

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, 11/E

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Robert A. Baron, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Donn Byrne, The University at Albany, State University of New York

Nyla R Branscombe, University of Kansas

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THE SELF

Understanding “Who Am I?”

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Thinking about the Self: Personal versus Social Identity

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Who I Am Depends on Others’ Treatment
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When I (Nyla Branscombe) was a young girl, the American space program was big news. Family and friends would gather nightly to watch the unfolding of this riveting scientific endeavor. Like others at that time, I remember watching the lunar launches on television and Neil Armstrong's walks on the moon with great excitement. I was truly fascinated by the idea that humans could fly such distances, and that there were indeed other worlds besides the one I lived in that might be explored.

I remember distinctly the night that I announced to my father at dinner that when I grew up I wanted to be an astronaut. He smiled at me and said, "Girls *can't* be astronauts," but, perhaps to placate me, he added that I "*could* be an airline stewardess if I wanted." At the time, they seemed similar enough to me—with flying being the crucial element that had captured my imagination—so I was not too upset to learn that I could expect to be forever barred from my favorite career option because of a part of myself that I could not change. Indeed, this incident quite effectively conveyed very important information about the nature of the world here on earth and my place in it. I learned that there were positions that my gender might prevent me from occupying, and more generally, that my category membership was sufficiently important that it was likely to have a pervasive influence on the course of my life.

You might be tempted to think that this story reflects a very different time and that gender-based exclusion and discrimination is a thing of the past. And, to a certain extent, you'd be right. Legal barriers that prevented women from entering many occupations have been dismantled; there have even been female astronauts (see Figure 5.1). But, as you'll see, differential treatment based on gender is not history, although it may operate in a considerably more subtle fashion than my father's certainty that women simply were not *allowed* to be in some occupations.

People's stereotypes about what women are like have changed over time, and this has been due, in part, to the actual changes in the roles that women occupy (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Although it may be amusing to take a look at how previous generations thought about women's work, as illustrated in "The Good Wife's Guide" in Figure 5.2

**Figure 5.1 ■ Gender and Occupations:
Some Women Have Become Astronauts**

Gender is still an important predictor of membership in many occupations, but some vanguards have led the way!



on page 172, it would be erroneous to conclude that women no longer experience discrimination in the workplace. Nor are the consequences of being a target of discrimination as easy to accept as an eleven-year-old's perception that exclusion from one occupation is OK because any job that involves flying can be interchanged with any other. To realize that no matter what you do, your gender—which is a stable part of the self—may consistently result in undesirable consequences, can harm psychological well-being (see Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002a). As the research we'll examine shows, there are negative emotional, cognitive, and behavioral consequences of perceiving the self as a target of prejudice.

In this chapter, we examine what social psychologists have learned about the nature of the self. Some have suggested that the self is the heart of social psychology; consequently, the self has been the focus of much systematic research. Not only does how we think about ourselves influence our choices and behaviors, but it also serves as a reference point for how we perceive and interact with others. We begin by first considering whether we have just one “self” or many selves. The issue of whether one aspect of the self is more “true” or predictive of behavior than another, or if it depends on the nature of the situation in which people find themselves, is one with which we will grapple quite extensively. What does it mean to be *self-aware*, and does that influence how we evaluate ourselves and other people? Do we experience ourselves the same way all the time, or does our experience of ourselves depend on the context and the nature of the comparison it evokes? If we do categorize and think about ourselves in terms of different identities, what consequences does this have for our judgments about ourselves? Do our perceptions of ourselves depend on whether we have high or low self-esteem? Do people have methods of knowing themselves that allow them to feel positively, even when others perform better than they do in some domain? After considering these important questions, we will examine the effects of being a target of prejudice for a number of self-related processes, including the emotional, cognitive, and performance consequences that can ensue when people face rejection by others because of their group membership.

Thinking about the Self: Personal versus Social Identity

One of the most fundamental principles of the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1985) is that individuals can perceive themselves differently depending on where they are at a particular moment in time on what is known as the **personal–social identity continuum**. The personal identity end of this continuum refers to when we think of ourselves primarily as *individuals*. The social identity end refers to when we think of ourselves as members of specific *social groups*. Because we do not experience all aspects of our self-concept simultaneously, which aspect of our identity is salient at any given moment will influence how we think about ourselves, and this, in

personal–social identity continuum

The two distinct ways that the self can be categorized. At the personal level, the self can be thought of as a unique individual, whereas at the social identity level, the self is thought of as a member of a group.

Figure 5.2 ■ The 1945 Stereotype of a Good Woman

Looking back more than a half century, it is difficult to believe that these were the normative expectations for women. Clearly expectations of employment outside the home for married women was entirely absent, although most college-educated women in the United States today will be in the labor force for much of their adult lives. (Source: Housekeeping Monthly, May 13, 1945.)



The Good Wife's Guide

- Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal ready, on time for his return. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men are hungry when they come home and the prospect of a good meal (especially his favorite dish) is part of the warm welcome needed.
- Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your makeup, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking. He has just been with a lot of work-weary people.
- Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives.
- Gather up schoolbooks, toys, paper, etc., and then run a dustcloth over the tables.
- Be happy to see him.
- Listen to him. You may have a dozen important things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him talk first—remember, his topics of conversation are more important than yours.
- Make him comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or have him lie down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him.
- Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him.
- A good wife always knows her place.

turn, has consequences for our behavior. When we may think of ourselves as unique individuals, our personal identities are salient, and this is likely to result in self-descriptions that emphasize how we are different from other individuals. For example, you might describe yourself as fun when thinking of yourself at the personal identity level, to emphasize your self-perception as having more of this attribute than other individuals you are using as the comparative referent. Because personal identity self-description can be thought of as **intragroup** in nature—involving comparisons with other individuals who share our group membership—which group is the implicit referent used when describing the personal self can affect the content of self-descriptions (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). For example, if you were asked to describe how you are different from other Americans, you might characterize yourself as particularly liberal, but if you were

intragroup comparisons

Judgments that result from comparisons between individuals who are members of the same group.

indicating how you are different from other college students you might say that you are rather conservative. If my family was the group I (Nyla Branscombe) was considering when describing myself, I might say that I'm a very patient person, even though I would not describe myself in this way if I were thinking of women, or scientists, or some other group that I belong to as the comparison. The point is that even for personal identity, the content we generate depends on some comparative reference, and this can result in different self-descriptors coming to mind, depending on the context.

At the other end of the personal–social identity continuum, we can perceive ourselves as members of a group, which means we emphasize the ways that we are similar to other group members. When we think of ourselves at the social identity level, we describe ourselves in terms of the attributes that members of our group share with each other and what differentiates “our group” from other groups. That is, descriptions of the self at the social identity level are **intergroup** in nature—they involve contrasts between groups. For example, you may think of yourself in terms of your social identity as a fraternity or sorority group member, and describe yourself as relatively athletic and self-motivated, attributes that you perceive to be shared with other members of your group, and as simultaneously differentiating your group from other fraternities or sororities that you see as being more studious and scholarly than your group perhaps. On other occasions, you might think of yourself in terms of a different social identity, that of your gender group. In that case, if you are female, you might emphasize the attributes that you share with other women (e.g., warm and caring) and that you perceive as differentiating women from men. What's important to note here is that when you think of yourself as an *individual*, the *content* of your self description is likely to differ from when you are thinking of yourself as a member of a *category* that you share with others. Of course, as these examples indicate, most of us are members of a variety of different groups (e.g., occupation, age group, sexual orientation, nationality, sports teams), but all of these will not be salient at the same time. When any particular social identity is salient, people are likely to act in ways that reflect that aspect of their self-concept. Thus, there may be a number of situational factors that will alter how we define ourselves, and the actions that stem from those differing self-definitions will also differ.

Can we say that one of these “selves” is the “true” self—either the personal self or any one of a person's potential social identities? Not really. All of these could be quite accurate portraits of the self, and accurately predict behavior, depending on the context and comparison dimension (Oakes & Reynolds, 1997). Note, too, how some ways of thinking about the self could even imply behaviors that are opposite of those that would result from other self-descriptions (e.g., fun versus scholarly).

Despite such potential variability in self-definition, most people manage to maintain a coherent image of the self, while recognizing that they may define themselves and behave differently in different situations (see Figure 5.3 for

intergroup comparisons

Judgments that result from comparisons between our group and another group.



Figure 5.3 ■ Seeing the Self as Competent Can Depend on the Context

This woman may define herself as competent in her role as executive but not so competent in her parental role (at least some days)!

an example of differing self-definitions, depending on the situation). For example, when you are at home with your parents, your self-image as a responsible adult might sometimes come into question. You might not pick up things after yourself, or you might even expect that someone else will do your laundry, and so forth. When, however, you are away at college, you perform these tasks competently and feel like a responsible adult. Despite such readily admitted pockets of irresponsibility, does that mean you will generally see yourself in this way? No, definitely not. You may maintain an image of yourself as responsible, either because the domains in which you are irresponsible are not particularly important to you, or they are not salient when you think of yourself as a college student (Patrick, Neighbors, & Knee, 2004). When people do face such mixed evidence for a valued self-perception as a function of context or audience, they can reduce the importance of competence in a given domain, or, alternatively, they can decide that only some reference groups are important for self-definition. Thus, some people may be affected by their families' perceptions of their competence, but not their professors, while others may show the reverse (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

Who I Am Depends on the Situation

College students' answers to the question, "Who am I?" typically consist of references to social identities (e.g., nationality, race, gender, university affiliation), interpersonal relationships (e.g., Karen's boyfriend, daughter of Howard and Rose), and a variety of personal traits such as honest or kind (Rentsch & Heffner, 1994). Indeed, people describe themselves differently, depending on whether the question being asked implies situational specificity or not. This effect was clearly illustrated in research by Mendoza-Denton and colleagues (2001). In their study, participants were given one of two different types of sentence completion tasks. When the prompt was open-ended, such as "I am a (an) . . . person," self-definition as an individual is implied. In this condition, participants' responses were primarily traitlike or global (e.g., "I am an ambitious person"). When, however, the prompt implied particular social settings, "I am a (an) . . . when . . .," the responses were more contingent on the situation considered by the participant (e.g., "I am an ambitious person when a professor provides me with a challenge").

Our tendency to see the self differentially, depending on what relationships with others we consider, and according to the context, increases with age (Byrne & Shavelson, 1996; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). We also differ across the life span in the extent to which we have multiple aspects of our self-concepts that are important to us. This has consequences for how we view the self when we experience stress. For instance, Linville (1987) found that people with more aspects of the self that are distinct (e.g., self as professional, mother, baseball fan) were less responsive to threats to any given identity (e.g., following a professional setback) than were people for whom those same identities were intertwined and not distinct. When important aspects of the self are distinct from one another—so that **self-complexity** is high—a failure in any one domain is less likely to affect how one feels about one's self overall. Indeed, those whose self-concepts are organized less complexly (have more overlap in different aspects of their self) exhibit more variability in how they feel about themselves than do those whose self-concepts are more complexly organized (aspects of the self are distinct or nonoverlapping). Stress is especially likely to be experienced by people when two important aspects of the self are perceived as in conflict with each other, creating **identity interference**. For example, Settles (2004) found that women in stereotypically masculine fields such as physics and astronomy who experienced interference between their identities as women and as scientists reported poorer well-being than did those who did not perceive their identities as in conflict.

Aspects of the self that are associated with a particular cultural tradition may be activated, depending on subtle context changes, and this can lead to different self-

self-complexity

How the self-concept is organized. For those whose self-concepts are organized complexly, important aspects of the self are distinct from one another. For those whose self-concept is low in complexity, there is greater overlap in different components of the self.

identity interference

When two important social identities are perceived as in conflict, such that acting on the basis of one identity interferes with performing well based on the other identity.

perceptions. For example, it is well known that North American culture emphasizes highly *individualistic norms* and an **independent self-concept**, whereas Asian cultures emphasize *collectivist norms* and an **interdependent self-concept** (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Because of this cultural difference, the self-concepts of people who spend their lives in one cultural context might be expected to differ from those who spend their lives in a different cultural context. Such culture-based self-concept differences may be reflected in systematic differences in what is assumed to be “personal” tastes and preferences.

To test this idea, Kim and Markus (1999) showed Koreans and Americans abstract figures, each composed of nine different parts, and participants were asked to say which they preferred or liked better. Koreans selected more of the figures wherein the parts fit together, whereas Americans chose more of the figures for which some part of the figure was distinctive or different from the other parts. Such cultural differences in the choices people make may well reflect contrasting interdependent (e.g., fitting together with others) and independent (e.g., being distinctive or different than others) self-conceptions. However, it could also be that subtle aspects of the context simply cue one aspect of the self over another—the interdependent or independent component—because everyone is some of both. In support of the latter possibility, research with bicultural individuals (people who belong to or are fluent in two different cultures) finds that they behave differently, depending on which identity is made salient. For example, people who are experienced with both Asian and western cultural traditions, might express their “Asian-ness” in contexts that cue that aspect of the self, but express their “western-ness” in contexts that cue that aspect of the self. This notion that bicultural individuals possess both Asian and western identities, and can respond according to either, was tested with students in Hong Kong who were fluent in both Chinese and English (Trafimow et al., 1997). These students were asked to answer the question, “Who am I?” in either one language or the other. The Hong Kong students who responded to the question in English described themselves in terms of personal traits that differentiate them from others, which reflects an individualistic self-construal, while those who answered the question in Chinese described themselves in terms of group memberships that they share with others, reflecting a more interdependent self-construal. Thus, important group-based differences in the self-concept may emerge primarily when that group identity is activated, as it is when using a particular language (for those who have more than one).

Consider another example, this time involving gender, that demonstrates the importance of the social context for whether group differences in the self-concept are exhibited. A number of researchers have suggested that men and women differ in their self-concepts and, as a result, in how they respond to moral issues (Cross & Madson, 1997; Gilligan, 1988; Markus & Oyserman, 1989). Specifically, men may describe themselves as independent and autonomous and be inclined to approach moral problems according to a **justice ethic**. That is, because people believe that men tend to apply abstract universal rules when engaged in moral reasoning, they will use those same rules regardless of the context. In contrast, because women tend to describe themselves in more interdependent and connected terms, they might be expected to approach moral problems from a **care ethic**. That is, because people believe that women are concerned with the maintenance of relationships and the promotion of the welfare of others, their answers to moral dilemmas might generally reflect this orientation. Such a presumed gender difference in the self-concept and differential approach to moral issues could, however, depend on men and women defining themselves in terms of their gender for its expression. Indeed, when a different way of defining the self is salient, such gender differences could be entirely absent (Deaux & Major, 1987).

In a recent study, Ryan, David, & Reynolds (2004) illustrated the importance of how the self is categorized for the ways in which men and women describe themselves. Their study examined when gender differences in such self-descriptions are present and when they are not. In their research, when *both* men and women were first asked to focus on groups to which they belonged (i.e., they were asked to think about

independent self-concept

In individualistic cultures, the expectation is that people will develop a self-concept as separate from or independent of others. Men are expected to have an independent self-concept more so than women.

interdependent self-concept

In collectivist cultures, the expectation is that people will develop a self-concept in terms of one’s connections or relationships with others. Women are expected to have an interdependent self-concept more so than men.

justice ethic

A justice and ethics orientation that emphasizes the application of universal rules regardless of one’s own relationship with those individuals. Moral dilemmas are accordingly solved by using the same principle across cases.

care ethic

A justice and ethics orientation that emphasizes the maintenance of relationships. Moral dilemmas are accordingly solved by focusing on the welfare of others.

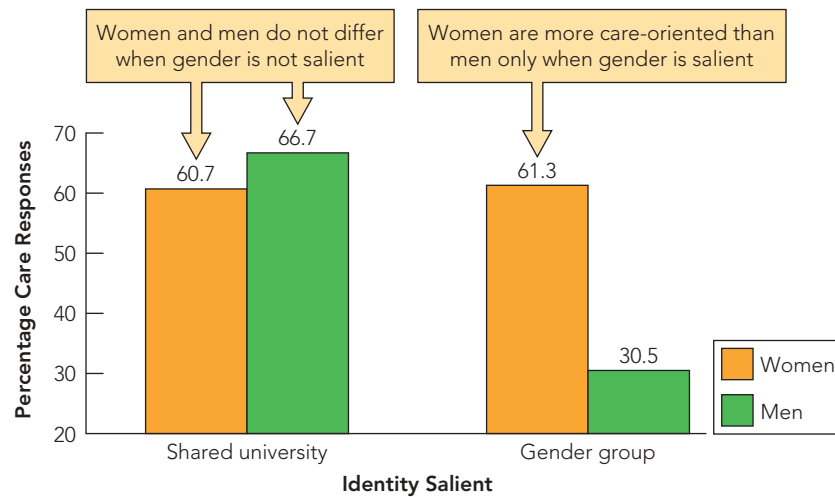


Figure 5.4 ■ Gender Differences Depend on What Identity Is Salient

When a shared identity with another in need is salient, both men and women display care-oriented responses. However, when one's gender group (and its differing norms) is salient, then men display fewer care-oriented responses to the same need situation compared with women. (Source: Based on data from Ryan, David, & Reynolds, 2004)

similarities between the self and others), they tended to describe themselves in terms of interdependent traits such as “dependable” and “understanding.” In contrast, when *both* men and women had first focused on groups to which they did not belong (i.e., they were asked to think about differences between the self and others), they were more likely to describe themselves in terms of independent traits such as “unique” and “objective.” Gender differences in self-definition *only* emerged when the participant's gender group membership was salient, but gender differences were not present in contexts such as these in which other identities were activated.

Such context shifts in self-definition have been shown to affect moral reasoning—a domain in which men and women have long been supposed to fundamentally differ. Ryan, David, and Reynolds (in press) showed that people's responses to a standard moral dilemma in which another person is in need depended on how they categorized themselves in relation to that other person. As shown in Figure 5.4, when the participant categorized the person in need as a university student and that person was therefore seen as a member of the same category as the participant, men and women were *equally* likely to display care-oriented responses toward the person in need in the dilemma. In contrast, when the participants categorized themselves in terms of their gender, then women displayed significantly more care-oriented responses than did men. In fact, men reduced their care-oriented responses to the person in need in the gender condition compared with the shared university-identity condition. Thus, both the self-concept and moral reasoning believed to stem from it appear to be flexible and context dependent. Gender differences in both the self-concept and moral reasoning depended on gender being a salient self category at the time the response was made. Nevertheless, gender is a powerful social category that is likely to be activated a great deal of the time (Fiske & Stevens, 1993). As a result, gender may be expected to influence perceptions of the self as well as responses to others with some frequency.

What determines *which* aspect of the self will be most influential at any given moment, if how we define ourselves can differ according to the context? First, one aspect of the self might be especially relevant to a particular context (e.g., thinking of ourselves as fun when at a party, but as hard working when we are in class or at work). Second, features of the context can make one aspect of the self highly distinctive, with that aspect of identity forming the basis of self-perception. For example, suppose an office is composed of only one woman among several men. The woman's gender distinguishes her from her colleagues. In such contexts, the lone woman is particularly likely to feel "like a woman" and she may be treated as representative of that group (Fuegen & Biernat, 2002; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). Similarly, African American students at predominantly white universities and other contexts in which other minority group members are rare are likely to think of themselves in terms of their race (Pollak & Niemann, 1998; Postmes & Branscombe, 2002). Third, some people may be more ready to categorize themselves in terms of a particular personal trait (e.g., intelligence) or group identity and its associated attributes (e.g., gender) because of its importance to the self. The more a personal attribute or social identity is valued, the more self-verification on that dimension will be sought (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Swann, 1990). Fourth, other people, including how they refer to us linguistically, can cue us to think of ourselves in personal versus social identity terms. Bernd Simon (2004) has noted that aspects of the self-concept that are referred to as nouns (e.g., woman, psychologist) are particularly likely to activate social identities. Nouns suggest discrete categories, which trigger perceptions of members of those categories as sharing a fundamental nature or essence that is different than members of other categories (Lickel, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2001). In contrast, aspects of the self that are referred to with either adjectives or verbs (e.g., weak, taller, supportive) reference perceived differences between people within a category (Turner & Onorato, 1999) and are likely to elicit self-perceptions at the personal identity level.

Who I Am Depends on Others' Treatment

How others treat us, and how we believe they will treat us in the future, have important implications for how we think about ourselves. When it comes to self-perception, no person is truly an island. When we expect that others will reject us because of some aspect of ourselves, we can choose from a few different possible responses (Tajfel, 1978). To the extent that it is possible to change an aspect of the self and avoid being rejected by others, we could potentially choose to do that. In fact, we could choose to change *only* that particular feature when we anticipate being in the presence of others who will reject us because of it. In other words, for some aspects of the self, people can attempt to hide them from disapproving others. As the U.S. military policy of "Don't ask, don't tell" on homosexuality suggests, there are group memberships that we can choose to reveal or not. However, this option is practically impossible for some social identities. We can't easily hide or change our race, gender, or age. In some cases, even if we *could* alter the part of the self that brings rejection, we may rebel against those rejecting us and make that feature *even more* self-defining. That is, we may emphasize the feature we possess as a method of contrasting the self from those who reject us—in effect, by emphasizing that feature, we are publicly communicating that we value something different than those who might judge us harshly because of it.

This point was illustrated in research conducted by Jetten and colleagues (2001). These researchers studied young people who elect to get body piercings in visible parts of the body other than earlobes (e.g., navel, tongue, eyebrow), a practice that has recently gained in popularity. How we dress and alter our bodies can be conceptualized as important identity markers—ways of communicating to the world who we are. Although some identity markers may bring acceptance into peer groups, they may be

perceived by other groups as weird or antinormative. Today, body piercings may be comparable to the wearing of blue jeans and men having long hair in the 1960s. These latter identity markers were the visible indicators of a “hippie” identity, a self-perception as a rebel against the establishment. Like their 1960s’ counterparts, those young people at present who opt for visible body piercings appear to be engaged in a similar form of rebel identity construction. Even though they know that they are likely to be discriminated against because of their piercings, this expectation can lead them to greater self-definition in terms of a group that is actively rejecting the dominant culture’s standards of beauty. Indeed, this research found that those with body piercings who were led to expect rejection from the mainstream because of their piercings identified more strongly with other people who have body piercings than did those who were led to expect acceptance from the mainstream. Such expected rejection and devaluation on the part of the culture as a whole can result in increasingly strong identification with a newly forming cultural group. As Figure 5.5 illustrates, people with body piercings seem to be creating an identity that communicates to all that “we are different from the mainstream.” If, however, over time, the practice of getting body piercings ultimately becomes diffused throughout the culture, with almost everyone adopting the practice—as happened in the 1960s as everyone started wearing blue jeans—then those who are attempting to convey their collective difference from the mainstream may be compelled to become increasingly more extreme to achieve the same identity end.

This sort of identity dilemma—whether to increasingly emphasize and take pride in an identity or, in contrast, discard and distance ourselves from it—may be especially likely to be provoked when a person moves from one social context to another. Consider the dilemma experienced by Hispanic students as they leave their home environment to attend a primarily Anglo university. Social psychologists have examined the

different strategies that such students can employ during their first year at college (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Evidence has been obtained of people facing this identity dilemma using one of two strategies—movement away from the identity or increased movement toward it. Among those for whom a Hispanic identity was initially not important, when they moved to a non-Hispanic environment, they emphasized their Hispanic identity to a lesser degree. In contrast, for those who initially valued their Hispanic identity, in this new context in which they know they could be rejected based on that identity, they increased the emphasis they placed on their ethnic identity, as indicated by joining Hispanic student associations. Interestingly, it was those students who increasingly emphasized their Hispanic identity and who took pride in their differences from others in this new environment whose self-esteem was better during the transition to college. Those who chose to distance themselves from their Hispanic identity suffered reduced self-esteem when they faced rejection based on that identity.



Figure 5.5 ■ Claiming an Identity That Is “Nonmainstream”

Many forms of body adornment and body modification are visual indicators of social identity. This young woman may be conveying to the “mainstream” that she is not one of them, and that she “fits in” with other members of her peer group.

As we saw with the body piercing research, whether others devalue an identity one might hold is typically not correlated with how important that identity is to the self (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). That is, because people have the option of either distancing from or increasingly identifying with a group that might be devalued by some groups, the perceived standing of a group in the wider culture is not predictive of how important an identity will be for the individual. In other words, it is not solely those identities that might be widely regarded as negative that the individual must decide whether to give up the identity or strengthen it further as shifts in context are made. Consider someone who moves from a context in which royalty is a valued identity to a new poorer setting in which it might not be. That person would be faced with a similar choice about whether to retain value in and emphasize the former “blue blood” identity or distance from it.

Self-Awareness: Terror Management

Constantine Sedikides and John Skowronski (1997) argue that the first level of self to emerge in terms of our evolutionary history and during the individual’s life span is **subjective self-awareness**. Such awareness allows organisms to differentiate themselves from the physical environment. Clearly, plants don’t possess this quality, but most animals do share this characteristic. For example, my cat knows where his paw ends and my arm begins, as do quite young human children. A few animals (primates) also develop **objective self-awareness**—the organism’s capacity to be the object of its own attention (Gallup, 1994). As shown in Figure 5.6, a chimp can inspect itself in a mirror and “know it knows” that it is seeing the self (Lewis, 1992, p. 124). Only humans, however, seem to have reached the third level of self-functioning—**symbolic self-awareness**—the ability to form an abstract representation of the self through language.

subjective self-awareness

The first level of self to emerge. It is the recognition that the self is separate from other objects in one’s physical environment.

objective self-awareness

The organism’s capacity to be the object of its own attention—to know that it is seeing its own self in a mirror, for example.

symbolic self-awareness

The uniquely human capacity to form an abstract representation of the self through language. It also is connected with knowing that death of the physical self is inevitable.



Figure 5.6 ■ Objective Self-Awareness: Recognizing the Self

Only among primates, such as the chimp shown here, does there seem to be *objective self-awareness*—the capacity to be aware of the self as an object. When a red spot is placed on the forehead of this chimp, it can only be detected in a mirror. The fact that seeing this image in the mirror leads the chimp to touch its own forehead is powerful evidence that there is some recognition that the reflected image is of the self.

Some social psychologists suggest that such self-awareness makes humans unique in the sense that they alone are aware of the inevitability of their own death. Such awareness of the fragility of our own existence creates the potential for **existential terror** (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997). When our own mortality is salient, according to **terror management theory**, it has implications for how we will perceive the self in relation to others. To manage the terror that arises from the certainty that we will ultimately die, we attempt to assure ourselves that we are meeting the culture's standards of value. To the extent that we feel we are meeting the culture's criteria, we will have positive self-esteem. From this perspective, self-esteem acts as a buffer against the anxiety that stems from awareness of our own demise. Research indicates that those whose self-esteem has been temporarily increased or who are dispositionally high in self-esteem show less defensiveness when mortality is salient than those whose self-esteem has been decreased or who are dispositionally low in self-esteem (Greenberg et al., 1992).

As already illustrated in this chapter, group memberships can reflect important aspects of the self and can affect self-esteem. When a group membership has positive implications for self-esteem, people may increasingly define themselves in terms of that group membership when they are reminded of their own mortality. However, when that same group is portrayed as having negative implications for the self or might undermine self-esteem, then people may increasingly distance themselves from that social identity when their own mortality is salient. To illustrate the consequences of experiencing such existential terror for self-definition, Arndt and his colleagues (2002) made mortality salient for some women but not for others. They found that when women were reminded of their own mortality, they showed greater alignment between themselves and other women in reaction to the threat to self. These women reported perceiving themselves as most similar to other women after performing a verbal test (a dimension on which women perform well). In contrast, though, women showed less alignment and identification with women after performing a math test (a dimension on which women are easily threatened, as you'll see later in this chapter). These findings indicate that we tend to define ourselves in terms of particular social identities to the extent that they protect self-esteem, and this seems to be true when we are feeling threatened. This process is illustrated in Figure 5.7.

existential terror

Anxiety stemming from awareness that the self will inevitably die.

terror management theory

Because humans are aware of the inevitability of their own death, they confront existential terror. Terror management theory suggests ways that people attempt to deal with this threat to the self when their own mortality is salient.

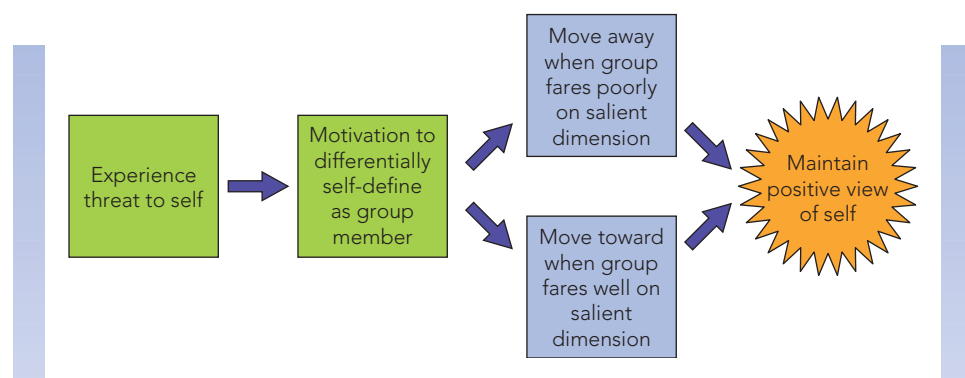


Figure 5.7 ■ Group Identification in Response to Threat

A variety of theoretical perspectives have suggested that when we experience a threat to the self, we are motivated to align ourselves with our group—to the extent that doing so will help us maintain a positive social identity. This process depends on whether the salient social identity is one that fares well on a particular dimension or not. (Source: Based on data from Arndt et al., 2002.)

Possible Selves: The Self over Time

Although we generally experience ourselves as relatively consistent over time, it is nonetheless true that people do change. Indeed, it is often gratifying to compare one's past self with the present self, for doing so will suggest that there has been improvement over time (Wilson & Ross, 2000). In fact, thinking about a future **possible self** that you may become can inspire you to forego current activities that are enjoyable but will not help, or might even hinder, bringing about this improved self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Instead, you may invest in less immediately enjoyable activities in order to achieve the goal of becoming your desired possible self. Think about what is involved in attaining a variety of social identities. We give up years of “having fun” in order to attain the status of being a “college graduate,” complete years of schooling and long internships to be able to call ourselves “doctors,” and put grueling hours into law school and studying for state bar exams to become “lawyers.” Lockwood and Kunda (1999) have found that *role models*—other people we wish to imitate or be like—can inspire us to invest in such long-term achievements, but, to do so, we must see the possible self that the role model represents as being potentially attainable. The image of a possible future self can influence our motivation to study harder, give up smoking, or invest in child-care and parenting classes, to the extent that we can imagine that a new and improved self will result from such changes.

People often consider new possible selves of this sort, as well as how to avoid negative and feared future possible selves, when they are making New Year's resolutions. Envisioning such self-changes can induce feelings of control and optimism, but failing to keep those resolutions is a common experience and repeated failures can lead to unhappiness (Polivy & Herman, 2000). When people feel they want to change but cannot succeed in doing so, they may be tempted to reduce this uncomfortable state of self-awareness by distracting themselves—either in mundane ways, such as getting lost in a novel, or in more damaging ways, such as consuming heavy amounts of alcohol (Baumeister, 1991). As we saw in Chapter 2, people appear to be generally *unrealistically optimistic* (Helweg-Larsen & Shepperd, 2001) in the extent to which they can achieve a host of positive outcomes (e.g., live to old age) and avoid negative outcomes (e.g., contracting a serious illness). The truth is, having confidence and efficacy in our ability to change is important for doing so, but overconfidence in our ability to do so can lead to false hope and, ultimately, disappointment. Although our ability to remake our physical selves may have limits, the photos in Figure 5.8 on page 182, like those seen on the new TV program *Extreme Make-Over*, suggest that rather dramatic changes are possible.

Successful performance in physical, academic, and job tasks is enhanced by feelings of **self-efficacy** (Courneya & McAuley, 1993; Huang, 1998; Sanna & Pusecker, 1994). It is necessary to believe that we *can* achieve a goal as a result of our own actions in order to even try (Bandura, 1997). Indeed, people high in self-efficacy in a domain tend to prefer to allocate their time and effort to tasks that *can* be solved, and they stop working on tasks that cannot be solved more quickly than those who are low in self-efficacy. A defining feature of people who are entrepreneurs (those who start new businesses) is their high levels of perceived self-efficacy (Markman, Balkin, & Baron, 2002).

When a task can be successfully accomplished only by working together with others, *collective self-efficacy* may be critical. As Figure 5.9 on page 182 illustrates, some successes critically depend on the team's performance as a whole—which is not equivalent to the self-efficacy that the individual members of the team may feel. Among basketball players, a shared belief in the collective efficacy of the team (measured at the beginning of the season) is associated with the team's overall success by the end of the season (Watson, Chemers, & Preiser, 2001). Likewise, collective self-efficacy can lead to political activism, such as persuading people to vote or joining a protest movement to bring about social change (Bandura, 2000; Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

possible selves

Images of how the self might be in the future—either “dreaded” possible selves to be avoided or “desired” potential selves that can be strived for.

self-efficacy

The belief that one can achieve a goal as a result of one's own actions. Collective self-efficacy is the belief that by working together with others, a goal can be achieved.



Figure 5.8 ■ There May Be Limits to Our Ability to Change Ourselves, but Some Extreme Makeovers Suggest That Incredible Change Is Possible

These photos make the point that if we make extreme enough changes to ourselves, including cosmetic surgery, there might not seem to be much of the original “self” left.



Figure 5.9 ■ Believing That Together We Can Accomplish Great Things

Why do some teams have so many victories? Part of the answer may involve the fact that they have high *collective self-efficacy*—high confidence in their ability to win.

Although we can bring about self-change as a result of our desire for self-improvement, many of these changes occur because of situational factors. Change can occur as we age, for example, because different demands are made on us as we occupy different roles throughout the life span. Consistent with this, much self-change occurs in response to relocating to a different community, where we begin to conform to new norms (Kling, Ryff, & Essex, 1997). Entering a new occupation also tends to bring about changes in our self-concept. Research indicates that becoming a police officer results in new self-perceptions (Stradling, Crowe, & Tuohy, 1993). Consider how you would see yourself differently when moving from working in a fast-food outlet to wearing a police officer's uniform, carrying a weapon, and having responsibilities that are more demanding than asking a customer, "Would you like fries with that?" Equally dramatic changes in the self-concept occur as one moves from civilian life to being in the armed forces and facing combat (Silverstein, 1994), as well as when college students graduate and leave the academic environment to become attorneys, engineers, or parents.

In addition, very negative effects on our self-concept can occur as a result of major life changes, such as losing a job (Sheeran & Abraham, 1994), contracting a serious illness (Taylor, Buunk, & Aspinwall, 1990), or losing someone close to you through death (Stroebe et al., 1995). Such identity changes can be conceptualized as either the addition of a new but not necessarily sought after identity (e.g., cancer survivor, rape victim, elderly) or deletion of a prior valued identity (e.g., employed person, no longer a son or daughter when one's parents are gone, lost youth).

KEY POINTS

- ★ Our self-conceptions can vary in terms of their emphasis on the *personal self* or the *social self*, with the resulting behavior being *intragroup* or *intergroup* in nature. We have multiple social identities, which could have rather different implications for behavior, depending on which social identity is activated.
- ★ The context in which we find ourselves can alter the aspect of the self that is salient. Gender differences will tend to be exhibited most when our gender group identity is salient, but may be absent entirely when another group identity is salient.
- ★ A frequent response to perceived rejection by others is to choose to emphasize the aspect of one's identity that differentiates the self from those rejecting us. To create a self-perception as a "rebel," one can "take on" a feature that differentiates members of one's peer group from the mainstream.
- ★ Images of future *possible selves* can inspire us to make difficult changes in the present in order to achieve this more desirable self.
- ★ Making our own mortality salient can threaten the self, and this can lead people to embrace aspects of the self that are positive and distance from aspects of the self that have the potential of harming self-esteem.
- ★ To succeed in changing something about ourselves, we need to have *self-efficacy*, or feelings that we can accomplish a goal. Some goals, however, can be accomplished only by joining with others—in these cases, it is important to feel *collective self-efficacy*, the feeling that together we can get the job done.
- ★ Self-change can occur as we find ourselves in a new social context. Such change can occur because we have moved, taken a new job, or become a parent. It can also result from negative events in our lives, such as illness, loss of a loved one, or loss of a job.

Self-Esteem: Attitudes toward the Self

So far we have considered some ways that people attempt to protect their self-esteem when they feel threatened, but we haven't yet discussed how self-esteem is routinely assessed. For the most part, **self-esteem** has been conceptualized by social psychologists as the individual's overall attitude toward the self. What kind of attitude do you have toward yourself—is it positive or negative? Is your attitude toward yourself stable, or does the situation affect how you feel, with self-esteem, as a result, varying across contexts?

The Measurement of Self-Esteem

The most common method of measuring self-esteem as a general traitlike evaluation is with the ten-item Rosenberg (1965) scale. As shown in Figure 5.10, this scale has rather straightforward items. People who agree strongly with such items are said to have high self-esteem, whereas those who disagree with the items have low self-esteem. Given that most people can guess what is being assessed with such items, it is not surprising that this measure correlates very highly with responses to the simple item, "I have high self-esteem" (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). On this measure, using a scale ranging from 1 (*not very true of me*) to 5 (*very true of me*), people are asked to provide their own explicit attitude toward themselves. There are also more specific measures of self-esteem that are used on occasion to assess self-esteem in particular domains such as academics, personal relationships, appearance, and athletics. In general, overall trait self-esteem, as measured with the Rosenberg scale, typically reflects the average of these more specific domains.

It is also the case that self-esteem can be responsive to specific situations. As Figure 5.11 illustrates, when we achieve important goals, self-esteem can improve, whereas failures can harm self-esteem. Such short-term increases in *state* self-esteem—how an individual feels about the self at a particular moment in time—can be induced easily in a laboratory setting. For example, simply giving people false feedback about their positive score on a personality test can raise self-esteem (Greenberg et al., 1992), and positive feedback about being accepted by other people has a similar effect (Leary, 1999). Self-esteem can be temporarily enhanced by wearing clothing that you like (Kwon, 1994) or by directing your thoughts toward desirable aspects of yourself (McGuire & McGuire, 1996).

self-esteem

The degree to which the self is perceived positively or negatively; one's overall attitude toward the self.

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.*
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.*
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.*
9. I certainly feel useless at times.*
10. At times I think I am no good at all.*

Figure 5.10 ■ Measurement: The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Each of the items with an asterisk is reverse-scored, and then an average of all ten items is computed so that higher numbers indicate greater self-esteem. (Source: Based on Rosenberg, 1965.)



Figure 5.11 ■ Self-Esteem: Attitudes toward the Self

One's self-esteem, or attitude about oneself, can range from very positive to very negative. At least temporarily, the individuals shown here would seem to be expressing a very positive (*left*) and a very negative (*right*) attitude about themselves.

Likewise, self-esteem can be temporarily undermined in laboratory settings. When people are reminded of the ways they fall short of their ideals, self-esteem can decrease (Eisenstadt & Leippe, 1994). In fact, for women who place importance on their physical appearance, simply being required to put on a swimsuit can undermine their self-esteem (Fredrickson et al., 1998). Being ostracized, excluded, or ignored by other people, even in chat rooms on the Internet or while playing cybergames that lack long-term importance to the individual, can lower self-esteem (Williams, 2001).

Researchers have recently attempted to measure self-esteem with greater subtlety. They believed that attitudes toward the self might be better revealed using unconscious assessment procedures, compared with the previously discussed, explicitly conscious methods such as the Rosenberg scale. This is because such implicit measures of self-esteem might be less susceptible to bias due to people's self-presentation concerns (e.g., their desire to present themselves to others in the best possible light). Given the **self-reference effect** in information processing, in which people seem to prefer stimuli that are associated with the self (e.g., we like the letters in our own name better than other letters), researchers have investigated whether this preference for self-relevant information is sufficiently automatic that it occurs rapidly and without a conscious intention. To assess this possibility, Gray and colleagues (2004) measured brain responses (known as *event-related potentials*—ERPs) to self-relevant words versus non-self-relevant words. They found evidence that people automatically allocate their attention to self-relevant information. Because such basic and unconscious processes appear to be involved in the self-reference effect, it suggests that strategies designed to improve self-esteem might be effective when administered at the unconscious level.

In an attempt to assess whether implicit self-esteem can be improved without the participant's conscious awareness, Dijksterhuis (2004) used the logic of *classical*

self-reference effect

People's orientation toward stimuli that are associated with the self. People show a preference for objects owned by and reflective of the self.

conditioning procedures (see Chapter 4 for more on how social attitudes are classically conditioned). After repeatedly pairing representations of the self (*I* or *me*) with positively valenced trait terms (e.g., *nice*, *smart*, *warm*) that were presented subliminally (too quickly for participants to consciously recognize them), implicit self-esteem was found to be significantly higher compared with those in a control group who were not exposed to such pairings. In addition, such subliminal conditioning prevented participants from suffering a self-esteem reduction when they were later given negative false feedback about their intelligence. Thus, consistent with research on explicit self-esteem (such as studies using the Rosenberg scale) that shows people with high self-esteem are less vulnerable to threat following a failure experience, this subliminal training procedure appears to provide similar self-protection in the face of threat to the self.

Self-Serving Biases

People want to feel positively about themselves, and most manage to see themselves favorably much of the time. The fact that most of us show the **above-average effect**—which is thinking we are better than the average person on almost every dimension imaginable—is strong evidence of our desire to see the self relatively positively (Alicke et al., 2001; Klar, 2002; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Even when we are directly provided with negative social feedback that contradicts our rosy view of ourselves, we show evidence of forgetting such instances and emphasizing information that supports our favored positive self-perceptions (Sanitioso, Kunda, & Fong, 1990; Sanitioso & Wlodarski, 2004).

As described in Chapter 3, people reliably show self-serving biases when explaining their personal outcomes. Information that might imply we are responsible for negative outcomes is assessed critically, and our ability to refute such arguments appears to be rather remarkable (Greenwald, 2002; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). Consider the **Beyond the Headlines** section showing the extremes to which people can take this. As children we adopt the mantra, “It’s not my fault,” which we take with us into adulthood. We can use this when it comes to explanations for outcomes for which we might be blamed, regardless of whether we are innocent or guilty. Overusing this excuse, though, can have important consequences for how others evaluate us.

In contrast to our resistance to accepting responsibility for negative outcomes, we easily accept information that suggests we are responsible for our successes. This is especially the case for people with high self-esteem (Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990). Not only do people show self-serving biases for their personal outcomes, but they also do so for their group’s achievements. Fans of sports teams often believe that their presence and cheering was responsible for their team’s success (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). People in groups that perform well tend to claim primary responsibility for those outcomes, while those who have been randomly assigned to groups that failed do not make this claim. There are, however, culture-based limits on people’s willingness to “grab the credit.” For example, in China, modesty is an important basis for self-esteem (Bond, 1996). Accordingly, Chinese students attribute their success in school to their teachers, whereas American students attribute it to their own skills and intelligence. Conversely, when it comes to failure, Chinese students are more likely to explain their failure as stemming from their own flaws, while Americans tend to explain their failures as being due to someone else’s fault.

Is High Self-Esteem Always Positive?

Given the many techniques that people have in their arsenal for maintaining self-esteem, it is reasonable to ask whether high self-esteem is a crucial goal for which we should all strive. Indeed, some social scientists have suggested that the lack of high self-esteem (or presence of low self-esteem) is the root of many social ills, including drug abuse, poor

above-average effect

The tendency for people to rate themselves as above the average on most positive social attributes.

When Complaining Runs Headlong into Self-Serving Biases

Fugitive Blames Police for Not Capturing Him Fast Enough

Bangor, Maine—“A convicted sex offender, Harvey Taylor, who was wanted in

Florida, fled into the Maine woods to escape from police. *The Bangor News* reports the 48-year-old spent at least three nights in the woods after running away from a Sheriff’s detective. He claims he

lost some toes to frostbite because he wasn’t arrested quickly enough. Speaking from the hospital, he said: “If the detective had done his job, I wouldn’t be in here now. I’m trying to find an attorney to bring a

lawsuit against this detective. If he had done his job properly I wouldn’t be in the condition that I’m in right now. I would have been in jail that very same day.”

What do you think of people who fail to accept responsibility for their own negative outcomes? In general, we don’t like people who blame other people and fail to take responsibility for their misfortunes—like the person in this story (Jellison & Green, 1981). In western cultures, internal explanations—attributions to something about the person—are highly valued and normative. Those who attribute their outcomes to internal rather than to external factors are perceived more favorably, and they are given greater access to social rewards (Beauvois & Dubois, 1988; Dubois & Beauvois, 1996).

Do our responses to people who appear to blame their negative outcomes on someone or something other than themselves depend on whether we believe the outcome was *actually* due to something about them (e.g., that it was their own fault)? Or, is it simply a matter of preferring people who accept responsibility for negative outcomes that happen to them?

Kaiser and Miller (2001) investigated this issue in the context of an African American student who attributed his negative grade on an essay to racial discrimination. Although these researchers varied the probability that the grader was racist—0 percent likelihood, 50 percent likelihood, or 100 percent likelihood—this had no effect on whites’ evaluations of the student who complained that his grade was due to the grader’s racism. Regardless of whether the white perceivers in this study agreed that the bad grade was likely to be due to discrimination or not, participants evaluated that person negatively compared with when he attributed the negative outcome to his own poor abilities. Thus, it would seem that even when we think that another person’s negative outcome is *not* that person’s own fault, when that individual does not accept responsibility for the outcome and instead attributes it to another person, it results in negative impressions. Such *social costs* include being labeled as a complainer or a troublemaker (Feagin & Sikes, 1994).

Does this mean we should never complain when we think we have been treated unjustly or harmed by another’s negligence? Should we always publicly attribute responsibility for negative outcomes to something about ourselves? Complaining about another person who has treated us unfairly, or about unjust circumstances, can serve an *instrumental* function (Kowalski, 1996). That is, it can draw people’s attention to undesirable conditions, and it may be an essential means of bringing about improved future outcomes. In fact, complaining is a critical aspect of the American legal system, because it is through formal complaints (i.e., lawsuits) that individuals and groups can seek redress when they have been wronged (Crosby et al., 2003). When people do not object to unfairness, their silence is likely to be interpreted as satisfaction, and this perpetuates unfair circumstances.

Complaining may lead to negative perceptions, in part, because doing so frequently involves an implication that another person is bad, which may be seen as rude, particularly if the situation or the evidence against the person is ambiguous (Kowalski, 1996). There is some evidence that it is high-status people who will be most willing to take the social risk of complaining about such negative outcomes. Goldman (2001) found that members of high-status groups were particularly inclined to formally file claims about discrimination. In a major survey of recently terminated employees, whites and men were *more* likely than were women or ethnic minorities to report that they had challenged the legitimacy of their termination to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or a Fair Employment Practice (FEP) office. Although these findings might seem surprising in light of who is actually most likely to suffer from discrimination, they do correspond with past research showing that men feel better, compared with women, after reporting their disadvantages (Branscombe, 1998).

school performance, depression, and various forms of violence, including terrorism. Some have argued that low self-esteem might be an important cause of aggression and general negativity toward others (Crocker et al., 1987; Nunn & Thomas, 1999). However, strong evidence has now accumulated in favor of the opposite conclusion—that high self-esteem is more strongly associated with bullying, narcissism, exhibitionism, self-aggrandizing, and interpersonal aggression (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). For example, it is men with high self-esteem, not those with low self-esteem, who are most likely to commit violent acts when someone disputes their favorable view of themselves. Why might this be the case? To the extent that high self-esteem implies superiority to others, that view of the self may need to be defended with some frequency—whenever the individual's pride is threatened. It may even be that high self-esteem coupled with instability (making for greater volatility) results in the most hostility and defensive responding (Kernis et al., 1993). When those with unstable high self-esteem experience failure, their underlying self-doubt is reflected in physiological responses indicative of threat (Seery et al., 2004). Thus, while there are clear benefits for individuals to have a favorable view of themselves, there also appears to be a potential downside.

Do Women and Men Differ in Their Levels of Self-Esteem?

This question has fascinated researchers for some time, and is one that has generated considerable research. Who do you think, on average, has higher or lower self-esteem—women or men? Most people might guess that men have higher self-esteem than women. Why might social psychologists predict this, too? Because women occupy positions of lower status and are frequently targets of prejudice, their social structural position should have negative consequences for their self-esteem. Beginning with George Herbert Mead (1934), who first suggested that self-esteem is affected by how important others in our sociocultural environment see us, women have been expected to have lower self-esteem overall compared with men because self-esteem is responsive to the treatment we receive from others. To the extent that women have been traditionally viewed as less competent than men in the larger social world, their self-esteem should be, on average, lower than that of men. How important the dimensions are on which women are devalued in the larger society, and how aware women are of their devalued status, should influence the extent to which a gender-based self-esteem difference is observed.

Williams and Best (1990) conducted a fourteen-nation study of the self-concepts of women and men to provide support for these predictions. In nations such as India and Malaysia, where women are expected to remain in the home in their roles as wives and mothers, women have the most negative self-concepts. In contrast, in nations such as England and Finland, where women are most active in the labor force and are valued participants in life outside the home, women and men tend to perceive themselves equally favorably. This research suggests that when women are excluded from important life arenas, they feel more strongly devalued and, as a result, have worse self-concepts than men. Longitudinal research with employed women in the United States similarly finds that women in jobs in which gender discrimination is most frequent exhibit increasingly poorer emotional and physical health over time (Pavalko, Mossakowski, & Hamilton, 2003). Harm to women—as a function of employment in a discriminatory work environment—can be observed in comparison to health status before their employment began.

A meta-analysis comparing the global self-esteem of women and men in 226 samples collected in the United States and Canada from 1982 to 1992 has likewise found that men have reliably higher self-esteem than women (Major et al., 1999). Although the size of the effect that they obtained across all these studies was not large ($d = -.14$; range for this measure is -1.0 to 1.0), as Prentice and Miller (1992) point out, small differences between groups that are consistently observed can be quite impressive. Precisely because

there are substantial differences within each gender group in level of self-esteem, being able to detect reliable group differences in self-esteem is rather remarkable. Consistent with the reasoning of the earlier cross-nation research, Major and his colleagues (1999) found that the self-esteem difference between men and women was less among those in the professional class and greatest among those in the middle and lower classes. Again, those women who have attained culturally desirable positions suffer less self-esteem loss than those who are more likely to experience the greatest devaluation. Interestingly, it was among white North Americans that the largest overall difference in level of self-esteem between men and women was observed ($d = -.20$), whereas no reliable difference in self-esteem by gender was obtained for minority Americans. For minority groups, members of *both* genders are likely to experience broad social devaluation based on their racial category, whereas only among whites are women likely to be discriminated against in important aspects of life. Consistent with this finding that the degree of gender discrimination matters, among preadolescents, there was no reliable gender difference in self-esteem, but beginning in puberty, when girls' options become increasingly limited (remember the opening vignette), a reliable self-esteem difference emerges that continues through adulthood, with women's self-esteem levels being lower than men's. So, is the commonsense notion correct after all—does overall self-esteem suffer for groups that are devalued in a given society? The research findings offer a straightforward answer for gender: Yes! How badly self-esteem suffers appears to depend on how much discrimination and devaluation the group that is the subject of such treatment experiences.

KEY POINTS

- ★ *Self-esteem* is the attitude we have toward ourselves. It can range from very positive to negative. Self-esteem is most frequently measured with Rosenberg's scale, which uses explicit items that capture people's perceptions that they do or do not have high self-esteem. Other more implicit measures assess the strength of the positive or negative association between the self and stimuli associated with it, including trait terms such as *warm* and *honest*.
- ★ Most people feel relatively positively about themselves. This is reflected in the *above-average effect*, in which people see themselves as above the average on most positive dimensions.
- ★ People maintain their positive view of themselves, in part, with self-serving biases in the explanations they provide for their outcomes. Americans especially accept credit for positive outcomes and refute their responsibility for negative outcomes, whereas Chinese people tend to show the reverse pattern.
- ★ People negatively evaluate others who fail to accept responsibility for their own negative outcomes. This is the case even when we know that person was *not* actually responsible for the negative outcome that happened! Although complaining about another's unjust treatment of us has "social costs," not doing so will maintain existing unfairness. Interestingly enough, it is high-status groups that are most likely to take the social risk and complain to formal authorities if they believe they were discriminated against.
- ★ Low self-esteem may not be predictive of the social ills many had thought. In fact, high self-esteem is predictive of violent reactions when one's superior view of the self is threatened.
- ★ There is a small but reliable gender-based difference in self-esteem. Women's self-esteem is worse than men's to the extent that they live in a nation with more exclusion of women from public life (lower labor force participation by women) and in the United States when they work in occupations in which discrimination is more likely.

downward social comparison

A comparison other who does less well than the self.

upward social comparison

A comparison other who does better than the self.

social comparison theory

Festinger (1954) suggested that people compare themselves to others because, for many domains and attributes, there is no objective yardstick with which to evaluate the self, so other people are therefore highly informative.

Social Comparison: Knowing the Self

How do we know ourselves—whether we're good or bad in various domains, what our best and worst traits are, and how likable we are to others? Some social psychologists have suggested that *all* human judgment is relative to *some* comparison standard (Kahneman & Miller, 1986). There is indeed considerable evidence that how we think about and feel about ourselves depends on the standard of comparison we use. To take a simple example, if we compare our ability to complete a puzzle with a five-year-old's ability to solve it, we'll probably feel pretty good about our ability. This represents a **downward social comparison**, in which our own performances are compared with that of someone who is less capable than we are. On the other hand, if we compare our performances on the same task with that of a puzzle expert, we might not fare so well, nor feel so good about ourselves. This is the nature of **upward social comparisons**, which tend to be threatening to our self-image. As the amateur musician in the cartoon in Figure 5.12 suggests, protecting our self-image can depend on choosing the right standard of comparison.

You might be wondering why we compare ourselves with other people at all. Festinger's (1954) **social comparison theory** suggests that we compare ourselves with others because, for many domains and attributes, there is no objective yardstick with which to evaluate ourselves; other people are therefore highly informative. Indeed, feeling uncertain about themselves in a particular domain is among the most crucial conditions that lead people to engage in social comparison (Wood, 1989).

With whom do we compare ourselves, and how do we decide what standard of comparison to use? It depends on our motive for the comparison. Do we want an accurate assessment of ourselves, or do we want to simply feel good about ourselves? In general,

the desire to see the self positively appears to be more powerful than either the desire to accurately assess the self or to verify strongly held beliefs about the self (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). But, suppose, for the moment, that we really do want an accurate assessment. As Festinger (1954) originally suggested, we might gauge our abilities most accurately by comparing our own performance with that of someone who is similar to us. But, what determines similarity? Do we base it on age, gender, nationality, occupation, year in school, or something else entirely? In general, similarity tends to be based on broad social or demographic categories such as gender, race, or experience in a particular domain—which might include time spent playing the flute, grade in school, or number of cooking classes taken (Goethals & Darley, 1977; Wood, 1989).

Often, by using comparisons with others who share a social category with us, we can judge ourselves more positively than when we compare ourselves with others who



Figure 5.12 ■ Choosing the Right Standard of Comparison Can Protect Our Self-Esteem

As this cartoon suggests, if we could induce others to use a low standard when evaluating us, we can have higher self-esteem! (Source: JEFF STAHLER reprinted by permission of Newspaper Enterprise Association, Inc.)

are members of a different social category (especially one that is more advantaged than our own). This is partly because there are different performance expectations for members of different categories in particular domains (e.g., children versus adults, men versus women). To the extent that the context encourages a person to categorize the self as a member of a category with relatively low expectations in a particular domain, the individual will be able to conclude he or she measures up rather well. For example, a woman could console herself by thinking that her salary is “pretty good for a woman,” while she would feel considerably worse if she made the same comparison with men, who on average are paid more (Reskin & Padavic, 1994; Vasquez, 2001). Thus, self-judgments are often less negative when the standards of our ingroup are used (see Biernat, Eidelman, & Fuegen, 2002). Indeed, some have suggested that such ingroup comparisons protect members of disadvantaged groups from negative and painful social comparisons with members of more advantaged groups (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, 1994).

Many have suggested that the goal of perceiving the self positively is human beings’ “master motive” (Baumeister, 1998). Social comparison is an important means by which this powerful motive is served (Wood & Wilson, 2003). How the generally positive self-perception that most of us have of ourselves is achieved depends on how we categorize the self in relation to the other to whom we are comparing. Such self-categorization influences how particular comparisons affect us by influencing the *meaning* of the comparison. Two influential perspectives on the self—the **self-evaluation maintenance model** and **social identity theory**—both build on Festinger’s (1954) original social comparison theory to describe the consequences of social comparison in different contexts. Self-evaluation maintenance (Tesser, 1988) applies when we categorize the self at the personal level and we compare ourselves as an individual with another individual. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) applies when we categorize the self at the group level (for example, as a Hispanic American), and the comparison other is categorized as sharing the same category as the self. When the context encourages comparison at the group level, the same other person will be responded to differently than when the context suggests a comparison between individuals. For example, another Hispanic American who performs poorly might be embarrassing to our Hispanic identity if we categorize the self as also belonging to that group. In contrast, that same poor-performing ingroup member could be flattering if we were to compare ourselves personally with that other individual.

Let’s consider first what happens in an interpersonal comparison context. When someone with whom you compare yourself outperforms you in an area that is important to you, you will be motivated to distance yourself from the person with whom you are comparing yourself. Such a situation has the potential to be a relatively painful interpersonal comparison. After all, this other person has done better than you have on something that matters to you! Conversely, when you are comparing yourself with another person in an area that is important to you and that individual performs similarly to you or even worse, then you will be more likely to seek closeness to that other person because the comparison is positive. By performing worse than you, this person makes you look good by comparison. Such psychological movement toward and away from a comparison other who performs better or worse than you illustrates an important means by which positive self-evaluations are maintained.

A study by Pleban and Tesser (1981) illustrates this effect. They had participants compete in a game with another person (who was actually an accomplice of the experimenter). When the questions being asked in the game were on a dimension of importance to the self, participants reported disliking the accomplice who outperformed them more than the accomplice who performed worse than they did. Mussweiler, Gabriel, and Bodenhausen (2000) similarly paired participants with an individual who either performed better or worse than they did. They found that the upward comparison led participants to focus less on an aspect of the self that they shared with the comparison

self-evaluation maintenance model

The perspective that suggests that in order to maintain a positive view of the personal self, we distance ourselves from others who perform better than we do on valued dimensions, but move closer to others who perform worse. This view suggests that doing so will protect our self-esteem.

social identity theory

Our response when our group identity is salient. Suggests that we will move closer to positive others with whom we share an identity, but distance ourselves from other ingroup members who perform poorly or otherwise make our social identity negative.

other, while the downward comparison resulted in a greater focus on an aspect of the self that they shared with the comparison. Supporting the idea that such shifts in focus are self-protective, participants who scored high on a measure of self-esteem (and presumably have more skill at using self-protective strategies) were more likely to exhibit these shifting focus effects compared with those low in self-esteem.

When, if ever, should we want to align ourselves with another person who clearly outperforms us? Do we always dislike others who do better than us on identity-relevant dimensions? No, not at all—it depends on how we categorize ourselves in relation to the other. According to social identity theory, people are motivated to perceive their groups positively, and this should especially be the case for those who value a particular social identity. Therefore, another person who is categorized as a member of the same group as the self can help make our group positively distinct from other groups, and, as a result, those fellow group members who perform well can enhance our group’s identity instead of threatening it.

To show that both of the self-protective processes described by the self-evaluation maintenance and social identity perspectives can occur, depending on whether personal or social identity is at stake, Schmitt, Silvia, and Branscombe (2000) manipulated the nature of the comparative context. When the performance dimension is relevant to the self—which was achieved by selecting people for the study who said that being creative was relevant to their own identity—then responses to a target who performs better than or equally poorly as the self will depend on the nature of the categorization context. As shown in Figure 5.13, when participants believed that their performance as an individual would be compared with the other target, they liked the poor-performing target better than the high-performing target, who represented a threat to their positive personal self-image. In contrast, when participants categorized themselves in terms of the gender group that they shared with the target and the expected comparison was intergroup in nature (between women and men), the high-performing other woman was evaluated more positively than the similar-to-self poor-performing other. Why? Because this person made the participants’ group—women—look good. In another study, these investigators showed that such positive evaluation of the high-performing target in the

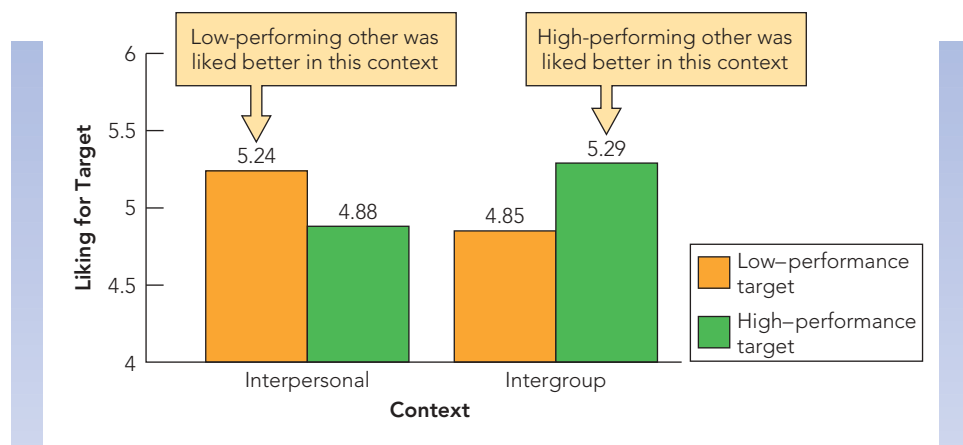


Figure 5.13 ■ How Do We Evaluate Another Who Performs Better or Worse Than We?

Research findings indicate that it depends on whether the context is interpersonal, whereby the personal self is at stake, or intergroup, with the social self at stake. As illustrated here, the low-performing target is liked best in an interpersonal context. The high-performing target is liked best in an intergroup context. (Source: Based on data from Schmitt, Silvia, & Branscombe, 2000.)

intergroup condition occurred most for those who highly valued their gender identity. Thus, different comparative contexts can induce us to categorize ourselves at varying degrees of inclusiveness, and this has important implications for the effects that upward and downward social comparisons have for self-evaluation.

Another important implication of group dynamics for how we evaluate ourselves and others is reflected in the **black sheep effect**—the rejection of negative ingroup members who threaten the positive image of our group. Members of our own group who perform poorly or otherwise make our group look bad can be intensely derogated (Marques & Paez, 1994). In fact, to the extent that their actions have implications for the positivity of our group’s identity, members of our own group may be derogated more severely than members of another group who behave in the same way. People who value a particular group identity (e.g., highly identified fans of the University of Kansas basketball team) are especially likely to show the black sheep effect by derogating a disloyal Kansas fan (Branscombe et al., 1993). Such derogation of black sheep casts the unfavorable ingroup member as nonrepresentative of one’s group, and this effectively protects the ingroup’s overall identity (Castano et al., 2002).

Self-Presentation and Self-Regulation

As described in the previous section, we all have a strong desire for others to perceive us in a positive light. To ensure that others do see us positively, we often attempt to manage the impressions that they form of us. In Chapter 3 we noted how people attempt to ensure that others form impressions of them based on their most favorable self-aspects—that is, we engage in *self-promotion*. However, we also seem to know that an important way to induce others to like us is to convey positive regard for those others. People like to feel that others respect them, and we really like those who convey this to us (Tyler & Blader, 2000). To achieve this end, you can present yourself to others as someone who particularly values or respects them. People who are newcomers to a group, for example, may be especially motivated to present themselves to powerful others as a “good person.” An important means of doing so is to communicate loyalty to the group and a willingness to conform to the group’s norms (Noel, Wann, & Branscombe, 1995). In general, when we want to make a good impression, we use **ingratiation**. That is, we can make others like us by praising them. This is generally quite effective, unless we overdo it and others suspect our sincerity, which can bring the risk of our being seen as “slime” by those who witness our “sucking up” to the powerful (Vonk, 1999).

We also can try to present ourselves to others as superbly competent or otherwise having positive and desirable attributes. The tendency to use this strategy depends on our cultural background. When Kanagawa, Cross, and Markus (2001) asked Japanese and American students to describe themselves, the American students tended to describe themselves in terms of their strengths (e.g., “I am good at math”), while the Japanese students tended to describe themselves in more self-critical terms (e.g., “I am not good at music”). In both instances, people are conforming to norms about how to make a good impression and be liked by others, although the norms of how best to accomplish this can vary tremendously from culture to culture.

Some people are more adept at monitoring their behavior and conforming to what others expect or will see as desirable than are others (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). One individual difference variable—**self-monitoring**—captures people’s willingness and ability to regulate their behavior. High self-monitoring means that people are concerned with how others will react, and it involves a focus on external cues such as expectations that others might have of them. Low self-monitoring involves a focus on internal cues such as their own beliefs or attitudes as a basis for behavior. Low self-monitors tend to be less responsive to situational norms (whatever those are in a given context), whereas high self-monitors tend to change as the situation changes (Koestner, Bernieri, & Zuckerman, 1992). Degree of self-monitoring is assessed with items

black sheep effect

When a member of the ingroup behaves in a way that threatens the value of the group identity and is intensely derogated as a means of protecting the group identity.

ingratiation

The attempt to make others like us by conveying that we like them.

self-monitoring

The monitoring by people of their behavior in response to others’ expectancies. Low self-monitors are not very effective at doing this and instead prefer to act consistently according to their personal views. High self-monitors are quite effective at monitoring their behavior and adjust their actions according to others’ expectations or the situation.

such as “I can only argue for ideas that I already believe,” with low self-monitors tending to agree more than high self-monitors with this idea. Indeed, differences in self-monitoring are reflected in how people use language (Ickes, Reidhead, & Patterson, 1986). High self-monitors tend to use third-person pronouns (*they, them*) when they speak, which reflects their outward focus on others. Low self-monitors, on the other hand, tend to use first-person pronouns (*I, me*) more frequently, reflecting their differential focus on the self.

High self-monitors know how to obtain positive evaluations from other people; this can be a quite useful characteristic in many occupations. Politicians, actors, and salespeople are especially likely to be high in self-monitoring (Lippa & Donaldson, 1990). Overall, high self-monitors tend to have higher self-esteem than low self-monitors. This may stem from the higher levels of social approval that high self-monitors receive compared with low self-monitors (Leary et al., 1995). Indeed, the basis on which self-esteem rests and can be therefore undermined differs for these two types of

Is Looking Inwardly the Best Route to Self-Insight?

In a whole host of self-help books that sell millions of copies per year, we are told time and again to get to know ourselves by looking inwardly. Indeed, many people in our society believe that the more people introspect about themselves, the better they will understand themselves. In fact, as shown in Figure 5.14, pop psychology authors repeatedly tell us that the road to self-knowledge runs through such self-inspection. Is this really the best way to accurately understand ourselves? Not necessarily.

First of all, often we do not know or have conscious access to the reasons for our actions, although if pressed we can certainly generate what appear to be logical theories of why we acted as we did. For example, in early research on this issue, Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson (1977) presented participants with a choice situation: They were shown a variety of different pairs of socks from which they were to choose their favorite. After making their selection, participants were then asked *why* they chose the pair they did. Although people came up with various reasons for their selection, the researchers knew that their choices were actually based on an entirely different factor (the order of the items on the table—the

more to the right the pair was, the better it was liked, regardless of which pair that was). Although the participants in this study can and did introspect about why they liked one pair of socks over another, and they came up with seemingly logical reasons such as their color or the design, they apparently did not have conscious access to the factor that actually predicted their affective responses to the various pairs of socks (order it was examined).



Figure 5.14 ■ Self-Help Books Recommend Introspection The titles of these various pop psychology books imply that the route to self-understanding may lie in introspection, but research reveals that this can be misleading. Depending on the nature of the factors that are actually driving our behavior, introspection may misdirect us.

individuals (Gonnerman et al., 2000). For low self-monitors, depression results when there is a discrepancy between the self and what the individual thinks he or she should be. For high self-monitors, depression results when there is a discrepancy between the self and what he or she thinks other people expect them to be. How do high self-monitors manage to be so successful in controlling the impressions others form of them? They seem to give others both what they expect and what they want!

So far, we have illustrated how we get to know ourselves by comparing how we perform on various tasks with others. In addition, by presenting ourselves in a particular way to other people, we come to see what we value about ourselves and what we hope others will perceive positively as well. Another important method that people have assumed is useful for learning about the self is to engage in **introspection**—to privately think about “who we are.” Is looking inwardly the best route to understanding ourselves—to gaining self-insight? For a discussion of this intriguing issue, see the **Making Sense of Common Sense** section.

introspection

Attempts to understand the self by self-examination; turning inwardly to assess one’s motives.

In fact, subsequent research has revealed that attempting to analyze our reasons for liking something or acting in a particular way can mislead us when we have to make a subsequent choice. That is, because we often genuinely don’t know why we feel a particular way, generating reasons (that are likely to be inaccurate) could result in our changing our minds about how we feel based on the reasons that we generate. Wilson and Kraft (1993) illustrated this process in a series of studies concerning introspection on topics ranging from “Why I Feel as I Do about My Romantic Partner” to “Why I Like One Type of Jam over Another.” They found that after analyzing the reasons for their feelings, people changed their attitudes, at least temporarily, to match their stated reasons. As you might imagine, this can lead to regrettable choices, because the original feelings that are based on other factors entirely are still there.

Another way in which introspection might be rather misleading to us is when we attempt to predict our future feelings. Try imagining how you would feel living in a new city, being fired from your current job, or living with another person for many years. When you are not in these specific circumstances, you might not be able to accurately predict how you will respond when you are in them. This applies to both positive and negative future circumstances. Gilbert and Wilson (2000) suggest that when we think about something terrible happening to us and try to predict how we would feel one year into the future, we focus exclusively on the awful event and neglect all the other factors that will contribute to our happiness level then. This means that people predict that they would feel much worse than they actually would when this future time arrives. Likewise, for positive

events, if we focus on only its occurrence, we will mispredict our happiness as being considerably higher than the actual moderate feelings that are likely one year later. Again, this would occur because we would not focus on all the daily hassles and other factors that would moderate how we actually feel at some future point in time.

Does all this mean that introspection is inevitably misleading, and is in fact potentially harmful? It depends on *what* we analyze about ourselves. When the behavior in question is actually based on a conscious decision-making process—and is not based on unconscious affective factors—thinking about those reasons might well lead to accurate self-judgments. In addition, if we introspect about our behavior frequency in a particular domain, it is likely to be a very good cue to our preferences. If we find ourselves consistently watching a particular program on TV each week, we might be pretty accurate at inferring that we must like that show (Bem, 1972). When we find ourselves working on a particular task for long periods of time without any external rewards or constraints, we are likely to conclude that we are intrinsically motivated by the task and enjoy it. On the other hand, if we only perform a task when we are being monitored or rewarded for doing so (e.g., cleaning up our rooms), we can accurately conclude that our reasons for performing those actions may be *extrinsic* and not due to sheer liking of the task. So, although looking *inward* can be helpful, it may not be, as popular books suggest, helpful under all circumstances. Research has revealed that we may be “asking ourselves” more than we actually know! Although, when asked, people can generate reasons for why they do what they do, those reasons may be based on theories about the causes of behavior, rather than the affective factors that frequently predict actions.

KEY POINTS

- ★ *Downward social comparison* refers to instances in which we are compared with someone of lesser ability than ourselves. These instances can be flattering, as long as we are not worried that the worse-off other represents our own future! *Upward social comparison*, in contrast, refers to someone who outperforms us in areas central to the self. We often find these people threatening in interpersonal comparative contexts, but they are tolerated to the extent that we believe we, too, can achieve the other's more favorable position. We tend to like those who outperform us, particularly when we share a social category with them and the context implies an intergroup comparison. Then, the better-performing other is making our group identity more positive and is not experienced as threatening as the same target would be if the comparison were interpersonal.
- ★ *Social comparison theory* spawned two perspectives on the consequences of negative or upward social comparisons for the self—the *self-evaluation maintenance model* and *social identity theory*. When the self is categorized at the individual level, we distance from a better-performing other, but when the self is categorized at the social identity level, we distance from the poor-performing other.
- ★ Presenting ourselves as liking or admiring others is often an effective way of ingratiating ourselves with them and being liked in return. There are cultural differences in the way people present themselves, as a function of the valued norm of modesty in Asian cultures and self-promotion norms in American culture.
- ★ The *black sheep effect* proposes that we will derogate a member of our own group more than a member of another group when we think that person reflects badly on our group's image. By doing so, we protect the image of our own group identity.
- ★ Individuals differ in the extent to which they engage in *self-monitoring*. Low self-monitors are keen to be true to themselves and show cross-situational consistency, whereas high self-monitors want to be what others want and adapt themselves to different people and situations.

The Self as Target of Prejudice

Although the experience of not getting what you want, or getting what you don't want, is generally negative, how you explain these outcomes has important implications for how you feel about yourself. The explanation we give for such undesirable events, influences how we cope with them. As you saw in Chapter 3, attributions affect the *meaning* derived from events, and some attributions for a negative outcome are more psychologically harmful (i.e., can cause depression and undermine self-esteem) than others (Weiner, 1985). How people explain and respond to one class of negative outcomes—prejudice-based negative treatment stemming from one's group membership—has been the focus of considerable research. Although overt discrimination against women and minorities has generally declined in the United States since the end of World War II, it is sufficiently prevalent (although often subtle) that it may explain the more frequent undesirable outcomes that members of devalued groups experience. As the cartoon in Figure 5.15 suggests, the mere presence of devalued group members, which their exclusion was consistently the case in the past, is not the same thing as their being able to feel comfortable in an environment in which they can feel assured that discrimination will be absent.



"To begin with, I would like to express my sincere thanks and deep appreciation for the opportunity to meet with you. While there are still profound differences between us, I think the very fact of my presence here today is a major breakthrough."

Figure 5.15 ■ Progress toward Group Equality Can Be Measured in Degrees.

As this cartoon illustrates, women's (or the dragon's) presence in male-dominated professions (the knights' domain) represents a "good start," but it can hardly be said to represent "a warm and welcoming environment." (Source: © The New Yorker Collection 1983 William Miller from cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.)

Emotional Consequences: How Well-Being Can Suffer

As discussed earlier in this chapter, social psychologists have long been interested in the self-esteem consequences of being a member of a devalued social group. George Herbert Mead (1934) initially suggested that our self-appraisals depend on how other people see us. Given that members of devalued groups are more likely to experience negative responses from others—because of their group membership—compared with mainstream group members, self-esteem processes between these two groups have been closely examined.

To account for how targets of prejudice maintain their self-esteem, Crocker and Major (1989) suggested that attributing negative outcomes to prejudice might be self-protective among those who are devalued and discriminated against. Specifically, they argued that an attribution for a negative outcome that points to another person's prejudice as the cause of one's poor outcome should be considered an *external* cause. For this reason, attributing a negative outcome to something outside the self should be self-protective. In fact, these theorists speculated that because an attribution to prejudice is a sufficiently self-protective explanation for poor outcomes that it "may not only be used in response to negative evaluations or outcomes that do, in fact, stem from prejudice against the stigmatized group, but also in response to negative outcomes that do not stem from prejudice" (Crocker & Major, 1989, p. 612). This implies that there could be a self-esteem protection motivation that encourages attributions to prejudice among devalued group members. Yet there is overwhelming correlational evidence that the more disadvantaged group members perceive discrimination against their group, the worse their well-being. Therefore, negative outcomes that are seen as stemming from stable

factors such as one's group membership are not predicting positive self-esteem. Such relationships between perceived discrimination and negative well-being have been obtained among members of different social groups, including women (Schmitt et al., 2002), black Americans (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), homosexuals (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999), Jewish Canadians (Dion & Earn, 1975), and people who are overweight (Crocker, Cornwell, & Major, 1993). Let's consider the evidence that experimental research has generated concerning these dual propositions: (1) that attributions to prejudice are external attributions and can therefore discount internal causes for negative outcomes, and (2) that attributions to prejudice for a *specific* negative outcome protect the well-being of devalued group members.

Should our group memberships be considered truly external to the self? As this chapter has already revealed, our social identities as members of a group can be an important aspect of the self. Use of Kelley's "covariation principle" (see Chapter 3) suggests that when something about the self (group membership) covaries with an outcome (discrimination), the attribution made will have a substantial internal component. That is, people will conclude that it is both something about me (my group membership) and something about the other's prejudice that causes discriminatory outcomes. To illustrate the previously unidentified internal component of attributions to prejudice, Schmitt and Branscombe (2002b) compared this attribution with a situation in which a clear external attribution for the same exclusionary outcome was plausible. These researchers had participants think about a situation in which a professor refused their request to let them into a course that required the professor's permission in order for them to enroll. This exclusion could be due to different reasons that would have differing implications for how the person would feel. By varying information about the professor and who was or was not let in the desired class, prejudice or an exclusively external cause for the participant's rejection was made plausible. In the "prejudice plausible" condition, participants learned that the professor had a reputation for being hostile toward their gender and that only members of the other gender were admitted to the class. In the "everyone excluded" condition, participants learned that the professor had a reputation of being hostile toward all students and that no one was given the special permission that was needed to be admitted. To what did the students attribute their failure to be admitted to the class? In the prejudice condition, they perceived the cause of their rejection as both due to something about the professor *and* due to something about themselves. Only when everyone was excluded was the internal attributional component (e.g., something about me) essentially absent. The finding that the self is implicated when a prejudice attribution is made (e.g., one's group membership is a part of the self, so internality is high), compared with when an attribution that does not involve prejudice is made, was subsequently replicated (Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003).

Given that we know that attributions to prejudice have a substantial internal component (i.e., the self at the group level), we can ask whether they are likely to be self-protective. That is, if attributions to prejudice are not external explanations, and instead reflect something that is internal and stable, attributions to prejudice may not protect self-esteem by discounting the self's role in causing the negative outcome. Indeed, Schmitt and Branscombe (2002b) found that, for women, making an attribution to the professor's prejudice against women harmed their well-being, compared with when everyone was excluded and the exclusion could not be attributed to prejudice. Using the same experimental materials involving the professor who refuses a student admittance to a course, Major, Kaiser, & McCoy (2003) found that there is an even worse attribution that can be made than either an attribution to prejudice or the professor's refusal to admit anyone. When the professor viewed the participant as *uniquely* stupid and, for this reason, the participant was the *only* person who was excluded from the class (i.e., all others who asked were admitted), this situation caused the participants' feelings about the self to be most negative.

The conclusions drawn about the emotional consequences of perceiving one's negative outcomes as stemming from prejudice against one's group clearly depend on the attribution to which it is compared. When negative outcomes are attributed to preju-

dice, this reflects an internal and relatively stable cause for disadvantaged group members. When compared with *another* important internal and stable feature of the self, such as one's lack of intelligence, an attribution to prejudice might be self-protective. To the extent that the other internal explanation is relevant to more situations or outcomes (is even more pervasive; Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003), making that attribution could cause greater harm to well-being than attributing the outcome to prejudice. On the other hand, when compared with an actual external attribution, such as the professor's generally negative disposition (something that is not related to the participant's self at all), then attributions to prejudice are relatively harmful for well-being (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b). As Figure 5.16 illustrates, attributions for the same unfavorable outcome can be differentiated along a continuum in terms of the extent to which they have negative implications for psychological well-being. The worst possibility is when the outcome is attributed to an internal and stable factor that is likely to apply to many situations (e.g., being uniquely unintelligent for a college student). The next, slightly better attribution, for it is unlikely to be applicable across quite as many situations, is an attribution to prejudice. Making an attribution to prejudice that is seen as infrequent or isolated will be even better for psychological well-being. True external attributions, which could come in many different forms (e.g., professor is a jerk, having a bad day, bad luck), are most likely to be protective of the attributor's self and well-being.

An attribution to prejudice can reflect pervasive discriminatory circumstances, or it can be perceived as reflecting a rare or unusual instance. In effect, for any given experience, an attribution to prejudice could be seen as reflecting wider social circumstances or could be seen as an encounter with a lone bigot. Schmitt, Branscombe, and Postmes (2003) illustrated the importance of the perceived pervasiveness of prejudice for psychological well-being in women. Participants believed that they were taking part in a study concerning job interviewing skills and that one of the twenty male business people involved in the study would give them feedback. Each participant received the *identical* negative feedback from the interviewer. However, while waiting for their interviewing feedback, the experimenter ostensibly confided to the participant either that (1) "your interviewer is a real jerk and seems to give everyone a negative evaluation" (the nonsexist external attribution); (2) "your *particular* interviewer is really sexist and gives the women negative evaluations, but is positive toward the men" (the lone sexist); or (3) "*all*

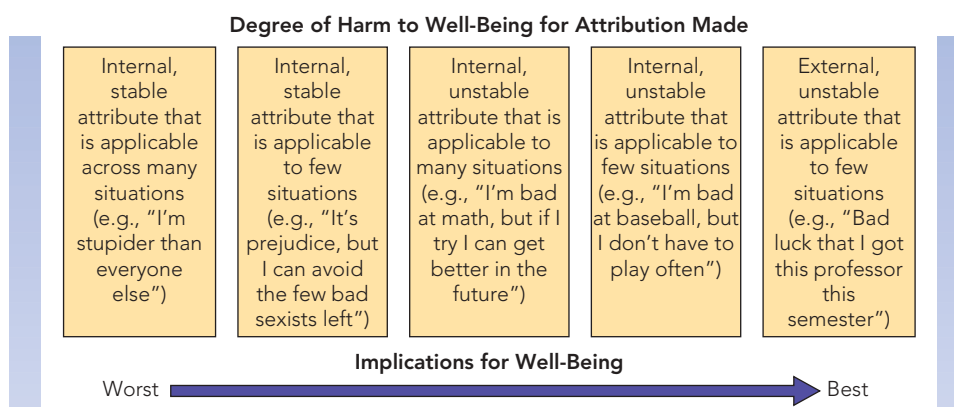


Figure 5.16 ■ **Attributions for an Outcome Differ in How Harmful They Are for Well-Being**

As this figure illustrates, the worst attribution a person can make for well-being is that there is something unique about themselves that is stable and applicable to many situations. The best attribution—for well-being—will be that the outcome is due entirely to something external that is unstable and is one that is unlikely to be encountered in many situations.

of the interviewers, including yours, are really sexist” (pervasive sexism). Both feelings of self-esteem based on their gender and overall positive mood worsened when the prejudicial outcome was seen as also likely to occur in other situations (prejudice was seen as pervasive across the twenty interviewers), compared with either when prejudice could be seen as limited to the lone sexist or when a prejudice attribution was not made at all. When discrimination was seen as isolated, self-esteem and mood did not differ from when a “nonsexist jerk” delivered the negative feedback. Thus, all attributions to prejudice are not equal. What is fundamentally important for how an event is coped with and whether psychological well-being will be harmed by the experience or not is perceptions of how likely it is that such discriminatory treatment will be encountered in the future.

Cognitive Consequences: Performance Deficits

Perceived prejudice can not only affect psychological well-being, but also can interfere with our ability to learn and acquire new skills. Several studies have found that when people fear that others will discover their devalued group membership, as might be the case for concealable stigmas (i.e., think of gays and lesbians in the military), this fear can negatively affect people’s ability to learn (Frale, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990; Lord & Saenz, 1985). When we are in a position in which we feel we need to hide our identity and worry about how others might perceive us, it can be rather distracting. Studies measuring attention allocation reveal that when such distractions weigh on disadvantaged group members, their cognitive abilities are impaired and performance suffers.

What is considered a valued versus devalued social identity can be culture specific. Therefore, cognitive deficits stemming from concerns about a given social identity might only be present when it is an identity that is devalued by the larger culture, but not when the identity is esteemed in the larger culture. Levy and Langer (1994) provided evidence that this is the case for cognitive tasks involving memory. Specifically, the photos in Figure 5.17 reveal that, in the United States, the elderly are negatively stereotyped in terms of poor memory ability, while in China, the elderly are a revered social category. When these researchers compared young and older adults in the United States and China, they found that the older U.S. citizens did show deficits in memory, while in China this was not the case. Apparently, these differences stemmed from the fact that in the United States, being elderly is a negative aspect of identity, while in China, the opposite is true.

Behavioral Consequences: Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat occurs when people believe they might be judged in light of a negative stereotype about their social identity or that they may inadvertently act in some way to confirm the stereotype of their group (Steele, 1997). When people value their ability in a certain domain (e.g., math), but it is one in which their group is stereotyped as performing poorly (e.g., women), stereotype threat may occur. When those who are vulnerable to stereotype threat are reminded in some overt or subtle way that the stereotype might apply to them, performance in that domain may be undermined.

Stereotype threat effects seem to be fairly difficult to control. For example, simply telling women before they take a math test that men do better on math than women do (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999) or having African Americans indicate their race before taking a difficult verbal test (Steele & Aronson, 1995) is sufficient to evoke stereotype threat and hurt their performance. Indeed, because women are negatively stereotyped as being worse at math than men, women tend to perform more poorly when they simply take a difficult math test in the presence of men, whereas they tend to perform better when the same test is taken in the presence of other women only (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000). It is worth noting that these decrements in performance occur *only* with respect to stereotype-relevant dimensions—it is not all types of performances that are harmed. Thus, women are vulnerable on math, but African Americans are vulnerable on tests of verbal ability.

stereotype threat

People’s belief that they might be judged in light of a negative stereotype about their group or that they may, because of their performance, in some way confirm a negative stereotype of their group.



Figure 5.17 ■ A Stigmatized Identity Depends on the Larger Cultural Context

Is “elderly” a positive or negative social identity? It depends on the cultural context. As you can see, in the United States, the elderly are often perceived as irrelevant and are negatively stereotyped. However, in Asia, the elderly are valued and viewed with veneration, not denigrated as incompetent. Where would you rather be a member of this social category?

Precisely because such stereotype threat effects have been quite difficult to eliminate, investigators have considered the response options that are available to devalued group members when they are in settings in which they experience stereotype threat. One option that has been suggested is disidentification with the domain (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). That is, people could try to distance themselves from domains in which they are stereotypically vulnerable. Such an option, though, is likely to be rather problematic for people who strongly value performing well in a given domain to begin with. In this research, the women who are selected are strongly concerned about doing well in math; likewise, African Americans who are selected are keen to do well in occupations requiring strong verbal skills. Another option that might be used in a stereotype threat situation is to attempt to distance the self from the group identity as a whole. That is, women could decrease how much they identify with their gender group, or African Americans might do the same with their race. However, this option also comes with long-term risks—minority group identification is known to be important for psychological well-being (Postmes & Branscombe, 2002).

Current research has revealed a third option that is available to those subjected to stereotype threat conditions. People who are vulnerable to stereotype threat can maintain their overall level of identification with their group, and distance themselves only from the stereotypic dimensions that represent a threat to their performance in a particular valued domain. Consider the dilemma of women who have taken a lot of math classes and who perceive math to be an important aspect of their self-concept. They also value their identity as women. When they then find themselves exposed to information that suggests there are reliable sex differences in math ability, with men doing better than women, these women do indeed experience threat. How then do they manage to cope with such threat, *without* simultaneously distancing from either the domain or their group as a whole? One possibility is suggested by social psychologists, Pronin, Steele, and Ross (2004), who found that high math-identified women distanced themselves only

from gender stereotypic dimensions that are deemed to be incompatible with math success (e.g., leaving work to raise children, being flirtatious) but did not do so for gender stereotypic dimensions deemed to be irrelevant to math success (e.g., being empathic, being fashion conscious). Disidentification from such aspects of their gender group occurred only in the stereotype threat condition but not when it was absent, suggesting it was a motivated process designed to alleviate the threat experienced.

Why do stereotype threat–based performance decrements occur? Some researchers suggest that anxiety is evoked in women, blacks, and Latinos when their group membership is portrayed as predictive of poor performance (Osborne, 2001). As a result of such anxiety, their actual performance on the relevant test is disrupted. If this is the case, when stress-based anxiety is prevented, as occurs among women who use humor as a coping strategy in stereotype threat situations, then performance decrements may be avoided (Ford et al., 2004).

Some studies have, however, failed to find increased self-reported anxiety among stigmatized group members in stereotype threat conditions (Aronson et al., 1999). This could be because members of stigmatized groups are reluctant to admit their feelings of anxiety in conditions in which they realize they will be compared with dominant group members, or it may be that they do not actually realize they are feeling anxious or aroused and so cannot accurately report those feelings.

Recent research that examines nonverbal measures of anxiety has revealed that anxiety can play a crucial role in stereotype threat effects. Although measures of self-reported anxiety have frequently failed to reveal the important role of anxiety, nonverbal measures of anxiety illustrate clearly the role that anxiety plays in stereotype threat effects. In a clever test of the hypothesis that anxiety does cause stereotype threat performance deficits, Bosson, Haymovitz, and Pinel (2004) first either reminded or did not remind gay and straight participants of their category membership before videotaping their interactions with young children in a nursery school. Participants were reminded of their sexual orientation by asking them to indicate their sexual orientation on a form just before they interacted with the children. After this subtle reminder that their group is stereotyped as one that is dangerous to children, the gay participants' child-care skills (as rated by judges blind to the hypotheses and procedure) suffered compared with when they were not so reminded of their category membership and its associated stereotype. This same group membership reminder had no effect on the straight participants because there is no such stereotype of danger to children. Consequently, straight participants were not at risk of potentially confirming a negative stereotype in the performance situation they faced.

Was increased anxiety in the gay men the cause of the reduction in their rated child-care skills? On standard self-report measures of anxiety and evaluation apprehension, the answer would seem to be “no”—Bosson, Haymovitz, and Pinel (2004) did not obtain differences in these self-reports as a function of either sexual orientation or stereotype threat condition. Importantly, however, independent judges of nonverbal anxiety—as indicated by various behaviors pointing to discomfort during the interaction with the children—were affected by sexual orientation and stereotype threat. Among the gay men who were reminded of their category membership, their anxiety was discernible in their nonverbal behavior, compared with the gay men who were not experiencing stereotype threat. Although the gay men experiencing stereotype threat did not rate themselves as more anxious than those not experiencing stereotype threat, they were visibly more fidgety, they averted their eyes, and otherwise exhibited signs of discomfort. This nonverbally exhibited anxiety disrupted their interactions with the children. However, among heterosexual men, reminders of their category membership tended to result in fewer nonverbal symptoms of anxiety, compared with when their category was not made salient.

Is it only for groups that are historically devalued in the culture as a whole that stereotype threat effects have been observed? No, definitely not. Such effects occur with men who are not a devalued group as a whole, but who are stereotyped as being less

emotional than women (Leyens, et al., 2000). When men were reminded of the stereotype concerning their emotional deficits, their performance on a task requiring them to identify emotions suffered. In an even more dramatic way, Stone and colleagues (1999) illustrated a similar point. They found that stereotype threat effects can occur among dominant group members as long as the implied comparison is based on dimensions on which their group is perceived less favorably. In their research, white men who were being compared with black men performed more poorly on an athletic performance task when they believed it reflected natural athletic ability. The reverse occurred when white men believed the exact same task reflected sports intelligence, which is a dimension on which white men expect to excel, as compared with black men. Likewise, although there is no stereotype that whites perform poorly on math, when they are threatened by a potentially negative comparison to Asians, who are stereotyped as performing better than whites in this domain, whites show math performance deficiencies (Aronson et al., 1999). Thus, the comparative context matters greatly for stereotype threat effects, and these effects are not limited to members of historically disadvantaged groups. Stereotype threat effects illustrate the importance of group membership for the experience of psychological threat, and how this can easily disrupt performance.

KEY POINTS

- ★ Emotional responses to a negative outcome depend on the attribution made for it. Although an attribution to prejudice is almost the most painful attribution that can be made—there is one that is worse. If you believe that bad outcomes happen because you are uniquely stupid (more so than all others) and this is a characteristic that predicts many negative outcomes, you will feel even worse than when an attribution to prejudice is made. When the identical outcome is attributed to prejudice, if that prejudice is seen as pervasive, then well-being will be harmed more than if it is seen as isolated or rare. When, however, an attribution for a negative outcome reflects an external cause, rather than prejudice against the person's group membership, well-being is protected.
- ★ The fear of being “found out” by others in terms of having a negatively valued group identity can disrupt performance. Such monitoring can consume cognitive resources and make it difficult to learn new skills. Such deficits occur only when the identity is devalued in the culture as a whole, and such deficits are absent when the same identity is valued.
- ★ *Stereotype threat* effects involve the undermining of performance in capable people in a domain they value. This occurs when a person is a member of a group that is negatively stereotyped in a particular domain. Stereotype threat effects have been observed in historically devalued group members (African Americans, women) and in dominant groups (whites, men) when they might negatively compare on an important dimension with members of another group. Stereotype threat effects can be difficult to control, and they can be induced very easily. Indeed, simply requiring people to indicate their group membership before taking a test in a domain in which they are vulnerable is enough to undermine performance.
- ★ When people experience stereotype threat, they can distance themselves from the task domain or they can distance themselves from the group as a whole. However, both of these options present long-term problems. One option that has received support is to disidentify with *only* the negative part of their group's stereotype.
- ★ Anxiety appears to be the mechanism by which stereotype threat effects occur. However, self-report measures of anxiety often fail to reveal its importance, but use of non-verbal measures has illustrated its important role.



SUMMARY AND REVIEW OF KEY POINTS

Thinking about the Self: Personal versus Social Identity

- How we think about ourselves varies depending on where we are on the *personal–social identity* continuum at any given moment in time. At the personal identity level, we can think of ourselves in terms of attributes that differentiate ourselves from other individuals, and therefore be based on *intragroup comparison*. Or, the self can be thought of as a member of a social group, with perceptions of the self being based on attributes shared with other group members; this perception of the self at the social identity level stems from *intergroup comparison* processes.
- Self-definitions can vary across situations, with each being valid predictors of behavior in those settings. How the self is conceptualized can also depend on how others expect us to be and how we believe they will treat us.
- Awareness of the self's mortality can encourage self-definitions in terms of group memberships that reflect positively on the self and discourage self-definitions that might reflect poorly on the self.
- Other selves, besides who we are currently, can motivate us to attempt self-change. Dreaded possible selves can lead us to give up certain behaviors (e.g., smoking), while desired possible selves can lead us to work long hours to attain them.

Self-Esteem: Attitudes toward the Self

- How we feel about ourselves can be assessed directly, as well as with more implicit or indirect methods. Most people show self-serving biases, such as the *above-average effect*, in which

we see ourselves more positively (and less negatively) than we see most other people.

- People tend not to like others who do not accept responsibility for their own negative outcomes. This is the case even when we do not believe that person was in fact responsible for the negative outcome that occurred. Thus, there can be important social costs for complaining about injustice on the part of another or existing circumstances.
- High self-esteem comes with risks. It is correlated with an increased likelihood of interpersonal aggression, which appears to be in response to the greater need to defend one's superior self-view.
- Women do, on average, have lower self-esteem than men. This is particularly the case in nations in which women do not participate in the labor force, and in the United States among middle and lower class women who work in environments in which gender-based devaluation is most frequent.

Social Comparison: Knowing the Self

- *Social comparison* is a vital means by which we judge and know ourselves. *Upward social comparisons* at the personal level can be painful, and *downward social comparisons* at this level of identity can be comforting. When we self-categorize at the group level, though, the opposite is the case. Ingroup members who perform poorly threaten the positive view of our group identity, while ingroup members who perform well reflect positively on our group identity. Indeed, we are likely to derogate ingroup members who behave disloyally (the *black sheep effect*), and doing so

protects the positive view of our group identity.

- People often present themselves to others in an ingratiating manner, in order to be liked, although this tendency can depend on the cultural norms that guide our behavior. Individual differences in *self-monitoring* predict people's ability and willingness to adapt their behavior according to differing situational norms.

The Self as Target of Prejudice

- Some researchers have suggested that, among devalued group members, attributions to prejudice are external attributions and therefore have the potential to protect self-esteem. Not only are such attributions to prejudice not perceived by the individual as external to the self (my group membership is about me), they generally are not protective—except when compared with the very worst possible attribution (an important dimension that is applicable to a wide range of situations and reflects both internal and stable aspects of the self). Indeed, perceiving the self as a target of discrimination can have negative consequences for well-being, particularly when the discrimination is seen as pervasive.
- Suspecting that prejudice might be operating and affecting one's outcomes can be distracting, deplete cognitive resources, and create anxiety. As a result, *stereotype threat* effects can occur in historically devalued groups when members are simply reminded of their group membership and fear they might confirm negative expectancies about their group. Stereotype threat can undermine performance in dominant group

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UMMARY AND REVIEW OF KEY POINTS, CONTINUED

members as well, when they fear a negative comparison with members of another group. This undermining of performance occurs only on dimensions relevant to the stereotype.

■ People cope with stereotype threat by distancing themselves from the performance domain (e.g., math) or from their group as a whole (e.g., women), but both of these options are emotionally

costly. Distancing from only the stereotypic dimensions relevant to high performance in a domain appears to be preferable.

Connections

INTEGRATING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

In this chapter, you read about . . .

the role of norms in social functioning

the nature of attribution and social explanation

individuals' concern with others' evaluations of their performance

the importance of the situation or context for judgment

the role of stereotyping and discrimination

In other chapters, you will find related discussions of . . .

the nature of norms and their role in social influence (Chapter 9) and aggression (Chapter 11)

self-serving biases in attribution (Chapter 3)

the effects of others' evaluations on our liking for others (Chapter 7) and self-presentation (Chapter 3)

audience effects on attitudes (Chapter 4)

the nature of prejudice (Chapter 6), and various forms of social influence (Chapter 9)

Thinking about Connections

1. Do you see any connection between perceiving yourself as a member of a group (in social identity terms) and stereotype threat? (Hint: Have you ever suspected that other people might see your group negatively?)
2. Most of us are motivated to protect our self-esteem. Given that you want to protect your self-esteem, what would be the most favorable attribution you could make when you explain a bad outcome that has happened to you? What would be the worst? How might others respond to you if you voiced aloud either of those attributions (remember the social

costs of not accepting responsibility for our own bad outcomes)? Is what is a self-protective attribution for the self different than the kind of attribution that leads to the most positive social evaluations?

3. We all want to know ourselves. How do we attempt to do this? Can you think of instances in which you compared unfavorably to another person and attempted to distance yourself from that person? Can you think of instances in which you compared favorably and liked being around the downward social comparison other? How did these different performances affect your relationship with that person? Do you think that after reading this chapter, you will question whether you can "get to know" yourself best

by introspecting about the reasons for your own actions?

4. If images of "new possible selves" can motivate us to change ourselves, can you identify a "desired possible self" and a "feared possible self" that might suggest useful changes in yourself? If so, describe the changes you would make to avoid your feared possible self and then consider the changes you would make to achieve your desired possible self.
5. Have you ever experienced a change in your self-perception as you move from one situation or group of friends to another? If so, does one self-perception seem more accurate than another? Or are they equally true, depending on the situation?

- Find a role model whose accomplishments seem attainable to you. If you think you can achieve his or her position or accomplishments ultimately, such an upward comparison can be inspiring.



- Present yourself as liking and valuing others if you want them to like you. People like others who value them.



- Avoid making attributions to prejudice for your own outcomes if you want to feel good about your future, because they are relatively internal and stable attributions, which are predictive of poor well-being. On the other hand, prejudicial treatment is likely to persist when complaints

of discrimination are avoided. If you do perceive an outcome as due to unjust discrimination, then seek social support from other members of your group. The female employees of Wal-Mart recently filed a class action lawsuit claiming pervasive sex discrimination. The result could be considerable change for women in the labor force.



- Avoid making public attributions that blame others for negative outcomes, for there will be social costs.



- *Stereotype threat* occurs when persons fear confirming a negative stereotype about their group. You can attempt to undermine its

likelihood of occurring by suggesting to vulnerable others that group differences are absent on a particular task. Here's how you can help prevent others from experiencing stereotype threat:

- Avoid making their group membership salient. Otherwise, take care to construct situations in which gender and race are balanced so group membership doesn't seem relevant.
- *Self-definition* can shift as the situation changes. Notice how you think about yourself when you are sitting in a classroom, in your dorm or apartment, when on a date, at your job versus when you are with your family.
- Think about what others expect of you and consider how that affects how you feel about yourself.
- Practice thinking about yourself positively. Think about all of your good attributes. Implicit self-esteem research suggests that you can increase your self-esteem this way.



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KEY TERMS

above-average effect (p. 186)
 black sheep effect (p. 193)
 care ethic (p. 175)

downward social comparison (p. 190)
 existential terror (p. 180)
 identity interference (p. 174)

independent self-concept (p. 175)
 ingratiation (p. 193)
 interdependent self-concept (p. 175)

intergroup comparisons (p. 173)
intragroup comparisons (p. 172)
introspection (p. 195)
justice ethic (p. 175)
objective self-awareness (p. 179)
personal–social identity continuum
(p. 171)
possible selves (p. 181)

self-complexity (p. 174)
self-efficacy (p. 181)
self-esteem (p. 184)
self-evaluation maintenance model
(p. 191)
self-monitoring (p. 193)
self-reference effect (p. 185)
social comparison theory (p. 190)

social identity theory (p. 191)
stereotype threat (p. 200)
subjective self-awareness (p. 179)
symbolic self-awareness (p. 179)
terror management theory (p. 180)
upward social comparison (p. 190)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Williams, K. D. (2001). *Ostracism: The power of silence*. New York: Guilford Press.

- This book reviews an intriguing program of research on ostracism and exclusion from groups. People find the experience painful, even when temporary or in an unimportant context, and engage in a variety of behaviors to attempt to regain inclusion by others.

Steele, C. M., Spencer, S. J., & Aronson, J. (2002). Contending with group image: The psychology of stereotype and social identity threat. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 34, 379–439.

- The article reviews research on stereotype threat and shows the

circumstances in which performance is undermined. Various coping strategies that people who are vulnerable to stereotype threat can employ are identified.

Schmitt, M. T., & Branscombe, N. R. (2002a). The meaning and consequences of perceived discrimination in disadvantaged and privileged social groups. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 12, 167–199.

- This article comprehensively reviews research on perceived discrimination, and considers the different meanings that an attribution to prejudice can have among members of low and high status groups. An important coping strategy—group identifica-

tion—that protects well-being in the face of devaluation threat is identified.

Dijksterhuis, A. (2004). I like myself but I don't know why: Enhancing implicit self-esteem by subliminal evaluative conditioning. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86, 345–355.

- Dijksterhuis examines whether implicit self-esteem can be conditioned and thereby improved. By practicing pairing the self with positive attributes, implicit associations between them can be strengthened and can protect the self when threat is encountered.