Self-esteem. The puzzle of low self-regard (pp 131–145). New York Plenum

Heatherton, T. F , & Vohs, K. D (2000). Interpersonal evaluations following threats to self. Role of self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78,* 725–736

Leary, M R., Tambor, E S , Terdal, S K , & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor The sociometer hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68,* 518–530

Maslow, A. (1968) *Toward a psychology of being.* New York. Van Nostrand

Rogers, C R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy.* Boston Houghton Mifflin

Sedikides, C & Skowronski, J. J. (1997). The symbolic self in evolutionary context. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 1,* 80–102.

Tooby, J , & Cosmides, L. (1990). On the universality of human nature and the uniqueness of the individual: The role of genetics and adaptation *Journal of Personality. 58,* 17–68

Vohs, K D., & Heatherton, T. F (2001) Self-esteem and threats to self: Implications for self-construals and interpersonal perceptions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81,* 1103–1118.

Optimal Is as Optimal Does

Steven J. Heine
Department of Psychology
University of British Columbia

When can we say that something is optimal? Providing an answer to this question requires us to consider the costs and benefits associated with different alternatives and to declare the one with the best overall payoff as *optimal*. Of course, the costs and benefits of any object or process are not intrinsic to the objects or processes themselves; the payoffs are accrued by interacting with a system that renders consequences of the object or process as costly or beneficial. For example, consider the question "What is the optimal tool to have in one's toolbox?" The answer to this is contingent upon the environment within which one lives. If one lives in a world held together by screws, then the optimal tool would be the screwdriver; life in a world of nails would dictate that the hammer is the best solution. There is nothing inherent about screwdrivers or hammers by themselves that makes them optimal tools, it is only through their interaction with their environment that their optimality is afforded.

The same rationale needs to be applied to the question "What is optimal self-esteem?" Kernis (this issue) conceptualizes optimal self-esteem as that which is high, genuine, and stable. He provides much convergent evidence that this kind of self-esteem may indeed provide the best payoff, warranting its label of "optimal." However, it does not appear to me that there is anything intrinsic about the self in isolation that renders this kind of self-esteem as optimal. It is only by considering the contingencies of the environment that afford this maximal payoff to the self that we are able to conceive of this as optimal self-esteem. To the extent that these contingencies are not constant across different contexts or cultures, the nature of optimal self-esteem will also vary accordingly. It is my contention that cultures vary significantly in terms of

the contingencies associated with what Kernis describes as the features of optimal self-esteem.

One feature of optimal self-esteem is that it arises from the "operation of one's core, true, authentic self as a source of input to behavioral choices" (Kernis, this issue). Kernis describes an authentic self as one that is unified and is experienced similarly across contexts. Behavior arises from individuals acting in accordance with their values, preferences, and needs, rather than by behaving in ways that are sensitive to others' expectations or contextual pressures. It seems reasonable to me that this logic often holds true within a North American cultural context, in which authenticity and inner-directed behavior are encouraged and valued.

However, acting in accordance with one's "true" self would seem to be of considerably less utility in some other cultures, for example, within a Japanese cultural context. Much literature has described the self-concept common in Japan as largely a relational phenomenon (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), in which an individual's relationships and roles within particular contexts take precedence over abstracted and internalized attributes, such as attitudes, traits, and abilities (Cousins, 1989). Hence, thoughts and behaviors need to be adjusted to the role requirements of a given situation. The ability to distinguish between the demands across situations (*kejime* in Japanese) and to behave appropriately is viewed as integral to a Japanese individual's maturity in ways that it is not in North America (Bachnik, 1992). From a theoretical perspective, "authenticity," in the way that Kernis defines it, is of less value in Japan than in North America.

There is much empirical evidence to show that acting in ways consistent with an inner self yields a smaller return in East Asian than in North American

contexts. First, much evidence reveals that East Asians act less consistently across different contexts than do North Americans (e.g., Campbell et al., 1996; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Suh, 2002). Second, this inconsistent behavior appears to be associated with fewer costs in East Asia than in North America. Campbell et al. (1996) found that the correlation between self-esteem and self-concept clarity was significantly larger for Canadians than it was for Japanese. Suh (2002) demonstrated that although cross-context consistency was beneficial for Americans in the sense that consistent people were liked more by their friends and had higher subjective well-being than did less consistent people, the correlations were significantly smaller for Koreans (and they did not show any relation between consistency and being liked). Likewise, Heine and Renshaw (2002) found clear self-verification effects in an American sample, where people reported more liking for those who viewed them similarly to how they viewed themselves compared with those who viewed them differently. In contrast, Japanese showed no relation between liking and self-peer agreement. There are fewer benefits for viewing oneself as consistent or "authentic" in an East Asian context, and hence, it would not appear to be an optimal way of viewing oneself.

Kernis's optimal self-esteem is not just authentic self-esteem —it is authentic *high* self-esteem. Indeed, there would appear to be few benefits of having authentic low self-esteem and of acting consistently with this authentic knowledge. Kernis makes a compelling case that high authentic self-esteem has a decent payoff in North American contexts, but are these benefits realized universally?

One source of evidence regarding the functionality of high self-esteem is the prevalence of it. One of the most consistently found cultural differences is that North Americans have far higher self-esteem scores than do Japanese (the effect sizes are often greater than 1; Heine & Lehman, 2003). Kernis suggests that the cultural differences in self-esteem might be due to there being more North Americans than Japanese with high fragile self-esteem but not those with high secure self-esteem. I don't know of any evidence to support this contention. A wide array of laboratory and questionnaire studies consistently reveals that North Americans embrace positive self-views to a greater extent than do Japanese (for a review, see Heine, in press).

Furthermore, positive self-views appear to have fewer benefits for Japanese than North Americans. When North Americans discover a positive aspect of themselves, they work harder; in contrast, Japanese work harder when they discover a negative aspect of themselves (Heine et al., 2001). North Americans show a tight linkage between self-critical thoughts (measured with actual-ideal discrepancies) and depression (Higgins, 1987). In contrast, this correlation is significantly less pronounced among Japanese (Heine & Lehman, 1999). There apparently are fewer benefits for maintaining high self-esteem in Japan than in North America.

Why would there be differential payoffs for having positive self-views across cultures? I have argued elsewhere (Heine, in press) that positive self-views are more beneficial in contexts in which (a) independence is encouraged more than interdependence; (b) intrapsychic concerns are given more weight than interpersonal ones; (c) an internal frame of awareness is favored over an external one; and (d) an entity theory of self is embraced rather than an incremental one. That these contexts are more common in North America than in Japan render positive self-views more functional there. Because different contexts are more common in Japan than in North America, the nature of optimal self-esteem must be different there as well.

In sum, much evidence reveals that both of the two components of optimal self-esteem that Kernis describes—the authentic component and the positive self-view component—are more common and are more functional in North America than they are in Japan. Authentic high self-esteem is optimal in North America because the cultural environment there affords a better payoff compared with other kinds of self-esteem. In contrast, behaving in situationally appropriate ways (e.g., Suh, 2002) and maintaining a self-critical perspective (e.g., Heine et al., 2001) yields a good (and perhaps optimal) payoff in Japan because of the contingencies between the self-concept and cultural environment there.

Note

Steven J. Heine, 2136 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4 Canada. E-mail: heine@psych.ubc.ca

References

Bachnik, J. (1992). *Kejime*: Defining a shifting self in multiple organizational modes. In N. R Rosenberger (Ed.), *Japanese sense of self* (pp. 152–172). Cambridge, England· Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, J. D., Trapnell, P , Heine, S. J., Katz, I. M., Lavallee, L. F., & Lehman, D. R (1996). Self-concept clarity: Measurement, personality correlates, and cultural boundaries. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70,* 141–156

Cousins, S. D. (1989) Culture and selfhood in Japan and the U.S. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56,* 124–131.

Heine, S. J. (in press) An exploration of cultural variation in self-enhancing and self-improving motivations. *Nebraska Symposium of Motivation.*

Heine, S J., Kitayama, S., Lehman, D. R., Takata, T., Ide, E., Leung, C , & Matsumoto, H. (2001). Divergent consequences of success and failure in Japan and North America: An investigation of

self-improving motivations and malleable selves. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81,* 599–615.

Heine, S. J., & Lehman, D R (1999). Culture, self-discrepancies, and self-satisfaction *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25,* 915–925

Heine. S J., & Lehman, D. R (2003). Move the body, change the self: Acculturative effects on the self-concept In M. Schaller & C. Crandall (Eds), *Psychological foundations of culture* (pp. 305- 331) Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Heine, S J., & Renshaw, K. (in press). Interjudge agreement, self-enhancement, and liking: Cross-cultural divergences. *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin, 28,* 442–451

Higgins, E. T. (1987). Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review, 94,* 319–340

Kanagawa, C., Cross, S. E., & Markus, H. R. (2001). "Who am I?". The cultural psychology of the conceptual self *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27,* 90–103.

Markus, H R., & Kitayama, S (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98,* 224–253

Suh, E. M. (2002). *Culture, identity consistency, and subjective well-being.* Manuscript submitted for publication.

In Search of The Real Self:
A Functional Perspective on Optimal
Self-Esteem and Authenticity

Sander L. Koole
Department of Psychology
Free University Amsterdam

Julius Kuhl
Department of Psychology
University of Osnabrück

Who is the real me? Am I in touch with my inner feelings? Do I live my life in accordance with what is most important to me? These and similar questions about the authenticity of one's self are frequently heard in today's postmodern society (Baumeister, 1987; Brown, 1998; Kuhl & Beckmann, 1994). Although notions of an authentic self have been around for ages (Harbus, 2002), they became most fully articulated and popularized by humanistic psychologists in the 20th century (Maslow, 1968; Schneider, Bugenthal, & Pierson, 2001; Yalom, 1980). In spite of humanistic psychologists' enduring fascination with the authentic self, most empirically oriented psychologists were hardly concerned with issues relating to the self's authenticity. Conceivably, this neglect was due to the difficulties that are inherent in specifying which aspects of the self are authentic and which are not (Kuhl & Kazén, 1994). Moreover, questions about the self's authenticity seemed to go beyond the scope of the field's traditional self-report methodologies, given that individuals might defensively distort their answers or lack introspective access into the functioning of their authentic self. In view of these obstacles, the role of authenticity in the functioning of the self seemed destined to remain uncharted territory, in spite of its central importance in modern-humanistic conceptions of the self.

In more recent years, however, a number of researchers have found ways of rendering the authentic self open to empirical scrutiny (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kuhl & Kazén, 1994; Tesser, 1993). Although this work is still preliminary, sufficient findings have accumulated to conclude that the functioning of the authentic self can be systematically observed and studied through experimental means. Kernis's (this issue) analysis of optimal self-esteem is in close harmony with these recent experimental approaches to the authentic self. Specifically, Kernis proposes that optimal self-esteem follows from the secure feelings of self-worth that arise from the successful operation of the person's authentic self. Because Kernis identifies various ways of operationalizing secure self-esteem, his analysis offers researchers some attractive new tools in the study of the authentic self. Indeed, research using these tools has been able to verify that high self-esteem that is genuine, true, stable, and congruent with implicit self-esteem is linked to various indicators of authentic functioning, which include self-insight, unbiased processing, autonomous goal striving, and an open way of relating to others.

Overall, Kernis makes a convincing case that secure self-esteem is linked to the functioning of the authentic self in theoretically significant ways. Nevertheless, as one might expect for an underinvestigated topic such as this, there remain some important unanswered questions about the relation between self-esteem and authenticity. In particular, Kernis's analysis leaves unexplicated (a) how the various forms of secure