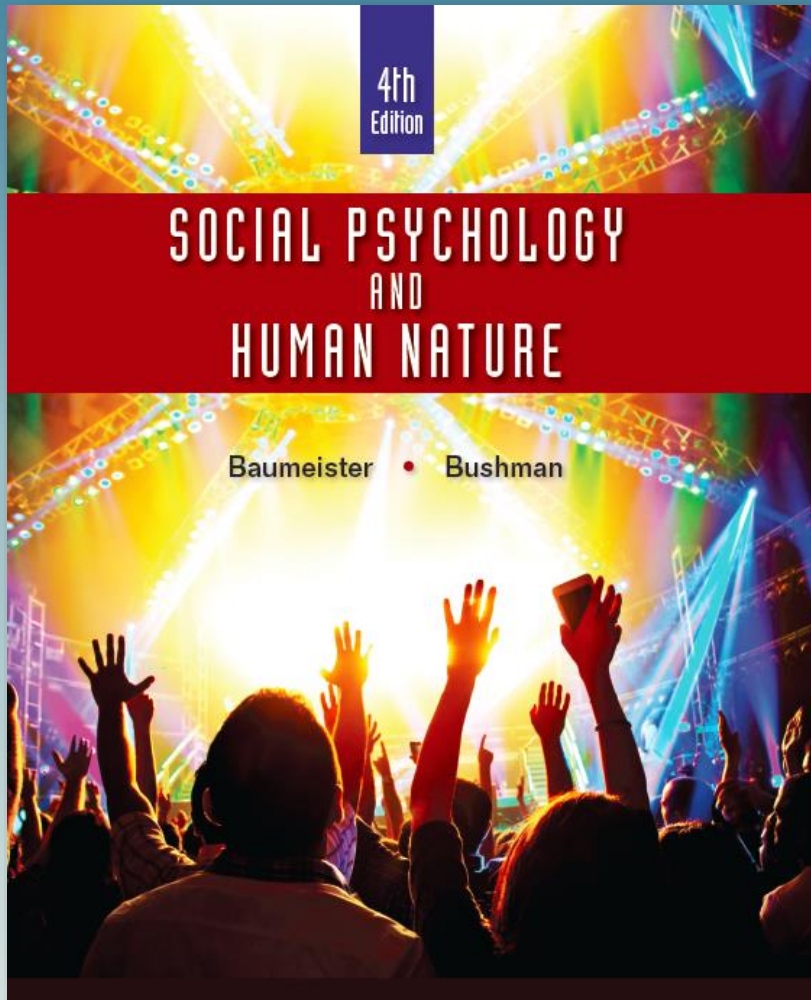




Social Psychology: Global Perspectives

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2

The Self

Learning Objectives

- Explain the importance of a complex self in a cultural animal
- Summarise the different sources and motives of self-knowledge
- Describe how the how the sources of self-knowledge lead to self-concept
- Analyse the benefits and drawbacks of high self-esteem and positive illusions
- Evaluate the different functions of self-presentation

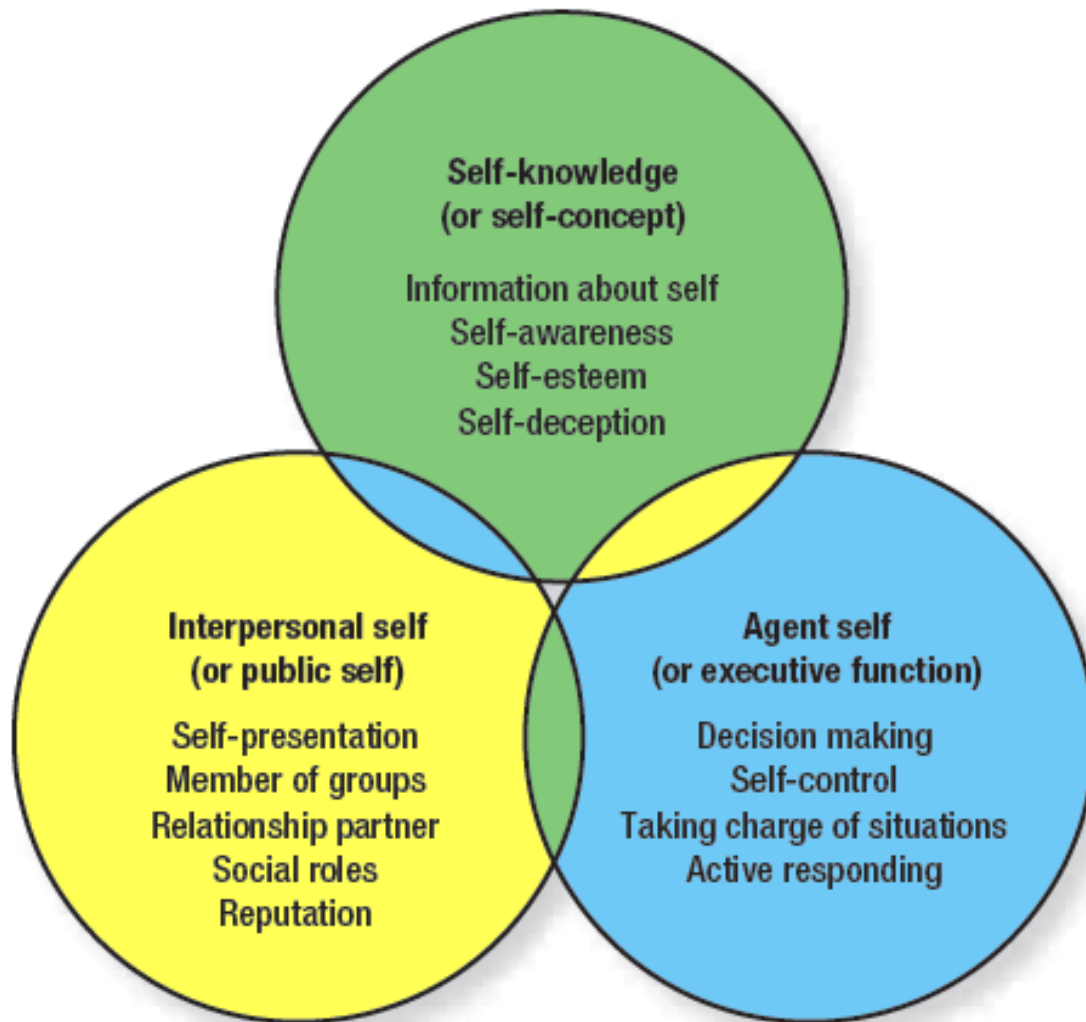
Introduction

- People have strong concern with how they are perceived by others
 - Serves survival and reproduction goals
- Concern with making a good impression after death
 - More and more people are requesting plastic surgery after death, to help them look their best for their funeral

What is the Self?

- Difficult to define
 - Some say it is an illusion
 - Specific spot in the brain that seems to correspond to the self has not been found
- The self's main jobs
 - Self-knowledge
 - Interpersonal self
 - Agent self

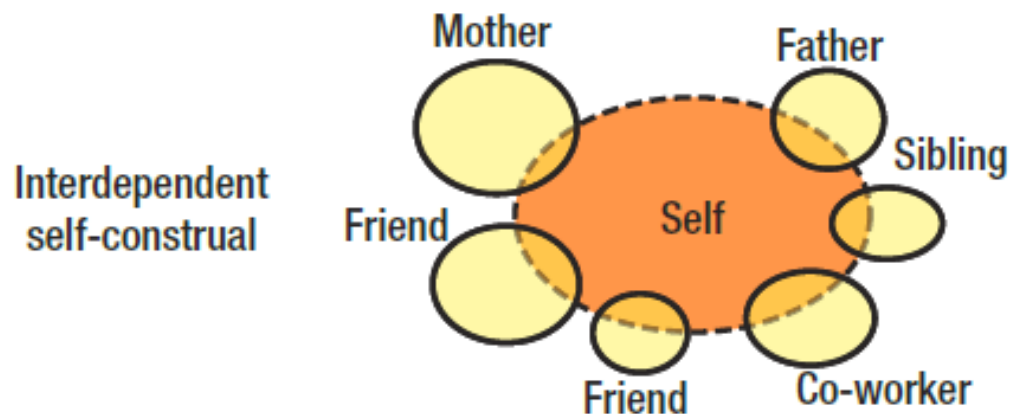
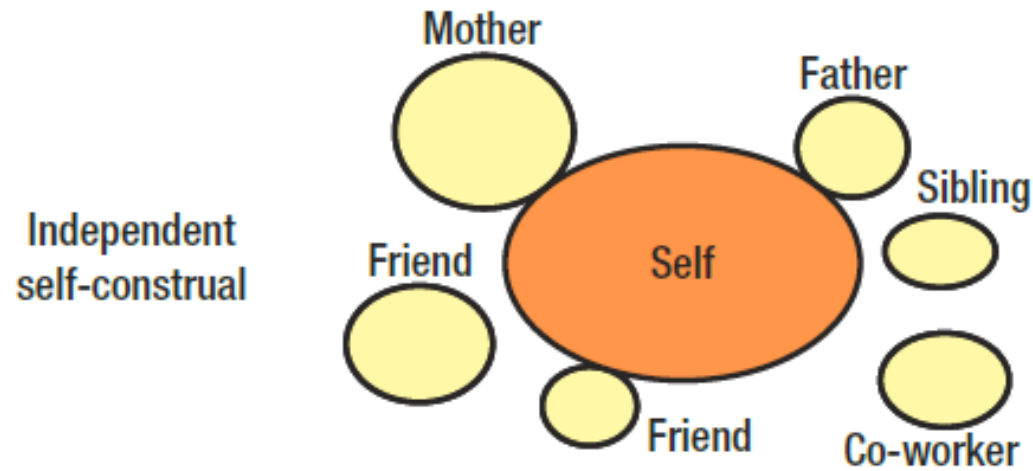
Three Parts of the Self



Who Makes the Self: The Individual or Society?

- The self: interface between inner biological processes and a sociocultural network
 - A true or real self?
 - Public actions and inner feelings
 - Culture and interdependence
 - Selves differ across cultures
 - Social roles
 - Social systems create and define roles
 - Individuals seek and adopt them

Self-Construals



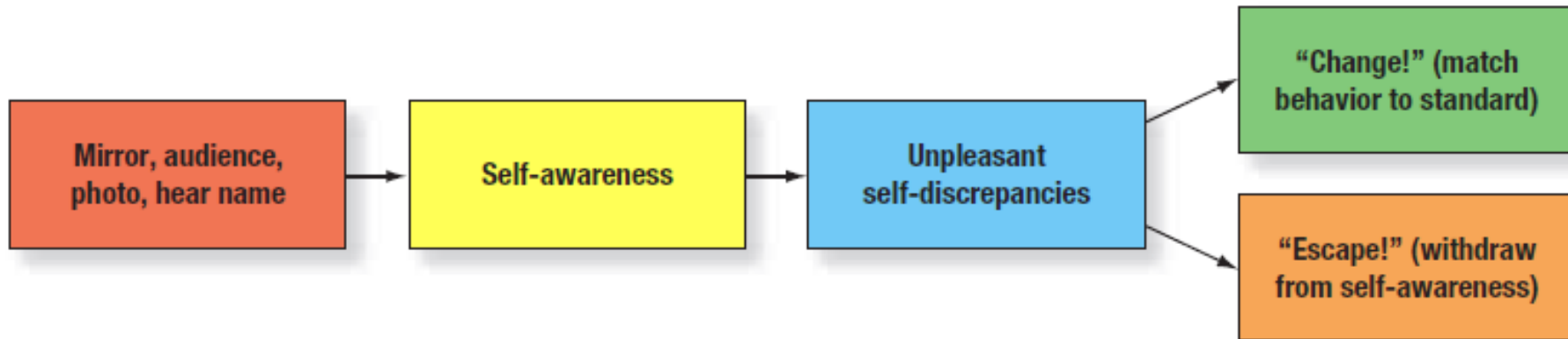
Markus and Kitayama (1991).

Self-Awareness

- What is self-awareness?
 - Attention directed at the self
- Private self-awareness
 - Looking inward at private aspects of the self
- Public self-awareness
 - Looking outward at public aspects of the self

Self Awareness Theory

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Self awareness theory suggests that some situations, such as looking in a mirror, lead to self-awareness. Self-aware people feel badly when they notice any discrepancies between who they are and some standard. They can either “change” by matching the behaviour to the standard, or “escape” by trying to escape the self-aware state (Duval & Wicklund, 1972).

Self-Awareness (cont'd.)

- Self-awareness and behaviour
 - Can make people behave better
 - Compare themselves to moral standards or ideals
- Escaping self-awareness
 - People seek to escape from self-awareness when it feels bad
- Why do we have self-awareness?
 - Self-regulation, social acceptance, perspective taking, and goal reaching
 - http://www.uncg.edu/~p_silvia/tools/osatools.htm

Food for Thought

- Dieters are high in public self-consciousness, but low in private self-awareness
 - Eating provides a low-level distraction from thoughts about self
 - Dieters may lose an awareness of “fullness”

Looking Outside: The Looking-Glass Self

- The looking-glass self
 - Imagine how you appear to others
 - Imagine how others will judge you
 - Develop an emotional response as a result of imagining how others will judge you
- The generalized other
 - Combination of others' views informs us

Looking Outside: The Looking-Glass Self (cont'd.)

- People respond to feedback from others
 - Discrepancies exist between the view of self and others' views
 - People are very selective in how they process incoming information about themselves

Looking Inside: Introspection

- Introspection: examining your thoughts and feelings
 - Privileged access to our inner processes
- Limitations of introspection
 - Development and children's views of themselves
 - People often don't realize how their minds work
 - http://depts.washington.edu/methods/readings/Nisbett_1977.pdf

Looking at Others: Social Comparison

- Theory of social comparison: examining the difference between oneself and another person
 - Learning what the facts mean in the context of what other people are like
 - Most useful comparisons involve people in the same general category

Self-Perception

- Self-perception theory
 - People observe their own behaviour to infer what they are thinking and how they are feeling
- The overjustification effect
 - Tendency for intrinsic motivation to diminish for activities that have become associated with rewards

Fluctuating Image(s) of Self

- Phenomenal self (working self-concept)
 - Image of self that are currently active
- Different situations call up different parts of self-knowledge into the phenomenal self
 - Heightened awareness of aspects of yourself are associated with differences in the group around you

Why People Seek Self-Knowledge

- Thirst for self-knowledge
 - Evolutionary origins
- Appraisal motive
 - Looking for the truth about oneself
- Self-enhancement motive
 - Looking for flattering aspects of oneself
- Consistency motive
 - Looking for confirmation about current beliefs about oneself

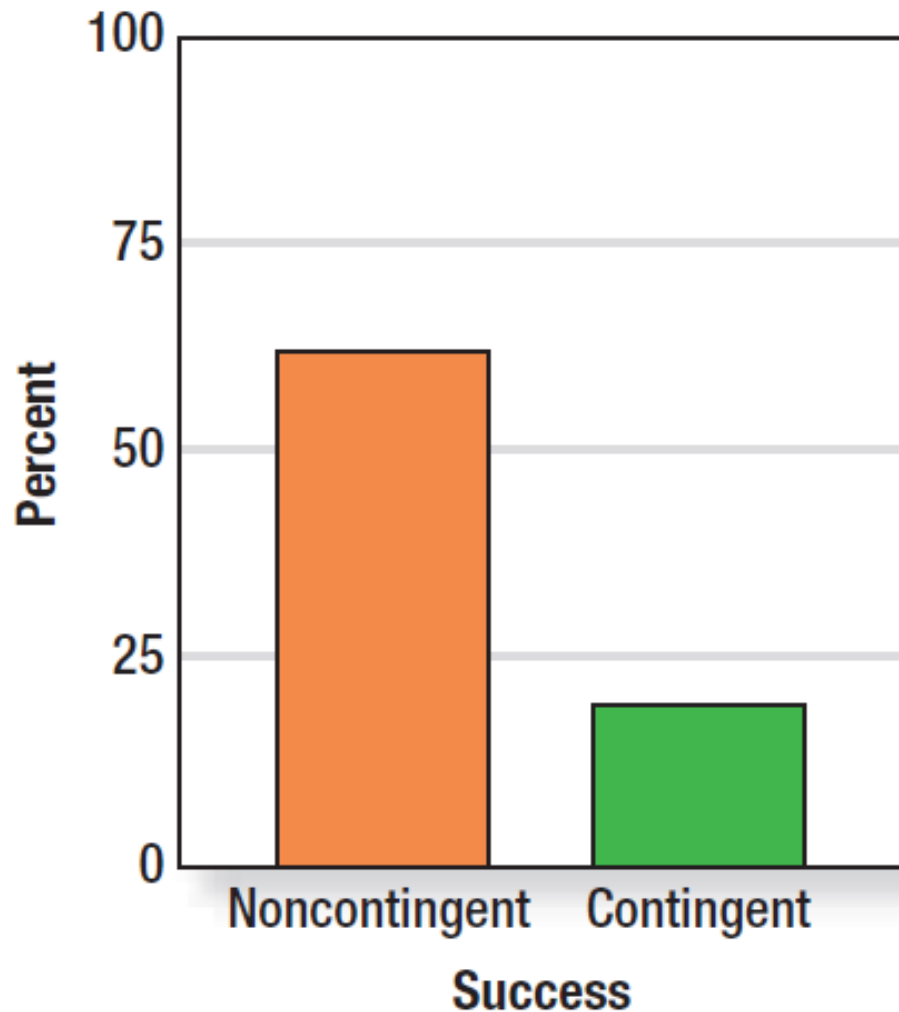
When Motives Compete

- Appraisal motive
 - Weakest motive
 - Self-enhancement motive
 - Strongest motive
 - Consistency motive
 - Second preference
-
- Why wouldn't people want to know the truth?

Tradeoffs: Self-Handicapping

- Self-handicapping: drinking or doing some other activity that will inhibit performance
 - Failure can be blamed on the obstacle
 - Example: drunk people do not perform as well as sober ones
 - Success assumes higher competence
 - Extra credit for success

Self-Handicapping



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Percent of participants in the noncontingent and contingent success groups choosing the alcohol-like drug Pandocrin that supposedly decreased intellectual performance.

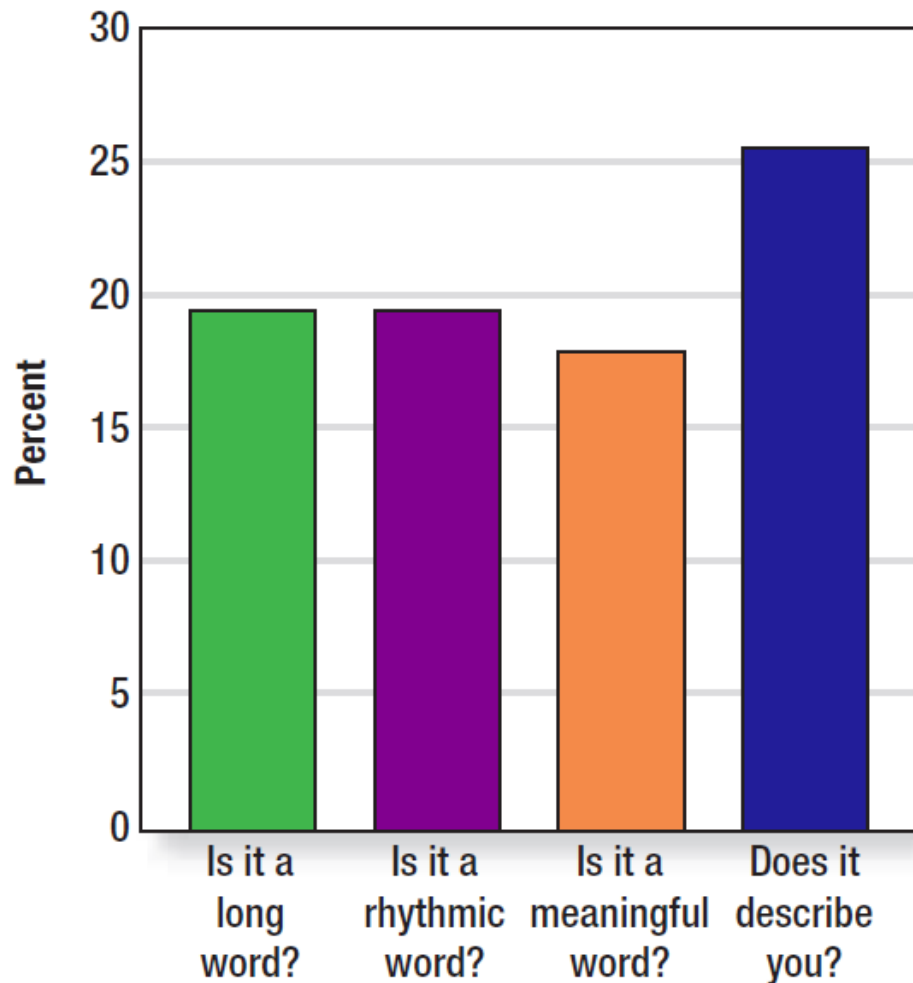
Self-Knowledge and the Duplex Mind

- Automatic egotism: response by automatic system
 - Everything good is me; everything bad is not me
- Modesty: conscious override of automatic egotism
 - Overcome impulse to offer a more humble account

Self and Information Processing

- Anything that touches the self...
 - More important than things that do not touch it
- Self-reference effect
 - Information relating to self is processed more deeply and remembered better
- Endowment effect
 - Items gain in value to person who owns them

The Self-Reference Effect



Information related to the self (e.g., Does it describe you?) is more memorable than information related to something besides the self (e.g., Is it a long word?).

Can the Self-Concept Change?

- Identity slowly changes over time
 - Children add new knowledge and skills
 - Adults take up new hobbies or break bad habits
 - Our body changes throughout our life
- Revising self-knowledge
 - Change how you think of yourself or change your behaviour and a change in self-concept will follow

Can the Self-Concept Change? (cont'd.)

- Changing the looking glass
 - What goes on inside the person is mainly there to serve interpersonal processes
- Promoting change
 - Best to enlist support
- New self, new story
 - People tend to revise their stories once the self-concept has changed

Self-Esteem

- How favourably someone evaluates himself or herself
 - High self-esteem: competent, likable, attractive, and morally good
 - Low self-esteem: incompetent, ugly, unlikable, and morally wicked
 - <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=exploding-the-self-esteem>
 - http://www.salon.com/2000/06/02/black_self_estee_m/

Reality and Illusion

- “Positive illusions” of normal people
 - Overestimating good qualities
 - Overestimating one’s control over events
 - Being unrealistically optimistic

How People Fool Themselves

- People use self-deception strategies to maintain a positive outlook
 - Using self-serving bias
 - Being more sceptical of bad feedback
 - Remembering good things more
 - Making comparisons with those slightly worse
 - Skewing impressions of others to highlight own good traits as unusual
 - Choosing definitions wisely

Benefits of Self-Esteem

- High self-esteem often amounts to nothing more than a false belief that one is superior
 - Students with high self-esteem do have slightly higher grades, but high self-esteem does not lead to good grades
- Two main benefits of high self-esteem
 - Having initiative and feeling good

Why Do We Care About Self-Esteem?

- Sociometer theory
 - View of self-esteem as linked to social acceptance
 - Sociometer: measure of how desirable one would be to other people
- Terror management theory
 - Having high self-esteem helps shield people from fear of death
 - People seek out self-esteem as a way of avoiding a recognition that they are going to die

Is High Self-Esteem Always Good?

- Negative aspects of high self-esteem
 - Narcissism: excessive self-love and a selfish orientation
 - Not the same as high self-esteem, but related
 - Higher prejudice
 - Poorer relationship partners
 - Antisocial actions
 - Persistence in the face of failure

Pursuing Self-Esteem

- Harmful consequences of pursuing self-esteem
 - Taking the easy road to ensure success
 - Impairing autonomy
 - Needing to meet expectations of others
 - Weakening individual intrinsic motivation
 - Impairing learning
 - Damaging relationships
 - Potentially harmful to health

Self-Presentation

- Behaviours that convey an image to others
- Include a wide range of actions
 - Explicit statements about the self (e.g., “I forgive but I don’t forget”)
 - How you dress or what car you drive
 - Making excuses or threats
 - Trying to hide your fear or anger so others think you are cool, calm, and collected

Who's Looking?

- Focus on self-esteem
 - Behaviour remains the same when someone else is watching
- Focus on what others think
 - Behaviour changes when someone else is watching

Making an Impression

- Claiming identity
 - People aspire to many identities
 - Claims require social validation
 - People use self-presentation to advance their claims to identity
 - People will change their behaviour to claim an identity

Making an Impression (cont'd.)

- Tradeoff: favourability versus plausibility
 - People present themselves in the best possible light
 - Within plausible range
- What about modesty?
 - More natural and common among friends
 - Helps people get along better
 - May be the default or automatic response
 - Friends are familiar with faults and failures

Self-Presentation and Risky Behaviour

- Self-presentation is very important
 - Sometimes people risk illness, injury, or even death in order to make a good impression
 - Gaining social acceptance is felt as an even stronger and more urgent motive than the motivation to stay alive and healthy
 - Self-presentation can be stronger than self-preservation
 - Another sign that the human psyche is designed to gain and keep a place in a social group

Summary

- Humans have self-concept that distinguishes them from others
 - Humans also crave social acceptance
- Self-esteem and self-presentation play an important role in establishing and preserving the self
 - High self-esteem is not always good