

# Chapter 2

## *Self, Perception, and Communication*

### Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain self-concept and how it is formed.
- Define *reflected appraisal*, *social comparison*, and *self-perception*.
- Describe some of the ways you can improve your self-esteem.
- Describe how perception and self-concept are related.
- Explain the perceptual steps of selecting, organizing, and interpreting.
- Describe some of the things about the self-concept and perception that can be stated with certainty.
- Explain why perceptions are less than perfect because of deletions, distortions, and generalizations.
- Explain perceptual filters and the ways that they may influence your perceptions.
- Describe the process by which objective reality becomes a subjective view.
- Explain how you can adjust to perceptual influences.

### Key Terms and Concepts

 [mhhe.com/hybel7](http://mhhe.com/hybel7)



Use the Communicating Effectively CD-ROM and Online Learning Center at [mhhe.com/hybel7](http://mhhe.com/hybel7) to further your understanding of the following terms.

Deletions 50–51	Perceptual filters 51	Self-fulfilling prophecies 37
Distortions 51	Psychological risk 41	Self-perception 39
Generalizations 51	Psychological safety 41	Social comparisons 37
Map versus territory 54	Psychological sets 46	Subjective view 54
Objective world/ reality 54	Reflected appraisals 36	
Perception 46	Scripts 36	
	Self-concept 34	



“WHO AM I? AM I WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY I AM, OR AM I WHO I SAY I AM?”

These are some of the most difficult and profound questions we can ask ourselves. How we answer them depends both on how we see ourselves and on how others see us. Rabbi Martin Siegel (Rubin, 1980) in his diary, describes the conflict between his own idea of himself and others' ideas of him:

*People tend to make me a symbol. They say they know me, but they don't. They know only my roles. To some of them, I am a radical. To some of them, I am a signature on the marriage contract. To some of them I am the man who opposes the indulgence of the psychotic fear of anti-Semitism.*

*People see me only as they care or need to see me.*

*And poor Judith has to be a wife to all this.*

*I can't recognize myself in their eyes, so how could she? We both have to live as exhibits in this community. While people are friendly, we have no friends. We have been made into what they want us to be. (pp. 187–88)*

In this passage, Rabbi Siegel is distressed that various people see only certain aspects of him. The people in his congregation never communicate to the whole man; instead, they communicate to the person he represents in their own eyes. For example, if they see him as a highly spiritual man, they may never talk with him about the ordinary problems of work or even the football game they saw on television. The passage, however, implies that he sees himself differently than the members of his congregation see him. Yet because all of them communicate to him on the basis of who they think he is, he (and his wife) have to struggle to maintain a fuller and more rounded self-concept.

## ■ SELF-CONCEPT

Your **self-concept** is how you think and feel about yourself. Our sense of self comes from our communication with others. Others tell us who we are (“You’re really a good kid”), what we look like (“You have your grandfather’s nose”), and how they feel about us (“I really feel that I can talk to you”).

Your self-concept is based on the values of the culture and the community you come from. Your culture tells you what is competent and moral by defining attitudes and beliefs; the community you belong to tells you what is expected of you. The extent to which you reflect the attitudes and beliefs of your culture and live up to the expectations of your community will determine how you see yourself. If you were to spend your life in the town where you grew up, your self-concept would be formed by a fairly limited group of people. But if you moved from a small town to a big city, there would be many more influences. If you moved between two or more



## On the Web

Visit the website below, take the personality self-rating scale, and then evaluate your score. This will give you some ideas for potential growth and alert you to the elements that one writer believes make up the composite “personality.”

**Website:** D. Davies, Self Concept: Personality Self-Rating Scale. Department of Agricultural Education, University of Arizona, August

16, 2001. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://ag.arizona.edu/classes/aed301/scale.htm>.

You will be asked to circle the appropriate number after 36 separate traits. A rating of 4 is outstanding, 3 is above-average, 2 is average, and 1 is poor. Following the scale, the author offers a system for evaluating your score.

cultures, the influences would be even greater. For example, Esmeralda Santiago explains how the American and Puerto Rican communities each wanted to define her in a different way. She says that her Puerto Rican mother expected her to be successful in American society but to stay 100 percent Puerto Rican. This was impossible.

*To Puerto Ricans on the island during my summer there, I was a different creature altogether. Employers complained that I was too assertive, men said I was too feminist, my cousin suggested I had no manners, and everyone accused me of being too independent. Those, I was made to understand, were Americanisms.*

*Back in the United States, I was constantly asked where I was from, and the comments about my not looking, behaving or talking like a Puerto Rican followed me (Santiago, 1994, pp. 34–36).*

Santiago realized that in order to move between the two communities she would have to resolve these conflicts:

*I’ve learned to insist on my peculiar brand of Puerto Rican identity. One not bound by geographical, linguistic or behavioral boundaries, but rather, by a deep identification with a place, a people and a culture which, in spite of appearances, define my behavior and determine the rhythms of my days. (pp. 34–36)*

Although of Mexican rather than of Puerto Rican heritage, Santiago’s experience is supported by Dolores Tanno (2000), a teacher of intercultural communication and rhetoric at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. “We are indeed enriched by belonging to two cultures,” she writes. “We are made richer still by having at our disposal several names by which to identify ourselves. Singly, the names Spanish, Mexican American, Latina, and Chicana communicate part of a life story. Together they weave a rhetorically powerful narrative of ethnic identity that combines biographical, historical, cultural, and political experiences” (p. 28).

Self-concept is made up of three distinct elements: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perception. Let’s look at each of them.

## Reflected Appraisals

Remember the story of Tarzan? Although Tarzan was a human, he believed he was an ape because he was brought up by apes and had no human experience. Tarzan's story reminds us that we are not born with an identity—others give it to us. Our parents, our friends, and our teachers all tell us who we are through **reflected appraisals**—messages we get about ourselves from others. Most reflected appraisals come from things people say about us. Your college speech instructor may say you are a good speaker; your peers may say you are a good friend, and your coach may tell you that you must work harder. All such messages from others help to create your self-concept.

Besides being given messages about ourselves, we are also given lines to speak (Murial & Joneward, 1971, pp. 68–100). These lines are often so specific that some people refer to them as **scripts**. Some scripts are given to us by our parents, and they contain directions that are just as explicit as any script intended for the stage. We are given our lines (“Say thank you to the nice lady”), our gestures (“Point to the horsie”), and our characterizations (“You’re a good boy”). The scripts tell us how to play future scenes (“Everyone in our family has gone to college”) and what is expected of us (“I will be so happy when you make us grandparents”). People outside our family also contribute to our scripts. Teachers, coaches, religious leaders, friends, and the media all tell us what they expect from us, how we should look, how we should behave, and how we should say our lines.

Writer and radio personality Garrison Keillor gives a list of scripts we get as we are growing up. Have you heard any of them or used them on your own children?

**I. *I don't know what's wrong with you.***

- A. *I never saw a person like you.*
  - 1. *I wasn't like that.*
  - 2. *Your cousins don't pull stuff like that.*
- B. *It doesn't make sense.*
  - 1. *You have no sense of responsibility at all.*
  - 2. *We've given you everything we possibly could.*
    - a. *Food on the table and a roof over your head.*
    - b. *Things we never had when we were your age.*
  - 3. *And you treat us like dirt under your feet.*
- C. *You act as if*
  - 1. *The world owes you a living.*
  - 2. *You've got a chip on your shoulder.*
  - 3. *The rules don't apply to you.*

**II. *Something has got to change and change fast.***

- A. *You're driving your mother to a nervous breakdown.*
- B. *I'm not going to put up with this for another minute.*
  - 1. *You're crazy if you think I am.*
  - 2. *If you think I am, just try me.*
- C. *You're setting a terrible example for your younger brothers and sisters.*



- III.** *I'm your father and as long as you live in this house, you'll—*
- A. *Do as you're told, and when I say "now" I mean "now."*
  - B. *Pull your own weight.*
    - 1. *Don't expect other people to pick up after you.*
    - 2. *Don't expect breakfast when you get up at noon.*
    - 3. *Don't come around asking your mother for spending money.*
  - C. *Do something about your disposition.*
- IV.** *If you don't change your tune pretty quick, then you're out of here.*
- A. *I mean it.*
  - B. *Is that understood?*
    - 1. *I can't hear you. Don't mumble.*
    - 2. *Look at me.*
  - C. *I'm not going to tell you this again (Keilor, 1985, pp. 304–5).*

If you were given positive reflected appraisals when you were young, you probably have a good self-concept; if the appraisals were largely negative, your self-concept may suffer. The messages we receive about ourselves can become **self-fulfilling prophecies**—events or actions that occur because we (and other people) have expected them. For example, at the beginning of the semester Professor Farley said to Kevin, “You’re going to be a very good student.” Because of this expectation, Kevin wanted to be a good student and worked hard to live up to Professor Farley’s prophecy. Similarly, negative prophecies can have a negative impact. If someone tells a child that he or she will “never amount to much,” there is a good chance the child will not.

## Social Comparisons

When we compare ourselves with others to see how we measure up, we are making **social comparisons**. First of all, we compare ourselves with our peers. You might ask, “Do I look as good as she does?” or “What grade did you get on your midterm?” or “What kind of car do you drive?” If you are a parent, you might compare your child to your friend’s child. “Can he talk yet?” “Did she get a position on the softball team?” In your job, you are likely to ask yourself if you are doing as well as your co-workers. Did you get as big a raise as the other guy got? Does the boss ever notice you and praise your work? The answers to these social comparison questions all contribute to your self-concept.

We get social comparisons from things or from people we don’t even know. Take children’s toys, for example. For years, people have complained that the Barbie doll gives little girls a false image of how a woman should look and dress. If a woman were to look like Barbie, she would have large breasts, a very small waist, and long, flowing hair. Her clothes would be very feminine, and her feet should fit into tiny little shoes. While Barbie has appealed to little girls, many little boys prefer G. I. Joe. First introduced in 1964, G. I. Joe has bulked up with each new version. Originally, he was the toy equivalent of 6 feet tall with normal biceps; 10 years later he was bulkier with a karate grip. By the mid-1990s he had a competitor who was even bigger, Gung-Ho, the ultimate marine. But G. I. Joe was not about to give



## Working Together

### Building a Self-Concept Map

Although you will be working in a group, you will be building your own self-concept map. The group should do each of the steps below, pausing after each step to allow each group member to record his or her own personal thoughts in a notebook. Each member should *write as many words or thoughts as time allows*. The purpose of the group responses is not confessional or self-revealing; the purpose is to generate words that can be used by group members when they record their own thoughts and ideas.

- 1: One at a time, each member of the group should orally complete the sentence "I want \_\_\_\_\_." To fill in the blank, members should use terminal values such as a comfortable life, intellectual growth, happiness, freedom, love, or friendship.
- 2: Again taking turns, each member of the group should orally complete the sentence "I am \_\_\_\_\_." To fill in the blank, members should use instrumental values such as honest, credible, ambitious, independent, optimistic, or caring.
- 3: Each member of the group, in turn, should orally complete the sentence, I like \_\_\_\_\_. To

fill in the blank, members should use attitudes that explain why they like what they like. For example: I like sports for its competition; I like working out for its physical fitness; I like cats for their independence; I like hiking for its adventure; or I like friendships for their security.

- 4: In turn, each member of the group should orally complete the sentence I believe \_\_\_\_\_. To fill in the blank, members should use authority beliefs that we accept because of the source (society, religion, parents, or peer-group authority). Examples include "You should respect others' beliefs," "Going to church is good," "You should honor your parents," or "Studying is necessary to get through college."
- 5: You now have four lists in your notebook. Look at your lists and see how the items relate to each other. Devise a way to visually represent all these aspects of yourself. A visual representation could be a chart, graph, model, outline, picture, 3D structure, or whatever works best for you.

Source: Adapted from an exercise by A. M. Shubb, "The Communication Pages: Building a Self-Concept Map." GeoCities, 1999. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/7908/building.htm>.

up; in the late 1990s he came out in a new incarnation called G. I. Joe Extreme—the biggest and bulkiest yet (G. I. Joe, 1999, p. 8A).

Some people argue that too much fuss is being made about such "ideal" forms in toys. Others argue that if this is how toy people are being represented to children, it is possible that as children grow up, they will think something is wrong with them if they don't look like the ideals. Toys, of course, are combined with many other images. The mass media are filled with the ideal "look." An evening of TV programs and commercials will convince you that everyone is tall, thin, well proportioned, and equipped with abundant hair. During prime time there are few representations of people who are even old, let alone of those with less-than-perfect bodies.

In a single day, you see many images of how people should look and behave. Magazines, movies, and videos all contribute to what the "ideal you" should be. Even if you can discount these images as being unrealistic,



The way we see ourselves is often a reflection of how we compare ourselves with others.

many of the people around you believe them and judge you and others by what they see and hear.

## Self-Perception

In your earliest years, how you think about yourself comes largely from how people react to you—how parents and caregivers, for example, handle and care for you. “As they grow older,” writes Valerie Wiener, in her book *Winning the War Against Youth Gangs* (1999), “teenagers broaden their people watching. At the same time teenagers are peering outward at others, they are also looking inward at themselves. Consciously or subconsciously, they weigh whether others’ thoughts, attitudes, actions, and reactions will work for them” (p. 4). At some point, then, you begin to see yourself in your own way. The way in which you see yourself is called **self-perception**.

Self-perception comes from your experiences. If you have experiences that help you achieve the things you want, you will see yourself in a positive way. “One of the most important beliefs that influences [your] self-leadership capability is [your] view of [your] own ability to carry out a task,” writes Manz and Sims, in their book *The New SuperLeadership* (2001, p. 110). They write that your “ability to perform successfully enhances the probability of actually *doing* it. Conversely, negative beliefs decrease the probability” (p. 110). Your state of mind about yourself clearly impacts your ultimate performance. Mary Boone, in *Managing Inter@ctively* (2001) claims that “At





## Another Point of View

In his article, “Lacking in Self-Esteem? Good for You!,” Andrew Sullivan writes that self-esteem isn’t all that its cracked up to be. Drawing on the research performed by Brad Bushman of Iowa State University and Roy Baumeister of Case Western Reserve University, Sullivan writes:

*Self-esteem can also be an educational boomerang. Friends of mine who teach today’s college students are constantly complaining about the high self-esteem of their students. When the kids have been told from Day One that they can do no wrong, when every grade in high school is assessed so as to make the kid feel good rather than to give an accurate measure of his work, the student can develop self-worth dangerously unrelated to the objective truth. He can then get deeply offended when he’s told he is getting a C grade in college and become*

*demoralized or extremely angry. Weak professors give in to the pressure—hence, grade inflation. Tough professors merely get exhausted trying to bring their students into vague touch with reality.*

### Questions

1. Have you experienced people who think they are God’s gift and who are offended if other people don’t treat them that way?
2. Can you see how inflated egos can be substituted for a proper sense of self? That is, the distortion can become the reality?
3. What are some ways to enhance the realistic and natural development of self-esteem?

Source: A. Sullivan, “Lacking in Self-Esteem? Good for You!” *Time*, Oct. 14, 2002, p. 102.

the core of truly deep reflection is self-knowledge. In order to get over yourself,” she writes, “you first have to know yourself well” (p. 126).

For most people, self-perception plays a greater role as they get older. Older people have learned and practiced being open to the ideas of others; they are okay with being wrong; they are not attached to particular outcomes; and they have learned how to be good listeners (Boone, 2001). Since they have gained confidence through life experiences, reflected appraisals and social comparison are no longer very important. Instead, they look at themselves from the point of view of the experiences they have had. Your parents, for example, might consider their lives to have been worthwhile because of you and your siblings.

## Gender, Sex, and Self-Concept

Several research studies show that men and women gain their self-concept in different ways (Schwalbe & Staples, 1991). Two researchers found that when forming self-concept, men give the most importance to social comparisons, whereas women attach more importance to reflected appraisals. Men put more value on reflected appraisals from their parents, while women give more importance to reflected appraisals from their friends.

Other studies have shown that female self-confidence comes primarily from connections and attachments, while male self-confidence comes primarily from achievement (Joseph, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992). This relates to research findings about gender and language. (In Chapter 5, Verbal

Communication, we discuss how women's language is tied to social networks, while men's language is tied to competition and achievement.)

Although your family and peers may influence how you act as a male or female, there is some evidence that your sexual identity is established when you are born. Researchers know this because of a terrible accident that occurred to an infant boy when he was eight months old. A surgeon was trying to repair a fused foreskin and accidentally cut off the boy's penis. Because the doctor thought he could never live as a boy, he recommended to the parents that they rear him as a girl. When the parents agreed, his testicles were removed and a vagina was constructed.

From this point on, the parents treated the child as a girl. They got her feminine clothes, gave her toys that girls liked, and even put her in the care of a female psychiatrist to help her adjust.

The child, however, never accepted her female identity. She tore off the dresses, refused the dolls, and looked for male friends. Instead of using makeup like her mother, she imitated her father by shaving and urinating standing up.

When she was 12, the doctors began estrogen treatments that enabled her to grow breasts. She did not like the feminizing effects of the drug and refused to take it. When she was 14, she refused any more treatment to feminize her. By this time she was so unhappy that her father told her what had happened to her, and her first feeling was that of relief.

At this point she went back to being a man. S/he took male hormone shots and had a mastectomy (an operation to remove breasts), and a surgeon began to reconstruct male genitals. Although the surgery was only partially successful, he married and he and his wife adopted children.

From this and other cases involving ambiguous genitals in newborns, many scientists have concluded that an infant with a Y chromosome will be a boy, regardless of his genitalia, and that nothing will ever change this.

## Psychological Safety and Risk

Ask some second-semester seniors what they are afraid of. Chances are they will reply that they are very apprehensive about going out into the world. Will they find jobs? Can they survive outside the structure of university life? What is the world like? What is their place in it?

For most of us, **psychological safety**—the approval and support that we get from familiar people, ideas, and situations—is important. However, as the late psychologist Abraham Maslow, who worked in the area of self-fulfillment, pointed out, the needs for safety and growth pull us in opposite directions. Maslow believed that in order to grow, people have to abandon some of the safe areas of their lives and take some psychological risks (Maslow, 1970).

A **psychological risk** involves taking a chance on something new. It could be getting to know someone different from us, trying to understand a different point of view, or even moving to a new place. Taking a psychological risk helps improve one's self-concept. For example, when students go away to college, they must leave the safety of home, friends, and family. This is such a great risk that some first-year students spend a week or two away from home, decide they can't stand it, and drop out of school. The

Going away to school involves psychological risks—taking a chance on something new.



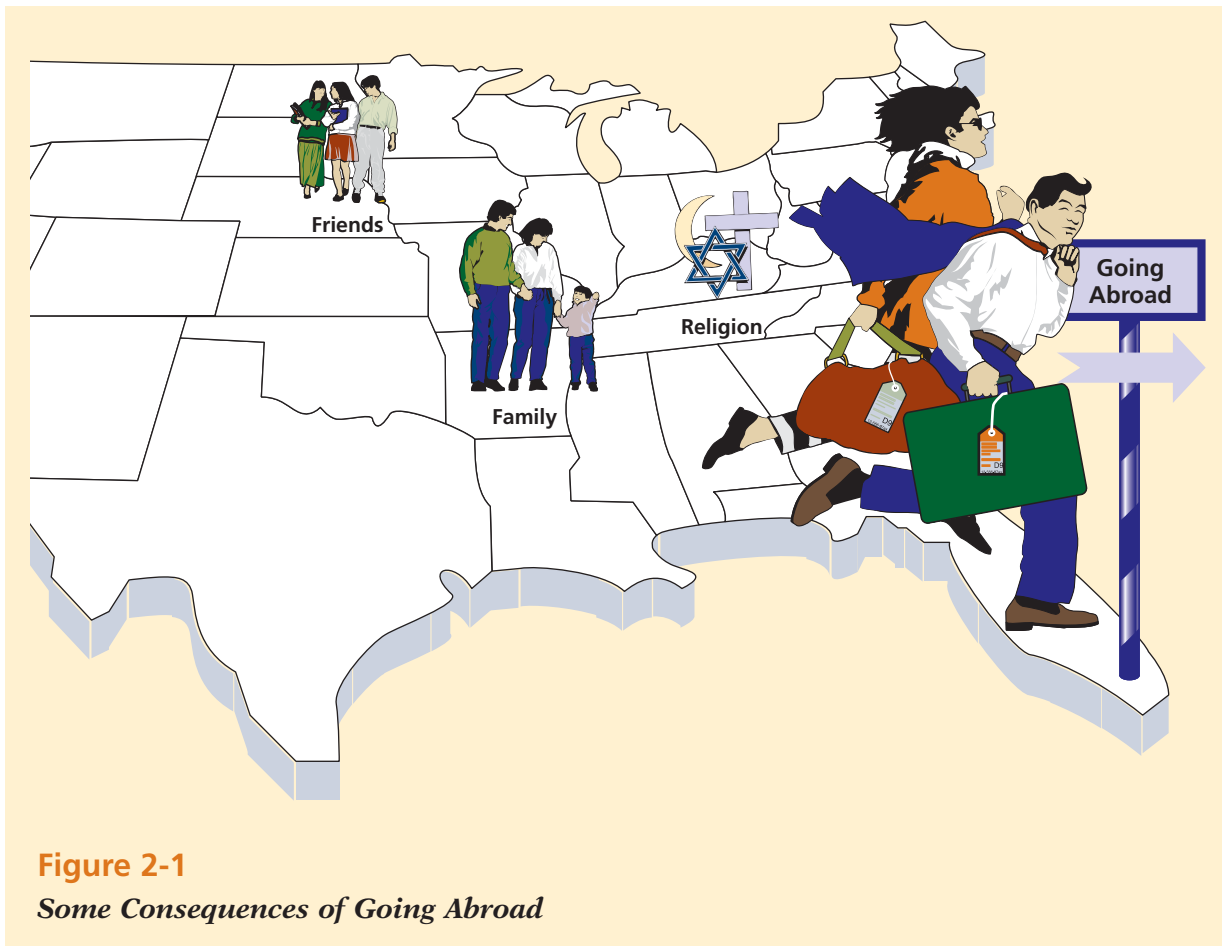
majority who remain, however, discover that they can cope on their own. This new knowledge helps to improve their self-concept.

New college students take risks not only in leaving home but also in being exposed to new ideas. For example, a student who has heard pro-choice ideas at home or in church will take a big risk if he or she tries to really understand a person who is pro-life, and vice versa. Similarly, it's risky for an athlete or a sports fan to try to understand the point of view that high schools might improve if they dropped competitive sports. The problem with taking the risk of really understanding a different point of view is that you might be changed. If you do change, you face the possibility that your family and friends probably will not change and you won't completely fit in anymore. Inevitably, whenever you take a risk, your circle of safety grows smaller.

Our first response to ideas that conflict with our own is to refuse to even listen to them. If we take this course, we choose psychological safety. When we take a psychological risk, we are ready to test our self-concept by considering ideas from another person's vantage point. Figure 2-1 shows some of the consequences of going abroad for a semester or quarter. As you can see, home is represented by religious values, family, and friends. As the two students get farther away from home, their connections to these things grow thinner and even threaten to break. For example, when you are in college, your religious beliefs might be threatened by a philosophy course or by late-night talks in the dorm with other students. If your beliefs are challenged, you might respond by no longer going to church or, in the extreme, by no longer believing in your church or even in religion. When this happens, you have taken a risk. When you go home, if you tell your parents what has happened, they probably are going to be upset; if you don't tell them, a gulf will grow between you and them as a consequence of your doing something so risky.

## ■ CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR SELF-CONCEPT?

If you have any doubt that we, as a society, are obsessed with self-concept or self-esteem, look in the self-improvement section of any bookstore or library. You will find literally hundreds of books—each guaranteeing that if



**Figure 2-1**

*Some Consequences of Going Abroad*

you read it, you will feel better about yourself and will change your self-esteem from negative to positive. One thing that many self-help books say is that the use of self-affirmations will assist you in raising your self-esteem. William Swann, Ph.D. (2001), of the University of Texas-Austin, suggests that self-affirmations, even when endlessly repeated, don't work and may even leave you more demoralized than before using them (Paul, 2001, p. 66).

According to Annie Paul, in her review article on “Self-Help” (2001), “The only way to change the final product—your self-esteem—is to change what goes into making it—feedback from other people.” Then, she quotes Swann, who says “If you find yourself in bad relationships where your negative self-view is getting reinforced, then either change the way those people treat you by being more assertive, or change who you interact with” (p. 66). Then, in one of the most succinct, profound, and instructive summaries, she writes, “Stand up for yourself. Surround yourself with people who think you're great, and tell you so. Do your best to live up to their high opinions. And be patient. Self-esteem is the sum of your interactions with others over a lifetime, and it's not going to change overnight” (p. 66).

You should know that a positive self-concept may have nothing to do with success. Researchers have found that criminals and juvenile delinquents often have high self-esteem (Johnson, 1998). Even though self-esteem may not be connected to success, a positive sense of who you are is good because it will make you feel happier.

Unfortunately, as noted earlier, you can't change your self-concept by wishing it was more positive. It is going to change only when you have positive experiences and the accumulation of these experiences makes you feel better about yourself. The Internet has provided a useful medium for youthful posturing and experimentation regarding trying on a variety of selves (Kanter, 2001, p. 295; Nie & Erbring, 2000). Peter Duskoch, in an article "Personality Crisis? Not on the Net," has noted that those flocking to chat-rooms and adopting new personae tend to have problems in real life. Other psychologists have found that most people are themselves online (Duskoch, 1998, p. 70).

## What Do You Want to Change about Yourself?

Pick one area in which you would like to improve yourself. See if you can figure out why you have had problems in this area. Were you given a script saying you were inadequate in this area? Are you living out a self-fulfilling prophecy?

## Are Your Circumstances Keeping You from Changing?

Are you living in circumstances that are holding you back? Do the people around you support you if you want to do something differently, especially if it involves taking a risk? Sometimes the people you live with try to hold you back—even though they might not be conscious of doing so. For example, one spouse says to the other, "Why do you want to go to Europe? We haven't seen all of the United States yet."

Sometimes you are locked into roles that are uncomfortable for you. Many women feel trapped when their children are small; some people hate their jobs; some students hate school. Are you in a role that you have chosen for yourself, or has someone else chosen it for you? Has someone else defined how you should play this role? Can you play this role in a way that will make it more comfortable for you? Can you change the role so that you can be more like the person you want to be?

## Are You Willing to Take Some Chances?

Colleges and universities offer great chances to take some risks. Take a course from a professor who is rumored to be hard but fair. Study a subject you know nothing about. Join a club that sounds interesting—even if you don't know any of its members. Many colleges and universities also offer opportunities to study abroad or to take an internship. Going abroad is especially helpful in building self-confidence.



## What Would Be a Realistic Goal?

Too often, people decide they are going to change their behavior overnight. Students who habitually get poor grades will often announce that this semester they are going to get all A's. This is an unrealistic goal. If you are going to try to change your behavior, see if you can break the problem down into steps you can handle. Let's say that you are shy but would like to speak up more in class because you often know the answers. Why not set a goal to speak up once a week in one class? That is probably a goal you can manage. Once you feel comfortable with that, you might increase your goal to speaking up two or even three times a week.

## Can You Discipline Yourself?

The old saying "Nothing succeeds like success" applies to a positive self-concept: As soon as you experience success, you start feeling better about yourself. Sometimes people think they are not successful because they are not motivated enough. Typical thinking might be, "If only I could motivate myself, I would get better grades." People who think this way confuse motivation with discipline. There's no way to motivate yourself to take out the garbage, do the dishes, or study your class notes. These jobs can be done only through discipline: You say, "I am going to do this job for one hour—whether or not I want to do it is irrelevant." This sort of discipline is what leads to success, which, in turn, helps you feel better about yourself.

## Are There People Who Will Support You?

Whenever we try to bring about a change in ourselves, we need to surround ourselves with people who will support us. These are people who understand how difficult it is to change and who understand our desire to do so. Take the example of speaking up in class. If you are very apprehensive about doing this, you might consider discussing the problem with an instructor you like and trust. Tell him or her that you are occasionally going to try to say something, and ask for his or her support. Also tell a couple of friends in your class what you plan to do. Just having other people know what you are trying to accomplish often provides good moral support. Not all people will support you, and some may even consciously try to defeat you. For them, the possibility that you might change is too threatening.

When you have found some people to support you, it's important that you tell them what you want to do and give them some direction as to how they can help you.

## Can You Be More You-Centered?

People who lack self-esteem often spend a lot of time looking inward at their miseries, while people who seem happy and content with themselves seem to spend their time interacting with others. If you look inward all the time, you are probably making yourself more miserable. For a few days, experiment with relating more to the people around you. Just asking some

one, “How was your day?” or “How is your semester (or quarter) going?” shows that you are interested.

If you have an opportunity to bestow some praise, do it. Look for situations around you in which you can praise people, and express your praise with genuine feeling. Tell your mother that her meatloaf tastes great, tell a professor that her class was really helpful on an internship, tell a friend that she looks wonderful in green. When you act positively toward others, they will act positively toward you, and this, in turn, will make you feel better about yourself.

## ■ PERCEPTION

Self-concept and perception are so closely related that they are often difficult to separate. While your self-concept is how you see yourself, **perception** is how you look at others and the world around you. Because your total awareness of the world comes through your senses, they all have a common basis and a common bias. How you look at the world depends on what you think of yourself, and what you think of yourself will influence how you look at the world.

Self-concept affects perception in another way as well. Acts of perception are more than simply capturing incoming stimuli. These acts require a form of expectation, of knowing what is about to confront you and preparing for it. These expectations or predispositions to respond are a type of perceptual filter called **psychological sets**, and they have a profound effect on your perceptions. “Without expectations, or constructs through which you perceive your world,” writes John Ratey (2001), associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, “your surroundings would be what William James called a ‘booming, buzzing confusion,’ and each experience truly would be a new one, rapidly overwhelming you. You automatically and unconsciously fit your sensations into categories that you have learned, often distorting them in the process” (p. 56). Your self-concept not only helps create the psychological sets, assists in putting together the constructs, and aids in the formation of the categories, but is responsible for the distortions that occur in the process as well.

We can see how this works in the case of Chad and Karen, who are both emergency medical technicians (EMTs) at the local hospital. They work in the same crew and go out on ambulance runs together. They are used to working together, and each respects the other’s ability. Chad admires how efficiently Karen can attach an IV to a patient, and Karen admires Chad’s ability to comfort children who are in pain. On days when very little happens, they sit and chat and discover that they have many interests in common. They both like baseball, hiking, and camping. After a few months go by, they find that one of the pleasures of going to work is to see each other. Each would like to see the other outside of work, but neither has made a move in that direction. Then one day they bump into each other on a hiking trail, and they decide to walk the trail together. As they walk, Chad is thinking, “I really would like to ask her out. I wonder if she has a boyfriend.” Karen is thinking along a similar line. “He really is a nice guy, I’d like to get to know him better. I think he likes me, but I’m really not sure.”

You can see how their experiences together created the expectations in both about the possibilities of future contact. You can also see how constructs have been established—both Chad and Karen have constructed complete images of the other from what they have discovered. And you can see, too, how information has been stored in specific categories like common interests. You might even be able to project what might have occurred had either Chad or Karen had a weak self-concept and distorted some of the images of each other because of them. Chad might say, “She’d never go for me, she’s too smart,” or Karen might say, “I know he’s too nice a guy for me. I could never keep such a nice guy, there is no point in even pursuing a relationship.” You begin to see what Ratey was talking about when he said “We automatically and unconsciously fit our sensations into categories. . . .” (p. 56).

Although Chad and Karen’s actual conversation and thoughts seem to be ordinary, each of them is going through a complicated perceptual process. Notice how expectations, constructs, categories, and distortions each play a role in the perceptual process. On one level, what Chad is saying and thinking reflects how he feels about himself (“I hate to ask someone out and then find out she has a boyfriend”). On another level, his thoughts reflect how he feels about Karen, or, his construct of Karen from what he knows of her thus far (“I like her, and I would like to know her better”). On yet a third level, they are influenced by how he thinks Karen sees him (“She seems to like me”). Although distortions could play a role at any level, this is a level where it often comes into play (“She’d never go for me, she’s too smart”).

Karen is going through a similar perceptual process. Her thoughts and what she says are influenced by how she sees herself, how she perceives Chad, and how she thinks Chad perceives her. Expectations, constructs, categories, and distortions will play just as important a role in her perceptual process as it did in Chad’s.

The workings of self-confidence and perception make Chad and Karen’s communication a complicated business. As is true in all transactional communication, many factors are occurring continuously and simultaneously. Chad’s perception of Karen is influenced by how he sees himself and how he sees his past relationships just as Karen is influenced by her sense of self and her experiences with other men. Not only are there likely to be distortions here because of the strengths and weaknesses of one’s self-concept, but think, too, about the psychological sets—expectations or predispositions to respond—based on past experiences. Has either just come out of a negative relationship? Has either come from a family full of separations and divorces—to name just two possible influences.

The complications, of course, don’t stop there. Chad and Karen will be influenced by how they see their roles in a male-female relationship. Think of the influence here of the constructs created about male-female interactions. Karen might want to be more assertive in moving their friendship forward, but because of her idea of the role a woman should play in a relationship, she’s worried about being too aggressive. Chad believes that it is his role to move the relationship forward, but he is too uncertain, and perhaps unsure of himself, to do so.

Just as Karen and Chad are slow in getting to know each other because of the way they see themselves, the way you view the world and communicate about it is greatly influenced by the way you view yourself.



## Consider This

As you read this piece from Dr. McGraw (Dr. Phil), think about the effect that negative internal dialogue has on your perceptions of yourself, others, and the world around you:

*Think of it this way: When you've lost your keys and then you find them, do you keep looking for your keys? If you've been searching for an answer and you believe you have it, do you continue investigating? No. You call off the search. Now suppose your conversation with yourself runs like this: "I am a knucklehead, I have always been a knucklehead, I will always be a knucklehead and no one will respect me." Once you begin believing yourself, why would you continue to process data? You might have ten experiences in the next week that run counter to your being a knucklehead, but your data processing window is shut, so you don't see the contrary information. You don't hear it. If your internal dialogue is that you are a knucklehead, and you believe that you are truthful with yourself then*

*you absolutely will miss evidence to the contrary. You will miss it, even if it's served up to you on a silver platter. And you certainly won't go seeking out such evidence.*

### Questions

1. Are you comfortable with Dr. McGraw's explanation? Have you any personal examples to support his conclusion?
2. Are there times when you have continued to process data after one would expect the data-processing window to be closed? Under what circumstances?
3. What precautions could one take to make certain the data-processing window isn't closed too early—before all relevant data has been captured and considered?

Source: P. C. McGraw, *Self Matters: Creating Your Life from the Inside Out*. New York: Simon & Schuster, (2001), pp. 193–94.

## The Perceptual Process

Your perceptions affect more than your direct interactions with people. They also influence your response to all the information around you. Whenever you encounter new information, whether it's from a television program, a newspaper, the Internet, or another person, you go through a three-step perceptual process: You select the information, you organize it, and you interpret it.

We do not all perceive information in the same way. Even when several people have access to the same information, they are likely to select, organize, and interpret it in different ways. Let's say, for example, that three different people read the same newspaper: Omar is a Syrian who is studying in the United States; Caroline is an American who has been an exchange student in Syria; and Jim is an American who has never traveled.

When Omar reads the paper, he looks for (selects) news about Syria. In his mind he organizes the information on the basis of what he already knows. He may interpret it by asking the meaning of certain government actions or by thinking that the reporter has the wrong slant on the story. Caroline goes through a similar process. She has a high interest in stories about Syria because she has been there. She, too, organizes what she reads



## On the Web

And what is the connection between perception and communication?

*Perception and communication are the twin skills needed by every good beer judge. Perception is the ability to see, taste, smell, and feel different elements in the beer, and to be able to recognize them for what they are and what*

*they tell a brewer or drinker about the beer in the glass. Communication is the ability to describe these perceptions to another brewer or knowledgeable beer drinker in a meaningful way.*

Source: M. Stevens, *Introduction to beer judging, tasting, and evaluation*. April 10, 1997. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://www.brewery.org/brewery/library/Tintro.html>.



Whenever you encounter new information you go through a three-step perceptual process: You select the information, you organize it, and you interpret it.

according to what she knows about the country. However, she may interpret the news stories differently because she doesn't have as much information as Omar. Also, her interpretation will probably be from an American point of view. When Jim reads the newspaper, he skips all the stories about Omar's country. He has never been there and has no immediate plans to go there. In fact, he skips all the news about the world and goes directly to the sports section. These three people are all exposed to the same information, but they all perceive it differently.



## Perceptions and the Self-Concept

There are a number of things that can be stated with certainty about the self-concept and perception (Purkey, 1988):

- Your self-concept is learned. It gradually emerges in the early months of life, but it is shaped and reshaped through repeated perceived experiences.
- Your self-concept is a social product that is developed through your perceptions of your experiences.
- Because of previous experiences and present perceptions, you may perceive yourself in ways different from the ways others see you.
- Your self-concept requires consistency and stability; it tends to resist change. If your self-concept were changed readily, you would lack a consistent and dependable personality; thus, your perceptions seek supportive information.
- Because your perceptions of yourself are quite stable, change takes time. Rome wasn't built in a day; neither is your self-concept.
- Your successes and failures impact on your self-concept. Just as failure in highly regarded areas lowers evaluations in other areas; success in prized areas raises evaluations in other areas as well.
- Your world, and all the things in it, are not just perceived, they are perceived only in relation to your self-concept.
- The development of your self-concept is a continuous process. Your perceptions are always alert to information. If you have a healthy personality, you will continually assimilate new ideas and discharge old ideas.
- You strive to behave in ways that are in keeping with your self-concept, no matter how helpful or hurtful to yourself or others.
- You continuously guard your self-concept against the loss of self-esteem, because such losses produce feelings of anxiety.
- Because your self-concept is constantly defending itself from assault, growth opportunities are limited (Purkey, 1988).

Of all the perceptions you experience in the course of living your life, none has more profound significance than those you hold regarding your own personal existence—your concept of who you are and how you fit into the world. But the perceptions you experience are subject to deletions, distortions, and generalizations, plus additional perceptual filters; thus, you do not come at the world in a pure, clean, untainted manner. The way you come at the world, instead, is—and has to be—totally unique. It is distinctive, exceptional, and unequaled—unmatched—in all the world. If you want something no one else has, you have it. It's the way you come at the world.

## Deletions, Distortions, and Generalizations

Any perceptions you have are less than perfect because of deletions, distortions, and generalizations (External Reality, 1999). **Deletions**—blotting out,

erasing, or canceling information—must occur, first, because your physical senses are limited. Your sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell are the means you use to get information, but those senses focus only on those aspects of the environment that are most important for your survival. Your senses are not capable of perceiving everything in your external environment. Deletions occur, too, because of your beliefs. If you believe something to be true, you have an almost infinite capacity to delete information that contradicts that belief. In addition, if you believe something to be true, you will go through your life searching for information that supports that belief and ignore information that does not.

In addition to deleting information, you also distort much of the information from your environment. **Distortions** involve twisting or bending information out of shape. You distort information, first because you only observe a small part of your external environment. Since what you observe is such a small part of the whole, you must fill in the blanks—specifically add information—to make your information make sense. The other reason why you distort information is so that it will support your existing beliefs and values.

In addition to deleting and distorting information, you draw generalizations based on little substantial information. **Generalizations** involve drawing principles or conclusions from particular evidence or facts. Once you have observed something a few times, you conclude that what has proven true in the past will prove true in the future as well. Generalizations are important to your survival. Getting burned by putting a hand on a hot stove will give you a conclusion about the consequences of putting your hand on a hot stove in the future. If you had several bad experiences with members of the opposite sex, of a different race, of a different culture, or of a particular organization, you might generalize that *all* members of the opposite sex, a different race, a different culture, or a particular organization are bad (External Reality). Then, all future experiences are filtered through that belief, information that contradicts the belief is deleted, and you distort other information so it will support the belief.

Keep these three activities in mind as you read the next section on perceptual filters. Realize that even before perceptual filters come into play and certainly while they are operating as well, deletion, distortion, and generalization are also influencing the information (External Reality, 1999).

## Perceptual Filters

Deletions, distortions, and generalizations are important and affect your perceptions, but perceptual filters can be even more important. If self-concept and perception are as intimately intertwined as the section on “Perception and Self-Concept” above illustrates, then what factors influence your perceptions? There are a number of contributing factors. As you read through them, notice that for you, just as for others, some factors may be more influential than others (Yeager, 2001). As you read them, too, consider them **perceptual filters**, or limitations that result from the narrowed lens through which you view the world. For example, your biologic makeup has a significant influence. If your biologic makeup differs from that of the predominant society—if you are obese, short, or unattractive, for

example—you may have difficulty securing and maintaining a positive self-concept because of the distortions your senses cause. You automatically see things differently than members of the predominant society.

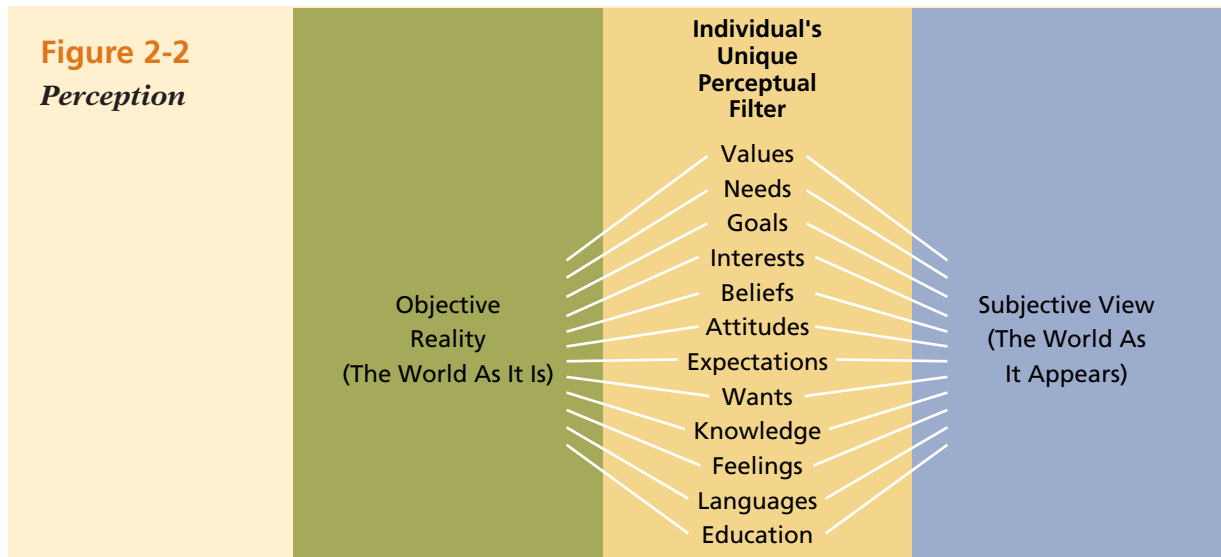
Other significant influences on your perceptions include your culture, values, and beliefs. You, like most people, find it easier to communicate with members of your own culture. By *culture*, as noted in Chapter 1, The Communication Process, and as further discussed and explained in Chapter 3, Intercultural Communication, we mean “The ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors (which can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion)” (Nieto, 1995, p. 390). Many of your customs (e.g., Halloween), values (e.g., Everything should be clean: people, streets, buildings), and beliefs (All men are created equal)—as well as your manners, ceremonies, rituals, laws, language, religious beliefs, myths and legends, knowledge, ideals, accepted ways of behaving, and even your concept of self—are culturally determined. If you do not integrate American cultural practices, values, and beliefs, but those of another culture, you may have difficulty securing or maintaining a positive self-concept.

There are numerous other influences, too, such as the ways you have for coping with and tolerance for stress as well as your conflict resolution strategies (Yeager, 2001). If through your upbringing you have developed inadequate coping patterns to adapt to stress or resolve conflict you may have difficulty securing or maintaining a positive self-concept. One major influence would be the familial patterns you observed between your parents and between your parents and you or other siblings. For example, some of the patterns you may have observed could include the excessive use of denial, projection of blame and responsibility, hypersensitivity to criticism, and rationalizing of failures. Destructive behaviors may have included overeating, excessive smoking or drinking, the overuse of over-the-counter medications, or illicit drug use. Even high rates of illness as a result of high blood pressure, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, frequent headaches or neck aches, may, too, have been influential.

Other influences on your perceptions could include your previous experiences. Many failures rather than successes may create difficulty. If you attribute your successes to luck, chance, or the influence of powerful others rather than to your own personal behavior, this could be a factor. If you have suffered stressful life events such as financial difficulties, problems on a job, change or loss of a job, relationship concerns, sexuality concerns, divorce, or moving, particularly if they have been cumulative, your perceptions could be affected. Illnesses, traumas, and surgery, too, can create alterations in self-esteem, body image, and personal identity and can influence your perceptions. Even your current physiological state can influence your perceptions. Insufficient nutritional food, lack of sleep, or a serious night of drinking and the consequent hangover can be influential.

Our purpose here has not been to cast a negative light on the role of your perceptions in creating and maintaining your self-concept, rather, it is to show how many factors are likely to influence your perceptions, and, thus, how your perceptions of yourself, others, and the world are likely to be different from any other person’s perceptions. Any changes from the norm—

**Figure 2-2**  
*Perception*



the perceptions of those who make up your predominant society—will influence your perceptions in some manner. Because there are so many influences, and because these influences are likely to combine in unknown ways and even have some cumulative effect, there is no way to predict or know how much effect the influences on your perceptions have nor how your self-concept is altered. What is interesting is that even self-assessments are likely to be distorted, since the self doing the assessing is also subject to the distortions!

## Adjusting to Perceptual Influences

George A. Miller, the psychologist, said, “Most of our failures in understanding one another have less to do with what is heard than with what is intended and what is inferred.” It would be great to believe that there were no such thing as perceptual filters. It would be great to believe that you come at the world straight on and that objective reality is, indeed, your reality. It would be great to believe, because of the truthfulness and honesty with which you conduct your life, that any observation you make is accurate, precise, and correct. That the conclusions you draw conform exactly to truth or to the standard set by the norm of others in your culture. Unfortunately, this is *never* the case. The fact is, your perceptions and the conclusions you draw from them represent, as noted in Figure 2-2, your reality, your subjective view, or the world as it appears to you.

If you think about it, if you were affected by any one of the perceptual influences listed above—lack of sleep, for example—you would experience some distortion from the norm. Whether or not you knew the distortion was occurring might depend on the severity of the influence—three nights without sleep—the circumstances in which you found yourself—taking a final exam—or whether you had other comparisons to make; that is, you had a way to compare your sensory data (observations) with that of others.

(Others thought the exam was fair; you thought it unfair.) You have drawn a conclusion that is true based on your perceptions.

*Stay healthy, get rest, and exercise.* Make every effort to come at the world as healthy, well-rested, and sufficiently exercised as possible. Because perception depends on your senses, the better condition that your senses are in, the more likely they will respond in proper ways. It is more likely that you will be able to be aware of and adjust to perceptual influences when you have a proper state of mind and body. For example, can you imagine getting physically and emotionally upset with an instructor because of an exam you felt was unfair after three days of no sleep, living on Mountain Dew, isolated in your room, and trying to study a semester's worth of notes in a day-and-a-half?

*Avoid hasty conclusions.* If you realize that you live in the same **objective world** as everyone else, the actual territory or external reality we all experience, and yet you have a different **subjective view** or personal mental map of that world—because of all your perceptual influences—then you realize at once that your experiences of the same external environment, whatever they are, have to differ. The **map is not the territory**. Your mental maps that you create, that is, your subjective experiences or subjective view, are different from the external, objective reality on which they are based. Thus, what are the chances that your conclusions about the objective world are going to be accurate? They will be based on *your* mental maps only, and therefore are likely to be just as inaccurate as anyone else's mental maps. That is why lawyers call on as wide a variety of witnesses as possible, hoping that through a combination of their views, they can get a closer, more accurate view of objective reality—realizing as they begin, no combination will get them the full picture they desire. Sometimes, of course, the selection of witnesses is specific and biased so the picture of reality will be the picture that will best help their client.

Getting back to avoiding hasty conclusions, if you feel it is necessary to publicly announce a conclusion, then state it tentatively rather than as a



## On the Web

We think it makes sense to ask how self and perception relate to communication. At a website designed to provide an outline of a "Communication Workshop," the opening, introductory paragraph explains the importance of this chapter:

*Communication is much more than a set of rules to follow. True communication involves not only the appreciation and expression of our different realities but also our ability to commune, to share and perceive the same reality. It involves*

*skillful use of one's senses, one's heart, one's intellect to make authentic contact with another. It is the way we bridge our own internal state to get our needs met. After internal work, we can connect with the world, in ways that can be heard and accepted, if we listen as actively as we speak!* (p. 1 of 7)

Source: (No author). *Communication Workshop*. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://www.growthandhealing.com/growthandhealing/comoutline.htm>.





## Assess Yourself

### How Strong is Your Self-Esteem?

Please mark each statement in the following way:

If the statement describes how you usually feel, put a check in the column *Like Me*.

If the statement does not describe how you usually feel, put a check in the column *Unlike Me*.

For this inventory, there are no right or wrong answers.

	Like Me	Unlike Me
1. I'm pretty sure of myself.	_____	_____
2. I often wish I were someone else.	_____	_____
3. I'm easy to like.	_____	_____
4. I never worry about anything.	_____	_____
5. I find it very hard to talk in front of a class.	_____	_____
6. There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could.	_____	_____
7. I can make up my mind without too much trouble.	_____	_____
8. I'm a lot of fun to be with.	_____	_____
9. I always do the right thing.	_____	_____
10. I'm proud of the college work that I do.	_____	_____
11. Someone always has to tell me what to do.	_____	_____
12. It takes me a long time to get used to anything new.	_____	_____
13. I'm often sorry for the things I do.	_____	_____
14. I'm never unhappy.	_____	_____
15. I'm doing the best work that I can.	_____	_____
16. I give in very easily.	_____	_____
17. I'm pretty happy.	_____	_____
18. I like everyone I know.	_____	_____
19. I like to be called on in class.	_____	_____
20. I understand myself.	_____	_____
21. Things are all mixed up in my life.	_____	_____
22. I'm not doing as well in college as I'd like to.	_____	_____
23. I can make up my mind and stick to it.	_____	_____
24. I have a low opinion of myself.	_____	_____
25. I don't like to be with other people.	_____	_____
26. I'm never shy.	_____	_____
27. I often feel upset in college.	_____	_____
28. If I have something to say, I usually say it.	_____	_____
29. I always tell the truth.	_____	_____



## Assess Yourself (continued)

	Like Me	Unlike Me
30. Most people are better liked than I am.	_____	_____
31. I always know what to say to people.	_____	_____
32. I often get discouraged in college.	_____	_____
33. Things usually don't bother me.	_____	_____



Go to the *Communicating Effectively* CD-ROM to see your results and learn how to evaluate your attitudes and feelings.

Source: Adapted from: S. Coopersmith, *The Antecedents of Self-Esteem*. (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1967). In J. P. Robinson; P. R. Shaver; & L. S. Wrightsman, *Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Attitudes* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1991), p. 127–31.

conclusion. For example, rather than stating that you know that flying saucers exist because you saw strange lights in the sky last night, why not offer your observations in a tentative way that will allow exploration and discussion: “You know, I saw strange lights in the sky last night. Did anyone else see any strange lights?”

*Take more time.* The second method for adjusting to perceptual influences follows from the last one. Take more time. When it is said, patience is a virtue, nothing could be more succinct or accurate. Time has a number of benefits. It allows you to gather more facts. With more facts, it is likely your conclusions will change. Time also allows you to think about your observations and conclusions. For example, you might overhear another conversation about the strange lights in the sky, or read a newspaper article about a meteor shower last night, or the glow from locally launched weather balloons. How often have you discovered that your first impressions were wrong? That, for example, you could not tell what a book was about by its cover alone?

There is an important caution to be aware of as you search for information. As noted previously, when you believe something to be true, you will find information to support that belief. And that statement introduces the caution. Your external environment contains ample evidence to support all beliefs about a subject (External Reality . . . , 1999). If you believe, for example, that most people are bad and will lie, cheat, steal, and otherwise injure you, you can find plenty of evidence in the news and in your daily encounters with others to support that belief. If you believe that most people are good and will behave in honest, caring, and courageous ways, you can find plenty of evidence to support this belief as well. The point of gathering information is to seek evidence that might suggest your beliefs are in error or that other explanations exist for the conclusions you have reached.

*Be available.* Another method for adjusting to perceptual influences follows from the previous two methods. Be available to see the other person's viewpoint. Availability, here, means both physical and psychological openness. How often, for example, in the heat of an argument you could not stop

long enough to really listen to another person's side? Rather, you were so upset you were framing your own ideas, choosing your own words, defending yourself from attack, and trying to outdo, outmaneuver, and outwit the other person? The advantage of counting to 10 to allow your emotions to calm, or stepping back and taking more time, or just trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes helps you become more available. The question, "Did anyone else see strange lights?" reveals availability and openness.

*Be committed.* Commit yourself to seeking more information. Commit yourself to having additional information before making any judgment. Commit yourself to being as fully informed as you would expect others to be with you before sharing their conclusions. Buy a local paper, for example, and examine it for possible explanations of strange lights in the sky. Listen to a local newscast for information. Go ask or make a call to a local expert who might have an answer. It is this kind of climate—the kind of climate in which educated and informed conversation and dialogue can take place—that is likely to produce additional perspectives, alternatives, and conclusions.

*Be prepared to change.* If everything has worked thus far, you are likely to get information, hear viewpoints, or gain perspectives, alternatives, or conclusions that you did not originally have. If this is true, you must be prepared to change accordingly. Whatever adjustments are necessary, you must be ready to make them. This is why it is important to avoid making hasty conclusions at the outset. In that way, changes at this point will be unnecessary. You simply adjust internally. If you expressed a hasty conclusion, now you must admit the error or openly reveal the adjustment necessary to accommodate the new information, viewpoint, perspective, alternative, or conclusion, and you can't save face, or protect yourself from embarrassment. Publicly admitting an error is difficult for anyone. As it turned out, the strange lights in the sky were a number of planes returning to the local airport at the same time, having all been at the same air show in another state. From the ground, at night, depending on your position or location, the planes lit up the night sky.

As you take steps to reduce the effect of perceptual influences on you, you will notice changes simply because the information you will get is likely to be more accurate and dependable. It will be better information for use in building a stronger self-concept.

## Chapter Review

Self-concept is how you think about and value yourself. Self-concept comes from three sources: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perception. Scripts, roles, and self-fulfilling prophecies also influence your self-concept. If people are willing to give up some of their psychological safety and take some risks, their self-concepts will become more positive.

There are several ways to improve your self-concept. Decide what you want to change about yourself, consider your circumstances, take some chances, set reasonable goals, use a program of self-discipline, find people who will support you, and act positively toward others.

While self-concept is how you look at yourself, perception is how you see others and the world around you. Your perceptions come

from interactions with others and from your cultural background. In the perceptual process you select information, organize it, and interpret it. Your education and experience will influence how you carry out this process.

There are a number of things that can be stated with certainty about the self-concept and perception including that they are intimately and intrinsically linked, each affecting the other in both subtle and profound ways. Your perceptions are essential to the building, maintenance, and sustained support of your self-concept.

Any perceptions you have are less than perfect because of deletions, distortions, and generalizations. Also, perceptual filters such as your biologic make-up, culture, values, and beliefs, coping with and tolerance for stress, conflict resolution strategies, previous experiences with failures and successes, illnesses, traumas, and sur-

gery will all have an effect on your perceptions. Because there are so many influences, and because these influences are likely to combine in unknown ways and even have some cumulative effect, there is no way to predict or know the effect of the influences on your perceptions nor on how your self-concept is altered.

There are a number of ways to adjust to perceptual influences. The first is to stay healthy and get rest and exercise. The second is to avoid hasty conclusions. The third is to take more time. Be available and be committed are four and five, and the sixth way to adjust to perceptual influences is to be prepared to change. But just because you have adjusted to perceptual influences, keep in mind that it is common to come to wrong conclusions; thus, it is extremely important to continually check out your interpretations of reality.

## Questions to Review

1. How do reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perception lead to a self-concept?
2. What is a self-fulfilling prophecy, and how does it contribute to one's self-concept?
3. What is psychological risk, and how does it contribute to one's growth and self-concept?
4. What are some of the ways by which self-concept might be improved.
5. What is perception, and how is it tied into self-concept?
6. What are the three steps of the perceptual process?
7. What are some things that can be stated with certainty about the self-concept and perception?
8. Why can it be said that the way you come at the world is distinctive, exceptional, and unequalled in all the world?
9. What role do deletions, distortions, and generalizations play in perceptions? Can you give an example of each one?
10. What are some of the perceptual filters that narrow the lens through which you view the world?
11. What are some of the ways you can adjust to perceptual influences?

mhhe.com/hybel



Go to the self-quizzes on the Communicating Effectively CD-ROM (side 2, track 10) and the Online Learning Center at [mhhe.com/hybel7](http://mhhe.com/hybel7) to test your knowledge of the chapter concepts.

## References

- Angier, N. (1997, March 14). "Sexual identity not pliable after all, report says." *New York Times*, A1, A18.
- Boone, M. E. (2001). *Managing inter@ctively: Executing business strategy, improving communication, and creating a knowledge-sharing culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Doskoch, P. (1998, March/April). "Personality crisis? Not on the net." *Psychology Today* 31:2, 70.
- (No author). (1999, Dec. 28). "External reality and subjective experience." Western Michigan University. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://spider.hcob.wmich.edu/bis/faculty/bowman/erse.html>.

- (No author). (1999, July 7). "G. I. Joe: Is he really a self-esteem problem?" *Columbus Dispatch*, 8A.
- Johnson, K. (1998, May 5). "Self-image is suffering from lack of esteem." *New York Times*, C7.
- Joseph, R. A., H. R. Markus, & R. W. Tafari. (1992, Sept.). Gender and self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63:3, 391–402.
- Kanter, R. M. (2001). *E-volve: Succeeding in the digital culture of tomorrow*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Keillor, G. (1985). *Lake Wobegon days*. New York: Penguin/Viking Press.
- Manz, C. C., & H. P. Sims, Jr., (2001). *The new super-leadership: Leading others to lead themselves*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and personality*, 2nd ed. New York: Harper & Row.
- Muriel, J., & D. Joneward (1971). *Born to win: Transactional analysis with gestalt experiments*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Nie, N., & L. Erbring (2000, February 17). *Internet and society: A preliminary report*. Stanford University, CA: Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society; InterSurvey, Inc.; and McKinsey & Company.
- Nieto, S. (1995). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* 2nd ed. New York: Longman. In F. Yeo, (1999, Fall). "The barriers of diversity: Multicultural education and rural schools." *Multicultural Education* 6th ed. 2–7. In F. Schultz (ed.). (2001). *Multicultural Education*, 8th ed. Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin.
- Paul, A. M. (2001, March/April). "Self-help: Shattering the myths." *Psychology Today*, 60–68.
- (No author). *Perception and the self*. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://webhome.idirect.com/~kehamilt/ipsyperc.html>.
- Purkey, W. (1988). *An overview of self-concept theory for counselors*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services. Ann Arbor, MI (an ERIC/CAPS Digest: ED304630).
- Ratey, J. R. (2001). *A user's guide to the brain: Perception, attention, and the four theaters of the brain*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Rubin, M., ed. (1980). *Men without masks*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Santiago, E. (1994, Dec. 18). "A Puerto Rican stew." *New York Times Magazine*, 34–36.
- Schwalbe, M. L., & C. Staples (1991). "Gender difference in self-esteem." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 54:2, 158–68.
- Tanno, D. V. (2000). "Names, narratives, and the evolution of ethnic identity." In Gonzalez, A., M. Houston, & V. Chen, eds. *Our voices: Essays in culture, ethnicity, and communication* Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company, 25–28.
- Wiener, V. (1999). *Winning the war against youth gangs: A guide for teens, families, and communities*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Yeager, S. (2001, Jan. 1). *Lecture notes: Self-concept*. DeSales University. Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://www4.allencol.edu/~sey0/selfla.html>.

## Further Readings

- Allen, R. L. (2001). *The concept of self: A study of black identity and self-esteem*. (African American Life Series). Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. Allen, a professor in the department of communication at the University of Michigan, examines past scholarship on African-American identity and explores a wide range of issues leading to the formation of an individual and collective sense of self. Using results of the National Study of Black Americans, he develops a model of African self. The three parts of his book illustrate his approach: 1) The Black Self, Trends, Influences, and Effects, 2) Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the Black Self, and 3) Theory Construction. A book designed for the serious student.
- Branden, N. (1998). *A woman's self-esteem: Struggles and triumphs in the search for identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. In this 160-page book Branden has expanded on the articles on women's issues he wrote for *New Woman* magazine in the early 90s. His primary focus is on the challenges facing women: how to embrace their strengths, how to be assertive, and how to keep appropriate boundaries. Early in the book, Branden summarizes his overall theory in a succinct, meaningful way. This book will make readers think deeply and clearly about the role of self-esteem in their lives.
- Dalrymple, T. (2001). *Life at the bottom: The world-view that makes the underclass*. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher. Dalrymple, a British psychiatrist, who treats the poor in a slum hospital and a prison in England, offers a searing account of life in the underclass and why it persists as it does. Of 22-chapters in this 263-page book, by far the most relevant for this chapter on self-concept, is "Choosing to Fail" in which Dalrymple offers real-



istic views of the nonverbal illustrations of failure, the self-fulfilling prophecies of doom, and the pernicious negative filters through which those who choose to fail, see the world. Dalrumple draws the conclusion for all members of our society: "for while we ascribe our conduct to pressures from without, we obey the whims that well up from within, thereby awarding ourselves carte blanche to behave as we choose. Thus we feel good about behaving badly" (p. 122). This is an excellent, readable, eye-opening book.

Eakin, P. J. (2001). *How our lives become stories: Making selves*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Using life writings from works by Christa Wolf, Oliver Sacks, Henry Louis Gates, Melanie Thernstrom, and Philip Roth, Eakin draws on the latest research in neurology, cognitive science, memory studies, and developmental psychology to re-think the nature of self-representation. He shows how living in one's body shapes one's self-identity. He clearly demonstrates that the self and the story of self are constantly evolving in relation to others.

Friday, N. (1997). *My mother/my self: The daughter's search for identity*. Surrey, England: Delta Publishing. Friday uses self-disclosure and hundreds of interviews to underscore the feminine legacy of the mother/daughter bond, and she reveals the anger, hate, and love that daughters hold for their mothers. Although originally written twenty years ago, it has great meaning for both men and women because it uncovers the causes for pain in broken relationships and the embarrassing patterns that engender them. An excellent self-development book.

McGraw, P. C. (2001). *Self matters: Creating your life from the inside out*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Listen to some of McGraw's early chapter titles: Defining the Authentic Self, Your Self-Concept, Locus of Control, and Internal Dialogue. Although the information appears to be correct, although the book is well written with a large number of useful and interesting examples, and although McGraw (Dr. Phil) covers the topics thoroughly, he includes no references, footnotes, or bibliography, and even when he writes, "In an experiment some years ago," he gives readers no source and the experimenters no credit. That doesn't deny the value of the information, but readers have to rely on McGraw's credibility for the validity of what he writes. This is a great motivational book for those whose self-concept is in need of repair or for those who use excuses and fears to run their lives.

Nam, V. (2001). *YELL-Oh girls! Emerging voices explore culture, identity, and growing up Asian American*. Hillsboro, NH: Quill Publishers. Nam's main focus is on the tough work of establishing identity, and it is relevant for young women of all ethnic backgrounds. The 80 brief essays in this 336-page book cover such things as body image, interracial friendship, dating, adoption, "model minority" stereotypes, Asian-American feminist activism, sexuality, language and white boy's "Asian fetish." It is useful especially for young females who are trying to understand their cultural identity. A well written book that is totally relevant for today's society.

Shields, V. R. & D. Heineken. (2002). *Measuring up: How advertising affects self-image*. State College, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press. Bringing together the literature of feminist media studies, feminist film theory, critical social theory, cultural studies, and critical ethnography, the authors examine the complex relationship between the idealized images of gender seen in advertising and one's own thoughts, feelings, and behavior in relation to these images. "They are technoenhanced labyrinths of unattainable appearances that leave women and men feeling horrified, estranged, and restricted by unrealistic, silent mandates," say the authors.

Tucker-Ladd, C. E. (1999). "Chapter 14—Methods for changing our thoughts, attitudes, self-concept, motivation, values, and expectations." *Psychological Self-Help* (An Online Book). Retrieved March 14, 2003, from <http://mentalhelp.net/psych-help/chap14/>. Although there are a number of sections in this work that are relevant to communication, this one is particularly useful because Tucker-Ladd, a licensed clinical psychologist, discusses changing self-concept, building self-esteem, and increasing self-awareness. He also offers help in improving one's self through motivation, straight thinking, common sense, and attitudes that will help you. A straightforward, encouraging book.

Whyte, D. (2001). *Crossing the unknown sea: Work as a pilgrimage of identity*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books (A division of Penguin Putnam, Inc.). Whyte views work not only as a means of support, but as a means for interacting with the world and developing self-expression and identity. He draws on the philosophical underpinnings of the self-help movement aimed at finding one's "inner compass," but there is no step-by-step format to follow here, rather an interesting and provocative look at the subject of work and its effect of individuals. This is a fascinating, insightful tour of the human psyche.

