

## CHAPTER 12

# To Be Adored or to Be Known? The Interplay of Self-Enhancement and Self-Verification

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WILLIAM B. SWANN, JR.  
*University of Texas–Austin*

Every man is inescapably a *Machtmensch*; his most coveted experience is the enhancement of his self-esteem, and his most ineradicable trait is vanity.  
—Gordon Allport (1937, p. 169)

Many people find it hard to believe that a person will defend and strive to maintain an idea [about himself] which is not to his advantage. But the evidence allows of no other conclusion.—Prescott Lecky (1945, p. 124)

What do people want to think of themselves? The founders of social and personality psychology generally assumed, as did Allport, that people want to think well of themselves. In fact, until the early 1950s, virtually every major theory of social behavior held that people are strongly motivated to enhance their self-images.

Yet during the 1950s and 1960s—what some regard as the “golden years” of social and personality psychology—a very different view of human organism prevailed, one that placed Lecky’s lofty desire for cognitive consistency or balance at the center of the person’s psychological universe (e.g., Aronson, 1968; Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1946; 1958; McGuire, 1960; Newcomb, 1956; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955; Rosenberg & Abelson, 1960; Secord & Backman, 1965). For nearly two decades, the concepts of “balance,” “congruity,” and especially “dissonance” so dominated the field of social psychology that some onlookers were moved to complain that “no behavioral phenomena were safe from the ravages of the imperialistic dissonance hordes” (Sears & Ables, 1969, p. 263).

The days of imperialism that inspired such ire are history now. In fact, even if the few remaining advocates of cognitive-consistency approaches *were* the ravaging type, any signs of pugnacity on their part would not go unchecked for long. This rather drastic shift in intellectual climate has stunned and perplexed

many workers in the field (e.g., Aronson, 1989; Berkowitz & Devine, 1989), who have somewhat wistfully asked why the cognitive-consistency community, so prosperous only two decades ago, has deteriorated into an intellectual ghost town.

There are, of course, many factors responsible for this complex phenomenon. Students of the more circumscribed consistency and balance theories (e.g., Heider, 1958; McGuire, 1960; Newcomb, 1956; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955) quickly answered the important questions that the theories raised. The broader, bolder, and more provocative theories such as dissonance suffered a very different fate, with some critics complaining that empirical support was weak and contradictory (e.g., Sears & Ables, 1969), others proposing alternative explanations of key effects (e.g., Bem, 1967; Chapanis & Chapanis, 1964; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971), and still others protesting the emphasis on experimental ingenuity at the expense of theoretical explicitness (e.g., Smith, 1968). Yet I believe that the most fundamental problem was that the Festingerians neglected an extraordinarily important component in the cognitive-consistency process: people's *enduring* self-concepts. This defect so weakened the theory that researchers, armed with dissonance alone, were unable to explain the provocative phenomena that were of interest to them. Rather than turn away from interesting phenomena, they discreetly spiced up the dissonance recipe with the very motive that it had eclipsed: self-enhancement. Eventually, outsiders spotted the self-enhancement wolf lurking beneath the cognitive-consistency fleece; this signaled the beginning of the end of social psychology's torrid love affair with dissonance theory.

My interpretation of the reasons underlying the demise of consistency theories is, of course, nothing more than that. To my mind, though, the real question is not so much why cognitive-consistency approaches have slipped into the backwaters of social psychology, but whether we should allow them to remain there. Here I can speak more confidently; although past consistency approaches may have been flawed in certain respects, I am convinced that it would be premature to let the cognitive-consistency *perspective* go the way of phlogiston, ether, and the four humors. At the same time, I am also convinced that the desire for self-enhancement is every bit as important as the desire for consistency, and must therefore be given its due in any serious treatment of human social behavior.

My purpose here, then, is not to banish or subsume *either* the self-enhancement or self-consistency approaches, but to suggest how these two motivational forces interactively guide behavior. First, however, I attempt to put my model in context by describing the intellectual traditions from which it sprang—namely, self-enhancement, self-consistency, and self-verification theories. In so doing, I ignore other alternatives to self-enhancement theory and devote a disproportionate share of attention to the self-consistency and self-verification formulations. Although I fear that this will be construed as a shameless display of favoritism, my real intent is to offer consistency approaches some recognition in an era so dominated by self-enhancement theories.

## HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

### The Desire for Self-Enhancement

Behavioral scientists have always clutched the self-enhancement assumption close to their hearts. Indeed, the notion that people strive to maintain high levels of self-esteem has been endorsed by philosophers (e.g., Hobbes, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Russell), anthropologists (e.g., Becker), sociologists (e.g., Goffman, Rosenberg), and psychiatrists and psychologists (e.g., Adler, Allport, Horney, James, Koffka, McDougall, Sullivan).

Over the last several decades two distinct versions of self-enhancement theory have emerged (e.g., Shrauger, 1975). What I will refer to as "simple" self-enhancement theory suggests that all people strive to systematically promote the perception that they are worthwhile persons. What I will refer to as "compensatory" or "defensive" self-enhancement theory (Baumeister & Jones, 1978) assumes that people with negative self-concepts rarely receive positive feedback and attempt to compensate for this deficit by intensifying their efforts to acquire positive feedback (Hull, 1943). The two versions differ, then, in that the simple version assumes that all people are motivated to self-enhance to an equal degree, and the compensatory version assumes that people with negative self-views are *especially* motivated to self-enhance.<sup>1</sup>

Researchers have attributed a wide range of empirical findings to self-enhancement strivings (e.g., Jones, 1973). For example, self-enhancement strivings have been used to explain self-presentational strategies (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Jones, 1964; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980, 1985; Tedeschi & Lindskold, 1976), self-attributions (e.g., Bradley, 1978; Greenwald, 1980; Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Zuckerman, 1979), predictions of future success (e.g., Alloy & Abramson, 1988; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Weinstein, 1980), the targets to which people compare themselves (e.g., Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Tesser, 1986, 1988; Wills, 1981), and even belief change (e.g., Steele, 1988). In short, there can be little doubt that the self-enhancement motive is a potent determinant of human social behavior.

A close look at the self-enhancement literature raises three concerns, however. First, most of the evidence has supported the simple version of self-enhancement theory; the compensatory version of the theory has received relatively little support (e.g., Brown, 1986; Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988; Campbell, 1986; Shrauger, 1975; Swann, 1987; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Second, researchers who have found evidence for self-enhancement theory have generally focused on "affective" reactions to social feedback, such as emotional responses to evaluations. Little evidence of self-enhancement is typically found when "cognitive" reactions to feedback are examined, such as memory for feedback or perceptions of its accuracy (e.g., Shrauger, 1975; Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). Third, much of the research that has been taken as support for the existence of a self-enhancement motive may in reality reflect self-consistency strivings. Consider, for example, the tendency for most people to resist attempts

to apply negative labels to them. Although such resistance *might* be fueled by a desire to feel good about themselves, it could also be a manifestation of the desire for self-consistency. That is, given that most people in our society have positive conceptions of themselves, the fact that most of an unselected sample of experimental participants resist negative labels may simply reflect a desire for others to see them as they see themselves (Swann, 1987). Therefore, evidence that people work to maintain positive self-views can be handled by self-consistency or self-enhancement theory; researchers can confidently identify self-enhancement strivings as such only if they can be sure that actor possesses a negative self-concept.

In summary, although there can be little doubt that people sometimes display a preference for favorable feedback over unfavorable feedback, the psychological mechanisms that underlie this preference are unclear, as is the generality of this preference. The model presented later in this chapter is designed, in part, to address both of these issues.

### The Desire for Self-Consistency

Since Sumner (1907) discussed the "strain of consistency," there have been numerous proponents of the idea that people seek feedback that confirms their beliefs. Lecky (1945) offered what is probably the boldest and most radical self-consistency formulation. He not only argued for the existence of a unique self-consistency or "unity" motive, but granted superordinate status to this motive: "All pleasure appears to trace back to the primary motive for unification" (p. 66).

Lecky's theory can be seen as an extension of the gestalt theories of Wertheimer, Koffka, and Kohler (e.g., see Hall & Lindzey, 1970). That is, whereas the gestalt theorists argued that humans strive for order and symmetry in their *physical* worlds, Lecky suggested that people seek order and symmetry in their perceptions of *themselves* and of *social reality*. Lecky departed from gestalt theorists, however, in his holistic or organismic view of the person (e.g., Goldstein, 1939). He believed that people's idiosyncratic life histories and enduring conceptions of self channel the manner in which the gestalt principles of perceptual organization gain expression.

Of the many theorists who followed in Lecky's tradition, Festinger (1957), Heider (1958), Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955), Rosenberg (1968), and Secord and Backman (1965) were among the most visible. Like Lecky, these theorists sought to apply gestalt principles to social-psychological phenomena. With the exception of Secord and Backman, however, these theorists eschewed Lecky's emphasis on the importance of people's life histories and enduring self-conceptions. This characteristic of post-Leckyan consistency theories ultimately contributed to their demise, as is illustrated by the history of the most prominent of these theories, Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance.

Festinger was interested in what happens when people realize that one of their cognitions is inconsistent with (i.e., does not logically follow from) one or more other cognitions. For instance, he supposed that dissonance would be

aroused if a man believed that it was raining, despite the fact that he remained perfectly dry. He suggested further that dissonance is unpleasant and that people will work to reduce it by modifying relevant cognitions. The dry man who believed he was caught in a downpour, for example, might try to convince himself that it was not really raining or that he actually was getting wet (p. 14).

Students of dissonance theory generated a vast and rich literature that offered support for various aspects of the formulation (e.g., Aronson, 1968; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). Unfortunately, as the research findings poured in, it became increasingly apparent that a pristine need for cognitive consistency would not of itself fuel the counterintuitive and compelling social behaviors that dissonance researchers were bent on studying: Something was needed to "warm up" the need for consistency. Although the precise nature of the "something" inspired years of debate—some investigators pointed to behavioral commitment, whereas others suggested ego investment or knowledge of consequences—the "something" that eventually emerged was none other than the desire for self-enhancement (e.g., Aronson, 1968; Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Greenwald & Ronnis, 1978; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). This was bad news for the theory, for it introduced overlap between dissonance theory and the self-enhancement theories it had eclipsed: "The long and the short of it may be that the dissonance literature chiefly concerns the psychology of what people do to recover from experimentally engineered major embarrassments" (Abelson, 1983, p. 43; see also Greenwald & Ronnis, 1978).

To be sure, there were some valiant efforts to rescue dissonance phenomena from the clutches of the self-enhancement usurpers. In particular, Aronson (1968; Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962) articulated and tested a provocative version of dissonance theory that placed the motivational burden squarely on the shoulders of cognitive-consistency strivings. *Contrary* to self-enhancement theory, he suggested that people with negative self-views would prefer a consistent negative world to an inconsistent positive one. "If a person conceives of himself as a 'schnook,' he will expect to behave like a 'schnook.' One of the advantages of this kind of statement is that it allows us to separate the effects of dissonance from other hedonic effects" (1968, pp. 27-28).

But if Aronson knew precisely what was needed to save dissonance theory from an untimely death, he failed to get the word to subjects in the relevant experiments. A widely cited exception to this generalization was a clever experiment he conducted with Carlsmith (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962). The experimenter asked subjects to determine whether a series of people pictured in photographs suffered from schizophrenia. After each of 100 trials, he delivered either positive or negative feedback to subjects. The crucial group of subjects received exclusively negative feedback throughout the study, followed by positive feedback on the last 20 trials. Shortly thereafter, the experimenter indicated that there had been an oversight, and asked subjects to take the final 20 trials of the test again. The major dependent variable was the extent to which subjects modified their responses to the last set of trials. The results were striking: Those who received unexpectedly positive feedback were particularly likely to under-

mine their outcomes by modifying their responses on the last set of trials! Apparently, the positive feedback aroused dissonance, causing subjects to modify their responses so they could obtain the negative feedback they expected.

If Aronson and Carlsmith's findings had proven to be robust, they may well have prevented researchers from concluding that dissonance theory was nothing more than a cleverly disguised version of self-enhancement theory. This was not to be: At last count (Dipboye, 1977), only 4 of 17 attempts to replicate Aronson and Carlsmith's findings had succeeded. This rather dismal track record was enough to convince most people that Aronson's (1968) version of dissonance theory was not tenable, and, more generally, that in a fair fight self-consistency striving were no match for self-enhancement strivings. Not surprisingly, then, many contemporary theorists tend either to subsume self-consistency strivings within a self-enhancement perspective (e.g., Backman, 1988; Schlenker, 1985; Steele, 1988) or to ignore them altogether.

Although the checkered history of the Aronson and Carlsmith study might give pause to even the staunchest advocate of cognitive-consistency strivings, I think this history says more about the frailties of the particular phenomenon they examined than it does about the limitations of consistency strivings. Influenced by the Festingerian-Lewinian emphasis on the importance of experimental control and associated disdain for personological or "class" variables (see Allport, 1937, p. 364, for a perspective on Lewin's views), Aronson and his followers tacitly assumed that the only inputs people consider in their quest for consistency are those given to them by the experimenter. They accordingly sought to *manipulate* self-views by presenting participants with unfavorable feedback regarding their ability to diagnose schizophrenics.

Although this tact of manipulating self-views is methodologically appealing, it is effective only insofar as people have no basis for evaluating themselves on the attribute being manipulated. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. Participants in Aronson and Carlsmith's paradigm, for example, presumably had a lifetime of experience as person perceivers on which they could draw in interpreting the feedback that they received from the experimenter.<sup>2</sup> Given that people generally believe that they are quite capable person perceivers (e.g., Swann, 1987), most of the subjects were probably somewhat incredulous when they received negative feedback; at any rate, it is unlikely that they suddenly became invested in maintaining the belief that they were inept. From this perspective, the fact that Aronson and Carlsmith's manipulation was *ever* successful probably says more about the extraordinary skill of those investigators who made it work than it does about the relative ease of manipulating self-conceptions.

If Aronson erred, then, it was not in assuming that people would work to confirm negative self-views in the service of self-consistency; rather, it was in his implicit assumption that the typical experimenter could reliably bring people to become highly invested in negative self-views through a laboratory manipulation. If so, then, under what conditions *do* people become so invested in their negative conceptions of self that they work to confirm these conceptions? It was in an effort to answer this question that I developed the self-verification formulation.

## THE SELF-VERIFICATION FORMULATION

Self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987) is a consistency formulation, in that it assumes, like dissonance and balance theories, that people are embarked on a quest for cognitive symmetry. The self-verification formulation departs from these theories, however, in its analysis of the processes that fuel and organize this quest. In particular, self-verification theory assumes that people want to confirm their self-views *not* as an end in itself, but as a means of bolstering their perception that the world is predictable and controllable. From this perspective, self-verification processes are "warmed up" by a desire for prediction and control (rather than, e.g., a desire for self-enhancement). Moreover, self-verification theory assumes that, in their efforts to exert control over their current situation, people rely heavily on their chronic views of self. In this respect, self-verification theory is akin to Lecky's (1945) organismic theory, Secord and Backman's (1965) interpersonal congruency theory, and Epstein's (1985, in press) cognitive-experiential self-theory.

Self-verification theory also departs from previous consistency theories in its assumptions regarding the generality of self-consistency phenomena. With a few exceptions (e.g., Epstein, in press), theorists who embrace consistency principles have assumed that self-consistency is an "equal-opportunity" motive, a motive that does not discriminate among measures falling into different response classes. Because self-verification strivings presumably grow out of conceptual analyses designed to make the world seem predictable and controllable, it follows that responses associated with such conceptual analyses should be more heavily influenced by self-verification strivings than those that are not (see also Epstein, in press). In what follows, I therefore examine more closely the nature of the conceptual analyses that underlie self-verification.

### Origins of Self-Verification

One of children's first tasks is to make sense of their worlds. To this end, they observe their own behavior (e.g., Bem, 1972), the reactions of others to them (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979), and the relation of their own performances to those of others (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Tesser, 1988). Eventually, they translate these observations into conceptions of themselves and their worlds (e.g., Epstein, 1973; Mead, 1934).

Soon after people form self-conceptions and become reasonably certain of them, they become invested in preserving these conceptions by eliciting self-verifying feedback. Like most robust psychological phenomena, the desire for self-verification is probably multiply determined or even overdetermined. At a general level, however, I believe that self-verification processes are driven by people's desire to maximize their perceptions of predictability and control. The desire for prediction and control presumably grows out of interpersonal (pragmatic) considerations as well as intrapsychic (epistemic) ones. From an epistemic perspective, stable self-conceptions act like the rudder of a ship, bolstering people's confidence

in their ability to navigate through the sometimes murky seas of everyday life (cf. Epstein, 1973; Kelly, 1955; Lecky, 1945; Mead, 1934; Secord & Backman, 1965). For this reason, events that confirm people's self-conceptions fortify their feelings of security, and events that disconfirm their self-conceptions engender fear that they may not know themselves after all.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of bringing others to verify one's self-views can also be understood from a *pragmatic* perspective. Social interaction is in large measure predicated on an implicit agreement that people will honor identities to which they have laid claim (e.g., Athay & Darley, 1981; Carson, 1969; Goffman, 1959; Jones, 1964; Swann, 1984). Therefore, they should work to ensure that others do not form overly negative appraisals (which could cause others to patronize them, or to accuse them of false modesty) or overly positive appraisals (which could cause others to expect too much of them, or to place extravagant demands upon them).

In short, just as being perceived in a self-congruent manner may promote perceptions of control and grease the wheels of social interaction, being perceived in an incongruent manner may invite psychological and interpersonal anarchy. For these and other reasons, people should be motivated to ensure that others see them as they see themselves—even if it means bringing others to recognize their flaws and limitations (cf. Baumeister, Hamilton, & Tice, 1985; Baumgardner & Brownlee, 1987).

If the desire for prediction and control is truly fundamental, one would expect that it would manifest itself in many aspects of cognitive and emotional functioning. The research literature supports this proposition. Research on the effects of "mere exposure" (e.g., Zajonc, 1968; for a review, see Harrison, 1977), for example, suggests that there exists a relatively primitive, nonconscious preference for familiar and predictable phenomena. As a result, exposure to entities or people makes them more attractive, presumably because exposure makes them more familiar and predictable. This effect holds even when people cannot recognize the stimuli consciously (e.g., Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980).

People's desire for predictability also seems to skew their hypothesis-testing activities. When asked to test hypotheses about physical objects (e.g., Wason & Johnson-Laird, 1972) or other people (e.g., Snyder & Swann, 1978), people preferentially search for evidence that is likely to confirm rather than disconfirm their hypotheses. Presumably, such hypothesis-testing strategies reflect the fact that people regard positive or confirmatory instances of phenomena as particularly trustworthy, diagnostic, and easy to process (e.g., Bruner, Goodnow, & Austin, 1956; Klayman & Ha, 1987). In any event, this preference for positive instances of phenomena even seems to color their perceptions of self-relevant information. For example, people rate information that confirms their self-conceptions as more diagnostic than information that disconfirms their self-conceptions (Swann & Read, 1981a, Study 3).

A conscious preference for the familiar over the unfamiliar seems to influence various other decision-making strategies as well. For example, Kahneman and Tversky (1983) have shown that people prefer receiving \$800 over taking an



85% chance of winning \$1,000, despite the fact that the gamble has a higher mathematical likelihood of paying off (i.e., \$850). Apparently, people are very unwilling to risk losing a sure or familiar thing—perhaps even a relationship partner who thinks poorly of them—even when taking such a risk would enhance the expected value of a payoff.

So basic are perceptions of predictability and control to living organisms that animals even seem to suffer when these perceptions are threatened. A study by Pavlov (1927) illustrates this principle. He began by feeding dogs while presenting an image of a circle, but not when presenting an image of an ellipse. After a few trials, the dogs could readily discriminate the two shapes, as shown by increased salivation when the circle was presented. Later, however, the experimenter presented a new series of ellipses that became increasingly circular. As the dogs began having difficulty discriminating the ellipse from the circle, they displayed a series of "neurotic" behaviors. Not only did they lose their ability to make the original circle-ellipse discriminations that they had mastered earlier; they began thrashing about, baring their teeth, and barking violently. Furthermore, their condition persisted even after they were taken to rest farms, leading Pavlov to conclude that they had suffered an "animal neurosis" (p. 291). Apparently, when the dogs recognized that their conceptual schemes were not up to the task at hand, their "faith" in these schemes collapsed, and psychological and emotional disorganization resulted (cf. Epstein, 1981; Lecky, 1945).

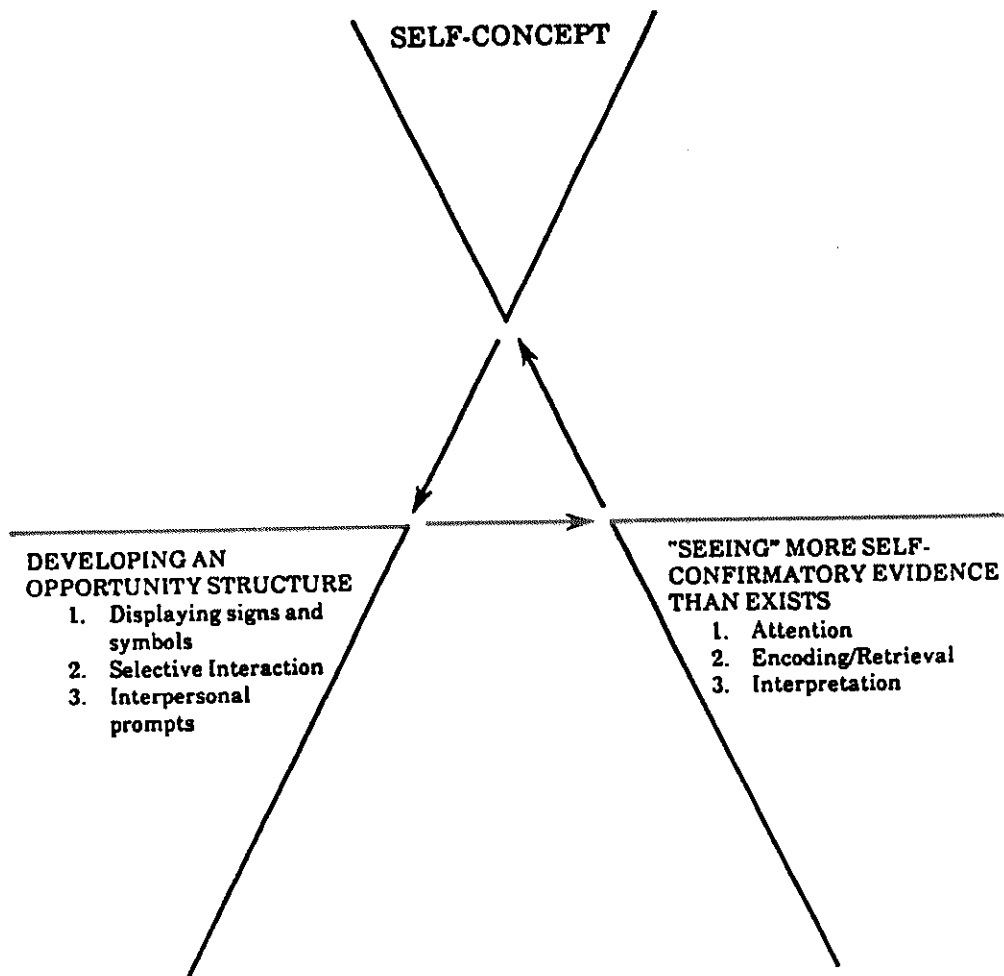
In short, there are sound reasons to believe that all organisms are strongly motivated to maintain their perception that the world is predictable and controllable. Given that self-conceptions are theoretically crucial to maintaining such perceptions (e.g., Epstein, 1973; Mead, 1934), people should think and behave in ways that promote the survival of their self-conceptions—even if their self-views happen to be negative. The research literature supports this proposition. For example, we (Swann & Read, 1981b) found that whether we examined looking time, overt interaction, or the extent to which participants paid attention to feedback, we encountered a clear preference for self-confirmatory feedback. Three additional investigations (Swann & Read, 1981a) showed that both males and females solicited self-confirmatory feedback preferentially. Furthermore, this was true whether the feedback pertained to valenced or neutral self-concepts. People were undaunted in their quest for self-confirmatory feedback even when they had reason to believe that it would make them depressed (Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1990) and even when they had to spend their own money to get it (Swann & Read, 1981a).

This evidence that people are motivated to verify their self-views is immune to several rival hypotheses. For example, the notion that people seek self-confirmatory feedback simply as a means of self-improvement or reducing uncertainty (Trope, 1979, 1986) is undermined by evidence that they are more inclined to verify self-views of which they are certain (e.g., Maracek & Mettee, 1972; Pelham, 1989; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988). Similarly, the idea that people self-verify simply to avoid interaction partners who seem

imperceptive is weakened by evidence that people seek self-verifying *feedback* as well as self-verifying interaction partners (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989; Swann et al., 1990; Swann & Read, 1981a). The question remaining, then, is not *whether* people prefer self-confirmatory feedback, but *how* they translate this preference into thought and action.

### Strategies of Self-Verification

The specific activities through which people manifest their desire for self-verifying feedback fall into two distinct classes (e.g., Swann, 1983, 1987). As can be seen in Figure 12.1, the first class of activities consists of the behavioral activities through which people strive to influence the reactions of others. Specifically,



**FIGURE 12.1** Self-verification processes. From "The Self as Architect of Social Reality" by W. B. Swann, Jr., 1985, in B. Schlenker (Ed.), *The Self and Social Life* (pp. 100-125), New York: McGraw-Hill. Copyright 1985 by McGraw-Hill Book Co. Reprinted by permission.

people work to create around themselves self-confirmatory social environments—that is, environments that provide them with support for their self-views (e.g., McCall & Simmons, 1966).

The second class of self-verification strategies contains the cognitive processes through which people's self-conceptions systematically distort their perceptions of social reality. In particular, people's thought processes produce the illusion of a social environment that is far more supportive of their self-views than is warranted by the objective evidence. I consider first the behavioral processes through which people alter the nature of the feedback available to them.

#### *Developing a Self-Confirmatory Social Environment*

Many biologists and ecologists have noticed that every living organism inhabits a "niche" that routinely satisfies its needs and desires (e.g., Clarke, 1954; Odum, 1963; Wilson, 1974). Human beings are no exception to this rule. Specifically, out of a concern for self-verification, people work to construct social environments that provide them with a steady diet of self-confirmatory feedback (McCall & Simmons, 1966).

In their efforts to construct self-verifying social environments, people may engage in three distinct sets of activities: They may strategically choose interaction partners and social settings; that may display identity cues; and they may adopt interaction strategies that evoke self-confirmatory responses (Swann, 1983, 1987). I consider each of these strategies in turn.

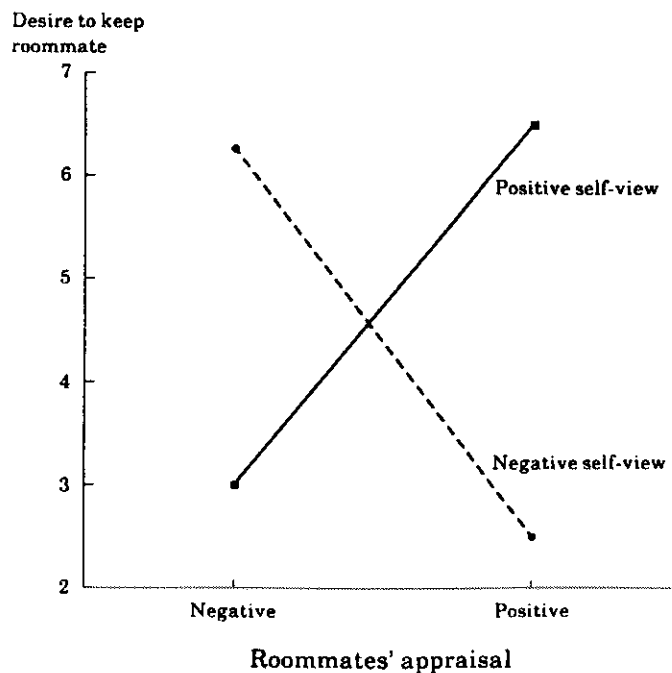
**SELECTIVE INTERACTION** The notion that people seek social contexts that provide them with self-confirmatory feedback has been around for several decades (e.g., Secord & Backman, 1965; Wachtel, 1973, 1977). Until recently, however, much of the evidence for this hypothesis has been correlational in nature. Pervin and Rubin (1967), for example, found that students tended to drop out of school if they wound up in colleges that were incompatible with their self-views (see also Backman & Secord, 1962; Broxton, 1963; Newcomb, 1956).

Recent laboratory investigations have shown that people with negative self-views prefer interaction partners who unfavorably appraise them over those who favorably appraise them. For example, we (Swann et al., 1989) told some participants (targets) that two others (perceivers) had evaluated them on performance dimensions that targets had previously identified as their "worst" attribute (e.g., athletic ability, physical appearance, etc.). One perceiver offered an unfavorable evaluation and the other offered a favorable evaluation. Targets chose to interact with the unfavorable, self-verifying perceiver rather than with the favorable, non-self-verifying one.

In a somewhat similar vein, we (Swann et al., 1990) had depressed people choose between an interaction partner who thought poorly of them and one who thought well of them. We found that highly depressed people (but not mildly dysphoric ones) displayed a clear preference for negative evaluators over positive ones.

We (Swann & Pelham, 1988) showed that this tendency for people to prefer self-verifying interaction partners manifests itself in their choice of actual relationship partners. For example, targets were particularly inclined to remain in relationships with college roommates whose appraisals of them were congruent with their self-views and to drop roommates whose appraisals were incongruent with their self-views. The means plotted in Figure 12.2 show that this tendency was *symmetrical* with respect to self-concept. That is, just as targets with positive self-conceptions were poised to flee from highly unfavorable roommates, so too were targets with negative self-views inclined to flee from highly favorable roommates. Subsidiary analyses helped rule out several alternative explanations of this finding: The effects were *not* due to a tendency for targets in congruent relationships to be more similar to one another, to engage in more self-disclosure, or to spend more time with their roommates. Furthermore, the roommates for whom targets displayed a preference perceived them negatively not merely in a specific sense, but in a global sense as well. That is, these preferred roommates not only rated targets low on specific attributes; they also rated targets as relatively "worthless."

In two complementary investigations (Swann & Pelham, 1990), people



**FIGURE 12.2** Selective interaction. From *The Social Construction of Identity: Self-Verification through Friend and Intimate Selection* by W. B. Swann, Jr., and B. W. Pelham, 1988, unpublished manuscript, University of Texas–Austin. Reprinted by permission of the authors.

involved in friendship relationships also showed a strong preference for congruent partners than people involved in roommate relationships. These investigations also revealed that only people who were highly certain of their negative self-views preferred unfavorable partners; those who were uncertain of their self-views displayed either a preference for favorable partners or no preference whatsoever. Apparently, as people become more certain of their self-conceptions, they are more inclined to rely on these conceptions to organize their experiences, predict future events, and guide behavior. For this reason, high certainty is associated with intensified efforts to self-verify through selective interaction.<sup>4</sup>

We (Swann & Pelham, 1990) also ruled out several additional alternative explanations of the self-verification effect. There was no evidence that people with negative self-views chose relationship partners who thought poorly of them as a means of improving themselves, or as a means of obtaining specific negative appraisals coupled with global acceptance; nor did they do so because they took expressions of favorability as signs of dull-wittedness or imperceptiveness.

Taken together, these data offer fairly clear evidence that people gravitate toward social relationships in which they think they will receive self-confirmatory feedback. An important characteristic of this selective interaction strategy is that once people enter a particular social relationship or institution, legal contracts and social pressures tend to keep them there. The power of such contractual arrangements is particularly salient in the case of marriage. Nevertheless, even dating couples are sometimes pressed by friends and family to maintain their relationships. From this vantage point, selective interaction strategies of self-verification often lock people into interpersonal feedback systems that are self-sustaining as well as self-verifying.

**DISPLAYING IDENTITY CUES** Another way in which people can succeed in laying claim to a particular identity is by "looking the part." To be effective, identity cues must meet two criteria: They must be under the person's control, and they must characteristically evoke desired responses from others.

Physical appearance represents a particularly salient class of identity cues. The clothes one wears, for example, can be used to tell others whether one is liberal or conservative, wealthy or destitute, easygoing or meticulous, prudish or promiscuous. Similarly, through the skillful use of cosmetics and wigs, people can project dramatically different identities to onlookers. Even body posture and demeanor may be used to communicate various identities to others. Take, for example, the teenager who radiates anomie, the "punk" who projects danger, or the new father who exudes naiveté in the hope of avoiding responsibility.

If motivated enough, people may actually modify their body structure to convey various identities to others. Self-perceived athletes, for example, may diet and lift weights to keep their muscles bulging. Aging people may employ an array of contrivances designed to keep their youthful appearances alive: liposuction for the belly, implants for the breasts, and a plethora of potions for restoring the splendor of hair to balding pates. There is hope even for those who are squeamish

about surgery or dubious about drugs, for material possessions may also serve to signal people's identities to others. The cars people drive, the homes they live in, and the trophies they display in their dens may all be used to tell others who they are and how they expect to be treated (see also Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980).

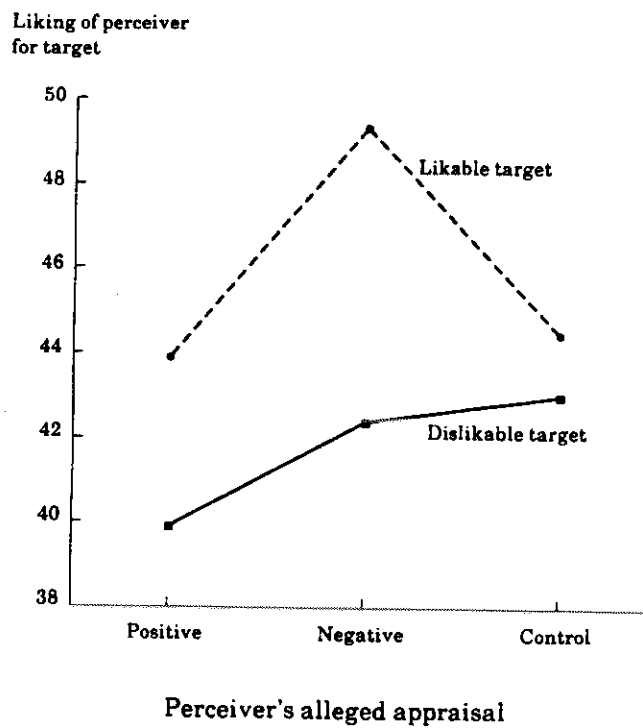
If such physical contrivances do not suffice, people may ensure that they are understood by relying on social conventions such as titles and occupational labels. In this way, before they even open their mouths, people can tell others a great deal about the identities they wish to assume.

**INTERPERSONAL PROMPTS** Even if people fail to gain self-confirmatory feedback through selective interaction, they may still acquire such feedback by adopting appropriate interaction strategies. We (Swann et al., 1990), for example, found that mildly depressed college students were more likely to solicit unfavorable feedback from their roommates than were nondepressed students. Moreover, students' efforts to acquire unfavorable feedback seem to have borne fruit: The more unfavorable feedback they solicited in the middle of the semester, the more their roommates were inclined to derogate them and to plan to terminate the relationship at the end of the semester (see also Coyne, 1976; Coyne et al., 1987).

If people are motivated to bring others to verify their self-conceptions, they should *intensify* their efforts to elicit self-confirmatory reactions when they suspect that they are misconstrued. We (Swann & Read, 1981b, Study 2) tested this proposition. The experimenter began by informing targets who perceived themselves as either likeable or dislikeable that they would be interacting with perceivers who had already formed impressions of them. Some targets learned that the perceiver had positive regard for them; some learned that the perceiver had negative regard for them; and still others learned nothing of the perceivers' evaluation of them.

There was an overall tendency for targets to elicit reactions that confirmed their self-views (see also Curtis & Miller, 1986). More important, the means in Figure 12.3 show that this tendency was especially pronounced when targets suspected that perceivers' appraisals might *disconfirm* their self-conceptions. Targets who thought of themselves as likeable elicited particularly favorable reactions when they thought perceivers disliked them, and targets who thought of themselves as dislikeable elicited particularly unfavorable reactions when they suspected that perceivers liked them. In short, targets were especially inclined to elicit self-confirmatory feedback from perceivers when they suspected that perceivers' appraisals were incompatible with their self-views (see also Hilton & Darley, 1985).

We (Swann & Hill, 1982) obtained a similar pattern of results, using a different procedural paradigm and dimension of the self-concept (dominance). Targets began by playing a game with a confederate in which each player alternately assumed the dominant "leader" role or the submissive "assistant" role. During a break in the game, the experimenter asked the players to decide who should be the leader for the next set of games. This was the confederate's cue to



**FIGURE 12.3** Self-verification through interaction. Based on data from Swann and Read (1981b).

deliver feedback to the participant. In some conditions, the confederate said that the participant seemed dominant; in other conditions, the confederate asserted that the participant seemed submissive. If the feedback confirmed targets' self-conceptions, they seemed to passively accept the confederate's appraisal. If the feedback *dis*confirmed their self-conceptions, however, targets vehemently resisted the feedback and sought to demonstrate that they were not the persons the confederate made them out to be. Thus self-conceived dominants labeled as submissive became all the more dominant, and self-conceived submissives labeled as dominant became especially submissive.

An interesting feature of this study was that some people behaviorally resisted the discrepant feedback more than others. We (Swann & Ely, 1984) speculated that such differences in resistance might be due to differences in the extent to which people were certain of their self-conceptions. Specifically, we reasoned that increments in self-concept certainty would be associated with heightened investment in verifying such views, which would in turn lead to greater resistance in the face of disconfirmation.<sup>5</sup> To test this hypothesis, we (Swann & Ely, 1984) had perceivers interview targets who were either certain or uncertain of their self-conceived extraversion. They led perceivers to develop an expectancy about targets that was discrepant with the self-conceptions of targets.

This situation created the potential for a "battle of wills," with perceivers' experimentally manipulated beliefs vying against targets' chronic self-views.

Consistent with earlier research (Snyder & Swann, 1978; see also Swann & Giuliano, 1987; Swann et al., 1988), perceivers acted on their expectancies by soliciting responses that would confirm their own expectancies but *disconfirm* targets' self-conceptions. For example, perceivers who believed that the target was an extravert often asked questions such as "Do you like to go to lively parties?" Targets who were low in self-certainty generally answered in ways that confirmed perceivers' expectancies (but disconfirmed their own self-conceptions) when perceivers were highly certain of their expectancies. In contrast, targets who were high in self-certainty actively resisted the questions (regardless of the perceivers' level of certainty), thereby bringing perceivers' expectancies into harmony with their self-views. Thus, as long as targets were high in self-certainty, self-verification "won" over behavioral confirmation in the battle of wills. (For a further discussion of factors that influence the outcome of such battles, see Swann, 1987.)

Maracek and Mettee (1972) illustrated the importance of self-certainty in an achievement context. They recruited a group of people who possessed low self-esteem and were either low or high in self-certainty. The experimenter provided everyone with success feedback and then monitored their subsequent performance. There was no evidence of self-verification among persons who were low in certainty: They always sought to elicit highly positive evaluations by striving to perform well. In contrast, those who were high in self-certainty displayed substantial self-verification strivings. Apparently, those high in self-certainty regarded their success as a threat to their negative self-concepts and sought to bolster their conviction in their own incompetence by performing poorly. These data may help to explain why the Aronson and Carlsmith (1962) study has been so difficult to replicate: People work to maintain negative self-views *only* when these views are chronic self-conceptions of which they are certain.

Together, these findings suggest that targets work to bring perceivers to see them as they see themselves. As effective as such efforts may often be, however, people may sometimes fail to create a self-confirmatory opportunity structure through their *behavioral* self-verification strategies. When these self-verification strategies fail, the survival of people's self-views may hinge on the effectiveness of the three *cognitive* self-verification strategies described next.

#### *Seeing More Self-Confirmatory Evidence than Actually Exists*

Researchers have shown that expectancies in general and self-conceptions in particular can exert a powerful channeling influence on information processing (for reviews, see Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984). This finding suggests that self-conceptions may guide the processing of social feedback so as to promote their own survival.

**SELECTIVE ATTENTION** To the extent that people are motivated to acquire self-confirmatory feedback, they should be especially attentive to it. We (Swann &



Read, 1981b, Study 1) tested this hypothesis. Targets who perceived themselves as likeable or dislikeable learned that a perceiver had evaluated them. Some targets were led to suspect that the perceiver had formed a favorable impression of them; others were led to suspect that the perceiver had formed an unfavorable impression of them. All were then given an opportunity to examine some remarks that the perceiver had ostensibly made about them—remarks that were sufficiently vague and general as to apply to anyone.

The results showed that targets spent longer scrutinizing the remarks of the evaluator when they anticipated that the remarks would confirm rather than disconfirm their self-conceptions. That is, just as those self-perceived as likeable spent the most time looking when they expected the remarks would be favorable, those self-perceived as dislikeable spent the most time looking when they expected the remarks would be unfavorable. Hence, it appears that people are more attentive to social feedback when they suspect that it will confirm their chronic self-views (for related demonstrations, see Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987).

**SELECTIVE ENCODING AND RETRIEVAL** Just as people may preferentially attend to self-confirmatory feedback, they may also encode and recall it selectively. Crary (1966) and Silverman (1964), for example, reported that people tended to recall more incidental information about experimental tasks in which they received self-confirmatory rather than self-discrepant feedback. Moreover, other research suggests that self-conceptions channel the *type* as well as the *amount* of feedback people recall. We (Swann & Read, 1981b, Study 3), for example, had targets who saw themselves as likeable or dislikeable listen to a perceiver make a series of positive and negative statements about them. Some targets expected that the statements would be generally positive; others expected that the statements would be generally negative. After a brief delay, targets attempted to recall as many of the statements as possible.

Overall, targets who perceived themselves as likeable remembered more positive than negative statements, and those who perceived themselves as dislikeable remembered more negative than positive statements. In addition, this tendency to recall more self-confirmatory statements than self-disconfirmatory statements was greatest when targets anticipated that the perceiver's statements would confirm their self-conceptions.<sup>6</sup>

**SELECTIVE INTERPRETATION** When people receive feedback, they may ask themselves, "Is the feedback valid? Is the source of feedback reliable and trustworthy? What implications does the feedback have in light of what I know about myself? The research literature suggests that people typically supply answers to these questions that promote the survival of their self-views.

At least three independent investigations have demonstrated that people will endorse the validity of feedback only if it fits with their self-conceptions (Crary, 1966; Korman, 1968; Markus, 1977). Similarly, Shrauger and Lund (1975) reported that people expressed relatively more confidence in the perceptiveness of

an evaluator when his impression confirmed their self-conceptions. We (Swann et al., 1987) replicated this effect and also found that people tended to attribute self-confirmatory feedback to characteristics of themselves and self-disconfirmatory feedback to the source of the feedback.

Together, the attentional, encoding, retrieval, and interpretational processes described in this section may prove formidable adversaries for self-discrepant feedback. This may be one reason why people's self-conceptions sometimes conflict with the actual appraisals of others (e.g., Felson, 1981a, 1981b) and, more specifically, why people overestimate the extent to which the appraisals of their friends and acquaintances confirm their self-conceptions (Miyamoto & Dornbusch, 1956; Orpen & Bush, 1974; Sherwood, 1967; Walhood & Klopfer, 1971). The fact that these cognitive self-verification strategies can lead to such misconceptions suggests that it is important that they do not work *too* well, since they may blind targets to perceivers' actual appraisals of them. In fact, if targets' misconceptions are serious enough, perceivers may avoid them (or, in extreme cases, recommend that they find their way to a therapist).

In closing this section, I would like to highlight some of the more important differences between the behavioral processes through which people create self-verifying social environments and those cognitive processes through which they "see" their social environments as offering more support than is warranted by the objective evidence. One difference is the sense in which the behavioral and cognitive activities are motivated by a desire to self-verify. For example, to some it might seem that behavioral resistance to self-discrepant feedback is evidence of a self-verification motive, but that selective recall of self-confirmatory feedback is produced by an "automatic" or "schematic" processing bias rather than by a self-verification motive.

Such concerns raise a host of heady issues, including the criteria that should be used to distinguish a motivated behavior from a nonmotivated one—issues that are obviously well beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, let me identify two reasons why at least some instances of selective attention, recall, and interpretation should be construed as manifestations of the desire to self-verify. First, some selective attention and recall processes are apparently produced by a tendency for the *anticipation* of self-confirming feedback to energize cognitive activity. In our (Swann & Read, 1981b) studies, for example, people looked at feedback longer (Study 1) and were more inclined to recall it (Study 3) when they suspected that it would confirm their self-views. Apparently, when people believe that self-confirmatory feedback is available, they intensify their efforts to acquire it through cognitive as well as behavioral activities.

In addition, even if a particular instance of information processing can be attributed to the structure of people's thought processes rather than to the vigor with which they engage those structures, self-verification processes may have been responsible for the formation of those structures in the first place. Thus, for example, a woman may preferentially recall feedback confirming her belief that she is an intellectual, because her success in eliciting such feedback in the past has

led her to develop a finely honed concept of herself as an intellectual. In such instances, although memory structures may provide a *proximal* explanation for preferential recall, the *ultimate* explanation may be the self-verification activities that have led to the formation of those memory structures. This example brings us to the distinction between routine and crisis self-verification.

### Routine versus Crisis Self-Verification

Most of us spend most of our time with people who have implicitly or explicitly agreed to honor the identities we have negotiated with them (e.g., Boissevain, 1974; Goffman, 1959; Swann & Predmore, 1985). Therefore, the bulk of the reactions people receive every day will be essentially preprogrammed, which means that people will rarely need to demonstrate that they want to be respected or coddled or dominated because their interaction partners will already know this. All they need to do is to remain in their self-verifying social environments, and their self-views will rarely be challenged.

Because of the automatic nature of such chronic self-verification activities, it is tempting to divorce them from the self and self-verification. This is a mistake, because *initially* people may have selected or "trained" their partners with an eye to acquiring self-confirmatory feedback. It is therefore perfectly appropriate to regard such routine self-verification activities as expressions of the self-concept and the desire to self-verify.

But if it is appropriate to regard such routine activities as members of a larger class of self-verification activities, it is also important to distinguish them from more active, "crisis" self-verification activities. Crisis self-verification activities differ from the relatively automatic, nonreflective activities that characterize routine self-verification, in that they involve self-focused attention and relatively specific and concerted efforts to elicit self-confirmatory reactions.

Probably the most common antecedent of crisis self-verification is the receipt of discrepant feedback. People may respond to such feedback in two ways. First, they may focus attention on the self-conception that has been threatened. Second, they may increase their efforts to learn about themselves by acquiring information that will be highly informative and diagnostic (e.g., Swann, Stephenson, & Pittman, 1981). Because people regard self-confirmatory feedback as particularly diagnostic (Swann & Read, 1981a), such intensified efforts to acquire *diagnostic* feedback will translate into attempts to acquire *self-confirmatory* feedback—that is, to self-verify.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I present research that shows each of these processes at work.

Hill and I (Swann & Hill, 1986) illustrated that self-discrepant feedback causes people to focus attention onto relevant self-conceptions. Participants who perceived themselves as either emotional or unemotional were given "diagnoses," ostensibly written by student clinicians, that either confirmed or disconfirmed their self-views. A baseline control group received no feedback. Participants then moved to a different room for a "second experiment." Here the experimenter asked them to decide whether or not a series of adjectives described them. Some of

the adjectives were emotionally-related; others were not. As participants made each judgment, the experimenter surreptitiously recorded their response latency.

As expected, the results revealed that those who received self-discrepant feedback were faster in making self-descriptive judgments than those who received either no feedback or self-confirmatory feedback. Furthermore, this pattern of results occurred only for the emotionally-related adjectives; the feedback manipulation had no impact on reaction times to the neutral adjectives. Apparently, self-discrepant feedback induced people to retrieve information relevant to the self-conception from memory, thereby making that information more cognitively accessible (e.g., Fazio, 1986; Higgins & King, 1981; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).

To the extent that self-discrepant feedback makes people's self-conceptions more accessible, it should increase the probability that these self-conceptions guide subsequent behavior (e.g., Carver, 1975; Gibbons, 1978; Snyder & Swann, 1976; Wegner & Giuliano, 1982). This may explain why participants in the Swann and Hill (1982) and Swann and Read (1981b, Study 2) studies discussed earlier were most inclined to behave in a self-confirmatory manner when they were presented with self-discrepant feedback. From this perspective, the self-discrepant feedback apparently made their self-conceptions more cognitively accessible, in turn increasing the probability that they would act on these conceptions by behaving in a manner that elicited self-confirmatory reactions. (See also Fazio's [1986] analysis of the conditions under which attitudes guide behavior.)

Crisis self-verification may also emerge when people must make a decision with far-reaching implications (e.g., choosing a career, marriage partner, or home). Like discrepant feedback, such decisions focus attention on the self, but on a slightly different aspect of the self. That is, instead of causing people to ask, "Who am I?", highly consequential decisions often encourage people to ask, "Who am I and what does this suggest for the person I will become?" (see Markus & Nurius, 1986). In many ways, this question highlights one of the self-verifier's greatest struggles: reconciling the desire for stable self-conceptions with the fact that most of us must assume somewhat different identities over the course of our lives. I do not address this issue here, as I have dealt with it elsewhere (Swann, 1983, 1985, 1987). Rather, now that I have covered the essentials of self-verification theory, it is time to turn to the other great struggle with which self-verifiers must deal: that between the desire to self-enhance and the desire to self-verify.

### **BEYOND THE "MINE'S BIGGER" APPROACH TO THE SELF-ENHANCEMENT VERSUS SELF-VERIFICATION DEBATE**

For people with positive self-views, favorable feedback is both self-enhancing and self-verifying, and thus the fact that such people prefer favorable over unfavorable feedback is consistent with both self-enhancement and self-verification theories. The two theories make competing predictions, however, regarding the behavior of people with negative self-views. Whereas the simple form of self-enhancement theory predicts that people with negative self-views should prefer favorable

feedback, self-verification theory suggests that they should prefer unfavorable feedback.

Advocates of the two theories, enticed by the promise of a good fight, have taken up the challenge to eliminate the opposition. Some have attempted to subsume the opposing theory within their own framework. Lecky (1945), for example, argued that all self-enhancement strivings are *ultimately* in the service of self-consistency. Similarly, some (e.g., Backman, 1988; Schlenker, 1985; Steele, 1988) have suggested that self-consistency strivings are, in the final analysis, produced by a desire for self-enhancement. However parsimonious they may be, these efforts are rather like supposing that people sleep so that they can enjoy their next meal: Although there is surely some truth to them, they seem neither psychologically compelling nor empirically falsifiable.

Trope (1986) has also sought to embrace evidence of self-enhancement and self-verification within a single framework by suggesting that such behaviors are motivated by a desire to reduce uncertainty. His formulation has two limitations. First, as formulated, it deals with achievement behavior only. Second, it suggests that people who are uncertain of their self-views should be more inclined to seek self-verifying feedback than those who are certain of their self-views, when in fact the opposite is true.

Shrauger (1975) offered what is perhaps the most fruitful attempt to reconcile evidence of self-enhancement and self-verification. He acknowledged that people are motivated to self-enhance as well as self-verify; he went on to suggest that "affective" responses (e.g., feelings about feedback) conform to self-enhancement theory and that "cognitive" responses (e.g., retention and appraisal of feedback) conform to self-consistency (or self-verification) theory. Subsequent research has generally supported Shrauger's thesis (e.g., McFarlin & Blascovitch, 1981; Moreland & Sweeney, 1984). For example, when my colleagues and I (Swann et al., 1987) presented participants with either favorable or unfavorable social feedback, participants with negative self-concepts indicated that unfavorable feedback was more self-descriptive than favorable feedback (as suggested by self-verification theory), but that it also made them depressed (as suggested by self-enhancement theory).

However insightful it may be, the power of Shrauger's distinction between affective and cognitive measures is ultimately limited by ambiguity inherent in the terms themselves (e.g., Buck, 1985; Epstein, 1985; Lazarus, 1984; Zajonc, 1984). That is, because any two psychologists are apt to define the terms "affective" and "cognitive" differently, the task of classifying the many important behaviors that have both affective and cognitive components (e.g., feedback seeking, choice of relationship partners) is hazardous.

Ambiguity inherent in the affective-cognitive distinction has also clouded subsequent theoretical statements in which it plays a major role. Raynor and McFarlin (1986), for example, have suggested that when "affective value" is high, behavior will be influenced by self-enhancement strivings, and that when "informational value" is high, behavior will be driven by self-verification strivings. One problem with this approach is that, like Shrauger, these authors fail to provide

operational criteria for affective versus informational value. Perhaps related to this, Raynor and McFarlin have made predictions that have since been disconfirmed. They suggested, for example, that people will seek negative feedback only in experimental settings in which information value is high (1986, pp. 339-340). This prediction has been falsified by evidence that people seek negative feedback and relationship partners in field settings (e.g., Swann et al., 1990; Swann & Pelham, 1988, 1990). Finally, although Raynor and McFarlin can offer post hoc explanations of the tendency for people to seek favorable feedback in some situations but not others, their theory cannot explain why the very same people seek favorable feedback about their positive attributes and unfavorable feedback about their negative attributes (while the "information value" and "affective value" of the situation are held constant; Swann et al., 1989).

A related formulation developed by Sorrentino and Short (1986) assumes that some people concentrate on maximizing "affective value" and others concentrate on maximizing "cognitive value." Although it is certainly useful to identify individual differences in the extent to which people self-enhance versus self-verify, the difficulty of operationalizing affective and cognitive value plagues this formulation as it does the ones mentioned above.

The formulation advanced in this chapter represents an effort to tie the constructs employed by earlier investigators to a relatively specific set of operational definitions. That is, people strive to nourish their sense of self-worth (i.e., to maximize affective value) through self-enhancement processes, and they strive to maintain their self-conceptions (i.e., to maximize informational value) through self-verification processes. Furthermore, distinct psychological processes seem to underlie self-enhancement and self-verification processes. In what follows, I discuss these processes.

### **The Mental Processes Underlying Self-Enhancement, Self-Verification, and Strategic Self-Presentation**

What is the minimal number of cognitive computations that can lead to a self-enhancing response as compared to a self-verifying one? Obviously, any given self-relevant stimulus (e.g., an evaluation by potential interaction partner) is psychologically meaningful only to the extent that one knows what that stimulus is. Therefore, both self-verifying and self-enhancing behaviors require that a person initially categorize self-relevant feedback as either favorable or unfavorable. And, in fact, self-enhancing behavior should require nothing more! That is, simply identifying feedback as favorable or unfavorable should be enough to enable people to self-enhance by embracing the former and avoiding the latter (e.g., Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, *in press*).

Self-verifying behavior, on the other hand, should require additional mental work. That is, if people are to accept feedback only when it confirms or matches their self-view, then the feedback must be categorized, the relevant self-view must be retrieved, and the two must be compared. In short, self-verification should, like self-enhancement, require the initial categorization of self-relevant feedback;

however, only self-verification should require the additional comparison between the feedback and a self-conception.

The logic of this claim becomes apparent when one expresses these processes as implementation rules for a logical processor. In the case of self-enhancement, the implementation rule can be written as a simple conditional statement with two logical operators: "If the feedback is unfavorable, then avoid it." Two such rules (one for favorable feedback and one for unfavorable feedback) are all that are needed to build a self-enhancing device. A self-verifying device, however, requires implementation rules of the form: "If the feedback is unfavorable *and* the self-concept is favorable, *then* avoid it." Not only is this rule itself more complex (because it requires the additional logical operator "*and*"); in addition, four such rules are required to build a self-verifying device, rather than the two needed to build a self-enhancing device.

In short, self-enhancement merely requires the simple categorization of feedback, and self-verification requires that people categorize the feedback and then compare it with their self-concept. This distinction is presented schematically in the upper half of Table 12.1. Four predictions follow from this analysis of self-enhancement and self-verification:

1. *Insofar as self-verification is predicted on a more lengthy and complex set of mental operations than is self-enhancement, it should require more processing resources (cf. Baddeley & Hitch, 1974) than should self-enhancement. The experimental depletion of a person's processing resources should therefore interfere with self-verification, but should have relatively little impact on self-enhancement.*

There is evidence that experimentally depleting people of cognitive resources tends to truncate the normal information-processing sequence (Ben Zur & Breznitz, 1981), thereby forcing behavior to be based on the output of early

**TABLE 12.1 Self-Enhancement, Self-Verification, and Strategic Self-Presentation**

<i>Stimulus</i>	<i>Probable outcome</i>	
I. Categorization phase (Is feedback positive or negative?)	→ Emotional reaction (happiness-sadness)	→ Self-enhancement
II. Comparison phase (How does feedback compare with relevant self-view?)	→ Emotional reaction (anxiety vs. comfort)	→ Self-verification
III. Strategic phase (Given the nature of the feedback, my self-view, and the situation, what will happen if _____, or _____, or _____, etc.?)	→ Emotional reaction	→ Strategic self-presentation

operations (see Norman & Bobrow's [1975] "principle of graceful degradation," Tversky & Kahneman's [1974] "anchor/adjust heuristic," or Gilbert's [1989] "principle of premature output"). Insofar as self-verification is just such a sequential operation, resource-deprived people should have difficulty comparing self-relevant feedback to their self-concepts to assess its accuracy. As a result, a person's behavior may be guided solely by the portion of the operation that he or she was in fact able to complete (i.e., the assessment of the positivity of the feedback). Depriving people of cognitive resources by, for example, encouraging them to rush their decisions should therefore leave them time to perform the operations involved in self-enhancement, but not those involved in self-verification.

To test this hypothesis, we (Swann et al., in press) examined the effect of depriving people of cognitive resources while they chose between interaction partners who evaluated them in a relatively favorable or unfavorable manner. The experimenter encouraged some participants to rush their choice of interaction partner and others to make their choice at leisure. Participants in the rushed condition tended to self-enhance—that is, to display a strong preference for the favorable evaluator over the unfavorable evaluator—presumably because they lacked the cognitive resources (i.e., time) to perform the computations underlying primary self-verification. In contrast, participants in the unrushed condition, who presumably possessed the cognitive resources required for self-verification, tended to self-verify.

A follow-up study provided further support for the hypothesis that depriving people of cognitive resources diminishes people's tendency to self-verify but not their tendency to self-enhance. In this study, people who were deprived of resources by being placed under cognitive load were particularly likely to self-enhance rather than self-verify. The results of this study also indicated that when participants were liberated from the load manipulation, they repudiated their self-enhancing responses in favor of self-verifying ones. This finding suggests that the cognitively loaded participants in Study 1 tended to self-enhance because they lacked the cognitive resources required by self-verification, not because the load manipulation somehow prevented them from picking up the information needed to perform the computations underlying primary self-verification.

The results of this study cast doubt upon the common assumption that self-enhancement processes are necessarily strategic (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Jones, 1964; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Lindskold, 1976). Indeed, in this research, it appeared that the more cognitive resources people had available to them (and, presumably, the more opportunity for strategic analysis), the *less* inclined they were to self-enhance.

This research may also lend insight into Shrauger's (1975) and Zajonc's distinction between affective and cognitive responses. Zajonc (1980), for example, has suggested that when people encounter a stimulus, they experience an immediate affective reaction before engaging in any higher-order cognitive analysis. He has argued that such affective reactions are propelled by a relatively



primitive neurological system that enables organisms to perform rudimentary analyses of their worlds and to take rapid action to avoid threats to their well-being (see also Epstein, 1985, in press; Gazzaniga, 1985; Greenwald, 1989; Tomkins, 1981; Wilson, 1985; Zajonc, 1980, 1984). When organisms apprehend stimuli, for example, they theoretically make an initial favorable-unfavorable discrimination, and use output from this computation to guide action while more complex analyses continue (see also Lazarus's [1966] discussion of primary and secondary reactions to stressors.).

Our data seem to fit with the notion that a unique set of cognitive operations underlies self-enhancement and self-verification. That is, when we forced participants to act quickly or while under concurrent task demands, we gave them no recourse but to act on the basis of their immediate, self-enhancing reactions. In contrast, when we allotted subjects sufficient time and energy, they pondered their choices and subsequently attempted to self-verify.

2. *Depriving people of cognitive resources should prevent them from assessing the extent to which feedback is congruent with their self-conceptions.*

In theory, the manipulation of resource deprivation used in our research (Swann et al., in press) promoted self-enhancement because it prevented people from comparing feedback to their self-views and recognizing the extent to which it was self-congruent. Consistent with this interpretation, we (Hixon & Swann, 1989) found that people used the self-congruency of feedback to estimate its accuracy only when they had time for reflection. In a somewhat similar vein, Paulhus and Levitt (1987) found that increments in affective arousal increased subjects' propensity to endorse positive trait adjectives as self-descriptive. Presumably, affective arousal (which has many of the properties of cognitive load; e.g., Easterbrook, 1959; Kahnemann, 1973) blocked the comparison process that ordinarily allows people to reject overly positive adjectives.

3. *Self-enhancement should emerge earlier in development than self-verification.*

A tendency to gravitate toward people who are accepting rather than rejecting emerges much earlier in development than anything resembling self-verification processes. For example, within mere weeks of developing the ability to discriminate facial characteristics, 5-month-olds attend more to smiling faces than to nonsmiling ones (Shapiro, Eppler, Haith, & Reis, 1987). Similarly, as early as 4½ months of age, children tend to orient to voices that have the melodic contours of acceptance instead of nonacceptance (Fernald, 1989). Contrary to Rogers's (1951) notion that self-enhancement processes are learned, this research suggests that self-enhancement processes grow out of a very basic, "hard-wired" propensity to approach superficially accepting organisms and avoid threatening ones.

The cognitive prerequisites for self-verification do not emerge until much later in development. Most importantly, it is not before the 18th month of age that an integral component of the comparison process emerges: the sense of self as object (e.g., Lewis, 1987). Even after children develop rudimentary self-

conceptions, self-verification will not occur reliably until they accumulate enough evidence that they become certain of them. Such well-articulated self-views probably do not emerge until several years later, particularly if the content of such views is abstract, negative, or both.

Although no one has actually tested the notion that active strategies of self-enhancement emerge before active strategies of self-verification, we do know that young children endorse positive descriptions of themselves well before they accept negative ones (e.g., Benenson & Dweck, 1986; Eshel & Klein, 1981; Nicholls, 1978, 1979; Stipek, 1981; Stipek & Daniels, 1988; Stipek & Tannatt, 1984). To the extent that feedback seeking is driven by the same processes that channel feedback acceptance, this evidence can be taken as indirect support for the idea that self-enhancement emerges earlier in development than does self-verification.

#### 4. *Self-enhancement should not require conscious recognition of self.*

Several investigators have suggested that self-enhancement strivings may influence the self-ratings of adults even in the absence of conscious self-recognition (Huntley, 1940; Wolff, 1933). Huntley, for example, surreptitiously photographed relatively innocuous aspects of his participants' bodies, such as the backs of their hands and their profiles. Six months later he had participants return to the laboratory and rate photos of their own hands and silhouettes as well as those of several other people. He found that participants tended to rate photos of themselves more favorably than the photos of others, and that this tendency was particularly strong when they failed to recognize the photos as their own. Thus it appeared that self-enhancement unfolded nonconsciously and that, if anything, self-recognition *diminished* self-enhancement processes. These findings offer further evidence that self-enhancement can occur without elaborate, self-relevant information processing.

Taken together, this research offers converging evidence that self-enhancement is a computationally simple tendency to approach and embrace friendly stimuli and avoid and reject unfriendly stimuli. Furthermore, it appears that this tendency is triggered by the mere categorization of feedback. Self-verification, in contrast, is a relatively complex process that grows out of the comparison of social feedback with representations of self stored in memory.

The categorization and comparison phases associated with self-enhancement and self-verification generate output (probably in the form of affect or emotional readout; see Buck, 1985; Pittman & Heller, 1987) that provides the person with two fundamentally distinct mandates; one emanating from the simple positivity of the feedback, the other from its subjective veridicality. These mandates then serve as inputs to a strategic or cost-benefit analysis. As can be seen in the lower portion of Table 12.1, this strategic analysis uses information about the self, the feedback, and social-contextual factors in the generation of hypothetical "if-then" scenarios. Such analyses may either bolster or undermine decisions emanating from the primary phase of the process (Hoffman, 1986). Some of the factors

that enter into this cost-benefit analysis, as well as self-enhancement and self-verification reactions, are considered below. Although there are obviously many factors that influence these processes, four classes of factors are especially important: (1) the relationship of the evaluator and recipient of the feedback; (2) the recipient's conceptions of self; (3) the nature of the evaluation; and (4) the nature of the response.

### **Determinants of Self-Enhancement, Self-Verification, and Strategic Self-Presentation**

#### *Nature of the Relationship between Evaluator and Recipient of Feedback*

Social norms tell us that some people should be more favorably disposed toward us than others. Just as intimates are supposed to spare the feelings of their partners, even if this requires obscuring the truth, teachers or superordinates are expected to be perfectly honest, even if this means communicating truths that hurt. The general principle here seems to be that increments in the intimacy of the relationship foster increments in self-enhancement. In support of this idea, we (Swann & Pelham, 1988) found that people preferred their intimates to view them most favorably, followed by their friends, followed by their casual acquaintances.

The existence of such social norms places people with negative self-views between a rock and a hard place. That is, although their knowledge of these norms encourages them to seek intimates who think well of them, their desire for self-verification urges them to seek intimates who think poorly of them. The situation is further complicated by the fact that if people with negative self-views locate relationship partners who think poorly of them, they risk being rejected; if they fail to find such partners, they will themselves want to leave. Not surprisingly, then, people with negative self-views tend to be in shorter-term friendships than those with positive self-views (Swann & Pelham, 1988).

#### *Nature of Recipient's Conceptions of Self*

**POSITIVITY OF SPECIFIC SELF-CONCEPTIONS** The research reviewed above makes it clear that people will work to confirm their self-views, even if those self-views are negative. This means that people with negative self-views will be less likely to self-enhance (by, e.g., seeking positive feedback) than those with positive self-views.

**POSITIVITY OF GLOBAL SELF-ESTEEM** Because people with low self-esteem typically have a wealth of negative self-views (Pelham & Swann, 1989), they will be less inclined than people with high self-esteem to self-enhance *overall*. This does not mean, however, that people with low self-esteem suffer from deficits in self-enhancement motivation (see, e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988). We (Swann et al., 1989), for example, proposed that the self-concept is sufficiently differentiated

that even people with low self-esteem possess positive attributes for which they can seek verification in the form of social feedback. We found that when people sought feedback pertaining to positive attributes, people with low self-esteem were just as inclined as people with high self-esteem to seek favorable feedback. Apparently, people with low self-esteem tend to seek unfavorable feedback because (1) they possess a wealth of negative self-conceptions and (2) they are faithful to self-verification principles; it is *not* that they have a poorly developed self-enhancement motive.

**SALIENCE OF SELF-CONCEPTIONS** People are probably more inclined to verify self-views that are relatively accessible. One of the most direct ways to increase the accessibility of self-views is simply to ask people to think about themselves. We (Snyder & Swann, 1976), for example, found that asking people to think about their attitudes toward women increased their tendency to act on these beliefs (see also Fazio, 1986). Similarly, Sherman and Gorkin (1980) found that making the beliefs of feminists accessible by challenging their beliefs increased the likelihood that they would engage in profeminist behavior. Finally, Mori, Chaiken, and Pliner (1987) reported that women whose self-perceived femininity was threatened by false feedback behaved in a manner consistent with their image of femininity: They ate less than did controls.

We (Swann & Read, 1981b) showed that self-discrepant feedback intensified people's efforts to self-verify even when the relevant self-views were negative. That is, when their self-views were challenged, people who perceived themselves as likeable intensified their efforts to elicit *favorable* reactions, and those who perceived themselves as dislikeable intensified their efforts to elicit *unfavorable* reactions.

**CERTAINTY OF SELF-CONCEPTIONS** People are more apt to verify self-views of which they are certain than ones they are uncertain about (e.g., Maracek & Mettee, 1972; Pelham, 1989; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann & Pelham, 1990; Swann et al., 1988). Presumably, this effect reflects a tendency for relatively certain self-views to be particularly likely to promote people's perceptions of prediction and control. One mediator of this effect may be that certainty narrows people's latitude of acceptance (Pelham, 1989). Thus, for example, people who are relatively certain of their negative self-views may be particularly inclined to solicit unfavorable feedback because they are more likely to recognize and be repelled by the self-discrepant character of favorable feedback.

Sorrentino and Short (1986) have noted that some people (certainty-oriented) are more inclined to verify their self-views than others (uncertainty-oriented). Although it is tempting to hypothesize that people who are certain of their self-views are certainty-oriented and people who are uncertain of their self-views are uncertainty-oriented (see also Sorrentino & Hancock, 1987), an individual-difference approach cannot explain evidence that *within persons*, people are more inclined to verify those self-views of which they are certain as compared to uncertain (Swann & Pelham, 1990).

**IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CONCEPTIONS** The more important a self-attribute is, the more people want feedback about it, even if that attribute is negative (Pelham, 1989). This finding probably reflects the fact that people regard as important those attributes that relate to their significant goals and plans. Academics, for example, tend to regard intelligence as important because they have, in a sense, "staked their beings" on being intelligent (e.g., James, 1890). At the same time, it seems reasonable to suppose that people are more motivated to seek verification for self-views that are highly important to them. Although this obviously poses problems for people who possess important self-views that are negative, it turns out that people rarely encounter such a dilemma because important self-views are almost always positive (Pelham, 1989).

**DISCREPANCY BETWEEN REAL AND IDEAL SELF** In general, people will be motivated to self-enhance insofar as their self-views fall short of (1) the persons *they* wish they were or (2) the persons that *significant others* wish they were (e.g., James, 1890; Linville, 1987; for insightful discussions of these and other forms of self-discrepancy, see Higgins, 1987, in press).

#### *Nature of the Evaluation*

People should be particularly likely to self-verify insofar as they regard the evaluation or evaluator as credible. That is, from an epistemic perspective, relatively credible evaluations will be particularly comforting if they are self-verifying and particularly unsettling if they are not. For this reason, any variable that might increase the credibility of an evaluation—such as expertise, knowledgeability, or intelligence of the source—should increase the probability that people will seek self-confirming feedback. The converse is also true: Any variable that decreases the credibility of an evaluation or evaluator should increase self-enhancement strivings.

#### *Nature of the Response*

**RELATION OF RESPONSE TO ANTECEDENTS OF SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND SELF-VERIFICATION** Responses that are closely allied with people's immediate, "affective" reactions should conform to self-enhancement theory. An elegant series of experiments by Tesser (1988) supports the former proposition: Affective responses (as measured by physiological reactions) conform to Tesser's "self-evaluation maintenance model" (a self-enhancement theory). Furthermore, my colleagues and I have shown that verbal measures of affective reactions to feedback also conform to self-enhancement theory (Swann et al., 1987).

By default, self-enhancement strivings should also influence any response that is logically unrelated to the considerations that underlie self-verification strivings. We (Swann et al., 1989), for example, asked people whether they would like to interact with someone who had formed an accurate appraisal of one of their strengths or one of their weaknesses. Even subjects with low global self-esteem chose to interact with the person who had evaluated one of their

strengths, presumably because acquiring praise regarding one particular attribute does not necessarily threaten the notion that one is worthless in a general sense (especially if one devalues that attribute as people with low self-esteem generally do).

Social comparison processes are also logically unrelated to the considerations underlying self-verification strivings. That is, there is no logical (or, for that matter, social-psychological) reason why people with negative self-views should make themselves feel bad by comparing themselves to their superiors. For this reason, people who perceive themselves as unintelligent can self-enhance by comparing themselves to reptiles without suffering the epistemic and pragmatic consequences associated with failure to self-verify (e.g., Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Tesser, 1986, 1988; Tesser & Campbell, 1983; Wills, 1981).

Brown et al.'s (1988) research on "indirect" strategies of self-enhancement offers another example of a self-enhancing response that is logically unrelated to self-verification considerations. For instance, Brown et al. found that people with low self-esteem promoted their own group when they were *indirectly* but not *directly* responsible for the group's performance. In this way, people with low self-esteem could bask in the glory of their group without claiming to be better than they actually were and thereby leaving themselves open to the negative consequences associated with failure of self-verification (see also Cialdini & Richardson, 1980).

Still another example of a self-enhancing response that is not constrained by self-verification strivings has been offered by Baumgardner under the rubric of "affect regulation." She and her colleagues (Baumgardner, Kaufman, & Levy, 1989) reported that among people whose responses were relatively public, those who had low self-esteem were especially inclined to compliment persons who liked them and derogate persons who disliked them. Presumably, by publicly "putting others in their place," victims of chronic negative feedback can improve their affective states without claiming to be persons that they are not. As noted above, of course, other classes of responses *are* constrained by the epistemic and pragmatic considerations underlying self-verification strivings: (1) ratings of the diagnosticity and accuracy of feedback, attributions regarding feedback, and perceptions of the evaluator (Swann et al., 1987); (2) within-attribute feedback seeking (Swann et al., 1989, 1990; Swann & Read, 1981a, 1981b); (3) overt interaction strategies (Curtis & Miller, 1986; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann, et al., 1988; Swann & Read, 1981b); and (4) choice of partners with whom to interact or pursue a relationship (e.g., Swann et al., 1989, 1990, in press; Swann & Pelham, 1988, 1990).

Yet another class of responses includes those that are only somewhat related to the epistemic and pragmatic considerations underlying self-verification strivings. Examples of such behaviors include ratings of the attractiveness of evaluators (e.g., Swann et al., 1987), preferences regarding future performances (e.g., McFarlin & Blascovitch, 1981), and preferences regarding the appraisals of relationship partners (e.g., Pelham & Swann, 1989).

**COGNITIVE RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN FORMULATING THE RESPONSE** As noted earlier, depriving people of cognitive resources while they are making a behavioral choice should increase the likelihood of self-enhancement and diminish the likelihood of self-verification. Thus when people make a decision hurriedly or when their attentions are divided, they will be especially likely to self-enhance (e.g., Swann et al., in press). In contrast, when people have time to think before making a decision, they will tend to self-verify.

A caveat is in order here, however. Although self-verifying behavior is predicated on a relatively complex set of cognitive operations, this does not mean that *all* reasoned action will therefore be self-verifying. Indeed, after much reflection, a person may well decide that self-enhancing behavior has fewer costs and more benefits than does a self-verifying response. For example, an unathletic professor may encourage his students to believe he was once "jock" because, after considerable thought, he realizes that there will be few undesirable epistemic or pragmatic consequences associated with such a masquerade. Thus, although depriving people of cognitive resources will make them more likely to behave in a self-enhancing manner, allowing them to reflect will promote self-verification only if the epistemic and pragmatic considerations that theoretically underlie self-verification override competing considerations. If, upon reflection, people decide that they can acquire unrealistically favorable feedback without suffering the epistemic and pragmatic consequences that usually accompany failures to self-verify, they may well do so.

These observations suggest that the interplay between people's immediate "affective" preferences and reasoned decisions may be thought of in terms of a three-step process: an initial, minimally cognitive phase (self-enhancement); a second phase of somewhat more complex cognitive operations (self-verification); and finally a third, reflective stage during which the initial affective preference may or may not resurface (strategic self-presentation).

Research by Wilson and his colleagues offers some support for such a three-step process in a different context (e.g., Wilson & Dunn, 1986; Wilson, Dunn, Draft, & Lisle, 1989; Wilson & Lisle, 1990). These investigators have shown that although people initially form preferences for stimuli (e.g., pens) based on superficial qualities (e.g., color), if encouraged to reflect on their decision they will focus on objective attributes of the stimuli that seem plausible (e.g., durability) and thus revise their initial judgments. Later, however, they may experience a resurgence of the initial preference that causes them to regret the reasoned decision. The analogy in the interpersonal sphere would be the woman with a negative self-concept who, after some reflection, chooses a contemptuous but self-verifying relationship partner. After a bit more reflection, she may decide that life is too short to spend with someone who constantly makes her miserable. The lesson here is that although impulsive or "thoughtless" decisions may sometimes be the source of difficulty (e.g., Janis & Mann, 1977; Koriat, Lichtenstein, & Fischhoff, 1980; Langer, 1978, 1989), thought is by no means an antidote to unhappiness in social relations.

**IMPORTANCE OF THE RESPONSE** When it comes to consequential decisions (choosing a spouse, close friend, or associate), people tend to take their time. Given that time promotes self-verification (at least up to a point), it is perhaps not surprising that when people with negative self-views select relationship partners, they self-verify by choosing persons who appraise them negatively (Swann & Pelham, 1988). This research also makes it easy to understand why laboratory investigators have typically found that people are more attracted to self-enhancing evaluators. That is, expressing attraction for a stranger who seems to have an inappropriately favorable appraisal of oneself is one thing. It is quite another to pursue a relationship with such a person (e.g., Huston & Levinger, 1978), since an incongruent relationship partner may frustrate the epistemic and pragmatic needs that drive self-verification processes. For example, the same flattering remarks that seem harmless and pleasant when delivered by a stranger may seem disturbing and unsettling when delivered by someone who should know one well. Thus, the fact that self-enhancement processes may be primary (in a temporal sense) does not necessarily mean that they influence important life decisions more strongly.

**"COGNITIVE" VERSUS "AFFECTIVE" RESPONSES** The foregoing analysis may take some of the mystery out of evidence suggesting that affective responses are generally self-enhancing and cognitive responses are generally self-verifying (e.g., Shrauger, 1975; Swann et al., 1987). That is, just as "affective responses" are typically rapid and unrelated to the considerations that underlie self-verification, "cognitive responses" tend to be relatively slow and thus more apt to be influenced by the considerations that underlie self-verification.

## CONCLUSION

Past attempts to reconcile self-enhancement and self-verification have resembled what members of the business community refer to as a "hostile takeover": Advocates of one theory have attempted to use their own theory's principles to explain the other theory's phenomena, and in so doing to eliminate the other theory. Some (e.g., Backman, 1988; Schlenker, 1985; Steele, 1988), for example, suggest that people strive for consistency in the service of a superordinate desire for self-enhancement. In a similar manner, Lecky (1945) asserted that, by definition, all behavior grows out of a desire for unity (consistency). Either approach makes one motive capable of predicting anything (e.g., a tendency to seek positive or negative feedback). Yet they both suffer from a major shortcoming: They are difficult, if not impossible, to disconfirm.

In my opinion, efforts to resolve the self-enhancement versus self-verification (self-consistency) debate have made it clear that we cannot do without *either* motive. Although each of these propensities ultimately promotes the survival of the organism, it makes no more sense to equate them than it does to equate the



desires to eat, to sleep, and to drink. Clearly, people want to be praised and loved, but they also want their worlds to be predictable and controllable. The task of future researchers will be to develop a more complete understanding of how these two basic social motives control behavior.

### Acknowledgments

The preparation of this chapter was supported by National Institute of Mental Health Grant Nos. MH 37598 and MH 00498 to William B. Swann, Jr. This chapter was prepared while I was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. I am grateful to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which helped support my stay there. I am also grateful to Ann Baumgardner, Daniel Gilbert, Tory Higgins, Kathleen Much, Brett Pelham, Dave Sears, Dick Sorrentino, Deborah Stipek, and Shelley Taylor for their helpful comments on the chapter.

This chapter incorporates material that originally appeared in "Identity Negotiation: Where Two Roads Meet" by W. B. Swann, Jr., 1987, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 1038-1051, and "From Self to Health: Self-Verification and Identity Disruption" by W. B. Swann, Jr., and J. D. Brown, 1990, in I. Sarason, B. Sarason, and G. Pierce (Eds.), *Social Support: An Interactional View*, New York: Wiley. Reprinted by permission of the American Psychological Association and John Wiley & Sons.

### Notes

1. Applied to simple self-enhancement, the term "self-enhancement" is thus misleading, in that some theorists (e.g., Tesser, 1988) have argued that people work to *maintain* (rather than enhance) their (typically positive) self-views. The crucial distinction, however, is that no self-enhancement researchers suggest that a person would work to maintain a negative self-view, as does self-verification theory.

2. I am not denying that laboratory manipulations may influence people's momentary views of self (e.g., Jones, 1990). Rather, I am merely suggesting that chronic self-views color people's interpretation of social feedback and anchor momentary self-images.

3. At first blush, this emphasis on the importance of prediction and control may seem incompatible with the fact that people are fascinated by novel and unfamiliar stimuli and become bored with phenomena that are too predictable (e.g., Berlyne, 1971; White, 1959). Nevertheless, social stimuli are probably sufficiently labile that they are almost never construed as *too* predictable. In addition, when stimuli are self-relevant, people may eschew the luxury of novelty because prediction and control are so essential within this domain. Finally, there are individual differences in the extent to which people prefer novelty versus predictability (Sorrentino & Short, 1986).

4. Although previous investigations obtained self-verification effects without relying on self-certainty as a moderator variable (Swann & Pelham, 1988; Swann et al., 1989, 1990), these investigations found self-verification only among people whose self-views were relatively extreme, and such people tended to be more certain of extreme self-views.

5. In principle, a person who is *extremely* high in self-certainty may simply dismiss discrepant feedback out of hand. Thus far, however, my colleagues and I have not encountered participants who are sufficiently certain of their self-views that they are inclined to do this.

6. These data may seem incompatible with Hastie and Kumar's (1979) contention that people are especially likely to recall expectancy-inconsistent evidence. Recent research, however, has indicated that Hastie and Kumar's findings were influenced by a confound between set size and expectancy. Researchers who have avoided this confound (e.g., Bargh & Thein, 1985; Hemsley & Marmurek, 1982) have found that people preferentially recall information that confirms well-formed beliefs (for further details, see Higgins & Bargh, 1987).

7. Although self-verification is essentially epiphenomenal in such instances, at other times it is theoretically motivated by epistemic or pragmatic considerations.

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