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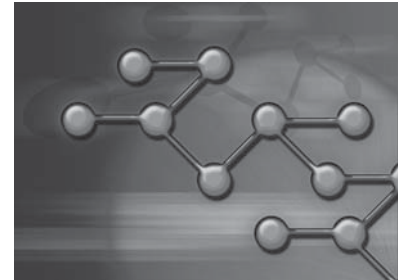
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The Social Self   **2**

Though I am not naturally honest,
I am so sometimes by chance.

—*William Shakespeare*

James Carroll is a best-selling author, novelist, and journalist. He comes from a remarkable family whose members played important, sometimes decisive roles in the events of the late 20th century. Carroll's life illustrates how the interlocking influences of birth, family life, education, and historical forces all influence the development of one's sense of self.

Carroll's father was the most important influence in his life. His father's dream was to be a priest, and James lived that dream for his father. He was the altar boy who became the priest and the college chaplain. Carroll loved his life as a priest. Soon, however, Carroll's life changed in ways that were unexpected and traumatic. These events created a breach between son and father, a breach only partially closed before the father died.

It is easy to see why Carroll's father so strongly influenced him as a young man. He was a figure of mythic proportions; he led a life almost only possible in movies, surely a figment of Hollywood imagination. As a young lawyer, Carroll's father caught the eye of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and became a top agent. When the Vietnam War began, the U.S. Air Force recruited the FBI agent and made him director of the agency that selected the bombing targets in Vietnam. Improbably, the now General Carroll—James's father—was the individual in charge of the U.S. Air Force's war against North Vietnam.

The Vietnam War forced the young Carroll to confront exactly who he was. On the one hand, his father was helping to run the war in Vietnam, and James's brother, who was an FBI agent, was tracking down draft evaders and keeping tabs on antiwar protesters. James's superiors in the Catholic Church also strongly supported the war. But Carroll, as a young seminarian, was turning against the war that his father was directing. In a moving account of his crisis of conscience and self-identity, Carroll, in

Key Questions

As you read this chapter, find the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the self?
2. How do we know the self?
3. What is distinctiveness theory?
4. How is the self organized?
5. What is autobiographical memory?
6. What is self-esteem?
7. How do we evaluate the self?
8. What is so good about high self-esteem?
9. What are implicit and explicit self-esteem?
10. What is emotional intelligence?
11. What is self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory?
12. How did self-enhancement help some survivors of September 11, 2001, cope with trauma?

his memoir *An American Requiem* (1996), chronicles his conflict with church hierarchy, the government, his father, and most of all himself. The son, who still admired and loved his father the general, began to align himself with antiwar protestors, draft resisters, and Catholic antiwar radicals.

In *Memorial Bridge*, Carroll's stirring novel of the Vietnam War period, the author artfully and seamlessly painted a barely fictionalized picture of the conflict between his father and himself, a conflict that forever changed his sense of who he was. Carroll recalls being a participant in the famous antiwar demonstration at the Pentagon and looking up at the sixth floor of the building, knowing that his father was looking down on his son, the protestor, the radical, who had just left the priesthood. But perhaps the most defining moment of Carroll's life was an earlier event, the moment that he publicly and irrevocably created a self-identity separate and distinct from his father, much of his family, and the experience of his life. When as a newly ordained priest Carroll conducted his first mass at an air force base in front of his family and his father's colleagues, the generals who were directing the Vietnam War, he expressed his moral outrage at their conduct, taking that moment to express clearly—a clarity he may have regretted later—his personal identity as distinct from his family's image of him.

In Carroll's life, we can see the interplay of the various parts of the self: The personal self—his own beliefs, knowledge, and principles—and that part of the self influenced by his relationships with family, friends, and church. Finally, we see the impact of the great social events of the time. It is no wonder that Carroll the novelist can write movingly and fervently about the effects of family, church, and country on one's self-concept. Carroll notes that he was much like his father and that he tried to live his father's dream, but events conspired to break both their hearts (Carroll, 1996).

Self-Concept

How do we develop a coherent sense of who we are? The vignette describing James Carroll suggests that our personal experiences, interaction with others, and cultural forces all play some role in our definition of self. Who am I? The answer to this question is the driving force in our lives. If you were asked to define yourself, you most likely would use sentences containing the words *I, me, mine,* and *myself* (Cooley, 1902; Schweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997).

The self may be thought of as a structure that contains the organized and stable contents of one's personal experiences (Schlenker, 1987). In this sense, the self is an object, something inside us that we may evaluate and contemplate. The self is "me," the sum of what I am. A significant part of what we call the *self* is knowledge. All the ideas, thoughts, and information that we have about ourselves—about who we are, what characteristics we have, what our personal histories have made us, and what we may yet become—make up our *self-concept*.

Self-Knowledge: How Do We Know Thyself?

reflected appraisal
A source of social information involving our view of how other people react to us.

We use several sources of social information to forge our self-concept. One comes from our view of how other people react to us. These **reflected appraisals** shape our self-concept (Cooley, 1902; Jones & Gerard, 1967). A second social source is the comparisons we make with other people (Festinger, 1950). Self-knowledge comes from

the **social comparison process** by which we compare our own reactions, abilities, and attributes to others (Festinger, 1950). We do this because we need accurate information so that we may succeed. We need to know if we are good athletes or students or race car drivers so that we may make rational choices. Social comparison is a control device, because it makes our world more predictable.

social comparison process A source of social knowledge involving how we compare our reactions, abilities, and attributes to others.

A third source of information comes from the self-knowledge gained by observing our own behavior. Daryl Bem (1967) suggested that people really do not know why they do things, so they simply observe their behavior and assume that their motives were consistent with their behavior. Someone who rebels against authority may simply observe her behavior and conclude, "Well, I must be a rebel." Therefore, we may obtain knowledge of our self simply by observing ourselves behave and then infer that our private beliefs must coincide with our public actions. Another method of knowing the self is through **introspection**, the act of examining our own thoughts and feelings. Introspection is a method we all use to understand ourselves, but there is evidence to suggest that we may get a somewhat biased picture of our own internal state. Thinking about our attitudes and the reasons we hold them can sometimes be disruptive and confusing (Wilson, Dunn, Kraft, & Lisle, 1989). More generally, the process of introspection—of looking into our own mind, rather than just behaving—can have this effect. For example, if you are forced to think about why you like your romantic partner, you might find it disconcerting if you are not able to think of any good reasons why you are in this relationship. This doesn't mean that you don't have reasons, but they may not be accessible or easy to retrieve. Much depends on the strength of the relationship. If the relationship is not strong, thinking about the relationship could be disruptive because we might not think up many positive reasons in support of the relationship. If it is pretty strong, then reasoning might further strengthen it. The stronger our attitude or belief, the more likely that thinking about it will increase the consistency between the belief and our behavior (Fazio, 1986).

introspection The act of examining our own thoughts and feelings to understand ourselves, which may yield a somewhat biased picture of our own internal state.

Personal Attributes and Self-Concept

Now that we have noted some of the methods we may use to form and gain access to our self-concept, let's see what is inside. What kind of information and feelings are contained in the self? First of all, the self-concept contains ideas and beliefs about **personal attributes**. A person may think of herself as female, American, young, smart, compassionate, the daughter of a single mother, a good basketball player, reasonably attractive, hot-tempered, artistic, patient, and a movie fan. All of these attributes and many more go into her self-concept.

personal attributes An aspect of the self-concept involving the attributes we believe we have.

Researchers investigated the self-concepts of American schoolchildren by asking them the following kinds of questions (McGuire & McGuire, 1988, p. 99):

- Tell us about yourself.

- Tell us what you are not.

- Tell us about school.

- Tell us about your family.

These open-ended probes revealed that children and adolescents often defined themselves by characteristics that were unique or distinctive. Participants who possessed a distinctive characteristic were much more likely to mention that attribute than were those who were less distinctive on that dimension (McGuire & McGuire, 1988).

distinctiveness theory The theory suggesting that individuals think of themselves in terms of those attributes or dimensions that make them different—rather than in terms of attributes they have in common with others.

According to **distinctiveness theory**, people think of themselves in terms of those attributes or dimensions that make them different, that are distinctive, rather than in terms of attributes they have in common with others. People, for example, who are taller or shorter than others, or wear glasses, or are left-handed are likely to incorporate that characteristic into their self-concept.

People usually are aware of the attributes they have in common with other individuals. A male going to an all-male high school is aware that he is male. But being male may not be a defining part of his self-concept because everybody around him has that same characteristic. He will define himself by attributes that make him different from other males, such as being a debater or a football player. It may certainly be important in another social context, such as when taking part in a debate about changing gender roles.

People who belong to nondominant or minority groups are more likely to include their gender, ethnicity, or other identity in their self-concept than are those in dominant, majority groups (e.g., white male). Among the schoolchildren in the study (McGuire & McGuire, 1988), boys who lived in households that were predominantly female mentioned their gender more often, as did girls who lived in households that were predominately male.

Of course, not all knowledge about the self is conscious simultaneously. At any given time, we tend to be aware of only parts of our overall self-concept. This *working self-concept* varies depending on the nature of the social situation and how we feel at that moment (Markus & Gnawers, 1986). So when we are depressed, our working self-concept would be likely to include all those thoughts about ourselves that have to do with failure or negative traits.

Although the self-concept is relatively stable, the notion of a working self-concept suggests that the self can vary from one situation to another (Kunda, 1999). For example, as the late Ziva Kunda (1999) pointed out, if you are shy but are asked to give examples of when you were very outgoing, at least momentarily you might feel less shy than usual. However, the ease with which the self may change may depend on how self-knowledge is organized and how important the behavior is.

The Self and Memory

In addition to personal attributes, the self-concept contains memories, the basis for knowledge about oneself. The self is concerned with maintaining positive self-feelings, thoughts, and evaluations. One way it does this is by influencing memory. Anthony Greenwald (1980) suggested that the self acts as a kind of unconscious monitor that enables people to avoid disquieting or distressing information. The self demands that we preserve what we have, especially that which makes us feel good about ourselves.

According to Greenwald, the self employs biases that work somewhat like the mind-control techniques used in totalitarian countries. In such countries, the government controls information and interpretations of events so that the leadership is never threatened. Similarly, we try to control the thoughts and memories we have about ourselves. The self is totalitarian in the sense that it records our good behaviors and ignores our unsavory ones, or at least rationalizes them away. The self is a personal historian, observing and recording information about the self—especially the information that makes us look good. Like a totalitarian government, Greenwald claims, the self tends to see itself as the origin of all positive things and to deny that it has ever done anything bad.

Is it true, as Greenwald predicted, that the self is a kind of filter that makes us feel good by gathering self-serving information and discarding information that discomfits us? The study of **autobiographical memory**—memory for information relating

autobiographical memory Memory for information relating to the self that plays a powerful role in recall of events.

to self—shows that the self does indeed play a powerful role in the recall of events (Woike, Gerskovich, Piorkowski, & Polo, 1999). The self is an especially powerful memory system, because events and attributes stored in the self have many associations (Greenwald & Banaji, 1989). Let's say, for example, that you are asked to recall whether you have done anything in your life that exemplifies a trait such as honesty or creativity. A search of your self-memory system perhaps would conjure up a recent event in which you devised a creative solution to a problem. The memory of that event might trigger similar memories from earlier periods in your history. You probably would be able to generate a flood of such memories.

Most people take only about 2 seconds to answer questions about their traits (Klein, Loftus, & Plog, 1992). This is because we have a kind of summary knowledge of our self-traits, especially the most obvious ones. Such a handy summary makes it harder to access memories that conflict with our positive self-concept, however. As noted earlier, memories that match a person's self-concept are recalled more easily than those that clash with that concept (Neimeyer & Rareshide, 1991). If you perceive yourself as an honest person, you will have trouble digging up memories in which you have behaved dishonestly.

A research study of social memory of everyday life among college students bore out these findings (Skowronski, Betz, Thompson, & Shannon, 1991). Participants were asked to keep two diaries: In one, they recorded events that occurred in their own lives, and in the other, they recorded events that occurred in the life of a close relative or friend, someone they saw on a daily basis. The students had to ask the consent of the other person, and they recorded the events discreetly. Participants made entries in the diaries for self and other for roughly 10 weeks, the length of the academic quarter. At the end of the quarter, the participants took a memory test on the events recorded in the two diaries. They were presented with the recorded events from the diaries in a random order and were asked to indicate how well they remembered the event, the date it occurred, and whether it was a unique episode.

The researchers found that participants recalled recent events more quickly than earlier ones, with faster retrieval of the oldest episodes than of those in the middle. They also found that pleasant events were recalled better than unpleasant ones, and extreme events, pleasant and unpleasant, were recalled better than neutral episodes. Pleasant events that especially fit the person's self-concept were most easily recalled. The self, then, monitors our experiences, processing information in ways that make us look good to ourselves. We interpret, organize, and remember interactions and events in self-serving ways, recalling primarily pleasant, self-relevant events that fit our self-concept. Obviously, this built-in bias influences the manner in which we understand our social world and how we interact with other people. Without realizing it, we are continually constructing a view of the world that is skewed in our favor.

Emotions and Autobiographical Memories Some of you may be thinking as you read this, "These findings don't square with what happens to me when I think about my past." It is true that you don't always retrieve memories that are positive, pleasant, or bolster good feelings. Indeed, sometimes the precise opposite is true. McFarland and Buehler (1998) examined how negative moods affect autobiographical memory. Generally, the memories you may recall seem to fit the mood that you are in. The explanation for this mood-congruence recall is that our mood makes it more likely that we will find memories of events that fit that mood: positive mood, positive recall; negative mood, negative recall. People who experience lots of negative moods can

enter into a self-defeating cycle wherein their negative moods prime or key negative memories that in turn make the individual even more sad or depressed.

Why do some people in negative moods perpetuate that mood and others make themselves feel better? It appears that the approach to how we retrieve these memories is the key (Lyubomirsky, Caldwell, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998). If you adopt a focused *reflective* attitude, which means that you may admit that you failed at this task, you explore the nature of why you feel bad and work to regulate that mood. This is in contrast to people who *ruminate* over their moods. That is, they focus neurotically and passively on negative events and feelings (McFarland & Buehler, 1998).

Of course, over our lifetimes our experiences may very well alter, sometimes dramatically, our sense of ourselves. If this change is significant, we may look back and wonder if we are in fact the same person we once were. William James (1890), the renowned 19th-century psychologist and philosopher, observed that the self was both a "knower" ("I") and an object ("me"). For college students, the transition from high school to university may produce a conflict between the person's current sense of self and that other person that existed before the transition: "I am not the same person that I was 2 years ago."

Psychologists Lisa Libby and Richard Eibach (2002) investigated what happened when people thought about behaviors that conflicted with their current self-concept. When this happens, individuals refer to their "old self" in the third person, as if it were an object no longer part of the psyche. Autobiographical memory, then, is not static, but may be altered by our current self-concept. For example, someone who recalls that he was a chronic overeater in the past may transform that bit of autobiographical memory into motivation not to overindulge at this Thanksgiving's meal (Libby & Eibach, 2002). Major life changes often require that people disengage from their past. Imagine, for example, "born again" religious experiences, or surviving a deadly cancer, or a divorce and the resultant radical change in lifestyle. These events can make people "disidentify" with their autobiographical memories of their past selves (Libby & Eibach, 2002). It is not as if we create a brand-new self, but rather we place the old one in a kind of cold storage.

Religion and the Self

Peers, school experiences, and involvement in religious activities and institutions may have profound effects on self-knowledge. As we suggested in the previous section, the self-concept is not an unchanging vault of personal information but is powerfully influenced by social, situational, and cultural forces. We saw the influence of the church on the life of James Carroll, the priest. In novelist Carroll's books after he left the priesthood, we can see that the church still has an enormous influence on his thinking and his view of himself and the world.

Bruce E. Blaine and his coworkers investigated the impact of religious belief on self-concept (Blaine, Trivedi, & Eshleman, 1998). Blaine pointed out that religion ought to be a powerful influence on the self-concepts of believers. Religious beliefs typically set standards for character and behavior, emphasizing positive behaviors and exhorting believers to refrain from negative ones. Blaine found that individuals who indicated that they maintained religious beliefs (Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish) provided more positive and certain self-descriptions. These positive self-descriptions were not limited in Blaine's study to religious spheres solely but were also related to positive self-descriptions in the individuals' work and social lives.

Blaine and his colleagues (1998) suggested several reasons for these findings. The first is that religious teachings may have clear relevance to the business world to the extent that people who hold religious beliefs actually apply them to other life activities. As one example, Blaine notes the Jewish Torah warns that interest ought not be charged on goods sold to needy countrymen. Religion also may be an organizing principle for the self-concept and thereby embrace all facets of life.

The Self: The Influence of Groups and Culture

Thus far we have focused on the **individual self**, that part of the self that refers to our self-knowledge, including our private thoughts and evaluations of who and what we are. But as we saw in James Carroll's life, the groups to which we belong and the culture in which we live play crucial roles in sculpting our self-concept.

The **collective self** is that part of our self-concept that comes from our membership in groups. This collective self is reflected in thoughts such as, "In my family I am considered the responsible, studious one." It reflects the evaluation of the self by important and specific groups to which the person belongs (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984). Basic research on groups shows that the groups we belong to have a strong influence on self-concept (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999). Our behavior is often changed by what other group members demand of us.

These two representations, the individual and the collective selves, do not occupy equal space and influence in the self-concept. The relative importance of each component of the self for an individual is determined in large part by the culture in which the person lives. In some cultures, the individual self is dominant. Cultures that emphasize individual striving and achievement—societies that are concerned with people "finding themselves"—produce individuals in which the private self is highly complex, containing many traits and beliefs. Other cultures may emphasize specific groups, such as family or religious community, and therefore the collective self is primary. Collectivist societies show a pattern of close links among individuals who define themselves as interdependent members of groups such as family, coworkers, and social groups (Vandello & Cohen, 1999). However, even within societies, the degree of collectivism may vary. Vandello and Cohen (1999) argued that collectivist tendencies in the United States would be highest in the Deep South, because that region still maintains a strong regional identity. Vandello and Cohen also thought that the greatest individualistic tendencies would be found in the West and mountain states. Figure 2.1 shows a map that identifies regional differences in collectivism. You can see that Vandello and Cohen's predictions were confirmed. Note that the states with the highest collectivism scores contain either many different cultures (e.g., Hawaii) or a strong and dominant religion (e.g., Utah).

One way to determine whether the individual or collective self is the dominant representation of who we are is to observe what occurs when one or another of these images of the self is threatened. Is a threat to the individual self more or less menacing than a threat to our collective self? If the status of the important groups to which we belong is threatened, is this more upsetting to us than if our individual, personal self is under attack?

In a series of experiments, Gaertner, Sedikides, and Graetz (1999) tried to answer these questions by comparing individuals' responses to threats to the collective or individual self. For example, in one study, women at a university were given a psychological test and were told either that they personally had not done very well on the test or that an important group to which they belong (women at the university) had not done well. Similar procedures were used in other experiments. Gaertner and his colleagues found

individual self The part of the self that refers to our self-knowledge, including our private thoughts and evaluations of who and what we are.

collective self The part of our self-concept that comes from our membership in groups.
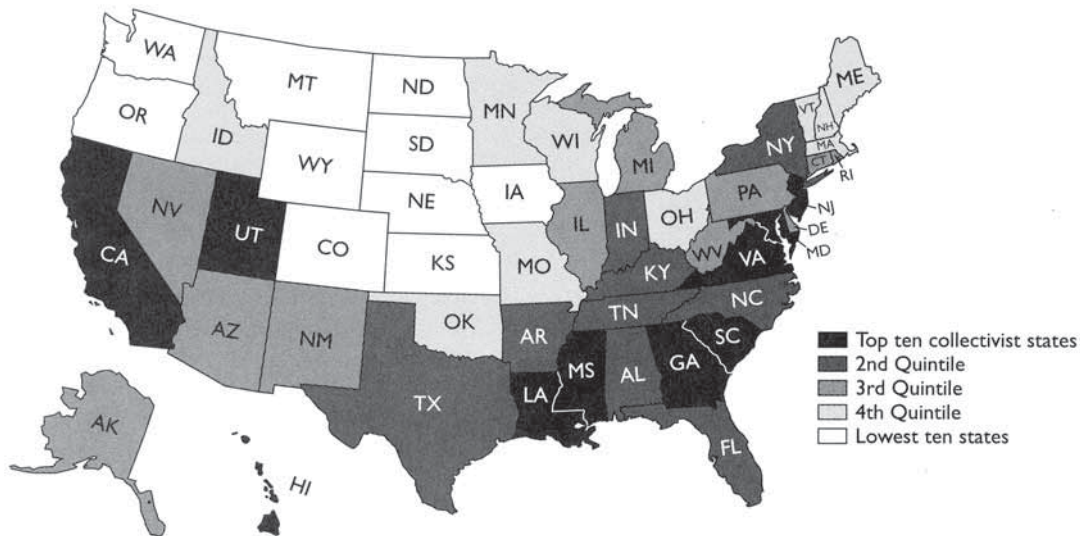
Figure 2.1 Map of the United States showing regional patterns of collectivism.

From Vandello and Cohen (1999).

that compared to a threat to the collective self, a threat to the individual self resulted in the perception that the threat was more severe, a more negative mood, more anger, and the participants' denial of the accuracy or validity of the test or source of the threat.

The results suggest that the individual self is primary, and the collective self is less so. Of course, this does not mean that the collective self is not crucial. It and our group memberships provide protection and financial and social rewards. But all things being equal, it appears that, in the United States, our individual self is more important to us than our collective self.

Who Am I? The Influence of Culture on Self-Concept

Nothing, it seems, could be more personal and individual than how we answer the question, Who am I? But as it turns out, our answer is powerfully shaped by the culture in which we grew up and developed our self-concept. As we have suggested, some cultures place more emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual—the private self—whereas others focus on how the individual is connected to important others—the collective self.

In a culture that emphasizes the collective self, such as Japan, individuals are more likely to define themselves in terms of meeting the expectations of others rather than of fulfilling their own private needs. In fact, if you asked Japanese participants to answer the question, Who am I? (a common technique for investigating self-concept), you would find that they give many more social responses ("I am an employee at X") than do Americans (Cousins, 1989). In contrast, Americans are more likely to emphasize the content of the individual (private) self, defining themselves with such statements as "I am strong-willed." The Japanese view themselves as part of a social context, whereas Americans tend to assume they have a self that is less dependent on any set of social relations (Cousins, 1989; Ross & Nisbett, 1991).

Individuals in cultures that emphasize the collective self are also less likely to view themselves as the focus of attention in social interactions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Japanese appear to view their peers, rather than themselves, as the focus of attention. Consequently, social interactions in Japan are quite different from those in a society such as the United States.

Individual-self societies emphasize self-fulfillment at the expense of communal relationships; collective-self societies are more concerned with meeting shared obligations and helping others. In Haiti, for example, where the culture emphasizes the collective self, people are willing to share houses and food with relatives and friends for long periods of time.

Of course, no matter the dominant sense of self in each culture, sometimes situational factors will determine which self is dominant. Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee (1999) showed that the individual self may be temporarily more dominant in a collectivist culture when people are focused on personal issues—say, one's intelligence or one's goals in life. Similarly, people who live in an individualistic culture may temporarily focus on collectivist factors when confronted by issues involving group belongingness ("I am a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma").

However, whatever the effects of temporary situational factors, obviously, the thoughts and traits that make up the core of the self of a Japanese or Haitian person are likely to differ from the content of the self of an American. We would expect many more individual attributes to be part of an American self-concept. Japanese or Haitian individuals would probably emphasize attributes that reflect their similarities with others, whereas Americans are more likely to emphasize attributes that make them different from other people.

This tendency to emphasize attributes that make an individual stand out in American society and to blend in and not be conspicuous in Japanese society may very well be due to historical and cultural processes that affect how individuals behave. For example, in the United States, our sense of well-being, of being happy or pleased with ourselves, depends to a great extent on whether we are seen as better—more accomplished, perhaps richer—than other people. But, Shinobu Kitayama, a Japanese social psychologist familiar with the United States, suggests that a sense of well-being in Japan depends less on attributes that make individuals different from others and more on correcting shortcomings and deficits (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). Research shows that the psychological *and* physical well-being of Japanese persons can be predicted quite accurately from the lack of negative characteristics and not from the presence of positive attributes (Kitayama et al., 1997). In the United States, in contrast, how positive we feel about ourselves is directly related to our sense of personal well-being (Diener & Diener, 1995). So these social psychological aspects of self-representations—the individual and the collective selves—are caused by historical forces that emphasized individuality in the United States and group harmony in Japan.

We see in this example both the pervasive role of the self-concept in directing behavior and the widespread role of culture in determining ideas about the self. The self-concept is not just a private, personal construct; culture plays a part in shaping the individual's deepest levels of personal knowledge.

Organizing Knowledge: Self-Schemas

Whatever the culture one lives in, people don't think of themselves as just chaotic masses of attributes and memories. Instead, they arrange knowledge and information about themselves and their attributes into **self-schemas** (Markus, 1977; Markus & Zajonc, 1985). A *schema* is an organized set of related cognitions—bits of knowledge and information—about a particular person, event, or experience. A self-schema is an arrangement of information, thoughts, and feelings about ourselves, including information about our gender, age, race or ethnicity, occupation, social roles, physical attractiveness, intelligence, talents, and so on. People have many different self-schemas for the different areas of life activities.

self-schemas
Self-conceptions that guide us in ordering and directing our behavior involving how we represent our thoughts and feelings about our experiences in a particular area of life.

Self-schemas serve a very important function: They organize our self-related experiences so that we can respond quickly and effectively in social situations. They help us interpret situations, and they guide our behavior. Schemas also help us understand new events (Scheier & Carver, 1988). You may have a self-schema about how you act in an emergency, for example. From past experience and from your ideals and expectations about yourself, you may believe that you are a person who stays calm, acts responsibly, and takes care of others, or one who panics and has to be taken care of by others. These beliefs about yourself influence your behavior when an emergency arises in the future. Or perhaps you have a self-schema about being a runner. When you hear people talking about keeping fit or eating the right foods, you know what they are talking about and how it relates to you. In these ways, self-schemas contribute to our sense of control over our social world.

Self-schemas lend order to our past experiences as well. They guide what we encode (place) into memory and influence how we organize and store that memory. Memories that match our self-schemas are recalled more easily than are those that do not (Neimeyer & Rareshide, 1991). Self-schemas also influence how we think we will behave in the future. A person who thinks of himself as socially awkward, for example, may behave inappropriately in social situations. And based on his behavior in the past, he expects to behave inappropriately in future social situations.

People tend to have elaborate schemas about areas of life that are important to their self-concepts. Markus (1977) observed that people may be either schematic or aschematic with respect to various attributes that are in the self-concept. The term *schematic* means that the individual has an organized self-schema in an activity that the individual rates as important. In other areas of life, those that are not important to us or that may not even exist for us, people are said to be *aschematic*. That is, they do not have an organized self-schema in that domain.
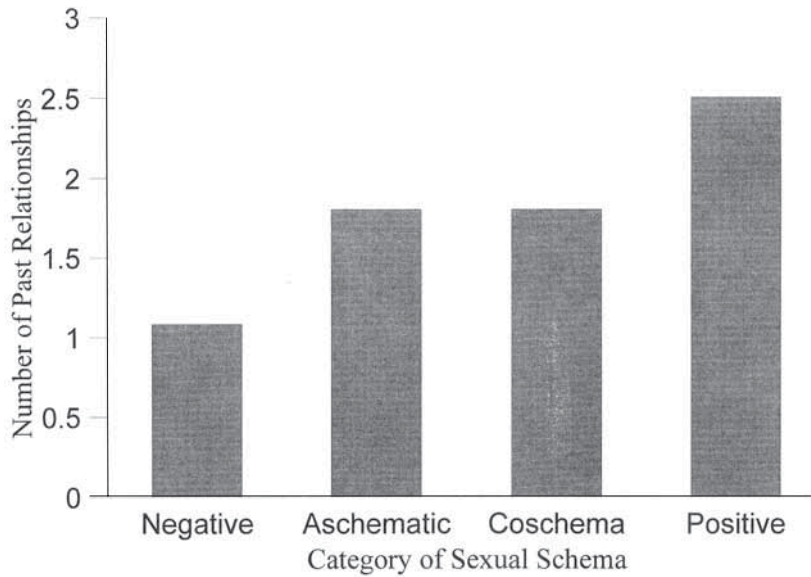
Sexuality and Self-Schemas

sexual self-schema
How we think about the sexual aspects of the self, derived from past sexual knowledge and experience, and which guides future sexual activity.

Sexuality is clearly a fundamental behavior, and therefore we expect people to have **sexual self-schemas** of varying degrees of organization. A sexual self-schema refers to how we think about the sexual aspects of the self. Sexual schemas are derived from past sexual knowledge and experience and, as all schemas do, they guide our future (sexual) activity. Cyranowski and Andersen (1998) studied the sexual self-schemas of university women and found that four different schemas emerged. Women who were schematic—that is, had well-developed schemas—displayed either positive or negative schemas. These positive and negative schemas reflected their individual past sexual history as well as their current sexual activity. As the sexual schema graph shows, positive-schema women had more previous sexual relationships (Figure 2.2) and scored higher measures of passionate attachment to their partners (Figure 2.3). These women were more likely to be in a current sexual relationship. Negative-sexual-schema women displayed an avoidance of intimacy and passion and were much more anxious about sexual activity.

Some women had both negative and positive aspects to their self-schemas, and they were labeled *co-schematic*. Whereas co-schematic women see themselves as open, passionate, and romantic (as do the positive-schema women), they differ from the positive-schema women in that they hold negative self-views, and this leads to anxieties about being rejected or abandoned by their partners.
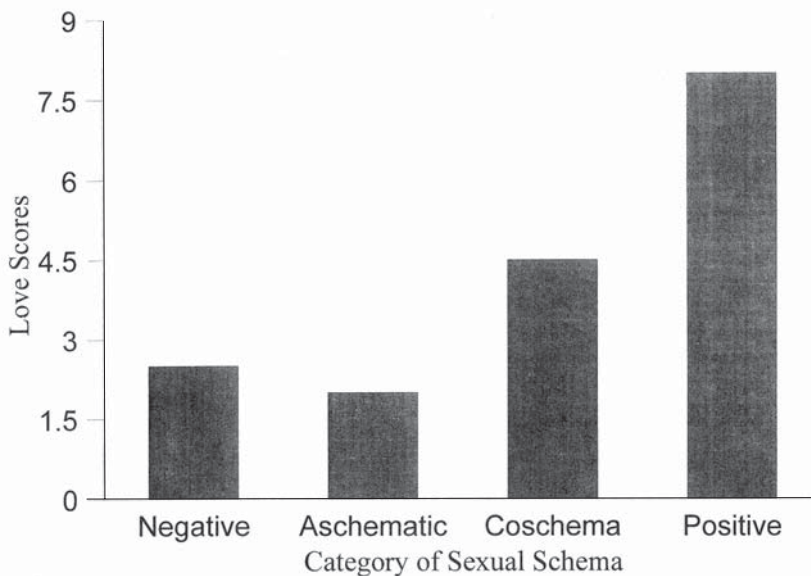
Figure 2.2   The relationship between an individual's sexual schema and the number of his or her first relationships.

Based on data from Cryanowski and Anderson (1998).

Figure 2.3   The relationship between an individual's sexual schema and his or her passionate love score.

Based on data from Cryanowski and Anderson (1998).

Aschematic women, like negative-schema women, have fewer romantic attachments, experience less passionate emotions about love, and avoid emotional intimacy. Aschematic women tend to avoid sexual situations and display anxiety about sex. A major difference between aschematic women and negative-schema women is that aschematic women do not have negative self-views. They are just less interested in sexual activity. Table 2.1 summarizes these findings.

Whereas women express sexual self-schemas that fit roughly into categories, men's sexual self-schemas appear to flow along a continuum, ranging from highly schematic to aschematic (Andersen, Cyranowski, & Espindle, 1999). Men who are schematic have

Table 2.1   Sexual Schemas and Sexual Behaviors

Sexual Behaviors	Schematic		Co-Schematic	Aschematic
	Positive	**Negative**		
Previous sex experiences	Many	Few	Moderate	Few
Passionate	High	Low	High	Low
Intimacy	High	Low	Low	Low
Anxiety	Low	High	High	High
Self-views	Positive	Negative	Negative	Moderate

sexual schemas that reflect strong emotions of passion and love, attributes shared with positive-schematic women. However, these men see themselves as strong and aggressive, with liberal sexual attitudes (Andersen et al., 1999). Schematic men lead varied sexual lives, may engage in quite casual sex, but are also capable of strong attachments. On the other end of the scale, we find aschematic men, who lead quite narrow sexual lives and have few if any sexual partners.

The more varied and complex our self is, the more self-schemas we will have. We can see that men and women have sexual self-schemas of varying degrees of organization, and these schemas reflect their sexual past and guide their current (and future) sexual behavior. These cognitive representations or self-schemas reflect both the importance of the behavior represented and the emotional tone of the behavior.

People differ in the number of attributes, memories, and self-schemas that are part of their self-concept. Some people have highly complex selves, others much less complex. Self-complexity is important in influencing how people react to the good and bad events in life. Someone who is, say, an engineer, an opera lover, a mother, and an artist can absorb a blow to one of her selves without much damage to her overall self-concept (Linville, 1985, 1987). If her latest artistic endeavors meet unfavorable reviews, this woman's sense of self is buffered by the fact that there is much more to her than being an artist. She is still a mother, an engineer, an opera lover, and much more. People who are low in self-complexity may be devastated by negative events, because there is little else to act as a buffer.

Self-Esteem: Evaluating the Self

self-esteem An individual's evaluation of the self, which can be positive or negative.

The self is more than a knowledge structure. The self also has a larger sense of our overall worth, a component that consists of both positive and negative self-evaluations. This is known as **self-esteem**. We evaluate, judge, and have feelings about ourselves. Some people possess high self-esteem: They regard themselves highly and are generally pleased with who they are. Others have low self-esteem, feel less worthy and good, and may even feel that they are failures and incompetent.

Self-esteem is affected both by our ideas about how we are measuring up to our own standards and by our ability to control our sense of self in interactions with others. Both these processes—one primarily internal, the other primarily external—have important repercussions on our feelings about ourselves.

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Internal Influences on Self-Esteem

Our feelings about ourselves come from many sources. Some, perhaps most, we carry forward from childhood, when our basic self-concepts were formed from interactions with our parents and other adults. Research in child development indicates that people develop basic feelings of trust, security, and self-worth or mistrust, insecurity, and worthlessness from these early relationships and experiences.

Self-Esteem and Emotional Intelligence

Our emotions are important sources of information. Emotions are a kind of early warning system, bells and whistles that tell us that important things are happening in our environment.

Social psychologists have recently started to take a close scientific look at the concept of **emotional intelligence,** a person's ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). It appears that individuals who are emotionally intelligent are more successful in personal and work relationships.

emotional intelligence
A person's ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions.

According Salovey and Grewal (2005), emotionally intelligent people are able to monitor their own emotions and those of the people with whom they interact. They are able to use that information to guide the way they think and behave. So, the emotionally intelligent person knows when to express anger and when not to do so. Such individuals are also good at manipulating their moods. Certain tasks and interactions may, for example, be better accomplished when in a sad mood than a good mood, and these people seem to know how to manipulate their own moods to reach their goals. They also read the emotions of other people rather well. In other words, some people trust their emotions and use them as information. Others "do not take counsel" of their emotions because they think that emotions are untrustworthy.

Lopes, Salovey, Cote, and Beers (2005) investigated the relationship of individuals' emotional intelligence, their ability to regulate their emotions, to choose good interaction strategies, and to accurately read others' emotions, and the quality of their friendships and social interactions. Those people who were high on emotion regulation abilities (high emotional intelligence) were more favorably rated by their friends and acquaintances, and were more likely to be nominated by their peers as people who were sensitive and helpful to others.

What does this have to do with self-esteem? The connection may be the discovery that individuals with high self-esteem take greater account of their emotions than people with lesser self-esteem. Emotions seem to be very useful in a variety of areas, including understanding other people, creative thinking, and even good health (Harber, 2005; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It appears that emotional intelligence is strongly related to self-esteem (Harber, 2005). The research showing that self-esteem is positively related to effective processing of emotional information suggests that for those high in self-esteem, emotions serve as important point of information. It is certainly true that a lot of the time we do not have the facts of the situation, and all we have to go on is our "gut" feelings.

Okay, so high-self-esteem people use their emotions. Is that good? Well, it depends. The evidence suggests that high-self-esteem individuals are much more likely to act on their anger (Harber, 2005). In other words, sometimes they may pay too much attention to internal emotional cues and not enough to what is going on in the environment. As Kent Harber neatly puts it, "How we feel about our emotions may be shaped by how we feel about ourselves" (p. 287).

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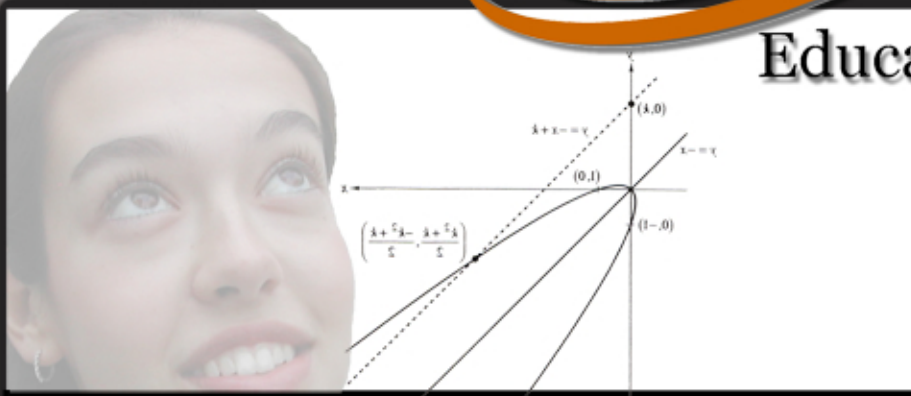
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Maintaining Self-Esteem in Interactions with Others

When interacting with others, human beings have two primary self-related motives: to enhance self-esteem and to maintain self-consistency (Berkowitz, 1988). Obviously, people have a powerful need to feel good about themselves. They prefer positive responses from the social world. They become anxious when their self-esteem is threatened. What steps do they take to maintain and enhance self-esteem?

self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory A theory explaining how the behavior of other people affects how you feel about yourself, especially when they perform some behavior that is important to your self-conception.

Enhancing the Self According to Abraham Tesser's **self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory** (1988), the behavior of other people, both friends and strangers, affects how we feel about ourselves, especially when the behavior is in an area that is important to our own self-concept. The self carefully manages emotional responses to events in the social world, depending on how threatening it perceives those events to be. Tesser gave this example to illustrate his theory: Suppose, for example, that Jill thinks of herself as a math whiz. Jill and Joan are close friends; Joan receives a 99 and Jill a 90 on a math test. Because math is relevant to Jill, the comparison is important. Therefore, Joan's better performance is a threat, particularly since Joan is a close other. There are a variety of things that Jill can do about this threat. She can reduce the relevance of Joan's performance. If math were not important to Jill's own self-definition, she could bask in the reflection of Joan's performance. Jill could also reduce her closeness to Joan, thus making Joan's performance less consequential. Finally, Jill could try to affect their relative performance by working harder or doing something to handicap Joan (Tesser & Collins, 1988).

This story neatly captures the basic elements of SEM theory. The essential question that Jill asks about Joan's performance is, What effect does Joan's behavior have on my evaluation of myself? Notice that Jill compares herself to Joan on a behavior that is important to her own self-concept. If Joan excelled at bowling, and Jill cared not a fig about knocking down pins with a large ball, she would not be threatened by Joan's rolling a 300 game or winning a bowling championship. In fact, she would *bask in the reflected glory* (BIRG) of her friend's performance; Jill's self-esteem would be enhanced because her friend did so well.

The comparison process is activated when you are dealing with someone who is close to you. If you found out that 10% of high school students who took the math SAT did better than you, it would have less emotional impact on your self-esteem than if you learned that your best friend scored a perfect 800, putting her at the top of all people who took the exam (provided, that is, that math ability was important to your self-concept).

SEM theory is concerned with the self's response to threat, the kinds of social threats encountered in everyday life. Tesser formulated SEM theory by investigating people's responses to social threats in terms of the two dimensions just described—relevance of the behavior to the participant's self-concept and closeness of the participant to the other person (Tesser & Collins, 1988). Participants were asked to remember and describe social situations in which a close or distant other performed better or worse than they did. Half the time the task was important to the participant's self-concept, and half the time the task was unimportant. The participants also reported the emotions they felt during those episodes.

Results indicate that when the behavior was judged relevant to the self, emotions were heightened. When participants did better than the other, distant or close, they felt happier, and when they did worse, they felt more personal disgust, anger, and frustration. When the behavior was not particularly relevant to the self, emotions varied, depending on the closeness of the relationship. When a close friend performed better than the

participant, the participant felt pride in that performance. As you would expect, participants felt less pride in the performance of a distant person, and, of course, they felt less pride in the friend's performance when the behavior was self-relevant.

One conclusion we can draw from this research and from SEM theory is that people are willing to make *some* sacrifices to accuracy if it means a gain in self-esteem. People undoubtedly want and need accurate information about themselves and how they compare to significant others, but they also display an equally powerful need to feel positive about themselves. This need for self-enhancement suggests that in appraising our own performances and in presenting ourselves to others, we tend to exaggerate our positive attributes.

In sum, then, one way the self maintains esteem is to adjust its responses to social threats. If a friend does better than we do at something on which we pride ourselves, we experience a threat to that part of our self-concept. Our friend's achievement suggests that we may not be as good in an important area as we thought we were. To preserve the integrity and consistency of the self-concept and to maintain high self-esteem, we can try to downplay the other's achievement, put more distance between ourselves and the other so that we feel less threatened by the performance, or try to handicap our friend. In each case, the self subtly adjusts our perceptions, emotions, and behaviors in the service of enhancing self-esteem.

Self-Enhancement and Coping with Disaster: The Survivors of September 11, 2001

An estimated 2,800 individuals lost their lives in the World Trade Center (WTC) buildings on that traumatic and horrifying day in 2001. Thousands of other individuals in the near vicinity or in the WTC survived but were exposed to both physical and psychological trauma. Bonnanno, Rennicke, and Dekel (2005) investigated how some survivors coped with this massive trauma. These researchers were very interested in those people who, while directly exposed to the attacks, showed few psychological effects of their experience. The study focused on those "resilient" individuals who used a kind of unrealistic self-enhancement strategy to deal with the trauma. These people in fact used self-enhancing strategies all of their lives so they did not alter their approach to deal with 9/11. The researchers wanted to know whether these self-enhancing "resilients" were truly in control of their emotions or were just whistling in the dark, so to speak.

Self-enhancement in this context refers to the tendency to have overly positive or unrealistic self-serving biases (Bonnanno et al., 2005). Many researchers think that self-enhancement biases actually are very good things and lead to many positive outcomes, including increased survival of serious, life-threatening illnesses (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003). Self-enhancers who were directly exposed to the attack on the WTC showed fewer post-traumatic and fewer depressive symptoms than other individuals who were at the scene on September 11. Self-enhancers have a very positive view of themselves and believe that they are in total control of themselves. They tend to project very positive feelings. Are these feelings real, or are they just a front for underlying problems?

Bonanno and his associates (2005) found that while other people were rather annoyed at the "resilient" self-enhancers and their remarkably upbeat attitudes in the face of the tragedy, these self-enhancers did not seem to be aware of this and in fact recovered from the trauma quicker than most, with fewer psychological scars. So, if you don't mind the fact that your friend might not appreciate your attitude, self-enhancement seems to be a pretty good approach to life's vicissitudes.

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Self-Esteem and Stigma

We have seen that people often define themselves in terms of attributes that distinguish themselves from others. Sometimes these attributes are positive ("I was always the best athlete"), and sometimes they are negative ("I was always overweight"). Some individuals have characteristics that are stigmatized—marked by society—and therefore they risk rejection whenever those aspects of themselves are recognized. One would expect that culturally defined stigmas would affect a person's self-esteem.

Frable, Platt, and Hoey (1998) wondered what effect stigmas that were either visible or concealable had on self-esteem. These researchers had Harvard University undergraduates rate their momentary self-esteem and feelings during everyday situations in their lives. Some of these students had concealable stigmas; that is, these culturally defined faults were hidden from the observer. The individuals were gay, bulimic, or came from poor families. Others had more visibly socially defined stigmas; they were African American, or stutterers, or 30 pounds overweight.

Frable and her coworkers thought that those people with concealable stigmas would be most prone to low self-esteem, because they rarely would be in the company of people who had similar stigmas. Other people who belong to the "marked" group can provide social support and more positive perceptions of the membership of the stigmatized group than can nonmembers. For example, cancer patients who belong to support groups and have other strong social support generally have more favorable prognoses than do those patients who remain isolated (Frable et al., 1998). In fact, these researchers found that those who were gay, poor, bulimic, or had other concealable stigmas had lower self-esteem and more negative feelings about themselves than both those with visible stigmas or people without any social stigmas at all. This suggests that group membership that can offer support and positive feelings raises our self-esteem and buffers us against negative social evaluations.

Although the Frable study indicates that visible stigmas have a less negative influence on self-esteem than do the concealable ones, conspicuous stigmas, such as being overweight, have definite negative effects on self-esteem as well. Early in life we get a sense of our physical self. Western culture pays particular attention to physical attractiveness, or lack of the same, and it should not be surprising that our sense of our physical appearance affects our self-esteem. As an aspect of appearance, body weight plays a role in self-esteem. One need only gaze at the diet books and magazines at supermarket checkout counters to confirm the importance of body types in our society.

Miller and Downey (1990) examined the relationship between self-esteem and body weight. They found that individuals who were classified as "heavyweights" (to distinguish these people from individuals who were obese because of glandular problems) reported lower self-esteem. This finding was particularly true for females, but heavyweight males also tended to have lower self-esteem. Interestingly, those individuals who were in fact in the heavyweight category but did not think that they were did not have lower self-esteem. This suggests that what is important is whether the individual is marked with disgrace—stigmatized—in his or her own eyes. It may be that those who are heavyweight but do not feel that they have to match some ideal body type do not carry the same psychological burden that other heavyweights do. This suggests that feelings about ourselves come from our evaluations of ourselves in terms of our internal standards, our self-guides. It is probable that heavyweights who had higher self-esteem had a better match between their ideal and actual selves than did other overweight individuals.

Self-Esteem and Cultural Influences

Self-esteem, as you might think, is influenced by factors other than one's personal experiences. After all, we live and identify with certain groups, small and large. We are students or professors at certain colleges and universities, we root for various sports teams, we have various religious, social, and national affiliations. All of these things influence our self esteem.

Schmitt and Allik (2005) studied the relationship between culture and "global self-esteem, defined as one's general sense of how worthy one is as a person." These researchers employed a commonly used measure of self-esteem known as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RESS). They had this instrument translated into 28 different languages and had 17,000 people in 53 different countries take the test. Researchers Schmitt and Allik (2005) found that people in all nations have generally positive self-esteem. It seems that positive self-esteem appears to be culturally universal.

A closer analysis of their data led these researchers to conclude that while individuals in all of these 53 countries had meaningful concepts of what self-esteem meant, there was also evidence indicating that in some countries (African and Asian cultures) people are less likely to engage in self-evaluation, which, of course, is the basis of self-esteem. Nevertheless, feeling positive about oneself seems to be universal, and the assumption that self-esteem is usually higher or more positive in individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States) as opposed to in collectivist cultures (e.g., Indonesia) in which the group tends to be more important seems not to be true (Schmitt & Allik, 2005).

What's So Good about High Self-Esteem?

What can we conclude about our discussion of self-esteem? It seems that high self-esteem is assumed to have positive effects, and low self-esteem, negative effects. Recently, researchers such as Jennifer Crocker have raised doubts about these conclusions and have suggested, based upon a closer review of the research, that the real benefits of high self-esteem are "small and limited" (Crocker & Park, 2004). Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs, (2003) also argued that high self-esteem may lead to good feelings and may make people more resourceful but does not cause high academic achievement, good job performance, or leadership; nor does low self-esteem cause violence, smoking, drinking, taking drugs, or becoming sexually active at an early age.

Crocker, Campbell, and Park (2003) have examined the effects of the pursuit of self-esteem rather than just examining who has low or high self-esteem scores. Most individuals tend to judge their own self-worth by what they need to do to be seen as a person of worth and value. In other words, they judge their self-esteem by external reactions. It often means competing with others. This explains to some extent the observation that high-self-esteem individuals are quick to react violently when their self-esteem is questioned.

While we tend to think that high self-esteem is a really good thing, we have not, as Roy Baumeister (2001) notes, looked closely at the consequences, good and bad, of self-esteem on behavior. Indeed, the evidence suggests that high-self-esteem individuals are more likely to be violent when their self-esteem is threatened (Baumeister, 2001). This pursuit apparently only produces rather temporary emotional benefits but imposes high costs. Crocker et al. (2003) argue that the pursuit of self-esteem "interferes with relatedness with other people, learning, personal autonomy, self-regulation, and mental and physical health."

Others have observed that while high self-esteem is related to all kinds of positive behaviors, because self-esteem seems to be based upon what people believe is the best way to live (their "worldview"), high self-esteem can also be a cause of horrible and tragic events, not unlike September 11, 2001. After all, in one worldview, "heroic martyrdom" is a good thing (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004, p. 461). So high self-esteem in and of itself may not be good or bad. It depends upon the way one behaves (Pyszczynski et al., 2004).

Implicit and Explicit Self-Esteem

The resolution to the question of what good is high self-esteem may be found in the idea that there are really two kinds of high self-esteem. The first is the kind of self-esteem that is below our conscious awareness. The **implicit self-esteem** refers to a very efficient system of self-evaluation that is below our conscious awareness (Jordan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2005, p. 693). As you might imagine, implicit self-esteem comes from parents who nuture their children but do not overprotect them (DeHart, Pelham, & Tennen, 2006). This kind of self-esteem is unconscious and uncontrolled by the individual (Dehart et al., 2006). Implicit self-esteem is automatic and less likely to be affected by day-to-day events.

In comparison, the kind of high self-esteem we've been talking about, more fairly called **explicit self-esteem**, arises primarily from interaction with people in our everyday life. We might expect that the two self-esteems would be related, but that appears not to be the case (DeHart et al., 2006). High implicit self-esteem is related to very positive health and social attributes, while explicit self-esteem seems to be a more fragile or defensive self-esteem, which accounts for the emotional reactions that threats to these individuals evoke.

Self-Control: How People Regulate Their Behavior

Maintaining self-esteem is a very powerful motive. However, an equally powerful self-motive is to maintain self-control, a very good predictor of success in life.

Self-Control and Self-Regulation

Social psychologist E. Troy Higgins (1989) proposed that people think of themselves from two different standpoints: their own perspective and that of a significant other, such as a parent or a close friend. He also suggested that people have three selves that guide their behavior. The first is the **actual self**, the person's current self-concept. The second is the **ideal self**, the mental representation of what the person would like to be or what a significant other would like him or her to be. The third is the **ought self**, the mental representation of what the person believes he or she should be.

Higgins (1989) assumed that people are motivated to reach a state in which the actual self matches the ideal and the ought selves. The latter two selves thus serve as guides to behavior. In Higgins's Self-Discrepancy Theory, when there is a discrepancy between the actual self and the self-guides, we are motivated to try to close the gap. That is, when our actual self doesn't match our internal expectations and standards, or when someone else evaluates us in ways that fail to match our standards, we try to narrow the gap. We try to adjust our behavior to bring it into line with our self-guides.

implicit self-esteem
An efficient system of self-evaluation that is below our conscious awareness.

explicit self-esteem
Self-esteem that arises primarily from interaction with people in our everyday life.

actual self A person's current self-concept.

ideal self The mental representation of what a person would like to be or what a significant other would like him or her to be.

ought self The mental representation of what a person believes he or she should be.

The process we use to make such adjustments is known as **self-regulation**, which is our attempt to match our behavior or our self-guides to the expectations of others and is a critical control mechanism.

Not only will individuals differ on the need to self-regulate, so will people who live in different cultures. Heine and Lehman (1999) observed that whereas residents of the United States and Canada showed a strong bias toward adapting to others' expectations, Japanese citizens are less likely to try to self-regulate. Heine and Lehman found that their Japanese participants were much more self-critical than were North Americans and had greater discrepancies between their actual self and the ideal or ought selves, but these differences were less distressful for the Japanese and did not motivate them to change.

The closer the match among our various self-concepts, the better we feel about ourselves. Additionally, the more information we have about ourselves and the more certain we are of it, the better we feel about ourselves. This is especially true if the self-attributes we are most certain of are those that are most important to us (Pelham, 1991). Our ability to self-regulate, to match our performance to our expectations and standards, also affects our self-esteem. In sum, then, we tend to have high self-esteem if we have a close match among our selves; strong and certain knowledge about ourselves, especially if it includes attributes that we value; and the ability to self-regulate.

We know that the inability to regulate our self leads to negative emotions. Higgins (1998) investigated the emotional consequences of good matches versus discrepancies among the selves. When there is a good match between our actual self and our ideal self, we experience feelings of satisfaction and high self-esteem. When there is a good match between our actual self and our ought self, we experience feelings of security. (Recall that the actual self is what you or another currently think you are; the ideal self is the mental representation of the attributes that either you or another would like you to be or wishes you could be; and the ought self is the person that you or others believe you should be.) Good matches may also allow people to focus their attention outside themselves, on other people and activities.

But what happens when we can't close the discrepancy gap? Sometimes, of course, we simply are not capable of behaving in accord with our expectations. We might not have the ability, talent, or fortitude. In this case, we may have to adjust our expectations to match our behavior. And sometimes it seems to be in our best interests not to focus on the self at all; to do so may be too painful, or it may get in the way of what we're doing.

In general, however, these discrepancies, if sizable, lead to negative emotions and low self-esteem. As with good matches, the exact nature of the negative emotional response depends on which self-guide we believe we are not matching (Higgins & Tykocinsky, 1992). Higgins, Shah, and Friedman (1997) reported that the larger the differences between the actual and ideal selves, the more dejected and disappointed the individuals felt, but only if they were aware of that difference. In a similar vein, the larger the discrepancy between the actual self and the ought self, the more people felt agitated and tense, just as the theory predicts. Again, this was true only for those people who were aware of the discrepancy. These findings mean that when self-guides are uppermost in people's minds, when people focus on these guides, then the emotional consequences of not meeting the expectations of those guides have their strongest effects. People who indicated, for instance, that they were punished or criticized by their parents for not being the person they ought to be reported that they frequently felt anxious or uneasy (Higgins, 1998).

self-regulation A critical control mechanism used by individuals to match behavior to internal standards of the self or to the expectations of others.

It turns out that discrepancies between what you are and what you would like to be can serve as a very positive motivating force. For example, Ouellete and her colleagues studied the effect of possible selves on exercise. They reasoned that a possible self is a person's idea of what they might become. Now, that might be both good and bad. If I flunk out of college, I might have to work in a factory. That's one possible self. But the image that these researchers were dealing with was one in which individuals were motivated by a possible self that projected an image of significant positive bodily and mental changes that would occur from an exercise program. They asked the individuals to conjure up images of what successful completion of such a program would mean for them. The results showed that these health images had a significant impact on the behavior of these individuals. The possible self motivated them to actually attain that image (Ouellette, Hessling, Gibbons, Reis-Bergan, & Garrard, 2005).

Of course, if we are not aware of the discrepancies between what we are and what we'd like to be or what we should be, the negative emotions that self-discrepancy theory predicts will not come to pass (Philips & Silvia, 2005). Research has shown that when people are not particularly focused on themselves, self-discrepancies go unnoticed. One might imagine that a combat soldier would be untroubled by these psychological differences. However, when self-awareness is high, discrepancies become very noticeable (Philips & Silvia, 2005).

Having positive self-esteem does not mean that people have only positive self-evaluations. They do not. When normal people with positive self-esteem think about themselves, roughly 62% of their thoughts are positive and 38% are negative (Showers, 1992). What is important is how those thoughts are arranged. People with high self-esteem blend the positive and negative aspects of their self-concept. A negative thought tends to trigger a counterbalancing positive thought. A person who learns she is "socially awkward," for example, may think, "But I am a loyal friend." This integration of positive and negative self-thoughts helps to control feelings about the self and maintain positive self-esteem.

But some people group positive and negative thoughts separately. The thought "I am socially awkward" triggers another negative thought, such as "I am insecure." This is what happens in people who are chronically depressed: A negative thought sets off a chain reaction of other negative thoughts. There are no positive thoughts available to act as a buffer.

The Cost and Ironic Effects of Self-Control

We have seen that the self has the capacity to engage in effortful behavior to deal with the external world. Now, it is very likely that most of the time, the part of the self that carries out this executive function does it in an automatic, nonconscious fashion, dealing with the world in neutral gear (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). But when the self has to actively control and guide behavior, much effort is required. Baumeister and his coworkers (1998) wondered whether the self had a limited amount of energy to do its tasks. If this is so, what would be the implications of self-energy as a limited resource?

In order to explore the possibility that expending energy on one self-related task would diminish the individual's ability (energy) to do another self-related task, Baumeister and his coworkers did a series of experiments in which people were required to exercise self-control or to make an important personal choice or suppress an emotion. For example, in one study, some people forced themselves to eat radishes rather than some very tempting chocolates. This, as you might imagine, was an exercise in self-control. Others were allowed to have the chocolates without trying
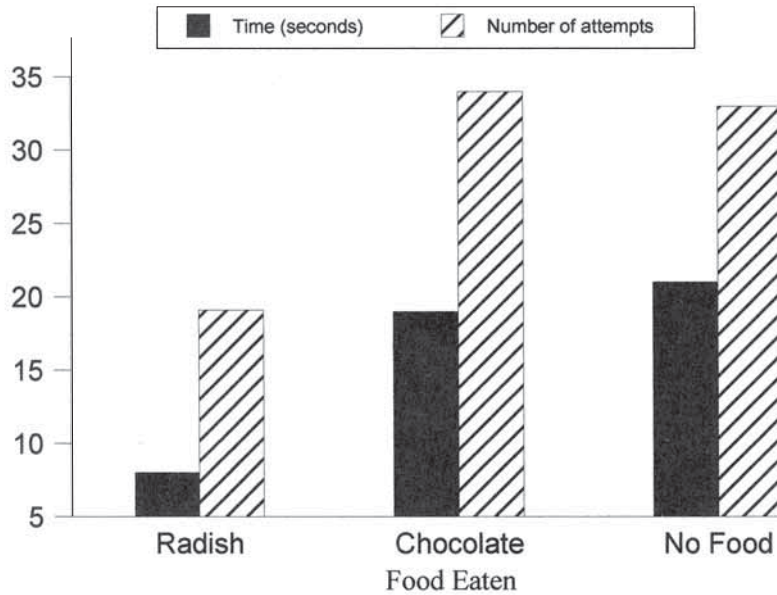
Figure 2.4 Persistence on an unsolvable puzzle as a function of the type of food eaten.

Based on data from Baumeister and colleagues (1998).

to suppress their desires and without having to eat the radishes. All were then asked to work on unsolvable puzzles. As shown in Figure 2.4, those who suppressed their desire for the chocolate and ate the radishes quit sooner on the puzzle than those who did not have to suppress their desire to eat the chocolate. Baumeister argued that the "radish people" depleted self-energy. Baumeister calls this **ego-depletion**, using the Freudian term (ego) for the executive of the self.

We all have had the experience of seeing a particularly distressing movie and walking out of the theater exhausted. Research reveals that if people see a very emotional movie, they show a decrease in physical stamina (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). In a related study, participants were given a difficult cognitive task to perform and were asked to suppress any thought of a white bear. Research shows that trying to suppress thoughts takes much effort (Wegner, 1993). Try not thinking of a white bear for the next 5 minutes, and you will see what we mean. After doing this task, the individuals were shown a funny movie but were told not to show amusement. People who had expended energy earlier on suppressing thoughts were unable to hide expressions of amusement, compared to others who did not have to suppress thoughts before seeing the movie (Muraven et al., 1998). All of this suggests that active control of behavior is costly. The irony of efforts to control is that the end result may be exactly what we are trying so desperately to avoid. We have to expend a lot of energy to regulate the self. The research shows that there are finite limits to our ability to actively regulate our behavior.

ego-depletion The loss of self-energy that occurs when a person has to contend with a difficult cognitive or emotional situation.

Thinking about Ourselves

Self-Serving Cognitions

In Garrison Keillor's mythical Minnesota town of Lake Woebegon, all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average. In thinking so well of themselves, the residents of Lake Woebegon are demonstrating the **self-serving bias**, which leads people to attribute positive outcomes to their own efforts and

self-serving bias Our tendency to attribute positive outcomes of our own behavior to internal, dispositional factors and negative outcomes to external, situational forces.

negative results to situational forces beyond their control. A person typically thinks, I do well on examinations because I'm smart; or I failed because it was an unfair examination. We take credit for success and deny responsibility for failure (Mullen & Riordan, 1988; Weiner, 1986).

There is a long-standing controversy about why the self-serving bias occurs in the attribution process (Tetlock & Levi, 1982). One proposal, the *motivational strategy*, assumes that people need to protect self-esteem and therefore take credit for successes (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). We know that protecting and enhancing self-esteem is a natural function of the self, which filters and shapes information in self-serving ways.

Another way of looking at self-serving biases emphasizes *information-processing strategies*. When people expect to do well, success fits their expectations; when success occurs, it makes sense, and they take credit for it. This bias, however, does not always occur and is not always "self-serving." Sedikides and his colleagues noted that people in close relationships did not demonstrate the self-serving bias. The bias, according to these researchers, takes a gracious turn for people who are close and is reflected in the following quote: "If more than one person is responsible for a miscalculation and the persons are close, both will be at fault" (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Eliot, 1998). What this means is that neither you nor your partner is likely to take more credit for success, nor will you or your partner give more blame to the other for failure. Less close pairs, however, do show the self-serving bias (taking credit for success or giving blame for failure). The closeness of a relationship puts a barrier in place against the individual's need to self-enhance, as revealed by the self-serving bias.

Maintaining Self-Consistency

Another driving motive of the self in social interactions is to maintain high self-consistency—agreement between our self-concept and the views others have of us. We all have a great investment in our self-concepts, and we make a strong effort to support and confirm them. Motivated by a need for **self-verification**—confirmation of our self-concept from others—we tend to behave in ways that lead others to see us as we see ourselves (Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992). The need for self-verification is more than just a simple preference for consistency over inconsistency. Self-verification lends orderliness and predictability to the social world and allows us to feel that we have control (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992).

self-verification A method of supporting and confirming your self-identity.

People seek to confirm their self-concepts regardless of whether others' ideas are positive or negative. One study showed that people with unfavorable self-concepts tended to pick roommates who had negative impressions of them (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989). In other words, people with negative self-concepts preferred to be with people who had formed negative impressions of them that were consistent with their own views of themselves.

Another study tested the idea that people search for partners who will help them self-verify (Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992). Half the participants in this experiment had positive self-concepts, and half had negative self-concepts. All participants were told that they would soon have the chance to converse with one of two people (an "evaluator") and could choose one of the two. Every participant saw comments that these two people had made about the participant. One set of comments was positive; the other set was negative (all comments were fictitious).

People with negative self-concepts preferred to interact with an evaluator who had made negative comments, whereas people with positive self-concepts preferred someone who had made positive comments. Why would someone prefer a negative

evaluator? Here is one participant's explanation: "I like the (favorable) evaluation, but I am not sure that is, ah, correct, maybe. It *sounds* good, but the (unfavorable evaluator)…seems to know more about me. So I'll choose the (unfavorable evaluator)" (Swann et al., 1992, p. 16).

In another study, spouses with positive self-concepts were found to be more committed to their marriage when their mates thought well of them. No surprise there. But in keeping with self-verification theory, spouses with negative self-concepts were more committed to their partners if their mates thought poorly of them (Swann et al., 1992).

People with low self-esteem do appreciate positive evaluations, but in the end, they prefer to interact with people who see them as they see themselves (Jones, 1990). It is easier and less complicated to be yourself than to live up to someone's impression of you that, although flattering, is inaccurate.

Individuals tend to seek self-verification in fairly narrow areas of the self-concept (Jones, 1990). You don't seek out information to confirm that you are a good or bad person, but you may seek out information to confirm that your voice is not very good or that you really are not a top-notch speaker. If your self-concept is complex, such negative feedback gives you accurate information about yourself but doesn't seriously damage your self-esteem.

People not only choose to interact with others who will verify their self-concepts but also search for situations that will serve that purpose. If, for example, you think of yourself as a storehouse of general knowledge, you may be the first to jump into a game of Trivial Pursuit. You have control over that kind of situation. But if you are the kind of person who can't remember a lot of trivial information or who doesn't care that FDR had a dog name Fala, then being forced to play Trivial Pursuit represents a loss of control.

Finally, keep in mind that most people have a positive self-concept. Therefore, when they self-verify, they are in essence enhancing their self-image, because they generally get positive feedback. So for most of us, self-verification does not contradict the need for self-enhancement. But as Swann's research shows, people also need to live in predictable and stable worlds. This last requirement is met by our need for self-verification.

Self-Awareness

Self-verification suggests that at least some of the time, we are quite aware of how we are behaving and how other people are evaluating us. In fact, in some situations we are acutely aware of ourselves, monitoring, evaluating, and perhaps adjusting what we say and do. Although sometimes our behavior is mindless and unreflective, we probably spend a surprising amount of time monitoring our own thoughts and actions. Of course, there are some situations that force us to become more self-aware than others. When we are in a minority position in a group, for example, we become focused on how we respond (Mullen, 1986). Other situations that increase **self-focus** include looking in a mirror, being in front of an audience, and seeing a camera (Scheier & Carver, 1988; Wicklund, 1975).

When people become more aware of themselves, they are more likely to try to match their behavior to their beliefs and internal standards. In one study, two groups of participants—one in favor of the death penalty, the other opposed—had to punish another participant, a confederate of the experimenter (Carver, 1975). Some participants held a small mirror up to their faces as they administered an electric shock (no shock was actually transmitted).

self-focus The extent to which one has a heightened awareness of oneself in certain situations (e.g., when a minority within a group).

When participants self-focused (looked into the mirror), they were truer to their beliefs: Their attitudes and their actions were more in harmony. Highly punitive individuals (those who favored capital punishment) gave much more shock when the confederate made errors than did the less punitive, anti-death-penalty individuals. No such differences existed when participants did not self-focus.

Self-focus means that the individual tends to be more careful in assessing his or her own behavior and is more concerned with the self than with others (Gibbons, 1990). Self-focused individuals are concerned with what is proper and appropriate, given their self-guides. Self-focused individuals probably have an increased need for accuracy and try to match their behavior to their self-guides. That is, they try to be more honest or moral.

Self-focusing may lead to positive or negative outcomes, depending on how difficult it is to match performance with the self's standards and with the expectations of others. Sometimes, for example, sports teams perform better on the road, especially in important games, than they do on their home field or arena. There is a definite home-field advantage—that is, teams generally win more games at home than on the road. However, baseball teams win fewer final games of the World Series than expected when they play on their home fields (Baumeister, 1984). Their performance declines due to the pressure of the home fans' expectations ("choking").

Does audience pressure always lead to choking? It depends on whether the performer is more concerned with controlling the audience's perceptions or with living up to internal standards. If concern centers on pleasing the audience, the pressure may have a negative effect on performance. If concern centers on meeting personal standards, then audience pressure will have less impact (Heaton & Sigall, 1991).

Self-Knowledge and Self-Awareness

Accurate information about ourselves as we actually are is essential to effective self-regulation (Pelham & Swann, 1989). Such knowledge may lead us to adjust our self-guides, to lower our expectations or standards, for instance, in order to close the gap between what we are and what we want to be or think we ought to be. Although it is effortful to adjust our standards, it is important to minimize discrepancies between the actual and the other selves. Small discrepancies—that is, good matches between the actual self and self-guides—promote a strong sense of who we really are (Baumgardner, 1990). This knowledge is satisfying, because it helps us predict accurately how we will react to other people and situations. It is therefore in our best interest to obtain accurate information about ourselves (Pelham & Swann, 1989).

Research confirms that people want to have accurate information about themselves, even if that information is negative (Baumgardner, 1990). It helps them know which situations to avoid and which to seek out. If you know that you are lazy, for example, you probably will avoid a course that promises to fill your days and nights with library research. There is evidence, however, that people prefer some sugar with medicine of negative evaluation; they want others to evaluate their negative attributes a little more positively then they themselves do (Pelham, 1991).

People who are not certain about their attributes can make serious social blunders. If you are unaware that your singing voice has the same effect on people as someone scratching a fingernail on a chalkboard, then you might one day find yourself trying out for the choir, thereby making a fool of yourself. Greater knowledge of your vocal limitations would have saved you considerable humiliation and loss of face.

Managing Self-Presentations

Eventually, we all try to manage, to some degree, the impressions others have of us. Some of us are very concerned about putting on a good front, others less so. Several factors, both situational and personal, influence how and when people try to manage the impressions they make on others. Situational factors include such variables as the social context, the "stakes" in the situation, and the supportiveness of the audience. Personal factors include such variables as whether the person has high or low self-esteem and whether the person has a greater or lesser tendency to self-monitor, to be very aware of how he or she appears to other people.

Self-Esteem and Impression Management

One research study looked at how people with high and low self-esteem differed in their approaches to making a good impression (Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990). People with low self-esteem were found to be very cautious in trying to create a positive impression. In general, they simply are not confident of their ability to pull it off. When presenting themselves, they focus on minimizing their bad points. On the other hand, people with high self-esteem tend to focus on their good points when presenting themselves.

As might be expected, people with low self-esteem present themselves in a less egotistical manner than those with high self-esteem. When describing a success, they tend to share the credit with others. People with high self-esteem take credit for success even when other people may have given them help (Schlenker, Soraci, & McCarthy, 1976). Interestingly, all people seem to have an **egotistical bias**; that is, they present themselves as responsible for success whether they are or are not.

Social context makes a difference in how people present themselves in different ways for people with high and low self-esteem. When participants were told to try to make a good impression in front of an audience, people with high self-esteem presented themselves in a very egotistical and boastful way, pointing out their sterling qualities (Schlenker et al., 1990). People with low self-esteem toned down egotistical tendencies in this high-pressure situation, becoming more timid. It seems that when the social stakes increase, people with high self-esteem become more interested in enhancing their self-presentation, whereas their low-self-esteem counterparts are more concerned with protecting themselves from further blows to the self (Schlenker, 1987).

egotistical bias
The tendency to present yourself as responsible for success, whether you are or not, and the tendency to believe these positive presentations.

Self-Monitoring and Impression Management

Another factor that influences impression management is the degree to which a person engages in **self-monitoring**—that is, focuses on how he or she appears to other people in different situations. Some people are constantly gathering data on their own actions. These high-self-monitors are very sensitive to the social demands of any situation and tend to fit their behavior to those demands. They are always aware of the impressions they are making on others; low self-monitors are much less concerned with impression management.

High self-monitors are concerned with how things look to others. For example, they tend to choose romantic partners who are physically attractive (Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick, 1985). Low self-monitors are more concerned with meeting people with similar personality traits and interests. Most high self-monitors are aware that they fit their behavior to the expectations of others. If they were to take a self-assessment like the one presented in Table 2.2, they would agree with the "high self-monitor" statements (Snyder, 1987).

self-monitoring The degree, ranging from low to high, to which a person focuses on his or her behavior when in a given social situation.

Table 2.2   Self-Monitoring Scale

1. I would probably make a good actor. (H)
2. My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings. (L)
3. I have never been good at games like charades or improvisations. (L)
4. I'm not always the person I appear to be. (H)
5. I can deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them. (H)
6. I can argue only for ideas that I already believe in. (L)
7. I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people. (L)
8. In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else. (H).

Source: Adapted from Snyder and Gangestad (1986).

It is not surprising to learn that high self-monitors are more prone to sex-based discrimination when they are in a position to hire someone in a business situation. When hiring for jobs that are sex-typed (either a male- or female-dominated job), human resource (HR) professionals who were high self-monitors were much more likely to hire the physically attractive job candidate rather than an equally or more qualified less attractive candidate (Jawaher & Mattson, 2005).

Interestingly, this only occurred for a sex-typed job. For gender-neutral jobs, the HR people hired the best candidate regardless of appearance. Again, high self-monitors appear to be heavily influenced by the notion of who "should" fill the job based upon appearance rather than judging individuals on less obvious, but more important internal facts, such as the skill they have to do the job.

Self-Presentation and Manipulative Strategies

When people engage in impression management, their goal is to make a favorable impression on others. We have seen that people work hard to create favorable impressions on others. Yet we all know people who seem determined to make a poor impression and to behave in ways that are ultimately harmful to themselves. Why might these kinds of behavior occur?

Self-Handicapping

Have you ever goofed off before an important exam, knowing that you should study? Or have you ever slacked off at a sport even though you have a big match coming up? If you have—and most of us have at one time or another—you have engaged in what social psychologists call self-handicapping (Berglas & Jones, 1978). People self-handicap when they are unsure of future success; by putting an obstacle in their way, they protect their self-esteem if they should perform badly.

The purpose of **self-handicapping** is to mask the relationship between performance and ability should you fail. If you do not do well on an examination because you did not study, the evaluator doesn't know whether your bad grade was due to a lack of preparation (the handicap) or a lack of ability. Of course, if you succeed despite the handicap, then others evaluate you much more positively. This is a way of controlling the impression people have of you, no matter what the outcome.

self-handicapping
Self-defeating behavior engaged in when you are uncertain about your success or failure at a task to protect your self-esteem in the face of failure.

Although the aim of self-handicapping is to protect the person's self-esteem, it does have some dangers. After all, what are we to make of someone who goes to a movie, rather than studying for a final exam? In one research study, college students negatively evaluated the character of a person who did not study for an important exam (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991). The self-handicappers succeeded in their self-presentations in the sense that the student evaluators were not sure whether the self-handicappers' bad grades were due to lack of ability or lack of preparation. But the students did not think very much of someone who would not study for an exam. Therefore, self-handicapping has mixed results for impression management.

Still, people are willing to make this trade-off. They are probably aware that their self-handicapping will be seen unfavorably, but they would rather have people think they are lazy or irresponsible than dumb or incompetent. A study found that people who self-handicapped and failed at a task had higher self-esteem and were in a better mood than people who did not handicap and failed (Rhodewalt, Morf, Hazlett, & Fairfield, 1991).

Self-handicapping can take two forms (Baumeister & Scher, 1988). The first occurs when the person really wants to succeed but has doubts about the outcome. This person will put some excuse in place. An athlete who says that she has a nagging injury even though she knows she is capable of winning is using this kind of impression-management strategy. People will really be impressed if she wins despite her injury; if she loses, they will chalk it up to that Achilles tendon problem.

The second form also involves the creation of obstacles to success but is more self-destructive. In this case, the individual fears that some success is a fluke or a mistake and finds ways to subvert it, usually by handicapping himself in a destructive and internal manner. For example, a person who is suddenly propelled to fame as a movie star may find himself showing up late for rehearsals, or blowing his lines, or getting into fights with the director. It may be because he doesn't really believe he is that good an actor, or he may fear he won't be able to live up to his new status. Perhaps being rich and famous doesn't match his self-concept. Consequently, he handicaps himself in some way.

The abuse of alcohol and drugs may be an example of self-handicapping (Beglas & Jones, 1978). Abusers may be motivated by a need to have an excuse for possible failure. They would rather that others blame substance abuse for their (anticipated) failure than lack of ability. Like the athlete with the injured leg, they want ability to be discounted as the reason for failure but credited as the basis for success. Because the self-handicapper will be embarrassed if the excuse that clouds the link between performance and outcome is absurd, it is important that the excuse be reasonable and believable. Self-handicapping is thus another way people attempt to maintain control over the impression others have of them.

Self-Handicapping in Academics

Although self-handicapping may have short-term benefits (if you fail at something, it is not really your fault, because you have an excuse in place), the behavior has some long-term drawbacks. Zuckerman, Kieffer, and Knee (1998) did a long-term study of individuals who used self-handicapping strategies and found that self-handicappers performed less well academically because of bad study habits and had poorer adjustment scores. They tended to have more negative feelings and withdrew more from other people than did others who did not self-handicap. As you might have predicted, all of this negativity started a vicious cycle that led to even more self-handicapping.

Edward Hirt and his colleagues at the University of Indiana thought that perhaps self-handicapping was really an impression management technique. That is, people put an excuse in place so that if they fail or just do poorly, people will not attribute the failure to the self-handicapper's ability. If I don't take the practice test offered by the professor and go to a movie the night before the exam, then maybe my poor performance will be attributed to something other than my lack of academic skills. Indeed Hirt, McCrea, and Boris (2003) set up such a scenario and found that while other students did not attribute failure to the student's (lack of) ability, their general evaluations of him were very negative. So the moviegoer's attempt to manage the impressions others have of him at least partially failed.

As Hirt and his colleagues showed in a series of three studies, there are trade-offs when one uses self-handicapping as a strategy. In one sense, it accomplishes the person's goal of avoiding the dunce cap: I did not do well because I am a goof-off but at least I am not stupid. But there are serious interpersonal coasts for self-handicapping. People observing the actions of a student who doesn't study and gets drunk the night before the big test conclude that he is irresponsible or, just as likely, that he is trying to manipulate others' perceptions of his behavior (Hirt et al., 2003).

The Impression We Make on Others

How accurate are we in assessing the impression we convey? In general, most people seem to have a good sense of the impression they make on others. In one study designed to look at this question, participants interacted with partners whom they had not previously met (DePaulo, Kenny, Hoover, Webb, & Oliver, 1987). After each interaction with their partners, participants had to report on the impressions they had conveyed to the partner. The researchers found that the participants were generally accurate in reporting the kind of impression their behavior communicated. They also were aware of how their behavior changed over time during the interaction and how it changed over time with different partners.

Another study also found that people are fairly accurate in identifying how they come across to others (Kenny & Albright, 1987); they also consistently communicate the same impression over time (Colvin & Funder, 1991). People tend to overestimate how favorably they are viewed by other people, however. When they err, it is on the side of believing that they have made a better impression than they actually have.

However, sometimes we can assume that other people recognize how we are really feeling, especially when we wish they could not. It appears, according to research by Thomas Gilovich and his coworkers, that we believe our internal feelings show more than they actually do (Gilovich, Savitsky, & Medvec, 1998). In general, we seem to overestimate the ability of others to "read" our overt behavior, how we act and dress. Gilovich and his colleagues called this the **spotlight effect**, suggesting that we as actors think others have us under a spotlight and notice and pay attention to what we do. This increased self-consciousness seems to be the basis of adult shyness: Shy people are so aware of their actions and infirmities that they believe others are focused (the spotlight) on them and little else. The reality of social life is quite different and most of us would be relieved to know that few in the crowd care what we do or think. For example, in one study, college students wore a T-shirt with the ever-popular Barry Manilow on the front, and the wearers much overestimated the probability that others would notice the T-shirt. The spotlight does not shine as brightly as we think.

spotlight effect
A phenomenon occurring when we overestimate the ability of others to read our overt behavior, how we act and dress, suggesting that we think others notice and pay attention to whatever we do.

Gilovich and colleagues (1998) believe that we have the same preoccupation (that others notice and pay attention to our external actions and appearance) with respect to our hidden, internal feelings. They called this the **illusion of transparency,** the belief that observers can read our private thoughts and feelings because they somehow "leak out." In one of the studies designed to test the illusion of transparency, Gilovich and colleagues hypothesized that participants who were asked to tell lies in the experiment would think that the lies were more obvious than they really were. Indeed, that was the result. In a second experiment, participants had to taste something unpleasant but keep a neutral expression. If, say, your host at a dinner party presented a dish you thoroughly disliked, you might try to eat around the edges for politeness' sake and not express disgust. How successful might you be at disguising your true feelings? The tasters in the Gilovich studies thought that they would not be very successful at all. Instead, observers were not likely to discern that the tasters were disgusted with the food or drink. Again, people overestimated the ability of others to determine their true, internal feelings.

Although most people seem to have a good sense of the impression they make on other people, some do not. In fact, some people never figure out that they are creating a bad impression. In a study designed to look at why some people do not seem to pick up on the cues that they are making a bad impression, individuals were observed interacting with people who had continually made either good or bad impressions (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & McNulty, 1992). Swann and his coworkers found that participants said basically the same generally positive things to both types of individuals. However, they acted differently toward the two types of individuals. They directed less approving nonverbal cues (such as turning away while saying nice things) at negative-impression individuals than at those who made positive impressions.

The researchers concluded that there are two reasons why people who continually make bad impressions do not learn to change. First, we live in a "white-lie" society in which people are generally polite even to someone who acts like a fool. Second, the cues that people use to indicate displeasure may be too subtle for some people to pick up (Swann et al., 1992).

The Life of James Carroll Revisited

In our brief examination of the life and work of best-selling author James Carroll, we had the opportunity to see how the author's personal life—his family, his teachers, and his religion, as well as the momentous social events that occurred during his formative years—shaped and influenced both his personal and social selves. Certainly, these events provided Mr. Carroll with rich materials for his writings, which include 10 fiction and nonfiction books.

illusion of transparency
The belief that observers can read our private thoughts and feelings because they somehow leak out.

Campfire queen
Cycling champion
Sentimental geologist*

Learn more about
Marjon Walrod
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about you. Visit
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Chapter Review

1. **What is the self?**

   The self is, in part, a cognitive structure, containing ideas about who and what we are. It also has an evaluative and emotional component, because we judge ourselves and find ourselves worthy or unworthy. The self guides our behavior as we attempt to make our actions consistent with our ideas about ourselves. Finally, the self guides us as we attempt to manage the impression we make on others.

2. **How do we know the self?**

   Several sources of social information help us forge our self-concept. The first is our view of how other people react to us. From earliest childhood and throughout life, these reflected appraisals shape our self-concept. We also get knowledge about ourselves from comparisons with other people. We engage in a social comparison process—comparing our reactions, abilities, and personal attributes to those of others—because we need accurate information in order to succeed. The third source of information about ourselves is observation of our own behavior. Sometimes, we simply observe our behavior and assume that our motives are consistent with our behavior. Finally, one may know the self through introspection, the act of examining our own thoughts and feelings.

3. **What is distinctiveness theory?**

   Distinctiveness theory suggests that people think of themselves in terms of the characteristics or dimensions that make them different from others, rather than in terms of characteristics they have in common with others. An individual is likely to incorporate the perceived distinctive characteristic into his or her self-concept. Thus, distinctive characteristics help define our self-concept.

4. **How is the self organized?**

   People arrange knowledge and information about themselves into self-schemas. A self-schema contains information about gender, age, race or ethnicity, occupation, social roles, physical attractiveness, intelligence, talents, and so on. Self-schemas help us interpret situations and guide our behavior. For example, a sexual self-schema refers to how we think about the sexual aspects of the self.

5. **What is autobiographical memory?**

   The study of autobiographical memory—memory information relating to the self—shows that the self plays a powerful role in the recall of events. Researchers have found that participants recalled recent events more quickly than older ones, pleasant events more quickly than unpleasant ones, and extreme events, pleasant and unpleasant, more quickly than neutral episodes. Pleasant events that especially fit the person's self-concept were most easily recalled.

6. **What is self-esteem?**

   Self-esteem is an evaluation of our overall worth that consists of both positive and negative self-evaluations. We evaluate, judge, and have feelings about ourselves. Some people possess high self-esteem, regard themselves highly, and are generally pleased with who they are. Others have low self-esteem, feel less worthy and good, and may even feel that they are failures and incompetent.

7. How do we evaluate the self?

We evaluate the self by continually adjusting perceptions, interpretations, and memories—the self works tirelessly behind the scenes to maintain positive self-evaluations, or high self-esteem. Self-esteem is affected both by our ideas about how we are measuring up to our own standards and by our ability to control our sense of self in interactions with others. Positive evaluations of the self are enhanced when there is a good match between who we are (the actual self) and what we think we'd like to be (the ideal self) or what others believe we ought to be (the ought self). When there are differences between our actual self and either what we would like to be or what we ought to be, we engage in self-regulation, our attempts to match our behavior to what is required by the ideal or the ought self.

8. What is so good about high self-esteem?

Researchers have found that while high self-esteem may lead to good feelings and may make people more resourceful, it does not cause high academic achievement, good job performance, or leadership; nor does low self-esteem cause violence, smoking, drinking, taking drugs, or becoming sexually active at an early age.

9. What are implicit and explicit self-esteem?

Implicit self-esteem refers to a very efficient system of self-evaluation that is below our conscious awareness. Implicit self-esteem comes from parents who nurture their children but do not overprotect them. This kind of self-esteem is unconscious and automatic and is less likely to be affected by day-to-day events.

In comparison, the more well-known conception of self-esteem, explicit self-esteem, arises primarily from the interaction with people in our everyday lives. High implicit self-esteem is related to very positive health and social attributes, while explicit self-esteem seems to be a more fragile or defensive self-esteem, which accounts for the emotional reactions that threats to these individuals evoke

10. What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence is a person's ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions. Research indicates that individuals who are emotionally intelligent are more successful in personal and work relationships. These individuals are very aware of their own emotional states, use them as information, and are very good at reading other people's emotions.

11. What is self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory?

According to Abraham Tesser's self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory, the high achievement of a close other in a self-relevant area is perceived as a threat. In response, we can downplay the other's achievement, put more distance between ourselves and the other, work hard to improve our own performance, or try to handicap the other.

12. What is self-verification?

An important driving motive of the self in social interactions is to maintain high self-consistency—agreement between our self-concept and the views others have of us. Motivated by a need for self-verification—confirmation of our self-concept—we tend to behave in ways that lead others to see us as we see ourselves. Self-verification suggests that at least some of the time we are quite aware of how we are behaving and how other people are evaluating us. In fact, when people become more aware of themselves—when they self-focus—they are more likely to try to match their behavior to their beliefs and internal standards.

13. How do we present the self to others?

We engage in impression management, the process of presenting ourselves in certain ways in order to control the impressions that others form of us. People with low self-esteem are cautious in trying to create a positive impression and focus on minimizing their bad points. Those with high self-esteem focus on maximizing their good points. Everyone, however, demonstrates an egotistical bias, the tendency to take credit for successes, whether appropriate or not.

14. What is self-monitoring?

Another factor that influences impression management is the degree to which a person engages in self-monitoring—that is, focuses on his or her own behavior in a given social situation. High self-monitors are very sensitive to the social demands of any situation and tend to fit their behavior to those demands; low self-monitors are much less concerned with impression management.

15. What is self-handicapping?

Self-handicapping involves actions that are harmful but that the person believes may produce some positive outcomes. An excuse is put in place that masks the relationship between performance and ability. It is an attempt to manage the impressions others have of the individual, but in the end, it is self-defeating.

16. How accurate are we in assessing the impression we convey?

In general, most people seem to have a good sense of the impression they make on others. People tend to overestimate how favorably they are viewed by other people, however. When they err, it is on the side of believing that they have made a better impression than they actually have.

17. What is the spotlight effect?

We sometimes assume that other people can recognize how we are really feeling, especially when we wish they could not. This spotlight effect suggests that we think others have us under a spotlight and notice and pay attention to what we do. This increased self-consciousness seems to be the basis of adult shyness.

18. What is the illusion of transparency?

Some individuals harbor the belief that others can read their hidden, internal feelings. This is the illusion of transparency, or the belief that observers can read our private thoughts and feelings because they somehow leak out. Despite this illusion, people usually overestimate the ability of others to determine their true, internal feelings.

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