

## Chapter 16

# *Self and Identity*

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From the beginning, psychology's relationship with the "self" has been a tempestuous one. When, for example, William James (1890/1950) marched the self to psychology's center stage in his classic text, the field promptly ushered it to the wings. There it languished for more than half a century, ignored by a psychological mainstream whose embrace of positivism made it squeamish about constructs that seemed to lack clear empirical referents (e.g., Allport, 1943). And when the self finally did gain admission into the social psychological mainstream in the 1960s, it had been stripped of some crucial features of the construct that James introduced. Whereas James saw the self as a source of continuity that gave the individual a sense of "connectedness" and "unbrokenness" (p. 335), the 1960s were dominated by an ephemeral, shape-shifting self that routinely reinvented itself in the service of winning social approval (e.g., Scheibe, 1985).

Happily, over the last few decades, conceptualizations of the self have reclaimed much of the richness and integrity with which James (1890/1950) first imbued the construct. Moreover, contemporary social-personality psychologists have warmly embraced these emerging, "neo-Jamesian" visions of the self: Between 1972 and 2002, the percentage of self-related studies published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* increased fivefold (Swann & Seyle, 2005). The rejuvenated image of the self is multidimensional. Most researchers now assume that the self has a rich history, some of which is conscious and accessible through self-reports and some of which is presumably nonconscious and accessible primarily through indirect measures. Although a strong belief still exists in the prepotency of a desire to win approval from others, most theorists acknowledge the significance of rival motivational forces, particularly in non-Western

cultural settings (e.g., Banaji & Prentice, 1994). And modern researchers have complemented their long-standing interest in personal self-views or identities (we use these terms interchangeably) with investigations of social identities. It was this growing interest in social identity that prompted us to cover this work and title the chapter "Self and Identity" instead of simply "The Self," the title of Baumeister's (1998) earlier contribution to this volume. Before turning to the specific substantive issues that we cover here, we place our analysis in historical context. In particular, we briefly describe the chain of events that led to the legitimization of a multifaceted, enduring conception of the self.

### EMERGENCE OF THE "NEO-JAMESIAN" SELF

Psychology's failure to follow up on James's (1890/1950) initial investigation of the self left a void that scholars from other fields quickly stepped in to fill. Two of the most prominent such scholars, the sociologists Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead, rallied behind the banner of a theoretical perspective known as symbolic interactionism (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). This theory was designed to illuminate the nature and origins of self-knowledge, especially the reactions of others and the roles people play. We know ourselves, the theory assumed, by observing how we fit into the fabric of social relationships and how others react to us. In its emphasis on the social construction of the self, symbolic interactionism zeroed in on the aspect of self that James dubbed the "social self" and about which he famously noted that "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (1890/1950, p. 294).

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Conspicuously absent from these accounts were the other, more enduring aspects of the self that figured prominently in James's account, notably the "empirical self," which includes the physical self, and the "spiritual self," which consists of beliefs about one's qualities. As symbolic interactionism assumed center stage in the scientific community's emerging understanding of the nature of the self, James's relatively enduring forms of self-knowledge faded into obscurity.

Several decades later, the dominance of the social self was augmented by one of symbolic interactionism's most prominent intellectual progeny, the dramaturgical movement. Spearheaded by Goffman (1959), this movement assumed that people are like actors in a play who perform for different audiences. As people take on various identities, the self is merely a consequence, rather than a cause, of the performance, a "product of the scene that comes off" (p. 252). Once people lay claim to an identity, they are obligated to remain "in character" until they move to the next scene, at which point the former self is discarded in favor of a self that fits the new context. For Goffman, there was no enduring sense of self; instead, Goffman envisioned the self as an ahistorical construction that emerged and vanished at the whim of the situational cues that regulated its form and structure.

When mainstream social psychologists developed an interest in the systematic study of the self in the 1960s, they looked to sociology for a promising paradigm. They were smitten with Goffman's (1959) newly minted vision of self and identity. Goffman's influence is most obvious in accounts of impression management (Jones, 1964), accounts that were later embellished by Edward Jones's students (e.g., Roy Baumeister and Fred Rhodewalt), as well as others (Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi, 1981). These theorists proved to be extremely influential in shaping early social psychological views of the self. But Goffman's vision of the self had broader impacts as well. First, if anyone could assume any identity that the situation demanded, then people were essentially interchangeable. This sentiment helped legitimize a situationist approach to the self and identity. Second, the theatre metaphor that Goffman used to exemplify social interaction led researchers to focus narrowly on a single goal: gaining the approval of "the audience" (i.e., other people). From this vantage point, people were presumably in the business of constructing whichever identities they believed would help them win the favor of their interaction partners, with the only proviso being that they should strive to prevent observers from viewing them as inconsistent or dishonest (e.g., Schlenker, 1980, 1985). Nowhere in this scheme was there an intrinsic need to reconcile the presented self with an enduring, underlying, or authentic sense of self. For social psychologists of the day,

the world was, as Daniel Webster put it, "governed more by appearances than by reality" (D. Webster, F. Webster, Sanborn, 1857, p. 146).

Even when researchers became interested in motives that seemed superficially incompatible with approval seeking or "self-enhancement," these motives were not informed by an enduring sense of self. For example, when researchers began to examine "self-consistency," they typically left the enduring self out of the equation. Dissonance researchers, for instance, would subtly persuade participants to behave in ways that made them look more or less deficient and then observe their subsequent efforts to save face (e.g., Aronson, 1968). Again, social actors were presumed to be interchangeable. Consequently, researchers had no need to consider how an enduring sense of self might influence people's reactions to the situations in which they found themselves.

It was not until the 1970s that the paradigm began to shift and the enduring sense of self began to gain currency within mainstream social psychology. Snyder (1974) developed a personality measure (the "self-monitoring" scale) that distinguished people who were thought to be perpetually engaged in Goffman-esque impression management activities from those whose actions were guided by a deep-seated, enduring sense of self that valued cross-situational consistency. In a somewhat parallel effort that drew on developments in cognitive psychology, Markus (1977) introduced the idea that some people possessed enduring "self-schemas" that systematically guided information processing about the self. Shortly afterwards, Kuiper and Rogers (1979) provided evidence that people store representations of the self in memory and that these mental representations facilitate the retrieval of self-relevant information.

By 1980, the stage had been set for a wide-ranging examination of the nature and consequences of a multifaceted self that featured enduring, as well as relatively fleeting, components (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Swann, 1983). No longer were social psychologists' conceptualizations of the self hitched to the wagon of pretense stubbornly intent on self-enhancement. Increasingly, researchers were abandoning the stage-acting metaphor of the self and the superficial relationships it illuminated and instead turning their attention to the relatively stable identities that people negotiated in their ongoing social relationships. This is not to say that all prominent social psychologists followed this trend. But even the few who continued to emphasize the ephemeral self over the enduring self updated and refined their analyses considerably (e.g., Gergen, 1991). And when more mainstream self theorists began to acknowledge people's stable identities, they quickly came to embrace the richness and complexity of the multifaceted, neo-Jamesian

conception of self. In the following section, we begin to examine the fruits of these efforts by turning to work that conceptualizes the self as a mental representation.

## SELF AS A MENTAL REPRESENTATION

Although we believe that psychology's love affair with logical positivism explains most of its historical ambivalence toward the self, an additional problem has been that the term "self" has been used in multiple, sometimes contradictory ways (Leary, 2004). In its most common usage, the self refers to a representation or set of representations about oneself, parallel to the representations people have of other individuals. This is the most straightforward and common usage of the term and the one on which we focus most of our attention in this chapter. It is the "me," or self-as-object, about which James (1890/1950) wrote—the entire set of beliefs, evaluations, perceptions, and thoughts that people have about themselves.

Nevertheless, the term "self" has also been substituted for "behavior," as in "self-regulation." Our review does not focus on work exemplifying the latter usage, partly because this work was covered comprehensively in Baumeister's (1998) chapter. In addition, however, we are concerned that if the boundary conditions of the subarea "self" are relaxed to encompass all research that involves behavior, then virtually any activity can be incorporated within the domain of self-psychology simply by prefixing it with "self-." For these reasons, our review focuses on work that directly or indirectly involves the represented self.

### Types of Self-Representations

In what follows, we identify and define several important distinctions that underlie people's mental representations of self. Although not exhaustive, this list is intended to capture most major forms that self-views (self-concepts and self-esteem) assume.

#### *Active Versus Stored Self-Knowledge*

The amount of self-knowledge—beliefs, thoughts, memories, and feelings about the self—that people possess is theoretically unlimited in quantity and scope. As such, it cannot all be brought to attention at once. Beginning in the late 1960s, researchers began to acknowledge this fact by differentiating between active and stored self-knowledge. Active self-knowledge includes information about oneself that is held in consciousness. It has been referred to as the *phenomenal self* (Jones & Gerard, 1967), the *spontaneous self-concept* (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978), and the *working self-concept* (Markus & Kunda, 1986).

In contrast, stored self-knowledge includes information about the self that is held in memory but is *not* being attended to. Thus, whereas most self-knowledge is at least theoretically accessible to conscious awareness, only information in the working self-concept is available for immediate reflection.

The working self-concept is highly responsive to context, such that people are particularly likely to bring to mind aspects of the self that stand out or differentiate them from others (e.g., McGuire et al., 1978). One consequence of this malleability is that self-knowledge can shift somewhat easily to fit the demands of the current situation, without eliciting troubling feelings of inconsistency or inauthenticity (e.g., Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). We have more to say about this later.

#### *Semantic Versus Episodic Self-Knowledge*

Based on Tulving's (1983) distinction between two types of declarative memory, Klein and Loftus (1993) distinguished semantic and episodic representations of the self. Semantic memory is relatively abstract, context-free knowledge such as "Elephants are heavy" and "George H. W. Bush was considered unpopular until his son brought new meaning to the word." Although semantic memory is not necessarily linked to the self, it can consist of propositions about the self (e.g., "I have brown hair"). More relevant here, the semantic memory system may contain a subsystem in which information about one's qualities, traits, and social roles is stored (e.g., "I can be assertive if pushed"). Such a system would be useful to those who are asked to describe themselves quickly and succinctly. For example, first dates, job interviews, and other first-time encounters often compel people to generate global self-characterizations with little time to consult the evidence on which such characterizations are based.

As the name implies, episodic memories encapsulate specific episodes or events that occurred in a person's life. When accessed, the retrieved events are experienced in conjunction with a conscious awareness that they actually occurred in the person's life (e.g., Suddendorf & Corballis, 1997). Most people can recall hundreds if not thousands of episodic memories, including events in the distant past (e.g., their first kiss) or only moments ago (e.g., the sentence they just finished reading).

Although it is obvious that episodic self-knowledge is based on specific events in people's lives, it is less obvious where semantic self-knowledge comes from. At first blush, it might seem that self-knowledge is organized inductively, with specific episodes of episodic self-knowledge giving rise to and supporting semantic knowledge about the self. Although this surely occurs in some instances, the research literature shows clearly that this is not always so. Instead, at least some semantic beliefs about the self seem to be

formed and stored quite independently of specific episodic memories. Early support for this generalization came from studies of normal college students who completed priming tasks. The results showed that priming a trait stored in semantic memory (e.g., “Does ‘stubborn’ describe you?”) does not facilitate the recall of corresponding episodic memories, namely, behavioral incidents that exemplify the trait (e.g., Klein & Loftus, 1993; Klein, Loftus, Trafton, & Fuhrman, 1992). Moreover, semantic and episodic self-representations seem to be stored in different regions of the brain. For example, participants who were asked to judge trait adjectives for self-descriptiveness showed activation of cortical areas associated with semantic memory retrieval (left frontal regions) but not of areas associated with episodic memory (right frontal regions; e.g., Kelley et al., 2002).

Converging evidence for the independence of semantic and episodic representations of self comes from case studies of people with various cognitive impairments (e.g., amnesia, autism, and Alzheimer’s dementia). For example, patients with brain injuries that make them unable to access and recall episodic memories are nevertheless able to make accurate judgments about their own traits. In addition, people with impaired episodic memories are capable of updating their semantic memories to accommodate newly acquired self-knowledge (e.g., Klein, Loftus, & Kihlstrom, 1996; for a review, see Klein, 2004).

### *Implicit Versus Explicit Self-Knowledge*

Like other types of knowledge stored in memory, self-knowledge varies in how explicit it is. Whereas explicit self-knowledge is relatively controllable and deliberate, implicit self-knowledge is relatively uncontrollable and automatic (Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986). Moreover, explicit self-knowledge is readily reported but implicit self-knowledge is often gleaned indirectly by observing its effects on people’s feelings and automatic behaviors. Indeed, Greenwald and Banaji (1995, p. 11) defined implicit self-esteem as “the introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) effect of the self-attitude on evaluation of self-associated and self-dissociated objects.”

Although indirect measures might ordinarily seem less desirable than measures that assess the target construct directly, some suggest that implicit self-esteem measures circumvent self-presentational processes to lay bare the unvarnished self (Farnham, Greenwald, & Banaji, 1999). Others propose that implicit self-esteem measures circumvent deliberative thought processes and thus reveal the “intuitive” self (Jordan, Whitfield, & Zeigler-Hill, 2007). So enticing is the prospect of bypassing respondents’ deliberative self-views that research on the nature, origins,

and consequences of the “implicit self” has grown at a remarkable rate. At the time of this writing, a PsycINFO search for publications with keywords including “implicit” and either “self” or “identity” yielded 292 publications between 2000 and 2009, as compared to only 50 such publications during the preceding decade.

Research on the implicit self explores several themes. Some work focuses on documenting a positivity bias on implicit measures of self-knowledge that parallels the positivity bias observed with explicit measures of self-knowledge (Taylor & Brown, 1988). At the trait level, people generally display highly favorable self-views and high self-esteem when these variables are measured implicitly (e.g., Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Yamaguchi et al., 2007). At the group level, however, members of minority and low-status groups display relatively weak implicit liking for their own social group relative to comparison majority or high-status groups (Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). These findings are consistent with work suggesting that members of disadvantaged groups can preserve their personal feelings of self-worth while still recognizing that their social groups are devalued by the wider culture (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Another research theme explores the manner in which implicitly measured self-knowledge shapes people’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. For example, in their work on *implicit egotism*—an automatic preference for things that resemble the self—Pelham, Carvallo, and Jones (2005) argue that people’s implicit feelings about the self guide many of their most important life decisions, including choice of occupation, romantic partner, and residence. Because most people feel quite favorably toward the self, they tend to seek out people, places, and things that remind them of the self.

A third theme in research on the implicit self focuses on the emotional and behavioral implications of discrepancies between people’s implicitly and explicitly measured self-knowledge. For instance, some work reveals that people who display favorable self-views on explicit measures, but relatively unfavorable self-views on implicit measures, are characterized by heightened levels of self-aggrandizement (e.g., Bosson, Brown, Zeigler-Hill, & Swann, 2003; Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003), verbal defensiveness (Kernis, Lakey, & Heppner, 2008), and belief conviction (McGregor & Marigold, 2003). Thus, it appears that discrepancies between implicitly and explicitly measured self-knowledge may predict a defensive tendency to present the self in an overly zealous manner.

Despite the attention that implicit self-knowledge—and implicit self-esteem in particular—has commanded in recent years, troubling questions have been raised regarding several fundamental issues, including what the construct is. There are currently (at least) two competing schools of

thought on the distinction between explicit and implicit self-knowledge. One perspective, exemplified in Epstein's (1994) cognitive-experiential self theory, assumes that explicit self-knowledge and implicit self-knowledge represent fundamentally distinct constructs that derive from different types of learning experiences; have independent effects on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and may even be processed via separate systems in the brain. Some advocates of this perspective assume further that implicit self-knowledge is nonconscious. That is, not only do people lack conscious awareness of the *effects* of implicit self-knowledge on their behavior—as Greenwald and Banaji (1995) initially asserted about implicit self-esteem—but people may also lack conscious awareness of the *contents* of their implicit self-knowledge (e.g., Devos & Banaji, 2003). As such, the same self-views measured via explicit and implicit methods should not necessarily be expected to correlate; in fact, they often do not (e.g., Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000).

The other perspective, exemplified in Fazio's motivation and opportunity as determinants model (Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999), holds that explicit and implicit measures of the same self-view often *do* access the same underlying attitude. According to this perspective, factors such as people's opportunity and motivation to control their behavioral responses determine the degree of correspondence between a self-view that is measured by self-report (an explicit method) and the same self-view measured by an implicit method such as response latency. Advocates of this perspective assume that both types of measures tap the same self-view but that explicit measures afford respondents more opportunities to influence the manner in which they present the self than do implicit measures (Olson & Fazio, 2008; Olson, Fazio, & Hermann, 2007). Thus, explicit and implicit measures of the same self-view predict different outcomes, but this need not imply that these measures access different underlying constructs. At present, the debate between these two perspectives continues.

Concerns have also been raised about whether implicit measures can, in principle, deliver on their promise. Initial enthusiasm for measures of implicit self-esteem was based on the hope that they would tap an unvarnished or "true" form of self-esteem and would therefore outpredict measures of explicit self-esteem in at least some domains. This theory has received some support (e.g., Spalding & Hardin, 1999) but likely not as much as hoped. One reason for this may be that, like explicit self-esteem, implicit self-esteem is a broad-based construct that has a wide bandwidth (Marsh & Craven, 2006; Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). If so, it may not be feasible to assess implicit self-esteem by way of a simple association between one or more specific characteristics and the self. Instead, it seems likely

that people have many nonconscious associations with various aspects of themselves. This might explain why different measures of implicit self-esteem are often uncorrelated with one another (Bosson et al., 2000).

A final concern is specific to measures of implicit self-esteem that are based on minimizing the ability of participants to reflect before responding (Farnham et al., 1999). This approach, which is used in some of the most popular measures such as the Implicit Association Test, presumably reduces the capacity of respondents to engage in self-presentation. This is not necessarily true, as self-presentational activity can be automatized (Paulhus, 1993). In addition, depriving respondents of the opportunity to reflect may have the additional effect of preventing them from accessing autobiographical knowledge, an activity that requires cognitive work. Therefore, when they are deprived of cognitive resources, people with negative and positive self-views tend to respond similarly to self-relevant feedback (Hixon & Swann, 1993; Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990). Such findings raise the possibility that measures that diminish the capacity to reflect may unintentionally throw out the self-knowledge baby with the self-presentational bathwater. This possibility is supported by evidence that responses to the Implicit Association Test predict theoretically relevant outcomes more strongly when they are contaminated by recently activated explicit beliefs about the self (e.g., Bosson et al., 2000).

Together, these considerations raise vexing questions about whether implicit measures of self-esteem do in fact provide *clearer* insight into people's self-views than do explicit measures. An alternative view is that implicit and explicit measures both reveal valid information about people's self-knowledge but that the image of self that emerges from such measures may differ as a result of various underlying processes and situational features. Recent research and theory offers insight into the processes that underlie responses to implicit and explicit measures of attitudes in general (e.g., Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Nosek, 2005). Time will tell whether these insights from the general attitudes literature will generalize to attitudes toward the self.

#### **Actual Versus Possible Self-Views**

Whereas we have restricted our discussion thus far to self-knowledge that people hold about themselves in the present, several influential theories focus instead on potential or possible self-knowledge. For example, E. Tory Higgins's (1987; Higgins, Klein, & Strauman, 1985) self-discrepancy theory proposes that people store self-knowledge not only in the form of *actual* beliefs about the self but also in the form of *ideal* and *ought* beliefs about the self. The ideal self contains people's beliefs about their personal aspirations, as well as their beliefs about important others' hopes for

them; the ought self contains people's beliefs about their personal obligations and duties, as well as their beliefs about important others' expectations for them. According to self-discrepancy theory, discrepancies between actual and ideal selves are associated with heightened levels of sadness and dejection, while actual-ought discrepancies are associated with fear and anxiety. Thus, the ideal and ought selves serve as guides that motivate behaviors aimed at minimizing existing discrepancies. Initial support for these predictions (e.g., Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986; Strauman & Higgins, 1988) was followed by the publication of some inconsistent findings (Tangney, Niedenthal, Covert, & Barlow, 1998). In an effort to reconcile these inconsistencies, researchers subsequently identified moderators of the effects such as the magnitude and importance of the self-discrepancy, the accessibility of the self-discrepancy, and the applicability and relevance of the self-discrepancy in a current context. Eventually, Higgins (1998) developed his ideas into a new theory of regulatory focus.

Similar to Higgins's (1987) self-guides, Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed the construct of possible selves, which are people's projections about what they might become, would like to become, and are afraid to become in the future. Possible selves motivate behaviors intended to achieve desired possible selves and to avoid feared ones (e.g., Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004). Nevertheless, possible selves alone may not be sufficient to motivate effective behaviors unless they are accompanied by plausible strategies for achieving desired goals (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006).

### ***Global Versus Specific Self-Knowledge***

Self-views vary in their breadth or specificity, which corresponds directly to the amount of information they convey (Hampson, John, & Goldberg, 1987). At the broadest level, global self-views are generalized beliefs that encompass a range of personal qualities (e.g., "I am worthwhile" and "I like myself"). At the narrowest level, specific self-views or self-concepts pertain to relatively specific qualities (e.g., "I am a world-class guitarist"). Between these extremes lie midlevel self-views that convey a moderate amount of information about the self (e.g., "I am cooperative" and "I lack common sense").

The distinction between global and specific self-views offers an alternative means of conceptualizing self-esteem. Instead of conceptualizing self-esteem as primarily affective (i.e., how people *feel* about the self) and self-concepts as primarily cognitive (i.e., what people *believe* about the self), as have some theorists (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003), it is possible to think of self-esteem as a global belief about the self and self-concepts as relatively specific beliefs about the self (Marsh & Craven,

2006; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Swann et al., 2007). The latter approach assumes that self-knowledge is structured hierarchically in memory, with global self-esteem at the top of the hierarchy. Beneath global self-esteem lie more specific self-concepts nested within domains such as academic, physical, and social. Empirical investigations support this hierarchical model. For example, evidence indicates that individual self-concepts, measured separately, combine statistically to form a superordinate global self-esteem factor (Marsh & Hattie, 1996).

Conceptualizing self-esteem as a global representation of the self can shed light on an ongoing debate in the self-esteem literature. Whereas some suggest that global self-esteem lacks predictive ability when it comes to important life outcomes (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2003), others find that global self-esteem *does* predict important outcomes, as long as those outcomes are measured at a global level, such as several outcomes bundled together (e.g., Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Thus, recognizing that self-knowledge assumes both global and specific forms may bear practical fruit by increasing researchers' ability to predict criterion variables of interest (e.g., Swann, et al., 2007).

Some theorists seek a middle ground between conceptualizing self-esteem as a single global entity and seeing it as numerous specific self-views. Based on the assumption that agency and communion represent universal dimensions that underlie much of human behavior and thought (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Wiggins, 1979), this "middle ground" approach identifies two components of global self-esteem that correspond to agency and communion (e.g., Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1971). Tafarodi and Swann (2001) labeled these components *self-competence*, an evaluation of one's ability to bring about desired outcomes, and *self-liking*, an evaluation of one's goodness, worth, and lovability. Supporting this distinction, research indicates that self-competence and self-liking predict unique outcomes (e.g., Bosson & Swann, 1999; Tafarodi & Vu, 1997).

### ***Personal Versus Social Self-Knowledge***

Within social psychology, social identity theorists were among the first to distinguish personal from social self-knowledge (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Whereas personal self-views refer to individual, trait-like attributes (e.g., submissive, intelligent), social self-views consist of people's knowledge of the social groups to which they belong, along with their feelings about those groups. One important consequence of this distinction is the recognition that people can derive feelings of value and worth not only from their personal qualities but also from their associations with valued groups (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Further refining the personal–social distinction, some theorists propose the existence of several levels at which self-knowledge is represented (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996). According to these perspectives, self-knowledge pertaining to people’s distinct traits and qualities, or *personal* self-views, is stored at the individual level. At the interpersonal level reside *relational* self-views, which describe qualities that are relevant to people’s social roles and relationships (e.g., protective older sister). Finally, two types of self-views associated with group memberships can be distinguished, collective self-views and group identities. *Collective self-views* refer to personal qualities that are associated with people’s group memberships (e.g., open-minded Democrat; Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004), and *group identities* refer to characteristics of a group that may or may not describe an individual member of that group (Lemay & Ashmore, 2004). For example, people may hold convictions about the groups to which they belong (“Spaniards are impulsive”) that conflict with their personal self-views (“I am cautious”).

Although all people presumably store self-knowledge at all three levels (personal, relational, and group), there exist stable individual differences in the extent to which people focus on, value, and derive self-esteem from each form of self-view. For example, people from collectivistic cultures tend to focus more on their relational and collective self-knowledge, whereas those from individualistic cultures tend to focus more on their personal self-knowledge (Cousins, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Moreover, whereas women emphasize their relational self-views more than men, men emphasize their collective self-views more than women (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). These differences in chronic focus suggest that people’s cultural background and gender play important roles in the types of self-relevant information they are most likely to notice, recall, and be influenced by.

### Metacognitive Aspects of Self-Knowledge

Metacognitive aspects of self-knowledge refer to characteristics—such as importance, certainty, and stability—that differentiate some self-views from others. Here, we cover several metacognitive aspects of self-knowledge that have attracted substantial empirical scrutiny.

### Valence of Self-Knowledge

Not surprisingly, robust associations exist between the valence of people’s specific self-views and their global feelings of self-esteem, such that people higher in self-esteem tend to have more positive self-views and fewer negative ones (Brown, 1998; Pelham & Swann, 1989). Theorists have explained this relation in two ways. According to the

bottom-up perspective, global self-esteem derives from the overall valence of individual self-views in the self-concept (e.g., Marsh, 1990). As such, a woman who thinks of herself as intelligent, sociable, and attractive has higher global self-esteem than a woman who thinks of herself as unintelligent, socially awkward, and unattractive. The competing, top-down perspective, holds that feelings of global self-esteem are the driving force behind the valence of people’s relatively specific self-views (e.g., Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001). According to this perspective, people develop global feelings of self-esteem early in life, and their global regard for the self determines whether they subsequently develop positive or negative beliefs about the self within specific domains. Thus, a man who has high global self-esteem thinks of himself as more intelligent, sociable, and attractive than a man who has low global self-esteem. At present, evidence exists for both of these perspectives, pointing to an interactive effect wherein bidirectional, direct and indirect links are found between the valence of self-knowledge and the valence of global self-esteem (Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2006).

### Importance of Self-Knowledge

James (1890/1950) first observed that self-views can vary in importance and that such variation can have important implications for the self. In fact, this observation led to his classic formula in which self-esteem equals success (actual achievements) divided by pretensions (desired achievements). Thus, competent performance in important domains fosters self-esteem, but incompetence does not threaten self-esteem if it occurs in devalued domains. As James put it, “I, who for the time have staked my all on being a psychologist, am mortified if others know much more psychology than I. But I am contented to wallow in the grossest ignorance of Greek” (1890/1950, p. 310). Initial attempts to test James’s formula were unsupportive (Hoge & McCarthy, 1984; Marsh, 1986). Later work, however, revealed that the importance of self-views is related to self-esteem primarily among people who have relatively negative self-views overall but are highly certain of their positive self-views (Pelham, 1995; Pelham & Swann, 1989).

The importance that people place on their specific self-views predicts other self-relevant phenomena. For example, when people deem a self-view high in importance they are more likely to behave in accordance with it (Pelham, 1991), and they demonstrate higher levels of cross-situational consistency in their self-descriptions of it (English & Chen, 2007). Indeed, people behave so as to protect and maintain their highly important self-views. For instance, people exhibit stronger resistance to challenges to highly important self-views than to self-views that are less important (Markus, 1977), and they work especially

hard to surround themselves with people and feedback that verify the self-views they deem most important (Chen et al., 2004; Swann & Pelham, 2002). Moreover, people avoid painful social comparisons when the domain of comparison is linked to their most important self-views (Wood, 1989), and they may even distance themselves from close friends who outperform them in such domains (Tesser, 1988).

Just as specific self-views can vary in importance, so can collective self-views and group identities. Whereas some people place great importance on their memberships in various social groups, others attribute little significance to “being male” or “being Native American” (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Turner & Brown, 2007). Placing a lot of stock in collective self-views is linked to both positive and negative outcomes. On the one hand, for members of negatively stereotyped social groups, placing importance on the collective self can serve as a buffer against the hurtful effects of discrimination on self-esteem and well-being (Crocker & Major, 1989; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). On the other hand, those who value strongly their group memberships are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of stereotypes about their group, and they display heightened levels of conformity to maladaptive group norms. We have more to say about these effects of group identification in our discussions of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) theories.

### *Certainty and Clarity of Self-Knowledge*

The certainty with which people hold self-views has important implications for the self. Increases in the certainty of people’s self-views, for example, are associated with increases in global self-esteem (Baumgardner, 1990; Story, 2004). Conversely, low levels of self-view certainty are associated with increased tendencies toward maladaptive psychological conditions, such as social phobia (Wilson & Rapee, 2006).

As with important self-views, people work especially hard to maintain their highly certain self-views. For instance, people who are more certain of their self-views tend to behave more consistently across situations (Baumgardner, 1990). Similarly, people are more likely to seek (Pelham, 1991) and receive (Pelham & Swann, 1994) interpersonal feedback that is consistent with self-views of which they are highly certain. When confronted with feedback that challenges highly certain self-views, people display resistance (Swann & Ely, 1984), and such resistance efforts may further buttress the certainty of their self-views (Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988).

Closely related to self-view certainty is self-concept clarity, which is defined as the extent to which self-views are clear, confident, consistent, and stable across time

(Campbell et al., 1996). Like certainty, the clarity of people’s self-views is associated with higher global self-esteem (Campbell, 1990). Moreover, heightened self-concept clarity is associated with decreased neuroticism (Campbell et al., 1996), more adaptive coping skills (Smith, Wethington, & Zhan, 1996), and increased psychological adjustment (Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003).

### *Stability of Self-Knowledge*

Despite an overall tendency toward stability across long periods (see the section on Identity Negotiation and Change), some self-views fluctuate a great deal across shorter time frames. Much of the research on short-term fluctuations in self-knowledge focuses on individual differences in self-esteem stability. Whereas some people provide similar ratings of their global self-esteem from one measurement to the next, others experience relatively frequent, transient fluctuations in state self-esteem (e.g., Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993). Moreover, although there is a modest, positive association between the level and stability of self-esteem (e.g., Kernis, Paradise, Whitaker, Wheatman, & Goldman, 2000), high levels of instability may occur at any level of global self-esteem.

In general, higher levels of self-esteem stability are associated with superior psychological well-being. For example, independent of their self-esteem level, people with more stable self-esteem are more likely to pursue everyday goals for intrinsic reasons (e.g., interest and enjoyment) rather than extrinsic reasons (e.g., feeling forced), and they feel less anxiety associated with the pursuit of such goals (Kernis et al., 2000). People higher in self-esteem stability also report fewer depressive symptoms in the face of daily stressors (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989).

To date, much of the research on self-esteem stability focuses on the experiences of people with stable versus unstable high self-esteem. Compared with their stable high self-esteem peers, individuals with unstable high self-esteem appear hypervigilant for social feedback, and they react to negative performance feedback with heightened anger, hostility, and defensiveness (e.g., Kernis et al., 1989). Because of its high reactivity to events that challenge the self, Kernis (2003) calls unstable high self-esteem a form of “fragile” high self-esteem.

Note that *actual* stability of self-knowledge and *perceived* stability of self-knowledge are independent. For instance, those who assume that their belief structures tend to remain stable across time may perceive greater consistency between their past and their present attitudes than is actually the case (Ross, 1989). Conversely, those whose implicit theories lead them to expect that training programs will improve their skills (e.g., Conway & Ross, 1984), or that personal and social adjustment generally increase with

age (Woodruff & Birren, 1972), may perceive *less* stability across time in these self aspects than they actually display. For these reasons and related ones, people's beliefs about the stability of their self-knowledge may fail to track the actual stability of such knowledge.

### **Organization of Self-Knowledge**

Research suggests that people differ in terms of how they organize self-knowledge in memory. Much of this research considers four features of the structure of self-knowledge. First is the number of different *self-aspects*—superordinate traits or roles (e.g., wife and social self)—that house all lower-order pieces of self-knowledge in the self-concept (e.g., Linville, 1987). Next is the valence of self-knowledge, often measured as a function of the ratio of positive to negative self-views in the self-concept (Showers, 1992). Third is the level of *compartmentalization* versus *integration* that characterizes the self-aspects. Compartmentalization refers to the tendency to store positive and negative self-views within separate self-aspects, whereas integration refers to the tendency to store both positive and negative self-views within the same self-aspects. Finally, some researchers consider the importance that people place on their different self-aspects, with the assumption that more important self-aspects—and their accompanying contents—are likely to be activated most frequently (Showers, 1992).

Consideration of these features of the self-concept has led to several important insights into the links between self-concept and mental health. For example, work done by Showers and colleagues (Showers, 1992; Showers & Kling, 1996) reveals that compartmentalization is generally associated with higher self-esteem and reduced depression among people who place importance on their positive self-aspects. For such individuals, compartmentalization limits their cognitive access to painful or threatening self-relevant information. Conversely, integrative self-structures are associated with higher self-esteem and lower depression for people who place importance on their negative self-aspects, because experiences that activate negative self-aspects call to mind both negative and positive pieces of self-knowledge. Integration also promotes resilience in the face of extreme stress or adversity (Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2007) or intense negative mood states (Showers & Kling, 1996).

### **Contingency of Self-Esteem**

The contingency of self-esteem refers to the extent to which people base their feelings of self-worth on their ability to achieve specific outcomes or match specific standards. As noted by Kernis (2003), at least two different approaches exist to the study of contingent self-esteem. One approach assumes that most people have contingent self-esteem but that they differ in the particular domains on which they

base their self-esteem (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). According to this perspective, college students differ reliably in the extent to which they base their self-esteem on their accomplishments within seven broad domains: academics, appearance, approval from others, competition, family support, God's love, and virtue (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). Moreover, consistent with James's (1890/1950) self-esteem formula, people's feelings of global self-esteem tend to fluctuate as a function of their successes and failures primarily within domains in which they are psychologically invested (Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn, & Chase, 2003; Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen, 2002). Although some work suggests that contingencies of self-worth can interfere with adaptive functioning (e.g., Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003), some domains of contingency may be healthier than others. For instance, basing self-esteem on internal contingencies, such as virtue or God's love, is associated with fewer signs of psychological distress than basing self-esteem on external contingencies, such as appearance or others' approval.

The other approach to contingent self-esteem assumes individual differences exist in the overall extent to which people possess contingent versus "true" (noncontingent) self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1995). According to this perspective, contingent and true self-esteem represent two types of self-esteem that derive from different learning experiences. Contingent self-esteem develops when individuals learn that their worth and lovability depend on their attainment of specific outcomes. Having internalized this belief, individuals with contingent self-esteem tend to pursue goals for extrinsic reasons (e.g., others' approval) rather than intrinsic reasons (e.g., interest), and they show heightened levels of conformity to external forces (Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). Conversely, true high self-esteem develops when individuals learn that they are valued for who they are and receive high levels of care and autonomy in the pursuit of their goals. Not surprisingly, true self-esteem is associated with a reduced focus on extrinsic reinforcers and higher levels of psychological adjustment (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995).

Although these approaches focus on different aspects of contingent self-worth, they need not be viewed as antagonistic. Indeed, while people do differ in the specific domains on which they base their self-esteem (Crocker, Luhtanen, et al., 2003), meaningful overall differences also occur in the degree to which people exhibit contingent versus true self-esteem (Kernis et al., 2008; Neighbors, Larimer, Markman Geisner, & Knee, 2004).

### **Narcissism: A Special Case of Fragile Self-Esteem**

Whereas most metacognitive features of self-knowledge discussed thus far have been unidimensional, narcissism

is a multidimensional construct. Some qualities associated with narcissism were discussed earlier, including highly positive self-views (in agentic domains; Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey, & Kernis, 2007; Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002), low levels of certainty and clarity, and contingent self-esteem within competitive, but not affiliative, domains (Crocker, Luhtanen, et al., 2003; Zeigler-Hill, Clark, & Pickard, 2008). We include narcissism in our list of metacognitive features because narcissism has broad effects on how people value, select, organize, store, and activate self-knowledge (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Rhodewalt, 2005).

Freud (1914/1957) first introduced the idea of narcissism to the psychoanalytical literature, viewing it as a disorder that arises when individuals attach too much *libido*, or psychic energy, to the self and not enough to their internalized representations of relationship partners. As a result, the individual develops excessive levels of self-regard but does not feel sufficient love for others. Later psychoanalytical theorists (e.g., Kernberg, 1986; Kohut, 1966, 1971) differed from Freud in their understanding of the origins of narcissism but still conceptualized it as an outgrowth of troubled relationships and unmet needs early in life (see Bosson et al., 2008).

Although narcissism is typically viewed as a personality disorder among clinical psychologists (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Westen, 1990), social and personality psychologists often treat it as an individual difference variable that can be assessed meaningfully within any population. This approach gave rise to the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1981), a scale designed to measure narcissistic tendencies within normal, nonpathological populations. When treated as a unidimensional scale, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory assesses *grandiose narcissism*, which is characterized by high self-esteem, vanity, entitlement, a willingness to manipulate and exploit others for personal gain, and high levels of defensiveness in response to self-threats (e.g., Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991). Like individuals with unstable high self-esteem and contingent self-esteem, those high in grandiose narcissism appear to have “fragile” high self-esteem because their self-esteem is easily threatened and requires constant validation (Kernis, 2003).

Recently, theorists have given increasing attention to a second narcissistic subtype referred to as *vulnerable narcissism* (see Dickinson & Pincus, 2003). Like grandiose narcissists, vulnerable narcissists entertain self-aggrandizing fantasies about themselves, and they demonstrate a heightened sense of entitlement and a willingness to exploit others. In contrast to grandiose narcissists, however, vulnerable narcissists report feelings of inferiority,

shame-proneness, and low self-esteem (Cooper & Ronningstam, 1992; Gramzow & Tangney, 1992). Moreover, vulnerable narcissists tend to hide their feelings of grandiosity behind a façade of modesty. Thus, whereas grandiose narcissists demand admiration and respect from others, vulnerable narcissists crave approval but are too inhibited to demand it.

## ORIGINS OF SELF-REPRESENTATIONS

The forms and features of self-knowledge described in the preceding sections do not arise in a vacuum. Self-knowledge is shaped by numerous interacting forces, both biological and social. Here, we outline some of the raw materials of self-knowledge, as well as the mechanisms through which people develop mental representations of the self. We also consider questions and findings concerning the accuracy of people’s representations of the self.

### Biological Origins of the Self and Identity

#### Brain

Where, in the brain, is the “self” represented? Although this question defies a simple answer, researchers have begun to specify the neurological correlates of various aspects of self-knowledge. In general, much of this work converges on the conclusion that self-referential tasks—such as thinking about one’s traits or feelings or evaluating the self—trigger heightened activity in the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC; e.g., Johnson et al., 2002; Kelley et al., 2002; Mitchell, Banaji, & Macrae, 2005; Ochsner et al., 2004; Saxe, Moran, Scholz, & Gabrieli, 2006). Notably, heightened MPFC activity is also observed when people think about the traits and mental states of close others (Ochsner et al., 2005), suggesting that the MPFC may be part of a network of brain systems that mediates social knowledge in general. Moreover, different areas of the brain become active when people report on the self-descriptiveness of trait terms associated with domains with which they have high versus low levels of personal experience (Lieberman, Jarcho, & Satpute, 2004). This latter work is interpreted as evidence that different brain systems process evidence-based (high personal experience) and intuition-based (low personal experience) self-knowledge. The larger point here is that no single brain system or area of the brain appears to be, of itself, responsible for our sense of self. Instead, multiple systems work together to create the sense of a unitary self, and some of the same systems that mediate self-knowledge are involved in mediating knowledge about others’ traits and states.

### ***Genes and Heredity***

Much of what is known about the genetic bases of the self comes from the personality literature, which typically assesses personality by having people report their self-views (e.g., Vazire, 2006). Based largely on twin studies, this research indicates a substantial genetic basis to people's self-views within the broad, "Big Five," personality factors of extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. Specifically, approximately 40% to 60% of the population variance in self-reports of the Big Five factors is accounted for by genes (for a review, see Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001). The remaining variance is typically attributed to environmental influences, gene-environment interactions, and chance factors.

Recently, there has been a surge of interest in understanding the genetic bases of global self-esteem. Thus far, researchers in this area have demonstrated that self-esteem is heritable (McGuire et al., 1999) and that genes explain approximately 30% to 50% of the population variance in self-esteem (Kamakura, Ando, & Ono, 2007; Kendler, Gardner, & Prescott, 1998). Heredity also appears to explain a substantial amount of the variance in self-esteem stability and change across time (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2006).

Despite the vigor with which some theorists have integrated genetic influences into broad, biosocial models of the self (e.g., Tesser, 2002), the biology of the self remains an area of inquiry in which research lags behind theory. One interesting challenge for future researchers will be to specify the biological bases of distinctions that are basic to the area, such as enduring versus weakly held identities. One possibility is suggested by a general theory of learning known as Hebb's (1949) law. The law states that if one neuron (A) is repeatedly involved in causing another neuron (B) to fire, metabolic changes occur in one or both cells that enhance the ability of A to cause B to fire. Simply put, cells that "fire together, wire together." Insofar as this principle applies to the clusters of neurons or pathways that are associated with self-knowledge, then it may be that enduring self-representations are simply ones that have been activated repeatedly in the past (which makes them more readily activated in the future). Although this particular account is speculative, it is clear that further elaboration of the neural bases of self-knowledge could be extremely beneficial to the development of theory within the subarea.

### **Interpersonal Origins of the Self and Identity**

#### ***Attachment Relationships***

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), infants begin to formulate rudimentary schemas—or *working models*—about their lovability

and worth early in life, before they have self-awareness. Working models reflect the consistency and responsiveness of treatment that infants receive from primary caregivers. Specifically, caregiving that is both consistent and adequately responsive to infants' needs should convince them that they are worthy of love and capable of efficacious action. This, in turn, should instill in children the foundations of favorable self-concepts and high global self-esteem (Bretherton, 1988; Verschueren, Marcoen, & Schoefs, 1996). Conversely, caregiving that is inconsistent, unresponsive, neglectful, or abusive teaches children that they are not valuable, that others are not trustworthy and dependable, or both. In such cases, relatively negative self-concepts and low esteem will likely result.

This is not to suggest, however, that young children with negative models of self will *describe* themselves in unfavorable terms. In fact, young children appear to display what Swann and Schroeder (1995, p. 1310) refer to as a "positive tropism"—a cognitively simplistic, automatic, and adaptive propensity to seek positive evaluations and avoid negative ones. Indeed, research reveals that young children generally describe their qualities and skills in an extremely positive manner (Harter, 1999), and the tendency to endorse positive self-descriptions emerges before the tendency to endorse negative ones (e.g., Benenson & Dweck, 1986; Stipek & Tannatt, 1984). This may occur because, before middle childhood, children lack the cognitive capacity to differentiate between their actual and ideal selves, and they answer questions about the self primarily in terms of their ideals (Harter, 2006; Turner, 1968). Alternatively, it may be that children in the West are socialized to embrace positive evaluations spontaneously and without reflection (e.g., Heine & Hamamura, 2007). In any event, around middle childhood, children begin to display a more nuanced understanding of the self, and stable individual differences in self-concepts and self-esteem emerge. Specifically, children at this age begin to internalize the appraisals of others (see the next section). Thus, it may be that the working models developed during infancy provide a lens through which children interpret others' reactions to them. Indeed, some research suggests that the working models that are set in place during infancy continue to influence people's interpretations of social feedback into adulthood (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987). It is important to note, however, that a substantial minority (30–45%) of people change their attachment style—their characteristic pattern of relating to others—across time (e.g., Cozzarelli, Karafa, Collins, & Tagler, 2003).

#### ***Appraisals***

Whereas working models presumably filter people's interpretations of self-relevant experiences and feedback,

appraisals are part of the raw materials from which people derive specific beliefs about the self. As noted earlier, Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) relied on the theory of symbolic interactionism to explain how people translate others' reactions into self-knowledge. According to this theory, people come to know their own abilities, traits, and qualities by seeing themselves through other people's eyes. More specifically, the symbolic interactionists described a sequence in which we (a) observe others' reactions to our behaviors; (b) use others' reactions to construct *reflected appraisals*, or inferences about how others perceive us; (c) internalize these reflected appraisals as elements of the self-concept; and (d) use the self-concept to guide subsequent behaviors. Thus, the self is created socially and is subsequently sustained in a cyclical, self-perpetuating manner.

Because children younger than 8 years lack the perspective-taking skills to evaluate themselves through the eyes of others (e.g., Selman, 1980), they do not typically demonstrate an awareness of others' appraisals until middle childhood. It is most likely for this reason that clear individual differences in self-reported self-esteem do not emerge until middle childhood (Harter, 1999). At this point, people who perceive that they are respected, admired, and loved accordingly internalize these appraisals as positive self-views, whereas those who perceive that they are evaluated unfavorably develop negative self-views. In turn, people's self-views shape their subsequent interpretations of others' reactions to them: Whereas people high in self-esteem believe that others perceive them quite favorably, those low in self-esteem tend to underestimate how favorably they are appraised by others (Bohrnstedt & Felson, 1983; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000).

Despite the intuitive appeal of symbolic interactionism in its original form, research has necessitated significant refinements of some of its tenets (see Tice & Wallace, 2003, for a review). In particular, while it is clear that people's reflected appraisals correlate strongly with their self-views—that is, people see themselves the way they believe that others see them—it is not clear that people's reflected appraisals correspond to others' *actual* evaluations of them (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Moreover, little evidence indicates that people observe specific others' reactions to them and then base their self-views on that feedback. Instead, people's own beliefs about the self seem to shape their assumptions about how others view them (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). Finally, people have a more accurate understanding of how they are perceived by others *in general* than of how they are perceived uniquely by specific others (Kenny & Albright, 1987), a finding that further challenges the notion that people internalize the feedback they receive from specific others. Thus, although

people undoubtedly base their self-knowledge to some degree on the feedback they receive from others, they have other influential sources of self-knowledge.

### *Social Comparisons*

According to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, people develop self-knowledge by comparing their own traits, abilities, opinions, and emotions with those of similar others (for reviews, see Suls & Wills, 1991; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Moreover, the direction of comparison that people make—upward versus downward—is assumed to influence their resulting self-views and feelings of self-esteem. For example, while comparing oneself with someone who is better than the self on a particular dimension of evaluation (an upward comparison) can diminish a person's feeling of self-esteem, comparing oneself with someone who is worse off than the self (a downward comparison) tends to boost self-esteem (e.g., Helgeson & Mickelson, 1995; Marsh & Parker, 1984).

Besides increasing people's self-knowledge, social comparisons serve an important motivational purpose. For instance, sufferers of stressful events and painful life experiences can facilitate their own coping and improve their affective state by comparing themselves with others who are worse off than them (Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985). Indeed, a large body of research suggests that people tend to make downward social comparisons when under conditions of threat (Taylor & Lobel, 1989). When motivated to improve the self, however, people may make upward comparisons with those who embody excellence along particular dimensions (Blanton, Buunk, Gibbons, & Kuyper, 1999).

As with reflected appraisals, research suggests that people do not develop the cognitive ability to compare the self explicitly with others until middle childhood (Harter, 1999; Ruble, Boggiano, Feldman, & Loebel, 1980). Once this ability emerges, social comparisons tend to occur spontaneously, effortlessly, and even unintentionally. For example, some work demonstrates that people change their self-views automatically on comparison with both appropriate *and* inappropriate comparison partners. Given adequate mental resources, however, people “mentally undo” modifications to the self-concept that are based on inappropriate comparisons (Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995).

### *Incorporating Others' Qualities*

As we saw in the previous three sections, people can acquire novel self-knowledge through their interactions with significant relationship partners. Self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1996), however, highlights yet another route through which people's interactions with close others can lead to changes in the self. The theory predicts that

as closeness between two people grows, they gradually come to experience a cognitive “overlapping” of their self-concepts. As a consequence, relationship partners begin to act as if the resources, perspectives, and characteristics of the close other are at least partially their own (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Thus, in close relationships, people acquire novel self-knowledge in the form of features of the close other that have been subsumed into the self-concept. Support for these ideas can be found in research demonstrating that people cognitively confuse the self more with close others than they do with non-close, but equally familiar, others (e.g., Mashek, Aron, & Boncimino, 2003). Similarly, people’s self-concepts contain more self-descriptive information in the weeks immediately after, versus before, they fall in love (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995), suggesting that features of the new loved one are incorporated into the self.

### ***Influences of Culture and Gender***

To a large degree, people’s self-knowledge reflects the culture in which they are socialized. Researchers interested in the effects of culture on the self have long assumed that the broad dimensions of collectivism and individualism differentiate not only the normative rules and structures of societies but the self-structures of individuals as well (for a review, see Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Individualism refers to a set of beliefs and values that has, at its core, the assumption that individuals are ascendant over the groups to which they belong. Conversely, collectivism holds that individuals are mutually interdependent and that groups take priority over individuals (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995). Given these different emphases on the individual versus the group, it is not surprising that people who are socialized in different cultures often display self-concepts with remarkably different structures, properties, and contents.

In their review of cross-cultural differences in the self, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that collectivistic cultures generally give rise to people with *interdependent* selves, whereas individualistic cultures engender people with *independent* selves. In the interdependent self, the individual is connected to significant others, relatively undifferentiated, and fluid across contexts and time; in the independent self, the individual is distinct from others, autonomous, and stable across contexts and time. Consistent with the different values that underlie collectivism versus individualism, people with interdependent versus independent selves tend to exhibit divergent motivations regarding the self. For instance, whereas people with interdependent selves appear to value modesty and self-criticism (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999), those with independent selves prefer being better than others

(Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Taylor & Brown, 1988). As a result, people who are raised in individualistic cultures report substantially higher global self-esteem than do people raised in collectivistic cultures (Heine & Hamamura, 2007). In analyses that treat culture as the unit of analysis, there is a strong positive correlation between a culture’s individualism and the global self-esteem of its inhabitants (Oyserman et al., 2002).

Using a two-component definition of self-esteem, however, may lead to a more nuanced understanding of the effects of culture on the positivity of the self-concept. Consider research showing that people raised in collectivistic cultures demonstrate relatively high levels of self-liking, whereas those raised in individualistic cultures demonstrate relatively high levels of self-competence (Tafarodi, Lang, & Smith, 1999; Tafarodi & Swann, 1996). As noted earlier, self-liking reflects people’s evaluations of themselves in terms of qualities that link them to others; conversely, self-competence reflects people’s evaluations of themselves in terms of qualities that distinguish the self from others. If collectivistic cultures value the group over the individual, then it makes sense that people with interdependent selves derive self-esteem primarily from those qualities that make them good group members, such as loyalty (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005; but see Heine, Kitayama, & Hamamura, 2007, who raise serious questions regarding the evidentiary basis of this assertion). It is also no surprise that people with independent selves tend to derive self-esteem primarily from the qualities that make them stand out from others. Within their cultural contexts, each way of constructing self-esteem makes adaptive sense.

Mirroring these cultural differences are gender differences in the extent to which people exhibit interdependent versus independent selves. Whereas girls are often socialized to prioritize the qualities that align them to others, boys are taught to prioritize the qualities that distinguish and differentiate them from others (e.g., Spence, Deaux, & Helmreich, 1985). Accordingly, women tend to develop more interdependent selves, and men tend to develop more independent selves (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Cross & Madson, 1997). Moreover, women tend to link their self-esteem to their relational qualities, whereas men link their self-esteem to their independent qualities (Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992).

### **Intrapsychic Origins of the Self and Identity**

#### ***Self-Perception***

Like outside observers, people sometimes learn about themselves by observing their own behavior, and the situation in which it occurs, and then inferring their underlying attitudes and dispositions (Bem, 1972). According to self-perception

theory, people are most likely to acquire self-knowledge through observation of their own behavior when their self-knowledge is weak, ambiguous, or difficult to interpret. Moreover, many attributional principles that guide people's perceptions of others also operate when they infer their own dispositions via self-perception. Thus, for example, the self-knowledge that people acquire through self-perception of their behavior is less certain to the extent that multiple possible causes exist for that behavior (Kelley, 1971). As such, an *overjustification effect* occurs when people lose intrinsic motivation to perform a certain activity because extrinsic rewards convince them that they are performing the behavior merely to obtain the rewards (for reviews, see Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Lepper, Henderlong, & Gingras, 1999).

As noted earlier, research on the inaccuracy of reflected appraisals casts doubt on the notion that others truly serve as “looking glasses” in which people see the self reflected (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). On this point, self-perception theory may provide an answer. Instead of accurately perceiving themselves through the eyes of others, people may engage in self-perception of their own behaviors and then attribute these perceptions of the self to others (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). If so, then self-perceptions of behavior may play an important role in two related, but distinct, self-knowledge processes: First, self-perceptions are used as a basis for inferring one's *own* internal qualities, traits, attitudes, and the like, and second, self-perceptions are used as a basis for inferring how *others* view the self.

In an interesting twist on self-perception theory, Goldstein and Cialdini (2007) proposed that people can learn about their own internal states—at least their temporary ones—by observing the behavior of others with whom their identities are merged. The logic is that, when viewing a close other perform a behavior, people vicariously infer novel information about the self, resulting in a change in the self-concept. Although the notion of “vicarious self-perception” is relatively new, it fits well with the general idea that people modify the self to achieve greater congruence with the presumed beliefs, self-views, and attitudes of close others (Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990; Hinkley & Andersen, 1996).

### **Introspection**

Unlike self-perception, which involves observing one's overt behaviors and using them to infer one's internal qualities, introspection involves deliberate attempts to achieve self-knowledge by directing attention “inward.” While introspecting about the self seems like a fairly obvious route to self-knowledge, research suggests that people spend surprisingly little time (about 8% of total thoughts) reflecting on themselves (Csikszentmihalyi & Figurski, 1982).

When people do engage in introspection, the fruits of their efforts are sometimes rather bitter. For example, introspection about the *reasons* behind one's attitudes, behaviors, and feelings is likely to produce inaccurate self-knowledge (Wilson, Laser, & Stone, 1982). As a consequence, when people introspect about the reasons behind their feelings, they sometimes change their feelings to match the reasons they generate (Wilson & Kraft, 1993), which can lead them to make decisions that they later regret (Wilson et al., 1993).

Introspection can also lead people to compare their current achievements and behaviors with their beliefs about how they should or ought to be, which can create discomfort if there is a disparity (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Higgins, 1987). Falling short of internal standards can produce painful feelings of shame for those who are prone to attribute their shortcomings to their whole self (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Some propose that this state of self-awareness can be so troubling that people go to great lengths to “escape the self” through activities such as drinking, drug use, binge eating, and even suicide (Baumeister, 1991).

Introspection can also have desirable effects, however. Introspecting about who one is, for example, can produce accurate self-knowledge if people have sufficient cognitive resources (Hixon & Swann, 1993). Similarly, when self-reflection reveals that one meets or exceeds one's standards, positive feelings result (Greenberg & Musham, 1981; Silvia & Abele, 2002). Moreover, people are more likely to behave in line with their personal values when in a state of self-awareness, suggesting that introspection can promote adaptive (or at least self-consistent) self-regulation (e.g., Beaman, Klentz, Diener, & Svanum, 1979; Gibbons, 1978).

### **Experiencing the Subjective Self**

Yet another source of self-knowledge is the continual, ever-changing “stream of consciousness” about which James (1890/1950) wrote—the spontaneous thoughts, feelings, and reactions that constitute the self-as-subject (or “I”). Experiencing the subjective self differs from both self-perception and introspection in fundamental ways. For instance, whereas both self-perception and introspection involve reflection on the self, experiencing the subjective self can involve an outward focus, a full engagement in the moment that draws attention away from the self (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Moreover, whereas behaviors provide the raw material for self-perception processes, private thoughts and feelings provide the raw material for subjective self processes.

Research suggests that people rely more on their subjective experiences than on their overt behaviors when constructing self-knowledge (Andersen, 1984; Andersen & Ross,

1984), and when people encounter others who share their subjective reactions to the world, they feel especially attracted to them (Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, & Pyszczynski, 2006). Apparently, when people sense that they and others perceive the world through the same psychological “lens,” their confidence in the validity of their own visions of reality is reinforced. Such “I-sharing” may constitute a powerful antidote to the problem of existential isolation.

### Accuracy of Self-Knowledge

Humans routinely assert that they know themselves. Most people assert that they know themselves better than others do (Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky, & Ross, 2001). And it is not just laypeople who harbor this belief in the fidelity of self-knowledge: Behavioral scientists harbor this same conviction. For example, in 2003, 70% of the studies published in a leading personality psychology journal (*Journal of Research in Personality*) relied on self-reports as the index of personality (Vazire, 2006). Such confidence in the veracity of self-knowledge is challenged by a spate of demonstrations, mostly conducted in the laboratory, indicating that some aspects of self-knowledge are simply wrong (e.g., Epley & Dunning, 2006; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003; for non-laboratory studies, see Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998; Vazire & Mehl, 2008). At least two potential sources of such errors exist. In the tradition of Freud, many have argued that people unconsciously or consciously suppress unwanted thoughts and feelings. Although intriguing, these processes have been notoriously difficult to demonstrate empirically (for reviews, see Erdelyi, 1974, 1993). The other source of errors in self-knowledge is that people simply lack access to many processes that give rise to self-relevant behaviors, which throws a wrench into the process of introspection. As a result, people err when asked about the causes of their actions (Nisbett & Wilson, 1979), their attitudes (e.g., Galdi, Arcuri, & Gawronski, 2008), or their future emotional reactions (e.g., Wilson & Gilbert, 2003; for a review, see Wilson & Dunn, 2004). In the end, such errors could undermine the veracity of people’s representations of themselves.

Such sharp clashes between people’s intuitions and the results of systematic research invariably led theorists and researchers to ask which source—individuals or research findings—really is more accurate. Such questions regarding the validity of self-knowledge are particularly vexing due to the criterion problem: It is easy to say whether or not someone has brown eyes or even a pleasant smile, but the problem of assessing the validity of self-knowledge is knotty indeed (e.g., Kruglanski, 1989; Swann, 1984). For example, when it comes to high-level, global self-views

such as “worthwhile,” questions of accuracy are impossible to answer definitively because choosing one or more criteria is inherently subjective. More specific self-views such as “extroverted” or “fastidious,” however, have relatively clear empirical referents. Empirical assessments of accuracy have therefore focused on lower-level self-views.

Some of the most telling studies of accuracy of self-knowledge involve comparing the capacity of people’s self-ratings and the ratings of peers to predict some objective outcome, such as the ratings of observers, or some naturally occurring outcome, such as success in military training. Different methodologies lead to different conclusions, but the studies using the strongest methodologies generally conclude that well-acquainted observers are at least as accurate as are people themselves. The results of one recent study (Vazire & Mehl, 2008) suggest that the specific content of criterion behaviors may be critical. These researchers compared the ability of individuals and acquainted others to predict naturally occurring behaviors over a 4-day period. Findings revealed that individuals were more accurate in predicting some of their behaviors (e.g., deliberate behaviors such as arguing) but acquaintances were more accurate in predicting other behaviors (e.g., spontaneous behaviors such as talking one on one). Although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions from this work, it is probably safe to say that people are accurate about the self within some arenas but that others—particularly close others—may be better able to predict people’s reactions within other arenas, especially when people’s own wishes and desires compromise their objectivity. Therefore, some analysts have concluded that accurate self-knowledge is best obtained not from introspecting but instead from consulting with friends and acquaintances or observing one’s own behavior (Wilson & Dunn, 2004).

### MOTIVATIONAL PROPERTIES OF THE SELF

My thinking is first and last and always for the sake of my doing.

—William James (1890/1950, p. 333)

Although James believed that the major function of self-knowledge was to guide action, this proposition has proven surprisingly controversial in certain quarters. Indeed, some prominent thinkers have gone as far as to take the opposite position, suggesting instead that self-knowledge is an epiphenomenal product of social relations that has no causal status. In self-perception theory, for example, Daryl Bem (1972) proposed that the flow of influence between behavior and the self is unidirectional: We infer who we are by observing our own behavior and the conditions under

which it unfolds, but self-knowledge has no impact on subsequent action. Theorists from different theoretical traditions have echoed Bem's assertions. Group researcher John Turner, for example, contended that personal self-views are "there to be explained, not in themselves explanations" (Turner, Reynolds, Haslam, & Veenstra, 2006, p. 25). Such pockets of skepticism notwithstanding, it is fair to say that today the self's motivational properties are widely accepted among most students of the self (e.g., Higgins & Pittman, 2008; Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). Testimony to contemporary enthusiasm for motivational processes is offered by the burgeoning literature on self-enhancement processes.

### Self-Enhancement Motive

The self-enhancement motive has been defined in many ways, but it is most commonly conceptualized as a desire to maximize the positivity of one's self-views (e.g., Leary, 2007). The notion that people prefer and seek self-enhancement is enormously popular, with one landmark statement of the viewpoint—Taylor and Brown's (1988) literature review—garnering more than 2,200 citations. The popularity of the self-enhancement motive is easy to understand. After all, the notion that people want positive evaluations seems like a relatively simple and readily testable argument. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the notion that self-enhancement is a basic human motive lends scientific credibility to the cultural assumptions and normative behaviors of the researchers conducting the research, most of whom happen to be Westerners.

Little wonder, then, that self-enhancement assumptions have found their way into an extraordinarily wide range of contemporary theories (e.g., Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). Purported evidence for the theory abounds. One popular phenomenon is the "better-than-average effect," wherein most people assert that they are above average, a mathematical impossibility. For example, college students overwhelmingly report that they are above-average drivers (Svenson, 1981). Ironically, when told of the existence of such "positive illusions," people claim that they are less susceptible to them than most others are (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004). At this juncture, dozens of such self-enhancing illusions have been reported in the research literature (for reviews, see Helweg-Larsen & Shepperd, 2001; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008).

Yet, in recent years, researchers have begun to voice reservations about social psychology's motivational centerpiece. Some findings suggest that some specific effects reflect the failure of participants to comprehend fully what they are being asked when they are encouraged to estimate

their standing relative to others. Kruger and Dunning (1999), for example, had participants estimate their performance on dimensions such as humor, grammar ability, and logical reasoning. Regardless of their actual performance, participants estimated that they scored in the 60th to 70th percentile. The result was that low scorers overestimated their performance but high scorers *underestimated* their performance. Similarly, other findings reinforce the notion that people's performance estimates should not be taken at face value. Indeed, in estimating performance relative to "average performance," people seem to rely on a heuristic that leads them to rate everyone—including unknown strangers—slightly above average (Klar & Giladi, 1997).

To be sure, some researchers (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenburg, 1995) have shown that people display self-enhancing performance estimates even when asked to compare themselves against specific others. Nevertheless, evidence that such biases are stronger when people have positive self-views (Brown, 1986) raises a further issue regarding the mechanism that gives rise to these effects. That is, almost all studies that are taken as evidence of self-enhancement suffer from a serious potential confound. Researchers have been aware of this confound for some time but have failed to appreciate its full implications. For example, in their review of the positive illusions literature, Taylor and Brown (1988) noted the following:

One caveat, however, deserves mention. A considerable amount of the research cited demonstrates that people solicit and receive self-confirming feedback, not necessarily positive feedback. For example, a woman who thinks of herself as shy may seek and receive feedback that she is (see Swann, 1983). At first, these results may seem contradictory with the position that social feedback fosters positive self-conceptions, but in fact, they are not. Because most people think well of themselves on most attributes, confirming feedback is typically positive feedback. (p. 202)

Taylor and Brown (1988) were alluding to an ambiguity imposed by almost all research on self-enhancement having been conducted on unselected participants, roughly 70% of whom have positive self-views (Diener & Diener, 1995). Therefore, evidence of self-enhancement may reflect, to an unknown degree, a desire for confirmation of chronic self-views (e.g., Kwan, John, Kenny, Bond, & Robins, 2004; Kwan, John, Robins, & Kuang, 2008).

To illustrate the import of Taylor and Brown's (1988) caveat, consider one of the most robust findings in the self-enhancement literature: the tendency for people to make self-serving attributions (e.g., Mezuilis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004; Miller & Ross, 1975). When researchers conducted a parallel study in which they measured the self-views of participants, they discovered that those with positive self-views displayed the self-serving pattern but those

with negative self-views displayed precisely the opposite pattern, perceiving negative evaluators to be more accurate than positive evaluators (e.g., Swann, Predmore, Griffin, & Gaines, 1987). This pattern of data clearly indicates that a desire to confirm, rather than enhance, self-views underlies participants' responses.

Another finding that has widely been attributed to self-enhancement strivings is the tendency for people to selectively recall positive feedback about themselves (Sanitioso & Wlodarski, 2004). Again, when researchers measured the self-views of participants in such studies, they discovered that their responses seemed to be driven by a desire for self-confirmation. That is, only those with positive self-views preferentially recalled positive feedback; people with negative self-views displayed the opposite tendency, recalling more negative than positive feedback (e.g., Story, 1998; Swann & Read, 1981). Similarly, people's tendency to define virtues as qualities they possess and vices as qualities they lack (Dunning, Perie, & Story, 1991) appears to be due primarily to people who have relatively positive views of themselves (Beauregard & Dunning, 2001).

The upshot of such findings is simple: Although "self-enhancement strivings" seem to be pervasive, the motive that is driving such strivings may be self-confirmation rather than self-enhancement. And even if it turns out that such putative self-enhancement strivings among people with positive self-views are indeed compelled by a self-enhancement motive, self-enhancement theory still cannot account for the responses of those with negative self-views. This is problematic for a propensity that is alleged to represent a basic human motivation. If the self-enhancement motive is so basic, why has this news escaped the attention of the roughly 30% of the population who possess negative self-views? The nonenhancing responses of people with negative self-views are particularly perplexing when we consider that when most human needs are frustrated people *redouble* their efforts to gratify those needs. Instead, people with negative self-views actually embrace negative evaluations (for a review, see Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Angulo, 2007).

Even if evidence of self-enhancement from participants in the West could be assumed to reflect a desire for self-enhancement, growing evidence indicates that such strivings do not generalize across cultures. Japanese people, for example, possess a relatively strong desire to be viewed as modest, and this desire causes them to eschew positive evaluations at times. In addition, a relatively strong interest in self-improvement among the Japanese seems to make them more receptive to negative feedback than Americans are (e.g., Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001). Japanese participants are also less unrealistically optimistic about their futures when compared with American participants (Chang, Asakawa, & Sanna, 2001).

Some counter such contentions by arguing that the East-West difference in behaviors related to self-enhancement reflects a difference not in the strength of the self-enhancement motive itself but only in how people pursue this motive (e.g., Kurman, 2003; Yik, Bond, & Paulhus, 1998). Japanese are modest, the argument goes, as a means of attaining social acceptance, which is considered self-enhancing in Japanese culture (e.g., Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). Although this tactic may appear to rescue self-enhancement theory from disconfirmation, it does so at the cost of redefining self-enhancement from a theory about a preference for positive evaluations to a theory about a desire for social acceptance or communion. As we argue later, the two motives are quite different in form, structure, and consequence. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, no one ever contended that the Japanese eschewed social acceptance or communion. To the contrary, it would seem that, if anything, Japanese individuals are *especially* interested in social acceptance and communion (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997).

A final concern grows out of mounting evidence that self-enhancement strivings can degrade the quality of people's relationships and even their well-being (Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995; Paulhus, 1998; Robins & Beer, 2001; for a review, see Crocker & Park, 2004). Such evidence leads one to wonder why the pursuit of a supposedly basic human motivation should be associated with dysfunctional outcomes.

There are, then, reasons to ask whether the superficial charms of self-enhancement theory and research are outweighed by some fundamental difficulties with the theory and the data that ostensibly support it. We think that the answer to this question is yes, and we accordingly propose an alternative approach to self-related motivation in the next section. Our goal is not to banish self-enhancement theory. Rather, we seek to partition it into two motives that we perceive as more viable, both logically and empirically. We then add an additional motive to the mix. The result is three broad self-motives that serve to guide most identity-relevant functioning.

Before turning to our three-motive scheme, let us add three caveats. Our goal is to identify three broad *self* motives. One can surely make fine-grained distinctions among variants of each of our motives, and it is no doubt useful to do so in certain contexts. In addition, our scheme is limited to identity-related motives and hence excludes biological motives (e.g., sex), as well as other motives that have appeared in formulations that are broader in scope (e.g., Fiske, 2004). Finally, although we believe that this scheme offers a useful lens for viewing the self literature, we see its role as limited to just that; we make no claim to having discovered *the* motives that underlie all human social behavior.

### Tripartite Motivational Approach

There is no doubt that people prefer and enjoy positive over negative evaluations when they perceive that such evaluations are appropriate and deserved (e.g., Swann, Krull, & Pelham, 1989). Nevertheless, we suggest that obtaining positive evaluations cannot be an end in itself (e.g., Leary, 2007). Like paper currency, positive evaluations are valuable more for what they symbolize than for their intrinsic properties. In particular, positive evaluations are valued because they are markers of one's *social worth* (and thus satisfy a desire for communion) and *competence* (and thus satisfy a desire for agency). From this vantage point, motives for *communion* (belonging and interpersonal connectedness) and *agency* (autonomy and competence) may be responsible for the phenomena that researchers have attributed to self-enhancement strivings.

The desires for communion and agency have a prominent history in the psychological literature. The needs for communion and agency are assumed to underlie many aspects of personality and social behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Wiggins & Broughton, 1991), and theories of optimal functioning emphasize the importance of meeting both needs (e.g., Ryff, 1989). In the domain of attitudes, researchers suggest that constructs similar to communion and agency (i.e., warmth and competence) represent the two basic dimensions of attitudes (e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Fiske et al., 2002; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). Of even more relevance here, communion and agency correspond with the dual forms of self-esteem discussed earlier in this chapter (e.g., Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1971). Using Tafarodi and Swann's (2001) terms, the need for communion motivates a desire for *self-liking* and the need for agency motivates a desire for *self-competence*.

Replacing the self-enhancement motive with the communion and agency motives evades the reservations raised earlier regarding self-enhancement. For example, whereas the self-enhancement formulation requires that people with both positive and negative self-views prefer positive evaluations over negative ones, our formulation does not. Therefore, evidence that people with negative perceptions of their social worth and competence fail to embrace positive evaluations of themselves on these dimensions (e.g., Bosson & Swann, 1999) does not challenge the assumption that such individuals *want to* enjoy feelings of communion and agency. Rather, communion and agency motives theoretically encourage people to achieve *actual* communion and agency rather than merely seeking positive evaluations for their own sake. Finally, although evidence indicates that people from Southeast Asia are less inclined to self-enhance than Westerners (e.g., Heine et al., 1999), the needs for communion and agency appear to be pancultural.

In addition to the desires for communion and agency, we propose a third motive: the desire for coherence. In our usage, coherence encompasses feelings of regularity, predictability, meaning, and control. Coherence is distinct from consistency, which emerges whenever any two psychological elements follow logically from each other (e.g., Festinger, 1957). Thus, to maintain consistency between two elements, such as a behavior and a related identity, one can change either element. In contrast, coherence is a special case of consistency that refers specifically to the degree of correspondence between one's enduring self-concept and the other elements in one's psychological universe (English, Chen, & Swann, 2008).

In some respects, the coherence motive may be even more fundamental than the desires for communion and agency (Guidano & Liotti, 1983; Popper, 1963). After all, those who lack the conviction that their knowledge system offers coherent and trustworthy insights into the world around them are unable to evaluate evidence of social worth or competence because they are not confident that they know such evidence when they see it. If the self-views serve as the lenses through which people perceive reality, incoherence degrades the vision of reality that these lenses offer. Deprived of a clear vision of reality, people have little means of knowing whether what they "see" faithfully reflects reality. Indeed, if people completely lose faith in the veracity of their knowledge system, their sense of self begins to unravel and they fall into a state of disintegration anxiety (Kohut, 1971). Deprived of stable self-knowledge, people feel that they have no basis for knowing how to act, and guiding action is the primary objective of thinking in the first place (James, 1890/1950).

Consider evidence that people who experienced events that bolstered their feelings of communion or agency, or both, also suffered deficits in mental and physical health *if those events challenged their need for coherence* (e.g., Swann et al., 2007). This research was based on the assumption that experiences that challenge one's enduring self-views are stressful enough that, over time, they may actually be physically debilitating. The first two studies (Brown & McGill, 1989) examined the impact of positive life events on the health outcomes of people with low and high self-esteem. Positive life events (e.g., improvement in living conditions or getting a high grade) predicted increases in health among high self-esteem people but decreases in health among people low in self-esteem. A more recent study (Shimizu & Pelham, 2004) extended these results by demonstrating that the effects replicated even while controlling for negative affectivity (thus undermining the rival hypothesis that negative affect influenced both self-reported health and reports of symptoms).

But if the desire for coherence may sometimes override the desires for communion and agency, we do not mean to imply this is always the case. Whereas some degree

of coherence may be necessary for people to effectively pursue their communion and agency needs, the opposite may also be true.

At first blush, it might seem that the three-motive conceptualization overlooks several motives that other theorists have deemed important. For example, whereas some propose motives that are somewhat overlapping with ours (acceptance, status, and meaning; Hogan & Shelton, 1998), others differentiate between motives that we instead classify together (autonomy and competence; Deci & Ryan, 1995) or introduce other motives into the mix (self-assessment; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Still others propose a six-motive scheme (i.e., self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy, and meaning; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Gollledge, & Scabini, 2006) that appears broader than our approach. Nevertheless, our approach incorporates most of these other motives if one allows that several of the motives distinguished by previous researchers in fact reflect the same core motive with different criteria used to gauge its gratification. In what follows, we consider several examples of these phenomena.

### **Communion**

The communion motive is designed to maximize feelings of acceptance, belongingness, and social worth. Humans evolved in the context of small, close-knit groups, and the need for communion remains a constant theme in the construction and maintenance of the self and identity (Bowlby, 1969; McAdams, 1989). On a biological level, evidence suggests that people require a minimum number of close, positive, interpersonal connections to thrive. Those who lack such connections exhibit relatively poor physical health, weakened immune functioning, and even higher mortality rates (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). On a psychological level, people who lack positive affiliations with others experience troubling feelings of loneliness (Archibald, Bartholomew, & Marx, 1995; Newcomb & Bentler, 1986), while those with rich social networks report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). So central is communion to humans' existence that Baumeister and Leary (1995) deemed the need to belong a "fundamental" human motive. Although researchers generally agree that the criterion for this motive should be the appraisals of others, the precise nature of these appraisals has varied. Whereas advocates of the self-enhancement motive argue for the importance of positive evaluations (e.g., Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Sedikides & Strube, 1997), others emphasize feelings of connectedness or belonging (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In recent years, the desire for communion assumed center stage in one prominent approach: Leary's sociometer theory (Leary & Downs, 1995). Leary and colleagues

assumed that people are profoundly invested in estimating the extent to which they are valued by interaction partners, group members, and relationship partners. Signs of rejection trigger an alarm reaction that is punctuated by a loss of self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem is a psychological "fuel gauge" that is sensitive to variations in perceived inclusion. Support for sociometer theory comes from evidence that manipulations that convey rejection, disapproval, or disinterest on the part of others tend to lower participants' state self-esteem (e.g., Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, & Holgate, 1997). Similarly, field studies demonstrate that self-esteem dips when people experience rejection (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003) and ostracism (e.g., Williams, 2001). Moreover, longitudinal research shows that perceived relational value is linked to changes in self-esteem over time (Srivastava & Beer, 2005).

Sociometer theory has performed the useful service of focusing attention on the utility of people's efforts to forge connections with others. From an evolutionary perspective, positive evaluations and the feelings of self-esteem that they foster are useful not because of their intrinsic value but because they are markers of acceptance within a larger social group whose protection and shared resources were vital to humans' survival. Conceivably, the argument could be taken even further, such that *all* self-views serve as indices of the manner in which we are perceived by others. Accepting this broader interpretation, however, could lead one to question the novel contribution of sociometer theory, because the notion that self-views provide a window into the perceptions of others has been around for more than a century (e.g., Cooley, 1902). These and other considerations led some theorists to raise troubling indictments of the theory (e.g., Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). A further limitation of the model, however, is that although people are aware of how others perceive them in general, they seem fairly inept at discriminating the appraisals of specific other individuals (e.g., Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). Therefore, the "self-esteem fuel gauge" sometimes offers faulty information. In addition, it is clear that self-esteem tracks more than simply social acceptance. For example, self-esteem seems acutely sensitive to indicators of agency.

### **Agency**

The agency motive is theoretically designed to maximize feelings of autonomy (e.g., self-determination) and competence. The need for agency begins to guide behavior early in life, such as when infants strain to escape their caregivers so that they can explore and manipulate the world around them (Bowlby, 1969). Later in life, people's sense of efficacy forms a core component of personality (Bandura, 1991) and contributes to psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989).

In the most general case, the agency motive encourages people to strive for successful performance of valued activities. A special case of agency strivings emerges when people seek to improve themselves (e.g., Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 1999; Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). Self-improvement strivings are presumably initiated when people focus on negative aspects of the self that they need to change to meet personal or social standards.

Some theorists argue that the prevalence of the self-improvement motive is strongly influenced by cultural factors. In particular, researchers suggest that East Asian cultures place an emphasis on self-improvement at the expense of self-enhancement (e.g., Heine et al., 1999; Kitayama & Markus, 1999). The rationale for this contention rests largely on the relative levels of individualism versus interdependence in East Asian versus Western cultures. Individualistic cultures (e.g., those in United States and Australia) place a premium on independence and therefore emphasize individual needs, goals, and rights. In contrast, collectivistic cultures (e.g., those in East Asia and Latin America) emphasize ingroup goals, needs, and obligations and thus strongly value interdependence. In such cultures, it is particularly crucial to attend to others' perspectives so as to meet the expectations of ingroup members and maintain interpersonal harmony (Heine et al., 1999). This greater sensitivity to social standards presumably explains the relative eagerness of East Asians to improve themselves to meet others' expectations.

### Coherence

Widespread support exists for the notion that people have a deep-seated need for psychological coherence (Guidano & Liotti, 1983; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006). As Popper (1963) contended, infants are born with a predisposition to identify patterns and regularities. Without this predisposition, they would be incapable of learning:

The expectation of finding a regularity . . . connected with an inborn propensity to look for regularities, or with a *need* to *find* regularities. . . . This "instinctive" expectation of finding regularities . . . is logically a priori to all observational experience, for it is prior to any recognition of similarities . . . and all observation involves the recognition of similarities (or dissimilarities). (pp. 47–48)

The coherence construct has gone by several labels, including *security* in Maslow's (1954) motivational hierarchy, *need for closure* in Kruglanski's (1990) formulation, *need for structure* in Neuberg and Newsom's (1993) model, and *meaning* according to Hogan and Shelton (1998). Evidence of the coherence need has surfaced in many cultures in addition to North America, including countries in Eastern and Western Europe, as well as in Australia, Korea,

and China, suggesting that it is not limited to a specific cultural milieu (e.g., Heine et al., 2006).

Moreover, two self theories feature a desire for coherence as the primary motivational mechanism: self-assessment (e.g., Trope, 1983) and self-verification (Swann, 1983). Each theory focuses on different criteria for assessing the coherence of self-related information. Self-assessment theorists have suggested that when people are uncertain of their self-views they seek relatively objective, diagnostic information about themselves. A series of laboratory studies provides support for this general approach (e.g., Brown, 1990; Strube, 1990). While the issue of the relative potency of self-assessment strivings remains to be determined, its range of application is limited to self-views of which people are uncertain. This is an important limitation, for people tend to be highly certain of the qualities that they care about. Such highly certain self-views have been the province of various self-confirmation theories (e.g., Lecky, 1945; Secord & Backman, 1965), the most recent of which is self-verification theory (Swann, 1983).

Self-verification theory assumes that, out of a desire for social worlds that are coherent and predictable, people want others to see them as they see themselves. This desire can be understood on both epistemic and pragmatic levels. Epistemically, receiving self-verifying evaluations reassures people that their self-views accurately reflect social reality and that they can count on their self-views to guide their behavior. Pragmatically, self-verifying appraisals signal to people that others hold appropriate expectations of them and that their interactions will therefore proceed smoothly. Among people with positive self-views, the desire for self-verification works with the desires for communion or agency, as all of these motives encourage people who view themselves positively to embrace positive evaluations. Among people with negative self-views, however, self-verification theory predicts that they will seek negative evaluations (e.g., Swann et al., 1989). Self-verification theory thus makes divergent predictions for people with enduring positive versus negative self-views.

One focus of research has been on the variables that determine when people will prioritize self-verification over the competing desire for positive feedback. The desire for self-verification prevails (e.g., people with negative self-views prefer and seek negative evaluations) when the self-view is firmly held (i.e., certain and important; Pelham & Swann, 1994; Swann & Pelham, 2002) or extreme (Giesler, Josephs, & Swann, 1996), when the relationship is relatively enduring (Campbell, Lackenbauer, & Muise, 2006; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994), and when people have the cognitive resources needed to compare the feedback against a relevant mental self-representation (Hixon & Swann, 1993; Swann et al., 1990). In addition,

challenges to a self-view will trigger compensatory activity that shores up that self-view or some other component of the self-system (Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992). Interestingly, such compensatory reactions are symmetrical with respect to self-esteem; just as high self-esteem people strive to reaffirm their positive self-views in the wake of negative feedback, those with low self-esteem strive to reaffirm their negative self-views in the wake of positive feedback (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992). Finally, whereas the foregoing research focused on personal self-views, other research extended the findings to collective self-views (Chen et al., 2004; Lemay & Ashmore, 2004) and group identities (Gómez, Seyle, Huici, & Swann, in press).

Researchers have identified several distinct strategies of self-verification. For example, people gravitate toward self-verifying environments, such as interaction partners who see them congruently and who are apt to provide them with self-verification (e.g., Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992). Once in a given setting, people display “identity cues” (i.e., overt signs of who they are, such as clothing or office décor) that communicate their identities to others (Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002). In addition, people can elicit self-verifying reactions by behaving in ways that evoke such responses (Swann & Hill, 1982; Swann & Read, 1981). And if these strategies fail to evoke self-verifying evaluations, people can distort nonverifying feedback through preferential attention and recall (Swann & Read, 1981), construe the feedback in ways that make it fit with their enduring self-views (Swann et al., 1987), or even leave the relationship (Swann & Pelham, 2002).

### Hybrid Theories

Elements of the three motives described above can be found in two major social psychological theories of the self, self-affirmation theory and terror management theory. Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) combines elements of the agency and coherence motives (see also self-esteem maintenance theory, Tesser, 1988). This theory focuses on how people react when they encounter challenges to their positive self-views—specifically, challenges to the sense of being a moral, adaptive, and capable person. The theory assumes that the self-system is composed of many interrelated parts that interact with one another. As a result, shoring up one component of the system can buttress other components against threats. Thus, whereas people ordinarily respond defensively when they receive information that challenges a positive self-view, these defensive reactions can be attenuated by inoculating them with positive feedback.

Interestingly, people strive to affirm their positive self-views in ways that may have little to do with the nature of the self-threat (Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1999; Tesser & Cornell, 1991). In some early research, the researchers used a cognitive dissonance paradigm to show that the self-threat that arises from counterattitudinal behavior can be alleviated by having participants first affirm an important, self-relevant value in a domain unrelated to that of the dissonant behavior (Steele & Liu, 1983). In a similar vein, later studies indicated that people were more willing to examine useful but potentially threatening feedback about themselves if they first enjoyed success on an unrelated task (Trope & Pomerantz, 1998).

One especially fruitful line of research was designed to explore the health implications of self-affirmation theory. The results of one study indicated that people were more willing to examine potentially threatening information related to AIDS prevention after an important but unrelated value was affirmed (e.g., Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000). In this and related studies, researchers appear to have uncovered an effective strategy for neutralizing the defensive reactions that have long impeded efforts to enlist the compliance of people who engage in risky behaviors (e.g., Jemmott, Ditto, & Croyle, 1986; Liberman & Chaiken, 1992).

Within our scheme, another hybrid approach is terror management theory (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2004). At its core, this theory is concerned with people’s attempts to evade the existential anxiety that arises from awareness of their own mortality. To quell the fear of death, people work to convince themselves that they are worthwhile actors who are playing an important role in a world that has meaning and purpose. More specifically, people rely on their self-concepts (beliefs about the self relative to culturally valued standards), their cultural worldviews (sets of socially shared beliefs and values), and their close relationships to help them manage the fear of death. When people encounter challenges to any components of this belief system, death awareness increases and existential anxiety ensues (Schimel, Hayes, Williams, & Jahrig, 2007). Note that self-views, worldviews, and relationships provide much (if not all) of the raw material through which people meet their needs for agency, coherence, and communion. Moreover, clear parallels can be drawn between the needs for self-esteem, meaning, and relationships, as discussed in terror management theory, and the three motives that we emphasize here. Thus, while sharing our recognition of the importance of the tripartite self-motives, terror management theory uniquely proposes that people pursue these three self motives as a means of buffering themselves against a primitive and basic fear of death.

Not surprisingly, people react strongly when their mortality is made salient (for a review, see Solomon et al., 2004). In dozens of inventive and provocative studies, researchers have shown that those who are reminded of their own mortality are more concerned with having high self-esteem (Greenberg, Solomon, et al., 1992) and are more inclined to behave in ways that defend and maximize self-esteem (Taubman Ben-Ari, Florian, & Mikulincer, 1999). Mortality salience manipulations also have a bearing on group relations. For example, those high in mortality salience are especially motivated to defend their cultural worldviews by derogating people who challenge these beliefs (e.g., Florian & Mikulincer, 1997; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). Notably, the tendency for mortality salience to trigger such activities is diminished among people with elevated levels of self-esteem (e.g., Greenberg, Solomon, et al., 1992) and among those in whom hope for an afterlife has been primed (Dechesne et al., 2003).

Terror management theory has also helped illuminate recent political trends in the United States. For many Americans, the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, was a naturally occurring manipulation of mortality salience. Terror management theory suggests that under such conditions people reach out for a strong-willed and decisive leader who promises to defend and protect them. U.S. President George W. Bush represented just such a leader to many, and as the theory would predict, his popularity soared after the attacks on the twin towers. More impressive evidence for the theory was provided by a series of experiments indicating links among the attacks, mortality salience, and endorsement of Bush. For example, subliminal exposure to stimuli related to September 11 increased participants' death-related thoughts, as well as their support for Bush. Furthermore, mortality salience made participants more inclined to vote for Bush in the upcoming presidential election and less inclined to vote for his opponent, Senator John Kerry (Landau et al., 2004). More generally, death anxiety appears to be a robust predictor of rightwing, conservative thinking (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), and salient encounters with mortality-threatening events can compel people to adopt more politically conservative values and beliefs (Bonanno & Jost, 2006). It is important to note, however, that the link between mortality salience and political conservatism is not always so direct. Among both strong adherents of political liberalism and those in whom the value of tolerance has been primed, mortality salience actually increases acceptance of differing worldviews (Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chatel, 1992).

In short, terror management theory raises the interesting possibility that many everyday behaviors that have traditionally been chalked up to motives such as agency, coherence,

and communion are really performed in the service of fending off anxiety associated with death. Yet some have raised serious challenges to this assumption. For example, Hart and colleagues independently threatened each of these three self-motives and found that, at least among some individuals (those who had insecure attachment styles), each type of threat produced defensive reactions that were similar in character to those produced by mortality salience manipulations (Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005). From this vantage point, reminders of death may gain their potency because they represent a triple whammy: they simultaneously undermine the assumptions that we have a future self to which we can aspire (challenging coherence needs), we have enduring relationships (challenging communion needs), and we will accomplish things in the future (challenging agency needs; for a similar view, see McGregor, Gailliot, Vasquez, & Nash, 2007). This reasoning raises a critically important question: Is fear of death the ultimate motivator of behavior that terror management theory would have us believe it is, or are other high-level motives (such as our tripartite motives) of themselves responsible, with the potency of mortality salience manipulations residing in their capacity to activate all three motives simultaneously? At this juncture, this question remains unanswered.

## SELF IN RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS

The idea that the self is socially constructed was first elaborated by the symbolic interactionists (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Since then, numerous theorists have emphasized the fundamentally interpersonal nature of the self (for a review, see Markus & Cross, 1990). So crucial are social interactions to the construction and maintenance of the self-concept that people surely would not possess self-views were it not for their interactions with others. Consider Gallup's (1977) seminal work on self-awareness in chimpanzees, which compared the self-recognition abilities of chimps raised in isolation with those of chimps raised with conspecifics. Whereas the chimps with prior social experience readily recognized their own reflections in a mirror, those raised in isolation showed no signs of self-recognition. Although they undoubtedly saw themselves reflected in the surface before them, the isolated chimps possessed no basis for understanding exactly who or what they were looking at. Our genetic similarity to chimps suggests that a similar fate might befall humans raised in isolation.

To make sense of the vast theoretical and empirical literatures on the interpersonal self, Markus and Cross (1990) identified three ways in which others shape the self. First, individuals come to know who they are, within a larger social structure, through their interactions with others.

This type of interpersonal influence occurs when individuals internalize the values, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and social roles to which they are exposed. It refers to those aspects of the self that are acquired via ongoing interactions with significant others and that become internalized so thoroughly by the individual that “they seem the natural and inevitable consequences of his or her own thoughts” (Markus & Cross, 1990, p. 582). Next, people rely on feedback and information from others to form the basis of their self-knowledge, as well as to evaluate, maintain, and regulate the self. This type of interpersonal influence is exemplified by work on symbolic interactionism (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), social comparisons (Festinger, 1954), self-presentation (Tedeschi, 1981), and self-verification (Swann, 1983), among other theories. What these approaches share is an emphasis on the ways in which the self is influenced by others’ real, perceived, and imagined reactions. Finally, people’s interpersonal relationships themselves become part of the self, as when individuals store mental representations of close others alongside information about the self in memory. Work on self-expansion (Aron & Aron, 1996) and individual differences in individualism versus collectivism (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995) illustrates this type of interpersonal influence on the self. An assumption that underlies this work is that close relationship partners do not just exist outside of us—in a real sense, close partners “get inside our heads.”

In what follows, we consider theories of self and identity that illustrate each of Markus and Cross’s (1990) three types of interpersonal influence. Note that much of the material discussed elsewhere in this chapter (e.g., symbolic interactionism, attachment dynamics, and self-motives) could fit just as easily in this section. To avoid redundancy, however, we confine this section to material that we have not discussed at length elsewhere. Moreover, the placement of theoretical approaches into one of the three categories of influence is, admittedly, rough at times. Certainly, the processes by which people construct, maintain, and store self-knowledge will, at times, reflect multiple forms of interpersonal influence. Nonetheless, we impose order by discussing social identity, self-categorization, and stereotype approaches under the Constructing the Self heading; desires for self-consistent versus overly positive partner appraisals under the Evaluating and Maintaining the Self heading; and broad cognitive models of the interpersonal self under the Including Others in the Self heading.

## Constructing the Self

### *Social Identity Approach*

Social identities refer to people’s knowledge of their memberships in social groups and the emotional significance

that they attach to these memberships (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These identities presumably emerge throughout the life span, beginning when children learn, through interactions and communications with caregivers and others, the normative behaviors, feelings, and values associated with the various social groups to which they belong. Once formed, social identities seem to exert a powerful influence on social thought and behavior. Indeed, some argue that because social identities are the building blocks of personal identities, social identities are more apt to influence behavior than are personal identities (Turner et al., 2006).

One version of social identity theory assumes that people enter groups that they perceive as both positive and distinctive as a means of self-enhancement (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Consistent with this idea, evidence indicates that people display a strong ingroup bias, or tendency to favor their own group relative to outgroups (e.g., Brewer & Kramer, 1985; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Combined with the outgroup homogeneity effect—the perception of greater similarity among the members of outgroups as compared with ingroups (Linville & Jones, 1980)—this bias facilitates people’s ability to dehumanize members of outgroups by perceiving them as lacking in human qualities. Dehumanization, in turn, plays a role in the justification and maintenance of intergroup prejudice and conflict (Cortes, Demoulin, Rodriguez, Rodriguez, & Leyens, 2005; Vaes, Paladino, Castelli, Leyens, & Giovanazzi, 2003).

In recent years, social identity approaches have shifted away from an emphasis on self-enhancement as the operative motive. Self-categorization theory avoids the issue of motivation altogether, stressing instead that the perceptual processes that prompt humans to parse the world into “us” and “them” are hardwired and basic to human existence (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Other approaches argue that social identities reduce uncertainty (e.g., Hogg, 2000; Hogg & Mullin, 1999), make the world more sensible and coherent (e.g., Ellemers & Van Knippenberg, 1997), or protect people from the existential terror of death (Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, & Sacchi, 2002). Whatever the nature of the motive that causes people to identify with groups, it is ironic that although group memberships are essential for survival, they also place people in grave danger, such as when social identities motivate people to confront or even kill one another.

Of course, considerable individual differences exist in how central of a role social identities play in people’s lives. Most people perceive gender and ethnicity to be important social identities, but variation occurs in the strength of people’s identification with these groups (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Moreover, the centrality of people’s social

identities varies not only as a function of the desirability of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) but also as a function of the group's structure, such as its size and distinctiveness relative to outgroups (Brewer, 2003).

Placing importance on one's social identities can yield both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, for members of low-status groups, higher levels of group identification can provide a psychological buffer against the negative effects of discrimination on self-esteem, well-being, and achievement (e.g., Wong et al., 2003). Some propose that strong identification with stigmatized ingroups at least partially explains the relatively high self-esteem and favorable self-views of members of many low-status groups (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; see also Crocker & Major, 1989). On the negative side, those who identify more strongly with their social groups are more likely to display the perceptual and motivational processes that contribute to intergroup conflict and prejudice (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Feather, 1994; Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996). Strong identification with social groups can also encourage rigid compliance with the group's behavioral norms, even when noncompliance would be beneficial. For example, some research reveals that members of ethnic minority groups avoid beneficial health behaviors—such as exercise and eating healthy foods—to the extent that they perceive those behaviors as violating their ingroup's norms (Oyserman, Fryberg, & Yoder, 2007). Thus, stronger identification with ingroups increases people's motivation to defend and uphold group norms even when these norms are harmful.

Since its inception, social identity theory has offered a powerful and generative framework for understanding how individuals connect themselves to the larger social structure and rely on groups to provide them with self-knowledge, meaning, and purpose. Although the seeds of the theory were sewn during post-World War II Europe (e.g., Tajfel, Jaspars, & Fraser, 1984), social identity theory's impact now extends far beyond the continent of its birth and it is considered a major social psychological theory on an international level. As evidence of the theory's generativity, a PsycINFO search of articles and chapters with keywords of “social identity,” “ingroup,” or “outgroup” produced more than 3,000 publications at the time of this writing. Moreover, the theory has been revitalized by new approaches (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2007; Vaes et al., 2003), as well as applications to diverse subareas within the behavioral sciences.

### *Interplay of Personal and Social Selves*

Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) proposes that the relationship between personal and social self-views is hydraulic. For example, the principle of functional

antagonism posits that as the salience of group identities increases, the salience of personal identities decreases. Similarly, the theory argues that when people enter groups, they undergo a “depersonalization” process wherein they come to see themselves as categorically interchangeable with other group members. Recently, some theorists have suggested that these principles may not always apply (e.g., Postmes & Jetten, 2006; Simon, 2004). A case in point is offered by a recent study of compensatory self-verification among “fused” people, that is, people whose personal and social self-views have fused. Compensatory self-verification refers to the tendency for people to react to self-discrepant (i.e., overly positive or negative) evaluations by intensifying their efforts to elicit self-verifying evaluations (e.g., Swann & Read, 1981). Because the personal and social identities of fused people are functionally equivalent, challenging either type of identity should fuel behavioral efforts to reaffirm the other type of identity. Consistent with this reasoning, when researchers presented participants with overly positive feedback that challenged the validity of their personal self-views, fused participants (but not nonfused participants) compensated by affirming their social self-views. Specifically, they expressed greater willingness to fight and die for their country (Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009). Such findings indicate that personal and social self-views may sometimes combine synergistically rather than at cross-purposes (see also Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002).

In a related vein, optimal distinctiveness theory suggests that just as people have an inherent drive to identify with groups, they also have an opposing drive for individuation (Brewer, 1991). To cope with these conflicting agendas, people strike a balance by finding a point of “optimal distinctiveness,” an identity that simultaneously addresses their needs for affiliation and individuation. This approach shares with self-verification theory the assumption that group members remain interested in being individuated and attaining verification of their personal identities when they enter groups. One could go even further to suggest that people may affiliate (at least in part) *as a means* of obtaining verification for their personal identities. An example of this would be a woman who joins a chess club to verify her personal identity as highly intelligent.

Researchers operating outside the social identity tradition have independently investigated the interplay between personal and social self-views. One line of research focused on what happens when the social stereotypes of some individuals (“perceivers”) channeled their behavior toward other individuals (“targets”). This work revealed that perceivers elicited behaviors from targets that confirmed their stereotypes (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). Subsequent investigations examined the conditions

under which targets who confirmed the expectations of perceivers internalized these expectations into corresponding self-views (for a review, see Snyder & Klein, 2005).

In more recent years, researchers have suggested that, even if stereotypes do not cause perceivers to behaviorally constrain the response options of targets, the mere existence of a stereotype may shape the behavior of targets in undesirable ways. In part, this research was a reaction to indictments of Black American culture that can be traced to the anthropologist John Ogbu. On the basis of anecdotal evidence, Ogbu suggested that in the United States, the Black minority culture gradually developed an “oppositional” orientation that encouraged them to disengage from the educational system, which was perceived as a “White” domain (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This argument gained widespread acceptance in the popular media, which used it to explain the Black–White achievement gap.

Although the validity of Ogbu’s assertions was never established, the psychological literature offers some evidence that people who identify themselves as having low status sometimes embrace these negative identities (e.g., Spears, Jetten, & Scheepers, 2002) or even the political systems that perpetuate their low status (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Moreover, the more people face discrimination, the more they emphasize the devalued identity (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001).

More direct evidence that cultural groups differ in the extent to which they promote academic achievement has come from researchers who asked why Asian Americans (specifically Chinese and Korean immigrants) outperform both Blacks and Whites on most indices of academic performance. Adopting an interactionist framework, some argue that the relatively high academic performance of Asian Americans is multiply determined (Portes & Zhou, 1993). For example, factors such as immigration selectivity, above-average levels of pre- and postmigration socioeconomic status, and ethnic social structures are thought to interact with immigrant optimism and the belief in education to override blocked mobility (Zhou & Kim, 2006). From this perspective, it is overly simplistic to blame the underperformance of some groups on constructs such as “oppositional culture,” since social structural variables must surely play a role as well. At a minimum, a culture of achievement requires economic resources to support it.

Others have developed formulations that attempt to explain the underachievement of minorities and other negatively stereotyped groups without referring to cultural variables. For example, Steele (1997) contended that for the marginalized, stereotypes represent a “threat in the air” that can trigger anxiety—even when the stereotypes are recognized as fallacious. Research supports the notion

that, in performance settings, anxiety due to stereotypes can distract the individual and cause poor performance and failure. Such failure may, in turn, cause the marginalized group member to disengage from the activity. If the activity happens to involve education, such disengagement may undercut the future socioeconomic viability of the marginalized group (see Aronson & Steele, 2005). Such effects appear to be strongest when the targets of stereotypes value strongly their group identities. That is, targets who value their group memberships are more likely to perceive discrimination against their group (Eccleston & Major, 2006; Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003), and their performance is more likely to suffer when they are reminded of negative stereotypes about their group (Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2007; Schmader, 2002).

### Evaluating and Maintaining the Self

In Orson Welles’s (1941) *Citizen Kane*, Charles Foster Kane holds grandiose illusions about his wife’s talents as an opera singer. So smitten is Kane with Susan’s singing voice that he uses his wealth and power to secure her headlining roles in world-class venues. Sadly, however, Susan knows that she is not the musical virtuoso that Kane believes her to be. Painfully aware of her vocal limitations, Susan grows increasingly traumatized by the humiliation of having to parade her mediocrity in front of an audience. Eventually, the pressure of Kane’s misguided illusions grows too much for Susan to bear, and she tries to escape by taking her own life. Although Susan survives, she never forgives Kane for refusing to see her for who she really is.

The relationship experiences of Kane—one of the most unique and memorable movie characters of all time—are by no means typical. Nonetheless, we believe that his conflict with Susan illustrates a fairly common relationship problem. Specifically, when couples disagree about “who is who” within the relationship, unhappiness ensues.

As noted in our discussion of the coherence motive, people desire appraisals from their relationship partners that verify their highly certain and important self-views, even if these self-views are negative. Moreover, the need for self-confirming appraisals runs particularly strong in the context of relationships characterized by high levels of interdependence. For example, among both college roommates and married couples, people with positive self-concepts prefer partners who view them favorably, whereas those with negative self-concepts prefer partners who view them negatively (Swann & Pelham, 2002; Swann et al., 1994). And when people’s spouses view them in a manner that is discrepant with their stable self-views, their relationships are characterized by high levels of marital distress (Schafer, Wickrama, & Keith, 1996). Indeed, as illustrated by the

case of Susan Kane, psychological health and well-being may suffer when people's close relationship partners disagree with them about who they are (Swann et al., 2007).

And yet, despite the results of research demonstrating that people desire consistent appraisals from their close relationship partners, some research suggests instead that people prefer overly positive evaluations from their partners. For example, Murray and colleagues find that even people with negative self-views feel most satisfied in their relationships, and closest to their partners, when partners view them more favorably than they view themselves (e.g., Murray et al., 1996). Furthermore, Murray suggests that the tendency to idealize romantic partners facilitates relationship success by assuaging people's doubts and giving them the confidence to trust each other (Murray et al., 2000). From this perspective, it is overly positive appraisals—not self-confirming ones—that members of intimate relationships crave.

What might account for the apparent discrepancy between these two bodies of work? One possibility concerns the level of abstraction (e.g., global versus specific) at which these two sets of researchers typically measure partners' self-views and perceptions of each other. Whereas most desires for self-verifying appraisals occur at the level of specific self-views ("My partner think I am at the 55th percentile in cooking ability"), most desires for illusory appraisals occur at the level of global self-views ("My partner thinks I am loving and kind"). Thus, it may be that members of happy couples maintain adoring appraisals of their partners at a global level while also appraising their partners accurately at a more specific level (e.g., Neff & Karney, 2002). Indeed, the results of longitudinal investigations suggest that marriages are most likely to endure over the long haul when partners' global love for each other is based on an accurate understanding of each other's specific traits and qualities (Neff & Karney, 2005). As such, overly positive appraisals of partners may promote relationship satisfaction, provided that they are grounded in reality.

One shortcoming of the global-enhancement, specific-verification argument is that there is no theoretical reason people should suspend their self-verification attempts once self-views exceed some threshold of globality. After all, if the primary function of self-views is to enable people to understand the world and guide behavior, then people should be motivated to verify their global self-views in non-relational contexts. In fact, research on depression (e.g., Giesler et al., 1996; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafari, 1992) and self-esteem (Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner & Bartel, 2007) has shown that people are indeed motivated to verify their global negative self-views.

An approach that confronts this issue directly assumes that it is a covariate of self-view globality—relationship relevance—that is critical. Whereas Swann and colleagues (1994) tend to measure people's self-views within domains that vary in their relevance to relationship satisfaction and functioning (e.g., intelligence, social skills, artistic abilities, and physical attractiveness), Murray and colleagues limit their focus to domains that are high in relationship relevance, such as warmth, kindness, and dependability (e.g., Murray et al., 1996). Stated differently, whereas Swann and colleagues consider self-views that fall along both agentic and communal dimensions, Murray and colleagues focus primarily on communal self-views. Given the critical importance of communal qualities in the context of relationships, it is perhaps not surprising that Murray's research participants were particularly happy with partners who held idealized images of their communal traits. Consistent with this possibility, Swann et al. (2002) found that romantic partners preferred appraisals from their partners that matched their self-views in most domains but desired overly positive appraisals in domains that they considered highly important for relationship satisfaction, such as physical attractiveness.

### Including Others in the Self

Several theorists have examined the ways in which close relationships alter and influence the cognitive contents of the self. For instance, as noted earlier, research on self-expansion reveals that people incorporate the perspectives, resources, and characteristics of close others into their own self-concepts (Aron et al., 1991). Thus, closeness with others inevitably leads to an expansion of the self, as the self-concept grows to incorporate new features (e.g., Aron et al., 1995). One consequence of this cognitive overlap between self and other is that people sometimes display "self-other confusions" (Mashek et al., 2003), suggesting that information about close others and the self is processed similarly.

Whereas self-expansion research focuses on the tendency to assume the features of close relationship partners, other approaches look at how cognitive processes are shaped more broadly by relationships. For example, Baldwin (1992) proposes that people store information about relationship partners in the form of *relational schemas*, or mental models consisting of scripts that describe typical interaction patterns, as well as representations of the self and other that capture how the self typically feels and behaves when interacting with the other. As such, cues that bring a particular relationship partner to mind also activate people's mental representations of self with other (Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991) and call to mind those aspects

of self-knowledge that are contained within that relational schema (Hinkley & Andersen, 1996).

Similar assumptions form the foundation of Andersen and Chen's (2002) relational self theory. In their theory, Andersen and Chen suggest that people's stored representations of self and others play important roles in shaping personality and the self by guiding the cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral patterns that become activated in particular contexts. Because representations of the self are linked in memory with representations of significant others, any chronic or transient reminders of significant others activate particular relational selves and their accompanying styles of thinking, feeling, and acting. Thus, personality and the self are interpersonal patterns that reflect the various selves an individual has constructed in the context of relationships with significant others. Although they acknowledge that the self most likely contains some aspects that are not directly related to representations of significant others, Andersen and Chen propose that the bulk of self-knowledge is acquired in the context of relationships and that significant others are thus "basic to self-experience" (p. 638).

## IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AND CHANGE

People can take on numerous identities. The same man, for example, may be warm with his children, guarded with his co-workers, and a blend of both with his neighbors. This fact of social life can prove challenging for those who are trying to predict what their partners are going to do next. We propose that people meet this challenge through the process of *identity negotiation*, which allows relationship partners to establish "who is who" via ongoing, mutual, give-and-take interactions with each other. Once people establish a "working consensus" that is agreeable to both parties (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Swann & Bosson, 2008), their mutually agreed on expectations transform disconnected individuals into collaborators who have common obligations, goals, and often, a modicum of commitment to each other. In this way, identity negotiation processes provide the "interpersonal glue" that allies people with one another. More generally, just as identities define people and make them viable as humans, identity negotiation processes define relationships and make them viable as a foundation for organized social activity.

Identity negotiation theory (Swann & Bosson, 2008; Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, in press) elaborates on the interpersonal principles that guide identity negotiations. People follow these processes, albeit largely unintentionally, during each of several successive stages of social interaction. Typically, the principles of identity negotiation

encourage people to negotiate identities that are compatible with their chronic self-views. At times, however, target individuals may encounter partners who are unable or unwilling to honor their chronic identities. To the extent that targets are invested in the identity (e.g., it is high in certainty and importance), they may intensify their efforts to elicit self-verifying evaluations. If investment is low and resistance from the perceiver is high, however, targets may behaviorally confirm the expectations of perceivers (e.g., Snyder & Klein, 2005). Eventually, they may internalize the new behaviors into their self-concept, resulting in identity change.

### Identity Negotiation in the East and West

Like most psychological structures, identities survive only insofar as they receive periodic nourishment from the social environment. Therefore, characteristics of the social milieu are a key determinant of how much identity change any given individual experiences. Consider Western versus Eastern cultures. Western cultures encourage identity stability by placing a premium on consistency in the identities people negotiate both over time and across settings. Given this, it is not surprising that identity stability seems to be relatively high in samples of Western participants. For instance, people's self-descriptions on the Big Five factors of extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness remain stable (correlations between .30 and .50) over periods of up to 20 years (e.g., Conley, 1985). Stability estimates are even higher (correlations in the .55–.85 range) if the measurement period is reduced to several years (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1988) or if the self-views are high in importance or certainty (English & Chen, 2007; Pelham, 1991).

Relative to Western culture, the culture of East Asians places more emphasis on relationships, connectedness, and belonging. This makes East Asians particularly inclined to conform their identities to the expectations and preferences of their current interaction partner. As a result, relative to North Americans, East Asians show lower cross-situational stability in their self-descriptions (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Suh, 2002). Furthermore, when describing themselves, East Asians are especially inclined to endorse semantically opposite self-views (Choi & Choi, 2002) and contradictory statements about themselves (Cousins, 1989; Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, Wang, & Hou, 2004).

On the surface, evidence that the identities of East Asians appear to be relatively situation specific may seem to undermine the notion that there exists a universal desire for coherence. But perhaps not. For those who define themselves in relational terms, coherence may hinge on the propensity to honor identities that are negotiated with

specific others. Consistent with this reasoning, among the Japanese, cross-situational consistency is less valued and more weakly related to the sense of having a “true” self than it is among Westerners (Kashima et al., 2004).

From this vantage point, there appear to be some intriguing differences in identity negotiation processes in the East versus the West. It is tempting, for example, to conclude that the tendency for behavioral confirmation to trump self-verification is more prevalent in East Asian than in Western cultures. Although this characterization seems technically accurate, it is probably somewhat misleading because self-verification may simply take a different form in Eastern cultures. More specifically, highly relational cultures may prioritize the tendency for relationship partners to remain true to the identities that they have negotiated within the relationship while being relatively unconcerned with the partner’s behavior outside the confines of the relationship (see the discussion of circumscribed versus global accuracy in Gill & Swann, 2004). More generally, evidence that East Asians display less cross-situational consistency than Westerners does not necessarily imply that Asians routinely experience true changes in their identities. In the section that follows, we suggest that for true identity change to occur a relatively dramatic shift in the social environment must occur that supports the change.

### Antecedents of Identity Change

Our emphasis on the importance of coherence thus far would suggest that changes in identity are typically unwelcome phenomena that can confuse or even derail the process of identity negotiation (as well as cause stress and undermine health at the individual level). Yet as wrenching as identity changes may sometimes be, they are a natural and critically important part of life (Robins, Nofle, Trzesniewski, & Roberts, 2005). Although many identity changes are triggered by events over which the person has no control, at times people disregard their coherence strivings and deliberately attempt to change their identities. Note, for example, that communion or agency motives may sometimes override the desire for coherence, and the former motives may sometimes require identity change if they are to be gratified. In what follows, we consider four sets of conditions that foster identity change.

### Sociocultural and Environmental Changes

Over the past half century, the United States saw sweeping changes in cultural expectations regarding groups that were historically saddled with minority status. For example, the Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation movements altered cultural expectations for Blacks and women, respectively. These shifting expectations gradually influenced the identities of

members of these groups. The Women’s Liberation movement, for instance, led to the erosion of cultural stereotypes that characterized women as weak and dependent (e.g., Spence et al., 1985). As these stereotypes lost force and more egalitarian attitudes took hold, girls and women adopted corresponding changes in their identities and associated behaviors.

Changes in people’s immediate social environment can also foster identity change. When, for example, people enter college or move they may encounter relatively unique expectations and behavioral norms among the locals (e.g., Iyer, Jetten, & Tsivrikos, 2008). By altering the way people relate to others, new settings may encourage people to alter their self-views (Hormuth, 1990). In addition, new environments may foster identity change because they lack the opportunity structures (McCall & Simmons, 1966) that once nurtured and sustained the original identity. For people to sustain their identities, on entering a new setting they must *reemerge* their identities within the new social structure (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Failure to do so results in identity change.

### Developmental Growth and Role Changes

When the community recognizes a significant change in an individual, it may set in motion a sequence of events that produces identity change. Examples of such community-initiated changes include changes in age (e.g., when adolescents become adults), status (e.g., when graduate students become professors), or social role (e.g., when singles get married). When such transformations occur, communities may abruptly alter the way they treat the person. Even if targets of such differential treatment resist change at first, eventually they recognize the inevitable, become less invested in maintaining the initial identity, and bring their identities into agreement with the treatment they receive. Studies of adolescence support this reasoning. Theory and research alike suggest that late adolescence marks a developmental period during which changing treatment and expectations trigger dramatic identity change (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1959; Pals, 1999).

### Acquisition and Loss of Abilities

The process of maturation is marked by the acquisition of new competencies and the loss of established ones. Whether one gains or loses an ability, the associated identity needs to be updated. This may explain why people’s identities are especially turbulent early and late in life. Although both gains and losses are sprinkled throughout the life span, gains tend to occur often during the early years (e.g., acquiring the ability to scale mountains and drive automobiles) and losses tend to occur during the later years (e.g., losing the ability to scale mountains and drive automobiles). Indeed, one of the most troubling aspects of

the aging process is not age itself but the loss of capacities that have become essential to the person's feelings of agency. From this vantage point, it is easy to understand how the physical changes that accompany aging can take a toll on people's identities (Whitbourne, 1996).

### *Self-Initiated Changes*

When people recognize that an identity is undermining their capacity to achieve a valued goal, they may negotiate a different identity within a circumscribed set of circumstances. If the fruits of such negotiations remain in effect for an extended period, the changes may generalize to other settings and eventually lead to permanent identity change. Consider, for example, a woman who suspects that her low self-perceived attractiveness will block her efforts to win the heart of a would-be lover. Recognizing the dilemma, she may strive to be exceptionally attractive in the presence of her love interest (Swann et al., 2002). If she succeeds and wins her beloved's affections, she may internalize his appreciation of her beauty and upgrade her self-perceived attractiveness (Jones, Gergen, & Davis, 1962).

The foregoing scenario is just one example of a larger class of instances in which people initiate an identity change either because they want to repair an unsatisfying life situation or because they aspire to self-improvement. Some evidence indicates that such intentional identity change requires a self-focused state of mental preparedness or *subjective readiness to change* (Anthis & LaVoie, 2006). Even for those who feel prepared for change, the tendency to ensconce oneself in self-verifying social environments (e.g., Swann et al., 2007) may complicate the business of identity change. For the effects of self-initiated identity change to be permanent, people must change not only their own self-views and narratives but also the social environments that typically support those self-views and narratives.

### SUMMARY

What does it mean to have a sense of "self"? Is there a single self, or does the self have multiple, independent components? Are there aspects of the self that cannot be accessed consciously, and if so, can they be measured? How do people derive and maintain a sense of self, and once they do, can it be altered? Do people from different cultures experience the self in the same way? And what are the personal and social consequences of our representations of self?

This chapter was designed to address these and related questions. We began with a brief history of the self, noting that in recent decades social psychology has at long last embraced some seminal conceptions of the self offered by

James (1890/1950) more than a century ago. The result of this neo-Jamesian approach to the self has been an unprecedented explosion of conceptual and methodological innovations that have breathed new life into the subarea.

But if this sudden burst of creativity has had clear benefits, it has had costs as well. To us, the most worrisome risk is that the subarea will become so broad that it will begin to lose focus. Eventually, newcomers may begin to wonder whether there is any "there, there." To avert this unhappy outcome, we suggest setting a boundary condition for the subarea: Work on the self should involve some consideration of the self as a mental representation.

A secondary concern is the lack of integration both within and across topic areas. This is understandable given the complexity of the subject matter and the resulting challenge of constructing meaningful integrations. Nevertheless, if the field is ever to develop a unified theory of the self, it is critical that theorists continue to forge connections among different themes in the literature.

As future researchers rise to the challenge of forging such connections, they will build on the fundamental truths that are gradually emerging in the literature. One truth that has already been distilled is that the self is, as the symbolic interactionists have long emphasized (e.g., Stryker, 2000), a social phenomenon. From our first inklings of self-awareness to our final reflections on the meaning of life, our social interactions define, nurture, and alter our sense of self. This basic truth has given rise to a range of investigations that are continuing to provide crucial insights into the nature of the self.

Many more such truths are within the grasp of contemporary self psychologists. Indeed, if our review of the literature has left us with a single impression, it is that as the topic area has increasingly attracted attention, the rate of scientific advances has accelerated proportionally. We are left with a strong feeling of optimism and a conviction that, in the future, the answers will come even faster.

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