

# THE DYNAMIC SELF-CONCEPT: A Social Psychological Perspective

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The unifying premise of the last decade's research on the self is that the self-concept does not just reflect on-going behavior but instead mediates and regulates this behavior. In this sense the self-concept has been viewed as dynamic—as active, forceful, and capable of change. It interprets and organizes self-relevant actions and experiences; it has motivational consequences, providing the incentives, standards, plans, rules, and scripts for behavior; and

it adjusts in response to challenges from the social environment. Virtually all of the early theoretical statements on the self-concept accord it this dynamic role (see Gordon & Gergen 1968), yet until very recently the empirical work lagged far behind these sophisticated conceptions of how the self-system functions. Indeed, the majority of self-concept research could best be described as an attempt to relate very complex global behavior, such as delinquency, marital satisfaction, or school achievement, to a single aspect of the self-concept, typically self-esteem.

In 1974, Wylie reviewed the literature and concluded that the self-concept simply could not be powerfully implicated in directing behavior. In the last decade, however, researchers have redoubled their efforts to understand the self-concept as one of the most significant regulators of behavior (see Suls 1982, Suls & Greenwald 1983, Schlenker 1985a). They have been sustained by their faith in the importance of the self-concept, by a number of compelling theoretical accounts of self-concept functioning, and by the poor showing of those approaches that ignore the self (e.g. theories that focus solely on life events or social structural features of the environment). In this review, we focus primarily on research that views the self-concept as a dynamic interpretive structure that mediates most significant *intrapersonal* processes (including information processing, affect, and motivation) and a wide variety of *interpersonal* processes (including social perception; choice of situation, partner, and interaction strategy; and reaction to feedback).

Progress in research on the self-concept came as a result of three advances. The first was the realization that the self-concept can no longer be explored as if it were a unitary, monolithic entity. The second was the understanding that the functioning of the self-concept depends on both the self-motives being served (e.g. self-enhancement, consistency maintenance, or self-actualization) and on the configuration of the immediate social situation. The third advance was a consequence of observing more fine-grained behavior. Overt, complex actions may not always be the appropriate dependent variables. An individual's behavior is constrained by many factors other than the self-concept. As a consequence, the influence of the self-concept will not always be directly revealed in one's overt actions. Instead its impact will often be manifest more subtly, in mood changes, in variations in what aspects of the self-concept are accessible and dominant, in shifts in self-esteem, in social comparison choices, in the nature of self-presentation, in choice of social setting, and in the construction or definition of one's situation.

## CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

### *The Multifaceted Self-Concept*

The most dramatic change in the last decade of research on the self-concept can be found in work on its structure and content. One of the formidable

stumbling blocks to linking the self-concept to behavioral regulation has been the view of the self-concept as a stable, generalized, or average view of the self. How could this crude, undifferentiated structure sensitively mediate and reflect the diversity of behavior to which it was supposedly related? The solution has been to view the self-concept as a multifaceted phenomenon, as a set or collection of images, schemas, conceptions, prototypes, theories, goals, or tasks (Epstein 1980, Schlenker 1980, Carver & Scheier 1981, Rogers 1981, Greenwald 1982, Markus & Sentis 1982, Markus 1983, Greenwald & Pratkanis 1984, Kihlstrom & Cantor 1984). These representations of the self have been described as being arrayed in a space (McGuire & McGuire 1982, Markus & Nurius 1986), a confederation (Greenwald & Pratkanis 1984), or a system (Martindale 1980).

Self theorists have abandoned as somewhat premature efforts to describe the active, "I" aspects of the self, and have been temporarily content to elaborate the structural features of the self-concept. Many recent models focus on the nature of cognitive representations of the self (see Greenwald & Pratkanis 1984, Kihlstrom & Cantor 1984 for reviews). The simplest of these models suggests that the self is just one node among many in an associative memory network. Based on network models of memory such as HAM (Anderson & Bower 1973) and ACT (Anderson 1976), such a model assumes that information about the self is stored in the form of propositions (Bower & Gilligan 1979). Others characterize the self-concept as either a hierarchical category structure whose elements are traits, values, and memories of specific behaviors (e.g. Carver & Scheier 1981, Rogers 1981, Kihlstrom & Cantor 1984) or as a multidimensional meaning space (Greenwald & Pratkanis 1984, Hoelter 1985). Another view of the self-concept is as a system of self-schemas or generalizations about the self derived from past social experiences. A schema is hypothesized to have a dual nature: to be at once a structure and a process (Neisser 1976, Rumelhart & Norman 1978, Markus & Sentis 1982). As such, it may have the capacity to represent the self as that which is both known and knower.

Whether researchers define the self-concept in terms of hierarchies, prototypes, networks, spaces, or schemas, they generally agree that the self-structure is an active one. What began as an apparently singular, static, lump-like entity has become a multidimensional, multifaceted dynamic structure that is systematically implicated in all aspects of social information processing. Among sociologists there has been a similar movement, and it is now commonplace to refer to the multiplicity of identity (Burke 1980, Martindale 1980, Stryker 1980, Rowan 1983, Weigert 1983, Lester 1984). Identity is described as including personal characteristics, feelings, and images (e.g. Burke 1980, Stryker 1980, Schlenker 1985b), as well as roles and social status. With this development, psychologists and sociologists are achieving a complete convergence in how they think about the self.

### *Types of Self-Representations*

Not all of the self-representations that comprise the self-concept are alike. Some are more important and more elaborated with behavioral evidence than others. Some are positive, some negative; some refer to the individual's here-and-now experience, while others refer to past or future experiences. Moreover, some are representations of what the self actually is, while others are of what the self would like to be, could be, ought to be, or is afraid of being. Self-representations that can be the subject of conscious reflection are usually termed self-conceptions.

The most apparent difference among self-representations is in their centrality or importance. Some self-conceptions are core conceptions (Gergen 1968) or salient identities (Stryker 1980, 1986), while others are more peripheral. Central conceptions of the self are generally the most well elaborated and are presumed to affect information processing and behavior most powerfully. Yet, more peripheral or less well-elaborated conceptions may still wield behavioral influence.

Self-representations also differ in whether or not they have actually been achieved. Some selves are not actual, but are possible for the person; other selves are hoped-for ideals. Markus & Nurius (1986) theorize that among one's set of self-conceptions are possible selves—the selves one would like to be or is afraid of becoming. These selves function as incentives for behavior, providing images of the future self in desired or undesired end-states. They also function to provide an evaluative and interpretive context for the current view of self. Representations of potential have also been explored by Schlenker (1985b) and Levinson (1978).

Building on earlier notions of the ego ideal (Freud 1925, Horney 1950, Rogers 1951), Rosenberg (1979) discusses ideal self-conceptions, distinguishing those ideal self-conceptions that are likely to be realized from those that are glorified images of the self. Higgins (1983) extends this work and hypothesizes that there are at least three classes of self-conceptions: those that reflect the "actual" self, those that represent the "ideal" self or the attributes the person would like to possess, and those that represent the "ought" self, which are representations of characteristics that someone, self or other, believes the person should possess. A discrepancy between any two of these self-concepts can induce a state of discomfort; and different kinds of discrepancy produce different types of discomfort. For example, Higgins et al (1985, 1986) find that a discrepancy between actual and ideal selves is associated with depression, while a discrepancy between actual and ought selves is related to anxiety.

A third difference in self-representations is whether they refer to past, present, or future views of the self—what Schutz (1964) calls the tense of the self-conception and what Nuttin (1984) refers to as its temporal sign. Images

of the self in the past or future may be as significant as the here-and-now aspects of self (Markus & Nurius 1986, Nuttin & Lens 1986).

A final difference among self-representations is in their positivity or negativity. Most work focuses on positive self-conceptions, but there has been some focus on what Sullivan (1953) called the "bad me," or the individual's negative self-conceptions. The majority of this work attempts to understand the "I'm no good, I'm useless or worthless" thinking that seems to predominate in the selves of many depressed individuals. Beck (1967) has postulated that depressives carry with them a depressive self-schema that continually distorts self-relevant thoughts. A large variety of studies now demonstrate that depressed individuals do indeed think more negatively about themselves than about others, and that this negativity pervades all aspects of their information processing (Derry & Kuiper 1981, Kuiper & Derry 1981, Kuiper & MacDonald 1982, Ingram et al 1983, Kuiper & Higgins 1985, Pietromonaco 1985). Currently, investigators disagree as to whether this negativity is a function of a fixed schema that distorts thinking, or whether the thinking of depressives is a fairly accurate reflection and integration of their life experiences.

There has been little attention to negativity in the self-concepts of people who are not depressed. Rosenberg & Gara (1985), following Erikson (1950), talk about the importance of negative identities, but little empirical work focuses on peoples' negative self-views. Indeed, many self-concept theorists (e.g. Tesser & Campbell 1984) give the impression that individuals do virtually everything within their power to avoid forming negative self-conceptions; yet work by Wurf & Markus (1983) suggests that even nondepressed, high self-esteem individuals can have negative self-conceptions that may be elaborated into self-schemas. Thus they find, for example, individuals who describe themselves as shy, lazy, or fat; who feel bad about these characteristics; who feel these are important aspects of their self-definition; yet who maintain overall high self-esteem. They suggest that negative self-conceptions are critical in initiating the process of self-concept change. Moreover, Wurf (1986) hypothesizes that these negative self-schemas may function to help individuals cope with the negativity in their lives, ensuring that negative experiences do not swamp the entire self-concept.

In the work on self-representations, several important concerns remain untouched. First, there has been relatively little attention paid to the representation of affect in the self-concept, beyond the assumption that self-conceptions vary in their valence. Some (Guntrip 1971; Kernberg 1977) assume that each self-representation contains both an affective and a cognitive component. Greenwald & Pratkanis (1984) suggest that affect functions as a heuristic that guides how various self-relevant experiences are organized, assigning them either to a positive class or a negative class. Similarly, Fast

(1985) argues that affect plays a major role in determining the connections among our experiences; it defines the similarity of our actions and thus provides the basis of the initial organization of the self-concept. Still others (e.g. Salovey & Rodin 1985) view affect as a consequence of the set of self-conceptions that are currently active.

A second missing element is speculation about how representations of the self differ in form and function depending on when, how, and why they were formed. Some representations may be derived from straightforward perception and organization of one's own behavior. These representations may be directly accessible to conscious awareness; or, they may not be accessible because they are so well rehearsed they have become automatic. Self-representations can assume a variety of forms—neural, motor, and sensory as well as verbal. Nonverbal representations may be inaccessible to conscious awareness. Finally, some self-representations may be actively repressed and kept from consciousness because they are based in certain defenses or desires (Singer & Salovey 1985, Silverman & Weinberger 1985). Representations of the self that derive from wishes or needs may have a very different form and function than representations that derive from straightforward organization of one's behavior.

A third important issue has to do with the structure and organization of self-representations. What happens when two self-conceptions are incompatible? Higgins (1983; Higgins et al 1985, 1986) has attempted to relate different types of self-concept discrepancy to emotional disorders, and Linville (1982) suggests that a complex self-structure can protect the individual from emotional turmoil. Similarly, a variety of studies from a sociological perspective suggest that the more identities individuals have, the better their mental health (Kessler & McRae 1982, Coleman & Antonucci 1983). However, this may only be true if the identities can be successfully integrated with each other (Thoits 1983, Pietromonaco et al 1986). In general, the relationship between variation in the configuration of the self-structure and differential behavior is largely unexplored.

### *Sources of Self-Representations*

Self-representations differ in their origins. Some self-representations result from inferences that people make about their attitudes and dispositions while watching their own actions. People also make inferences from their internal physiological (arousal) reactions (Bandura 1977), and their cognitions, emotions, and motivations (Harter 1983, Anderson 1984, Anderson & Ross 1984). Anderson finds that people's thoughts and feelings have even greater weight in determining self-perceptions than do behaviors. In fact, when observers are given information about the actor's thoughts and feelings, they come to see the actor very much as that person views him- or herself; whereas

when they are given information about the actor's behaviors, they may see him or her quite differently (Anderson 1984).

Representations of the self also derive from direct attempts at self-assessment. Trope (1983, 1986) presents a formal model of self-assessment that describes the diagnosticity of a task, based on the person's uncertainty about his or her ability level and the probabilities of success and failure. In research drawing on this model, Trope and his associates find that people prefer to do tasks that are maximally diagnostic of their abilities, particularly when they are uncertain about those abilities (Trope 1983). People may differ in their willingness to seek out potentially threatening information about the self (Sorrentino & Short 1986). In certain situations they may be more willing to seek out or accept potentially threatening information—for example, during life transitions (Cantor et al 1985) or when making decisions with long-term consequences (Trope 1986).

People also learn about themselves from others, both through social comparisons and direct interactions. McGuire and his colleagues (McGuire 1984, McGuire & McGuire 1982) find that one of the most powerful determinants of currently available self-conceptions is the configuration of the immediate social environment. Individuals will focus on whatever aspects of themselves are most distinctive in a particular social setting; for example, short children will notice their height when in classroom of taller children. Social comparison can be a potent source of self-knowledge (Suls & Miller 1977, Schoeneman 1981). Children learn how to use social comparison to evaluate themselves and become progressively more skilled at doing this during their school years (Frey & Ruble 1985). People compare with superior others to evaluate themselves and with inferior others to make themselves feel good; the comparison others may be chosen to satisfy one or both motives (Brickman & Janoff-Bulman 1977, Gruder 1977, Taylor et al 1983). Finally, direct interaction with others also provides information about the self (see the section below on interpersonal processes). Symbolic interactionists in fact suggest that all self-knowledge derives from social interaction (Baldwin 1897, Cooley 1902, Mead 1934; for a historical review, see Scheibe 1985; for a review of symbolic interactionism, see Stryker 1980).

The growth of self-structures is determined by both the information the person receives about the self (through self-perception, social comparison, and reflected appraisals) and by the individual's ability to cognitively process self-conceptions. Harter's (1983) model of the development of self-conceptions posits a tendency for self-descriptions to become increasingly abstract, incorporating first behaviors (e.g. "good at doing sums"), then traits ("smart"), then single abstractions ("scientific"), then higher order abstractions ("intellectual"). Within each of the phases, there is an alternating sequence of first overgeneralizing self-conceptions and then differentiating

and reintegrating them (e.g. first the child thinks of herself as "all smart," and then later as "smart in English, but dumb in math"). Thus, conceptions of the self within different domains may be at different developmental stages.

### *The Working Self-Concept*

Among both psychologists and sociologists, an emphasis on the multiplicity or multidimensionality of the self-concept or identity has led to the realization that it is no longer feasible to refer to *the* self-concept. Instead it is necessary to refer to the working, on-line, or accessible self-concept (Schlenker 1985b, Cantor & Kihlstrom 1986, Markus & Nurius 1986, Rhodewalt 1986, Rhodewalt & Agustsdottir 1986). The idea is simply that not all self-representations or identities that are part of the complete self-concept will be accessible at any one time. The working self-concept, or the self-concept of the moment, is best viewed as a continually active, shifting array of accessible self-knowledge.

This approach to the self-concept is welcomed now for several reasons. First, it flows naturally out of an increasingly large volume of research indicating that individuals are heavily influenced in all aspects of judgment, memory, and overt behavior by their currently accessible pool of thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs (Nisbett & Ross 1980, Higgins & King 1981, Sherman et al 1981, Snyder 1982). Second, this view of the self-concept moves much closer to that implied by the symbolic interactionists (Mead 1934, Stryker 1980). There is not a fixed or static self, but only a current self-concept constructed from one's social experiences. Third, this formulation allows for a self-concept that can be at once both stable and malleable. Core aspects of self (one's self-schemas) may be relatively unresponsive to changes in one's social circumstances. Because of their importance in defining the self and their extensive elaboration, they may be chronically accessible (Higgins et al 1982). Many other self-conceptions in the individual's system, however, will vary in accessibility depending on the individual's motivational state or on the prevailing social conditions. The working self-concept thus consists of the core self-conceptions embedded in a context of more tentative self-conceptions that are tied to the prevailing circumstances.

Results that are taken to reveal the malleability of the self (Gergen 1965, 1968, Morse & Gergen 1970, Fazio et al 1981, Jones et al 1981, McGuire & McGuire 1982) can be explained by assuming that the contents of working self-concept have changed. That is, the circumstances surrounding the experimental manipulation make certain self-conceptions, and not others, accessible in thought and memory. For example, if after responding to questions about extroversion, subjects appear to view themselves as more extroverted than do subjects who have responded to questions about introversion (see Fazio et al 1981), it is because most individuals can be assumed to



have conceptions of themselves as both introverts and extroverts. The extrovert manipulation makes salient one's extrovert self-representations and the individual is likely to see the self at that moment as relatively more extroverted. Temporary change that occurs in the self-concept when one set of self-conceptions is activated and accessible in working memory rather than another is only one type of self-concept malleability. It is to be distinguished from change of a more enduring nature, the type that occurs when new self-conceptions are added to the set, when self-conceptions change in meaning, or when the relationship among self-components changes.

Self-concept and identity theorists appear to be converging on a notion of the self-concept as containing a *variety* of representations—representations that are not just verbal propositions or depictions of traits and demographic characteristics. Rather, representations of self may be cognitive and/or affective; they may be in verbal, image, neural, or sensorimotor form; they represent the self in the past and future as well as the here-and-now; and they are of the actual self and of the possible self. Some are organized into structures that contain both a well-elaborated knowledge base and production rules for how to behave when certain conditions are met. Other self-conceptions may be more tentative, constructed on the spot for a particular social interaction. At any one time, only some subset of these various representations is accessed and invoked to regulate or accompany the individual's behavior. The important remaining task is systematically to implicate these diverse representations of the self and the various organizations they can assume in the regulation of behavior; and conversely, to delineate how actions in turn influence these various self-representations.

## SELF-REGULATION

While some self theorists grapple with the content and structure of the self-concept, others focus on the problem of self-regulatory processes: how individuals control and direct their own actions. Research on self-structure and on self-regulation would appear to have direct relevance for each other, but they are pursued in two virtually nonoverlapping literatures. Self-regulation theorists are concerned with the very general problem of the individual's involvement in controlling his or her own behavior. By self-regulation, some theorists mean how the person, as opposed to the environment, controls behavior, but they do not focus specifically on representations of the self as regulators (e.g. Kanfer 1970). In this section, we review those approaches to self-regulation that at least implicitly involve the self-concept.

The self-concept, of course, is only one of numerous factors, including culture, the social environment, individual need or tension states, and non-self-relevant cognitions, that may directly influence behavior. Although be-

havior is not exclusively controlled by self representations, it has become increasingly apparent that the representations of what individuals think, feel, or believe about themselves are among the most powerful regulators of many important behaviors.

Several component processes are involved in the process of self-regulation. These include goal setting, cognitive preparation for action (e.g. planning, rehearsal, strategy selection), and a cybernetic cycle of behavior, which includes monitoring, judgment, and self-evaluation. Different theorists stress different components in their theories, and theorists who focus on the same components may disagree about the conditions under which these processes function most optimally. In the following section, we first review the recent literature on some of these processes, pointing out areas of contention; and then we turn to an examination of the role of self-structures in the self-regulation process.

### *Goal Setting*

Self-regulation theorists agree that self-controlled behavior is done in the service of some goal. However, they disagree about the determinants of the goals people set for themselves, and on how goals should be construed to be maximally effective. In general, three types of factors are seen as determining, either singly or jointly, goal selection. These three factors include expectations; affective factors such as needs, motives, or values; and desired self-conceptions derived from the individual's personal and social history.

Various sorts of expectations have been proposed as determinants of goal choice. These include expectations about the self's abilities and control over behavior (efficacy expectations) and expectations about what the outcomes will be if a certain behavior is performed. Bandura (1977, 1982, 1986) is the major proponent of the role of self-efficacy expectations in determining behavior. He has used the term both as a generalized perception of controllability over behavior and as a specialized perception of ability to execute a particular task. The actions that a person attempts, the effort expended at them, the persistence in the face of failure, and the thoughts and feelings experienced while engaging in behavior are presumed to be determined by these percepts of efficacy (see Bandura 1982, 1986 for summaries of research findings). For example, in studies with phobics, the behaviors (e.g. handling a snake) that the subject attempted during a test phase, and the anxiety experienced during execution, were shown to be a function of self-efficacy percepts (Bandura et al 1982).

Research on self-efficacy has demonstrated an impressive array of effects. Kirsch (1985) points out that both ability and willingness to perform an activity may independently contribute to the subject's expectancy for performance, and that these two factors cannot be untangled in some of Ban-

dura's operationalizations of self-efficacy expectations. In addition, both types of expectations are probably influenced by environmental contingencies and by generalized perceptions of control (e.g. Ajzen 1985). Expectations—whether for the self's ability or willingness to execute a particular behavior, or for the probability that the behavior will achieve the desired outcome, or for a generalized sense of controllability over one's actions and outcomes—clearly play an important role in determining what goals the person will select. People generally select goals that they have some expectations of being able to achieve (though they also often have fantasies about unachievable, or low probability, attainments). However, this selection of goals is also influenced by affective factors that determine which of the many possible behaviors the individual will prefer.

Three different affective components have been postulated to influence goal selection—needs, motives, and values. Needs are generally conceived of as internal, organic motivators of behavior (Murray 1938) that inspire interaction between person and environment (Nuttin 1984). Although needs are “required,” what satisfies them is not; instead, what satisfies needs is determined by the person's values, experiences, and self-conceptions. This conception of need is fairly similar to McClelland's (1951) concept of motive. The primary difference between the constructs is that needs are diffuse and innate, while motives are more specific and are learned. Thus Nuttin (1984) suggests that motives are “channelized needs.” A third affective determinant of which goals the person will select is values. Values, or incentives, are similar to motives in that they are fairly specific. McClelland (1985), however, suggests that values and motives are critically different: values are conscious and related to the behaviors people choose to do, while motives are unconscious and related to spontaneous behavior. Values are seen as directing the form that motivated behavior will take; for example, in a study by Constantian (1981), subjects who had a high motive for affiliation but who valued solitude were particularly likely to spend time writing letters. Thus, while motives are seen as more specific than needs, values are seen as more specific yet.

What is the relationship of needs, motives, and values to self-conceptions? This relationship is rarely discussed in the literature. However, it might be inferred that needs, motives, and values contribute to which self-conceptions are formed or activated in the working self-concept as a behavior is enacted. For example, a person high in need for achievement is likely to seek out challenging achievement situations; as the person engages in these behaviors, he or she is likely to develop a self-concept of being a high achiever. In turn, the activated self-conceptions may call up certain needs, motives, or values. Thus a person who has a “high achiever” self activated in the working self-concept may be particularly motivated to achieve. In this way (and jointly

with expectations) the affective factors of needs, motives, and values determine the particular goals for which an individual strives.

Finally, self-conceptions may also become an important source of motivation in themselves. The person may select goals that represent not just achievements, but enduring self-definitions. Thus the person who spends an entire day in the kitchen preparing dinner may be striving not just to cook a delicious meal, but also to demonstrate to self and others that he or she is a gourmet cook. A variety of theorists stress this motivational function of self-conceptions, particularly Wicklund & Gollwitzer (1982) and Markus & Nurius (1986). Similarly, several theories discuss the motivating function of more general life goals derived from the individual's past experience, way of seeing the world, and developmental pressures (e.g. see Cantor & Kihlstrom 1986 on life tasks, Schank & Abelson 1977 on life themes, Little 1983 on personal projects). In these theories, general life goals become personalized into desired self-conceptions that in turn motivate selection of particular goals and behavior (e.g. see Cantor et al 1986). Theories about desired self-conceptions and life goals are further reviewed in the section below on intrapersonal processes.

Although theories agree that goals are important in the regulation of behavior, they disagree on what is the optimal way for the person to construe the goal. Some researchers (e.g. Bandura & Schunk 1981) demonstrate that proximal goals produce the best performance and the most increase in intrinsic motivation. Others, however, find that more distal goals produce maximum results (e.g. Kirschenbaum et al 1981, 1982, De Volder & Lens 1982). Some researchers even question whether focusing on goals at all promotes self-regulation: Kuhl (1984) suggests that too much attention to the end goal can distract attention from acting to achieve it (see also Mischel 1981). One possible resolution to this controversy is that proximal goals may work best for refractory behaviors, while distal goals may work best for nonproblematic behaviors. In support of this interpretation, Manderlink & Harackiewicz (1984) find that distal goals are superior to proximal goals for inspiring performance on an intrinsically motivated task. Similarly, Hyams & Graham (1984) found that specific goals improved performance for subjects low in initiative, while high initiative subjects performed better with the global instruction to do their best.

### *Cognitive Preparation for Action*

The next step in the self-regulation process (and a step that does not always occur) is planning and strategy selection. The cognitive processes engaged in here draw on both the person's repertoire of procedural knowledge or strategies and on the person's metacognitive knowledge about what strategies will be useful in which situations or to meet which goals (Flavell 1979, 1981,

Mischel 1981, Sternberg 1984). Metacognitive knowledge can be used to plan effective behavior. For example, Mischel's work on delay of gratification (summarized in Mischel 1981) shows that children's ability to delay gratification depends on their metacognitive knowledge about which strategies are effective when. Similarly, Rosenbaum (1980) shows that ability to withstand pain in a cold pressor task depends not just on the person's available coping strategies, but on the ability to choose among them effectively. And Kuhl (1985) shows that "action-oriented" subjects use more effective self-regulatory strategies and hence are more likely to achieve their goals. Clinicians are beginning to develop techniques to teach clients metacognitive skills, which suggests that the key to successful behavior management is not just having the right strategies, but knowing when to use each (Meichenbaum & Asarnow 1979, Turk & Salovey 1985).

Besides being able to choose among strategies, the person must have an appropriate repertoire from which to choose. The repertoire of readily available strategies may be represented as some form of procedural knowledge—for example, production rules (Anderson 1982) or scripts (Schank & Abelson 1977) that may be automatically executed in the appropriate situation, and that may be linked to particular knowledge structures. Thus the restaurant script is linked to declarative knowledge about restaurants; similarly, a wall-flower script may be attached to a person's shy self-schema. Such links between declarative and procedural knowledge may be crucial for tying cognitive structures about the self to behavior. Links between self-schemas and scripts are likely to be well developed and automatically executed in the appropriate circumstances, which suggests that the self may be involved even in nonconscious self-regulation. When no script is available, or when the person is consciously trying to change his or her behavior, the person may construct novel plans using metacognitive knowledge to combine lower order strategies in the service of particular goals (Sternberg 1984).

### *Cybernetic Cycle: Behavior, Monitoring, Judgment, Self-Evaluation*

The next step in self-regulation is to attempt performance execution. Most self-regulation theorists talk about a cycle of self-regulation that typically includes monitoring behavior, making a judgment about how well the behavior is being executed, and evaluating or reinforcing the self. Both Bandura (1978) and Kanfer (1970) propose such three-stage cycles. During the self-monitoring phase, people attend to various aspects of their behavior, such as its quality or frequency. The observed behavior is then judged against a criterion derived from one's own standards or the standards of significant others. Finally, the person rewards (or punishes) the self via feelings of approval or disapproval and tangible rewards. Both Bandura and Kanfer see

these processes as consciously engaged in and essential for helping people change their own behavior.

Carver & Scheier (1981, 1982) have developed a control theory of self-regulation also based upon a cyclic feedback process. Carver & Scheier's model consists of the cycling of three basic stages: attending to the self, comparing the self to a standard, and attempting to reduce the discrepancy between the way one is behaving and the way one wants to behave. This model is elaborated into an interconnected hierarchy of control systems, each at a progressively higher level of abstraction. For example, at the very highest level of control, the person is concerned with fulfilling self-motives such as self-enrichment; at the next highest level, the person may be concerned with being a good student; at the next level, the person is concerned with studying for a test, and, five levels later, the person is engaged in the various muscle movements involved in writing up a set of notes. This theory differs from Bandura's and Kanfer's theories in three ways. First, the theory posits an interconnecting hierarchy of self-regulatory processes, rather than a single system. Second, the theory attempts to explain the regulation of all behavior, rather than just conscious attempts to behave in a certain manner. Thus Carver & Scheier use control theory to explain nonconscious and automatic processing, as well as conscious control of behavior. Finally, whereas Bandura and Kanfer posit some sort of self-reinforcement as critical for self-regulatory success, Carver & Scheier consider information rather than reward as the critical determinant of attempts at change.

### *The Involvement of the Self-Concept in Self-Regulation*

Self-regulation operates with varying degrees of efficiency. Sometimes the person attempts to regulate her behavior, and she is able to do so effectively: all phases of self-regulation flow naturally one after another. Other times, however, the person attempts to regulate her behavior, but cannot do so. She cannot decide between which of multiple salient goals to pursue; she ends up mulling over her goals, rather than acting to achieve them; she lacks the appropriate procedural knowledge and doesn't know what to do; or she tries but repeatedly fails. There are any number of ways in which the self-regulatory process can go wrong. The involvement of the self-concept has been suggested as a critical variable in how smoothly self-regulatory processes function. The nature and effects of this involvement, however, are unclear.

Some authors suggest that self-regulation will operate most efficiently when the person is self-focused. Carver & Scheier (1981) are the primary proponents of this position. Their theory claims that when a behavioral standard is salient and the person is focused on the self, attention to the self will lead to a comparison between the current state and the standard. The

discrepancy between where the person is and where he wants to be is presumed to motivate attempts at behavior (provided the person expects that he can reach the standard; if he expects not to be able to reach it, then he is predicted to withdraw, physically or mentally, from attempts at change). Carver & Scheier use a variety of manipulations (mirrors, audiences, cameras, or dispositional differences in self-consciousness) to demonstrate that self-focused individuals regulate themselves more effectively (i.e. more in line with standards) than do non-self-focused individuals (see Carver & Scheier 1981 for a summary of this research). Greenwald (1982, Breckler & Greenwald 1986) suggests that what is really being affected by self-awareness manipulations is the person's ego involvement; if the manipulation calls up one of the person's "ego tasks," then the person will be ego-involved and will regulate behavior more effectively.

In opposition to these formulations, other authors seem to imply that focusing on the self (implicating the self-concept) can interfere with the smooth operation of self-regulation. Kuhl (1985), for example, suggests that focusing on "states" (internal states or external goals), rather than on actions, impairs effective self-regulation. Similarly, Wicklund (1986) suggests that people who are dynamically oriented (attending to the environment), rather than statically oriented (attending to personal characteristics), will best regulate themselves. Further, the dynamically oriented person is focused on his or her relationship to the environment, and while behaving, experiences a loss of self (cf Csikszentmihalyi 1975). The role of the self in such theories is unclear, because there are circumstances under which these authors claim that self-involvement aids self-regulation. Kuhl (1984), for example, suggests that "the *full* repertoire of volitional strategies is provided only if the current intention is a self-related one" (p. 127). And Wicklund (1986) suggests that a focus on one's own standards for performance may aid dynamically oriented functioning.

Clearly, there is a need for further theorizing to reconcile these approaches. The existence of such disparate theories suggests that there are ways in which the self-concept can both facilitate and interfere with self-regulation. For example, all the theories seem to agree that a focus on discrepancies between where the self is and where it wants to be may effectively motivate behavior (provided the discrepancy is not too large). In contrast, a focus either solely on where the self is or on where it wants to be, without any attention to the discrepancy between the two, is unlikely to motivate behavior change. Consistent with this, research on "self-regulatory failure" (Tomarken & Kirschenbaum 1982) demonstrates that monitoring one's successes (on well-learned behaviors) leads to decreased performance, while monitoring one's failures (i.e. discrepancies) leads to increased performance. For new behaviors (which are characterized by a discrepancy between where one is and where one wants

to be), monitoring successes is either superior to or equal to monitoring failure in increasing performance.

A further reconciliation might involve distinguishing between the self as "me" and the self as "I." While theories of self-structure focus on the content of the self, on the "me," theories of self-regulation implicitly focus on dynamic, process-oriented aspects of self—the "I." The subjective experience of loss of self during peak experiences (Privette 1983) or effective self-regulation may reflect a lack of attention to the "me." This does not mean, however, that the self is not involved. The person may experience a subjective loss of self when performing behaviors that are "ego syntonic," that is, congruent with the ego ideal. Instead of expressing a loss of self, these behaviors may reflect the fullest involvement of self, experienced as a merging of the "I" with the behavior it enacts.

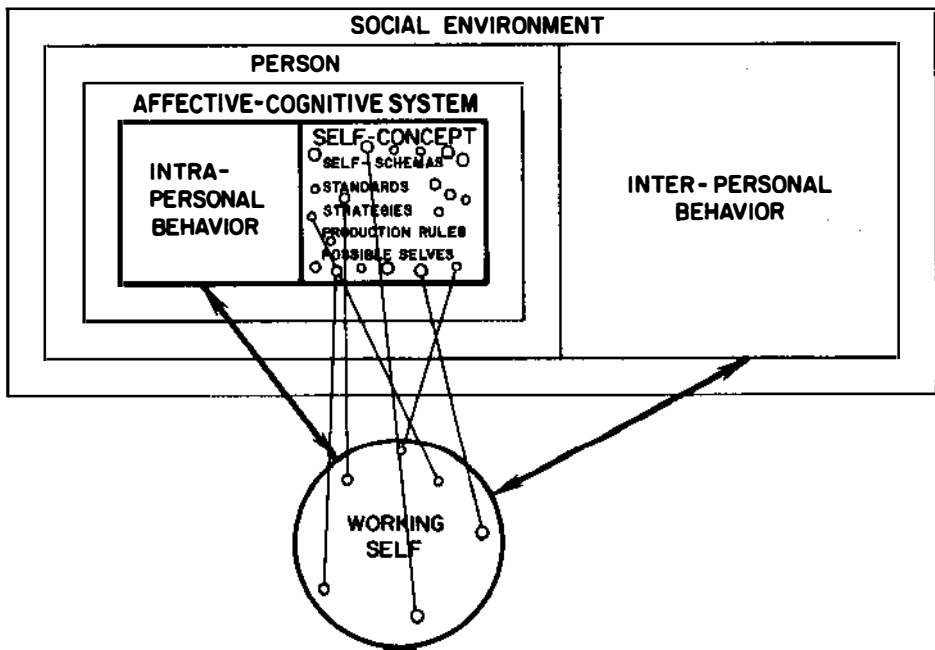
## THE DYNAMIC SELF-CONCEPT

In the developing model of the dynamic self-concept (see Figure 1), the self-concept is viewed as a collection of self-representations, and the working self-concept is that subset of representations which is accessible at a given moment. These representations vary in their structure and function and have been given a variety of labels. They are activated depending on the prevailing social circumstances and on the individual's motivational state. Some self-representations are more or less automatically activated as a result of salient situational stimuli. Many others, however, are willfully recruited or invoked in response to whatever motives the individual is striving to fulfill. The person may, as we discuss below, seek to develop or maintain a positive affective state about the self—a motive frequently referred to as self-enhancement. Alternatively, or simultaneously, the person may seek to maintain a sense of coherence and continuity, fulfilling a self-consistency motive. Yet another important motive is what Maslow (1954) referred to as self-actualization, the desire to improve or change the self, to develop, grow, and fulfill one's potential. These various self-motives, in conjunction with social circumstance, determine the contents of the working self-concept.

As shown in Figure 1, the affective-cognitive system is distinguished as one feature of the person, and the self-concept is defined as one aspect of this system. In turn, the working self-concept is the particular configuration of representations drawn from the self-concept that regulates the individual's on-going actions and reactions. Thus the individual's behavior is regulated according to whatever set of dynamic structures (self-schemas, possible selves, prototypes, scripts, ego-tasks, standards, strategies, or productions) are currently activated in the working self-concept.

The structures active in the working self-concept are the basis on which the individual initiates actions and also the basis for the observation, judgment,





### THE DYNAMIC SELF-CONCEPT

*Figure 1* The currently active set of dynamic self-structures comprises the working self-concept, which regulates both intrapersonal and interpersonal behavior.

and evaluation of these actions. The influence of the working self-concept in the shaping and controlling of behavior can be seen in two broad classes of behaviors: *intrapersonal processes*, which include self-relevant information processing, affect regulation, and motivational processes; and *interpersonal processes*, which include social perception, social comparison, and seeking out and shaping interaction with others. The outcomes of one's intrapersonal and interpersonal behavior determine the current motivational state and the salient social conditions for the next cycle of self-regulation. In the remainder of the chapter we review the nature of the self-concept's influence on intrapersonal and interpersonal processes.

### INTRAPERSONAL PROCESSES MEDIATED BY THE SELF-CONCEPT

In defending the importance of the self-system, early self theorists devoted a significant amount of their theorizing to identifying the crucial functions that the self performed (Allport 1955, Erikson 1950). Several major functions

were specified. These included providing the individual with a sense of continuity in time and space, providing an integrating and organizing function for the individual's self-relevant experiences, regulating the individual's affective state, and providing a source of incentive or motivation for the individual.

The first general function, providing a sense of continuity, has received little empirical attention and has been accepted largely as a matter of faith. Recently, however, some theorists have focused specifically on the related question of how individuals weave together various self-conceptions. Most people appear to construct a current autobiography or narrative (Bruner 1986; Dennett 1982; Gergen & Gergen 1983)—a story that makes the most coherent or harmonious integration of one's various experiences. This narrative is a superstructure to which individuals attach their current set of life experiences. This personal narrative is a particularly intriguing type of self-representation because it is very often revised. The flexibility and malleability of self-structure organization is further supported by research suggesting that individuals often rewrite their personal histories to support a current self-view (Ross & Conway 1986, Greenwald 1980).

The other intrapersonal functions of the self have been the source of a burgeoning experimental literature. As the cognitive approach and the information processing model took root in all areas of psychology, it became evident that some empirical underpinnings could be given to the phenomenal or cognitive theories of Rogers (1951), Kelly (1955), Combs & Snygg (1959), and Allport (1955). Long-standing assumptions about the selecting, filtering, or distorting functions of the self-concept could now be assessed using the methods and models provided by cognitive psychology. With the self-concept operationalized as a set of cognitive structures, it became obvious that the self-concept can influence every aspect of the processing of self-relevant information. Individuals appear to be differentially sensitive to stimuli that are self-relevant and to privilege the processing of these stimuli. Such selective processing seems to occur even outside of the subject's awareness.

### *Information Processing*

Research on the information processing consequences of the self-structure continues to grow, and some of the relationships between the self and various cognitive functions are much better documented than others. Extensive reviews of this research can be found in Kihlstrom & Cantor (1984), Greenwald & Pratkanis (1984), Greenwald (1980), Markus & Sentis (1982), Singer & Salovey (1985). Summarized briefly, these consequences include:

1. Individuals show a heightened sensitivity to self-relevant stimuli. Bargh (1982) for example, noted that self-relevant adjectives (trait terms that were very descriptive of the individual) interfered with performance when they

were presented in the unattended ear during a dichotic listening task. Performance was impaired during the presentation of the self-relevant words, yet following the task subjects reported no awareness of the words being presented. More recently, J. M. Nuttin Jr. (1985) has described the name-letter effect, or the tendency to prefer the letters of one's own name. Subjects were presented with a pair of letters, each pair containing a letter from either their first or last name. Asked to choose as quickly as they could which letter they preferred, subjects reliably chose the letter from their own name. Subjects given a chance to study the letter pairs carefully had no awareness that their name was embedded among the pairs of letters.

2. Self-congruent stimuli are efficiently processed. Numerous studies have found that stimulus materials that are highly self-descriptive are processed quickly and confidently (e.g. Markus 1977, Kuiper & Rogers 1979, Mueller 1982). Druian & Catrambone (1986) found that individuals scoring high on the Machiavellianism scale were significantly faster in reading a story congruent with high Machiavellianism than when reading a story congruent with low Machiavellianism. Parallel results were obtained for subjects scoring low on Machiavellianism. Other aspects of efficient processing include more accurate discrimination in self-relevant domains. Thus, Hamill (1980) found higher hit rates in a recognition task for faces that had been judged for independence by those subjects for whom independence was self-descriptive than for subjects for whom it was not.

3. Self-relevant stimuli show enhanced recall and recognition. This effect has been extremely well demonstrated; memory for all aspects of one's behavior is enhanced relative to memory about others or to nonsocial information (Wallen 1942, Cartwright 1956, Jarvella & Collars 1974, Bower & Gilligan 1979, Hull & Levy 1979, Keenan & Baillet 1979, Kuiper & Rogers 1979, Ross & Sicolty 1979, Greenwald 1980, Markus 1980, Brenner 1983, Mills 1983, Mueller et al 1984, Nasby 1985, Strube et al 1986).

4. Individuals make confident behavioral predictions, attributions, and inferences in self-relevant domains (e.g. Markus et al 1982, Anderson 1984, Anderson & Ross 1984).

5. Individuals are resistant to information that is incongruent with the self-structure. They often appear to reject those accounts of their behavior that differ from their own accounts (e.g. Markus 1977, Swann & Read 1981a,b, Swann & Hill 1982, Tesser & Campbell 1983). In addition, they are likely to make situational attributions for any behavior they enact that is inconsistent with their self-view (Kulik et al 1986).

### *Affect Regulation*

One of the most important intrapersonal functions that the self-concept serves is the regulation of affect. Most affective states implicate the self. Giving special attention to the processing of self-relevant information is one method

of regulating affect; but individuals engage in a variety of behaviors that have this effect. The regulation of affect typically involves defending one's self against negative emotional states. This is accomplished by maintaining consistency with one's previous views of self (most of which are usually positive), and by enhancing and promoting the self whenever possible.

When individuals receive information that challenges a prevailing conception of the self (e.g. being told that they are not as dominant as they thought, or that they are not academically competent), the structure of the self-concept is threatened and thus their affective state is disturbed. The most obvious choice of action in this situation is to reaffirm the self—to recruit into the working self-concept conceptions of the self that verify the prevailing conception (e.g. Markus & Kunda 1986), or to interact with others who provide support for one's prevailing view of self (Swann & Hill 1982, Swann 1985). In this way, maintaining the stability of the self is one way to regulate affect. It appears that the impressive stability accorded the self (Markus 1977, Greenwald 1980, Mortimer & Lorence 1981, Swann & Read 1981a,b, Swann & Hill 1982, Swann 1983) and the perseverance of certain beliefs about self (Ross et al 1975, Lepper et al 1986) may not be achieved by a flat-out denial of inconsistent information, but rather by an elaborate process in which the individual evaluates the information and then attempts to integrate the self-conceptions offered by the environment with existing ones (e.g. through the process of self-confirmatory attribution, Kulik et al 1986). In many cases this will involve a great deal of work that may not be revealed by global self-descriptive measures. The stability of the self that is implied by such measures may belie significant malleability or fluidity that occurs as individuals respond to information that challenges their view of themselves.

It has been popular to contrast the self-consistency and self-enhancement motives (for reviews, see Moreland & Sweeney 1984, Shrauger 1975). These studies have focused on how people with negative self-conceptions or low self-esteem react to positive (and hence inconsistent) feedback. The results of numerous studies have been equivocal, and various interpretations of the apparent conflict have been offered (Swann 1983, Schlenker 1985b, Raynor & McFarlin 1986, Trope 1986). Currently, most researchers view the two motives as quite interdependent (Epstein 1973, Rosenberg 1979, Greenwald 1980, Trope 1986). If we assume that affect is the primary basis for determining which self-representations are organized together in the self-concept (Greenwald & Pratkanis 1984, Fast 1985), then maintaining the structure of the self is essential for a positive affective state and, conversely, maintaining this affective state is essential for maintaining the structure of the self.

In the absence of a direct challenge or threat to the self, people are generally self-enhancing; that is, they prefer and seek out positive information about themselves. People may structure their activities to enhance the

probability that they will receive positive feedback; and, when the feedback is negative, they will selectively interpret information in such a way as to minimize the threat to their positive self-conceptions. Reviews of self-enhancement research can be found in Greenwald (1980), C. R. Snyder et al (1983), and Taylor & Brown (1986).

Tesser's self-evaluation maintenance theory (1986; Tesser & Campbell 1983) suggests that people vary their self-definitions so that an individual claims as most personally relevant those activities he or she is best at. However, he qualifies this statement by suggesting that it is *relative* performance in comparison to similar others, rather than absolute level of performance, that is critical. Tesser posits that people can maintain positive self-evaluations in one of two ways: by being better than similar others on personally relevant dimensions, or by "basking in the reflected glory" (cf Cialdini et al 1976) of a superior other on irrelevant dimensions. Data from a variety of studies by Tesser and his colleagues (Tesser & Campbell 1980, 1982, Tesser & Smith 1980, Tesser & Paulus 1983, Tesser et al 1984) support the idea that people will vary personal relevance and activity choice or the perceived closeness of interaction partners in a manner that enhances their self-evaluations, particularly relative to others.

Similarly, a variety of other work suggests that people can maintain or enhance their self-evaluations through selective social comparisons. Lewicki (1983), for example, demonstrates that people choose to judge others on dimensions that are personally relevant; this enhances the probability that the self will be seen as superior to the other (see also Taylor et al 1983). Work on downward social comparisons (Wills 1981, Wood et al 1985) demonstrates that such selective comparisons are frequently used to enhance self-evaluations and subjective well-being, particularly under conditions of threat to the self. Such downward comparisons are not only sought, but are achieved through biases in perception of others [e.g. false consensus effects (Sherman et al 1984, Campbell 1986) or attributive projection (Sherwood 1981)], and through the active construction of standards in comparison to which the person fares well (Taylor et al 1983). For example, Campbell (1986) finds that people underestimate consensus for domains in which they have high abilities, which lets them see themselves as even better relative to others. People also overestimate consensus for their opinions and for domains in which they lack ability, helping them see the self positively in these domains.

Yet another way in which people are self-enhancing is in their selective interpretation of events. For example, research on biases in memory shows that people selectively remember their successes and revise their memories to support positive self-conceptions (for reviews of this literature, see Greenwald 1980 or Ross & Conway 1986). The existence of self-serving biases in attributions is well-documented (e.g. Miller & Ross 1975, Bradley 1978), and

evidence is mounting that these attributions may, at least at times, be motivated (Snyder et al 1978, Zuckerman 1979). Similarly, C. R. Snyder and his colleagues (1983, Snyder 1985) review literature on excuse-making, documenting a variety of ways actors can avoid the implications of their negative performances. Another strategy for handling challenges to the self in one domain is to bolster the self in another domain ("I may not be smart, but I sure am nice"). This process has been termed compensatory self-inflation by Greenberg & Pyszczynski (1985) and self-affirmation by Steele & Liu (1983). It may be one of the most efficient methods of handling a short-term challenge to the self. Finally, people may regulate negative affect by reducing their self-awareness; for example, Hull (1981, Hull et al 1983, Hull & Young 1983) demonstrates that people may drink following negative experiences because alcohol decreases self-awareness and the associated negative affective state.

People are positively biased not only about their pasts, but also about their futures. Taylor & Brown (1986) review literature showing that people maintain illusory perception of control (e.g. Langer 1975) and are unrealistically optimistic about their futures (e.g. Weinstein 1980). Similarly, Kunda (1985) demonstrates self-serving biases in inferential processes which may mediate this unrealistic optimism. Optimism about the future is related to defensiveness about the past: Norem & Cantor (1986) show that optimists had high expectations and perceptions of control before a performance; and, if they failed, they used self-serving attributions to cope with this.

People may even be self-denigrating in the service of self-enhancement. Avoiding self-esteem loss or threats to more valued self-perceptions may lead people to engage in self-handicapping (Berglas & Jones 1978; Jones & Berglas 1978), engaging in self-defeating actions prior to a performance to provide a ready-made excuse for failure. Shyness (Snyder et al 1985), test anxiety (Smith et al 1982), drinking and drug use (Berglas & Jones 1978, Jones & Berglas 1978), and hypochondriasis (Smith et al 1983) have all been shown to have this ultimately self-protecting function.

A controversial issue is how aware people are of various attempts to regulate affect. Generally, people are not presumed to be aware of engaging in self-enhancement, although in some conditions they can be (e.g. Snyder et al 1983, Taylor & Brown 1986, Tesser 1986). However, researchers differ on how motivated this lack of awareness is presumed to be. Some believe that self-enhancement strategies can be motivated self-deceptions (Sackheim & Gur 1978, Gur & Sackheim 1979, Lazarus 1983, Snyder et al 1983, Taylor & Brown 1986). In contrast, others (e.g. Greenwald 1984) suggest that the basis for lack of awareness is in the structure of the cognitive system, with its capacity for automatic processing, and that defensive motivation is not necessary to explain this lack of awareness.

### *Motivation*

A third important function performed by the self is that of motivating individuals, of moving them to action. In the section on self-regulation we discussed how goals are generally assumed to control behavior. In this section we are concerned with the interface between the individual's goals and the self-concept. The question here is how goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats are represented in the self-concept.

Nuttin (1984) has noted the need to understand how abstract, nebulous, sometimes unconscious motives are transformed into very personal and concrete intentions and plans. Several theorists have begun to personalize motivation and have framed the question of motivation directly in terms of self-conceptions. These approaches include Markus & Nurius's (1986) conception of possible selves, Wicklund & Gollwitzer's (1982) symbolic self-completion theory, and Schlenker's (1985b) discussion of desired self-images. Markus & Nurius (1986) define possible selves as self-conceptions of the person's perceived potential (either feared or desired), and suggest that they function to individualize global motives and thus can be viewed as the cognitive component of motivation. Possible selves are images of the person having actually achieved a goal; as such, they are both specific and personalized, qualities which may enable them to regulate behavior. Possible selves have been shown to relate systematically to a person's current self-conceptions, especially in domains for which the person has a self-schema (Wurf & Markus 1986a), to mediate feelings about the current self (Markus & Nurius 1986), to regulate effort and task persistence (Ruvolo & Markus 1986), and to be related to coping outcomes (Porter et al 1984).

Schlenker (1985b) also discusses motivation in terms of achieving particular self-conceptions, or desired selves. Desired selves are "what the person would *like to be* and thinks he or she *really can be*" (p. 74). Thus desired selves concentrate on positive and realistic possibility, and are a particularly important subset of the person's possible selves. Schlenker hypothesizes that the desired selves brought to mind at a given time are determined both by situational constraints and by the anticipated audience for the behavior (which can include the self). These available desired selves are presumed to mediate behavior by acting as the cognitive structures that process information in the setting, and by acting as relevant standards for behavior.

Wicklund & Gollwitzer (1982) provide yet another approach to the relationship of self-conceptions to motivation and behavior. These authors stress the importance of commitment to self-definitions. According to their theory, people who are committed to a self-definition strive to achieve "completeness"; that is, they are concerned with establishing that the self-definition in question is an enduring and unquestioned aspect of self. People who are "incomplete" (have not yet achieved, or are interrupted in the process

of displaying or enacting relevant behaviors) with regard to a particular committed self-definition feel a psychological tension that causes them to seek alternative *symbolic* routes to achieving the self-definition. These symbolic routes substitute for the achievement of the self-definition by establishing the person as having actually achieved the definition in the eyes of others. Experiments on symbolic self-completion (summarized in Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1982) show that subjects who were committed to a self-definition but who were incomplete in achieving it, described themselves more in terms of the self-definition, were more likely to attempt to influence or proselytize people to endorse the relevant opinion or activity, were unwilling to admit to mistakes made in the activity, and were more likely to display visible symbols (e.g. wearing crucifixes for a religious self-definition), compared to complete or noncommitted subjects. Thus, people committed to an as-yet-unachieved self-relevant goal use multiple paths, symbolic as well as direct, and expend great effort to achieve desired self-definitions.

Recent approaches to motivation developed by personality and clinical psychologists (see Sorrentino & Higgins 1986) also concentrate on the personalization of motivation, discussing how the person's individuality gets played out as they approach their life tasks (Cantor & Kihlstrom 1986), personal projects (Little 1983), current concerns (Klinger 1975), or psychological career (Raynor & McFarlin 1986). While only some of these theories explicitly discuss the relationship to self-conceptions, for all of them the links could be drawn.

Cantor & Kihlstrom (1986) are the most explicit in tying their motivational framework to self-conceptions. These authors posit the notion of "life tasks," or the problems that an individual sees the self as working on at a particular time of life. Life tasks are thus fairly broad units that integrate and give meaning to a wide variety of activities that the individual may undertake. The individual's idiosyncratic construal of a life task is presumed to be importantly determined by his or her self-knowledge. Furthermore, how the task is framed determines what strategies the person will use for dealing with it. Thus, Cantor & Kihlstrom attempt, through the life task conception, to tie self-knowledge to self-regulation. Research on life tasks is beginning to demonstrate these links. For example, Cantor et al (1985) looked at how college freshmen dealt with life tasks such as making friends, establishing an identity, and getting good grades. Subjects were asked to rate each life task on dimensions such as difficulty and enjoyment and to specify plans for dealing with hypothetical problems within each task category. Individuals judged life tasks quite differently, presumably based on their available self-knowledge. These differences in judgments had important implications for self-regulation. Life tasks perceived as more difficult also had more well-elaborated plans; furthermore, the elaboration of these plans was associated with outcomes such as grade point average and perceived stress.



## INTERPERSONAL PROCESSES MEDIATED BY THE SELF-CONCEPT

As the person strives to carry out such personally motivated behavior, he or she is inevitably swept up in social interaction. Other people often serve as the means for achieving one's goals, requiring the person to have skills for successful negotiation. Further, these interactions—a cup of coffee with a friend or an intimate moment with a lover—are very often ends in themselves. Because of these dependencies on others, people both shape and are shaped by their social interactions. The self-concept provides a framework that guides the interpretation of one's social experiences but that also regulates one's participation in these experiences. A great deal of social behavior, sometimes quite consciously and sometimes unwittingly, is in the service of various self-concept requirements. The relevant research questions include how the self-concept influences social perception, how the self-concept guides the selection of situations and interaction partners, what strategies the individual uses to shape and interpret interactions with others, and how the person reacts to feedback from others that is incongruent with the self-concept.

### *Social Perception*

Researchers interested in self-structures have extended their investigations from studying how these structures influence processing information about the self to how these structures influence the processing of information about other people (see Markus & Smith 1981, Markus et al 1985, for reviews). Studies generally find that people tend to judge others on dimensions that are personally important to themselves (Fong & Markus 1982, Lewicki 1983, 1984). Further, when making judgments about others on dimensions that are not only self-relevant, but for which the person also has a well-elaborated self-schema, people encode the information in larger chunks (Markus et al 1985), process it more deeply (Kuiper & Rogers 1979, Hamill 1980, Kuiper 1981), draw a greater number of and more extreme inferences and are more confident about these (Fong & Markus 1982, Markus et al 1985), and are more responsive to processing goals (Markus et al 1985) than are people who lack a self-schema in the domain. The use of the self as a reference point depends on whether the person is primarily focused on the self or on the other, and on relative amount of information about each (Smith 1982, Holyoak & Gordon 1983, Srull & Gaelick 1983, Markus et al 1985): people are more likely to use the self as a basis for judging others when they are focused more on the self than on the other, and when they have much information about the self, but little about the other.

Although most research on how the self influences social perception finds that people are inclined to see others as similar to the self, there are conditions

under which the person will see the self as being very different: when the characteristic of concern is a trait rather than an opinion (Marks 1984); when the person has a committed self-definition (Wurf & Markus 1986b); when the person has a high need for uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin 1980, Kernis 1984); when, because only a moderate level of similarity is preferred, the similarity of others is too high (Snyder & Fromkin 1980, Markus & Kunda 1986); or when the person is motivated to make the self feel better about a negative self-conception by seeing others as being in a worse condition (Wills 1981, Taylor et al 1983, Wood et al 1985). Both cognitive and motivational factors thus seem important in determining the effects of the self on social perception (see Holmes 1978, Sherwood 1981, Sherman et al 1983, 1984, Lewicki 1984).

### *Situation and Partner Choice*

People have knowledge of situations (Cantor et al 1981) as well as of themselves. Both types of knowledge, as well as individual goals, importantly determine that person's situational choices. For example, Snyder (1979) suggests that low self-monitors, who are concerned with being consistent with themselves, have well-elaborated conceptions of themselves in different situations, while high self-monitors, who care about being consistent with the situation, have well-elaborated conceptions of prototypical persons in situations. Accordingly, Snyder & Gangestad (1982) find that low self-monitors preferred situations that let them express their own dispositions, while high self-monitors preferred well-structured situations. Similarly, Lord (1982) demonstrates that similarities in people's conceptions of situations predict whether their behavior will be consistent between different situations. A field study on college students' housing choices (Niedenthal et al 1985) demonstrates that self-knowledge can influence choice in actual, important situations: students, particularly those who were low self-monitors or who saw their housing choice as reflecting personal rather than financial concerns, used a self-to-prototype matching strategy to guide them in their decisions.

Self-conceptions and goals also determine choice of and behavior in personal relationships. Cantor et al (1984) find that people's choice of interaction partners is determined both by the appropriateness of the partner for the activity and by how comfortable the person feels in various situations: people who differentiated more between the comfort of different situations were also more exacting in their partner choice. Similarly, Snyder et al (1983) find that people's choice of partner for casual activities was determined by personal dispositions for low self-monitors and by perceived appropriateness of partner for high self-monitors. High and low self-monitors differ similarly in attention to pragmatic versus personal goals in their intimate relationships (Snyder & Simpson 1984). The interrelationship of self-conceptions may be a critical

factor in relationship satisfaction. For example, Swann (1985) suggests that relationship satisfaction depends on partners' confirming each other's self-conceptions; similarly, Schlenker (1984) suggests that satisfaction depends on the partners validating each other's desired self.

### *Interaction Strategies*

The self functions not only to perceive and set the stage for interactions, but also to direct them once the scene is in motion. Much of the work done on the role of the self in social interaction has been done by researchers studying self-presentation, or impression management. The focus of these theories is on how a person tries to shape a particular identity in the mind of his or her audience during an interaction, using a variety of strategies and tactics to fulfill one or more of several possible motives.

An identity is an image of the self that one tries to convey to others; it exists both as a cognitive structure in the mind of the person trying to convey it (see the section on self-structure) and as an entity out in the world. Conceived of as an entity in the world, the situated identity (Alexander & Wiley 1981) is a "joint construction" of the person, the audience, and the situation (Schlenker 1985b) that functions for both the individual and the interaction. Identities are presented to an audience. While early developments in the impression management literature (e.g. Goffman 1959) focused on presentation to external audiences, the recent literature focuses on self-presentation to an internal audience as well (e.g. Baumeister 1982, Tetlock 1985). In fact, two different types of internal audiences have been posited: the self and an internalized reference group (Baldwin 1984, Greenwald & Breckler 1985, Schlenker 1985b).

Different audiences inspire different goals or motives in social interaction. A focus on an external audience may whet the desire for approval and attention (Cheek & Hogan 1983, Hogan 1982) or for social power and influence (Jones & Pittman 1982, Tedeschi & Norman 1985). A focus on an internal audience may lead the person to desire predictability and consistency (Cheek & Hogan 1983, Swann 1985) or to seek signs that one is achieving a desired or ideal self (Baumeister 1982, Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1982, Schlenker 1985b). In turn, the responsiveness of an external audience to the actor's goal has a significant impact on the quality of the relationship (Swann & Giuliano 1982, Schlenker 1984, Swann 1985); and the satisfaction of the internal audience has important consequences for global self-esteem (Greenwald & Breckler 1985) and more specific affects (Higgins et al 1985, 1986).

Depending on the goal and on the audience, the person will try to construct a different identity, using one or more impression management techniques (see Jones & Pittman 1982 or Tedeschi & Norman 1985 for taxonomies of strategies). The use of impression management techniques is seen by most

theorists as being potentially either conscious or unconscious (Cheek & Hogan 1983, Paulhus 1984, Schlenker 1985b, Tetlock & Manstead 1985). The effective use of conscious impression management may rely on the person's level of self-awareness (Cheek & Hogan 1983, Buss & Briggs 1984, Schlenker 1985b), while unconscious impression management is usually conceived of as an automatized process. Discussions about the effective management of self-presentation have begun to lead to links with the literature on self-regulation (e.g. Swann 1983, Schlenker 1985b, Tedeschi & Norman 1985).

### *Reactions to Feedback*

A person acting in a situation attends to both the reactions of others and to his or her own behaviors (Darley & Fazio 1980). Both self-perceptions and others' reactions thus constitute feedback to the self-system. This feedback may be either congruent or incongruent with current or with desired self-images. The congruence, affective valence, and personal importance of this feedback, and the goals and interrelationship of the actors (Swann 1984) determine the person's cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions.

People may bias their chances of receiving congruent feedback by the way they seek information in an interaction. The literature on hypothesis testing in social interactions suggests that people may be biased to seek, and hence to receive, confirmatory feedback (Snyder & Swann 1978a,b, Shrauger & Schoeneman 1979, Nisbett & Ross 1980, Snyder & Gangestad 1981, Darley & Gross 1983; see also Semin & Strack 1980, Trope & Bassok 1982, Fiske & Taylor 1984, Swann 1984, Trope et al 1984 for discussions on limitations to this effect). People seek confirmation about themselves as well as about other people (Snyder & Skrypnik 1981, Swann & Read 1981a,b). Feedback that is congruent with one's self-conceptions is self-affirming and can have positive affective consequences (Schlenker 1985b, Swann 1985).

When a person receives feedback that is incongruent with self-conceptions, he or she may (a) cognitively reconcile the discrepancy (b) act against it, or (c) act in accordance with it. If the person acts in accordance with incongruent feedback, this may or may not lead to the person's accepting the new identity (see Snyder & Swann 1978b, Fazio et al 1981 for two examples of people internalizing others' perceptions; see Swann 1984 for a more general discussion of when this will occur).

The cognitive strategies people use to cope with disconfirming feedback include selective attention, selective memory, and selective interpretation (Swann 1983). These strategies enable the person to reinterpret the disconfirming feedback to see it as irrelevant or as not disconfirming. Although little research has directly addressed the cognitive strategies used in response to self-disconfirming feedback (see Swann 1983, Miller & Turnbull 1986 for

reviews), research on biases in social memory and social inference suggests that a variety of biases support confirming over disconfirming information (see Fiske & Taylor 1984 for a review).

Behavioral reactions to self-disconfirming information are discussed in the literature on self-fulfilling prophecies, or interpersonal expectancy effects (for general reviews, see Darley & Fazio 1980, Jussim 1986, Miller & Turnbull 1986, Rosenthal & Rubin 1978). Researchers initially focused on how people behaved to confirm others' perceptions of them; more recently, researchers have turned to exploring the limits of the effect. Whether a person acts to dispel or to confirm another's expectations depends on whether the expectancy is positive or negative (Miller & Turnbull 1986) and on how big the discrepancy is (Fiske & Taylor 1984). In addition, reactions to feedback depend on whether the person is aware of the other's expectation (Hilton & Darley 1985) and whether the person believes that others will learn of it (Baumeister & Jones 1978). Finally, the person's reaction depends on dispositional factors such as (a) whether the disconfirmed self-view is one that the person is highly certain of (Swann & Ely 1984), has a self-schema for (Markus 1977, Wurf & Markus 1983, Jussim 1986), or considers highly important (Fiske & Taylor 1984); (b) situational factors such as the status equality with the other (Jussim 1986); (c) the perceived costs and rewards of reacting (Miller & Turnbull 1986); and (d) the opportunities for doing so (Miller & Turnbull 1986; see also Darley et al 1986).

Recent research and theorizing promises further progress in research on the role of the self-concept in interpersonal interaction. Advances include, first, the suggestion that the nature of the relationship may critically influence the strategies the self will use in social interaction (Jussim 1986; Tedeschi & Norman 1985); and second, the demonstration that the person's interaction goals influence his or her behavior toward others (Darley et al 1986). A third advance in the literature is the attention to reactions of "targets" as well as of perceivers (Hilton & Darley 1985; Swann & Ely 1984). Fourth, several theorists suggest that in order to study self-presentation effectively, the process will have to be studied over time. While there is theorizing about how the self acts in interaction over time (e.g. Darley & Fazio 1980), little research actually undertakes such a process analysis. A fifth promising direction is the examination of how self-conceptions, desired or possible as well as actual, impact on and are affected by the process (e.g. see Wicklund & Gollwitzer 1982, Schlenker 1985b).

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have reviewed the recent research in social psychology that emphasizes the dynamic nature of the self-concept. The view of the self-

concept as an active, interpretive structure that is continually involved in the regulation of on-going behavior is also receiving attention in clinical psychology (e.g. Goldfried & Robins 1982, 1983; Horowitz 1979), sociology (e.g. Gecas 1982), and anthropology (Shweder & LeVine 1984). The self-concept emerges in all of this work as a critical component of the individual's affective and cognitive system. When stimuli, experiences, or events cross the threshold of self-concept such that they achieve self-relevant meaning, they become special. Yet exactly how the self-concept functions in relation to various affective and cognitive processes, and how it can be differentiated from them, remains to be explored.

With respect to the content and structure of the self-concept, we can ask many more questions about the nature of self-representations, about the principles that guide their organization, and about how this organization can be threatened or disrupted. The work reviewed here has yet to confront the perennially thorny issue of what it is that is represented in self-representations (see Shevrin 1986) or, who is this "I" that is asking what is this "me"? The question of individual differences in the structure and organization of the self-concept has barely been broached. How do self-concepts differ in elaboration, integration, and differentiation, and how is this related to the significant experiences of one's social and developmental history? Do individuals differ in which types of self-representations predominate in their self-concepts? What do self-concepts in crisis or conflict look like? These types of questions, of course, lead to the speculation that self-concepts differing in their form may also differ in how they function. Are some self-concepts more centrally involved in regulating behavior than others? Is the self-concept of the individual who is generally less self-reflective and self-focused perhaps less elaborated and hence less likely to mediate on-going behavior?

A significant gap in our understanding concerns when and how self-representations will control behavior. What distinguishes those instances in which one sits in a chair in front of the television and thinks "I shouldn't be eating this ice cream" and "I should be writing my paper" from those instances where one resists the ice cream, doesn't turn on the television, and continues working? Certainly the role of a variety of self-conceptions, standards, behavioral rules, and strategies are critical here, but when and how do they impel behavior? Toward this end, the research on general self-regulatory processes (reviewed above) should be integrated with those studies focusing specifically on how the self regulates intrapersonal behavior. In particular, the place of affect regulation in the behavioral regulation cycle should be drawn out.

The role of the self in interpersonal interaction has been explored in a variety of creative studies. Most of these studies examine how the self guides

behavior in interaction; relatively few examine how these interpersonal events in turn have an effect on the structures and organization of self-conceptions. The self guides self-presentation, but what is the impact of making these presentations on the self? When will the person treat self-presentations as unrepresentative acts, and when will the person take these actions to heart and incorporate them into the self-concept? How does the presentation of the self in one situation influence how the person acts in other situations or with other people? Are particular others important in providing feedback to the self, or will any audience do? How are these audiences represented with respect to the self-concept? Such questions remain to be explored and may have important implications for the study of topics such as social support (e.g. Swann & Predmore 1985).

The research summarized here has focused primarily on how the self-concept may guide and control behavior. The reciprocal relation is assumed, but it is much less often addressed. How is the self-concept adjusted and calibrated as a consequence of one's actions? What happens to the self-concept of the individual who keeps changing what is personally relevant to maintain self-esteem? And finally, what is the relationship between momentary variations in which self-conceptions are active and more long-term, enduring changes in the self-concept? It should be possible to develop a model of the self-concept that reveals its relatively continuous and stable nature but at the same time reflects the fact that the self-concept is dynamic and capable of change, as it reflects and mediates the actions of individuals who are negotiating a variety of social circumstances.

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