

CHAPTER 2: THE SOCIAL SELF

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 explores various aspects of how individuals define and feel about themselves. The chapter begins with a discussion of self-concept (how we define ourselves) and how knowledge about ourselves is used to develop a self-concept. The chapter also presents information on precisely what information individuals use when forging a self-concept and how we think of ourselves in terms of attributes that distinguish ourselves from others. The role of the self and memory is also discussed, showing how one's self-concept serves as a filter for self-relevant information. Social influences, as well as the role of group affiliation and culture, on self-concept are discussed. The role of self-schemas in organizing self-related information is explored as is the relationship between self-schemas and sexuality. The second major section of the chapter focuses on self-esteem, or how we feel about ourselves. The relationship between stigma and self-esteem is discussed. Three components of the self (actual, ideal, ought) are presented and it is shown how self-esteem is related to the balance between these three components. Discussions of the strategies individuals use to maintain and enhance self-esteem are also included. The third major section of the chapter covers self-awareness and how we are sometimes acutely aware of our behavior (and sometimes not). The chapter discusses how self-knowledge and self-awareness are related and how it is cognitively costly to maintain self-control, and the impressions we make on others.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Self-Concept

- Self-knowledge: How we know the self

 - Personal attributes and self-concept

 - The self and memory

 - Moods and autobiographical memories

 - Social influences

- The influence of groups and culture on the self

 - Who am I? The influence of culture on self-concept

 - Organizing knowledge: Self-schemas

 - Sexuality and self-schemas

Self-esteem: Evaluating the self

- Internal influences on self-esteem

 - Self-esteem and stigma

Self-regulation and self-esteem
Maintaining self-esteem in interactions with others
Enhancing the self
Self-serving cognitions
Maintaining self-consistency

Self-awareness

Self-knowledge and self-awareness
The cost and ironic effects of self-control
Managing self-presentations
Self-esteem and impression management
Self-monitoring and impression management
Self-presentation and manipulative strategies
Self-handicapping

The impression we make on others

The life of James Carroll revisited

Chapter review

Internet activity

Suggestions for further reading

KEY TERMS

Self-concept (33)	Self-schema (41)	Self-serving bias (48)
Reflected appraisal (33)	Sexual self-schema (41)	Self-verification (49)
Social comparison process (33)	Self-esteem (44)	Self-focus (50)
Introspection (34)	Actual self (45)	Ego depletion (53)
Personal attributes (34)	Ideal self (45)	Egotistical bias (54)
Distinctiveness theory (34)	Ought self (45)	Self-monitoring (54)
Autobiographical memory (35)	Self-regulation (45)	Self-handicapping (55)
Individual self (37)	Self-evaluation maintenance theory (47)	Spotlight effect (57)
Collective self (37)		Illusion of transparency (57)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of Chapter 2, you should be able to:

1. Define *self-concept* and understand the forces that shape self-concept.

Included here is a basic understanding of how we define ourselves and the sources of information we use (reflected appraisals, social comparison, and self-observation). You should also know about the role of introspection in defining the self and how personal attributes relate to self-concept. The relationship between the self and memory (autobiographical memory) which houses the information one has about the self. You should understand how the self affects what we encode into memory. You should be cognizant of the role that group affiliation and culture play in defining the self. Finally, you should gain an appreciation of the role that self-schemas play in organizing information about ourselves and how one's sexuality is related to self-concept.

2. Define *self-esteem* and understand how it relates to a range of social phenomena.

After reading the section of self-esteem, you should have an understanding of the concept of self-esteem and the various factors that influence it. You should know about the relationship between stigma (e.g., being overweight) and self-esteem. Individuals often define themselves in terms of those characteristics that make them different from others and these differences have implications for self-esteem. An important idea that you should grasp is that the self comprises three interrelated components (the actual self, ideal self, and ought self) and that individuals are motivated to resolve discrepancies between these components and that through self-regulation we reconcile our behavior with the expectations of others. You should understand that the better the match between the components of the self, the higher is one's self-esteem.

Self-regulatory behavior is influenced by needs to match our self-concepts to our self-guides, the degree to which we focus on the self, and beliefs about our abilities in various domains (self-efficacy expectancies). You should be able to summarize the ways in which these various self-concepts increase or decrease individuals' needs to match their attitudes to their behaviors, and vice-versa.

3. Discuss the various strategies used to maintain and enhance self-esteem.

You should understand that self-regulation is not the only thing that is important to maintaining self-esteem. In addition, we seek to maintain and enhance self-esteem when we in-

teract with others. You should know that the behavior of others influences self-esteem, especially when that behavior is relevant to one's self-concept (self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory). You should understand how SEM theory explains how we maintain self-esteem under conditions of threat. In particular, you should review the role of comparison processes in protecting self-esteem—that is, understand how social comparison mediates self-esteem following the success or failure of a close or distant other individual. You should also grasp how self-serving cognitions help maintain self-esteem and how through self-verification we maintain consistency between our self-concept and how others view us.

4. Talk about the notion of self-awareness.

You understand that in some instances we are acutely aware of our behavior and how others evaluate us, and that in other instances we are less aware. Through the process of self-focus we become aware of how we are reacting in a given situation. You should understand the relationship between self-focus and self-consistency. You should also understand the relationship between self-knowledge and self-awareness and that accurate self-knowledge is crucial to the self-regulation process. It is important for you to know that we want accurate information about ourselves, even if that information is negative. You should also understand that maintaining self-control over behavior carries with it cognitive costs that influence how we can deal with multiple situations.

5. Understand the types of self-presentation strategies we use to manage others' impressions of us.

We are aware that others evaluate us, so we attempt to present ourselves in a positive light and carefully manage the impressions we make on others. You should be cognizant of the relationship between impression management and self-esteem. You should also understand the relationship between self-monitoring behavior and concerns for impression management. You should be able to talk about how manipulative strategies (e.g., self-handicapping) are used to enhance the impressions we make on others.

6. Discuss how accurate individuals are in evaluating the impressions they convey to others.

You should know that in most cases individuals have a good idea about the impressions that others have of them. However, you should also understand that we sometimes believe that others can “read” us accurately when they cannot or aren't even trying. You should know how the spotlight effect and illusion of transparency feed into this phenomenon.

KEY QUESTIONS

These questions appear at the beginning of the chapter. As you read the text, answer these questions as a way to learn the material.

1. What is the self?
2. How do we know the self?
3. What is distinctiveness theory?
4. How is the self organized?
5. What is autobiographical memory?
6. What is self-esteem?
7. How do we evaluate the self?
8. What is self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory?
9. What is self-consistency?
10. How do we present the self to others?
11. What is self-monitoring?
12. What is self-handicapping?
13. How accurate are we in assessing the impressions we convey?
14. What is the spotlight effect?
15. What is the illusion of transparency?

PRACTICE TESTS

Multiple-Choice Questions

Choose the alternative that best completes the stem of each question.

1. All of the ideas, thoughts, and information that we have about ourselves make up our

- a. self-esteem.
- b. self-schema.
- c. self-concept.
- d. self-idea.

2. If you relate your skills and abilities to those of a friend, you are engaging in

- a. social comparison
- b. reflected appraisal
- c. social correspondence
- d. reflected comparison

3. In _____ we store information that is relevant to our self.

- a. autobiographical memory
- b. biographical memory
- c. self-memory
- d. episodic

4. Cultures that emphasize personal striving and achievement produce individuals with highly complex

- a. individual selves.
- b. collective selves.
- c. actual selves.
- d. public selves.

5. According to your text, a self-schema

- a. organizes our experience so that we can respond quickly in social situations.
- b. helps us interpret situations.
- c. guides behavior.
- d. both a and b.
- e. all of the above.

6. You think to yourself that someday you would like to be a successful lawyer who is respected in the field. This is an example of a(n)

- a. potential self
- b. ideal self
- c. viable self
- d. probable self

7. When there is discrepancy between your actual self and your ideal self, the result tends to be

- a. anxiety
- b. enhanced self-esteem
- c. suicidal thoughts
- d. lower self-esteem.

8. According to self-evaluation maintenance theory

- a. stress results when there is a mismatch between one's individual and collective selves
- b. our self-concept is a purely personal matter, not tied to how others view us
- c. the behavior of others affects how you feel about yourself
- d. none of the above.

9. Our tendency to attribute positive outcomes to our internal characteristics and negative outcomes to situational factors is known as

- a. self-regulation
- b. the self-serving bias
- c. self-focus
- d. basking in self-reflective glory
- e. none of the above

10. According to the self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) theory, if a friend of yours did better than you on some task (e.g., an important history exam), you would most likely have a negative reaction if

- a. you really didn't like your friend that much.
- b. the task was important to you and relevant to your self-concept.
- c. the task was not important to you and irrelevant to your self-concept.
- d. none of the above.

11. You see yourself as outgoing and fun to be with. At a party you behave in a friendly manner with everyone you meet, telling jokes and stories. According to your text, you are engaging in

- a. self-verification.
- b. self-validation.
- c. self-focus.
- d. self-certification.

12. The extent to which you heightened awareness of yourself in certain situations is called

- a. self-centration.
- b. self-focus.
- c. self-spotlighting.
- d. self-regulation

13. _____ is the process of losing self-energy when faced with prolonged stressful situations.

- a. Self sacrificing
- b. Self monitoring
- c. Self-concept degradation
- d. Ego depletion

14. At work you present yourself as being responsible for landing an important client, even though you had little to do with it. According to your text, you are displaying

- a. the egotistical bias.
- b. self-aggrandizement.
- c. ego-glorification.
- d. the self-serving bias.

15. According to your text, a person who is a high self-monitor

- a. is very sensitive to the social demands of the situation.
- b. is likely to choose a dating partner based on his or her physical appearance.
- c. is not terribly concerned about what others think.
- d. both a and b.
- e. both b and c.

16. John chooses his dating partners based on whether he has interests in common with them, rather than based on their physical attractiveness. Most likely, John is

- a. a high self-monitor.
- b. a low self-monitor.
- c. prone to the egotistical bias.
- d. a self-verifier.
- e. none of the above

17. The night before an important exam, Freddy stays up late and gets drunk instead of studying. Freddy is engaging in

- a. self-handicapping.
- b. self-destruction.
- c. counterproductive behavior.
- d. the egotistical bias.

18. According to your text, self-handicapping can take the form(s) of

- a. putting an excuse in place because of fear of failure.
- b. using ineffective strategies to achieve a goal.
- c. putting obstacles in the way of success.
- d. both a and c.
- e. all of the above

19. The “spotlight effect” involves

- a. overestimating the degree to which others can read behavior.
- b. putting up roadblocks to future success after an initial unexpected success.
- c. taking too much credit for positive outcomes.
- d. sharing in another person’s success to enhance one’s self-esteem.

20. The belief that others can easily read our inner thoughts and feelings is known as

- a. primary self-destruction.
- b. the window illusion.
- c. the spotlight effect.
- d. the illusion of transparency.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

21. The _____ includes all knowledge and thoughts related to the person you believe you are.
22. The _____ process, by which we compare our own reactions, abilities, and attributes to those of others, leads to self-knowledge.
23. _____ is the act of examining our own thoughts and feelings to better understand ourselves.
24. _____ suggests that a person thinks of herself in terms of the qualities that make her different from others.
25. _____ is memory for information relating to the self.
26. _____ is the part of the self that is derived from group membership.
27. a(n) _____ are conceptions that help order and direct behavior.
28. _____ involves matching behavior to internal standards or the expectations of others.
29. _____ suggests that the behavior of others affects how one feels about oneself.
30. Individuals are motivated to seek _____ by behaving so that people come to see them as they see themselves.
31. Having a heightened awareness of yourself in certain situations is known as _____.
32. _____ occurs when we lose self-energy in stressful or threatening situations.
33. When people present themselves as responsible for success whether they are or not, they are displaying a(n) _____.
34. _____ refers to the degree to which a person focuses on his or her behavior when in a social situation.

Answers

Multiple Choice

#	<i>correct</i>	<i>page in text</i>
1	c	33
2	a	33
3	a	35
4	a	39
5	e	41
6	b	45
7	d	46
8	c	47
9	b	48
10	b	48
11	a	49
12	b	50
13	d	53
14	a	54
15	d	54
16	b	54
17	a	55
18	e	56
19	a	57
20	d	57

Fill-in-the-Blank

<i>#</i>	<i>correct</i>	<i>page in text</i>
21	self-concept	33
22	social comparison	33
23	introspection	34
24	distinctiveness theory	34
25	autobiographical memory	35
26	collective self	37
27	self-schema	41
28	self-regulation	45
29	Self-evaluation maintenance theory	47
30	Self-verification	49
31	Self-focus	50
32	Ego-depletion	53
33	Egotistical bias	54
34	Self-monitoring	54

KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

Think of a significant event you went through with a close friend. Write about the event in as much detail as you can remember.

Now have your friend write an account of the same even, without looking at yours.

Compare the two accounts. Do they differ in any significant ways from each other?

In the Akira Kurosawa film *Rashomon* an even is told through the eyes of four different characters, and each account of the event tells a different story. Anthony Greenwald notes that we have “Totalitarian Egos,” that each of our selves distorts knowledge about social events in systematic ways. Two biases Greenwald talks about are benefactance, or a tendency to see ourselves in a more positive light than we objectively should, and egocentrism, or a tendency to see ourselves as being more centrally involved in events than we really are. The characters in *Rashomon* show both of these biases. Did either your account of the event or your friend’s account show either of these biases?

KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION: PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

Different people often define their self-concepts using varying criteria. The following is a self-assessment technique that has been used to look at individual differences in definitions of the self (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). Finish each phrase below to make a complete sentence that answers the question “Who am I?”

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

I am _____ . I am _____ .

Now, read over your responses and classify each as either an *idiocentric* response (that is, things that refer to you as an individual: personal qualities, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that do not relate to others) or a *group* response (that is, demographic categories or groups with which you share a common fate) or neither. For example, if you said “I am intelligent” this would be an idiocentric response, and if you said “I am a Roman Catholic” this would be considered a group response. Write an “I” after each idiocentric response and a “G” after each group response. If neither applies, write an “N.” Count up the number of I’s and G’s.

In a study comparing college students from an individualistic culture (the United States) and a collective culture (China), Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991) found that U.S. students made more idiocentric responses than Chinese students (78% vs. 63%), whereas Chinese students made more group responses than U.S. students (26% vs. 13%). How do your percentages compare to these?

KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION: OBSERVATION

One self-serving bias that people tend to show is that they are unrealistically optimistic about future events that will happen to them. Pick 10 students at random on campus and ask them the following questions on a 10-point scale (1=definitely not; 10=definitely).

1. How likely is it that you will live past the age of 80?
2. How likely is it that you will be married for the rest of your life?
3. How likely is it that you will land a good job when you graduate?

Now pick 10 other students at random on campus and ask them the following questions.

1. How likely is it that the average college student will live past the age of 80?
2. How likely is it that the average college student will be married for the rest of his or her life?
3. How likely is it that the average college student will land a good job when he or she graduates?

Take the average response of all 10 students to each question. Compare the average answer to each question between the students who answered the questions about themselves to those who answered the questions about the average college student. Were those who answered the questions about themselves more optimistic than those who answered the questions about the average college student?