

This chapter discusses self-perception and other-perception—how you see yourself, how you see others, and how you present yourself so that others see you as you want to be seen. We begin by looking at the self.

The Self in Interpersonal Communication

3.1 Define *self-concept*, *self-awareness*, and *self-esteem* and explain the ways in which you may increase self-awareness and self-esteem.

Self-concept (the way you see yourself), *self-awareness* (your insight into and knowledge about yourself), and *self-esteem* (the value you place on yourself) all figure heavily into your interpersonal interactions. These aspects of the self influence and are influenced by the way you communicate.

Self-Concept

You no doubt have an image of who you are; this is your **self-concept**. It consists of your feelings and thoughts about your strengths and weaknesses, your abilities and limitations, and your aspirations and worldview (Black, 1999). Your self-concept develops from at least four sources: (1) the image of you that others have and that they reveal to you, (2) the comparisons you make between yourself and others, (3) the teachings of your culture, and (4) the way you interpret and evaluate your own thoughts and behaviors (see Figure 3.1).

OTHERS' IMAGES OF YOU According to Charles Horton Cooley's (1922) concept of the looking-glass self, when you want to discover, say, how friendly or how assertive you are, you would look at the image of yourself that others reveal to you through the way they treat you and react to you (Hensley, 1996). You'd look especially to those who are most significant in your life. As a child, you'd look to your parents and then to your teachers. As an adult, you might look to your friends, romantic partners, and colleagues at work. If these important others think highly of you, you'll see this positive image of yourself reflected in their behaviors; if they think little of you, you'll see a more negative image.

COMPARISONS WITH OTHERS Another way you develop your self-concept is by comparing yourself with others. When you want to gain insight into who you are and how effective or competent you are, you probably look to your peers. For example, if you play on a baseball team, it's important to know your batting average in comparison with others on the team. You gain an additional perspective when you see your score in comparison to the scores of your peers. And, if you want to feel good about yourself, you might compare yourself to those you know are less effective than you (it's called *downward social comparison*), though there is value in comparing yourself to those you think are better than you (*upward social comparison*). If you want a more accurate and objective assessment, you'd compare yourself with your peers, with others who are similar to you.

Social networking sites and social media generally have provided you with the tools (all very easy to use) to compare

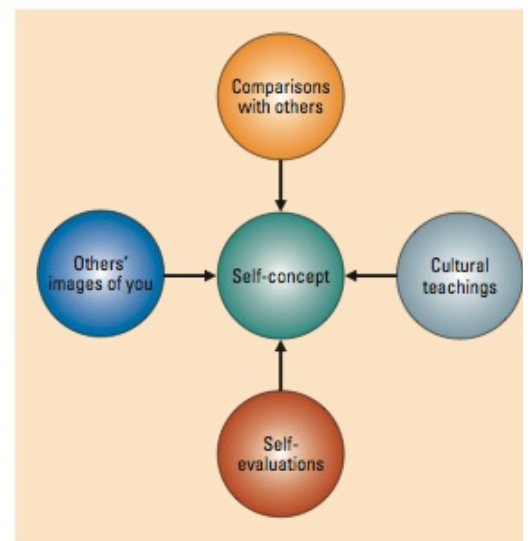


Figure 3.1 The Sources of Self-Concept

This diagram depicts the four sources of self-concept: others' images of you; comparisons with others; cultural teachings; and your own observations, interpretations, and self-evaluations. As you read about self-concept, consider the influence of each factor throughout your life. Which factor influenced you most as a preteen? Which influences you the most now? Which will influence you the most 25 or 30 years from now?