relationship to

brain functions is what might be called the “easy” problem. The hard problem that remains is somewhat of a mystery, is what is called the “knower”. Those with religious inclinations would refer to the “knower” as the immaterial soul. The scientist does not find that construct convincing as the soul construct explains everything and in reality nothing. The soul definition is a form of nominalism that simply puts a label or name to a process, and we do not advance much in our understanding by just placing another label on the “knower”.

### *3.1 The easy and the hard problem in self-definition: Me versus the knower*

Freud wrote a great deal about conscious and unconscious processes. Much of our thinking is in fact accessible to our awareness. We make plans for the future, decide on what to have for dinner, save up for children’s college. These and much more are conscious in the sense that they are accessible thoughts that we can think about and evaluate. Other processes like the functions of the autonomic nervous system are largely unconscious. We know they are present in the body, but they are generally not available to the reasoning or planning functions of the brain.

The hard problem is trying to understand why it feels like we have a conscious process to begin with, that we are aware of a first person very subjective experience, the executive “I” or the decision maker (Pinker, 2007). The scientist finds it difficult to explain how this subjective feeling of the self arises from neural computations in the brain. Do you believe that all our joys and pain can be reduced to neurological activity in the brain? The hard problem is: does consciousness exist in an ethereal soul or is consciousness purely a brain function defined as the activity of the brain.

Today some cognitive neuroscientists claim that by using MRI we can practically read people’s thoughts from blood flow in the brain. Through electrical stimulation of certain areas of the brain we can cause hallucination such as hearing music played long ago, or experiencing childhood memories. Anti-depressants like Prozac can profoundly affect feelings and thoughts. Also, whenever the brain function ceases so far as we can see our consciousness comes to an end. No reliable reports of contacts with the dead have been produced. Even near death experiences where the soul purportedly departs the body only to return are probably caused by oxygen starvation of the eyes and brain. Some Swiss neuroscientists (Pinker, 2007) have managed to turn out-of-body experiences off and on by stimulating the part of the brain overlapping vision and

bodily sensations. The fact that all observable psychological activity has a physiological concomitant lends little support for a soul construct.

Many visions or “miracles can be attributed to how the brain developed to meet survival needs. It appears, for example, that we possess a template for the recognition of faces in a variety of objects. Some years ago a woman made herself a cheese sandwich and experienced a vision, as she perceived the Virgin Mary in the brown skillet marks. She eventually sold the sandwich on eBay for \$28000.00 probably to someone who wanted a vicarious vision. In another case people saw a three dimensional face on the surface of Mars after an orbiter captured images from the Cydonia region of Mars. That image ignited enthusiasm, and encouraged conspiracy theories about denial of life on our sister planet. All of us have had the experience of gazing into the sky and finding faces in the moving clouds. These experiences appear to be functions of three regions of the temporal lobe of the brain that is involved in the recognition of faces. The tendency to see faces is a result of neural architecture with obvious evolutionary advantages (Svoboda, 2007) In our distant past some faces or images should be avoided like that of the saber tooth tiger; others should be approached like that of family or beneficent higher powers.

The materialist explanation is advanced by the argument that the “knower” or “executive I” is an illusion. From this perspective consciousness consists of numerous or even an overwhelming amount of external events that compete for attention. As an evolutionary adaptation the brain developed decision-making functions to discriminate between important and non-essential input. Subsequently the brain rationalizes the outcome after it has occurred giving us the impression that someone was in charge. Information overload requires the decision making function of the self, and those who developed better neural webs were the ones who survived. Pinker believes that the “knower” is nothing more than “executive summaries of the events and states that are most relevant to updating an understanding of the world and figuring out what to do next” (p.65).

Damasio (2007) argues that self-awareness is a function of evolutionary biology and psychology. Initially gene networks organized themselves to evolve complex organisms with brains. Further evolution enriched the complexity of brains by developing sensory and motor maps to represent the environmental context. Eventually with more evolutionary complexity different parts of the brain developed the ability to communicate, and generate sophisticated maps of the

organism interacting with the environment. From this natural knowledge the basic self emerges, and the brain's sensory-motor maps change from non-conscious mental patterns to conscious mental images. Scientists are gradually developing the ability to find neural correlates of conscious activity of the self.

However, what of the inner experience we called the hard problem? Some would simply call it information processing thereby making it an "easy" problem. Others would say that since there is no test that could distinguish between a well-designed robot, and a human, we should just let the problem go away as irrelevant (Dennett, 2007). Still others will say that our failure to understand the hard problem is a function of the limitation of our brain. After all we have many other limitations like failing to grasp the existence of spheres greater than three. Brain limitations include the difficulty of understanding how stimuli from the outside produce subjective feelings on the inside.

Many fear the loss of a moral perspective if we come to believe in a material self. After all if we do not have an immortal soul why worry about salvation in an unseen world to come? Others would argue that believing in the materialist self would increase empathy as we are all in the same existential boat. To be aware of how temporary life and consciousness is should give poignant meaning to all life and sympathy for all who struggle with the same reality. Keep in mind that belief in the immortal soul did not prevent believers from engaging in gross defiance of morality by committing genocide and cruelty. The crusades conquered land with great cruelty still remembered by Muslim zealots today. In the dark ages half a million women were burned at the stake by the inquisition in an attempt to save their immortal souls. The destruction of 9/11 and what followed was largely motivated by religious morality on both sides including the belief in the immortal soul. Religious ideology often provides heavenly rewards for killing and destruction. Perhaps we would all be better off believing in a fragile and temporary existence.

### *3.2 The hard problem remains*

At the end of the day the hard problem remains unsolved. It seems particularly difficult to understand deep feelings as solely a consequence of brain activity. Some of us have experienced awe in the presence of the truly noble and good. How can one attribute these feelings as an interpretive consequence of brain activity? The sense of unspeakable joy that comes in the wake of love, the truly altruistic behavior of others resonates in our minds in ways not easily understood



by the material self. The cynic can of course reduce altruism to reward expectations, but the “knower” knows the difference. The feelings of grandeur in the presence of nature, the emotions experienced from certain types of music are examples of the presence of a “knower”. The drumbeats of the Nazi’s reflect the robotic self that resonates with martial spirit and aggression and self-aggrandizement. However, music may also cause meditation and bring to us harmony and peace. Understanding meditative feelings, altruism, and the noble as brain functions remains a hard problem.

Perhaps viewing consciousness from the perspective of brain functioning is good science, but philosophically unsound? Science has made great progress in breaking objects into atomic and subatomic particles. Is there a bias in that perspective? Are there other routes to the factual and truth? At least we know that the whole is always more than the sum of its parts. Human attributes create questions as many people feel compassion towards others. Where does that come from? If we can’t find the answer in neurons firing, then is consciousness a primary principle? Are we really illusions caused by 100 billion simmering neurons? What is the locus for experiencing ideas and intentions temporally? Do we perceive time because it is separate from us? Some parts of the self remain for life, we can recognize our basic components, but we are also aware of time and change. If we were caught up in time could we perceive it? These and many other issues remain for the most intriguing and fundamental issue of human existence.

There is a mysterious aspect to life that even the greatest minds cannot understand. Einstein too was in a state of awe by what he saw as a causal and ordered nature. Perhaps he was affected by the certainty of the subjective “I” when he wrote his credo “ The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds can not grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I am a devoutly religious man” (Isaacson, 2007). Did Einstein address the common human limitation of our brains? Did he attribute religiousness to our inability to understand what is after all natural stimuli? Or did Einstein acknowledge with certainty that the hard problem remains, and will not easily yield a solution.

#### *4. The development of the Social Self*

How do we come to know who we are? The sources of the self-knowledge are primarily other people, although we can also learn by observing our own behavior, and by thinking about ourselves. Socialization is the context in which we form our self-attributes. It is through family and other socialization agents that we learn about our level of competence, success in achieving important goals, and whether we are evaluated positively. From that we derive self-esteem. Through socialization we acquire our standards for behavior, and we incorporate the values of our family and culture. The way we are consistently treated in early socialization forms the core of what we come to believe about ourselves that guides us throughout life.

Cooley (1902) developed a concept called the “looking glass self”. From his perspective we learn about ourselves through the reactions of other people. This is called reflected appraisals. Those who experience constant praise come to believe they are valuable; those who experience maltreatment grow up thinking their lives are worthless. So feedback from others is a basic key to understanding the social self. The importance can be seen in a study on parental perceptions and children’s self-perceptions (Felson & Reed, 1986). In general there is close similarity between parent’s beliefs about children’s abilities, and the children’s self-concept.

Later of course, we encounter peers and these have profound importance during adolescence (Leary, Cottrell, & Phillips, 2001). Most of us know intuitively our social standing from the preferences of our peers. The order in which children are chosen for athletic teams tells a lot about the person’s perceived contribution to a team, and value to his peers. Whether a girl gets asked out for dates also tells her a great deal about how peers perceive her in terms of physical attractiveness and her personality. Teachers give feedback on school performance that is either encouraging or discouraging in competitive educational environments. Competitive educational experiences using the normal curve for grading feedback do not foster growth in all children. Some children will always occupy low or failing comparative standing. These early experiences contribute to whether the individual’s possible self is optimistic or pessimistic. If we are encouraged in childhood and adolescence we form plans about what we can become, what contribution we can make to society, and how we can find self-fulfillment. We have more to say about self and motivation in section 9.

#### *4.1 Forming the possible self through family socialization*

A family has influence not only through parental guidance, but also through relationships formed with siblings. In societies with scarce resources, sibling conflict is frequent and violent. Human history bears witness to violent outcomes from Cain and Abel to current news stories. Even very young children engage in frequent conflict (Dunn & Munn, 1985). Birth order matters because children learn to adjust to certain niches in the family that is functional and rewarding. Older siblings tend to be more dominant and assertive as well as more achievement oriented and conscientious (Sulloway, 1996; 2001). The larger size of older siblings would naturally make them more dominant, and at the same time give them a greater share of responsibility to look after the younger sibling.

On the other hand, younger siblings tend to be more open to new ideas, and experiment with novel thoughts. In Suloway's study of thousands of scientists, younger siblings were more open to novelty and thinking outside the box. On the negative side, they were also more likely to endorse pseudoscientific ideas like phrenology. Later born scientists possessed the consistency to make many scientific discoveries, whereas younger siblings were risk takers traveling far away in search of novel ideas. Darwin, for example, was the fifth sibling in his family, and developed a theory that changed physical and social science forever. He risked a great deal in his search for scientific data, traveling to unknown parts of the world to collect information in support of evolution, a theory that challenged the very fabric of our religiously founded beliefs about the origin of man.

#### *4.2 The social self and group membership*

Our social identity becomes part of our self-concept as we learn the values associated with the group membership, and its emotional significance in our lives (Tajfel, 1981). Much work has been completed in recent decades that show that mere membership even in meaningless groups attaches profound significance to behavior and self-conception (e.g. Doise, Dann, Gouge, Larsen, & Ostell, 1972). Since membership in nonsensical groups produces significant influence on behavior, how much more powerful is the influence of group identity if based on memberships in real social groups that produce attitudinal reactions by society? Members of minority groups often have confusing demands made by membership in both the minority and in coping with the larger society (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Some minorities develop bicultural

competence and identity; others are assimilated into the dominant culture, and yet others are marginalized from both societies (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Phinney, 1991).

Minority status has important consequences for the self-concept and esteem. As socialization takes place, the individual often engages in self-stereotyping identifying with the attributes thought positive in the group (Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996). Bicultural identification seems to produce the best results for self-esteem (Phinney, 1991). High self-esteem in minorities is a function of strong ethnic identity combined with positive attitudes toward the mainstream culture. It stands to reason that those with bicultural identities and competence will experience life as more rewarding, and will function more successfully in society.

#### *4.3 Culture as a source of the self-concept*

In chapter 1 we introduced the concept of independent and interdependent cultures. It is now time to apply the concept to the formation of the social self. We shall see that this cultural difference has applications throughout this chapter and in the chapters that follow. Culture has profound effects in socializing people. It produces predictable differences in self-concepts between members of different cultures. Western societies found in North America and Europe have inculcated social values significant to adaptation and survival in the capitalist model. The term “rugged individualism” points to a person who is first and foremost independent, and able to cope with the hazards of life in early United States. In this cultural environment the values of individual rights and freedoms were promoted at least formally. Each man was a king in his own house, and society was preoccupied with individual self-actualization.

In Asian societies, on the other hand, we have ancient cultures that had to adapt to high levels of physical density. Physical density is not experienced as crowding the way it would be experienced in the west, because of the highly developed structures of courtesy that meet the need for personal space and privacy. These cultural differences have been summarized in the terms “independent “ and “interdependent” societies introduced in chapter 1. Hall (1976) thought of independent societies, as “low-context cultures” where social roles while not unimportant mattered less. Therefore a person from independent cultures would more or less act the same regardless of the changing context of behavior or the situation. In interdependent cultures on the other hand, the social context matters a great deal, and the individual’s behavior will change dependent on the specific

role played by the participant. In interdependent cultures the self would differ depending on role expectation. The person would behave differentially depending on whether the behavior involves a relationship with parents, peers, or colleagues. As we shall see, in western societies the bias toward independence leads to attribution errors where we underestimate the influence of the situation, and attribute behavior primarily to individual traits.

In recent years social psychologists have carried out many cross-cultural studies on how motivations, emotions, and behaviors are shaped by cultural conceptions of the self. (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rhee, Uleman, & Roman, 1995; Triandis, 1995). From this accumulated research the independent cultures are identified primarily in the West. In these societies the self is seen as autonomous, as distinct and separate from other members of society. The focus of the independent self is on what makes the self distinctive or different from others. Consequently explanations for behavior are sought within the individual's personality. Not only is independence a fundamental value, but also westerners believe that the main object of socialization is to create independent children (Kitayama, 1992). The self is therefore described as composed of individual attributes (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Achievements are seen as primarily the result of individual and distinctive efforts, where family or society played at best peripheral roles.

In the interdependent cultures of Asia and countries in the developing world the self is perceived as part of the larger social context. The self is not construed apart from other people, but rather as connected to family and larger social organizations. The willingness of people to go on suicide missions like the kamikaze pilots of Japan is related to the interdependent self-construal where country and emperor are part of the self. Western combatants may also fight with great courage, however that is best elicited when there is some possibility if not probability of survival. In interdependent societies the self is completely embedded in the roles and duties of social relationships. Culture therefore determines to a large extent self-knowledge and self-esteem, as well as self-presentations and impression management. The self is connected to the attributes of others, is not seen as distinctive, but associated with common traits (Bochner, 1994). These cultural differences are thought to profoundly affect how individuals think about themselves, how they relate to others in society, and what motivates their behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1994).

Studies have shown that Americans achieve primarily for personal reasons,

whereas those from interdependent societies strive to achieve group goals (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). It is the personal nature of tasks and objectives that motivate behavior in the West, whereas Asian students are motivated more by group goals. Consequently students in the West are more likely to select careers or tasks in which they have experienced previous competence or which had been positive and rewarding in the past. The career choices of Asians on the other hand are not based on such personal expectations or prior performance (Oishi & Diener, 2003).

As we can imagine, these cultural differences in self-construal also affect how we organize information in memory (Woike, Gershkovich, Piorkowski, & Polo, 1999). People in independent cultures disregard the social context in memory formation, or think of events in personal terms. Elections in the United States are typically about the personal attributes of candidates where the social context matters little. Typically this process manipulates the indifferent electorate to disregard political programs in the search for the “right” person.

There are some researchers who feel these cultural differences in self-construal make intercultural communication very difficult (Kitayama & Markus, 1994). Yet, at the end of the day we must remember that these cultural differences are abstractions. There are always more differences to be found within than between social groups. In independent cultures there are many with interdependent self-construal, particularly among women (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Cross & Vick, 2001). In interdependent societies there are those who’s self-construal are independent. Further, migration is changing the world. For example within United States and Europe there are many immigrants who think of themselves with interdependent self-construal. Many migrants work hard in western societies just so they can send most of their earnings back to the home country. Globalization is also producing more converging values for example an emphasis on human rights in nearly all societies, and as that takes its course in the future we must reevaluate the cultural differences discussed above.

#### *4.4 Gender and the social self*

Gender is the most obvious parameter in our self-concept. In every society males and females are treated differentially with life-long consequences. Women are more interdependent as they tend to view themselves connected to relationships as mother, daughter or wife. Their behavior therefore tends to be more influenced by the thoughts and feelings of others because relationships are construed as

central to self and life (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Cross & Madson 1997; Cross, Bacon, Morris, 2000; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Women display relational interdependence in close relationships especially within the family. On the other hand men display relational interdependence within larger collectives such as political parties, athletic teams, or in feelings of national identity. (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Consistent socialization processes throughout the world lead females to focus more on intimacy and to have a greater willingness to discuss emotional topics than men (Davidson & Duberman, 1982). These gender differences in self-construal appear consistent across cultures (Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka, & Kashima, 1992), and reflect the different functions of the sexes in the historical and evolutionary struggle for survival.

When women define themselves they use references to other people and relationships. For example when asked to show photographs they are more likely to include intimate others in the photos (Clancy & Dollinger, 1993). Women spend more time thinking about their partners (Ickes, Robertson, Tooke, & Teng, 1986), are better judges of other peoples personality, and more empathetic (Bernieri, Zuckerman, Koestner, & Rosenthal, 1994; Hall, 1984). In directing their attention toward others women also demonstrate greater alertness to situational clues and the reactions of other people, whereas men focus better on internal processes such as increase in heart rate (Roberts & Pennebaker, 1995).

How does socialization encourage gender differences in self-construal? All the agents of socialization are at work. The media portray women differently from men encouraging interdependent stereotypes. The educational system forms different expectations for appropriate goals and behaviors. Parents treat girls differently than boys from the very beginning. All these socialization agents work consistently together to establish reliable gender differences (Fivush, 1992). Throughout childhood girls and boys play in separate playgroups with girls playing more cooperatively, and boys engaging more in competitive games (Maccoby, 1990). In early human history these gender differences most likely evolved in response to evolutionary demands that rewarded survival to those who developed gender specific traits. As we are the most dependent of all species we are lucky for women's innate desire to love and look after defenseless infants, and their very personal interests in the survival and well-being of their babies. In the following sections we will consider two theories explaining the development of the social self.

## *5. Social comparison theory: learning about the social self from others*

Festinger (1954) proposed a theory for understanding self-knowledge. He asserted that people have a drive to accurately evaluate their beliefs and opinions. Since there are no explicit physical standards for psychological constructs we learn by comparing our thoughts with those who are similar to us. This original model has been worked over a great deal since first proposed (Goethals & Darley, 1987; Wood, 1989; Suls & Wheeler, 2000). Research has shown that people compare themselves across all imaginable dimensions including emotional responses, personality traits, and objective dimensions like equity in salary. Any relationship that makes the self salient would evoke the comparison process, our marriage as compared to other couples, our racial group compared to others for evaluating fair treatment, our fellow students for correct answers to test questions and grades, all comparisons contribute to relative satisfaction depending on comparison outcomes.

### *5.1 Comparing for self-enhancement or achievement*

How do we get a sense of who we are without reference to the accomplishments or failures of other people in similar situations? Sometimes we seek self-enhancement by comparing downward, to someone not doing as well, and to those less fortunate. By comparing ourselves to those who earn lower grades, get less salary, or are hungry, many can at least temporarily feel better (Lockwood, 2002). Downward comparisons are especially strategic when one has experienced failure. By comparing downward and emphasizing one's positive qualities the damage to self-esteem is reduced (Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000).

At other times we are interested in improvement trying to reach a relevant and lofty goal. In that case successful others can serve as models for achievement comparisons. Most of us, perhaps all of us, would not achieve the mathematical insight of Albert Einstein. However, the aspiring scientist may be inspired by his example and seek a related self-relevant high achievement. At times upward comparisons are discouraging. When the goal is truly unreachable the comparison can result in envy and feelings of inadequacy (Patrick, Neighbors, & Knee, 2004). Anorexia and bulimia are large problems in today's society, many believe caused by the emphasis in thinness for women in the media. Nearly all models of women's clothing are super thin, and in fact look unhealthy. Perhaps worse they set an unattainable standard for most women. (See also discussion of social influence in chapter 7). Women who place high value on physical appearance



suffer in self-esteem from such social comparison (Patrick et al, 2004). In summary some comparisons can be inspirational if the goals are possible and realistic in a person's future, but discouraging and demoralizing if they involve impossible goals or dreams.

Some people also compare from a desire to bond with others in the same straits (Staple & Kooman, 2001). How do we react to a crisis like hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters? Most of us will look to others to find the appropriate mixture of fear and courage in dealing with the situation. We also compare to similar people to enhance a sense of solidarity and common fate (Locke, 2003). When experiencing common fate people compare their responses to others to feel the strength of the community in facing crisis situations.

Social comparisons may occur in any situation of uncertainty when we are trying to find some appropriate response (Suls & Fletcher, 1983). You find yourself invited to a formal dinner party for the first time, a situation of some anxiety. Being uncertain how to dress appropriately, you ask the host for some helpful guidelines. At the dinner party chances are that you will let others more experienced carry the conversation until you get your bearings.

### *5.2 Social comparisons in summary*

In general we seek comparisons from similar others, but if we want to enhance the self we compare downwards, if we are motivated by desire for improvement we find more successful models. (Goethals & Darley, 1977; Blanton, Buunk, Gibbons, & Kuyper, 1999). Sometimes we enhance the self-concept by comparing temporally with our former self (Ross & Wilson, 2002; Wilson & Ross, 2000). Most of us can find events from our earlier life that are more negative than our current situation. For example, perhaps we have fewer friends when we get older, but we believe that the quality of relationships has improved. To enhance we can compare our lives temporally and conclude that although the quantity of relationships has declined, life long friendships have a higher value than those formed in our youth.

### *6. Self-perception theory: self-knowledge by self-observation*

Experience produces familiarity and most of us know how to react in situations we have visited previously. You listen to a political leader and from the storehouse of memories have ready feelings about the message and the messenger. Most people have established attitudes about a variety of topics like hip-hop music,

jazz, or classical music and know how to react based on these schemas. At some point, however, you may experience the novel or unfamiliar and you are uncertain of how to respond. A stranger hands you a \$100 bill, how should you react? Should you be happy or offended? If you react with joy, you may examine your reaction and conclude that you are happy. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) asserts that when our attitudes or feelings are ambiguous we infer their meaning by observing our own behavior as well as the situation. In other words, when we are unsure of our feelings we infer our feelings from our own behavior, how we actually respond,. You find yourself laughing in the presence of another person and conclude from that he/she makes you happy. You observe yourself kissing the person and from that and the other's behavior conclude that you are in love. When a person is in a situation not previously evaluated, and feelings are somewhat of a mystery, often our objective behavior becomes a guide to explain these feelings (Andersen & Ross, 1984; Chaiken & Baldwin, 1981).

Secondly, in deciding the meaning of the behavior it is attributed to either the person or the situation. Is the situation compelling your behavior or is the "executive I " in charge? If we are in control of the situation and feel in charge we may attribute the feelings to our dispositions. If, however, there are compelling pressures in the situation we are likely to attribute feelings to the situation rather than to the self. In short self-perception theory argues that we infer our feelings by observing our own behavior and infer either a personal cause or a situational reason for our behavior (Albarracin & Wyer, 2000; Dolinsky, 2000). We have more to say about self-perception and attitude formation in chapter 5.

Self-perception theory has important consequences for education and learning. For example does learning occur because of some extrinsic reward like grades? Such extrinsic reward is likely to produce short-term learning since the student feels justified to forget the learning once the reward is achieved. All the anxiety and cramming that occur in American universities is not for any intrinsic pleasure of learning, but just to pass a course or get good grades. Some children however, learn because of the intrinsic pleasure of mastering a subject. Students who are intrinsically motivated engage the subject matter because they find it interesting and enjoyable. (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Senko & Harackiewicz, 2002). Self-perception theory would argue that rewards could inhibit intrinsic motivation and destroy the pleasure of mastering the subject matter. When students come to believe that they are learning to obtain rewards it leads to an underestimation of the role

played by the intrinsic motives (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999; Lepper, Henderson, & Gingras, 1999). So although rewards can be motivational in the short run, they may produce external attribution that overlooks the intrinsic pleasure of learning.

It is obvious that any significant achievement occurs only where the self attributes intrinsic pleasure to the pursuit of knowledge. Students may pass courses, but little of the information learned from the reward of grade incentives will be stored in long-term memory. When the rewards cease so does the motivation to remember which is why the vast amount of information learned is lost within weeks. In one study on math games children's performance was compared between a reward program and the follow up during which no rewards were provided. The reward program did initially produce more interest and the children played more. However, those who initially had enjoyed the games lost interest during the follow-up and played less after the reward program ended (Greene, Sternberg, & Lepper, 1976). The researchers determined that it was the reward program that caused the children to like the games less. Related research (Tang & Hall, 1995) should cause us to think about what we do to the minds of children in an obsessive grade competitive educational system.

For parents rewards can be a two-edged sword. Praise for work well done can increase the child's self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy. It can also convey something about parental expectations for future work. But it is important that the child believes that their performance is not for external rewards but for reasons that are intrinsic and enjoyable. The child must have some control in the educational process where teachers and parents can nurture intrinsic motivation by doing enjoyable learning activities (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). Otherwise the child comes to attribute reasons for performance to the reward system with resulting loss of motivation.

### *6.1 Schacter's two-factor theory of emotion*

Schacter (1964) proposed a theory of emotion using self-perception ideas. Essentially the theory proposes that we learn to infer our emotions the same way as we learn about our self-concept by observing our own behavior. In Schacter's theory people observe their physiological internal experiences and try to make sense of these by looking for the most plausible explanation. The theory is called two-factor because we first experience the physiological reaction and then look for a reasonable cause to explain it. One now classic experiment was carried out to test this theory (Schacter & Singer, 1962). When the subject arrived for the

experiment he was told he was participating in a study on the effect of a vitamin compound called Suproxin on vision. After the injection the subject was led to a waiting room to let the drug take effect. While there the subject was asked to fill out a survey containing some very insulting personal questions including one asking the subject about his mother's extramarital affairs. Another participant present, an experimental collaborator, also read the questions and angrily tossed the survey on the floor and left the room.

In fact the real purpose of the experiment was not to study vision, but to understand people's reaction to physiological arousal and the meaning attached. The participants were not given a vitamin compound but were injected with epinephrine, a hormone produced by the body that causes increased heart and breathing rates. How would you feel in a similar situation? You would have noticed the physiological change that occurred from the epinephrine. Your breathing rate would have increased and you would have felt aroused. Then the other participant reacts with anger at the survey. What is the most plausible explanation for the arousal that you feel? Since you have no information that you have been injected with epinephrine the most plausible explanation is found in the situational context of the survey and the other participant's anger. In fact that is what happened, and the participants injected with epinephrine were much more angry than the participants given a placebo.

In an extension of this work the researchers demonstrated that emotions are somewhat arbitrarily defined depending on what is the most plausible explanation found in the situational context (Schacter & Singer, 1962). For example, the emotion of anger could be aborted by offering a non emotional explanation for the arousal. The researchers accomplished this by telling the participants that they could expect to feel aroused after being injected. When the subjects then began to feel aroused they inferred that it was the injection that caused the change and they did not react with anger. In yet another condition Schacter and Singer demonstrated that they could create a very different emotion by providing an alternate explanation for the arousal. In this condition the experimental collaborator acted as if euphoric and happy. The subjects began to feel the same way and inferred that they too were feeling happy and euphoric. In short Schacter and Singer showed that emotions are part of the self-perception process where people seek the most plausible reason for internal bodily changes.

## *6.2 Misattribution for arousal*

Since we have no explicit standard to determine what causes our emotions we can misinterpret the cause (Savisky, Medvec, Charlton, & Golovich, 1998; Zillman, 1978). We know now that the same physiological arousal occurs in a variety of circumstances and to varying stimuli. In some situations there may be more than one source to which we can attribute the arousal. To what do we attribute the increased heartbeat, shallow breathing, and the rise in body temperature? If next to another person could the physiological changes be the effect of that person? What about if you are next to the other person during a parachute jump? Is it the fascination with the other person or is it that you are approaching the Earth at great speed that causes the increased heartbeat? There is no standard that will tell for certain, and the possibilities of misattribution of the cause exist in all such circumstances.

In the classical Dutton & Aron study (1974) the researchers demonstrated the ease by which misattribution of arousal can occur. The experimenters had an attractive young woman approach males with a survey purportedly for a project for her psychology class. When they completed the survey she explained that she would be happy to explain more about the project at a later time, and she wrote her phone number on a corner, tore it off and gave it to the participant. This procedure was followed under two independent experimental conditions. In the first condition the men were approached after they had crossed a rickety 450 feet high footbridge over a river in Canada. Most of us would after the crossing experience all the symptoms of the epinephrine injection found in the study of Schacter and Singer. Most people have hard wired brains preferring low and safe altitudes, and this bridge was very high and did not give the appearance of safety. As the men were approached immediately after crossing their hearts were still racing and they experienced physiological arousal. In the second condition the men were allowed to rest for a while after crossing, and had a chance to calm down somewhat, before the woman approached. They too were also given the phone number and the opportunity to call later for more information.

What would we predict would be the outcome from Schacter's two-step theory? In the first condition the men had just experienced physiological arousal and were primed to find a plausible explanation. The most plausible cause for what they felt was the crossing of the bridge, but the beautiful woman made the stronger impression. Was the arousal due to the presence of the woman? In fact the results showed that significantly more men who were approached having just crossed the

bridge called the woman subsequently to ask for a date, whereas few did if they were approached after resting. In other words the men misattributed the cause of their arousal from the true source, the crossing of the bridge, to the more powerful stimuli found in the lovely woman. Misattribution of arousal has also been found in other studies (Sinclair, Hoffman, Mark, Martin, & Pickering, 1994).

### *6.3 Cognitive appraisal theory: Emotion follows cognitive interpretation*

Some researchers have noted that we sometimes experience emotion when there is no physiological arousal (Roseman & Smith, 2001; Russell & Barrrett, 1999; Scherer & Schorr, 2001). Cognitive appraisal theories explain that sometimes emotions follow cognition, after we determine the meaning of the event or situation. We appraise the event in terms of implications being good or bad, and what caused the event. A colleague is given a promotion, how do you interpret that event. If you live in a professional world of zero sum game behavior where someone's promotion gives you less of a chance to advance, you may feel envy and later anger. However, if you are already at the top of the game and can advance no further you might feel happy. Suppose you have helped the colleague? Then perhaps you can attribute his or her success to your advice and assistance and feel pride (Tesser, 1988).

The main point is that in cognitive arousal theories the arousal comes after cognition, after attributing meaning and cause to the event. Arousal does not always precede emotion. Sometimes we feel the emotion, as we begin to fully understand the implications of what has happened and how the situation has changed. The two-step theory and cognitive appraisal theories complement each other as previous arousal is explained by the two-step theory, and interpretation followed by arousal explains emotion from the cognitive appraisal perspective.

### *7. Introspection: An unreliable source of self-knowledge*

We can also learn about ourselves by "looking inside" and examining our own thoughts and feelings. You find yourself in an emergency situation when a man is drowning and immediately jump in the water to save him. Afterwards you think about the event, and come to the conclusion that the reaction was consistent with who you are, with your self-concept. Sometimes looking for inside knowledge can provide accurate responses, other times it can be misleading. You may think introspection is so obvious a source of self-knowledge that it is routine for most people. In fact we spend little time thinking about ourselves (Wilson, 2002). Even when we do introspect, the true reasons for behavior may not be part of the

conscious process. In one study (Csiszentmihaly & Figurski, 1982) the participants wore a beeper that sounded off some 7 -9 times a day. Each time the beeper sounded the respondents were asked to record their thoughts and moods that were subsequently content analyzed. From all these responses the investigators determined that only 8 percent of all responses were about the self. Since life is about survival it is not surprising that much more thought was given to work, but nevertheless it suggests that the self is not a favorite object of contemplation.

Self-awareness theory contains the idea that people focus attention on the self in order to evaluate behavior in terms of meeting internal standards and values (Carver, 2003; Duval & Silvia, 2002). Only the psychopath would spend no time in being self-conscious and trying to objectively evaluate the self. Bundy, the serial killer spent the very last moments of his life trying to rationalize his behavior attributing his deeds to pornography. Of course the opposite is also true, some people have rigid moral systems and spend much time in self-accusation and self-blame. Most of us fall in-between, and from time to time become aware of discrepancies between behavior and moral beliefs. At times such self-awareness can be very unpleasant and motivate improvement and changes in life (Fejfar & Hoyle, 2002; Mor & Winquist, 2002). When self-awareness becomes too unpleasant we seek escape. Is that the reason so many people spend a good part of their lives watching television (Moskalenko & Heine, 2002)? The popularity of soaps could be understood as a way of solving personal problems by identifying with characters outside the self. Some escape is necessary in a stressful world. It becomes non adaptive when it substitutes for real answers to the person's life and challenges.

At times escape takes the route of alcohol or drug abuse. When people drink to excess they can at least temporarily divert attention away from the self, although the day after may bring back unpleasant anxiety. The fact that so many people worldwide are involved in drug abuse is a testimony to how unpleasant self-awareness can be (Hull, Young, Jouriles, 1986). Religious devotion can also be a way to escape self-focus, and find forgiveness for not living up to moral standards. Like drug abuse, some religious focuses are self-destructive when the well-being of the self is totally ignored. What comes to mind are the suicide bombers who seek total escape to "paradise" in acts of self-destruction. At other times self-awareness can be pleasant. When you graduate from the university or

professional school, or complete other significant achievements you may rightly feel enhanced in your self-awareness (Silvia & Abele, 2002). Sometimes self-awareness can help us avoid moral pitfalls when we are tempted to ignore some moral prompting. So self-awareness can serve both positive as well as aversive roles in human psychology.

One problem with introspection is that it may not tell us the real reasons for our feelings since these may lie outside our awareness. (Wilson, 2002). You find yourself instantly attracted to someone, how do you explain such feelings to yourself? Is it purely physical stimuli, or is it something else? Have you discussed important issues and found yourself in agreement, and you believe the attraction is based on similarity? People at times feel an instant chemistry (called that because we have no other explanation), but the real reason for our feelings escapes self-awareness. Introspection may not be able to access the causes of many feelings because we are simply unaware of the reasons. Most people will come up with plausible explanations, but these may in fact be untrue or incomplete.

Growing up in our societies we all have causal theories about feelings and behavior. For example many people believe that mood is affected by the amount of sleep, whereas mood is in fact independent of preceding sleep (Niedenthal & Kitayama, 1994; Wegner, 2002). Our legal system gives women custody of children based on the common belief that they are the best custodians. Yet we know that women also commit infanticide, and child abuse. Often causal theories are simplifications or simply not true, and we can make incorrect judgments about our behavior or actions. Sometimes influences that are under the screen of awareness are the deciding factor in behavior. In one study of clothing preference people evaluated clothing of identical quality. Whereas their causal theories might promote the idea that choice was based on quality, the investigators showed that it was the position of the clothing on the display table that mattered. The clothing that was placed farther to the right was preferred (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Most people would intuitively reject that idea, but it was the causal factor, perhaps dictated by brain hemispheric dominance. In all, this research shows that we should use caution in accepting causes derived from introspection about our behavior. We may come up with very plausible reasons, but they may be incorrect, and unimportant in the final analysis.

## *8. Organizational functions of the Social self*



Self-knowledge takes on many forms including the beliefs we have of ourselves, our self-esteem, our memories, and especially in the west of what we think are distinctive attributes. Self-knowledge describes our social beliefs, our roles and obligations, and our relational beliefs that refer to our identity as part of families and community. Furthermore it describes our personal beliefs with respect to our traits, abilities and other attributes (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Ethier, 1995). Self-knowledge performs primarily a constricting and narrowing influence on perceptions. We construe the current situation with information from previous history thereby overlooking what might be novel. Information and experiences are made to fit our preconceived ideas about the self. In general information that can be integrated into what we already know about ourselves, our schemas, is more easily recalled. This self-reference effect has been demonstrated in several studies (Klein & Kihlstrom, 1986; Klein & Loftus, 1988). So self-knowledge not only shapes what we are likely to remember, but makes recall more efficient (Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977).

### *8.1 Self-schemas: Structured cognitions about self-relevant concepts*

What are the dimensions you use to think about important matters? Do you consider yourself an independent person? Do you want to do everything on your own rather than rely on assistance from parents or spouses? Are you hardnosed about immigrants in your country? Then you might think the country's future depends on how global migration is solved. Self-schemas is defined as our organized thinking about important matters that are readily available in memory.

If peace as a concept was an important dimension you would have a storehouse of memories and beliefs readily available to comment on the ever-growing conflicts in the world. Some of the beliefs might explain the causes of conflict as for example derived from greed, intolerance, or the desire to control oil resources. One schema might define the solution to conflict is to treat everyone equitably. For each relevant issue your preexisting knowledge is organized for readily available responses. When we possess schemas it allows us to quickly identify and recognize situations that are schema relevant (Kendzierski & Whitaker, 1997). We judge other's behavior and essence according to their similarity to our own personality. One study asked the respondents to rate themselves and twenty other people. The results showed that the dimensions the respondents found important in rating themselves were also employed in rating others. The execution of Saddam Hussein was a grim affair. However, you may have noted that he went to

his death with great personal courage and dignity. If you value bravery in the face of annihilation your opinion of Saddam Hussein might have changed somewhat, independent of your evaluation of his policies as a political leader. We tend to use self-knowledge in an egocentric fashion when evaluating others. If scholarship is important to you, you may apply strict standards in judging the scholastic work and ability of others (Dunning & Cohen, 1992).

We cannot attend to everything in the environment. We selectively attend to those situations that are most relevant to the self. Self-schemas allow us to access information quickly and respond efficiently (Markus, 1977). Self-schemas also are restrictive and prevent information from being evaluated if it is seen as inconsistent with what we already believe.

Most people display self-image bias (Lewicki, 1983). Again culture may play a role. In the west the self-bias exists, because the self is construed independently. Asian students, on the other hand, are more likely to say they are similar to others rather than others are similar to them. Therefore in Asian self-construal, the other person becomes the standard for comparison. In one study on being the center of attention (Cohen & Gunz, 2002) the researchers showed that self-knowledge among Asian people use the perspective derived from others. In comparing Asian students with those who were native to Canada they found that Canadians were more likely to assess the situation from their own independent perspective, whereas Asians took the perspective of other persons in describing similar situations.

An important property of self-schemas is the sense of stability that they confer on the self-concept. The feeling that we have that we are essentially the same person over time, that the core of the self remains the same (Caspi & Roberts, 2001). For example children who are identified as shy as toddlers still remain shy at age 8 (Kagan, 1989), and have problems with social interaction later in life (Caspi, Elder, & Bem, 1988). Whatever we are in early life is likely to remain over time as we behave consistent and selectively to our self-schemas. Consistence is true for functional and alas also for maladaptive behavior. We are likely to remember information that is consistent with early self-schemas and disregard disconfirming events. As we review the past, self-schemas are employed to confirm our present self-concept and we resist thinking about discrepant or novel information (Ross, 1989).

## *8.2 Self-regulation*

An important aspect of self-schemas is the concept of the possible self. Possible selves are our conceptions that propel us into the future in search of goals and achievements (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Some of us grow up thinking that we like a particular career. Envisioning ourselves as doctors, trade people, or mechanics leads us to the training required and sustains the motivation necessary to reach the goals. Those who have a vision of future possible selves work harder at accomplishing relevant tasks (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Self-schemas have obvious adaptive value. They not only allow us to quickly identify relevant situations and recall appropriate and effective behaviors from memory. They also guide our behavior as we think of what is possible in the future.

So the self serves regulatory functions determining people's choices, and their plans for the future (Baumeister, & Vohs, 2003; Carver & Scheier, 1998). We appear to be the only species capable of long-term planning. Plans for our educational goals, or for family related matters like acquiring an ideal home, requires a self capable of self-regulation. In self-regulation a finite amount of energy is available. If we spend much self-regulative energy during the day we have less left over at night. Is that why couples have more arguments after a long hard day at work? (Baumeister, & Hetherington, 1996; Vohs & Hetherington, 2000). Research shows that dieters are more likely to fail at night when they are tired. Previous smokers are more likely to take up the habit again after experiencing adversity, bulimics are more likely to binge eat after a long day of self-control. With only so much energy available self-control has limits. We all need rest periods to develop the energy necessary to achieve health related goals.

Our self-regulation is determined to some extent by the culture in which we were socialized (Dhawan, Roseman, Naidu, Thapa, & Rettek, 1995). A study comparing Japanese with American college students demonstrated a cultural difference consistent with interdependent and independent societies. Typically American college students perceive of themselves in terms of personal traits. The independent self-construal emphasizes that which makes the person distinct. Self-regulation pertaining to personal achievement would rank high as an important trait in independent cultures. On the other hand Japanese students defined themselves much more in terms of social roles recognizing their relationship to family and society.

### *8.3 The stable versus the working self-concept*

A stable concept is the sense of self-continuity from early memories to the

present. However, some situations call for specific attributes that are part of a temporary working self-concept. The citizen soldier may have a stable self-concept that includes a working career and family life. However, when he goes to war the situation requires different attributes that become part of a working or temporary self. This working self-concept may involve a willingness to engage in violent behavior guiding action while in the war zone. Sometimes behavior in the war zone may permanently change a person, and the temporary self becomes part of the stable self. Many members of the Armed Forces returned from the war in Vietnam with permanent scars affecting their relationships and trust in other people in their civilian life. The temporary self guides what goes in a specific situation, but may itself become part of the stable self (Ehrlinger & Dunning, 2003).

In less traumatic circumstances the working self-concept may operate on the periphery of the self, and when the individual returns to normal circumstances the stable self takes over (Nezlek & Plesko, 2001). In one study (Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen, 2002) the investigators studied applicants to graduate school. The respondents were asked to complete self-esteem measures on days when they received acceptance or rejection notices from graduate school programs. For those respondents whose self-esteem depended a great deal on scholastic achievement acceptance to programs increased self-esteem significantly, whereas rejection decreased self-esteem. In one graduate program rejections and acceptances were noted on a comparative poster for all students applying for Ph.D. programs (KSL). A similar enhancement reaction occurred. Those who were accepted enhanced the self. Whose idea do you think it was? Probably those applicants who were very confident of acceptance and sought further evidence for self-enhancement in the eyes of fellow students!

### *9. Motivational properties of the self-concept*

A major function of the self-concept is its relationship to motivation (Higgins, 1999; Sedikides & Showronski, 1993). What is it that causes us to make plans for the future? Our possible selves refer to our possibilities, what we can become or hope to be in the future (Cross & Markus, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986). The self-concept also includes social and cultural, and religious standards that we utilize in deciding on our behavior. Feelings of shame or guilt are associated with these aspects of the self (Higgins, 1987; 1999). We compare our actions not only to the actual self, who we believe we are, but also to the ideal self, what we

should be including all our aspirations. The “ought” self also has motivating properties which refers to the duties and obligations we feel from family and society, and whether we behave appropriately. These various aspects of the self have proven to have motivational properties both in terms of cognition as well as behavior (Shah & Higgins, 1991).

### *9.1 Discrepancies and motivation*

When we observe discrepancies between the actual self and what we think we ought to be we often experience fear or anxiety (Boldero & Francis, 2000). Loss of self-esteem might be defined as a discrepancy between real and actual compared to the ideal or ought selves. The greater the discrepancy the more dejected the person feels (Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Moretti & Higgins, 1990). These effects arrive from what Freud would call the superego, the early socialization that incorporates parental standards into the self-concept. The ideal self has a special influence when warm and accepting parents raise children. Children, on the other hand who have been raised by more rejecting parents think of behavior primarily in terms of meeting standards and avoiding rejection (Manian, Strauman, & Denney, 1998).

In recalling scenes of embarrassment Asians saw it through the eyes of other persons rather than from the perspective of personal feelings. (Chau, Leu, & Nisbett, 2005). People raised in independent cultures are more likely to look to the ideal self for guidance in regulating behavior, and be motivated to reduce discrepancies. People who are raised in interdependent environments pay more attention to the demands made by family and society as expressed by the “ought self” concept (Lee, Acker, & Gardner, 2000). The route to well-being is to regulate behavior to reduce or eliminate discrepancies between these aspects of the self and the goals they pursue in life (Bianco, Higgins, Klem, 2003).

### *9.2 Motivated by consistent and accurate selves*

We all experience a sense of the self that is stable from childhood through the varying stages of life. Perhaps consistency in the self-concept is partially a cultural need as our rationalized society expects consistency in behavior to plan life-sustaining activities. Without consistency, a factory could not plan a work program, without a sense of continuity in traits and abilities the individual could not plan for the future, and society would be unable to educate. We need to believe that there is something within us that is consistent over time (Swann, 1983).

The motivating properties of self-consistency can be observed in a study by Swann and Read (1981). The participants were given feedback that was either consistent or inconsistent with their self-conceptions. Results showed that the students spent more time studying feedback consistent with the self-concept than inconsistent information. The need for self-affirmation can also be observed in our selective behavior. We tend to interact only with those who confirm our self-concepts. If we have a high estimation of our scholarly abilities we probably make friends with other students who also think we are good students and affirm our self-concept (Katz & Beach, 2000). We remember information better that confirms our self-concept (Story, 1998), and holds consistent self-beliefs as members of groups (Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004). This search for self-affirmation is modified by self-esteem. People who possess high self-esteem are willing to entertain both positive and negative self-affirming information. Those with low self-esteem want mainly positive self-affirming information whether accurate or not (Bernichon, Cook, & Brown, 2003).

Having an accurate self-concept has obvious adaptive value. To make plans for the future and experiencing success requires a fairly accurate self-concept including realistic assessments of our traits and abilities. Many of the tasks we choose are based on self-assessment of aptitudes. As discussed later all people are motivated by a desire to save face and impress others, so we are likely to pick objectives closely related to what we think we can do (Trope, 1983).

### *9.3 Our Self-worth: Motivated by the desire to elevate self-esteem*

Culture also affects self-esteem. Those living in independent cultures experience primarily ego-based emotions. Accomplishments are a source of personal pride. Those who live in interdependent cultures experience satisfaction or frustrations based on their connectedness to others. (Mesquita, 2001). Parents and their children are for example, connected intimately in the children's scholastic achievement. Self-esteem is likewise dependent on the interdependent form of self-construal. (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Yik, Bond, Paulhus, 1998; Diener & Diener, 1995). Social approval is a primary motivator in interdependent cultures, and a better predictor of life satisfactions. In independent cultures life satisfaction is more a function of individual emotions (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998).

Our self-esteem is a major dimension of our self-concept. Self-esteem is a global evaluative assessment we make of our worth. Most psychologists employ simple

surveys to assess self-esteem (e.g. Larsen, 1969). Those who have high self-esteem feel relatively good about their self-worth, those with low self-esteem feel some ambivalence, and a relatively few feel self-loathing. Trait self-esteem refers to consistent levels of self-esteem over time probably determined from early experiences with success or failure. Trait self-esteem is defined by self-conceptions of competence and efficacy in various areas of achievement. Trait self-esteem feelings remain consistent over time (Block & Robins, 1993).

We also experience momentary changes in self-esteem as a result of development or from the impact of significant events (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Male self-esteem tends to increase during adolescence, whereas female self-esteem falls during the same time (Block & Robins, 1993). At various times in our lives we may experience enhancing events that improve self-esteem. A large raise in salary or promotion at work may improve self-esteem. On the other hand we can also experience failure. If you find yourself competing against contemporaries with higher levels of ability the comparison may have negative consequences for your self-esteem (Brown, 1998; Marsh & Parker, 1984).

How comparisons are experienced depend on the relative centrality of the domain of achievement. Is the area of competition central to your self-worth or peripheral (Crocker & Park, 2003)? Professional achievement is central to many people's sense of self-worth. If achievement is appreciated and work is progressing generally in the right direction, self-esteem will enhance; otherwise the blows of misfortune will probably impact the self-esteem negatively (Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen (2002).

Central to a person's self-esteem is the human need to be included. There is probably no more serious punishment in society than solitary confinement. Many prisoners can endure other forms of torture and denigration, but to accept isolation is very difficult. Some researchers assert that self-esteem is simply an index measuring relative inclusion-exclusion (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). From an evolutionary perspective it is easy to understand the power of social approval. Those who obtain approval from significant others are more likely to survive and thrive. Approval seeking affects a variety of behaviors (Larsen, 1974a; Larsen, 1974b; Larsen, Martin, Ettinger, & Nelson, 1976; Larsen, 1976a). Those who feel excluded are likely to report low self-esteem. Even our changing feelings correspond to the approval by others (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002).

Self-esteem responds also to temporary conditions. Our moods change from time to time, and the reasons why are not always clear. Temporary mood swings affect self-esteem in either positive or negative directions (Brown, 1998). Even setbacks that have very little real meaning can temporarily reduce self-esteem. For example if your favorite athletic team loses an important game, self-esteem may decline (Hirt, Zillman, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992).

As noted self-esteem is closely related to the domains we consider most relevant to our self-concept. Most people derive self-esteem from selected human activities. For some self-esteem is based on competence in scholarship or career. For others self-esteem is built on athletic prowess. Yet other people think that success in family and human relationships is of greatest significance. It is really a question of what we value in life. What domains are significant to you, and have you experienced success or failure?

Crocker & Wolfe (2001); and Crocker & Park (2003) have proposed a theory of self-esteem based on domains of self-worth. Self-esteem rises or falls with experiences of success or failure in key areas. Societies and cultures will vary as to what domains are considered important. Independence is a significant value in Western societies and is related to achievement of economic independence and reaching career goals. In interdependent Asian cultures the respect of others and maintenance of successful relationships may be more of a central value. Self-worth is to some degree selected by cultural emphasis and values. Regardless of culture it is important that we do not base self-worth on one or few domains since failure will be less salient if we have many domains of interest and achievement. Failure can be devastating for those who seek achievement in a single domain since they have no fallback position for self-worth.

#### *9.4 Cultural boundaries of self-esteem and self-enhancement*

The preoccupation with self-esteem is largely a Western phenomenon. It derives from our cultural values focusing on the individual and personal distinctions. It seems ironic that the rugged individualist valued in the West is vulnerable to feelings of low self-esteem. Westerners do self-report higher levels of self-esteem as compared with interdependent peoples (Dhawan, Roseman, Naidu, Thapa, & Rettek, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). That finding however, may be attributed to the greater modesty of interdependent peoples, and the greater preoccupation with the self in Western societies. A great deal of energy is spent in Western societies trying to enhance the self, and also supporting the impression



management and face work of others to enhance their self-esteem. Americans and Canadians insist they have comparatively more positive qualities than others (Holmberg, Markus, Herzog, & Franks, 1997). The very nature of social interaction in the West, including but not limited to education, media effects, and socializing, encourages a preoccupation with self-esteem.

Being rewarded and praised for achievement is much more common in the West where people as noted seek distinctiveness, whereas in interdependent cultures people are motivated by common goals and self-improvement (Heine, 2005; Crocker & Park, 2004; Norenzayan & Heine, 2004). In Asian cultures self-criticism is common in the pursuit of social harmony and self-improvement. A student from the West who is invited to criticize himself may perceive that invitation as a threat to the self-concept and self-esteem. Cultural differences are rooted in either a preoccupation with self-esteem in the West, or self-improvement in interdependent societies.

Finally, we should keep in mind that cultural differences are abstractions. There are within societies more individual differences than can be found between cultures. Furthermore societies change over time. The individualism of Western societies is a product of recent centuries and the advancement of capitalist economies (Baumeister, 1987; Twenge, 2002). Each generation struggles with the issues related to adaptation, and in a broader sense values that lead to reproductive success. Globalization has produced values held in common by more and more people. In the new world order many countries accept the values of independence promoted in the West. Furthermore, there is evidence that many cultures are becoming more convergent in values and what is required for self-esteem (Heine & Lehman, 2003).

### *9.5 Preoccupation with self-enhancement*

Since self-esteem in Western societies is largely based on independent egos and achievement based distinctions, most people are motivated to enhance self-esteem (Tesser, 1988). We like to see ourselves in the most favorable light possible given the constraints of reality. According to Tesser we accomplish this vicariously by reflection where we enhance ourselves by associating with those who have accomplished significant goals. The pride of parents in their children's achievements is of this type, as is associating with those of social status. Much effort in Western societies goes into convincing others of our value by relating to those who possess status.

According to Tesser we also seek to enhance by social comparison. Social comparison can be used either upward for achievement or downward to enhance our self-esteem. Even in failure one can compare downward for self-enhancement. One is reminded of some countries where students noted a university degree in their vita followed by the word "failed". Just the mere fact that a student entered a university program attributed higher status compared with those who never started!

On a more personal basis we select friends outside our most salient domains so we can always compare downward. Since these friends may perform well in other areas, the downward comparison can be in both directions. As a general rule we select friends we outperform in our salient domains, but who are talented in other areas. Self-esteem in competitive societies is based on this fundamental idea of ranking higher than someone else. In one study (Tesser, Campbell, & Smith, 1984) the researchers asked grade school children to identify their closest friends, their own most and least important domains or activities, and how good their friends were in these activities. As evidence of self-enhancing Tesser et al found that students rated their own performance as better in the salient areas, whereas they related their friends' performance as better in areas less self-relevant (the reflection process). In other words the students overestimated their own performance in self-relevant areas, and overestimated their friends' performance in other domains lending support to both social comparison and reflection processes.

Self-enhancement needs are important, and perhaps of overriding importance for most people (Sedikides, 1993). They are especially important when life has struck a blow in the important domain area. Being refused entrance to a favorite university may be very painful to the aspiring scholar. Threat or failure leads to self-enhancement efforts trying to shore up of self-esteem (Beauregard & Dunning, 1998; Krueger, 1998). Self-enhancement means that we evaluate ourselves more favorably than others (Suls, Lemos, & Stewart, 2002). Our efforts at enhancing self-esteem also affect the memory process. We remember the good and positive features about ourselves, and forget the negative (Sedikides & Green, 2000). We believe we are more altruistic than others (Epley & Dunning, 2000), we think we are happier than others, and less biased (Klar & Giladi, 1999; Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002).

There may be times when we acknowledge that we are less than perfect.

However, in our efforts to maintain self-esteem we tend to think that the negative in our performance is less important than the positive (Campbell, 1986; Greve & Wentura, 2003). Not surprisingly we are less likely to falsely enhance when we can get caught in our little self-enhancing lies. If we are poor students we are less likely to boast to our professors about our previous achievements, if we are poor lovers our partners will eventually know. When the truth can not be hidden permanently we are more likely to be modest in our self-aggrandizement (Armor & Taylor, 1998).

### *9.6 Self-enhancement and stress*

The exaggerated self-conceptions produced by self-enhancement can encourage better mental and physical health (Taylor, Kemeny, Reede, Bower, & Grunewald, 2000). That illusions can have positive consequences runs counter to many ideas in psychology. From the perspective of existential psychology self-enhancement is a form of defensive neuroticism, and distorts the real world. Since neurotic behavior is associated with continuous anxiety and stress, self-enhancement should be maladaptive. In one study (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage & McDowell, 2003) students were asked for their self-assessed personal traits like intelligence and physical attractiveness as compared to their peers. Participants who self-rated higher than their ratings of peers were considered self-enhancing. Later the participants performed tasks designed to create stress as manifested by higher heart rates and blood pressures measures. The results showed that the self-enhancing group had lower heart rates and blood pressure responses, and recovered to normal measurements more quickly. Self-enhancers also had lower cortisol levels than did the comparative group of non-enhancers. In short the self-enhancers had healthier responses, tended to be more optimistic, had feelings of personal control, and a supportive social group that all contributed to the lower cortisol levels. These experimental results support the contention that self-enhancement leads to healthier physiological and endocrine functions.

### *9.7 Threat and self-enhancement*

When people are confronted with threats to self-worth they typically shore up self-worth by reaffirming in other unrelated attributes of the self (Steele, 1988; Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995; Koole, Smeets, van Knippenberg, & Dijksterhuis, 1999). Self-affirmation theory applies only to those respondents who have high self-esteem. In one study students high and low in self-esteem were led to believe they had either failed or succeeded on a test of intellectual ability.

Respondents who were high in self-esteem, but who had been led to believe they had failed, exaggerated their positive social qualities. Respondents with low self-esteem generalized their failure experience as one already consistent with what they believed about themselves. Since those with high self-esteem believe they have many other positive traits they immediately seek to reaffirm their strengths in an unrelated area after perceived threat (Dodgson & Wood, 1998). The healthy nature of self-affirmation can be observed by the fact that the respondents feel good about themselves in the aftermath, and are strong enough to entertain potential negative information about the self. (Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000).

There is no greater threat than that of personal annihilation. Terror management theory asserts that the threat of death leads people to seek ways to minimize or manage this vulnerability (Greenberg, Porteus, Simon, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1995). The threat of personal annihilation is kept in control by two mechanisms. First of all self-esteem helps the individual feel a valued person in a meaningful universe and this controls to some degree the threat of death. In the face of imminent death people have a need to reaffirm the importance of their lives, and the legacy they have created including assessments of meaningful work, and personal relationships.

Secondly, in a world-view that provides hope for the future, or at least makes some sense of the present assists in controlling threats to mortality. Conformity to cultural expectations and values is another means by which people control fear (Greenberg, Lieberman, Solomon, Greenberg, Arndt, & Simon, 1992). The familiar is soothing and allows the individual to see continuity even when personal existence is ending. At the same time when confronted with the fear of death, people also seek affiliation (Wisman & Koole, 2003). We can observe that need in the increasing popularity of the hospice movement. From anecdotal experiences (KSL) death threat is lowered when the patient is under the care of hospice, and the individual feels less lonely or isolated through the efforts of volunteers accompanying the patient on the last journey.

When people are scared by threats to mortality they are also more likely to act with aggression toward those who challenge their world-view (McGregor et al, 1998). Hostile reactions can be observed in the anger displayed by people who are related to soldiers serving the US army in Iraq or other theaters. The slogan "support the troops", flag waving, and shrill denunciations of war opponents, emerge most likely from the perceived threat to mortality to the loved one.

Nations mobilizing for war have known how to manipulate the threat of mortality in order to energize the war effort, and demonize the enemy. That story continues throughout the world today.

### *9.8 Group membership and false self-esteem*

The German people after the First World War were a morally defeated people, on the battlefield, and in estimation of the international community. The great depression that followed created economic insecurity and a loss of faith in contemporary society. It was a perfect time for the great manipulators of history to gain power by appeals to false self-esteem and false pride. The Nazi's sought to restore false self-esteem by use of in-group symbols and by being willing to find scapegoats for social frustrations. Although the Nazi's appearance on the stage of history was extreme in destruction and victimization, fundamentally they were no different than any other genocidal group. The genocide in Rwanda and Darfur were caused by similar in-group identification and the demonization of adversaries. The concentration camp that the Palestinian people have lived in the past half a century is motivated by the similar fears that caused the victimization of the Jewish people by the Nazi's. We seem to have learned nothing from history and so repeat the crimes derived from in-group based false self-esteem.

In contemporary society the phenomenon of gang violence takes a similar path. Gang members typically come from poor and deprived environments ripe and ready for exploitation by misleaders. Typically gang membership is compensation for all that is missing in a young person's life. As a result self-esteem is derived from gang pride emphasized by the use of symbols and colors. The Bloods (red color) and the Crips (blue color) are common criminal gangs in the US. Typically gang members display an elevated sense of self-worth and grandiosity not supported by achievements or good works (Wink, 1991). The fact that gang members possess false self-esteem can be observed in their sensitivity to any perceived insult or denigration. Children are shot dead in the streets of the US for imagined insults to the colors of another gang, revealing the fundamental insecurity underlying gang enhancement.

In fact psychopaths possess the same grandiose sense of self-worth (Hare, 1993) and are responsible for a majority of violent crimes. Psychopathic criminals also have inflated views of self-worth combined with hypersensitivity to perceived threats or denigration. The murders and bullies emerging out of gang culture have no genuine self-esteem, but rather are narcissistic and arrogant individuals.

Is it a coincidence that members of the White prison gang “Aryan brotherhood” use Nazi symbols? This false sense of self-esteem is historically responsible for genocidal deeds whether slavery, modern forms of terrorism, or other forms of violent behavior (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). In fact all gangs of history, from those led by Hitler to the military fascists led by Pinochet, have in common grandiose feelings of superiority and arrogance and a deficit in real genuine self-esteem.

#### *10. A sense of well-being: How do we reach that blessed state?*

In traveling to other countries one can often observe the apparent sense of well-being expressed by people poor in material possessions. Yet in our modern world we are taught that consumption is the road to happiness, and having money to consume produces life satisfaction. However, even in modern capitalist societies money makes little difference to a sense of well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). People adjust to whatever the economic and social circumstances that are present within some degree of latitude. Of course, if people live with deprivation from poverty in the form of hunger or untreated health issues, well-being is impacted. Well-being is related to the quality of our life experiences (van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). The here and now is important to the enjoyment of life. Many people delay living to some point in the inaccessible future. They perpetually look for the joy of weekend, the vacation, the retirement, and eventually a place in heaven, but fail to enjoy the journey itself.

Realistic expectations play an important role in well-being. If expectations are too high, or if you do not have the resources necessary, frustration may follow. Being able to withdraw from unrealistic goals and move in a different direction is related to satisfaction (Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003). A sense of well-being probably is a consequence of the person you are. Some people see a glass half empty; others see the wine bottle next to the glass is still nearly full. We can focus on aspects of life that are going well for us, or we can concentrate on reliving all our failure. Important to well-being is the pursuit of goals that reflect who we are, and which are consistent with basic human values.

Those who live in poverty in third world countries may never have the same degree of freedom that we possess, but that in and of itself does not prevent a meaningful life. Regardless of where we live in the World we all have basic needs for self-directed lives, for autonomy, for establishing competence in mastering the social environment, and having supportive social network (Kang, Shaver, Sue,

Min, & Jing, 2003). Being optimistic obviously matters, and maintaining positive emotions over time is associated with a greater sense of well-being (Updegraff, Gable, & Taylor, 2004).

### *10.1 The route to well-being: Complexity of attributes and self-efficacy*

Central attributes have a significant affect on the sense of well-being. Some of us put all our achievement eggs into one or few baskets. For students whose self-esteem is bound up with academic performance and little else, a low grade may be devastating. Others look to achievements in a number of areas to sustain positive feelings about the self. Students can also have hobbies, special talents, a wide-ranging mind, may participate in athletics, and much more. As noted for respondents with complex self-concepts setbacks in any one area produce less vulnerability since they have other achievements to sustain positive feelings. On the other hand respondents with simple self-concepts are vulnerable when experiencing setbacks, as they have nothing else to sustain their self-concept (Linville, 1985). People with simple self-conceptions may feel good when successful, but are likely to be depressed in cases of failure (Showers & Ryff, 1996). Self-complexity produces a buffer against the inevitable setbacks and adversity of life. That is true for those holding complex positive self-concepts. Those with negative self-views are not going to feel better by having more complex negative self-concepts, since that just provides more reasons to stay depressed.

Having feelings of self-efficacy also creates a sense of well-being. The lack of self-efficacy is probably the reason that most dieters fail to stay with the program. Many people have little confidence that they can achieve the weight loss they want, and they then behave appropriate to these expectations of failure. Others have had experiences of success upon which to build self-efficacy. This is the time of year when one of the authors goes on an annual diet called the “keep your mouth shut diet”. Based on past success experiences there is confidence that this approach will work again and bring down weight to a more optimal level. There is no doubt that this success story will be repeated.

Self-efficacy probably grows out of early experiences with parents and teachers. Early success leads to stable self-conceptions of efficacy in a variety of areas. Self-efficacy produces a sense of personal control giving encouragement to a person's planning for the future. Feelings of self-efficacy also help in coping with possible setbacks by self-regulating and changing behavior (Pham, Taylor, & Seeman,

2001).

Self-efficacy reduces the stress of life and produces more optimism about the future. In the long run self-efficacy produces basic approach or avoidance orientations to life. Some develop a behavioral activation system based on positive happenings of the past. Others with negative experiences develop an inhibition system that prevents the individual from undertaking important challenges for lack of confidence (Gable, Reis, & Elliott, 2000). Some think of these basic approaches as stable personality traits. For example, extraversion is a behavioral activation based on social intelligence and success. On the other hand neuroticism is an extreme example of avoidance (Carver, Sutton, & Sceier, 2000).

### *10.2 Positive illusions: Another road to well-being*

Self-knowledge can affect our well-being. We need realistic self-conceptions to make good decisions and be successful. However, positive illusions about the self can be enhancing, and encourage and motivate behavior (Taylor & Brown, 1988; 1994). Many psychologists in humanistic and existential psychology (including Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow) have encouraged us to accept life as it is and believe that self-illusions are fundamental in neurotic behavior.

Contrary to existential views it appears that unrealistic positive self-concepts are in fact related to well-being. Most people think that positive traits describe them better than negative dimensions. In accepting negative self-descriptions we dilute the effect on the self-concept by asserting that we share these negative attributes with many others. We reason that the flaws we possess are not important since we share them with many people, whereas our positive traits are distinctive.

Those who are well adjusted tend to have an exaggerated sense of control over their lives. People often think that ritual will affect the outcome of life. On game shows one can hear the player “command” the game to perform in the winning direction when in fact the outcome is based on randomness. In a study on lottery tickets (Langer, 1975) the experimenter tried to buy back lottery tickets which all had the exact same probability of yielding a winning result. Those buyers who had chosen their lottery ticket based on some superstition, held out for a larger return when asked to sell the ticket prior to the drawing. On the other hand depressed people are more accurate in their appraisals of control, but are of course less happy (Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989).



Self-enhancing perceptions are adaptive (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003). Even if our optimism is not justified we feel better about the future based on positive illusions. Positive illusions give us feelings of control where in fact we have none. Believing in the heaven to come may be a positive illusion that nevertheless helps the believer cope with randomness and absurdity. Should we encourage people to have positive beliefs even if they are illusionary? Some research has supported the idea that optimism and false sense of control may help people feel better about themselves and feel happier (Regan, Snyder, & Kassin, 1995). Do we need a new psychology based on positive illusions since at least in some areas they are adaptive and not neurotic?

When we feel good about ourselves it has positive consequences for our social relationships. You must have noted that when you feel good about life you are more open and agreeable. Positive self-regard fosters relationships, within some limits (Taylor et al, 2003). However, people will get tired of the self-promoter, and self-aggrandizement can also lead to alienation. As in the cases of most other behavior, self-enhancement is an issue of balance. Have you ever met perpetually happy people so self-enhancing that you shake your head and tell yourself “that can’t be for real”?

People living in the West are likely to have unrealistic optimism about the future (Aspinwall & Brunhart, 1996; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Seligman, 1991). The optimism is personalized since they believe positive events will happen to them, but not necessarily to others. Unrealistic optimism emerges out of people’s egocentrism, where most people focus on their own outcomes and ignore happenings to others (Kruger & Burros, 2004).

In any event, having unrealistically positive self-perceptions lead to exaggerated sense of control and unrealistic optimism. Overall these illusions improve well-being by creating positive moods, healthier social relationships, and by promoting goal directed behavior. Few of us would start any journey, even an easy one, if we did not believe the outcome would be positive. In struggling against tyranny like in Burma where the state holds all the power, few people would work for reform or change unless they had the positive illusions that in the near future or historically their efforts would be crowned with success.

The ego-centrism can go too far (Colvin & Block, 1994). The narcissist typically endorses extreme self-enhancement illusions. However, self-promotion turns off

most people in the long run. Narcissists have the tendency to blow their own horn too long and people reject such behavior (Paulhus, 1998). Longitudinal studies have shown a further downside of positive illusions. Students who exaggerate their academic abilities eventually come up against reality and experience failure at school and loss of self-esteem (Robins, & Beer, 2001; Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995). So not all forms of positive illusions serve the function of well-being. It would appear that we need some positive illusions to become motivated to reach goals, but not so illusionary that we experience constant failure. A balance must be created between the positive illusions and accurate self-concepts.

### *10.3 Culture and positive illusions*

Cultures show significant differences in the endorsement of positive illusions. Westerners are more likely to endorse these when compared to Asian peoples (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). In considering academic abilities Japanese hold fewer positive illusions compared to Western students, and display less unrealistic optimism when compared to Canadian students (Heine & Lehman, 1995; Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, Takata, Ide, Leung, Matsumoto, 2002). In a study of 42 nations Sastry and Ross (1998) found that Asians were less likely to feel they had complete control over their lives, whereas people from Western societies displayed unrealistic optimism.

So from a cultural perspective we must conclude that positive self-delusions do not automatically lead to well-being. In independent societies well-being is a construct closely tied to positive views of self, control, and optimism. In Asian societies well-being is tied more to interdependent self-conceptions. The fulfillment of social roles and expectations is fundamental to self-construal in Asia, and satisfaction in these areas is more likely to bring a sense of well-being (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998).

### *11. Impression management: We are actors on the stage of life*

Have you noticed that your behavior changes depending on the person with whom you converse and the objectives of the interaction? With your parents you act with a measure of love and social obligation, with teachers you are courteous trying to produce a favorable impression, with a baby you are natural and feel no need to impress. These varying responses can also be called situational conformity. Before interaction we have an awareness of the person, the situation and the objectives. We mold our behavior to make a correct and useful impression,

especially on those who have status and power. The psychopath is perhaps the most skillful in impression management. How did Bundy, the serial killer, create enough trust in young women, so they accompanied him to his car where they were overpowered. He did it by putting his arm in a sling, and looking helpless he appealed for help from sympathetic coeds.

In a broader way we want to be accepted by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As noted there is psychologically nothing more painful than social exclusion. Some societies use that knowledge to torture prisoners whether at Guantanamo in Cuba, or in special penitentiaries in the US, where prisoners sit in a cage like cells for 23 hours a day with no social interaction. We can think of the death penalty as the ultimate form of social exclusion and torture that on the face is both cruel and rather unusual. As noted earlier in this chapter social exclusion is related to self-esteem. Researchers have also demonstrated that social exclusion is among the most painful and stressful conditions known to humanity (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; Twenge, Cantanese, & Baumeister, 2003). We self-monitor so that our behavior is acceptable and we will be included.

We can see by these examples that there is a significant difference between people's public and private selves. Much that we have discussed in this chapter pertains to the private self, the executive "I" as decision maker or regulator of behavior and how it is influenced by the social context. We operate in a social context of no small importance, and learn early that others have power to make life better or worse. The public self is devoted to impression management, where we try to convey an image and convince others that this image is our true self. We work hard to get other people to see us the way we want to be seen (Goffman, 1959; Knowles & Sibicky, 1990; Spencer, Fein, Zanna, & Olson, 2003).

We are actors on the stage of life concerned with self-presentation and the monitoring of our behavior. Impression management is about convincing others to believe in the "face" we are presenting. We try to control what others think of us because doing so has utility in terms of material, relational, and self-relevant advantages. Goffman was probably the first to systematically examine how we construct our identities in public. He maintained that much of our public behavior is governed by claims we make in an effort to maintain a positive face. The image we want to convey Goffman calls face (see also Baumeister, 1982; Brown, 1998; Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Impression management follows a certain script we have memorized to be used whenever we interact with others. We also expect others to play their roles and to respect the identity we convey. This is a mutual support society since other people depend on us to honor the claims they make. To lose face is very painful, and in Asian cultures can be unbearable. We want other people to respect, not the private self, but the one we present to the world. We are all actors trying to be convincing to our audience.

### *11.1 Ingratiation*

In the process of impression management we can employ several strategies (Jones & Pittman, 1982). The term “brown nosing” is used to describe those who try to ingratiate themselves to gain advantage with powerful others. Ingratiation is a frequently used strategy to make ourselves more likeable with the powerful (Gordon, 1996; Vonk, 2002). Nothing is more effective than sincerely meant praise in promoting liking relationships. On the other hand if the praise is for ulterior motives, and most of us can feel that, the ingratiation may backfire (Kauffman & Steiner, 1968).

### *11.2 Self-handicapping*

Another strategy to protect face is self-handicapping. Our face is so important that we often engage in self-defeating behaviors to avoid losing face. In self-handicapping we set up excuses prior to any performance, so if we do poorly we have an excuse that exonerates the public self (Arkin & Oleson, 1998; Thill & Curry, 2000). Students may self-handicap prior to an important exam. Spending the night drinking with friends provides the alibi for poor test performance, and therefore does not reflect on the image created among fellow students. In one study (Berglas & Jones, 1978) students were offered a chance to either take a performance enhancing drug, or one that would impair test taking. The respondents were placed in one of two conditions. One group was led to believe that they were going to succeed on the test, the other group were led to believe that failure was likely. The participants who thought failure was likely preferred the performance-inhibiting drug even though that would result in poor test performance. From the point of view of self-handicapping, students would rather fail, but have a good alibi for failure, than take the chance for success, but have no excuse if they failed.

Self-handicapping can have serious consequences for health. Condoms have proven an effective preventive of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases,

yet from 30 to 65 percent of respondents reported that they were embarrassed when buying these health-promoting devices. Somehow buying condoms violates many people's self-presentations as perhaps non-sexual or at least not promiscuous. In this day of increasing skin cancer many continue to sunbathe to excess to meet a self-presentation of beauty and ironically of health. Social approval continues as a basic motivation for impression management (Leary & Jones, 1993).

Some self-handicapping is not so obvious. We may simply prepare within ourselves ready-made excuses for poor performance. We know the material, in fact we feel that we are experts, but we attribute poor performance on tests as due to test anxiety, headaches or being in a bad mood on the day of performance. In the process of self-handicapping we may become self-fulfilling prophecies and come to believe in our excuses. Self-handicappers may become permanent poor performers and fail to establish the parameters for a successful life. It is ironic that the concern underlying self-handicapping, i.e., to be liked for the face being conveyed, may in fact have opposite results. Most people see through the charade and do not like those who spend their efforts at self-handicapping rather than working (Hirt, McCrea, & Boris, 2003).

### *11.3 Self-promotion*

Impression management is all about making a "good" impression (Schlenker, 1980). Some people use the direct route and self-promote, never tiring in telling others of their many and varied accomplishments. The self-promoter is primarily interested in other people's perceptions of their competence (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Self-promotion depends on the norms of social interaction. In athletic competition a norm of modesty prevails. Therefore it is not in good form to boast of one's own performance, but rather attribute success to the efforts of teammates, coaches, and fans. Normative modesty works best when it is false, and the athlete has cause to boast. Then modesty is a strategy of positive impression management (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989).

Other forms of self-promotion are vicarious. We like to enjoy "the reflected glory of others". By associating with successful others we obtain positive associations (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989). Oregon State University had a terrible record in football across many decades. During that time few fans attended the games or wore clothing identifying with the team. That all changed when a new coach created a team with a winning record. Now thousands of cars approach the city on

game day, with banners, and team symbols. Vicarious self-promotion contributes to positive impressions associated with winning and status, at least in the western world.

#### *11.4 Private versus public self-consciousness*

The aforementioned discussion supports the difference between a public self (known to others) and a private self (known only to the self), (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Being publicly self-conscious encourages people to engage in face saving and impression management. The ironic aspect about public self-consciousness is that nearly everyone is conscious of his or her audience and painfully aware that others are observing. However, since everyone is focused on the affect of the audience there is really little time left over to actually observe others. A lot of face saving and impression management efforts are wasted because while we are aware of others the focus is on the effect internally. There are individual differences. Those with fragile egos are overly concerned about what others might think about them (again a wasted effort). Insecure people tend to think of themselves in terms of social popularity and approval (Fenigstein, 1984). In public self-consciousness awareness is directed toward what others think, however since everyone shares that attribute, the focus is internally on the effects of the audience and people really do not observe others. Then why be publicly self-conscious?

Some people have private self-consciousness and a greater awareness of internal feelings and thoughts. Those with a private self tend to think of themselves more in terms of their own independent thoughts and feelings. Those with private self-consciousness care little about what others think, but are a rare breed. Due to the long dependency period of humans beings, and the nature of the social self formed by social interactions, private self-consciousness is not only rare, but probably also affected by what others think.

Since we want to be accepted we spend energy and time on self-monitoring (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Most people want to be socially acceptable and therefore monitor behavior to see if they fit the requirements of the situation. People high in self-monitoring are the true actors on the stage of life. They are situational conformist, switching behavior as required from one situation to the next. Low monitors are more likely to respond to internal impulses or demands, and are less dependent on the social context. Is monitoring adaptive? In one study (Snyder, 1974) patients in a mental hospital scored low on self-monitoring. That

finding suggests that to cope effectively with life requires at least some awareness of surroundings and the social demands for appropriate behavior.

### *11.5 Cultural differences in impression management*

In all cultures the social self emerges from social interactions and is formed by the socialization of varying social values. The fundamental difference in cultural values as noted previously is the predominant emphasis on independence in Western cultures, and interdependence in Asian and some other developing societies. The term “saving face” has been associated with Asian cultures and reflects a special sensitivity in maintaining face in these societies. To lose face is to lose identity for interdependent people. Appearance is of great importance. For example, if it is important to have many wedding guests, and if one has an insufficient number of friends attending, one can rent guests (Jordan & Sullivan, 1995). If there are insufficient lamenters at a funeral one can hire professional lamenters to produce appropriate grief display.

In Asian cultures, impression management concerns the measuring up to social roles and expectations whereas in the West there is a greater desire for individual enhancement (Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). In fact self-enhancement is ubiquitous in all Western societies while relatively uncommon in interdependent cultures. The various terms discussed in this chapter like self-consciousness and self-regulation take different forms depending on culture (Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummedy, 1995). Yet these cultural differences must be taken with a grain of salt. Culture may account for small amounts of the behavioral variance, and societies are changing as the world is becoming more convergent. At the same time if we want to improve intercultural communications we must have some awareness of cultural values.

### *Summary*

This chapter discusses several dimensions of the social self, self-knowledge and self-esteem. Self-awareness starts at an early age, perhaps as early as nine months, and certainly by age two the child recognizes the self as distinct. Over time we accumulate knowledge about the self from experiences with family, school, and culture. As our interactions become more complex, a belief system about the self emerges, and along with that an understanding of our more complex attributes. Self-esteem is our judgment of personal morality, and the satisfaction with our performance relative to ideal and ought selves. People who are low in self-esteem need constant approval and reaffirmation. High self-esteem

is functional in setting goals and persisting in our goal directed behaviors. Those with low self-esteem are more pessimistic and do not believe they have self-efficacy.

The building blocks of the self point to five basic traits as being universal: namely conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The research literature supports the heritability of personality traits. We use these traits in judging others and ourselves. Since the traits are understood everywhere they must have a biological evolutionary basis growing out of needs to adapt and survive. The heritability of traits is supported by studies of fraternal and identical twins. Also, traits identified early in children, like shyness, tend to have lifelong consequences. Neuroticism is associated with subjective stress, and on the opposite side extraversion is associated with the presence of the neurotransmitter Dopamine. It is impossible to separate the self from biological inheritance. Recent research points to the complex interaction between genetic inheritance and specific environments in producing predictable behavior. Perhaps some traits like neuroticism were adaptable in early human history in the struggle for survival, but are non-adaptable now in our complex society.

Scientists and philosophers have long discussed the nature of the self. As science has progressed we understand more and more the so-called “easy” problem that links thought to brain function. The “hard” problem is trying to understand the “knower” the subjective experience that someone is in charge, an executive “I” or decider. Why does it feel like we have a conscious process, and how does that subjective experience emerge from neural computations in the brain? When scientists use MRI’s they can practically map thought processes in the brain, but there is no convincing evidence of an ethereal soul. Is the “knower” nothing but an illusion required by the information overload in the brain, and the need to evaluate stimuli? Can the knower be understood solely as brain activity? Certainly believing in a soul construct has not supported moral behavior as is evidenced by all human history. The hard problem remains and may never be solved. All we can say with certainty is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The development of the social self is produced by the consistent reactions of socialization agents. These reactions influence the development of self-knowledge and self-esteem. It is the consistent treatment by early socialization agents such as family that is the basis of what we believe about ourselves and that knowledge guides our behavior for the rest of our lives. The family is central in the creation



of the possible self, the self of the future. Other factors that influence the development of self-knowledge and self-esteem are birth order and group memberships. Birth order has an effect as children learn to occupy various niches in the family that are functional and rewarding. Group memberships are also a key to understanding the self because groups socialize values that have motivational significance. Research has shown that even nonsensical groups may have profound effects on decisions and history shows that group categorization itself is responsible for much of the mayhem in the world. Minorities for example have to deal with special challenges as they cope with mainstream cultures. Although in general, strong ethnic identity combined with positive attitudes toward the larger society is associated with high self-esteem.

Culture is a major source of the self-concept. The main differences discussed in this chapter and in what follows are the reliable differences found between interdependent and independent societies introduced in chapter 1. For the interdependent societies of Asia and elsewhere, the social context of family and society matters greatly in the development of the self-concept. The independent societies of North American and Europe have more independent self-construal where the self is seen as autonomous, distinct, and separate from others. Whether we achieve for personal reasons or for group goals is to some extent determined by culture. One's culture might also affect the choice of career; and whether we seek to enhance the self or society. In independent societies self-esteem is ego based, whereas in interdependent cultures it is more related to family and social approval. As always we must remember that cultural differences are abstractions, that people differ within cultural models, and that the world is becoming more convergent.

Gender plays, along with family, groups and culture, a vital role in development of the self-concept. All cultures treat males and females differentially with lifelong consequences. Women become more interdependent and connected to intimate relationships. Men are more affected by larger social groupings. Socialization through the efforts of families, society, and educational processes produce these predictable differences. Gender differences probably evolved early in human history in response to survival demands that required role specialization. A few theories have been discussed in this chapter.

Social comparison theory asserts that we learn about ourselves by comparing our behavior to that of others. We enhance ourselves when we compare downward,

and inspire ourselves for achievement when comparing ourselves to high achieving models. At times, e.g. when facing a crisis or in response to uncertainty, we compare in order to bond with other people.

Self-perception theory suggests that we derive the meaning of emotions from self-observation of our own behavior. At times we meet with novel situations or the unfamiliar and do not know what we are supposed to feel. In these cases our objective behavior becomes the guide for understanding our emotions. We attribute meaning by ascribing the cause for our feelings to either the situation or to personal volition. Self-perception theory has been applied to education, and supports the importance of intrinsic motivation in producing lasting learning. Schacter used self-perception theory in his two-factor model of emotion. He states that people note their internal physiological reactions to stimuli and then look in the environment for a plausible cause to explain these feelings. This has been demonstrated in research that showed that emotional labels may be arbitrary and can be manipulated. For example, happiness or anger can be attributed from the same physiological reactions depending on environmental factors. Misattribution of arousal is possible as more than one source can explain what we feel. Research shows that misattribution for arousal can also easily be manipulated. In relation to this cognitive appraisal theories point out that sometimes we experience emotions after we think about and understand the situation. The meaning of the situation, the good or bad it implies for our well-being brings on emotions after we have thought about these consequences.

We can also learn about the self-concept by introspection although introspection is not reliable. Most people spend little time thinking about themselves because it is, at times painful, especially if we are aware of shortcomings in meeting ideal or ought selves. We seek escape in drugs, excessive television viewing, or dogmatic religion that tells us all we need to know. Also, introspection may not tell us the real reasons for our feelings as we may rely on causal theories derived from society that offer plausible but false causes.

A major organizational function of the self is the constricting and narrowing of our perceptions. Research shows that the self affects memory, as recall of material is more efficient if related to self-relevant schemas. Self-schemas refer to the basic dimensions we employ in cognizing about the self, it is our organized thinking about important self-relevant dimensions. Self-schemas are readily available in memory, and are a fundamental organizing tool. We develop self-

schemas because we cannot attend to everything, and therefore focus selectively on information considered most relevant. At the same time self-schemas restrict information by removing from awareness information that is inconsistent from that which we already believe. Self-schemas are stable over time, precisely because we act consistently and selectively to new information.

A major function of self-schemas is self-regulation. We think about the future and envision a possible self, what we can become, and this motivates our planning and behavior. The self serves regulatory functions in determining plans and choices for creating the future that we expect and want. It is important to keep in mind that energy for self-regulation is finite. This fact makes us vulnerable when trying to stay on diets or refrain from taking up bad habits once discarded. The stable self provides a sense of continuity throughout the lifespan. At times we are faced with novel situations like soldiers in wartime, and develop working temporary selves to cope with demands. Sadly, these temporary working self-concepts can become part of the permanent self when the behavior varies widely from the stable self, and the situation is traumatic and powerful in its effects.

The self has motivational properties. Our current behavior is determined by our plans for the future and our possible selves. Possible selves also include religious and cultural standards, and are often associated with feelings of guilt and shame. The ideal self refers to our aspirations in life, whereas our ought self describes our obligations and duties. Discrepancies between ideal and ought and what is real causes anxiety, and produces for some the motivation necessary to change. Most alcoholics feel the discrepancy eventually, and many seek help.

In judging others we use our self-image bias. Whether we accept others is related to how similar others are to ourselves. Culture plays here a role as well. For example in the West others are judged according to criteria of the independent self where the ideal self plays a primary role. In interdependent cultures others become standards for judgment, and the ought self including obligations and duties is the primary evaluative tool.

We are motivated by consistent and accurate self-conceptions. Especially feedback that is consistent with our self-conceptions is motivating. We seek primarily self-affirmation in our interactions with others and this in fact influences our choice of friends. We select those friends who will confirm our self-concepts. This selection is to some degree modified by self-esteem: Persons with high self-

esteem are more likely to be receptive to both negative and positive self-confirming information than persons with low self-esteem. An accurate self-concept is adaptive since plans and success in the future depend on accurate self-assessments.

Most people are motivated to enhance a sense of self-worth. There are components of self-esteem that remain consistent as a personality trait throughout life. Momentary changes in self-esteem, however, may occur from developmental issues and as a consequence of significant events. A central issue in the need for self-esteem is the desire to be accepted and included. Isolation is therefore extremely painful, as penologists know. This preoccupation with approval derives from obvious social and evolutionary advantages. Our self-esteem may rise or fall with experience in domains key to the self. In turn culture determines to some extent what areas are considered salient domains. Research shows that self-esteem is more functional if based on more than one or a few domains. With many domains we can control the inevitable setbacks that life hands us.

Preoccupation with self-esteem is primarily a Western phenomenon. It is derived from the cultural focus on independence and personal distinctions. That Western respondents self-report higher levels of self-esteem, may be attributed to the greater modesty of interdependent peoples. Being rewarded or praised for achievement is more common in the West, whereas in interdependent cultures people are more motivated by common goals and self-improvement. Cultural differences in self-esteem are abstractions as again there are differences within cultures, and globalization is encouraging convergence in values.

False self-esteem is aggrandizement based on group memberships where the group operates by the scapegoating and demonization of outsiders. Gang violence is caused by false aggrandizement as compensation for all that is missing in the gang member's life. Gang member's display elevated self-esteem not justified by accomplishments or good works. Their fundamental insecurity is revealed by their sensitivity to perceived insults. Psychopaths possess grandiose conceptions of self-worth, but no genuine self-esteem.

The preoccupation with enhancement influences the way in which we associate with others. It leads to comparison between the self and the other for advantages looking downward or enjoying the reflected glory of the achievements of those

with whom we associate. Friendships are based on the need for enhancement. When we select our friends we ensure that we can compare downward in most salient domains. In Western cultures self-enhancement is of overriding importance, especially when we are threatened by failure. In general most people believe that their positive traits are more important than their negative attributes. Self-enhancement leads, in fact, to better mental health, and better physiological and endocrine functions.

When the self-concept is threatened we shore up self-worth by reaffirming in other unrelated attributes of the self. For example, there is no greater threat than mortality. We control this essential threat through self-esteem, we assert that our lives are worthwhile and we rely on a worldview that makes life meaningful. When people are threatened by mortality they are easily manipulated and provoked to aggression. Threat to world-views or to conventional society undermines the cultural meanings that controls death anxiety.

In a complex world how do we find a path to well-being? In Western societies people have been convinced that consumption is the road to follow. However, well-being is related to the quality of life, to the journey of life, and to realistic expectations. Furthermore, our personality also matters. For instance, for some people a glass is half empty, for others the glass is half full and next to a plentiful bottle. It is important to pursue self-relevant goals that reflect that which we value in life. Regardless of cultural differences we all have basic human needs for autonomy, for competence to deal with challenges, and for a supportive social network.

Research shows that a complexity of attributes and self-efficacy is necessary for well-being. Respondents who possess more complex self-concepts are not overcome when facing a setback in a singular dimension. Self-efficacy is the feeling of "can do", that we have the necessary competence to succeed. Self-efficacy grows out of early experiences with parents and educators. Our early success reduces experienced stress in life. Positive illusions refer to exaggerated optimism and sense of control in life. The well-adjusted often display positive illusions that can enhance, encourage, and motivate behavior. Those with positive illusions are happier and have better social relationships than the depressed that have more realistic conceptions. People in the West are especially likely to display unrealistic optimism about the future. The downside of positive illusions is that at times we must face unpleasant reality. Positive illusions are more likely endorsed

in Western societies. Well-being in interdependent cultures is more related to fulfillment of roles and social expectations.

Impression management suggests that people are actors on the stage of life. Most people mold their behavior according to situational demands, we are chameleons according to need. Psychopaths are especially skilled at impression management. Since we all want to be accepted we work hard to convince others that our self-presentation is true. We encourage others to believe in our public face. Ingratiation is a form of impression management where we try to make ourselves more likeable to the powerful through flattery. Self-handicapping promotes face saving by engaging in self-defeating behaviors prior to performance. Sometimes people take foolish chances with health in order to preserve their face and image. Self-promotion is a more direct path of impression management. We seek to impress others of our competence, and our associations with others of status and power. It is primarily the publicly self-conscious who engage in impression management. People with private self-consciousness are concerned with independent thoughts and feelings. The social self emerges from social interaction in all cultures. The self-concept is therefore a consequence of cultural values. Saving face is of particular importance to Asian cultures. Central to these societies is the concern about roles and expectations, whereas people in the West are more concerned about individual enhancement.