Social Psychology Course Notes

Social Psychology – Week 7 – Lecture and Tutorial Notes

Tutorial Notes

Face Reading

- Todorov et al. (2005) found that people can judge someone's competence based solely on facial appearance from pictures and that this is done very quickly, within a 1-second exposure.
- Fascinatingly, political candidates' competence perceived this way predicted the outcome of the actual election results better than chance.
- The findings suggest that rapid, personality inferences can contribute to voting choices.

Heuristics

- **Availability heuristic**: the frequency or likelihood of an event is estimated from how quickly instances or associations come to mind.
- **Representativeness heuristic**: instances are assigned to categories or types on the basis of overall similarity or resemblance to the category.
- **Anchoring and adjustment heuristic**: a cognitive shortcut in which inferences are tied to initial standards.

Social Role

- **Roles**: patterns of behaviour that distinguish between different activities within the group.
    - Roles represent a division of labour.
    - Roles furnish clear-cut social expectations and provide information about how members relate to one another.

Social Role and Attribution

- One experiment paired students to play questioner and contestant in a quiz show format. The roles were randomly assigned.
- The questioners were given 15 minutes to come up with questions to which they knew the answers but most people did not. Not surprisingly, the contestants could not answer very many of the questions.
- Afterwards, questioners, contestants and observers were asked about the questioners' and contestants' level of general knowledge.
- Questioners rated themselves and their partners about the same level of intelligence.
- Contestants gave their partners higher ratings than themselves and observers also saw the questioners as extremely knowledgeable and the contestants as about average.
- The fundamental attribution error helps explain why Adam Hills, the long-time host of Spicks and Specks, seems so knowledgeable about music. He always gives the right answers after contestants are wrong. But we tend to forget his distinct advantage – he has the answers in front of him.

Stanford Prison Study

- A social psychologist, Phillip Zimbardo, was interested in how people adopt and internalise roles.
- In an experiment, 24 psychologically stable male volunteers were recruited and randomly assigned the roles of prisoners or guards.
- The prisoners were arrested at their homes and then handed over to the guards in a simulated prison constructed in the basement of the Psychology Department at Stanford University.
- Results:
    - Deindividuation: students dressed as guards became brutal to other students who were deindividuated as prisoners.
    - The guards harassed, humiliated and intimidated the prisoners.
    - The prisoners gradually became passive. Some prisoners had to be released from the study because they showed symptoms of severe emotional disturbance.

Social Psychology – Week 8 – Lecture and Tutorial Notes

Lecture Notes – Self and Identity

Self

- Self is a rich knowledge structure that guides how we construe social information.
    - **Self-schemas**: understanding of the existence and properties of the self (your answer to a question "Who am I?").

Developments of Self

- Young infants discriminate their body from that of others.
- Explicit self-awareness, characterised by an objective understanding that the self is a physically unique being, develops gradually.
- An 18-month-old's response to her reflection indicates that she recognises her unique physical features and is aware of herself as a separate being, distinct from other people and objects.

Knowing the Self

- **Introspection** (e.g., "Who am I?").
    - Research suggests introspection is not a very effective way of gaining insight into our "true self".
    - In fact, people who analyse the reasons why they have a particular attitude (e.g., why they like their boyfriend or girlfriend, why they prefer certain subjects) show a lower correlation between those attitudes and behaviour than those who don't engage in this type of self-reflection.
- **Self-perception**: inferring our own attitudes from our own behaviour.
    - "I know that I enjoy eating curry because, if given the opportunity, I eat curry of my own free will and in preference to other foods, and not everyone likes curry."
- Facial feedback hypothesis example of self-perception.

Schachter's Two-Factor Theory of Emotion

- According to Schachter's two-factor theory of emotion, when you experience physiological arousal, you look to the situation to cognitively interpret the meaning of this arousal, and this interpretation influences the emotion you experience.

Knowing the Self

- If you give children a reward for doing something they already enjoy doing, they will subsequently like that activity less.
- According to a principle of positive reinforcement, giving a reward will increase the frequency of that behaviour.
- But what is the effect of reward giving on people's thoughts about themselves?
- Lepper et al. (1973) conducted a study with preschool children. Many children enjoy drawing so many simply chose to draw when given a chance.
- The experimenters randomly selected a group of children and promised a reward for drawing.
- A few days later, the children were observed for their free play activities. The children who received rewards for drawing spent half as much time drawing as did the others.
- **Overjustification effect**: the tendency for people to view their behaviour as caused by compelling extrinsic reasons, making them underestimate the extent to which it was caused by intrinsic reasons.
    - Research with both children and adults reveals that those who receive an expected reward (e.g., are told that they will get to do a fun activity if they do three other activities first) are less creative than those who get no reward or get an unexpected reward.
- **Affective forecasts**: people tend to overestimate the impact that both positive and negative events will have on their mood.

Regulating the Self

- An important function of the self is to be the chief executive who makes choices about what to do, both in the present and in the future.
- Self-control is a limited resource. "Muscle metaphor" – self-control depletes with use, recovers after rest, gain strength with training.
    - Smokers who are attempting to quit are more likely to start smoking again under stress, which presumably exhausts self-control.

- Self-awareness is a state in which you are aware of yourself as an object. Compare between how you actually are and how you would like to be.
- The outcome of this comparison is often a sense that you have shortcomings, along with negative emotions associated with this recognition. People then try to rectify their faults by bringing the self closer into line with ideal standards.
- **Promotion focus** – you are habitually motivated to attain your hopes and aspirations. You will be on the lookout for positive events. You might try to improve your grades, find new challenges and treat problems as interesting obstacles to overcome.
- **Prevention focus** – you are motivated to fulfil your duties and obligations. You will be on the lookout for negative events. You might concentrate more on avoiding failure than achieving the highest possible grade.

Self-Esteem

High Self-Esteem	Low Self-Esteem
Persistent and resilient in the face of failure	Vulnerable to impact of everyday events
Emotionally and affectively stable	Wide swings in mood and affect
Less flexible and malleable	Flexible and malleable
Less easily persuaded and influenced	Easily persuaded and influenced
No conflict between wanting and obtaining success and approval	Want success and approval but are sceptical of it
React positively to a happy and successful life	React negatively to a happy and successful life
Thorough, consistent and stable self-concept	Sketchy, inconsistent and unstable self-concept
Self-enhancement motivational orientation	Self-protective motivation orientation

- People generally have a rosy sense of self – they are, or try to see, themselves through 'rose-tinted spectacles'.
- People normally overestimate their good points, overestimate their control over events and are unrealistically optimistic.

- **Self-enhancement bias**: highlighting positive aspects of self and ignoring negative aspects.

- Increase in people's levels of self-esteem over time in the U.S.

Self-Esteem and Narcissism
- **Narcissism**. A form of high self-esteem that is unhealthy. The combination of excessive self-love and a lack of empathy toward others. Narcissists are extremely self-centred, concerned much more with themselves than with other people.
- On the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, a commonly used questionnaire measure, narcissists endorse such items as "I wish somebody would someday write my biography" and "I find it easy to manipulate people".
- In the United States, narcissism has been increasing among college students.
- Today narcissism refers to the combination of excessive self-love and a lack of empathy toward others.

Culture and Self
Independent Self
- Self as a unitary and autonomous entity that is socially independent.
- Important to positively distinguish the self from others. Important to maintain positive self-esteem.

Interdependent Self
- Self as a socially interdependent entity.
- Important to become a harmonious member of a group. Positive self-esteem less important.

Culture and Self
- American and Chinese participants were asked to think of someone (either the self, mother, or a stranger) and then judge whether an adjective shown on a screen describes that person.
    - In both groups, thinking of self resulted in a greater activation of medial prefrontal cortex relative to thinking of a stranger.
    - Among Chinese participants, these areas were also activated for mother. This was not the case among Americans.

    - Self and mother merged in the brain among Chinese but are distinct among Americans.
- Differences in independent and interdependent self implicate other differences in the way in which individuals think about themselves.
    - Importance of positive self-esteem.
    - Social understanding. Whether a social behaviour is seen as reflecting internal or external characteristics.
    - Importance of personal choice and self-expression.

Culture and Self-Expression
- Iyengar and Lepper (1999) recruited 5th graders in San Francisco to an experiment. Half of the children were Asian-American and the other half were European-Americans. Children played a video game ("Space Quest") designed to teach arithmetic.
- Children assigned to the personal choice condition made a number of choices about the game. In the other conditions, these choices were made by somebody else, either someone close (classmate, mother) or younger children from another school.
- European-American children were most strongly motivated in the personal choice condition.
- Asian-American children were most strongly motivated in the mother/classmate condition.
- Being able to make own choices was a less strong determinant of motivation among Asian-American.

Tutorial Notes
Regulating the Self
- An important function of the self is to be the chief executive who makes choices about what to do, both in the present and in the future.
- Self-control is a limited resource. "Muscle metaphor" – self-control depletes with use, recovers after rest, gains strength with training.
- Baumeister (1998) = Ego-depletion theory.
    - Used the 'muscle metaphor'.
- 2012 study investigation decisions made by judges on parole boards.
    - Factors influencing decisions of parole board officers:
        - Number of previous incarcerations.
        - Availability of rehab.
        - Length of time since last meal break.
    - Supports ego-depletion theory.
- Evan et al. (2015) – meta-analysis on ego-depletion theory.
    - Many studies had small samples which resulted in false positive results.
    - Ego-depletion theory seriously challenged.
- Hagger et al. (2016)
    - Used computers to replicate Baumeister study.
    - No evidence for ego-depletion theory.

Generation Me
- Plenty of empirical evidence. For example, younger generations of Americans have higher self-esteem, higher tendency towards narcissism, and lower empathy and trust of others.
- Self-esteem is increasing in the U.S. but not in Australia.

Social Psychology – Week 8 – Reading Notes

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Who Are You?

- Social interaction, and social existence itself, depends on people knowing who they are and who others are. Your identity and your self-concept underpin your everyday life – knowing who you are allows you to know what you should think and do, and knowing who others are allows you to predict what they think and what they do. Knowing our identity regulates and structures how we interact with others; and in turn there are ways of interacting and structures in our society that provide identities for us.
- Many scholars have argued that it is reflexive thought – that is, the ability to think about ourselves thinking – that separates us from almost all other animals. Reflexive thought means that we can think about ourselves, about who we are, how we would like to be and how we would like others to see us. These days, humans have a highly developed sense of self. Self and identity, then, are fundamental parts of being human.
- In this chapter, we explore the self – where it comes from, what it looks like, and how it influences thought and behaviour. Because self and identity are cognitive **constructs** that influence social interaction and perception, and are themselves influenced by society, the material in this chapter connects to virtually all other chapters in the book. The self is an enormously popular focus of research.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Self and Identity in Historical Context

- The self is, historically, a relatively new idea. Baumeister paints a picture of medieval society in which social relations were fixed and stable and legitimised in religious terms. People's lives and identities were tightly mapped out according to their position in the social order – by ascribed attributes such as family membership, social rank, birth order and place of birth. In many ways, what you saw was what you got, so the idea of a complex individual self lurking underneath it all was difficult to entertain and probably superfluous.
- All this started to change in the 16th century, and the change has gathered momentum ever since. The forces for change included the following:
    - **Secularisation** – the idea that fulfilment occurs in the afterlife was replaced by the idea that you should actively pursue personal fulfilment in this life.
    - **Industrialisation** – people were increasingly seen as units of production that moved from place to place to work, and thus had a portable personal identity that was not locked into static social structures such as the extended family.
    - **Enlightenment** – people felt that they could organise and construct different, better identities and lives for themselves by overthrowing orthodox value systems and oppressive regimes (e.g. the French and American revolutions of the late 18th century).
    - **Psychoanalysis** – Freud's theory of the human mind crystallised the notion that the self was unfathomable because it lurked in the gloomy depths of the unconscious.
- Psychoanalysis challenged the way we might think about self and identity: it attributes behaviour to complex dynamics that are hidden deep within the person's sense of who they are. The theory of **social representations** invoked psychoanalysis as an example of how a novel idea or analysis could entirely change the way that people think about their world.
- Together, these and other social, political and cultural changes caused people to think about self and identity as complex and problematic. Theories of self and identity propagated and flourished in this fertile soil.

Psychodynamic Self

- Freud believed that unsocialised and selfish libidinal impulses (the **id**) are repressed and kept in check by internalised societal norms (the **superego**), but that, from time to time and in strange and peculiar ways, repressed impulses surface. Freud's view of the self is one in which you can only truly know yourself, or indeed others, when special procedures, such as hypnosis or psychotherapy, are employed to reveal repressed thoughts. His ideas about self, identity and personality are far-reaching in social psychology.

Individual Versus Collective Self

- Freud, like many other psychologists, viewed the self as very personal and private – the high point of individuality: something that uniquely describes an individual human being. When someone says '*I am*…' they are describing what makes them different from all other human beings.
- But think about this for a moment. 'I am Australian', 'I come from Melbourne', 'I am a social psychologist' – these are all descriptions of *myself*, but they are also descriptions of many other people's selves (there are 22 million Australians, 4 million people currently living in Melbourne, and many thousands of social psychologists). So the self

can also be a shared or collective self – a 'we' or 'us'. Sometimes these two aspects are breathtakingly close. Think of the moment when an athlete stands on an Olympic podium, wearing a medal as an individual, 'I', and listening to an anthem for a nation, 'we'.
- Social psychologists argued long and hard for more than a century about what to make of this. Is the self an individual or a collective phenomenon? For much of this time, advocates of the individual self have tended to prevail. This is largely because social psychologists have considered groups to be made up of individuals who interact with one another rather than individuals who have a collective sense of shared identity. Individuals interacting in aggregates make up the province of social psychology, whereas groups as collectives are the province of several other social sciences, such as sociology and political science.
- This perspective on groups, summed up by Floyd Allport's legendary proclamation that 'There is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals', has made it difficult for the collective self to thrive as a research topic. However, in recent years the field has loosened up.

Collective Self
- It was not always like this. In the early days of social psychology, things were very different. Wundt was the founder of psychology as an experimental science, and he proposed that social psychology was the study of:
    - those mental products which are created by a community of human life and are, therefore, inexplicable in terms merely of individual consciousness since they presuppose the reciprocal action of many.
- Wundt's social psychology dealt with collective phenomena, such as language, religion, customs and myth, which, according to Wundt, could not be understood in terms of the psychology of the isolated individual. Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology, was influenced by Wundt's interest in collective life and also maintained that collective phenomena could not be explained in terms of individual psychology.
- The view that the self draws its properties from groups is shared by many other early social psychologists: for example, early theorists of collective behaviour and the crowd. Notably, McDougall, in his book *The Group Mind*, argued that out of the interaction of individuals there arose a 'group mind', which had a reality and existence that was qualitatively distinct from the isolated individuals making up the group. There was a collective self that was grounded in group life. Although phrased in rather quaint old-fashioned language, this idea has a direct line of descent to subsequent experimental social psychological research which confirms that human interaction has emergent properties that endure and influence other people: for example, Sherif's research on how norms emerge from interaction and are internalised to influence behaviour, and some of Asch's research on conformity to norms.
- Since the early 1980s there has been a revival of interest in the notion of a collective self; largely initiated by European research on the emergence of social representations out of social interaction, and on the role of social identity in group processes and intergroup behaviour.

Symbolic Interactionist Self
- Another twist to the idea of the collective self is recognition that the self emerges and is shaped by social interaction. Early psychologists such as William James distinguished between self as stream of consciousness, 'I', and self as object of perception, 'me'. In this way, reflexive knowledge is possible because 'I' can be aware of 'me', and people can thus know themselves. However, this is not to say that people's self-knowledge is particularly accurate. People tend to reconstruct who they are without being aware of having done it, and, in general, although people may be aware of who they are in terms of their attitudes and preferences, they are rather bad at knowing how they arrived at that knowledge.
- Nevertheless, people do have a sense of 'me', and according to **symbolic interactionism** the self arises out of human interaction. G. H. Mead believed that human interaction is largely symbolic. When we interact with people it is mainly in terms of words and non-verbal cues that are rich with meaning because they symbolise much more than is superficially available in the behaviour itself. Mead believed that society influences the way individuals think about themselves, a process that is continually updated as we interact with other people. We use symbols that must have shared meaning if we want to communicate effectively. If you say to your friend 'let's eat out tonight', you both know what this means and that it opens up a variety of choices that each of you know about.
- Interacting effectively also rests on being able to take the role of the other person. More specifically, this entails seeing oneself as others do – as a social *object*, 'me', rather than a social *subject*, 'I'. Because others often see us as representatives of a category (e.g. a student), the 'me' is probably more often seen as a collective 'me' – we might even think of it as 'us'. The representations, or views, that our society has of the world are traded through interacting symbolically with others. We are effective only if we can take the role of the other, and thus see ourselves as others (ultimately society) do. In this way, we construct a self-concept that reflects the society we live in; we are socially constituted.

- Symbolic interactionism offers a quite sophisticated and complex model of how the self is formed. And yet it generates a very straightforward prediction. Because forming our concept of self comes from seeing ourselves as others see us, which is the idea of the **looking-glass self**, how we rate ourselves should be closely connected to how others rate us. Shrauger and Schoeneman reviewed 62 studies to see if this was true. What they found was that people did *not* tend to see themselves as others saw them but instead saw themselves as they *thought* others saw them.
- The idea coming through in studies like Tice's is that people do not see themselves as others see them, but instead see themselves as they *think* others see them. So we do not actually take the role of the other in constructing a sense of self. An alternative reading is that the communication process in social interaction is noisy and inaccurate. It is influenced by a range of self-construal motivations (motives to view others, and be viewed by them, in particular ways) that conspire to construct an inaccurate image of others and what they think about us. We are mostly unaware of what other people really think of us, perhaps fortunately so. A sage person once said 'if you really want to hear how much people like you, you'd better listen to what they say at your funeral!'
- As we discover below, our concept of self is linked to how we go about enhancing our self-image. People normally overestimate their good points, overestimate their control over events and are unrealistically optimistic – Sedikides and Gregg call this the **self-enhancing triad**.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Self-Awareness

- If the truth be known, you do not spend all your time thinking about yourself. Self-awareness comes and goes for different reasons and has an array of consequences.
- In their book, *A theory of objective self awareness*, Duval and Wicklund argued that self-awareness is a state in which you are aware of yourself as an object, much as you might be aware of a tree or another person. Thus they speak of objective self=awareness. When you are objectively self-aware you make comparisons between how you actually are and how you would like to be – an ideal, a goal or some other standard. The outcome of this comparison is often a sense that you have shortcomings, along with negative emotions associated with this recognition. People then try to rectify their faults by bringing the self closer into line with ideal standards. This can sometimes be very difficult, and people can give up trying, experience reduced motivation and feel even worse about themselves.
- Objective self-awareness is generated by anything that focuses your attention on yourself as an object: for example, being in front of an audience or catching your image in a mirror. Indeed, a very popular method for raising self-awareness in laboratory studies is precisely this – place participants in front of a mirror. Carver and Scheier elaborated self-awareness theory. They distinguished between two types of self that we can be aware of:
    - 1. the **private self** – your private thoughts, feelings and attitudes
    - 2. the **public self** – how other people see you, your public image.
- Private self-awareness leads us to match our behaviour with our internalised standards, whereas public self-awareness is oriented towards presenting ourselves to others in a positive light.
- Being self-aware can be very uncomfortable. We all feel self-conscious from time to time and are only too familiar with how it affects our behaviour – we feel anxious, we become tongue-tied, or we make mistakes on tasks. We can even feel slightly paranoid. However, sometimes being self-aware can be a terrific thing, particularly on those occasions when we have accomplished a great feat. In early December 2003, having won the rugby world cup, the England team paraded through London and ended up in Trafalgar Square in front of three-quarters of a million people – standing in an open-topped bus, the team looked freezing, but certainly did not suffer from the crowd's adulation.
- Self-awareness can also make us feel good when the standards against which we compare ourselves are not too exacting: for example, if we compare ourselves against standards derived from 'most other people' or from people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Self-awareness can also improve introspection, intensify emotions and improve performance of controlled effort-sensitive tasks that do not require undue skill, such as checking over an essay you have written.
- The reverse side of being objectively self-aware is being in a state of reduced objective self-awareness. Because elevated self-awareness can be stressful or aversive, people may try to avoid this state by drinking alcohol, or by more extreme measures such as suicide. Reduced self-awareness has also been identified as a key component of **deindividuation**, a state in which people are blocked from awareness of themselves as distinct individuals, fail to monitor their actions and behave impulsively. Reduced self-awareness may be implicated in the way that crowds behave and in other forms of social unrest.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Self-Knowledge

- When people are self-aware, what are they aware of? What do we know about ourselves and how do we gain a sense of who we are? Self-knowledge is constructed in much the same way and through many of the same processes as we construct representations of other people.

Self-Schemas

- Information about other people is stored in the form of a **schema**. Research suggests that we store information about the self in a similar but more complex and varied way. Information about the self is stored cognitively as separate context-specific nodes such that different contexts activate different nodes and thus, effectively, different aspects of self. Research suggests that no single brain system or area of the brain is, of itself, responsible for one's sense of self. Instead, the experience of self emerges from widely distributed brain activity across the medial prefrontal and medial precuneus cortexes of the brain.
- According to Markus, the self-concept is neither a 'singular, static, lump-like entity' nor a simple averaged view of the self – it is complex and multifaceted, with a relatively large number of discrete self-schemas. People tend to have clear conceptions of themselves (i.e. self-schemas) on some dimensions but not others – that is, they are schematic on some but aschematic on others. People are self-schematic on dimensions that are important to them, on which they think they are extreme and on which they are certain the opposite does not hold. For example, if you think you are sophisticated, and being sophisticated is important to you, then you are self-schematic on that dimension – it is part of your self-concept. If you do not think you are sophisticated, and if this does not bother you, then being *sophisticated* is not one of your self-schemas.
- We try to use our self-schemas strategically. Linville used a colourful phrase to describe what we usually do: 'don't put all your eggs in one cognitive basket'. Having a variety of self-schemas provides a buffer from some of life's misfortunes: we can always pull some self-schemas out of other baskets to derive some satisfaction.
- Self-schemas that are rigidly compartmentalised have disadvantages. If some self-schemas are very negative and some are very positive, events may cause extreme mood swings according to whether a positive or negative self-schema is primed. Generally, more integrated self-schemas are preferable. For example, if James believes that he is a wonderful cook but an awful musician, he has compartmentalised self-schemas – contexts that prime one or the other self-schema will produce very positive or very negative moods. Contrast this with Sally, who believes that she is a reasonably good cook but not a great musician. She has self-schemas where the boundaries are less clear – context effects on mood will be less extreme.
- Self-schemas influence information processing and behaviour in much the same way as schemas about other people: self-schematic information is more readily noticed, is overrepresented in cognition and is associated with longer processing time. Self-schemas do not only describe how we are. Markus and Nurius have suggested that we have an array of possible selves – future-oriented schemas of what we would like to become, or what we fear we might become. For example, a postgraduate student may have future selves as a university lecturer or a rock musician.
- Another perspective is offered by Higgins' **self-discrepancy theory**. Higgins suggests that we have three types of self-schema:
    - 1. **actual self** – how we currently are
    - 2. **ideal self** – how we would like to be
    - 3. **'ought' self** – how we think we should be.
- The ideal self and the 'ought' self are in effect 'self-guides', but they mobilise different types of self-related behaviours. The same goal – for example, prosperity – can be constructed as an ideal (we strive to be prosperous) or an 'ought' (we strive to avoid not being prosperous). Discrepancies between actual, and ideal or 'ought', can motivate change to reduce the lack of fit – in this way we engage in **self-regulation**. Furthermore, these self-discrepancies make us emotionally vulnerable. When we fail to resolve an actual-ideal discrepancy we feel generally dejected (e.g. disappointed, dissatisfied, sad); when we fail to resolve an actual-'ought' discrepancy we feel generally agitated (e.g. anxiety, threat, fear).

Regulatory Focus Theory

- Higgins made it clear that he wanted to go beyond Freud's *pleasure-pain principle*, that we are bent on procuring the first and avoiding the second. At the root of this simplistic proposition, argued Higgins, is a motivational principle with two separate self-regulatory systems related to the pursuit of different types of goals. Consider the case of students as they look to their future:
    - The **promotion system** – You are motivated to attain your hopes and aspirations: your ideals. You will be on the lookout for positive events. When you focus in this way you adopt an approach strategy to attain your goals – for

example, you might try to improve your grades, find new challenges and treat problems as interesting obstacles to overcome.

- The **prevention system** – You are motivated to fulfil your duties and obligations: your 'oughts'. You will be on the lookout for negative events. When you focus in this way you adopt an avoidance strategy to attain your goals – for example, you might try to avoid new situations or new people, and concentrate more on avoiding failure than achieving the highest possible grade.

- Some people are habitually more approach-focused and others more prevention-focused – it is an individual difference that can arise during childhood. A promotion-focus can arise if children are habitually hugged and kissed for behaving in a desired manner (a positive event) and love is withdrawn as a form of discipline (absence of a positive event). A prevention-focus can arise if children are encouraged to be alert to potential dangers (absence of a negative event) and punished and shouted at when they behave undesirably (a negative event). Against the background of individual differences, regulatory focus can also be influenced by the immediate context, for example by structuring the situation so that people focus on prevention or on promotion.
- Research shows that people who are promotion-focused are especially likely to recall information relating to the pursuit of success by others. Lockwood et al. found that people who are promotion-focused look for inspiration to positive role models who emphasise strategies for achieving success. Such people also show elevated motivation and persistence on tasks that are framed in terms of gains and non-gains. On the other hand, people who are prevention-focused behave quite differently – they recall information relating to the avoidance of failure by others, are most inspired by negative role models who highlight strategies for avoiding failure, and exhibit motivation and persistence on tasks that are framed in terms of losses and non-losses.
- **Regulatory focus theory** has recently been explored in the context of intergroup relations and how people feel about and behave towards their ingroup and relevant outgroups. For example, studies by Shah et al. have shown that in intergroup contexts a measured or manipulated promotion focus strengthens positive emotion-related bias and behavioural tendencies towards the ingroup, while a prevention focus strengthens more negative emotion-related bias and behavioural tendencies against the outgroup.

Inferences from Our Behaviour

- One of the most obvious ways to learn about who you are is to examine your private thoughts and feelings about the world – knowing what you think and feel about the world is a very useful clue to the sort of person you are.
- However, when these internal cues are weak we may make inferences about ourselves from what we do – our behaviour. This idea underpins Bem's **self-perception theory**. Bem argues that we make attributions not only for others' behaviour but also for our own, and that there is no essential difference between self-attributions and other-attributions. Furthermore, just as we construct an impression of someone else's personality on the basis of being able to make internal dispositional attributions for their behaviour, so we construct a concept of who we are not by introspection but by being able to attribute our own behaviour internally. So, for example, I know that I enjoy eating curry because, if given the opportunity, I eat curry of my own free will and in preference to other foods, and not everyone likes curry – I am able to make an internal attribution for my behaviour.
- How we perceive ourselves can also be based on simply imagining ourselves behaving in a particular way. For example, sports psychologist van Gyn et al. divided runners into two groups; one group practised power training on exercise bikes, the other did not. Half of each group used imagery, that is, also imagined themselves sprint training, whereas the others did not. Of course, the sweaty business of power training itself improved subsequent performance; but, remarkably, those who imagined themselves sprint training did better than those who did not. The researchers concluded that imagery had affected self-conception, which in turn produced performance that was consistent with that self-conception.
- Self-attributions have important implications for motivation. The theory predicts that, if someone is induced to perform a task by either enormous rewards or fearsome penalties, task performance is attributed externally and thus motivation to perform is reduced. If there are minimal or no external factors to which performance can be attributed, we cannot easily avoid attributing performance internally to enjoyment or commitment, so motivation increases. This has been called the **overjustification effect**, for which there is now substantial evidence.
- Take an example. Lepper et al. had nursery-school children draw pictures. Some of the children simply drew of their own free will, while the rest were induced to draw with the promise of a reward, which they were subsequently given. A few days later, the children were unobtrusively observed playing; the children who had previously been rewarded for drawing spent half as much time drawing as did the other group. Those who had received no extrinsic reward seemed to have greater intrinsic interest in drawing.
- In fact, a review by Condry showed that introducing external rewards may backfire by reducing motivation and enjoyment of a task that was previously intrinsically motivated. This has clear educational implications. Parents

generally love to tell their children stories and in time encourage the young ones to enjoy stories by learning to read themselves. However, if reading is accompanied by rewards their intrinsic joy is put at risk. Is it possible for rewards to play any useful role? The answer is yes. The trick is to reduce a reliance on rewards that are *task-contingent* and make more use of those that are *performance-contingent*. Even a task that people find boring can be enlivened when they shift their attention to features of their performance. Consider how you look for ways to maintain interest in a monotonous physical fitness program, especially when you need to work out alone. You could of course listen to music or watch television. However, a performance-contingent strategy is to set targets using measures such as 'distance' covered on an exercycle and to check your heart rate and how many calories you expended.
- We turn now to the impact that other people have on how our self-concept develops.

Social Comparison and Self-Knowledge
- Are you bright? How do you know? There are aspects of ourselves that call for a yardstick: we can learn by comparing ourselves with other people. Indeed, Festinger developed **social comparison theory** in just this way, to describe how people learn about themselves through comparisons with others. People need to be confident about the validity of their perceptions, attitudes, feelings and behaviour, and because there is rarely an objective measure of validity, people ground their cognitions, feelings and behaviour in those of other people. In particular, they seek out similar others to validate their perceptions and attitudes, which can, to some extent, be read as meaning that people anchor their attitudes and self-concept in the groups to which they feel they belong.
- When it comes to performance, we try to compare ourselves with people who are slightly worse than us – we make downward social comparisons, which deliver an evaluatively positive self-concept. Often, however, our choices are limited: for example, younger siblings in families often have no option but to compare themselves with their more competent older brothers and sisters. Indeed, upward comparison may sometimes have a harmful effect on self-esteem.
- How can we avoid this? According to Tesser's **self-evaluation maintenance model**, we try to downplay our similarity to the other person or withdraw from our relationship with that person. Medvec et al. conducted an intriguing study along these lines. They coded the facial expressions of medal winners at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona and found that the bronze medallists expressed noticeably more satisfaction than the silver medallists! Silver medallists were constrained to make unfavourable upward comparisons with gold medallists, whereas bronze medallists could make self-enhancing downward comparisons with the rest of the field, who received no medal at all.
- Downward comparisons also occur between groups. Groups try to compare themselves with inferior groups in order to feel that 'we' are better than 'them'. Indeed, intergroup relations are largely a struggle for evaluative superiority of one's own group over relevant outgroups. This in turn influences self-conception as a group member – social identity. According to **self-categorisation theory**, an extension of social identity theory, the underlying process is one in which people who feel they belong to a group categorise themselves as group members and automatically internalise as a self-evaluation the attributes that describe the group – if the group is positive, the attributes are positive, and thus the self is positive.
- Sport provides an ideal context in which the outcome of this process can be seen. Few New Zealanders will not have felt enormously positive when their field athlete, Valerie Adams, won gold medals at the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games. Cialdini et al. have referred to this phenomenon as 'basking in reflected glory', or **BIRGing**. To illustrate the effect, they conducted experiments in which they raised or lowered self-esteem via feedback on a general knowledge test; and student participants were then, seemingly incidentally, asked about the outcome of a recent football game. Participants who had had their self-esteem lowered tended to associate themselves with winning and not with losing teams – they tended to refer to the teams as 'we' in the former case and as 'they' in the latter.
- We now move to a real poser: do you ever feel that you are more than one person?

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Many Selves, Multiple Identities
- It is probably inaccurate to characterise the self as a single undifferentiated entity. In his book, *The concept of self*, Gergen depicts the self-concept as containing a repertoire of relatively discrete and often quite varied identities, each with a distinct body of knowledge. These identities probably grow from the many different social relationships in our lives. They are anchoring points ranging from close personal relationships with friends and family, from relationships and roles defined by work groups and professions, and from relationships defined by ethnicity, nationality and religion.
- As we noted earlier, we differ in **self-complexity**. Some of us will have a more diverse and extensive set of selves than others who have only a few, relatively similar, aspects of self. The notion of self-complexity is given a slightly

different emphasis by Brewer et al. who focus on self that is defined in group terms (social identity) and the relationship among identities rather than the number of identities people have. They argue that people have a complex social identity if they have discrete social identities that do not share many attributes, but a simple social identity if they have overlapping social identities that share many attributes.
- Grant and Hogg have recently suggested and shown empirically that the effect, particularly on group identification and group behaviours, of the number of identities one has and their overlap may be better explained in terms of the general property of social identity prominence – how subjectively prominent, overall and in a specific situation, a particular identity is in one's self-concept.

Types of Self and Identity
- Social identity theorists have argued that there are two broad classes of identity that define different types of self:
  - 1. **social identity**, which defines self in terms of group memberships
  - 2. personal identity, which defines self in terms of idiosyncratic traits and close personal relationships.
- Brewer and Gardner asked the question 'Who is this we?' and distinguished three forms of self:
  - 1. **Individual self** – based on personal traits that differentiate the self from all others
  - 2. **Relational self** – based on connections and role relationships with significant others
  - 3. **Collective self** – based on group membership that differentiates 'us' from 'them'.
- More recently it has been proposed that there are four types of identity:
  - 1. **Person-based social identities** – emphasising the way that group properties are internalised by individual group members as part of their self-concept
  - 2. **Relational social identities** – defining the self in relation to specific other people with whom one interacts in a group context – corresponding to Brewer and Gardner's relational identity and to Markus and Kitayama's 'interdependent self'
  - 3. **Group-based social identities** – equivalent to social identity as defined above
  - 4. **Collective identities** – referring to a process whereby group members not only share self-defining attributes, but also engage in social action to forge an image of what the group stands for and how it is represented and viewed by others.
- The relational self is interesting. Although in one sense it is an interpersonal form of self, it can also be considered a particular type of collective self. As Yuki observed, some groups and cultures (notably East Asian cultures) define groups in terms of networks of relationships. Not surprisingly, Seeley et al. found that women place a greater importance than men on their relationships with others in their groups.
- The following table shows one way in which different types of self and self-attributes could be classified according to level of identity (social versus personal) and type of attributes (identity defining versus relationship defining).

	Identity attributes	**Relationship attributes**
Social identity	*Collective self*	*Collective relational self*
	Attributes shared with others that differentiate the individual from a specific outgroup, or from outgroups in general.	Attributes that define how the self as an ingroup member relates to specific others as ingroup or outgroup members.
Personal identity	*Individual self*	*Individual relational self*
	Attributes unique to self that differentiate that individual from specific individuals, or from other individuals in general.	Attributes that define how the self as a unique individual relates to others as individuals.

Contextual Sensitivity of Self and Identity
- Evidence for the existence of multiple selves comes from research where contextual factors are varied to discover that people describe themselves differently, and may even behave differently, in different contexts. For example, Fazio et al. were able to get participants to describe themselves in very different ways. They did this by asking them loaded questions that made them search through their stock of self-knowledge for information that presented the self in a different light.
- Other researchers have found, time and time again, that experimental procedures that focus on group membership lead people to act very differently from procedures that focus on individuality and interpersonal relationships. Consider 'minimal group' studies in which participants are either: (a) identified as individuals; or (b) explicitly categorised, randomly or by some trivial criterion as group members. A consistent finding is that categorisation makes people discriminate against an outgroup, conform to ingroup norms, express attitudes and feelings that

favour the ingroup, and indicate a sense of belonging and loyalty to the ingroup. Furthermore, these effects of minimal group categorisation are generally very fast and automatic.
- The idea that we may have many selves, and that contextual factors can bring different selves into play, has a number of ramifications. Social constructionists have suggested that the self is entirely situation-dependent. An extreme form of this position argues that we do not carry self-knowledge around in our heads as cognitive representations at all, but rather that we construct disposable selves through talk. A less extreme version has been proposed by Oakes, who does not emphasise the role of talk but still maintains that self-conception is highly context-dependent. A middle way is to argue that people do have cognitive representations of the self that they carry in their heads as organising principles for perception, categorisation and action, but that these representations are temporarily or more enduringly modified by situational factors.

The Search for Self-Coherence
- Although we may have a diversity of relatively discrete selves, we also have a quest: to find and maintain a reasonably integrated picture of who we are. Coherence provides us with a continuing theme for our lives – an 'autobiography' that weaves our various identities and selves together into a whole person. People who have highly fragmented selves (e.g. some people with schizophrenia, amnesia or Alzheimer's disease) find it extraordinarily difficult to function effectively.
- People use many strategies to construct a coherent sense of self. Here are some that you may have used yourself:
    - Restrict your life to a limited set of contexts. Because our various selves come into play as contexts keep changing, by reducing their number you will protect yourself from self-conceptual clashes.
    - Keep revising and integrating your 'autobiography' to accommodate new identities. Along the way, get rid of any worrisome inconsistencies. In effect, you are rewriting your history to make it work to your benefit.
    - Attribute changes in the self externally to changing circumstances, rather than internally to fundamental changes in who you are. This is an application of the **actor-observer effect**.
- We can also develop a self-schema that embodies a core set of attributes that we feel distinguishes us from all other people – that makes us unique. We then tend to recognise these attributes disproportionately in all our selves, providing a link that delivers a sense of a stable and unitary self.
- In summary, people find ways to construct their lives such that their self-conceptions are both steady and coherent.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Social Identity Theory
- **Social identity theory** is a major influence on how social psychologists conceptualise the relationship between social categories and the self-concept. This theory addresses a wide range of social psychological phenomena.
- Social identity theory has its origins in the work of Tajfel on social categorisation, intergroup relations, social comparison, and prejudice and stereotyping. It is sometimes called the **social identity theory of intergroup relations**. Later, Turner et al. turned their attention to how we categorise ourselves – whether at a personal (individual) or a social (collective) level – and how this can lead to actions that may be either: (a) more unique (e.g. trying to become a lawyer), or (b) more group-oriented (e.g. striking for better wages). The second of these is the basis of the **social identity theory of the group** or **self-categorisation theory**.

Functions of Personal and Social Identity
- As we have noted, social identity theorists point to two broad classes of identity that define different types of self: personal identity, which defines the self in terms of idiosyncratic personal relationships and traits; and social identity, which defines the self in terms of group memberships.
- **Personal identity** is associated with positive and negative close interpersonal relationships and with idiosyncratic personal behaviour. We have as many personal identities as there are interpersonal relationships we are involved in and clusters of idiosyncratic attributes that we believe we possess.
- **Social identity** is associated with group and intergroup behaviours such as ethnocentrism, ingroup bias, group solidarity, intergroup discrimination, conformity, normative behaviour, stereotyping and prejudice. We have as many social identities as there are groups that we feel we belong to. Social identity can be a very important aspect of our self-concept. For example, Citrin et al. describe a study in which 46% of Americans reported that they felt being an American, a social identity, was the most important thing in their life.

Processes of Social Identity Salience
- In any given situation, our sense of self and associated perceptions, feelings, attitudes and behaviour rests on whether social or personal identity, and which specific social or personal identity, is the psychologically salient basis of self-conception. The principle that governs social identity salience hinges on the process of social categorisation

and on people's motivation to make sense of and reduce uncertainty about themselves and others, and to feel relatively positive about themselves.
- People use limited perceptual cues (what someone looks like, how they speak, what attitudes they express, how they behave) to categorise other people. Generally, we first 'try out' categorisations that are readily accessible to us because we often use them, they are important to us, or perhaps they are glaringly obvious in the situation. The categorisation brings into play all the additional schematic information we have about the category. This information is cognitively stored as a **prototype**, which describes and prescribes the attributes of the category in the form of a fuzzy set of more or less related attributes, rather than a precise checklist of attributes.
- Category prototypes not only accentuate similarities within groups but also accentuate differences between groups – they obey what is called the **metacontrast principle**. As such, group prototypes usually do not identify average or typical members or attributes, but ideal members or attributes. The content of a group prototype may also vary somewhat from situation to situation – for example, how Aussie or Kiwi you feel will probably be slightly different in a situation where one is interacting with other Aussies or Kiwis than a situation where one is interacting with Americans. There is a process in which category attributes in memory interact with situational factors to generate the situation-specific prototype – however, social neuroscience research has confirmed that the attributes stored in memory effectively act as an anchor that maintains the integrity of the core identity and furnishes limits to the degree of influence the situation can have on the prototype.
- Ultimately, if the categorisation fits, in the sense that it accounts for similarities and differences between people satisfactorily (called **structural fit**), and it makes good sense of why people are behaving in particular ways (called **normative fit**), then the categorisation becomes psychologically salient as the basis of categorising self and others.

Some Consequences of Social Identity Salience
- When a categorisation becomes psychologically salient, people's perception of themselves and others becomes **depersonalised**. What this means is that people no longer consider themselves or others as unique multidimensional persons but as simple embodiments of the category prototype – they are viewed through the relatively narrow lens of a group membership that is defined by the specific ingroup or outgroup prototype.
- In addition to the transformation of self-conception into social identity, people also think, feel, believe and behave in terms of the relevant prototype. The process produces the range of behaviour we characteristically associate with people in groups and with the way groups treat each other, a theme that recurs throughout this book.
- The actual nature of the behaviour (what people think and do) depends on the specific content of the relevant prototype, and on people's beliefs about the status of their group in society and about the nature of the relations between groups. Group status is important because groups define social identity and social identity defines our self-concept; thus the evaluative implications of a specific group (the status, prestige and regard in which it is held) reflect the esteem in which others hold us, and influence the esteem in which we hold ourselves, our self-esteem.
- Thus people strive for membership in prestigious groups, or strive to protect or enhance the prestige and esteem of their existing group. How they go about this is influenced by their understanding of the nature of the status relations between their group and a specific outgroup – is it permeable, is it stable, is it legitimate? If the group's evaluation in society is generally unfavourable and you feel you can pass into a more prestigious group, you might try to leave the group entirely; however, this can often be very difficult, because in reality the psychological boundaries between groups can be impermeable or impassable. For example, various immigrant groups in Germany may find it difficult to 'pass' as German because they simply do not look German or they are readily 'given away' by subtle clues in their accent. If 'passing' is not possible, people can try to make sure that the attributes that do define their group are positive ones, or they can focus attention on less prestigious groups, in comparison with which they will look rather good.
- Groups can sometimes recognise that the entire basis on which their group is considered low status is illegitimate, unfair and unstable. If this recognition is tied to feasible strategies for change, then groups will compete directly with one another to gain the upper hand in the status stakes – a competition that can range from rhetoric and democratic process to terrorism and war.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Self-Motives
- Because selves and identities are such critical reference points for the way we adapt to life, people are enthusiastically motivated to secure self-knowledge. Entire industries are based on this search for knowledge, ranging from personality tests to dubious practices such as astrology and palmistry. However, people do not go about this search in a dispassionate way; they have an idea about what they want to know and can be dismayed when the quest unearths things they did not expect or did not want to find.

- Social psychologists have identified three classes of motive that may interact to influence self-construction and the search for self-knowledge. We pursue:
    - self-assessment to validate ourselves
    - self-verification to be consistent
    - self-enhancement to look good.

Self-Assessment and Self-Verification

- The first motive is a simple desire to have accurate and valid information about oneself – there is a **self-assessment** motive. People strive to find out the truth about themselves, regardless of how unfavourable or disappointing the truth may be. But people also like to engage in a quest for confirmation – to confirm what they already know about themselves they seek out self-consistent information through a **self-verification** process. So, for example, people who have a negative self-image will actually seek out negative information to confirm the worst.

Self-Enhancement

- Above all else, we like to learn favourable things about ourselves – we seek new favourable knowledge about ourselves as well as revise pre-existing but unfavourable views of ourselves. Some of us are guided by a **self-enhancement** motive. This motive to promote self-positivity has a mirror motive, self-protection, which fends off self-negativity. Research suggests that self-enhancement functions operate routinely and relatively globally, but that self-protection functions are usually only occasioned by an event or series of events that threatens a specific self-related interest.
- One manifestation of the self-enhancement motive is described by **self-affirmation theory**. People strive publicly to affirm positive aspects of who they are; this can be done blatantly by boasting or more subtly through rationalisation or dropping hints. The urge to self-affirm is particularly strong when an aspect of one's self-esteem has been damaged. So, for example, if someone draws attention to the fact that you are a lousy artist, you might retort that, while that might be true, you are an excellent dancer. Self-affirmation rests on people's need to maintain a global image of themselves as being competent, good, coherent, unitary, stable, capable of free choice, capable of controlling important outcomes, and so on. Ultimately, we like to be viewed as moral beings – and so we engage in a range of behaviours aimed at establishing and even asserting our moral credentials.
- Which motive is more fundamental and more likely to prevail in the pursuit of self-knowledge – self-assessment, self-verification or self-enhancement? In a series of experiments, Sedikides pitted the three motives against one another. His participants used a self-reflection task in which they ask themselves questions. Some of these involved central traits that applied to their selves whereas other questions related to more peripheral traits about their selves. The degree of self-reflection should depend on which of the three self-motives is operating:
    - **Self-assessment** – greater self-reflection on *peripheral* traits than on central traits of self, whether the attribute is desirable or not, indicates a drive to find out more about self (people already have knowledge about traits that are central for them)
    - **Self-verification** – greater self-reflection on *central* traits than on peripheral traits, whether the attribute is positive or not, indicates a drive to confirm what one already knows about oneself
    - **Self-enhancement** – greater self-reflection on *positive* aspects than on negative aspects of self, whether the attribute is central or not, indicates a drive to learn positive things about self.
- Sedikides found that self-enhancement was strongest, with self-verification a distant second and self-assessment an even more distant third. The desire to think well of ourselves reigns supreme; it dominates both the pursuit of accurate self-knowledge and the pursuit of information that confirms self-knowledge.
- Because self-enhancement is so important, people have developed a formidable repertoire of strategies and techniques to pursue it. People engage in elaborate self-deceptions to enhance or protect the positivity of their self-concepts.
- Techniques people use to enhance or protect positive aspects of the self:
    - They take credit for their successes but deny blame for their failures; this is one of the self-serving biases.
    - They forget failure feedback more readily than success or praise.
    - They accept praise uncritically but receive criticism sceptically.
    - They try to dismiss interpersonal criticism as being motivated by prejudice.
    - They perform a biased search of self-knowledge to support a favourable self-image.
    - They place a favourable spin on the meaning of ambiguous traits that define self.
    - They persuade themselves that their flaws are widely shared human attributes but that their qualities are rare and distinctive.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Self-Esteem

- Why are people so strongly motivated to think well of themselves – to self-enhance? Research suggests that people generally have a rosy sense of self – they see, or try to see, themselves through 'rose-tinted spectacles'. For example, people who are threatened or distracted often display what Paulhus and Levitt called **automatic egotism** – a widely favourable self-image. In their review of a link between illusions and a sense of wellbeing, Taylor and Brown concluded that people normally overestimate their good points, overestimate their control over events and are unrealistically optimistic. Sedikides and Gregg call these three characteristics of human thought **the self-enhancing triad**.
- In one study, very low achieving students (in the bottom 12%) thought they were relatively high achievers (in the top 38%). According to Cross, your lecturers show positivity bias too, with 94% convinced that their teaching ability was above average! The tendency to overestimate our good points is well documented in research, and is referred to as the **above-average effect**.
- People who fail to exhibit these biases tend towards depression and some other forms of mental illness. Thus a self-conceptual positivity bias, based on positive illusions, is psychologically adaptive.
- However, a breathlessly inflated sense of how wonderful one is is not only nauseatingly gushy but also maladaptive, as it does not match reality. Having an accurate sense of self is also important, but, as we have seen, less important than feeling good about oneself. Generally, it seems that the self-conceptual positivity bias is small enough not to be a serious threat to self-conceptual accuracy, and that people suspend their self-illusions when important decisions need to be made. Nevertheless, a positive self-image and associated self-esteem is a significant goal for most people most of the time.
- The pursuit of self-esteem may be a cultural universal, but how one pursues self-esteem may differ between cultures. For example, although Japanese society stresses communality and interconnectedness and engages in self-criticism, researchers argue that this is simply a different way of satisfying self-esteem – in Western countries self-esteem is more directly addressed by overt self-enhancement. According to Leary et al., self-esteem is a reflection of successful social connectedness.

Threats to Self-Concept

- There are three major sources of threat to our self-concept and all can affect our sense of self-worth:
  - 1. **Failures** – ranging from failing a test, through failing a job interview, to a marriage ending in divorce.
  - 2. **Inconsistencies** – unusual and unexpected positive or negative events that make us question the sort of person we are.
  - 3. **Stressors** – sudden or enduring events that may exceed our capacity to cope, including bereavement, a sick child and over-commitment to work.
- There are several ways in which people try to cope with self-conceptual threats:
  - **Escape** – people may remove themselves physically from the treat situation. When people who had done poorly on an intelligence and creativity task were asked to wait in another room equipped with a mirror and video camera (to heighten self-awareness), they fled the scene much more quickly than participants who had done well on the task.
  - **Denial** – people may take alcohol or other drugs, or engage in risky 'just for kicks' behaviour. This is not a particularly constructive coping mechanism, since it can create additional heatlh problems.
  - **Downplay the treat** – this is a more constructive strategy, either by re-evaluating the aspect of self that has been threatened or by reaffirming other positive aspects of the self. For example, Taylor found that breast cancer patients who were facing the possibility of death often expressed and reaffirmed what they felt were their most basic self-aspects – some quit dead-end jobs, others turned to writing and painting, and others reaffirmed important relationships.
  - **Self-expression** – this a very effective response to threat. Writing or talking about one's emotional and physical reactions to self-conceptual threats can be an extraordinarily useful coping mechanism. It reduces emotional heat, reduces headaches, muscle tension and pounding heart, and improves immune system functioning. Most benefits come from communication that enhances understanding and self-insight.
  - **Attack the treat** – people can directly confront threat by discrediting its basis ('This is an invalid test of my ability'), by denying personal responsibility for the threat ('The dog ate my essay'), by setting up excuses for failure before the event (on the way into an exam, announcing that you have a terrible hangover – **self-handicapping**), or by taking control of the problem directly, such as seeking professional help or addressing any valid causes of threat.

Self-Esteem and Social Identity

- Self-esteem is closely associated with social identity – by identifying with a group, that group's prestige and status in society attaches to one's self-concept. Thus, all things being equal, being identified as belonging to the group of obese people is less likely to generate positive self-esteem than being identified as belonging to the group of Olympic athletes. However, there is a general caveat – members of stigmatised social groups can generally be extremely creative in avoiding the self-esteem consequences of stigmatised group membership.
- In practice, and according to social comparison theory, there can be several outcomes when self-esteem interfaces with social identity. These depend on the perceived relative status of those outgroups with which our various ingroups are usually compared.
- Take the example of Jesse Owens: he was the star athlete at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the winner of four gold medals. As a member of the U.S. team he was triumphant in demonstrating the athletic superiority of the U.S. over Germany against the backdrop of Hitler's white supremacist notion of the Master Race. Ironically, Jesse Owens was less happy on his return home, where he was just another member of an underprivileged black minority.
- Our ethnicity or race is a significant source of self-esteem mediated by social identity. For example, studies have shown that members of ethnic minorities often report perceptions of lowered self-esteem when making inter-ethnic comparisons. However, these findings need to be treated with caution, since the conditions under which they occur are restricted in at least two ways:
    - 1. The **level of analysis** for self-esteem should be *intergroup* (e.g. question: 'As an African American I feel good/bad'; answer: 'very often, often, occasionally, seldom') rather than *personal* (e.g. question: 'I often feel good/bad'; answer: 'very often, often, occasionally, seldom').
    - 2. The status relationship between the ethnic minority and the majority must be distinctly unequal.
- The seminal research dealing with ethnic identity and self-worth was carried out in the U.S. in the 1930s and 1940s and was restricted to studies of African American and Caucasian American children. Later work has extended the samples to include other non-White minorities, such as Native Americans, 'Chicanos', Chinese and French Canadians, New Zealand Maori and Indigenous Australians. Consistently, children from non-white minorities showed clear outgroup preference and wished they were white themselves.
- Although pre-adolescent children from an ethnic minority might prefer to be members of the ethnic majority, this effect gradually declines with age. It is probable that young, disadvantaged children experience a conflict between their actual and ideal selves. As they grow older, they are able to pursue various options to resolve this problem:
    - They can avoid making self-damaging intergroup comparisons.
    - They can join with other ingroup members in a quest to establish more equal status relative to the majority group.
    - They can identify or develop ingroup characteristics that provide a sense of uniqueness and positivity, such as their language and culture.

Individual Differences

- We all know people who seem to hold themselves in very low regard and others who seem to have a staggeringly positive impression of themselves. Do these differences reflect enduring and deep-seated differences in self-esteem? The main thrust of research on self-esteem as a trait is concerned with establishing individual differences in self-esteem and investigating the causes and consequences of these differences.
- One view that has become somewhat entrenched, particularly in the U.S., is that low self-esteem is responsible for a range of personal and social problems such as crime, delinquency, drug abuse, unwanted pregnancy and underachievement in school. This view has spawned a huge industry, with accompanying mantras, to boost individual self-esteem, particularly in child-rearing and school contexts. However, critics have argued that low self-esteem may be a product of the stressful and alienating conditions of modern industrial society, and that the self-esteem 'movement' is an exercise in rearranging deck chairs on the *Titanic* that merely produces selfish and narcissistic individuals.
- So, what is the truth? First, research suggests that individual self-esteem tends to vary between moderate and very high, not between low and high – most people feel relatively positive about themselves, at least university students in the U.S. do. However, lower self-esteem scores have been obtained from Japanese students studying in Japan or the U.S.
- Even if we focus on those people who have low self-esteem, there is little evidence that low self-esteem causes the social ills that it is purported to cause. For example, Baumeister, Smart and Boden searched the literature for evidence for the popular belief that low self-esteem causes violence. They found quite the opposite. Violence was associated with high self-esteem; more specifically, violence seems to erupt when individuals with high self-esteem have their rosy self-images threatened.

- However, we should not lump together all the people who hold themselves in high self-esteem. Consistent with commonsense, some people with high self-esteem are quietly self-confident and non-hostile, whereas others are arrogant, conceited and overly assertive. These latter individuals also feel 'special' and superior to others, and they actually have relatively volatile self-esteem – they are narcissistic. Colvin, Block and Funder found that it was this latter type of high self-esteem individual that was likely to be maladjusted in terms of interpersonal problems.
- In a review dealing with 'the dark side of self-esteem', Baumeister et al. suggested that some high-self-esteem individuals become violent when they perceive that their ego has been threatened. An experiment provided support for this idea, and at the same time featured **narcissism** as a potential causal factor. After writing an essay, students received an evaluation which was either an 'ego threat' or an 'ego boost'. Later, they were given the chance to act aggressively toward the person who had offended them. Self-esteem did not predict aggression, but narcissism did – narcissistic individuals were more aggressive towards people who had provoked and offended them. The statistical analysis used pointed to perceived threat as a mediating factor: narcissism -> perceived threat -> aggression. An interesting extension to this idea has focused on group level narcissism, collective narcissism, and shown how narcissistic groups (e.g. narcissistic ethnic groups, religions or nations) that experience a status threat are more likely than non-narcissistic groups to resort to collective violence.
- Overall, research into self-esteem as an enduring trait provides quite a clear picture of what people with high and low self-esteem are like. There are two main underlying differences associated with trait self-esteem: (1) **self-concept confusion** – high self-esteem people have a more thorough, consistent and stable stock of self-knowledge than do low self- esteem people; (2) **motivational orientation** – high self-esteem people have a self-enhancing orientation in which they capitalise on their positive features and pursue success, whereas low self-esteem people have a self-protective orientation in which they try to remedy their shortcomings and avoid failures and setbacks.

In Pursuit of Self-Esteem

- Why do people pursue self-esteem? This may initially seem a silly question – the obvious answer is that having self-esteem makes you feel good. There is of course some truth here, but on the other hand there are causality issues to be addressed – being in a good mood, however caused, may provide a rosy glow that distorts the esteem in which people hold themselves. So, rather than self-esteem producing happiness, feeling happy may inflate self-esteem.

Characteristics of People with High and Low Self-Esteem

High self-esteem	Low self-esteem
Persistent and resilient in the face of failure	Vulnerable to impact of everyday events
Emotionally and affectively stable	Wide swings in mood and affect
Less flexible and malleable	Flexible and malleable
Less easily persuaded and influenced	Easily persuaded and influenced
No conflict between wanting and obtaining success and approval	Want success and approval but are sceptical of it
React positively to a happy and successful life	React negatively to a happy and successful life
Thorough, consistent and stable self-concept	Sketchy, inconsistent and unstable self-concept
Self-enhancement motivational orientation	Self-protective motivational orientation

Fear of Death

- Greenberg et al. suggested an intriguing, but somewhat gloomy, reason why people pursue self-esteem: it is to overcome their fear of death. They developed this idea in their **terror management theory**. They argue that the inevitability of death is the most fundamental threat that people face, and thinking about our own death produces 'paralysing terror' – fear of dying is thus the most powerful motivating factor in human existence. Self-esteem, however achieved, is part of a defence against that threat.
- Through high self-esteem, people can escape from the anxiety that would otherwise arise from continual contemplation of the inevitability of their own death – the drive for self-esteem is grounded in terror associated with dying. High self-esteem makes people feel good about themselves – they feel immortal, and positive and excited about life. One way to elevate self-esteem in order to protect against fear of death is to acquire symbolic immortality by identifying with and defending cultural institutions and their associated world view – cultural institutions survive long after we are dead.
- In support of this analysis, Greenberg et al. conducted three experiments in which participants did or did not receive success and positive personality feedback (manipulation of self-esteem) and then either watched a video

about death or anticipated painful electric shocks. They found that participants who had had their self-esteem raised had lower physiological arousal and reported less anxiety.
- Another reason why people pursue self-esteem is that it is a very good index, or internal monitor, of social acceptance and belonging. In this respect, self-esteem has been referred to as a 'sociometer'. Leary and his colleagues have shown that self-esteem is quite strongly correlated (at about 0.50) with reduced anxiety over social rejection and exclusion, and there is strong evidence that people are pervasively driven by a need to form relationships and to belong. Leary feels that having high self-esteem does not mean that we have conquered our fear of death but rather that we have conquered the threat of loneliness and social rejection. Other critics of terror management theory suggest that high self-esteem may be a response to overcoming existential uncertainty or uncertainty about who we are and our place in the world, rather than overcoming fear associated with dying.
- Leary et al. conducted a series of five experiments to support their view. They found that high self-esteem participants reported greater inclusion in general and in specific real social situations. They also found that social exclusion from a group for personal reasons depressed participants' self-esteem.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Self-Presentation and Impression Management

- Selves are constructed, modified and played out in interaction with other people. Since the self that we project has consequences for how others react, we try to control the self that we present. In *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Goffman likened this process of **impression management** to theatre, where people play different roles for different audiences. There is a vast amount of evidence that people behave differently in public than in private. There are two general classes of motive for self-presentation: strategic and expressive. Research by Snyder into individual differences in **self-monitoring** suggests that high self-monitors adopt strategic self-presentation strategies because they typically shape their behaviour to project the impression they feel their audience or the situation demands, whereas low self-monitors adopt expressive self-presentation strategies because their behaviour is less responsive to changing contextual demands.

Strategic Self-Presentation

- Building on classic work by Jones, Jones and Pittman identified five strategic motives:
    - 1. **self-promotion** – trying to persuade others that you are competent
    - 2. **ingratiation** – trying to get others to like you
    - 3. **intimidation** – trying to get others to think you are dangerous
    - 4. **exemplification** – trying to get others to regard you as a morally respectable individual
    - 5. **supplication** – trying to get others to take pity on you as helpless and needy.
- The behaviour that represents the operation of these motives is fairly obvious. In fact, ingratiation and self-promotion service two of the most common goals of social interaction: to get people to like you and to get people to think you are competent. Warmth and competence are the two most fundamental and pervasive dimensions on which we form impressions of people. Research into ingratiation tends to show that ingratiation has little effect on an observer's liking for you but a big effect on the target – flattery can be hard to resist.

Expressive Self-Presentation

- Strategic **self-presentation** focuses on manipulating others' perceptions of you. Expressive motives for self-presentation involve demonstrating and validating our self-concept through our actions – the focus is more on oneself than on others. But we are not naive: we usually seek out people who would validate who we are. The expressive motive for self-presentation is a strong one, because a particular identity or self-concept is worthless unless it is recognised and validated by others – it is of little use to me if I think I am a genius but no one else does. Identity requires **social validation** for it to persist and serve a useful function.
- For example, research by Emler and Reicher has shown that delinquent behaviour among boys is almost always performed publicly, or in forms that can be publicly verified, because its primary function is identity validation – validation of possession of a delinquent reputation. There is little point in being a closet delinquent. Other research confirms that people prefer social situations that allow them to act in ways that are consistent with their self-concept, and they prefer partners who agree with their own self-images.
- Social validation of expressed behaviour also seems to be implicated in self-concept change. Refer back to Tice's experiment, in which she asked her participants to act as if they were either emotionally stable or emotionally volatile. Half of them performed the behaviour publicly and half privately. They all then completed ratings of what they believed their 'true self' was like. Tice found that only publicly performed behaviour was internalised as a description of their self. What is important in self-concept change is that other people perceive you in a particular way – this is social validation. It is not enough for you and only you, to perceive your *self* in this way.

- The self-conceptual consequences of public behaviour have additional support from a program of research by Snyder. Observers were led to believe that a target stranger they were about to meet was an extrovert. Snyder then monitored what happened. The expectation constrained the target to behave as an extrovert would. In turn, this confirmed the expectation and strengthened the constraint, leading the target to believe that he or she really was an extrovert.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Cultural Differences in Self and Identity

- As far as self and identity are concerned, however, there is one pervasive finding. Western cultures such as Western Europe, North America and Australasia tend to be individualistic, whereas most other cultures, such as those found in Asia, South America and Africa, are collectivist.
- Markus and Kitayama describe how people in individualistic cultures tend to have an independent self, whereas people in collectivist cultures have an interdependent self. Although, in both cases, people seek a coherent sense of who they are, the independent self is grounded in a view of the self as autonomous, separate from other people and revealed through one's inner thoughts and feelings. The interdependent self is grounded in one's connection to and relationships with other people. It is expressed through one's roles and relationships. 'Self…is defined by a person's surrounding relations, which often are derived from kinship networks and supported by cultural values such as filial piety, loyalty, dignity, and integrity'.
- From a conceptual review of the cultural context of self-conception, Vignoles et al. conclude that the need to have a distinctive and integrated sense of self is probably universal. However, self-distinctiveness means something quite different in individualist and collectivist cultures. In one it is the isolated and bounded self that gains meaning from separateness, whereas in the other it is the relational self that gains meaning from its relations with others.
- Consistent with our historical analysis of conceptions of the self at the beginning of this chapter, the most plausible account of the origins of individualist and collectivist cultures, and the associated independent and interdependent self-conceptions, is probably in terms of economic activity. Western cultures have, over the past 200–300 years, developed an economic system based on labour mobility. People are units of production that are expected to move from places of low labour demand to places of high labour demand – they are expected to organise their lives, their relationships and their self-concepts around mobility and transient relationships.
- Independence, separateness and uniqueness have become more important than connectedness and the long-term maintenance of enduring relationships – these values have become enshrined as key features of Western culture. Self-conceptions reflect cultural norms that codify economic activity.

Differences between Independent and Interdependent Selves

	Independent self	Interdependent self
Self-definition	Unique, autonomous individual, separate from context, represented in terms of internal traits, feelings, thoughts and abilities.	Connected with others, embedded in social context, represented in terms of roles and relationships.
Self-structure	Unitary and stable, constant across situations and relationships.	Fluid and variable, changing across situations and relationships.
Self-activities	Being unique and self-expressive, acting true to your internal beliefs and feelings, being direct and self-assertive, promoting your own goals and your difference from others.	Belonging, fitting in, acting appropriately to roles and groups norms, being indirect and non-confrontational, promoting group goals and group harmony.

Chapter 4 – Self and Identity – Summary

- The modern Western idea of the self has gradually crystallised over the past 200 years as a consequence of a number of social and ideological forces, including secularisation, industrialisation, enlightenment and psychoanalysis. As a recent science, social psychology has tended to view the self as the essence of individuality.
- In reality, there are many different forms of self and identity. The three most important are probably the collective self (defined in terms of attributes shared with ingroup members and distinct from outgroup members), the individual self (defined in terms of attributes that make one unique relative to other people), and the relational self (defined in terms of relationships that one has with specific other people).
- People experience different selves in different contexts, yet they also feel that they have a coherent self-concept that integrates or interrelates all these selves.
- People are not continuously consciously aware of themselves. Self-awareness can sometimes be very uncomfortable and at other times very uplifting – it depends on what aspect of self we are aware of and on the relative favourability of that aspect.

- Self-knowledge is stored as schemas. We have many self-schemas, and they vary in terms of how clear they are. In particular, we have schemas about our actual self, our ideal self and our 'ought' self. We often compare our actual self with our ideal and 'ought' selves – an actual-ideal self-discrepancy makes us feel dejected, whereas an actual-ought self-discrepancy makes us feel anxious. The way in which we construct and regulate our sense of self is influenced by the extent to which we are prevention- or promotion-focused.
- People construct a concept of self in a number of ways in addition to introspection. They can observe what they say and what they do, and if there are no external reasons for behaving in that way, they assume that the behaviour reflects their true self. People can compare themselves with others to get a sense of who they are – they ground their attitudes in comparison with similar others but their behavioural in comparison with slightly less well-off others. The collective self is also based on downward comparisons, but with outgroup others.
- The collective self is associated with group memberships, intergroup relations, and the range of specific and general behaviour that we associate with people in groups.
- Self-conception is underpinned by three major motives: self-assessment (to discover what sort of person you really are), self-verification (to confirm what sort of person you are) and self-enhancement (to discover what a wonderful person you are). People are overwhelmingly motivated by self-enhancement, with self-verification a distant second and self-assessment bringing up the rear. This is probably because self-enhancement services self-esteem, and self-esteem is a key feature of self-conception.
- Some people have generally higher self-esteem than others. High self-esteem people have a clear and stable sense of self and a self-enhancement orientation; low self-esteem people have a less clear self-concept and a self-protective orientation.
- People pursue self-esteem for many reasons – probably mainly because it is a good internal index of social integration, acceptance and belonging. It may indicate that one has successfully overcome loneliness and social rejection. To protect or enhance self-esteem, people carefully manage the impression they project – they can do this strategically (manipulating others' images of the self) or expressively (behaving in ways that project a positive image of the self).
- Individualist Western cultures emphasise the independent self, whereas other (collectivist) cultures emphasise the interdependent self (the self defined in terms of one's relations and roles relative to other people).