

# THE SELF IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	297
MOTIVES OF THE SELF.....	298
STRATEGIES OF THE SELF .....	299
<i>Social Reasoning Strategies</i> .....	300
<i>Social Comparison and Interaction Strategies</i> .....	302
<i>Self-Presentation Strategies</i> .....	306
<i>Collective Identification Strategies</i> .....	310
MODERATING VARIABLES .....	315
<i>Social Categories</i> .....	315
<i>Individual Differences</i> .....	319
<i>Culture</i> .....	320
INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIES ON THE SELF .....	322
<i>Self-Maintenance Processes</i> .....	323
<i>Self-Concept Change</i> .....	324
FINAL COMMENT .....	325

## INTRODUCTION

If the number of papers published on a topic is an accurate indicator of the interest it evokes and the attention it commands, then the self continues to hold center-stage position in psychology. Over 5000 articles about the self have

been published since the last *Annual Review of Psychology* chapter on the topic appeared seven years ago (Markus & Wurf 1987). The title of that chapter, "The Dynamic Self-Concept," presaged much of the work to come, for a major focus of research attention in the intervening years has been on how the self is involved in the regulation of social behavior. However, the emphasis has been less on demonstrating the dynamic nature of the self per se than on investigating how that dynamic nature is expressed within specified social contexts. In particular, researchers have examined how individuals pursue goals of self-enhancement, self-knowledge, and self-improvement through processes of social reasoning, social comparison, social interaction, self-presentation, and collective identification. Although individual investigations have focused on determining the precise nature or relative importance of self motives or goals, the overarching concern across investigations has been with delineating strategies used to pursue these goals.

In this review, we examine the strategies of the self in social contexts. We concentrate specifically on studies of how the self directs social cognition and social behavior. We restrict our review to articles published in major journals from 1988 to 1992, with book chapters and additional articles included more sparingly. Thus, the chapter by no means represents an exhaustive review of the literature on the self. Not reviewed here, for example, is the rich history of research on the self that has shaped current interest in this topic (see Markus & Cross 1990). Also absent are studies on the relationship of self and memory (Klein & Loftus 1993, Greenwald & Banaji 1989, Prentice 1990, Skowronski et al 1991), self and mood (Salovey 1992, Sedikides 1992), self-knowledge and its development (Harter 1989, Lewis 1990, Neisser 1988), comparative analyses of self-awareness (Gallup 1991), the relation of self to mental health outcomes (Bandura 1988, Deaux 1992a, Emmons & King 1988, Taylor & Brown 1988), and goal-directed behavior that does not specifically implicate the self (see Buss & Cantor 1989, Pervin 1989). These literatures touch on the concerns of this chapter, but space limitations prevent us from including them.

## MOTIVES OF THE SELF

Most recent research on the self has traced its activity to two general sets of motives that we term self-knowledge and self-enhancement (see Kunda 1990; Schlenker & Weigold 1989, 1992; Strube 1990; Swann 1990). Self-knowledge refers to the desire for accurate and certain evidence of one's traits and abilities, and in particular, for evidence that confirms one's self-assessments. The need for self-knowledge is presumably rooted in a more basic need, although whether that need is for consistency (Backman 1988), for uncertainty reduction (Trope 1986), for the ability to predict and control the environment (Swann 1990), or for some combination of these rewards remains unclear (see

Schlenker & Weigold 1992). Self-enhancement refers to the desire for positive feedback about the self and includes both self-protective impulses unleashed by threatening or negative experiences and the ongoing drive to have a positive sense of self. It is presumably rooted in the more basic tendency to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. Although there has been some debate in recent years about the precise nature of specific motives and the needs underlying them, most researchers would agree on some version of these two general sources of goal-directed behavior.

A frequent addition to the short-list of self motives is the need for self-improvement. Self-improvement refers to the desire to bring oneself closer to what one should or would ideally like to be (see Higgins 1987, 1989; Markus & Ruvolo 1989; Taylor & Lobel 1989; Wood 1989). Like self-knowledge and self-enhancement, self-improvement can be either defensive (avoiding feared selves) or offensive (striving for ideal selves). It is presumably rooted in more basic needs for control (Markus & Ruvolo 1989) and/or achievement (Taylor & Lobel 1989, Wood 1989). Although empirical evidence of behaviors directly attributable to a self-improvement motive is, at present, somewhat limited, much research on goal-directed behavior has been predicated on the assumption that such a motive exists (see Cantor & Zirkel 1990 for a review, and Pervin 1989 for many examples). In this review, we include only those studies in which behavior is linked explicitly to a desire to improve oneself.

This discussion of self motives obscures what is perhaps the most remarkable feature of recent research on the self: an implicit agreement among social and personality psychologists on the validity of a motivational perspective. After years of debating whether or not motivation affects social cognition and behavior (see Greenwald 1975, Miller & Ross 1975, Tetlock & Levi 1982), self theorists appear to have settled the issue with a considerable degree of consensus. The legitimization of a motivational approach seems to have come less from a satisfactory resolution of perennial concerns than from a realization that such a resolution was unlikely to be achieved (Tetlock & Levi 1982). Agreement on the ground rules has had both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, the past half-decade has been a period of remarkable productivity in the study of the self, as researchers have explored the potential of this motivational approach for predicting and explaining social behavior. On the negative side, this period has witnessed a proliferation of self theories and constructs with only modest attention paid to the relations among them.

## STRATEGIES OF THE SELF

The pursuit of self-knowledge, self-enhancement, and self-improvement can account for a wide variety of social behaviors. Indeed, these motives appear to

influence how people reason about the social world, with whom and on what dimensions they compare themselves, their choice of interaction partners, the way they present themselves both publicly and privately, and their relations to the groups of which they are members. Most recent investigations of the link between the self and social behavior have focused on the strategies that individuals use to satisfy these motives in particular social contexts. The specification of context is important here, because recent research has shied away from all-encompassing strategies like Freud's (1925) defense mechanisms or Festinger's (1957) dissonance reduction. Instead, it has focused on more circumscribed strategies that take into account both the motives driving the self and the opportunities and limitations inherent in the social context. Most of these strategies specify behavior in the domains of social reasoning, social comparison and interaction, self-presentation, and collective identification.

### *Social Reasoning Strategies*

Research on social reasoning strategies has focused on three effects of self-serving motives: 1. how they influence the content and use of cognitive structures, 2. how they bias memory search and evaluation processes, and 3. how they influence attributional processes. Exactly how these strategies serve the self (i.e. what specific motives are invoked) has received little attention. Instead, the emphasis has been on demonstrating motivationally guided departures from rational thought.

**SELF-ENHANCING COGNITIVE STRUCTURES** When given sufficient leeway, people define positive traits, abilities, and outcomes in a way that makes them self-descriptive. Dunning and colleagues found that people rate self-descriptive traits as highly central to the prototypes of positive qualities, such as intelligence and creativity, and as not at all central to the prototypes of negative qualities, such as submissiveness and aloofness (Dunning et al 1991). They also found that people with low standing on a particular trait or ability define success more leniently than do those with high standing (Dunning & Cohen 1992). These self-enhancing biases are facilitated by the ambiguity of most traits and abilities, which thereby allows for self-serving definitions that can be justified to self and others (Dunning et al 1989, see also Kunda 1987). Moreover, these studies suggest that the effects of motivation end there: Traits and theories that are defined self-enhancingly are used rationally (Dunning & Cohen 1992).

However, additional studies support the role of self-serving motives in the use of traits and categories as well. For example, several investigations have shown that failure in an ability-related domain leads one to evaluate that ability as less central (Hill et al 1989) and as less important (Frey & Stahlberg 1987). In addition, Niedenthal and colleagues have recently provided evidence for the self-serving use of a prototype-matching strategy (Niedenthal & Mordkoff

1991, Setterlund & Niedenthal 1993). Subjects asked to rank-order four kinds of psychotherapists preferred to see the therapist whose prototypical patient was most dissimilar to them on emotions and most similar to them on traits. Interestingly, these results were stronger for comparisons of the prototype with the ideal self than with the actual self (Niedenthal & Mordkoff 1991). Finally, additional studies indicate that a prototype-matching strategy is used more by people high in self-esteem than by those low in self-esteem (Setterlund & Niedenthal 1993), implicating this cognitive strategy in the maintenance of positive self-regard.

**BIASED SEARCH AND EVALUATION PROCESSES** Self motives are also pursued through biased strategies for accessing, constructing, and evaluating self-knowledge (Kunda 1990). In numerous studies, Kunda and colleagues (Kunda & Sanitioso 1989, Sanitioso et al 1990) have shown that subjects led to believe that a particular trait is associated with success rated themselves higher on that trait and accessed trait-relevant memories more readily than subjects who believed that the opposite trait predicted success. These self-enhancing tendencies were tempered, however, by self-knowledge: Subjects in these studies were constrained in their self-assessments by their prior standing on the trait dimension. Kunda (1990) has proposed that the motivation to self-enhance simply leads people to pose to themselves the hypothesis that they possess the desired trait, which is then confirmed through normal cognitive processes (Kunda et al 1993).

**MOTIVATED ATTRIBUTIONAL PROCESSES** Self-serving attributions, and in particular, the tendency to make internal attributions for positive outcomes and external attributions for negative outcomes, are perhaps the most well-researched of all motivated reasoning strategies. They were the primary focus of earlier debates about the validity of a motivational approach (Bradley 1978, Miller & Ross 1975, Tetlock & Levi 1982), and were a major impetus for much of the research we have discussed in this section. Recent studies of self-serving attributions have analyzed closely the motives underlying this strategy and have provided some evidence for its self-protective function. Tennen & Herzberger (1987) found that self-esteem predicts attributional style and argued that attributional style differences that are typically associated with depression, in fact, reflect attempts at self-esteem maintenance. Consistent with the contention that attributional style is driven by self-esteem maintenance, Brown & Rogers (1991) demonstrated that arousal plays a mediating role in the use of external attributions to explain failure. However, a field experiment in which subjects were assigned randomly to receive successful or unsuccessful outcomes provided no evidence of self-serving attributions (Taylor & Riess 1989).

Two additional studies have examined other ways in which self motives influence the attribution process. First, Braun & Wicklund (1988) demonstrated a positive correlation between attributions to ability and effort when a task was relevant to an important identity. They argued that the pursuit of self-knowledge leads people to bring identity-relevant factors into line with each other, and thereby reverses the usual negative relation between ability and effort associated with discounting. Second, Krosnick & Sedikides (1990) found evidence for self-enhancement in people's use of consensus information to predict their own behavior, but only among high self-monitors.

**SUMMARY** Recent research on motivated reasoning has provided more precise accounts of reasoning than of motivation. Theorists have sought to refine their accounts by isolating the effects of motivation in a single stage of the information-processing sequence. In this way, they have departed from earlier accounts that proposed more pervasive motivational effects (e.g. Pyszczynski & Greenberg 1987).

### *Social Comparison and Interaction Strategies*

Interpersonal contexts provide expanded opportunities for the pursuit of self-knowledge, self-enhancement, and self-improvement. In particular, they allow people to choose comparison targets and interaction partners in ways that maximize benefits to the self. Of the many strategies through which self motives can be satisfied in these social contexts (e.g. Swann et al 1992b, Wood 1989, Wood & Taylor 1991), recent empirical studies have focused primarily on the pursuit of self-knowledge in social interactions and of self-enhancement in social comparisons.

**SELF-VERIFICATION IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS** One manifestation of a desire for self-knowledge is that people tend to choose interaction partners who see them as they see themselves. Swann and colleagues (Swann et al 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992a,b) have conducted a series of studies of the self-verification process. According to Swann (1987), people use two general strategies to self-verify: They create environments that confirm their self-views, primarily by choosing appropriate interaction partners, and they interpret and remember their interactions as confirming their self-views. The literature contains considerable support for the second of these strategies (see Swann 1987 for a review); recent empirical studies have focused more closely on the first. The critical tests in these studies have concerned people with negative self-views, for whom self-verification and self-enhancement accounts make differential predictions. Both laboratory (e.g. Swann et al 1989) and field studies (e.g. Swann et al 1992a) have demonstrated that people choose and are highly committed to interaction partners who confirm their self-views, even if those self-views are negative.

Swann and colleagues argue that the inclination to choose interaction partners who confirm one's self-views is rooted in a desire to maintain perceptions of predictability and control. Two different types of findings have provided support for this proposal. First, several studies suggest that people seek verification only of self-views of which they are highly certain and confident (Pelham 1991b, Swann et al 1988). It makes sense that one's desire to know social reality would be most threatened by evidence that disconfirms those things of which one is certain. Second, more direct evidence of the motives underlying self-verification was provided by Swann et al (1992b). They analyzed the spontaneous verbalizations of subjects who were choosing interaction partners, and found that those who chose self-verifying partners did so mostly because the confirmation of their self-views put them at ease. Although the desire for positive social feedback also played a role for people with positive self-views, these positivity strivings were independent of self-verification.

**SELF-ENHANCING SOCIAL COMPARISONS** Whereas recent studies have portrayed social interactions as vehicles for self-verification, they have portrayed social comparisons primarily as opportunities for self-enhancement. In contrast to Festinger's (1954) original emphasis on the use of social comparison to evaluate one's abilities (in which he invoked both self-knowledge and self-improvement motives), recent investigations have examined the self-enhancing properties of downward comparisons (see Wood 1989 for a review). Many of these investigations were inspired by downward comparison theory (see Wills 1981, 1991), which holds that individuals under threat will improve their subjective well-being by comparing themselves with someone less fortunate. Empirical studies have validated this claim, operationalizing threat as negative feedback (Gibbons & McCoy 1991), low self-esteem (Smith & Insko 1987), depression (Pelham 1991a), and illness (Buunk et al 1990). Several of these studies also provided evidence for the information-seeking aims that Festinger posited (and that considerable earlier research has supported; see Wood 1989, Wood & Taylor 1991 for reviews), but their main emphasis was on the use of downward comparison as a self-enhancement strategy.

Although empirical evidence has generally supported the downward comparison framework, it has revealed the need for elaboration on two points, one pertaining to self-esteem and the other to the social context. Several recent studies indicate that level of self-esteem does not influence the extent of downward comparison (as Wills 1981 proposed), but instead the kind of downward comparison strategies people use. Gibbons & McCoy (1991, see Gibbons & Gerrard 1991) found that high self-esteem subjects were more likely to use an active form of downward comparison when threatened (e.g. to derogate the unfortunate comparison target), whereas low self-esteem subjects

were more likely to use a passive form (e.g. to experience mood improvement after the comparison opportunity). Similarly, Brown et al (1988) found that high and low self-esteem subjects differed not in how much they enhanced, but in how directly they enhanced. High self-esteem subjects showed more in-group favoritism when they were actively involved in a group than when they were not, whereas low self-esteem subjects showed more outgroup derogation when they were not actively involved in a group than when they were active (see also Crocker et al 1987). Brown et al (1988) argued, on the basis of these findings, that everybody seeks positive identities but that people low in self-esteem are constrained in their self-enhancement by concerns over whether their positive identities can be defended.

A similar set of arguments applies to the social context. In a recent investigation, Brown & Gallagher (1992) found that the social context moderates the extent to which people use downward social comparison to self-enhance after failure. Subjects who failed privately tended to exaggerate their relative superiority over others, whereas those who failed publicly showed no signs of self-enhancement. Brown & Gallagher again traced this difference to concern over whether their self-presentations could be defended. It is difficult to maintain (with a straight face) that one is superior after having just shown oneself to be a failure. (See Wood 1989 for a more extended discussion of the role of the social context in social comparison.)

**EVIDENCE FOR A SELF-IMPROVEMENT MOTIVE** In his original formulation of social comparison theory, Festinger (1954) proposed that comparisons would be characterized by a unidirectional drive upward, whereby people would seek comparisons with slightly superior others in order to obtain information on how to improve. Earlier investigations of social comparison in nonthreatening circumstances have provided considerable evidence for the unidirectional drive upward (see Wood 1989). But recent studies have demonstrated that social comparison can serve this function even in groups under threat. For example, Buunk et al (1990) found that cancer patients were able to benefit from both upward and downward comparisons, with upward comparison targets serving mainly as models of self-improvement (particularly for those patients with high self-esteem). Similarly, Taylor & Lobel (1989) argued that people under threat may evaluate themselves in comparison to less fortunate targets, but they prefer to seek information and affiliation from more fortunate others. Thus, downward comparisons are clearly not the only way to deal with threat. Upward comparison strategies may also serve as effective coping strategies.

**UNDERLYING MECHANISMS** One obvious question raised by the findings reviewed in this section is how to reconcile the evidence for downward comparison, on the one hand, and self-verification, on the other. That is, what factors



promote the differential pursuit of self-enhancement and self-knowledge in these social contexts? A partial answer is provided by research on the mechanisms underlying these strategies. Several studies have provided converging evidence that self-enhancement is rooted primarily in the affective system whereas self-verification is rooted primarily in the cognitive system. Some of this evidence comes from Tesser's (1988) research on the self-evaluation maintenance model. According to this model, reactions to another's performance on a task depend on three variables: the quality of the performance, one's closeness to the performer, and the relevance of the task to the self. For high relevance tasks, one compares oneself to the performer and feels better if the performer does poorly than does well (a form of downward comparison). For low relevance tasks, one reflects in the other's performance and feels better if the performer does well than does poorly. Closeness to the performer increases the pain of comparison and the pleasure of reflection. In several studies, Tesser and colleagues (Tesser et al 1988, 1989, see Tesser 1991 for a review) have shown that this strategy of self-evaluation maintenance is driven by arousal. For example, Tesser et al (1988) found that being outperformed by a close other worsened performance of a complex task but improved performance of a simple task, suggesting that the experience was arousing. In a very different investigation, Tesser et al (1989) found that effects predicted by the self-evaluation maintenance model were found under normal conditions but were eliminated when arousal could be misattributed. These and other studies suggest that self-evaluation maintenance, which includes a downward comparison component, is rooted in the affective system (see also Paulus & Levitt 1987).

Further evidence that different mechanisms underlie self-enhancement and self-verification was provided by Swann and his colleagues (Swann et al 1987). Swann et al (1987) presented subjects who had positive or negative self-views with either favorable or unfavorable social feedback. They found that cognitive responses to the feedback were influenced by its consistency with their self-views, whereas affective responses were influenced by its positivity. Swann et al (1990) provided additional support for the cognitive basis of self-verification. In several studies, they found that people preferred consistent feedback under normal conditions, but preferred enhancing feedback when deprived of cognitive resources. Swann et al argued that self-enhancement is driven by a simple preference for favorable social feedback, whereas self-verification involves a more complex process of comparing feedback with representations of the self in memory.

**SUMMARY** Recent studies of social comparison and social interaction have addressed two separate questions. Social comparison studies have focused on the strategies that people use under threat, and have thereby invoked the affective system and desires for self-enhancement. Social interaction studies, on the other

hand, have typically examined choice of interaction partners in the absence of explicit evaluative threat, and thus have invoked desires for self-knowledge. The points of convergence in these two research traditions, particularly regarding the motives and mechanisms underlying the strategies, suggest that they are most usefully conceived as complementary approaches. A view of the self as driven by both self-enhancement and self-knowledge concerns can accommodate all of the existing data.

### *Self-Presentation Strategies*

The task of presenting oneself before others offers yet another forum for the pursuit of self motives. The strategic possibilities in this context seem almost limitless, and indeed, recent studies serve as a testimony to this broad range of possibilities. Less research attention has been given to disentangling the motives underlying these strategies. Most theoretical frameworks have implicitly or explicitly included the three self motives that we have described, typically combining them under the more general goal of constructing desired identities that are both believable (a self-knowledge concern) and beneficial (a self-enhancement/self-improvement concern; see Leary & Kowalski 1990, Schlenker & Weigold 1989, 1992). In addition, some of these models have posited interpersonal motives for self-presentation, including the desire to maximize social and material outcomes (Leary & Kowalski 1990) and to influence the behavior of others (Baumeister 1982).

**CONTENTS OF SELF-PRESENTATIONS** The contents of self-presentations are influenced by numerous factors including properties of the presenter (e.g. his or her current self-concept, desired and undesired identities) and properties of the social context (e.g. role constraints, the beliefs and values of the audience; see Leary & Kowalski 1990). Several recent studies have outlined strategies that presenters use to self-enhance in contexts that mitigate against positive self-images. For example, Fleming & Rudman (1993) examined self-presentational strategies that people use to insulate themselves from the consequences of negative self-discrepant behaviors. They found that subjects who read counterattitudinal essays about affirmative action in front of an African-American audience member performed various distancing behaviors (e.g. self-embracing posture, lip and mouth movements, disclaimers, excuses) in order to dissociate themselves from their statements. This strategy was apparently quite effective, as it eliminated the need for dissonance-reducing attitude change and served as a discounting cue for naive observers. In another line of research, Cialdini and colleagues (Cialdini & DeNicholas 1989, Finch & Cialdini 1989) investigated self-presentational strategies involving associations with others. They found that subjects who believed they were in a unit relation with another person (a male who was described as sharing their birthday) presented him and their

connection with him so as to benefit both parties, even when he was disreputable or a failure. These studies illustrate that people are skilled self-enhancers, even within quite constraining contexts.

Of course, people vary in what they consider to be a desirable identity to present. For example, Jones et al (1990) assigned subjects to play the role of a morally reprehensible person and found that high self-monitors felt better if they succeeded than if they failed, whereas low self-monitors felt better if they failed than if they succeeded. Schlenker & Weigold (1990) found that privately self-conscious subjects presented themselves as autonomous, whereas publicly self-conscious subjects presented themselves as social animals. Chaiken and colleagues (Mori et al 1987, Pliner & Chaiken 1990) found that female subjects moderated their eating behavior in order to present themselves as feminine, consuming less while getting acquainted with a desirable male than with other types of companions. Thus, people differ considerably in how they want to be seen, but they share in common an active pursuit of those desired self-images (see also Doherty et al 1990).

**ROLE OF SELF-ESTEEM** Self-esteem has also proven to be an important predictor of how people self-present, and in particular, of the extent to which they present themselves in a self-enhancing fashion. Two competing views of the relation between self-esteem and self-presentation have been proposed. First, Baumeister et al (1989) have suggested that people with high self-esteem tend to present themselves in a self-enhancing fashion, characterized by an inclination to accept risks, to focus on their outstandingly good qualities, to engage in strategic ploys, and to call attention to themselves. People with low self-esteem, on the other hand, tend to present themselves in a self-protective fashion, characterized by an inclination to avoid risks, to focus on avoiding their outstandingly bad qualities, to eschew strategic ploys, and to refrain from calling attention to themselves. In support of this framework, Baumeister et al (1993) found that when exposed to evaluative threat, subjects with high self-esteem took greater risks (and as a result, tended to lose more) than subjects with low self-esteem. Similarly, Schlenker et al (1990) found that social pressures (i.e. pressure to make a good impression and to make it publicly) led high self-esteem subjects to be more self-assertive and low self-esteem subjects to be more self-protective in their attributions, especially after they had received failure feedback (see also Brown & Gallagher 1992).

Baumgardner et al (1990) have proposed a very different view of the relation between self-esteem and self-presentation. They began with the premise that self-enhancement is a strategy used to improve affect and that this strategy necessarily takes different forms depending on the favorableness of one's self-regard. People with high self-esteem, because they are certain of their positive self-conceptions, tend to engage in private self-enhancement

involving thought and attentional processes. People with low self-esteem, by contrast, need social support for their positive self-conceptions and thus tend to engage in public self-enhancement involving self-presentation. Several empirical studies have provided evidence consistent with this framework (see Baumgardner 1990, Baumgardner et al 1989).

Although these two views make opposite predictions about who will engage in public self-enhancement, they have several points of convergence. In particular, both suggest that a critical factor affecting how people present themselves is the certainty with which they hold their self-conceptions. However, the two accounts differ in what they regard to be the goal of self-presentation. For Baumeister and colleagues, self-presentation is a strategy for securing positive evaluations of the self by others. People with high self-esteem seek to maximize the positivity of these evaluations by adopting a self-assertive style. People with low self-esteem seek to minimize the negativity of these evaluations by adopting a self-protective style. For Baumgardner and colleagues, self-presentation is a strategy for improving self-affect. People with high self-esteem do not need to assert to others that they are good in order to have positive self-regard. People with low self-esteem feel more certain of themselves in public than in private, and thus engage in more public forms of self-enhancement.

These views also differ in the circumstances under which each applies. Most of the studies supporting Baumeister's view involve behavior under threatening conditions (e.g. when the audience expects failure or when subjects have received failure feedback), whereas those supporting Baumgardner's view do not involve an explicit threat. This difference may also account for the differential predictions of the two frameworks (see Baumgardner et al 1990).

**SELF-HANDICAPPING** Another strategy of self-enhancing presentation that is used under threatening circumstances is self-handicapping. In self-handicapping, people arrange in advance for impediments to a successful performance, thereby ensuring that failure will not threaten their self-esteem (Jones & Berglas 1978). Although self-handicapping is only one of many self-presentational strategies that people can use to ward off threat, it has proven to be an enormously popular topic of research for the past 15 years (Higgins et al 1990).

Like other self-presentational strategies, self-handicapping is influenced by both properties of the presenter and properties of the social context. Shepperd & Arkin (1989a) provide a recent example of research on contextual factors. Subjects were to take either a high- or low-validity aptitude test with an impediment to their performance (i.e. a handicap) either already present or absent in the environment. The question was whether they would choose a handicap themselves. Results indicated that subjects chose a handicap only in

anticipation of an important task and only if no preexisting handicap was available in the environment. In a review of the situational influences on self-handicapping, Self (1990) concluded that self-handicapping is most likely when an important aspect of the self is threatened with public disconfirmation, when handicaps are both available and legitimate, and when the performance does not involve tangible rewards.

More attention has been paid lately to how properties of the presenter influence self-handicapping. Rhodewalt et al (1991; see Rhodewalt 1990) have developed a self-report inventory that measures generalized preferences for self-handicapping behavior. This measure has been found to predict both the likelihood that a person will self-handicap and the specific strategies that he or she will employ (see also Hirt et al 1991). Likewise, public self-consciousness has been found to predict the likelihood of self-handicapping (Shepperd & Arkin 1989b). And numerous studies have demonstrated gender differences in the likelihood (Shepperd & Arkin 1989b) and strategies (Hirt et al 1991) of self-handicapping, although these gender differences are still not well understood (see Rhodewalt 1990 for a review).

Not surprisingly, self-esteem is also associated with differences in self-handicapping. Although scores on the self-handicapping scale are inversely related to self-esteem (Rhodewalt 1990), indicating that people low in self-esteem are more likely to self-handicap, recent evidence suggests that people high in self-esteem are also likely to self-handicap if presented with an opportunity to appear outstanding. For example, Rhodewalt et al (1991) found that high self-esteem subjects used self-handicapping both to discount failure and to augment success, whereas low self-esteem subjects used it only to discount failure (and then, only if they scored high on the self-handicapping scale). Similarly, in several investigations, Tice (1991) found that high self-esteem subjects were more likely to handicap if success was meaningful whereas low self-esteem subjects were more likely to handicap if failure was meaningful (see also Tice & Baumeister 1990). These and additional findings support the view that self-presentation serves an enhancing function for people of high self-esteem and a protective function for people of low self-esteem (Baumeister et al 1989).

Finally, several studies have addressed the effectiveness of different types of self-handicapping, both as a discounting cue for the audience and as a self-esteem buffer for the presenter. From the audience perspective (typically, a subject reading a scenario), involuntary handicaps, like depressive symptoms (Schouten & Handelsman 1987) or unintentional low effort (Baumgardner & Levy 1988), appear to serve as more powerful discounting cues for poor performance than do voluntary handicaps (Baumgardner & Levy 1988). Moreover, even when voluntary handicaps reduce negative attributions about ability, they can lead to more negative attributions about other personal character-

istics (Luginbuhl & Palmer 1991). However, from the presenter's perspective, self-handicapping can be an effective strategy to ward off the negative feelings that come with failure. Rhodewalt et al (1991) found that self-handicapping reduced the dampening influence of failure on both self-esteem and mood, whereas it had no effect on the positivity associated with success. Thus, for the presenter, self-handicapping may be a valuable strategy indeed.

**SUMMARY** Research on self-presentation has continued to reveal just how skillful people are at constructing strategies to negotiate difficult social circumstances. The view of the self underlying this research is quite consistent with the enhancement- and knowledge-seeking creature we have been describing. However, self-presentation research has also accorded the social context (including the audience and properties of the situation) a powerful role in determining an individual's goals and behaviors. Indeed, this work provides an excellent illustration of how the self both shapes and is shaped by the social context. We will see more evidence for this theme in the literature on collective identification.

### *Collective Identification Strategies*

The relation of the individual to the collective has traditionally been a central issue in social psychology. In this section, we examine recent advances in the study of how the self influences and is influenced by identification with social groups. This literature reflects the growing conviction among many researchers that self structure and process must be considered with reference to entities larger than the individual (Brewer 1991; Crocker & Major 1989; Deaux 1992a,b, 1993; McCann 1990; Markus & Cross 1990; Morgan & Schwalbe 1990; Serpe & Stryker 1987; Stryker 1991). Empirical support for this contention is accumulating, but the theoretical statements remain more impressive at the present time. These statements can be classified, according to their primary focus, into two categories: self-enhancement and self-esteem maintenance theories and distinctiveness theories.

**SELF-ENHANCEMENT THEORIES** Most recent research on self-collective relations has been guided by social identity theory and its successors. The original formulation of social identity theory (Tajfel 1972, Tajfel & Turner 1986) stated that individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem by their membership in social groups that permit either positive or negative identification. More recently, self-categorization theory has incorporated this assumption into a more explicit account of the self (Turner 1985, Turner et al 1987, Turner & Oakes 1989). Self-categorization theory defines the self-concept as comprised of two components: personal identity and social identity. Personal identity refers to the self-categorization or cognitive grouping of the self based on intrapersonal

similarities and differences from other individuals. Social identity refers to the social categorization of the self based on interpersonal similarities or differences derived from group membership (e.g. Californian, Zoroastrian, female). Of particular interest are the conditions under which people are more likely to categorize themselves primarily in terms of their personal or social identity and the consequences of such categorization.

Considerable research has addressed the second of these questions, and much of it has examined the effects of shifting focus from personal to social identity on subsequent behavior. These studies have shown that this shift in focus (known as depersonalization) leads individuals to behave as group members, producing increased evidence for such group behaviors as stereotyping, cooperation and competition, norm formation, conformity, and polarization (Abrams et al 1990, Brewer & Schneider 1990, Hogg 1992, Oakes & Turner 1990, Turner 1991, Turner et al 1987).

More recently, attention has turned to the questions of how and why variability in self-categorization emerges. Here, Turner and colleagues (see Turner et al 1994) subscribe to Bruner's (1957) emphasis on the accessibility of particular categories as a function of past experience, present circumstances, and immediate motives and goals. The relative prominence of personal versus social identity derives from the degree of fit between category specifications and the stimulus to be represented. For example, Hogg & Turner (1987) found that males and females used gender in judgments of self more when they made intergroup rather than intragroup comparisons (see also Oakes et al 1991).

The notion of fit has also been used to generate predictions about the role of social context in self-judgment (Turner et al 1994). For example, several studies have shown that self-categorization becomes more inclusive as comparative context expands to include those seen as different from self (increasing perceived differences between *us* and *them* compared to differences between *me* and *you*) (Haslam & Turner 1992, Gaertner et al 1989, Wilder & Thompson 1988). Additional evidence suggests that these results reflect the influence of social context on the way social categories are defined. Specifically, McGarty et al (1992) found that changes in ingroup/outgroup boundaries altered judgments of common social categories (e.g. categories such as psychologist and American). Such experiments have been interpreted to implicate a view of self as neither fixed nor chaotic, but as a dynamic process that works in lawful relation to the social context (Turner et al 1994).

Social identity and self-categorization theories have inspired numerous related accounts of collective identification. For example, Cheek (1989) has proposed a view of personal and social identities in which they are not defined by the immediate social context but instead are stable, enduring properties of individuals. In Cheek's formulation, personal identity refers to one's self-knowledge and self-evaluation, whereas social identity includes the character-

istics of self that emerge in interaction with others (e.g. attraction, popularity). Support for a dispositional view of these identities has come from correlational research relating individual differences in personal and social identity to numerous traits and behaviors, including altruism, social appropriateness, achievement, and uniqueness (for discussion of individual differences in identity effects see also Abrams 1992, Hinkle & Brown 1990).

Another perspective on collective identification has emerged from a closer consideration of the relation between self-esteem and group membership (Crocker & Major 1989). An examination of the empirical literature on this point reveals an apparent contradiction: Studies have consistently failed to demonstrate the association between membership in a stigmatized group and low global self-esteem that would be predicted by social identity and other theories. Crocker & Major (1989) proposed instead that members of stigmatized groups can adopt several strategies to deflect negative feedback including 1. attributing it to the group rather than self (Crocker et al 1991), 2. comparing themselves with disadvantaged (ingroup) rather than advantaged (outgroup) others, and 3. selectively devaluing those dimensions on which their group is known to perform poorly. In a related inquiry, Bat-Chava (1994) found that among deaf subjects, the relation between group identification and self-esteem was low overall, but was moderated by the degree of deaf awareness present in the subject's family. If awareness was low (hearing parents and siblings, no use of sign language), the correlation between self-esteem and group identification remained low; if awareness was high, a substantial correlation between these two variables was observed. Such analyses add to a growing body of literature suggesting that the relationship between self-esteem and group identity is not nearly as straightforward as earlier theories would suggest.

In a separate line of work, Crocker & Luhtanen (1990; Luhtanen & Crocker 1991, 1992) have developed and tested a measure of collective self-esteem. They construe collective self-esteem to be an individual difference variable (empirically distinct from personal self-esteem) that measures the extent to which individuals generally evaluate their social groups positively. Crocker & Luhtanen (1990) provided recent evidence in support of this notion of collective self-esteem. Subjects in a minimal group experiment received either success or failure feedback about the performance of their group and then rated above-average and below-average scorers. Results showed that subjects high in collective self-esteem varied their ratings to enhance ingroup performance, whereas subjects low in collective self-esteem did not (nor was this pattern obtained when using the personal self-esteem measure). Similarly, Brown et al (1988) found that high self-esteem subjects (measured by the Texas Social Behavior Inventory, a measure that places emphasis on the social aspects of self-esteem) were more likely than low self-esteem subjects to display ingroup favoritism when they were directly involved in group processes. However, this



study also showed that low self-esteem subjects were more likely than high self-esteem subjects to display ingroup favoritism when they were not directly involved in group processes.

In a final, related line of research, Deaux (1991, 1992a,b) has examined how individual experiences combine with social situations to influence identity. Deaux (1993) defines identity as the social categories in which an individual claims membership, and focuses on how people adopt identities by categorizing themselves as members of various groups. This perspective differs from traditional social identity and self-categorization theories primarily in the emphasis it places on the personal meaning that individuals attach to their social categories. As a result, Deaux (1993) views personal and social identity to be very closely linked. On the one hand, personal identity is partly defined by group memberships and on the other, identification with social categories is colored by personal meanings. She and her colleagues have explored this notion of identity by asking subjects to name the identities they claim and then to provide the characteristics associated with each identity.

Additional arguments for a more flexible view of personal and social identity have been offered by Abrams (1992, Abrams & Hogg 1988). His disagreement with traditional social identity theory concerns its emphasis on the self-esteem maintenance function of collective identification. Abrams contends that identification with a group can, in fact, serve a myriad of functions, ranging from material wealth, power, and control, to self-knowledge, cognitive consistency, and self-efficacy. Moreover, Abrams (1994) has recently argued for the integration of social identity and self-awareness approaches in order to achieve a better understanding of collective behavior.

**DISTINCTIVENESS THEORIES** A second set of theories has emphasized the role of distinctiveness in determining the collectives that define the self. In an account inspired by social identity theory, Brewer (1991, 1993) has proposed that collective identification is driven by the tension between needs for validation and similarity to others and needs for uniqueness and individuation. According to her optimal distinctiveness theory, social identity is a compromise between assimilation toward others (i.e. those in the ingroup) and differentiation away from others (i.e. those in the outgroup). Among the theory's main assumptions is that individuals will identify most strongly with groups that best resolve this conflict between assimilation and differentiation.

In support of optimal distinctiveness theory, Brewer (1991) reviewed research showing that individuals often act in accordance with their social identity rather than their personal identity, even when the context is not explicitly depersonalizing. For example, numerous studies have shown that people perceive greater discrimination against their groups than against themselves, and that it is the perception of group discrimination that motivates collective action

(Taylor et al 1987, 1990). In a more direct test of the optimal distinctiveness notion, Brewer & Schneider (1990) examined collective identification using a social dilemma task. They found that if a collective identity was not available or if the available collective was large or amorphous, subjects acted in their own self-interest. However, if the available collective was intermediate in size, subjects acted in the collective interest.

Distinctiveness is derived, in part, from group size, leading to the prediction that group identification will be stronger among members of minority than majority groups. This prediction has received support from studies showing that biases in favor of the ingroup increase as the ratio of ingroup to outgroup size decreases (Mullen et al 1992). However, group status complicates this simple prediction, as minority size is often correlated with disadvantages in status, placing distinctiveness and positive social identity in opposition. Recently, Brewer et al (1993) examined the effects of group status, majority status, and depersonalization on ingroup bias. They found that group status and majority status interacted for control subjects, with members of high status majority groups and of low status minority groups providing the most positive evaluations of the ingroup. However, for depersonalized subjects, they found that members of minority groups provided more positive ingroup evaluations than did members of majority groups, irrespective of status.

McGuire & McGuire (1988) have adopted a unique approach to the study of distinctiveness. Pointing out that research on the self has overemphasized reactive measures and evaluative judgments, they have examined the self by asking subjects simply to "Tell us about yourself" or "Tell us about school." Numerous findings have supported their major prediction that distinctive aspects of self would be mentioned more frequently in these spontaneous self-concepts than would nondistinctive aspects. For example, boys and girls mentioned their gender more often as the number of opposite gender members in their family increased. Likewise, children who belonged to ethnic minority groups were more likely to mention their ethnicity than were white children, but were less likely to mention their ethnicity as its representation in their classroom increased. These findings demonstrate the importance of both enduring and immediate social contexts in shaping the self-concept.

**SUMMARY** Research on collective identification strategies has shown how these strategies reflect both the motives of the self and the influence of the social context. Some investigators have emphasized the agency of individuals, who are guided in their relations with collectives by needs for self-enhancement and self-definition (Brewer 1991, Crocker & Major 1989, Deaux 1993, Turner et al 1994). Others have emphasized the influence of group membership in the spontaneous self-concept (McGuire & McGuire 1988). Taken together, these investigations have provided considerable support for the contention that col-

lectives are not external to individuals, but instead are authentic and significant aspects of the self.

## MODERATING VARIABLES

Our discussion has focused on the common psychological and behavioral strategies through which people pursue goals of self-knowledge, self-enhancement, and self-improvement. However, numerous variables moderate the use of these strategies by particular individuals. In some cases, these variables influence the form that a particular strategy takes (e.g. the dimensions of downward comparison, the methods of self-handicapping, the relations between public and private collective self-esteem). In other cases, these variables influence whether a particular strategy is adopted at all (e.g. whether people choose situations using a prototype-matching strategy, whether they self-enhance after failure). We now review explicitly such moderating effects, documenting the influence of social categories, individual difference variables, and culture on the self. We focus especially on how these variables moderate strategies of the self, but also review their effects on related aspects of self-evaluation and self-definition.

### *Social Categories*

Social psychologists trained in psychology have traditionally devoted little attention to how membership in particular social categories shapes the self. However, this topic has been of long-standing interest to sociologists, who see social categories, and more generally social roles and identities, as providing definition and meaning to self (see Markus & Cross 1990 for a review). Recent theoretical perspectives include Stryker's (1991) identity theory, which considers how societal norms that are attached to social category, positional, and role designations are translated into individual identities. Also, Wiley & Alexander (1987) have offered an analysis of the conditions under which social categories and roles should influence the self (e.g. they argue that if one component of a role is gratifying, other aspects of the role will be adopted as well). Here, we review empirical studies that have demonstrated an influence of social category membership on the self, focusing in particular on gender and ethnicity.

**GENDER** Gender is the most fundamental of human categories, so it is hardly surprising that gender should influence the strategies of the self. We have already reviewed evidence showing gender differences in downward comparison (Gibbons & McCoy 1991), self-presentation (Mori et al 1987), and self-handicapping strategies (Hirt et al 1991). In addition, Josephs et al (1992) found gender differences in the bases for self-esteem, with men deriving self-esteem from

achievements that are personally distinguishing and women deriving self-esteem from attachments to important others. But in a related finding, Pratt et al (1990) demonstrated that gender differences in connectedness (females greater than males) disappear in late adulthood, when connectedness becomes important for men as well.

Although research on gender has moved away from simply documenting main effects, some gender differences in self-evaluation and self-definition have been noted. Recent research has shown that women more than men underestimate performance on self-evaluations (Beyer 1990), place less value on physical attractiveness in others (Feingold 1990), score higher on some measures of emotional intensity (Fujita et al 1991, LaFrance & Banaji 1992), report greater happiness and life satisfaction (Wood et al 1989), self-disclose to a greater degree under conditions of close friendships (Dindia & Allen 1992), and disclose information of differing quality to same-sex and opposite-sex partners (Snell 1989).

Additional gender differences have been documented in aspects of the self related to depression. Levit (1991) found that adolescent males make greater use of externalizing ego-defenses (e.g. projection and outward aggression), whereas female adolescents make greater use of internalizing ego-defenses (e.g. turning against the self). Similarly, Block et al (1991), in a study of the antecedent conditions of depressive tendencies, found that girls show less aggression, less self-aggrandizing, and greater overcontrolling than do boys. Further studies have shown that women exhibit a greater tendency to self-focus (Ingram et al 1988), and to amplify their moods by ruminating about their depressed states (Nolen-Hoeksema 1987) than do men. Finally, Rohde et al (1990) found that being female predicted a future diagnosis of depression, but did not predict an increase in depressive symptoms.

Finally, the relation between gender and gender identity has emerged as an important topic of research. Investigations have suggested that gender identity, rather than gender per se, is often the better predictor of behavior. For example, Jose & McCarthy (1988) found that subjects with high masculinity scores on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem 1974) were perceived to talk more and to contribute more good ideas in the course of social interaction, whereas females and subjects with high femininity scores were judged to be more concerned about group members' feelings. Other studies have shown that gender identity influences behaviors as diverse as me-not me judgments on trait adjectives (Payne et al 1987) and choice of ego defense style (Levit 1991). These and similar findings have led to the development of a new procedure to measure the contribution of gender in terms of diagnosticity (Lippa 1991).

**SATISFACTION WITH THE PHYSICAL SELF** Among the various dimensions of self, none is as visible as one's physical self or body. Social psychologists have

traditionally paid little attention to this facet of self, but its importance is beginning to be recognized (Cash & Pruzinsky 1990). In particular, Cash (1990) has recently documented the ways that bodily attributes affect self-perceptions. Additionally, Fallon (1990) has reviewed the influence of culture on the formation and maintenance of body image, the differential influence of cultural standards on individuals within social categories of sex, culture, and class, and the suffering caused by unnatural cultural ideals of body image.

Empirical evidence for the impact of the physical self on self-evaluation and self-definition, especially among women, has been provided by Chaiken, Pliner, and their colleagues. Pliner et al (1990) conducted a survey of more than 600 women and men, ranging in age from 10 to 79 years, in which they measured concern with body weight, eating, physical appearance, and global and appearance-specific self-esteem. Women reported more concern than men about body weight, eating, and physical appearance, and showed lower appearance self-esteem than men at all ages. In a related experiment, Chaiken & Pliner (1987) found that a food diary attributed to a male or female target who ate either small or large meals led to different inferences about the target on a variety of dimensions: Male targets were rated similarly regardless of the size of their meal, whereas females were rated as more feminine, more likely to possess feminine personality traits, more concerned about appearance, and more physically attractive if they ate small portions than if they ate large portions.

Additional studies have shown how these gender-specific norms for appearance and eating behavior shape self-presentation strategies. Mori et al (1987) found that females ate reliably less when in the presence of a desirable rather than an undesirable opposite-sex partner, whereas males did not show this sensitivity to partner's attractiveness. Even more impressively, females who had been led to believe that they had masculine rather than feminine interests ate less in the presence of a partner whom they believed was aware of this information. More recently, Pliner & Chaiken (1990) have suggested that although both men and women are concerned about social desirability in eating behavior, women show an additional concern with appearing feminine.

Finally, a separate line of research has provided converging evidence for the relation between physical appearance and self-evaluation, especially among women. Following from Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory, Strauman et al (1991) found that actual-ideal discrepancies among female undergraduates were correlated with dissatisfaction with body mass and appearance-related beliefs about self. In addition, an actual-ideal discrepancy was associated with bulimic-related disorders and an actual-ought discrepancy with anorexic-related disorders in populations of both women and men.

**ETHNICITY** Social scientists have theorized that ethnicity is central to the self-concept, but surprisingly little empirical research on this topic has appeared in the major personality and social psychology journals (see Phinney 1990 for a review). There are, however, a few very recent findings to suggest that ethnicity influences collective identification strategies and their relation to psychological well-being. First, in an investigation of identity change among Hispanic students at Ivy League universities, Ethier & Deaux (1990) found no relation between perceptions of identity threat (as measured by self-report) and ethnic identity among students entering college, but a large negative correlation was found on later measures. This research also showed that the stronger the perceived threat to one's identity, the more likely that identity was to be viewed negatively (see also Cameron & Lalonde 1994).

In addition, Crocker et al (1991) have provided evidence that ethnicity moderates both relations among components of collective self-esteem and the relation of collective self-esteem to psychological well-being. Among European-, Asian-, and African-American college students, these investigators found systematic differences in the relation between the public self and the private self. European-American students showed a moderate positive correlation between public and private collective self-esteem, suggesting that they view their own social groups largely as they believe others evaluate them. African-American students, on the other hand, showed no correlation between public and private collective self-esteem, suggesting a separation of personal feelings about their groups from beliefs about how others evaluate them. In contrast to both these groups, Asian-American students showed a high positive correlation between public and private collective self-esteem, suggesting that they place a strong emphasis on the connection between themselves and their groups (see Markus & Kitayama 1991). In addition, this study showed that for members of minority groups (African-Americans and Asian-Americans), but not the majority group (European-Americans), collective self-esteem predicted psychological well-being beyond the effects of personal self-esteem. (For a discussion of the effects of race identity on self-esteem see Jones 1992.)

**SUMMARY** Taken together, these demonstrations of the moderating effects of social categories provide important evidence for the influence of society on the self (Stryker 1991). Social categories differ both in their desirability (as culturally defined) and in what their members consider to be desirable behavior. Thus, the strategies used by members of these categories to pursue self-knowledge and especially self-enhancement are likely to differ as well. The studies in this section, particularly those of Pliner & Chaiken (1990), Ethier & Deaux (1990), and Crocker et al (1994), serve as excellent illustrations of this point.

### *Individual Differences*

Numerous individual differences in personality have also been found to moderate the strategies of the self. By far the most popular moderator among researchers has been self-esteem, although a number of others have received attention as well. In this section, we review recent research on individual differences in self-strategies, focusing especially on studies that have linked individual difference variables directly to concerns with self-knowledge and self-enhancement.

**SELF-ESTEEM** Common conceptions of self-esteem tend to equate it with the balance of positive and negative conceptions one has about oneself. The more positive self-conceptions and the fewer negative self-conceptions one holds, the higher one's self-esteem. In support of this view, Greenwald et al (1988) demonstrated reliable correlations between self-esteem and the number of items generated in categories such as liked activities, positive qualities, and names of friends.

However, most recent investigations of self-esteem have emphasized not its evaluative component but rather its association with the certainty or clarity of self-conceptions (Pelham & Swann 1989). For example, Baumgardner (1990) demonstrated that individuals with low self-esteem were less certain than those with high self-esteem about possessing a variety of trait attributes. Likewise, Campbell (1990) found that individuals with low self-esteem rated themselves less extremely, less confidently, less quickly, and with less temporal stability than did individuals with high self-esteem. In addition, this study showed that the self-concepts of low self-esteem people, compared with high self-esteem people, were less internally consistent, less congruent with perceptions of current behavior, and less congruent with memory for past behavior (see also Campbell & Fehr 1990).

Most of the moderating effects of self-esteem on motivated strategies have been traced to this association between self-esteem and self-certainty. In particular, differences between individuals with high and low self-esteem in prototype-matching (Setterlund & Niedenthal 1993), downward comparison (Gibbons & McCoy 1991), ingroup favoritism (Brown et al 1988), self-presentation (Baumeister et al 1989, 1993; Baumgardner 1990, Baumgardner et al 1989, Schlenker et al 1990), and self-handicapping (Baumeister et al 1989, Rhodewalt et al 1991, Tice 1991, Tice & Baumeister 1990) have all been attributed to underlying differences in the certainty of their self-conceptions. In addition, Brown and colleagues have recently shown that the self-evaluations of low self-esteem people were more vulnerable to their recent experiences (Brown & Smart 1991) and to their mood (Brown & Mankowski 1993) than were those of high self-esteem people.

Finally, additional studies have suggested that self-certainty is an important predictor of the relation between self-esteem and emotional experience. Kernis et al (1991) found that an inverse correlation between level of self-esteem and depression emerged only for individuals with stable self-esteem (as measured by repeated completion of a self-esteem measure; see Showers 1992a for a related finding). And in a separate investigation, Kernis et al (1989) found that unstable self-esteem was associated with greater tendencies to experience anger and hostility, especially among high self-esteem individuals.

**OTHER INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES** Self-esteem is not the only variable that moderates the strategies of the self. We have already reviewed studies demonstrating the influence of self-monitoring on social reasoning (Krosnick & Sedikides 1990) and of both self-monitoring (Jones et al 1990) and self-consciousness (Schlenker & Weigold 1990) on self-presentation. In these cases, the moderating variables appear to affect the kind of private or public image that the self seeks.

In other cases, moderating variables influence the type of strategy that is adopted. Researchers have identified a number of specific strategies that characterize some individuals but not others. For example, Cantor et al (1987) have distinguished between two types of people who differ in their approaches to challenging situations: Optimists assume the best until proven otherwise and protect self-esteem only in the event of failure; defensive pessimists emphasize the negative possibilities inherent in a situation up front in order to prepare for the possibility of failure and to motivate maximum effort. Each of these self-protective strategies can work very well, but only for individuals disposed to use them. Recent studies have demonstrated that a mismatch between the person and the strategy has negative consequences for both affect and performance (Norem & Illingworth 1993, Showers 1992b). Similar investigations have delineated a self-critical interaction strategy (Powers & Zuroff 1988) and a narcissistic personality style (Raskin et al 1991), each of which serves a self-protective function for particular individuals.

## *Culture*

An additional moderator of self-evaluation and self-definition is culture. In recent years, two influential analyses of culture and the self, one by Markus & Kitayama (1991) and the other by Triandis (1989), have traced differences in self-related thoughts and feelings to differing cultural emphases on independence and individualism, on the one hand, and interdependence and collectivism, on the other. To date, this research has sought primarily to document group differences in the self as a function of geographic location or, even more generally, of simple East-West distinctions. However, the consequences of these cultural differences for motivation and behavior are a source of consider-



able current interest. Thus, without examining the controversial questions that typically accompany cross-cultural research, we summarize here the two major theoretical perspectives on culture and the self and recent findings that support them.

In his analysis of culture and the self, Triandis (1989) relied on the common distinction between the private self (the assessment of self by the self), the public self (the assessment of self by a generalized other), and the collective self (the assessment of self by a particular reference group). Triandis argued that the probability that an individual will sample each of these three aspects of the self varies across cultures. In individualistic cultures (e.g. the United States) the private self tends to be more complex and more salient than the collective self, and thus is more likely to be sampled. In collectivistic cultures [e.g. Japan, the People's Republic of China (PRC)], the collective self tends to be more complex and more salient than the private self, and thus is more likely to be sampled. Recent empirical studies have provided support for this framework. Trafimow et al (1991) found that private and collective self-cognitions were represented independently in memory, and that subjects from an individualistic culture (the United States) retrieved more cognitions about the private self and fewer about the collective self than did subjects from a collectivistic culture (e.g. the PRC).

Additional investigations have focused on documenting the consequences of these cultural differences in self-sampling. Triandis et al (1990) used subjects from five cultures known to differ *a priori* in their levels of collectivism (America, Greece, Hawaii, Hong Kong, and the PRC) and five methods to probe aspects of self. They found that the view of self obtained from members of collectivistic cultures showed more group-linked elements, greater perception of homogeneity of ingroup than outgroup, more intimate and subordinate behavior toward the ingroup, and greater emphasis on values that promote the welfare of the ingroup than did the self obtained from members of individualistic cultures. However, further evidence has suggested that these cultural differences in closeness to the ingroup are not observed for all types of ingroups (Triandis et al 1988).

Markus & Kitayama (1991, 1994) provided a related view of culture and the self. In contrast to Triandis' (1989) comprehensive theory of cross-cultural differences, Markus & Kitayama focused their analysis on just one aspect of how people see themselves, namely, their degree of separation from versus connection with others. They distinguished between two types of self-construals: an independent construal, in which the self is a separate and autonomous entity, guided by internal thoughts, feelings, and actions; and an interdependent construal, in which the self is fundamentally connected with others and guided, at least in part, by perceptions of others' thoughts, feelings, and actions. Markus & Kitayama (1991, 1994) argued that Western cultures pro-

mote the development of an independent self-construal, whereas many non-Western cultures promote the development of an interdependent self-construal (see also Singelis 1994 for a self-report scale that measures interdependent and independent self-construals).

Markus & Kitayama (1991) maintained that these divergent self-construals have specific consequences for cognition, motivation, and behavior. Recent empirical investigations have begun to document these consequences, focusing especially on cognition. For example, Markus & Kitayama (1991) reported the results of a study in which students raised in the United States showed asymmetries in self-other similarity judgments in favor of self (i.e. self was judged as less similar to other than other to self), whereas students raised in India showed the opposite asymmetry. Similarly, Cousins (1989) found that Japanese and American students differed in their patterns of self-descriptions depending on the interpersonal context. In response to the generic prompt, "Who am I?," Japanese students provided examples of behaviors in specific roles (i.e. one who swims often), whereas American students described themselves with psychological attributes (e.g. easy going). However, in response to a contextualized prompt (e.g. "Who am I with family?," "Who am I with friends?"), Japanese students described themselves with psychological attributes, whereas American students referred to preferences and wishes. These findings illustrate some of the cognitive consequences of independent and interdependent self-construals; their motivational and behavioral consequences remain largely unexplored.

**SUMMARY** Recent research has provided two useful frameworks within which to examine the moderating effects of culture on the self. The ways in which culture influences both the motives of the self and the psychological and behavioral strategies used to pursue these motives are intriguing topics for future research (see Markus & Kitayama 1991).

## INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIES ON THE SELF

Thus far, the self has been seen primarily as a causal agent in the regulation of behavior in a variety of social contexts. But the relation between the self and social behavior is not unidirectional—the strategies that an individual adopts, in turn, affect his or her self-concept. We now examine the influence of motivated strategies on the self, focusing first on the processes that maintain existing assessments of self, and then on the conditions that promote self-concept change.

### *Self-Maintenance Processes*

Most recent research on the self attests to its powerful conservatism (see Greenwald 1980). The literature is replete with examples of how behavior serves to verify, protect, and maintain existing conceptions and evaluations of self (although see Paulus & Reid 1991). Indeed, most of the motivated strategies we have examined thus far appear to function primarily to preserve the self's status quo.

In addition, several more general theories have outlined strategies that serve to maintain the integrity of the self in the face of threat. For example, one formulation of cognitive dissonance theory has posited that dissonance occurs when people behave in ways that violate important elements of their self-concepts, whether those self-concepts are positive or negative (Thibodeau & Aronson 1992). The cognitive inconsistency produced by these violations motivates individuals to reduce dissonance in a way that maintains the self. Thus, strategies for reducing dissonance vary depending on one's self-concept, although given how well most people think of themselves, these strategies typically involve an effort to maintain a sense of the self as both competent and morally good (Thibodeau & Aronson 1992).

A similar view of self-maintenance is provided by self-affirmation theory (Steele 1988). In this view, a threat to the self activates processes that are designed to affirm the general integrity of the self, rather than to resolve any particular threat. Self-affirmation theory differs from dissonance theory in the self-defensive goal it posits (global self-integrity, rather than cognitive consistency) and in the flexibility of strategies that can be used to accomplish that goal. The most impressive empirical evidence in support of this theory has come from studies showing that when subjects experiencing dissonance are allowed to affirm important but unrelated aspects of their self-concepts, they no longer show dissonance-reducing attitude change (see Steele 1988 for a review).

A final, related view of self-maintenance processes is provided by terror management theory (Rosenblatt et al 1989, Solomon et al 1991), according to which a wide variety of social behaviors are directed by the motivation to maintain self-esteem and faith in a cultural worldview. This motivation stems, in turn, from the capacity of these psychological structures to afford protection from the anxiety associated with awareness of personal vulnerabilities and ultimate mortality. Empirical support for this theory has come from two different types of studies, one linking mortality salience to strategies for affirming cultural worldviews (Greenberg et al 1990, 1992a), and the other showing that enhancing self-esteem alleviates anxiety (Greenberg et al 1992b).

These various accounts of self-maintenance processes converge on a view of the self as strongly committed to preserving the status quo, but they also

raise the question of whether these different self-protective strategies reflect one or many underlying processes. Recent studies support the common-process account. Tesser & Cornell (1991) found that giving subjects the opportunity to self-affirm eliminated self-enhancing comparison and reflection strategies and, in a separate study, that the use of these latter strategies blocked dissonance-reducing attitude change. These findings complement Steele's (1988) demonstrations of the dissonance-reducing effects of self-affirmation. And in a related investigation, Pyszczynski et al (1993) found that encouraging subjects in a dissonance experiment to express their feelings about writing a counterattitudinal essay reduced subsequent attitude change. These findings all portray a self motivated by maintenance, not maximization: The use of one self-protective strategy appears to eliminate the need for others.

### *Self-Concept Change*

In light of the impressive evidence for maintenance of the self, it is somewhat surprising that self-concepts ever change at all. Indeed, the literature contains many demonstrations of temporary changes in the self-concept, but relatively few examples of enduring self-concept change.

**CHANGES IN THE IMMEDIATE SELF-CONCEPT** How one thinks about oneself at any particular time is strongly influenced by the immediate social context. Changes in context can produce changes in the working self-concept. We have already reviewed research showing how self-definition, and especially the tendency to identify oneself with social groups, varies depending on the structure of both immediate and enduring contexts (see McGuire & McGuire 1988, Turner et al 1994).

Other research has examined changes in the self-concept as a result of self-presentation. These studies have involved inducing subjects to behave in a particular way and then examining the conditions under which that behavior is internalized. Several independent investigations have shown that behavior is more likely to lead to self-concept change when it is performed publicly rather than privately (Tice 1992), when the target of the presentation has high power rather than low power (Kowalski & Leary 1990), and when the presenter has relatively low self-esteem (Baumgardner et al 1989, Kowalski & Leary 1990) or weak prior self-beliefs (Schlenker & Trudeau 1990). Although these studies certainly attest to the vulnerability of the working self-concept to immediate behavior, it is not clear whether such change is enduring.

**ENDURING SELF-CONCEPT CHANGE** More substantial changes in the self-concept have been documented during periods of life transition. Several studies have highlighted the active process through which individuals construct new identities during times of change. For example, Deutsch et al (1988) examined

changes in the self during the transition to first-time motherhood. In a cross-sectional comparison of women in the planning, pregnant, and post-partum stages of the transition, they found that those in the planning and pregnant stages actively sought information about motherhood and used that information to construct new identities for themselves as mothers. Women in the post-partum stage based their self-definition to a significant extent on direct experiences with their newborn. As another example, Ethier & Deaux (1990, 1992) found that the more threat Hispanic students perceived to their ethnic identity upon entering an Ivy League university, the less strongly they identified with Hispanics over time (see also Zirkel 1992, Zirkel & Cantor 1990 for related studies of goal-pursuit during life transitions).

These demonstrations of self-concept change reflect many of the same processes of identity construction and self-esteem maintenance that usually serve to stabilize the self. Indeed, existing data suggest that self-concept change occurs primarily, and perhaps only, in response to major changes in role or situational demands. This conclusion again coincides with a view of the self as consistent in its motives and conservative in its strategies, yet ultimately responsive to environmental contingencies.

## FINAL COMMENT

In recent years, investigators have taken the study of self into numerous social contexts, and have documented how it regulates social behavior. Specific lines of research have examined (a) the ways in which normal reasoning processes enhance the self, (b) the social comparison strategies used to ward off threat, (c) the search for interaction partners that confirm self-views, (d) the artful strategies of self-presentation, and (e) the causes and consequences of group identification. In more recent efforts, researchers have begun to identify factors that moderate the form and use of these strategies, including social category memberships, individual difference variables, and cultural origins. With these new investigations, they have begun to expand the notion of context to include the societal and cultural norms that shape the self and social behavior. Finally, recent demonstrations of self-concept change during periods of life transition suggest a powerful influence of changing contexts on the outcome of self-regulatory processes. Investigating the workings of the self within these expanded contexts should provide an interesting agenda for future studies.

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