Citation in APA format: Chen, S., & Critcher, C. R. (2025). Self and identity. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, E. J. Finkel, & W. B. Mendes (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (6th ed.). Situational Press.. https://doi.org/10.70400/XPVA2367

Self and Identity

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Human beings have the ability to recognize themselves as objects, to reflect on their own thoughts, to project themselves into the future, and to pursue goals. All these are possible because humans have achieved selfhood. Selfhood is defined as "the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that arise from the awareness of self as object and agent" (Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999, p. 2). This sense of selfhood is seen when a young child points to her reflection in a mirror and says her name. It's what leads a person to feel embarrassed when he accidentally spills his drink in an upscale restaurant. It's also what helps guide people's choices about what hobbies they pursue, the clothing styles they prefer, the groups they want to affiliate with, and so on. The recognition that the self exists both in the present and in the future is what allows people to develop plans and motivates them to pursue their goals. Without such functions of selfhood, many of the advances in medicine, technology, education, government, the arts, and other societal domains may not have come to be.

Although philosophers and scientists alike have long recognized the role that the self plays in human functioning, questions about the nature of the self, how the social environment shapes the self, whether and how well people know themselves, how people seek to protect and improve themselves, what are the neural underpinnings of the self, and so on all are questions that researchers continue to tackle. Attempts to address these questions have resulted in numerous articles and chapters, in psychology and related disciplines, that span a wide array of subtopics on the self and identity. The broad aim of this chapter is to provide readers with an overview of major theories and research in the psychological literature on the self and identity by describing classic studies to provide foundation and context, as well as more contemporary advances that provide glimpses into where the field is heading. Two more specific goals served as guides. First, the chapter should cover a broad span of the subtopics that are traditionally studied by self and identity researchers—for example, information processing, self-knowledge, and self-esteem—while making sure to include newer perspectives in these areas that have emerged since the last edition of this handbook. Second, the chapter should include topics that some may see as less traditional but represent promising new domains of inquiry on the self and identity.

To preview, a brief history provides background on the psychological literature on the self and identity. Some basic definitional issues surrounding "self" and "identity" as well as some boundary-setting frame the review. From there, characterizing the self and identity entails describing widely agreed-upon features, as well as an array of dimensions along which the self and identity are thought to vary, such as cultural differences. This will be followed by five sections reviewing

theory and research in five broad domains of inquiry on the self and identity—information processing, knowing the self, self-esteem, self-evaluative motives, and self-judgment biases—with coverage of various sub-topics within each domain. The conclusion explores some possible future directions for the study of the self and identity.

SETTING THE STAGE

A Brief History

Philosophers reflected on the nature of the self well before psychology was a formal discipline, but it was still over a century ago that William James (1890) wrote about the self in the chapter "The Consciousness of Self" in his *Principles of Psychology*. There, he introduced several foundational ideas about the self that have stood the test of time. Among these, James distinguished between the "self as knower" (the I) and the "self as known" (the me). These concepts capture that the self can be both the agent and object of its own reflection. Recognizing early on the critical role that the social environment plays in shaping the self, James offered the notion of the "social me" to refer to aspects of the self experienced in relation to individuals and groups whose opinions are valued. He distinguished these social aspects of the self with aspects representing the "material me" (e.g., one's body, possessions) and the "spiritual me" (e.g., one's moral values and conscience). More broadly, then, his writings suggested that the self is multi-faceted, now a widely accepted viewpoint. A final example of James' contributions are his propositions about self-esteem in which he suggested that self-esteem fluctuates as a function of successes and failures in domains that matter to the individual—again, an idea that is commonly assumed (and demonstrated) in contemporary work on the self.

Following James's (1890) early theorizing on the self, psychologists and other social scientists furthered thinking on the self, particularly the role of others in shaping the self. Especially notable was work in the symbolic interactionist tradition. Symbolic interactionists focus on the relationship between the person and society and believe that the two are mutually constructed in the course of social interaction (for a review, see Stryker & Statham, 1985). Cooley (1902), a leading figure of symbolic interactionism, viewed the person and society as two sides of the same coin. He used the term *looking-glass self* to capture the idea that people perceive themselves through the eyes of others, particularly important others.

Echoing Cooley, Mead (1934) maintained that the self is shaped by the anticipated and observed responses of others, though his focus was on important social groups and society at large as the "others." Mead also emphasized the cognitive underpinnings of the self, unlike his predecessors who focused on feelings about the self. In particular, Mead theorized about the crucial role of perspective taking, arguing that the emergence of the self entails an individual "taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved" (p. 203). In short, individuals assume the role of an other in perceiving the self. This notion of role taking can also be seen in subsequent work by Goffman's (1959) on self-presentation. Goffman argued that the nature of the self hinges on the role one is playing for the current audience.

Interest in the interplay between the self and other also bloomed outside of the symbolic interactionist tradition, such as in the work of both J. M. Baldwin (1897, 1911) and Sullivan (1953),

both of whom put forth the notion that personality is developed in the context of recurring social interactions and relationships. In short, the self—its aspects, how it develops, its social nature, how it is subjectively experienced—received considerable theoretical attention in psychology as well as other disciplines during the first half of the 20th century.

The self as a focus of psychological inquiry waned considerably in the mid-20th century in an intellectual environment biased heavily toward behaviorism. The behaviorist perspective that only observable action was suitable for scientific scrutiny rendered studies of people's internal, unobservable thoughts and feelings about themselves neither meaningful nor worthwhile. However, the narrow behaviorist stance on human behavior as reflecting passive stimulus-response associations encountered pushback with the emergence of the humanist movement in psychology in the 1950s. Key figures of this era included Abraham Maslow (1954) and Carl Rogers (1951, 1959), for whom internal processes, experiences, and constructs—including the self—were central to understanding human behavior and potential.

The cognitive revolution of the 1970s and onward through the 1980s, with its primary focus on internal mental events and processes, helped bring the self back to the forefront. During these decades, social psychologists not only studied the structural and information processing properties of the self (Markus, 1977; Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977), but also laid the foundation for later theory and research on affective and motivational bases of the self. Prominent examples of the latter include work on self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965; Wylie, 1974), self-affirmation (Steele & Liu, 1983), self-evaluation maintenance (Tesser, 1986), and self-verification (Swann, 1983). During these decades, social influences on the self continued to be a theme, as reflected in studies of standards of comparison (e.g., Wills, 1981; Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985), audiences for self-presentation (e.g., Schlenker & Leary, 1982), and individual differences in the tendency to adjust the self to the social situation (Snyder, 1974). It was also during this same period that key theories on the influence of social groups on the self emerged, including social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) and, soon thereafter, self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985). These different areas of inquiry tended to develop independently, but converged in highlighting the deeply social nature of the self.

In 1990, taking stock of the literature on social bases of the self, Markus and Cross identified three key ways in which the self has interpersonal foundations. First, one may internalize and experience others' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as one's own. A basic example of this is when children internalize the attitudes of their parents and other socialization agents. Second, one may use others in the evaluation and maintenance of the self, such as when one's standards and life goals are shaped by important others (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Higgins, 1987). Finally, one may experience the self as interdependent with others such that the self exists only in the context of others. This third way of conceptualizing the interpersonal nature of the self was fleshed out soon thereafter in Markus and Kitayama's (1991) landmark paper distinguishing independent and interdependent self-construals, with the interdependent self-construal exemplifying the notion that others are, in effect, overlapping parts of the self.

More broadly, the 1990s and early 2000s saw an explosion of cross-cultural perspectives in psychology, as seen in work by Triandis, Singelis, Heine, and others (e.g., Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis, 1995), that called into question both explicit and implicit assumptions about the universality of many psychological phenomena, processes, and outcomes. Most pertinent here, this corpus included challenges to prevailing portrayals of the self as an independent, autonomous entity that are commonly seen in North American and other individualistic cultures (e.g., Cousins, 1989; Triandis, 1989). In turn, this helped

to fuel recognition of and interest in social bases of the self more generally, alongside more personal, individual facets of the self, such as among close relationships researchers (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000).

Moving forward into the 21st century, an array of generative new areas of inquiry on the self has emerged. These include theorizing and research on the accuracy of self-knowledge and self-judgment, authenticity and the self, self-compassion, self-continuity, and the neural underpinnings of the self. Major theories and findings on these topics, as well as various others, are described in the pages that follow.

Definitional Issues And Boundaries

Before delving into the meat of this chapter, it may be useful to briefly comment on the terms "self" and "identity," and to demarcate some boundaries for this review. First, "self" and "identity" are often used interchangeably without significant implications for the theory or research in question. Sometimes one term is used instead of the other mainly due to precedent in the given domain of inquiry. Broadly speaking, both "self" and "identity" are assumed to be mentally represented in some form, although theory and research on mental representation and cognitive processes tend to use the term "self" more than "identity"—with an early example being research on self-schemas (e.g., Markus, 1977). For both the self and identity, a substantial number of theoretical perspectives assume or focus on the fact that people can have more than one; individuals may have multiple selves and/or multiple identities. Also, various theories acknowledge that selves and identities can refer to different timepoints in a person's life, such a past self or a future identity. Furthermore, for both the "self" and "identity," numerous theories and findings allow for both stability and malleability across situations and time.

All of the above said, if distinctions were to be made between the terms, one would be that the "self" has long been recognized as having both agent ("I) and object ("me") aspects, whereas this duality is not typically discussed in relation to "identity." Also, the self is generally viewed to be a broader construct such that the self is often thought of as encompassing all of a person's identities. More specifically, identities, which refer to specific traits, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is, make up part of the "me" (vs. "I") self. In a related vein, the term "identity" is used more widely than the term "self" when it comes to theory and research focused on people's social group memberships; thus, for example, it is more common to refer to people's racial and gender identities than to their racial or gender selves, though some do use the term "collective selves" to refer to what is meant by social identities (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). In this chapter, choice of term was guided by whatever has been most commonly used in the specific literature being reviewed.

To set some boundaries, this chapter covers theory and findings on both the "me" self, or the self as object, and the "I" self, or self as agent. Although many literatures that focus on the "me" (e.g., self-knowledge, self-evaluation) necessarily implicate the motives, experiences, and cognitive processes that underpin the "I," many topics that focus on the 'I' (e.g., goals, self-regulation) are foci in their own right for other chapters in this volume (Fishbach & Turnwald, 2023; Hofmann, 2023). Also, although there will be some mention of aspects of the self that are associated with one's social group memberships–that is, a person's social identities or collective selves–there are entire literatures related to various "master status" identities (Hughes, 1945) such as race and gender,

which have separate chapters devoted to them as well (Richeson, 2023; Schmader, 2023). Finally, theory and research that emphasizes the link between social identities and intergroup relations will be covered in other chapters (Ellemers, 2023).

CHARACTERIZING THE NATURE OF THE SELF AND IDENTITY

The aim of this section is to more fully characterize the nature of the self and identity by describing key features and dimensions associated with them about which there is considerable agreement in the literature. Many of the topics reviewed later in this chapter will touch back on these foundational features and dimensions.

Unitary Or Multifaceted? Stable Or Malleable?

Is the self unitary or multifaceted in nature? Lay discourse about the self often seems to imply that the self is unitary—that each individual possesses a single, monolithic "self." To be sure, this unitary perspective on the self can be seen in various domains of scientific inquiry as well, such as in work that emphasizes who the self is in general, with corresponding references to global evaluations of and knowledge about the self (e.g., Rosenberg, 1965). But the notion that people have multiple "mes" or selves (James, 1890) has always been part of the psychological literature on the self, as noted above. Furthermore, over the decades, numerous theories have focused on the fact that people's thoughts, feelings, motives, and behavior, along with their subjective experiences of the self, often fluctuate across contexts (e.g., Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Markus and Wurf (1987) introduced the phrase "working self-concept" to capture this basic and powerfully resonant idea, and spelled out its social-cognitive underpinnings. Specifically, they argued that the working self-concept refers to the particular subset of a person's vast array of stored knowledge about the self that is activated, recruited from long-term memory into short-term or "working memory," at a given moment in time and place. The content of working memory—including the self-knowledge that is active in it—is ever-changing depending on internal and external cues and circumstances. When the working self-concept shifts, so too do subjective experiences of the self—in effect, who the self "is."

Whether the self is unitary or multifaceted is closely related to questions about the stability and malleability of the self. The working self-concept idea clearly suggests there is often malleability in the self, as a person moves from one context to the next (e.g., at school vs. at home vs. with one's boss vs. with one's friends), but does this then preclude stability in the self? Can stability and malleability in the self co-exist? Though this question is not critical to many areas of inquiry on the self, which often simply assume stability or malleability in the self, the notion that stability and malleability can and do co-exist is supported by various theories within and beyond the self literature. First, basic cognitive principles would suggest that even as different selves are brought into working memory in different contexts, there is relative stability in the overall body of self-knowledge that individuals have stored in long-term memory. Put another way, the constellation of selves a person has stored in memory is relatively stable, even though different selves may guide the person's thoughts, feelings, motivations, and actions in particular contexts. Second, consistent with social-cognitive theory and research on knowledge accessibility (e.g., Higgins, 1990; 1996), it is both possible and likely that certain components of self-knowledge are chronically accessible,

meaning that they frequently occupy working memory, thereby lending stability to a person's thoughts, feelings, motivations, and behaviors across time and situations. A third way in which stability and malleability in the self can co-exist is embodied in the idea of Person X Situation signatures, predictable and thus stable malleability in the self tied to specific contexts (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). That is, a person may show malleability in the self in that she is shy with authority figures, but assertive with close friends, but can still exhibit stability in these situationally dependent contingencies.

Actual And Possible Selves

Related to the ideas that the self is both multifaceted and malleable is the distinction between actual and possible selves. Whereas actual selves refer to selves that individuals subjectively perceive themselves as possessing, possible selves refer to hypothetical, conceivable future selves, such as selves that people fear or dream of becoming. Though possible selves are only just that, possible not actual, they are nonetheless assumed to be mentally represented, capable of being brought to the forefront in relevant contexts. For example, an aspiring pre-med student may have knowledge stored in memory about characteristics and behaviors she associates with her hoped-for doctor self; this future (doctor) self is likely to be activated in relevant contexts such as when the student is studying for the medical school entrance exam. Possible selves are thought to provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation (Markus & Nurius, 1986), as they embody incentives for future behavior aimed at achieving them in the case of desirable (e.g., ideal) selves or avoiding them in the case of undesirable (e.g., feared) selves.

The distinction between actual and possible selves is at the crux of a number of theories on the self and identity. A prominent example is self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), which focuses on the affective and motivational consequences of discrepancies between a person's actual selves and either their ideal selves (i.e., the selves people hope to become) or their ought selves (i.e., the selves people believe they have a duty or obligation to become, respectively). Such discrepancies are consequential. When people perceive that their actual self falls short of their ought self, self-discrepancy theory predicts that they experience anxiety and other agitation-related emotions. Self-discrepancy theory forms the basis of regulatory focus theory (e.g., Higgins, 1997), which elaborates on the distinct strategies people use when they are striving to attain ideal versus ought selves.

Another theory that highlights the link between possible selves and motivation is identity-based motivation theory (e.g., Oyserman, 2015; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004). To start, this theory assumes that different contexts bring different identities into the working self-concept. It then proposes that such identity fluctuations influence how situations and difficulties are interpreted, with implications for what behaviors people are likely to enact. More pointedly, when behavior feels congruent with an activated identity, difficulties are experienced as validating the importance and meaningfulness of the action. In contrast, when behavior feels incongruent with an activated identity, encountered obstacles communicate the action is pointless and not suitable for the self.

Cultural Bases Of The Self

A pivotal moment in the history of social psychological theory and research on the self and identity was the publication of Markus and Kitayama (1991) in which the authors distinguished between independent and interdependent self-construals. Whereas independent self-construals—in which the self is an autonomous, separate and bounded entity—fit prevailing ways of thinking in North American and other individualistic cultures—the interdependent self-construal exemplifies the notion that others are overlapping parts of the self, a perspective more common in East Asian and other collectivistic cultures. Markus and Kitayama theorized about the role of the differing traditions, institutions, and practices of individualistic versus collectivistic cultures in giving rise to independent versus interdependent self-construals, respectively, and outlined the implications of these distinct self-construals for cognition, motivation, emotion, and behavior. Their work joined other challenges to singular portrayals of the self as a separate, autonomous entity (e.g., Cousins, 1989; Triandis, 1989), and helped to facilitate the rapid emergence of cross-cultural approaches across a range of social psychological domains (e.g., attribution; Morris & Peng, 1994; for a review, see Kashima & Gelfand, 2023).

As noted, this work on cultural differences in self-construals helped fuel interest in social bases of the self more generally, alongside more personal, individual facets of the self, such as among close relationships researchers (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). One example is Cross and colleagues' (2000) work on the relational interdependent self-construal, which defines the self in terms of one's close relationships. Cross et al. (2000) developed the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) scale to assess individual differences in this self-construal. Higher, relative to lower, scorers report defining the self largely in relational terms. These high scorers are more likely than their low-RISC counterparts to consider the needs and opinions of significant others in their decision-making and are judged as more open and responsive by interaction partners after a getting-acquainted interaction (Cross et al., 2000). Other work has shown that high RISC people selectively attend to, and thus better remember, relational information about other people (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002). Although there is conceptual overlap in the interdependent and relational interdependent self-construals, they are not one and the same. The latter is focused on relationships with others, whereas Markus and Kitayama's notion of interdependence captures connections with close others and one's social groups. Also, research on the relational interdependent self-construal has largely focused on consequences associated with individual differences in RISC within North American samples.

Markus, Connor, Stephens and their colleagues went on to broaden the conceptualization of culture beyond the East-West divide (e.g., Markus & Connor, 2013; Stephens, Townsend, & Dittman, 2019). More specifically, whereas the preponderance of earlier work linking different cultures to independent and interdependent self-construals focused on the contrast between Western versus East Asian cultures, this more recent work examines cultures of social class (higher vs. lower social class), political ideology (conservative vs. liberal), organizations (e.g., profit vs. non-profit), gender (female vs. male), and so forth, articulating the ways in which these other cultural divides also shape the nature of people's self-construals.

A final noteworthy development in this arena comes from theory and research by Vignoles et al. (2016), who argue that the basic distinction between independent and interdependent self-construals does not sufficiently capture variations in models of selfhood seen across different regions of the world. Based on results from two large-scale surveys, which recruited respondents from over 50 cultural groups across 33 countries, these researchers found evidence that the contrast between independence and interdependence alone does not adequately account for the diverse

ways that people report being independent or interdependent. Instead, Vignoles et al. offer a 7-dimensional model—with dimensions including, for example, self-containment versus connection to others, consistency versus variability, self-expression versus harmony, and self-reliance versus dependence on others—that they suggest provides a more accurate and comprehensive picture of global variations in independent versus interdependent selfhood. It's not that independence versus interdependence is not a useful distinction; rather, the seven-dimensional model enables the assessment of multiple ways that people are independent as well as interdependent. Though the simple independent-interdependent contrast continues to be used in the literature, incorporation of the Vignoles et al. (2016) model is on the rise (e.g., Kashima & Gelfand, 2023; Kitayama et al., 2017; Liu, Morris, Talhelm, & Yang, 2019).

To take a step back, research on independent versus interdependent self-construals—as well as the relational interdependent self-construal—has focused on how people differ from one another in their predominant self-construal, in effect treating self-construal as an individual difference. But in shining a light on social foundations of the self, this work also has helped to stimulate theory and research that argues that most people have both independent and interdependent facets to their self-construal. What facet is most influential at a given moment in time depends on the context and circumstances. In this way, this work takes the approach that most people possess multiple levels of self-representation (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001).

Multiple Levels Of Self-Representation

In Brewer and Gardner's (1996) tripartite framework of multiple levels of self-representation, the self is represented at the personal, relational, and collective levels. The personal refers to the individuated self-concept, is the focus of most research on the self in Western psychology, and is closely aligned with Markus and Kitayama's independent self-construal. The relational self refers to aspects of the self that are associated with significant others and in this way is similar to the interdependent self-construal (Chen et al., 2006). Finally, the collective level of self-representation in Brewer and Gardner's (1996) model refers to aspects of the self associated with one's social identities and group memberships, which is the focus of theories such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1994). Again, what distinguishes perspectives like Brewer and Gardner's from work in the tradition of Markus and Kitayama (1991) is that the former emphasizes that individuals likely have all three levels of self-representation, whereas the latter assumes that most people have a predominant self-construal or self-representation.

Another perspective in this area (Gaertner, Sedikides, & O'Mara, 2008; Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2002) starts with multiple levels of self-representation or multiple selves—individual, relational, and collective—that map onto the tripartite framework of Brewer and Gardner (1996). However, it argues that the individual self has motivational primacy—it is the primary level of self-definition, even though relational and collective selves may come to the fore in particular contexts. Supporting the motivational primacy of the individual self, these researchers have shown that people are more inclined to engage in strategic maneuvers to protect the individual self compared to other selves.

Implicit And Explicit Facets Of The Self

For over a century, it was widely assumed that the self—particularly James's (1890) notion of the "me" self, or self as object—referred mainly to all the self-related thoughts, feelings, and experiences of which an individual is conscious. That is, the self as object was the self that people were explicitly aware of, that they experienced phenomenologically. Yet lay intuition and experience, not to mention emerging theory and research, chipped away at this assumption. A notable early example was Nisbett and Wilson (1977) demonstrating that people have limited access to the self's inner workings, meaning that there is more to the self than what people can explicitly and accurately report. Then, with the rise of social-psychological theory and research on implicit cognition during the late 20th and early 21st centuries (e.g., Bargh, 1994; Fazio & Olson, 2003; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Jacoby, 1991; Schacter, 1987), researchers began to explore the possibility of implicit forms of self-knowledge and implicit self-related processes—that is, knowledge and cognition related to the self that may exist and unfold outside of conscious awareness. Indeed, in their review chapter on the self and identity, Swann and Bosson (2010) noted the sharp growth in the literature on the implicit self during the first decade of the 21st century. Work in this area has continued and it's now widely understood that both explicit and implicit self-knowledge and self-processes are core to a comprehensive understanding of the self and identity.

Studying implicit facets of the self, given their nature, requires going beyond explicit measures of self-knowledge and self-processes, ones that directly ask respondents to report on themselves. Indeed, a good deal of the literature on implicit self-aspects has focused on the psychometric properties of different implicit measurement techniques. Many measures of the implicit self utilize some form of a response latency paradigm wherein people's speed to respond to self-related stimuli is taken as an indirect measure of evaluations, attributes, or social identities people associate with the self (e.g., the Implicit Association Test; Greenwald & Farnham, 2000). Other measures and phenomena rely on evaluations of self-related stimuli (e.g., implicit egotism, name-letter effect; Pelham, Mirenberg, & Jones, 2002; Nuttin, 1985), such as the letters in one's name, to infer evaluations of the self. What criterion variables these implicit measures predict, and just how strongly, have also been topics of inquiry in this area (e.g., Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000).

In some research on the implicit self, the focus has simply been on demonstrating that self-processes often transpire non-consciously. For example, research has shown that members of lower-status groups (e.g., women, compared to men) tend to exhibit not only greater implicit self-categorization into their low-status group (i.e., gender self-categorization), but also greater implicit self-stereotyping (i.e., implicitly associating female-stereotypic attributes with the self; Cadinu & Galdi, 2012). As another example, both Whites and Asians tend to implicitly self-stereotype in line with prevailing stereotypes about their ingroup (e.g., that Whites are confident and talkative in a classroom setting, whereas Asians are quiet and shy) in stereotype-relevant contexts. More specifically, response latencies on an Implicit Association Test, taken when imagining oneself in a classroom context, have shown that White participants associate the self with being talkative, whereas Asian participants associated the self with being reserved (Devos & Yokoyama, 2014).

Other work on the implicit self has offered a more comprehensive view of the distinction between explicit and implicit forms of self-knowledge and self-processes. A key example is Epstein's (1994) Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (CEST). Briefly, this model posits that people possess both an implicit, "experiential" self and an explicit, "rational" self. Each self is guided by independent systems, each with its own set of rules and forms of information processing. Whereas the experiential self operates on an intuitive, nonconscious level, the rational self is governed by deliberate, conscious thought and judgment. A later section elaborates on this model (see Information Processing and the Self).

A final but important characterization of the literature on the implicit self is that much of it focuses specifically on implicit self-esteem (see Self-Esteem section). This work has grappled with issues such as the relationship between explicit and implicit self-esteem and the implications of discrepancies between them.

Self-Concept Clarity

Self-concept clarity is a structural property of the self that describes the organization of its content. More concretely, self-concept clarity refers to whether a person's beliefs about the self are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and stable across time (Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1996). The construct is assessed with a self-report scale that queries respondents about the confidence, consistency, and stability of their beliefs about the self. Thus, although self-concept clarity is considered to be a structural characteristic, it is measured in terms of a person's subjective beliefs about the clarity of their self-concept (Guerrettaz & Arkin, 2016). Of note, self-concept clarity pertains to the organization of self-beliefs, not their accuracy (see Knowing the Self).

Self-concept clarity was introduced early on as a likely concomitant to self-esteem such that people with high self-esteem were surmised to also possess confidently held, consistent, and stable self-beliefs, just as those with lower self-esteem were thought to have less confident, less consistent, and less stable self-beliefs (Baumgardner, 1990; Campbell, 1990). The positive association between self-esteem and self-concept clarity is robust (DeMarree & Bobrowski, 2017). Considering the range of outcomes that self-concept clarity predicts, its explanatory role must be distinguished from that of self-esteem. Although some researchers have been sensitive to this concern, others measure one construct without the other. The explanatory power of self-concept clarity—when properly isolated from those of self-esteem—often becomes weaker and varies across contexts and outcome. More research needs to map where individual differences in self-concept clarity are most likely to be an independent predictor.

Although most studies on self-concept clarity have taken an individual-differences approach, increasingly research assesses momentary fluctuations in self-concept clarity. For example, building on evidence that self-concept clarity is undermined by negative, self-relevant events (e.g., Nezlek & Plesko, 2001)—such as setbacks to valued, self-relevant goals (Lavallee & Campbell, 1995)—encountering social rejection is associated with lowered self-concept clarity among individuals high in rejection sensitivity, an individual-difference construct associated with valuing the avoidance of rejection (Ayduk, Gyurak, & Luerssen, 2009).

Another growing trend connects self-concept clarity with close relationship processes and outcomes. For example, self-concept clarity predicts self-disclosure in romantic relationships, such that higher self-concept clarity is associated with greater disclosure, even controlling for self-esteem (Tajmirriyahi & Ickes, 2020). Other work has shown that lower self-concept clarity is associated with less support for partners' desired self-change (Emery, Gardner, Finkel, & Carswell, 2018), presumably because a partner's self-change may require changes in one's own self. Change to the self is threatening to individuals with lower self-concept clarity because taking on new facets of the self may add further confusion to their already unclear sense of the self (Emery, Walsh, & Slotter, 2015). As a final example, relationship break-ups reduce self-concept clarity, perhaps because relationships intertwine the self with relationship partners (Slotter, Gardner, & Finkel, 2010).

Self-Continuity

An earlier section introduced the notion of actual and possible selves. One kind of possible self is the "future self"—or a person one can envision becoming in the future. The notion of future selves raises the dimension of time in the study of the self. Although most of the vast literature on the self has focused on the self at a single point in time—typically, the present self—people do have conceptions of their past, present, and future selves. Work on self-continuity examines people's subjective sense of how connected, similar, or overlapping their past, present, and future selves are to one another (Chandler, 1994; Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 1993; McLean, 2008). A sense of self-continuity is thought to provide an enduring, coherent sense of who one is (Noa & Karniol, 2012). In more lay terms, continuity is the glue that bonds one's experience of the self in the past, present, and future. People's different selves in different situations (e.g., me with my best friend, me at work, me when competing in sports) can exist alongside a sense of self-continuity, which refers to a more overarching sense of who one is over time (e.g., "Am I essentially the same me today as I was in high school or as I will be in middle age?"). This question of retaining an overriding sense of the self over time is captured in the "Ship of Theseus" thought experiment, which asks: Is the Greek hero's sea-faring vessel still the same ship if, over time, all of its parts—one-by-one—are eventually replaced? The physical self, composed of billions of cells, experiences such a full evolution through its lifetime—many times over, in fact. People's sense of self-continuity entails glossing over the continuous stream of upgrades to the self to see a single entity over time.

Broadly speaking, attaining and maintaining a sense of self-continuity is thought to be a basic human need (e.g., Vignoles, 2011). Consistent with this, people desire future selves that help maintain a sense of self-continuity (Vignoles, Manzi, Regalia, Jemmolo, & Scabini, 2008). Self-continuity is thought to be crucial to psychological adaptation (e.g., Sadeh & Karniol, 2012; Sani, Bowe, & Herrara, 2008; Sokol & Serper, 2019), while the absence of continuity in the self has been linked to various forms of psychopathology (e.g., Hacking, 1995; Westen & Heim, 2003), and in extreme cases even to suicide (e.g., Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003). Indeed, Erikson's (1963) notion of "identity crisis" was theorized to arise when people lack a sense of continuity from their past self to the person that they experience themselves to be in the present—in essence, a "break" or disruption between the past and present. Notably, some work on self-continuity has focused on connections (or lack thereof) between past and present selves, as in Erikson's theorizing, whereas other work has focused on interrelations between the present self and future selves. Research also varies in whether the focus is on phenomenological or narrative forms of self-continuity (Addis & Tippett, 2008). As McAdams (2013) describes, the former, which is often taken for granted, is illustrated by the fact that most of us go to bed at night assuming that we will awake the next morning more or less the same person (James, 1892/1961). By comparison, narrative continuity has to do with a person's life story, one that offers a coherent tale of how the self has changed over time and yet how there remains a sense of sameness across one's past, present, and imagined future selves.

Regardless of these variations, how or where do people derive a sense of self-continuity? Self-continuity and chronological age are positively associated (Rutt & Lockenhoff, 2016). One possible mechanism for this association (Landau, Arndt, Swanson, & Bultmann, 2018) suggests that older (vs. younger) adults experience greater self-continuity because they are more likely to chunk life events and experiences into broader categories (e.g., entertainment, work), whereas younger adults tend to store events and experiences in more specific, unique categories (e.g., yesterday's day at work, watching a specific movie). Given these differential tendencies, when older adults look back

in time, they have fewer categories to integrate, thereby fostering both a sense that time has passed quickly and also a sense of self-continuity.

Culture is another influence on self-continuity. For example, cultural differences in temporal attention to the past and future could affect one's sense of self-continuity. In one study, Chinese participants saw the past and future as more connected and closer to the present than did Euro-Canadian participants, and also reported greater self-continuity than did Euro-Canadians (Ji et al., 2017). Further research demonstrated a causal effect of perceived distance to the past on self-continuity, with shorter distance linked to greater self-continuity.

Other work has focused on social contributors to people's sense of self-continuity. For example, painful social interactions, such as experiences of ostracism, disrupt self-continuity (Jiang, Chen, Wang & Hou, 2021). Ostracism threatens social connections, whereas social connections foster a sense of continuity between the past, present, and future selves (Sedikides et al., 2016). As such, disruptions to one's social relationships disrupt self-continuity.

Further speaking to the importance of social connections for fostering a sense of self-continuity is research linking nostalgia and self-continuity. Nostalgia is the sentimental longing for one's past, arising from self-relevant and social memories (Sedikides, Wildschut, Ardnt, & Routledge, 2008). Nostalgia has been theorized to breed self-continuity (e.g., Davis, 1979; Sedikides et al., 2016). This may occur because nostalgia boosts feelings of social connectedness and belonging, which in turn promote a sense of self-continuity (Sedikides et al., 2016). Nostalgia does link reliably to feelings of social connectedness (e.g., Hepper et al., 2012; Wildschut et al., 2006; Zhou, Sedikides, Wildschut, & Gao, 2008), as the emotion often conjures up fond memories of meaningful relational bonds, such as with members of one's family-of-origin or a childhood best friend. In turn, social connectedness is thought to foster self-continuity. Part of the reasoning here is that nostalgia often involves bringing people from one's past into the present, such as when people reflect on how a close other from the past might view the present self (Sedikides et al., 2016). In a related vein, the present self may be defined in large part by relationships from the past (Andersen & Chen, 2002), once again bridging the past and present selves. Also, people often experience nostalgia about important life events, many of which are likely to have involved close others—such as birthdays and other holiday celebrations, graduations, and anniversaries—again, bringing memories of the past self into present consciousness. Indeed, numerous studies have documented links between nostalgia and self-continuity, with social connectedness as an underlying mechanism (Sedikides et al., 2016).

Nostalgia may foster continuity not only between past and present selves, but also present and future selves (Hong et al., 2021). This may occur because feelings of nostalgia often involve mental time travel not only to the past, but also to the future (e.g., Sedikides & Wildschut, 2020). For example, nostalgic thoughts may be a source of inspiration for the future (e.g., "I hope to have my kids have a great relationship with their grandparents like I had with mine.")

Research on the correlates and consequences of self-continuity has focused on the notion that a sense of self-continuity is psychologically adaptive. For example, after returning to their home countries, international teachers reported nostalgia for their host culture, which was positively associated with a sense of continuity between past and present selves (Zou, Wildschut, Cable, & Sedikides, 2016). This self-continuity was in turn linked to higher self-reported approach motivation, self-esteem, and job satisfaction. Whereas this study focused on past-to-present self-continuity, other work has focused on the effects associated with present-to-future self-continuity, sometimes referred to as future self-continuity. In the educational realm, greater future self-continuity has been linked to improved academic performance and self-control (Adelman et al.,

2016; Chishima & Wilson, 2020; Nurra & Oyserman, 2018). In the health domain, future self-continuity is associated with healthier behaviors and outcomes (Rutchick, Slepian, Reyes, Pleskus, & Hershfield, 2018; Sokol & Serper, 2017).

Relatedly, the felt degree of continuity (or lack thereof) between one's present and future selves has implications for financial decision-making. For example, greater future self-continuity is associated with financial perspectives and decisions that give greater weight to the future self, such as higher valuation of future rewards and putting money into savings versus spending it (Ersner-Hershfield and colleagues (Ersner-Hershfeld, Garton, Ballard, Samanez-Larkinm & Knutson, 2009; Ersner, Wimmer, & Knutson, 2010). A strong link between one's present and future selves encourages the present self to act in the future self's interests.

Neural Bases Of The Self

The neural underpinnings of the self is yet another important dimension to consider in characterizing the self. Research emerging over the past two decades has made considerable inroads into describing and understanding the neural bases of an array of self processes—including self-knowledge, self-evaluation, self-awareness, and self-regulation. Broadly speaking, neuroscientific approaches address three kinds of questions about the neural basis of a given process: where the process takes place in the brain, what kinds of computations are involved, and how those processes are influenced by external factors (e.g., contextual circumstances) or internal factors (e.g., other mental activity; Lieberman & Pfeifer, 2005). There is some level of agreement on the neural regions and processes involved in various self-processes, among them self-referential processing and self-evaluation (for research on the neural bases of self-control and self-regulation in particular, see Decety & Leong, in this volume).

What regions of the brain are involved when people are thinking about the self in some manner, and is the involvement of these regions specific to self-related processing? Neuroscientific research aimed at answering questions like these can take various forms, such as assessing the consequences of lesions in particular brain regions or measuring blood flow in particular brain areas using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) during self-relevant processing. Starting in the 2000s, fMRI research began to amass evidence suggesting that a variety of self-related processes are associated with activation in a broad region known as the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC). In one early example, participants were imaged while they made trait-adjective judgments in relation to three different questions—namely, whether the trait described the self, described another person (e.g., George Bush), or simply whether the word was written in uppercase (Kelley et al., 2002). Some sub-regions of the mPFC were associated with person judgments (whether self or social), whereas other regions appeared to be uniquely implicated during the course of self-related judgments.

Numerous other studies also showed activation in sub-regions of the mPFC related to self-related processing (e.g., Heatherton et al., 2006; Kim & Johnson, 2012; Macrae et al. 2004). Subsequent meta-analyses and reviews bolstered this basic conclusion (e.g., Denny et al., 2012; Lieberman, 2010; Murray et al., 2015; Northoff et al., 2006). Although studies like these indicate that the mPFC is involved in self-related processing and judgments, they cannot speak definitively to whether the mPFC is necessary for such processing and judgments. Patients with lesions in the mPFC can speak more directly to this question. For example, one study used the Kelley et al. (2002) paradigm with patients who had focal brain damage to the mPFC; these patients did not show the self-reference effect, a memory advantage for information processed in relation to the self (Philippi, Duff,

Denburg, Tranel, & Rudrauf, 2012). This study suggests that the mPFC is necessary for at least some forms of self-related processing.

Further research has dug deeper into the question of how self-specific mPFC activation is. Although some studies (e.g., Kelley et al., 2002) have suggested such selectivity in mPFC activation for self- versus other-related processing and judgments, others have found little difference in neural activation in response to trait judgments about the self versus others, regardless of whether those are personally unknown or intimate others (e.g., Ochsner et al., 2005; Seger, Stone, & Keenan, 2004; for a review, see Rameson & Lieberman, 2007). Thus, although mPFC is clearly essential for self-related processing and judgments, it does not preclude this region's involvement in other domains of processing and judgment, such as our understanding of other people in general.

Adding complexity to this issue are the mPFC's subregions (e.g., ventral medial PFC, dorsal medial PFC), which show differential activation in relation to self- and other-related processing and judgments (for reviews, see Beer & Flagan, 2015; Denny et al., 2012). In this vein, in a review of the literature on the role of the mPFC, Lieberman et al. (2019) took a multi-method, multi-domain approach to examine the functionality of mPFC subdivisions—focusing on the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (DMPFC), anteromedial prefrontal cortex (AMPFC), and ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC)—on processes in five different domains, one of which was self processes. In each domain, the authors reviewed evidence from methods (e.g., fMRI) relying on forward inference (i.e., identifying neural activity when particular task demands are present), as well as from methods (e.g., lesion work, transcranial magnetic stimulation) that have reverse inference or causal inference value (i.e., identifying which neural regions are necessary for particular types of processing). Overall, their review of the available data yielded clear and consistent evidence implicating the AMPFC in self-related processes, with only occasional (but not consistent) evidence implicating the other two examined mPFC subdivisions.

Another line of research in this area suggests that different kinds of self-evaluative judgments (e.g., self-serving, overconfident) not only engage different subregions of the mPFC, but may also be associated with activity in other regions of the brain entirely (e.g., dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, orbitofrontal cortex; Beer & Harris, 2019; Beer, Lombardo, & Bhanji, 2010; Delgado et al., 2016; Hughes & Beer, 2012; 2013; Meyer & Lieberman, 2018; for a review, see Beer & Flagan, 2015). On balance, then, the current state of the literature seems to suggest that although the mPFC is clearly associated with self-related processing and judgments, subregions of it are also engaged with processing information and making judgments about other people and, furthermore, brain regions beyond the mPFC are engaged with various forms of self-evaluation, such as ones reflecting self-enhancement.

Looking ahead, alongside continued progress in existing lines of inquiry, other questions remain to be pursued. For example, research on developmental changes in the neural regions that are engaged in self-related processing has grown over the past few decades (e.g., Pfeifer, Leiberman, & Dapretto, 2007; Pfeifer & Peake, 2012; Van der Cruijsen, Peters, van der Aar, & Crone, 2019; Van der Cruijsen, Peters, Zoetendaal, Pfeifer, & Crone, 2018). As a more specific example, particular neural activity emerges when people engage in self-affirmation prior to exposure to threatening health-related messages (Falk et al., 2015). A final example is research examining the neural regions that are engaged in judgments related to the future self, including whether and how they differ from present-self judgments (Stendardi, Biscotto, Bertossi, & Ciaramelli, 2021).

INFORMATION PROCESSING AND THE SELF

The self is both an information processor and a target of information processing, an "I" and a "me" (James, 1890). This section focuses on the self's "I," the self as the knower. Discussions of the "I" will necessarily consider the "me," the self as known. The "I" is the information processor, but do not be misled by the seemingly cognitive nature of the term. Although psychologists have often represented human thought processes as algorithmic steps, much like a computer program operates, the self is also a highly experiential agent whose understanding of the world is influenced by feelings and motivations. In fact, this section begins with a theory describing how the self seems to be of two minds—one governed by dispassionate reason, the other by affect-laden intuition—in its understanding of its own place in the world.

Cognitive Experiential Self Theory

Background

Whereas William James dichotomized the self into the "I" and the "me," Epstein's (1973) cognitive-experiential self theory (CEST) essentially divides the "I" even further by recognizing an experiential self and a rational self. Each is guided by its own information processing approaches and implicit rules. These systems guide one's interactions with the environment, make sense of one's own and others' behaviors, and evolve with new experiences and knowledge. Epstein (1973) argued that the experience of navigating between these two systems lends an experiential plausibility to the notion of a human soul: It seems there is an ethereal operator that is torn by sometimes competing input as it makes decisions about how to direct the physical body.

The experiential self operates automatically and intuitively. The rational self arrives at impressions and intentions through deliberation. Many of social psychology's dual-process models share a similar dichotomy. Perhaps none has had more influence than Kahneman's (2003) distinction between fast (System I) and slow (System II) approaches to judgment and reasoning problems. Heuristics, the workhorses of System I (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), are but one instantiation of CEST's experiential system (Epstein, 2003).

More fundamentally, CEST posits basic motives that guide the self. First, the self seeks to *maximize pleasure* and *minimize pain*. Optimism and pessimism reflect beliefs about the achievability of these goals. Second, the self has a basic need to assimilate its experience into a *coherent understanding* of the world and the self as they are already understood. This helps to sustain perceptions of the external world as predictable, controllable, and just (Lerner, 1980). Third, the self needs to maintain relatedness to other selves, founded on a belief that *others can be trusted*. Fourth, the self has a basic need for self-esteem, and most people do believe in the self's worthiness. Collectively, these beliefs are core implicit theories that underlie the self's experience, shaping how one interacts with the world and makes sense of one's life experience. Related core motives have resurfaced throughout psychology's history (Fiske, 2014): belonging, understanding, controlling, enhancing the self, and trusting others. Regardless of how they are parsed, when these motives are not fulfilled, anxiety may result (Rimé, 2005).

Implicit Theories

CEST posits that the self navigates its world by drawing on a set of affect-laden beliefs, theories, and sub-beliefs that bridge the self and its external environment (Epstein, 2003). Fitting into CEST's dual-system framework, some of these theories exist rationally and operate through conscious, language-mediated thought. Other theories exist experientially. These emerge from the unconscious, are called upon automatically, and have a phenomenological component to them.

Implicit theories can be about the self as an object or about the world in which the self operates. One example of an implicit theory in which the self is the object of judgment is "I am worthy." By contrast, the implicit theory "Other people are generally trustworthy" guides one's interactions with the world. Such theories are consequential not only for the self's own behavior and experience, but also for the responses they elicit from others. For example, those who adopt a cynical worldview are less likely to extend trust to others, which elicits disrespectful slights in turn (Stavrova, Ehlebracht, & Vohs, 2020). In this way, implicit theories can push the self into a self-fulfilling prophecy in which they encourage confirmation of the self's preexisting beliefs about the world and their place in it.

Notably, CEST's distinction between rational and experiential is not simply based in the logical notion of rationality. Theories of both types can be valid or reasonable. Instead, these terms describe how these theories are called upon and influence subsequent self-related information processing and behavior. In fact, when the self has a more well-developed experiential processing system, it tends to engage in more constructive thinking about the self. Such individuals are less likely to endorse items like, "I spend a lot of time thinking about my mistakes, even if there is nothing I can do about them." Without being weighed down by these counterproductive thought patterns, these people actually navigate life more effectively, performing better in school, for example (Epstein, 2003). This association held even when controlling for markers of intelligence. In this way, the experiential system can promote a reasonable approach to life.

The experiential system is thought to be evolutionarily older. When pet owners wonder what their dogs and cats *really* think of them, they are likely making the mistake of assuming the existence of a rational system in their furry friends. Instead, navigating the world with affect-based intuitions that are devoid of verbal content is the way the self operates in most of the animal kingdom. But even for humans, the experiential system learns about the self and its place in the world by tracking and being responsive to what brings it pleasure and pain (Epstein, 1984, 1998). In this way, understanding the distinction between these two systems both identifies what makes humans' sense of self special and what the human self has in common with its animal brethren's.

Being Of Two Minds

The self does not simply process information using its experiential *or* its rational system. Instead, the self can come to understand a situation using both systems. In this way, the self can arrive at two contradictory conclusions: one based on what it knows, another based on what it feels (Denes-Raj & Epstein, 1994). The experiential system may be uniquely operative when one is cognitively busy or taxed (Finucane, Alhakami, Slovic, & Johnson, 2000; see Samson & Voyer, 2012), but the operation of the rational system more often complements than it does override the output of the experiential system.

Consider the following example of how a person might divide blame between the self and another. The subject, along with two other people, each flip a coin. If each coin toss results in the same outcome (e.g., all heads, all tails), then each person will get $100. The subject flips heads. The second

person flips heads. But the final person gets tails. In this situation, how would the subject feel toward the third person? Participants who considered this thought experiment tended to report that they would be angry with the third person, and that they would not want them to join a trip to Vegas in which all attendees would split their winnings. These same participants said that a completely logical perspective would not arrive at such a conclusion (Epstein, 1994; see Miller & Gunsegaram, 1990). In other words, the self can admit to using (experiential) information as the basis for self and social perceptions while simultaneously conceding that such reasoning is fallacious. CEST explains these dual, inconsistent views as the simultaneous operation of the experiential and rational systems. Risen (2017) calls this detection of normative error, combined with a failure to correct for it, acquiescence (see also Risen, 2016).

The Information-Processing Means By Which One Achieves Desired Self-Views

Whereas CEST identifies two general systems that influence how the self understands itself and its place in the world, other research identifies how information processing seems designed to advance or achieve certain self-views. Self-relevant information is often processed in ways to encourage positive views of the self, *self-enhancement*, and to discourage negative views of the self, *self-protection* (Tesser, 2001). But crucially, these patterns of information processing apply not only to details that implicate the self narrowly construed, but the extended self as well. For example, information that speaks to one's significant others will be processed in a similar manner (Murray, 1999).

In fact, this extended-self positivity can rival or exceed that afforded to the self. Especially in satisfying relationships characterized by love, commitment, and little conflict, partner ratings of kindness, intelligence, and physical attractiveness often exceed the self's own self-ratings (Dijkstra et al., 2014; Murray et al., 1996). Whether aiming to understand the narrowly construed self or the extended self, selective attention (e.g., Burke & Harrod, 2005), selective self-relevant recall, and ultimately selective interpretation (Swann, 2012) all reinforce self-views. This can produce both desired directionality (positive or negative valence) as well as desired consistency (Kruglanski et al., 2018) in self-views. This? section discusses how self-relevant information processing unfolds in the service of achieving these preferred conclusions.

Selectively Seeking Out Contexts

People will be selective about the contexts they enter so that they control what sort of self-relevant information will be revealed, either socially or simply to the self (Beer & Harris, 2019). This suggests that people will be strategic about the opportunity structures—i.e., the sorts of behavioral roles that will be supported and thus realized in social contexts—that people seek (McCall & Simmons, 1966). In some cases, this involves approaching contexts that are likely to permit or even encourage the display of certain behaviors, which are likely to bring about desired social feedback (Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988). For example, people may accurately anticipate that their partner will help them to reappraise certain potentially self-threatening experiences, which is one reason they may seek counsel from those partners. This supportive dynamic may help the self to achieve the self-views it wants and offer one's partner a validating emotional reward at the same time (English & Eldesousky, 2020). Just as important is avoiding contexts or relationships that threaten these desired conclusions (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994).

Socially Signaling Desires For Specific Feedback

Not only do people intentionally place themselves in situations where they expect to be able to display or hear what they want, but they also go further in aiming to influence the sort of feedback they receive. How one styles one's hair, chooses to dress, decorates one's office, or even selects a social media handle, all communicate to one's audience how the self wants to be viewed (Chang-Schneider & Swann, 2009; Haynes, 2012; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). For the sake of social harmony, audiences are generally compliant, offering social confirmation and validation of the image people obviously want to project. If a friend clearly spent a lot of time getting gussied up for a night out, others are likely to notice their effort, infer its importance and identity relevance, and heap praise on the friend. When one is caught staring at a stranger's unusually colored hair, the typical explanation involves offering flattery, regardless of one's true opinion. Such social feedback may not reflect perceivers' true perceptions. Thus, the way people view themselves—given they can elicit public social confirmation —predicts biases in their metaperceptions of how they are socially viewed (Murray, Holmes, Dolderman, & Griffin, 2000).

Social signaling can also change actual social impressions, at least partly independently of such impressions' accuracy. In one study (Murphy, 2007), some participants attempted to convey intelligence during a dyadic conversation. Judges were influenced by such impression management efforts, seeing these actors as more intelligent. But this was only the case when the judges could actually see the actors' nonverbal behavior. When judges only read a transcript of the target's speech, judgments of intelligence were not elevated. This was because impression managers' behavior differed from matched controls' in three nonverbal ways: looking at their partner while speaking to them, looking at their partner while listening to them, and sitting in a more upright way. Notably, two of these three cues (all but looking while speaking) showed no correlation with actual intelligence. This study illustrates how (nonverbal) behavior was effectively managed—in part, independently of reality—to elicit desired social impressions of the self. This study goes beyond demonstrating that people can elicit desired *feedback* from others, showing instead that (and how) people can create desired *impressions*.

Modifying How One Engages With The Search For Self-Relevant Information

When engaging with the world, people have access to countless amounts of information. Not only do people look for self-relevant information where they want to look, but they dynamically change how they engage with that information search if they are not happy with what they first see (Beer & Harris, 2019). For example, people may modulate how eagerly they attend to information (Kwang & Swann, 2010). When they think that information will be of a valence that they prefer—for example, one that matches their preexisting self-views—they will engage with it for longer (Swann & Read, 1981). And when self-relevant information is ambiguous as to its meaning (e.g., the stares of co-workers when one's work promotion is publicly announced), the self—with the support of the ventromedial prefrontal cortex—can quickly arrive at a desirable interpretation (Flagan, Mumford, & Beer, 2017).

In one classic study, participants were told they would be tested for a medical condition, TAA deficiency (Ditto & Lopez, 1992). Although participants were led to believe that those who lack the TAA enzyme would be prone to experience pancreatic disorders later in life, the disease itself was actually fictitious. Instead, this setup was merely a pretense for having participants dip a testing swab in a cup of their own saliva to see whether it would change color from yellow to dark green.

Given the test strip was actually just yellow construction paper, no one would see a color change. When participants were told that a lack of a color change would indicate that they were in the clear healthwise, they waited just over 76 seconds to decide that their test was complete. But when participants were informed that the strip would change to dark green if they had a normal amount of the enzyme, they continued to wait almost 105 seconds for the strip to change colors. In other words, continued engagement with the information acquisition depended on whether participants had already received their expected, desirable results.

When the self does not yet receive the feedback it wants from a source, it could just passively wait. As reviewed earlier, the self can signal to others the sort of feedback it hopes to get. But when others are not proving cooperative in providing the sort of validation the self wants, it can redouble its efforts, leading to dynamic shifts in behavior aimed at eliciting one's desired social perceptions and feedback (Swann & Brooks, 2012; Swann & Hill, 1982).

And even without receiving any feedback, when the self knows (due to situational constraints) that it is not achieving the social impressions that it desires, these same processes may kick in. In one study, dyads considered the issue of abortion (Brooks, Swann, & Mehta, 2011), One participant was asked to talk freely, while the other was supposed to listen in silence. When those who saw themselves as assertive had to play the silent part, they increased how much they talked in a subsequent free-form discussion of another issue, same-sex marriage. This may have reflected these assertive participants' desire to achieve social confirmation of their preferred self-view, the sort of views they could not elicit while silent. Of course, these effects may not have emerged for such strategic reasons. An alternate possibility is that when a loquacious, assertive individual is made to exercise such restraint, then that pent-up pressure may explosively release once the constraint is removed.

Attentional Biases That Operate At Encoding

With the enormous variety and breadth of available stimuli and feedback, selective attention is necessary to effectively navigate the world (Kahneman & Triesman, 1984). Targets linked to highly accessible attitudes automatically capture attention (Roskos-Ewoldsen & Fazio, 1992). Self-representations are themselves highly accessible, in part due to the self's familiarity with and frequent focus on itself (Critcher, Dunning, & Rom, 2015; Prentice, 1990). But also, as the accessibility of self-views increases, people begin to interpret ambiguous feedback in ways that reaffirm those views (DeMaree et al., 2010). In short, attentional and evaluation processes combine to encourage the self to notice and assimilate self-relevant feedback into its preexisting understandings of itself.

Linguistic Biases

When self-relevant information is encoded, this can occur at different levels of abstraction. For example, performing well on a test can be understood in quite concrete terms ("getting nearly all of the answers correct") or in more abstract terms ("displaying one's intelligence"). Such linguistic framings have been studied most extensively in intergroup contexts. Expectancy-consistent behaviors are communicated more abstractly than expectancy-violating behaviors, which encourages people to see the former as commentaries on the actors themselves, but the latter as aberrant consequences of the actor's situation (Wigboldus, Semin, & Spears, 2000). This *linguistic expectancy bias* in part explains why people describe in-group members' positive behaviors in more

abstract terms than out-group members', but then show the reverse pattern for negative behaviors. Maass and colleagues (1989) called this the *linguistic intergroup bias*.

These patterns also appear in the self's description of its own behaviors (Wigboldus & Koole, 2007). Participants described positive and negative behaviors that the self had performed. In general, participants described positive behaviors more abstractly than negative behaviors. Notably, these patterns were attenuated following a false feedback manipulation that was designed to lower participants' self-views. That is, after temporarily lowering people's self-views, the expectancy-consistent negative behaviors were instead described more abstractly. Although social norms that promote modesty may limit how often people communicate about their own behaviors in self-serving terms, these findings—that at least give insight into how people privately think about their own behaviors—illustrate how representations of the self's own behaviors promote stable and typically positive self-views, at least among North American and European samples.

Judging The Validity Of Information

Regardless of whether behavioral information is encoded concretely or abstractly, there is a question—especially when confronted with a mixed bag of behavioral evidence—of what conclusions are justified. People seem to be flexible in the evidentiary standards they need to reach to draw desired conclusions. People can look at the same body of ambiguous evidence and draw different conclusions based on what they want to or already believe. Such patterns of *biased assimilation* (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979) mean that the self can accurately encode its own low-level behavioral evidence but then synthesize it in an especially ego-friendly way.

Reasoning that helps one see what one wants or expects to see need not encourage normatively inappropriate information processing. For example, people avoid a confirmation bias—a tendency to test a conclusion by selectively seeking out confirmatory evidence and neglecting potentially disconfirmatory evidence—when this typical error in reasoning would encourage one to draw unflattering conclusions about the self and its social identities (Dawson, Gilovich, & Regan, 2002). This highlights that one should avoid assuming that all self-serving judgments of validity reflect biased reasoning. Instead, people seem to be motivated to reach the conclusions they wish to reach, independent of whether that happens to lead reasoning to appear normatively questionable or unusually normatively sophisticated.

Attributional Processes

When good or bad things happen to the self, one can code them as stemming from personal qualities of the self or to the (un)fortunate influence of the situation. People tend to show a self-serving attribution bias, a tendency to offer internal, stable, and global attributions more for positive than negative events. That said, these tendencies are exaggerated in Western (vs. East Asian) samples as well as in children and older adults (compared to those of more middling age); such biases tend to be reduced in those experiencing psychopathology, especially depression (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hanking, 2004). The self-serving patterns of attribution also extend to fellow in-group members, reflecting what Pettigrew (1979) called the ultimate attribution error. In one study, both Black and White participants were especially likely to offer forgiving attributions for why a fellow racial-ingroup (vs. -outgroup) member was laid off from a previous job, a flattering interpretation that led them to be more positive about a new job application that the fellow ingroup member submitted (Chatman & von Hippel, 2001).

Valuation Of Domains

People rarely receive feedback about the self as a whole. Instead, they receive feedback that speaks to specific aspects of the self's abilities, traits, and character. Thus, there is latitude around whether and how these narrow, relatively concrete pieces of information have evaluative implications for one's understanding of the broader and more abstract self. The self exploits this ambiguity. It comes to see tasks at which it has succeeded as inherently more important than tasks at which it has failed (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). What's more, (de)valuation can serve a broader identity-protecting function. In one study, men and women completed a test of an (actually fictitious) ability, surgency. When men were told that, at least among the other participants, men tended to score lower (as opposed to higher) than women, men responded by deciding the domain was less important (Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, 2001).

Memory Biases In Recall

People are exposed to much self-relevant feedback, meaning it is unlikely that they can remember it all. That said, there is systematicity to *what* people recall. Those who entered a study possessing more positive or more negative self-views were found to remember more of the positive or negative self-relevant statements, respectively, to which they were subsequently exposed (Swann & Read, 1981).

Other research shows that memory is often biased in a self-enhancing direction. Imagine someone had a job interview and gets both positive and negative feedback from the interviewer. If later asked to recall this feedback, are they more likely to remember the interviewer's positive or negative impressions? It's probably unsurprising to hear that people tend to remember positive feedback better than negative feedback. According to the mnemic neglect model (Green & Sedikides, 2004; Sedikides, Green, & Pinter, 2004; Zengel, Wells, & Skowronski, 2018), this memory bias is a self-enhancement strategy aimed at protecting the self from threatening information. This model assumes that people generally hold positive self-concepts and are motivated to maintain this positivity. One cognitive strategy for doing so involves processing self-bolstering information in a deep manner, but self-threatening information in a shallow manner. In general, the more thoroughly information has been processed, the more connections are made between the information and stored knowledge, enabling the information to be better remembered. Thus, people show mnemic neglect, whereby they exhibit poorer memory for self-threatening compared to self-enhancing feedback.

Not all negative feedback is self-threatening and therefore subject to mnemic neglect (Sedikides & Green, 2000). Mnemic neglect occurs mainly for feedback that is not only negative, but also central (vs. peripheral) to one's self-definition When feedback refers to traits about another person, the same memory bias is not seen for positive versus negative feedback. Supporting a self-enhancement interpretation of mnemic neglect, when the self is affirmed in some manner, mnemic neglect is not found (Green, Sedikides, & Gregg, 2008).

Possibly, information continues to influence self-evaluations even once it is explicitly forgotten. One may remember that one is a terrible croquet player even without recalling any specific episodes of actually playing the game. That said, sometimes people do not remember feedback they have received because they (mis)remember a skewed version of that feedback. In one study, only 36% of college undergraduate research participants could accurately recall their SAT score

(Shepperd, 1993). Of those who were mistaken, 80% reported a score that was higher than they had actually achieved. (The researchers had participants' permission to verify their actual scores with the university admissions office.) Whether the influence (e.g., on self-esteem) of remembered self-relevant knowledge depends on the accuracy of that knowledge is an open question that would speak to the effectiveness of distorted self-relevant information processing.

Conditions Needed For Engaging In Self-Serving Processing Of Information

To allow people to draw the conclusions they wish to draw from self-relevant information, there needs to be sufficient ambiguity in the information context to permit latitude for interpretation. In other words, there exists a sweet spot in which people can maintain a sense of their own rationality and integrity while also exploiting the affordances of a context to allow them to achieve or maintain desired self-views. At times, this ambiguity gives the self the ability to construe ambiguous feedback in self-flattering terms. Perhaps more subtle are cases in which the ambiguity allows one to avoid having to demonstrate one's own skills or competence in a context in which a failure to truly test the self is not itself *seen* as a failure.

In a demonstration of the latter phenomenon, participants were asked by a computer to solve a series of mental math tasks (Von Hippel, Lakin, & Shakrachi, 2005). But a(n actually intentional) bug in the program required participants to press the spacebar to keep the answer from appearing. Although participants actually had time to block the answer on all trials (even though the experimenter would supposedly not know if this had happened), participants were told on the second half of trials that they might have trouble pressing the spacebar in time. Cheating (i.e., not pressing the spacebar) increased on these trials. These participants exploited the ambiguity that was part of the performance context—i.e., that failing to press the spacebar might not in fact reflect a self-serving shortcut, but instead slow reflexes. Bolstering the account that this pattern reflected an exploitation of the ambiguity of the situation and not simply a reduced ability to press the spacebar in time, the extent to which participants cheated more on the later (fast) trials was predicted by another measure of self-serving processing—namely, how much they valued domains as important to the extent they had just performed well (vs. poorly) on relevant performance tasks. In other words, self-serving information processors do not simply distort the evaluative meaning of feedback, but also refuse to put their own skills to the test if they can do so while maintaining plausible deniability to themselves that they are not actually avoiding assessment. Such demonstrations led Yong, Li, and Kanazawa (2021) to suggest that humans are less rational animals than they are *rationalizing* animals.

Maintaining Stability

Coherence In The Self-System

As cognitive-experiential self theory—which opened this section—emphasizes, people do not merely process information in order to achieve directionally positive views of themselves and the world. They also strive for coherence within their personal conceptual system (Epstein, 1987). Out of this desire, people will repress ideas or even thoughts that threaten the stability of their own

beliefs and ideologies, all so as not to disrupt their understanding of their place in the world. Such efforts are in part purely internal. But other efforts involve actively shaping the beliefs and understandings of others to socially reinforce one's own conceptual structures (Swann, 1983). For example, following a romantic breakup—a major life event that requires the reconstruction of one's identity, thereby posing a threat to the stability of the self—people often seek out social help in assimilating the experience into their existing self-relevant beliefs (Harvey & Karpinski, 2016; Horowitz, 1986).

One cognitive route to coherence is through the development and maintenance of schemas, cognitive structures that serve to categorize and thus make sense of both the self and its lived experience (Markus, 1977). Schemas can be idiosyncratic or socially shared. The automatic operation of schemas is reflected in their cognitive accessibility; this allows them to automatically guide both what people attend to and how they interpret it. Such processes serve a basic epistemic function, but their information-filtering and -assimilating functions also feed back to reinforce the schemas' continued operation.

This purely cognitive perspective on how the self maintains a sense of coherence and stability elicited some critiques. Epstein (1992) argued that this purely cognitive approach neglects the role of both emotions and motivation in this process. Achieving coherence in one's belief system may be mediated through cognitive mechanisms—many summarized above—but it is often one's experiential system (e.g., discomfort or frustration as one attempts to make sense of self-relevant information) that motivates the cognitive work to accommodate new self-relevant information. For conceptual structures that people have repeated practice protecting—a description that may more aptly describe the self than any other target—this emotion-inspired process can become automated (Epstein, 2003). Ultimately, given that maintaining stability and coherence in one's belief systems is inherently rewarding, this process is likely to be reinforced.

Consistency In The Self-System

Maintaining a stable sense of self involves maintaining consistency in one's (typically positive) self-views, leading self-related cognitions to show a sort of belief perseverance (von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995). A preference for social evaluations that confirm and thus promote the stability of one's self-conceptions emerges in early childhood (Cassidy, Ziv, Mehta, & Feeney, 2003). This begins a long-lasting epistemic desire to have a coherent understanding of the self that can be stable and consistent across time.

Through a confirmation bias—seeking out what is likely to be confirming evidence while neglecting what is likely to contradict one's preexisting self-views (Nickerson, 1998)—people can actively promote this goal.

Historically, the most influential account of consistency in social psychology has been part of cognitive dissonance theory (Aronson, 1968). That theoretical tradition emphasizes how people try to bring their own behavior and their own cognitions into alignment. Given that behaviors tend to be discrete events whereas cognitions linger and are thus open to revision, consonance is often achieved by modifying cognitions to justify behaviors. It is easier to enact such cognitive flexibility when people can achieve social validation for these desired conclusions (Swann, 1983). After all, it is a long-understood idea that people's self-knowledge is strengthened, solidified, and thus held steady by the reinforcing perceptions of others (Mead, 1934).

As noted, CEST anticipates tensions between the rational and experiential systems. The experiential system may prefer self-enhancement, prompting more positive self-views. The rational system prefers self-consistency. Although the experiential system may typically be more powerful (Sedikides, 1993), ultimately compromises between these conflicting goals lead people to only somewhat more positive self-assessments than are justified (Morling & Epstein, 1997). Note that the earlier-reviewed information processing mechanisms can ultimately encourage self-enhancement *or* self-consistency, depending on how they are used.

Consistency In Whose Information Processing Consistently Reinforces Self-Positivity

This section reviewed general information-processing patterns that explain why people generally tend to arrive at consistent or consistently positive self-views, but individuals also vary in these tendencies (Von Hippel et al., 2005). As one example, those who explicitly report high self-esteem but who implicitly display low self-esteem are more likely to display defensive information processing (Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003), a pattern that helps to maintain stable, positive self-views.

Much of the person-level variability in self-serving processing is likely to be tied to the specific self-aspect in question. For example, people vary in the extent to which morality is central to the self-concept (Aquino & Reed, 2002). And those who more highly identify with morality are those who respond with more defensiveness to moral identity threats (Mulder & Aquino, 2013). Such predictable defensive processing emerges not only in how the self makes sense of self-relevant information, but also in assumptions about how others will process that information. As one illustration (Effron, 2014), high and low moral self-identifiers decided whether to engage in a particularly tedious task (i.e., memorizing long number strings and scanning long passages for specific characters) or another that sounded more fun but that also had a prosocial consequence (i.e., answering simple trivia questions to earn 50 cents for charity). The vast majority chose the latter option, which is ambiguous as to whether it reflects selfish or selfless motives. Some participants thought they would also be completing a measure of "implicit moral character," one that would have the strong potential to reveal that they were actually an unethical person. This possibility made high moral self-identifiers particularly anxious. Such elevated anxiety statistically explained why these participants were especially likely to believe that others would interpret their own ambiguously moral actions as particularly reflective of participants' own good moral character. These findings illustrate how evaluative anxiety may kickstart motivated reasoning that is quite adept at maintaining positive self-perceptions (and assumed positive social perceptions) of one's valued self-concepts.

In other cases, valuation of a domain can foreshadow *less* use of these self-protective mechanisms. Such patterns are seen in individuals who fit clinical definitions of perfectionism. When individuals' sense of self-worth becomes hyper-dependent on success in a domain, they can set unrealistic self-standards that are nearly impossible to live up to and that set one up for downstream dysphoria and depletion (Shafran, Egan, & Wade, 2010). When such individuals do meet their nearly impossible standards, they often decide that the standards they set for themselves were actually too low or that their positive performance actually reflected the lax standards of their evaluator instead of their own skills and abilities (Egan, Wade, Shafran, & Antony, 2014). This can lead to a vicious cycle in which perfectionists are often exhausted and depressed by their sense of always falling short. Although social psychologists have often grappled

with the question of whether self-serving patterns of information processing are psychologically productive, the perfectionism literature highlights the clear psychological risks of being caught in the reverse pattern of thinking.

KNOWING THE SELF

When asking whether people know themselves, there is considerable ambiguity in what it is that people are expected to know. According to a classic dichotomy, people's behavior can be a function of the person or the situation. Behavior is of course a function of both. People display a certain consistency in how they think, feel, and ultimately behave in different situations. In this sense, the question of whether people know themselves is a question of how they will respond and act *in* situations. After all, the self does not operate in a decontextualized manner, and thus self-knowledge is situationally bound. At the same time, the self reveals its own contents when it has control over and thus a *choice* of how to behave, even when such behavior is in part determined by sources outside of it (Monroe & Malle, 2010).

Although much of the research on self-knowledge examines the self's accuracy in tracking or forecasting its own behavior, people also have a subjective sense of their *true self* that is itself separate from their everyday behaviors—a hidden aspect that lies beneath the surface and that even the self as an agent must work to discover (Laing, 1960; Schlegel, Vess, & Arndt, 2012). Those who have a clear and cognitively accessible understanding of this (subjectively construed) true self also tend to have higher self-esteem and a greater sense of meaning in their lives (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009). Such states are contrasted with *self-alienation*, which reflects a discrepancy between one's actual experiences and one's internal self-understanding (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). Such self-alienation can create a sense of emptiness—"a hollowness and blankness"—that can give rise to feelings of loneliness (Rokach, 1988, p. 534).

The following sections will focus on major themes from studies of self-knowledge. The section begins by considering the nature of self-accuracy, including how it is empirically operationalized and some of the information-processing and motivational origins of self-views. Available evidence suggests both that self-knowledge is reasonably accurate but also that others often seem to hold insights about the self that the self lacks. Discussion will proceed to a broader consideration of self-knowledge that includes its social origins (e.g., that shape one's sense of who one wants to be) and social consequences. The closing section considers authenticity: living in accord with one's true self.

Sources Of Accuracy And Bias In Self-Knowledge

Ambiguity complicates what it means to display *accurate* self-knowledge. This relates to the criterion problem. If self-ratings cannot be trusted, what can be? Identifying an appropriate standard—one that both lay people (e.g., naïve subjects) and experts (e.g., researchers) can agree is a valid indicator of the construct of interest—is quite the challenge (Kruglanski, 1989).

A separate issue is how to assess whether certain judgments align with the accuracy criterion. There are two general approaches (Donnelly, Moon, & Critcher 2022; Robins & John, 1997). The correlational or validity approach determines whether judgments *correlate with* the accuracy

criterion. For example, do self-ratings of studiousness correlate with a marker of studiousness, say, the actual number of hours per week one spends studying? A positive correlation would indicate that those who actually spend the most time studying also provide some of the highest self-ratings of studiousness.

The mean-level of bias approach, theoretically orthogonal to the correlational or validity approach, asks whether self-judgments systematically deviate, in a positive or negative direction, from the criterion. Note that these judgments must be directly comparable to the criterion. To adapt the previous example, one could ask whether the number of hours people report that they have studied or will study tends to be significantly higher or lower than their actual study behaviors.

Several models consider how information is processed to make sense of the self. These models thus allow for the identification of origins of accuracy and error. Rosenzweig and Critcher's (2014) SAW model—itself an extension of Brunswick's (1956) lens model—unpacks that self-judgments draw on information to the extent that it is *Salient*, depend on how the salient information is *Assessed* or interpreted, and then vary based on how the assessed information is *Weighted*. Robins and John (1998) used four metaphors to describe how the self arrives at its self-views. The self sometimes acts as a *scientist*, aiming—even if with insufficient thought and effort (Fiske & Taylor, 1991)—to arrive at an accurate self-understanding. In other cases, it is a *consistency-seeker*, processing information to maintain stable self-views (e.g., Swann, 1990). The self can be a *politician*, crafting an image to meet the perceived demands of one's audience (Tetlock, 1992), impression management that is ultimately internalized. And finally, the self can be an *egoist*, narcissistically twisting reality in a positively inflated direction—whether in response to identity threat or not (though implicating distinct neural patterns in each case; Beer, 2014, 2021). In essence, these four relevant motives describe how the self comes to know itself. The information-processing mechanisms (previously described) offer frameworks to understand how these motives guide the synthesis of information to arrive at different self-understandings.

The Self As An Expert On Itself

In thinking about how the self comes to understand itself, one can think about how the self comes to understand *any* person. According to Funder's (1995, 1999, 2012; Letzring & Funder, 2019) realistic accuracy model, accurate perceptions of a person require four conditions to be met. First, relevant information that speaks to an attribute must exist. Second, such relevant information must be available to the perceiver. Third, that valid information must be both attended to and internalized by the perceiver. Fourth, this detected information must be incorporated or applied accurately to arrive at a judgment.

Thus, for many attributes, no one knows the self like (and thus better than) the self does. Consider loneliness, a discrepancy between one's actual and desired social relationships (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Although one's amount of social interaction may be visible to others, one's desired social contact—given its low observability (Vazire, 2010)—is most available to the self. For this reason, self-reported loneliness has been taken as the gold-standard accuracy criterion to understand which social perceivers best infer the self's loneliness (Luhmann, Bohn, Holtmann, Koch, & Eid, 2016).

Although this example illustrates how in certain cases the self *is* the ultimate arbiter of truth about itself, the self tends to approach the task of self-understanding, more generally, with clear confidence in its own expertise (Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky, & Ross, 2001; Vazire & Mehl, 2008). After

all, the self is with itself in every context, meaning it has access to more self-relevant information than any other person does (Funder, 1999). Such a reality led Paulhus and Vazire (2007) to call it "an indisputable fact" (p. 227) that no other person rivals the self in terms of access to self-relevant information. Furthermore, the fact that the self has considerable control over its own personality only adds to its expertise about itself. Most people aspire to change aspects of themselves, and those change goals can have actual effects on personality development (Hudson & Roberts, 2014; Stieger, Wepfer, et al., 2020; Thielmann & de Vries, 2021). Presumably the self is more aware of these efforts to change the self, and thus should be more aware of the corresponding effects, than are others. For almost all of twenty-five everyday behaviors, participants indicated that they themselves would be more accurate than those who knew them well at predicting how frequently the self would engage in them (Vazire & Mehl, 2008).

Given the self's intimate familiarity with itself and its own personality change goals, the self's ratings of its own personality show decent correlations with the self's actual behaviors (Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001). After all, this basic assumption of self-insight is a core assumption behind much of personality psychology as an empirical enterprise, given the field's frequent reliance on self-reported personality traits (Vazire, 2006). And although the self has often been shown to be more accurate at anticipating some mundane behaviors (e.g., frequency of playing cards), one challenge for much of this research is that the accuracy criterion is often itself self-reported behavior (Shrauger, Ram, Greninger, & Mariano, 1996), which may be subject to common biases that also influence self-forecasts (Vazire & Mehl, 2008).

The Self May Not Be An Expert On Itself

Even though the idea that the self is an expert on itself has great intuitive appeal, clear limits on self-insight have also been documented (Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998; Paulhus & John, 1998; Pronin & Kugler, 2007; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). In some cases, social perceptions offer independent predictive validity of the self's behaviors, suggesting that others see something in the self that the self does not. For example (Vazire & Mehl, 2008), unobtrusively recorded snippets of participants' everyday lives, over the course of four days, offered an objective metric of the frequency of the self's everyday behaviors (e.g., singing, talking on the phone). Prior to this behavioral tracking, the self—as well as informants (e.g., one's best friend, one's parent, and/or one's romantic partner)—estimated how often the self engages in these actions. The self's own estimates and social estimates (of the self) often independently predicted the self's behavior, and to a similar degree overall. This suggests that social perceivers either had access to or relied on information that the self did not.

In other cases, social perceptions are actually *more* predictive of the self's outcomes than are self-reported perceptions. In one study (Wagerman & Funder, 2007), undergraduates' self-reported conscientiousness weakly predicted their GPA (r = .14), whereas informant reports of the self's conscientiousness (from people nominated by the self as people who knew the self well) were more substantial predictors? (r = .36). Even previously unacquainted participants were quickly able to anticipate who would be most active and animated in a series of dyadic discussions, with their predictive power rivaling and at times exceeding self-judgments (Levesque & Kenny, 1993). And among U.S. military members who had just finished basic training, peer reports of personality disorders—much better than those recruits' self-reports—predicted who remained active duty two years later (Fiedler, Oltmanns, & Turkheimer, 2004). One limitation of this study, though, is that the self-report and peer-report measures used different items, which confounds self versus peer report, with measurement instrument.

Spouses' ratings, but not patients' own ratings, of patient antagonism predicted the patient's coronary artery calcification, which is itself a risk factor for heart disease (Smith et al., 2007). These authors speculate that patients may have been less willing to accurately report their own antagonistic, socially inappropriate behaviors. Bolstering this concern, self-reports of behaviors that just occurred—compared to dispassionate coders' identification—were positively distorted (Gosling et al., 1998), an effect that was driven by narcissists, those who are particularly disposed to paint a socially desirable picture of the self. Whether these narcissists truly believed these distortions, or merely modified their responses in a self-flattering direction, is unclear. But more generally, given that self-ratings are often no better at predicting evaluatively neutral outcomes than are social ratings, it is unlikely that social desirability distortions account for the bulk of these apparent limitations of self-insight.

Why Do Self-Knowledge And Social Knowledge Differ?

On the one hand, comparing what the self knows to be true of itself with what others think of the self allows one to distinguish what is known (by someone) versus what is at least knowable. But asymmetries in self-knowledge versus others' knowledge of the self call for a more careful consideration of what may explain these differences. Self- and social perceivers differ in the information that they use when forming impressions of the self, the information that they can access, and the conclusions that the self's behavior permits in drawing broader inferences about the self as a person. Research related to each of these categories and theoretical frameworks has aimed to structure when self-knowledge as opposed to social knowledge offers a more accurate picture of the self.

Focus Of Analysis

Both the self and others must extrapolate beyond information that is at their immediate disposal to make sense of the self. Whereas other people's analyses tend to focus on making sense of the self's overt behaviors, the self spends more of its time analyzing and offering explanations for its own internal behavior (Malle & Knobe, 1997). The self does share some of its self-analysis with others based on what it believes will be most helpful to observers (Moore, 2015), but such analysis has more phenomenological immediacy and thus potential impact on the self's own perspective. Of course, self-analysis is incomplete and often flawed. Self-insight failures can emerge because the true causes of the self's behaviors are sometimes automatic, outside of the self's own awareness and control (Bargh & Williams, 2006). As a result, conscious reflections on the self may not look to the proper cues to understand how the self does and will behave (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson, Dunn, Kraft, & Lisle, 1989). On the one hand, this would not give social observers any advantage, given they should not necessarily have more accurate theories of what causes the self's behaviors. That said, social observers may have an upper hand when they are not led astray by these internal cues and instead prioritize more diagnostic, observable information.

As one example, the self often puts undue weight on its own future-oriented thoughts and experiences, downplaying the relevance of its past behavior, when predicting its future behaviors (Helzer & Dunning, 2012). To be clear, social perceivers also think that access to someone's private thoughts and feelings—when such information is available—offers unique diagnostic insights into them as a person. But social perceivers seem less willing than the self to set aside information about the self's past behavior when determining what information is most diagnostic of the self

(Andersen & Ross, 1984). When students in a mid-level psychology course forecast how they would do on the class's second exam, these students leaned heavily on their own target score (i.e., their goal) for that upcoming exam (ß = .68), but relatively little on their first-exam performance (ß = .21). But when these students received this information about a yoked peer in their class, their reliance on the target score (ß = .27) and first-exam performance (ß = .62) showed the reverse prioritization (Helzer & Dunning, 2012). Despite lofty intentions and ambitions to change and improve, history often repeats itself; past is prologue. And indeed, Exam 1 performance significantly predicted Exam 2 performance, yet a student's target score offered no additional predictive power. Given it is the self—more than others—who tends to have access to these questionably diagnostic internal cues, such excess information threatens the validity of self-knowledge.

Visual Perspective

Even though the self may have access to *more* self-relevant information (which, as reviewed above, can sometimes mislead self-judgments), others often have *different* information about the self. Most simply, others have a different visual perspective on the self (Vazire, 2010), which typically means that the self's own behaviors are not as visually focal to the self as they are to others (Malle & Knobe, 1997). This may explain the self's tendency to underreport having engaged in behaviors that are highly observable to others (Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998). The fact that the self's own behaviors are often not visually salient to itself may contribute to the self's tendency to overlook its own behavioral base rates.

The very position of the eyes means that some of the self's behaviors—for example, a subtle grimace or a flicker of excitement at the mention of a certain person—are not simply not salient to but actually go unobserved by the self. Even when the self can notice its own behaviors, the phenomenological experience of being—complete with thoughts, feelings, and sensations that are not available to others—is itself attentionally arresting. As a result, people simply spend less time pondering and drawing conclusions about their own overt behavior (Malle & Knobe, 1997). This is not to say that social observers do not care about the self's internal states. Instead, social observers carefully examine behaviors in order to draw inferences about the self's internal states and dispositions, which are core to understanding another person (Critcher, Inbar, & Pizarro, 2013).

Many of the most diagnostic signals about a person's states, dispositions, and future behavior may be communicated though relatively subtle and unmanaged behaviors (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992), the sort of nonverbal cues that others may pick up on but the self may miss. This too may explain why the self's privileged access to its own thoughts, emotional experiences, intuitions, behavioral intentions, goals, and physiological experiences does not straightforwardly serve as a unique source of self-insight. Instead, these experiential cues can become the raw materials that distort self-understanding (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Vazire, 2010; Wilson & Dunn, 2004). More generally, this differential access or salience of information may help to explain why others are often at least as good as the self at describing what a person is like and predicting what they will do (Vazire & Mehl, 2008; cf. Robins & John, 1997).

Actor-Observer Asymmetries In Attributions

Even when the self and others attend to the same behaviors, they may draw different conclusions about how much such behaviors should inform one's picture of the self. According to the classic actor-observer bias (Green & McClearn, 2010; Jones & Nisbett, 1971), the self is less willing to see its

own actions as reflective of its own personality as opposed to the situation it finds itself in. Construal level theory anticipates that as social distance decreases, there is less interest in abstract, enduring explanations (Trope & Lieberman, 2010). The attributional target that is closest in distance is always the self. It follows that the actor-observer effect may emerge not merely because people gravitate to more situational (as opposed to dispositional) explanations for the self's behaviors, but because people see less stability in the causes of one's own behavior (Körner, Moritz, & Deutsch, 2020). That said, the actor-observer effect may be less robust than once believed (Malle, 2006), emerging only under specific conditions (e.g., when the events explained were hypothetical).

Frameworks That Bring Order To When Self Versus Social Knowledge Is Superior

By considering the accuracy of self-knowledge versus social knowledge, the goal is not to set up a horserace to ask who, unconditionally, knows the self better. Instead, by understanding what factors influence self-knowledge and social knowledge, the goal is to understand where or when the self or others can best offer an accurate perception of the self. Aiming to give structure, *Joe* Luft and *Harry* Ingham offered the eponymous Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955; Luft, 1969). The 2 X 2 matrix distinguishes what is known versus unknown to the self, as well as what is known versus unknown to others. By fully crossing these factors, one can organize what is known to both self and others (*the arena*, the area of free activity), what is known to the self but not others (*the façade,* the hidden area), what is known to others but not the self (*blind spots,* the blind area), and what is apparently outside of everyone's knowledge (*the unknown,* the area of unknown activity; Luft, 1961). For many years, this framework served more to structure discussion around who knows what about the self (e.g., Oltmanns & Turkheimer, 2009); only later have each cell's general contents begun to be identified.

Vazire's (2010) Self-Other Knowledge Asymmetry (SOKA) model offered a substantial advance on this front. By her account, the self is superior at assessing self-qualities that have low observability (e.g., neuroticism). In contrast, others are superior at assessing aspects of the self that require evaluation (e.g., intellect). The SOKA model helped to make sense of previously observed findings, like that the self is better at predicting internal states like calmness, whereas others can better assess likeability and arrogance (see Kolar et al., 1996). It also explains more recently documented findings, such as particularly low self-knowledge on the HEXACO personality dimension that is highest in evaluativeness: Honesty-Humility (De Vries, Realo, et al., 2016; Thielmann & De Vries, 2021). That said, there are certainly exceptions to the SOKA model's general rule. For example, the self can have surprisingly little insight into its own internal preferences (e.g., Eastwick & Finkel, 2008), perhaps because preferences are revealed through (observable) behavior, even as the (internal) origin of those preferences is often opaque to the self.

Self-Discrepancy Theory: The Importance Of Contrasting Conceptions Of The Self

Considerations of self-knowledge have largely compared self-understandings to reality. Implicit in such comparisons is that accurate self-views offer a reference point that the self does not (typically) achieve. But the self has other reference points that it constructs and thus, necessarily, can assess. Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), as described earlier in relation to the idea that people have multiple selves, posits the importance of two conceptions of the self that complement people's

understanding of their *actual self*. One, the *ideal self*, is who one wants or hopes to be. The second, *the ought self*, is what one feels an obligation or duty to be.

Discrepancies between the actual and ideal self can lead to feelings of sadness and dejection, whereas discrepancies between the actual and ought self can prompt self-criticism (Higgins, 1987) that leads to agitated states: fear, restlessness, and anxiety (Strauman & Higgins, 1988). Notably, these emotional consequences do not emerge simply because these discrepancies are made salient by the measurement itself, for these emotional states can be predicted by discrepancies measured two months prior (Strauman & Higgins, 1988). Furthermore, these distinct emotions are elicited not only by actual events that highlight discrepancies between one's actual, ideal, and ought selves, but also by merely pondering such events (e.g., considering getting a bad grade in a course; Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986). These consequences have been measured in self-reported emotional states as well as in behaviors that are known to reflect the influence of these emotions (e.g., feelings of dejection depressing writing speeds; Natale & Hantas, 1982).

The emotional consequences of self-discrepancies can be adaptive, especially given that ideal and ought selves are socially informed. As one example, one reason that people extend trust to others is because they feel a social obligation to do so, meaning it is part of their "ought selves" (Dunning et al., 2014). This means that failing to trust others, which produces an actual-ought discrepancy, will encourage anxiety and guilt. The basic success of social and economic systems requires a basic orientation of trust toward others, in part because with generalized trust comes more expansive moral concern for others (Kirkland et al., 2023). Thus, mechanisms that encourage trust encourage smooth societal functioning (Dunning, Fetchenhauer, & Schlösser, 2020; Schlösser et al., 2016).

Metaperceptions

Although the accuracy of self-knowledge is often determined by testing how it is associated with social perceptions of the self (Tice & Wallace, 2003), sometimes those social perceptions are a target of judgment in their own right. More specifically, metaperceptions reflect the self's beliefs about how others view the self. *Meta-accuracy* is achieved through a significant positive correlation between metaperceptions and social perceptions (Malloy, Albright, & Scarpati, 2007; Oltmanns, Gleason, Klonsky, & Turkheimer, 2005). Although one route to meta-accuracy may be to project one's own self-views when estimating metaperceptions (given self-perceptions and social perceptions are often correlated), *meta-insight* is achieved by evidence of meta-accuracy even after controlling for self-views (Carlson, Vazire, & Furr, 2011). Furthermore, people do not merely hold universally applied metaperceptions, but instead understand that different people view the self in different ways (Carlson & Furr, 2009).

Developmentally, metaperceptions grow more accurate as children mature (Malloy et al., 2007). Meta-accuracy is stronger for friends than for acquaintances (Carlson & Furr, 2009), and stronger still for family members (Malloy, Albright, Kenny, Agastein, & Winquist, 1997). But deviations from meta-accuracy are also systematic and thus predictable. In part, this is because people inaccurately think that they live their lives in the spotlight, thereby overestimating how much of their observable behavior is noted by others (Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000). But they also fail to appreciate how little of their internal experience—for example, their evaluation anxiety (Cameron, Holmes, & Vorauer, 2011) or their goals and intentions (Vorauer & Claude, 1998)—can even be detected by others. Furthermore, the self errs in thinking that its narrow deficiencies (e.g., poor Trivial Pursuit abilities) will be overgeneralized to broader abilities (e.g., intelligence) in the minds of

others more than they actually are (Moon, Gan, & Critcher, 2020). All of this means that efforts to shape and enhance the impressions others hold of the self will be hampered by the self's own difficulty in understanding how it comes across.

Metaperceptions are important not merely because they can inform impression management efforts (e.g., knowing to whom the self may need to do more to endear itself), but because metaperceptions reflect one's understanding of the status and health of one's relationships. In romantic pairings, those who begin to harbor doubts about how positively their partner views them become increasingly dissatisfied themselves, are less likely to continue the relationship, and may even then engage in destructive behaviors (Murray, Holmes, & Collins; 2006; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). Of course, to the extent that metaperceptions are accurate, then they can help one to anticipate and plan. Inaccurate metaperceptions, on the other hand, can leave one in a bad spot. For example, team members often underestimate how highly their teammates regard them, which may discourage them from asking for help that would have been willingly offered (Mastroianni, Cooney, Boothby, & Reece, 2021).

Metaperceptions have also been examined in the context of specific identities. Group memberships are important components of self-definitions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and social psychologists have long been interested in intergroup dynamics. Both white and Black people tend to underestimate how favorably they are evaluated by members of the opposite group (Krueger, 1996), leading Shelton and Richeson (2005) to argue that members of each racial group live in a state of pluralistic ignorance regarding just how interested outgroup members are in interacting with the self. That said, other evidence suggests that within specific relationships (e.g., friendships, romantic relationships), members of interracial dyads are fairly accurate in how the other views the racial aspect of the self's identity. These are called *racial metaperceptions* (Lemay & Teneva, 2020).

Even though racial metaperceptions are clearly tethered to reality, there are three known sources of error. First, the self assumes *reciprocity*: The self's attitude toward its own racial identity is assumed to be shared by one's partner. Second, the self engages in *projection*: The self's feelings about one's outgroup partner's racial identity color metaperceptions regarding how the self's own racial identity is assumed to be viewed. Third, the self's own stigma consciousness can give rise to a *confirmation bias*: To the extent the self expects to be stereotyped based on its own racial identity, it begins to see evidence of such stereotyping in the minds of specific others. Although these dynamics describe dyadic relationships, metaperceptions also influence intergroup dynamics. For example, Americans' metaperceptions that citizens of the Arab world dehumanize Americans fuels Americans' dehumanization of those Arabs as well as support for aggressive policies toward them (Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016).

Interpersonal Consequences Of Knowing The Self

Self-knowledge speaks to, most obviously, whether one knows the self. But self-knowledge may relate to how well one knows others. Individuals vary in *interpersonal sensitivity*, the ability to read one's personal, interpersonal, and social environments (Hall, 1984; see Bernieri, 2001). But interpersonal sensitivity may not be a unitary, stable, cross-domain skill. Instead, it may simply be a term used to describe the essentially inevitable variability that will be observed in the accuracy of judgments in a certain context (Hall, 2001; Hall & Bernieri, 2001). This does not imply that the nature of interpersonal sensitivity is itself purely random. For example, chronically activated self-knowledge can lead people to become schematic for certain qualities (e.g., sociality), thereby

encouraging people to use such constructs as filters for how they navigate their social worlds (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982; Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982).

One measure of whether people chronically activate, or are schematic for, a trait, is a Me/Not Me judgment task. The faster that people can indicate whether ("Me") or not ("Not Me") a trait applies to the self, the person is said to be schematic for that trait (Markus, 1977). In one study, those whose trustworthiness-related self-knowledge was more chronically accessible were also those who were better at detecting who would cheat (or *defect*) in a real Prisoner's Dilemma game (Shoda & McConnell, 2013). Though notably, these trustworthiness-schematic participants were not better at differentiating genuine versus feigned smiles. How exactly the chronic accessibility of a self-aspect translates into accurate social perception is still in need of additional study.

Other work suggests that as a result of people's efforts to understand themselves, the self's expectations about and impressions of others are colored. People are especially likely to hold *causal trait theories* to make sense of the self (Critcher, Dunning, & Rom, 2015). A causal trait theory is an explanation for why one of the self's traits (e.g., introversion) may give rise to another (e.g., conscientiousness). For example, someone may think, "Given I don't like to socialize as much as other people do, this gives me more time to make sure that I am highly organized and on top of my schoolwork." A conscientious extrovert may have a contrasting theory, instead thinking that their own extroversion pushes them to develop an especially structured home and work life. These theories that are developed to make sense of the self then shape one's expectations about and perceptions of others, a phenomenon called *pattern projection* (Critcher & Dunning, 2009; Critcher et al., 2015). This illustrates how efforts to understand the self can color one's efforts to understand one's social world.

Authenticity

Earlier the accuracy of self-knowledge brought up the notion of the true self—the self that purportedly reflects who a person "really" is. The concept of a true or real self is often invoked in theorizing and research on authenticity as authenticity is thought to entail, broadly speaking, being the self one truly is (for reviews, see Baumeister, 2019; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019). In more lay terms, authenticity is what is being referred to in admonitions and adages such as "be yourself!" What makes this pertinent to this section on knowing the self is that many conceptualizations of the true self and authenticity assume, either explicitly or implicitly, that authenticity entails having access to and accurate knowledge of one's true self—such as one's true attitudes, beliefs, motives, and values. After all, how can one be authentic and thus true to the self, without knowing who this self is?

At this point, having reviewed research indicating that most people do not actually have full access to and fully accurate knowledge about the self, it should be apparent that the question of whether or not accurate self-knowledge is necessary for people to be authentic is not a straightforward one. If one believes that accurate self-knowledge is necessary, authenticity is not attainable. And yet strong intuition and everyday experience—not to mention substantial research (e.g., Chen, 2019; Heppner et al., 2008; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Lenton, Bruder, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2013; Wood et al., 2008)—indicate that it is not at all uncommon for people to report being authentic, at least some of the time, and for other people, a lot of the time. Complicating matters further, the extant literature on authenticity is characterized by a range of theoretical and operational definitions of the construct. Some of these definitions do appear to assume that authenticity requires accurate

knowledge about the true self (e.g., Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Rogers, 1959; Wood et al., 2008). Others, however, do not (e.g., Fleeson & Wilt, 2010; Kim, Cristy, Rivera, Hicks, & Schlegel, 2021; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997), including ones that emphasize the subjective nature of authenticity—that is, people's subjective reports of being authentic—which put aside the thorny question of whether or not people can be, or are, *truly* authentic (e.g., Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009; Schlegel, Hicks, King, & Arndt, 2011). Some definitions overlap and are consistent with one another, but others are incompatible. Some treat authenticity as a dispositional, trait-level variable (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood et al., 2008), whereas others focus on momentary, context-specific or state experiences of authenticity (e.g., Aday & Schmader, 2019; Chen, 2019; Sedikides, Slabu, Lenton, & Thomaes, 2017).

In short, considerable variability in the current landscape of theory and research on authenticity has fomented confusion and, in turn, fueled efforts to sort through, organize, and provide greater clarity (e.g., Hewlin, Karelaia, Kouchaki, & Sedikides, 2020; Hicks, Schlegel, & Newman, 2019; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Newman, 2019). One thing, however, is already clear: Authenticity is a psychologically meaningful and impactful construct, despite the fact that self-knowledge is often incomplete. Reasons for this include the fact that people hold strong lay beliefs about the import of authenticity—judging it to be valuable, moral, and something to strive for (e.g., Strohminger, Knobe, & Newman, 2017). Also, subjective feelings of authenticity in and of themselves, regardless of whether they are warranted, predict meaningful psychological and life outcomes (e.g., psychological well-being, job satisfaction; Heppner et al., 2008; Rivera et al., 2019). In sum, although some conceptualizations of authenticity explicitly or implicitly treat knowing the self as a prerequisite, the psychological reality is a different story.

SELF-ESTEEM

It is hard to think of a construct in psychology that is as familiar to the average person as self-esteem. Of course, self-esteem has long been, and continues to be, a widely discussed construct in the scientific community as well. Given such enduring and widespread interest in the construct, this section on self-esteem will be necessarily selective. Nonetheless, it aims to cover theory and research on some of the most fundamental topics and issues surrounding self-esteem. These include different definitions of self-esteem, and its developmental trajectory, consequences, and functions. The section ends by addressing two constructs that are often discussed in relation to self-esteem: narcissism and self-compassion.

Defining Self-Esteem

Early self-esteem theorists (e.g., Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965), and some more recent ones as well (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), have approached the study of self-esteem much like psychologists approach the study of attitudes. Attitudes are positive or negative evaluations of specific objects, such as a political candidate (e.g., Barack Obama), social issue (e.g., abortion), or consumer product (e.g., car). In the case of self-esteem, the attitude object is the self, and thus self-esteem can be thought of as a person's positive or negative evaluation of that object. Self-esteem researchers have often focused on people's subjective evaluations of their "worth." Whereas high self-esteem entails a positive evaluation of one's worth that is characterized by feelings of self-acceptance and self-respect, low self-esteem involves a negative self-evaluation that is

characterized by self-doubts and feelings of failure (e.g., Coopersmith, 1967; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2011). Most self-esteem researchers endorse some version of this definition (for reviews, Bosson & Swann, 2009; Jordan, Zeigler-Hill, & Cameron, 2020; Kernis, 2006). Furthermore, it captures William James's (1890) early notion that people possess an "average tone of self-feeling" (p. 306). However, some researchers depart from this broad definition.

Global Versus Domain-Specific Evaluations Of The Self

The above definition assumes that people have an overall or global evaluation of their worth. Yet people may possess domain-specific evaluations of themselves—such as their evaluations of their academic performance, physical appearance, or athletic ability. In his early theorizing on the self-concept, James (1890) actually recognized both kinds of self-evaluations, referring not only to the idea that people possess an average tone of self-feeling, but also to the idea that self-esteem reflects a ratio of people's *successes* relative to *pretensions*. The latter has been interpreted as the ratio of people's judgments of how well they are doing in particular domains relative to how well they aspire to do in the domains, thus implying that people possess domain-specific evaluations. Although most contemporary self-esteem researchers would agree that in addition to a global evaluation of the self people possess domain-specific self-evaluations, there are some disagreements involving the latter. Perhaps the most notable has to do with the relationship between global and domain-specific self-evaluations.

The main issue here is whether the relationship between global and domain-specific self-evaluations operates in a bottom-up or top-down fashion. That is, are domain-specific self-evaluations the building blocks of an individual's global evaluation of the self (bottom-up; e.g., Pelham & Swann, 1989; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), or does an individual's global self-evaluation shape his or her self-evaluations in specific domains (top-down; e.g., Brown, 1993; Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001). Evidence supports both perspectives. In one study, 7th through 10th grade students rated how positively or negatively they viewed themselves in 15 specific academic domains, some of which reflected core academic subjects (e.g., English language, mathematics), whereas others were seen as non-core subjects (e.g., art, music; Marsh, 1993). The students also indicated their global evaluations of themselves. Students' specific self-evaluations were correlated with their global self-evaluations, particularly for the core academic subjects, suggesting that global self-esteem is built bottom-up from domain-specific self-evaluations to the extent that the domains are viewed as important.

That said, other research would seem to favor the top-down over the bottom-up perspective. In some such work, researchers have had participants evaluate themselves on a fictitious ability. For example, high self-esteem people (determined by responses to a global self-esteem measure) rated themselves higher on "integrative orientation," purportedly a problem-solving ability but actually fictitious, when they were led to believe it was an important ability to possess versus when they were told it was unimportant; low self-esteem people did not show this difference (Brown et al., 2001). Given participants could not have already had a self-view on a fictitious ability, such self-evaluations were likely a top-down product of participants' general self-esteem. That said, the fact that global self-esteem was applied top-down to an important more than an unimportant domain does raise questions about whether Marsh's (1993) findings offered clear evidence of the bottom-up route.

Overall, there are several reasons suggesting it may be premature to draw any conclusions on this topic of bottom-up versus top-down influences (Rentzsch & Schroder-Abe, 2022). First, the corpus of

findings on this topic is small. Second, few longitudinal studies exist, and those that do have often relied on relatively short time intervals. Third, extant studies typically examine only a limited number of domains (e.g., only academic or physical self-esteem). Fourth, studies have typically examined top-down or bottom-up effects, not both. And perhaps most important, the findings have been mixed over the years (e.g., Harris, Wetzel, Robins, Donnellan, & Trzesniewski, 2018; von Soest, Wichstrøm, & Kvalem, 2016).

One large study that tested for both top-down and bottom-up effects over a two-year period failed to find support for either perspective (Rentzsch & Schroeder-Abe, 2018). In another study, however, these same researchers used more sophisticated tools—True Intraindividual Change models (Steyer et al., 1997) and Latent Trait-State-Occasion models (Cole et al., 2005)—to model top-down and bottom-up processes (Rentzsch & Schroder-Abe, 2022). Briefly, these analytical models address key methodological limitations in extant research, with the former model quantifying change within individuals over time. The latter quantifies stability and variability in global self-esteem and domain-specific self-evaluations in terms of the proportion of variance explained. In a preregistered investigation, global self-esteem and domain-specific self-esteem (in five domains) were assessed at four time points across a six-year period (Rentzsch & Schroder-Abe, 2022). Their sample was composed mainly of highly educated, adult females. In this case, a top-down perspective was supported. For example, an increase in global self-esteem predicted a subsequent increase in domain-specific self-esteem. To be sure, this study's many strengths render it a significant contribution, but more research is needed to replicate these findings using, for example, non-WEIRD samples, different time intervals for assessments, and different developmental time ranges.

Trait Versus State Self-Esteem

The prevailing definition of self-esteem as a global evaluation of one's worth not only assumes that people possess such global evaluations, but also that self-esteem is relatively enduring across time and situations. And indeed, individuals respond fairly consistently to self-esteem scales across measurement episodes. Yet most people would say they sometimes feel good about themselves, such as when they succeed at something, whereas at other times they evaluate themselves more negatively, such as after a romantic rejection. What do these fluctuations in self-evaluations have to do with self-esteem?

Many researchers think of global self-esteem as a personality disposition or trait variable, not unlike extraversion or openness. Traits are thought to be stable, enduring qualities of a person. Thus, trait self-esteem refers to how people tend to evaluate themselves across time and situations. Traits can be contrasted with states, which generally refer to fleeting qualities of a person (e.g., bodily states or moods). Accordingly, researchers often use the term state self-esteem to refer to momentary fluctuations in people's self-evaluations.

This raises the question of whether trait and state self-esteem are more or less the same thing, with their main difference being that one is stable and the other fluctuates. On the one hand, the development and use of scales designed to assess state self-esteem seem to suggest this. An example is the State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991), which asks respondents to indicate how true of them "at the moment" statements are, such as "I feel confident about my abilities" and "I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure." An implicit assumption of these scales seems to be that momentary increases or decreases in self-evaluation should have effects similar to the effects of high and low trait self-esteem, respectively. In other words, people who experience a momentary increase in their self-evaluation are akin to high self-esteem individuals, whereas those

who experience a momentary decrease in their self-evaluation are more or less like low self-esteem individuals. To the extent that this assumption is valid, it allows researchers to manipulate state self-esteem—for example, by presenting participants with favorable or unfavorable, self-relevant feedback—and, in turn, to draw causal conclusions about the effects of trait self-esteem (vs. using trait self-esteem to predict an outcome variable).

On the other hand, some researchers disagree that momentary increases or decreases in people's self-esteem are simply state versions of trait self-esteem. For example, Brown and colleagues argue that such momentary fluctuations are more akin to emotional states—what they call *feelings of self-worth* (FOSW)—than they are to self-esteem per se (Brown, 1993, 1998; Brown & Dutton, 1995; Brown et al., 2001). To these researchers, whereas self-esteem refers to people's enduring, trait-like evaluations of themselves, FOSW refer to fleeting emotional states such as pride and humiliation. Importantly, FOSW refer only to emotional states that are self-relevant; pride and humiliation are considered FOSW because they have implications for how people feel about themselves, whereas emotional states such as happiness and sadness do not. Supporting this viewpoint, in one study high and low trait self-esteem participants (based on their responses to a global self-esteem measure) were told they failed at an achievement task and then indicated their emotional reactions. The failure manipulation led to higher reports of unhappiness (relative to various control conditions) among both high and low trait self-esteem participants, but low trait self-esteem participants reported higher reports of negative FOSW (e.g., shame) relative to their high trait self-esteem counterparts (Brown & Dutton, 1995).

Yet another perspective on the topic of trait versus state self-esteem comes from research examining individual differences in the stability of self-esteem (Kernis, 2005). To obtain a measure of self-esteem stability, researchers have respondents complete a state version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale daily over a set period of time (e.g., a week) and then compute the standard deviation of their set of responses. Someone who has highly unstable self-esteem reports more fluctuations in how she evaluates herself over days, whereas someone with very stable self-esteem reports fewer such self-esteem fluctuations. In other words, the degree to which a person's self-esteem shows temporary or state fluctuations can be thought of as a trait or personality characteristic in its own right. We will discuss self-esteem stability in more detail below in reviewing different varieties of self-esteem.

Finally, note that state self-esteem, though tied to specific moments and situations, is conceptually distinct from domain-specific self-esteem or self-evaluations. Thus, it would not be appropriate to assume that domain-specific self-evaluations necessarily fluctuate more than global self-esteem. In fact, the Rentzsche-Schroder-Abe (2022) study described earlier found that domain-specific self-esteem was as stable as global self-esteem in terms of both rank-order stability and mean-level change over time. Moreover, the stability coefficients for both global and domain-specific self-esteem were of similar size to those that have been found for "classic" trait measures such as the Big Five (e.g., Anusic & Schimmack, 2016; Borghuis et al., 2017; Wortman et al., 2012). In short, such evidence suggests that global and domain-specific self-esteem are similarly trait-like.

In sum, different perspectives debate the importance of global versus domain-specific evaluations, as well as trait versus state self-esteem. Nonetheless, as noted, most self-esteem researchers have treated self-esteem as a relatively stable indication of a person's global sense of self-worth and have produced a sizable body of interesting and useful findings by doing so. In other words, there are many robust and important self-esteem-related phenomena in which the above distinctions and

points of controversy do not come into play. That said, it is of course worthwhile to be aware of these distinctions and the conditions under which they may play a significant role.

Measuring Self-Esteem

Now having a sense of what self-esteem is, the question of how researchers measure it arises. Because the majority of self-esteem research has focused on global self-esteem as a trait variable, the review will emphasize global measures of self-esteem.

Self-Report Measures

The most common method of measuring global self-esteem is via self-report. This makes sense given global self-esteem is not directly observable, for it refers to individuals' *subjective* perception of their personal worth. Among literally hundreds of self-report measures of global self-esteem, a small subset has been used most frequently (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). The Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, the most widely used, was designed to be easy to administer, face valid, and relatively short to complete. And indeed, all are strengths of the Rosenberg scale. The scale has very strong psychometric properties (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001): test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and predictive validity.

But the Rosenberg scale, and similar measures, are not without weaknesses. In fact, one strength—face validity—carries with it a shortcoming. Because the items on the Rosenberg and similar measures make what is being measured transparent, respondents can manipulate their responses so as to convey a particular image of themselves. A second potential weakness of self-report scales is that people may not be able to accurately report on their global self-esteem insofar as they may not be fully aware of, or have full access to, the self-evaluative knowledge that does guide their thoughts and behavior. Thus, although global self-esteem is typically measured in subjective terms, a person could be so motivated to see herself positively that she may not be fully aware of—and thus cannot report on—her underlying doubts about her personal worth.

Self-esteem researchers continue to rely on self-report measures of global self-esteem, weighing their strengths more heavily than their weaknesses. This is reasonable so long as researchers make sure to consider potential implications of the weaknesses of self-report measures when interpreting their results. However, another strategy for dealing with these weaknesses is to use non-self-report measures instead of, or in conjunction with, self-report measures. One popular category of such alternatives is implicit measures of self-esteem. These measures assume that in addition to the global self-evaluations that people can explicitly or directly report when completing measures such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, people also possess implicit, or automatic, evaluations of themselves to which they do not necessarily have conscious access.

Implicit Measures

The defining feature of implicit measures of self-esteem is that they measure self-esteem indirectly such that it is revealed through responses to a superficially different set of questions or actions (Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). As a result, their purpose is often not apparent to respondents. To illustrate, instead of relying on respondents to report their self-evaluations, these measures infer people's self-evaluations from their reaction times (i.e., the speed

with which respondents respond to particular, self-relevant stimuli), or from their evaluations of ambiguously self-relevant stimuli. As a concrete example, the self-esteem Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald & Farnham, 2000) measures the relative strength of people's positive and negative associations with the self, compared with others. Another example comes from the name-letter effect (Nuttin, 1985), which measures people's evaluations of the self as reflected in their evaluations of a close associate, their initials. Such evaluations are sometimes used as a measure of implicit self-esteem.

Do measures of implicit self-esteem circumvent the issues with explicit measures of self-esteem—that respondents can discern what is being assessed and alter their responses in various ways—while still measuring what the latter measures, namely, global self-esteem? Although some studies have yielded findings with implicit measures of self-esteem that parallel those found with explicit measures (e.g., Greenwald & Farnham, 2000), others have not (e.g., Spalding & Hardin, 1999). Furthermore, the relationship between implicit and explicit self-esteem varies considerably, with scores on explicit and implicit measures sometimes significantly positively correlated, but at other times, weakly or not at all correlated (for a review, see Bosson et al., 2000).

Rather than focusing on the strength of the relationship between explicit and implicit self-esteem, some research has examined the combined effects of the two types of self-esteem, most commonly the pairing of high explicit self-esteem and low implicit self-esteem (e.g., Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003; Kernis, Lakey, & Heppner, 2008; Zeigler-Hill, 2006). People who explicitly report a favorable opinion of themselves, but whose responses on implicit measures suggest that they harbor unfavorable evaluations of themselves are especially likely to exhibit defensiveness, perhaps to compensate for their self-doubts. In one study, participants who scored high on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale completed the self-esteem IAT and then took a bogus intelligence test (Jordan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2005). They were then given negative test feedback as a threat to their positive self-views. Next, they read various cases of student misconduct, one about a student who started a fistfight at a bar. The student was described as either an in-group or out-group member. Participants were asked to rate how severe a punishment the instigator should receive. Previous research had indicated that high self-esteem people discriminate against out-group members as a means of defending threatened self-views (Fein & Spencer, 1997). Adding nuance to this finding, the student conduct study found that it was those high in explicit self-esteem who also harbored negative implicit self-views who showed the most out-group discrimination (i.e., more severe punishment for out-group vs. in-group member).

Other work has focused on attempting to identify moderators of the relationship between explicit and implicit self-esteem. Although implicit self-esteem is less available to direct introspective access, people do have some experiential access to it in the form of affect and loose intuitions. This raises the possibility that because women are socialized to trust their feelings and intuitions more than men, women should have more access to, and hence be more likely to lean on, their implicit self-esteem when explicitly reporting their self-esteem (Pelham et al., 2005). Support for this was found across six samples using multiple implicit measures (e.g., the name-letter effect) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. Along related lines, people who perceive intuitions to be a valid source of information show stronger positive correlations between their explicit and implicit self-esteem than do their counterparts who have low faith in the validity of intuition (Jordan, Whitfield, & Zeigler-Hill, 2007).

Nevertheless, the literature on implicit self-esteem and its measurement has various conceptual and methodological issues, many of which continue to be explored (Bosson et al., 2000; Buhrmester,

Blanton, & Swann, 2011; Falk, Heine, Takemura, Zhang, & Hsu, 2015; Jusepeitis & Rothermund, 2022; Perinelli, Alessandri, Donnellan, & Laguna, 2018; Schimmack, 2021). These include fundamental questions about what exactly measures of implicit self-esteem tap (e.g., global implicit self-esteem, state implicit self-esteem, or neither), the reliability and validity of implicit self-esteem measures, and the degree to which different implicit self-esteem measures assess the same construct. In short, further clarity on the meaning and utility of the implicit self-esteem construct awaits further research.

Finally, on most implicit measures of self-esteem, people predominantly exhibit implicit self-positivity (Bar-Anan & Nosek, 2014; Bosson et al., 2000; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2014; Koole et al., 2001). This finding has emerged across numerous cultures (Yamaguchi et al., 2007). Although positive implicit self-evaluations are robust, research points out that the most commonly used measures only assess relative implicit self-evaluations—that is, they measure implicit evaluations of the self on a single continuum, ranging from good to bad, which does not leave room for the possibility that people may possess both positive and negative implicit self-evaluations. In research addressing this, implicit self-evaluations were assessed using the Evaluation Priming Task (EPT; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995), which allows for the assessment of both positive and negative automatic self-evaluations (Zayas, Wang, & McCalla, 2022). The researchers found that priming the self facilitated respondents' classification of both positive and negative targets. Thus, although implicit evaluations of the self may be more positive than negative, it appears that a certain degree of ambivalence may characterize implicit self-evaluations.

Developmental Trajectory Of Self-Esteem

Building on decades of research (e.g., Block & Robins, 1993; Wylie, 1974), considerable advances have addressed the long-term stability of individual differences in self-esteem and identified the normative pattern of self-esteem change across the lifespan. The accumulated evidence to date, reflecting numerous longitudinal studies that capture a broad range of the lifespan, strongly suggests normative developmental changes in self-esteem over the lifespan. Furthermore, observed differences between people in their self-esteem are relatively consistent across time, making it akin to a personality trait, as noted earlier (e.g., Donnellan, Kenny, Trzesniewski, Lucas, & Conger, 2012, Kuster & Orth, 2013; Wagner, Ludtke, & Trautwein, 2016; Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003). Thus, for example, people who have low (or high) self-esteem compared to same-age others tend to have low (or high) self-esteem compared to same-age others 1, 2, or even 3 decades later (Kuster & Orth, 2013).

This stability in self-esteem is attributed to both genetic and environmental factors (for a review, see Orth & Robins, 2019). Environmental factors (e.g., family, resources, health) account for greater variance than genetic ones, but the heritability of self-esteem has been estimated to be upwards of 40% (e.g., Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2006; Neiss, Stevenson, Legrand, Iacono, & Sedikides, 2009; Raevuori et al., 2007; Roy, Neale, & Kendler, 1995). Despite considerable stability—even over relatively long periods of time—in individual differences in self-esteem, certain time periods and factors are associated with some fluctuations in this stability. For example, as the time interval between assessment of self-esteem increases, the stability of self-esteem tends to decline (Kuster & Orth, 2013). As another example, the self-esteem of a sample ranging in age from 13 to 72 years increased in stability from adolescence to older age (Meier, Orth, Denissen, & Kuhnel, 2011).

What about self-esteem levels across the lifespan? On average, self-esteem increases during adolescence and young adulthood, peaks in middle adulthood at around 50 to 60 years of age, and then declines in old age (e.g., Orth, Erol, & Luciano, 2018; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012; Orth, Trzeniewski, & Robins, 2010). In studies that include middle childhood, the data suggest that self-esteem may show a normative decline in the transition from childhood to young adolescence, at which point self-esteem begins to rise (e.g., Chung, Hutteman, van Aken, & Denissen, 2017). This normative trajectory is not cohort-specific but apparently holds across all generations born during the 20th century (e.g., Orth, Trzeniewski, & Robins, 2010, for a review, see Orth & Robins, 2019). The pattern holds for both men and women (Orth et al., 2018), although men do exhibit somewhat higher self-esteem levels during some periods of life (e.g., Donnellan, Trzeniewski, & Robins, 2011; Orth et al., 2010). Furthermore, there may be cultural differences in the effects of gender and age on self-esteem levels (Bleidorn et al., 2016). On the other hand, Orth et al.'s (2018) meta-analytic results suggest that this normative trajectory of self-esteem holds across various other potential moderators, including ethnicity and country.

Considerable advances have been made in understanding normative rises and falls in self-esteem across the lifespan. For example, a high sense of mastery, low risk taking, and better health have been shown to predict higher self-esteem at every age from 14-30 years (Erol & Orth, 2011). This role of health is compatible with other findings that show changes in physical health (as well as socioeconomic status) account for the normative decline in self-esteem occurring in old age (Orth et al. 2010; von Soest, Wagner, Hansen, & Gerstorf, 2018).

In another vein, the link between self-esteem and social factors, including family and relationships, has also received considerable attention (e.g., Krauss, Orth, & Robins, 2020; Luciano & Orth, 2017; Orth, 2018; von Soest et al., 2018; Wagner, Ludtke, Johnkman, & Trautwein, 2013). For example, for the transition from high school to young adulthood, having a romantic partner is associated with increases in self-esteem (Wagner et al., 2013). In a sample of adults in middle and older adulthood (M_{age} = 58) that was followed over 5 years, not having a cohabiting partner was associated with both lower levels of self-esteem and declines in self-esteem over time (von Soest et al., 2018).

On the other end of the lifespan spectrum, prospective longitudinal research has followed participants from 8 to 27 years of age, with access to assessments of features of the home environment (e.g., quality of the parental relationship, poverty, presence of the father) as reported by participants' mothers during the first 6 years of life. This work found that aspects of the home environment during early childhood—particularly its quality (e.g., warmth and responsiveness of parenting, cognitive stimulation, safety of the physical environment)—predicted self-esteem as the children grew up (Orth et al., 2018). A meta-analysis examining the extant longitudinal data relevant to the prospective impact of social relationships on self-esteem, as well as the (reverse) prospective effect of self-esteem on relationships, suggests that relationships and self-esteem predict each other reciprocally over time. The effect size is similar in each direction (Harris & Orth, 2020). Moreover, these findings were robust to several potential moderator variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, and time lag between assessments of the key variables.

A different meta-analysis focused on the developmental trajectory of domain-specific self-evaluations, examining mean-level changes in domain-specific evaluations across time in 8 different domains (e.g., academic abilities, physical appearance, social acceptance; Orth et al., 2021). The effect sizes included in the analyses were based on samples with participants aged 5 to 28 years old. One major takeaway was that the domain in question matters, such that self-evaluations in some domains (e.g., academic abilities) exhibited a developmental trajectory similar to that of global self-

esteem, whereas self-evaluations in other domains (e.g., morality) showed a different developmental pattern over time.

Consequences Of Self-Esteem

One of the central reasons for the longstanding popularity of self-esteem as a topic of scientific inquiry is the notion that it has significant life consequences, such as academic success, job performance, and relationship longevity. This notion formed the backdrop of the self-esteem movement, which blossomed in the U.S. in the 1970s, triggered in part by the 1969 publication of psychotherapist Nathaniel Branden's book *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*. In this book, Branden argued that low self-esteem is at the root of nearly every psychological problem. From this perspective, raising self-esteem would be crucial for bringing about positive outcomes in life. The societal impact of the self-esteem movement is hard to underestimate. So powerful was this movement that in 1986, the California State Legislature agreed to fund a Task Force on Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility with an annual budget of $245,000 (just under $700,000 in 2023 dollars). State assemblyman John Vasconcellos went so far as to argue that raising self-esteem would solve many of the state's problems, including drug use, teenage pregnancy, and juvenile delinquency.

Despite the enthusiasm that fueled the self-esteem movement, there is considerable debate about the size and direction of the effects attributable to self-esteem. For example, some have questioned the size of the effects of global self-esteem on key outcomes such as academic performance, as well as the direction of the effects (i.e., self-esteem may be a consequence rather than a cause of such "outcomes"; Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Scholars have also suggested that high (global) self-esteem may be linked to negative outcomes insofar as high levels of self-esteem may foster *narcissism*, a personality disorder characterized by a grandiose self-concept, self-aggrandizing tendencies, and interpersonal exploitativeness (Raskin & Terry, 1988; explored in more depth below).

However, other researchers have documented that high (global) self-esteem is associated with positive outcomes, such as a significantly greater likelihood of graduating from college and staying off unemployment, whereas low (global) self-esteem is linked to negative outcomes—such as significantly poorer mental and physical health, higher levels of criminal behavior, and worse economic prospects (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). In a study examining whether self-esteem influences the development of a range of important life outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, salary, depression, physical health), nearly 2,000 individuals, ranging from 16 to 97 years old, were assessed five times over a 12-year period (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). The results were consistent with self-esteem being a cause rather than a consequence of life outcomes, although the size of the impact of self-esteem varied across different life outcomes (e.g., bigger for job satisfaction, smaller for physical health). In a qualitative review and meta-analysis (Orth & Robins, 2022) the consequences of self-esteem for six life domains (e.g., school, work, physical health) were summarized. Overall, self-esteem has benefits in all these domains, and these benefits generalize across age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Of course, perhaps self-esteem measured today in part reflects people's (accurate) anticipation of their life trajectory. In that way, even longitudinal studies may not definitively establish that self-esteem plays a causal role in future successes.

Another complication in the debate about self-esteem's consequences is the question of whether the focus on global self-esteem as a predictor of specific outcomes (e.g., achievement in a particular

academic subject) is misplaced. That is, perhaps to evaluate the effects of self-esteem, one should instead examine the link between domain-specific self-evaluations and specific outcomes (e.g., Marsh & Craven, 2006; Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). For example, in a 7-year longitudinal sample of adolescents, researchers found that adolescents' academic self-evaluations predicted their school grades, whereas adolescents' global self-evaluations did not (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008). Such findings suggest the operation of a specificity-matching principle: Global self-esteem may be the better predictor when the outcome one is trying to predict is relatively broad, whereas domain-specific self-evaluations may more strongly predict specific outcomes (e.g., Marsh & O'Mara, 2008; Swann et al., 2007). Indeed, in Orth and Robins's (2022) review and meta-analysis, tests of the consequences of domain-specific evaluations were limited in number, but existing evidence was consistent with the specificity-matching principle.

Thus far, the discussion of the consequences of self-esteem has focused on relatively concrete life outcomes such as academic success. But what about psychological consequences? A good deal of the research on this question has focused on how self-esteem differences predict responses in situations with evaluative implications for the self (e.g., getting performance feedback). For example, regarding negative evaluative feedback, low self-esteem individuals tend to be more affected than high self-esteem people. In the earlier Brown and Dutton (1995) study, upon receiving failure feedback, low self-esteem people reported more shame and humiliation (i.e., FOSW) than high self-esteem individuals. In addition, high self-esteem individuals tend to be more self-serving and strategic in evaluative situations compared to their low-esteem counterparts. As one early example, researchers had a clinical graduate student interview high and low self-esteem participants before giving them feedback about the interviewer's supposed assessments (Shrauger & Lund, 1975). Some participants were told the interviewer evaluated them positively, whereas others received a negative assessment. In response, high but not low self-esteem participants were self-serving: They rated the interviewer to be less competent and more biased in the negative relative to positive feedback condition.

In other work, low self-esteem people who were told they did poorly on an exam performed worse and expressed less motivation on subsequent tasks relative to high self-esteem individuals (Brockner, Derr, & Laing, 1987). Related findings have emerged when the negative feedback is interpersonal in nature. Specifically, when low self-esteem individuals were exposed to stimuli connoting rejection (e.g., abandoned, dumped) rather than acceptance (e.g., welcomed, attached) or control stimuli, they evaluated themselves more negatively, gave up sooner on a difficult task, and did poorer on a laboratory task (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002). In contrast, high self-esteem individuals evaluated themselves more positively, persisted longer on the difficult task, and performed better on the laboratory task.

Various explanations have been offered for the kinds of self-esteem differences just described (e.g., Blaine & Crocker, 1993). One is that high self-esteem individuals are more motivated to enhance the self, whereas low self-esteem individuals focus more on protecting the self. Another explanation for differences between high and low self-esteem individuals in evaluative situations—in particular, ones involving the receipt of negative evaluative feedback—is more cognitive in nature. Specifically, low self-esteem individuals may overgeneralize more when receiving negative feedback, to call to mind many other negative self-characteristics, even ones not directly related to the threat itself (Kernis, Brockner, & Frankel, 1989).

The evidence to date may lead one to conclude that high self-esteem has more positive psychological consequences than low self-esteem. This is likely true, but there are some caveats that

add nuance to this claim. For example, research shows that negative feedback leads high self-esteem people to define themselves in more independent ways—emphasizing their personal traits, goals, and accomplishments—whereas low self-esteem people define themselves in a more interdependent manner, emphasizing their close relationships and group memberships (Vohs & Heatherton, 2001). Most pertinent here were the downstream consequences of these divergent responses. Relative to low self-esteem people, high self-esteem individuals who received negative feedback were subsequently rated lower in likeability and higher on various negative personality dimensions (e.g., arrogance) by a new acquaintance with whom they had just had a short interaction. These differences in the likability of high and low self-esteem individuals were explained by the different self-definitions triggered by the negative feedback among these two groups of individuals.

In terms of caveats, although the literature has documented a variety of consequences associated with high versus low self-esteem, there is also substantial evidence for multiple "varieties" of high and low self-esteem. Although a later section will expand on these varieties, the crucial point is that at times it may be too simplistic to attribute outcomes and consequences simply to "high" or "low" self-esteem. For example, as mentioned earlier, high self-esteem people with low implicit self-esteem do not exhibit the same tendencies as those with high explicit/high implicit self-esteem (Jordan et al., 2005).

Functions Of Self-Esteem

Studying whether self-esteem has significant consequences is one approach to answering the question "Why study self-esteem?" A different approach is to ask what function(s) self-esteem serves. Three major perspectives on self-esteem function—terror management theory, sociometer theory, and hierometer theory—shed some light.

Terror Management Theory

Terror management theory (TMT; Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2015; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) argues that human beings, like all other life forms, have a propensity for survival. Unique to humans, however, is the cognitive capacity to be aware of the inevitability of death. TMT asserts that knowledge of our mortality gives rise to paralyzing terror that humans have found ways to buffer. In particular, people have developed cultural worldviews: "shared symbolic conceptions of reality that give meaning, order, and permanence to existence" (p. 436; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). These shared views embody a set of standards that people should strive for and that, if met, provide people with either literal or symbolic immortality. In TMT, self-esteem refers to the degree to which people believe they meet the standards of value dictated by their cultural worldviews. High self-esteem results from meeting or exceeding these values, and thus should buffer the anxiety of death by signaling that one is a person of value. In short, the TMT answer to why self-esteem is important is that self-esteem is a key route by which people buffer the terror of death (Schimel, Landau, & Hayes, 2008).

Various forms of evidence support this TMT perspective on self-esteem (Pyszczynski et al., 2004, 2015). For example, high self-esteem people appear to be less susceptible than low self-esteem individuals to manipulations designed to elicit death-related anxiety, and reminders of mortality lead to efforts to raise one's self-esteem. Tests of this hypothesis have treated self-esteem in either

dispositional or state terms. To illustrate the latter, participants in one study were asked to watch a video depicting either death-related scenes (as a way of arousing death anxiety) or neutral scenes (Greenberg et al., 1992). Before watching the video, participants were given either neutral feedback or very positive feedback (as a way of momentarily increasing their self-esteem) on a bogus personality test. After the video, participants completed an anxiety measure. Participants who watched the death-related video and did not receive the self-esteem boosting personality feedback showed the highest anxiety levels. Put differently, participants who watched the death-related video and were given the self-esteem boost reported levels of anxiety as low as participants who watched a neutral video.

The literature on TMT is vast, with hundreds of studies yielding findings consistent with core TMT hypotheses. A 2010 meta-analysis capturing two decades of TMT studies reported an overall moderate effect size for mortality salience effects on a range of world-view and self-esteem-related dependent variables (Burke, Martens, & Faucher, 2010). Their self-esteem-related results, however, departed from prior theorizing and findings on the role of self-esteem in terror management (e.g., Harmon-Jones et al., 1997) in that the meta-analysis yielded a significant effect size for worldview validation among high self-esteem but not low-esteem individuals, whereas the TMT self-esteem hypothesis would suggest that higher levels of self-esteem should buffer people from death-related anxiety, thereby decreasing their need for worldview validation. Burke and colleagues suggest that the discrepancy could be explained by different operationalizations of self-esteem, such that studies that use dispositional and explicit measures of self-esteem (the focus of their self-esteem results) may show enhanced mortality salience effects on worldview validation, whereas other operationalizations of self-esteem—such as manipulations that momentarily boost or dampen self-esteem or implicit self-esteem measures—may yield the TMT-anticipated self-esteem finding.

In part due to the attention this theory has received, TMT has been the focus of a large-scale replication attempt that entailed 21 different labs attempting to replicate the basic TMT hypothesis that mortality salience increases people's inclination to defend their worldviews (Klein et al., in press). Overall, this project failed to replicate the basic effect for worldview defense, suggesting that at least some caution in evaluating TMT is warranted. At the same time, it is probably imprudent to view a single set of replication attempts as negating the entire corpus of findings on TMT. Instead, firm conclusions about what tenets of TMT are and are not replicable, and under what conditions, should await further inquiry.

Sociometer Theory

Sociometer theory offers a different perspective on the function of self-esteem (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). This theory is grounded in the premise that humans have a fundamental need for belongingness, one that evolved because humans who belonged to social groups were more likely to survive. Given the survival implications of belongingness, a psychological mechanism must have evolved to monitor it. A prime candidate is self-esteem. According to the theory, self-esteem serves as a meter or gauge that monitors the social environment for cues of acceptance or rejection. High levels of self-esteem signal acceptance, belonging, or inclusion, whereas low levels signal rejection, lack of belonging, or exclusion. Fluctuations in self-esteem thus inform the individual to take affiliative action to re-gain acceptance. In short, sociometer theory's answer to why self-esteem is important is that it signals one's degree of social inclusion.

Consistent with this theory, early studies showed that people's trait levels of self-esteem are substantially correlated with their ratings of how much they generally feel included or excluded by

others (Leary et al., 1995). The researchers also found that participants' ratings of how much engaging in various behaviors (e.g., donating blood, losing your temper) would affect their state self-esteem paralleled their ratings of the interpersonal implications of the behaviors (i.e., whether they would elicit social acceptance or rejection). Behaviors that made people feel bad about themselves were precisely the ones that they said would lead to rejection, whereas behaviors that made people evaluate themselves positively were linked to acceptance. As a final example, participants who were led to believe that they were excluded from a group based on their personality reported lower self-esteem compared to those who were accepted into the group as well as those who were told they were excluded for random, non-diagnostic reasons.

Sociometer theory has fueled considerable research over the past several decades, amassing various strands of support. For example, one study testing a key prediction of the theory—that people who are successful at satisfying their belonging need should have higher self-esteem—found support at multiple levels of analysis (Denissen, Penke, Schmitt, & van Aken, 2008). At the intraindividual level, daily reports of the quality of social interactions, for example, were linked to daily fluctuations in self-esteem, with higher-quality interactions associated with more positive self-evaluations. At the interindividual level, people who reported feeling close to significant others also reported higher trait self-esteem. Finally, countries whose inhabitants reported regularly interacting with friends were characterized by higher nationwide self-esteem levels compared to countries whose inhabitants did not report such regular interactions.

Research on the developmental trajectory of self-esteem also has bearing on sociometer theory. Just as sociometer theory anticipates, belonging-related variables such as positive relationships (e.g., with family, peers, romantic partners), feelings of social inclusion, peer popularity, and social support prospectively predict self-esteem (e.g., Gruenenfelder-Steiger, Harris, & Fend, 2016; Morin, Maıano, Marsh, Nagengast, & Janosz, 2013; Wagner, Ludtke, Robitzsch, Gollner, & Trautwein, 2018). For example, one study assessing children from second through fifth grade found that within-person changes in a child's social support were directly linked to changes in their self-esteem level (Magro, Utesch, Dreiskamper, &Wagner, 2019).

Despite considerable support for sociometer theory, scholarship suggests some possible refinements. These include the proposals embedded in a third major perspective on the function of self-esteem, hierometer theory (Mahadevan, Gregg, Sedikides, & deWaal-Andrews, 2016).

Hierometer Theory

Hierometer theory (Mahadevan, Gregg, & Sedikides, 2019; 2021; Mahadevan et al., 2016) converges with sociometer theory in proposing that self-esteem serves an evolutionary function. But the hierometer's function is not just to track inclusion; it also tracks status and informs individuals on how best to navigate status hierarchies. Regarding the latter, the theory assumes that people do not pursue status indiscriminately, for it would be maladaptive to do so if the odds of succeeding are low. Rather, people should be keener to engage in status-seeking behaviors when they sense they are likely to be successful in doing so, and less keen when they are not. According to hierometer theory, then, high self-esteem should encourage assertive, status-seeking behavior because it signals that such behavior is likely to succeed. In contrast, low self-esteem should breed more acquiescent behavior because it signals that assertiveness is not likely to lead to status gains. In short, hierometer theory's answer to why self-esteem is important is that self-esteem functions as a status monitor.

An initial pair of studies testing hierometer theory yielded support for its basic tenets (Mahadevan et al., 2016). Specifically, the researchers found that self-regard, whether defined in terms of self-esteem or narcissism, was positively correlated with both status and assertiveness. The link between self-regard and status supports the theory's prediction that self-regard tracks status; the association between status and assertiveness supports the prediction that self-regard regulates assertive behavior, such that assertiveness is more likely when self-regard is high. These initial studies also found, consistent with hierometer theory, that self-regard at least partially statistically mediated the association between status and assertiveness.

Subsequent findings offer further insights into, and suggest refinements to, both hierometer and sociometer theories. In one series of studies, correlational and experimental methods were used to examine both self-esteem and narcissism (Mahadevan et al., 2019). Cross-sectional evidence showed that both status and inclusion were positively correlated with self-esteem, but only status was correlated positively with narcissism. These effects held across gender, age, and the other Big Five personality traits. In two experiments in which status and inclusion were orthogonally manipulated, both higher status and higher inclusion increased self-esteem, whereas only higher status boosted narcissism. The robustness of this dissociation was bolstered in a daily diary study in which respondents completed measures of status, inclusion, self-esteem, narcissism, assertiveness, and affiliativeness on a daily basis over a 10-day period (Mahadaven, Gregg, & Sedikides, 2020). Participants reported higher self-esteem on days when they also reported higher status and inclusion, but reports of narcissism were only higher on days when reports of status were also higher. Also, both assertiveness and affiliativeness were higher on days when self-esteem was higher, but assertiveness was higher only on days when narcissism was higher. Together, these studies suggest that self-esteem functions as both a sociometer and hierometer—monitoring both status and inclusion—whereas narcissism functions mainly as a hierometer.

In sum, there is not a single answer to the question of the function(s) of self-esteem. The focus here has been on three perspectives on this question, but others also exist (e.g., Gebauer et al., 2015; Howell, Sosa, & Osborn, 2019). The picture that is still emerging suggests that there are important nuances and distinctions to consider (e.g., Mahadevan et al., 2021), such as that between self-esteem and narcissism.

Varieties And Dimensions Of Self-Esteem

Although the vast majority of self-esteem research has focused on levels of self-esteem, there is widespread recognition that "there's more to self-esteem than whether it is high or low" (Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993, p. 1190). In short, there are qualitatively different varieties and dimensions of self-esteem. Two of these are described next.

Stable Versus Unstable Self-Esteem

An earlier section introduced the idea that the degree to which a person's self-esteem fluctuates can be thought of as an individual difference or personality variable; some people have relatively stable self-esteem, whereas others have relatively unstable self-esteem. As described above, researchers typically measure self-esteem stability by having participants complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale once or twice a day over the course of 4-7 days, under the instruction to base their responses on how they feel "at the moment they are completing each form," rather than based on how they

generally feel about themselves (Kernis, 2005). The standard deviation of each individual's set of self-esteem scores reflects the degree of self-esteem (in)instability. Stability and level of self-esteem are often positively correlated, but the correlations tend to be small, implying relative independence. Speaking to their dissociability, self-esteem instability has different effects for high versus low self-esteem individuals (e.g., Kernis et al., 1993).

Illustrating this is research addressing diverging perspectives on self-esteem and aggression, with some work linking low self-esteem to aggression, whereas other research suggests high self-esteem, at least when paired with threat, may breed aggression (e.g., Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffit, & Caspi, 2005). Self-esteem instability may help resolve these disparate viewpoints. To illustrate, researchers of one study asked 1000 friends and family members of over 200 participants to evaluate them on their aggressiveness (Zeigler-Hill, Enjaian, Holden, & Southard, 2014). Participants' self-esteem instability moderated the link between self-esteem level and aggressiveness: Those with stable high self-esteem were perceived as less aggressive than those with unstable high self-esteem or low self-esteem (whether stable or unstable).

Contingent Versus Non-Contingent Self-Esteem

Another dimension of self-esteem is whether it is contingent or non-contingent (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1995). Contingent self-esteem refers to evaluations of the self that are dependent on living up to certain standards; self-esteem is high when one meets or exceeds the standards, but low when one falls short of them. Non-contingent self-esteem, by contrast, refers to evaluations of the self that do not hinge on meeting particular standards. Building on assertions that James (1890) made over a century ago, Crocker and colleagues have posited that there are individual differences not only in the degree to which a person's self-esteem is contingent, but also the domains of contingency (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Park & Crocker, 2013). For example, some people have self-esteem that is contingent on academic performance, whereas others' self-esteem depends on morality. Self-esteem is thought to rise with success and drop with failure, but only for successes and failures in a person's contingency domain(s). In this way, contingencies of self-esteem help to explain one source of self-esteem instability.

Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, and Bouvrette (2003) developed the Contingencies of Self-Worth (CSW) scale to assess the domains on which people base their self-worth. This scale includes seven different domains assumed to be potentially relevant to college students: academics, appearance, approval from others, competition, family support, God's love, and virtue. Scores on this scale predict daily fluctuations in self-esteem, daily affect, goal pursuit, and behavior (Crocker, Luhtanen, & Sommers, 2005). In one study, college seniors who were applying to graduate school filled out the CSW scale (Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen, 2002). Then, for 2 months during the academic term, the students completed measures of self-esteem twice a week as well as on any day they received a notice of acceptance or rejection from one of the graduate schools to which they had applied. Students' self-esteem fluctuated as a function of those acceptances and rejections, but only among the students who were high in academic contingency. It wasn't that low academic contingency students were unaffected by being accepted or rejected by graduate schools—indeed, all participants reported feeling happier on days when they received an acceptance versus a rejection —it was just that they did not link acceptance and rejection to the self. In other words, one can feel good or bad about doing well or poorly in a given domain, but it does not necessarily mean that one sees the self as a good or bad person as result.

Self-esteem level and contingencies of self-worth may also have joint effects. To illustrate, one study had student participants first complete the CSW scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Park, Crocker, & Kiefer, 2007), after which they were randomly assigned to either the failure condition in which they took a very difficult verbal ability test (on which most do very poorly), or the control condition in which they simply rated which words in the verbal ability test they liked best. Afterward, all participants completed measures of state self-esteem and mood. In the failure (but not control) condition, low self-esteem participants whose self-worth was contingent on academics reported lower state self-esteem and less positive affect. High self-esteem participants who failed showed a contrasting pattern: the more their self-worth was contingent on academics, the more they reported somewhat *higher* state self-esteem. (In this case, no associations with mood were observed.) Overall, these findings suggest that if one's dispositional level of self-esteem is high, being highly contingent on a particular domain need not result in negative intrapsychic consequences upon failing in that domain. High self-esteem may mark those who are particularly talented at spontaneously leveraging psychological resources to bounce back from threats.

Although most work has treated CSWs as relatively stable constructs—and there is indeed evidence that they are relatively stable (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003)—some researchers have conceptualized CSWs in state terms, identifying fluctuations in CSWs as a function of situational circumstances (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, & Sommers, 2004; Horberg & Chen, 2010; Strahan et al., 2008). In this vein, research has shown that threat has different effects on the degree to which participants with high versus low self-esteem report being contingent in the threatened domain (Buckingham, Weber, & Sypher (2012). That is, threat led high self-esteem participants to decrease the degree to which their self-worth hinged on success or failure in the threatened domain, whereas the reverse was true among low self-esteem participants, thus leaving the self-esteem of the low self-esteem participants more "on the line" or vulnerable.

When self-worth is contingent on financial success, this can also have myriad consequences (Park, Ward, & Naragon-Gainey, 2017). For example, people who scored higher (vs. lower) on a measure that Park et al. created to assess financially contingent self-worth reported making more financially based social comparisons with others and experiencing more stress and anxiety both chronically and in response to financial threats. Such contingencies of self-worth also have behavioral consequences. On the one hand, people who are high (vs. low) in this CSW exhibit more self-protective responses in response to financial threats—for example, by disengaging from their financial problems. On the other hand, such individuals were also less likely to make extravagant spending decisions under financial threat. In follow-up research, the focus on money that financially contingent self-worth tends to elicit was associated with greater feelings of loneliness and social disconnection, presumably because concerns with and the pursuit of financial success often come at the cost of spending time with family and friends (Ward, Park, Naragon-Gainey, Whillans, & Jung, 2020).

Narcissism

The construct of narcissism has come up several times in this review of work on self-esteem. Though there has been some confusion about the relation between narcissism and self-esteem (for a review, see Brummelman, Thomaes, & Sedikides, 2016)—with the belief, for example, that the difference between high self-esteem and narcissism is mainly a matter of degree—accumulated evidence supports qualitative distinctions between the two.

An early conceptualization of narcissism, noted earlier, defined it as a personality or clinical disorder defined by a grandiose self-concept, self-aggrandizing tendencies, and interpersonal exploitativeness (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Since then, the construct has been widely studied in sub-clinical terms, with narcissists seen as individuals who "feel superior to others, believe they are entitled to privileges, and crave respect and admiration from others" (Brummelman et al., 2016, p. 8). Different types of narcissism (e.g., grandiose vs. vulnerable, agentic vs. communal) have been proposed. The prototypical narcissist is the grandiose kind who views the self as superior to others and does so specifically on agentic traits such as intelligence, rather than communal ones such as helpfulness (Hyatt et al., 2018).

How does this prototypical narcissist differ from a person with high self-esteem? Both individuals harbor positive views of themselves. Not surprisingly, narcissism and self-esteem are at least weakly to moderately positively correlated (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). But the two are qualitatively distinct in that feeling superior to others is a defining feature of the narcissist's self-view, whereas the high self-esteem individual views the self positively, but not as superior (e.g., Tracy, Cheng, Robins, & Trzesniewski, 2009). Narcissists and high self-esteem individuals also view the world and relationships through different lenses (Brummelman, 2018). Narcissists seek to get ahead because they view the world through a zero-sum lens, with another person's win as their loss. High self-esteem individuals, in contrast, try to and typically succeed at getting along with others, guided by a non-zero-sum principle in their relationships whereby everyone can win.

Narcissism and self-esteem also differ in their developmental origins and trajectory. Narcissism is nurtured though parental overevaluation—a hyper-praising orientation toward one's child that cultivates a self-image that they are special and thus entitled to privileges (Brummelman, Nelemans, Thomaes, & Orbobio de Castro, 2017; Brummelman et al., 2015; Brummelman & Sedikides, 2020). In contrast, high self-esteem is nurtured by parental warmth—treating one's child with affection and appreciation and conveying that they matter and are worthy individuals. In terms of developmental trajectories, narcissism and self-esteem are thought to come online at a similar age, around early to middle childhood (Brummelman, 2018), but then their normative trajectories diverge, with narcissism peaking in adolescence and gradually declining over adulthood (e.g., Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). Self-esteem instead reaches its lowest point in adolescence and then increases over adulthood (Orth & Robins, 2014).

A different taxonomy of narcissism differentiates grandiose narcissism (itself divided into four subtypes) from vulnerable narcissism (Sedikides, 2021a). By this framework, what is common across all variants and forms of narcissism is a belief in one's superiority and a sense of entitlement that is paired with indifference or even antipathy towards others (Sedikides, 2021a). To turn to variations of grandiose narcissism, admirative grandiose narcissists are thought to engage in assertive self-promotion to obtain social admiration, whereas rivalrous grandiose narcissists antagonize and derogate others in their efforts to protect and maintain their superior self-view (e.g., Back et al., 2013). Agentic grandiose narcissists focus on inflating their standing on agency-related traits (e.g., competence, intelligence), whereas communal narcissists inflate their standing on communion-related dimensions (e.g., warmth, morality; Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, & Maio, 2012). All four forms of grandiose narcissism contrast with vulnerable narcissism (Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008; Miller, Back, Lyman, & Wright, 2021; Miller et al., 2011). In broad strokes, whereas grandiose narcissism is characterized by extraverted, bold, and immodest behavior, vulnerable narcissism is marked by neurotic, introverted, and insecure tendencies (Mahadevan & Jordan, 2022).

One more form of narcissism in the extant literature is collective narcissism (de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009; de Zavala & Lantos, 2020), which is thought to entail "an emotional investment in an unrealistic belief about the ingroup's greatness" (de Zavala et al., 2009, p. 1074). Put simply, collective narcissism extends the target of narcissism beyond the self to one's ingroup(s). Whereas the other forms of narcissism are relevant to shedding light on intrapersonal and interpersonal processes and behavior, collective narcissism has bearing on intergroup processes and behavior, such as outgroup derogation (de Zavala et al., 2019), nationalism (Frederico & de Zavala, 2020), and political extremism (Cichocka, Bocian, Winiewski, & Azevedo, 2022). Overall, theory and research examining different forms of narcissism have been on the rise in the past few decades and are likely to continue, as many questions remain (Guekes et al., 2017; Sedikides, 2021).

Other areas of research on narcissism focus on identifying its correlates and consequences. For example, research has examined the link between narcissism and psychological health (e.g., depression, subjective well-being, loneliness). Summarizing the extant literature (Sedikides, 2021a), this link may differ depending on not only the form of narcissism being examined, but also on whether psychological health is assessed in the short- versus long-term. For example, grandiose (compared to vulnerable) narcissism is associated with concurrently measured psychological health and may serve as a psychological buffer in the face of various forms of self-threat (for a review, see Sedikides, 2021a). This may be because narcissists' highly positive self-views afford them mental toughness (i.e., positive psychological resources; Papageorgiou, Wong, & Clough, 2017). They may be inclined to dismiss neutral or unfavorable feedback or at least interpret it in less threatening ways (e.g., Foster & Campbell, 2005). Such psychological tactics can even facilitate performance (e.g., Papageorgiou et al., 2018; see also Nevicka, Baas, & Ten Velden, 2016).

Narcissism does carry downsides. For example, a meta-analysis established a broad (positive) link between narcissism and aggression (Kjærvik & Bushman, 2021). Specifically, this review suggests that narcissism of various forms, including grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, is linked to aggression, and that this link is stronger when narcissists are somehow provoked. This result held across multiple forms of aggression (e.g., indirect, direct, verbal, physical), measurement approaches (e.g., self-report, observation), and a number of moderators (e.g., gender, age, culture).

Turning to interpersonal outcomes, narcissists tend to be well-liked by others early on, "at first sight" (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010), even though people are fairly accurate in discerning who is a narcissist (Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008). The very features of narcissism that tend to undermine relationships in the longer term—namely, a sense of entitlement and a tendency to exploit others—are associated with behaviors (e.g., self-assured body movements) that account for narcissists' initial popularity (Back et al., 2010). Narcissists endear themselves to newly acquainted others when they exhibit assertive or aggressive behaviors, but not when their narcissism manifests in arrogant and combative behavior (Küfner, Nestler, & Back, 2013; see also Poorthuis, Slagt, Aken, Denissen, & Thomaes, 2021).

Although the self-confidence and charms of the narcissist may translate into romantic success in the short-term (e.g., Foster & Campbell, 2005; for a review, see Campbell, Brunell, & Finkel, 2006), the relationship tendencies of narcissists in longer-term romantic relationships—which often manifests as game-playing (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002) and perceiving better alternative relationship options (Campbell & Foster, 2002)—cause problems. The divergent romantic outcomes of narcissism in the short- versus long-term map onto the admiration-seeking versus rivalrous variants of narcissism, respectively (Wurst et al., 2017). That is, the romantic appeal of narcissists early on traces back to the admiration-related tendency to promote a positive self-view by seeking

others' admiration, whereas the romantic problems that narcissists often face over time is attributable mainly to the rivalrous tendency to protect the self from a negative self-view by derogating others.

In sum, narcissism has often come up in discussions of self-esteem because a positive view of the self is a core feature of both. Beyond this, however, the literature is now quite clear that the two are distinct, each associated with its own array of origins, correlates, and consequences.

Self-Compassion

Like self-esteem, self-compassion is a source of positive self-regard that does not involve seeing oneself as superior to others. However, unlike self-esteem, which refers directly to one's favorable evaluation of the self, self-compassion does not involve any evaluation of the self and instead refers to relating to the self with kindness and acceptance, especially in difficult times (e.g., when encountering a failure). More precisely, Neff (2003, 2011, 2023) maintains that self-compassion has three interrelated components. These are self-kindness, a tendency to apply a caring and tender, rather than judgmental, attitude towards one's difficult experiences; common humanity, the recognition that it is only "human" to make mistakes and that one's suffering is shared by others; and mindfulness or facing one's failure and observing one's pain with equanimity. The common humanity facet of self-compassion highlights another clear point of departure between self-esteem and self-compassion. Whereas the shared humanity aspect of self-compassion breeds feelings of similarity and connection with others, efforts to maintain self-esteem often entail social comparisons that favorably distinguish the self from others.

To be sure, self-esteem and self-compassion are correlated, often to a moderately high degree (e.g., Leary, Tate, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007; Neff, 2003). This of course makes sense given that both constructs entail positive self-regard. Moreover, being kind and compassionate toward the self when facing difficulties is likely to boost self-evaluations, whereas lacking such self-compassion in such circumstances is likely to lower self-evaluations. Thus, given the positive association between the two constructs, it is commonplace for self-comparison researchers to use self-esteem inductions as a comparison condition by which to understand the unique causal effect of self-compassion inductions (e.g., Breines & Chen, 2012).

Most scholars consider the publication of Neff (2003) as the starting point to what has blossomed into a highly active area of psychological inquiry. Since 2003, over 4000 articles on self-compassion have been published (Neff, 2023) across many subfields of psychology, including personality, social, developmental, and clinical. Multiple scales have been developed to measure both trait and state forms of self-compassion (e.g., Gu, Baer, Cavanagh, Kuyken, & Strauss, 2020; Neff, 2003; Neff, Tóth-Király, Knox, Kuchar, & Davidson, 2021; for a review, see Strauss et al., 2016). The majority of the self-compassion literature is composed of correlational studies in which self-compassion has been treated as an individual difference, conceptualized as an antecedent and/or consequence of other variables. But in the past decade, experimental and intervention approaches have risen considerably. With the rapid growth of research on self-compassion, some debates and controversies have arisen, such as whether self-compassion should be conceptualized and therefore measured as a unitary construct or as a multidimensional one (e.g., Ewert, Vater, & Schröder-Abé, 2021; Floria, Chio, Mak, & Yu, 2021; Muris & Otgaar, 2020; Neff, 2020). These debates notwithstanding, substantial evidence indicates that self-compassion is linked to a broad array of

psychological outcomes, including better mental and physical well-being as well as relationship health (for a review, see Neff, 2023).

A thorough review of the empirical literature on self-compassion is not the goal here. Instead, this section introduces the construct because, as noted, self-compassion and self-esteem often come hand in hand, making it important to address how they are conceptually and empirically related. On the other hand, another way to approach the relationship between the two is to ask how they may bidirectionally influence one another. Self-esteem may be an antecedent of self-compassion in that treating the self with kindness and acceptance may require the appraisal that one is worthy of such compassion (e.g., Donald et al., 2017). On the flip side, many have theorized that healthy forms of self-esteem—for example, high self-esteem that is both stable and non-contingent—may be fostered by taking a self-compassionate stance toward the self (e.g., Neff, 2011).

SELF-EVALUATIVE MOTIVES

There has long been an ebb and flow in psychology in whether the grand theories that serve to define the era prioritize a cool, almost robotic conception of the self or instead an experientially and emotionally rich self that is guided by strong motivational forces. Sigmund Freud is perhaps best associated with the dynamic unconscious, the deep-seated repository in which psychosexual and other motives are the true origins for both consequential and even mundane behaviors. Behaviorism emerged as a reaction against this relatively unscientific tradition (Skinner, 1957, 1974). Through behaviorism's lens, legitimate scientific inquiry must reject what is not directly observable and instead seek to understand behavior through the principles of reinforcement learning that do not include a mind, let alone a self. Although behaviorism's intellectual hegemony was ultimately challenged—perhaps most famously by Noam Chomsky's (1959) searing critique of a behaviorist account of language—it would take longer for motivation to reassume a prominent place within psychological inquiry and the study of the self. Instead, social psychology became taken with cognitive theories that examined ways in which perceivers were sometimes sophisticated and sometimes flawed in how they offered explanations (Kelley, 1967) and judgments (e.g., Cervone & Peake, 1986) regarding the self's and others' attributes and behaviors.

Following these major pendulum swings, researchers studying the self began to think about how to reinsert motives into examinations of self-related judgments and evaluations. This research continued the tradition of examining information-processing mechanisms that guide self-impressions, but also recognized that people are motivated regarding which information they consider and how they reason from it to arrive at certain conclusions. Motives often influence judgments through emotional cues, like feelings of threat. But crucially, such emotional states should not simply be conceived of as sources of bias to condemn; they are key contributors to building a stable, protected, and well-functioning self-system. After all, it is psychopaths whose cognitions are devoid of emotional input (Evans, 2003). Even expected-value calculations, the sort of tasks at which computers are optimized to excel, are facilitated by emotional centers in the brain (Damasio, 2005). In short, modern perspectives on the self have taken an integrated perspective on cognition, emotion, and motivation in ways that lend themselves to more direct empirical test than the more nebulous motivational perspectives that once dominated the field (Crews, 2017).

Self-Evaluation

The Nature Of Threats

Self-evaluation describes an interplay between the self-system and the social world in which it operates. The self must seek out feedback, remember it, affectively respond to it, and ultimately make use of it to achieve self-knowledge and engage in productive behavior (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003; Sedikides & Hepper, 2009; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). That self-evaluation is itself a broadly applicable motivated process becomes apparent upon appreciating the wide variety of ways in which self-evaluative threat can emerge. Failing to achieve one's goals, sensing that one is not held in high regard by one's peers, coping with negative social feedback, experiencing the dissolution of a romantic relationship, and even being spooked by the presence of unwanted thoughts reflect just some of the wide variety of threats to self-evaluation (Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000; vanDellen, Campbell, Hoyle, & Bradfield, 2011). More generally, social attacks on one's reputation (e.g., one's honor) and value systems (e.g., one's religion or political ideology) can lead people to sacrifice their physical self for the sake of protecting their self-concept (Jost, Becker, Osborne, & Badaan, 2017; Nisbett, 1996).

People can experience self-evaluative threats even before they engage in behaviors that directly invite negative evaluations. A perception that one lacks the personal resources to later achieve one's goals can be threatening in the same way as actually arriving at such a roadblock (Atkinson, 1957). Furthermore, threats that would seem to reside outside of the physical self—like threats to one's affiliative bonds—can ultimately be self-threats to the extent they lead the self to question its own personal qualities, like whether they are sufficiently likeable and lovable (Alicke, Sedikides, & Zhang, 2020). Just as self-knowledge serves many functions beyond the purely epistemic, the self can face a wide variety of challenges while navigating its environment that can prompt self-evaluative threat to the extent they imply the self sooner or later will face major challenges.

The degree of threat that people experience depends on how much that person values self-esteem. In one study, some participants were led to believe that it was particularly important or unimportant to hold the self in high esteem (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021). At that point, participants completed a test of intellectual ability whose items were drawn from practice standardized tests and validated IQ tests. Participants then received false feedback; they were told that their performance compared quite favorably (89^{th} percentile) or unfavorably (14^{th} percentile) to other university students'. Those pushed to value self-esteem responded to failure (as opposed to success) with less calm and more anger. Notably, dispositional self-esteem did not moderate these results. This suggests that experiences of self-evaluative threat depend not only on the nature of feedback, but also on people's meta-preferences for how high of self-regard is essential.

Complex Sources Of Threat

In some contexts, the presence or absence of evaluative threat exists along a simple continuum. The worse one performs on a test of a valued ability, the more self-evaluative threat this encourages. In these more straightforward situations, when the self fails to achieve the feedback or performance that it desires, self-evaluative threat may result. But in other cases, the self may experience threat as a result of getting what it does desire.

That is, humans may be unique in their dual possession of what Frankfurt (1982) called first-order desires (what the self wants immediately) and second-order desires (what the self wishes that it wanted). Such tensions are core to self-control conflicts. One open question is how the combination

of these desires and people's ultimate behavior contribute to or reduce self-evaluative threat. For example, when people successfully enact their second-order desires, is this more or less threatening in the presence of countervailing first-order desires? Foregoing dessert after being tempted by a tantalizing dessert may be a cause for pride. Maintaining one's cool while being tempted to shove one's mother-in-law may be a cause for shame. By default, one's behaviors speak to the self, but determining when mere desires, even those not acted upon, contribute to self-evaluation and self-evaluative threat has yet to be fully resolved.

Self-Enhancement

The self-enhancement motive pushes people to have positive, but not unconditionally grandiose, self-views. Self-views are typically enhanced, but only modestly so compared to objective standards (Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Shi, Sedikides, Cai, Liu, & Yang, 2017). Various strategies and information-processing mechanisms (some already reviewed) contribute to the development and maintenance of such self-positivity (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009). A desire to self-enhance shapes important life trajectories people take in ways that help achieve positive feedback and validation in their own and others' minds (Lv, Zhang, Liu, Wang, & Wang, 2022; Namrata & Rast, 2010). Self-enhancement is complementary to self-protection. The former reflects the attainment of desired self-views, whereas the latter describes the avoidance of negative self-views (Tice, 1991). If self-enhancement describes the filling of the self's cup, self-protection works to identify and plug any leaks.

Self-enhancement is facilitated in part by internal information-processing strategies, reviewed earlier. These can include directly modifying beliefs about the self (e.g., coming to believe the self is relatively less likely than others to experience health threats; El-Toukhy, 2015) as well as the nature and priorities of one's self-concept (e.g., shifting one's commitments to different values or identities). The self changes not only its mind, but its context. People place themselves in situations in which they are more likely to behave as they desire and find the right audience to witness such performances. After all, most people prefer to interact with those who view them positively (Zell & Alicke, 2010). They actively solicit validating feedback from others and are adept at identifying who will offer it (Sanitioso & Wlodarski, 2004; Sedikides, 1993). Furthermore, they will strengthen bonds with others who will allow the self to bask in the others' reflected glory or simply offer flattering comparison standards (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). And when it seems likely that one's achievements will fall short of one's personal standards, the self will take steps to delegitimize the validity of the feedback it may receive (e.g., through self-handicapping; Jones & Berglas, 1978) or focus on the relative deficiencies of even poorer performers (Hoorens, 1993).

Although the self will modify its external environment in the service of self-enhancement, the self's internal strategies are the go-to ones for efficient self-enhancement. After all, the self has limited control over the contexts it finds itself in; upward social comparisons are inevitably thrust upon the self (Alicke, Zell, & Guenther, 2013). Anyone who has attended an awards banquet is well aware that the world has a way of reminding people of just how many people are better (or at least deemed so by others) than the self. Furthermore, people's environments often offer unrepresentative information about others' standing that is not helpful to self-enhancement goals. For example, people tend to observe others in social contexts in which their social connections are salient, not in their private moments of loneliness. Especially social individuals are environmentally focal and thus readily accessible exemplars who offer intimidating standards of comparison. As a result, people tend to think others have more active social lives and closer

friendships than does the self (Deri, Davidai, & Gilovich, 2017; Whillans, Christie, Cheung, Jordan, & Chen, 2017). To convince oneself of one's own adequacy, one is going to need to lean on internal self-protective strategies to complement the unrepresentative reality with which one is confronted.

The Psychological Immune System

Much as the biological immune system serves to identify and neutralize threats to the physical self, self-enhancement and self-protection reflect the operation of the psychological immune system that supports psychological homeostasis (Damasio, 2018; Sedikides, 2021b). In considering self-enhancement and self-protection strategies, one can distinguish between strategies that serve to delay having to fully accommodate potentially threatening information from those that involve the actual denial of reality (Vaz, Mata, & Critcher, 2021). For example, the self may use tactics such as distraction or self-affirmation to give itself time, distance, and perspective to chart a long-term productive course (Baumeister, 1991; Critcher & Dunning, 2015; Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000). These strategies do not require the self to reject or distort concrete information that may be threatening today but ultimately helpful to the self's future goal pursuits. In this way, self-enhancement can be healthy, not merely in terms of offering a subjective sense of psychological adjustment in the moment (Dufner, Gebauer, Sedikides, & Denissen, 2019), but also in endowing the self with the stability and fortitude to steadily and productively confront life's challenges. After all, the self-enhancement and self-protection systems will fail in their long-term efforts to support the self if they interfere with its ability to successfully pursue its desires (Sedikides, 2020; Vaz et al., 2021).

Even if the self wishes to tether its self-enhancing and self-protecting strategies to reality, it may have trouble recognizing that it is departing from this standard. For example, when a student aims to cope with the threat of academic failure, she may latch onto a reason that is objectively true (e.g., "The night before my final exam, I was woken up by my roommate who decided that 2am was the right time to bake a cake"). What this accurately remembered fact may overlook is that the decision to spend no time studying for the exam may have played a larger causal role. This single-excuse rationalizing pattern can make the psychological immune system's work feel accurate even as at a deeper level it displays a failure to appreciate the multiplicity of causal forces at play (Alicke, Sedikides, & Zhang, 2020). This is likely one route by which the self can feel tethered to reality—a feature that makes the psychological immune system's output feel legitimate—even though that tethering is only partial.

More generally, people may explain shortcomings in themselves by generating *causal trait theories* of why one aspect of the self (e.g., empathy, morality) gives rise to a personal flaw (e.g., a lack of conscientiousness, disagreeableness). Such theories can color the self's perceptions of other people as well (Critcher & Dunning, 2009; Critcher, Dunning, & Rom, 2015), thereby allowing the self to achieve social confirmation of their own excuses ("The only reason he can get along with everyone better than I can is that I'm sure he has no principles!"). Once again, it will be hard for the self to appreciate the extent to which its own perception of reality is only a partially accurate construction.

Emotional Homeostasis As A Cue To Psychological Homeostasis

The psychological immune system aims to achieve psychological homeostasis by monitoring and regulating the self's emotional states (Alicke, Sedikides, & Zhang, 2020; Sedikides, 2021b). Many

distinct areas of psychology have focused on negative emotional states for their signal value. Freud (1961) identified anxiety as a consistent manifestation of all not being right with the self. More recently, emotions have been viewed through a social functional perspective, in recognition of the useful role they play in informing the self and preparing it to act (Keltner & Gross, 1999; van Kleef, 2017). Sadness and anger are experienced, respectively, when one experiences seemingly unchangeable threats to one's goals or surmountable but currently frustrating roadblocks (Tyran, 2018). Negative emotions such as guilt and shame result from a sense that one should have behaved otherwise and a sense that one's moral self more generally has failed (Janoff-Bulman, 2011). The pain one feels in response to a loss of social affiliations makes use of the same neural substrates that identify and give rise to physical pain (Eisenberger, 2012). Emotions are attentionally arresting cues that both identify departures from equilibrium and help to guide the self back toward a healthy baseline state.

Emotional equanimity, and thus psychological homeostasis, results when the self's identities and desires align (Alicke et al., 2020). Even among lower mammals, the experience of closing the gap between desire and reality is an inherently rewarding experience (Hull, 1943). Self-enhancement helps to create this alignment by helping one to achieve the positive self-views one desires, thereby achieving high self-esteem (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). Those with high self-esteem go through life with more positive affect (Kuster, Orth, & Meier, 2013), a reflection that for these individuals psychological homeostasis has been attained.

Individual Differences

Even if one grants that self-enhancement itself is a universal motive, there is considerable individual variability in which self-aspects are prioritized for enhancement (Alicke, Sedikides, & Zhang, 2020). This is in part because, as reviewed earlier in the literature on self-esteem, people vary in their contingencies of self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). If self-worth is not contingent on a domain, then the psychological immune system will have nothing to protect; setbacks in that domain are thus unlikely to prompt an immune response. When the psychological immune system is engaged, it can serve to address sources of self-threat directly, or instead aim to restore the self indirectly. Experiencing a threatening setback at work may lead some to redouble their efforts at the office, whereas it may push others to do the same at the gym or at home.

Who elects to affirm the self indirectly? Recent research suggests that holistic thinkers—those likely to see parts as components of a greater whole (Nisbett et al., 2001; Rozin et al., 2016)—are more likely to engage in such indirect efforts, *fluid compensation* (Wang, Lisjak, & Mandel, in press). That is, these individuals may address a threat by bolstering the self in an unrelated domain. In one study, participants' thinking style was manipulated with an Embedded Figures Task (Monga & John, 2008). Holistic thinking was induced by having participants write a story about how 14 objects embedded in a figure were connected. Control participants merely focused on the objects individually. At that point, the extent to which participants felt they were falling short of their fitness goals was made salient. When the discrepancy highlighted was high, those induced to think holistically were more willing to engage in extra effort to win an item that could signal their intelligence to others (a reflection of fluid compensation). Holistic thinking style is known to differ across cultures (Choi et al., 2004); thus, one possibility is that there are predictable cultural differences in the extent to which the psychological immune system will respond directly or operate in a more fluid, compensatory way.

In other cases, self-enhancement has been measured not as a direct cognitive or behavioral tactic that bolsters the self, but instead as a motive or value. Schwartz and colleagues' (2001) Portrait Values Questionnaire measures four higher-order human values. Self-enhancement is operationalized as a desire for achievement and power (e.g., thinking it important to be successful and impress others), though what constitutes achievement will itself be socially constructed and thus culturally dependent (Jaravaza & Saruchera, 2022; Schwartz, 1992). In this framework, self-enhancement is contrasted against self-transcendence, or putting others' interests first. Those who particularly value self-enhancement may not only show different patterns of judgments and decisions in an effort to advance the self, but also tend to possess a suite of negative social qualities. Those who value self-enhancement (and not self-transcendence) tend to lack qualities like honesty, humility, and agreeableness that promote harmonious relations with others (Zacharopoulos, Hanel, Wolfradt, Maio, & Linden, 2021). In one study (Al-Kire, Ratchford, Tsang, Rowatt, & Schnitker, in press), American Christians high in the self-enhancement value were particularly likely to display generalized prejudice toward certain outgroups (e.g., Muslims, Hindus). Notably, the same people perceived more religious identity threat—that is, a belief that Christians are under attack in the United States. The causal story is ambiguous, though one possibility is that those who value building a socially validated, inflated sense of self may be quick to perceive persecution from those who do not assist with these goals. Outgroup resentment may follow.

The use of self-enhancement strategies is itself a broad, multi-factor individual difference. In one investigation, participants self-reported the extent to which they engaged in each of a large set of previously identified self-enhancement strategies (Hepper, Gramzow, & Sedikides, 2010). Strategy usage clustered into four factors: defensiveness, positivity embracement, favorable construals, and self-affirming reflections. As one example, those who tend to use positivity-embracement strategies report: spending more time with those who think highly of the self, believing the self's successes speak volumes about who the self really is, and seeking out performance opportunities based on whether they think the self can excel at them. Some personality variables (e.g., narcissism, promotion-focus) tended to predict greater use of self-enhancement across the board. By contrast, self-esteem showed inconsistent relationships: positively predicting self-affirming reflections and favorable construals, but negatively relating to defensiveness. Further efforts are needed to move beyond a literature that has largely identified a wide variety of self-enhancement mechanisms with less understanding of the spontaneous use of and connections among such strategies.

Self-Verification

Whereas self-enhancement refers to the motive to view the self positively, self-verification describes the desire to confirm one's preexisting understanding of the self (Swann, 2012). On the surface, there is a tension between the directional goals of self-enhancement and the consistency goals of self-verification, at least when it comes to James's "me." But regarding James's "I," self-verification affirms the self as a knower. Reinforcing one's preexisting self-understanding promotes one's sense of self as holding an accurate and valid worldview, thereby preserving the rationality of one's beliefs and the sense of predictability and control that such accuracy affords. Challenges to one's self-understanding can be dissonance-provoking and thus aversive (Festinger, 1957).

The potential for conflict between self-enhancement and self-verification is likely to be minimized in practice. After all, the very existence of self-enhancement anticipates that many of the self's existing beliefs are flattering. The prevalence of such positive self-views is seen quite early in development, even before most people can enact sophisticated self-enhancing tactics, in part

because such self-positivity is typically? often? facilitated by attachment figures (Cassidy, 1988). Throughout the lifespan, self-verification more frequently refers to the maintenance of positive self-views than it does interest in negative feedback.

Social norms also help to ease the tension between self-verification and self-enhancement. Even when people seek out feedback from others who are believed to share more tepid impressions of the self, others will often be reluctant to offer unvarnished feedback because it would be taboo (Brown & Levinson, 1987). White lies are commonplace (Camden, Motley, & Wilson, 1984). Although people are quite aware of offering distorted feedback to others (e.g., pretending to laugh at a joke they did not actually find funny), they seem to be unaware that others' identical responses are often offered merely out of politeness (Fay, Jordan, & Ehrlinger, 2012). As a result, even sincere self-verifying efforts often end up returning more positive or rosy takes on the self than initially predicted. Strong conflicts between self-verification and self-enhancement may be more the exception than the rule.

Self-Improvement

Self-enhancement and self-verification focus on directionality to people's epistemic goals. In contrast, the self-improvement motive is focused on the realization of actual self-change (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Self-improvement is an approach motive (Elliot & Mapes, 2005) that leads the self to be interested in feedback or opportunities to improve the self in ways that make the achievement of one's goals more likely. Such goals can be instrumental (e.g., to achieve a promotion at work) or experiential (e.g., to approach one's days with more energy; Sedikides, 1999). Self-improvement itself is premised on the possibility of dynamic change. As a result, self-improvement seems possible to the extent one sees a particular self-aspect as malleable instead of fixed (Dweck, 1991).

Psychology has long viewed improvement strivings as core to healthy and even morally upstanding functioning. They were foundational to humanistic approaches to psychology (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Rogers, 1961). Those who operate in an achievement framework see them as core components of psychological health (Csikszentmihalyi, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1991).

At the same time, sociologists have suggested that the centrality of self-improvement to American individualism—as reflected in cultural discourse around the rags-to-riches promise of the American dream—may have had deleterious effects on social relationships and community (Vázquez, 2008; Wuthnow, 2006). In that sense, whereas actual self-improvement may be definitionally positive, the self-improvement motive may have the potential to become excessive.

Assessing Improvement

As people track performance across time, they learn about one's ability. But the implications of observed improvement may depend on whether it is witnessed in the self or in others (Jones et al., 1968). In judging the self, people are quite sensitive to their own performance trajectory. When the self starts weak but steadily improves, then it assumes this foretells great things for its own future. But when judging another person one has just met, the self is swayed by their initial performance. In that sense, the self takes credit for self-improvement; social impressions, on the other hand, can be sticky, disproportionately influenced by early impressions. Notably, judgments of others may become more sensitive to positive trajectories when such improvement is observed over a longer time period (e.g., a year) instead of during a single performance episode. Such shifts—observed over

a longer duration—are more likely to be explained by stable shifts in another person's underlying abilities (Vanhouche & Alba, 2009).

The self is particularly sensitive to improvement trajectories because such dynamics are core foci of one's meta-monitoring system, which facilitates self-regulation and goal pursuit. As part of assessing their current standing, self-regulators are attentive not merely to the gap between their present and desired states, but the rate at which such a gap is closing. When this gap is closing sufficiently quickly—i.e., when one is improving fast—positive affect rewards such efforts (Carver & Scheier, 1990). More generally, in taking stock of their experiences, people are sensitive not merely to what they objectively experienced but the trajectory that such experiences took. When one experiences a burden that is gradually worsening as opposed to one that is gradually lessening, the overall experience is characterized as more aversive despite the underlying equivalence (in mirrored form) of what was experienced (Ariely, 1998). Similarly, coming to be liked more and more by another can be more satisfying than receiving consistent positive affiliative signals over time (Aronson & Linder, 1965; Nicholls, 1975). Improvement is inherently rewarding. For those who face health setbacks, expectations of improvement are central for maintaining hope, and more controversially, may even play a causal role in promoting rehabilitation (Warwick, 2012).

In contrast, the experience of decline or deterioration can be quite aversive. At least for individuals with low self-esteem, declining performance is more aversive than consistently poor showings (Brown, Farnham, & Cook, 2002). And indeed, low self-esteem individuals can enter into a vicious cycle whereby their low self-esteem can lead to social and health decline, which lowers self-esteem further (Stinton et al., 2008). One way out of this spiral is for low self-esteem individuals to reflect on their distal future selves, which they do believe will be more positive (Lachowicz-Tabaczek & Bajcar, 2017). By contrasting that with their present circumstance, even low self-esteem individuals experience affective benefits and elevated state self-esteem from their perceived prospects for improvement (Lachowicz-Tabaczek & Bajcar, 2018).

In general, people do see themselves as successfully improving. People think that over time their personalities are moving toward the more socially desirable ends of the Big 5 personality dimensions (Fleeson & Heckhausen, 1997). They think the quality of their marriage has gone up over time (Karney & Frye, 2002). They even think their prospects for future achievement are improving as well (Johnson, 2009).

That said, it is an open question how much these improvements are real as opposed to illusory. As one example, those who have suffered acute traumatic brain injury typically think that they have made a fuller recovery than their clinicians or even their family members report (Powell, Machamer, Temkin, & Dikmen, 2001). And more generally, younger adults tend to see their life satisfaction as having improved over time and likely to continue on an upward trajectory (Staudinger, Bluck, & Herzberg, 2003). But in reality, life satisfaction is fairly constant over the same time period (Fujita & Diener, 2005). Are perceptions of improving life satisfaction constructed bottom-up (as a synthesis of perceived changes in various life domains, each of which may show distinct patterns of change) or determined top-down (as a general belief about the direction of one's life that would be reflected in similar perceived subjective trajectories across varied life domains)? Evidence supports the former possibility. In one study, participants saw evidence of self-improvement in certain domains (e.g., their marriage) and decline in others (e.g., their sex life), and it was a merger of these varied trajectories that combine to predict perceptions of changes in global life satisfaction (Busseri & Mise, 2020).

In combination, this offers a mixed picture regarding the reality of self-improvement. On the one hand, more global perceptions of the improvement in one's life are indeed tethered to a variety of more concrete assessments. That said, the very fact that those more specific upward trajectories may themselves be illusory may reflect that more concrete perceptions of improvement are positively distorted even as such perceptions show variability across life domains.

Situational Contributors To Self-Improvement

Although self-improvement motives have a dispositional component to them, they are also triggered by situational forces. Upward social comparisons can encourage efforts at self-improvement, as long as the comparison standards' success seems achievable (Edmonds & Rose, 2022; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). People's reports of when a self-improvement motive was engaged almost always cite a past threat or failure as the precipitating source (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). Consistent with such an origin, in response to traumatic (as opposed to mildly negative) life events, victims see positive changes in their personal attributes (McFarland & Alvaro, 2000). Such *growth* is in part achieved by derogating one's pre-trauma selves, which further calls into question just how much of self-improvement is real as opposed to illusory. Regardless, even these results fit the pattern that setbacks inspire the *desire* to improve.

Sedikides and Hepper (2009) argue that there is an interplay between the self-improvement motive and the receipt of social or evaluative feedback. Much as upward social comparisons can encourage efforts at self-improvement, the activation of the self-improvement motive can encourage people to seek out social comparison. When taking this route, there may be an intertemporal tradeoff: Upward social comparisons may threaten the present self even as they help one to chart a path by which to improve in the future. Those with low self-esteem—likely those most in need of self-improvement—are especially interested in such social comparison feedback (Wayment & Taylor, 1995). That said, one challenge is that lower self-esteem individuals tend to perceive themselves as lower in social support (Kong et al., 2012; Xiang, Wang, & Guan, 2018), which raises the concern that upward social comparisons may be less likely to come from close others who can help to motivate self-improvement in a supportive and non-threatening way.

Self-affirmations may offer the sort of resource boost that facilitates the dispassionate response to and recall of improvement-facilitating feedback. This may allow the self to shift from a self-enhancement to a self-improvement orientation when considering upward social comparisons and other potential sources of threat. The challenge is, once people begin to internalize (instead of merely being aware of others') valuation of an ideal, then they are likely to respond to upward social comparison targets with self-evaluative anxiety (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). Determining how to assist people with spontaneously leveraging their own psychological resources to treat upward social comparison targets in a way that inspires improvement instead of debilitating threat is itself a worthwhile task for future research.

Self-improvement is not merely a reaction to the negative, but can be encouraged by positive emotions as well. According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions expand one's openness to and engagement with novel thoughts and actions. Positive states of mind are associated with vigor, dedication, engagement, and absorption (Kossyva, Theriou, Aggelidis, & Sarigiannidis, in press; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Clearly, this describes a mindset that is ready to engage in self-improvement. Separately, positive emotions themselves can offer something of an affective buffer that can guard against the affective experience of ego threat that is likely to accompany efforts to push oneself further in efforts to improve (Raghunathan & Trope, 2002).

Finally, others serve not merely as targets of social comparison, but also as sources of inspiration that can encourage and reinforce drives for self-improvement (Lockwood, 2006; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002). Researchers have examined how workplace managers can best foster desires to improve knowledge, skills, and competence in their employees (e.g., Lyons & Bandura, 2021). Learning how to help others engage in self-improvement is a challenge because most people who are unofficially or even officially tasked with such responsibilities do not receive formal training in carrying out such efforts well (Lyons & Bandura, 2023). Ultimately, these efforts succeed when such extrinsic prods can be internalized into an intrinsic drive to improve. When this process works well, it can facilitate not only personal development (i.e., literal self-improvement), but also one's commitment to a broader context or group in which such personal strivings take place (e.g., one's workplace). Self-improvement motives can lead to success because they encourage people to seek out and rely on feedback from others in order to identify the self's own performance shortcomings (Jordan & Audia, 2012). Social groups can leverage their collective resources most effectively when its members think of each other not merely as offering standards that allow the self to gauge its own adequacy, but also as sources of information that allow the self to improve to levels that are more than adequate.

SELF-JUDGMENT BIASES

Social psychology has long examined how people come to understand other people. Regardless of the specific phenomenon under investigation, such efforts have focused on two questions. One is what psychological *processes* explain how people come to form impressions of, make judgments about, and offer behavioral forecasts concerning others (Jones, 1979; Jones & Harris, 1967). The second is whether certain judgments reflect *normative* departures, violations of the rules of logic or assessments that do not accurately characterize reality.

Consider these dual goals through the lens of one classic social psychological phenomenon?,, what is called either the *correspondence bias* (Gilbert & Malone, 1995) or the *fundamental attribution error* (Ross, 1977). Social perceivers display this bias when they are too quick to draw inferences about another's underlying personality or character based on their observable behaviors. The fact that behaviors are also a product of one's situation—external forces that lie outside of a person—is thus often neglected. A process focus may draw on evidence that behaviors themselves are visually arresting (Heider, 1958), such that the actor herself is visually focal (and thus explanatorily available). Because situational forces are often less visually salient, their influence can more easily go unnoticed. Such a perceptual process explanation may also explain why the outcomes of behaviors—consequences that are typically more observable than intentions—are themselves quite determinative of what inferences are drawn about actors (Baron & Hershey, 1988; Fischhoff, 1975). A normative focus would instead carefully scrutinize whether the social inferences actually reflect questionable logic (e.g., "Maybe other people were egging him on…but he knew what he was getting into when he showed up at that rally") or conclusions that are objectively wrong (e.g., incorrectly forecasting that a behavior would be repeated in a different context).

A natural question is whether these process and normative conclusions also apply to the one human target of judgment not covered by social perception, the self. As will become clear in this section, there are certain ways in which the self as knower struggles to make sense of itself in much the same way (and sometimes for the same reasons) that it struggles to make sense of others. But self-judgments should be expected to depart from social judgments simply by virtue of the fact that the self has much more information about itself: its thoughts, feelings, past behavior (the self was

always there!), and even the qualia that accompany it all (Andersen & Ross, 1984). According to *the acquaintanceship effect*, as people come to have more information about another, they can judge that other more accurately (Beer, 2019). No doubt self-judgment is made easier for this reason. Perhaps because of this, mental representations of the self are typically more complex and elaborate than are social representations (Linville & Carlston, 1994). Self-relevant information is also processed in a more systematic and thus careful manner (Chaiken et al., 1989). Of course, more systematic processing and careful consideration need not mean more accuracy, but they at least may imply that different processes are used to arrive at self-judgments.

This section begins by discussing the nature of the self-knowledge that people access when making self-judgments. A crucial distinction between inductive and deductive cues is introduced. It then turns to a host of classic self-judgment biases. At that point, it considers the roles of motivations, emotions, and cognitions—sometimes stable and sometimes transitory—in guiding judgments about the self.

Self-Knowledge

That self-knowledge is imperfect means that it is characterized by both accuracy and error (Wilson, 2002). In understanding sources of accuracy and error, it is useful to consider two general sources of self-knowledge: inductive and deductive (Klein & Monin, 2009). Inductive judgments are bottom-up; they draw on relevant attributes, previous behaviors, and personal characteristics of the self. Deductive judgments are top-down. They reflect the application of general beliefs about the self to more specific situations. For example, a smoker's perception of their own risk of lung cancer should be based on inductive cues, such as the number of cigarettes they have smoked. Although this may make it tempting to conclude that inductive judgments are superior, their accuracy of course depends on the relevance and diagnosticity of those bottom-up cues.

Whether people arrive at self-knowledge inductively or deductively will depend on whether information of one type or the other is both accessible and desirable. One longitudinal study (Klein, Blier, & Janze, 2001) collected baseline measures of participants' risk factors for heart disease (e.g., frequency of eating greasy foods, consuming butter, facing stressful events) as well as their global self-esteem. These reflect potential inductive (specific risk factors imply disease risk) and deductive (people's self-esteem may inform their more specific self-judgments) sources of knowledge, respectively. Several months later, some of these participants were first given the opportunity to reflect on a personal source of pride or self-regard, a general self-reflection that should have made their global self-views accessible. Orthogonal to this manipulation, some participants received distributional information about the risk factors participants had reported previously. Because most people see themselves as better than average, the social comparison information tended to demonstrate to people that they did not fare as well (relative to others) on these potentially inductive cues as they had suspected.

The central question was what information the self would draw upon to determine its own risk for heart disease. In the absence of the potentially threatening social comparison information, participants pretty clearly took an inductive route: Their self-assessments of risk were closely tethered to their risk factors that they had self-reported several months prior. The same was true for those who did receive the threatening social norm information but who had not completed the self-regard manipulation. But those who did receive this social comparison threat *and* had the opportunity to reflect on their general self-regard shifted to take a more top-down perspective.

Their sense of personal heart disease risk drew less on their personal risk factors and more on their general self-esteem. In other words, self-judgments were inductive, unless those inductive cues were made threatening and a positive deductive source of information was made focal.

On the one hand, this pattern is compatible with the idea that people's self-judgments are sensitive to their motive to self-enhance, combined with the principle that self-judgments are constrained by what information is accessible (and thus easily recruited). That said, these results may seem surprising in light of research on the effects of self-affirmation interventions. Self-affirmations make salient sources of self-worth. Such interventions have been shown to decrease defensive responses to ego threats more generally (Sherman & Cohen, 2006) and health threats in particular (Harris & Epton 2010).

It remains to be fully resolved when focusing on the self's general positive resources offers a deductive route to support more specific positive self-judgments or instead the psychological resources needed to more dispassionately consider and inductively incorporate more specific evidence. Klein, Hamilton, Harris, and Han (2015) highlight that self-affirmations can indeed have inconsistent effects. They suggest one key moderator may be whether the self sees certain potential inductive cues as unambiguously diagnostic of a judgment (e.g., whether people see inconsistency in expert health recommendations). They find that when the self starts by seeing more ambiguity, self-affirmations seem to operate in more of a defensiveness-reducing manner.

Thus far, we have been describing contributors to people's explicit self-views, those that reflect people's directly stated beliefs and opinions. As noted earlier when characterizing the very nature of the self, psychologists have also been interested in implicit self-views, those revealed through indirect measures. For example, speeded reaction time tasks show that people are faster to identify targets as positive (and slower to identify them as negative) when such response methods (e.g., pressing a specific button) are also used to identify a target as related to the self (Karpinski, 2004). When there is a conceptual or attitudinal mismatch between two concepts assigned to the same response key (e.g., negativity and the self), response competition occurs, and reaction times are slowed. The ultimate promise of implicit self-knowledge measures will be realized upon more fully identifying the incremental validity of implicit self-knowledge over and above explicit self-knowledge measures.

Classic Self-Judgment Biases

Many self-judgment biases simply reflect different ways in which self-views are positively distorted (Dunning, 2005, 2023). Though when thinking about the existence of self-judgment biases, it is first useful to consider what exactly is meant by accuracy, error, and bias. In the Truth and Bias Model (West & Kenny, 2011), person judgments can display their validity in two ways. One approach is to look for whether a judgment tends to systematically depart from reality. Whereas error describes any departure from an accuracy criterion, bias refers to a force that pushes judgments in a specific direction (Alicke, Sedikides, & Zhang, 2020; Kruglanski & Ajzen, 1983). In this way, specific forces can bias (or push) judgments in a certain direction, but such bias could nudge judgments toward or away from the accuracy criterion. The second approach is to look for evidence of accuracy, or whether there is a correlation between different people's self-judgments and what is actually the case for each target. All too often, researchers tend to adopt one accuracy standard or the other without clarifying in what way a judgment is biased (see Donnelly, Moon, & Critcher, 2022, for a broader discussion).

Using (correlational) accuracy to assess self-judgment's validity, a synthesis of meta-analyses found an overall correlation of .29 between self-evaluations of ability and objective performance criteria (Zell & Krizan, 2014). Self-ratings predict such accuracy criteria only modestly more strongly than peer ratings do (Vazire & Carlson, 2010). But people are biased not only in their self-relevant judgments, but also in the extent to which they (as opposed to others) fall prey to biases (Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002). Sometimes this may occur because maintaining a belief in the correctness of one's own beliefs requires one to dismiss others as irrational and biased (Elnakouri & McGregory, in press). We proceed to detail a number of the most well-studied self-judgment biases.

Better-Than-Average Effect

The better-than-average effect (BTAE) describes the tendency to view one's own abilities, competencies, and personality qualities as superior to those of the average peer (Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Pelham & Swann, 1989; Sedikides, Meek, Alicke, & Taylor, 2014). Zell et al. (2020) say that the BTAE is the longest and most frequently studied manifestation of self-enhancement. The effect is quite robust, such that a meta-analysis that combined judgments from almost one million participants found an average effect size of $d = 0.78$ (Zell et al., 2020). The BTAE is greater for trait judgments ($d = 0.89$) than it is for ability judgments ($d = 0.51$; Zell et al., 2020). This may reflect that traits are often more ambiguously defined than abilities, an ambiguity that self-enhancers will be quick to capitalize on. Furthermore, with age, BTAE effects grow (Zell et al., 2020). Finally, the BTAE is stronger among certain cultural populations (e.g., European Americans) than others (e.g., East Asians).

Note that the BTAE speaks to systematic mean-level errors instead of to correlational accuracy. After all, every person could believe themselves to be above average but still show perfect accuracy in terms of how different people's self-judgments line up with their true standing. The BTAE emerges most strongly when measured directly (asking how the self compares against another; Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenburg, 1995) instead of indirectly (such that self-judgments and other-judgments are measured separately and then compared). Though this finding itself is a function of how comparative judgments are made. People's judgments of how A stacks up against B are more a commentary on A than they are B. Consistent with this premise, judgments of how the self compares to another are better predicted by self-judgments than other-judgments (Klar & Giladi, 1999). Furthermore, the BTAE is reduced when people indicate how the average person compares to the self rather than vice versa (Pahl & Eiser, 2005). In that sense, the BTAE effect in part reflects the positivity that tends to be extended to human targets, whether they be self or other.

Worse-Than-Average Effect

If judgments that compare A against B are mostly commentaries on A, then it follows that evidence of the better-than-average effect—measured as how the self (A) is seen to stack up against others (B)—should emerge most clearly in contexts in which the self views itself positively. One corollary is that such effects should attenuate or even reverse when the self considers how it compares to others in domains that tend to be challenging for most people. Indeed, in such domains in which the self tends to struggle, meaning most people tend to lack such abilities (e.g., juggling), the self tends to see itself as worse than average (Zell et al., 2020).

Unrealistic Optimism

Optimism characterizes one's outlook on the future. Unrealistic optimism is thus an unjustified belief that positive outcomes are especially likely to befall the self or that negative outcomes are unlikely to do so. That such optimism is unrealistic can be established in one of two ways (Shepperd, Klein, Waters, & Weinstein, 2013). First, it can emerge at the group level when the average person believes their own future is likely to be rosier than is others. Second, it can be identified at the individual or group level when people's forecasts optimistically depart from relevant base rates.

Projection

Whereas the other just-reviewed judgment biases describe ways in which judgments of the self systematically depart from judgments of others, projection instead describes a pattern by which self-knowledge guides social impressions. When people estimate individuals' attitudes, behavioral tendencies, or other characteristics, their views of what is true of others are disproportionately driven by what is seen to be true of the self. Such projection has also been called the false consensus effect or the assumed similarity bias (Cronbach, 1955; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Marks & Miller, 1987; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). Whereas the other biases reviewed were defined in terms of systematic error (overestimation or underestimation compared to a normative standard), projection is reflected in a correlation between self-judgments and other-judgments.

Do People Actually Believe Their Biased Self-Views?

Psychologists' long reliance on self-report measures means that researchers are accustomed to taking participants at their word. Although the field has long appreciated the limits of introspection to determine the process by which judgments and decisions are made (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), social psychologists tend to trust that people can report the consciously accessible output of such processes. That said, many of our field's adjacent disciplines—most notably economics—tend to greet self-reported beliefs with skepticism in the absence of incentives to offer accurate self-characterizations. From this perspective, we can ask whether people actually believe their inflated self-views.

Psychologists have long been attuned to concerns that social desirability biases may distort judgments. But it is unclear why research participants would think that self-enhancing assessments are necessarily the way to endear themselves to others. Several investigations have shown that people are willing to put their money behind their (unrealistically positive) self-assessments. For example, they will stake money on their claim that they are especially likely to perform better than their peers (Williams & Gilovich, 2008). Trying to incentivize unbiased appraisals often has little effect on eliminating distorted self-judgments (e.g., Ehrlinger, Johnson, Banner, Dunning, & Kruger, 2008). Self-judgment biases thus frequently reflect biases in beliefs, not simply in presentation.

The Motivation-Cognition Debate

Earlier, we reviewed an ebb and flow in psychology's zeitgeist in which the relative importance of cognition and emotion has risen and fallen. Ultimately, these two perspectives came to a clash as psychologists debated whether certain effects, and self-judgment biases in particular, reflected the

operation of cognitive, information-processing mechanisms or instead the distorting influence of motivational forces. Consider the case of self-serving attributions (Zuckerman, 1979). People engage in motivated interpretations, being disproportionately likely to take credit for their own successes and excusing their failures as products of the contexts they are in (Knight & Vallacher, 1981; Miller & Ross, 1975). But what looks like the application of a self-enhancement motive is also consistent with the application of a positive prior belief that leads information and new experience to be interpreted through a positive, self-flattering lens. If the self knows a friend to be exceptionally talented in math but then learns that the friend fails a test, then a rational application of the prior is to conclude that some feature of the situation (e.g., an unfair instrument) is responsible for the failure. That the self would draw similar self-serving attributions about its own performance failure can thus follow from the same purely cognitive logic (Sedikides & Alicke, 2012).

Instead of seeing self-judgments as merely a product of cognition or motivation, it is often the case that one can identify motivational forces that guide cognitive approaches to a judgment. For example, consider someone with a strong need for personal control over outcomes. Such an interest means that these individuals will be particularly interested in trying to understand why they have experienced the fate they have (Burger & Hemans, 1988). They may have refined the mental structures that support recognizing, reasoning about, and later recalling forces that exert control over outcomes (Burger, 1993). This sophisticated cognitive infrastructure would all combine to endow the self with a better-developed explanatory system and thus a sense of control. That is, motivations can selectively engage cognitive strategies that can promote conclusions that ultimately satisfy those motivations (Kunda, 1990).

Motivational Sources Of Bias

A consideration of motivated reasoning entails the identification of different cognitive strategies or environmental constraints that facilitate or limit people from drawing the conclusions that they wish to draw. Self-relevant information is often processed systematically. But as noted, systematic processing does not guarantee more accuracy. Instead, it may refer to the greater amount of thought that people will engage in to twist and distort information in efforts to achieve self-flattering views (Kruglanski, 1989; Kunda, 1987).

From this perspective, one can identify different moderators of self-serving biases that serve to limit the operation of cognitive strategies that help to prop up positive self-views. As a general rule, factors that limit flexibility in construal reduce motivated reasoning. When dimensions are more abstract and vague (Logg, Haran, & Moore, 2018) or when one's standing cannot easily be externally verified (Van Lange & Sedikides, 1998), people will exploit that ambiguity, especially given a lack of accountability. And more generally, this motivated reasoning is more likely to be engaged to the extent that a domain is personally (Brown, 2012) or societally valued (Sedikides et al., 2003). Of course, there is some uncertainty regarding the direction of causality. This relationship likely reflects both that people are motivated to engage in self-enhancement to the extent they value a domain and that one comes to value domains more to the extent one already sees oneself as relatively superior on that dimension. Furthermore, people likely work harder on those life aspects that they value more, thereby leading some of what can look like motivated self-enhancement to actually be an accurate assessment of one's personal standing.

Cognitive Sources Of Bias

On the one hand, cognition is the vehicle through which motivations and emotions operate to color judgment. For example, socially anxious individuals show poorer recall for socially positive words and feedback (Glazier & Alden, 2017; Liang et al., 2011). More generally, several cognitive properties underpin a variety of self-related biases. Some of the major ones are reviewed next.

Differential Access To Introspection

One unique contributor to self-judgment biases is the self's unique ability to introspect on its own thoughts and experiences. Most straightforwardly, this allows the self to lean on certain classes of information when forming self-judgments that it cannot access when making social judgments. Without such information about others, it can be tricky to determine others' intentions. But with insider access to the self's own mental contents, the self can fall prey to illusions like magical thinking (see Woolley, 1997). For example, when the self has certain desires or thoughts that precede events that could not have rationally been caused by the self's mental precursors (e.g., positive visualizations that precede a basketball player sinking a free throw), people can be left with a powerful illusion of authorship over such events (Pronin, Wegner, McCarthy, & Rodriguez, 2006).

These effects can arise due to the same principle that underlies the representativeness heuristic (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973), the powerful intuition that like (e.g., a cause) goes with like (e.g., a superficially similar effect). Magical thinking may also arise due to motivations to reassert a sense of control over one's world (Keinan, 1994). After all, the very nature of causality vexed philosophers for centuries. Causality's ambiguity gives wiggle room for biases in the self's determination of its own authorship and agency (Wegner, 2003; Wegner & Wheatley, 1999). (Interested readers should consult Pronin and Kugler (2007) for other examples of effects that stem from the self's unique access to its own internal experience.)

The very immediacy of one's own life lends a phenomenological richness to experience that can be easily confused for insight. Furthermore, the self's direct access to its own thoughts and experiences, content that can only be indirectly inferred in others, helps to produce a sense that the self's own insights reflect unfettered access to reality and are thus particularly credible. Appreciating the idea is almost definitionally counterintuitive, as it is meant to encourage the intuition that one's intuitions lack validity, which perhaps explains why it is a self-judgment bias that has captured the public's interest (Dobelli, 2013). These ideas anticipate why people display a *bias blindspot*, readily seeing biases in others that they are blind to in themselves (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004).

Not only do people have unique access to their own introspections, but they also *value* the sincerity and legitimacy of their own introspections more than they do others' (Pronin & Kugler, 2007). People define themselves by their inner lives even as they define others by their observable behaviors (Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky, & Ross, 2001). Problems arise because introspections can access only the *output* of mental operations, which means the true causes of judgments and behaviors may not be introspectively retrievable (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). In this way, the bias blindspot emerges due to people's *naïve realism,* which describes people's failure to appreciate that their own experience is not a direct read-out of the world (what is happening both outside of and inside of the self) but is itself a mental construction that imperfectly and subjectively characterizes those targets (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004; see Ross & Ward, 1995). When Princeton university undergraduates read about scientific research—actually a fictitious *Science* article—that described many non-conscious influences on behavior, they then no longer believed that they showed less of a host of

classic social psychological biases (e.g., biased assimilation) than did their peers (Pronin & Kugler, 2007).

Individuation

Whereas social targets can come in different forms—a person one has just met, one's extended family, fellow countrymen—one distinguishing feature of the self is that it is just one person. People judge individuals more positively than they do collections of people from which those individuals are drawn. This applies both to specific individuals with whom one has a relationship, such as one's romantic partner (Brown & Han, 2012), as well as to random strangers (Klar, 2002). Notably, such person positivity in part reflects mere individuation—the fact that a target is an individual, even an individual about whom no individuating information is known (Critcher & Dunning, 2013, 2014). The self, as a specific individual, benefits not merely from the baseline positivity offered by mere individuation, but also from all the supplemental cognitive work done to enhance those perceptions further.

Better-Than-Average Heuristic

The self possesses a suite of cognitive strategies that permit self-enhancing conclusions, such as that the self is better than average. Most people seem to internalize this conclusion in the form of a heuristic, a rule of thumb that they will reflexively apply in considering how the self stacks up against a depersonalized other (Alicke et al., 1995). Once the comparison other becomes an actual person—even one about whom little information is known—people seem less willing to apply the heuristic.

The better-than-average heuristic is a deep-seated intuition and thus is hard to challenge. When people receive favorable information about others, they will favorably update their own self-beliefs so that their self-understanding continues to conform to the heuristic (Klein & Kunda, 1993). Although the heuristic itself operates as a simple cognitive belief or prior, note that its adoption may be motivational in origin. Desires to see the self as capable, adequate, and moral all encourage the mindless deployment of the better-than-average heuristic (Fiske, 2014).

Too Much Reliance On Priors

When people aim to make judgments about their own behaviors, they do not simply evaluate their own performance in isolation. Instead, they often enter performance contexts with expectations about how they are likely to perform. Such chronic self-views inform and bias people's assessments of their own performance, independent of their actual level of achievement (Ehrlinger & Dunning, 2003). Self-views may color estimates of performance by two distinct pathways—one direct, one indirect (Critcher & Dunning, 2009). By the direct account, self-views are priors that directly influence performance assessments: If the self believes itself to be a history buff, then it should conclude that it scored relatively well on a test of history knowledge. By an indirect account, self-views are top-down beliefs that color one's bottom-up experience of the performance episode itself. In one study, participants completed the 15-item interpersonal perception task (Costanzo & Archer, 1989) on which test-takers watch a series of scenes and must lean on subtle cues to draw conclusions about the depicted dynamics (e.g., which of two people is higher status). Whereas participants' actual performance was a weak predictor of their own performance evaluation (ß =

.14), participants' preexisting self-views were a stronger one (ß = .27). Both a direct effect of self-views on performance evaluations and an indirect effect through bottom-up experience were observed. Reflecting the latter, those who entered the performance task more confident in their abilities reported arriving at their answers more quickly and going back and forth less between answer choices. The influence of self-views only added error to performance evaluations, given self-views showed no relationship with actual performance.

A reliance on one's priors is, in theory, a good strategy for making sense of both the world and oneself. The problem is that people, especially those who *should* have more negative self-views, have difficulty learning from experience. According to the Dunning-Kruger effect, the least competent individuals tend to lack the metaknowledge that is necessary to be aware of their own relatively low ability, thereby leading them to be unskilled and unaware (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Schlösser et al., 2013). In one study, poor performers were quicker than good performers to indicate confidence that they had performed well on an item recognition test (Muller, Sirani, & Addante, 2021). EEG readings suggested that the former (typically those who overestimate their relative performance) were leaning on less diagnostic memory signals than were strong performers (i.e., fuzzy feelings of familiarity instead of specific recollections). Whether these findings would help to explain the Dunning-Kruger Effect beyond a recognition memory paradigm—an atypical performance context in this literature—is an open question.

Social Comparison Information

There is often a gap between knowledge of objective details or facts about the self and the ability to interpret those facts' evaluative significance. In such circumstances, social comparison information is instrumental in offering context to make sense of what is true of the self (Festinger, 1954; Suls & Wheeler, 2017). More generally, receiving information not merely from but also about others should be most useful when it is about a distribution of individuals and not just a single (potentially unrepresentative) person. Recognition of this fact has shaped the evolution of social comparison research (e.g., Buckingham & Alicke, 2002).

Egocentrism

Early interest in egocentrism conceived of it as a childlike stage from which people will escape with development (Piaget, 1926). Indeed, people do escape certain egocentric errors with age. In one study, children ranging from 5 to 9 years old witnessed a crime that was or was not seen by another person. Although participants of all ages showed evidence of egocentrism—thinking that even an absent other would know who committed the crime—this mistake was particularly common among the younger children (Durkin & Howarth, 1997). Adults' theory of mind is more sophisticated than that of young children, but the immediacy and salience of the self's own experience and knowledge mean that people of any age can inappropriately default to their own perspective.

Egocentrism is more an information-processing orientation than a bias in its own right, one that leads self-judgments and the self's experience to color one's understanding of others. It only indirectly affects self-judgments (e.g., affecting how common one's own attributes and opinions are seen to be). In determining what another person sees or thinks, the self will anchor on its own perspective and then adjust (often insufficiently) from there (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004). That said, there is a tension concerning the normative standing of egocentric biases: Do they

reflect a logical mistake or the self's attempts at coping with limited information? For this reason, it is important to differentiate cases in which the self fails to adjust from an egocentric perspective despite having information about others from cases in which the self is simply more informed concerning itself than it is about others (Dawes, 1989; Dawes & Mulford, 1996). The self does lean on information about itself more than it does information provided by another person when estimating population base rates (Clement & Krueger, 2000), suggesting that at least some of egocentric projection effects are counternormative.

Transitory Influences On Self Judgment

Much as people's preferences have a stable as well as a local or situational component to them (Simonson, 2008), people's self-judgments are determined both by a stable, cross-temporally consistent component as well as a local, variable component. In what follows, transitory influences on self-judgment will be seen to vary as a function of the salience of different identities or self-relevant information, as well as specific emotional states that may vary as one gets temporally closer to the moment of performance feedback.

Identity Salience

An identity can become salient when identity-relevant cues in a context activate one or more such identities. Telling people that their responses will be used to understand what makes their group distinct from another group will activate a group-level identity, whereas having people focus on individuating information first will make salient an individual identity (Maitner, Mackie, Claypool, & Crisp, 2010; Ray, Mackie, Rydell, & Smith, 2008). But also, the notable absence of others who share one's own identities in one's local environment can make an identity salient. More specifically, when one is the only member of a social category in a context, that identity may become quite focal in one's mind. When the self is the only member of a group—especially a low status group—in a testing context, the self's performance can suffer (Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002).

Information Salience

People cannot draw on all information at their disposal to inform any particular self-judgment they must make. Instead, their self-judgments will be a function of the information that happens to be salient at the moment. For example, if people first judge specific personal risk factors, these salient cues will color their judgments of personal risk that follow (Weinstein & Klein, 1995). Although such effects are sometimes referenced to discuss threats to the validity of self-reports, the fact that real-world self-judgment contexts vary in the extent to which they make different information top-of-mind suggests that such information salience effects are of interest in their own right.

Emotions

Emotions can color self-judgments because they can be taken as a source of information. According to the appraisal theory of emotions (Lerner & Keltner, 2000), people experience emotions in response to their understanding of the situation in which they find themselves. For example, people experience fear when they lack a sense of personal control in a situation that feels highly uncertain. In contrast, anger is elicited when the self has a strong sense of control in a context that

they understand with certainty. Earthquakes and terrorism inspire fear because they are so unpredictable. A clear sense that one has been wronged by a specific offender arouses anger.

These appraisal tendencies, inspired by one elicitor, can color one's consideration of other self-relevant judgments. As one example, research participants were asked to vividly relive a situation that made them angry or afraid. Angered individuals were more optimistic about their future (e.g., believing their work would be honored with an award) than were fearful individuals. Mediational analyses showed that these effects were statistically explained by the greater sense of control that people felt about the angering events, an appraisal that carried over into their perceptions of unrelated events (Lerner & Keltner, 2001). In this way, there is a bidirectional relationship between emotion and the self's understanding of its capacity for agency and control in its world.

Temporal Dynamics

In other cases, the self-judgment context itself triggers emotions, which can then influence self-judgments. For example, as people consider how they fared on a performance task, even though their actual past performance may be set, the amount of time that remains until the self receives performance feedback is constantly changing. As feedback becomes increasingly imminent, pessimism grows (Shepperd, Ouellette, & Fernandez, 1996). Anxiety grows as well (Taylor & Shepperd, 1998). Such anxiety is misattributed, being seen not as a product of the looming moment of evaluation but instead as a signal of one's poor performance (Shepperd, Grace, Cole, & Klein, 2005). Those for whom such feedback would be especially personally crushing are those who most show this pessimism (Shepperd, Findley-Klein, Kwavnick, Walker, & Perez, 2000). This may be because for these individuals, the prospect of feedback is particularly anxiety-arousing.

POTENTIAL FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Having reviewed a large spectrum of classic and newer questions and topics in the self and identity literature, several things should be clear. First, the literature is far-reaching, and interest in the psychological study of the self and identity has remained robust over the span of many decades. Second, the self is implicated in, if not at the core of, a startlingly broad range of psychological processes as well as judgment and behavioral phenomena. Third, although huge advances have been made in our understanding of the self and identity, particularly over the past half a century, it should be clear that many interesting and important questions about the self and identity remain.

At several points, this review has alluded to various questions and gaps that extant research has identified but not fully addressed, as well as some newer areas of inquiry with considerable room for growth. For example, the distinction between independent and interdependent construals fundamentally changed default assumptions that the self is largely independent and autonomous in nature, and has generated an enormous body of findings on the implications of different self-construals. Nonetheless, work by Vignoles and colleagues (2016), for example, suggests that there are multiple forms of independence and interdependence, and that there are systematic, global variations in these different forms that may add predictive value. Theory and research on the neural underpinnings of the self have progressed from identifying what brain regions are implicated in self versus social processing to more fine-grained examinations of the neural regions and processes involved in more specific self processes (e.g., particular forms of self-evaluation; Beer & Flagan, 2014). There has been a resurgence of interest in the relationship (i.e., top-down vs.

bottom-up) between global self-esteem and domain-specific self-evaluations (e.g., Rentzsch & Schroder-Abe, 2022). Exciting progress has been made on factors that shape the developmental trajectory of self-esteem, such as childhood family environment (e.g., Harris & Orth, 2020), but firm conclusions await additional research. As a final example, although research has identified a wide array of strategies that people use in the service of self-enhancement, relatively little work addresses their spontaneous use and potential connections among these strategies.

Other possible areas for future research involve looking at the intersection of different topic areas on the self and identity. For example, self-verification theory has focused on the present, that is, people's desire to have their pre-existing self-views verified by others in the here and now. Do such self-verification strivings in the present influence people's sense of self-continuity, which entails seeing connections between one's past, present, and future selves? On the one hand, it may be that greater self-verification fosters greater self-continuity in that both serve as a source of stability in the self. On the other hand, perhaps self-verification strivings interfere with self-continuity insofar as they may be directed at convincing oneself that a past self really was different from a present-day or envisioned future self.

Examining the intersection of self-compassion and the use of self-enhancement strategies is another possible future research direction. Self-compassion is thought to breed acceptance of the self, one's strengths as well as shortcomings, thereby explicitly discouraging an evaluative or judgmental stance toward the self, particularly when the self is confronted with a setback, failure, or personal weakness. Self-enhancement strategies, on the other hand, are typically employed precisely when a threat to the self is perceived and are explicitly aimed at protecting or boosting the favorability of one's self-view. Would taking a self-compassionate response to a personal weakness, for example, obviate the tendency to deploy self-enhancement? Consistent with this possibility, research indicates that the warmth and non-judgmental orientation engendered by self-compassion breeds a self-improvement mindset rather than fomenting a drive for self-enhancement (e.g., Breines & Chen, 2012; Zhang & Chen, 2016; 2017), but research directly assessing the interplay of self-compassion and a range of self-enhancement strategies is needed.

Earlier when discussing transitory influences on self-judgment, we reviewed some evidence for how emotions can influence judgments that people make about themselves, such as the amount of agency and control they have. Another example of research linking emotion to the self are findings documenting a connection between the emotion of awe and the experience of the self (Bai et al., 2017). Awe is an emotional experience that stems from appraisals that one is in the presence of something incomprehensibly vast that leads to feelings of personal insignificance (Critcher & Lee, 2018; Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Along this vein, research suggests that awe shifts attention away from the self—one's individual interests and concerns—leading one's personal identity to recede into the background. In other words, awe produces the sense of a small self. Across multiple studies, researchers have found evidence for an association between awe and a small sense of self both in daily life and following laboratory-induced experiences of awe (Bai et al., 2017). In turn, a sense of small self helps account for the effect of awe on collective forms of cognition and behavior. In addition to advancing the literature on awe, such findings speak more broadly to how emotions in general may enhance our understanding of the everyday experience of the self and identity.

Another possible future direction is to ask how we can use what we know about the self and identity to help solve social problems, such as social and economic inequalities. Research has documented social-class differences in conceptions of the future self (Antonoplis & Chen, 2021). These researchers reasoned that the greater uncertainties and stressors experienced by lower-

social-class (relative to higher-social-class) individuals may lead them to assume their future is likely to resemble the present. Accordingly, a lower-social-class individual may focus less on their future self, coming to view it less vividly, as less likable, and less valuable—predictions supported by both correlational studies and a pre-registered experiment. Mentally elaborating future selves is important because such self-conceptions serve as important drivers of people's choices and behavior (e.g., Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Such findings linking social class to future selves suggest, then, that encouraging lower social-class individuals to develop not only vivid, likable, and valuable conceptions of their future selves, but also higher-aiming selves, may help motivate choices and behaviors that result in outcomes (e.g., academic or employment-related) commensurate with those more often enjoyed by higher social-class individuals. This may be one social psychological route to chip away at social-class-related inequalities.

Theorizing on authenticity also sheds light on possible mechanisms that may undergird social and economic disparities. In their State Authenticity as Fit to the Environment (SAFE) model, Schmader and Sedikides (2018) conceptualize authenticity in state terms, rather than as a dispositional variable, and as situated within (and activated by) different environments. Thus, although the experience of authenticity is tied to situations, it can nevertheless be considered a prolonged experience insofar as people must often return to the same environment repeatedly (e.g., home, work, school). A core proposition of the SAFE model is that state authenticity signals one's fit with the environment, which in turn influences situation selection—whether people choose to seek out or select out of particular situations. Low state authenticity prompts disengagement and selecting out. This model therefore sheds light on how the same context (e.g., school) may foster authenticity and thriving for some individuals or groups, while producing a lack of authenticity and alienation for others. Applied to elite academic settings, underrepresented students are more prone than majority students to experience a lack of fit and diminished state authenticity, making it more likely they will disengage or even fully withdraw from such institutions. In giving state authenticity a central role, the SAFE model clearly illustrates the potential importance of experiences of the self and identity in determining people's choices, behavior, and outcomes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In their chapter on the self and identity for the previous edition of this *Handbook*, Swann and Bosson (2010) concluded with the observation that the pace of scientific advances on the self and identity was accelerating and expressed optimism that the rate of discovery would only continue to rise. Though our review of the self and identity literature was necessarily selective, given its vastness, we covered enough terrain to safely say that their optimism was warranted. We know more about the self and identity than ever before. Theory and research on classic topic areas on the self and identity—such as information processing and self-esteem—speak to the enduringness of interest in and importance of these foundational domains of inquiry. At the same time, more recent advances—such as in the areas of self-continuity and authenticity—reveal that a lot remains to be examined and more fully understood about the self and identity. Looking ahead, as the literature continues to expand, it will be important to make sure the "me" and "I" remains at the heart of inquiry in this broad realm, and to build bridges across disparate areas of research toward achieving a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the self and identity.

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ENDNOTES