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Chapter Twenty-Three

Self-Concept and Identity

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In its widest possible sense . . . a man's Self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works. . . . If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant, if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down.

James, 1890/1950, pp. 291–292

Self-concept and *identity* provide answers to the basic questions “Who am I?”, “Where do I belong?”, and “How do I fit (or fit in)?” In our society, each self-concept is assumed to be unique, different from any other self, and private – fully knowable only to the self (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). Improving oneself, knowing oneself, discovering oneself, creating oneself anew, expressing oneself, taking charge of one's self, being happy with oneself, being ashamed of oneself, are all essential self-projects, central to our understanding of what self-concept and identity *are* and how they *work*. Our images of the self we might be, expect to be, are afraid we might be, motivate current behavior and color understanding. *Self-concept* and *identity* are what come to mind when we think of ourselves (Neisser, 1993), including both personal and social identities (Stryker, 1980; Tajfel, 1981). They are our theory of our personality (Markus & Cross, 1990), what we know or can know about ourselves.

Being human means being conscious of having a self and the nature of the self is central to what it means to be human (Lewis, 1990). The self has been correlated with an array of life situations and life outcomes and is considered a psychological resource – self-concepts differ not only in content but also in their effectiveness (for reviews of assessment and context issues see Byrne, 1996; Harris, 1995; Wylie, 1989). Self-concepts differ in complexity (Linville, 1987), organization of positive and negative self-relevant information

(Showers, Abramson, & Hogan, 1998), and the extent that they promote persistent striving versus disengagement, sense of general contentment or incipient despair. Various conceptualizations as a dependent, independent, mediator, and moderator construct, the self-concept has emerged as one of the most studied areas of psychology. *Psychological Abstracts* shows 23,943 publications from applied and basic science journals (including almost 150 from this year's *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* alone) with the key word "self-concept" and standard textbooks on social psychology almost invariably contain chapters on self-concept and related concepts such as self-esteem. Recent reviews of self-concept and identity from a social psychological perspective include Banaji & Prentice (1994), Baumeister (1998), Brown (1998), Kihlstrom & Klein (1994), and Markus & Wurf (1987), and in the present volume the related constructs of self-esteem (chapter 22) and self-regulation (chapter 14) are reviewed. The focus of this chapter will be to integrate the main themes highlighted in self-concept research within a broader cultural and contextual perspective. In order to do so, I will briefly highlight themes in the social development of self-concept – its content, structure, and organization – and then turn to the ways that a sociocultural frame illuminates new issues and guides hypotheses testing.

Defining the Self-concept

The self-system is both an array of self-relevant knowledge, the tool we use to make sense of our experiences, and the processes that construct, defend, and maintain this knowledge (Epstein, 1973; Higgins, 1996; Markus, 1977). The self-concept functions as a repository of autobiographical memories, as an organizer of experience, and as an emotional buffer and motivational resource (Markus & Wurf, 1987). The notion that each of us has a self-concept, an idea or set of ideas of who we are, and that this conceptualization is relatively constant over time, is intuitively appealing. Not surprisingly, some aspect of the self-concept has been studied within all branches of psychology. Yet what is actually meant by self-concept seems variable across disciplines and research methodologies, as does the self's assumed and documented stability versus malleability. Most dramatically, clinical field trials suggest that it is hard to change one's self-concept, while experimental researchers routinely document that the self is extremely variable and easily changed by even minor experimental manipulations (Markus & Kunda, 1986).

While clearly there is a self-concept that provides an answer to the "Who am I?" question quite simply by anchoring reality and providing the response "*I am me*," what is meant by the self-concept in research and theorizing is often quite ambiguous. The best summary of what is normally meant in experimental research is likely to be the working self-concept – the part of the self-concept that is relevant or made salient in a particular situation (Markus & Kunda, 1986). Even here there is some ambiguity as to whether what is meant is the content that is temporarily accessible or the self-relevant cognitive processing mechanisms that are made temporarily salient. For example, a number of lines of research suggest that observing an other's successes or failures influences both the content of one's on-line or working self-concept and also the cognitive process that is salient – particularly the extent that one focuses on self-enhancement (selectively processing in a

self-enhancing manner). Conversely, in quasi-experimental and correlational research, what is meant by the self-concept are the chronically salient aspects of the self-concept, most likely to be repeatedly brought to mind given the everyday contexts in which the individual is embedded.

That the self is both stable and mutable is in fact necessary to our theories of change and self-improvement. The self is seen as an active agent, seeking competence, resolution of life phase conflicts, and mastery in real world terms (see Brown, 1998), yet it is also viewed as importantly molded and shaped by early experiences and relationships (e.g. Aber, Allen, Carlson, & Cicchetti, 1989; Mikulincer, 1998; Rogers, 1954). What the self-concept does is mutually constructed by developmental shifts in cognitive abilities and the requirements of particular life tasks embedded in particular times and spaces (e.g. Maddux, 1991; Moretti, Higgins, & Simon, 1990). Yet in a particular situation, the self-concept is a centrally important cognitive concept and memory structure (Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998). Relevance to the self is basic to such cognitive processes as similarity judgments (Catrambone, Beike, & Niedenthal, 1996) and increases processing speed and facilitates inferences (Catrambone & Markus, 1987; Markus, 1977; see Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994, for a review). What we remember, how we remember it, and the sense we make of our experience are each importantly shaped by our self-concepts.

Assessing the Self-concept

In spite of or perhaps because of its centrality for cognition and memory, assessing the content of self-concept continues to be an elusive goal. First, the self-concept contains a dizzying array of content, such a rich array of episodic, experiential, and abstracted information about the self that not all of it can be salient at any given point in time. Therefore, when asked to report on the self, individuals can only report on that subset of all the self-relevant information that is salient and therefore seems important or central at that point in time. Importantly, saliency-eliciting cues are likely to go unnoticed by the research participant. For example, a researcher interested in shyness is likely to find that average ratings of shyness are higher when instructions request a specific instance of shyness (easily brought to mind) and lower when instructions request a specific instance of extroversion (also easily brought to mind) (Fazio, Effrein, & Falender, 1981). This influence of accessible content, however, is influenced by the ease with which it comes to mind. Information that comes to mind easily is assumed to be more self-defining, more "true" of the self, than are self-descriptions that require effortful search in memory, so that in response to questions about the self-concept, we rely on what comes to mind easily to report on the self. Yet using this "ease of retrieval" heuristic in deciding what is true about the self-concept means that all self-concept measures are open to a variety of confounds (Schwarz, 1998; Schwarz, Bless, Strack, Klumpp, Rittenauer-Schatka, & Simons, 1991). Following the same example, researchers obtaining a longer list of instances of shyness (or extroversion) are likely to find lower ratings of these social characteristics because difficulty of bringing to mind the requested number of examples is used as a judgment cue in the research context. This means that paradoxically, bringing to

mind twenty examples of shyness may convince the respondent that he is less shy than bringing to mind three or four examples.

Second, subtle contextual cues including features of the interview schedule can make salient particular aspects of the self, for example personal or social characteristics of the self (Trafimow & Smith, 1998). Because these contextual influences go unnoticed, the instrument and immediate setting may well create the context. For example Norenzayan, Schwarz, & Rothman (1996) found that the letterhead on which the questionnaire was printed influenced content of self-concept in open-ended descriptions. Participants used more social roles in describing themselves when the questionnaire was printed on a letterhead from the department of political science and more personal traits to describe themselves if they thought the study was taking place in a psychology department. Though the self-concepts of these participants could hardly be said to change as a result of the letterhead, what they reported about themselves did. It seems unlikely that this was a conscious act, therefore leading to the conclusion that the self-concept, though vital in guiding motivation, behavior, and understanding, is highly susceptible to social and situational structuring.

Operating a Self-concept: The Self-concept in Action

In spite of these difficulties in assessment, it seems clear that the self-concept is a social force: it influences what is perceived, felt, and reacted to and the behavior, perceptions, and reactions of others (Harris, 1995; Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994). It can be thought of as an information processor, functioning to reconfigure social contexts, diffuse otherwise negative circumstances, and promote positive outcomes for the self. The self-concept is inferred to be at work when making one's self momentarily salient results in behavioral change: when seeing oneself in the mirror (for a review, see Banaji & Prentice, 1994), bringing to mind one's group membership (Steele, 1997), or even when wearing a bathing suit (Fredrickson, et al., 1998). More directly, the self-concept is inferred to be at work when it moderates outcomes – among youth, positive racial-ethnic minority identity mediates risk of declining academic performance (Oyserman & Harrison, 1997), while positive self-views reduce risk of bullying (Egan & Perry, 1998). Self-relevant thinking, emotion regulation, and motivation (Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Markus & Wurf, 1987) are all examples of the self-in-action. For example, controlling for ability, persistence on a math task drops when minority status is made salient, but not for youth who self-define as both members of their minority group and also members of larger society (Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, & Brosh, 1999). For these dual identity youth, the self-concept responses to the "Who am I?", "Where do I belong?", and "How do I fit (in)?" questions bolster motivation and facilitate persistence as opposed to the stereotype threat experienced by their peers (Steele, 1997).

Because the self-concept frames experience and motivates action, the self-concept has been described as a "theory" about oneself that represents and organizes current self-knowledge and guides how new self-knowledge is perceived (Epstein, 1973). As a theory, the self-concept is made of the current state of knowledge about the self and is assumed to be veridical enough to help organize experience, focus motivation, regulate emotion, and

guide social interaction. It is not assumed to reflect some absolute truth about one's skills, abilities, competencies, or worth. More than simply a theory about the self, some researchers have posited that the self-concept is the seat of basic effectance and competency drives, reflecting an innate need to become effective, more competent over time (Maslow, 1954), and a desire to improve the self. Models based in this premise, termed *self-assessment*, *learning*, *efficacy*, and *self-improvement* models (Maddux, 1991; Trope, 1986; see chapter 22, this volume, for a review), have received some support. These models suggest that individuals are motivated to seek out accurate information about the self in order to be able to improve the self (Wurf & Markus, 1991). Two other basic functions of the self-concept have been outlined (see chapter 22, this volume, for a review): the promotion of positive self-views, termed *self-evaluation maintenance* (chapter 22, this volume) or *self-affirmation* (Steele, 1988), and the provision of a consistent anchor for information processing, termed *self-consistency* or *self-verification* (Swann, 1997).

Since the early writings of James (1890/1950), feeling good about oneself, evaluating oneself positively, feeling that one is a person of worth, have been described as a basic goal of the self-concept, a basic human need, akin with the pleasure principle. Numerous studies have shown a robust tendency to maintain and enhance a positive image of the self (Greenwald, 1980). The notion that positive self-esteem is a fundamental human need is the basis for an array of self-concept theories, including group-based theories such as social identity theories (Haslam, Oakes, Turner, & McGarty, 1996; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and collective self-esteem theory (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). According to self-esteem maintenance assumptions, all else being equal, individuals prefer to feel good about themselves and so will self-define in such a way as to maintain positive self-feelings. In this view, the self is a positivity-seeking information processor. It seeks out domains in which positive self-definitions are possible (e.g. Steele, 1988), disengages from domains in which positive self-definitions are not possible (James, 1890/1950), and compares the self to others in ways that reflect favorably on the self (e.g. Beauregard & Dunning, 1998). While tending toward somewhat rosy self-descriptions (Taylor & Brown, 1988), individuals differ in the extent that they bias their self-evaluations upward. The upward trend is most pronounced when evaluating the self on a dimension that is clearly valenced (Asendorpf & Ostendorf, 1998) and high self-esteem individuals may be better able to shift self-definitional focus to create a positive identity in the face of setback (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998).

In addition to its self-promotive functions, the self-concept also provides and maintains a cognitive anchor, a consistent yardstick, or way of making sense of who one is and therefore what to expect of the self and others. According to Swann's self-verification theory, individuals are motivated to preserve self-definitions and will do so by creating a social reality that conforms to their self-view (see Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Baumeister, 1998; Swann, 1997, for reviews of this perspective). The assumption is that we prefer a consistent sense of self in order to be able to use the self-concept to make predictions about the world (Greenwald, 1980), and to maintain relationships with those others with whom these self-definitions were created (see Higgins, 1996). This means that the self-concept is a conservative information processor. Important self-relevant information, even if negative, is maintained in the face of contradictory information if it is in a domain central to one's self-definition and one is given a chance to process it.

Building a Self-concept: The Self-concept as Structure

Clearly, the self-concept requires memory and in some basic way it is all of those things that we can remember about ourselves. However, it is not simply a collection of autobiographical memories, it is also a cognitive structure. We remember information better if it is linked to the self-concept (Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994) and currently salient self-concept content influences ongoing information processing, meaning-making and behavioral, motivational, and affective responses (Kemmelmeyer & Oyserman, in press; Trafimow & Smith, 1998). A common conceptualization of the self-concept is that it is a multifaceted set of self-relevant schemas containing self-knowledge, guiding and directing action and providing future-oriented goals (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Epstein, 1973; Fiske & Taylor, 1994; Greenwald, 1982; Holland & Quinn, 1987; Markus, 1977). As a cognitive concept, self-concept is based in experience and as a cognitive structure, it shapes experience by guiding both what we pay attention to and the meaning we make of it.

By conceptualizing the self-concept as a set of self-schemas, researchers imply that the self-concept is not necessarily hierarchically organized. In fact, different models have been suggested (for a review, see Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994). First, abstract traits may cue specific exemplars, which are stored as situated memories, or specific exemplars. For example, thinking of one's self as shy may bring to mind the times one was too tongue-tied to volunteer one's opinion in a classroom debate. Second, specific exemplars may cue trait descriptors. For example, remembering a time one was tongue-tied may make salient the feeling that one is shy. Third, exemplars and trait descriptors may be independently stored in memory. In this case, bringing to mind a memory of one's self as shy would cue other such memories and these would be separate from memories of the self as tongue-tied and so on. Although the first model is often assumed to be correct, this assumption is not well supported (Marsh & Yeung, 1998) and current evidence suggests most support for the latter model type, termed *independent storage models*. These models do not assume that specific exemplars and abstracted traits are hierarchically arranged. Rather, when context or other cues make abstract trait information salient, specific examples are not elicited and similarly, when specific examples are elicited, this does not reliably cue general trait information. It is this independence that makes possible the ease of retrieval errors described above.

Developing a Self-concept: The Self-concept as Cognitive Product

How does this cognitive construct and memory structure, so central to our understanding of personhood, emerge? Developmental research suggests that the self-concept is both a *basic tool* of cognitive and social development and an important *consequence* of this development (see excellent reviews by Bretherton, 1992; Damon & Hart, 1988; Lewis, 1990). Sense of self initially involves simply sensing that one's body is separate from others, so that identity begins with a physical sense of the boundaries of one's body and where it is in space (Lewis, 1990). Yet because infants cannot engage their environment directly, this

insight must occur within the context of interactions with others. Thus, the infant's emerging relationality scaffolds and supports its emerging identity. Adult caregivers frame and carry the interaction in the social space between infant and adult so that in some basic way, infants learn who they are through the sense their caretaker provides of who they are. These initial interactions, termed synchronized exchanges, involve caretaker and infant in linked interactions that take into account the responses of the other. Caretaker-infant synchrony develops rapidly in the first few months of life (Tronick & Gianino, 1986). The quality of this synchrony has been related to later child self-characteristics such as self-control (Feldman, Greenbaum, & Yirmiya, 1999) and affect regulation (Weinberg, Tronick, & Cohn, 1999). It is posited that these interchanges are the basis of attachment style or working model of relationality (Bretherton, 1992), that sets up a basic sense of worth, esteem, and efficacy (for a review, see Hammen, 1991).

Basic sense of efficacy in turn provides an impetus to explore the world, stimulating cognitive and language development – highlighting the influence of self-concept development on cognitive development. As the capacity for memory develops in the first year of life, infants begin to develop a more nuanced sense of identity because they can engage in and store differential interaction with different others. At two years of age, self-consciousness begins to emerge, solidifying by the end of the fourth year of life. Early self-consciousness involves being able to distinguish unexpected changes in the self. By age two, but not reliably before, toddlers touch their forehead when they look in the mirror and see a red paint smear (Lewis & Brooks-Gunn, 1979). A temporal sense of self follows by age four; at this age, toddlers reliably touch their forehead when viewing their paint-smear on a video monitor only when it is a "live tape" and not an image from a previously videotaped play session (Povinelli & Simon, 1998). This emerging self-concept is linked to self-conscious emotions such as embarrassment at recognizing the self, fear when the mother leaves, and pride in the self's accomplishments (for a review, see Hammen, 1991).

In the years from two to eight, as language develops, children begin to make self-descriptive statements, with content shifting from age two to eight from physical to psychological terms (Damon & Hart, 1988). In early adolescence, both past and future orientation to the self evolves and youth begin to use more abstract descriptions, shifting from descriptions of what they usually do to comparative assessments, to interpersonal concerns, to systematic beliefs and plans. Utilizing James's basic framework of dimensions of the self, Damon & Hart (1988) suggest a developmental progression from material, to social, to psychological perspectives on the self, with each new level integrating and transforming the previous one. As the psychological self evolves, youth grapple to integrate various perspectives on the self – how they present themselves to the world, who they aspire to become, who they were, and who they are now (Harter, 1990; Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996; Ruble, Eisenberg, & Higgins, 1994). Development of a sense of the adult one will become has been viewed as a main task of adolescence, yet who one is and where one belongs continues to be central across adulthood (Erikson, 1968).

Constructing the Self: The Self-concept as Social Product

This multifaceted self-concept that takes on and grapples with the life phase-appropriate versions of the basic questions "Who am I?", "Where do I belong?", and "How do I fit (in)?" is clearly social in nature (see Higgins, 1996; Lewis, 1990; Markus & Cross, 1990). From the beginning, theorists have conceptualized the self-concept as a *social product* that develops through relationships with others and what they see in one's self. In this way, social reality can be more potent than behavioral or observed reality. For example, while related to their actual school performance, middle schoolers' academic self-concepts are more influenced by their parents' perceptions of their abilities than by their actual school grades (Frome & Eccles, 1998). William James (1890/1950) described this as the social aspect of the self-concept and *social selves* were described as the unique version of the self reflected in each human interaction. Other early conceptualizations of the self-concept also highlighted the ways others' views of us, or at least our perceptions of these appraisals, influence how we conceive of ourselves (Cooley, 1902). Others were seen as vital to the production and experience of being a self: "the self can exist for the individual only if he assumes the roles of the others" (Mead, 1921-1925/1964, p. 284). The self is thus experienced "indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group" (Mead, 1934/1964, p. 138).

Selves are created within contexts and take into account the values, norms, and mores of the others likely to participate in that context. By adolescence, individuals are able to distinguish between the selves they would like to be and become and the selves others want them to be (Moretti, Higgins, & Simon, 1990). Students given a say in their social contexts are more likely to report expressing their "true" selves, the selves they want to be, rather than feeling compelled to present situation-appropriate "false" selves, the selves they know others want them to be (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastelic, 1998). Others are clearly present in the self-concept, they are standards of comparison – we feel good when we outperform others (see chapter 12, this volume), bask in the success of close others if there is little chance we will be compared negatively to them (see chapter 22, this volume). We feel less likely to succeed if similar others fail (Kemmelmeyer & Oyserman, in press). In this way, the accomplishments and failures of close others help define the self. By 11 years of age if not sooner, children see the actions of close others as self-relevant, feeling pride in a close other's accomplishments and shame in their failings (Bennett, Yuill, Banerjee, & Thomson, 1998). More generally, others are arbitrators of personal worth and self-esteem drops in the face of public devaluation such as bullying or teasing (Egan & Perry, 1998; Graham & Juvonen, 1998), and is strengthened by peer acceptance (Roffey, Majors, & Tarrant, 1997).

But the influence of social contexts is not limited to self-relevant information gleaned from interactions with particular others. Who one *is* in a particular situation is importantly framed by the social context. Being a "solo," the only one of one's gender, racial-ethnic or other social category in a particular context makes these categories salient in self-definition (e.g. McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976). Moreover, solo status can intensify negative effects of stereotypes about members of one's social group on self-regard (e.g. Frable, Platt,

& Hoey, 1998). At the same time, we are loath to be too similar to others in our social groups, striving instead for an optimal level of both uniqueness and similarity (Brewer, 1991). In this way, self-concepts emerge through interactions, making one's most basic identities part and parcel of and specific to the particular groups within which one is embedded (Raeff, 1997).

By taking into account the influence of social statuses more generally, social psychological research has begun to explore more systematically areas previously left to fields such as cultural, race-ethnicity, and gender studies. Building on these earlier insights, the current generation of social psychological theorizing about the self is taking a new look at what constitutes a social context and the implications of social context for self-concept development, content, and structure, and the behavioral, motivational, and affective consequences of self-concept. For example, Croizet & Claire (1998) show that making one's working-class status salient impairs academic performance, while Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady (1999) show that making one's Asian-ness salient improves or impedes performance depending on the content of the local social stereotype about being Asian.

These examples make clear that social contexts enable, elicit, and scaffold certain selves while dis-enabling, suppressing, and dismantling others even in the face of what might appear to be objective evidence of these self-dimensions. It is also becoming increasingly clear that the social construction of the self depends not only on particular relationships or immediate situations but also on larger sociocultural and historical factors. Being Serb or Albanian in Kosovor matters and is likely to establish ways of being in the world, open certain possible selves, and close off others. Feeling Serbian or Albanian in Kosovor sets up patterns of action, ways of making sense of the world in ways that are quite different from feeling Serbian or Albanian in the United States or Switzerland. The way that this matters for self-concept is not rooted in the influence of a particular other's view of the self but rather in a more global, societal stance as to whether the self can be fundamentally separate from group memberships.

Having and Being a Self: The Self-concept in Sociocultural Context

Societies and cultures differ in the way that they make sense of what it means to be an individual, the aspects of human experience that are centralized, and the resolutions to basic human dilemmas that they endorse or value (Hofstede, 1980). These basic dilemmas include how to deal with human inequality, the premium placed on reducing or avoiding uncertainty about the future, the nature of the valued or normative relationship between individuals and groups, and the value assigned to enhancing versus attenuating differences between the sexes (Hofstede, 1980). It seems reasonable to suppose that the self-concepts created in differing cultural milieux will take on these culture-specific ways of being (e.g. Weigert, Teige, & Teige, 1990). Yet, perhaps because it is so broadly encompassing as to be transparent, unnoticed, culture has not typically informed social psychological research on the self-concept (Bond & Smith, 1997; Oyserman & Markus, 1993, 1998; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 1999). While the self-concept has long been viewed as a social product and the implications of contextual salience are mainstream research foci, the field

is just beginning to explore the ways larger social structures such as culture may set up the nature of both the social interactions and immediate contexts. At issue for self-concept theorizing and research is whether self-concept development and processes studied in one cultural context can be generalized to others.

The bulk of the research described in this chapter focuses on North American participants and assumes a North American cultural context, so it is particularly important to understand how this cultural frame may influence how the self has been conceptualized and studied. Broadly speaking, North American and Western European cultures have been described as individualistic. That is, they socialize members to believe in individual rights and personal freedoms, the centrality of personal pleasure and autonomy, and the personal, private, and unique self. These cultures are viewed as not highly accepting of human difference, preferring models of equality to one's assuming hierarchy. Yet, though highly accessible and part of popular representations in these countries, this democratic, individualistic frame is also transparent, that which goes without saying so that its influence on the way the self is studied, the research questions asked, and the theories developed, is only recently being questioned.

Thus, current theories about personality (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998) and well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) imply a bounded, autonomous goal-oriented self focused on attainment of personal happiness-making goals, able to make friends and develop helpful social networks with relative strangers – all characteristics of democratic individualism. Given the relative size of North American publication impact (Bond & Smith, 1997), it seems reasonable to propose that North American individualism is the standard prism through which psychological phenomena are construed, whether or not culture is an explicit unit of analysis (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Oyserman & Markus, 1993). Yet by not making explicit a cultural frame, researchers have limited their opportunity to investigate the way culture may influence all aspects of the self-concept – its definition and assessment, its structure and functions. Having and being a self may not be a fully generalizable experience. In the remaining portion of this chapter, I review what we currently know about the generalizability of the North American and Western European self-concept presented until now (see chapter 2, this volume, for a review of the cultural psychology literature).

Societies that emphasize individualism are said to value individual rights, not duties or obligations, to emphasize personal autonomy and self-fulfillment, and believe that the self is created through personal achievements and accomplishments, not group memberships (Kim, 1994; Triandis, 1995). Within this cultural frame, the self is viewed as bounded, distinct, and stable, with attitudes and behavior ensuing derived from this stable self rather than being a social and situational product (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Kagitcibasi, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sampson, 1977; Triandis, 1989). Within this worldview, creating and maintaining a positive sense of self is assumed to be a basic human endeavor. Feeling good about oneself and having many unique or distinctive personal attitudes and opinions is valued (Oyserman & Markus, 1993; Markus, 1998; Triandis, 1995), as is positive self-esteem (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). Concerns about the possibility that individualism is not a universal socialization goal are echoed in gender studies and racial-ethnic studies research as well (Frale, 1997).

Although societies differ in many ways, most commonly societies that emphasize individualism have been contrasted with societies that emphasize collectivism, summarized as a focus on the group membership or social aspects of the self (Schwartz, 1990). These societies emphasize somewhat different resolutions to basic human dilemmas. Rather than placing emphasis on the individual and his or her unique attributes, emphasis is on the individual's place within a group and the group's unique attributes (Triandis, 1995). In this way, the interdependence between the individual and ingroup is emphasized; because individuals are parts, not stand alone wholes, others are represented within the self-concept (Hofstede, 1980; Kim, 1994). Moreover, rather than striving to become valued due to unique individual abilities and independence, individuals strive to become valued due to their ability to maintain relationships and interpersonal harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The social, not the personal self is emphasized through cultural practices such as dropping use of personal pronouns, co-producing sentences (Kashima & Kashima, 1997), and using enigmatic similes in which the speaker provides half the simile so that meaning becomes clear only upon joint completion (Rohsenow, 1991).

Empirical support is accruing for the notion that when collectivism is salient ingroup membership is seen as a fixed, meaningful part of identity (Kim, 1994), personal goals and group needs are viewed as congruent (Oyserman, Sakamoto, & Lauffer, 1998), even when the group is faring poorly (Chen, Brockner, & Katz, 1998). Similarly, individuals who rate themselves as focused on collectivist values are lower in personal need for uniqueness, higher in self-other affiliation, and are also more sensitive to the other's rejection (Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, & Sugimori, 1995). Also, students from those societies which emphasized individualism more, viewed personal success as a particularly important basis of self-esteem, while participants from countries that emphasized individualism less viewed family life as a particularly important basis of self-esteem (Watkins, et al., 1998).

Cross-cultural research suggests the cultures place differential emphases on abstract versus episodic, experiential aspects of the self-concept, self-esteem maintenance versus self-improvement, and active versus quiescent self-related emotions. Rather than the self-enhancement or self-esteem maintenance goal central in cultures emphasizing individualism, cultures that emphasize collectivism make central self-goals such as fitting in and being a good group member, becoming more competent, and avoiding embarrassing oneself or others (for a review, see Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 1999). For example, preliminary support for the notion that societies differ in the extent that they emphasize self-esteem maintenance comes from research comparing Japanese and North American students. After receiving failure feedback, North American students are more likely to attempt to compensate or buffer self-feelings by working on easier problems or choosing another task, while Japanese students are more likely to choose the self-improvement strategy of working more on the failed task (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997).

To the extent that the self-concept is defined, studied, and theorized about within individualistic assumptions, self-concept research is likely to focus on the domains valued by individualism as a cultural frame. This appears to be the case. For example, since knowing and positively evaluating the self – self-concept and self-esteem – are intimately linked in Western tradition and common language, they are used interchangeably in much of the literature (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Since being happy, outgoing, and sociable are

valued characteristics within an individualistic cultural frame it is likely that these characteristics will be seen as normative. In fact, the ability to "bounce back" and focus on the positive rather than dwelling on the negative after failure is both culturally valued and – in North America – a characteristic of high rather than low self-esteem individuals (Dodgson & Wood, 1998). Further, the high cultural value placed on positive self-evaluation has resulted in a shift in the meaning of self-esteem from the notion that self-esteem means defining oneself as an adequate person, of equal value as others, toward implicitly assuming that positive self-regard means extremely positive identity (Baumeister, 1998).

In the West, particularly the US, source of much psychological theorizing on the self-concept (Bond & Smith, 1997), it is clear that people tend to have positive views of themselves, at least as assessed by our measures of self-esteem. While a focus on self-esteem seems less useful if researchers are to understand other functions of the self-concept, self-esteem is often used as a key individual difference variable and fluctuations in self-esteem are used to show the influence of social situations on the self. Yet in contexts other than the US, feeling good may be less of a cultural imperative.

Individualistic contexts highlight the importance of a positive self-view and focus attention on the self-concept as an array of traits. North American and European student based research evidence supports these assumptions about the nature of the self: individuals attempt to set up interactions in ways that protect positive self-views, and anticipating negative social feedback is disturbing (Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998). American children as young as kindergarteners learn to assess themselves and others in terms of stable and fixed traits (Heyman & Gelman, 1998). North Americans believe that self-interest is a prime motivating factor (Miller & Ratner, 1998) and view relationships with ambivalence, correctly assuming that close others may inhibit self-enhancing tendencies (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998).

Yet we may be finding individualistically oriented selves and self-processes because our models focus on these and utilize mostly research participants from countries where individualism is likely to be chronically salient. Within a country, though individualism and collectivism could be separately primed to study the generalizability of findings about self-concept processes, this is typically not done. Further, self-concept and self-esteem are typically assessed, manipulated, or made salient in psychological research paradigms focusing on interactions with strangers, achievement situations, or situations in which attainment of personal goals is centralized, the very situations likely to make an individualistic worldview most prominent (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 1999). North American and Western European research paradigms rarely study situations likely to evoke a collectivist worldview such as interactions with family members or situations where a sense of common fate with ingroup members has been elicited. Thus, they are unlikely to find evidence of these collective self-processes. Thus, the situations and participants that form the bulk of mainstream social psychological research on the self-concept are heavily weighted toward finding evidence of individualistic self-concept content and processes. This is not to say that evidence for collectivist processes and content would not be found if these were the focus of research attention.

Clearly, however, even within the US, not all contexts promote individualism; behaving individualistically may require power and resources not available across gender and ethnic boundaries (e.g. Kerber, 1991). American collective structures and created spaces afford

and sustain the individual focus of American society, particularly the middle class white niche of that society that forms the bulk of our researchers and research participants. These contexts afford and bolster the centralization of the individual in construing cause and effect, and make personal choice, free will, and personal happiness plausible constructs. Clearly, one's place within the social structure influences whether and how individualism is expressed. Broadening the frame of self-concept research will facilitate research dealing with these context-bound aspects of the self. Thus, studying self-concept more broadly, by taking into account both the situations likely to be experienced and the goals likely to be pursued in contexts that make collectivism salient, would do much to deepen understanding of what the self-concept is and how it functions.

Cultural psychological theorizing has made the omission of culture as the broader context in standard self-concept research more obvious and has highlighted the congruence between theories of self-esteem maintenance and individualistic values. Only by broadening the focus of our research attention can we begin to learn the extent to which other goals – such as intimacy and relational goals – motivate the self. In addition, while people often focus on positive aspects of the self, it is also the case that people are interested in seeking accurate information about themselves and in preserving a sense of consistency, even if the consistent information reflects badly on one's self. By taking a broader perspective on the self-concept, the workings of these other self-goals can be more successfully pursued. Using a cultural perspective also highlights the potential for mismatches between the goals assumed by the larger culture and personal goals. For example, an individual may be focused on relationality or self-improvement in contexts that reward autonomy and self-enhancement.

Some research has taken into account issues emerging in this new look at the self. In particular, European literature on social identities (e.g. Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) posits that group membership is an important component of one's identity and that individuals are motivated to view their groups as positive, distinct from other groups. In addition, a new look at social contexts is emerging from a convergence of evidence that contexts matter not only because they influence the situational content elicited by self-concept probes, but importantly because they influence the structure and function of self-concept. These converging lines of research include efforts to explore the effects of social stigma on self-esteem (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994), the effects of race and racial identity on self-concept (Oyserman & Harrison, 1998), and the effects of gender on self-schemas (Cross & Madson, 1997; Markus & Oyserman, 1989). Together, these perspectives suggest ways that insights about the self-concept gained from studies of primarily white middle-class European American undergraduates are in fact culture-bound and could vary systematically by cultural frame. These insights, combined with the work on racial and ethnic aspects of identity and social identity more generally, provide insight into new directions in self-concept research.

While there is preliminary evidence suggesting that Euro-Americans and Western Europeans generally may be more likely to have the kinds of selves assumed by self-concept researchers, evidence is as yet preliminary and is often based on correlational methodologies (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 1999). The strength of cultural perspectives lies in their challenge to the assumed universality of psychological theories of self-concept, but

the perspective is hampered by a reliance on cross-national studies that assume that participants hold mutually exclusive, stable, and uniform individualistic or collectivistic views. By bringing cultural constructs to the study of self-concept, this paradigm has made clear that there are multiple self-goals – to be part of and connect with others and to be unique from and distinct from others. While cultural psychologists have not emphasized group boundaries *per se*, social identity theories highlight the need to take into account not only group membership but also the way that the group is constituted in relation to other groups. This research has utilized laboratory settings to manipulate group size, salience, permeability of boundaries, and other potentially relevant cues, showing that individuals who are committed to an identity respond differently to threats to this identity than noncommitted individuals (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Spears, Oakes, Ellemers, & Haslam, 1998). Cultural research, exploring cultural context, specific goals, constructs and contexts, including the influences of migration and other acculturation processes (for a review, see chapter 2, this volume), is likely to provide rich material for future research on the generalizability of self-processes.

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