

# ASPECTS OF THE SELF

# HOW WE DEVELOP OUR SELF CONCEPT

- Self concept
- Self esteem
- Self handicapping (excuses)
- Social comparison

# SELF CONCEPT DEFINED

- A person's view of what she is good at
- Where her interests lie
- Her talents and skills
- Her abilities
- Her personality--traits again
- Also includes perceptions of self as a moral actor

# SELF ESTEEM DEFINED

- A person's overall sense of self worth
- Positive or negative
- “Most of the time I feel really good about myself”
- Do you see how it is different from self concept?

# SELF HANDICAPPING

- Protecting the possibility that one's abilities are high, even when one's performance might be low
- Done for one's own self
- Done to preserve others' good opinion of me
- In advance
- After the fact (called "excuses")

# SOCIAL COMPARISON

- We learn about our own abilities from performing
- And watching the performances of others
- And comparing the two
- Correcting for background factors

# DETERMINANTS OF PERFORMANCE

- Heider,  $P=M \times A$
- Weiner, Performance is a function of internal and external, long and short term factors
- Darley and Goethals, Performance is a function of many, many things
- Linkages. This creates the possibility of self-handicapping and excuses

# FACTS ABOUT SELF ESTEEM

- For most people it is normally high
- But can be made to fluctuate down by circumstances
- Unpleasant, so we engage in self-esteem maintenance activities
- A few people have genuine, chronic, low self esteem.

# WILLIAM JAMES ON SELF ESTEEM

- Self esteem in any culture depends on doing well those things the culture values
- If I do not aspire to do well at a particular task, my self esteem is not diminished by doing poorly at it
- “One’s achievements divided by one’s pretensions”
- There is a tension between these two points

# THE DEVELOPMENTAL STORY

- To protect our self esteem
- We self handicap and make excuses
- Which eventually rule certain abilities out of our self concept
- Our task is to create a self concept out of those things we seem good at
- To protect our self esteem

# TWO WAYS TO READ THIS STORY

- The conventional way
- This is how a child's real talents become formed into a societally useful social identity
- The radical way
- This is how society tricks disadvantaged or stereotyped children into low self concepts

# LOW SELF ESTEEM

What can people with low self esteem teach us about self esteem in general?

# SELF ESTEEM

- CONSISTS OF TWO PERHAPS THREE COMPONENTS
- LIKEABLE/LOVABLE
- COMPETENT
- CANDIDATE: MORAL
- CAN BE STABLE OR VARIABLE

# THE SELF ATTRIBUTES QUESTIONNAIRE

- Intelligence
- Social skills
- Physical attractiveness
- Athletic ability
- Artistic ability

# LOW SELF ESTEEM IS NOT DEPRESSION

- Both tend to rate themselves negatively
- Low self esteem is stable, depression fluctuates
- Depression is characterized by lethargy, memory loss, physical symptoms
- Depression can be caused by depressing life events

# THERE ARE TWO SELF MOTIVES

- Self enhancement
- Self verification.
- It is by examining the reactions of low self esteem people that we can discriminate these two motives.
- Because negative information is self verifying but not enhancing for them.

# COUNTERINTUITIVELY, LOW SELF ESTEEM PEOPLE:

- Pay more attention to negative evaluations
- Remember them better
- Are more likely to have partners who confirm their self view--that is, don't think much of them.
- Change away from others who praise them
- Experience worse health after experiencing positive events.

# SUMMING UP

- The desire for a predictable, orderly, world
- Thus self verification often trumps self enhancement
- Self esteem campaigns are naive
- Low self esteem does not seem to be objectively produced.
- This latter supports the radical developmental view