

# PSYC 325

## Fundamentals of Social Psychology



### Chapter 5: Self-Knowledge And the Need to Maintain Self-Esteem

# Outline

- The Nature of the Self
- Knowing Ourselves Through Introspection
- Knowing Ourselves by Observing our Own Behaviour
- Knowing Ourselves through Social Interaction
- Knowing Ourselves by Comparing Ourselves to Others
- The Need to Feel Good about Ourselves
- Self-Evaluation: Biased or Accurate?

# The Nature of the Self

- **Self-concept:**
  - Our knowledge about who we are
- **Self-awareness:**
  - The act of thinking about ourselves
- **Self-recognition** starts around the age of 2
  - Other species can recognize themselves
    - Rouge test



# Functions of the Self: Self-Regulation

- The self-concept serves an executive function
  - It regulates our behaviour, choices, and plans for the future
- This self-control requires **energy**
  - When we are tired or stressed we may not have the energy needed to maintain self-control

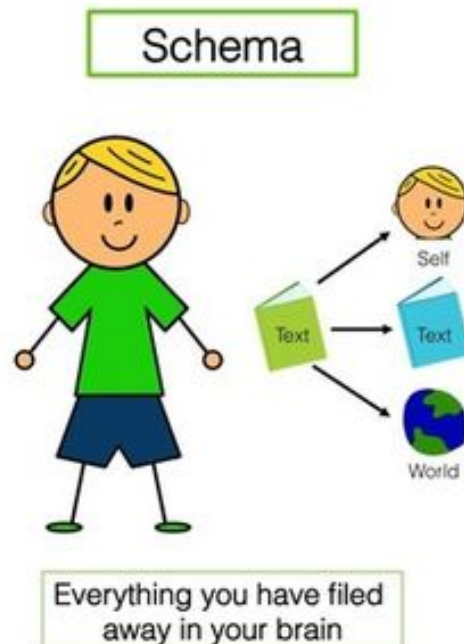
# The Content of the Self: Self-Schemas



- **Self-schema:**
  - An organized body of knowledge about the self that influences what people notice, think about, and remember about themselves
  - These guide our behaviour and also influence our autobiographical memories
    - The memories accessed will depend on the self-schema in question
  - e.g., attitudes, preferences, traits

# The Content of the Self: Self-Schemas

- Self-Reference Effect:
  - The tendency for people to remember information better if they relate it to themselves



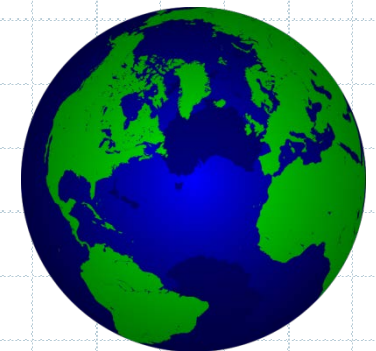
# The Content of the Self: Self-Schemas

- **Self-Concept Clarity:**
  - The extent to which knowledge about the self is stable, clear, and consistently defined
  - Compared to those with high self-concept clarity, those with low self-concept clarity tend to have:
    - Decreased self-esteem
    - Increased neuroticism
    - Increased rumination
    - More prone to overall depression



# Cultural Differences in Defining the Self

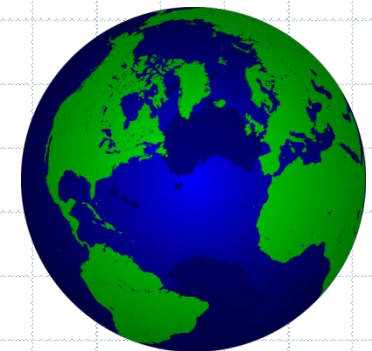
- Western cultures have an **independent view** of self-concept:
  - Defining oneself in terms of one's own internal thoughts, feelings, and actions
  - Not in terms of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of other people
  - Higher self-concept clarity
  - Linked to self-esteem





# Cultural Differences in Defining the Self

- Eastern cultures have an **interdependent view** of self-concept:
  - Defining oneself in terms of one's relationships to other people
  - Recognizing that one's behaviour is often determined by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others
  - Lower self-concept clarity
  - Not linked to self-esteem



## Gender Differences in Defining the Self

- In individualist cultures, men tend to have an **independent view** of the self

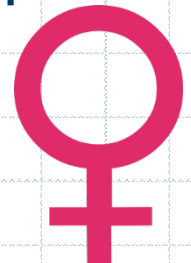
**“I am honest, carefree, determined..”**



- Women tend to have a more **relational, interdependent view**

– Define themselves more in terms of their relationships with others

**“I am a sister, a good friend...”**



## Gender Differences in Defining the Self

- Research by Watkins et al. (1998) found that both genders had an **equal** tendency to have a **relational view** of the self in collectivist cultures that emphasized **interdependence**
  - e.g., China, Ethiopia, Black South Africa

## Gender Differences in Defining the Self

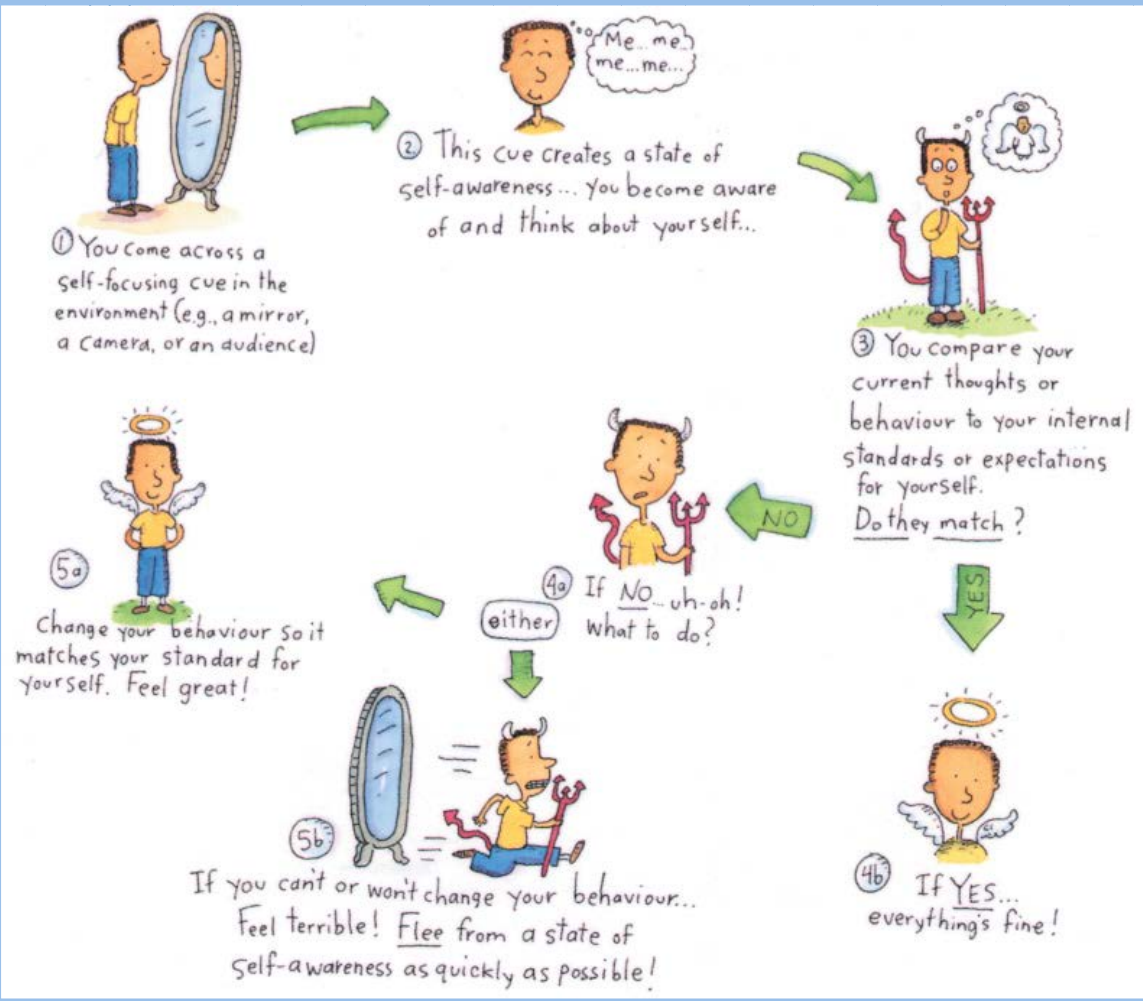
- Men in individualistic cultures do not completely lack interdependence
  - Rather than **relational** interdependence, men are more likely to have a **collective** interdependence
    - i.e., interdependence in relation to social groups such as sports teams



# Knowing Ourselves Through Introspection

- **Introspection** is the process whereby people look inward and examine their own thoughts, feelings, and motives
- Even when people use introspection, the *reasons* for their feelings and behaviours can be *hidden* from conscious awareness

# Focusing on the Self: Self-Awareness Theory



- Proposes that when people focus their attention on themselves, they evaluate and compare their behaviour to their internal standards and values

# Focusing on the Self: Self-Awareness Theory

- When we focus attention on ourselves, we:
  1. Believe we are more transparent to others
  2. Evaluate our behaviour according to our values
- Discrepancy?
  - Avoid source of self-awareness or change behaviour



# Focusing on the Self: Self-Awareness Theory

- Effects?
  - Keeps your behaviour consistent with your values



- Can be aversive:
  - Alleviated through positive and negative escape



## Cultural Differences in Self-Awareness

- East Asians are more likely to have an **outside perspective** of the self
  - i.e., viewing themselves through other people
- People in Western cultures are more likely to have an **insider perspective** of the self
  - i.e., focusing on private experiences without considering how others see them

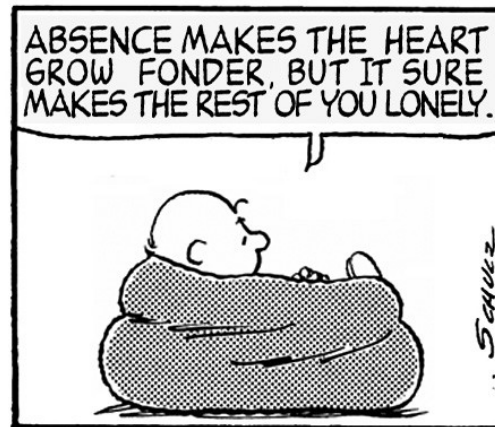
# Judging Why We Feel the Way We Do: Telling More Than We Can Know

- It may be difficult to know **why** we feel the way we do
- People have a tendency to explain *more* about their feelings and behaviour than they actually know
  - What Nisbett & Wilson call “**Telling more than we know**”

# Judging Why We Feel the Way We Do: Telling More Than We Can Know

- Causal Theories

- Theories about the causes of one's own feelings and behaviours
- Often we learn such theories from our culture
  - e.g., absence makes the heart grow fonder

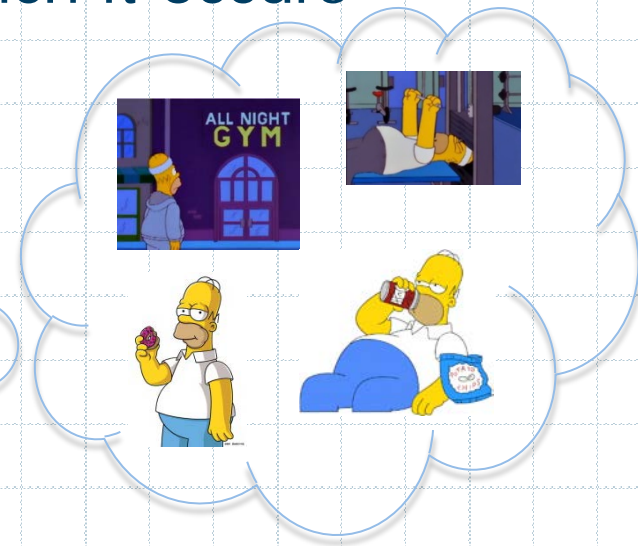


# Knowing Ourselves by Observing Our Own Behaviour

- Self-Perception Theory
  - Bem (1972) proposed that when we are uncertain how we feel about something, we **turn to our behaviour** for answers
    - Inferring who we are by the way we behave
  - Being reminded of past behaviours helps clarify our position on a given issue

# Knowing Ourselves by Observing Our Own Behaviour

- Self-Perception Theory
  - When our attitudes and feelings are **uncertain** or **ambiguous**, we infer these states by observing our behavior and the situation in which it occurs



# Knowing Ourselves by Observing Our Own Behaviour

- Self-Perception Theory
  - More likely to infer our feelings from our behaviour when:
    - Initial feelings are **weak** or **unclear**
    - Freely choose to engage in that behaviour
  - Employ **attributional principles** to infer their own attitudes and feelings
    - We observe our behavior and explain it to ourselves
    - Evaluate whether the behaviour was of free choice, and also if the behaviour was **intrinsically** or **extrinsically motivated**

# Knowing Ourselves by Observing Our Own Behaviour

- **Intrinsic Motivation**
  - The desire to engage in an activity because we enjoy it, or find it interesting
- **Extrinsic Motivation**
  - The desire to engage in an activity because of external rewards or pressures

# Knowing Ourselves by Observing Our Own Behaviour

- Intrinsic Motivation is a more consistent motivational factor
  - Positively correlated with persistence
  - More likely to engage in repetitive tasks
  - Continuing membership in fitness center

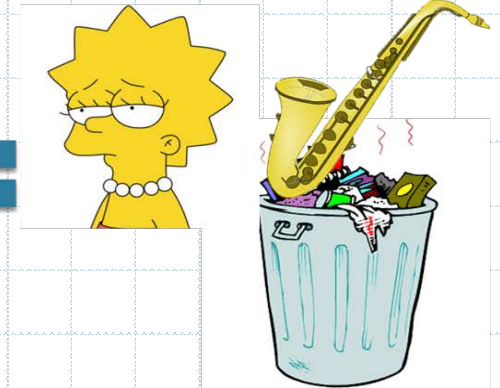
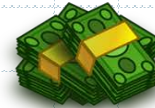


# Knowing Ourselves by Observing Our Own Behaviour

High intrinsic motivation

Reward

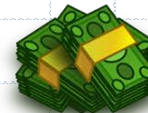
Reward undermines interest



Low intrinsic motivation

Reward

Reward does not undermine interest



Overjustification Effect:

Replacing IM with EM makes people lose interest in the activity they initially enjoyed

# Knowing Ourselves by Observing Our Own Behaviour

- Overjustification effect
  - The case whereby people view their behaviour as caused by (usually compelling) extrinsic reasons
  - The presence of extrinsic rewards can undermine intrinsic enjoyment of an activity
    - Therefore decreases behaviour
    - The external cause is viewed as having a greater influence on behaviour than the internal cause



# Knowing Ourselves by Observing Our Own Behaviour

- Preserving Intrinsic Interest
  - Rewarding for performing well on a task (performance-contingent rewards) is less likely to decrease intrinsic interest than is rewarding for simply performing a task (task-contingent rewards)

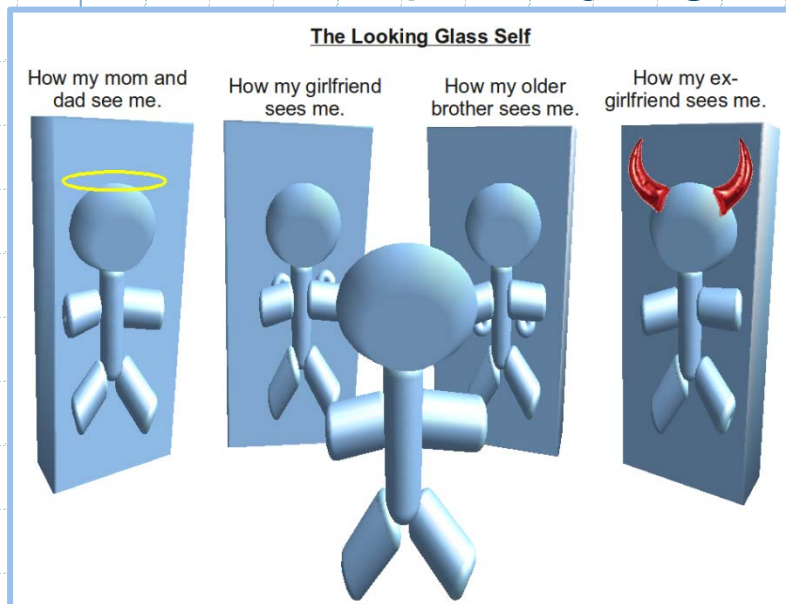
# Knowing Ourselves Through Social Interaction

- Social relationships play an important role in our definitions of self
- People can have **multiple “selves”**
  - Develop in response to different social situations
  - e.g., you probably present a different self around your friends than around me



# Knowing Ourselves Through Social Interaction

- Looking-glass self
  - We see ourselves through the eyes of others and incorporate their views into our self-concept
    - Especially significant others

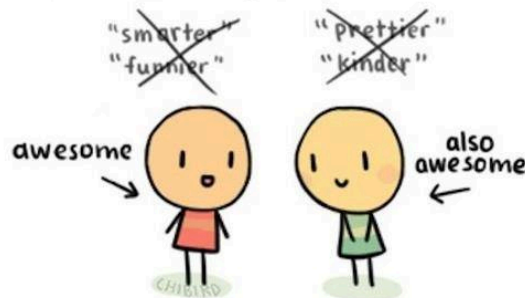


- Other examples:
  - Conservative vs. liberal
  - Disapproving vs. supportive

# Knowing Ourselves by Comparing Ourselves to Others

- We learn about our own abilities and attitudes by *comparing* ourselves to other people
- This process is identified in **social comparison theory**
  - Proposed by Festinger (1954)

stop comparing yourself to others.



# Social Comparison Revisited

- Two important considerations:
  - When?
    - No objective standard to use as a measure
  - To whom?
    - Similar others (accuracy)
- Two types or directions:
  - Upward and downward



# Social Comparison Revisited

- **Downward social comparison:**
  - Comparing ourselves to people who are worse than we are in a particular trait or ability
    - e.g., comparing our bad luck to that of a cancer patient
  - Can also compare current performance with inferior past performance
    - e.g., superior university grades with average high school grades
  - A **self-protective, self-enhancing** strategy
  - However, this occurs only if we do not feel vulnerable to the other's negative outcome



# Social Comparison Revisited

- Upward social comparison:
  - Comparing ourselves to people who are better than we are in a particular trait or ability
  - The effect of doing this depends on the “self” being compared:
    - Usual self: inspirational
    - Best self: deflating
    - Attainability is the key
    - Otherwise it can be **threatening** to our self-esteem



# Social Comparison and Culture

- Lockwood et al. (2005):
  - European-Canadians were more motivated by positive (successful) role models than were Asian-Canadians
  - The latter were more motivated by negative (unsuccessful) role models than were the European-Canadians
  - Suggests that people from collectivist cultures are more concerned with avoiding failures than achieving success
    - Whereas the opposite is true in individualistic cultures

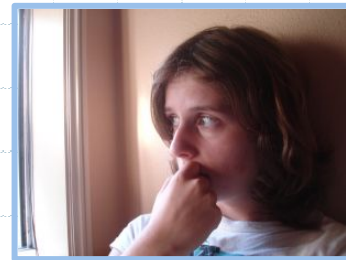
# Self-Discrepancy Theory

- The theory that we become distressed when our sense of who we truly are, our **actual self**, is discrepant from our personal standards or desired self-conceptions
  - Higgins (1987)
- **Actual self**: who we are
- **Ideal self**: who we would like to be
- **Ought self**: who we should be



# Self-Discrepancy Theory

- Discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self may lead to **depression-related** emotions
  - Dejection, sadness, dissatisfaction, etc.
- Discrepancy between the actual self and the "ought" self may lead to **anxiety-related** emotions
  - Fear, worry, tension, etc.



# Self-Discrepancy Theory

- Coping with discrepancies:
  - Re-evaluate cause of discrepancy
  - Alter behaviour to avoid future discrepancy
  - Seek out social recognition (**self-completion**)



# Self-Discrepancy Theory & Culture

- Research by Heine & Lehman (1999) showed:
  - Japanese students had a **greater discrepancy** between their actual and ideal self than did the Canadian students
  - However, these discrepancies were **less depressing** to the Japanese students than to the Canadian students

# Self-Evaluation: Biased or Accurate?

- Maintenance Theory:
  - Self-concept is threatened by someone else's performance
    - As opposed to our own failure to live up to ideals
  - Level of threat depends on:
    - Closeness of individual
    - Personal relevance of skill

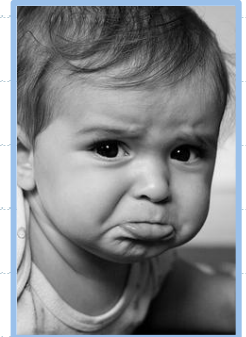


# Self-Evaluation: Biased or Accurate?

- Close friend + non-relevant skill = bask in reflected glory



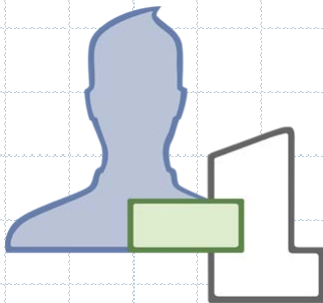
- Close friend + relevant skill = feel poorly
- Stranger + relevant skill = threat is low





# Self-Evaluation: Biased or Accurate?

- If we feel threatened by being outperformed by a friend in a relevant domain, we restore self-esteem by:
  1. Distancing ourselves from the person
  2. Improving our performance
  3. Reducing the relevance of the task



# Self-Evaluation: Biased or Accurate?

- Given the conflict between the need to preserve self-esteem and the need for accuracy, the question that arises is whether our self-evaluations are biased or accurate
  - We have a tendency to think we are above average

# Self-Evaluation: Biased or Accurate?

- **Self-Enhancement:**
  - An unrealistically positive view of oneself in order to enhance self-esteem
  - Largely a phenomenon of individualist cultures
- **Self-Effacement:**
  - A tendency to hold a negative view of oneself
  - Found in Asian (collectivist) cultures

# Self-Verification: Wanting to Know the Truth About Ourselves

- **Self-Verification Theory:**
  - Suggests that people have a need to seek confirmation of their self-concept
    - Whether the self-concept is positive or negative
    - “Tell me the truth, even if it hurts!”
  - Need for truth depends on the **dimension** being evaluated and the **evaluator**
- Self-enhancement and self-verification are opposing needs

# Self-Verification:

## Wanting to Know the Truth About Ourselves

- In some circumstances, this tendency can **conflict** with the desire to uphold a favourable view of oneself
  - “Honey, how does this dress look?”
- Accurate feedback dominates over positive feedback when:
  - Highly **certain** of those self-concepts
  - **Consequences** of being improperly evaluated are too great (e.g., contact with the person is common)
  - People believe they can **improve** their abilities

on the next...



Chapter 6:

# ATTITUDES