The Sociocultural Self

University of Michigan
Hazel Rose Markus

Hebrew University
Daphna Osnheim

the ways in which these sociocultural factors give rise to, or are reflected in the self or identity, are not addressed. Most psychologists, especially those intrigued by the social nature of the self, probably never intended to create a genderless, classless, ethnicity-free self. Yet whatever the earlier intentions of the field, it no longer seems viable to examine the creation and functioning of the self without an explicit consideration of the role of sociocultural factors. The sources of psychology’s recent sensitivity to the impact of sociocultural factors are diverse, and an analysis of them is beyond the scope of this chapter (for recent discussions of these issues see Bond, 1988; Cole, 1990; Fiske, 1990; Kim, in press-a, in press-b; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a; Markus & Oyserman, 1989; Miller, 1988; Moghadam, 1987; Sampson, 1988; Shweder, 1991; Shweder & LeVine, 1984; Triandis, 1990a; Turner & Oakes, 1989). This awareness, however, encourages a new look at how these sociocultural influences may both constrain and afford the self-system.

THE SOCIAL SELF

A social psychological perspective on the self begins with the assumption that the responses of others are critical in defining the self. The self in social psychology is invariably described as a social product whose content derives from its relevant social contexts (Baldwin, 1911: Baldwin & Holmes, 1987; Brewer, 1990; Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Rosenberg, 1965; Stryker, 1987). The emergent self-concept and how one feels about the self is a function of how the individual is viewed and responded to by important others in his or her significant life domains. Even within a highly individualistic Western psychological framework, it is immediately evident that one cannot be a self by one’s self. Following Baldwin and Holmes (1987), we suggest that “the private as well as the public self is ultimately a social self” (p. 1090). As the social identity literature has shown, people experience their worlds and define themselves in terms of their sociocultural contexts (as Americans, as Israelis, as Southern Californians, as psychologists, as middle class, as women, as Blacks, as students, etc.) (Asch, 1952; Gurin & Markus, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Zavalloni, 1971). Moreover, individuals who belong to ethnic groups whose language, physical, and cultural characteristics make them distinctive with respect to the dominant group (e.g., in North America those who are not White, male, English-speaking, middle class, and urban) are likely to be responded to in terms of this group membership even if these categories are not particularly personally salient (Hughes & Demo, 1989; Jackson, Antonucci, & Gibson, 1989; Milner, 1984). Thus, a Japanese American boy and a Korean American boy may both be seen as Asians and as good in math and science even though these boys may not think of themselves in these ways at all. Similarly, all women define themselves in terms of their gender (Gurin & Markus, 1988), but as reflected in many recent well-publicized sexual harassment cases, others often respond to them in this way.

Despite the evident social nature of the self, most current models of the self are still decidedly aroial (Brewer, 1990; Taylor & Dube, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). Almost all American social psychological research views the self as an autonomous, bounded, independent entity. Such a view may well prevent a realization and an exploration of the multilevel interdependence between the self and its embedding sociocultural contexts. As Oakes and Turner (1990) have noted, the idea that one is an exemplar of a social category or that individual freedom or agency is importantly configured by one’s past or current group membership seems somehow undemocratic or unAmerican. Although, sociocultural contexts and their influences may be pervasive, powerful, and difficult to escape, their sources and boundaries are not easy to identify. These contexts often include values, goals, assumptive frameworks, categories, and labels which contain largely implicit and unexamined meanings (Jackson, in press; Russell, Cahill, & Spain, 1992).

Cole (1990), for example, examines the sociocultural context provided by one’s country of origin. This context gives rise to compelling differences in the ways in which American and Japanese nursery school teachers understand the meaning of a child’s behavior and the differences in their preferred response to the behavior. A child’s boisterous, disobedient behavior is typically viewed within an American cultural frame as a sign that the child is bored, probably because he is intelligent and is not receiving enough individual attention. Teachers usually suggest isolating him (e.g., give him a time out) until he calms down and then providing him with increased, focused attention and more demanding tasks. Teachers operating within a Japanese cultural frame, view similar behaviors in a child as a sign that he has not learned proper obedience and dependence, probably because his mother does not spend enough time with him. They commonly suggest keeping him as part of a large group so he can learn the proper behaviors for contributing to group harmony.

The purpose of this chapter is to pose a series of questions about how various sociocultural contexts may influence the content of the self, the structures and processes of the self, as well as what it means to be a self. We simultaneously consider a variety of such sociocultural contexts (e.g., ethnicity, gender, class, region of origin) with the goal of generating a variety of speculations and some hypotheses about how such social contexts instigate, support, foster, and maintain various features and processes of the self-system. There is insufficient empirical work on any one of these sociocultural factors and their interdependence with the self or identity to allow reasonable generalizations, but just posing questions about the nature of their potential influence may serve to broaden and extend current theorizing about the self-concept and its function.
A Perspective on the Self

A perspective on the self should be viewed as plural and diverse even within the individual. This emphasis on multiplicity and multiperspectivity leads to the realization that it is not possible to confine self-consciousness in a single, monolithic way through the theory of the individual and the idea of the self. The individual, in its social and cultural context, is not fixed but is continually reconstructed. Therefore, the self is not a fixed entity but a dynamic process of self-discovery and self-definition.

The term "self" is a construct that arises from the social and cultural context. It is not a fixed notion but is continually shaped by interactions with others and the environment. This perspective recognizes the role of the social and cultural context in the construction of the self.

The self is not a static entity but is a dynamic process of self-discovery and self-definition. It is a construct that arises from the social and cultural context, and it is continually shaped by interactions with others and the environment. This perspective recognizes the role of the social and cultural context in the construction of the self.
out the one on which to stake his salvation. All other selves thereafter become unreal, but the fortunes of this self are real. Its failures are real failures, its triumphs real triumphs carrying shame and gladness with them” (p. 310). Such a passage conjures images of James and his fellows settled in comfortable armchairs, projecting their futures and deciding among “doctor, lawyer, Indian, thief” with no constraints save personal desire.

While the individual's agentic role in creating a self, at least within this Western cultural frame cannot be denied, it is also the case that the sociocultural environment fosters and affords some types of self-definition while closing off many others. Moreover, some individuals, because of their positions in the social structure, are afforded many more easily realizeable self-definition opportunities than others. The sociocultural contexts people are embedded within provide them with the materials of identity construction. People then seek to create selves that are relevant and appropriate to the characteristics valued in these social contexts. Our view is that it is now productive to more broadly and thoroughly contextualize the active, agentic self with the goal of exploring how various sociocultural contexts give rise to the self, and also how these context are, in turn, created and maintained by particular perspectives on self.

THE SELF AS A SOCIOCULTURAL LOCUS

A sociocultural approach suggests that to gain an understanding of the content and processes of the self, it is important to highlight some of the characteristics of the environments within which one lives. Individual psychological processes are culturally mediated, in that they develop within a historical context and are based in everyday activities which have practical meaning to the individual (Cole, 1990). One makes sense of him or herself in terms of the characteristics valued by the immediate environments in which one lives. These environments are social products embedded within the larger society. Typically, an individual's sociocultural worlds are not passive (Goodnow, 1990). Instead, they are often quite active, comprised of individuals and groups of individuals who are continuously providing advice and direction with respect to “how to behave” and “how not to be.” Each significant context influences the kinds of selves—past, current, and possible—one can conceive of and the support one receives in developing and expressing these selves in everyday behavior.

The self-concept then can be considered a locus of sociocultural influence. It receives and organizes the diverse messages that are communicated by one's various contexts, for example, one's gender context, one's birth cohort context, and one's ethnic group context. These messages concern what matters in the world and, more generally, how to be an appropriate or valued member within a given context (Hsu, 1983; Kirkpatrick & White, 1985; Shweder, 1990). The self then integrates and personalizes these various messages functions as an orienting, mediating, and interpretative framework giving shape to what people are motivated to do, how they feel, what they notice and think about, as well as their overt actions (Markus & Kitayama, 1994a; Shweder & Miller, 1991).

Sociocultural contexts differ in size, complexity, and importance for everyday life as well as in their authority, legitimacy, and power to define realities for individuals and society as a whole. The focus here is on the messages about how to be a person, how to be a self, or more generally “how to be” that various sociocultural contexts provide. Our assumptions are (a) that all major sociocultural contexts provide such messages either explicitly or implicitly, and that (b) the messages that individuals receive may be similar or complementary, or in contrast, they may present different, perhaps even conflicting, ideas about how to be a self.

We have chosen to focus on the implicit and explicit messages that a sociocultural environment transmits about how to be a “good” or “acceptable” or “normal” or “appropriate” self because we assume that people everywhere have a need to answer questions such as “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?” and to impose some order and coherence on their experiences (Shweder & Sullivan, 1990). Answers to these questions are embedded in the general cultural frame. Individuals seek them wherever they are to be found, and they thus provide a reasonably direct link between the sociocultural environment and the constructed self.

Individuals develop or construct their selves and identities within a field of overlapping groups and collectivities. At birth and increasingly thereafter, people are cast into and come complete with membership and attachment to a diverse array of groups. Already at birth a whole set of social identities are there to be used in the identity formation process. One can be categorized as a White, middle class, Lutheran, Midwesterner male or as an Hispanic, working class, Catholic, Southwestern female, and these categorizations carry meaning. And soon after birth, at least in Euro-American contexts, a set of individualizing, personal attributes—stubborn, smart, athletic, curious—are added to the repertoire. Social embeddedness thus refers to each of the layers or contexts within which one is anchored and through which one is perceived and learns to perceive (Condor, 1991; Gurin & Markus, 1988; Jackson, McCullough, & Gurin, 1987; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987; Zavalloni, 1971).

Most obviously, differences in sociocultural contexts mean that the content of the self-concept will differ. A child growing up in Flint, Michigan after the 1973 oil embargo and the closing of the local auto manufacturing plants was presented with a different set of messages about how to be a self than a child growing up in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the mid-sixties. Similarly, children growing up middle class, Mormon, and in Salt Lake City, Utah are likely to view themselves and their possibilities in ways that are different from children growing up working class, African American, in Camden, New Jersey, and both sets of children will diverge markedly in their ideas about themselves from children growing up as
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Fig 7.5. The socially embedded self.
VARIATION IN CONTENT OF THE SELF

If we imagine that each major sociocultural context provides a message about how to be a self, both now and in the future, then there are many potential sources of self-schemas and possible selves. One’s sociocultural context provides individuals with the very categories to use in thinking about one’s self. Thus, being successful may be desirable for people in both Japan and the United States. In the United States, however, the focus in the pursuit of success is on the development of ability and skills. In Japan, and also among Asian-Americans, success is a result of effort and much greater attention is given to developing habits of persevering and enduring (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). The nature of the self-schemas that must be cultivated to foster individual success are quite different in the two cases.

The most powerful of all the sociocultural contexts may be the family (Kagitcibi, 1989). It is a changing, but nevertheless persistent, influence on individuals’ lives. It provides its own messages (“Us Andersons never quit”) and it serves as the translator of most of the other sociocultural influences—gender, age, social class, and so on. Almost all everyday interactions within the family convey some information about what it means to be a person. In the U.S., children are asked what they want for dinner and what they want to wear, and some parents knock on their child’s door before entering. All of these behaviors communicate that the child is expected to have desires, preferences, and interests that are separate from, and not knowable, even by one’s own parents (e.g., Shweder & Miller, 1991). Messages about which domains are important are also subtly conveyed to the individual (e.g., is the child sent out to play after school or sent to do homework, are siblings told to help one another with schoolwork or is a tutor hired).

Many of the conversations within families also carry powerful, self-definitional messages. Children hear, “only babies cry,” “You have to learn to stand up for yourself,” “Play by the rules,” “If you don’t look after yourself who will?” (Shweder, 1982). For example, children of 2- or 3-years-of-age, regardless of their particular sociocultural environment, are likely to get into fights with each other if they play together for any length of time, and it is here where the first lessons of the value of aggression, group harmony, responsibility, and how to be a valued member of the group begin. A well-known study by anthropologists Whiting and Edwards (1974) explored the child rearing practices of a group of Texas mothers, a group of Mormon mothers, and a group of Zuni mothers. Whiting and Edwards reported that Texan parents allowed some fighting and quarreling with playmates, and then separated and/or punished children if they continued to fight. They often reported that if children were quarreling they let the children “fight it out,” “settle it themselves,” or “get it out of their systems.” Mormon parents appeared almost as tolerant of aggression, but they seemed to step in earlier and were more likely to use distractions. Zuni parents, in contrast to the Texans and the Mormons, consider fighting to be more serious and think that children should learn to control their tempers at a very early age. One mother reported, “How would you like it if your grandfather and father started to fight? Would you like that? Then there would be trouble in the family. Nothing would work right.” In this admonishment there is an explicit emphasis on the value of relationship and the value of interpersonal harmony. Among Texan and Mormon families, the message was quite different. A lenient attitude toward aggression combined with a strong pressure for self-reliance and individual achievement appears to create an unparalleled appreciation of agency, self-assertion, and standing up for one’s self.

More recent studies comparing Japanese and American families find that most American parents continue to value standing up for one’s self and not letting others push one around. In sharp contrast, Japanese parents do not view yielding personal autonomy as giving up the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a; White & LeVine, 1986). Rather the message is that the way to be a self is to work with, and maintain engagements with, others. According to Kumagai (1981), from this perspective, cooperation is not a denial of self but an act of affirmation of the self.

Focusing on another sociocultural context, Heath (1982) analyzed the various messages that different social class environments send about literacy and its role in life. Her study compared a White middle class community, a Black working class community, and a White working class community. She found that as early as 6-months-of-age, middle class infants learn to pay attention to books and the information that comes from books. Books and book-related activities are considered entertainment. And very importantly “any initiation of a literary event by a preschooler makes an interruption, an untruth, a diverting of attention from the matter at hand (whether it be an uneaten plate of food, a messy room, or an avoidance of going to bed) acceptable” (p. 53). In contrast, in the working class communities, literacy events are not so central to self-definition. There are fewer bedtime stories. Reading is what is done to find something out and it is less likely to be considered an interactive, pleasurable activity. In the place of reading, the focus is on talking. According to Heath, working class children are rewarded for being able to recount events they have witnessed in an interesting and compelling way.

Schools and organized religions also transmit messages about how to be a person, and what characteristics of the self are to be valued. Thus, incoming 6th graders at one Ann Arbor middle school are required to memorize the school philosophy (“We are people first, then students and teachers. Everyone is entitled to make responsible mistakes. Everyone has a right to a pleasant day. No one should feel threatened in school.”). The philosophy makes some clear statements about personhood and the self, for example, that one is more than one’s social roles, that personhood per se is valued, and that positive affect is to be expected.

Gender is yet another powerful sociocultural context that both provides its
Which messages are salient?

Working alone, I have found that messages from the school are more difficult to maintain. I am slightly more likely to notice, and I am least likely to notice, messages from the school. Moreover, the messages from the school are more likely to be noticed, whether or not I am paying attention. I am least likely to notice messages from the school, even if I am paying attention, and I am most likely to notice messages from other people, even if I am not paying attention. This suggests that messages from the school are less likely to be noticed, and that messages from other people are more likely to be noticed, regardless of whether or not I am paying attention.

Working with others, I have found that messages from the school are more difficult to maintain. I am slightly more likely to notice, and I am least likely to notice, messages from the school. Moreover, the messages from the school are more likely to be noticed, whether or not I am paying attention. I am least likely to notice messages from the school, even if I am paying attention, and I am most likely to notice messages from other people, even if I am not paying attention. This suggests that messages from the school are less likely to be noticed, and that messages from other people are more likely to be noticed, regardless of whether or not I am paying attention.
description and the ones with red hair the most likely to mention hair-color. Thus, to the extent that some Blacks or Hispanics or women find themselves in settings where they are chronically distinctive as a consequence of their ethnicity or gender, it is likely that their ethnicity or gender will become salient. And indeed McGuire, McGuire, Child, and Fujioka (1978) find that integrated settings in which ethnicity is less distinct are associated with a decrease in the salience of ethnicity.

The McGuire (McGuire, 1984; McGuire & McGuire, 1982) studies have not, however, analyzed how the self-definitional process may vary depending on the value attached by the individual himself or herself and by others to the distinctive attribute. Thus, some findings suggest that those raised in racially concordant environments will be more likely to establish a positive racial identity (Broman, Jackson, & Neighbors, 1989). Others suggest that integration into the main-stream, as measured by interracial contact and adult socioeconomic attainment, is associated with less Black group attachment but more positive Black group identification (Demo & Hughes, 1990). Hall (in press) suggests that Black racial group identification is the result of cultural attachments as well as social-structural forces.

Forms of Self-Knowledge

Such findings raise the possibility that the sociocultural context influences not only the content of the self—what it is people come to believe about themselves—but the form this self-knowledge takes. Neisser (1988) makes a distinction among five types of self-knowledge—ecological (i.e., self as perceived with respect to the physical environment), interpersonal (i.e., a sense of self in human interchange), extended (i.e., sense of self based on personal memories and anticipations), private (i.e., an awareness of experience not shared with others), and conceptual (i.e., one's theory of self) self. Studies of the self have to this point highlighted particular aspects of the conceptual self. It is possible, however, that this emphasis on the conceptual and on generalized or abstracted self-knowledge is what Gergen (1990) has termed logocentric. It is certainly possible that the self is conceptualized in ways other than in abstracted trait attributes (e.g., I am competitive, I am shy, etc.) or roles. It is possible that in some cultures the self is more embodied and represented somatically or enactively.

Triandis, Leung, Villareal, and Clack (1985) have repeatedly found that respondents in Asian cultures are more likely to characterize themselves in terms of their roles and social categories than in attribute terms. Similarly, Akbar (1984), in discussing the African self, suggests that the self will be experienced and represented as connected with others. He cites the African adage "I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am" (p. 407), implying that the content of self-concept and the experience of self can be based in a sense of the will, needs, and desires of the group. Recently, Markus, Herzog, Holmberg, and Dielman (1992) find that White, urban, middle class males with some college education are the ones most likely to characterize themselves in terms of trait attributes. In contrast, women, Blacks, those with less formal education, and those from rural areas are decidedly more likely to characterize themselves in terms of their actions (e.g., I bowl on Thursday nights, I take care of my grandchildren). For some people, the self seems represented in terms of one's concrete actions—what one does.

Studies of respondents in some other non-Western cultures suggest that the self is conceived of and represented in a variety of ways, many of which are decidedly different from current conceptions. Jacobson-Widdig (1990), for example, describes the lower Congo view of the self as a shadow, as elusive, and as based in emotion and intuition. From another cultural frame, as described by Kirkpatrick (1985), Marquesans' do not view the self as the seat of motivation, rather, various body parts are credited with a degree of autonomy, viewed as self-governing bodies within the person. It is the throat that thristes, the genitals that lust. These body parts are viewed as singular in their motivation, driving behavior to satisfy their needs. The individual is not to feel shame at behaviors rooted in these bodily demands because they are not under the control of the self. For a Marquesan, motivation is not located only in the self.

VARIATIONS IN PROCESSES OF THE SELF

As noted in Fig. 7.1, our perspective assumes that the function of the self is to lend meaning and organization to one's experiences, to regulate affect, and to motivate action. The nature of one's sociocultural context and the messages about "how to be" should have a marked impact on how various self-processes (self-awareness, self-consciousness, self-monitoring, self-verification, etc.) unfold and take shape. Such a perspective affords a variety of questions. To take an example from recent empirical work, what happens to the self-evaluation processes of individuals who must contend with persistent, unwanted, and/or unsolicited feedback which focuses on their membership in various social categories or groups and ignores their individual characteristics, attributes, and actions? How might the need to consistently disavow, discount, or deny the feedback of some others influence the process of self-evaluation and self-definition? For the most part, current models of self-processes have assumed first that to the extent that individuals attend to their social environment they will receive fairly unambiguous feedback about themselves as individuals which can be integrated into the self-concept if desired. And second, these models have assumed that with some effort these individuals should be able to convey various conceptions of themselves to others with reasonable accuracy.
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tent,” perhaps this means that one is not caring?). Without a clear strategy for weighting or compartmentalizing various messages, women may be left chronically unsure or uncertain about the meaning of the feedback they receive, making integration of experience, regulation of affect, and setting a clear motivational agenda difficult, at least relative to those who receive less ambiguous feedback. As noted earlier, however, the exact consequences of such identity work are unclear and await empirical exploration. Such self-definitional effort could be viewed as challenging, pushing the individual to develop capacities such as self-awareness and empathy that would be less likely to develop without such challenge.

An extreme example of these difficulties is highlighted in the situation of Black athletes who, having achieved athletic success at great effort, are told that these achievements are due to a Black “athleticism” trait (Steele, 1990). Such a conceptualization can rob the athlete of a highly valued sense of personal control over his or her success. In American culture, people are socialized to believe that true athletic ability involves dedication, competitiveness, perseverance, and skill. To reduce success to innate characteristics in this case (e.g., “I was just born that way”) reduces the internality of the attribution. If athletic success is not a result of will, if it is not me who willed this success, then the success cannot be owned, it cannot be self-defining.

For people in certain sociocultural contexts, successful performance cannot be automatically internalized and assumed to reflect an individual attribute of ability. Success in a particular domain may not be internalized as self-defining if one’s group has been previously defined as unsuccessful in this domain (Eccles & Jacobs, 1986; Eccles, Wigfield, Fianagan, & Miller 1989; Wigfield, Eccles, Maclver, & Reuman, 1991). Thus, girls have been found to describe their academic success, particularly math success, as due to hard work (e.g., “I just studied extra hard”) rather than to a personal characteristic (e.g., “I am good at math”). Teachers, parents, and the students themselves are susceptible, often quite unknowingly, to the strong and coherent American stereotype of women’s inferiority in math and science. Thus a good grade in math does not have the same diagnostic value for boys and girls, and it will not contribute to their view of self in the same way. In this individualistic American culture it is assumed that each individual has certain traits, skills, and characteristics which can be maximized by hard work. Yet, lacking the trait, skill, or characteristic, “mere” hard work is not believed to be sufficient. Lacking a conceptualization of the self as “owning” the desired trait, that is, lacking a schema for the self as mathematically adept, girls may find it more difficult to persevere in math tasks and thus may, in fact, put less effort into math success. The schema of the self as trying, or as lucky cannot substitute for the culturally determined “skilled” schema.

Despite various obstacles, individuals must find ways to construct a positive sense of self (Rosenberg, 1989). One powerful strategy seems to involve a refusal to attend to negative self-relevant information or an unwillingness to construct it as relevant. Steele and his colleagues (Spencer & Steele, 1992; Steele, 1990) have labeled the process “dis-identification” and they have documented its occurrence in Black students from elementary school through college. Black students, particularly male students, very often refuse to identify with school; they do not incorporate school and learning as self-defining domains, and in this way they avoid incorporating any and all feedback from the school. School is framed as an institutionally racist system in which Blacks are bound to fail because they are devalued from the start. Dis-identification then becomes an attractive alternative. Steele (1992), in fact, argues that one’s view of self is constructed so that achievement is not a basis of self-evaluation. Students who identify with the school experience put themselves in a perilous situation. School failure suggests that one lacks ability and they also confirm stereotypes of the inferiority of one’s group.

Evidence that such dis-identification occurs can be found in studies conducted by Hare (1980, 1984, 1988) and by Hughes and Demo (1989). Hare’s studies suggest that while self-esteem for Whites, especially middle class Whites, is based on self-definition in domains of family, peers, and achievement, for Blacks and poor Whites, achievement in school is not related to self-esteem. Instead, especially for Black youth, self-esteem is heavily based on peer-based self-characterizations. Hughes and Demo review literature on Black self-esteem and self-efficacy, suggesting that, as documented in Hare’s research, for Blacks self-esteem is typically not related to school success. They found no Black-White differences on self-esteem, whether the population studied is youth or adult, but that Blacks exhibit lower efficacy scores. Further, while efficacy and esteem are positively related for Whites, they appear to be independent for Blacks. The authors conclude that although it seems to be possible to build a sense of esteem based on interpersonal relationships and not on achievements in work and school, development of self-efficacy is strongly related to occupational prestige, and academic achievement. Institutional inequality and racial devaluation have worked to make success in these domains unlikely.

Self-efficacy is usually defined as one’s sense of competence, or more generally, positive affect associated with making things happen, the pleasure of knowing that one is the cause of some effects (Bandura, 1977; Gecas, 1989). Self-efficacy has also been related to a sense of control, self-determination, and autonomy (Gecas, 1989). Although efficacy is not necessarily related to the domains of school and work, these are a dominant feature of the daily life of youth and adults in the United States. Within the American Individualistic society, rooted in Protestant work ethic, individuals are valued and value themselves to the extent that they achieve success, material, academic, professional (e.g., Giorgi & Marsh, 1990; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a; Tropman, 1992).

In current American society, valued personal attributes include independence, achievement, success, hard work, and creativity. But individuals can lay claim to
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others and the surrounding context that are emphasized. Instead of an emphasis on the head there is an emphasis on the body, and a highlighting of feelings and immediacy. Lebra's (1992) analysis is elaborate and detailed and reveals, for example, how a concern with permanence and causation will be important features of a meaning system rooted in self-objectification, whereas a concern with impermanence and co-occurrence will be highlighted in a system rooted in gaining freedom from the constraints or boundaries of an individual self.

Lebra (1992) analyzes only two ontological systems; there are obviously some number of other systems as well, and a variety of other distinctions that could be made. But the point, for our purposes here, is that virtually all of our knowledge about the self and its functioning, and for that matter, all of psychological knowledge is rooted in just one ontological system, which has a particular view of existence and of the meaning of being a self. And if the self is an interpretive, integrative, or orienting framework for individual behavior, as many models of self assume, whether you have a self based in self-objectification, or alternatively, a self rooted in freedom from self should make an important difference for how the self is structured and how it functions in the mediation and the regulation of behavior. The argument is that these systems then are not just metaphysical byproducts. Instead they comprise the framework for individual lived experience. They are different but equally viable and each one appears as right, obvious, or natural to its adherents (Shweder, 1991).

The Cartesian ontology gives rise to the Western notion of the self as an entity containing significant dispositional attributes which is detached from the social context. This view has been called the Western, separate, individualist, or independent view of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a; Oyserman, 1992; Triandis, Bontempo, & Villareal, 1985). It is characteristic of North American and European, but particularly White, urban, middle class, secularized, contemporary people. The Shinto-Buddhist ontology is associated with a very different model of the self—one that is characteristic of China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, South America, and Africa. It is typically a collectivist or interdependent view of the self. The self is viewed as interdependent with the surrounding social context, and it is the other or the self or the self-in-relation-to-other that is focal in individual experience. According to this view, people are seen as connected with others, not as separate. The individual is viewed not as an autonomous whole but as a fraction that becomes whole when in interaction with others. The cultural goal is to fit-in with others, to fulfill and create obligation, and, in general, to become part of various interpersonal relationships—to submerge the individual self and to regulate wants and needs in accordance with the wants and needs of others.

The differences these two contrasting views of the self and the nature of being make for behavior have been systematically analyzed in a number of recent papers. Markus and Kitayama (1991a) have detailed how self-relevant cognition, emotion, and motivation are markedly divergent depending on the view of self that anchors them. For example, Japanese, Korean, and Thai respondents tend to view others as better, smarter, more sociable, and more in control than the self, while the reverse tends to be true for United States respondents. In the United States, respondents tend to view the self as better than others in a variety of positively valenced domains. The tendency to believe that the self is distinctive or unique, termed a false uniqueness bias, has been documented in a variety of studies in which U.S. respondents are asked to document how much of a positive attribute they have relative to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; see, however, Suls, Marco, & Tobin, 1991; Suls & Wan, 1987; Suls, Wan, Barlow, & Heimberg, 1990; Suls, Wan, & Sanders, 1988 for a more detailed discussion of false uniqueness bias). The typical Japanese, Korean or Thai response has been termed a self-harmonizing or self-efficacy bias in which there is a tendency to overestimate rather than self-serving and to view the other as better, smarter, more sociable, or more in control than the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a). This bias is in keeping with trying to submerge the self or to find freedom from the self, just as believing one's self to be better than one's peers is in keeping with the goal of self-objectification.

Similarly, Kitayama, Markus, Kurokawa, and Negishi (1992) find that the range and intensity of emotional experience is tied to one's mediating view of self. So, for example, anger is a commonly expressed emotion in the West. Typically it is a consequence of the sense that one's rights have been abridged or one's goals have been blocked or frustrated. In an independent view of self, one's goals and rights are important defining elements, so frustration or infringement of these goals and rights must be taken seriously and will motivate action. In contrast, for those with interdependent selves, it is not internal attributes like rights and goals that are quintessentially self-defining, but instead relations with others. So feeling bad as a consequence of having one's own goals blocked or frustrated may be less likely to be internally elaborated and less likely to be expressed. Instead, emotions that are directly based on one's relations with others such as shame, friendliness, or close feelings will be those that are experienced the most frequently and given the most internal elaboration.

A review of the literature suggests that these divergent views of personhood also have consequences for interpersonal and group behavior (Oyserman, in press). Individualism and the idea of an autonomous self focuses attention on attainment of personal goals and is characterized by interactions with many others in a variety of nonpermanent or fluid ingroups (Georgas, 1989; Kagitcibasi, 1987; Triandis, 1987). Within this view, the self is viewed as the basic unit of survival, the development and maintenance of a separate personal identity is extolled, and the importance of striving for self-actualization is highlighted (Hui & Villareal, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a). Differences between the group and the individual are clearly delineated, individuals are supposed to discover and attain their own "true" selves by reflecting on and attending to themselves (Hsu, 1983). To an individualist, relationships are achieved, not
people, and the goal of constructing a sense of one's place in the social and cultural environment. Our understanding of social dynamics is informed by research that highlights the importance of cultural capital and identity formation within social groups. (Cox, 1997; Markus & Nurius, 1986) The social context, including family, friends, and community, plays a crucial role in shaping individual experiences and perceptions. (Cox, 1997) Understanding how these factors interact is essential for developing effective communication strategies and fostering positive relationships. (Cox, 1997)