Self-esteem:

Nature, origins, and consequences

Jennifer K. Bosson   William B. Swann, Jr.

University of South Florida   University of Texas at Austin

Please address correspondence to Jennifer K. Bosson, Department of Psychology, University of

South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, PCD 4118G, Tampa, Florida, 33620-7200. Phone:

813/974-7692; fax: 813/974-4617; e-mail: jbosson@cas.usf.edu.

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Self-esteem refers to people's evaluation of themselves. It is, at once, one of psychology's most important – and controversial – constructs. It has inspired a vast literature, including scores of books and thousands of articles. At the same time, it has attracted a small but vocal cadre of critics who argue that it is essentially useless and adds little, if anything, to our ability to predict important social outcomes. We suggest here that the checkered reputation of self-esteem owes, in part, to disagreements regarding what it is and how its consequences ought to be assessed. In this chapter, we offer a compromise by proposing a broad definition of self-esteem and discussing its nature, origins, and consequences. To set the stage for this discussion, we begin with a brief history of the construct.

A Brief History of Self-esteem

Like the proverbial blind men who formed very different impressions of an elephant based on the part of the elephant's body that they touched, different authors have focused on different aspects of self-esteem and, accordingly, come away with dramatically different views of it. William James (1890), for example, noted that people can stake their self-worth on strikingly distinct qualities, with the result that anyone can achieve high self-esteem so long as they emphasize their strengths and devalue domains of weakness. In contrast, Cooley (1902) focused on the interpersonal processes that generate and sustain people's beliefs about themselves, and concluded that we rely on the reactions of others, particularly significant others, in forming impressions of ourselves.

Within mainstream American psychology, interest in self-esteem waned during the first half of the 20th century. This dip in interest occurred, in large measure, due to the dominance of behaviorism and its hostility toward mentalistic constructs such as self-esteem. Progress was

made during this era, however, in conceptualizing narcissism, which is a disorder of self-esteem. Freud (1914) introduced the idea of narcissism, or excessive self-love, to the psychoanalytic literature. He believed that whereas self-love was a normal feature of the developing child, it could grow into a pathological condition if it became excessive. Over the years theorists have offered many variations on Freud's original arguments, but there seems to be some agreement that narcissism emerges when troubled interpersonal relationships undermine individuals' certainty in their own self-worth. Such doubts cause narcissists to overreact when they encounter challenges to the self (e.g., American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991; Westen, 1990).

By the late fifties, behaviorism was beginning to lose its grip on psychology in America. As a result, more and more theorists began focusing on issues related to the self, although most avoided using the language of self-esteem. In his theory of social comparison, for example, Festinger (1954) posited that people learn about their abilities and opinions by comparing themselves with others. Although Festinger did not state that social comparison could serve as a basis for self-esteem, such a conclusion is surely compatible with his formulation. Similarly, while Bem (1972) refrained from discussing self-esteem in his self-perception theory, his notion that people derive self-knowledge from observing their own behavior and the conditions under which it occurs can be understood as a means through which people develop self-esteem.

Not long after the introduction of Bem's (1972) theory, there was an explosion of interest in the self within social psychology. There were several reasons for this emerging interest, but one factor seems to have been the success of efforts to draw parallels between self-knowledge and other cognitive structures (e.g., Kuiper & Rogers, 1979; Markus, 1977). By drawing on well-

researched cognitive phenomena – such as mental schemas, priming effects, and semantic networks – research on the self and self-esteem earned new credibility.

Independent of these developments in academia, a self-esteem movement emerged within the lay community in the late 1960s (Branden, 1994; see also Twenge & Campbell, 2001). The movement peaked in the 1980s with the formation of California's Task Force to Promote Self-esteem and Personal and State Responsibility (State of California, 1990). On the basis of no empirical evidence (and, in fact, evidence to the contrary), the movement characterized self-esteem as a panacea that would cure a wide range of social ills, from teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency to juvenile delinquency and low educational attainment. As a result, thousands of Americans came to believe not only that raising self-esteem could cure all of society's problems, but that it could be accomplished by merely reciting a few affirmations such as "I am lovable and capable."

Members of the academic community challenged the extravagant claims of the self-esteem movement, noting that they lacked a solid basis in reality (e.g., Dawes, 1994; Swann, 1996). Some recent authors took the argument a step further, not only echoing the criticisms of the self-esteem movement but also questioning the viability of the self-esteem construct itself. Most significantly, after reviewing a subset of the self-esteem literature, Baumeister and colleagues (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003) asserted that measures of self-esteem fail to offer strong predictions of socially important behaviors as promised by the California Task Force. Some have taken this gloomy assessment to mean that self-esteem is not a viable construct and its effects should no longer be studied (Scheff & Fearon, 2004).

Others, however, took issue with Baumeister et al.'s (2003) draconian conclusions regarding the viability of the self-esteem construct (e.g., Marsh & Craven, 2006; Swann, Chang-

Schneider, & McClarty, 2007, in press). For example, Swann et al. (2007) countered Baumeister

et al.'s claims by noting several key flaws in their review and conclusions. Most important, in

evaluating the capacity of a global construct (self-esteem) to predict a host of specific behaviors,

Baumeister et al. failed to heed a widely recognized doctrine of psychometrics, the specificity

matching principle (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). We elaborate on this issue and related ones in

the course of discussing the nature of self-esteem.

<div align="center">The Nature of Self-esteem</div>

A key aspect of understanding self-esteem is recognizing its relationship to the self-

concept and other cognitive structures. Some authors stress that self-esteem is "affective" (i.e.,

what people *feel* about themselves), as distinguished from self-concepts, which are supposedly

"cognitive" (i.e., what people *believe* about themselves). Although this distinction has some

appeal, research largely fails to support it (Marsh, 1986; Marsh & Hattie, 1996). It is not difficult

to see why. Most strikingly, many of the self-concepts that social-personality psychologists study

are strongly affectively charged. People often care a great deal, for example, about their belief

that they are intelligent, athletic, or dominant. Likewise, *social* self-concepts (self-concepts that

align people to groups, such as Christian, American, or Teacher) are sometimes held so

passionately that their bearers make huge sacrifices for them, even to the point of giving up their

lives. Not only do self-concepts have an affective component, but self-esteem also has a strong

belief component; it is, after all, a belief about one's worth. Thus, it is overly simplistic and

somewhat misleading to posit that self-esteem is more affectively charged than are self-concepts,

or that self-concepts are more cognitive than is self-esteem.

In this chapter we circumvent these difficulties by defining self-esteem as a global view

of the self, and self-concepts as relatively specific views of the self along various dimensions

(e.g., honest, clumsy, mathematically-inclined). As such, we question the usefulness of hard and fast distinctions between self-esteem and self-concepts, and we emphasize that they both belong to the same superordinate category of *self-views* (Swann et al., 2007).

This conceptualization of self-esteem has clear implications for how its consequences should be assessed. Specifically, if self-esteem and self-concepts are simply more or less specific members of the same overarching category, it makes little sense to consider the predictive validity of one without simultaneously considering the predictive utility of the other. This point is related to a key insight from the last three decades of research on attitudes (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005) and traits (e.g., Epstein, 1979; Fleeson, 2004), dubbed the specificity matching principle. To compensate for the fact that outcomes in naturally occurring settings are often caused by multiple factors other than the predictor variable of interest, the specificity matching principle holds that the specificity of predictors and criteria should be matched. When a predictor variable is relatively specific, the impact of rival influences on the predictor–criterion relationship can be minimized by selecting an equally specific criterion variable (e.g., attitudes toward action films predict how many action films people watch in a given year, but not the total number of movies they watch). Conversely, when a predictor variable is relatively general, the impact of rival influences can be averaged out by combining numerous behaviors into the criterion variable (e.g., attitudes toward movies in general predict how many movies of all types that people watch in a given year, but not necessarily how many action films they watch). In short, specific predictors should be used to predict specific outcomes and general predictors should be used to predict general outcomes.

Applied to research on self-esteem, the specificity matching principle suggests that researchers who use global self-esteem as a predictor should focus on global outcome measures,

such as several outcomes bundled together (see also Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995). From the perspective of the specificity matching principle, then, Baumeister et al.'s (2003) review of the self-esteem literature was flawed because it focused on the capacity of global self-esteem to predict specific outcomes (e.g., Does self-esteem predict grades in a math class?). It is thus unsurprising that these authors concluded that self-esteem predicts very little.

The intricate interplay between self-concepts and self-esteem also figures importantly in understanding the relationship between constructs that have recently been integrated into the psychological literature. That is, whereas the terms "self-esteem" and "self-concept" have traditionally been used to refer to characteristics of single individuals, theorists have recently popularized "groupier" variations on these constructs such as collective self-esteem and group identity. As we discuss next, the key difference between these distinct but related self-views lies in how global (versus specific) and group-like (versus personal) their referents are.

The Dimensions of Self-esteem and Self-Concepts

We suggest that the referents of self-esteem and self-concept can be organized along the two orthogonal dimensions of *globality* and *groupiness*. As seen in Figure 1, self-concepts or identities (we use these terms interchangeably) refer to personal qualities that are relatively specific; hence, they reside in the lower left-hand quadrant of the figure. Pelham and Swann's (1989) Self-attributes Questionnaire, which asks respondents to rank themselves relative to others along several dimensions (e.g., social skills, physical attractiveness, artistic ability), measures this type of self-view. Similarly, Marsh and Shavelson's (1985) Self Description Questionnaire assesses people's self-views along relatively specific dimensions such as academic, social, emotional, and physical. Self-esteem also refers to a personal quality, but it is

global in nature; hence, it is located in the upper left-hand quadrant of the figure. Rosenberg's

(1965) Self-esteem Scale is the most popular measure of global self-esteem. This scale asks

respondents to indicate their agreement with statements such as "I feel that I am a person of

worth, at least on an equal basis with others."

To the right are self-views that are social – rather than personal – in nature. Because

group identity refers to relatively specific qualities of groups (e.g., "Germans are industrious,"

"Students care about their grades"), it appears in the lower right-hand quadrant of Figure 1.

Although we are not aware of any scales designed explicitly to measure group identity, measures

of self-stereotyping (e.g., Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996) and infrahumanization (e.g., Cortes,

Demoulin, Rodriguez, Rodriguez, & Leyens, 2005) can be used to assess people's beliefs about

the qualities that link them to their in-groups. Finally, collective self-esteem refers to global

feelings of self-worth that derive from one's memberships in social groups. As such, it occupies

the upper right-hand quadrant of Figure 1. An example of a scale that measures this type of self-

view is Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-esteem Scale, which ask respondents to

indicate their agreement with statements such as "I am a worthy member of the social groups I

belong to," and "I'm glad to be a member of the social groups I belong to."

Certainty and Stability of Self-esteem and Self-concepts

In addition to varying along the dimensions of globality and groupiness, self-esteem and

self-concepts differ in other meaningful ways. For instance, people differ in the extent to which

their self-views are held with certainty and stable across time.

Generally speaking, the more converging evidence people have to support a given belief,

the more certain of that belief they will be. Applying this principle to self-views, the more

consistent evidence people have to support a particular view of themselves, the more certain that

self-view will be (e.g., Pelham, 1991). The certainty with which people hold self-views, in turn, has important implications. For example, increases in the certainty and confidence of people's self-views predict increases in global self-esteem (Baumgardner, 1990; Campbell, 1990).

The earliest consideration of the implications of self-certainty was offered in the literature on narcissism. In particular, theorists contended that people who were uncertain of their self-worth would be easily threatened. Furthermore, they proposed that people would engage in compensatory activity when threatened, sometimes resulting in high levels of defensiveness and vigorous attacks on the source of the threat. This early theorizing on narcissism gains expression in several distinct lines of contemporary research. Aside from current discussions of narcissism in clinical populations (e.g., Westen, 1990), the most direct descendant of early treatments of narcissism is the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1981), a scale designed to measure narcissistic tendencies within normal, non-pathological populations (see also Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). As expected, scores on the NPI predict a host of defensive behaviors including derogating others who outperform the self, derogating the source of negative feedback, self-handicapping, and distorting memory for past events (see Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

Interestingly, a controversy arose recently over the relationship between narcissism and self-esteem, with one set of investigators arguing that narcissism is a form of self-esteem (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; but see Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). The basis for this argument was that scores on measures of narcissism correlate positively with scores on measures of self-esteem. Based on this association, these investigators concluded that high self-esteem – and not low self-esteem – is linked with various nasty tendencies, such as defensiveness and aggression.

Although it is true that narcissism and self-esteem scores are correlated, the relationship between these constructs is modest ($\approx$ .30; Campbell, 1999). Moreover, both narcissism and self-esteem are multifaceted constructs, and research suggests that the facets of each correlate differently with one another. For instance, narcissism correlates strongly and positively with self-esteem scales that capture dominance and agency (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004), but not at all with measures of communal self-concepts (Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey, & Kernis, 2007). Similarly, self-esteem correlates with the socially benign components of narcissism such as vanity and authority, but it is largely independent of the socially noxious aspects of narcissism such as entitlement and exploitativeness (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins, Poulton, & Caspi, 2006). It should therefore come as no surprise that, just as narcissism predicts maladaptive tendencies toward defensiveness and aggression, self-esteem predicts a wide array of pro-social behaviors (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Paulhus et al., 2004; Webster, 2007).

Deficits in the certainty of self-knowledge may also manifest themselves in unstable self-assessments across time. Kernis (2005), for example, finds that people with unstable high self-esteem, i.e., high baseline levels of global self-esteem but relatively large changes in moment-to-moment feelings of self-worth, exhibit some of the characteristics of narcissists. For example, both narcissists and individuals with unstable high self-esteem are hyper-vigilant for social feedback and highly reactive to events that have evaluative significance for the self. A major difference between these two types of individuals, however, lies in the extent to which their high self-esteem is over-inflated (unrealistically positive). Kernis (2001) notes that whereas narcissists' self-esteem is inflated, the self-esteem of people with unstable high self-esteem is poorly anchored, but not unrealistic. Moreover, unlike people with unstable high self-esteem,

narcissists tend to manipulate and exploit relationship partners to meet their own ends.

Confirming the idea that narcissism and unstable high self-esteem are independent constructs,

the results of a meta-analysis showed no correlation between them (Bosson, Lakey, Campbell,

Zeigler-Hill, Jordan, & Kernis, 2007; but see Rhodewalt, Madrian, & Cheney, 1998). Thus,

although narcissism and unstable high self-esteem are both fragile forms of self-esteem (Kernis,

2003) that may have their roots in uncertain self-knowledge, they should be considered distinct.

Components of Global Self-esteem

Since the publication of the first self-esteem instrument 58 years ago (Raimy, 1948),

researchers have developed a wide range of self-esteem measures. Of these, the vast majority are

self-report scales (for a review, see Blascovich, & Tomaka, 1991). Exceptions to this general rule

include a pictorial self-esteem measure that was developed for use with children (Harter & Pike,

1971), and instruments that attempt to circumvent respondents' ability to "fake" high self-

esteem. Examples of the latter category of instruments include experience-sampling measures of

self-esteem (Savin-Williams & Jaquish, 1981), and measures based on observer judgments

(Waters, Noyes, Vaughn, & Ricks, 1985) or peer ratings (Demo, 1985). More recently, the quest

for a measure of uncontaminated, "true" self-esteem led researchers to develop implicit tests of

self-esteem (e.g., Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998).

Still, as noted, most self-esteem research relies on respondents' self-reports. This practice

makes sense given that self-esteem is, by definition, the esteem that one has for oneself. Asking

people directly about their feelings toward the self is therefore a reasonable strategy for assessing

such feelings. Among researchers who utilize self-report measures, however, there are widely

divergent ideas about the number of distinct components or aspects that presumably underlie

global self-esteem. We group these diverging perspectives below into single component, two component, and multiple component approaches.

The single component approach. Probably the most common approach to measuring self-esteem is based on the assumption that it consists of a single, general dimension that can be measured with a modest number of items (e.g., Coopersmith, 1967). This assumption is evident in the most commonly used measure of self-esteem, Rosenberg's (1965) Self-esteem Scale. Taking the unifactorial assumption even further, some researchers recently developed a one-item self-esteem scale that consists of the single statement "I have high self-esteem" (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001).

The two component approach. In recent years, it became increasingly popular to divide global self-esteem into two components. One approach – which harkens back to Osgood's (1952) early work on the evaluative and potency components of social judgments, as well as Bakan's (1966) distinction between communal and agentic aspects of personality – distinguishes between people's assessments of their lovability (*self-liking*) and competence (*self-competence*). Several scales capture these components (e.g., Diggory, 1966; Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1971), but the one that does so most explicitly is Tafarodi and Swann's (2001) Self-liking and Self-competence Scale. Tafarodi, Swann, and their colleagues note that although self-liking and self-competence are correlated, the correlation is moderate and, more importantly, each component independently predicts outcomes (e.g., Bosson & Swann, 1999; Tafarodi & Milne, 2002).

Another two component approach distinguishes between *trait self-esteem*, which refers to people's baseline level of global self-esteem that remains fairly stable across time, and *state self-esteem*, which fluctuates on a moment-to-moment basis in response to self-relevant experiences. To assess people's transient feelings of self-esteem, Heatherton and Polivy (1991) developed the

State Self-esteem Scale. However, this scale's substantial correlation with trait measures of self-esteem ($r \approx .75$) raises questions about whether it truly captures a distinct component of self-esteem. Others (e.g., Kernis, 2005) measure state self-esteem by administering trait self-esteem scales multiple times throughout the day, with the instruction to "respond according to how you feel about yourself *right now*."

Finally, another popular two component approach is based on the distinction between implicit and explicit attitudes. Although different authors make different assumptions about the precise nature of explicit and implicit attitudes, one common view holds that *explicit self-esteem* is controllable, deliberate, and easy to verbalize whereas *implicit self-esteem* is uncontrollable, automatic, and difficult to verbalize (Epstein & Morling, 1995). Several unobtrusive methods are used to capture implicit self-esteem, including measures of people's preferences for their own initials relative to other letters (e.g., the Name Letter Task; Koole, Dijksterhuis, & van Knippenberg, 2001), and reaction time tasks that assess the speed with which people associate positive versus negative stimuli with the self (e.g., the Implicit Association Test; Greenwald et al., 1998). The consistently low or non-existent correlations between explicitly-assessed and implicitly-assessed self-esteem lend credence to the notion that they are distinct, while simultaneously raising questions about whether implicit and explicit scales truly tap the same underlying construct. Currently, theorists disagree on this point (see Olson, Fazio, & Hermann, 2007), and may continue to do so until further research sheds more light on this issue.

The multiple component approach. Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) were among the first to articulate a multidimensional and hierarchically-structured self, with *global* self-esteem at the top of the hierarchy and self-concepts nested within relatively *specific* dimensions (e.g., academic, physical, social) falling beneath it. As originally theorized by Shavelson et al.,

the specific dimensions of the self-concept should correlate with each other, but some empirical work fails to support this hypothesis. For example, Marsh and Hattie (1996) found that specific self-concepts are only weakly associated with each other, although self-concepts as a whole combine to form a superordinate global self-esteem factor.

The multiple component approach poses a possible solution to the ongoing debate over the usefulness of self-esteem in predicting important outcomes (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2003; Swann et al., 2007). As noted, matching the specificity of predictor and criterion variables maximizes the strength of predictor-criterion relationships. Thus, academic self-concepts are more predictive of academic achievement than is global self-esteem (Marsh & Craven, 2006), and global self-esteem predicts aggregated outcomes better than specific self-concepts do (e.g., Trzesniewski et al., 2006). These patterns are consistent with the multiple component approach, which theorizes both global and specific dimensions of the self-concept.

Origins, Bases, and Functions of Self-esteem and Self-concepts

Having considered many of the fundamental questions regarding the nature of self-esteem and self-concepts, we now turn to related issues such as where these self-views come from and what impact they have on people's lives. In what follows, we first summarize influential perspectives on how people acquire a stable sense of self-esteem, and then consider why self-esteem is important for human functioning.

Nature. As with many individual difference variables, people's self-esteem levels appear to be shaped by both biological (genetic) and sociocultural (environmental) factors. Concerning the biology of global self-esteem, results of twin studies suggest that self-esteem is shaped, in part, by genes (McGuire, Manke, Saudino, Reiss, Hetherington, & Plomin, 1999), with a heritability estimate of about .30 (Kendler, Gardner, & Prescott, 1998). This suggests that genes

explain approximately 30% of the population variance in global self-esteem levels. Heredity also explain a substantial amount of the variance in changes in self-esteem across time (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2002). Given the strong negative correlations between self-esteem and neuroticism or negative affectivity (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002), and particularly depression (Watson, Suls, & Haig, 2002), some speculate that genes influence neuroticism which in turn influences self-esteem (Neiss et al., 2002). At present, however, behavioral genetic studies of self-esteem are relatively scarce as compared to studies that focus on the sociocultural origins of self-esteem.

Nurture. If genes explain approximately 30% of the population variance in self-esteem, then this leaves roughly 70% of the variance to be explained by other factors, including environmental influences and gene X environment interactions. Much of the research on environmental influences on self-esteem explores how specific relationship partners – such as parents, siblings, peers, and teachers – as well as the broader culture, shape individuals' self-esteem.

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), infants begin to formulate schemas (working models) about their worth, based on the treatment they receive from caregivers, before they even have self-awareness. During infancy and early childhood, working models are shaped by the consistency and responsiveness of caregivers' treatment. Specifically, consistent and responsive caregiving should instill in children the rudimentary foundations of high self-esteem and favorable self-concepts by teaching them that they are worthy of love and capable of efficacious action (Bowlby, 1973; Mikulincer, 1995; Verschueren, Marcoen, & Schoefs, 1996).

During middle childhood (around the age of eight), relatively sophisticated cognitive processes further refine children's self-esteem and self-concepts (Harter, 1990). For instance,

children at this age begin developing specific self-concepts by comparing their traits and abilities

with those of their peers (Festinger, 1954). They also begin looking to others for feedback about

the extent to which they are valued (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), and they internalize their

perceptions of others' approval (or disapproval) as feelings of self-esteem. Thus, across

childhood, high self-esteem is associated with positive self-concepts in valued domains, and

perceptions of approval from significant relationship partners (Harter, 1999). Importantly, the

type of approval that children receive from others can influence their developing self-views.

Whereas approval that is contingent on the child accomplishing specific goals or meeting

specific standards can foster self-esteem that is unstable and fragile, approval that values the

child's inherent worth should foster authentic feelings of true self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

Continuing through adolescence and into adulthood, individuals continue to develop

specific self-concepts through comparisons with others (Festinger, 1954) as well as observations

of their own behavior (Bem, 1972). The positivity versus negativity of specific self-concepts can

then influence self-esteem via the importance that individuals place on them. For example,

individuals who place importance on success in a given domain, and who have positive self-

concepts in this domain, will enjoy higher global self-esteem than those who have negative self-

concepts in valued domains (Higgins, 1987; James, 1890; Pelham, 1991). Moreover, given the

multidimensionality of the self, successes in a given domain may predict increases in the

positivity of specific self-concepts *without* also influencing global feelings of self-esteem (Marsh

& Craven, 2006).

On a broader level, self-concepts and self-esteem are shaped by the culture in which

people are socialized. One consistent finding is that, on average, people who are raised in

individualistic cultures report substantially higher self-esteem and more favorable self-concepts

than do people raised in collectivistic cultures (Heine & Hamamura, 2007). Indeed, in analyses that treat culture as the unit of analysis, there is a strong positive correlation between a culture's individualism and the average self-esteem of its members (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Furthermore, as the length of exposure to an individualistic culture increases, so does the self-esteem of visitors from a collectivistic culture (Heine & Lehman, 1997).

These cross-cultural findings raise an interesting – and currently unresolved – question about the "true" self-esteem of people from individualistic versus collectivistic cultures. Some theorists suggest, for example, that the tendency toward high self-esteem and positive self-concepts is universal, and that people from collectivistic cultures merely appear (relatively) low in self-esteem because of the value they place on modest self-presentation and "fitting in" rather than "standing out" (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). In support of this view, Sedikides and his colleagues report that people from collectivistic cultures display highly favorable views of themselves on communal self-concepts that are valued within their culture, such as loyalty (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005). Likewise, Tafarodi and Swann (1996) found that Chinese participants scored higher than American participants on the self-liking dimension of global self-esteem, whereas they scored lower than Americans on the self-competence dimension. In contrast, other theorists call the tendency toward high self-esteem and positive self-concepts "strikingly elusive" among people from collectivistic East Asian cultures (Heine & Hamamura, 2007, p. 22), and argue that such individuals instead display a tendency toward self-criticism (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Although this debate is still going strong, one promising resolution involves the development of a method for separating the self-presentational component of self-esteem from "true" self-esteem. For example, Kwan and Mandisodza (in press) identified three components in self-esteem: benevolence, merit, and bias. The bias

component is conceptually similar to self-enhancement bias, whereas the benevolence and merit components seem to reflect "true" self-esteem. This approach may provide a starting point from which to pursue questions about the nature of self-esteem across cultures.

Functional perspectives. Rather than focusing on the origins of individuals' self-esteem, several perspectives take a broader look by focusing on the origins of self-esteem itself. These perspectives ask: Why do humans have self-esteem in the first place, and what function(s) are served by self-esteem? One such perspective proposes that self-esteem and self-concepts reflect the operation of psychological mechanisms that evolved because they helped humans negotiate the social world (Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2001). According to this perspective, self-esteem and self-concepts provide people with information about, for example, their dominance status (Barkow, 1989), social inclusion versus exclusion (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), prestige (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001), and mate value (Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993). When goals relevant to success in these social domains are not met, negative self-assessments and feelings of low self-esteem motivate the individual to either renew efforts toward goal achievement or redirect energies elsewhere.

Another functional perspective suggests that self-esteem feelings protect people from the existential anxiety that accompanies awareness of their own mortality (Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). According to this view, high self-esteem and positive self-concepts signal that one meets or exceeds the value standards associated with one's role(s) within a larger system of meaning. Conversely, low self-esteem and negative self-concepts signal a breakdown in the psychological "armor" that protects people from their deep-rooted fear of death and its accompanying unknowns. Thus, drops in self-

esteem and negative self-assessments motivate behaviors geared toward restoring one's value in the eyes of others and shoring up support for human-made systems of meaning.

Whereas the aforementioned perspectives suggest that self-esteem and self-concepts confer survival benefits, such arguments seem to come perilously close to mistaking an abstraction (i.e., self-esteem) for a thing (i.e., a psychological entity that shapes rather than merely reflects reality). From this vantage point, the survival benefits associated with self-esteem may merely reflect those qualities that give rise to self-esteem rather than self-esteem itself. Furthermore, excessive focus on self-esteem may be problematic in and of itself. Crocker and Park (2004), for example, suggest that preoccupation with one's achievements in self-esteem-relevant domains can divert attention from other important needs, such as the needs for relatedness, competence, autonomy, and self-regulation. Note, however, that this view is not necessarily incompatible with the functional views described above. While self-esteem may have evolved to serve the informational and/or protective functions noted above, valuing self-esteem *for its own sake* may indeed yield the maladaptive outcomes noted by Crocker. Moreover, although self-esteem is an abstraction, it can have motivational properties. For example, people who enjoy high self-esteem are likely to persist on tasks in the wake of failure (McFarlin, Baumeister, & Blascovich, 1984), and those who suffer from low esteem are prone to tolerate various forms of poor treatment (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007).

Consequences and Correlates of Self-esteem and Self-concepts

Research on the consequences and correlates of self-esteem and self-concepts is abundant. Given the expansiveness of the literature, we can do little more than summarize broadly some of the key findings. We organize these findings below temporally, beginning with

the metacognitive features of self-views and then progressing through goal setting, environment and partner selection, self-presentation, cognitive and affective reactions, and ending with real-world outcomes. Note that in keeping with our conviction that self-esteem and self-concepts are members of the larger self-view category, we include investigations of both in our review.

Metacognitive features of self-views. Metacognitive features include qualities such as the content and structure of, and links among, individual self-views. For example, global self-esteem shows robust correlations with the valence of people's specific self-concepts, such that higher self-esteem is associated with more positive evaluations of the self along specific dimensions (Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001; Pelham & Swann, 1989), as well as smaller discrepancies between actual and ideal beliefs about the self (Higgins, 1987). Higher self-esteem is also associated with smaller overall proportions of negative, relative to positive, self-views (Hoyle, 2006; Showers, 1992), and the negative self-views of people with high self-esteem tend to be relatively less complex and differentiated (Morgan & Janoff-Bulman, 1994; Woolfolk, Novalany, Gara, Allen, & Polino, 1995). These structural features buffer people who have primarily favorable self-views from the painful effects of negative self-relevant information (such as negative feedback, memories of undesirable past behavior, etc.). Unfortunately, these same features do little to protect those who have many negative self-views from painful reminders of their deficits (Showers, 1992).

Decisions and goals. When it comes to decision-making, research paints a portrait of low self-esteem people as being less decisive (Rosenberg & Owens, 2001) and more likely to procrastinate (Ferrari, 1994) than those high in self-esteem. Persons lower in self-esteem are also more easily persuaded than those high in self-esteem (Gibson, 1981), particularly in response to forceful or heavy-handed communications, which tend to produce reactance effects among those

high in self-esteem (Brockner & Elkind, 1985). In a similar vein, people low as compared to high in self-esteem are also more risk averse when making decisions, most likely because they have relatively low expectations of success (Wray & Stone, 2005), and are motivated to avoid feelings of regret should a risky decision yield negative consequences (Josephs, Larrick, Steele, & Nisbett, 1992).

In addition to making riskier decisions, people high in self-esteem also tend to set higher goals for themselves, and persist more doggedly through setbacks, than those low in self-esteem. Indeed, some research suggests that persons high in self-esteem pursue goals with an eye to achieving excellence, whereas those low in self-esteem seek merely to attain adequacy (Baumeister & Tice, 1985). Moreover, higher self-esteem is associated with superior self-regulation during goal pursuit. For example, people with high self-esteem persist more than those with low self-esteem after a single failure, but they persist less than low self-esteem persons after repeated failures (Di Paula & Campbell, 2002). People with high self-esteem also persist more than those low in self-esteem if they believe that persistence is linked with success at a particular task, but not if they believe that persistence is irrelevant to success (McFarlin, 1985). These findings suggest that high self-esteem persons are particularly adept at modifying their goal pursuit strategies to reflect the likelihood of goal attainment.

Creating a niche. Once people make decisions and set goals, they must select the environments and relationships within which to pursue those goals. According to self-verification theory, the need for psychological coherence – or a sense that the world fits with past experiences – is a primary motive behind the selection of settings and interaction partners (Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003). That is, people actively seek and embed themselves within social environments that sustain their stable self-views. Evidence of this tendency appears in

people's choices of relationship partners, careers, home and work environments, group

memberships, and even home and office décor (Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002;

Sadalla, Vershure, & Burroughs, 1987).

To illustrate, people low in self-esteem tend to withdraw and isolate themselves from

others, whereas those high in self-esteem more readily seek others' company (Rosenberg &

Owens, 2001). Once they enter relationships, people's stable self-views shape their preferences

for specific interaction partners. Whereas people with favorable self-concepts tend to seek out

relationship partners who view them favorably, those with negative self-concepts prefer the

companionship of those who view them unfavorably (Swann et al., 1994; Swann & Pelham,

2002). Similarly, people high in self-esteem seek work environments that offer them more

positive feedback (in the form of financial compensation), while those low in self-esteem seek

work environments that offer fewer such financial rewards (Schroeder, Josephs, & Swann,

2006). Such tendencies should ensure that people surround themselves with relationship partners,

feedback sources, and environments that bolster, rather than challenge, their self-esteem and self-

concepts. Moreover, to the extent that a given relationship or environment *dis*confirms people's

self-concepts or self-esteem, they are likely to leave in search of a better-fitting niche (Schroeder

et al., 2006; Swann & Pelham, 2002).

Self-presentation. Within their chosen relationships and environments, people's self-

esteem and self-concepts shape the manner in which they present themselves. For example,

whereas high self-esteem persons seek to impress others – and thereby enhance themselves – by

presenting the self in a highly favorable manner, those low in self-esteem present themselves in a

more modest, self-protective fashion (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989). Ironically, one of the

ways in which high self-esteem people present a favorable image is by self-handicapping, or

creating obstacles to their own success so as to create plausible external attributions for poor performance (Jones & Berglas, 1978). To illustrate this phenomenon, Tice and Baumeister (1990) measured the amount of time that high and low self-esteem people spent practicing for an upcoming test, under public versus private conditions. Only when they thought that others would know how much time they practiced did high self-esteem people self-handicap by engaging in less preparation than low self-esteem people. Thus, the desire to present the self favorably may, at times, lead high self-esteem persons to behave in ways that undermine their own performance.

Social cognition. Social interactions provide the raw material for a host of social cognitive processes that differ as a function of self-esteem and self-concepts. In this section, we consider the role of self-views in shaping such processes as information seeking, attention, encoding and recall, interpretation, and mental simulation.

Within their interactions, people tend to seek self-relevant information that is consistent with their chronic, firmly-held self-views (e.g., Swann, 1983, 1990). Despite early findings suggesting that global self-esteem did not predict people's reactions to positive or negative feedback (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989), later studies revealed strong links between specific self-concepts and information-seeking tendencies regarding those self-concepts. Thus, when researchers uphold the specificity matching principle, they find that people generally seek positive information about their favorable self-views and negative information about their unfavorable self-views (e.g., Bosson & Swann, 1999).

Just as people seek information that is consistent with their self-views, they pay more attention to evaluatively consistent than inconsistent information. In general, people low as compared to high in self-esteem attend more to negative information and events (Leitenberg, Yost, & Carroll-Wilson, 1986). When it comes to self-relevant information, people with negative

self-concepts pay more attention to unfavorable than favorable evaluations of themselves, while the reverse is true among those with positive self-concepts (Swann & Read, 1981). In the wake of failure feedback, persons with low self-esteem focus attention on their weaknesses whereas those high in self-esteem increase attention to their strengths (Dodgson & Wood, 1998). Finally, people high in self-esteem are more likely than those low in self-esteem to focus on the ways in which their own outcomes compare favorably to the outcomes obtained by the friends, acquaintances, and strangers that they encounter in daily life (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992).

Perhaps reflecting these differences in attention, people display better memory for feedback and experiences that are congruent relative to incongruent with the valence of their self-esteem, and they recall incongruent feedback and experiences as more congruent than they really were (Christensen, Wood, & Barrett, 2003; Story, 1998). Similar effects have been found at the level of self-concepts, with people displaying better recall for feedback that is congruent as compared to incongruent with the positivity or negativity of their self-perceived likability (Swann & Read, 1981). Interestingly, these congruency effects in memory for self-relevant information appear to be moderated by self-esteem level, such that people high in self-esteem exhibit a stronger congruency bias (i.e., tendency to recall past behavior in a manner congruent with self-concepts) than those low in self-esteem (Campbell, 1990).

Self-esteem differences in recall also emerge during threatening experiences. For example, people high in self-esteem are more likely than those low in self-esteem to remember *other people's* negative behaviors following their own failure experiences (Crocker, 1993), and high self-esteem persons spontaneously recall more positive autobiographical memories than do low self-esteem persons when in an experimentally-induced negative mood (Setliff & Marmurek,

2002). Such recall biases presumably facilitate and hamper mood repair efforts among high and low self-esteem persons, respectively.

The manner in which people interpret their own and other people's behaviors and outcomes is also linked predictably with their self-esteem and self-concepts. For instance, people interpret feedback that is congruent with their self-concepts as accurate, whereas they dismiss incongruent feedback as inaccurate (Markus, 1977; Shrauger & Lund, 1975; Swann, Griffin, Predmore & Gaines, 1987). Moreover, a large body of research on attribution processes shows that people high in self-esteem take credit for their successes and blame their failures on external factors (for reviews see Blaine & Crocker, 1993; Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). In contrast, people low in self-esteem are less inclined to take credit for their successes and more inclined to assume responsibility for their failures (e.g., Fitch, 1970).

Similarly, self-esteem relates to the manner in which people interpret ambiguous social stimuli. To illustrate, people who are high as compared to low in self-esteem are more likely to interpret ambiguous phrases ("Is this how you want it?") as conveying positive feelings toward them (Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000; Tafarodi, 1998). Furthermore, people with low self-esteem may not even interpret their own success experiences as successes unless a credible outsider tells them directly that they have done well (Josephs, Bosson, & Jacobs, 2003).

Paralleling these self-esteem differences in interpretation are differences in people's mental simulations, or thoughts regarding alternative possible outcomes for the self. Whereas people low in self-esteem tend to think more about how future outcomes "could be better," those high in self-esteem think more about how future outcomes "could be worse" (Sanna & Meier, 2000). Similar self-esteem differences emerge when people generate alternative outcomes for past events, with people low in self-esteem simulating more "could have been better" scenarios

and those high in self-esteem simulating more "could have been worse" scenarios (Sanna, Turley-Ames, & Meier, 1999).

Affect. Given the aforementioned differences in self-views, choice of partners and environments, and cognitive responses to their worlds, it should come as no surprise that people's self-esteem and self-concepts are closely tied to their chronic and moment-to-moment affective states. As noted, global self-esteem is strongly negatively correlated with neuroticism (Judge et al., 2002) and negative affectivity (Suls, 2006), both of which reflect people's stable tendencies to experience unpleasant emotions. Thus, people who are higher in self-esteem tend to experience fewer negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and hostility. Indeed, the negative association between self-esteem and depression is so strong ($r \approx .80$; Watson et al., 2002) that some suggest conceptualizing self-esteem and depression as endpoints of the same bipoloar continuum (Suls, 2006). Likewise, people higher in self-esteem also tend to score higher in extraversion and positive affectivity (Watson et al., 2002), which reflect people's chronic tendencies toward positive emotions such as enthusiasm and joy. Moreover, research has revealed strong and consistent positive links between self-esteem and reports of subjective happiness (e.g., Diener & Diener, 1995), leading Baumeister et al. (2003) to conclude – in the midst of their otherwise disparaging review – that "high self-esteem may pay off handsomely for the individual in terms of subjective happiness" (p. 26). Related to this self-esteem-happiness link is a strong positive correlation between self-esteem and optimism, or the tendency to anticipate positive future outcomes for the self (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & Dimatteo, 2005).

Considerably less research explores the links between self-esteem and self-conscious emotions, but the existing work points to strong negative correlations between self-esteem and shame-proneness (Leith & Baumeister, 1998), moderate negative correlations between self-

esteem and hubristic (all-encompassing) pride, and strong positive correlations between self-esteem and authentic (achievement-oriented) pride (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Thus, people high in self-esteem neither react to their own failures and transgressions with painful feelings of disgrace, nor do they react to their successes with overblown feelings of arrogance. Instead, they appear to feel good or bad about their actions in a given context, rather than feeling good or bad the self as a whole.

Life outcomes. In this section, we consider some of the ways in which the self-esteem and self-concept differences summarized above produce real-world outcomes in terms of people's relationship functioning, academic and athletic performance, criminal activity, health behaviors, and finances.

As noted earlier, some theorists propose that self-esteem evolved to alert people to survival-relevant fluctuations in their relationship status (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). According to this sociometer hypothesis, painful drops in self-esteem inform people about possible threats to their social inclusion (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Consistent with this idea, people low in self-esteem exhibit an attentional bias toward information that conveys interpersonal rejection, whereas those high in self-esteem pay particular attention to information that conveys acceptance (Dandeneau & Baldwin, 2004). Unfortunately for those low in self-esteem, their heightened sensitivity to rejection cues can have harmful implications for their close relationships. To illustrate, the heightened rejection sensitivity of those low in self-esteem undermines their confidence in romantic partners' love for them, which then causes them to withdraw psychologically from partners (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998). Moreover, people low in self-esteem may react to relationship conflict in ways that anger and frustrate their partners, ultimately eliciting the very rejection they fear most (Downey, Freitas,

Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). In contrast, high self-esteem persons' expectations of acceptance allow them to use their romantic relationships as sources of self-affirmation in the face of failure, thus furthering their confidence in their partners' positive regard and increasing their commitment to those partners (Murray et al., 1998).

People's specific self-concepts also play an important role in relationship functioning. Self-concepts shape the types of appraisals that people seek and prefer from their partners, as well as their feelings of commitment to and intimacy with partners who offer them congruent appraisals. In relationships ranging from college roommates to long-term married partners, 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). Indeed, people experience higher levels of marital distress to the extent that their spouses' views of them disconfirm their stable self-concepts (Schafer, Wickrama, & Keith, 1996). As such, securing relationship partners who confirm their self-views may be important for people's psychological well-being (e.g., Swann et al., 2003).

In the academic domain, there are strong links between people's relatively specific academic self-concepts and outcomes such as academic achievement, college grade point average, and persistence at academic pursuits (e.g., Marsh & Craven, 2006; Robbins, Lauver, Le, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004). In the domain of athletics, physical self-concepts predict future exercise behavior, gymnastic self-concepts predict future gymnastic performance, and swimming self-concepts predict performance during elite swimming competitions (for a review see Marsh & Craven, 2006). It is worth noting that these effects emerge even when controlling for past performance in the domain of interest; this suggests that self-concepts have direct, causal effects on people's behaviors in relevant domains. Conversely –

and consistent with the specificity matching principle – global self-esteem has been shown to predict bundled outcomes, or summary indices that combine multiple behavioral observations. Some work, for example, shows that people lower in self-esteem during adolescence are more likely to develop physical and mental health difficulties, use tobacco, commit crimes, drop out of school, and suffer money and work problems in adulthood (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Thus, many types of important life outcomes can be predicted by people's specific self-concepts and global self-esteem.

<center>Future Directions</center>

We began this chapter by acknowledging the deep doubts that several vocal and influential critics recently expressed regarding the self-esteem construct (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2003; Crocker & Park, 2004). Although we agree that simple minded characterizations of self-esteem as a panacea for all of society's ills are wrong headed, we believe that some critics have gone too far in arguing for the abandonment of the self-esteem construct. In support of this viewpoint, we summarized a vast literature that points to the critical role of self-esteem and self-concepts in shaping people's behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and life outcomes. We now outline three suggestions for improving the study of self-esteem.

First, when addressing matters related to predictive validity, self-esteem should be reunited with other members of the self-view family. This will mean moving away from the knee-jerk use of Rosenberg's (1965) global self-esteem scale, and toward assessing the key components of self-esteem (self-liking vs. self-competence, implicit vs. explicit self-esteem), as well as the specific self-concepts that are most relevant to researchers' outcome variables. In addition, researchers may benefit from assessing the metacognitive features of self-views such as their certainty, importance, clarity, extremity, accessibility, organizational structure, and

temporal stability, to name a few. Such shifts not only make sound conceptual sense, they are also consistent with the way that related psychological constructs, such as attitudes and traits, have been conceptualized and studied. Furthermore, once other members of the self-view family are thrown into the mix, specificity matching becomes possible, and following this important psychometric principle will lead to assessments that are simultaneously more meaningful and more optimistic. Note, however, that we do not recommend that researchers blur the distinction between global self-esteem and specific self-concepts. To the contrary, we are simply pointing out the importance of recognizing that self-esteem and self-concepts are members of the same self-view category, and that following the specificity matching principle will undoubtedly improve researchers' ability to predict the outcomes of self-esteem.

Second, as in research on attitudes, theoretical models of the factors that constrain the links between self-views and behavior should be developed. Attitude researchers have approached this challenge in two distinct ways. First, in their reasoned action model, Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) identified the many normative, contextual, and personal variables that moderate the links between attitudes and behaviors, thus allowing for heightened precision when predicting behavioral outcomes from attitudes. Second, in his Motivation and Opportunity as Determinants (MODE) model, Fazio (1990) offered a process model of the chain of events that determines when attitudes will become translated into behaviors. Fazio and his colleagues (e.g., Olson et al., 2007) have made progress in applying the MODE model to the study of self-esteem, but additional work is needed. For example, their initial work focuses primarily on the conditions under which people's global self-esteem (an attitude) translates into self-reports of self-esteem (a behavior). It is important to know as well the conditions under which both global self-esteem and specific self-concepts translate into behaviors and outcomes outside of the laboratory.

Finally, in light of the debilitating effects of negative self-views, it is critical to learn more about how they can be changed. We recognize, of course, the irony of ending this chapter with the question of how to change self-views, as changing self-views was the original (and almost comically misguided) goal of the much-maligned California Task Force. While acknowledging this irony, we also defend our position by pointing out that self-esteem change, when based on empirically substantiated strategies, can theoretically produce large improvements in people's well-being and overall functioning. In this regard, we are encouraged by recent evidence that self-esteem can be improved via elaborate programs (e.g., DuBois & Flay, 2004; Haney & Durlak, 1998). Of course, self-esteem programs are not for everyone – after all, most people in the general population have high self-esteem and thus do not require self-esteem interventions. Furthermore, successful self-esteem improvement programs have all been multifaceted, and it is not clear which of their many components are effective in generating change. Rigorous empirical work is needed to pinpoint the strategies that most effectively increase self-esteem, and to explore whether increasing the positivity of self-esteem and self-concepts can, in fact, engender some of the beneficial outcomes that originally inspired the efforts of the Task Force.

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Figure 1. Self-views organized along the dimensions of globality and groupiness.