THE SATURATED SELF

Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life

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duction to the second edition, a thousand miles and a thousand conversations from my seat on the plane from whence I began.

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Mas du Vieux Charron
Le Paradou
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ONE

The Self Under Siege

I had just returned to Swarthmore from a two-day conference in Washington, which had brought together fifty scholars from around the country. An urgent fax from Spain lay on the desk, asking about a paper I was months late in contributing to a conference in Barcelona. Before I could think about answering, the office hours I had postponed began. One of my favorite students arrived and began to quiz me about the ethnic biases in my course syllabus. My secretary came in holding a sheaf of telephone messages, and some accumulated mail, including an IRS notice of a tax audit and a cancellation notice from the telephone company. My conversations with my students were later interrupted by phone calls from a London publisher, a colleague in Connecticut on her way to Oslo for the weekend, and an old California friend wondering if we might meet during his summer travels to Holland. By the morning's end I was drained. The hours had been wholly consumed by the process of relating—face to face, electronically, and by letter. The relations were scattered across Europe and America, and scattered points in my personal past. And so keen was the competition for "relational time" that virtually none of the interchanges seemed effective in the ways I wished.

I turned my attention optimistically to the afternoon. Perhaps here I would find moments of seclusion, restoration, and recentering. No such luck. There were not only two afternoon classes, one rescheduled from the time spent in D.C., but more calls, an electronic-mail dispatch, more students, and a colleague visiting the campus from Chicago. At day's end, should I by chance feel understimulated, my car radio and the cassette

deck awaited the homeward drive. Arriving at home I noticed that the grass was overgrown and the house trim badly needed painting. No time for such matters, as there was also the day's mail, newspapers, and my family eagerly waiting to talk about what they had been doing. There would be messages on the answering machine, additional calls from friends, and the television beckoning with twenty-six channels of escape. But how could I afford to escape with so many unfilled obligations for research papers, letters, and course preparations? In effect, I was immersed in and consumed by social connection, and the results were numbing.

Perhaps teachers are more socially engaged than most people; communication is, after all, central to teaching and research. However, my state of social immersion is hardly unique; in fact, compared to many business and professional people, scholars are fairly insulated. The signs of global immersion are everywhere:

- A call to a Philadelphia lawyer is answered by a message recorded in three languages.
- A business acquaintance complains that his weekly tennis group expanded several years ago from four to six persons because everyone in the group was so often traveling. This year they are adding a seventh.
- I gave a short speech at a birthday party in Heidelberg last year. When I returned to the United States three days later, a friend on the opposite coast called to tell me about the guests' reactions to the talk. He had gotten the gossip two days earlier via electronic mail.
- A newsstand near me offers no less than twenty-five different magazines on computers, word processing, and desktop publishing.
- Over 20 million vacationers from around the globe now visit Disney World each year. (London's *Independent* predicts that by the year 2000 tourism will be the largest industry in the world.)[1]
- A *USA Today* headline, "If you wonder where in the world to eat . . .", is followed by detailed descriptions of top restaurants in seven countries from Europe to Asia.

Lest we forget, not one of these observations could have been made even ten years ago.

I grew up in a small North Carolina town. Except for the junior-class trip to Washington in 1952, most of my high-school classmates had never set foot across the state line. Even Chapel Hill seemed mysterious and

exotic if you lived fifteen long miles away in Durham. Letters were special events in most families I knew; family members might be drawn together for a reading of the precious lines. Long-distance phone calls were so rare that people would talk about them for weeks. Visitors from outside the state acquired the status of virtual royalty; visitors from abroad were almost nonexistent. The local newspaper and the three available radio stations concentrated heavily on local events—farm prices, state politics, the joys and sorrows of the Durham Bulls. If we had one important tie beyond the community, it was to Dixie, land of the proud rebellion, aristocratic gentility, and human letters, our cultural past. The problem was not how to keep up with an incessant parade of passing voices, but rather how to sustain a valued heritage.

Yet even this tranquil existence seems chaotic if we turn the calendar back a few more decades. Recently I spoke with a neighbor who had just celebrated her hundredth birthday. She talked about her childhood, and the joys of a life based on a limited and unchanging set of relationships. As a child she knew virtually everyone she saw each day. Most relationships were carried out face to face, with visits to friends made on foot or by carriage. Calling cards were essential to signal one's intention for connection. She remembered her thrill when her father announced to the family that an apparatus called the telephone would soon be installed—now they would be able to talk to neighbors three blocks away without leaving the house.

The contrast to my typical day at work makes clear that I am the victim (or benefactor) of profound changes that have been taking place throughout the twentieth century. New technologies make it possible to sustain relationships—either directly or indirectly—with an ever-expanding range of other persons. In many respects we are reaching what may be viewed as a state of social saturation.

Changes of this magnitude are seldom self-contained. They reverberate throughout the culture, slowly accumulating until one day we are shocked to realize that we've been dislocated—and can't recover what has been lost. Although some of these effects are directly disruptive, my chief quarry in this book is more subtle and elusive. Specifically, I wish to explore the impact of social saturation on our ways of conceptualizing the human self and related patterns of social life. Our vocabulary of self-understanding has changed markedly over the past century, and with it the character of social interchange. With the intensifying saturation of the culture, however, all our previous assumptions about the self are jeopardized; traditional patterns of relationship turn strange. A new culture is in the making.

CHANGING CONCEPTS OF THE SELF

[Concepts of the self] operate in the individual and in the society as functional realities *which play a key part in helping to fix the bounds of that very human nature of which they are supposed to be a model.*

—David Bohm, *Human Nature as the Product of Our Mental Models*

What is it about our characterizations of self—the ways in which we make ourselves intelligible to each other—that is so critical to our lives? What makes changes in these characterizations important subjects of concern? Consider:

It is a pivotal moment in their relationship. They have enjoyed each other's company for months, but have never spoken of their emotions. She now feels a strong need for self-expression and for clarification of his feelings. But what is she to say? Her vocabulary of self-expression is large enough. For example, she might demurely admit that she is "attracted," "stimulated," "fascinated," or "intrigued." More boldly, she could say she is "infatuated" or "falling in love," or, more riskily, that she is "intoxicated" or "madly passionate." Such terms as "soul," "need," "want," and "lust" are also on the tip of her tongue. But how should she choose at this delicate moment?

The question is all the more important because the fate of the relationship stands in the balance. Each term of self-revelation has different implications for the future. To admit "attraction" is somewhat reserved; it suggests distance and judgments to be made. To say "stimulated" implies a more cerebral future. The terms "fascinated" and "intrigued" are comparatively dynamic, but still not very sensual. In contrast, to say she is "in love" could suggest that she is slightly irrational or out of control. It is also an expression of emotional dependency; to add "passionately so" might drive the man away. Perhaps he only wanted a good time. The terms "soul" and "lust" could carry the relationship in still different directions. Her expressions of self cannot be separated from their social consequences.

In English, we have a sizable vocabulary of emotional expression; but what if various terms were abandoned? What if "in love" were unavailable? If one hopes to move toward a deep and committed relationship, the expression "in love" is very useful. It paints a picture of a significant future, and invites the other to take part. To say that one is "attracted" or "stimulated" or "feeling turned on" simply does not accomplish the same end. In effect, "in love" can achieve a form of relationship not easily available to its competitors. Similarly, the alternative expressions can achieve other ends—such as maintaining distance, or restricting the relationship to the physical level—that "in love" cannot. To abandon any of these terms means to lose latitude of action in social life.

By the same token, if we expand the vocabulary of self-expression, new options for relationships become possible. For example, there is currently no emotional term available in English sufficient for establishing a relationship of periodic passion. If a couple wishes to see each other now and then, but they desire for these occasions to be "deeply moving," they have no easy options for self-expression. The terms "attraction," "stimulation," and the like do not describe a deeply moving interchange. And to say that one is "in love" does not permit periodic absences to pass with indifference. As the vocabulary of self-expression is expanded, so is the potential repertoire of relationships.

The Cambridge philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote that "the limits of language . . . mean the limits of my world."[2] This insight carries special validity for the language of the self. The terms available for making our personalities intelligible—terms of emotion, motivation, thought, values, opinions, and the like—place important constraints over our forms of action. A romantic relationship is only one of an enormous array of instances in which our vocabulary of self insinuates itself into social life. Consider our courts of law. If we did not believe that people possessed "intentions," most of our legal procedures would make little sense. We determine guilt or innocence largely in terms of intent. If you aim at a bear while hunting, and accidentally fell a colleague instead, you will probably feel contrite for the rest of your life, but may face no greater punishment. You didn't "intend" to slay your friend. But if you aim at the colleague and "intentionally" shoot him, you may spend a lifetime in prison. If we were to abandon the concept of intention—arguing, for example, that all our actions are driven by forces beyond our control—we would render the difference in aims irrelevant.

Consider also the domain of education, and the difficulties that would face teachers if they could not speak of students' "intelligence," "interests," "span of attention," or "motivation." Such characterizations of persons are the means by which students are singled out for special attention—both positive and punitive. They form the vocabulary by which students are warned and praised, and indeed, they are crucial to our educational policies. If we did not believe selves to be constituted by such processes as "reason," "attention," and the like, our educational system might collapse for lack of rationale. Systems of democratic governance similarly depend on commitments of the citizens to certain definitions of the self. It makes sense for individuals to vote only if they are presumed to have "powers of independent judgment," "political opinions," and "desires for social good." Without certain shared definitions

of human selves, the institutions of justice, education, and democracy could scarcely be sustained.[3]

The language of the individual self is also woven into virtually all our daily relationships. In speaking of our children we rely on notions such as "feelings," "temperament," "needs," and "wants." In marriage most participants define themselves as having "commitments," "love," "romance," and "trust." In our friendships we make frequent and important use of such terms as "liking" and "respect." Business relations are suffused with words such as "motivation," "incentive," "rational," and "responsibility." The clergy would have a difficult time dealing with their parishioners if they could not speak in terms of "faith," "hope," and "conscience." To put the case more squarely, without the language of the self—of our internal states, processes, and characteristics—social life would be virtually unrecognizable.

THE SELF: FROM THE ROMANTIC TO THE POSTMODERN

The thesis of this book is that the process of social saturation is producing a profound change in our ways of understanding the self. Cultural life in the twentieth century has been dominated by two major vocabularies of the self. Largely from the nineteenth century, we have inherited a *romanticist* view of the self, one that attributes to each person characteristics of personal depth: passion, soul, creativity, and moral fiber. This vocabulary is essential to the formation of deeply committed relations, dedicated friendships, and life purposes. But since the rise of the *modernist* worldview beginning in the early twentieth century, the romantic vocabulary has been threatened. For modernists the chief characteristics of the self reside not in the domain of depth, but rather in our ability to reason—in our beliefs, opinions, and conscious intentions. In the modernist idiom, normal persons are predictable, honest, and sincere. Modernists believe in educational systems, a stable family life, moral training, and rational choice of marriage partners.

Yet, as I shall argue, both the romantic and the modern beliefs about the self are falling into disuse, and the social arrangements that they support are eroding. This is largely a result of the forces of social saturation. Emerging technologies saturate us with the voices of humankind—both harmonious and alien. As we absorb their varied rhymes and reasons, they become part of us and we of them. Social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self. For everything we "know to be true" about ourselves, other voices within

respond with doubt and even derision. This fragmentation of self-conceptions corresponds to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships. These relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an "authentic self" with knowable characteristics recedes from view. The fully saturated self becomes no self at all.

To contrast with the modern and romantic approaches to the self, I shall equate the saturating of self with the condition of *postmodernism.* As we enter the postmodern era, all previous beliefs about the self are placed in jeopardy, and with them the patterns of action they sustain. Postmodernism does not bring with it a new vocabulary for understanding ourselves, new traits or characteristics to be discovered or explored. Its impact is more apocalyptic than that: the very concept of personal essences is thrown into doubt. Selves as possessors of real and identifiable characteristics—such as rationality, emotion, inspiration, and will—are dismantled.

As I shall propose, this eroding of the identifiable self is both supported by and manifest in a wide range of beliefs and practices. The postmodern condition more generally is marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality—to be accepted as legitimate expressions of the true and the good. As the voices expand in power and presence, all that seemed proper, right-minded, and well understood is subverted. In the postmodern world we become increasingly aware that the objects about which we speak are not so much "in the world" as they are products of perspective. Thus, processes such as emotion and reason cease to be real and significant essences of persons; rather, in the light of pluralism we perceive them to be imposters, the outcome of our ways of conceptualizing them. Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The center fails to hold.

Is such talk of "dramatic change" and "disappearance" to be taken seriously? After all, we speak about ourselves today pretty much the same way we did last year, or even twenty years ago. And we can still read Dickens, Shakespeare, and Euripides with a sense that we understand the characters and their actions. Why should we anticipate important changes now, even if we are increasingly saturated by our social surroundings? This question is an important one, and an answer is a necessary prelude to all that follows.

Studies of the concept of self in other cultures and periods can begin

to show us just how fragile and historically pliable our current beliefs and practices may be. We find that there is enormous variety in what people accept as "obviously true" about themselves, and many of our current truisms are surprisingly new. Let's consider some examples of this variety and change.

THE CULTURAL LOCATION OF SELF

Emotional meaning is a social and cultural achievement.
—Catherine Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions*

If there is one message writ large within the annals of anthropology, it is to beware the solid truths of one's own culture. If we contrast our views with those of others, we find that what we take to be "reliable knowledge" is more properly considered a form of folklore. Consider the very definition we hold of a single, autonomous individual. We more or less take it for granted that each of us is a separate individual possessing the capacity for self-direction and responsibility. We grant inalienable rights to individuals—not to families, social classes, or organizations. Our moral system holds single individuals responsible for their actions, and not their friends, families, or professional associates. In our traditional concept of romantic love, the appropriate target is the single individual; to be romantically engaged with several persons simultaneously is thought to be either inconceivable or immoral.

Our view of the individual would be extraordinary in many cultures of the world, however. Consider the Balinese. As the Princeton anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes Balinese culture, the concept of the unique or individual self plays but a minimal role in everyday life.[4] Rather, individuals are considered representatives of more general social categories. It is the social category that is of critical significance in cultural life. In Geertz's terms, "It is not . . . their existence as persons—their immediacy and individuality, or their special, never-to-be-repeated impact upon the stream of historical events—which [is] played up, symbolically emphasized: it is their social placement, their particular location within a persisting, indeed an eternal, metaphysical order."[5] In effect, to love or despise, honor or humiliate, someone because of the state of his or her individual mind (feelings, intentions, rationality, etc.) would border on the nonsensical. It is not the personalized individual to whom one relates, but what we in Western culture would view as the depersonalized being.

As pointed out earlier, ways of talk are embedded within forms of

cultural life. Consider, for example, Balinese patterns of naming. In the West, each individual receives at least one name that will identify him or her for a lifetime. But for the Balinese, names are primarily used to designate the kinds of groups to which the individual belongs. Infants do not receive a personal name until 105 days after birth. Such names are used only sporadically to refer to the child, and once the child has reached adolescence these names virtually disappear from use. Other names dominate, which primarily designate social status. For example, there are names to designate the individual's placement in the birth order—Wayan for the firstborn, Nioman for the second, and so on. There are also kinship names that define the generational group to which one belongs. In this system one receives the same name as all one's siblings and cousins within a given generation.

One of the most prominent designations is the "tekonym," a name that may change several times during one's life. An adult who becomes a parent is called "Father of . . ." or "Mother of . . ." (followed by the child's name). Later, when a grandchild is born, the person's name changes again, to "Grandfather of . . ." or "Grandmother of . . .", and once again if a great-grandchild is born. Meanwhile, status titles indicate one's social standing, and public titles indicate one's function or service in the community (e.g., postman, teamster, politician).

This socially embedded view of the self is also revealed in relationship patterns. Because the social group is central, relationships tend to be general and formal rather than specific and personal. We in Western culture, concerned with the unique character of individuals, typically pay more attention to the momentary character of our friends. We are continuously concerned with how they are "feeling," what they are "thinking," and so on. For us friendships often seem open-ended and suffused with potential; we cannot always predict where a friendship will lead. In contrast, among the Balinese, relationships are viewed as links between representatives of different groups or classes. As a result the relationships tend to be ritualized. Particular patterns of action may be repeated again and again, with only the cast of characters changing. Unpredictable outcomes are unlikely. Westerners carry out similar rituals with people in professional roles—doctor, garage mechanic, or waiter. (Yet even these ritualized relationships cannot always withstand the intense pressures toward personalization, as when a waiter introduces himself by first name to a table.) In Bali, according to Geertz, even the closest friendships may be conducted like well-mannered ceremonies.

Not only the emphasis on individuality varies from one culture to another.[6] So do assumptions about the makeup of a person. Consider the emotions, for example. In Western culture our emotional expressions can

usually be sorted into less than a dozen broad categories. We can legitimately say, for example, that we feel anger, disgust, fear, joy, love, sadness, shame, or surprise (or we can use various alternative terms, such as saying "depressed" instead of "sad").[7] Further, we treat these emotional terms as representing biological givens. Thus we say that people inherit the capacities for these emotional feelings, and that we can literally "see" the expressions of these emotions in people's faces. Any adult who did not have the capacity to feel sadness, fear, or love, for example, would be considered psychopathic or autistic.

Yet when we look at other cultures, we become painfully aware of just how parochial these "biological givens" are. In some cultures, investigators find it difficult to locate any terms referring to "inner states." In others, the vocabulary is very limited, including only one or two terms that Westerners would identify as emotions. In still other cultures, many *more* terms are used to depict emotions than are found in the West. And often when another culture does have terms that seem to correspond to our own, their meanings turn out to be quite different.[8]

Consider the Ilongot people of the northern Philippines, for whom one of the most basic ingredients of the mature male psyche is a state called *liget*. As the anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo describes liget, it is roughly akin to the English terms "energy," "anger," and "passion."[9] However, the state is not identical to any of these, nor to any combination thereof. Liget is a distinct possession of the male, and we in Western culture could scarcely imagine its expression among us. A young Ilongot possessed by liget might weep or sing or sulk. He might stop eating certain foods, slash baskets, yell, spill water, or demonstrate irritation or distraction. And, when liget has reached its peak, he will be moved to slice the head from a neighboring tribesman. Having taken a head, he feels his liget transformed and transforming. His resources of energy are increased, he feels passion for the opposite sex, and he acquires a deepened sense of knowledge. Surely it is difficult for us to imagine that liget is basic to the biological constitution—that it somehow lurks within us, seeking expression, inhibited only by artificial layers of civilization. Liget appears to be a construction of the particular Ilongot culture, just as feelings of romantic love, anxiety, and envy are constructions of our own.

THE SELF THROUGH HISTORY

Like anthropologists, historians take a keen interest in people's conceptions of the self. For many historians, such explorations have an emancipatory aim. If we can comprehend the origins and changes in our

Western beliefs about the person, they reason, we can soften the grip of what is currently taken for granted. If what we take to be solid facts about human beings turn out to be by-products of a particular social condition, then such "facts" are more appropriately considered opinions or myths. Thus, they hope, historical awareness might release us from the prisons of our current conventions of understanding.[10]

Many historians find the Western preoccupation with the unique individual both extreme and restricting. How did our culture come to place such importance on individual selves? In one fascinating account of this development, John Lyons proposes that the centrality of the self was largely a product of late-eighteenth-century thought.[11] Before then, people tended to view themselves as exemplars of more general categories—members of a religion, class, profession, or the like. Even the soul, argues Lyons, was not quite an individual's possession. It was fabricated by God and placed in mortal flesh for a transient period. In the late eighteenth century, however, common sensibilities began to change. The evidence can be found in such diverse sources as philosophical treatises, biographies, confessional records, and tales of rogues and adventurers.

Consider the reports made of travels to exotic climes. For centuries, argues Lyons, a traveler reported what anyone would be expected to report, speaking as a representative of everyone. But in the late eighteenth century, the manner of reporting starts to change. When Boswell describes his visit to the Hebrides, for example, he is attracted to the special details that move him personally. He writes at length of his individual feelings and of why he is moved. It was during this period that people began to "take a walk to take a walk—not especially to get somewhere. . . . Seeing became a confirmation of the self rather than a process by which the outer world of nature was understood."[12] This is the conception of the individual self that has by now seeped into virtually every corner of Western cultural life.

At the same time, the set of characteristics attributed to individual selves has also changed dramatically over the centuries. Once-cherished characteristics have vanished, and new ones have come to take their place. Consider the child, for example. Today we believe that babies are born with the ability to feel many emotions, but their capacities for rational thought are not yet developed. Western parents tend to believe that their children don't demonstrate the capacity for abstract thought until they are over three years old. In effect, we believe that the child's mind must "mature."[13] Yet as the historian Philippe Aries demonstrates, for much of Western history—roughly until the seventeenth century—childhood was not considered to be a state of mental immaturity, a state somehow dif-

ferent or separated from that of the adult.[14] Instead, the Dutch psychologist J. H. van den Berg proposes, the child was more typically viewed as an adult in miniature—fully in possession of adult faculties, but simply without the experience to make full use of them.[15] Thus Montaigne wrote in his essay on children's education that philosophical discourse should be introduced at a very early age—in fact, "from the moment it is weaned the child will, in any case, be able to understand philosophical discourses."[16] Later, John Locke stated that children desire "gentle persuasion in reasoning," for "they understand it as early as they do language; and if I misobserve not, they like to be treated as rational creatures."[17] These understandings of the child corresponded to patterns of conduct. Montaigne wrote of a friend's child who read Greek, Latin, and Hebrew when he was six years old, and translated Plato into French before he was eight. Goethe was able to write in German, French, Greek, and Latin before he was eight. In the upper classes, reading and writing were common by the age of four; children were able to read the Bible and discuss complex matters of moral principle before they were five. Looking through the lens of contemporary beliefs about the "maturing mind," such abilities border on the incomprehensible.

Other historical work has examined cultural beliefs about motherhood. In modern times we tend to view mothers' love for their children as a basic aspect of human nature, much like our belief in a genetic basis for emotion. When a mother fails to demonstrate love for her children—abandoning them or selling them, for example—she seems something less than human. (Interestingly, if a man abandons his wife and children we generally do not see it as "unnatural.") And yet, argues the French historian Elisabeth Badinter, it was not always so.[18] In France and England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the child lived a marginal existence. Writings of the time demonstrate a pervasive antipathy for the infant, who was born in sin, often a burdening nuisance, and at best a plaything or potential laborer. For the poor, with no significant means of birth control or abortion, abandoning a child was common practice. Clearly the concept of "maternal instinct" would have seemed alien.

Indeed, in many circles, even nursing was considered a waste of the mother's time. If a family was rich enough, the newborn child was often sent to the countryside for care by a wet nurse. Because of the poor care and the insufficiency of the wet nurse's milk, infant mortality was common. Such deaths were seen as routine, and the child replaceable at a later date; family journals show little more concern for a child's death than for the death of a neighbor or even for the family's financial dealings of the day. As Badinter quotes Montaigne: "I lost two or three children during their stay with the wet nurse—not without regret, mind you, but without

great vexation."[19] The concept of the mother's instinctive love for the child, concludes Badinter, is a recent development in Western history.

LANGUAGE AND ENCUMBERING THE SELF

Today common sense tells us that people differ in their reasoning abilities, that emotions are powerful forces in people's lives, and that it is important to be aware of a person's true intentions. Such assumptions represent what we take to be true and universal about human selves. Yet, as both cultural and historical study indicates, all such assumptions about "what we are really like" are precariously placed—products of a certain culture at a certain point in its history. Can our present conventions hold up against the forces of twentieth-century technologies that are set against all "truths about the self"?

At this point the skeptic may still reply, "Yes, such variations in belief and practice may be found, but Western cultural history is long, and our traditions of speaking and acting are deeply entrenched. Major change is unlikely." A final illustration, however, should indicate the rapidity with which change can occur—even within the present century. Consider the following characterizations of the self:

Low self-esteem	Authoritarian
Externally controlled	Repressed
Depressed	Burned out
Stressed	Paranoid
Obsessive-compulsive	Bulimic
Sadomasochistic	Midlife crisis
Identity crisis	Anxious
Antisocial personality	Anorexic
Seasonal affective disorder	Kleptomaniac
Self-alienated	Psychopathic deviate
Post-traumatic stress disorder	Voyeuristic

These are all terms commonly used by the mental-health professions and a significant sector of the public in making sense of the self. Two features of the list are especially noteworthy. First, all these terms have come into common usage only within the present century (several only within the past decade). Second, they are all terms of mental deficit. They discredit the individual, drawing attention to problems, shortcomings, or incapacities. To put it more broadly, the vocabulary of human deficit has undergone enormous expansion within the present century. We have