CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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By the slimmest of margins, the citizens of Quebec voted recently not to secede from Canada. Although the referendum failed, over 60% of French-speaking Quebeckers voted for separation, despite evidence that secession would bring economic, political, and social instability. What fuels such intense devotion to ethnic identity? Why would people be willing to risk so much for the chance of establishing a separate French-speaking country?

Naturally, there are many answers to these questions, including years of anger at the British stemming from the battles on the Plains of Abraham. But there is a more psychological issue involved as well. Many French Canadians are concerned that their French identity is being compromised by the dominant Anglo culture they see encroaching upon them. They want to retain their identity, even if doing so entails sacrifice and strife. In short, they want to think of themselves as French.

In a general sense, this book is concerned with understanding issues of this sort. It is concerned with understanding how people think and feel about themselves, how they want to think and feel about themselves, and how these thoughts and feelings develop and guide behavior. Questions like these are among the most interesting and important ones we can ask in our struggle to understand who we are. Questions like these form the heart of a psychological analysis of the self.

Chapter 1 is designed to acquaint you with the way psychologists study the self. In the first section of the chapter, we will define our terms and examine how the study of the self fits in with other areas of psychology.

The second section of this chapter places the study of self in an historical context. Here we will see that most American psychologists ignored the study of the self for many years. This neglect occurred because the behaviorist movement (which ruled American psychology) believed that people's thoughts and feelings about themselves were too subjective and too unimportant to study. Ultimately, various developments led psychologists to reconsider their opposition to the study of the self, and the self returned as an important topic of psychological inquiry.

The final section of this chapter previews the rest of this book, highlighting the many areas of psychology that now include a consideration of the self. Of course, psychologists are not the only ones who study the self. Philosophers, theologians, cultural anthropologists, and sociologists also consider such matters. Poets and novelists, too, explore the essence of selfhood, and numerous works on the topic can be found in libraries and bookstores. Although we will draw on many of these perspectives throughout this book, our emphasis will be on theoretically derived and empirically tested ideas regarding the nature of the self. Particular attention will be paid to the work of personality and social psychologists, as these researchers have actively studied the self in recent years.

I. What Psychologists Mean by Self

> ... self-awareness is ... most illusive. You ... find yourself as between the two mirrors of a barber-shop, with each image viewing each other one, so that as the self takes a look at itself taking a look at itself, it soon gets all confused as to the self that is doing the looking and the self which is being looked at. (Hilgard, 1949, p. 377)

A. *The I and the ME*

We'll begin by noting that the self has a unique quality, a quality we will refer to as a reflexive property. Consider the statement "I see Pat." The self is implicated in this statement by the use of the personal pronoun I. I am doing the seeing. Now consider the statement "I see me." Here, the self is implicated in two ways. I am still the one doing the seeing, and the thing I am seeing is ME. In more formal terms, we can say that people are able to take themselves as an object of their own attention. They look back on themselves, much as when they see their reflection in a mirror (hence the use of the word reflexive).

William James (1890) was one of the first psychologists to recognize this duality. He recommended using different terms, the I and the ME, as a means of distinguishing between these two aspects of the self. Following his suggestion, we will use the term I to refer to that aspect of self that is actively perceiving, thinking, or in our example above, seeing. We will use the term ME to refer to that aspect of self that is an object of our attention, thought, or perception. When I say "I see Pat," only the I is implicated. When I say "I see me," both uses of the term are implicated. I am doing the seeing, and what I see is me.

Defined in this manner, it might seem as if the I is synonymous with all basic psychological processes (e.g., perception, sensation, thought). This is not really so. It is not these processes, per se, but our subjective awareness of them that comprises the I. The I refers to our awareness that we are thinking or our awareness that we are perceiving, rather than to the physical or psychical processes themselves.

The ME is also very much a subjective, psychological phenomenon. As we use the term, the ME refers to people's ideas about who they are and what they are like. For example, I think I am athletic and I think I am impatient. Psychologists call these beliefs self-referent thoughts. Self-referent thoughts are simply thoughts that refer to oneself. They are people's ideas about what they are like. A variety of terms have been used to refer to these beliefs, including self-views, self-images, identities, and self-conceptions. For our purposes, these terms are interchangeable; they all refer to people's ideas about who they are or what they are like.

In addition to having thoughts about themselves, people also have feelings toward themselves. I may like myself as a person or feel bad about my perceived impatience. These are both examples of self-referent feelings—feelings that refer to oneself.

Psychologists generally use different terms to refer to these two aspects of

the ME. The term self-concept refers to the way people characteristically think about themselves; the term self-esteem refers to the way people characteristically feel about themselves. The term self is used more broadly. It refers not only to how we think and feel about ourselves, but also to processes we earlier identified as being aspects of the I (e.g., our awareness of our thinking and perceiving).

Although the I and the ME are both important aspects of the self, psychologists are most concerned with understanding the nature of the ME. They focus on how people think and feel about themselves, and how these thoughts and feelings develop and affect other aspects of psychological life. Philosophers, on the other hand, tend to be more concerned with understanding the nature of the I. They have sought to understand that aspect of self that seems to directly experience the world. We will have an opportunity to consider both approaches in this book, but we will devote most of our attention to understanding the nature of the ME.

B. *Self-Psychology and Personality*

A focus on the way people think and feel about themselves distinguishes self-psychology from other areas of psychology. One of these areas is personality psychology. Self-psychology is concerned with subjective experience (with what people think they are like); personality psychology is more concerned with objective experience (with what people are actually like).

To illustrate this distinction, let's reconsider my belief that I'm athletic. This is a self-referent thought—a belief I hold about what I am like. Whether or not I am athletic is an entirely different matter. Unfortunately, thinking I'm athletic doesn't necessarily make it so. If you saw me on a tennis court, you might not agree. The larger point here is that self-psychology is concerned with our picture of the self—our ideas about what we are like (Rosenberg, 1979). But our pictures may not be entirely accurate; they may not capture what we are really like.

In this book, we will think of personality psychology as the study of what people are actually like. Rather than focusing on people's ideas about themselves—which is the domain of self-psychology—personality psychology is concerned with what people are really like. It would not be uncommon, for example, to hear someone say "Jack is an extrovert" or "Jill is conscientious." These phrases suggest that we are referring to what the person is truly like, not simply to what the person thinks he or she is like.

Having said this, it should be noted that the distinction between self-psychology and personality psychology blurs. There are at least four reasons for this (McCrae & Costa, 1988).

1. *What We Really are Influences How We* Think *About Ourselves*

First, aspects of personality affect our thoughts about ourselves. In theory, people are free to think whatever they want about themselves. But in reality, people's ideas about what they are like are usually at least loosely tied to objective criteria. People with low intelligence—a personality characteristic—are unlikely to regard themselves as brilliant. It can happen, but it's unlikely. Similarly, people

who are seven feet tall are unlikely to think of themselves as short. Again, it can happen, but it's unlikely. These examples show that although no one is born with a conception of the self as unintelligent or tall, people are born with certain physical and psychological characteristics that influence how they think about themselves.

This is not to say that our thoughts about ourselves are identical with what we are actually like. All of us know people who think they are smarter than they are (or at least smarter than we think they are). We've also met people who strike us as obnoxious yet regard themselves as the greatest thing since sliced bread. Throughout this book we will see that although people's views of themselves are influenced by what they are really like, they are not faithful representations of their true characteristics. Most people think of themselves in overly positive terms—as somewhat better than what they are really like.

2. *What We Really are Influences How We* Feel *About Ourselves*

Another way in which self-psychology and personality are related is that personality affects how we feel about ourselves. Some important aspects of personality are inherited. For example, temperament refers to a person's general activity level and usual mood. This is an inheritable characteristic: From the moment they are born, some infants are more emotionally distressed than are other infants (Kagan, 1989). This personality variable influences self-esteem. People who are prone to experience negative emotions tend to feel more negatively about themselves (Watson & Clark, 1984). After all, it's hard to feel good about yourself when you're agitated or sad all the time. In this manner, a personality variable, temperament, can influence self-esteem.

3. *Self Is One Aspect of Personality*

A third intersection between self-psychology and personality is that people's thoughts and feelings about themselves are one aspect of their personality. For example, some people think of themselves as attractive; other people think of themselves as unattractive. Although these thoughts don't tell us whether these people really are attractive or not, it is still the case that the people differ with respect to what they think they are like. These individual differences can be treated as personality variables.

We can also distinguish people according to how they feel about themselves. This is self-esteem research. Self-esteem research divides people into two categories: Those who feel good about themselves are designated as having high self-esteem; those who do not feel as good about themselves are designated as having low self-esteem. In this manner, individual differences in how people feel about themselves are treated as personality variables.

When we treat self-referent thoughts and feelings as individual difference variables, we are treating the self as one aspect of personality. In this sense, personality is a broader term that refers to the entire psychological nature of the individual (McCrae & Costa, 1988). Self-referent thoughts and feelings are a subset of personality.

4. *Self-Report is Often Used to Measure Personality*

A fourth way in which self-psychology and personality are related is that personality researchers often use self-report to assess personality. Many personality tests ask people to indicate what they think they are like. For example, a test of extraversion might ask people "How sociable are you?" or "How shy are you?" Strictly speaking, tests like these are measuring people's ideas about what they are like, not what they are actually like.

To summarize, self-psychology and personality represent distinct, though related approaches. Self-psychology is concerned with what people think they are like; personality psychology is concerned with what people are really or actually like. But the line between these two perspectives is often blurred.

When comparing self-psychology and personality, then, the question is really one of emphasis. Self-theorists believe that the psychological action resides at the level of the self, particularly when it comes to predicting freely-chosen behavior. The individual who thinks she has a great wit and a keen sense of humor will be the one at the party telling story after story; this will be the case even though others may not be the least bit enamored with her repartee. As another example, consider the bright individual who, for whatever reason, doubts his ability. Despite the fact that the person is smart by some objective criteria, he may fail to excel in school because of the self-defeating belief that he lacks ability. The larger point is that people's beliefs about themselves sometimes clash with what they are really like. When this occurs, self-theorists believe that people's thoughts and feelings about themselves determine their behavior.

C. *Self-Psychology and Phenomenology*

In addition to considering the overlap between self-psychology and personality psychology, we can also examine the relation between self-psychology and a philosophical school of thought known as phenomenology (Schutz, 1972). The word phenomenology has its origins in the Greek word phainesthai, which means 'to appear so' (Burns, 1979). Phenomenology is concerned with people's perception of reality, with the way the world appears to the individual. Phenomenology holds that it is these subjective perceptions, rather than the objective world itself, that govern our psychological lives.

The phenomenological approach is represented within Gestalt theories of perception. The Gestalt psychologists argued that the psychological world of the individual is not the same as the physical world (Wertheimer, 1912). To illustrate this point, let's examine an optical illusion you've probably seen before. Consider the two lines shown in Figure 1.1. Which is longer?

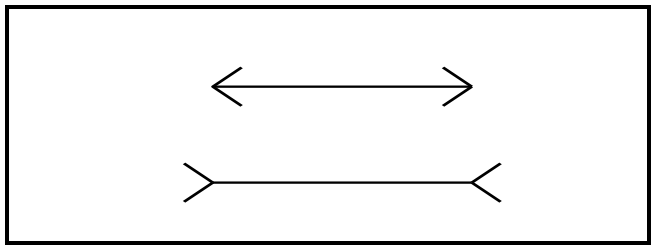

Figure 1.1. Mueller-Lyer Illusion.

In actuality, the lines are the same length. But the second line appears longer. Now imagine that these are two chocolate bars and you ask children which one they prefer. The chances are good that even though the two lines are the same, the children will prefer the line that appears longer. What if the two lines are lines of broccoli? Now which one will most children prefer?

This is what phenomenology is all about. It says two things: (a) what we perceive is not necessarily the same as what exists in the external world and (b) our behavior depends more on the world as it appears than on the world as it actually exists. Kurt Lewin, an influential motivational and social psychologist, framed the issue as follows:

> If an individual sits in a room trusting that the ceiling will not come down, should only his 'subjective probability' be taken into account for predicting behavior or should we also consider the 'objective probability' of the ceiling's coming down as determined by the engineers? To my mind, only the first has to be taken into account. (Lewin, 1951, p. 58)

Lewin's point is not that the objective world is unimportant. The objective world is important, but only insofar as it influences people's subjective perceptions. This is the essence of the phenomenological perspective. Phenomenologists emphasize that behavior depends on the perceived world—the world as it appears, rather than the world as it actually is.

An emphasis on how things seem rather than on what they are is reminiscent of the distinction we have drawn between self-psychology and personality. Self-psychology is phenomenological. It is concerned with people's perceptions or beliefs about what they are like, more than with what they are actually like. For the self-theorist, behavior often depends more on your beliefs about yourself than on what you are really like.

As a final, albeit extreme, illustration of this point, consider anorexia. The anorexic believes she is overweight and starves herself in an effort to lose weight. Even though by objective criteria she is thin, she acts as if she is fat because that's how she sees herself.

II. The Study of Self in American Psychology

> One of the oddest events in the history of modern psychology is the manner in which the ego (or self) became sidetracked and lost to view. (Allport, 1943, p. 451)

Considering how important people's thoughts and feelings about themselves are in psychological life, you might think that the field of psychology has always been interested in the self. This is not so. Although William James gave the topic extended treatment in a landmark textbook written at the end of the nineteenth century (James, 1890), most American psychologists completely ignored the study of self during psychology's formative years. Only in the second half of this century has the self been restored to legitimacy as an object of scientific and psychological inquiry.

A. *The Behaviorist Movement in American Psychology*

To understand this state of affairs, we need to become familiar with the behaviorist movement in American psychology. For nearly 40 years (roughly 1915-1955), American psychology was ruled by behaviorism. The movement was founded by the American psychologist John Watson. Watson (1913) had become dissatisfied with the subjective nature of turn-of-the century American psychology. Introspectionism was the dominant school of psychology at that time. The hallmark of the introspectionist movement was a systematic analysis of consciousness. The introspectionists would expose individuals to various stimuli (e.g., beeswax) and have them describe, in as small detail as possible, their subjective experience. The introspectionists would then take these reports and attempt to distill the basic elements of sensation. For example, Wundt, a founder of the introspectionist movement, concluded on the basis of his research that there were four elementary taste sensations: sweet, sour, bitter, and salty. All other tastes were regarded as combinations of these. In a similar manner, four elementary skin sensations were discovered: warmth, cold, pain, and pressure. All other sensations of touch were regarded as blends of these four (Woodworth, 1948).

Watson objected to this emphasis on private, subjective perception. He noted that people disagree on what they see, hear, smell, taste, and feel, and there is no way to resolve these disagreements. Watson argued that in order for psychology to take its place as an independent science, it must abandon the study of private, mental phenomena and focus instead on the study of overt behavior. Writing with the conviction of a zealot, Watson (1913) spelled out his vision of psychology:

> Psychology, as the behaviorist views it, (a) is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science; (b) its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior; (c) introspection forms no essential part of its methods; and (d) it recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. (Watson, 1913, p. 158)

1. *Behaviorism's Two Central Assumptions: Positivism and Mechanism*

Ultimately, the behaviorist movement received its most influential and articulate treatment from two other American psychologists, B. F. Skinner and Clark

Hull. The behaviorism of these psychologists was guided by two central assumptions. The first assumption is known as the doctrine of positivism. This is a methodological doctrine that maintains that only phenomena that can be concretely measured and verified by impartial observers are suitable for scientific analysis. The term comes from Auguste Comte (1798-1857). For Comte, positive meant observable and undebatable, not inferential or speculative (Boring, 1957).

The behaviorist movement also adopted the doctrine of mechanism. Mechanism is an assumption about the nature of psychological life. It asserts that thoughts play no role in directing behavior. Instead, behavior is assumed to be the function of simple stimulus-response bonds. To illustrate, we might train a pigeon to peck at a particular pattern by giving the pigeon food whenever it pecks in the presence of the pattern. Over time, the pigeon comes to emit the behavior with greater and greater frequency when the stimulus is presented. According to the behaviorist, this occurs because the food (the reinforcer) strengthens the associative bonds between the pattern (the stimulus) and the pecking behavior (the response).

Mechanists view the relation between stimuli and responses as direct and immediate. Mental processes, except those pertaining to noticing or registering the stimulus itself, are regarded as entirely superfluous to understanding behavior. Another way of saying this is that these theorists believe behavior can be fully understood without considering mental processes. Pigeons (and people) behave as they do simply because certain responses have become attached or conditioned to certain environmental stimuli.

2. *Positivism, Mechanism, and Self-Psychology*

The positivistic and mechanistic leanings of the behaviorist movement led its advocates to disregard the study of the self. Let's look first at how the doctrine of positivism fits with the study of self. As applied to psychology, positivism holds that only concrete phenomena that can be objectively verified are admissible for psychological study. This rules out the self. The self cannot be directly observed; it is not a physical entity like an arm or a leg or a brain. It is by definition mental, and its measurement is inherently subjective. Subjectivity was anathema to the positivists. Anything that did not have a physical basis was not to be studied. This excluded the self; it also excluded the study of emotions, fantasies, dreams, and other important psychological phenomena.

The second problem the behaviorists had with the study of the self was even more fundamental than the measurement issue. This issue pertained to the explanatory value of the self. The behaviorist argued that even if the self could be objectively measured, it would be of only limited value to psychology. This is because the behaviorists were mechanists; they believed that environmental stimuli directly evoke behavioral responses. Intervening mental processes, like people's thoughts about themselves, were regarded as unnecessary to predict and understand behavior.

This is not to say that these thoughts didn't occur. As people, behaviorists

realized they had thoughts (and feelings) about themselves. But they did not believe these thoughts and feelings influenced their behavior. They regarded these thoughts and feelings as epiphenomenal (epiphenomenal means "above the phenomena," or not directly part of the phenomena). From this perspective, even if we could objectively assess people's thoughts and feelings about themselves, there wouldn't be any point in doing so. It would not improve our understanding or prediction of behavior.

The doctrine of mechanism contrasts most sharply with what is known as a purposive or goal-directed analysis of behavior. According to a purposive model, behaviors are undertaken in order to achieve some goal (that is, they are undertaken for a purpose). An organism wants some object or endstate and takes steps to secure or attain it. This emphasis on goal-directed (or purposive) behavior is completely absent in mechanistic accounts of behavior.

To illustrate these differences, consider a person who thinks, "I'm hungry. I want something to eat," and then walks to the refrigerator and takes out some food. A purposive analysis of behavior would maintain that the thoughts "I'm hungry" and "I want something to eat" led the person to walk toward the refrigerator to get food. The behaviorists would disagree. They would contend that these thoughts did not initiate the behavior (i.e., that the thoughts were epiphenomenal). The person walked to the refrigerator simply because that is where the person has found food when hunger arose in the past.

3. *Mechanism and Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection*

Mechanism closely parallels Darwin's theory of natural selection. The process of natural selection is not a purposive one. Random variations occur among individual members of species. Some of these variations prove adaptive: They help the organism to survive and reproduce, and so they are selected for and endure. Thus, although natural selection is an active process, it is not one that is goal directed. The amphibians didn't think, "Gee, if only I could figure out how to lay eggs on land, I could become a reptile!" Instead, through random variation, some amphibians laid eggs with tougher shells. As the earth gradually warmed and became drier, these eggs had a selective advantage. Ultimately, these animals evolved into reptiles. The entire process is one of blind chance, not purposive. In the words of Solomon Asch (1952) "natural selection ... produces without purpose the same result that would have been produced had a purposive agent been at work" (p. 97).

The mechanistic view of behavior is very similar to the process of natural selection (Skinner, 1990). Just as the theory of natural selection maintains that physical characteristics are shaped by their adaptive consequences, mechanism holds that behavior is shaped by its adaptive consequences. Behaviors that meet with reinforcement are strengthened or repeated; those that do not meet with reinforcement are weakened and extinguished. Just as laying eggs on land might prove adaptive, be selected for, and endure, so, too, do some behaviors prove adaptive and come to be part of the animals' repertoire.

Mechanism and Thorndike's Law of Effect. The application of this principle in psychology is best illustrated in Thorndike's (1911) analysis of instrumental learning. Working in the basement of William James's house, Thorndike placed various animals, usually cats or chicks, in an enclosed box. Food was placed outside the box. When the animal made a response that Thorndike had arbitrarily designated to be the correct one, the animal was allowed to escape the box and consume the food.

At first, Thorndike notes, the animal engages in relatively random behavior (these random movements are conceptually akin to the random mutations or variations that occur within members of species). At some point, the animal happens to make the response arbitrarily chosen by Thorndike to be the correct one. The door to the puzzle box is then opened and the animal is allowed to leave the box and consume the food. When the animal is later returned to the box, it tends to emit the correct response sooner than in the initial trial. After many such trials, the animal comes to emit the response immediately upon being placed in the box.

The behaviorist analyzes this behavior in terms of stimulus-response bonds. The reinforcing properties of the food cause the behavior (the response) to become associated with or attached to the puzzle box (the stimulus). When the animal is returned to the box, it emits whatever behavior has been most closely associated with the cues in the environment. In this case, this response is the one Thorndike had earlier labeled as the correct response.

It is important to note that, according to the behaviorist, the animal never makes the correct movements in order to get out of the box or in order to get the food. That would be too goal oriented or purposive. Instead, the animal makes the correct response simply because that behavior, more than all others, has come to be most firmly connected to the stimuli in the box via the reinforcing properties of the food. Thorndike (1911) described the process this way:

> The process involved in the learning was evidently a process of selection. The animal is confronted by a state of affairs or, as we may call it, a 'situation'. He reacts in the way that he is moved by innate nature or previous training to do, by a number of acts. These acts include the particular act that is appropriate and he succeeds. In later trials the impulse to this one act is more and more stamped in. ... The profitless acts are stamped out. ... So the animal finally performs in that situation only the fitting act. Here we have the simplest and at the same time the most widespread sort of intellect or learning in the world. There is no reasoning, no process of inference or comparison; there is no thinking about things, no putting two and two together; there are no ideas—the animal does not think of the box or of the food or of the act he is to perform. (Thorndike, 1991, pp. 283-284)

Formally, this process of learning is known as the law of effect. According to the Law of Effect, behavior is ruled by the past—the effect it has had or the reinforcement it has met with in the past. It is not governed or even influenced by

what is expected to happen in the future. That is why this is a nonpurposive view of behavior.

The behaviorists applied these principles to a wide range of behaviors, extending far beyond relatively simple acts like escaping a puzzle box. Through processes of association, stimulus-response bonds were presumed to govern very complex behaviors. By way of example, imagine a person is just about to graduate high school and thinks to herself, "I think it's important to be an educated person." She then sends out applications for admission to college. According to the behaviorist, her decision to attend college has nothing whatsoever to do with her beliefs about the person she wants to be, or even her ideas about the importance of a college education. She undertakes the behavior simply because she has been reinforced for this (or other highly similar) behaviors in the past. Her behavior is merely a learned response to a stimulus; her beliefs about herself, entirely epiphenomenal.

It is important to fully appreciate the impact these assumptions hold for a psychology of the self. Mechanism represents a far more fundamental aspect of behaviorism than does positivism. It argues that even if thoughts could be adequately measured, even if we could develop methodologies that would allow us to quantify mental experience in such a way that objective observers could agree on what is occurring, in short, even if thoughts could be admissible as scientific constructs, nothing important would be gained. Thoughts do not influence behavior, so they are superfluous. These assumptions ruled American psychology for more than half a century and led American psychologists to treat the self as a persona non grata.

> In face-to-face contact with another person, references to an initiating self are unavoidable. There is a 'you' and there is an 'I.' I see what 'you' do and hear what 'you' say and you see what 'I' do and hear what 'I' say. We do not see the histories of selection responsible for what is done and therefore infer an internal origination, but the successful use of vernacular in the practice of psychology offers no support for its use in a science. In a scientific analysis, histories of variation and selection play the role of the initiator. There is no place in a scientific analysis of behavior for a mind or self. (Skinner, 1990, p. 1209)

B. *The Decline of Behaviorism and The Return of The Self*

1. *Theorists Who Kept The Study of Self Alive*

Despite behaviorism's dominance, not all theorists ignored the self during the first half of the twentieth century. Two American sociologists, Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934), undertook theoretical analyses of the self, including the important role it plays in the socialization process. We will cover their theories in Chapters 3 and 4.

Other psychologists, operating somewhat out of the orthodoxy of academic psychology, also retained an interest in the self. Some (e.g., Allport, 1943; Goldstein, 1940; Lecky, 1945; Rogers, 1951; Snygg & Combs, 1949) objected to the passive and

disjointed portrait behaviorism painted of the individual. They argued that human behavior is not mechanically driven by the past but is actively oriented toward the future. People seek growth and challenge; their psychological lives exhibit activity and coherence and are governed by a unifying principle. They referred to this principle as self-actualization—a desire for a person to "become everything that one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1970, p. 46).

Self-relevant phenomena were also studied by a group of clinical psychologists. These theorists (e.g., Erikson, 1956; Sullivan, 1953) had become disenchanted with their training in psychoanalytic (Freudian) theory. Classical Freudian theory gave only passing attention to the self. Although the term ego is often used interchangeably with the self, this is not really warranted. For Freud, the ego consists of a set of mental processes (e.g., thinking, remembering, reasoning) that function to mediate between the inexorable demands of the id and the uncompromising rectitude of the superego (Symonds, 1951). People's thoughts and feelings about themselves are only one aspect of the ego.

Ego processes did, however, play a role in the study of self. Their entry occurred with respect to the so-called ego-defense mechanisms or mechanisms of defense. Freud and his followers identified a set of psychological processes (e.g., rationalization, projection, identification, reaction formation) that function to insulate the individual from psychological pain. Often times, these processes shield people from acknowledging unflattering truth about themselves. For example, people use rationalization to avoid thinking of themselves as someone who behaved in a negative manner or brought about a negative outcome. The use of this mechanism implies a self-image one is attempting to defend or protect (Hilgard, 1949).

2. *Experimental Findings*

In addition to these theoretical statements, several experimental findings highlighted the important role of mental processes, including ones that implicated the self. The most notable of these for our purposes was research on level of aspiration. This work was carried out by Kurt Lewin and his colleagues during the 1940s (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, & Sears, 1944). Level of aspiration refers to a standard of performance people set for themselves when undertaking an achievement-oriented activity.

A ring toss provides a suitable example. Imagine that you are a participant in a typical experiment. Your task is to toss a ring over a peg. You are first given 10 practice trials to familiarize yourself with the task. Afterward, you are asked to indicate how many of the 10 rings you think will throw over the peg on the next block of trials. You also decide how far away to stand from the peg; the farther the distance, the greater the difficulty. These judgments comprise your level of aspiration. This procedure is repeated after each block of 10 trials, allowing you to periodically adjust your aspiration level.

Imagine that on the first trial you anticipate tossing six rings over the peg from a distance of three feet. And in fact, that's just what you do. Now what will you

do? If you are like most people, you will raise your aspiration level by making the game more difficult for yourself, either by increasing the number of tosses you expect to make ("this time I'll try for seven") or by moving back a step or two.

This sort of behavior is difficult to explain with reference only to mechanistic principles. Application of the law of effect suggests that you should merely repeat your prior performance; it has met with success (i.e., has been reinforced), so it should be repeated. Yet most people are not content to simply repeat their prior performance. Instead, they make the task increasingly more difficult for themselves until they reach a distance that is just far enough away to make the game challenging but not so far away as to make it impossible. The tendency for people to avoid repeating behaviors that have met with prior reinforcement runs counter to the law of effect and is therefore inconsistent with a mechanistic analysis of behavior. It suggests instead that people's behavior is purposive, guided by a desire to think favorably about their abilities and to experience feelings of pride.

> The law of effect would be truer if it held that a person, being rewarded, employs his past successes in whatever way he thinks is likely to bring him satisfaction in the future. ... An individual's past performances often mean little or nothing to him. Only if the [self] would be served thereby, does he engage in a repetition of the successful act. (Allport, 1943, p. 468)

These and other findings led Allport (1943) to propose that there were two motivational systems. One, passively ruled by habit, instinct, and reflex; the other, actively guided by purpose, foresight, and volition.

> ... [self]-involvement, or its absence, makes a critical difference in human behavior. When a person reacts in a neutral, impersonal, routine atmosphere, his behavior is one thing. But when he is behaving personally, perhaps excitedly, seriously committed to a task, he behaves quite differently. In the first condition his [self] is not engaged; in the second condition it is (Allport, 1943, p. 122).

C. *The Cognitive Revolution and the Study of Self*

Twenty years after Allport offered his analysis, the grip of the behaviorist movement began to loosen. A new movement, known as the cognitive revolution, arose to take its place. The cognitive movement is diverse and has influenced every area of psychology. Its central assumption is that people (as well as lower animals) are not passive creatures who blindly respond to environmental stimuli. Instead, they are active organisms, capable of planning and initiating behaviors in order to achieve desired endstates. The emphasis is not solely on the past, as it is with behaviorism; it is on the present and the future.

The cognitive movement pays close attention to the internal, mental processes of the behaving organism. For this reason, it is quite compatible with the study of self. Self-relevant thoughts and feelings are one class of internal, mental processes that are relevant to a psychological analysis of behavior.

A willingness to treat the self as a legitimate topic of study led theorists to

identify various functions of the self. Although there is not perfect agreement on the matter, six important functions of the self have been discussed. Three of these functions refer to an awareness of our own existence (i.e., the I); the other three refer to our ideas about what we are like (i.e., the ME).

1. *The Functions of the* I

First, our concept of self serves to differentiate or distinguish us from other objects and people. When we hit the table with a hammer we feel no pain; when we hit our thumb with a hammer it is quite a different matter. This distinction is an important one to master! As we will see in Chapter 4, making this distinction is a first step in forming a concept of self.

A concept of self also serves a motivational or volitional function. The realization that one is separate from other things and people is accompanied by the realization that one has control over some things but not others. We realize that we can't will the table to get up and move, but we can will ourselves to get up and move. Understanding what we can control and what we can't control is another important developmental milestone we will discuss in Chapter 4.

Finally, a concept of self also provides us with a sense of continuity and unity. I know I am the same person who sat here a few days ago because I possess a concept of self. Without such a concept, I would experience myself anew each day. I would awaken and ask myself: "Who is this guy?" In a similar vein, our concept of self provides unity to our psychological life. We perceive our various thoughts and perceptions as joined rather than fragmented. It is our sense of self that ties these experiences together. We will consider this function of the I at length in Chapter 2.

2. *The Functions of the* ME

In addition to considering three functions of the I, we can also consider three functions of the ME. Here we are referring to people's ideas about what they are like.

First, people's thoughts about themselves serve an important cognitive function (Epstein, 1973; Kelly, 1963; Markus, 1977). They influence the way people process and interpret information. For example, people are especially apt to notice information that fits the way they think about themselves, and to process this information rapidly and efficiently (Markus, 1977). People also show better memory for information they relate to themselves (Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977), particularly information that matches the way they characteristically think about themselves (Markus, 1977).

Second, people's ideas about themselves guide their behavior. A person who thinks of herself as artistic engages in artistic pursuits; a person who regards herself as stylish wears the latest fashions. In more general terms, we can say that many of the activities people pursue and the lifestyle decisions they make are affected by what they think about themselves (Niedenthal, Cantor, & Kihlstrom, 1985; Snyder, 1979; Swann, 1990).

Finally, self-conceptions serve a motivational function. Because people can

project their identities across time, into the future, they can strive to think of themselves as becoming a certain person (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). A student can enroll in graduate school with an eye toward becoming a professor. If the student didn't possess a concept of self, she wouldn't possess a concept of "me as a professor."

III. Overview of Text

Self-relevant phenomena are currently implicated in virtually all areas of psychology; they are also of interest to sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers as well. Take a moment to skim the chapters in this book, and you will see what I mean.

A. *Chapter Previews*

In Chapter 2 we examine the nature of the self. Here we will be concerned with understanding what people think of when they think of ME. In exploring this issue, we will draw on many areas of psychology (e.g., cognitive, social), as well as on the fields of sociology. We will also consider the nature of the I in the context of an ancient philosophical problem known as the problem of personal identity.

In Chapter 3 we explore how the self develops. The questions we will pose here include: How do people come to develop a conception of themselves, and how do people's thoughts about themselves change over time? Our discussion here draws on the fields of developmental psychology, sociology, and social psychology.

In Chapter 4 we will consider how people come to know who they are and what they are like. Many forces shape the acquisition of self-knowledge, including a desire to know what we are really like, a desire to feel good about who we are, and a need to maintain consistent and stable views of ourselves. Our discussion here will draw most heavily on research in contemporary social psychology and personality.

In Chapter 5 we will examine the self from a cognitive perspective. Here we will examine (a) how self-knowledge is represented in memory; (b) what factors determine which of our many self-views is active at any given time; and (c) how self-knowledge influences the way people process information.

In Chapter 6 we will approach the self from the perspective of motivational psychology. Here we will explore how self-relevant processes initiate and guide behavior. We will also examine how self-relevant processes can sometimes interfere with effective behavioral regulation.

In Chapter 7 we will investigate the self from a social psychological perspective. Here we will ask: How do people present themselves to others, and what effect do these presentations have on people's private thoughts and feelings?

Chapter 8 examines the self from the perspective of personality psychology. Our focus here will be on understanding the nature and functions of self-esteem. We will ask: What is the essence of self-esteem? How does it develop? What consequences does self-esteem have for psychological life?

In Chapter 9 we focus on clinical psychology, exploring the role self-relevant processes play in depression. We will examine how people think and feel about themselves when they are depressed and explore how self-relevant processes affect the development of depression and recovery from depression.

In Chapter 10 we will consider the relation between self-relevant processes and psychological and physical health. A key issue here will be the question of whether it's best to know what we are really like, or whether we are better served by thinking of ourselves in ways that are a bit better than what we are really like.

B. *What Won't Be Covered*

The preceding section previewed some of the many issues we will be covering in this book. I want to conclude this chapter by noting what won't be covered in this text. First, we will not study the self from a spiritual or mystical perspective. Many religions, particularly Eastern religions, emphasize self-awareness or the need get outside of the self. These perspectives lie beyond the scope of contemporary psychology. This doesn't mean that they are unimportant, only that they are not part of the psychology of the self.

Our analysis will also focus on modern approaches to understanding the self, as viewed through the lens of a Western cultural background. People's ideas about themselves very much depend on when they are born and where they live. These ideas have changed enormously over the centuries, ranging from a concern with the supernatural to a preoccupation with distinctive psychological qualities (Baumeister, 1986; Cushman, 1990; Gergen, 1985; Sampson, 1985). Our review will emphasize the way people think about themselves in modern times. We will also concentrate on a view of the self that dominates in contemporary Western cultures, although we will have occasion to document cross-cultural differences when data permit.

IV. Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced you to a psychological analysis of the self. We began by distinguishing two ways in which the term self is used (the I and the ME). We then examined the fit between self-psychology and personality psychology, and the overlap between self-psychology and the phenomenological perspective.

Following this, we placed the study of self in an historical context. Behaviorism was the dominant movement during psychology's formative years. It was governed by two assumptions (positivism and mechanism) that led psychologists to ignore the study of the self for nearly 50 years. Ultimately, the behaviorist movement waned and the self was restored to legitimacy within the field of psychology, with virtually all areas of psychology currently interested in self-relevant phenomena.

We ended the chapter by indicating what the book will cover and by noting several topics that will be omitted.

- This book presents a psychological analysis of the self. Psychologists study how

people think and feel about themselves, how they want to think and feel about themselves, and how these thoughts and feelings develop and guide behavior.

- The self is comprised of two, correlated, aspects: The I and the ME. The I refers to that aspect of self that is actively experiencing the world (e.g., perceiving, thinking, or feeling). The ME refers to that aspect of self that is an object of our attention, thought, or perception. The I is implicated in (virtually) everything we do; it is nearly always present in consciousness. The ME is not always part of our experience; we very often take other people and things as the object of our attention.
- The term self-concept refers to the way people characteristically think about themselves; the term self-esteem refers to the way people characteristically feel about themselves.
- Self-psychology is concerned with subjective experience (with what people think they are like); personality psychology is more concerned with objective experience (with what people are actually like). Despite these differences, self-psychology and personality share many similarities. This occurs because what people are really like influences how they think and feel about themselves, and because people's thoughts and feelings about themselves represent one aspect of their personality.
- Phenomenology is a school of thought that emphasizes that behavior is guided by the world "as it appears," rather than by the world "as it really is." Self-psychology is phenomenological. It emphasizes that behavior is often guided by people's ideas about what they are like, rather than by what they are really like. Anorexia provides a dramatic example. Although the anorexic is actually thin, she perceives herself as being overweight and starves herself in an attempt to lose weight.
- The self was an important part of American psychology in the late nineteenth century, but the rise of the behaviorist movement in the early part of the twentieth century led most psychologists to ignore the self. The behaviorist movement was guided by two central assumptions: positivism and mechanism. Positivism is a methodological doctrine that holds that only concrete phenomena that can be objectively measured by neutral observers are suitable for scientific study. This emphasis on objectivity excluded the study of the self, as the self is inherently a subjective, psychological phenomenon. Mechanism is a doctrine about the nature of psychological life. It holds that thoughts play no role whatsoever in guiding behavior. This assumption also excluded the study of the self, as it maintained that people's thoughts and feelings about themselves play no role in guiding their behavior.
- The mechanistic position of the behaviorist movement contrasts most sharply with a purposive or goal-directed analysis of behavior. According to a purposive model, behaviors are undertaken for a purpose. An organism wants or desires some object or endstate and takes steps to secure it. This emphasis on goal-directed behavior or purposive behavior is absent in mechanistic

accounts of behavior.

- Not all theorists ignored the self during the era when behaviorism reigned. Sociologists and numerous clinical psychologists maintained that people's self-referent thoughts and feelings were an important topic for psychological study. Several experimental findings also cast doubt on a strictly mechanistic analysis of behavior. These developments allowed the self to be restored as a legitimate topic of psychological study.
- Several functions of the self were identified. The I refers to our awareness that we are a distinct and unified entity, continuous over time, and capable of willful action. The ME influences the processing of information, and guides present and future behavior.

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