Chapter One

Self-Direction in a Changing World

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- Living with Other Social Changes
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- Self-Direction and Society
- Positive Psychology and the Humanistic Perspective
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to

1.1 Explain how technology is changing the way we communicate and live.
1.2 Discuss other recent social changes unrelated to technology.
1.3 Explain the concept of self-direction.
1.4 Compare individualistic and collectivist societies.
1.5 Define positive psychology.
1.6 Summarize the humanistic perspective.
1.7 Discuss what it means to take charge of your life.
1.8 Describe some of the problems of using self-help books.
1.9 List some characteristics that change over time and list some that remain the same.
1.10 Describe the three-phase cycle by which we experience personal growth.
1.11 Explain why it is important to move beyond individualism.

Zachary is a freshman in college in the late 1800s. He is among the privileged few to attend an institute of higher learning, mostly because his family is sufficiently well off to send him to school. Zachary travels to college by train, passing through miles of farmland and forests along the way. He keeps in touch with his family by letters. Zachary hopes to be a physician, an occupation pretty much closed to women in the 1800s. Zachary lives at a boardinghouse for male college students. He takes his meals there but studies at the library, where he reads by gaslight. He writes papers by hand. No one, absolutely no one, is using a mobile phone in Zachary’s library.

Karen, Zachary’s great-granddaughter, is a first-year college student of the twenty-first century. She is able to attend college because of financial aid from private lenders and the government. Karen travels back and forth to college by plane several times a year. To keep in touch with her family, she has only to pick up her walkie-talkie enabled phone, send a text message, or post a status update on Facebook or Twitter. Electricity lights up the room in which Karen reads and powers the computer she uses for term papers and correspondence. Karen, who lives in a coed dormitory, is accustomed to mingling with students from different ethnic and racial groups on campus, and about half of them are women.

Karen hopes to be a physician, as did Zachary, who planned to be a general practitioner. Zachary knew some patients could not give him money, so he would take produce, wool, or other products in payment. Karen, on the other hand, wants a posh office, working hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and an answering service so she can enjoy her private life. She knows she will set up her financial accounting system to accept credit cards, not eggs and bacon.

SOCIAL CHANGE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Explain how technology is changing the way we communicate and live.
1.2 Discuss other recent social changes unrelated to technology.

Living in a Technological World

Both Zachary and Karen lived in eras of rapid social change, defined as changes in social patterns and institutions in society. Social change can occur in any time period and be planned in advance
or totally unplanned. Planned changes are those created and engineered by humans, for example, building a new housing development wired for the most current technology. Unplanned changes are created by nature or by social accident, such as tsunamis and hurricanes or unexpected shifts in the population of a country due to disease or famine (Moritsugu, Wong, & Duffy, 2010).

In Zachary’s lifetime, America slowly transformed from an agrarian society to an urban one, and numerous inventions of the industrial revolution made transportation, farming, and manufacturing better and easier. Shortly thereafter, America was transformed from a frontier society to an industrial giant. Karen, in turn, takes technological change for granted. She believes that medical advances will soon have a cure for many life-threatening illnesses, including AIDS and cancer. She worries that the shortages of fossil fuels in addition to increased greenhouse gases are changing the world she knows. Meanwhile, she has learned that spiraling social change is normal and inevitable, although she occasionally wonders what lies ahead. Karen knows that social change is not always planned or positive.

All of us now realize that the galloping rate of technological, scientific, and social change occurs worldwide and has far-reaching (global) consequences. For your consideration, many of the demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience that ultimately led to the over overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s regime were organized through Facebook, with 20-year-old Khaled Kamel’s page, “We are all Khaled Saeed,” leading the path to revolution (Hauslohner, 2011). Social change seems to be a pervasive condition of our time, and technology has expanded interconnectedness of peoples and increased awareness of a common, global humanity (St. Clair, 2011).

Across the globe, Internet use has spiked in the past decade. Since 2000, the number of Internet users has increased by 2527 percent in Africa, 1987 percent in the Middle East, 1037 percent in Latin America/Caribbean, 709 percent in Asia, and 150 percent in North America. Moreover, 44 percent of the world’s Internet users are located in Asia; only 13 percent are found in North America (InternetWorldStatistics.com, 2012). Table 1–1 reveals current home media and Internet use in the United States and comparable countries.

### Table 1–1 Media in the Home: A Comparison of Three Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>&gt;99</td>
<td>&gt;99</td>
<td>&gt;99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video game console</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet access</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iPod or MP3 player</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Technology makes relationships among people more fluid, flexible, and portable and has freed us from the constraints of being in only one place. Technology connects us to more people more of the time; it also equips us to work both at home and at our job sites, blurring the boundaries between them (Amichai-Hamburger, 2009). Technology, in fact, may be the most powerful engine of change in today’s world (Sood & Tellis, 2005). People in almost every country are growing up in a world of greater interdependence because of technology. The revolution in communication, in particular, is re-creating the world in the image of a “global village,” in which every aspect of life—every thought, act, and institution—is being reconsidered in light of what is happening to people in other parts of the world (Shah, 2007).

**Exploration 1.1: Technology**

**www.cpsr.org** A site supported by computer professionals concerned about the responsible use of technology in society. Their motto is “Technology is driving the future; it is up to us to do the steering.”

Although people recognize the fact of change, they often disagree on the direction in which we’re headed (Kohut & Wike, 2008). Is it changing for better or worse? Some assume that the world as we know it will last indefinitely and that all the changes around us will not shake the familiar social, economic, and political structures that hold our society together (Moen & Roehling, 2005). A larger proportion of people, however, fed by a steady diet of bad news about crime, economic problems, world crises, the threats of terrorism, natural disasters, and possible nuclear destruction, have adopted a bleaker view (Huddy, Khatib, & Capelos, 2002). And yet others worry that digitalization and technology will damage or threaten local cultures and economies (Shah, 2007). However, worries about the negative effects that new technologies have on society are nothing new, as they have been around for hundreds of years. In the late 1800s, scholars believed that reading novels lead to bloated imaginations, over-exited nervous systems, and distorted views of reality. Newspapers were thought to cause unnatural, rapid shifts in attention, which ultimately undermined the mental health of the reader. During the early 1900s, movies were thought to teach depravity and immorality, and the cinema was marked as a training ground for criminals. Moreover, the comic books of the 1940s–1950s were believed to glorify violence, stimulate unhealthy ideas about sex, laud delinquency, and teach lawlessness. Simply put, throughout history, new technological advances, especially those related to media, have been vilified as “evil influences” on society (Starker, 1989).

From this generation forward, many forms of employment are and will be affected by automation and computerized systems. The increasing need for technical solutions places a premium on intellectual and technical knowledge. In turn, educated, middle-class workers will make up a larger proportion of the workforce in comparison to blue-collar workers, at least in the United States. One major problem related to increasing people’s knowledge and use of technology, however, is that some people fear technology, a phenomenon referred to as technophobia (Wagner, Hassanein, & Head, 2010). For example, some people are apprehensive about using computers because they worry they will break the computers, make costly errors, or look stupid. This has created a seeming digital divide. Those individuals who are already less powerful use technology least; they are perhaps the very individuals who could benefit from knowledge about technology in order to improve their jobs, social standing, and economic conditions (Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004).

Interestingly, the overall technology picture is changing, as “on the go” technology (cell phones and other wireless handhelds) is reducing this digital divide (Horrigan, 2008).
These technological changes, along with other scientific discoveries, are moving Americans, Canadians, Koreans, Swedes, and other technologically advanced societies away from manufacturing and industry to service-oriented and technological employment, just as the Industrial Revolution moved Zachary’s generation from agricultural to manufacturing jobs. For an interesting summary of other ways in which technology has changed our world, see Table 1–2.

### Table 1–2 The Social/Cultural Dimension of the Information Revolution: How the World Has Changed

- More information flowing with less obstruction
- Information flowing independent of distance
- Increasing opportunities for economic cooperation across borders
- Greater opportunities to profit globally
- The erosion of censorship
- People being inundated with vast quantities of information
- The democratization of information
- A growing gap between rich and poor
- Empowerment individuals vis-à-vis their governments
- Gradual adaptation to a surplus of information

*Source: Alterman (1999).*

Living with Other Social Changes

What other changes can we expect in today’s global village? One additional change will be continued population expansion and attendant worries about the health of our environment, including sufficient water and arable land, increased pollution, poverty, unemployment, and a plethora of related problems (Worldwatch.org, 2012). The world population stands at around 7 billion, with almost 150 new people born every minute. Furthermore, pollution as well as exhaustion of natural resources are problems for all countries and are contributed to by our increasing population. As mentioned above, another dramatic change will be the increase in the diversity of the population in the United States. Table 1–3 documents some of these changes.

### Table 1–3 Changes in Our Population

As you can see from this table, the percentage of the population made up by minorities as identified by the U.S. Census Bureau is increasing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>1990—% of total</th>
<th>2010—% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic*</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race other than above</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Hispanics are the fastest growing segment of our population.

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historic changes. Beyond the data in the table, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2042 minorities will no longer be “minorities” and that by 2050 they collectively will represent 54 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, Census, 2012). An increasing number of immigrants from various regions of the world are entering this country too, bringing with them a wealth of cultural ideas, languages, and customs. Accommodating these individuals, and the cultural diversity that they bring, will not always be easy, for some people are closed-minded, and rather ignorant of, insensitive to, or bigoted about cultures different from their own (Lamb, 2009).

Exploration 1.2: Cultural Diversity

Find songs, quotations, speeches, documents, and research related to multicultural issues.

How Certain Is Our Future?

How each of us understands the changes and trends in today’s world is somewhat like the proverbial question of whether we perceive a partly filled glass as half empty or half full. Pessimists tend to see the glass as half empty; optimists see it as half full. Social forecasters, who speculate on our long-term future, admit that we live in uncertain times—both good and bad (Kohut & Wike, 2008). They nevertheless project a fairly optimistic future. Although they do not necessarily agree on what the future holds for us, they typically see it as promising. Do you?

Social forecasters view many of the problems of our time as the growing pains of success rather than the harbingers of doom. While the problems of overcrowding, unemployment, environmental pollution, social inequality, and poverty cannot be dismissed, such issues perhaps should be seen as temporary phenomena with which society must deal rather than the inevitable foreshadowing of the end of civilization. Societies can and do rebound from problems that at the time appear to be insurmountable (Moritsugu et al., 2010).

THE CHALLENGE OF SELF-DIRECTION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.3 Explain the concept of self-direction.
1.4 Compare individualistic and collectivist societies.
1.5 Define positive psychology.
1.6 Summarize the humanistic perspective.
1.7 Discuss what it means to take charge of your life.

Self-Direction and Society

Rapid social changes and the growing importance of information and access to technology heighten the challenge of self-direction, which is the need to learn more about ourselves and our world as a means of directing our lives more effectively. Self-direction helps us respond to many life events as either a threat or a challenge. For example, some individuals find on-line dating to be both exciting and stimulating; they relish the opportunity to quickly meet so many new, and different, types of people. Others view on-line dating as overwhelming and are fearful about making their personal lives available for inspection to so many people with just the click of a mouse.

Another issue is that the world is seemingly changing and shrinking, in large part due to the technological changes discussed earlier. Given this, there are bound to be cultural clashes,
disputes, and sometimes out-and-out warfare. On a daily basis, people from one society are bound to conflict with or misunderstand others from a different society (Moritsugu et al., 2010).

Here’s a specific cultural example related to technology. A study of electronic advertising (i.e., SPAM) found that whereas Korean SPAM includes an apology for the unsolicited nature in which the product information was sent, SPAM in the United States does not. Not surprisingly, Koreans are more likely than Americans to think it is rude to complain about receiving unsolicited electronic advertisements (Park, Lee, & Song, 2005).

We are increasingly exposed to other cultures due to the diversity of the U.S. population, ever-changing technology, and easier modes of travel.

The study of culture, then, is extremely important to our understanding of one another. Culture is broadly defined as the ideas, customs, arts, and skills that characterize a group of people during a given period of history. To that end, one commonly used system for classifying cultures is via the orientation taken toward the individual in that culture. Individualistic societies are societies in which individual gain is appreciated more than general societal gain. Individualistic societies are sometimes referred to as independent or autonomous cultures, where the sense of self is developed based on privately held attitudes, preferences, and judgments. Another term for individualistic culture is individual-level culture. Individualistic societies can be contrasted to collectivist societies, in which collective or societal gain is cherished over individual advancement. Collectivist societies are also known as interdependent societies, where the sense of self is based on attitudes, preferences, and judgments held by others. Another way to refer to collectivistic cultures is as consensual-level (or group-level) or embedded cultures (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Matsumoto, 2007). Thus, the pressure to conform to group or cultural pressures in collectivist societies is far greater than in individualistic societies.

If you have only lived in the Western world you may be familiar with individualistic societies but unfamiliar with collectivist ones. Describing his childhood in a collectivist society, Joseph

Les Pâtes et Les Nouilles
Lemasolai Lekuton, born Maasai in Kenya, said about his childhood in this nomadic society, “In my tribe, the village is you, and you are the village. . . . Everyone older than you will tell you what to do. And you never defy their orders” (Court, 2003, p. 5). In contrast, people from Western cultures enjoy personal freedom, independence from others, and take greater pride in personal achievements than do people in collectivist cultures. By the same token, people from individualistic societies may be more vulnerable to insecurity, confusion, and loneliness. Rest assured that there are other dimensions along which societies and cultures vary (Cohen, 2009), many of which will be pointed out in subsequent chapters.

In contrast to North American and European societies, many Eastern and Asian cultures remain collectivist in nature. Some contemporary scientists argue, however, that the contrasts are not as sharp between individualistic and collectivistic societies as once thought (Oishi et al., 2005). Ask yourself whether this could be because of the technological revolution we are experiencing today. In the same vein, it is important to remember that any label applied to a culture cannot and does not capture the individual variations that exist within that culture (Matsumoto, 2007). For example, although there is culture-level consensus in many Western societies about the value of equality, prejudicial viewpoints, such as ageism, racism, sexism, and homophobia, are still prevalent.

Positive Psychology and the Humanistic Perspective

Positive psychology is an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and positive actions that allow individuals and institutions to thrive (Seligman, 2011). Those in the field of positive psychology investigate diverse areas, such as teaching techniques that help students flourish, managerial strategies that maximize the productivity of workers, and the virtues that people possess, like the capacity for courage, love, and compassion. Thus, a major goal of positive psychology is to explore the best of human behavior, rather than the worst, which has been the traditional focus of much of psychological research (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009).

Similarly, psychologists in the humanistic perspective focus on what makes human existence distinctive, such as the meaning and richness of subjective interpretations, the holistic characteristics of experience, and our capacity to willfully choose and determine behaviors and thoughts for ourselves (Fischer, 2003; Lenderking, 2005). The humanistic perspective consists of a group of related theories and therapies that emphasize the values of human freedom and the uniqueness of the individual. Thus, both positive psychology and the humanistic perspective have called our attention to the constructive side of psychology. Individuals are now being viewed in the light of their potential for health and fulfillment as well as in terms of their vulnerabilities and maladjustments. Two of the main ideas in the humanistic perspective are the phenomenal self and self-actualization. Let’s take a look at each.

Exploration 1.3: Positive Psychology

http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/ Learn more about the field of positive psychology by reading articles or becoming a participant in online experiments. This site is sponsored by the leading researcher in the field of positive psychology, Martin Seligman.

THE PHENOMENAL SELF The phenomenal self is the individual’s overall self-concept available to awareness. Here, the term phenomenal refers to that which is apparent to or perceived by the senses—in short, reality as experienced by the individual. Carl Rogers (1980), a leading humanistic psychologist, emphasized that it is this “perceived reality,” rather than absolute reality, that is the basis of behavior. Essentially, human behavior is the goal-directed attempt by individuals to satisfy needs as they experience or perceive them. In other words, how a person sees and interprets events in the environment determines how the person reacts to them.
Rogers assumed the existence of an actualizing tendency at the biological level—a human’s tendency to develop and fulfill the self. As individuals become aware of themselves, they automatically develop a need for **positive regard** or **acceptance by others**. In the course of actualizing, the individual engages in a valuing (evaluation) process. Experiences that are perceived as enhancing are valued positively and sought after; those that are perceived as blocking fulfillment are valued negatively and avoided. The degree to which individuals trust this valuing process depends in a large measure on their self-concept, especially the **self-image** derived from one’s experience with significant others (such as parents) during the formative years of childhood.

**SELF-ACTUALIZATION**  Self-actualization is the process of fulfilling our inborn potential. The term **self-actualization** is usually associated with Abraham Maslow, who gave it its fullest explanation (Hanley & Abell, 2002). Maslow, like Rogers, assumed the existence of an inborn actualizing tendency in the individual. Each child and adult has an inherent need to actualize his or her potentialities. However, in Maslow’s conceptualization, the core of growth operates in relation to a hierarchy of needs. Only as the individual’s most basic needs are met do the higher growth needs become a potent force in motivation. As long as the individual’s needs of hunger, safety, and human companionship remain unsatisfied, the person is motivated to fulfill them. Once these needs are relatively satisfied, the individual becomes more aware of growth motivation, such as the desire to fulfill needs related to self-esteem, achievement, and personal development (Reiss & Havercamp, 2005). Maslow’s concepts will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter entitled Managing Motives and Emotions.

Maslow (1971) held that certain people have reached a healthier, more optimal level of functioning than the average person. He called them **self-actualizing** people and held that studying them may teach us much about our potential for growth. Such people are relatively free from major psychological problems and have made the best possible use of their talents and strengths. Compared to the average person, self-actualizing people have certain characteristics in common, such as a continued freshness of appreciation of everyday realities; greater acceptance of themselves and others; high creativity; and high resistance to conformity (Delle, Massimini, & Bassi, 2011). **Self-actualized** individuals accept responsibility for their lives and carefully scrutinize the alternatives available to them. They also keep their eyes open and have the courage to admit when they are wrong and need to change. If self-actualization is indeed a positive process, we should seek out means by which to become more actualized. Activity 1–1 contains a questionnaire designed to assess how much you are moving toward your self-actualization.

**Activity 1–1**

**Are You Becoming More Self-Actualized?**

The following survey can help you determine how far you have progressed on the road to self-actualization. Each statement is followed by a scale of 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree). Please mark the extent of your agreement by circling the appropriate number.

1. I experience life fully in the present moment rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.
   
   Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Agree

2. I make choices that will enhance my growth by taking reasonable risks that will develop my potential rather than keep me safe and secure.
   
   Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Agree
Our inner core of growth needs may be relatively weak and undeveloped, making it easily stifled by discouraging circumstances. Many people fail to actualize themselves because of the lack of supportive circumstances. However, countless people have been significantly creative despite deprived circumstances, and Maslow acknowledged that it is something of a mystery why wealth and prosperity releases some people for growth while stunting others. As a result, Maslow suggested that a favorable environment is not enough to ensure growth. Individuals must also have an intense desire to grow to offset the fear and resistance to growth.

All things considered, Maslow envisioned personal development as a struggle between growth-fostering forces and growth-discouraging forces, such as fear of the unfamiliar. He felt that society discourages growth by overvaluing safety and physical comfort, as, for example, overly protective parents do. Instead, he suggested that we should minimize the attractions of security and maximize its hazards, such as boredom and stagnation. At the same time, he felt we should emphasize the attractiveness of growth while minimizing its dangers. Maslow (1968) repeatedly emphasized that “growth is, in itself, a rewarding and exciting process, thereby overcoming much of our resistance to self-actualization” (p. 30).

**APPLYING IT TO YOURSELF** Positive psychology and the humanistic perspectives encourage us to see ourselves in terms of our positive potential, or what we can become. As such, they are

3. I listen to my own needs and reactions rather than let others influence me.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
4. I am honest with myself and with other people.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
5. I strive to do my best in accomplishing tangible goals in everyday life.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
6. I am assertive in expressing my needs, ideas, and values.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
7. I recognize and live by the inspiration of special moments or peak experiences in which I feel especially close to fulfilling my potential.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
8. I relish new experiences and new knowledge.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
9. I can identify my defenses and am willing to put them aside in order to revise my expectations, ideas, and values.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
10. I commit to concerns and causes outside of myself because I recognize that self-actualization comes as a by-product of unique experiences.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
11. I remember that self-actualization is a lifelong process; it is never fully achieved.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree
12. I trust my own experiences to be my guides in life.
   - Disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Agree

Now add up your scores. The higher the score, the more you may have progressed toward optimal being or self-actualization. Find topics (questionnaire items with low scores) that might need more work. Also, keep in mind that few people are truly self-actualized. Actualization is a process, not a final end state. Remember, this questionnaire was specifically devised for this book and thus should be interpreted with caution.

more concerned with our **personal growth** than with sheer survival. Problems and conflicts are neither necessary nor inevitable. When these occur, it’s likely to be the result of our restrictive self-images, faulty choices, or an unsupportive environment. We may improve ourselves by changing the way we see ourselves and achieving more of the potential control we have over our lives. Such changes occur more readily in an environment conducive to growth, whether a challenging job or a happy marriage, not simply in psychotherapy.

**The Ambiguity of Personal Freedom**

The above discussion brings us to another issue related to self-direction—freedom. Nobody has written more eloquently about the ambiguity of human freedom than Erich Fromm (1963), the distinguished psychoanalyst. His experience of growing up in Germany during the Nazi regime and his subsequent move to the United States gave him tremendous insight into the problems of totalitarianism and human freedom. According to Fromm, those in individualistic societies have freedom to direct their lives—from the details of their daily existence to more crucial choices, such as what career to pursue. On the other hand, the challenge of freedom can make them feel more anxious, insecure, and isolated. Fromm contends that such isolation may be so unbearable that many people are inclined to escape from the burden of freedom into new dependencies. Examples of such dependencies included looking to experts and the government for assistance, or in our modern society, becoming reliant on the Internet for help in all walks of life, from researching health-related information, to finding new romantic partners, to shopping for clothes, books, and food; and all without leaving the comfort and safety of our homes.

The ambiguity of human freedom is especially evident when making important life choices, for example, *who* we want to be and *how* we want to live our lives. We may find ourselves coping by becoming anxious and “freezing up” in the face of important decisions. Another common strategy is *drifting*. Instead of choosing how to live, people simply drift along, either by living according to the status quo or by dropping out, becoming people whose lives are guided by no ties, codes, traditions, or major purposes.

Another strategy is based on *shared decision making*, as in committee work, marriage, and family life, and assumed agreements among friends. Instead of really making a decision, people just talk until something happens. They presume a consensus, often never questioning it, but if things turn out badly, no one feels responsible: Each merely goes along. Another frequently used strategy for making choices is based on an *appeal to some type of authority*—an expert, a movement, a religion, the government, or some institution. Truly autonomous people rely on none of these strategies. Case in point, many Russian writers working under communist rule in Soviet times, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, made one decisive choice after another in order to maintain their personal integrity. They often made these decisions in the face of overwhelming criticism and the threat of severe punishment from their oppressive governments.

**Taking Charge of Our Lives**

Today, many people the world over are pursuing an odyssey of freedom. Much of the dissatisfaction that occurs in other countries reflects people’s desire for the greater liberty and economic opportunity they see in the more economically advanced societies. Case in point, many of the people who immigrate to the United States seek freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of movement. Moreover, the majority of Americans today feel they have more freedom and control over their lives than their parents did, who were hemmed in by all kinds of social, educational, and economic constraints. For example, most of today’s middle-aged Americans did not face the Great Depression or World War II, which delimited their parents’ options. They believe they have more opportunities in the important areas of education, work, sex, marriage, religion, family, friends, travel, possessions, where to live, and how to live.

Before you proceed further, make an honest assessment of whether you are actively taking charge of your life by completing the survey in Activity 1–2.
ACTIVITY 1–2

Do You Take Charge of Your Life?

INSTRUCTIONS: For each statement below, circle T if the statement is generally true of you; circle F if the statement generally is not true of you.

1. I enjoy being interconnected to others—both friends and family members. T F
2. Sometimes I have difficulty making the choices that make the most sense for my life. T F
3. I have many options from which to select in terms of my education, career, social circle, etc. T F
4. My friends are better than I am at making efficient and sound decisions. T F
5. I get a great deal of satisfaction out of helping others less fortunate than I. T F
6. If I have a choice, I much prefer to do the safe rather than the risky thing. T F
7. I strongly feel that a promise is a promise and should not be broken. T F
8. Difficult decisions daunt me because I have little confidence in my decisional abilities. T F
9. No matter where I am (e.g., at work or at college), I accept my responsibilities. T F
10. Sometimes I call in sick when I am healthy because I do not want to work or study. T F
11. I’d invest my money in a risky but challenging venture. T F
12. During times of stress, I feel as if my life is out of control. T F
13. I am fully aware of who, where, and what I am as well as my personal goals. T F
14. I am disturbed that some charities call me for donations and invade my privacy. T F
15. When and if I ever borrow money, I make sure that I pay it back. T F
16. I do not like it when others expect me to be the one to choose our leisure activity. T F

SCORING: Even-numbered items are phrased in a negative direction, so if you answered “F” (false), you may have a “take-charge” attitude or exercise self-direction. The odd-numbered items are phrased such that a “T” (true) indicates agreement with an item demonstrating that you probably have self-direction.

Score 1: Total number of “Fs” for even-numbered items
Score 2: Total number of “Ts” for odd-numbered items
Total for self-direction = Score 1 + Score 2

The higher your grand total, the more self-direction you may have. Now return to the regular reading with your score in mind. Pay attention to how and in what areas of self-direction you can improve.
Freedom, however, has its challenges. Exercising our positive freedom means facing up to the necessity of decision making in our lives, especially the life choices that shape our destinies. At the same time, the fear of making the wrong decision in front of others is so great that many youths speak of “keeping my options open,” living in an “extended holding pattern,” and being “leery of commitment.” Much of this reaction is understandable in light of the uncertainties of our times. However, individuals extrinsically motivated by financial success, an appealing appearance, or social recognition have lower vitality and lower self-actualizing potential and report more health problems than individuals who are more intrinsically or internally inspired. Intrinsically motivated, autonomous, self-actualized individuals appear to be healthier, more self-accepting, and more community-minded as well as better adjusted and less distressed (Baker, 2004; Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

Taking charge of our lives means that we can and must choose for ourselves, that is, we must be self-directed. A lack of decisiveness, by default, becomes its own decision. Also, we must make choices in a timely fashion so that our choices do not make us miss opportunities that lead to personal growth. On the other hand, it is fortunate that not all decisions are cast in stone. We can and often do change many decisions as we grow and mature, such as switching college majors or starting a new career. Meanwhile, the realization that our decisions are only as good as the information they are based on reminds us again of the value of continuous learning and critical thinking.

Acting on our positive freedom also means assuming responsibility for our choices, without blaming others or fate for what happens to us. In fact, those who are self-actualized or internally directed experience less interpersonal distress and more interpersonal closeness, perhaps because they are less likely to blame others (Baker, 2004; Sheffield, Carey, Patenaude, & Lambert, 1995). Interestingly, self-actualized individuals are also more likely to demonstrate altruism, or the desire to help others at cost to the helper (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

Admittedly, we had no choice about being thrust into the world, but we have a great deal of choice in the manner in which we live. However, we often hear people say things such as “I can’t help it because that’s the way I am” or “Naturally I’m this way because of the way I grew up.” These people fail to realize that free choice and responsibility go hand in hand. As a constant reminder of this fact, Viktor Frankl (1978) suggested that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by the Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.

Self-realization also involves taking calculated risks and making commitments in spite of uncertainty. Where would the world be without the risks taken by, for example, Thomas Edison, Mikhail Gorbachev, the Dalai Lama, and Steve Jobs? Personal growth involves stepping into unfamiliar and potentially risky situations, thereby leaving us more vulnerable to hurt and disappointment. Perfectionists are especially prone not to take risks and to be satisfied with low levels of actualization. Self-actualizers are more tolerant of failure (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, & Mosher, 1991). With regard to these issues, it is important to ask yourself the following questions: How self-directed are you? How does perfectionism interfere with your taking risks? How actualized are you?

The decision to grow or actualize our potential often has to be made in spite of risks and therefore requires courage. This is the “courage to be,” that is, the courage to affirm ourselves and our possibilities in spite of the perils that lie ahead. On the other hand, we run a risk whenever we avoid growing. Each time we pass up an opportunity to develop a new skill or when we value security over challenge, we run the risk of becoming stagnant or succumbing to boredom. When we habitually suppress or deny the inherent growth tendency of humans, we risk becoming maladaptive, sometimes in obvious ways, sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes immediately, or sometimes later in life. Fortunately, mechanisms for growth, such as higher education and continual learning, help individuals self-actualize (Barnes & Srinivas, 1993; MacKay & Kuh, 1994). Abraham Maslow (1968) once observed that many of the characteristic disorders of our
time such as the “stunted person,” the “amoral person,” or the “apathetic person” result from the fundamental failure to grow.

**Living in Today’s Individualistic Society**

Interestingly, the times in which we live afford us a more supportive environment because of the technological advances that bring friends and family on the other side of the continent “closer” to us. In fact, we can contact whole group of supportive people at once by merely pressing a few buttons on our handheld devices. Just as important, though, is the increased number of hazards in our social and physical environments: We meet more people, some of whom are highly critical of us and judgmental; we become bewildered by the increasing number of available consumer choices; and we worry about the proliferation of hazards in our environment, from threats of child victimization on the Internet to pandemics such as H1N1 (Swine) flu and AIDS. These, in turn, heighten the challenge of self-direction.

The cumulative impact of these social changes has given rise to newer social values and newer rules by which people live in comparison to older generations. Generally, these changes mean greater interest in shaping the environment to meet our needs (i.e., increased personal control) rather than society’s needs and goals. Ask yourself this: In today’s society, to what extent are people preoccupied with themselves?

**THEMES OF PERSONAL GROWTH**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1.8 Describe some of the problems of using self-help books.
1.9 List some characteristics that change over time and list some that remain the same.
1.10 Describe the three-phase cycle by which we experience personal growth.
1.11 Explain why it is important to move beyond individualism.

**Living with Contradictions and Uncertainty**

All of us face the challenge of reconciling old rules with new rules and old values with new values. Many of us feel we must honor the old values of hard work, frugality, and moderation to complete an education and secure our careers and, thus, the means to enjoy the new values associated with personal pleasure and freedom (Moen & Roehling, 2005). In many ways these two sets of values contradict each other, making it difficult to reconcile them. For example, we know we must work to support our families, but at the same time we may also want to drive an expensive convertible and experience the thrill of the wind blowing through our hair—a symbol of independence and freedom.

Those of us who seek guidance about personal growth from popular self-help books, television shows that entertain more than they educate, and movements that blend pop psychology with quasi-religious thought do not always fare well. Many of these sources oversimplify the process of personal and social change, generating grossly unrealistic and disappointing results, while at the same time garnering the purveyors of such drivel millions upon millions of dollars (Salerno, 2005). In contrast, psychological research (such as that found in this book) can provide sound principles of personal development and growth as well as guidance related to self-direction and social responsibility. Throughout this book we attempt to show how the principles and findings of contemporary psychology can help us better understand ourselves and others and, thus, to cope more effectively with our environment and fulfill more of our potential.

This statement does not mean that personal growth can be achieved by simply reading a book on the subject. Neither does mere exposure to scientific knowledge or interesting examples guarantee that you will use the information. Now, let’s look further at some other issues related to seeking self-direction.
Continuity and Change

A key issue for psychologists and the public alike is the extent to which people change over a lifetime. Do our personalities really change, or do they remain stable? Do we change in fits and starts or gradually? What makes us change—many small experiences or cataclysmic events? As it turns out, many positive aspects of our personalities, such as levels of warmth, assertiveness, and sociability, tend to remain stable throughout the life span; however, so to do many negative traits, such as depression, anxiety, hostility, and impulsiveness. Thus, individuals who were expressive and outgoing in their teens are apt to remain that way in adulthood. In contrast, those who were inhibited and shy in their teens tend to remain inhibited and shy.

Psychologists supporting the stability thesis state that even when individuals do change because of personal maturation or life experiences, the unique differences among people remain. This means that a rather impulsive 20-year-old like Karen may be a bit less impulsive by the time she is 55, but she is still likely to be more impulsive than her age-mates at any given time. In addition, as people grow older, the stability of their personalities becomes more evident. Thus, there is more stability of personality from ages 30 to 40 than there is from 20 to 30 (Pfaffenberger, 2005). Part of the reason for increased stability with age is that we tend to select and stay in environments and marry people that help sustain our traits (Caspi & Herbener, 1990).

Nevertheless, our lives are also filled with change, especially in the areas of self-esteem, sense of personal mastery or control over their environment, and values. Additionally, personal beliefs (e.g., about the malleability of personality) can play a significant role in altering personality across the life span (Dweck, 2008). Individuals who believe that they can change are more open to learning, more willing to confront challenges, and are better able to bounce back from failures. Those who believe that their traits are fixed have a more difficult time facing challenges, such as stressful business tasks or conflict-laden relationships. The emphasis on the potential for change has been embraced by those who want to foster change, from weight watchers to social watchers, all of whom stress openness to change throughout the course of adulthood.

The tension between continuity and change is found not only in academic debates but also in each of us. How much personal growth or change in a desirable direction we want depends greatly on the different priorities we assign to stability or change, that is, how much we want to change and how differently we want to live our lives. Thus, people with traditional values tend to exhibit a high degree of stability in their lives unless something happens to make them change. For them, the events most likely to cause change are usually quite dramatic, such as an unwanted divorce, the death of a child, failure in one’s career, or witnessing a traumatic event. In contrast, those who put value on personal growth will experience positive change throughout their lives, and without the need for a dramatic or traumatic event to propel them forward.

The Experience of Personal Growth

To believe we can change is one thing. To pursue and actively achieve personal change is something else. Think about all the times you have vowed to exercise but didn’t or swore to quit smoking cigarettes and failed. These are but small instances of attempts to change. Like all patterns of development, our inner experience of growth tends to be uneven, with spurts and plateaus. We may be willing to try out something new one minute and retreat to the familiar the next. Because we experience our inner world more as a continuous flow of ideas, feelings, and meanings, we are more apt to realize that we’ve grown in retrospect than while we’re in the midst of personal growth.

Exploration 1.4: Personal Growth

www.best-personal-growth-resources.com A site dedicated to personal growth, with lots of free resources, including information on growth-promoting activities.
In fact, the experience of personal growth tends to follow a three-phase cycle:

1. **Acknowledging change.** Growth usually begins with the acknowledgment of change. Actually, changes occur all the time, but we’re not always aware of them. A constant awareness of change would be too disruptive to our daily lives. Instead, we strive to construct an image of ourselves and our world that pictures reality as under our control and more stable than it really is. As a result, we become more acutely aware of changes at some moments than at others. Sometimes, we become aware of change rather suddenly, for example, by receiving an unexpected compliment or criticism. Taking on new responsibilities, such as a marriage, parenthood, or promotion at work, forces us to acknowledge change, too. The common denominator in all these experiences is the realization that things are different from what they were—or what we believed or expected they would be.

2. **A sense of dissonance or dissatisfaction.** Whether the awareness of change leads to growth depends on how we react. Sometimes we may respond to change defensively, with little awareness of our real feelings—positive or negative. In contrast, when someone feels disappointment, he or she actually may be aroused or motivated to seek further change or confront the challenge of disappointment. Thus, the growth cycle can often be triggered by disappointment and failure as well as by success. This phase of growth (dissonance) is inevitably accompanied by a certain degree of anxiety and discomfort. When our motive for growth proceeds out of a sense of challenge or mastery, we may be more stimulated and less apprehensive about the outcome. But when our motive springs from profound dissatisfaction with ourselves, our feelings tend to be more agonizing.

3. **Reorganizing our experience.** In conventional psychological terms, **reorganizing** is often defined as acquiring new ideas and then altering our attitudes, behaviors, and values in response. As an example, we may adopt a new attitude toward another person, becoming more willing to listen to someone’s criticism because we know that the person wants to help rather than hurt us. Growth may also take the form of new self-perceptions, for example, increased self-acceptance and confidence from an achievement, such as earning a college degree. The main point is that each inner adjustment or change we make affects the whole of our experience, so that growth consists of the continuous reorganization of that experience.

### Beyond Individualism

At times, the language of individualism has the potential to limit the way people think. For example, we have long celebrated “independence” on July 4, but we are only now slowly recognizing our “interdependence” on others via Make a Difference Day. Being responsible to the self alone limits the influence of both culture and society, rendering people less committed to the common purposes of humanity. This is in sharp contrast to collectivist societies in which self-orientation is held in check by strong ties to family and community. That is not to say, however, that those from individualistic society think solely about themselves. For instance, each year millions of Americans volunteer their time and money to help those in need. And witness how the whole nation pulled together following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

### Exploration 1.5: Interdependence

**www.change.org**  A site dedicated to those interested in creating social change.

A major reassessment of the search for self-fulfillment may be giving rise to a more realistic view of life and personal fulfillment. Millions of people are discovering, often through
Terrorist acts and disasters sometimes stimulate collectivism in Americans who are otherwise fairly individualistic.

such painful experiences, such as watching their adult children or parents become unemployed, that preoccupation with their own personal needs is not a direct path to fulfillment. The heart of this new outlook is the realization that personal fulfillment can be achieved only in relation to others—through a web of shared meanings that transcend the isolated individual. Personal fulfillment in the deeper sense requires commitments that endure over long periods of time and perhaps require self-sacrifice. The term commitment shifts the focus away from unduly individualistic notions of the self, either self-denial or self-fulfillment, toward the more inclusive “self connected to others.” This is a positive change, because almost all of our activity occurs in relationships, groups, and community, structured by institutions and interpreted by cultural meaning. As we’ve seen, human fulfillment is more complex than popularly thought and requires a better balance between the interests of self and of society.

Activity 1–3 is designed to help you discover the extent of your own individualism in our interdependent world. When you have finished the activity, ask yourself if you need to be more interconnected with your family, friends, and community.

**Activity 1–3**

**How Individualistic Are You?**

Go back to your e-mail account, your diary, letters you have written to your friends and family, or some other written document developed by you. Count how many times pronouns related to yourself such as I, my, me, mine, etc., occur and how many times pronouns such as you or we or they (or pronouns indicating that you were taking into account another’s feelings, needs, or desires) occur.

PRONOUNS RELATED TO SELF _________________

PRONOUNS RELATED TO OTHERS _______________

Which type of pronouns prevailed? Are pronouns indicating the importance of others more predominant or are pronouns related to you more predominant? In terms of individualism and social connectedness, what do your results suggest about you?
Chapter Summary

SOCIAL CHANGE

1.1 Explain how technology is changing the way we communicate and live.
Technological changes have given rise to a global outlook in which people are influenced by what they see happening in other countries. Technology has made relationships more fluid, flexible, and portable, but it has also blurred the boundaries between work and home.

1.2 Discuss other recent social changes unrelated to technology.
In the United States, there is an increasingly diverse population. Across the globe, the population expansion has resulted in concerns about poverty, unemployment, and the health of our environment.

THE CHALLENGE OF SELF-DIRECTION

1.3 Explain the concept of self-direction.
Self-direction refers to the need to learn more about ourselves and our world as a means of directing our lives more effectively.

1.4 Compare individualistic and collectivist societies.
In an individualistic society, individual gain is appreciated more than general societal gain. In contrast, in a collectivist society societal gain is cherished over individual advancement.

1.5 Define positive psychology.
Positive psychology is an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and positive actions that allow individuals and institutions to thrive.

1.6 Summarize the humanistic perspective.
The humanistic perspective focuses on what makes human existence distinctive, such as the meaning and richness of subjective interpretations, the holistic characteristics of experience, and our capacity to willfully choose and determine behaviors and thoughts for ourselves.

1.7 Discuss what it means to take charge of your life.
Taking charge of your life means that you face up to the importance of decision making, taking calculated risks for the sake of growth, and assuming full responsibility for your lives.

THEMES OF PERSONAL GROWTH

1.8 Describe some of the problems of using self-help books.
People looking to self-help books for advice tend to find an oversimplified idea of self-fulfillment, leading to unrealistic expectations that end in disappointment. In contrast, the field of psychology offers sound principles and tested knowledge that may help to achieve realistic self-direction and growth.

1.9 List some characteristics that change over time and list some that remain the same.
Many positive aspects of our personalities, such as levels of warmth, assertiveness, and sociability, tend to remain stable throughout the life span; however, so do many negative traits, such as depression, anxiety, hostility, and impulsiveness. Characteristics that can change include self-esteem, sense of personal mastery or control over their environment, and values.

1.10 Describe the three-phase cycle by which we experience personal growth.
The subjective experience of growth involves a three-phase cycle: (1) the acknowledgment of change within ourselves or our environment, (2) a sense of dissonance or dissatisfaction within, which in turn leads to (3) reorganizing our experience in some way, such as adopting a new attitude toward ourselves or others.

1.11 Explain why it is important to move beyond individualism.
Today, a major reassessment of the self-fulfillment movement is under way, giving rise to a more realistic view of life and personal fulfillment. The core of this new approach is the call for a realignment of the interests of self and society so that personal fulfillment can be realized in relation to others—through a web of shared meanings that transcend the isolated individual.

Self-Test

1. Facebook has transformed the way that people network for jobs, interact with others, and stay in touch with family and friends. In other words, Facebook helped establish _______ throughout the world.
   a. mesosystems
   b. social change
   c. collective modifications
   d. universal reforms
2. Eddard is very old fashioned. He likes to read books printed on paper, watch re-runs of Gunsmoke on a black and white TV, and listen to music on vinyl records. For over 40 years, he successfully avoided using all of those new electronic gizmos and gadgets that kept popping up. Based on this profile, Eddard may be classified as having ____________.

a. electrophobia  
b. mediaphilia  
c. digital fright  
d. technophobia

3. Which of the following activities is least likely to promote self-direction?

a. learning how to use Photoshop  
b. attending a workshop on cultural diversity  
c. playing with your dog in the park  
d. seeing a counselor to deal with emotional issues resulting from a divorce

4. Cultures in which individual gain is appreciated more than general societal gain are referred to as ____________ societies.

a. individualistic  
b. collectivist  
c. interdependent  
d. consensual level

5. The statement “It takes a village to raise a child” would most likely be used to guide behavior in a ____________ society.

a. collectivist  
b. intradependent  
c. individualistic  
d. autonomous

6. Which group is increasing fastest in the United States?

a. Hispanics  
b. Asians  
c. African-Americans  
d. Whites

7. What is the correct ordering for the three-phases associated with the experience of growth

a. a sense of dissonance, reorganizing our experience, acknowledging change  
b. acknowledging change, a sense of dissonance, reorganizing our experience  
c. reorganizing our experience, acknowledging change, a sense of dissonance  
d. a sense of dissonance, acknowledging change, reorganizing our experience

8. After suffering a career-ending injury to her knee, Whitney realized that her life would never be the same. Which phase in the experience of growth does this example illustrate?

a. acknowledging change  
b. a sense of dissonance  
c. reorganizing our experience  
d. none of the above

9. People need to realize that ____________ are a necessary component of self-fulfillment.

a. relationships with others  
b. egocentrism  
c. self-denial  
d. isolation

10. The individual’s overall self-concept available to awareness is called the ____________.

a. actualized self  
b. archival self  
c. phenomenal self  
d. developmental self

Exercises

1. Social change. What two or three societal changes are having the greatest impact on your life (e.g., changes in technology, the economy)? Write a page or so about how your life is affected by these changes. For example, think about how a computer has altered your academic, business, and personal life. Are most of the societal changes having a negative or positive impact on your life? Are you coping with the changes appropriately? Are the changes helping you grow?

2. Change as a challenge or threat. Select some change that has occurred in your environment recently, such as a new professor, a marital engagement, or layoffs at work. Then write a page or so describing how you feel about this change, especially whether you see it as a challenge or a threat and why.

3. Identify your level of interdependence. Identify at least one important aspect of your life, such as a job, a friendship, or marriage. Then describe in a few paragraphs how much you’re prepared to give to this relationship and how much you expect in return. Are your expectations fair? If the give and take is unbalanced, how do you think your expectations will affect your relationships?

4. How important is self-fulfillment to you? Think about what you do that is fulfilling. What are your life goals? Are they generally other-centered or self-centered, and is this adaptive and growth-oriented? What do you do to actively meet these goals?

5. Self-fulfillment and personal and social involvement. Select some area of your life that has been very gratifying to you (an accomplishment, relationship, etc.) and describe the extent to which your sense of fulfillment depended on involvement with others.
Questions for Self-Reflection

1. Are you more optimistic about your own personal future than that of our society or the world?
2. Are you so concerned about keeping your options open that you may suffer from the inability to make decisions? Are you too perfectionistic?
3. How much control do you feel you have over your life? How much control do you think you need? Are you a self-directed person?
4. Would you agree that many of the ground rules in our society have changed from one century to the next? How so?
5. Have you met people who act as if there are no rules—that anything goes? What are such people like?
6. How important are self-fulfillment values to you?
7. Do you expect more out of life than your parents did?
8. Can you remember a difficult time in your life and, in retrospect, realize it was a time of growth?
9. Would you agree that personal fulfillment is achieved mostly in and through our relationships with others?
10. What keeps you from self-actualizing?