Self-Esteem

Self-esteem: The evaluative aspect of the self-concept (page 603).

### Table 12.6 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Consider each statement and circle SA for strongly agree, A for agree, D for disagree, and SD for strongly disagree.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>At times, I think I am no good at all. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I feel that I have a number of good qualities. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am able to do things as well as most other people. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I feel I do not have much to be proud of. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I certainly feel useless at times. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I wish I could have more respect for myself. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I take a positive attitude toward myself. SA A D SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


For items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10, SA = 2. A = 2. D = 2. SD = 1. For items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9, the scoring is reversed, with SA = 0.

High self-esteem reflects a highly favorable global self-evaluation, whereas low self-esteem reflects a global unfavorable self-evaluation.
Self-Esteem

Self-esteem depends on the context such as
- academic competence
- work competence
- sexuality
- athletic competence
- physical attractiveness

People with low self-esteem are associated with
- suicide attempts,
- perceiving rejection in ambiguous feedback,
- eating disorders and
- more likely to become jealous in relationships.
- More likely to be defensive when reality doesn’t match their view of it.

People with high self-esteem are associated with
- being more persistent at difficult tasks
  - having better school performance
  - having better job performance
  - taking the initiative
- living longer
- coping better with stress
- happier and healthier lives
Self-Esteem

However, self-esteem evaluations about the self may not match reality. One may have high self-esteem, but it may not match reality. They may be narcissistic, arrogant and grandiose. People who are narcissistic are excessively self-centered, put their needs over others, rarely show empathy toward others and when their self-esteem is threatened devalue those around them and act aggressively toward others. On the opposite end, one may have a low self-esteem and dwell too much on their shortcomings.

Most psychologists believe that it is best to have a realistic or mildly positive self-illusion.
Grandiose Self-Esteem and Narcissism

Just as having too low of a self-esteem can be problematic in keeping you from taking the initiative, persisting and accomplishing tasks, having too high of a self-esteem can be problematic as well.

If a person has too high self-esteem, some people become violent when they feel that others are not treating them with an appropriate level of respect (page 606). When people with high self-esteem believe their abilities have been challenged, they may act in ways that cause other people to dislike them such as becoming antagonistic or boastful (page 606).

Narcissism is having an inflated self-esteem. Narcissists are self-centered, view themselves in grandiose terms. They feel entitled to special treatment and are manipulative (page 606). Narcissists tend to have poor relationships with others, become angry when challenged and abuse people who do not share their lofty opinions of themselves (page 606).
Increasing Self-Esteem

Here are six strategies that can increase an individual’s self-esteem:

1. **Identify your sources of self-esteem and what is causing low self-esteem.** A key first step in improving self-esteem is to determine what is contributing to low self-esteem. Is the source of low self-esteem academic performance? relationship problems? unrealistic insecurities? fear of losing your job? or possibly some combination of these or other problems?

2. **Face a problem and try to cope with it.** Self-esteem is often increased when individuals try to cope with a problem rather than avoiding it (Bednar, Wells, & Peterson, 1995). Facing problems realistically, honestly, and nondefensively leads to favorable thoughts about oneself, which lead to self-approval and higher self-esteem. In chapter 5, “Coping,” we will describe a number of coping strategies that can benefit self-esteem.

3. **Seek emotional support.** Emotional support and social approval have a positive influence on self-esteem. However, some individuals experience little emotional support or social approval because their families are filled with conflict or their romantic relationships are marred by hostility. In some cases, alternative sources of emotional support can improve self-esteem. Quality friendships, counseling, or therapy can sometimes compensate for shortcomings in other sources of emotional support.

4. **Take responsibility for your self-esteem.** Assume that you have the ability to improve your self-esteem and take the initiative to do so (Crocker & Park, 2003).

5. **Look for opportunities to achieve.** Achievement can also improve self-esteem (Baumeister & others, 2003). Perhaps you can find a straightforward skill to master or a task to complete. If you know specific steps to take to complete a goal, you are more likely to reach that goal and then to feel better about yourself as a result.

6. **Explore resources to improve your self-understanding.** Many individuals with low self-esteem don’t know themselves very well. A number of resources can help you learn more about yourself and develop some good strategies for increasing your self-esteem. These include the self-help resources described at the end of the chapter, the Internet connections for this chapter on the book’s Online Learning Center, and talking with a counselor or therapist.

(Source: Human Adjustment, Santrock)
Other ways of Building Self-Esteem

Longer-term
• Feeling accepted / feeling like you belong
• Broad accomplishments to have a broad identity
• Continual successful accomplishments
  • Set your goals slightly above your skill level. In order to do this, you need to know your skills, and get feedback on your own performance.

Short-term
• Complements from others
• Believing you are “better than average”
• Self-serving bias
• Basking in reflected glory (BIRG)
• Lowering the self-esteem of others
Better than Average Effect

There is a tendency for more people to believe they are “better than the average person”. Consider the following (most are cited in Social Psychology, 3rd Edition, 1993, David Myers):

- Most business people see themselves as more ethical than the average business person, 90% of all business managers rate their performance as superior to their average peer.
- Most community residents see themselves as less prejudiced and as fairer than others in their community.
- Most drivers, even most drivers who have been hospitalized for accidents believe themselves to be safer and more skilled than the average driver.
- Most Americans believe that they are more intelligent than their average peer, and as better looking.
- Most college students believe they will outlive their peers by ten years.
- In one sample of high school students,
  - 70% believed they were above average in leadership ability, while only 2% rated themselves as below average.
  - Of the 829,000 students, zero rated themselves as below average in their ability to get along with each other, while 60% rated themselves in the top 10%, and 25% saw themselves in the top 1%.
- Schor (1998) found that seventy percent described the average American as materialistic, while only eight percent felt they were materialistic themselves.
- When asked what income bracket are you in by percentage, 50% of Americans surveyed marked the top 1% income bracket. (top 1% makes $200,000, top 5% makes $125,000, the median is $40,000).

What are the problems with the better than average belief?
Self-serving bias and Self-effacing bias

Self-serving bias: The tendency for individualistic cultures to explain success with internal, personal causes, and failures with external, situational causes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successes</th>
<th>Failures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal, personal causes</td>
<td>External, situational causes</td>
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</table>

“When I win, it is skill”  “When I lose, it is bad luck”

Effect of the self-serving bias:
- Those who tend to commit the self-serving bias tend to be happier, but have a less accurate perception of the world around them.
**Student examples of self-serving bias**

Mick likes to cook and is pretty good and knows it. He says he has a talent for it etc. However, when the dish comes out bad, he says it's because the meat was not fresh or the wine was not good.

Richard is a hockey goal-tender and when his team wins, he talks about the great saves he made, etc. When his team loses the team played like crap. "Where was my defense?", Richard says "I was screened, that shot was deflected, he didn't cover his man, etc."

When Jeff got an “A” on his History mid-term he congratulated himself on being so smart. Then when he got a “D” on the History final exam he sighed and reassured herself that he had been tired and overly stressed and that is why he got the “D”.

The last time Ashley aced a test, she claimed it was because she was smart. Yet, in the same class, the test before, she failed and blamed her failure on unfair teaching practices.

I usually score about 92-96% on my calculus tests. When I received 100% on a calculus test I thought that it was because I was good at calculus. The next test I got an 88% and claimed that the professor graded unfairly.
Basking in Reflected Glory

We tend to associate with successful groups or people to enhance our self-esteem.

- We feel better when “our band” (Rush), gets inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame
- When the University of Oregon Ducks win, people say “We win. When the University of Oregon Ducks lose, people say they lost.
Self-Esteem and Death Anxiety

According to terror management theory, when we realize that when reminded of your own mortality (that you will die), such as
- Terrorism
- Funerals
- Planning for retirement
- Death of a friend
increases the positivity of their reactions to anyone or anything that praises your culture (in most of our cases, America), and the negativity of reactions to anyone or anything that criticizes your culture (in most of our cases, America).

Why would this be so?

When reminded of death and that we are mortal (the death anxiety), we want some part of us to become immortal and last. Instead of becoming literally immortal, we become symbolically immortal through our culture.

Challenges to our culture threaten our sense of meaning of life and what will continue beyond our death.
Self-Esteem and Life Outcomes

Even though self-esteem is less important than psychologists thought, it still is important.

People with high self-esteem, report greater happiness, but is weakly related to objective life outcomes.