
CHAPTER 2

Self and Identity

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Self and identity have been central concerns of a sociological social psychology at least since the writings of G. H. Mead (1934), C. H. Cooley (1902), and the early interactionists in the 1920s and 1930s. In these writings, the self is essentially social in nature, anchored in language, communication, and social interaction. Increasingly, this focus on the social context of the self has expanded to include social structural and historical influences, particularly where “identity” is the aspect of self under consideration.

While interest in the self has remained steady in sociology over the past fifty years, it has waxed and waned in psychological social psychology.¹ Since the mid-1970s, interest in the self and self-related phenomena have become major concerns in psychological social psychology as a consequence of the “cognitive revolution” and the “crisis of confidence” precipitated by the discovery of “demand characteristics” and other self processes inadvertently operating in experimental studies (Hales 1985). As a result, many of the major psychological social psychology theories either have become self-theories or have been modified to take self-processes into account (see Gecas 1982, 1989 for reviews).

The increased interest in self phenomena in psychological social psychology and the continuing focus on the self in sociological social psychology has led to some convergences between these two traditionally separate branches of social psychology. This is particularly evident in discussions of labeling and attribution processes, impression management and identity negotiations, and self and

emotions. In general, however, sociological social psychology and psychological social psychology remain largely separate and distinct in their orientations toward the study of the self. Sociologists are still much more likely to be interested in the social contexts within which selves develop and the processes by which the self is affected. Psychologists are much more likely to focus on intrapsychic processes and on the consequences of self-phenomena for behavior.²

The literature on the self is extensive in social psychology and extends into clinical psychology, cultural anthropology, and political science. Our emphasis in this chapter is on developments in sociological social psychology, but we will also consider some of the major trends in psychological social psychology and anthropology, particularly as they intersect with sociological concerns. We begin with some definitional and conceptual clarifications, then briefly discuss the major social psychological perspectives on self and identity. We then proceed from micro to macro considerations, specifically from discussions of various self-components and self-processes (e.g., self-esteem, identities, self-consistency) to examinations of how social structure, culture, and history affect self and identity.

DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

To facilitate the discussion that follows, we offer definitions and distinctions between several key concepts: self, self-concept, identity, and personality. The concept of self essentially refers to the

process of reflexivity that emanates from the interplay between the “I” and the “Me.” Reflexivity or self-awareness refers to humans’ ability to be both subjects and objects to themselves. Reflexivity is a special form of consciousness, a consciousness of oneself, which is frequently considered the quintessential feature of the human condition (Mead 1934; Smith 1978).

While the core of the self is the process of reflexivity, the concept of self is often used generically to encompass all of the *products* or consequences of this reflexive activity. It would be more accurate to refer to the latter as the “self-concept” or the phenomenal self (Gecas 1982). The self-concept can be thought of as the sum total of the individual’s thoughts and feelings about him/herself as an object (Rosenberg 1979). It involves a sense of spatial and temporal continuity of the person (Smith 1978; R. H. Turner 1968) and a distinction of essential self from mere appearance and behavior (R. H. Turner 1976). It is composed of various identities, attitudes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences, along with their evaluative and affective components (e.g., self-efficacy, self-esteem) in terms of which individuals define themselves.³

Much of the content of self-concepts can be discussed in terms of identities. *Identity* refers to who or what one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others. In sociology, the concept of identity refers both to self-characterizations individuals make in terms of the structural features of group memberships, such as various social roles, memberships, and categories (Stryker 1980), and to the various character traits an individual displays and others attribute to an actor on the basis of his/her conduct (Alexander and Wiley 1981; Goffman 1959, 1963). In a sense, identity is the most public aspect of self. As Stone (1962) observed, identity locates a person in social space by virtue of the relationships and memberships that it implies.

Last, we need to distinguish between self and personality. If personality generally refers to the various psychological traits, motivations, dispositions, and styles or patterns of thinking and feeling

(Singer and Kolligian 1987), then self is that part of personality that is aware of itself and defines itself in terms of these qualities. Even though self can be viewed as a subset of personality, the different intellectual histories and traditions associated with the two concepts (sociology versus clinical psychology) have resulted in quite different emphases and orientations: “personality theory” is still largely equated with “trait theory,” emphasizing early formation and relative permanence of traits (Pervin 1985); “self theory” is more likely to emphasize the social, interactional, and changeable qualities of the self. However, there is a blurring of these historical differences as personality psychologists have increasingly turned to the study of self-processes (see Singer and Kolligian 1987) and as the “social structure and personality” area has become more prominent within sociological social psychology.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SELF AND IDENTITY

Social psychological perspectives on self and identity can be characterized by four general orientations: (1) situational, which emphasizes the emergence and maintenance of the self in situated (typically face-to-face) interaction; (2) social structural, which focuses on the consequences of role relationships and other structural features of social groups; (3) biographical-historical, which focuses on the self as a cultural and historical construction; and (4) intrapersonal, focusing on processes within self and personality affecting behavior. The first three of these orientations are primarily sociological and build on the legacy of Mead, Cooley, James, and the early interactionists. The emphasis on meaning, its maintenance in communication and social interaction, and its relevance for the concepts of self and identity are evident in each orientation. Also evident in each is the methodological requirement to take the actor’s perspective into account, and all three subscribe to some version of the interactionist proposition that self reflects society.

But there are also substantial differences in emphasis and approach between these orientations.

The *situational approach* takes as its subject matter the *process* of social interaction in naturally occurring social situations. Developed by Blumer (1969) and elaborated by Becker (1964), Strauss (1978), Stone (1962), and especially Goffman (1959, 1963, 1967) in what has come to be called the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism, the focus is on how individuals go about "defining the situations" and thereby constructing the realities in which they live. A critical aspect of these situational definitions is the establishment or construction of the relevant identities of the interactants. Identity construction is viewed as problematic, often involving considerable negotiation (Strauss 1978), bargaining (Blumstein 1973), role taking (R. H. Turner 1962), impression management (Goffman 1959), and altercasting (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963). Goffman's (1959, 1963, 1967) influential development of this approach describes in considerable detail the "staging operations" involved in our presentations of self in everyday life, the outcomes of which are rarely certain, sometimes resulting in embarrassment and shame over "spoiled identities" and usually requiring elaborate rituals of deference and demeanor for the maintenance and protection of "face" or valued identity. Identities are social fictions created out of this symbolic milieu, but they are highly valued fictions having real consequences for the interactants and the course of the interaction. Money, power, love, esteem, or other resources may be at stake.

Research on the self based on the situational approach has favored observational or field studies, preferably participant observation. The best way to know what is going on in "natural" interaction settings, it is claimed, is to be part of the action, or at least to observe it at close range (for recent examples, see Fine 1987; Lyng 1990). While there is a preference for naturalistic methods in the situational approach to the self, occasionally experimental methods are used. Alexander's (and Knight 1971; and Wiley 1981) work on "situated identity theory" and Blumstein's (1973) work on identity bargaining are two successful attempts to bring into the laboratory some of Goffman's ideas about self-presentation and the bases of making

identity attributions. This shift to the laboratory as the setting for studying specific aspects of the situated self is particularly evident in psychological social psychology (see, especially, Snyder 1987, on self-monitoring; Tedeschi 1981, on impression management).

The situational approach to the self has contributed to our understanding of the interpersonal processes and personal strategies involved in identity formation, to our understanding of the processes involved in socialization in various subcultures ("normal" and "deviant"), and to the development of "labeling theory" in sociology. It continues to be a viable and popular approach to the self.

In contrast to the situational approach, the *structural approach* developed through two other schools of symbolic interactionism. The first, the Iowa school developed by Kuhn and his students, has advocated survey methods, objective measures, and quantitative analyses of self-concepts (Meltzer and Petras 1970). Kuhn's work emphasized structural as opposed to processual conceptions of self and society and viewed behavior not as emergent and nondeterministic in the manner of Blumer, but as determined by antecedent variables having to do with aspects of the self as well as with historical, developmental, and social conditions (Kuhn 1964). To understand the self as both cause and consequence, Kuhn and McPartland developed the Twenty Statements Test (TST) as a technique for measuring the self (Kuhn and McPartland 1954). This instrument has been widely used in studies of identities and self-structures (see Gordon 1968).

The second, growing out of the Iowa school, is the Indiana school of structural symbolic interaction as developed by Stryker and his colleagues into what has come to be called "identity theory" (Stryker 1980). While the Iowa school moved the study of self and identity into the realm of quantitative survey methods, its focus on the TST as the primary measurement instrument necessarily limited its development. The Indiana school and identity theory pushed the study of self and identity further in this direction and paid more attention to the links between self and society. By developing

the concept of self as composed of a hierarchical set of identities, each of which was tied to roles within the social structure, the link between self and society was made more explicit (Stryker 1980). More recently, Burke (1991a, 1991b) has been developing a cybernetic control model of identities and procedures for measuring them, thus extending identity theory beyond its symbolic interactionist roots. The program of research generated by this approach is discussed later in the chapter.

The *biographical-historical approach* to self and identity has many similarities with the situational and structural approaches, with an emphasis on communication, meaning, and the symbolic nature of the self. But its scope is the broadest of the three: it brings in temporal considerations at the personal (as biography) and societal (as history) levels and is concerned with the larger cultural context within which selves are constructed. Insights from Mead and the interactionists are combined with those from Weber (1958) and Mills (1959) to provide the theoretical foundation for studying the intersections of culture, history, and biography. This approach to the self in sociology (e.g., Hewitt 1989; Perinbanayagam 1991; Schwalbe 1983) is also found in cultural anthropology (Geertz 1973) and parts of psychology on the fringes of the mainstream (Baumeister 1987; Gergen 1984).

A major focus of this approach is language as text or narrative, out of which self-concepts are constructed and through which they are justified and maintained. Biographies are studied as life stories that reflect the disposition, intent, and memory of the storyteller and, like history, are often rewritten. The biographical approach to the self is concerned with how individuals make sense of their lives and give continuity and coherence to their sense of self and the words they use to tell their life stories (Gergen and Gergen 1988; Shotter and Gergen 1989). The larger cultural context is viewed as the major determinant of these personal accounts, by structuring experiences of self and providing the "language" for their expression.⁴

This approach, like much of the situational approach, is antipositivistic in its orientation to

the self, particularly by practitioners who favor hermeneutics, constructivism, textual analysis, or other qualitative or interpretive methodologies. Much of this orientation is evident in cultural studies, feminist scholarship, and what has come to be called "postmodernist" literature on the self (Agger 1991).

The fourth perspective on self and identity might be termed the *intrapersonal* approach, in contrast to the prior three, which are interpersonal perspectives. Much of the current work in this approach is being done by psychological social psychologists. Indeed, studies of self-processes play a large part in the cognitive framework that has swept psychology in the last dozen years. The focus of this work is on the mechanisms and processes within the self that influence the individual's behavior (e.g., Greenwald and Pratkanis 1984). For example, Markus's (1977) notion of self-schemas characterizes the self as a cognitive structure consisting of organized elements of information about the self. The function of self-schemas is to recognize, interpret, and process self-relevant information in the situation. Some primary focal points of research in this perspective are on the self as an information processor (Kihlstrom and Cantor 1984), the self as an agent guiding actions that enhance and/or maintain self-esteem (Tesser 1986), and the self as an agent guiding behavior that serves to verify one's self-concept (Swann 1990). Within each of these focal points various theories and perspectives on the motives, motivations, and inner workings of the self have been developed, and a vast amount of empirical research has been generated based primarily on laboratory experiments.

SELF-DYNAMICS

While past writings gave much more attention to the self as a product of social influences than as a force (Rosenberg 1981), that gap is narrowing. Increasingly, the self is conceptualized and studied as a force affecting individual functioning, social interaction, and the surrounding environment (see Markus and Wurf 1987 for a review). Developments that reflect an emphasis on the active self

include: (1) increased attention on the motivational aspects of the self (e.g., the self-esteem motive, self-efficacy motive, self-consistency/verification/congruence motives, and identities as sources of motivation); (2) increased emphasis on the defenses employed by the self to protect, enhance, or assert a particular self-conception, reflected in research on self-presentation, impression management, and various perceptual and cognitive distortions; and (3) increased interest in emotions and their connection with self-cognitions and behavior. In this section, we examine some of these developments dealing with the dynamic self-concept.

Identity Theories and Processes

At least since Foote's (1951) seminal article on identification as a basis for a theory of motivation, the concept of identity has provided a fertile ground for theories of self-dynamics.⁵ Foote argued that individuals have multiple identities and that one's identities are active agents which influence one's behavioral choices. In this way, ~~identities~~ **do provide behavior with meaning, goals, and purpose.**

Stone (1962) built on Foote's idea of identity and the process of identification by distinguishing between identification *of* (i.e., distinguishing between various persons and positions in society) and identification *with* (i.e., taking on an identity). ~~Identification of persons and positions is accomplished largely through appearance~~ and is a crucial, negotiated aspect of any definition of the situation. Stone also made a strong argument for separating the notion of self from identity. In his view, *identity* is not a substitute word for *self* but denotes a situatedness of the person in terms of standing in the context of a particular social relationship or group.

McCall and Simmons (1966) extended the structurally situated nature of identities. They introduced the term *role-identity*, the character and the role an individual devises *as an occupant of a particular social position*, thereby linking social structures to persons. In this way the multifaceted nature of the self (each facet being an identity) is tied to the multifaceted nature of society.

Building on McCall and Simmons's (1966) concept of role-identity, Stryker (1980, 1991) developed *identity theory*, in which the self is seen as a hierarchical ordering of identities, differentiated on the basis of salience (the probability of activating a given identity in a situation) and commitment (the number and affective strength of ties to others as a result of having a particular role-identity). Identity hierarchies have consequences for behavioral choices, variable consistency of individual action across situations, and variable resistance of individuals to change in the face of changing circumstances. Stryker's basic theory is fairly simple. The greater one's commitment premised on an identity, the greater will be the salience of the identity (Stryker 1980, 1991; Stryker and Serpe 1982). In turn, the salience of an identity directly influences the behavioral choices made among available choices in any given situation.

Burke (1980; Burke and Reitzes 1981, 1991) extended identity theory with a cybernetic control model and developed measurement procedures to capture the content and meaning of identities. In this framework, the connection between identity and behavioral choices became more explicit. Persons modify, adjust, and negotiate their behavior and its meanings to control reflected appraisals (i.e., meaningful feedback) to make them more congruent with and verify the meanings of their identities. In more recent work (Burke and Freese 1989), the control of resources, in addition to meanings, is viewed as playing an important role in understanding social behavior. In this formulation, identities become the linchpins holding together more macro social structural (resource) processes and more micro (symbolic) processes. With regard to measurement, Burke and Tully (1977) developed the use of the semantic differential to provide quantitative measurements of the meanings that comprise identities. This led to an active research program to develop and test theoretical ideas and hypotheses about the link between identities and behavior (e.g., Burke 1989; Burke and Hoelter 1988; Burke and Reitzes 1981; Serpe 1991; Stryker and Serpe 1982).

Heise (1985) framed a cybernetic theory of identity and identity processes, which he called *affect control theory*. This theory focuses on the motivational and emotional antecedents and consequences of social actions resulting from the relationship of these actions to the identity of the person, the setting, and objects of the action. In many ways similar to the work of Burke (above), an identity is conceptualized in terms of a set of meanings or affective responses. Unlike Burke's model, however, affect control theory uses only the three general dimensions of affective responses—evaluation, potency, and activity—which correspond to the social dimensions of status, power, and expressivity. An important aspect of affect control theory is that it is developed in interactional terms and thus shows the relationship between different actors and the actions in which each engages (in contrast to Stryker and Burke, above, who focus primarily on the identity-based actions of one individual at a time). By dealing with the full interactional situation, the full cybernetic control features of the model and the implications of that model for ongoing interaction are more readily apparent (see chapter 5 for a more extensive discussion).

Situated identity theory builds on the earlier work of Goffman (1959) and Stone (1962) but differs with regard to the question of how people will make choices among possible behaviors in any given situation. The theory was formulated to predict choices among normatively defined action alternatives. Alexander and Wiley (1981) suggest that perceived events and activities are processed and encoded to establish, confirm, or display identities. A long history of experimentation has shown that people are sensitive to the identity implications of most social settings and that by knowing the identities of those involved in the situation, people can predict the behaviors that will be displayed (see Alexander and Wiley 1981). In this way, situated identity theory seems to be a forerunner of affect control theory in indicating which behaviors and expectations are consistent with which identities and in showing how these change depending on others in the situation as well as past activity.

A primarily European entry to identity theorizing is *social identity theory*, developed by Tajfel (1981) and his colleagues (Abrams and Hogg 1990). This theory emphasizes group membership and belongingness and their consequences for interpersonal and intergroup relations. Social identity theory grew out of social categorization theory (J. C. Turner 1985), which deals with the propensity to perceive self and others as members of groups and social categories (e.g., "I am an American"). Groups into which we categorize others (often to their disadvantage) have relevance for our own social identity (Wilder 1986). For example, Tajfel (1982) points out that in the process of searching for a positive sense of self, persons compare their group with relevant other groups and act to create a favorable distinction between the groups, sometimes with negative consequences for intergroup relations (e.g., conflict and discrimination).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the evaluative and affective aspects of the self-concept, to how "good" or "bad" we feel about ourselves (Gecas 1982; Rosenberg 1979). It is by far the most popular aspect of self-concept studied and for years was almost synonymous with "self-concept." For example, Wylie's (1979) monumental reviews of the self-concept literature deal almost exclusively with self-esteem. McGuire (1984) observes, and laments, that 90 percent of self-concept research is devoted to this single dimension.

The popularity of self-esteem is due largely to its perceived salutary consequences for individual functioning and to the perceived strength and pervasiveness of the self-esteem motive (i.e., the motivation to maintain or enhance one's favorable view of self). In the minds of many (scholars as well as the general public), high self-esteem has come to be associated with numerous "good" outcomes for individuals (e.g., academic achievement, popularity, personal success, health, and happiness), while low self-esteem is associated with various "bad" outcomes (e.g., delinquency, aca-

demographic failure, and depression). For example, the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility (1990, 4) concludes: "Self-esteem is the likeliest candidate for a social vaccine, something that empowers us to live responsibly and that inoculates us against the lures of crime, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, chronic welfare dependency, and educational failure. The lack of self-esteem is central to most personal and social ills plaguing our state and nation."

Research on self-esteem gives a much more qualified and equivocal picture. While there is a tendency for self-esteem to be associated with some positive outcomes, the relationships tend to be modest, often mixed or insignificant, and specific to certain variables and conditions (Gecas 1982; Rosenberg 1981; Wells and Marwell 1976; Wylie 1979).⁶ Explanations for the low associations and mixed results are common to much of the research in social psychology: problems of measurement (validity and reliability); problems of conceptualization (relating a global variable to a specific behavioral outcome); failure to control for other, confounding variables; and reliance on cross-sectional research designs (Demo 1985; Smelser 1989). Longitudinal studies are particularly valuable for understanding the relationship between self-esteem and problem behaviors, since the direction of influence can go either way. Rosenberg et al.'s (1989) analysis of the reciprocal relationships between self-esteem and three problems of youth (delinquency, poor school performance, and depression) found that low self-esteem fosters delinquency and delinquency enhances self-esteem (supporting Kaplan 1975), school performance has a greater effect on self-esteem than the reverse, and the causal relationship between self-esteem and depression is bidirectional. Even in this careful study, however, the associations, while significant, are not great.

There are reasons besides methodological shortcomings that make it difficult to determine the consequences of self-esteem. High self-esteem may be based on the individual's competence and effective performance, on reflected appraisals, or on

defensiveness and the need for social approval. These different sources of self-esteem could be expected to have different consequences for individual functioning (Franks and Marolla 1976; Gecas and Schwalbe 1983). There may also be an optimum level of self-esteem beyond which the consequences for individuals become negative (Gecas 1991; Wells and Marwell 1976, 69-73). Perhaps the greatest source of confounding effects in studies of self-esteem is the operation of the self-esteem motive, which is a major source (along with self-efficacy and congruency motives) of perceptual and cognitive bias, and the basis for many of the self's defense mechanisms.

The motivation to maintain and enhance a positive conception of oneself is a major dynamic of many contemporary self-theories (see Gecas 1982, 1991; Wells and Marwell 1976). Various self-theories suggest that people's self-conceptions are valued and protected and that a low self-evaluation (on criteria that matter) is an uncomfortable condition which people are motivated to avoid. This may occur through increased efforts at self-improvement or (more typically) through such self-serving activities as selective perception and cognition, various strategies of impression management, and restructuring the environment and/or redefining the situation to make it reflect a more favorable view of self (Greenwald 1980; Rosenberg 1979). These manipulations and distortions may indeed raise self-esteem, but sometimes at the price of self-deception (Alloy and Abramson 1979; Lewinsohn and Mischel 1980). We return to this theme in the section on defense mechanisms.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy may be the most direct expression of the self-concept as a social force. Self-efficacy refers to the perception or experience of oneself as a causal agent in one's environment. There is a motivational component associated with self-efficacy, in that people typically seek to enhance their experience of self as efficacious. Much of the support for the self-efficacy motive comes from cognitive and developmental psychology, such as

Deci's (1975) theory of intrinsic motivation, and White's theory of "effectance motivation" (see Gecas 1989).

Cognitive theories of self-efficacy based on attribution and social learning theories place more emphasis on beliefs and perceptions of causality, agency, or control and less on the motivations to hold such beliefs. This is a matter of relative emphasis, however, since these beliefs have motivational implications. The self-attributions individuals make with regard to the extent of personal control over events that affect them have a wide range of behavioral consequences. Rotter's (1966) influential distinction between "internal" and "external" causal attributions spawned numerous studies of the consequences of these beliefs for individual functioning (Gecas 1989; Lefcourt 1976). Similarly, Bandura's (1977, 1986) work on self-efficacy beliefs has generated a great deal of research because of the motivational consequences of such beliefs for a wide range of individual functioning.

Ideas regarding the importance of self-efficacy can also be traced to several sociological traditions. Marx's (1844) theory of alienation emphasizes self-creation through efficacious action in the context of work activities. In the writings of Mead (1934) and the pragmatists of his day, action and its consequences are viewed as critical for the development of meaning, self, and society. The concept of "I" in Mead's reflexive self is the source of action and creativity. This emphasis on the efficacious self is also quite evident in more recent symbolic interactionist writings, such as Goffman's (1959) work on impression management as interpersonal control and Weinstein's (1969) work on interpersonal competence. R. H. Turner (1976) notes that behaviors thought to reveal the "true self" are ones whose causes are perceived as residing in the person rather than the situation, particularly when moral issues are at stake (Backman 1985).

Research on self-efficacy has consistently found it to have salutary or beneficial consequences for individual functioning and well-being. Research based on Bandura's theory has found self-efficacy to be an important factor in various

health-related behaviors, such as overcoming phobias and anxieties, eating disorders, and alcohol and smoking addictions and recovery from illness or injury (see Bandura 1986; O'Leary 1985). The research of Bandura and his colleagues has increasingly turned to examining the physiological processes affected by perceived self-efficacy, which would account for its therapeutic qualities, particularly the impact of self-efficacy on the immune system (Bandura et al. 1985; Wiedenfeld et al. 1990). This exciting line of research has considerable potential for increasing our understanding of the links between mind and body.

The connection between self-efficacy and depression has also received a good deal of empirical attention, much of it inspired by Seligman's (1975) theory of "learned helplessness," which proposed that depression is likely to occur when one comes to believe that one's actions have no effect on changing one's (unfavorable) circumstances. In much of this research, self-efficacy serves a mediating or buffering role between some type of stress (e.g., economic strain, physical injury, disability) and depression (Pearlin et al. 1981). Since feelings of inefficacy are undesirable and depressing, people may engage in distortions of reality and operate under the illusion of greater personal control and efficacy than they really have (Langer 1975).

The increased prominence of self-efficacy in social psychology is understandable: not only is it in line with the increased emphasis on the active self, but it is also congruent with the western (especially American) emphasis on self-reliance, mastery, and individualism. However, self-efficacy may not be as important to physical and mental health in cultures with a more communal and less individualistic ethos, a possibility considered further in the section on cultural influences.

Consistency, Congruency, and Verification Processes

A number of self theories propose some form of congruency or consistency as a central dynamic in processing information and organizing knowledge

about the self. Lecky (1945), an early advocate, argued that individuals seek to maintain a coherent view of themselves in order to function effectively in the world. Several prominent contemporary self theories, characterized by their heavily cognitive orientations, are variations on this theme (e.g., Higgins 1987; Markus 1977; Swann 1983).

The central premise of Swann's *self-verification theory* (1983, 1990; Swann et al. 1987) is that people are motivated to verify or confirm currently held views of their self-conceptions as a means of bolstering their perception that the world is predictable and controllable. What is interesting about this theory is that it suggests that people prefer self-confirming feedback even when the self-view being confirmed is not positive (Swann, Pelham, and Krull 1989). While this argument seems to conflict with self-enhancement theories, Swann et al. (1987) suggest that consistency processes operate primarily at the cognitive level of the self, whereas enhancement processes operate more on the affective level.

Similar in many ways to self-verification theory is Higgins's (1987, 1989) *self-discrepancy theory*, which deals with the consequences of the failure of self-verification. According to the theory and the research supporting it, inconsistencies or discrepancies between the *actual self* (as revealed in reflected appraisals) and the *ideal self* (those attributes one desires) or between the *actual self* and the *ought self* (those attributes one feels obliged to be or have) produce emotional responses and a strong motivation to reduce the discrepancy. The emotional responses to actual/ideal discrepancies, however, are much different from the emotional responses to actual/ought discrepancies (Higgins 1989). Actual/ought discrepancies produce social anxiety as evidenced by social avoidance, distress, and fear of negative evaluation, while actual/ideal discrepancies produce depression (Higgins, Klein, and Strauman 1985).

Backman's (1985, 1988) *interpersonal congruency theory* has strong similarities with both of the previous consistency theories but is more explicitly interpersonal. Backman suggests that congruency operates not only at the level of cognitive

organization, but also at the level of interpersonal relations; that is, people seek social relationships that are congruent with their self-conceptions. Furthermore, congruent social relationships help stabilize self-conceptions and make them even more resistant to change.

A different manifestation of consistency processes is found in theories emphasizing self-schemas. Markus (1977) suggests that the substance of one's self-concept inheres in relatively enduring self-schemas. A self-schema is a cognitive structure consisting of organized elements of information about the self that have evolved through experience and reflected appraisals (Nurius 1991). These cognitive structures or self-schemas are used to recognize and interpret self-relevant stimuli. Self-schemas determine whether information is attended to, how it is structured, how much importance is attached to it, and what happens to it subsequently (Markus 1977). In support of these ideas about self-organization, Bargh (1982) showed that individuals display a heightened sensitivity to self-relevant information; Mueller (1982) found that self-congruent stimuli are more efficiently processed; and Markus (1980) showed that self-relevant stimuli are more easily recalled and recognized. In more recent work, Markus and Nurius have elaborated the self-schema to include "possible selves," or representations of oneself in future states and circumstances (Markus and Nurius 1986; Nurius 1991).

Self-Defenses and Deceptions

An important consequence of the self as a motivational system is that persons engage in various distortions and deceptions to maintain valued self-conceptions. Increasing social psychological interest in this domain is reflected in three main areas of study: (1) self-presentation and impression management; (2) the operation of cognitive biases; and (3) self-deception.

Contemporary research on self-presentation and impression management continues to draw much of its inspiration from Goffman's (1959, 1967) insightful analysis of "facework," deference

and demeanor, embarrassment, and numerous other insights into the tactics of self-presentation. Many of these tactics have subsequently been elaborated and investigated by others: self-serving accounts, in the form of excuses and justifications, for inappropriate behavior that could damage the self-image (Mehlman and Snyder 1985; Scott and Lyman 1968); disclaimers offered in anticipation of actions with possibly negative identity implications for self (Hewitt and Stokes 1975); and various other rhetorical devices used either to stage or to repair a certain self-image (Fine 1987). Individuals may even engage in self-handicapping strategies to protect self-esteem—that is, self-defeating actions (such as not studying for an exam) before a performance so they will have a ready-made excuse for failure (Rhodewalt et al. 1991). Social interaction itself is highly selective and self-serving. People tend to pick friends who like them, to choose reference groups or comparison groups that allow for more favorable comparisons, and to select areas of interaction that permit more favorable and/or consistent expressions of self (Lewicki 1983; Rosenberg 1979; Swann 1990).

Self-serving biases are also quite evident in research on cognitive processes. Perception, cognition, and retention of self-relevant information are highly selective depending on whether the information is favorable or unfavorable to one's self-conception (see Markus and Wurf 1987). For example, people are more likely to remember their successes and to distort their memories toward more favorable self-conceptions (Greenwald 1980; Ross and Conway 1986). Not only are people's conceptions of their past distorted to serve self-motives, but so are conceptions of their futures (Markus and Nurius 1986). Attribution research is replete with evidence of self-serving bias in causal attributions (Mehlman and Snyder 1985), which is quite congruent with symbolic interactionists' work on excuses, justifications, and so on.

Particularly interesting with regard to self-serving distortions is whether the self deceives *itself* in this process. The condition of self-deception (e.g., knowing something about oneself is true and

at the same time believing it is not true) has been viewed as a paradoxical yet pervasive condition (Champlin 1977; Pears 1986). Sartre (1958) considered self-deception to be characteristic of life in modern society and the major obstacle to being an "authentic" self. For Freud (1938), self-deception was an unavoidable byproduct of the ego's defenses against the unconscious impulses of the id.

Gur and Sackeim (1979) provide empirical evidence to support the argument that to be self-deceived an individual must hold two contradictory beliefs simultaneously, one of which cannot be subject to awareness, and that this nonawareness is motivated. For Gur and Sackeim it is the self-esteem motive that acts to suppress one of the beliefs (the belief less favorable about self). They, along with Hilgard (1949), maintain that self-deception is a key aspect of all defense mechanisms. Swanson (1988) presents a provocative thesis that defense mechanisms are related to forms of social organization. He argues that ego defenses are a function of social interdependence and arise as a means of maintaining social solidarity in the face of threats stemming from questions about the kind of person one is. These questions arise when impulses or desires are incompatible with self-conceptions and social norms. Furthermore, different levels of social organization, having different bases of social solidarity, should be associated with reliance on different ego defenses. His findings, based on data from individuals on themselves and their family relations, generally support these expectations.

Developments in the social psychology of emotions provide another avenue for considering self-deception. Disjunctures or incongruities between thinking and feeling, attempts to generate feelings when they are not there, and the kind of "emotion labor" described by Hochschild (1983) in her study of flight attendants and R. H. Turner's (1976; Turner and Schutte 1981) work on "real" and "false" selves lead to questions of authenticity and self-deception. This, also, is a very promising line of investigation.

SELF AND SOCIETY

Proximate Processes Affecting Self and Identity

Self-conceptions are the products of various proximate processes (i.e., those that directly impinge on us) with socializing consequences, such as the learning of social roles, values, and beliefs; language acquisition; commitment to identities or adjustment to identity loss; and processes of social comparison, self-attributions, and reflected appraisals. The last three have received the most attention as sources of information used in developing a conception of self (Gecas 1982; Rosenberg 1979). Of these, the process of reflected appraisals, based on Cooley's (1902) concept of the "looking-glass self" and Mead's (1934) emphasis on role taking in the genesis of the self, is the most central to sociological perspectives on self-concept formation, and also the most problematic.

The study of reflected appraisals focuses on others' perceptions of us and their impact on our self-concept. According to interactionist theory, people come to see themselves as they think others see them. Research on the reflected appraisals process, however, has not convincingly and consistently demonstrated that peoples' self-concepts are, in fact, a reflection of the conceptions held by others, even significant others. Early correlational studies in natural settings showed little correspondence between one's self-views and the views of significant others (see Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979, for a review and critique); however, these studies were beset with methodological problems. Later, using cross-sectional data, systematic recursive causal models of the process found minimal direct effects of others' appraisals on self-appraisals but showed that others' appraisals influence one's perceptions of those appraisals, which in turn influence one's self-concept (Bachman and O'Malley 1986; Felson 1985; Schaffer and Keith 1985). However, it is still possible that the relationship between self-concept and perceptions of the appraisals of others is not a one-way street.

More recent nonrecursive causal models have recognized that not only might perceptions of others' appraisals affect one's self-appraisals, but one's self-appraisals may affect one's perception of others appraisals (called the *false consensus* or social projection effect). It appears that when social projection is controlled in the nonrecursive causal analyses, much of the effect of reflected appraisals disappears (Felson 1981, 1989; Ichikawa, 1993).

Where does this leave us? It is our view that some serious rethinking about reflected appraisals is in order. The models that have been investigated, by and large, are oversimplified and fail to take account of other theoretical and empirical work on self and identity, as well as Cooley's own qualifications regarding the "looking-glass self" (see Franks and Gecas 1992, for elaboration). For example, the self is not simply a passive sponge that soaks up information from the environment; rather, it is an active agent engaged in various self-serving processes. Thus one needs to ask when one's self-appraisals depend on others' appraisals (even mediated by perception). For example, persons may be more sensitive to others' appraisals when they are feeling insecure about their self-image. Heightened sensitivity to reflected appraisals may also occur when one's motive in self-presentation is to impress others, either as a means of gaining resources or to raise one's self-esteem.

Burke (1991b) argues that any change in reflected appraisals that occurs when an identity has achieved some degree of equilibrium in a social environment will be resisted (see also Swann 1990). Action will be taken to alter others' perceptions and bring them back in line with the individual's self-appraisals. Only when the individual finds it difficult or impossible to bring about such change of others' appraisals (and distress, anxiety, or depression result) does the self-concept change, becoming more in line with others' appraisals. Thus, the reflected appraisals process does not operate all the time or under all conditions. People work hard to verify and maintain the self-concepts or identities they already hold, and do not easily

change them. To test the reflected appraisals process, therefore, we need to find conditions under which the self-verification processes are minimized and, at the same time, others' appraisals are not self-verifying. In short, we need to think of reflected appraisals as Cooley did, as a variable and problematic process in self-concept formation.

Social Class, Race, and Self-Evaluation

A concern with the effects of social structure on self-conceptions distinguishes much of the sociological research on self and identity. Much of this research has focused on the consequences of social class and other major categories of social stratification and differentiation (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity) for self-evaluation, especially self-esteem.

Research that has simply looked at the global, unmediated relationship between social class and self-esteem has generally found weak and inconsistent results (see Gecas 1982; Rosenberg and Pearlin 1978). This is not surprising, since the important task in studying macrostructural effects on aspects of self-concept is to specify how the social structure affects the immediate interpersonal relations and experiences of individuals in ways that enhance, maintain, or diminish the self (Gecas and Seff 1989; Rosenberg and Simmons 1972). The current thrust of much of this research is toward greater specification—of processes, mediating variables, and the dimensions of self affected. For example, Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) clarified much of the confusion in social class effects by showing how social class impinges on adults' self-esteem through four processes of self-concept formation (reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attributions, and psychological centrality) and why we would expect these processes to produce negligible social class differences for children (a pattern of relationships replicated in subsequent studies by Demo and Savin-Williams 1983 and Wiltfang and Scarbecz 1990). The significant relationships found for adults, but not for children, can be explained by the differential meanings and experiences social class has for adults and children, such as constituting a (more or less)

achieved status for adults and an ascribed status for children.

In decomposing the effects of social class on self-esteem, one fertile line of research has focused on occupations and occupational conditions (Kohn and Schooler 1973). Although self-concept was not a major focus of Kohn's research, Kohn and Schooler (1973) found that substantive complexity of work was significantly related to self-esteem. However, the class-related occupational condition that seems to be most consequential for self-esteem is work autonomy—the degree of freedom or control the worker has over his/her work. Work autonomy has a positive effect on self-esteem, based primarily on evaluations of self in terms of efficacy and competence⁷ (Gecas and Seff 1989; Mortimer and Lorence 1979; Staples, Schwalbe, and Gecas 1984). The strategic importance of work autonomy for self-esteem is elaborated by Schwalbe (1985), who implicates it in the three main processes affecting self-evaluation: autonomy as freedom to act and take responsibility for success is relevant to the self-attribution process; autonomy as a status indicator in the workplace culture is used for social comparisons with others at work; autonomy as a reward given by one's boss for reliability and competent performance signifies positive reflected appraisals.

As the studies in this area have shown, individuals in more prestigious occupations (and thereby in a higher social class) are more likely to have greater work autonomy with its beneficial consequences for self-efficacy and self-esteem. However, individuals in lower-class occupations, characterized by less autonomy, less challenge, and greater supervision, are not necessarily doomed to low self-esteem: the correlations between occupational conditions and self-esteem are generally modest (in the low 0.20s). An important reason for the modest effects of occupation on self-esteem is that there are many other sources of self-esteem (e.g., family, recreation, voluntary associations); furthermore, individuals play off these different sources depending on which is most beneficial to their sense of self. Gecas and Seff (1990) argue that psychological centrality and compensation processes in

the self-concept operate to mitigate the potentially negative effects of the workplace (or other contexts) on self-esteem. In a study of employed men, they found that when work is central to self-evaluations, social class and occupational conditions had a significantly stronger effect on self-esteem than when work is not central. By comparison, when family is central to self-definitions, family variables were found to have a stronger effect on self-esteem. These findings underscore the active, selective, and protective nature of the self in its relationship to various social environments.

Work autonomy and control have ramifications for workers beyond their effect on self-esteem. Loss of control over the labor process and products is, of course, a central theme of Marx's theory of alienation and the basis of his critique of capitalism. It continues to be a fertile source of ideas about the social structural bases of individual functioning and well-being (see Schwalbe 1986). An interesting and important variation on this theme of alienated labor is found in Hochschild's (1983) work on the "commodification of emotion" in the workplace and its consequences for self-estrangement. Hochschild's innovative study of flight attendants and bill collectors addressed what happens when feelings and their expression (e.g., smiling and being cheerful or being rude or threatening) become part of expected employee work behavior. Hochschild observed that employees doing "emotion work" can become alienated from their emotions, just as factory workers doing physical work become alienated from what they produce. When the private management of emotions is converted into emotional labor for wages, Hochschild observes, inauthenticity becomes an occupational hazard. Building on Hochschild's work, Erickson (1991) found similar consequences of emotion work in her study of female hospital and bank employees. This line of research is promising and important. It focuses on a phenomenon (i.e., feelings of inauthenticity and self-estrangement) that seems to be increasingly characteristic of our times (see R. H. Turner's 1976 analysis of increasing estrangement from institutional sources of authenticity).

Research on race and self-concept overlaps to some extent that on social class, since race is one important element in the American stratification system. But the research on the self-concepts of African Americans has been more controversial and puzzling than research on social class differences. Considering the history of race relations and racial discrimination in the United States, we would expect African Americans to have lower self-esteem than whites. Early work in this area, particularly the influential "doll studies" by Clark and Clark (1947), seemed to support this expectation. They found that African-American children preferred white dolls and inferred from this that African-American children viewed themselves as inferior and therefore had low self-esteem. Both the methodology and interpretations of these early studies have been subsequently criticized as seriously flawed (Greenwald and Oppenheim 1968; Simmons 1978). More recent research has found either no difference between the self-esteem levels of African Americans and whites or slightly higher self-esteem of African Americans than whites (Rosenberg and Rosenberg 1989; Taylor and Walsh 1979; Yancey, Rigsby, and McCarthy 1972). The most reasonable interpretation of this apparently counterintuitive, yet consistent, finding is that self-esteem is most affected by interpersonal relations with family, friends, and local community. These local contexts of interaction, and not society at large, provide the significant others and reference groups within which reflected appraisals and social comparison processes operate to affect African-American self-esteem (Hughes and Demo 1989; Rosenberg 1979; Rosenberg and Simmons 1972).

While African American self-esteem seems to be insulated from patterns of racial inequality, self-efficacy among African Americans is not. African Americans are found to have lower self-efficacy or sense of personal control than whites (Gurin, Gurin, and Morrison 1978; Porter and Washington 1979). This suggests that self-efficacy, unlike self-esteem, is more dependent on macrostructural systems and their consequences for power, control, and access to resources of individuals differentially

located within them (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983; Hughes and Demo 1989). To the extent that racial inequality limits or hinders African Americans' access to power and resources which enable efficacious action, black self-efficacy will suffer (Hughes and Demo 1989, 1992).

Gender and Self-Conceptions

As with race and social class, gender constitutes a major basis of social differentiation in American society and can be expected to have pervasive consequences for self-concepts. But there is a good deal of confusion in research dealing with gender identities and self-conceptions, much of it a consequence of inconsistent ways of defining these concepts (Burke 1992). First, there is a distinction between feminine and masculine (gender) in a social or psychological sense and between female and male (sex) in a biological sense (Lindsey 1990). With respect to gender, there is also a distinction between the denotative social categories of male and female (usually, but not always, the same as the biological categories) and the connotative meanings of masculine and feminine that deal with degrees of masculinity and femininity. Finally, there is a question about the degree to which variations in masculinity are independent of variations in femininity.

Gender identities are the socially defined self-meanings of masculinity/femininity one has as a male or female member of society and are inherently derived from and tied to social structure. These self-meanings have both a categorical component (male-female), and a variable component (degree of masculinity or femininity). Social identity theory deals with the categorical approach to social identities, whereas identity theory has dealt more with the variability of connotative meanings of masculine and feminine. Although some researchers (e.g., Bem 1974) have measured this variability of masculine and feminine self-meanings on separate, independent dimensions, Storms (1979) has shown that most people view masculine and feminine as opposite ends of a single continuum ranging from extremely masculine to ex-

tremely feminine, along which both males and females are arrayed. *Gender roles*, in contrast to gender identities, are a dualistic mix of instrumental and expressive behaviors appropriate for persons in given statuses in the social structure (Spence and Helmreich 1978). It is important, therefore, to distinguish between the study of gender identities, which focuses on meanings, and the study of gender roles, which focuses on behavior. Dittmar (1989) examines both by studying the meanings of various personal objects for males and females. This study finds that the meanings of objects vary by sex and are partly tied to the role expectations of each. Males tend to focus on the instrumental, pragmatic, self-referential character of objects, while females are more likely to see the emotional, expressive, and interpersonal attachment character of objects.

Focusing on the impact of gender identities on behavior, Burke and Tully (1977), in a study of the gender identities of a large sample of middle school girls and boys, found that the gender identity scores for both boys and girls were normally distributed along the masculine-feminine dimension with an overlap of about 18 percent. They also found that children with cross-sex identities (boys who thought of themselves in ways similar to the way most girls thought of themselves, and vice versa) were more likely than children with "gender-appropriate" identities to have engaged in "gender-inappropriate behavior," to have been called names like "tomboy," "sissy" or "homo," and to have lower self-esteem. Among middle school children, boys and girls with a more feminine gender identity had higher marks than those with a more masculine gender identity (Burke 1989). Among college students, men and women with more feminine gender identities were more likely to inflict and sustain physical and sexual abuse in dating relationships (Burke, Stets, and Pirog-Good 1988).

Quite a different perspective on gender and self-conceptions, with paradigmatic implications, has begun to appear in the feminist literature. Here the focus is not on identities as such, but rather on some of the fundamental differences between men and women in the nature of their self-conceptions.

With respect to the differences, it is proposed that men are more likely to have a self-concept that separates or distinguishes them from others, a sense of self or "self-schema" that can be described as "individualistic," "autonomous," and "egocentric." Women, by contrast, are more likely to have a self-concept grounded in relationships and connections to others, one that has been described as "relational," "interdependent," "collectivist," and "sociocentric" (Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982, 1988; Lykes 1985; Markus and Oyserman 1989; Miller 1986). These gender-related conceptions of self are viewed as consequences of differential socialization associated with patterns of sexual inequality (Lykes 1985; Miller 1986).

Empirical observations of differences between men and women on various dimensions of psychological functioning become more understandable when viewed in light of gender-related self-conceptions. For example, the greater competence of girls/women in verbal abilities, field dependence, empathy, and social sensitivity is compatible with a predominantly "relational self," whereas the greater competence of boys/men in spacial and analytic skills, field independence, and abstract reasoning is more compatible with a predominantly "independent self" (see Markus and Oyserman 1989).

While these average differences between males and females have been documented, it is important to recognize the diversity among women and men with respect to their self-conceptions (see Thompson and Walker 1989). For example, Gilligan (1982, 1988) has proposed that different conceptions of self, as fundamentally relational or as fundamentally separate, give rise to different visions of moral agency: the morality of the relational self emphasizes attachment, care, and connection, while the morality of the autonomous self emphasizes equality, reciprocity, justice, and rights. At the same time, she points out that while these perspectives on morality are gender-related, they are not gender-specific, since there is much variability among both males and females. Gilligan's work on gender differences in moral reasoning, which constitutes (among other things) a cri-

tique of Kohlberg's (1964) influential theory of moral development, has launched a major controversy (Sher 1987; Walker 1986). It has also opened new and exciting lines of inquiry into the relationship between gender, self-conceptions, and morality.

Cultural and Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Selfhood

Criticisms that theories and research on the self are ethnocentric have increased in the past decade (Bond 1988; Markus and Kitayama 1991; and Marsella, DeVos, and Hsu 1985; Sampson 1988; Smith 1985). Indeed, most social psychological literature on the self can justifiably be described as the social psychology of the *Western* self. Geertz (1975, 48) describes the Western conception of the person as a bounded, self-contained, autonomous entity, comprising a unique configuration of internal attributes and acting as a consequence of these internal attributes. This view is a reflection of the Western (especially American) ethos of rugged individualism, independence, and self-reliance (Markus and Kitayama 1991). However, this is hardly a universal conception of personhood or selfhood, even within American society (see Gilligan 1988; Markus and Oyserman 1989; Sampson 1988).

A contrasting and alternative conception of selfhood is emerging, primarily from studies of Asian cultures as well as of minority groups and women in American society. This alternative view conceives of the self as essentially interdependent (rather than independent), contextual and relational (rather than autonomous), and connected and permeable (rather than bounded). Markus and Kitayama (1991) call this cultural construal of self *interdependent* and contrast it with the dominant Western view of self as independent.

Empirical support for the interdependent self is based mainly on studies of Asian cultures and populations (Chinese, Indian, and especially Japanese). The themes of interdependence, connectedness, relatedness, and social context are quite evident in descriptions of the "Japanese self" (Cousins

1989; DeVos 1985; Doi 1986; Lebra 1983). Lebra (1983), a Japanese anthropologist, identified the essence of Japanese culture as an "ethos of social relativism," by which she meant that the Japanese have a pervasive concern for belongingness, dependency, reciprocity, and occupying one's proper place. The Japanese word for self, *jibun*, refers to "one's share of the shared space" (Hamaguchi 1985). The interdependent self, with its emphasis on social context and relationships, is also evident in studies of Chinese (Hsu 1970) and Indian cultures (Bharati 1985).

These cultural comparisons are important in that they reveal fundamental differences in peoples' experiences and conceptions of self. More important, they force us to reexamine our *theories* about the self, most of which have been developed on the basis of the Western-self paradigm (Markus and Kitayama 1991). The motivation for cognitive consistency, for example, seems to be more relevant for the "Western self" than it is for the "Eastern self." Doi (1986, 240) points out that Americans are more concerned with consistency between feelings and actions than are the Japanese. In Japan there is virtue in controlling the expression of one's innermost feelings and no virtue in expressing them—the expression of one's emotions is considered a sign of immaturity. By contrast, for Americans, perceived consistency between emotions and their expression is the main criterion for feelings of authenticity (Hochschild 1983).

The self-esteem motive is also affected by these cultural self-conceptions. For independent selves, where the focus is on oneself, the self-esteem motive typically results in a pervasive self-serving bias. Numerous studies of American subjects show that they take credit for their successes and explain away their failures (Markus and Kitayama 1991). However, for interdependent selves, *other* enhancement is more desirable than self-enhancement, because the latter risks isolating the individual from the network of reciprocal relationships. Misattributions involving the self take quite different forms in these two cultural contexts: a

self-enhancement bias for those with "independent selves," and a self-effacing bias for those with "interdependent selves." Markus and Kitayama (1991) maintain that the self-enhancement motive is primarily a Western phenomenon. They argue that our formulations of other self-motives (e.g., achievement motivation, self-actualization, self-verification, self-control, self-efficacy) as well as self-emotions (e.g., shame, guilt, pride) need modification when considered in the context of the interdependent self paradigm.

The cultural and societal contexts of self-conceptions are clearly important in shaping the content and processes of self-experiences, as these cross-cultural comparisons reveal. But they also oversimplify the situations *within* societies. There is considerable diversity in self-conceptions in any reasonably heterogeneous society, and certainly within American society. Hewitt (1989) persuasively argues that both cultural themes—*independence and interdependence, freedom and community, individualism and communitarianism*—have been present in American society from the beginning, presenting a fundamental dilemma and ambivalence in Americans' self-conceptions. He maintains that much of our academic discourse about the self in society reflects *either* one or the other of these cultural themes, resulting in either a pessimistic or an optimistic view of social change. Scholars who assume interdependence as a correlation for healthy selfhood see the decline of community and the rise of modernity, industrialization, and urbanization as undermining the self. This pessimistic view is most evident in the work of scholars in sociology and other social sciences (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985; Lasch 1984). By contrast, the optimistic view celebrates individualism. Modernity and social change are seen as liberating the self from stifling, repressive traditions and as providing new opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment. This perspective is most clearly expressed in humanistic and clinical psychology. These dominant and competing conceptions of the self in American society, Hewitt argues, provide a major axis of ambivalence for American selves as well as

a major cleavage in the scholarly discourse on the self.

Historical Considerations and the "Postmodern Self"

The relationship between self and society has become increasingly problematic. Historical analyses of the "Western self" from the Middle Ages to modern times document the rise of individualism and its consequences for the self (Baumeister 1987; Logan 1987; Schooler 1990). The securities and constraints imposed by tradition have substantially receded in modern societies, presenting individuals with greater choice, freedom, and possibilities for action, as well as new threats to the self in the form of impersonal bureaucracies, depersonalizing communities, and alienating work conditions.

The pervasive themes of modernist writers on the self are fragmentation, ambivalence, and estrangement. Weigert's (1991) "ambivalent self" is a contemporary product of mixed emotions stemming from a multitude of choices, contradictory messages and expectations, and increasingly relativized values; Lasch's (1984) "minimal self" is a self under siege from the pressures of modern society; the "alienated self" of Marxist writers (Burawoy 1979; Schwalbe 1986) is a consequence of powerlessness and meaninglessness in the workplace; R. H. Turner's (1976) "impulsive self" is an emergent of the increasing delegitimation of institutional roles; and Zurcher's (1977) "mutable self" is the chameleonlike adaptation of moderns to the rapidity of social change. Perhaps the central problem of selfhood in modern societies, reflected in these various characterizations, is the problem of authenticity (Baumeister 1987; Hochschild 1983; Trilling 1972; R. H. Turner 1976; Weigert 1990). The rise of individualism associated with modernization highlights authenticity as a central concern, while at the same time the social forces associated with modernity have made authenticity increasingly problematic.

A very different view of the self is taking shape in what has come to be called "postmod-

ernism." Postmodern society, with its emphasis on images and illusions and the increasing difficulty in distinguishing the "real" from the "imitation," is viewed as inimical to the maintenance of the bounded, private, centered self striving for agency and authenticity. The postmodern world is saturated with images and simulations to such an extent that the image, or what the French postmodernist Baudrillard (1981) calls "simulacra," is viewed as *replacing* reality. The implications of such a state of society for the selves that inhabit it are described as profound.

Whereas modernism heightens awareness of self and the (typically problematic) relationship between self and society, postmodernism diminishes the centrality of the self and the tension between self and society. The postmodern self is characterized as decentered, relational, contingent, illusory, and lacking any core or essence (Erickson 1991; Gergen 1991; Glassner 1989). Problems of authenticity recede as beliefs in a core or essential self to which one must remain true or committed disappear. In the postmodern world, Gergen (1991) observes, "one's identity is continuously emergent, re-formed, and re-directed as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships. . . . It becomes increasingly difficult to recall precisely to what core essence one must remain true. The ideal of authenticity frays about the edges; the meaning of sincerity slowly lapses into indeterminacy" (p. 15).

The postmodern emphasis on images and illusions is reflected in greater attention to self-presentation and to style over substance. For that matter, the distinction between the real and the presented self, between substance and style, disappears (Gergen 1991, 155). Fashion and personal appearance increase in importance as central means of creating the self and influencing the definition of the situation (Kaiser, Nagawawa, and Hutton 1991). The accentuated emphasis on physical fitness and body shaping is understandable when self and appearance are viewed as the same (Glassner 1989). "Self-image" has replaced "self-concept" in the postmodern discourse on the self.

These depictions of the postmodern self are reminiscent of some major lines of symbolic interactionism, particularly the situational (e.g., Blumer 1969; Fine 1987) and the dramaturgical (e.g., Goffman 1959; Stone 1962) varieties. For that matter, Goffman is considered a precursor to postmodern sociology (see Battershill 1990; Dowd 1991; Erickson 1991; Tseelon 1992), with his work on situated identities, self-presentation, impression management, and depiction of the self in a manner that evokes the deconstructionist treatment of the author (i.e., the self as a decentered reader of cultural scripts). (His work on total institutions, however, would not fit as well, since the self in *Asylums* struggles to maintain its integrity under conditions of institutional assault—a theme congruent with *modernist* writings). Stone (1962) could also be considered a precursor, with his emphasis on clothing and appearance in establishing identities. The self as depicted in this branch of interactionism is, like the postmodernist self, relational (e.g., contextual or situated), decentered (identities as elements of the social context, not the person), contingent (dependent on negotiated meanings), and a dramaturgical construction. Yet, unlike the postmodern self, it still retains some essentialist qualities (e.g., the “I” and “me” components).

There is also an affinity between the postmodern self and the relational or interdependent self in feminist writings (Gilligan 1988; Markus and Oyserman 1989) and the descriptions of self in Asian (and some American Indian) cultures (Markus and Kitayama 1991). They share the view of a decentered, relational self and contrast it with the modernist and/or predominantly Western conception of self. They differ in some important respects, however. The relational self of Asian cultures and feminist writings is grounded in relationships of greater permanence and importance and involving greater commitment than the contextual or situational self of postmodernism. Consequently, shame, guilt, and other self-emotions, as well as authenticity, are more relevant to the former relational self than to the latter.

Not too surprisingly, the postmodern self is much less compatible with that branch of symbolic

interactionism most closely associated with the study of the self—the self and identity theories of Kuhn, Stryker, and Rosenberg. This branch of interactionism places much more emphasis on the phenomenal self, which is structured, relatively stable, and the source of various emotions and motivations. It also approaches the study of the self more positivistically and assumes greater determinacy than does postmodernism. This approach to the self has been the subject of much of the postmodern critique (Denzin 1988; Gergen 1984). But even Mead’s (1934) view of the self has come under attack by postmodern sociologists. For example, Denzin (1988) “deconstructs” Mead’s concepts of the “I” and the “me,” relegating them to the status of linguistic conventions (mere pronouns) with no substantive reality beyond that, and eventually abandons the concept of self altogether. Dowd (1991) goes even further, arguing that the erosion of the self due to changes in society associated with postmodernism is the cause of the *real* crisis in social psychology. With the erosion of the self, Dowd argues, social psychology is left without its central subject of study.

We disagree with Denzin’s claim that these self-constructs are merely byproducts of language and with Dowd’s contention that the “demise” of the self is at the heart of the crisis in social psychology. It is premature to sound the death knell for the self. An argument can still be made for the reality of human groups and people’s commitment to them, for the existence of self-reflexive beings, and for the reality of self-feelings, such as guilt, shame, and authenticity. Modernist perspectives still dominate our understanding of selves in contemporary society. However, postmodernism has presented a major challenge to our conceptions of self and society, a challenge that has yet to be adequately addressed (but see Farberman 1991 for a good start).

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

These are interesting times in the social psychology of self and identity. The study of self-phenomena is flourishing in both the sociological

and psychological branches of social psychology. Perennial topics of inquiry reflect new vigor and research activity: the structure and organization of self-conceptions; the internal dynamics of self-concepts; the relationship between social structure and self-conception; the interplay between identities, self-evaluations, and behavior; the consequences of self and identity for individual functioning.⁸ Most of the contemporary research on these topics draws its theoretical inspiration from some version of symbolic interactionism (in sociology) or some version of cognitive and social learning theories (in psychology).

The field is also characterized by the emergence of multiple new lines of inquiry. The emergence of emotions as a major focus of social psychological interest has spilled over into studies of self and identity—previously a cognitive stronghold. Connections between emotions and self-conceptions beginning to be explored include the affective concomitants of identities; the emotional consequences of self-discrepant experiences; the significance of self-emotions, such as shame, guilt, and pride; and the consequences of “emotion work” for individual well-being. There are many interesting aspects to the interrelation-

ships between emotions, self-conceptions, and behavior, not the least of which are questions regarding the consequences of disjunctures between these domains.

There is a renewed interest in the topic of motivation and in viewing the self-concept as a motivational system (Burke and Reitzes 1991; Gecas 1991; Swanson 1989; J. C. Turner 1987), which is part of the increasing emphasis on the active, agentive self. The proliferation of self theories emphasizing self-dynamics and self-motives is another expression of this trend. So is the renewed interest in defense mechanisms, the ways in which persons present themselves, manipulate their environments, and engage in various distortions, biases, or deceptions to protect valued self-conceptions.

Most of the developments and trends discussed here generally fall within what might be called the “dominant self-paradigm,” a view of the self as bounded, centered, and the locus of motives, interests, and so on. It will be interesting to see whether the paradigmatic critiques of this view, increasingly found in cross-cultural studies of self-concept, feminist writings, and the postmodernist literature, will have an impact on subsequent studies and theories of self and identity.

NOTES

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1. See Rosenberg (1989) for a discussion of the obstacles to the study of the self in psychology, psychoanalysis, and to some extent sociology due to the dominance of inhospitable scientific paradigms for much of the twentieth century.

2. Some notable exceptions to this generalization are Baumeister's (1987) historical analysis of identity, Ger-gen's (1984) sociohistorical approach to the self, and Sampson's (1988) call for greater sensitivity to culture and history in the study of the self.

3. In many respects the self-concept is similar to the concept of ego as used by psychologists (see Sherif 1968), although less emphasis is placed on social and reflexive qualities in discussions of ego than is found in discussions of self and self-concept.

4. An interesting variation of this orientation, found mostly in political sociology literature, focuses on ideologies and their consequences for selves and identities (Gouldner 1976; Warren 1990). Ideologies, as Warren (1990) argues, have a wide range of identity implications, such as telling individuals who they are, where they fit in the social hierarchy, and who is a member of a community and who is not and providing a moral framework for social relations and individual experience. Much of the power and persistence of ideologies derives from these identity-sustaining features for those who hold them.