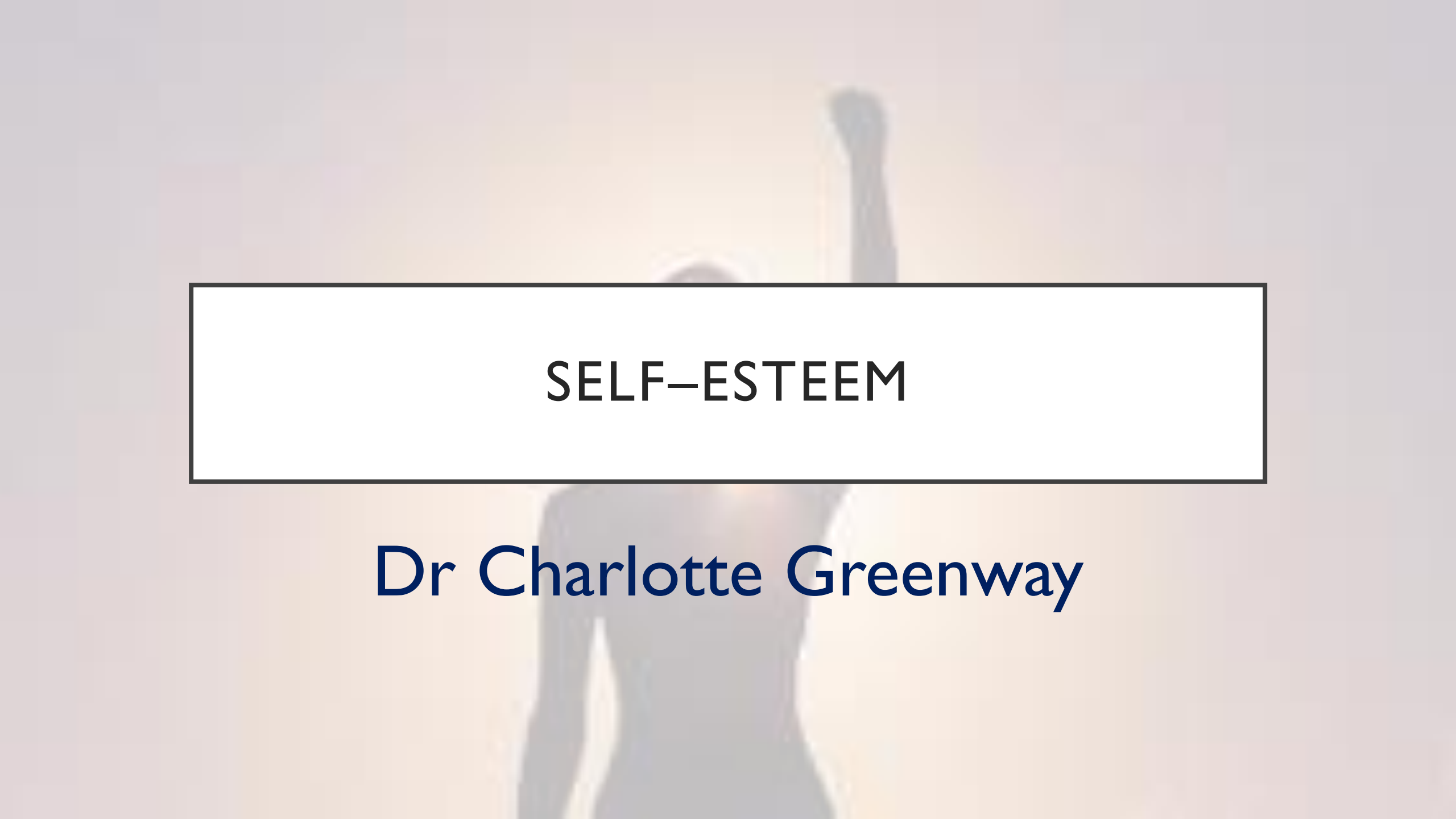




SELF-ESTEEM

Dr Charlotte Greenway

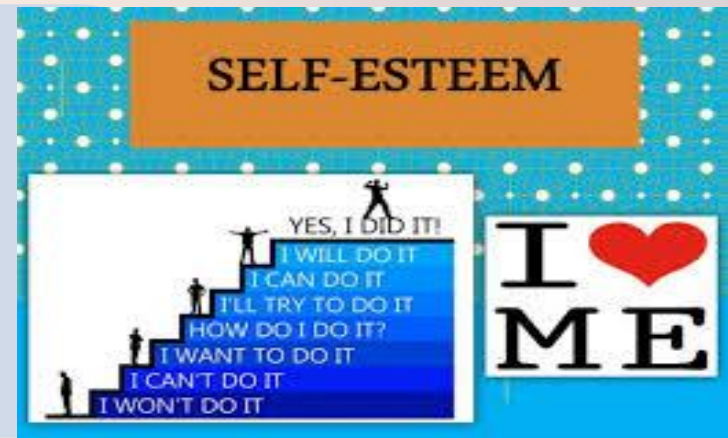
WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?

Our evaluations of ourselves, it can range between feeling that we are worthy and valuable members of society to feeling we are worthless and valueless.

Self-esteem is also popular in the fields of personality and social psychology, conformity (Brockner, 1984), attraction (Hatfield, 1965), persuasion (Rhodes & Wood, 1992), cognitive dissonance (Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993), subjective well-being (Diener & Diener, 1995), and social comparison processes (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1993; Gibbons & Gerrard, 1991)

Low self-esteem is one of the reasons behind so many social problems

- teenage pregnancy
- school drop out
- drug/alcohol abuse
- maltreatment of children
- criminals



WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?

Although research has systematically found no evidence to support the hypotheses that self-esteem is systematically related to problematic behaviour (Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989).

How can this be?

Are our beliefs
about the
importance of self-
esteem wrong?

Or is it something
else?

Inadequate
measurement
tools.

Simple self-report measure of self-concept and global self-esteem are at best imprecise (Wylie, 1979)

Self-concept scales usually consist of standard questions that all participants answer. It is mechanically determined- not weighted to represent their relative importance to each individual.

The absence of a universal, standardised definition has resulted in hundreds of scales (200), most are not comparable to one another.

WHAT IS IT?

An affective approach to understanding the nature of self-esteem.

This approach asserts that self-esteem is a feeling of affection for oneself that develops largely through visceral or irrational processes (“deep in ward feeling, not based in logic”).

A cognitive view believes that self-esteem is a **judgment** people make about themselves. This judgment is largely based on an assessment of one’s various **abilities and attributes**.

Whereas the former approach likens self-esteem to **feelings of love** (which typically are not rational or logical), the latter likens self-esteem to a decision people make about their **worth and value** as a person.

THREE MEANINGS OF SELF-ESTEEM

Global Self-Esteem (termed “self-esteem/ trait self-esteem)

- It captures the way people generally feel about themselves.
- Relatively enduring, both across time and situations.
- Within normal populations, high self-esteem is characterized by a general fondness or love for oneself; low self-esteem is characterized by mildly positive or ambivalent feelings toward oneself.
- In extreme cases, low self-esteem people hate themselves, but this kind of self-loathing occurs in clinical populations, not in normal populations (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989).

THREE MEANINGS OF SELF-ESTEEM

The way people evaluate their various abilities and attributes (a person who doubts his ability in school is sometimes said to have low academic self-esteem, and a person who thinks she is popular and well liked is said to have high social self-esteem).

People speak of having high self-esteem at work or low self-esteem in sports. The terms self-confidence and self-efficacy have also been used to refer to these beliefs, and many people equate self-confidence with self-esteem (self-evaluations or self-appraisals)

Self-esteem and self-evaluations are **related**—people with high self-esteem think they have many more positive qualities than do people with low self-esteem—but they are not the same thing.

A person who lacks confidence in school might still like himself a lot. Conversely, a person who thinks she is attractive and popular might not feel good about herself at all.

Self-Evaluations

THREE MEANINGS OF SELF-ESTEEM

Feelings of Self-Worth

- Momentary emotional states, particularly those that arise from a positive or negative outcome.
- This is what people mean when they speak of experiences that bolster their self-esteem or threaten their self-esteem.
- For example, a person might say her self-esteem was sky-high after getting a big promotion, or a person might say his self-esteem was really low after a divorce.
- Feeling proud or pleased with ourselves (on the positive side), or humiliated and ashamed of ourselves (on the negative side) are examples of what we mean by feelings of self-worth.
- Because they involve feelings toward oneself, some researchers (e.g., Butler, Hokanson, & Flynn, 1994) use the term **state** self-esteem to refer to the emotions we are calling feelings of **self-worth**, and **trait** self-esteem to refer to the way people generally **feel about themselves**.
- Thus, high self-esteem or low self-esteem can be created by temporarily leading people to feel good or bad about themselves (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1992). This is typically accomplished by giving people positive or negative self-relevant feedback (e.g., telling people they are high or low in some ability).



SELF-REPORT MEASURES OF SELF-ESTEEM

The Rosenberg (1965) global self-esteem scale is one of the most widely used instruments

Focuses on people's general **feelings toward themselves**, without referring to any specific quality or attribute. Half of the items are worded in a positive direction; the other half are worded in a negative direction.

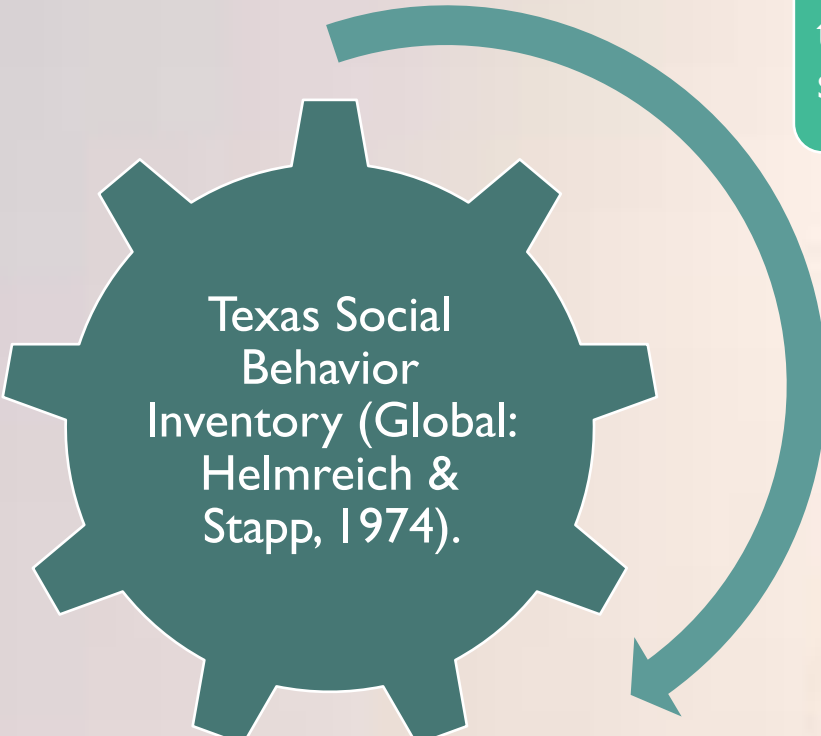


SELF-REPORT MEASURES OF SELF-ESTEEM

It measures how comfortable and competent a person feels in social situations. Scores on this scale are related to scores on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale ($r=.65$ or so), but the two scales do not measure the same thing.

A person can be uncomfortable in social situations and still like himself in general.

Alternatively, a person can be relaxed and outgoing with others but not like herself in general. For this reason, the Rosenberg scale is the appropriate one to use for measuring global self-esteem.



Texas Social
Behavior
Inventory (Global:
Helmreich &
Stapp, 1974).

PROBLEMS WITH SELF-REPORT MEASURES

Baumeister, Tice, and Hutton (1989) have argued that scores on self-report measures of self-esteem are compromised by self-presentational concerns.

- These self-presentational patterns are assumed to be imperfectly correlated with how people privately feel about themselves.

Defensive processes also influence self-report measures of self-esteem (Weinberger, 1990)

AFFECTIVE MODELS OF SELF-ESTEEM

Affective models of self-esteem = self-esteem develops at an early age and is characterized by two types of feelings.

feelings of belonging - rooted in social experiences

feelings of mastery - somewhat more personal in nature.

Belonging is the feeling that one is **unconditionally loved and valued**, not for any particular quality or reason but simply for who one is. A sense of belonging gives people a **secure base** in life. It gives them the feeling that no matter what happens, they are valued and respected (Rogers - unconditional positive regard).

Mastery involves the perception that one is having an impact on the world. Mastery is not the same as perceived competence.

It is the feeling we get when we are immersed in an activity or are striving to overcome some obstacle (e.g., Brissett, 1972; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

Eg - difference between mastery and perceived competence is to consider a child who is making mud pies. The squishing, the feeling of the mud between the child's fingers and the sheer joy that comes from that experience creates feelings of mastery. These feelings promote high self-esteem. But this is not the same as thinking one is a "good mud pie maker." The squish is process oriented—it is joy in creating and manipulating; the evaluation is outcome oriented—it is a judgment of whether one is good at something. The affective model maintains that only the former is relevant to the genesis of self-esteem.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-ESTEEM

Affective models of self-esteem assume that feelings of belonging and mastery normally develop early in life.

Erik Erikson's model of psychosocial development - the first developmental task infants face is establishing feelings of trust with their caregivers. These feelings of trust, which are thought to develop during the first year of life, correspond to the feelings of belonging.

The next stage - “autonomy versus shame and doubt” - the development of feelings of mastery. Children develop feelings of mastery when they are encouraged to explore, create, and modify their world (e.g., to build things, to draw, or paint); they may fail to develop these feelings when their parents subvert, ridicule, or are overly critical of their efforts (Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992).

COGNITIVE MODELS OF SELF-ESTEEM

Cognitive models offer a different perspective on the nature and origins of self-esteem.

They view self-esteem as a more or less **conscious decision** people make regarding their worth as a person.

If you think you possess many socially desirable qualities, then you will have high self-esteem.

Cognitive models emphasize that **how we evaluate ourselves in various domains** determines our overall level of self-esteem.

Three Cognitive Models of Self-Esteem Formation

The simplest of these models assumes that self-esteem is the aggregate of **the way people evaluate their specific qualities and attributes.**

- Add-em-up approach.
- Weightem-by-importance
- Self-Ideal Model

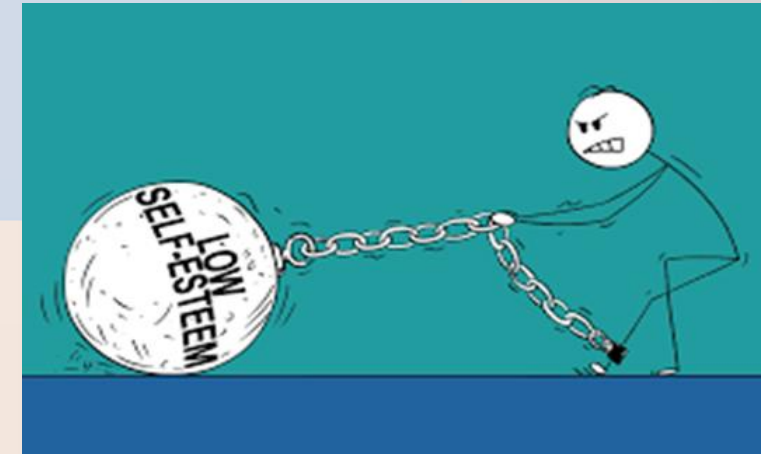


Table 8.3. Three Cognitive Models of Self-Esteem Formation (Note: For each example, two (hypothetical) people have indicated how attractive, intelligent, well-liked, and athletic they think they are (1 = not at all; 7 = very).

	Add-em-up Model				
	Attractive	Intelligent	Well-Liked	Athletic	Self-Esteem
Person A	5	2	5	7	19
Person B	3	7	4	3	17

The add-em-up model assumes that global self-esteem represents the sum of the way people evaluate their more specific qualities. To test this approach, we would simply add up the four self-evaluation scores to determine each person's self-esteem score. Using this approach, we would predict that Person A has higher self-esteem than Person B.

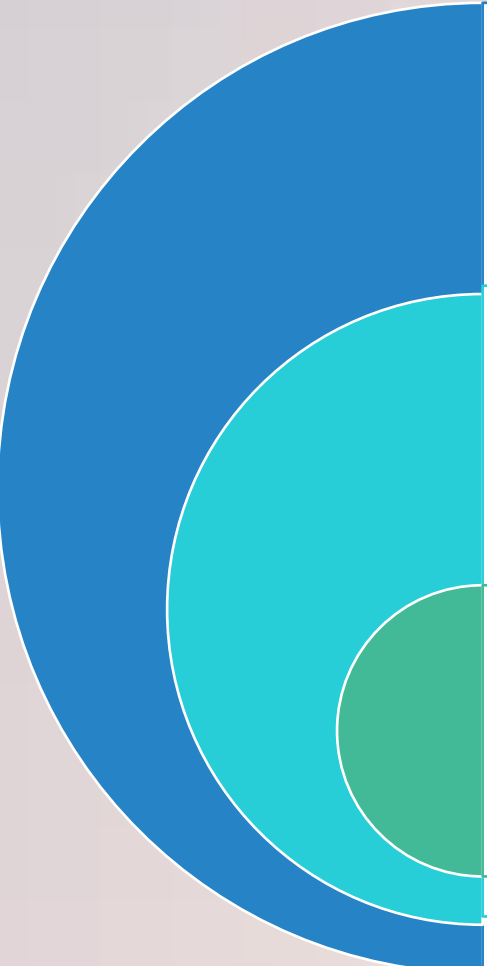
	Weight-em By Importance Model				
	Attractive	Intelligent	Well-Liked	Athletic	Self-Esteem
Person A	5 * (2)	2 * (3)	5 * (4)	7 * (1)	43
Person B	3 * (1)	7 * (4)	4 * (3)	3 * (2)	49

The weight-em by importance model assumes that self-esteem depends not only on how you evaluate yourself in specific domains, but also on how important you think it is to be good in those domains. To test the model, we have each person rank order the four attributes in terms of their personal importance (1 = least important; 4 = most important). We then multiply each self-evaluation score by its corresponding importance rating (in parentheses), and add the products. Using this approach, we would predict that Person B has higher self-esteem than Person A. This is because Person B values what he thinks he is good at more than does Person A.

	Self-Ideal Model				
	Attractive	Intelligent	Well-Liked	Athletic	Self-Esteem
Person A	5 - (7)	2 - (6)	5 - (7)	7 - (6)	-7
Person B	3 - (3)	7 - (4)	4 - (7)	3 - (2)	+1

The self-ideal model assumes that self-esteem depends on the difference between who we think we are now and who we would ideally like to be. To test the model, we have each person indicate how attractive, intelligent, well-liked, and athletic they would like to be (1 = not at all; 7 = very). We then subtract these ideal self-ratings (in parentheses) from their corresponding self-evaluation score, and sum the differences. Using this approach, we would predict that Person B has higher self-esteem than Person A.

THREE COGNITIVE MODELS OF SELF-ESTEEM FORMATION



One problem with this method (which you may have already identified) is that it ignores the fact that **different things are important to different people.**

Despite its intuitive appeal, research has not found strong support for the weight-em-by-importance model (Marsh, 1993b, 1995; Pelham, 1995). Simply adding up the person's self-evaluations and ignoring importance often provides as good an indication (if not better) of the person's level of self-esteem. **This may be because people tend to believe all of these attributes are important, so that the importance rating does not add much information.**

Another possibility is that it is not the individual's own importance rating that is critical, but how important the attribute is to **society in general** (Hoge & McCarthy, 1984; Marsh, 1993b, 1995). This possibility assumes that individuals are **not entirely free to decide what is important and what is not.**

SOCIOLOGICAL MODELS OF SELF-ESTEEM



Self-esteem is influenced by societal factors.

If we think we are highly regarded and valued by society at large, then we have high self-esteem.

From this perspective, sociological variables, such as occupational prestige, income, education, and social status (e.g., race, religion, and gender) are assumed to affect self-esteem.

The evidence supporting such associations is weak.

The successful, the affluent, the well educated, and the socially privileged do not have higher self-esteem than people who are less advantaged in these areas (Crocker & Major, 1989; Wylie, 1979).

Indeed, members of stigmatized and minority groups sometimes report higher levels of self-esteem than do those who are more privileged (Rosenberg, 1979).

SOCIOLOGICAL MODELS OF SELF-ESTEEM



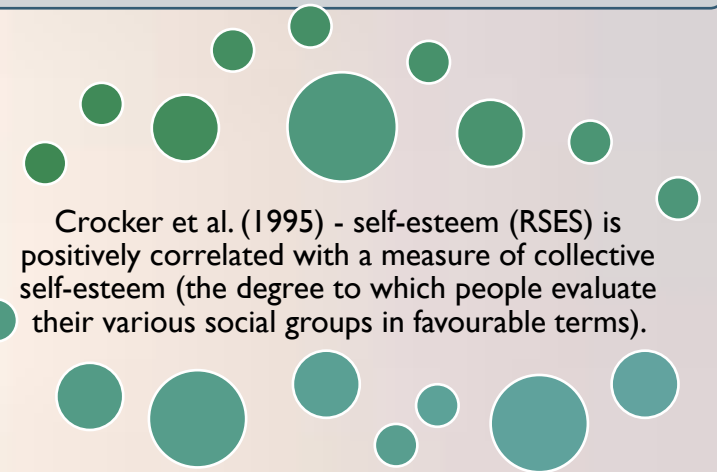
Group pride may explain why self-esteem is not lower in socially disadvantaged groups.

Minority groups are currently encouraged to view their minority status as a badge of honour rather than a stigma. (Black pride, Gay pride).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), self-esteem depends on our group memberships or social identities.

People who evaluate their social groups positively enjoy greater self-esteem than those who evaluate their social groups negatively.

Group pride, in turn, may affect self-esteem.



Crocker et al. (1995) - self-esteem (RSES) is positively correlated with a measure of collective self-esteem (the degree to which people evaluate their various social groups in favourable terms).

Crocker and Major (1989) - socially disadvantaged groups protect themselves from prejudice and discrimination (1) by attributing negative feedback to prejudice against their group rather than to themselves; (2) by selectively comparing their own outcomes with other ingroup members rather than with members of the majority group; and (3) by devaluing attributes on which their group is deficient and exaggerating the importance of attributes on which their group excels.

FURTHER DIFFERENCES IN SELF-ESTEEM

Again, the effects are weak.

GENDER

- Contrary to reports circulating in the popular press, research does not show that females have lower global self-esteem than men (Feingold, 1994; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Pliner, Chaiken, & Flett, 1990; Wylie, 1979).
- Sex differences do emerge, however, with respect to how males and females evaluate certain attributes and abilities (Beyer, 1990; Marsh, 1990). For the most part, these differences mirror cultural stereotypes.

Terror Management Theory

- Becker (1973) argued (1) that a defining feature of human existence is the capacity to contemplate one's own death, (2) that an awareness of one's own mortality creates anxiety and existential terror, and (3) that cultures function to mollify this terror by prescribing a way of life that is meaningful and valuable and offers some hope for immortality.
- For example, one culture may emphasize achievement, another charity, and another piety as the appropriate way to live. Extending these ideas, Solomon et al. suggested that high self-esteem develops among people who believe they are upholding the standards and ideals emphasized by their particular culture.



SOCIAL COMPARISON

Low self-esteem people continue to be self-protective even after they have performed some task or activity.

Wood et al. (1994) first gave participants positive or negative feedback on an alleged test of occupational success.

- All participants were then given the opportunity to engage in social comparison.
- Low self-esteem participants eagerly sought social comparison when they thought it would be favourable (after receiving positive feedback), but they actively avoided social comparison when they thought it would be unfavourable (after receiving negative feedback).
- This cautious, “play it safe” strategy provides further evidence that self-protection is a dominant motivational force in the lives of low self-esteem people.

When we compare ourselves with someone else, we run the risk of finding out that we are worse off than they are.



Because low self-esteem people are highly concerned with self-protection, they ought to be reluctant to take this gamble unless they are quite certain they will learn good things about themselves.