2013

Interpersonal Communication: Building Connections Together

Teri Kwal Gamble
The College of New Rochelle, tgamble@cnr.edu

Michael W. Gamble
New York Institute of Technology

Recommended Citation
Gamble, T. K. & Gamble, M. *Interpersonal Communication: Building Connections Together*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2013.

INTERPERSONAL
COMMUNICATION

············ Building Connections Together ············

TERI KWAL GAMBLE & MICHAEL W. GAMBLE

Know thyself.

—Socrates

THE IMPACT OF SELF-CONCEPT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to demonstrate mastery of the following learning outcomes:

1. Define self-concept, distinguishing it from the self.

2. Explain reflected appraisal theory, social comparison theory, and confirmation, rejection, and disconfirmation, using them to discuss the role you and others play in shaping the self-concept.

3. Define self-fulfilling prophecy and distinguish between positive and negative Pygmalions.

4. Explain the influence that cultural diversity and gender have on self-concept.

5. Describe how media and technology affect self-concept.

6. Identify how you can change and strengthen your self-concept.

The feature film *The Social Network* presents a fictional characterization of the real Mark Zuckerberg, the entrepreneur who created Facebook. As one writer observed, of significance is the fact that Zuckerberg created *Face*book, and not Footbook or Elbowbook.[1] By starting Facebook, Zuckerberg acted on the belief that it is human for people to want to know what is going on. And we have proven Zuckerberg right. If you are over twelve years of age, you likely are among the more than half of all Americans who use Facebook.

We are not just Facebook's users, however. We are also Facebook's products. We log on to Facebook, post photos that display ourselves as attractively or enticingly as possible, and update our lives for others to share by the minute if we're obsessed, by the hour if we're driven, and by the day if we're typical users.

> What motivates our participation in Facebook? A deep interest in each other, and a desire to be noticed!

What motivates our participation in Facebook? A deep interest in each other and a desire to be noticed. We feel the need to tell about a new shirt, car, promotion, hairstyle, significant other, or status change. Facebook capitalizes on our longing for connection and attention. Zuckerberg understands that we want others to know about us. He understands that showing our face helps us validate our existence—and our concept of self.[2]

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

Before continuing your reading of this chapter, which of the following five statements do you believe to be true and which do you believe to be false?

1. People with high self-esteem are less likely to be bullies. T F

2. Your perceived self is the one others see. T F

3. Engaging in face-work improves your looks. T F

4. Positive expectations have no impact on performance. T F

5. Childhood experiences influence our ideas about gender. T F

Read the chapter to discover if you're right or if you've made any erroneous assumptions.

ANSWERS: 1. F; 2. F; 3. F; 4. F; 5. T

How you see yourself affects your relationships with others.

Who are you? What do you think of yourself? Do you consider your relationship with yourself to be a good one? When you evaluate yourself, do you characteristically give yourself a "thumbs-up" or a "thumbs-down"? This chapter offers you the opportunity to develop **self-awareness** by reflecting on and monitoring your own behavior. Use this information to explore the nature of the self; to analyze how culture gender, media, and technology influence its development; and to examine how the intrapersonal level of communication (the individual level, the communicating you do with yourself) affects the choices you make, your behavior, and your relationships.

The poet-philosopher Alan Watts noted, "Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth."[3] Exactly how confident are you that you really know yourself? And how willing are you to try to get to know yourself better?

Who you think you are and how you think about yourself in relationship to others influences every one of your interpersonal contacts. What you think of yourself is your baseline, your starting point for communication.

THE SELF-CONCEPT: YOUR ANSWER TO WHO YOU ARE

Where does self-concept come from? While we are not born with a self-concept, over time we certainly develop one. The day a child first says "me," the day she recognizes herself as separate from her surroundings, her life begins to change as she strives to fit into the world as she sees it. In short order, our concept of self—that relatively stable set of perceptions each of us attributes to ourselves—becomes our most important possession.

Beginning in childhood, the **self-concept** is composed of everything we think and feel about ourselves. It is the perceived self—our self-identity—the image we form of ourselves. In fact, self-concept has two key components: self-image and self-esteem (see Table 2.1). **Self-image** is the mental picture you have of yourself—it sums up the kind of person you *think* you are. It is a composite of the roles you claim and the attitudes and beliefs you use to describe who and what you are to others, and your understanding of how others see you. **Self-esteem** is your self-evaluation—your estimation of your self-worth. In many ways it is an indication of how much you like and value yourself, including your feelings, positive and negative, about your abilities, character, and feelings.

With this as background, it becomes apparent that self-concept affects behavior, including what we think possible. As a result, it is important to use every opportunity to think carefully about self-concept.

How you complete the sentences in the "Who Are You?" "Try This" box on page 38, and the categories into which your answers can be grouped, offers clues to your self-concept,

Self-awareness: Personal reflection on and monitoring of one's own behavior.

Self-concept: The relatively stable set of perceptions one attributes to oneself.

Self-esteem: One's appraisal of one's own self-worth.

Self-image: The mental picture one has of oneself.

TABLE 2.1 Looking at Yourself

Self-concept	Everything you think and know about yourself
Self-image	Your mental picture of you
Self-esteem	Your estimation of your self-worth

As you read the following poem by Teri Gamble, consider these questions: What do you think is the significance of the clown's omnipresent rainbow smile? Like the poem's subject, do you ever "play" to people around you? Like the clown, do you ever wonder who you really are?

The rubber man in the spotlight

> *Propels himself*
> *Beyond the reach*
> *Of reality.*
> *Midway between today and tomorrow*
> *He pauses*
> *Suspended in his reverie by the crowd.*

The rubber man in the spotlight

> *Warmed by laughter*
> *Finds a face*
> *To play to.*
> *Dancing upon an ever-turning spindle*
> *He plays to another*
> *And another, and another.*

The rubber man in the spotlight

> *Sweeps up the dreams*
> *That remind him*
> *Of yesterday.*
> *Then tumbling out of the ring*
> *His face frozen in a rainbow smile*
> *He wonders who he is.*

including your self-image and self-esteem. For example, you might conceive of yourself in reference to your gender (male or female), religion or spirituality (Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, nonbeliever), race (African American, Hispanic, Asian), nationality (U.S. citizen, Canadian, Chinese), physical attributes (tall, stout), roles (spouse, daughter, sibling, employee), attitudes and emotions (optimistic, dejected, personable), mental abilities (academically challenged, gifted), or talents (musically or artistically proficient). The words you use to express your self-perceptions reveal what you think you are like. In many ways, your answers represent a construct that you have built to make sense of who you are. Remember, however, that the self-concept is not necessarily the same as the self.

HOW ARE THE SELF AND SELF-CONCEPT RELATED?

According to industrial psychologist William Haney, the self and the self-concept differ from each other in a number of ways. First, the self is very fluid and in a state of constant change,

whereas the self-concept is more highly structured and difficult to change (see Figure 2.1). Second, a portion of the self-concept may not actually be included in the self; this area represents the part of ourselves that we invent. Third, there is much more to the self than is included within the self-concept; this area represents our untapped potential. For example, you may think of yourself as friendly and outgoing, while others see you as snobbish and reserved. You may have the potential to become a leader, but because of your inability to convince others that you would like to work with them, you might not have the opportunity to demonstrate this talent.

To put it another way, the self-concept is a "map" that we create to chart the "territory" that is the self.[4] Our map or mental picture is, at least in part, a result of our interpretations of the messages others send us. As such, it may be accurate or inaccurate, positive or negative. The self-concept is depicted in Figure 2.1 as a rigid, geometric design to indicate that we like to make sense to ourselves. Experiencing uncertainty about the self is not a comfortable state for us, and so we work to develop consistency in the way we perceive ourselves.

HOW ACCURATE IS THE SELF-CONCEPT?

Although change is a constant in life, the thirst for constancy causes us to cling to outdated self-notions even in the face of evidence that renders these notions obsolete. Instead of revising our self-concepts to conform to new information, we do our best to acquire information that confirms what we already believe is true. Our reluctance to let go of set ideas allows outmoded notions about the self to persist. It is understandable that we might resist changing an inaccurate self-concept when the new information available to us is negative, because our self-concept could become
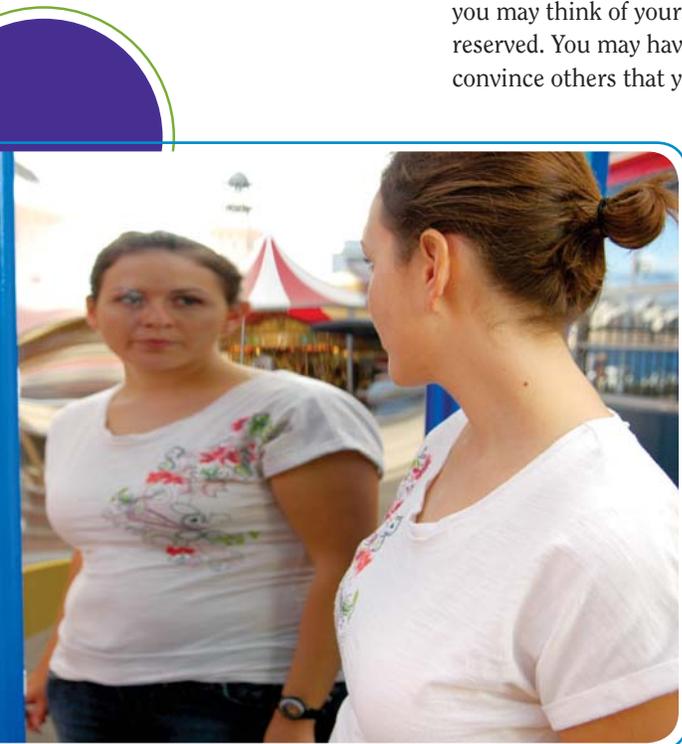

Do you see yourself as you are or as you think you are?

more negative. For example, this could happen when we are no longer considered to be as bright or hardworking as we once were. It is hard to comprehend, however, why we similarly resist changing when the information is positive and would enhance our self-concept, such as when we are no longer perceived to be gawky or unfriendly. By rejecting such information, we deny ourselves a chance for growth and self-renewal. Defending an unrealistic negative or positive self-concept keeps us from making efforts to redefine ourselves. Whether that redefinition would result in a more positive or a more negative picture of who we are does not matter; our cognitive conservatism keeps us from seeing the real need for change and allows us to continue deluding ourselves. Refuting new information that could lead us to change only limits us and obscures our view of how others see us. Conducting a reality check is necessary to validate or invalidate who we think we are. Have you conducted one recently? What did you discover?

Thus, as we go through life, each of us builds a self-concept that includes feelings of self-worth. The questions each of us must answer include the following: What is my feeling of self-worth? Why? What, if anything, do I want to do about how I feel about myself?

Figure 2.1 The Self and the Self-Concept
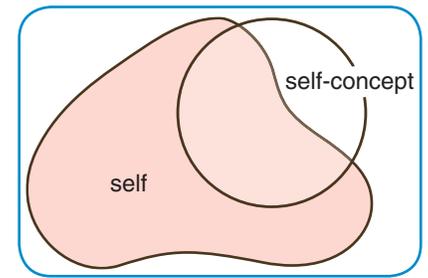
self-concept

self

SELF-ESTEEM: ASSESSING SELF-WORTH

When we feel good about our achievements, we also tend to value and feel good about ourselves. Self-esteem, our positive or negative evaluation of our self-concept or sense of personal worth, is important because it can nurture and feed success or make succeeding more difficult. When we achieve or acquire new competencies, our self-esteem grows. In other words, we build self-esteem when we overcome obstacles, acquire specific skills or achievements, or are given increased responsibilities. Feeling good about the self and what we are capable of contributes to our performing well.

Since self-esteem is a measure of the value we place on ourselves, we carry it with us from one interpersonal interaction to another. What is more, we relay our level of self-esteem to others by how we interact with them.

HIGH VERSUS LOW SELF-ESTEEM

People with high self-esteem differ from those with low self-esteem in communication style. They tend to display different eye contact, posture, and expression. Think about your friendly and romantic relationships. How does your opinion of your self-worth affect them?

Individuals with high self-esteem often think better of others, expect others to like them, evaluate their own performance favorably, perform well in front of others, work hard for those who demand it, feel comfortable interacting with superiors, and defend themselves against others' negative appraisals. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem often disapprove of others, expect others not to like them, evaluate themselves unfavorably, perform poorly in the presence of others, feel threated by their superiors, and find it hard to defend themselves against those who view them critically, equating criticism with rejection.[5]

When we perceive ourselves as failures, we are more likely to behave in ways that cause us to fail. When we perceive ourselves as successes, we are more apt to act confidently and in ways that bring about success. Every success we have helps build our self-esteem.

SELF-ESTEEM AND PERFORMANCE

When self-esteem is not connected to performance, it can be self-defeating. Feeling good about yourself when you have no reason to—that is, when you have added to neither your
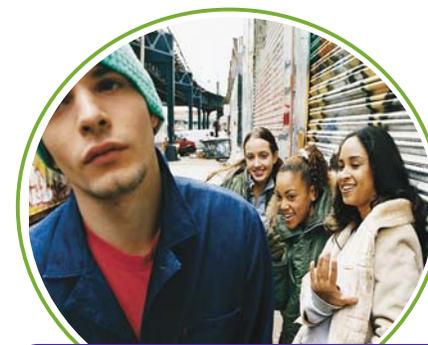
WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

True or False
1. *People with high self-esteem are less likely to be bullies.*
False. High self-esteem may actually increase the tendency to bully.

achievements nor your competencies—can lead to your developing a favorable self-appraisal that will not be matched by others' views of you. Thus, when we talk about the importance of developing self-esteem, we are not talking about merely praising or becoming a cheerleader for you. Rather, we are talking about opening yourself to opportunities that will help you develop your skills and abilities to their fullest potential.

And here's a note of caution—research reveals that individuals with high self-esteem may pose more of a threat to others than persons with low self-esteem.[6] In fact, research indicates that overemphasizing the importance of self-esteem in those who possess an unrealistically inflated self-appraisal can precipitate a culture of bullying characterized by persistent teasing, name-calling, or social exclusion. These findings have led some to argue that there needs to be a balance in the amount of praise given, to prevent inflated perceptions of self-importance in already self-centered individuals.[7] Researchers advise that instead of fostering self-esteem, we should be fostering resilience, because resilience helps people recover from personal disappointments and defeats.[8]

Self-concept, self-worth, and self-esteem are all significant in their influence on how we communicate, but it is important to remember that when they are unrealistically inflated they can pose problems.

HOW OTHERS SHAPE OUR SELF-CONCEPT

While your experiences help shape your self-concept, your self-concept, in turn, helps shape your future experiences. How you see yourself in relation to others both guides and modifies your behavior. Probably, you act differently depending on the people you are with. You may act outgoing when in the presence of one friend but be intimidated by another. You may feel like a star in art class but inferior in chemistry, or vice versa. At any given moment, the nature of your self is affected by the nature of the situation in which you are interacting. And your interactions shape your view of your self. Consequently, your language, attitudes, and appearance are apt to change as you move from one set of conditions to another. In a way, you become different selves as you adapt to perceived changes (see Table 2.2).

WE REFLECT OTHERS' APPRAISALS

More than a century ago, psychologist William James put it this way: "A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind."[9] In similar fashion, in his **reflected appraisal theory**, psychologist Charles Cooley described the mirrorlike image we derive from our contacts with others and then project into our future experiences. In other words, we build a self-concept that reflects how we think others see us.[10] Thus, as our assessments of situations and people change, we show different sides of ourselves. In fact, we use the views of others to develop our view of ourselves. According to reflected appraisal theory, the self we present is in large part based on the way others categorize us, the roles they expect us to play, and the behaviors or traits they expect us to exhibit. Cooley believed that by reflecting back to us who we are and how we come across, other people function as our mirrors. In fact, he coined the term "looking glass self" to represent the self that comes to us from others. For example, if others see you as a leader, capable, and outgoing, you may reflect their appraisals by viewing yourself in those ways. Of course, the roles we play and how we play them affect both how and with whom we communicate. They all influence the content, objectives, and frequency of our communication contacts.[11]

Belief in yourself shapes what is possible for you.

Reflected appraisal theory: A theory that states that the self a person presents is in large part based on the way others categorize the individual, the roles they expect him or her to play, and the behaviors or traits they expect him or her to exhibit.

Feelings about aging may affect notions of self-worth. What messages about the self does our society send people as they age? What messages does it send to the physically challenged as compared to the able-bodied?

Consider these questions:

1. Picture yourself in the future. How do you think your view of yourself would change if you were thirty to forty years older? How do you imagine you would you feel about your appearance? How do you suppose you would feel about your potential to find a good job? How would you feel reporting to someone younger than yourself in your workplace?

2. How would your view of yourself change if instead of being able-bodied you suddenly had to use a wheelchair or vice versa?

3. What steps could you take to foster resilience in yourself when you are faced with forces that challenge your self-conceptions?

TABLE 2.2   Theories Reveal How Others Help Shape Us

Reflected appraisal theory	We build a self-concept that reflects how we think others see us.
Social comparison theory	We assess how we measure up against others.

Of course, not all messages others send us about how they see us carry the same weight. Those sent by our significant others and by individuals whose opinions we respect and trust normally exert more influence on us than do the opinions of strangers and mere acquaintances.

WE COMPARE OURSELVES WITH OTHERS

According to **social comparison theory**, we compare ourselves to others to develop a feel for how our talents, abilities, and qualities measure up to theirs.[12] In other words, in the effort to learn more about ourselves, we use others as measuring sticks, and then we evaluate ourselves in terms of how we think we measure up to them. As we compare ourselves to others, we form judgments of our skills, personal characteristics, and so on. We can, for example, decide whether we are the same as or different from others, whether we are better or worse, stronger or weaker, or more or less creative than those with whom we compare ourselves. Often, as we assess our similarities and differences, we also make decisions regarding the groups we fit into. Generally, we are most comfortable interacting with others we perceive to be like us.[13]

Our self-esteem suffers if we continually feel we fall short when gauging ourselves in relation to others. When this happens, however, it may well be that we have chosen to compare ourselves to an inappropriate reference group. For example, if we compare our looks with those of a supermodel, our musical ability with those of an *American Idol* or Grammy winner, or our athletic prowess with that of an Olympian, we probably are making an unfair comparison and, as a result, will develop an unrealistic assessment of our appearance, talent, or ability. On the other hand, if we compare ourselves with members of a more appropriate reference group, we might be able to inflate rather than deflate our sense of self.

Our accuracy in assessing our self-concept and self-esteem depends on how successful we are at processing experience and receiving feedback. If we pay more attention to our successes than to our failures and more attention to positive reactions than to negative ones, we could end up overinflating our sense of self. On the other hand, if we pay more attention to our failures and give more credence to negative reactions, then our sense of

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

True or False
2. *Your perceived self is the one others see.*
False. Your perceived self is the image you have of yourself, not the self you aspire to be.

Social comparison theory: A theory affirming that individuals compare themselves to others to develop a feel for how their talents, abilities, and qualities measure up.

True or False
3. *Engaging in face-work improves your looks.*
False. Face-work is what you do to protect your self-image by reducing the negative aspects of yourself that are visible to others.

Perceived self: A reflection of one's self-concept; the person one believes oneself to be when one is being honest with oneself.

Ideal self: The self one would like to be.

Impression management: The exercising of control over one's behaviors in an effort to make the desired impression.

Possible self: The self that one might become someday.

Expected self: The self that others assume one will exhibit.

Dramaturgical approach to human interaction: A theory, originated by Erving Goffman, that explains the role that the skillful enacting of impression management plays in person-to-person interaction.

self could deflate. In neither instance would our sense of self conform to reality. Rather than achieving congruence, our sense of self would be inconsistent with both real-life experiences and feedback.

WE HAVE PERCEIVED, IDEAL, AND EXPECTED SELVES

Each of us possesses a perceived self, an ideal or possible self, and an expected self. Sometimes, these views of the self can conflict with one another.

The **perceived self** is a reflection of your self-concept. It is the person you believe yourself to be when you are honest with yourself. Usually, there are some aspects of the perceived self that you wish to keep secret from others. For example, you might hesitate to let others know that you do not think you are good-looking or intelligent, that you are fixated on becoming wealthy, or that you are more concerned for your own welfare than theirs. Your **ideal self** is the self you would like to be. For example, you may want to be likable, and so you try to be a likable person. To accomplish this, you engage in **impression management**; you exercise control over your behavior in an effort to elicit the desired reaction.[14] The **possible self** is the self you might become one day—the one you dream of becoming. You may, for instance, want to be a passionately loved self, an accomplished self, or a rich self. The **expected self** is the one others assume you will exhibit. It is based on behaviors they have seen you display in the past or stereotypes they hold.

Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach. Through his concept known as the **dramaturgical approach to human interaction**, Erving Goffman explains the role that the skillful enacting of impression management plays in person-to-person interaction.[15] If we consider social interaction as a performance and the setting(s) in which interaction occurs as the stage, then the actors (the persons on the stage) play their parts to manage the impressions of others sharing the stage with them, so that they, the actors, may achieve their personal objectives. The more skillful the actors, the more effective they are at convincing others that they are knowledgeable and trustworthy and that they possess a charisma or dynamism that makes them attractive to others.

We can use several dramatic elements to make the best impression in any given scene. First, we can employ *framing,* specifically defining a scene or situation in a way that helps others interpret its meaning in the way we desire. We can also use *scripting,* the identification of each actor's role in the scene. In effect, we convince others on the stage with us to play their roles. Of course, we use *engaging dialogue*—storytelling together with colorful and descriptive language and effective use of nonverbal cues—to guide the responses of the other players. Together, these elements underlie our *performance.*

When performing, we can also choose from among a number of techniques to encourage others to see us as we wish to be seen. For example, we may use *exemplification,* in which we serve as an example or act as a role model for others; *promotion,* in which we elucidate our personal skills and accomplishments and/or a particular vision; *face-work,* in which we take steps to protect our image by reducing the negative aspects of ourselves visible to others; or *ingratiation,* in which we employ techniques of agreement to make others believe us to be more attractive and likable and less threatening, harmful, or pernicious.

Describe a performance, face-to-face or online, that you or another person you know has enacted in an effort to come off as authentic. Were you or the other person successful? Were you or the other person authentic? How do you know?

Imagining a Future Self. According to Kelly McGonigal, author of *The Willpower Instinct,* a disconnection may exist between what we think of ourselves in the present and how we conceive of ourselves in the future—our "future self."[16] Brain scans reveal that the

parts of our brain that are active when we think about others are different from the parts of the brain that are active when we think about ourselves. If, however, we feel too little connection to our future self, the same regions that activate when we think of others activate when we think of ourselves in the future. It is as if when we think of our future self we are seeing someone other than ourselves.

Whether you do or do not connect with your future self can affect the decisions you make about your life. When we fail to pay attention to our future self, for example, we may make unethical decisions, such as leaking secrets that could destroy another person, causing ourselves problems both in the present and potentially down the road.[17]

REACTIONS TO YOU: CONFIRMING, REJECTING, AND DISCONFIRMING RESPONSES

As we interact with others, how we feel about ourselves changes. Some people we interact with provide **confirmation** of our opinion of ourselves, communicating with us in ways consistent with our own appraisal of ourselves. How they treat us during our interactions with them reflects the way we think we are. For example, if you believe yourself to be intelligent, confirmers might reflect this by asking you to tutor them.

Others with whom we interact signal **rejection** of our self-appraisals by treating us in ways inconsistent with our sense of self—whether that is good or bad. For example, if you believe yourself to be hardworking but rejecters treat you as if you are lazy, over time their treatment of you might cause you to revise your picture of yourself.

We try to manage the impressions others form of us.

Confirmation: A communication that tells another person that his or her self-image is affirmed.

Rejection: The negation of or disagreement with a self-appraisal.

Disconfirmation:
Communication that denies another person's significance.

Self-efficacy: A positive belief in one's own abilities, competence, and potential.

Self-fulfilling prophecy: A prediction or expectation that comes true simply because one acts as if it were true.

Still others give us **disconfirmation** of, or show lack of regard for, our self-appraisals by sending us messages that tell us that as far as they are concerned, we are not even important enough for them to think about; in their eyes, we do not exist—we are irrelevant. Someone who disconfirms you ignores you and goes about her business as if you were not present. By treating other human beings like nonentities, consistent disconfirmers may eventually rob others of their sense of self, without which it becomes virtually impossible for them to relate to the world effectively.[18]

Thus, those around us help shape our self-concepts in both positive and negative ways. Virtually every interpersonal contact we share sends a message regarding our importance, our capabilities, and how others view both our potential and our inadequacies.[19] (See Table 2.3.)

TABLE 2.3   The Self in Relationships

Confirming response	Supports self-appraisal
Rejecting response	Negates self-appraisal
Disconfirming response	Robs the individual of a sense of self

THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY: THE INFLUENCE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PYGMALIONS

Are you a pessimist or an optimist? Optimists believe they will succeed and persevere; pessimists tend to give up when confronted with challenges. Consequently, pessimists fail more frequently than do optimists, because one's expectations of success often precipitate the expected level of success. Optimists are resilient; they have feelings of **self-efficacy**, possessing a positive belief in their abilities and competence, believing in their own possibilities.[20] Unfortunately, the pessimist's outlook and lack of resilience may lead to failure even as success is within reach. In many ways, both pessimists and optimists live out self-fulfilling prophecies.

A **self-fulfilling prophecy** occurs when we verbalize a prediction or internalize an expectation that comes true simply because we act as if it already were. Thus, our behavior increases the likelihood of an outcome. For example, have you ever been invited to a function you did not want to attend because you expected to be bored? Were you? If you were, to what extent is it possible that your prediction of boredom increased the likelihood of its occurrence?

There are five basic steps in the self-fulfilling prophecy cycle (see Figure 2.2).[21] First, we form expectations of ourselves, others, or events—for example, "Monica won't like me." Second, we communicate the expectation by exhibiting various cues—"so I'll keep my distance from Monica." Third, others respond to the cues we send by adjusting their behavior to match our messages—Monica tells herself, "Ed is stuck up. I don't even want to talk to him." Fourth, the result is that our initial expectation comes true. Because we act as if our belief is true prior to its being confirmed, eventually it *is* confirmed—"It seems that, in fact, Monica does not like me." Fifth, we attain closure as we complete the self-fulfilling prophecy cycle. The way we interpret the actions of others only strengthens our original belief—"Every time I see Monica, I am reminded that she does not like me."

A self-fulfilling prophecy can be either self-imposed or other-imposed. When your own expectations influence your behavior, the prophecy is self-imposed. When the expectations

Pessimists and optimists approach life with divergent outlooks.

Because self-concept is a product of person-to-person interactions, other people can help shape our self-concept by confirming, rejecting, or disconfirming our sense of self.

1. Identify individuals who have confirmed, rejected, or disconfirmed you. Describe the short-and long-term effects of their actions on you.

When someone else . . .	Confirmed your self-concept	Rejected your self-concept	Disconfirmed your self-concept
Short-term effects			
Long-term effects			

2. Identify an instance when you confirmed, rejected, or disconfirmed someone else. Describe what you did or said and the effects of your words and actions on the other person and yourself.

When you . . .	Confirmed someone else's self-concept	Rejected someone else's self-concept	Disconfirmed someone else's self-concept
You said . . .			
The effect was . . .			

3. Identify words and behavior you can use to express your positive regard for someone.

4. Explain how indifference, inattentiveness, and disqualification influence conceptions of the self.

Figure 2.2 The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Story

Figure 2.2 The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Story

1. We develop expectations of people or events.

2. We express those expectations verbally and/or nonverbally.

3. Others adjust their behavior to match our verbal and/or nonverbal messages.

4. Our expectation becomes reality.

5. The confirmation of our expectation strengthens our original belief.

of others help direct your actions, the prophecy is other-imposed. Either way, we exhibit behavior that we or another person expects.

Among the most widely reported examples of the self-fulfilling prophecy is that used by psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in their classic study *Pygmalion in the Classroom,* named for George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion.* Rosenthal and his associates informed a number of teachers that certain of their students were expected to "bloom"— that is, perform exceptionally well—during the academic years. The teachers were unaware that the student names had actually been selected randomly, and there was no true basis for predicting who would succeed. Despite this, the students who were singled out to bloom did so, improving their IQs and performing at higher levels than would otherwise have been expected.[22] Apparently the teachers functioned as **positive Pygmalions**. Just as playwright Shaw's character Henry Higgins transforms Cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle into a duchess by showing her his belief that he can help her learn to speak and act like one, the teachers caused the students to live up to the labels placed on them. The teachers' positive expectations positively influenced their treatment of the students. The teachers gave the "about to bloom" students extra positive verbal and nonverbal reinforcement, waited patiently for the students to respond if they hesitated, and did not give them negative feedback when they offered incorrect answers. Thus, the way the teachers behaved influenced the students' perceptions of their own abilities. The "about to blooms" responded to the teachers' prophecies by fulfilling them. Like Eliza Doolittle, the students acted like the persons others perceived them to be.

The Pygmalion effect, as this form of the self-fulfilling prophecy has come to be known, influences performance in a variety of settings, from work-related to educational to social, and it does so in both positive and negative ways. Just as when others hold high expectations for a person, their opinions tend to result in enhanced performance, when **negative Pygmalions** hold low expectations for others, their low expectations typically result in diminished performance. Consequently, managers' expectations can help or hinder worker production, teachers' expectations can boost or deflate student grades, and your own expectations can serve you as an ego maker or breaker. We live up to—and down to— expectations, whether these expectations emanate from others or ourselves. We are what we believe we are. What is important is that we recognize that our self-concept can change. At any point, we can work to strengthen our sense of self-worth.

REVISING YOUR SELF-CONCEPT: REEXAMINING IMPRESSIONS AND CONCEPTIONS

How others treat us and how we treat ourselves influence the person we think we are. Thus, if we wish to change our self-concept, we need to do our part to break with old ways of thinking. We need to update the way we think about ourselves and assess the accuracy of our self-concept. Figuratively speaking, we need to turn on a light inside ourselves so we become more self-aware, recognize the kinds of messages others send us, and be cognizant of messages we typically ignore, discount, or purposefully misinterpret.

While the tendency is to hold on to our existing self-concept—even when it is proved false—this does not mean that we cannot change it. We just have to work to overcome our natural resistance to change. In fact, some of us seek professional help in making meaningful changes. To combat the tendency to cling to an erroneous self-concept, we need to develop the willingness and skills to reevaluate or reinvent ourselves. That way, we will be better able to shed outdated conceptions—one impression at a time.

To start this process, we need to understand how we manage to maintain a self-image that others may regard as unrealistic. For example, we might suppose we are great thinkers while others believe our thinking lacks depth. Perhaps because we are overly concerned with how we come across to others, we put all our energy into presenting ourselves in as favorable a light as possible. When we focus on ourselves, however, we are less likely to notice others' reactions to us, and we may miss feedback cues revealing how they really see us. In addition, sometimes we persist in holding on to an unrealistic self-image because others are reticent to reveal their true responses to us for fear of hurting our feelings. Instead, they tell us what they think we want to hear. Other times, we base our assessment of ourselves on obsolete information—we opt to cling to memories rather than face current realities.

Just as we can view ourselves more favorably than others do, we can also be our own worst critics and view ourselves more harshly than is warranted. For example, we might convince ourselves that we are fat despite others insisting we are a perfect weight. Why do we do this? We might be acting on the basis of outmoded data—information that was true at one time but is no longer true. Or we might receive distorted feedback from an overly critical friend that warps our view of ourselves. Or we might criticize ourselves simply because we believe that is what society expects us to do. We might feel that society prefers we own up to our inadequacies while downplaying our strengths.

When you visualize yourself, do you see a person who can achieve anything or a person with limitations who is likely to fail? Research reveals that conceptions of the self influence self-perspectives of failure.[23] Do you view yourself more positively or negatively than you believe valid? Being too harsh on yourself can keep you from fulfilling your potential. Instead of denigrating yourself, assess your strengths and shortcomings honestly, freeing yourself to reshape your self-image and grow.

DIVERSITY AND CULTURE IN RELATIONSHIPS: HOW IMPORTANT IS THE "I"?

Individuals in most, if not all, cultures have a notion about the self, although the specific notions held vary across cultures, affecting person-to-person interactions in subtle to dramatic ways.[24]

THE SELF IN INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURES

In North American and Western European cultures, the word *self* reigns supreme, reflecting the importance individuals place on realizing their personal goals. Members of such individualistic cultures, in which individual identity is paramount, value uniqueness and personal identity; they tend to believe in themselves, seek to do their own thing, and shun conformity. In contrast, in the collectivistic cultures of Asia, Africa, and Central and South America, where group goals are given a higher priority than individual goals, individuals are more apt to downplay their own goals and emphasize goals set or valued by the group as a whole.[25] Japanese parents, for example, typically refrain from lavishing praise on their children, believing that children who are overpraised are likely to end up being self-centered and not focused enough on the group's needs.

For the members of collectivistic cultures, the self is not the center of the universe. For them, the group—not the individual—is the primary social unit. Where individualistic cultures link success with personal achievement, collectivistic cultures link it to group cohesion and loyalty. This basic difference is underscored by the fact that the "I" in the Chinese written language

Individualistic culture: A culture in which individual identity is paramount.

Collectivistic cultures: Cultures in which group goals are given a higher priority than individual goals.

REFLECT ON THIS: *Changes*

In his book *Uh-Oh,* philosopher and author Robert Fulghum presents his observations concerning when and how our self-conceptions change:

Ask a kindergarten class, "How many of you can draw?" and all hands shoot up. Yes, of course we can draw—all of us. What can you draw? Anything! How about a dog eating a fire truck in a jungle? Sure! How big you want it?

How many of you can sing? All hands. Of course we sing! What can you sing? Anything! What if you don't know the words? No problem, we make them up. Let's sing! Now? Why not!

How many of you dance? Unanimous again. What kid of music do you like to dance to? Any kind! Let's dance! Now? Sure, why not?

Do you like to act in plays? Yes! Do you play musical instruments? Yes! Do you write poetry? Yes! Can you read and write and count? Yes! We're learning that stuff now.

Their answer is Yes! Over and over again, Yes! The children are confident in spirit, infinite in resources, and eager to learn. Everything is still possible.

Try those same questions on a college audience. A small percentage of the students will raise their hands when asked if they draw or dance or sing or paint or act or play an instrument. Not infrequently, those who do raise their hands will want to qualify their response with their limitations: "I only play piano, I only draw horses, I only dance to rock and roll, I only sing in the shower."

When asked why the limitations, college students answer that they do not have talent, are not majoring in the subject, or have not done any of these things since about third grade, or worse, that they are embarrassed for others to see them sing or dance or act. You can imagine the response to the same questions asked of an older audience. The answer: No, none of the above.

What went wrong between kindergarten and college?

What happened to YES! Of course I can?

Consider these questions:

1. To what extent, if any, do your experiences support Fulghum's observations?

2. What factors do you believe cause us to change our answers to Fulghum's questions as we mature?

3. Based on Fulghum's insights, what advice would you give today's kindergarten and college students?

SOURCE: Robert Fulghum, *Uh-Oh,* New York: Villard Books, 1991, p. 228–229.

Idiocentric orientation: An orientation displayed by people who are primarily individualistic in their ways of thinking and behaving.

Allocentric orientation: A perspective displayed by people who are primarily collectivistic in their thinking and behaving.

looks very much like the word for "selfish."[26] Members of collectivistic cultures gain a sense of identity through their group memberships, not by promoting themselves or stressing how important they are, as members of Western cultures are apt to do.[27] Thus, while some of us have been raised to call attention to ourselves, sing our own praises, and develop ourselves at the group's expense, others of us have been reared to avoid such behavior by nurturing the *interdependent self* instead.[28]

Persons who are primarily individualistic in their thinking and behaving have an **idiocentric orientation**. Those who are primarily collectivistic in the way they think and behave have an **allocentric orientation**.[29] To which group do you belong?

Our unique personal experiences and shared membership in groups influence how we define ourselves. Together with culture, these factors play integral parts in forming our self-concept. Still, care should always be taken against rigidly categorizing people from any given culture, whether individualistic or collectivistic in orientation. Keep in mind that variations occur within countries. For example, in the United States, persons from the South exhibit higher levels of collectivism than do people living the West.[30] In addition, after persons from the Western and Eastern worlds interact with each other, their cultural orientations moderate. In fact, Asian exchange students who have lived in the United States tend to have somewhat more individualized self-concepts than do other Asian students.

Do you think American culture is becoming more individualistic or more communal?

THE SELF IN HIGH- AND LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

People from different cultures also exhibit different communication style preferences. Individuals belonging to **high-context cultures** tend to be very polite and indirect when interacting with others. In contrast, persons from **low-context cultures** typically exhibit a more direct communication style.[31] When meeting someone for the first time, a person from a low-context culture is likely to ask direct questions in an effort to gather background information and get to know the person; the priority is the discovery and expression of individual uniqueness. Similarly, persons from individualistic cultures feel the need to explain everything and, because of the value they place on assertion, to speak out.

In comparison, persons from high-context cultures hesitate to ask others direct questions, preferring to rely on nonverbal, contextual information. They value silence and reticence, believing that persons of few words are thoughtful, trustworthy, and respectable. As a result, they also are likely to find unsolicited self-disclosures inappropriate. And because they would view such behavior as a sign of disrespect or disloyalty, they are less likely than persons from low-context cultures to criticize one another publicly. When their words hurt another person, they believe they hurt themselves as well.

THE SELF IN HIGH- AND LOW-POWER-DISTANCE CULTURES

Attitudes toward the self also differ along the dimension of **power distance**, or the extent to which individuals are willing to accept power differentials. Persons from high-power-distance cultures, such as Saudi Arabia and India, perceive power as a fact of life. In these cultures, persons in low-power positions are very apt to defer automatically to persons in authority. In contrast, persons from low-power-distance cultures, such as the United States and Sweden, are more likely to emphasize and value their independence even when superiors are present.[32] A general feeling of equality prevails in such cultures (see Table 2.4).

High-context cultures: Cultures in which people tend to be very polite and indirect when interacting with others.

Low-context culture: A culture in which people typically exhibit a direct communication style.

Power distance: The extent to which individuals are willing to accept power differentials.

TABLE 2.4   Culture and Influences on the Self

Persons with individualistic orientations	Conceive of the individual as the basic social unit Make individual goals a priority Link success and individual achievement
Persons with collectivistic orientations	Conceive of the family/group as the basic social unit Make interdependence/group goals a priority Link success and group achievement
Persons from high-context cultures	Exhibit an indirect communication style Make face-saving a consideration
Persons from low-context cultures	Exhibit a direct communication style Seldom think of face-saving
Persons from high-power-distance cultures	Defer to superiors
Persons from low-power-distance cultures	Value independence

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE SELF ACROSS CULTURES

Even though their cultures may differ, young people throughout the world are likely to share many attitudes regarding the self. Most hope to develop and sustain social relationships, especially with their peers, and most are optimistic regarding their abilities to assume responsibilities for themselves in the future. In the face of the optimism displayed by the majority of young people, between 25 and 30 percent of them also describe themselves as lonely, overwhelmed by life's problems, and frequently sad.[33] Interestingly, Japanese teens are even more likely to attribute these traits to themselves, with 55 percent reporting frequently feeling sad and 39 percent reporting feeling lonely. Japanese young people are also almost twice as likely as young people from other cultures to fear disappointing their parents.[34]

Many years ago, clinical psychologists Darlene Powell Hopson and Derek Hopson, reported that African Americans expressed discontent with the self, finding that as early as the age of three, black children expressed the desire to be white, even expressing a preference to play with white dolls.[35] Do you believe that such self-perceptions are related to African Americans' being victims of racism? Based on your personal experiences, do you believe such feelings still exist today? A more recent study did not find that African Americans had negative attitudes toward the self because of skin tone.[36] Do you believe, however, that negative attitudes toward the self may exist in individuals who are members of marginalized groups, such as the elderly and people who are physically or mentally challenged?

GENDER AND SELF-CONCEPT

If you awoke one day to discover that you had changed into someone of the opposite sex, how would that affect you? In what ways, if any, would this alteration change your plans for the day? The week? The month? The year? What impact would it have on the rest of your life?

As we noted in Chapter 1, *sex* refers to the biological characteristics that define men and women. *Gender,* in contrast, refers to the socially constructed roles and behaviors that the members of a given society believe appropriate for men and women. Thus, gender is a variable that influences how others treat us and how we treat them because of our sex. Our gender becomes integrated into our self-concept, providing us with a **gender identity**, that is, an inner sense of being male or female. The experiences we have during our formative years influence our views of masculinity and femininity, affecting our identities in later years. As we internalize the attributes of maleness and femaleness, what we have come to believe about our gender affects the way we conceive of our self. Transgender activist Chaz Bono has been quoted as saying, "I believe gender is between your ears, not between your legs."

Men and women are likely to see and describe themselves differently. Males generally characterize themselves as possessing initiative, control, and ambition. In contrast, females see themselves as sensitive, concerned for others, and considerate. While appearance plays a major role in the self-image of women, until recently it was not considered integral to the self-image of a man.[39] Young women are still teased about both their looks and their weight more often than are young men, but the macho male, muscular and fit, is making a comeback, placing pressure on men to "bulk up" or be thought of as unmanly.[40]

Unfortunately, in our society, social and cultural expectations cause women to be vulnerable to damage to their self-concepts, in part because of the many conflicting and confused messages they receive.[41] Our society expects those who are feminine to be nurturing,

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

True or False
5. *Childhood experiences influence our ideas about gender.*
True. Children integrate into their self-concepts what those around them believe is appropriate behavior for a male or female.

Gender identity: An inner sense of being male or female.

1. Interview a male relative and a female relative, both of whom are older. Ask them these questions:

   a. Who are you? What roles do you perform? What adjectives describe you?

   b. How has the way you see yourself today changed from how you saw yourself when you were a child, a young adult, and middle-aged?

   c. How do you believe the ways your family and friends see you have changed through the years?

   d. Is there an era of your life you would want to repeat? Why?

2. The following quotations reveal the self-perceptions of two older people. These quotations are not meant to characterize all older people; rather, they are used to illustrate, from their perspective, how aging affects self-perception:

   The young want everything to move fast. They let their impatience show in their eyes. When you are hard of hearing it is worse. People get impatient when you try to join in. They yell in your face. Finally, they just give up on you and act like you are not there because it is too much trouble to try and keep you in the flow of things.[37]

   You ask me if I enjoy remembering things from the past. Well I do. . . . it is as if there are reels of movies in my head, all starting at different eras. I can go back and start one up any time. Different people, dressed differently, living in rooms and houses without electricity. And all starring a different me, of course . . . the past—what I did and accomplished and endured and loved—are all part of who I am.[38]

   Compare and contrast the answers your interviewees provided to the questions listed above with the perceptions of these two people.

unassertive, sensitive, caring, deferential, and emotional. As a result of such expectations, society rewards young women for a pleasing appearance, revealing their feelings, being forgiving, and being nice or helpful to others. In contrast, our society expects men to be strong, ambitious, in control of their emotions, and successful; unlike women, men are reinforced for displaying these qualities and achieving results.[42]

Of significance is the finding that our society values male characteristics more highly than female characteristics. Thus, men typically feel better about themselves than do women. The upshot is that many women try harder and harder to attain success by attempting to be it all and do it all. The comedian Carol Leifer perhaps put it best in her act when she said, "I just had a baby an hour ago and I'm back at work already. While I was delivering, I took a course in tax-shelter options."

SEEING THE SELF THROUGH THE MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY LOOKING GLASS

The products of our modern lives provide the programs, films, music, and applications that help us forge our identities, our sense of self, and who we want to be. From these we learn how to dress, look, interact, and consume. We learn who has power and who does not, who has followers and who does not. The sites and media we frequent also influence our sense of ethnicity and race, gender, and class.

REFLECT ON THIS: *Beauty Standards and Dying to Be Thin*

In "The Girl Who Could Never Be Thin Enough: One Family's Tragedy," we learn about Stacy Asbury, a teenager suffering from anorexia nervosa who sadly succumbed to the disease. Her father, Tom, was left heartbroken at his inability to help his daughter overcome the disease's ravages. Approximately 100,000 people, both female and male, but predominantly female, have this disease. Like Stacy, because of their desire to be thin and the distorted images they have of their own bodies, 3 to 5 percent of sufferers starve and exercise themselves to death. They do jumping jacks to the point of exhaustion—until they can no longer raise their hands above their waists—until their hearts are no longer able to support their frail bodies.

Consider these questions:

1. In your opinion, is it appropriate for any industry to send women the message that beauty and thinness are requisites for success?

2. What role do the cosmetic and diet industries play in feeding a woman's longing to attain a self that mirrors the ideal presented in media?

3. In what ways, if any, are the messages the media send women any different from the messages they send men regarding athleticism and the ideal muscular build?

4. Should we blame the media for individuals' feelings of inferiority or inadequacy?

5. What, if anything, can we do to counter the effects of media messages and campaigns featuring male and female ideals?

SOURCE: Gene Wojciechowski, "The Girl Who Could Never Be Thin Enough: One Family's Tragedy," special to *Los Angeles Times,* December 27, 1993. See also Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth,* New York: Morrow, 1991.

THE IMPACT OF THE MEDIA

Media depictions help us assess what the general public's preferred patterns of behavior and appearance are. They help shape our opinions about how our bodies should look, how males and females should interact, and the meaning of success. The way we interpret their offerings reinforces or negates our own sense of self by influencing our sense of who we are as compared to who we should aspire to be.

Often we are not conscious of the extent to which the media work us over, how much they are "**make-believe media**"—that is, they make us believe.[43] Our concepts of what we should be like or, for that matter, what our relationships should be like, or even more specifically what African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, and males and females are supposed to be like, are conveyed to us via the media, so much so that some critics complain that the media preempt real life, offering us fabricated views of the world in its place.

Among the media's messages are that violence against women is commonplace; that men are hard, tough, and independent; and that minorities and women are less visible than men. Women, for example, were underrepresented in the one hundred top-grossing films of 2011, which featured fewer female than male protagonists and female characters

Make-believe media:
Media offerings that make us believe things that are not necessarily true.

who were younger than the male characters. Women were also less likely than men to be portrayed as leaders and more likely to be identified by their marital status.[44] Other messages are that African American males are either athletes or unlawful, that Asian males are awkward, and that Muslim men are terrorists. Such messages often distort how we see ourselves and influence our perception of what is normal and desirable behavior. In addition, media models adversely affect our evaluations of ourselves as attractive, successful, or smart. And all too often, the thirst the media develop in us for "beautiful thing-hood" turns into painful and enduring feelings of inadequacy when we are unable to acquire the items we covet.[45]

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

We derive our sense of self not only from communicating face-to-face but also from communicating online. By using technology we participate in the creation of new worlds and new ways of finding out about ourselves. Interacting in **cyberspace**, we can be ourselves or, at time, someone else—that is, we can exist as personas.

For some of us, the lives we live are more virtual than real. Some of us regularly inhabit virtual worlds, participating in simulations and assuming different personas. We may have a number of e-mail and Twitter addresses and various screen names as we use the Internet to experiment with multiple identities—while concealing our real identities from both friends and strangers with whom we interact online.[46] We might, for example, pose as a member of the opposite sex, conceal our age or ethnicity, hide physical characteristics, or otherwise pretend to be someone we are not. In other words, online we can be genderless, raceless, rankless, and appearanceless.[47]

We also can create parallel identities that facilitate the exploration of murkier aspects of the self, something very different from being an employee part of the day, a student another part of the day, and a family member at home. As psychologist Sherry Turkle notes, "The obese can be slender, the beautiful plain, the 'nerdy' sophisticated" due to the construction of an identity that is not part of their authentic selves. Turkle asserts that instead of developing internally, as a result of our being overly influenced by the opinions of others, the self is being externally manufactured. She contends that when we tweet and communicate via Facebook, we are playing to the crowd—presenting a self that is based on what others respond to positively.[48]

Research shows that we try to present ourselves in as positive a light as possible online—especially, as we noted as the outset of this chapter, when using a social networking site such as Facebook. In effect, we psychologically boost our ego, enhancing our self-esteem.[49] Some researchers believe that Facebook has a dark side, in that it feeds users' narcissistic tendencies by providing opportunities for self-promotion, access to shallow relationships and detached communication, and numerous self-solicitations for support.[50] Other researchers disagree, however, contending that frequency of Facebook use is not associated with narcissism—a trait they assert applies only to those Facebook users who gather unrealistically inflated numbers of friends—but rather with greater openness and lower concern regarding privacy.[51] For avid online game players, spending too much time online can result in depression and anxiety, because failing in game playing becomes as real as failing in real life.[52]

What are you like online? Does communicating online tend to make you more or less social? More or less inhibited? Do you act more or less yourself? Do you assume multiple identities, negotiate identities, or relate as yourself? What have you learned about yourself interacting with others online?

Cyberspace: The virtual space that exists in an online or computer environment.

In Sidney Lumet's award-winning 1976 film *Network,* written by Paddy Chayefsky, the main character, a television news anchorman, speaks these words to his audience:

> Television is not the truth. We lie like hell. . . . We deal in illusions, man. None of it is true. But you people sit there day after day, night after night. . . . We're all you know. You're beginning to think that the tube is reality and your own lives are unreal. You do what the tube tells you to do. You dress like the tube, you eat like the tube, you raise your children like the tube. In God's name, you people are the real thing; we're the illusion!

1. What does the preceding quotation suggest about our relationship with media?

2. Compare and contrast the image you have of each of the following with the image portrayed in the media. Which image do you prefer and why?

   A nurse

   A lawyer

   The police

   A corporate executive

   The wealthy

   Arabs

   Teenagers

   Older people

3. Divide your life into three approximately equal segments. For example, if you are currently twenty-one years old, divide your life into the following segments: ages one to seven, eight to fourteen, and fifteen to twenty-one. From each life segment, select a television program, film/DVD, music video/song, or book that you believe exerted a significant influence on your self-perception and interaction with others. Explain its influence.

4. If you could trade places with any media personality or character, past or present, who would it be and why?

SOURCE: Quote from *Network,* written by Paddy Chayefsky, MGM and United Artists, 1976.

GAINING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE: WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR SELF-CONCEPT

We all carry a figurative snapshot of the person we think we are wherever we go. Our snapshot is an impressionist collage of merged images: what we think we were like in the past, what we wish we had been like, what we think we are like right now, and what we expect to be like in the future. In many ways, our photo is a composite of how we see ourselves, how we wish we saw ourselves, and how we imagine others see us. Use the following suggestions to improve your mental picture-taking ability and to develop a clearer sense of self.

UPDATE PICTURES

Although changing your mental image of yourself is not easy, it is possible. To do it, remind yourself that a photo captures but a moment in time linked to a particular environment and communication context. Each picture you shoot, however, reveals a

How clear is the picture you have of you?

somewhat different you. Photos are frozen in time. People are not. We change from moment to moment, person to person, year in and year out. Thus, while our memories are important and help us construct our sense of who we are, we need to keep the mental picture we carry with us current. By doing this, we will be better able to discount images that no longer accurately represent us, and thereby avoid focusing on what psychologists refer to as regrets—"the lost lives, lost selves a person could have lived or been if s/he had done a few things differently."[53]

TAKE LOTS AND LOTS OF PICTURES

Watch yourself in action. Review your self-snapshots, periodically taking time to reassess the roles you perform, the statements you use to describe yourself, and the extent to which you approve of your own values and behavior. Are you satisfied as you scroll through them? Do you have realistic goals? It takes courage and open-mindedness to do this.

EXPLORE OTHERS' PICTURES OF YOU

The people we interact with regularly often see the strengths or weakness we tend to either overlook or underplay. While we need not become what others think we are, if we are willing to explore others' perceptions of us, we at least open ourselves to the possibility of change. If we are receptive to how others see us, we may be able to make adjustments and become more effective in other person-to-person contacts.

PICTURE POSSIBILITIES

The self is flexible and changeable. In a constant transitional state, it has the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and conditions. By asking yourself, "Who am I now?" instead of "Who am I always?" you will be able to take picture after picture of a changing you, someone who opens him- or herself to the possibilities that today and tomorrow offer. As a Xerox executive said in a speech aptly titled "Butterflies, Not Pigeonholes":

> In a knowledge-driven economy, self-confidence means a willingness to champion new ideas and the resilience to roll with the punches when ideas turn out to be better in the abstract than in reality. Plus, self-confidence provides the persistence to try again from another angle. Self-confidence enables an individual to withstand the criticism of colleagues, to live with the fact that not everyone will like everyone else.
>
> And it gives one the ability to listen to others, to work as part of a team, to be willing to let others share the load . . . and the spotlight, confident that one's contribution to the success of the whole will be recognized.
>
> In short, self-confidence enables people to feel comfortable outside the pigeonholes, to contribute in an ever-changing environment. Without it, the most gifted individual can toil in the shadows, the gifts of provenance never fully realized.[54]

Isn't it better to picture yourself as a butterfly, free, than stuck in a pigeonhole?

"I'll never be able to pass this course," Aisha moaned to herself as she sat at Starbucks staring at her laptop with her text opened beside her. "I've been trying to write this paper all weekend and I'm still on the first page." She sighed deeply, and then rose to get another cup of coffee.

As Aisha sipped her coffee, she began to thumb through the Sunday paper. She stopped to read an article about the Efficacy Institute, a school that provides students with instruction on self-concept. The article noted that studies on "efficacy" suggest that any person can succeed if he or she is motivated and works hard. Efficacy programs help students believe in themselves by repeatedly delivering messages such as "Work hard!" "Think you can!" "Believe in yourself!"

Aisha began to think about her own situation. She had dropped out of college years earlier and had only recently reenrolled. Now she found herself stuck in the same old trap—she didn't think she could do the work. Aisha wondered—should she also enroll at the Efficacy Institute? Aisha remembered how bad she had felt after dropping out of college, and now she was experiencing those same feelings of failure—all because of this paper. Then she had a brainstorm. She typed the following lines on her laptop and posted them on her Facebook wall:

Recipe for Success in College

1. Believe in Your Abilities to Succeed.
2. Work Hard on All Assignments.
3. You can do it!

She stared at the words. Then she started writing. Her head was filled with so many new ideas that her fingers could barely keep up. Could all these ideas have come from the simple lines she had just posted?

Aisha didn't dwell on the question. She was working too hard and writing too fast to ponder that possibility.

What do you think?

1. Do you believe that improving a college student's self-esteem will enable him or her to earn better grades? Why or why not?

2. Are there recipes for success you believe a student should follow to succeed in college? What about in the world of work? In life? If so, describe them, comparing and contrasting your various success recipes.

3. Does *self-talk*—that is, what you tell yourself—influence your chances of succeeding? Explain.

REVIEW THIS

CHAPTER SUMMARY

1 Define self-concept, distinguishing it from the self. Self-concept, the baseline for communication, is that relatively stable set of perceptions we attribute to ourselves. Composed of everything we think and feel about the self, it guides our communicative behavior.

2 Explain reflected appraisal theory, social comparison theory, and confirmation, rejection, and disconfirmation, using them to discuss the role you and others play in shaping the self-concept. According to reflected appraisal theory, our self-concept reflects how we believe others see us. According to social comparison theory, we compare ourselves to others to develop a feel for how we measure up to them. *Confirmation* supports our self-appraisal, *rejection* negates our self-appraisal, and *disconfirmation* reveals a total disregard for us as a person, suggesting that for the other person, we do not exist, robbing us of a sense of self.

3 Define self-fulfilling prophecy and distinguish between positive and negative Pygmalions. A self-fulfilling prophecy is a prediction that increases the likelihood that an anticipated outcome will occur. A positive Pygmalion has positive expectations and fosters positive change in us, while a negative Pygmalion has low or no expectations and fosters diminished performance in us.

4 Explain the influence that cultural diversity and gender have on self-concept. Cultural differences influence our self-notions. Whether we are from an individualistic or collectivistic culture, display an idiocentric or an allocentric orientation, or ascribe to masculine or feminine gender prescriptions is derived from the lessons taught us by society and culture.

5 Describe how media and technology affect self-concept. Media and technology provide us with information about preferred patterns of behavior and appearance, sometimes causing us to develop unrealistic expectations for ourselves and at times either adversely or positively affecting our feelings of adequacy.

6 Identify how you can change and strengthen your self-concept. To strengthen our feelings of self-worth, we need to reassess the nature of our self-concept periodically, visit and revisit others' perceptions of us, and keep ourselves open to the possibility of change.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1   Can you identify the components of self-concept and then use them to describe yourself? (See pages 36–37.)

2   Can you describe how the social comparisons you make with others influence your thoughts about yourself? How does reflected appraisal theory play out in your own life? (See pages 40–42.)

3   Can you name individuals who have served as positive and negative Pygmalions in your life, making you feel better or worse about yourself? Can you explain how you have served as a positive/negative Galatea for yourself? (See pages 44–46.)

4   Can you explain how living in an individualistic or collectivistic culture affects a person's self-concept? What about living in a celebrity-obsessed culture? How about when communicating online? (See pages 47–51.)

5   Can you identify steps you can take to strengthen your self-concept? (See pages 55–56.)

CHECK YOUR SKILLS

1 Can you describe your "perceived identity"? (See pages 36–37 and 42; and **Try This**, page 38.)

2 Can you provide examples of your personal growth and participation in the process of self-renewal? (See page 38.)

3 Can you identify situations that have affected how you see yourself? (See pages 39–40.)

4 Can you name the people and reference groups you use to gauge whether you are a success? (See pages 41–42.)

5 Can you use Goffman's dramaturgical approach to human interaction to make a good impression on others? (See page 42.)

6 Can you point to individuals who have confirmed, rejected, and disconfirmed your sense of self, and describe how you have done the same for others? (See pages 43–44; and **Try This**, page 45.)

7 Can you function as a positive Pygmalion? (See page 46.)

8 Can you determine if you have sufficient self-awareness to reevaluate yourself? (See pages 46–47.)

9 Can you provide examples demonstrating your culture's effects on how you see yourself? (See **Try This,** page 50; and **Try This,** page 52.)

10 Can you use your skills to analyze how self-concept can act to limit or enhance opportunities? (See **The Case of Aisha's Term Paper**, page 57.)

KEY TERMS

Self-awareness *36*

Self-concept *36*

Self-image *36*

Self-esteem *36*

Reflected appraisal theory *40*

Social comparison theory *41*

Perceived self *42*

Ideal self *42*

Impression management *42*

Possible self *42*

Expected self *42*

Dramaturgical approach to human interaction *42*

Confirmation *43*

Rejection *43*

Disconfirmation *44*

Self-efficacy *44*

Self-fulfilling prophecy *44*

Positive Pygmalion *46*

Negative Pygmalion *46*

Individualistic cultures *47*

Collectivistic cultures *47*

Idiocentric orientation *48*

Allocentric orientation *48*

High-context cultures *48*

Low-context cultures *48*

Power distance *48*

Gender identity *51*

Make-believe media *53*

Cyberspace *54*

STUDENT STUDY SITE

Visit the student study site at **www.sagepub.com/gambleic** to access the following materials:

- SAGE Journal Articles
- Videos
- Web Resources
- eFlashcards
- Web Quizzes
- Study Questions