CHAPTER

5

The Self

You've just taken your first exam in your first psychology course. Expecting a B, you're looking forward to getting your test back. Your instructor hands you your exam and you look at your grade: a C–. You're stunned! How could this be? You thought that you knew the material really well. As you sit there taking in this disappointing and disturbing turn of events, you anxiously search for possible explanations for your performance. "Did I read the chapters carefully? Do I need to revamp my study methods? Is this course a lot harder than I had thought? Am I really 'college material'?" As you leave the class, your mood has shifted from up to down. You're feeling dejected and already worrying about how you'll do on the next exam. This scenario illustrates the process of self-perception and the effect it can have on emotions, motivation, and goal setting. People engage in this process constantly to understand the causes of their own behavior.

In this chapter, we highlight the self and its role in adjustment. We start off by looking at two major components of the self: self-concept and self-esteem. Then we review some key principles of the self-perception process. Next, we turn to the important topic of self-regulation. Finally, we focus on how people present themselves to others. In the Application, we offer some suggestions for building self-esteem.

Self-Concept

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- *Describe some key aspects of the self-concept.*
- *Cite two types of self-discrepancies and describe their effects.*
- *Describe two ways of coping with self-discrepancies.*
- *Discuss important factors that help form the self-concept.*
- *Discuss how individualism and collectivism influence the self-concept.*

If you were asked to describe yourself, what would you say? You'd probably start off with some physical attributes such as "I'm tall," "I'm of average weight," or "I'm blonde." Soon you'd move on to psychological characteristics: "I'm friendly," "I'm honest," "I'm reasonably intelligent," and so forth. How did you develop these beliefs about yourself? Have your self-views changed over time? Read on.

The Nature of the Self-Concept

Although we usually talk about the self-concept as a single entity, it is actually a multifaceted structure (Mischel & Morf, 2003). That is, the ***self-concept* is an organized collection of beliefs about the self.** These beliefs, also called *self-schemas,* are developed from past experience and are concerned with one's personality traits, abilities, physical features, values, goals, and social roles (Campbell, Assanand, & DiPaula, 2000). People have self-schemas on dimensions that are important to them, including both strengths and weaknesses. Figure 5.1 depicts the self-concepts of two hypothetical individuals.

Stanford University News Service, photo by L. A. Cicero

Hazel Markus

Each of these self-schemas is characterized by relatively distinct thoughts and feelings. For instance, you might have considerable information about your social skills and feel quite self-assured about them but have limited information and less confidence about your physical skills. Current thinking is that only a portion of the total self-concept operates at any one time. The self-concept that is accessible at any given moment has been termed the *working self-concept* by Hazel Markus, a leading researcher in this area (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Self-schemas are dynamic and play a major role in processing self-relevant information. For example, when a particular self-schema is operating, its attendant thoughts and feelings strongly influence the way individuals process information about that aspect of the self. When you're in class, for example, the beliefs and emotions associated with your intellectual self-schema will influence how you process information you receive in that setting. Similarly, when you're at a party (or thinking about a party when you're in class!), you tap into your social self-schema and the thoughts and feelings related to it.

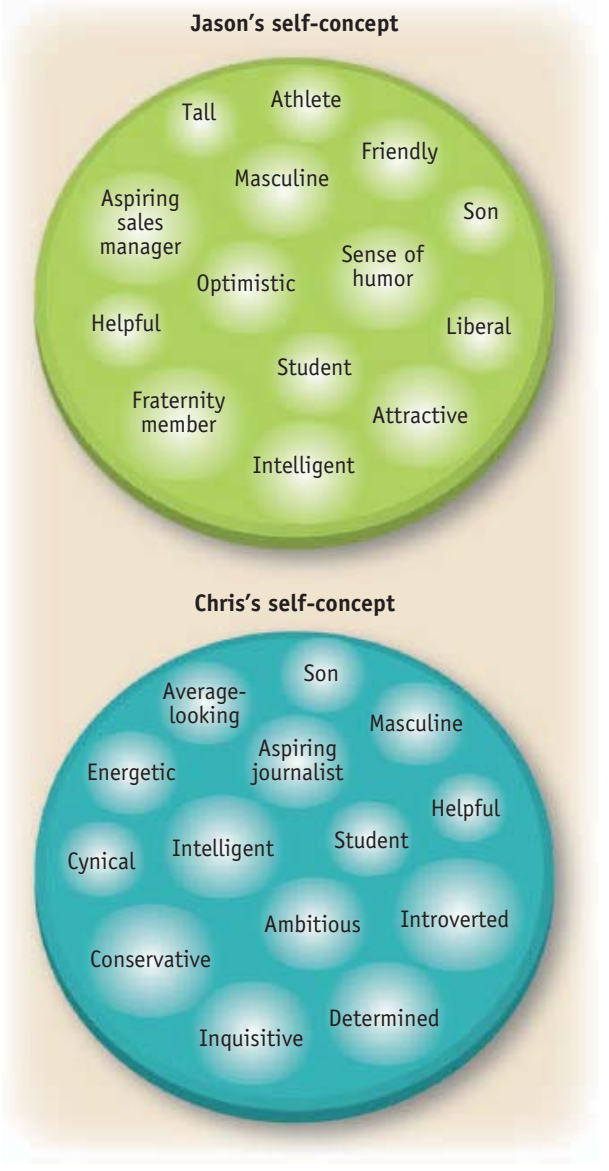


FIGURE 5.1

The self-concept and self-schemas. The self-concept is composed of various self-schemas, or beliefs about the self. Jason and Chris have different self-concepts, in part, because they have different self-schemas.

Beliefs about the self influence not only current behavior but also future behavior. ***Possible selves*** **refer to one's conceptions about the kind of person one might become in the future** (Markus & Nurius, 1986). If you have narrowed your career choices to personnel manager and psychologist, these represent two possible selves in the career realm. Possible selves are developed from past experiences, current behavior, and future expectations. They make people attentive to goal-related information and role models and mindful of the need to practice goal-related skills. As such, they help individuals not only to envision desired future goals but also to achieve them (Cross & Markus, 1991). Interestingly, it has been found that, for individuals who have experienced traumatic events, psychological adjustment is best among those who are able to envision a variety of positive selves (Morgan & Janoff-Bulman, 1994). Sometimes, possible selves are negative and represent what you fear you might become—such as an alcoholic like Uncle George or an adult without an intimate relationship like your next-door neighbor. In this case, possible selves function as images to be avoided.

Individuals' beliefs about themselves are not set in concrete—but neither are they easily changed. People are strongly motivated to maintain a consistent view of the self across time and situations. Thus, once the self-concept is established, the individual has a tendency to preserve and defend it. In the context of this stability, however, self-beliefs do have a certain dynamic quality (Markus & Wurf, 1987). They seem to be most susceptible to change when people shift from an important and familiar social setting to an unfamiliar one—for example, when moving off to college or to a new city for one's first "real" job. This finding clearly underscores the social foundations of the self-concept.

WEB LINK 5.1

Research Sources: Concepts of Person and Self
Over the past century psychologists, philosophers, and many others have wondered what we mean when we use terms like "person" and "self." Professor Shaun Gallagher of the University of Central Florida's Philosophy and Cognitive Science Department provides visitors with a variety of resources to explore these concepts.

Self-Discrepancies

Some people perceive themselves pretty much the way they'd like to see themselves. Others experience a gap between what they actually see and what they'd like to see. For example, Nathan describes his actual self as "shy" but his ideal self as "outgoing." **Such mismatching of self-perceptions is termed *self-discrepancy*.** According to E. Tory Higgins (1987), individuals have several self-perceptions: an *actual self* (qualities you believe you *actually* possess), an *ideal self* (characteristics you would *like* to have), and an *ought self* (traits you believe you *should* possess). The ideal and ought selves serve as personal standards or self-guides that direct behavior.

Self-Discrepancies and Their Effects

According to Higgins, when people live up to their personal standards (ideal or ought selves), they experience high self-esteem; when they don't meet their own expectations, their self-esteem suffers (Moretti & Higgins, 1990). In addition, he says, certain types of self-discrepancies are associated with specific emotions (see Figure 5.2). One type of self-discrepancy occurs when the *actual* self is at odds with the *ideal* self. Such instances trigger *dejection-related* emotions (sadness, disappointment). As actual-ideal discrepancies outnumber actual-ideal congruencies, sadness increases and cheerfulness decreases (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997). Consider Tiffany's situation: She knows that she's attractive, but she is also overweight and would like to be thinner. Self-discrepancy theory predicts that she would feel dissatisfied and dejected. Interestingly, research has shown an association between discrepant actual/ideal views of body shape and eating disorders (Strauman et al., 1991).

A second type of discrepancy involves a mismatch between *actual* and *ought* selves. Let's say you don't stay in touch with your grandparents as often as you feel you should. According to Higgins, actual/ought self-

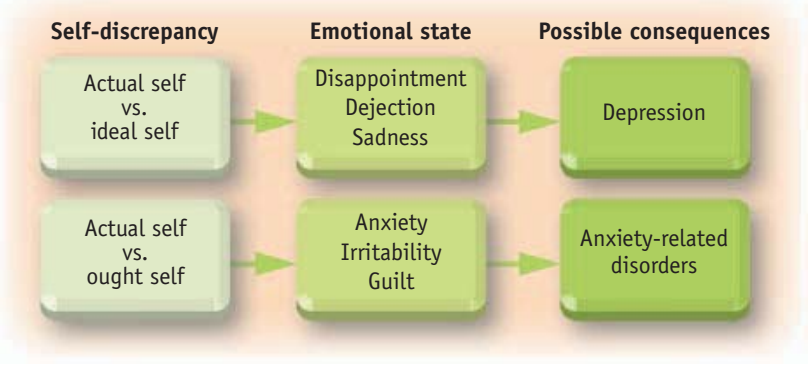


FIGURE 5.2

Types of self-discrepancies, their effects on emotional states, and possible consequences. According to E. Tory Higgins (1989), discrepancies between actual and ideal selves produce disappointment and sadness, whereas discrepancies between actual and ought selves result in irritability and guilt. Such self-discrepancies can make individuals vulnerable to more serious psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety-related disorders.

discrepancies produce *agitation-related* emotions (irritability, anxiety, and guilt). As actual-ought discrepancies outnumber actual-ought congruencies, anxiety increases and calm emotions decrease (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997). Extreme discrepancies of this type can result in anxiety-related psychological disorders.

Everyone experiences self-discrepancies, yet most people manage to feel reasonably good about themselves. How is this possible? Three factors seem to be important: the amount of discrepancy you experience, your awareness of the discrepancy, and whether the discrepancy is actually important to you (Higgins, 1999). Thus, a pre-med major who gets a C in calculus will probably feel a lot worse than an English major who gets a C in the course.

Although people use both ideal and ought selves as personal standards, they usually rely on just one of these self-guides. These "preferences" are rooted in parent-child interactions and individual temperament (Higgins, 1987). If Kyle's parents typically communicate with him in terms of what they would *like* him to do, he will probably develop a strong *ideal* self-guide. If their communications usually take the form of what they think he *ought* to do, Kyle will probably develop a strong *ought* self-guide.

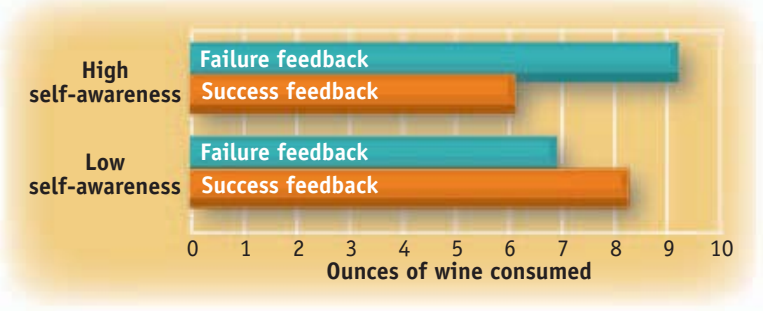
One study took a closer look at self-guide "preferences." The researchers first tested college students to determine their temperament and the self-guides (ideal or ought) students "preferred" (Manian, Strauman, & Denney, 1998). Then they asked participants to recall the parenting style their parents used. A preference for the ideal self-guide was strongly associated with a positive temperament and parental warmth, while a preference for the ought self-guide was strongly associated with a negative temperament and parental rejection. Of course, a retrospective study can't show that parenting style determines self-guide preferences, but the results are interesting. Other researchers report that "ideals" look for opportunities to advance their aspirations, while "oughts" keep an eye out for obstacles to their goals to avoid possible failures (Dweck, Higgins, & Grant-Pillow, 2003). Thus, self-guides can determine the types of goals you pursue and the way you pursue them.

Coping with Self-Discrepancies

Can individuals do anything to blunt the negative emotions and blows to self-esteem associated with self-discrepancies? Yes! For one thing, people can *change their behavior* to bring it more in line with their ideal or ought selves. For instance, if your ideal self is a person who gets above-average grades and your actual self just got a D on a test, you can study more effectively for the next test to improve your grade. But what about the times you can't match your ideal standards? Perhaps you had your heart set on making the varsity tennis team, but didn't make the cut. Maybe you had planned to go to medical school, but barely managed to eek out C's in your science courses. One way to ease the discomfort associated with such discrepancies is to bring your ideal self a bit more in line with your actual abilities. Another option is to *blunt your self-awareness.* You can do so by avoiding situations that increase your self-awareness—you don't go to a party if you expect to spend a miserable evening talking to yourself.

Some people use alcohol to blunt self-awareness. In one study, college students were first put into either a high or a low self-awareness group based on test scores (Hull & Young, 1983). Then, both groups were given a brief version of an intelligence test as well as false feedback on their test performance. Half of the high self-awareness group were told that they had done quite well on the test and the other half were told that they had done quite poorly. Next, supposedly as part of a separate study, these participants were asked to taste and evaluate various wines for 15 minutes. The experimenters predicted that the high self-awareness participants who had been told that they had done poorly on the IQ test would drink more than the other groups, and this is precisely what the study found (see Figure 5.3). Those who couldn't escape negative information about themselves drank more alcohol to reduce their self-awareness. Similarly, in the real world, it has been found that alcoholics who have high self-awareness and who experience negative or painful life events relapse more quickly and completely (Hull, Young, & Jouriles, 1986).

Heightened self-awareness doesn't *always* make people focus on self-discrepancies and negative aspects of the self. If that were true, most people would feel a lot worse about themselves than they actually do. As



● FIGURE 5.3

Self-awareness and alcohol consumption. Individuals who were high in self-awareness drank significantly more wine in a 15-minute period if they believed that they had performed poorly on an IQ test than did any other group.

From Hull, J. G., & Young, R. D. (1983), Self-consciousness, self-esteem, and success-failure as determinants of alcohol consumption in male social drinkers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44,* 1097–1109. Copyright © 1983 American Psychological Association. Reprinted by permission of the author.

When people don't live up to their personal standards, self-esteem suffers, and some turn to alcohol to blunt their awareness of the discrepancy.

you recall, self-concepts are made up of numerous self-beliefs—many of them positive, some negative. Because individuals have a need to feel good about themselves, they tend to focus on their positive features rather than their "warts" (Tesser, 2001).

Factors Shaping the Self-Concept

A variety of sources influence one's self-concept. Chief among them are one's own observations, feedback from others, and cultural values.

Your Own Observations

Your observations of your own behavior are obviously a major source of information about what you are like. Individuals begin observing their own behavior and drawing conclusions about themselves early in life. Children will make statements about who is the tallest, who can run fastest, or who can swing the highest. Leon Festinger's (1954) ***social comparison theory*** **proposes that individuals compare themselves with others in order to assess their abilities and opinions.** People compare themselves to others to determine how attractive they are, how they did on the history exam, how their social skills stack up, and so forth.

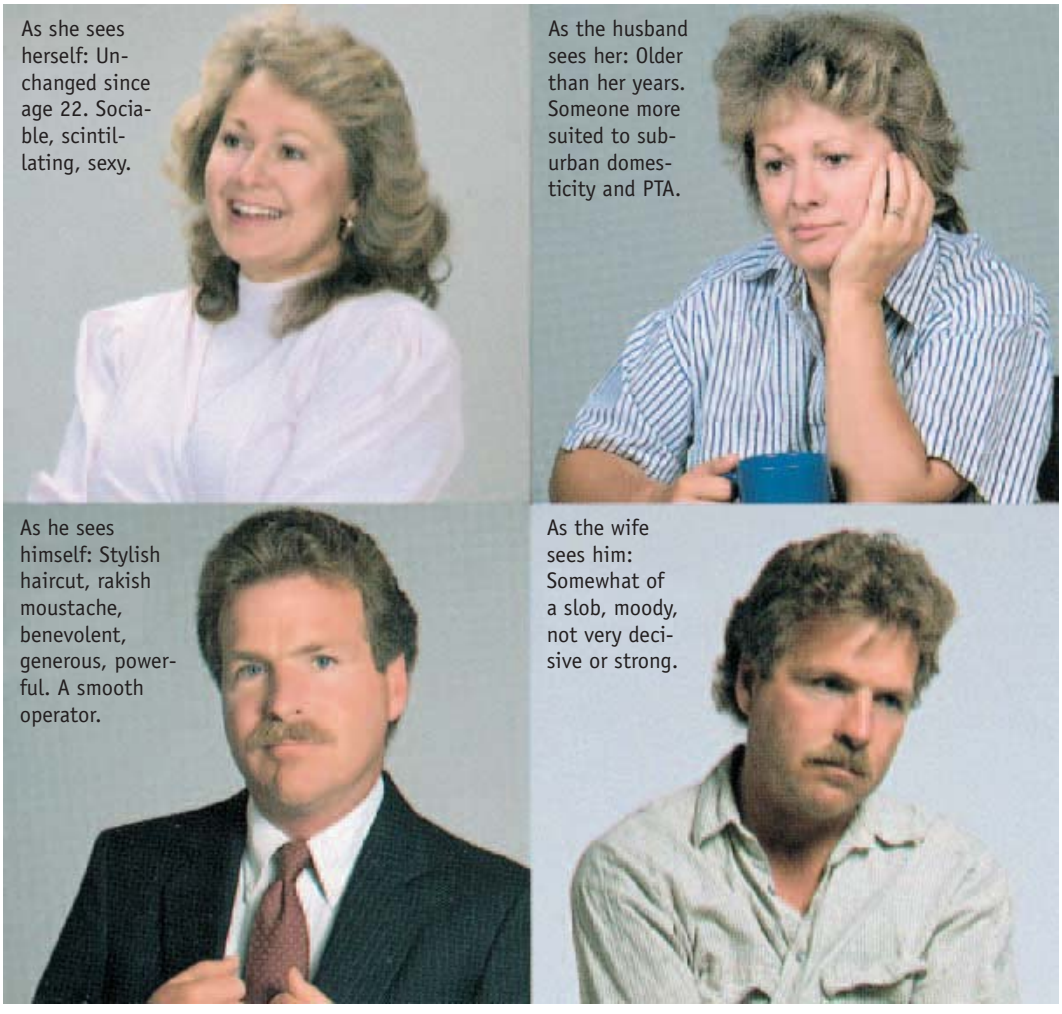
Although Festinger's original theory claimed that people engage in social comparison for the purpose of accurately assessing their abilities, research suggests that they also engage in social comparison to improve their skills and to maintain their self-image (Wood & Wilson, 2003). Furthermore, the reasons people engage in social comparison determine whom they choose for a point of comparison. **A *reference group* is a set of people against whom individuals compare themselves.** For example, if you want to know how you did on your first test in social psychology (ability appraisal), your reference group will be the entire class. On the other hand, if you want to improve your tennis game (skill development), your reference group will probably be limited to those of superior ability, because their skills give you something to strive for. And, if your self-esteem needs bolstering, you will probably compare yourself to those whom you perceive to be worse off than you so you can feel better about yourself.

The potential impact of such social comparisons was dramatically demonstrated in the classic "Mr. Clean/Mr. Dirty" study (Morse & Gergen, 1970). Subjects thought they were being interviewed for a job. Half the participants met another applicant who was neatly dressed and who appeared to be very competent. The other half encountered a competitor who was unkempt and disorganized. All subjects filled out measures of self-esteem both before and after the bogus job interviews. The results indicated that subjects who encountered the impressive competitor showed a decrease in self-esteem after the interview while those who met the unimpressive competitor showed increases in self-esteem. Thus, comparisons with others can have immediate effects on one's self-concept.

People's observations of their own behavior are not entirely objective. The general tendency is to distort reality in a positive direction (see Figure 5.4 on the next page). In other words, most people tend to evaluate themselves in a more positive light than they really merit (Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994). The strength of this tendency was highlighted in a large survey of high school seniors conducted as part of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (Myers, 1980). By definition, 50 percent of the students must be "above average" and 50 percent "below average" on specific questions. However, 100 percent of the

WEB LINK 5.2

Identity and Self
Professor Andy Lock at Massey University in New Zealand has posted the outline of a possible upper-level course that would explore contemporary psychological conceptions of the self and identity development, particularly from the social constructivist and cultural viewpoints. His site includes a full set of bibliographical and topical guides.



● FIGURE 5.4

Distortions in self-images. How people see themselves may be different from how others see them. These pictures and text illustrate the subjective quality of self-concept and people's perception of others. Generally, self-images tend to be distorted in a positive direction.

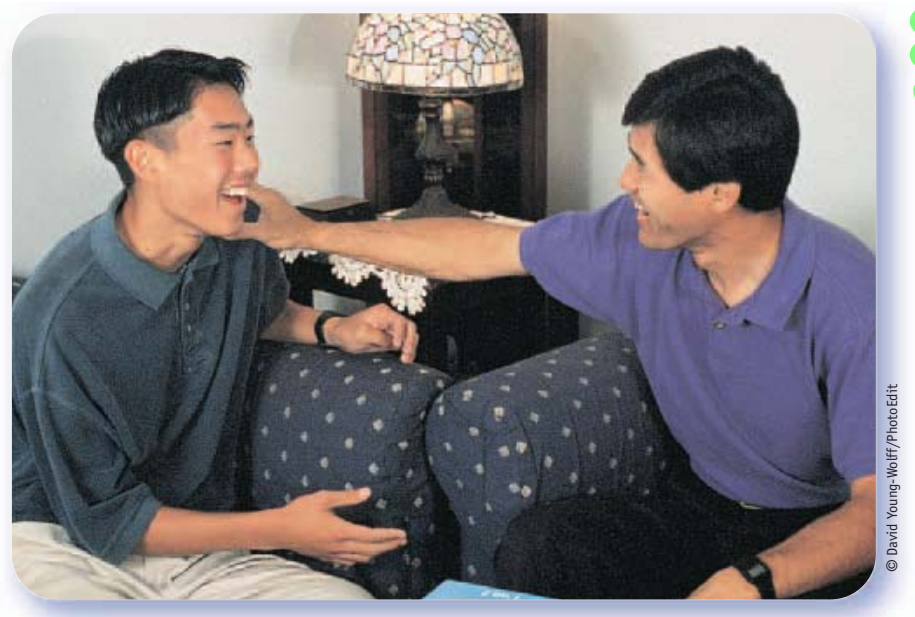
respondents saw themselves as above average in "ability to get along with others." And 25 percent of the respondents thought that they belonged in the top 1 percent!

Although the general tendency is to distort reality in a positive direction, most people make both positive and negative distortions. For example, you might overrate your social skill, emotional stability, and intellectual ability while underrating your physical attractiveness. Also, a minority of people consistently evaluate themselves in an unrealistically negative way. Thus, the tendency to see oneself in an overly favorable light is strong but not universal.

Feedback from Others

Your self-concept is shaped significantly by the feedback you get from important people in your life. Early on, parents and other family members play a dominant role. Parents give their children a great deal of direct feedback, saying such things as "We're so proud of you" or "If you just tried harder, you could do a lot better in math." Most people, especially when young, take this sort of feedback to heart. Thus, it comes as no surprise that studies find a link between parents' views of a child and the child's self-concept (Berne & Savary, 1993; Burhans & Dweck, 1995). There is even stronger evidence for a relationship between children's *perceptions* of their parents' attitudes toward them and their own self-views (Felson, 1989, 1992).

Teachers, Little League coaches, Scout leaders, classmates, and friends also provide feedback during childhood. In later childhood and adolescence, parents and classmates are particularly important sources of feedback and support (Harter, 2003). Later in life, feedback from close friends and marriage partners assumes importance. In fact, there is evidence that a close partner's support and affirmation can bring the loved one's ac-



Whether positive or negative, feedback from others plays an important role in shaping a youngster's self-concept.

tual self-views and behavior more in line with his or her ideal self (Drigotas et al., 1999). For this situation to happen, the partner needs to hold views of the loved one that match the target person's ideal self and behave in ways to bring out the best in the person. If the target person's behavior can closely match the ideal self, then self-views can move nearer to the ideal self. Researchers have labeled this process the *Michelangelo phenomenon* to reflect the partner's role in "sculpting" into reality the ideal self of a loved one.

Keep in mind that people filter feedback from others through their existing self-perceptions. That is, individuals don't see themselves exactly as others see them, but rather as they *believe* others see them (Baumeister & Twenge, 2003; Tice & Wallace, 2003). Thus, feedback from others usually reinforces people's self-views.

Cultural Values

Your self-concept is also shaped by cultural values. Among other things, the society in which you are reared defines what is desirable and undesirable in personality and behavior. For example, American culture puts a high premium on individuality, competitive success, strength, and skill. When individuals meet cultural expectations, they feel good about themselves and experience increases in self-esteem and vice-versa (Cross & Gore, 2003).

Cross-cultural studies suggest that different cultures shape different conceptions of the self (Cross & Markus, 1999; Cross & Gore, 2003). One important way cultures differ is on the dimension of individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede, 1983; Triandis, 1989, 2001). ***Individualism*** **involves putting personal goals ahead of group goals and defining one's identity in terms of personal attributes rather than group memberships.** In contrast, ***collectivism*** **involves putting group goals ahead of personal goals and defining one's identity in terms of the groups one belongs to** (such as one's family, tribe, work group, social class, caste, and so on). Although it's tempting to think of these perspectives in either-or terms, it is more appropriate to view them as points along a continuum. Thus, it is more accurate to say that certain cultures are more or less individualistic (or collectivist) than others rather than seeing them as either individualistic or collectivist.

In comparison to individualistic cultures, collectivist cultures place a higher priority on shared values and resources, cooperation, and concern for how one's actions will affect other group members. Child-rearing patterns in collectivist cultures emphasize the importance of obedience, reliability, and proper behavior, whereas individualistic cultures stress the development of independence, self-esteem, and self-reliance.

A variety of factors influence societies' tendencies to cherish individualism or collectivism. Among other things, increases in a culture's affluence, education, urbanization, and social mobility tend to foster more individualism (Triandis, 1994). Many contemporary societies are in transition, but generally speaking North American and Western European cultures tend to be individualistic, whereas Asian, African, and Latin American cultures tend to be collectivist (Hofstede, 1980, 1983).

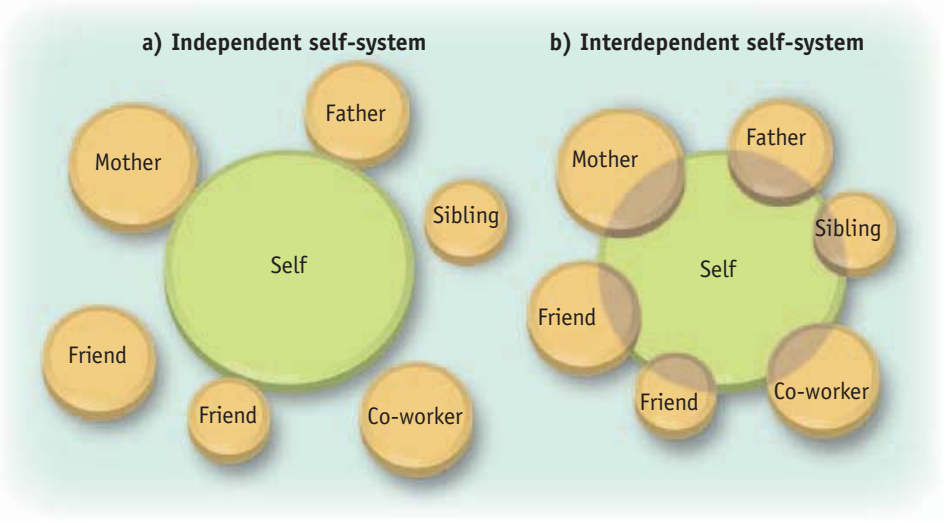
Individuals reared in individualistic cultures usually have an *independent* view of the self, perceiving themselves as unique, self-contained, and distinct from others. In contrast, individuals reared in collectivist cultures typically have an *interdependent* view of the self. They see themselves as inextricably connected to others and believe that harmonious relationships with others are of utmost importance. Thus, in describing herself, a person living in an individualistic culture might say, "I am kind," whereas someone in a collectivist culture might respond, "My family thinks I am kind" (Triandis, 2001). Figure 5.5 (on the next page) depicts the self-conceptions of individuals from these contrasting cultures.

Individuals with an independent view of the self are socialized to maintain their sense of self as a separate person—to "look out for number one," claim more than their share of credit for group successes, and disavow responsibility for group failure. Those with an

● FIGURE 5.5

Independent and interdependent views of the self. **(a)** Individuals in cultures that support an independent view perceive the self as clearly separated from significant others. **(b)** Individuals in cultures that support an interdependent view perceive the self as inextricably connected to others.

Adapted from Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98,* 224–253.



interdependent view of the self are taught to adjust themselves to the needs of the groups to which they belong and to maintain the interdependence among individuals. In this situation, social duties and obligations assume great importance and people are likely to see themselves as responsible for group failures (Cross & Gore, 2003).

Researchers have noted parallels between the self-views promoted by individualistic and collectivist cultures and the self-views of some groups. For example, women usually have more interdependent self-views than men (Cross & Madson, 1997). But don't take this to mean that men are less social than women; instead it means that men and women get their social needs met in different ways (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997). Thus women are usually involved in close relationships involving intimate friends and family members (*relational* interdependence), while men interact in social groups such as clubs and sports teams (*collective* interdependence) (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). These gender differences in self-views may explain other observed gender differences, such as women being more likely than men to share their feelings and thoughts with others. We'll take up such issues in subsequent chapters.

Cultural values are also responsible for various stereotypes that can mold people's self-perceptions and behavior. And stereotypes—about gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and religion—can influence self-conceptions.

Self-Esteem

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- *Describe the implications of self-concept confusion and self-esteem instability.*
- *Discuss how high and low self-esteem are related to adjustment.*
- *Distinguish between high self-esteem and narcissism, and discuss narcissism and aggression.*
- *Discuss some key influences in the development of self-esteem.*
- *Summarize the findings on ethnicity and gender regarding self-esteem.*

One of the functions of the self-concept is to evaluate the self; the result of this self-evaluation is termed *self-esteem.* ***Self-esteem* refers to one's overall assessment of one's worth as a person.** Self-esteem is a global self-evaluation that blends many specific evaluations about one's adequacy as a student, an athlete, a worker, a spouse, a parent, or whatever is personally relevant. Figure 5.6 shows how specific elements of the self-concept may contribute to self-esteem. If you feel basically good about yourself, you probably have high self-esteem.

It has long been thought that individuals with low self-esteem hold strong negative views about themselves. In reality, it seems that the self-views of these individuals are not more negative, but more confused and tentative (Campbell, 1990; Campbell & Lavallee, 1993). In other words, their self-concepts seem to be less clear, less complete, more self-contradictory, and

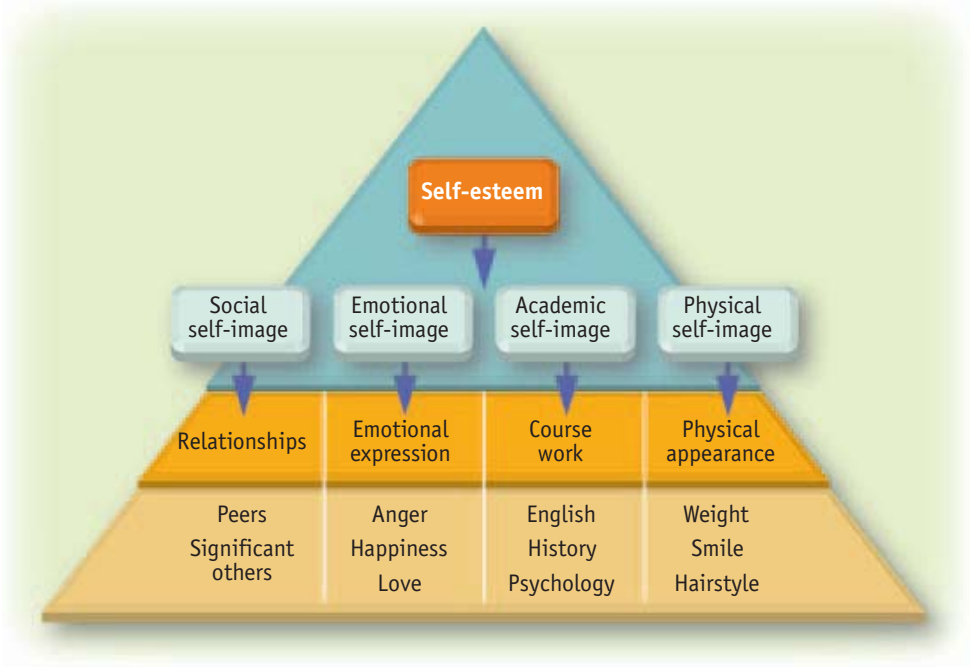


FIGURE 5.6

The structure of self-esteem. Self-esteem is a global evaluation that combines assessments of various aspects of one's self-concept, each of which is built up from many specific behaviors and experiences. (Adapted from Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976)

more susceptible to short-term fluctuations than the self-views of high self-esteem individuals. According to Roy Baumeister (1998), an eminent researcher on the self, this "self-concept confusion" means that individuals with low self-esteem simply don't know themselves well enough to strongly endorse many personal attributes on self-esteem tests, which results in lower self-esteem scores.


Courtesy, Roy Baumeister

Roy Baumeister

Studies generally show self-esteem to be quite stable over time, once past childhood (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003). In other words, if you have high self-esteem today, you are likely to have high self-esteem six months or two years from now. While it's true that baseline self-esteem is stable, it's also true that the ups and downs of daily life can produce short-term fluctuations in self-esteem. Recall your elation when that great-looking person at work asked you out and your distress when you saw that C– staring back at you on your last calculus exam. People vary in the stability of their self-esteem. Those whose self-esteem fluctuates in response to daily experiences are highly sensitive to interactions and events that have potential relevance to their self-worth, and they may even mistakenly view irrelevant events as having significance (Kernis & Goldman, 2003). Thus, in their eyes, their self-worth is always on the line. These tendencies have important implications for adjustment, as you'll see shortly.

Investigating self-esteem is challenging for several reasons. For one thing, it is difficult to obtain accurate measures of self-esteem. The problem is that researchers tend to rely on self-reports from subjects, which obviously may be biased. As you've seen, most individuals typically hold unrealistically positive views about themselves; moreover, some people may choose not to disclose their actual self-esteem on a questionnaire. Second, in probing self-esteem it is often quite difficult to separate cause from effect. Thousands of correlational studies report that high and low self-esteem are associated with various behavioral characteristics. For instance, you saw in Chapter 1 that self-esteem is a good predictor of happiness. However, it is hard to tell whether high self-esteem causes happiness or vice versa. You should keep this problem in pinpointing causation in mind as we zoom in on this fascinating topic.

The Importance of Self-Esteem

Popular wisdom holds that self-esteem is the key to practically all positive outcomes in life. In fact, its actual benefits are much fewer—but, we hasten to add, not unimportant. A recent comprehensive review of research looked at the purported and actual advantages of self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003). Let's look at the findings that relate to self-esteem and adjustment.

Self-Esteem and Adjustment

The clearest advantages of self-esteem are in the *emotional sphere*. Namely, self-esteem is strongly and consistently related to happiness. In fact, Baumeister and his colleagues are persuaded that high self-esteem ac-

tually leads to greater happiness, although they acknowledge that research has not clearly established the direction of causation. On the other side, low self-esteem is more likely than high self-esteem to lead to depression.

In the area of *achievement,* high self-esteem has not been shown to be a reliable cause of good academic performance. In fact, it may actually be the (weak) result of doing well in school. Baumeister and his colleagues speculate that other factors may underlie both self-esteem and academic performance. Regarding job performance, the results are mixed. Some studies find that high self-esteem is linked to better performance, but others find no difference. And it may be that occupational success leads to high self-esteem.

In the *interpersonal realm,* Baumeister and his colleagues report that people with high self-esteem claim to be more likable and attractive, to have better relationships, and to make better impressions on others than people with low self-esteem. Interestingly, these advantages seem to exist mainly in the minds of the beholders because objective data (ratings of peers) do not support these views. In fact, Mark Leary's *sociometer theory* suggests that self-esteem is actually a subjective measure of one's interpersonal popularity and success (Leary et al., 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Regarding romantic relationships, those with low self-esteem are more likely to distrust their partners' expressions of love and support and to worry about rejection compared to high self-esteem individuals. Still there is no evidence that self-esteem (high or low) is related to how quickly relationships end. When it comes to groups, high self-esteem people are more likely to speak up and to criticize the group's approach. And they are perceived as contributing more to groups.

What about self-esteem and *coping*, a key aspect of adjustment? Individuals with low self-esteem *and* a self-blaming attributional style are definitely at a disadvantage here. For one thing, they become more demoralized after a failure experience than those with high self-esteem do. For them, failure contributes to depression and undermines their motivation to do better the next time. By contrast, individuals with high self-esteem persist longer in the face of failure. Second, as can be seen in Figure 5.7, individuals with low self-esteem often have negative expectations about their performance (in a social situation, at a job interview, on a test). Because self-esteem affects expectations, it operates in a self-perpetuating fashion. As a result, they feel anxious and may not prepare for the challenge. Then, if they blame themselves when they do poorly, they feel depressed and deliver one more blow to their already battered self-esteem. Of course, this cycle also works (in the opposite way) for those with high self-esteem. In either case, the important point is that self-esteem can affect not only the present, but also the future.

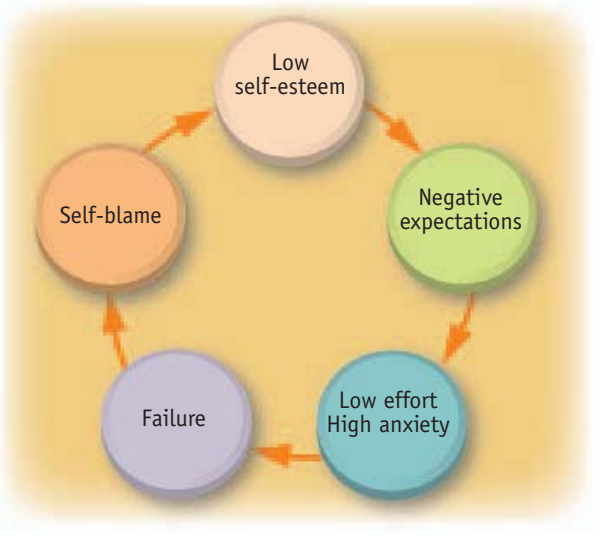


FIGURE 5.7

The vicious circle of low self-esteem and poor performance. Low self-esteem is associated with low or negative expectations about performance. These low expectations often result in inadequate preparation and high anxiety, which heighten the likelihood of poor performance. Unsuccessful performance triggers self-blame, which feeds back to low self-esteem.

Adapted from Brehm, S. S., & Kassin, S. M. (1993). *Social Psychology*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Copyright © 1993 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Adapted with permission.

High Self-Esteem Versus Narcissism

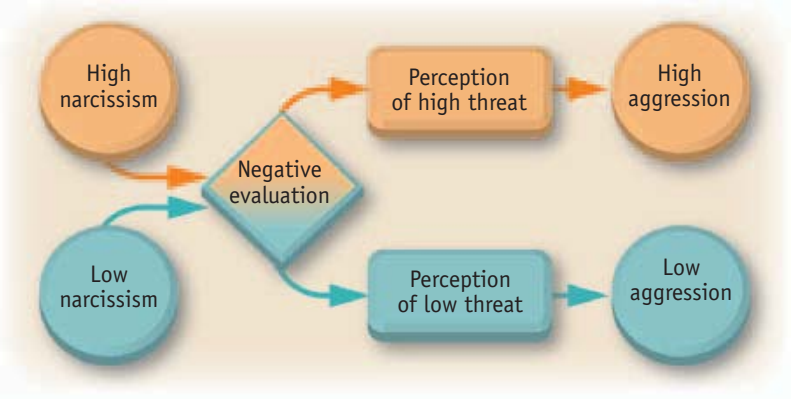
Although feeling good about oneself is desirable, problems arise when people's self-views are inflated and unrealistic. ***Narcissism* is the tendency to regard oneself as grandiosely self-important.** Narcissistic individuals passionately want to think well of themselves and are highly sensitive to criticism (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). They are preoccupied with fantasies of success, believe that they deserve special treatment, and react aggressively when they experience threats to their self-views (ego threats). Those with fragile (unstable) self-esteem also respond in this manner (Kernis, 2003a, 2003b). On the other hand, individuals whose positive self-appraisals are secure or realistic are not so susceptible to ego threats and are less likely to resort to hostility and aggression in the face of them. Note that narcissists' aggression must be provoked; without provocation, they

WEB LINK 5.3

Self-Esteem vs. Narcissism: Implications for Teachers of Young Children
Self-esteem in early childhood can be undermined by well-intentioned, but ill-informed, teachers who misunderstand how self-esteem is developed. Lilian G. Katz explores durable foundations for a child's self-worth in this online book from ERIC, the Education Resources Information Center.

are no more likely to aggress than nonnarcissists (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Twenge & Campbell, 2003).

Baumeister speculates that narcissists who experience ego threats are likely to engage in aggression such as partner abuse, rape, gang violence, individual and group hate crimes, and political terrorism (Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Is there any evidence to support this idea? In a series of studies, researchers gave participants the opportunity to aggress against someone who had either insulted or praised an essay they had written (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). The narcissistic participants reacted to their "insultors" with exceptionally high levels of aggression (see Figure 5.8). Another study compared male prisoners and college men on narcissism and self-esteem. Violent offenders scored significantly higher in narcissism, but their self-esteem scores were similar to those of the college men (Bushman & Baumeister, 2002).



● FIGURE 5.8

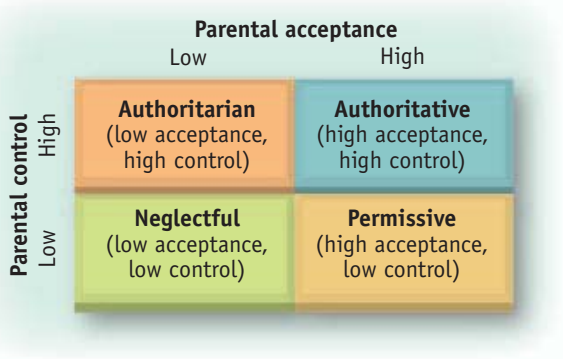
The path from narcissism to aggression. Individuals who score high on narcissism perceive negative evaluations by others to be extremely threatening. This experience of ego threat triggers strong hostile feelings and aggressive behavior toward the evaluator in retaliation for the perceived criticism. Low scorers are less likely to perceive negative evaluations as threatening and, therefore, behave much less aggressively toward evaluators. (Adapted from Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).

These findings have important practical implications (Baumeister et al., 1996). Most rehabilitation programs for spousal abusers, delinquents, and criminals are based on the faulty belief that these individuals suffer from low self-esteem. In opposition to this view, current research suggests that efforts to boost (already inflated) self-esteem are misguided; a better approach is to help such individuals develop more self-control and more realistic views of themselves.

The Development of Self-Esteem

Because the foundations of self-esteem are laid early in life (Harter, 2003), psychologists have focused much of their attention on the role of parenting in self-esteem development. Indeed, there is ample evidence that parental involvement, acceptance, support, and exposure to clearly defined limits have marked influence on children's self-esteem (Felson, 1989; Harter, 1998). Two major dimensions underlie parenting behavior: acceptance and control (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Diana Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1978) identified four distinct parenting styles as interactions between these two dimensions (see Figure 5.9). *Authoritative parenting* uses high emotional support and firm, but reasonable limits (high acceptance, high control). *Authoritarian parenting* entails low emotional support with rigid limits (low acceptance, high control). *Permissive parenting* uses high emotional support with few limits (high acceptance, low control), and *neglectful parenting* involves low emotional support and few limits (low acceptance, low control). Baumrind and others have found correlations between parenting styles and children's traits and behaviors, including self-esteem (Furnham & Cheng, 2000; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Authoritative parenting is associated with the highest self-esteem scores. Authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting, and neglectful parenting are second, third, and fourth in line. These studies were correlational, so they don't demonstrate that parenting style *causes* high or low self-esteem.

Of course, parents are not the only significant others in a person's life: teachers, classmates, and close friends also play important roles. As you would expect, children who perceive they have the most support from significant others have the highest self-esteem, whereas those who have the lowest perceived support



● FIGURE 5.9

Baumrind's parenting styles. Four parenting styles result from the interactions of parental acceptance and parental control.

Adapted from Baumrind, D. (1971). Current patterns of parental authority [Monograph]. *Developmental Psychology, 4*(1, Part 2), 1–103. American Psychological Association. Adapted by permission of the author.

LIVING IN TODAY'S WORLD

Self-Esteem and Threats to Mortality

One consequence of living in a post–9-11 world is anxiety about subsequent terrorist attacks in the United States, as well as elsewhere. As explained in Chapter 2, *terror management theory (TMT)* (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997) is an influential new theoretical perspective asserting that self-esteem plays a pivotal role in people's efforts to deal with the threats to mortality posed by modern terrorism. As you may recall, terror management theory notes that human beings are the only creatures who live with the knowledge that they will die. According to TMT, the instinctive desire to live is juxtaposed against the inevitability of death, which produces the potential for paralyzing terror (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Goldenberg, 2003). To diminish the existential terror resulting from the awareness of their mortality, people are thought to rely on two defenses: the first involves efforts aimed at validating one's cultural worldview, while the second bolsters self-esteem.

First, belonging to a culture supposely reduces the fear of death because it provides a sense of meaning beyond oneself and a sense of belonging to a larger entity that will live beyond one's own lifetime. This idea has considerable support. Compared to participants who are not reminded about their own death, those for whom death is made salient are more likely to endorse negative evaluations of outgroup members (Schimel et al., 1999) and to endorse harsh punishments for those who violate cultural values (Greenberg et al., 1990).

More relevant to the current discussion is the second terror management mechanism, which ascribes great importance to self-esteem. Terror management theory proposes that the principal function of self-esteem is to serve as a buffer against death-related anxiety. The idea is that people can reduce or ward off their fear of death by focusing on thoughts and experiences that help them feel good about themselves. This idea was supported in a series of experiments in which people were shown graphic scenes of death aimed at building anxiety about their own mortality (Greenberg et al., 1992). Prior to viewing these scenes, half of the participants were given positive feedback to temporarily increase their self-esteem. Interestingly, the group that got the "self-esteem boost" showed less anxiety and less defensiveness in viewing the gruesome scenes than did a control group that didn't receive the prior positive feedback.

Thus, terror management theory has generated some interesting hypotheses about the role that self-esteem plays in modulating reactions to rumors and media discussion about the possibility of terrorist attacks. According to TMT, when the specter of future attacks is elevated, people should increase their self-esteem striving. In other words, they will be more likely than usual to engage in behaviors and patterns of thinking that are likely to bolster their self-esteem. TMT also posits that people who are relatively high in self-esteem should be somewhat less vulnerable to the threat of terrorism. That is, they should be less easily rattled and shaken by media speculation about possible terrorist strikes.

Although TMT offers an intriguing perspective on the function of self-esteem, there are alternative explanations as well (Leary, 2004). That said, there is quite a bit of empirical support for the specific idea that high self-esteem counteracts anxiety (Baumeister et al., 2003). This anxiety-buffering function of high self-esteem seems particularly relevant in these troubled times.

have the lowest self-esteem (Harter, 2003). For older children and adolescents, approval from parents and approval from classmates are the two strongest predictors of high self-esteem; by college age, peers have much more impact on self-esteem than parents do (Harter, 1993).

Children (and adults) also make their own judgments about themselves. Perceiving oneself as successful in domains that are highly valued is important in these self-evaluations (Harter, 2003; MacDonald, Saltzman, & Leary, 2003). For instance, if Maria values success in the academic and social areas and sees herself as competent in these arenas, she will have higher self-esteem than Heather, who also values these domains but rates herself low on one or both of them. An important basis for self-judgments is how well one "stacks

Significant others play a key role in shaping self-esteem.

up" against a selected reference group (recall social comparison theory). A classic study reported that pre-adolescents' academic (but not global) self-esteem was affected by the quality of competition they faced in school (Marsh & Parker, 1984). In this study, children from schools in higher socioeconomic class areas with "high-quality" competition (high-ability reference group) were compared to children of similar ability from schools in lower-class areas with "low-quality" competition (low-ability reference group). Surprisingly, the children in the low-quality schools tended to display greater academic self-esteem than children of similar academic ability enrolled in the high-quality schools. This finding that academic self-esteem is boosted by being a "big fish in a small pond" has found widespread support, even in many other countries (Marsh & Hau, 2003). Thus, it seems that individuals compare themselves to others in their specific reference group (other students in their school), not to a general reference group (other students in the country). The fact that individuals with similar talents may vary in self-esteem depending on their reference group demonstrates the importance of social comparison in the development of self-esteem.

Ethnicity, Gender, and Self-Esteem

Because prejudice and discrimination are still pervasive in the United States, people commonly assume that members of minority groups have lower self-esteem than members of the majority group. Research both supports and contradicts this assumption. On the one hand, the self-esteem of Asians, Hispanics, and American Indians is lower than that of whites, although the differences are small (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). On the other, the self-esteem of blacks is higher than that of whites (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Adding gender to the mix complicates the picture even more. White males have higher self-esteem than white females, but minority males have lower self-esteem than minority females (Twenge & Crocker, 2002).

Thus, ethnicity and gender interact in complex ways in self-esteem. The fact of cultural differences in the self-concept may provide some insight here. Recall our earlier discussion of individualism and collectivism. Note that differences on this dimension are found not only between different nations but also within a given country. And here's another fact: High individualism is associated with high self-esteem. What's interesting here is that the pattern of ethnic differences in individualism closely mirrors the pattern of ethnic differences in self-esteem (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). That is, blacks score higher than whites, whites do not differ significantly from Hispanics, and Hispanics score higher than Asian Americans. Thus, the ethnic differences in self-esteem are likely rooted in how the different groups view themselves, based on cultural messages.

Although females are not a minority group, they resemble ethnic minorities in that they tend to have lower status and less power than males. The popular press abounds with reports of low self-esteem in adolescent girls and women (Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994). Is there any empirical basis for this assertion? In a massive undertaking, researchers examined gender differences in self-esteem by statistically summarizing the results of several hundred studies (with respondents ranging from 7 to 60 years of age) as well as the data from three nationally representative surveys of adolescents and young adults (Kling et al., 1999). In both analyses, males scored higher on self-esteem than females, although the differences were small for the most part. The largest difference occurred in the 15- to 18-year-old age group. Also, white girls have lower self-esteem than minority girls do. The fact that white girls have more negative body images than minority girls may be a factor in their lower self-esteem (Twenge & Crocker, 2002).

Basic Principles of Self-Perception

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- *Distinguish between automatic and controlled processing.*
- *Define self-attributions, and identify the key dimensions of attributions.*
- *Explain how optimistic and pessimistic explanatory styles are related to adjustment.*
- *Discuss four motives that guide self-understanding.*
- *Describe four strategies people use to maintain positive feelings about the self.*

Now that you're familiar with some of the major aspects of the self, let's consider how people construct and maintain a coherent and positive view of the self.

Cognitive Processes

What do I want for breakfast? What shall I wear today? You're barely awake and you're already making decisions. People are faced with an inordinate number of decisions on a daily basis. How do they keep from being overwhelmed? The key lies in how people process information. According to Shelley Taylor (1981a), people are "cognitive misers." In this model, cognitive resources (attention, memory, and so forth) are limited, so the mind works to "hoard" them by taking cognitive short-cuts. For example, you probably have the same morning routine—shower, drink coffee, read the paper as you eat breakfast, check e-mail, and so forth. Because you do these things without a lot of thought, you can conserve your attentional, decision-making, and memory capacities for important cognitive tasks. This example illustrates the default mode of handling information: *automatic processing*. On the other hand, when important decisions arise or when you're trying to understand why you didn't get that job you wanted, you spend those precious cognitive resources. This mode is termed *controlled processing*. Ellen Langer (1989) describes these two states as *mindlessness* and *mindfulness*, respectively. In addition to guiding the processing of self-relevant information, these two modes of information processing operate in a variety of social situations, as you'll see in subsequent chapters.

Another way that cognitive resources are protected is through *selective attention*, with high priority given to information pertaining to the self (Bargh, 1997). An example of this tendency is a phenomenon known as the "cocktail party effect"—the ability to pick out the mention of your name in a roomful of chattering people (Moray, 1959; Wood & Cowan, 1995).

Another principle of self-cognition is that people strive to understand themselves. One way they do so, as you saw in our discussion of social comparison theory, is to compare themselves with others (Wood & Wilson, 2003). Yet another is to engage in attributional thinking, our next topic.

Self-Attributions

Let's say that you win a critical match for your school's tennis team. To what do you attribute your success? Is your new practice schedule starting to pay off? Did you have the home court advantage? Perhaps your opponent was playing with a minor injury? This example from everyday life illustrates the nature of the self-attribution process. ***Self-attributions* are inferences that people draw about the causes of their own behavior.** People routinely make attributions to make sense out of their experiences. These attributions involve inferences that ultimately represent guesswork on each person's part.

Fritz Heider (1958) was the first to assert that people tend to locate the cause of a behavior either within a person, attributing it to personal factors, or outside of a person, attributing it to environmental factors. He thus established one of the crucial dimensions along which attributions are made: internal versus external. The other two dimensions are stable/unstable and controllable/uncontrollable.

Internal or external. Elaborating on Heider's insight, various theorists have agreed that explanations of behavior and events can be categorized as internal or external attributions (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967; Weiner, 1974). ***Internal attributions* ascribe the causes of behavior to personal dispositions, traits, abilities, and feelings. *External attributions* ascribe the causes of behavior to situational demands and environmental constraints.** For example, if you credit your poor statistics grade to your failure to prepare adequately for the test or to getting overly anxious during the test, you are making internal attributions.

Whether one's self-attributions are internal or external can have a tremendous impact on one's personal adjustment. As you'll see in Chapter 8, lonely people tend to attribute the cause of their loneliness to internal, stable causes ("I'm unlovable"). Similarly, studies suggest that people who ascribe their setbacks to internal, personal causes while discounting external, situational explanations may be more prone to depression than people who display opposite tendencies (Riso et al., 2003).

Stable or unstable. A second dimension people use in making causal attributions is the stability of the causes underlying behavior (Weiner, 1986, 1994). A stable cause is one that is more or less permanent and unlikely to change over time. A sense of humor and intelligence are *stable internal* causes of behavior. *Stable external* causes of behavior include such things as laws and rules (speed limits, no smoking areas). Unstable causes of behavior are variable or subject to change. *Unstable internal* causes of behavior include such things as mood (good or bad) and motivation (strong or weak). *Unstable external* causes could be the weather and the presence or absence of other people. According to Bernard Weiner (1986, 1994), the stable-unstable dimension in attribution cuts across the internal-external dimension, creating four types of attributions for success and failure, as shown in Figure 5.10.

Let's apply Weiner's model to a concrete event. Imagine that you are contemplating why you just landed the job you wanted. You might credit your good fortune to internal factors that are stable (excellent ability) or unstable (hard work on your eye-catching résumé). Or you might attribute the outcome to external factors that are stable (lack of top-flight competition) or unstable (luck). If you didn't get the job, your explanations would fall in the same four categories: internal-stable (lack of ability), internal-unstable (inadequate effort on your résumé), external-stable (too much competition in your field), and external-unstable (bad luck).

Controllable or uncontrollable. A third dimension in the attribution process acknowledges the fact that sometimes events are under one's control and sometimes they are not (Weiner, 1986, 1994). For example, the amount of effort you expend on a task is typically perceived as something under your control, whereas an aptitude for music is viewed as something you are born with (beyond your control). Controllability can vary with each of the other two factors.

These three dimensions appear to be the central ones in the attribution process. Research has documented that self-attributions can influence future expectations (success or failure) and emotions (pride, hopelessness, guilt), and that these expectations and emotions combine to influence subsequent performance (Weiner, 1986, 1994). Thus, self-attributions play a key role in one's feelings, motivational state, and behavior.

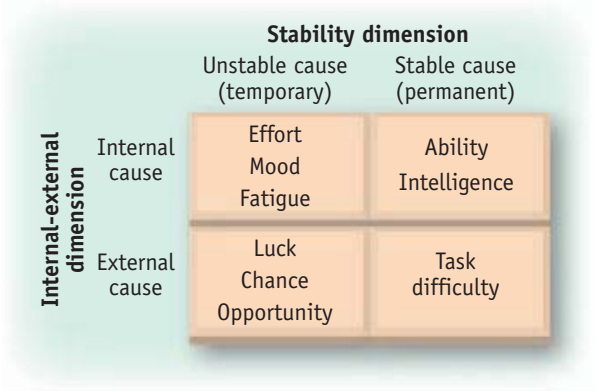


FIGURE 5.10

Key dimensions of attributional thinking. Weiner's model assumes that people's explanations for success and failure emphasize internal versus external causes and stable versus unstable causes. For example, if you attribute an outcome to great effort or to lack of effort, you are citing causes that lie within the person. Since effort can vary over time, the causal factors at work are unstable. Other examples of causal factors that fit into each of the four cells in Weiner's model are shown in the diagram.

From Weiner, B., Frieze, I., Kukla, A., Reed, L.. & Rosenbaum, R. M. (1972). Perceiving the causes of success and failure. In E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelly, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Perceiving causes of behavior.* Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Explanatory Style

Julio and Josh are freshmen who have just struck out trying to get their first college dates. After this disappointment, they reflect on the possible reasons for it. Julio speculates that his approach was too subtle. Looking back, he realizes that he wasn't very direct because he was nervous about asking the woman out. When she didn't reply, he didn't follow up for fear that she didn't really want to go out with him. On further reflection, he reasons that she probably didn't respond because she wasn't sure of his intentions. He vows to be more direct the next time. Josh, on the other hand, mopes, "I'll never have a relationship. I'm a total loser." On the basis of these comments, who do you think is likely to get a date in the future? If you guessed Julio, you are probably correct. Let's see why.

***Explanatory style* refers to the tendency to use similar causal attributions for a wide variety of events in one's life.** According to Martin Seligman (1991), people tend to exhibit, to varying degrees, an *optimistic explanatory style* or a *pessimistic explanatory style* (see Figure 5.11 on the next page). The person with an optimistic explanatory style usually attributes setbacks to external, unstable, and specific factors. A person who failed to get a desired job, for example, might attribute this misfortune to factors in the interview situation ("The room was really hot," "The questions were slanted") rather than to personal shortcomings. This style can help people discount their setbacks and thus maintain a favorable self-image. It also helps people bounce back from failure. One study found that optimistic students had more confidence and performed better than pessimistic students after a sports failure (Martin-Krumm et al., 2003).

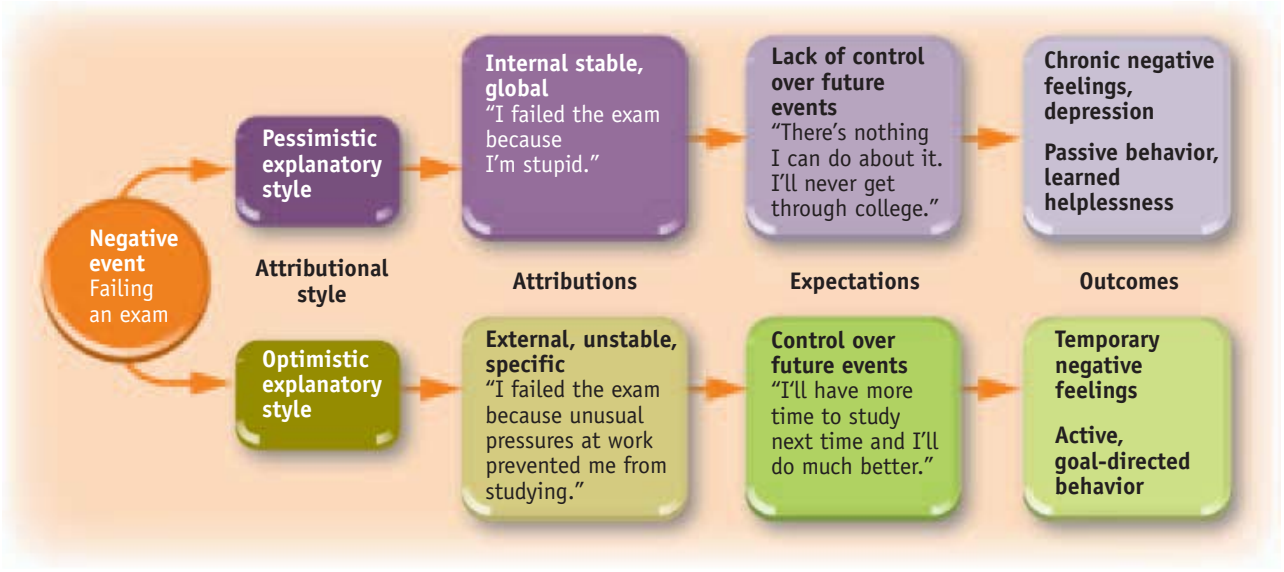


FIGURE 5.11

The effects of attributional style on expectations, emotions, and behavior. The pessimistic explanatory style is seen in the top set of boxes. This attributional style, which attributes setbacks to internal, stable, and global causes, tends to result in an expectation of lack of control over future events, depressed feelings, and passive behavior. A more adaptive, optimistic attributional style is shown in the bottom set of boxes.

In contrast, people with a pessimistic explanatory style tend to attribute their setbacks to internal, stable, and global (or pervasive) factors. These attributions make them feel bad about themselves and pessimistic about their ability to handle challenges in the future. Such a style can foster passive behavior and make people more vulnerable to learned helplessness and depression (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993). Luckily, cognitive-behavioral therapy appears to be successful in helping depressed individuals change their pessimistic explanatory style (Seligman et al., 1999). Thus, individuals can learn to stop always blaming themselves for negative outcomes (especially when they can't be avoided) and to take personal credit for positive outcomes.

Motives Guiding Self-Understanding

Whether people evaluate themselves by social comparisons, attributional thinking, or other means, they are highly motivated to pursue self-understanding. In seeking self-understanding, people are driven by four major motives: assessment, verification, improvement, and enhancement (Biernat & Billings, 2001; Sedikides & Strube, 1997).

Self-Assessment

The *self-assessment motive* is reflected in people's desire for truthful information about themselves (Trope, 1983, 1986). Individuals seek accurate feedback about many types of information—their personal qualities, abilities, physical features, and so forth. It's obvious why people look for accurate information. After all, it helps them set realistic goals and behave in appropriate ways (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2001). Still, the bald truth is not always welcome. Accordingly, people are also motivated by other concerns.

Self-Verification

The *self-verification motive* drives people toward information that matches what they already know about themselves, whether it is positive or negative. This tendency to strive for a consistent self-image ensures that individuals' self-concepts are relatively stable. Individuals maintain consistent self-perceptions in a number of subtle ways and are often unaware of doing so (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). For example, people maintain consistency between their past and present behavior by erasing past memories that conflict with present ones. To illustrate, people who were once shy and who later became outgoing have been shown to recall memories about themselves that indicate that they perceive themselves as always having been outgoing (Ross & Conway, 1986). This inclination to revise the past in favor of the present may lie behind the oft-heard parental reproof, "When *I* was your age . . ." Here, parents conveniently erase memories of their childhood behavior—which was probably similar to that of their children—and, instead, compare their children's behavior to their

own *current* behavior (Ross, McFarland, & Fletcher, 1981).

Another way people maintain self-consistency is by seeking out feedback and situations that will confirm their existing self-perceptions and avoiding potentially disconfirming situations or feedback. According to William Swann's ***self-verification theory,* people prefer to receive feedback from others that is consistent with their own self-views.** Thus, those with positive self-concepts should prefer positive feedback from others and those with negative self-concepts should prefer negative feedback. Research usually finds this to be the case (Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003). In one study, college men were divided into either a positive self-concept group or a negative self-concept group based on test scores. They were then asked to choose a partner for a subsequent 2- to 3-hour interaction. Participants were led to believe that one of the prospective partners held views of him that were consistent with his self-view and that the other held views of him that were inconsistent with his self-view. As predicted, subjects with positive self-views preferred partners who viewed them positively, whereas those with negative self-views chose partners who viewed them negatively (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Geisler, 1992).

Self-Improvement

What is your current self-improvement project? To study more? To get more exercise? When people seek to better themselves, the self-improvement motive comes into play. In trying to improve, individuals typically look to successful others for inspiration (Collins, 1996). Advertisers of personal care products (tooth whiteners, exercise machines, and so forth) tap into this motive by showing before-and-after photographs of individuals who have used the products.

Self-Enhancement

Finally, people are motivated by ***self-enhancement,* or the tendency to maintain positive feelings about the self.** One example of self-enhancement is the tendency to hold flattering views of one's personal qualities, a tendency termed the *better-than-average effect* (Alicke, 1985; Buckingham & Alicke, 2002). You've already seen an example of this effect in our earlier report that 70 percent of students who took the SAT rated themselves above average in leadership ability—a mathematical impossibility. Students can take perverse pleasure in knowing that faculty also succumb to this bias: 94 percent of them regard their teaching as above average (Cross, 1977)!

A second example of self-enhancement concerns *illusions of control* (Langer, 1975), in which people overestimate their degree of control over outcomes. Thus, individuals who pick their own "lucky" numbers on lottery tickets falsely believe that they can influence the outcome of such random events. A third form of self-enhancement is the tendency to have *unrealistic optimism about future events* (Weinstein, 1980). For example, most people believe that they will have a brighter future and experience fewer negative events than others (Helweg-Larsen & Shepperd, 2001).

While self-enhancement is quite common, it is not universal. Individuals who have low self-esteem or who are depressed are less likely to use self-enhancement than others (Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994). Culture also plays a role. A number of studies have found that self-enhancement is more pronounced in Western than in Eastern cultures (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001). Still, self-enhancement motives are not entirely absent in collectivist cultures. It seems that American subjects self-enhance on individualistic attributes and Japanese participants on collectivist attributes (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). In other words, people tend to self-enhance on the characteristics that their culture designates as important. Thus, people may self-enhance on different (culturally valued) attributes, but self-enhancement appears to be a universal motive.

The four self-motives of assessment, verification, improvement, and enhancement permit flexibility in making self-evaluations. Although you would think that accurate information would be the most useful to people, that doesn't seem to be the case. In a series of studies that pitted self-assessment, self-verification, and self-enhancement against each other, the self-enhancement motive was found to be the strongest, the self-verification motive a distant second, and the self-assessment motive an even more distant third (Sedikides, 1993).

Methods of Self-Enhancement

The powerful self-enhancement motive drives individuals to seek positive (and reject negative) information about themselves. Let's examine four cognitive strategies people commonly use.

Downward Comparisons

We've already mentioned that people compare themselves to others as a means of learning more about themselves (social comparison), whether or not they expect to receive esteem-threatening information. Once threat enters the picture, people often change their strategy and choose to compare themselves with someone who is worse off than they are (Wood, 1989). **This defensive tendency to compare oneself with someone whose troubles are more serious than one's own is termed *downward social comparison*.** Why do people switch strategies under threat? It seems that downward social comparisons are associated with increases in both mood and self-esteem (Reis, Gerrard, & Gibbons, 1993).

A dramatic example of downward comparison can be found in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001: Compared to the devastating losses suffered by the victims and families, most people's problems suddenly appeared insignificant. There are also more common examples. If you have ever been in a serious car accident in which your car was "totaled," you probably reassured yourself by reflecting on the fact that at least no one was seriously injured. Similarly, people with chronic illnesses may compare themselves with those who have life-threatening diseases. On television talk and "reality" shows (*Dr. Phil,* for example), people with assorted life tragedies provide numerous opportunities for downward social comparison. This aspect no doubt contributes to their popularity.

Self-Serving Bias

Suppose that you and three other individuals apply for a part-time job in the parks and recreation department and you are selected for the position. How do you explain your success? Chances are, you tell yourself that you were hired because you were the most qualified for the job. But how do the other three people interpret their negative outcome? Do they tell themselves that you got the job because you were the most able? Unlikely! Instead, they probably attribute their loss to "bad luck" or to not having had time to prepare for the interview. These different explanations for success and failure reflect **the *self-serving bias,* or the tendency to attribute one's successes to personal factors and one's failures to situational factors** (Miller and Ross, 1975).

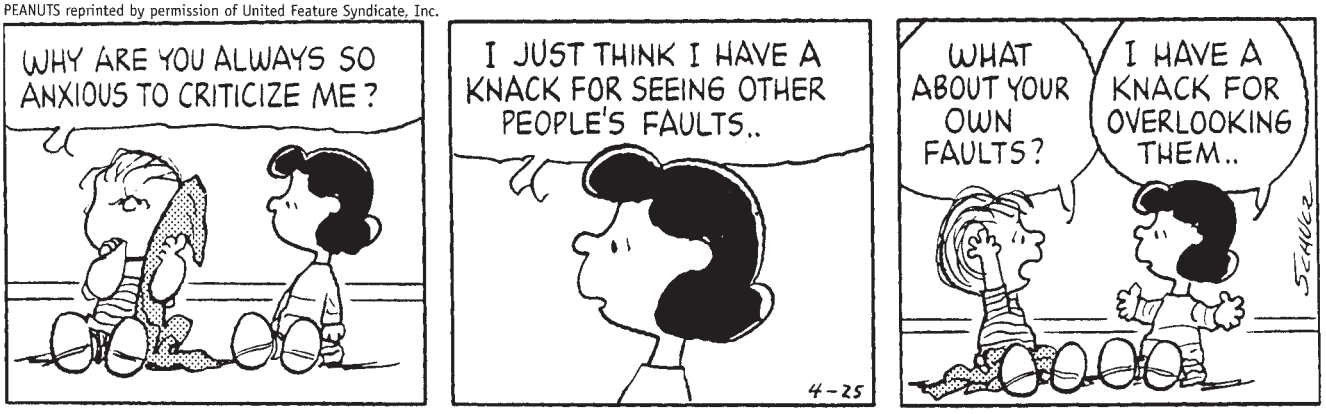
Research indicates that people are more likely to take credit for their successes than they are to disavow their failures (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). To illustrate: In an experiment, two strangers jointly took a test. They then received bogus success or failure feedback about their test performance and were asked to assign responsibility for the test results. Successful participants claimed credit, but those who failed blamed their partners (Campbell et al., 2000). Still, people don't always rush to take credit. In another experiment in the just-cited study, participants were actual friends. In this case, participants shared responsibility for both successful and unsuccessful outcomes. Thus, friendship places limits on the self-serving bias.

Although the self-serving bias has been documented in a variety of cultures (Fletcher & Ward 1988), it seems to be particularly prevalent in individualistic, Western societies, where the emphasis on competition and high self-esteem motivates people to try to impress others, as well as themselves. In contrast, Japanese subjects exhibit a *self-effacing bias* in explaining successes (Akimoto & Sanbonmatsu, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), as they tend to attribute their successes to the help they receive from others or to the ease of the task, while downplaying the importance of their ability. When they fail, Japanese subjects tend to be more self-critical than subjects from individualistic cultures (Heine & Renshaw, 2002). They are more likely to accept responsibility for their failures and to use their setbacks as an impetus for self-improvement (Heine et al., 2001). Studies have also failed to find the usual self-serving bias in Nepalese and Chinese samples (Lee & Seligman, 1997; Smith & Bond, 1994).

Basking in Reflected Glory

When your favorite sports team won the national championship last year, did you make a point of wearing the team cap? And when Ben, your best friend, won that special award, do you remember how often you told others the good news about him? If you played a role in someone's success, it's understandable that you would want to share in the recognition; however, peo-

People frequently claim association with others who are successful (bask in reflected glory) to maintain positive feelings about the self.



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ple often want to share recognition even when they are on the sidelines of an outstanding achievement. ***Basking in reflected glory* is the tendency to enhance one's image by publicly announcing one's association with those who are successful.**

Robert Cialdini and his colleagues (1976) studied this phenomenon on college campuses with nationally ranked football teams. They predicted that, when asked how their team had fared in a recent football game, students would be more likely to say, "We won" (in other words, to bask in reflected glory, or to "BIRG"—pronounced with a soft "g") when the home team had been successful than to respond "We lost" when it had been defeated. As predicted, students were more likely to BIRG when their team won than when it lost. Also, subjects who believed that they had just failed a bogus test were more likely to use the words "we won" than those who believed they had performed well.

A related self-enhancement strategy is "CORFing," or *cutting off reflected failure*. Because self-esteem is partly tied to an individual's associations with others, people often protect their self-esteem by distancing themselves from those who are unsuccessful (Cialdini et al., 1976; Boen, Vanbeselaere, & Feys, 2002). Thus, if your cousin is arrested for drunk driving, you may tell others that you don't really know him very well.

Self-Handicapping

When people fail at an important task, they need to save face. In such instances, individuals can usually come up with a face-saving excuse ("I had a terrible stomachache"). Curiously, some people actually behave in a way that sets them up to fail so that they have a ready-made excuse for failure, should it occur. ***Self-handicapping* is the tendency to sabotage one's performance to provide an excuse for possible failure.** For example, when a big test is looming, they put off studying until the last minute or go out drinking the night before the test. If, as is likely, they don't do well on the exam, they explain their poor performance by saying they didn't prepare. (After all, wouldn't you rather have others believe that your poor performance is due to inadequate preparation rather than lack of ability?) People use a variety of tactics for handicapping their performance: alcohol, drugs, procrastination, a bad mood, a distracting stimulus, anxiety, depression, and being overcommitted (Baumeister, 1998). A related tactic is *sandbagging*, in which people attempt to reduce performance expectations by playing down their abilities and predicting they'll fail (Gibson & Sachau, 2000).

Individuals differ in their reasons for self-handicapping. People with low self-esteem more often use it to maintain a positive impression (or to avoid failing), whereas those with high self-esteem are more likely to use it to enhance their image (Tice, 1991). That is, if they happen to do well, they can claim that they are especially capable because they performed so well with minimal preparation.

Self-handicapping seems like a "win-win" strategy: If you fail, you have a face-saving excuse ready, and if you happen to succeed, you can claim that you are unusually gifted! However, it probably has not escaped your attention that self-handicapping is highly risky. By giving yourself an attributional "out" in case of failure, your self-defeating behavior will likely result in poor performance (Zuckerman, Kieffer, & Knee, 1998). Moreover, while self-handicapping may save you from negative self-attributions about your ability, it does not prevent others from making different negative attributions about you. For example, people believe that individuals are less competent when they self-handicap than when they don't (Rhodewalt et al., 1995). Also, others may perceive you as lazy, inclined to drink too much, or highly anxious, depending on the means you use to self-handicap. Consequently, this self-enhancement tactic has serious drawbacks.

Self-Regulation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- *Define self-regulation, and explain the ego-depletion model of self-regulation.*
- *Explain why self-efficacy is important to psychological adjustment.*
- *Describe how individuals develop self-efficacy.*
- *Describe the three categories of self-defeating behavior.*

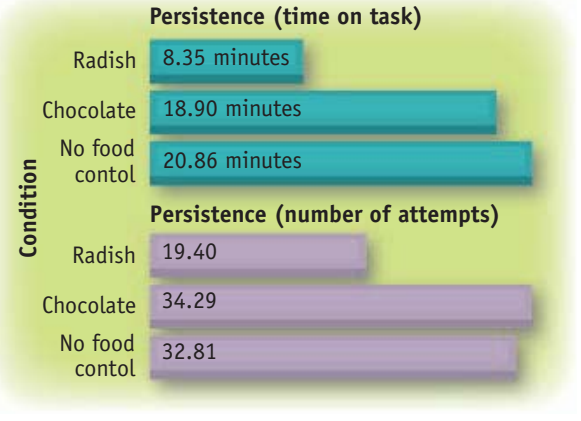
"Should I have that hot fudge sundae or not?" "I guess I'd better get started on that English paper." People are constantly trying to resist impulses and make themselves do things they don't want to do. They also determine the various goals they want to pursue and how to reach them. **This work of directing and controlling one's behavior is termed *self-regulation*.** Clearly, the ability to manage and direct what you think, how you feel, and how you behave is tied to your success at work, your relationships, and your mental and physical health (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003). Being able to forgo immediate gratification (studying instead of partying) and focus one's behavior toward important, longer-range goals (graduating and getting a good job) is of paramount importance if one is to be successful in life.

It's possible that people have a limited amount of self-control resources. So if you tax these resources resisting temptation in a given situation, you may have a hard time resisting the next immediate temptation or persisting at a new task. At least that's the idea behind the *ego-depletion model of self-regulation* (Baumeister et al., 1998). To investigate this hypothesis, researchers asked college students to participate in a study of taste perception (the study was actually on self-control) (Baumeister et al., 1998). Some participants were asked to eat two or three radishes in 5 minutes but not to touch the chocolate candy and chocolate chip cookies that were nearby. Others were asked to eat some candy or some cookies but were told not to eat any of the nearby radishes. A control group didn't participate in this part of the study. Then all subjects were asked to solve what were, unbeknownst-to-them, unsolvable puzzles while they supposedly waited for another part of the study. Researchers measured the subjects' self-control by the amount of time they persisted at the puzzles and the number of attempts they made. According to the ego-depletion model, the radish-eaters would use more self-control resources (resisting the chocolate) than would the chocolate-eaters (resisting the radishes) or the subjects in the no-food control group. Thus, this group should have the fewest self-control resources to use for persisting at a difficult task. As you can see in Figure 5.12, the radish-eaters gave up sooner and made fewer attempts on the puzzles than the chocolate-eaters or the control group. One of the reasons people rely so often on habit and automatic processing is to conserve these important self-control resources (Baumeister, Muraven, & Tice, 2000).

Self-regulation seems to develop early and remain relatively stable. One study reported that 4-year-olds who were better at delaying gratification did better both in terms of academic performance and social competence some ten years later (Mischel, Shoda, & Peake, 1988; Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990). In this section, we examine self-efficacy, a key aspect of self-regulation, as well as self-defeating behavior, a case of self-control failure.

Self-Efficacy

As explained in Chapter 2, ***self-efficacy* refers to people's conviction that they can achieve specific goals.** According to Albert Bandura (1997, 2000), efficacy beliefs vary according to the person's skills. You may have high



● FIGURE 5.12

Persistence on unsolvable puzzles. Participants who were instructed to eat radishes and not to eat chocolate chip cookies or chocolate candy used more self-control resources than participants who were instructed to eat the chocolate and not to touch the radishes or participants in the no-food control group. Because the radish-eaters had relatively few self-control resources to help them persist at a difficult task (unsolvable puzzles), they persisted for the shortest time and made the fewest attempts to solve the puzzles compared to the other two groups. (Adapted from Baumeister et al., 1998)

self-efficacy when it comes to making friends but low self-efficacy when it comes to speaking in front of a group. However, simply having a skill doesn't guarantee that you will be able to put it into practice. Like *The Little Engine that Could,* you must also *believe* that you are capable of doing so ("I *think* I can, I *think* I can . . ."). In other words, self-efficacy is concerned not with the skills you have, but with your *beliefs about what you can do* with these skills.


Courtesy, Albert Bandura

Albert Bandura

Correlates of Self-Efficacy

A number of studies have shown that self-efficacy affects individuals' commitments to goals, their performance on tasks, and their persistence toward goals in the face of obstacles (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003). In addition, people with high self-efficacy anticipate success in future outcomes and are able to tune out negative thoughts that can lead to failure. Self-efficacy is related to academic success (Schunk, 2003), career choice (Betz & Klein, 1996), and job performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

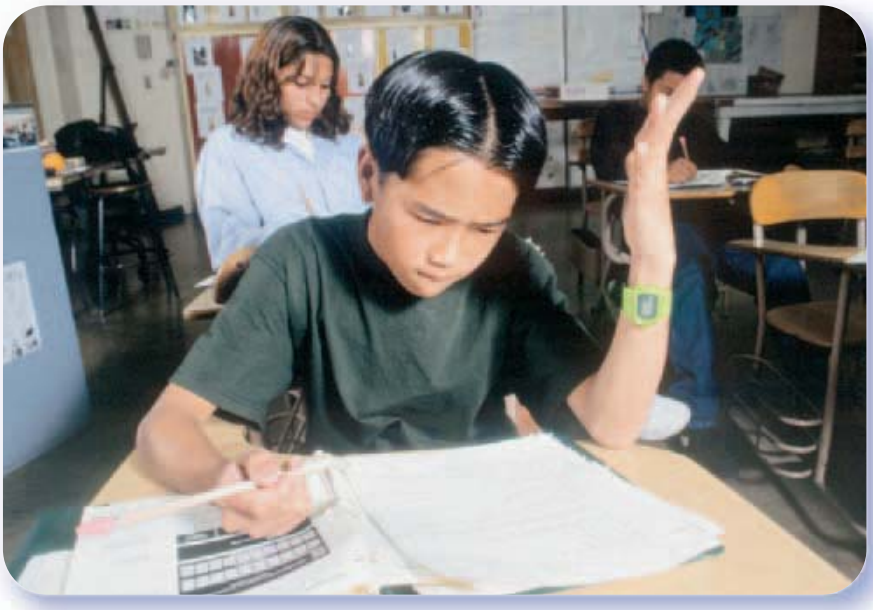
Because of the importance of self-efficacy in psychological adjustment, it is worth keeping in mind that it is learned and can be changed. Research shows that increasing self-efficacy is an effective way to improve health (losing weight, stopping smoking) (Maddux & Gosselin, 2003) and to treat a variety of psychological problems, including test anxiety (Smith, 1989), phobias (Williams, 1995), fear of sexual assault (Ozer & Bandura, 1990), eating disorders (Goodrick et al., 1999), and substance abuse (DiClemente, Fairhurst, & Piotrowski, 1995).

Developing Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is obviously a valuable quality. How does one acquire it? Bandura (1997, 2000) identifies four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, persuasion/encouragement, and interpretation of emotional arousal.

Mastery experiences. The most effective path to self-efficacy is through mastering new skills. Sometimes new skills come easily—learning how to use the copy machine in the library, for instance. Some things are harder to master, such as learning how to use a spreadsheet program or how to play the piano. In acquiring more difficult skills, people usually make mistakes. How they handle these failure experiences is the key to learning self-efficacy. If you give up when you make mistakes, your failure instills self-doubts or low self-efficacy. On the other hand, if you persist through failure experiences to eventual success, you learn the lesson of self-efficacy: I *can* do it! A practical implication for parents, teachers, and coaches is that they should set high, but attainable, goals for children and encourage them to learn from their mistakes and to persevere until they succeed. This approach provides children with the mastery experiences they need to build self-efficacy and approach future challenges with confidence. Well-intentioned parents, teachers, and supervisors unwittingly deprive individuals of opportunities to develop self-efficacy when they do others' work or regularly allow others to opt out of obligations with no consequences.

Vicarious experiences. Another way to improve self-efficacy is by watching others perform a skill you want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Ironically, difficulties and failures can ultimately contribute to the development of a strong sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy tends to improve when youngsters learn to persist through difficulties and overcome failures.

to learn. It's important that you choose a model who is competent at the task, and it helps if the model is similar to you (in age, gender, and ethnicity). For example, if you're shy about speaking up for yourself, observing someone who is good at doing so can help you develop the confidence to do it yourself. Picking successful role models is important—watching unsuccessful ones can undermine self-efficacy.

Persuasion and encouragement. Although it is less effective than the first two approaches, a third way to develop self-efficacy is through the encouragement of others. For example, if you're having a hard time asking someone for a date, a friend's encouragement might give you just the push you need. Of course, persuasion doesn't always work. And, unless encouragement is accompanied by specific and concrete suggestions, this tactic is unlikely to be successful.

Interpretation of emotional arousal. The physiological responses that accompany feelings and one's interpretations of these responses are another source of self-efficacy. Let's say you're sitting in class waiting for your professor to distribute an exam. You notice that your palms are moist and your heart is pounding. If you attribute these behaviors to fear, you can temporarily dampen your self-efficacy, thus decreasing your chances of doing well. Alternatively, if you attribute your sweaty palms and racing heart to the arousal everyone needs to perform well, you may be able to boost your self-efficacy and increase your chances of doing well. Of course, self-regulation doesn't always succeed. That's the case in self-defeating behavior, our next topic.

Self-Defeating Behavior

It's adaptable for people to act in their own self-interest, and typically they do. But sometimes people knowingly do things that are bad for them—such as smoking, having unprotected sex, and completing important assignments at the last minute. ***Self-defeating behaviors*** **are seemingly intentional actions that thwart a person's self-interest.** According to Roy Baumeister (1997; Baumeister & Scher, 1988), there are three categories of intentional self-defeating behaviors: deliberate self-destruction, tradeoffs, and counterproductive strategies. The key difference among these three behaviors lies in how intentional they are. As you can see in Figure 5.13, attempts at deliberate self-destruction involve the most intent; counterproductive strategies are the least intentional, and tradeoffs fall in between.

In *deliberate self-destruction,* people want to harm themselves and they choose courses of action that will forseeably lead to that result. Although this type of behavior may occur in individuals with psychological disorders, deliberate self-destruction appears to be infrequent in normal populations.

In *tradeoffs,* people foresee the possibility of harming themselves but accept it as a necessary accompaniment to achieving a desirable goal. Overeating, smoking, and drinking to excess are examples that come readily to mind. Other examples include procrastinating (putting off tasks feels good in the short-run, but the struggle to meet looming deadlines results in poor performance and increased stress and illness), failing to follow prescribed health care advice (it's easier to slack off now, but doing so leads to future problems), shyness (avoiding social situations protects against anxiety but makes loneliness more likely), and self-handicapping (getting drunk before an exam explains poor performance but increases the chances of failure).

One factor that underlies most self-defeating tradeoffs is poor judgment. That is, people choose immediate benefits (pleasant sensations, escape from painful thoughts or feelings) over long-term costs (heart disease, lung cancer, few intimate relationships). To bolster their choices, they usually ignore or downplay the long-term risks of their behavior. Two other factors that underlie tradeoffs are emotional distress (anxiety) and high self-awareness. Because negative emotions are distressing, people want quick escape. Thus, they light a cigarette or have a drink to bring immediate relief, and they tune out the long-term negative consequences of their actions. In short, people engage in tradeoffs because they bring immediate, positive, and reliable outcomes, not because they want to kill themselves.

In *counterproductive strategies,* a person pursues a desirable outcome but misguidedly uses an approach that is bound to fail. Of course, you can't always know in advance if a strategy will pay off. Thus, people must *habitually* use this strategy for it to qualify as self-defeating. For example, some people tend to persist in

Three Categories of Self-Defeating Behavior

Type of self-defeating behavior	Harm foreseen?	Harm desired?
Deliberate self-destruction	Yes	Yes
Tradeoffs	Yes	No
Counterproductive strategies	No	No

FIGURE 5.13

Three categories of self-defeating behavior. Roy Baumeister and Steven Scher (1988) distinguished three categories of self-defeating behaviors, based on how intentional the behaviors are. Intentionality is determined by two factors: an individual's awareness that a behavior could bring possible harm and an individual's desire to harm himself or herself. Deliberate self-destruction is the most intentional, followed by tradeoffs, then counterproductive strategies. (Based on Baumeister & Scher, 1988)

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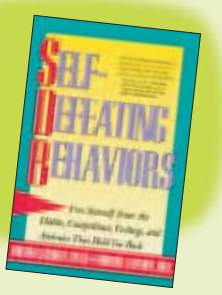
Self-defeating behaviors come in many forms with many underlying motivations. Overeating is a matter of tradeoffs. *People realize that excessive eating may be harmful in the long run, but it is enjoyable at the time.*

RECOMMENDED READING



Self-Defeating Behaviors
by Milton R. Cudney and Robert E. Hardy (Harper San Francisco, 1991)

Having successfully treated thousands of clients, the authors (two counseling psychologists) decided to share their approach with a wider audience. (Dr. Cudney died in 1992.) They offer insights on a wide array of self-defeating behaviors, including procrastination, substance abuse, smoking, overeating, worrying, compulsive actions, shyness, and perfectionism. They assert that self-defeating behavior develops as an ineffective way of protecting oneself against hurt and disappointment. Thus, a woman who is afraid of being lonely grasps at any man she meets. Predictably, men are put off by her desperation, and she finds herself alone. The tragic irony of self-defeating behavior is that the fear of a particular consequence (loneliness) leads to behaviors that virtually guarantee the feared outcome. The authors explain the genesis and dynamics of self-defeating behavior and offer practical advice to guide individuals away from self-defeating behaviors and toward life-enhancing actions. Although short on documentation, the book is highly readable, provides useful examples, and is sprinkled with numerous charts and helpful self-tests.

unproductive endeavors, such as pursuing an unreachable career goal or an unrequited love. Such behavior costs valuable time, generates painful emotions, and blocks the discovery of productive approaches. The key cause of counterproductive behavior seems to be errors in judgment, such as misjudging one's abilities or the actions required to produce a desired result. People persist in these behaviors because they believe they'll be successful, not because they are intent on self-defeat.

To conclude, although most people engage in self-defeating behavior at some time, there is little evidence that they deliberately try to harm themselves or to fail at a task. Instead, self-defeating behavior appears to be the result of people's distorted judgments or strong desires to escape from immediate, painful feelings. If you're plagued by self-defeating behavior, the Recommended Reading titled *Self-Defeating Behaviors* (Cudney & Hardy, 1991) provides additional insights and suggestions for dealing with this frustrating problem.

Self-Presentation

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- *Explain why and when individuals engage in impression management.*
- *Cite some strategies people use to make positive impressions on others.*
- *Describe how high self-monitors are different from low self-monitors.*

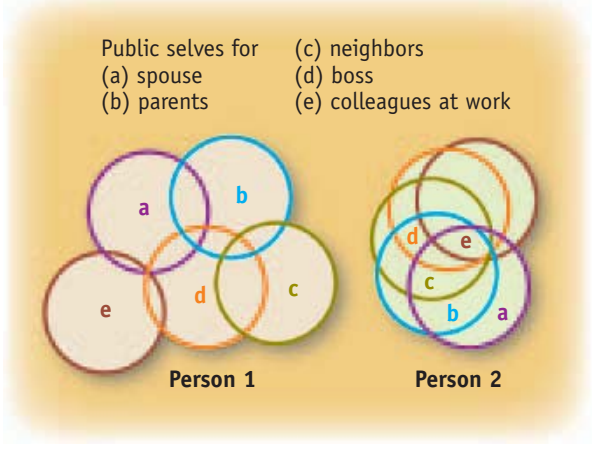
Whereas your self-concept involves how you see yourself, your public self involves how you want others to see you. **A *public self* is an image presented to others in social interactions.** This presentation of a pub-

lic self may sound deceitful, but it is perfectly normal, and everyone does it (Schlenker, 2003). Many self-presentations (ritual greetings, for example) take place automatically and without awareness. But when it really counts (job interviews, for example), people consciously strive to make the best possible impression.

Typically, individuals have a number of public selves that are tied to certain situations and certain people. For instance, you may have one public self for your parents and another for your peers. (Do you cover your tattoo when you go home?) You may have still others for your teachers, your boss, your co-workers, and so forth. Also, people differ in the degree of overlap or congruence among their various public selves (see Figure 5.14). Does it matter whether you perceive yourself to be essentially the same person in different situations? It seems so. People who see themselves as being similar across different social roles (with friends, at work, at school, with parents, with romantic partners) are better adjusted than those who perceive less integration in their self-views across these roles (Donahue et al., 1993; Lutz & Ross, 2003).

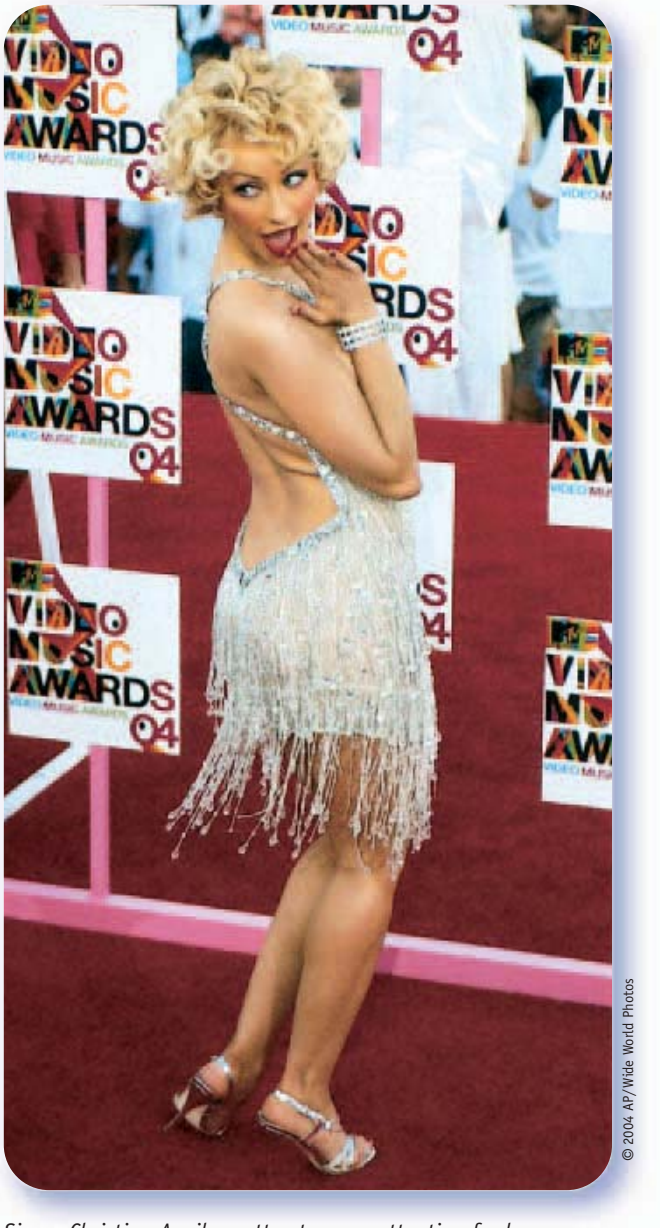
Impression Management

Interestingly, people think others notice and evaluate them more than is the actual case (Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999). This common tendency is aptly termed *the spotlight effect.* People also normally strive to make a positive impression on others to be liked, respected, hired, and so forth (Baumeister & Twenge, 2003). ***Impression management* refers to usually conscious efforts by people to influence how others think of them.** To see impression management in operation, let's look at a study of behavior in simulated job interviews (von Baeyer, Sherk, & Zanna, 1981). In this study, female job applicants were led to believe that the man who would interview them held either traditional, chauvinistic views of women or just the opposite. The researchers found that applicants who expected a chauvinist presented themselves in a more traditionally feminine manner than subjects in the other condition. Their self-presentation efforts extended to both their appearance (they wore more makeup) and their communication style (they talked less and gave more traditional answers to a question about marriage and children). In a job interview, people are particularly attentive to making a good impression, but impression management also operates in everyday interactions, although



● FIGURE 5.14

Public selves and adjustment. Person 1 has very divergent public selves with relatively little overlap among them. Person 2, whose public selves are more congruent with each other, is likely to be better adjusted than Person 1.



Singer Christina Aguilera attracts press attention for her unusual self-presentation behavior.

individuals may be less aware of it (Schlenker, 2003). Let's look at some common impression management strategies.

Impression Management Strategies

One reason people engage in impression management is to claim a particular identity (Baumeister, 1998). Thus, you select a type of dress, hairstyle, and manner of speech to present a certain image of yourself. Tattoos and body piercings also create a specific image. A second motive for impression management is to gain liking and approval from others—by editing what you say about yourself and by using various nonverbal cues such as smiles, gestures, and eye contact. Because self-presentation is practiced so often, people usually do it automatically. At other times, however, impression management may be used intentionally—to get a job, a date, a promotion, and so forth. Some common self-presentation strategies include ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication (Jones, 1990).

Ingratiation. Of all the self-presentation strategies, ingratiation is the most fundamental and most frequently used. ***Ingratiation* is behaving in ways to make oneself likable to others.** For example, *giving compliments* is effective, as long as you are sincere (people dislike insincerity and can often detect it). *Doing favors for others* is also a common tactic, as long as your gestures aren't so spectacular they leave others feeling indebted (Gordon, 1996). Other ingratiation tactics include *expressing liking for others* and *going along with others* (to get others to like you, it helps to do the things that they want to do).

Self-promotion. The motive behind self-promotion is earning respect. You do so by playing up your strong points so you will be perceived as competent. For instance, in a job interview, you might find ways to mention that you earned high honors at school and that you were president of the student body and a member of the soccer team. To keep from coming across as a braggart, you shouldn't go overboard with self-promotion. For this reason, false modesty often works well.

Exemplification. Because most people try to project an honest image, you have to demonstrate exemplary behavior to claim special credit for integrity or character. Danger-fraught occupations such as those in the military or law enforcement provide obvious opportunities to exemplify moral virtue. A less dramatic, but still effective, strategy is to behave consistently according to high ethical standards—as long as you don't come across as self-righteous. Also, your words and deeds need to match unless you want to be labeled a hypocrite.

Intimidation. This strategy sends the message, "Don't mess with me." Intimidation usually works only in nonvoluntary relationships—for instance, when it's hard for workers to find another employer or for an economically dependent spouse to leave a relationship. Obvious intimidation tactics include threats and the withholding of valuable resources (salary increases, promotions, sex). A more subtle tactic is emotional intimidation—holding over a person's head the threat of an aggressive outburst if you don't get your way. The other self-presentation strategies work by creating a favorable impression; intimidation usually generates dislike. Nonetheless, it can work.

Supplication. This is usually the tactic of last resort. To get favors from others, individuals try to present themselves as weak and dependent—as in the song, "Ain't Too Proud to Beg." Students may plead or break into tears in an instructor's office in an attempt to get a grade changed. Because of the social norm to help those in need, supplication may work; however, unless the supplicator has something to offer the potential benefactor, it's not an effective strategy.

Individuals tailor their use of self-presentation strategies to match the situation. For instance, it's unlikely that you'd try intimidating your boss; you'd be more likely to ingratiate or promote yourself with her. As you can see in Figure 5.15 on the next page, all of these strategies carry risks. Thus, to make a good impression, you must use these strategies skillfully.

Perspectives on Impression Management

Curiously, almost all research on self-presentation has been conducted on first meetings between strangers, yet the vast majority of actual social interactions take place between people who already know each other. Noting the gap between reality and research, Dianne Tice and her colleagues (1995) investigated whether self-presentation varied in these two situations. They found that people strive to make positive impressions when they interact with strangers but shift toward modesty and neutral self-presentations when they are with friends. Why the difference? Because strangers don't know you, you want to give them positive information so they'll form a good impression of you. Besides, strangers have no way of knowing whether you are bending the truth. On the other hand, your friends already know your positive qualities. Thus, belaboring them is unnecessary and may make you seem immodest. Likewise, your friends know you well enough to know whether you are grandstanding, so you don't bother.

WEB LINK 5.4

Impression Management
This short article at TheFreeDictionary.com explains impression management and provides a number of links to other articles on related issues.

Strategic Self-Presentation Strategies

Presentation strategy	Impression sought	Emotion to be aroused in target	Negative impressions risked
Ingratiation	Likable	Affection	Boot-licker, conformist
Self-promotion	Competent	Respect	Conceited, defensive
Exemplification	Morally superior	Guilt	Hypocrite, sanctimonious
Intimidation	Dangerous	Fear	Blusterer, ineffectual
Supplication	Helpless	Obligation	Undeserving, lazy

● FIGURE 5.15

Strategic self-presentation strategies. Individuals rely on a variety of self-presentation strategies to present a certain image of themselves to others (Jones, 1990). To avoid the risks associated with the strategies, it's important to use the tactics skillfully.

Based on Jones, E. E. (1990). *Interpersonal perception*. New York: W. H. Freeman & Company, p. 198.

Sometimes the need to project a positive public image can lead to dangerous practices (Leary, Tchividjian, & Kraxberger, 1994). For instance, to avoid the embarrassment of buying condoms or talking with their sex partners, people will practice unprotected sex and heighten their risk of contracting AIDS. In pursuit of an attractive tan, people spend hours in the sun, thereby increasing their chances of getting skin cancer. To keep thin, many (especially women) use strong diet medications and develop full-blown eating disorders (see the Chapter 15 Application). To impress their peers, some adolescents take up drinking and smoking and even drug abuse. Finally, out of the desire to appear brave and daring, some people engage in reckless behavior that ends in accidents and death.

How good are people at discerning the results of their impression management attempts? As we noted earlier, individuals are much better judges of how people, in general, view them than they are of how specific persons evaluate them.

Self-Monitoring

According to Mark Snyder (1979, 1986), people vary in their awareness of how they are perceived by others. ***Self-monitoring*** **refers to the degree to which people attend to and control the impressions they make on others.** People who are high self-monitors seem to be very sensitive to their impact on others. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, are less concerned about impression management and behave more spontaneously.

Courtesy, Mark Snyder

Mark Snyder

Compared to low self-monitors, high self-monitors want to make a favorable impression and try to tailor their actions accordingly; they are skilled at deciphering what others want to see. Because they control their emotions well and deliberately regulate nonverbal signals, they are talented at self-presentation (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). In contrast, low self-monitors are more likely to express their true beliefs or, possibly, to try to convey the impression that they are sincere and genuine individuals.

As you might infer, these two personality types view themselves differently (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Low self-monitors see themselves as having strong principles and behaving in line with them, whereas high self-monitors perceive themselves as flexible and pragmatic. Because high self-monitors don't see a necessary connection between their private beliefs and their public actions, they aren't troubled by discrepancies between beliefs and behavior.

You may be wondering whether these groups differ on psychological adjustment. It seems that more adjustment problems are found among individuals who score either very high or very low on self-monitoring compared to those who score closer to the middle (Miller & Thayer, 1989). On a final note, we'll add that self-monitoring scores decline as people age—probably because individuals become more comfortable with themselves over time (Reifman, Klein, & Murphy, 1989). In the upcoming Application, we redirect our attention to the critical issue of self-esteem and outline seven steps for boosting it.

WEB LINK 5.5

Building Self-Esteem
The Counseling Center at the University of Florida offers tips on how to build self-esteem and self-confidence at this website.

APPLICATION

Building Self-Esteem

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- *Explain when it is inadvisable to increase one's self-esteem and why this is so.*
- *List seven ways to build self-esteem.*

Answer the following "yes" or "no."

___ **1.** I worry that others don't like me.
___ **2.** I have very little confidence in my abilities.
___ **3.** I often feel awkward in social situations and just don't know how to take charge.
___ **4.** I have difficulty accepting praise or flattery.
___ **5.** I have a hard time bouncing back from failure experiences.

If you answered "yes" to most of these questions, you may suffer from low self-esteem. As we noted earlier, people with low self-esteem are less happy and more prone to depression, become demoralized after failures, and are anxious in relationships. Too, people with high global self-esteem may have pockets of low self-esteem—for example, you may feel great about your "social self" but not so good about your "academic self." Thus, this Application can be useful to many people.

We have one caveat, however: It is possible for self-esteem to be too high—recall our earlier discussion about narcissism, ego threats, and violence. Better adjustment is associated with realistically high (and stable) self-esteem. Thus, our suggestions are directed to those whose self-esteem could use a legitimate boost, not to those whose self-esteem is inflated. The latter group can benefit from developing more realistic self-views.

As you saw in our discussion of self-efficacy, there is ample evidence that efforts at self-improvement can pay off by boosting self-esteem. Following are seven guidelines for building self-esteem. These suggestions are distilled from the advice of many experts, including Baumeister et al. (2003), Ellis (1989), McKay and Fanning (2000), Rogers (1977), and Zimbardo (1990).

1. Recognize That You Control Your Self-Image

The first thing you must do is recognize that *you* ultimately control how you see yourself. You *do* have the power to change your self-image. True, we have discussed at length how feedback from others influences your self-concept. Yes, social comparison theory suggests that people need such feedback and that it would be unwise to ignore it completely. However, the final choice about whether to accept or reject such feedback rests with you. Your self-image resides in your mind and is a product of your thinking. Although others may influence your self-concept, you are the final authority.

2. Learn More About Yourself

People with low self-esteem don't seem to know themselves in as much detail as those with high self-esteem. Accordingly, to boost your self-esteem, you need to take stock of yourself. The Recommended Reading titled *Self-Esteem* (McKay & Fanning, 2000) contains a self-concept inventory that includes areas such as physical appearance, personality characteristics, relating to others, school and job performance, intellectual functioning, and sexuality. In taking inventory, you may discover that you're fuzzy about certain aspects of yourself. To get a clearer picture, pay careful attention to your thoughts, feelings, and behavior and utilize feedback from others.

3. Don't Let Others Set Your Goals

A common trap that many people fall into is letting others set the standards by which they evaluate themselves. Others are constantly telling you that you should do this or you ought to do that. Thus, you hear that you "should study computer science" or "ought to lose weight." Most of this advice is well intentioned and may contain good ideas. Still, it is important that you make your *own* decisions about what you will do and what you will believe in. For example, consider a business executive in his early forties who sees himself in a negative light because he has not climbed very high in the corporate hierarchy. The crucial question is: Did he ever *really* want to make that arduous climb? Perhaps he has gone through life thinking he should pursue that kind of success only because that standard was imposed on him by his family. Think about the source of and basis for your personal goals and standards. Do they really represent ideals that *you* value? Or are they beliefs that you have passively accepted from others without thinking?

RECOMMENDED READING

Self-Esteem
by Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning (New Harbinger Publications, 2000)

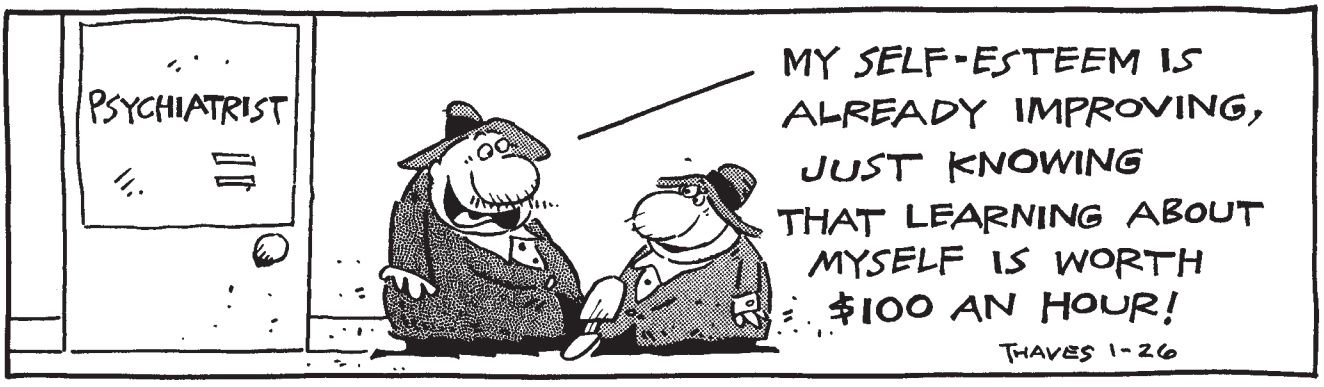
If you want to assess, raise, and maintain your self-esteem, this book can help you. The authors work from the premise that everyone has a "pathological critic," an inner voice that is judgmental and fault finding. Some people have an overly active and harsh pathological critic that, over time, erodes self-esteem. The reader is shown how to deal with these destructive self-statements through the use of cognitive restructuring. This book is easily understood, is written in an interesting style, and packs a lot of information in a few pages. It is most useful for those whose self-esteem problems are limited to a specific area (work, parenting, sex, etc.). While the book is also helpful to those whose esteem problems are more serious, the authors suggest that it will be most effective for this group when used along with psychotherapy.

4. Recognize Unrealistic Goals

Even if you truly value certain ideals and sincerely want to achieve certain goals, another question remains. Are your goals realistic? Many people demand too much of themselves. They want to always perform at their best, which is obviously impossible. For instance, you may have a burning desire to achieve national acclaim as an actress. However, the odds against such an achievement are enormous. It is important to recognize this reality so that you do not condemn yourself for failure. Some overly demanding people pervert the social comparison process by always comparing themselves against the *best* rather than against similar others. They assess their looks by comparing themselves with famous models, and they judge their finances by comparing themselves with the wealthiest people they know. Such comparisons are unrealistic and almost inevitably undermine self-esteem.

If you like singing star Usher or actress Jennifer Aniston, that's fine, but they are not sensible benchmarks for evaluating your attractiveness or success. Some people distort the social comparison process.

FRANK AND ERNEST ®by Bob Thaves



5. Modify Negative Self-Talk

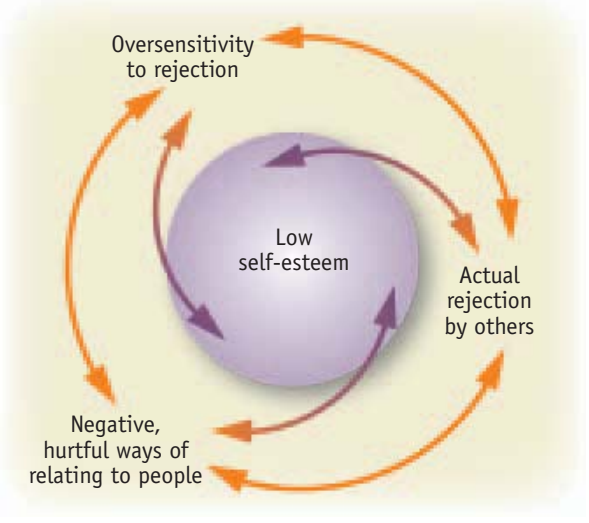
How you think about your life influences how you see yourself (and vice versa). People who are low in self-esteem tend to engage in various counterproductive modes of thinking. For example, when they succeed, they may attribute their success to good luck, and when they fail, they may blame themselves. Quite to the contrary, you should take credit for your successes and consider the possibility that your failures may not be your fault. As discussed in Chapter 4, Albert Ellis has pointed out that people often think irrationally and draw unwarranted negative conclusions about themselves. If someone breaks off a romantic relationship with you, do you think, "He doesn't love me. I must be a worthless, unlovable person?" The conclusion that you are a "worthless person" does *not* follow logically from the fact of the break-up. Such irrational thinking and negative self-talk breed poor self-esteem. Recognize the destructive potential of negative self-talk and bring it to a halt.

6. Emphasize Your Strengths

This advice may seem trite, but it has some merit. People with low self-esteem often derive little satisfaction from their accomplishments and virtues. They pay little heed to their good qualities while talking constantly about their defeats and frailties. The fact is that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. You should accept those personal shortcomings that you are powerless to change and work on those that are changeable, without becoming obsessed about it. At the same time, you should take stock of your strengths and learn to appreciate them.

7. Approach Others with a Positive Outlook

Some people with low self-esteem try to cut others down to their (subjective) size through constant criticism. This faultfinding and negative approach does not go over well. Instead, it leads to tension, antagonism, and rejection. This rejection lowers self-esteem still further (see Figure 5.16). You can boost your esteem-building efforts by recognizing and reversing this self-defeating tendency. Cultivate the habit of maintaining a positive, supportive outlook when you approach people. Doing so will promote rewarding interactions and help you earn others' acceptance. There is probably nothing that enhances self-esteem more than acceptance and genuine affection from others.



● FIGURE 5.16

The vicious circle of low self-esteem and rejection. A negative self-image can make expectations of rejection a self-fulfilling prophecy, because people with low self-esteem tend to approach others in negative, hurtful ways. Real or imagined rejections lower self-esteem still further, creating a vicious circle.