

The special significance of the moral image—whether musts, oughts, or shoulds, whether socially structured or individually selected—is that its violation is attended by *self-condemnation*. As far as matters of conscience are concerned, such violation is experienced as shame or guilt. The power of guilt or shame has long been recognized, and their motive force has usually been considered in association with the rewards and punishments of earlier years. It seems apparent, however, that these experiences represent direct blows to current self-esteem. The soldier who flees under fire, or the pillar of respectability revealed as an embezzler or a pervert may choose suicide as an alternative preferable to facing both society and himself. But failure to live up to the moral image may also have more pervasive, if less dramatic, manifestations. A dieter may experience stronger pangs of guilt, and consequent feelings of self-hatred, at consuming a hot fudge sundae than at violating the sex mores or cheating an insurance company.

The individual is thus subjected to an elaborate structure of self-demands to which he submits, or attempts to submit, on pain of self-condemnation. The question is not whether people are *influenced* by these self-demands but whether, in Horney's words, they are *tyrannized* by them. Indeed, one important but neglected area of research is the individual's tolerance or intolerance of his failings. Many people who have a sympathetic and understanding attitude toward the natural human failings of others have no such tolerance for themselves. They understand that others may become tired, make mistakes, or yield to biological drives, but they flog themselves mercilessly for failing to live up to their self-demands.

The gap between the extant self-concept and the desired self (idealized, committed, moral) is thus a source of perpetual concern to the human being. One of the reasons for consigning events or feelings to the unconscious is the fear of having to see a self that we cannot stand—a self too different from the desired self to bear. The fear of admitting to oneself that one feels greed, lust, hatred of parents, homosexual desires, sadistic inclinations is the fear of looking at a self that is intolerable. This is the situation of the self-concept deploring the self, the "me" finding the "I" too horrible to bear, the superego condemning the id.

Two general points about the desired self are worthy of attention. The first is that the desired self is a motive force, a spur to action. It is not, like so much of human knowledge, an inert mass of thoughts lodged in the mind, waiting to be accessed when needed.

On the contrary, the individual is constantly at work seeking to shape himself into this imaginative vision. He works to become a "better person", strives to realize his ambitions, struggles to censor his unacceptable impulses, selectively directs his efforts in the immediate situation or in the long run to converting the self he observes into the self he wishes to observe or to maintaining a desired self against the forces that threaten to blench it. It does not seem extravagant to assert that much of human behavior is motivated by the wish to attain, to maintain, or to retain a desired self.

The second point is that, although it is meaningful to distinguish among an extant self, idealized self, committed self, and moral self, the individual is not always successful in compartmentalizing these images. We may confuse what we wish to be, or feel we should be, with what we are, arrogating to ourselves the glorious qualities observed in our fantasies and resenting society for not according us the respect and deference due such a wondrous creature. We may flog the actual self unmercifully for falling short of the stern array of "shoulds" which serve as its standards of worth. An understanding of the self-concept thus requires an understanding of the *relationship* among these various self-concept regions.

In sum, it is plain that we can never attain an adequate grasp of the self-concept without taking account of man's extraordinary tendency to visualize himself as other than what he is, to construct in imagination a picture of what he wishes to be. No one can see himself as bad or good, admirable or contemptible, except with reference to the standards he has set for himself. Hence, the individual's idealized image, committed image, and moral image must all be considered parts of "the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object"—that is, of the self-concept.

From: *Norman Randall, Encountering the Self* (1979)

The Presenting Self

Implicitly and explicitly, we are always engaged in "impression management" (Goffman, 1956), governing, guiding, and controlling our own actions, acting in accordance with the type of person we wish to appear.¹¹ Whatever social ingredients are used in the formulation of the role, we are both script authors and central actors. No actor can portray Hamlet without a defined image of the character

and an effort on his part to behave in a fashion overtly portraying it. And just as the self portrayed on the dramaturgical stage may or may not correspond to the innate propensities and inclinations of the performers, so does the self we intentionally present on the social stage match (or diverge) from the self-pictures we inwardly hold.

The form and content of the presenting self is likely to go beyond specific traits to include some of the broader social types described earlier. A person may seek to present himself as an average Joe, a devoted father, a dedicated scientist, a dynamic leader, a free spirit, and so on. These types will vary from thinly constructed dramaturgical roles—consisting of little more than a single trait—to fully fleshed out characters with clearly defined statuses, attitudes, values, actions, and goals.

This presenting self, it should be stressed, is not the same in all situations. As James (1890) noted, we present one side of ourselves to our family, another to our clubmates, a third to our employees, a fourth to our students. Many a youth, he notes, demure enough before his parents, swears and swaggers like a young pirate when in the company of his tough young friends. Similarly, Gordon Allport (1961) points out that the flinty-eyed businessman, unbending as steel in dealing with business associates or employees, may be soft as a marshmallow in dealing with his pretty young daughter.

Given such sharply varying behavior, some theorists have doubted whether there actually is any such thing as a self-concept. Their argument is that if people allegedly behave in a fashion consistent with their self-concepts, then what sort of will-o'-the-wisp entity is it that is responsible for such widely varying behavior in diverse situations? The answer is that, although this presenting self is much more variable and situation-bound than other self-concept components, it is by no means chameleon-like. At the core, and frequently cross-situationally, there is a more or less consistent self that we elect to present to the world. Certain of its features will come to the fore in one type of situation, other features in another, but a more or less consistent, if complex, presenting self is also characteristic of human beings. We generally want other people to think of us as a certain type of person, and make efforts to insure that they do.

PRESENTING SELF MOTIVES

Why do people "put on an act" rather than simply "be themselves"? Although some writers attribute this propensity to in-

dividual psychopathology, the disposition is more fundamental and characterizes the healthy personality as well as the ill. There are several objectives in presenting certain selves: (1) the fulfillment of ends, goals, or values; (2) the self-consistency and self-esteem motives; and (3) the internalization of social roles.

Means and Ends. First, the presenting self is the chief instrument available to the individual for the fulfillment of those personal goals, aims, or ends which implicate other people. These goals may be as specific as selling a product to a customer or as broad as establishing a general reputation for morality. Does someone want a job? He must consider how to act in order to impress a prospective employer. Does he wish his love to be requited? He must think about the appearance and behavior that will arouse feelings of love in the object of his desire. Does he seek membership in a club? He must decide whether dignified or casual, conformist or nonconformist, emotional or restrained behavior will elicit the desired response.

From a sociological viewpoint, it is important to note that the nature and prevalence of such presenting selves may be strongly influenced by social and historical factors. This is vividly illustrated in Fromm's (1947) discussion of the "marketing personality." In the earlier stages of a capitalist economy, Fromm pointed out, the focus was on production. In a competitive market economy, the most efficient producer prospered, the least efficient failed. As technology developed, however, production became standardized, thus eliminating the productive advantage of one competitor over another. The realm of competition thereupon shifted to sales. Since technology insured that the products and prices of all producers were more or less interchangeable, the chief bases for gaining customer preference were more attractive packaging, more effective sales claims, more successful types of "impression management." A salesman, no longer able to sell his products on the basis of superior price and quality, had to induce his customers to buy because they liked him—to sell his "personality," not his product. According to Fromm, this orientation currently dominates social life: a candidate is elected because he is likeable, a minister is chosen because of his dignified manner, a girl is married because of a "pleasing personality," a doctor is selected because of his "bedside manner," and an executive is promoted because of his social skills. In all these cases, success involves the presentation of a certain type of self.

But broader and more fundamental objectives also underly pre-

sending selves. One of the major aims or ends of human striving is social approval. Hence, the tremendous force for conformity in society or its subgroups. The high-schooler who wants to be accepted by a "fast crowd" must dress a certain way, act a certain way, approve of certain things, violate certain rules, and so on. The delinquent who aspires to acceptance in a delinquent subculture is just as rigidly bound by an elaborate system of behavioral and attitudinal prescriptions. If we wish to command the favorable opinions of different types of people, we may be obliged to present different selves to different types, depending on their attitudes and values.

Self-consistency and Self-esteem. A second objective in presenting a certain self is the satisfaction of the self-consistency and self-esteem motives. As we shall see in the next chapter, everyone has a need to establish and protect a self-picture. Hence, selves are presented in order to *confirm a self-picture* (if it is established) or to *test a self-hypothesis* (if it is in process of formation). Although, in both cases, the immediate aim may be to convince others that we are a certain type of person, this objective serves the deeper purpose of convincing ourselves. However much an individual may like to think of himself as intelligent, attractive or skilled in some way, in the long run he will actually believe he is so only if this view is substantiated by external evidence. One of the major sources of evidence is the responses of others toward us (consensual validation). It is difficult to maintain our self-view as a profound philosopher if others consider our ideas trite or trivial; as a wit, if they yawn at our jokes; as a dignified figure, if they puncture our pretensions.

For youth in particular, self-presentation is likely to assume the function of testing, and attempting to validate, one or more self-hypotheses. The adolescent may thus reflect on many different possible selves, playing diverse roles, cultivating diverse abilities, and experimenting with different traits. In a groping and tentative way, different selves may be rehearsed—the glamor girl, the caustic wit, the world-weary sophisticate, the dedicated revolutionary. Selves may be tried on or discarded like garments as adolescents attempt to convince others of their sophistication, their cheerfulness, their allure, their intelligence. Hence, the common sense question: "What is he trying to prove?" has profound psychological significance, for that is precisely what the adolescent is trying to do. A girl wants a date in order to have *evidence* that she is attractive or lovable. A boy wants to succeed in school in order to gain *evidence*

that he is intelligent. What concerns these youngsters is the *uncertainty* about what they are like; what motivates them is the desire to know, to achieve certainty. When an adolescent—or anyone else—tries to achieve a certain goal, he does so not simply for the direct advantage it affords, but because it enables him to *prove* something about himself to himself. Yet ultimate certainty forever eludes us so that the responses of others are required not only for confirmation but for the lifelong reconfirmation of our working self-hypotheses.

Another major objective in presenting certain selves is to protect and enhance self-esteem. Since the perceived self—what we believe others think of us—and our own self-esteem are closely associated, people are at considerable pains to insure that others think well of them. For the cocktail party *bon-vivant* who attempts to dazzle the assembly with his wit, the adolescent striving mightily to entertain his date, the conspicuous consumer attempting to impress others with his pecuniary strength, the motivation is the same—to act publicly in such a way as to make a favorable impression on the minds of others, in order thereby to produce a favorable impression on ourselves.

Conformity to Norms. The final major basis of self-presentation involves conformity to social rules and norms. Socially, we act in certain ways because we are taught that this is appropriate behavior, either in general intercourse or with reference to specific statuses. Many of these rules of self-presentation are implicit, operating below the level of conscious awareness, but this fact only accentuates their sociological importance.

A classic example of such social rules is the ritualistic deference expressed in traditional Oriental cultures. The Chinese and Japanese developed highly stylized and skilled techniques of self-abasement, characterized by the effort to present oneself as utterly worthless and the other as the most noble and worthy of mankind. In such interaction, of course, neither member believes that what he says about himself or the other is true; these are simply norms of courtesy.

The purposes of such norms vary. Some, such as the universal norm of *tact*, are intended essentially to protect the self-esteem of all members involved in the interaction. Others are designed to lubricate social relations in order to effect other ends. Still others are intended to reaffirm the extant status system. What all these norms have in common is the fact that they are fairly standardized ways of presenting oneself in interaction with others; such rules may

be normative within the society as a whole or may be shared practices within some subgroup of it.

In addition to general behavioral prescriptions, there are specific social role demands imposed on the incumbent of a given status. Consider the doctor. The functional aspect of this role is to provide medical care for his patients and generally to act in the interests of their health. Beyond that, however, the doctor's role involves preferred but not absolutely obligatory behavior. Thus, the doctor should comport himself with dignity, not coarsely; should exude confidence, not insecurity; should show sympathy for suffering, not indifference; should devote himself day and night to the welfare of his patients; and so on. Although it is acceptable for the businessman's activities to be directed solely toward the acquisition of money, the self presented by the doctor is expected to be different.

That the self we attempt to set forth in social interaction does not necessarily correspond to the view we hold of ourselves does not mean that the presenting self and the extant self-concept are necessarily in conflict. No one can in large measure or in basic respects put on an act all the time; the strain would be intolerable. Hence, in general people will select presenting selves that are not only functional but also are comfortable and congenial, suited to their dispositions and consonant with their extant self-concepts. There is, then, a core of self-presentation which is trans-situational. But this is not to deny that the presenting self shows much greater variability than the extant self-concept or desired self-concept.

If, as suggested at the outset of this chapter, the self-concept is viewed as the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object, then it is apparent that the presenting self qualifies for inclusion. Implicitly or explicitly, the presenting self is a product of intention or decision; how we attempt to act is essentially under our control. Such a presenting self is predicated on the individual's ability to stand outside himself and to view himself as an object, to make decisions about that object and to carry out those decisions in speech and action. To some extent, every person is his own puppet master; our musculature submits to the authority of our minds.

In sum, we have suggested that the three major regions of the self-concept are the extant self, desired self, and presenting self. So conceived, the self-concept is largely a cognitive structure, a set of ideas about something. It exists on different planes and includes all these

planes. But it is not simply an inert lump of knowledge, akin to known facts about the annual yield of corn in Iowa or the total square miles covered by the national forests. On the contrary, the self-concept matters, makes a difference, is motivated. People not only have self-concepts but they also have feelings and wishes about these self-concepts. It is therefore important to consider the thrust behind the self-concept—the self-concept motives—as well as certain principles underlying its formation.

NOTES

1. Among other useful conceptual contributions are Bem (1965, 1967, 1972), Sherif (1968), Brissett (1972), Epstein (1973), Wells and Marwell (1976), Gergen (1972), and Gordon (1968, 1974, 1976).
2. This definition is similar to that of Rogers: "The self-structure is an organized configuration of perceptions of the self which are admissible to awareness" (1951: 501).
3. Best epitomized in the epigram: "There is more to the self than Mead's 'the I'."
4. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Mark Twain remarked on the wide gap between logical and social definition. Speaking of the slave, Roxy, he observed: "From Roxy's manner of speech a stranger would have expected her to be black, but she was not. Only one-sixteenth of her was black, and that sixteenth did not show. . . . Her complexion was very fair. . . . To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody, but the negro. She was a slave and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave. . . ."
5. The large volume of body-image research by Fisher and Cleveland (1958) is less concerned with the individual's picture of his own body than with how people's ways of thinking about the body may reflect underlying attitudes.
6. A well-known example is the favorability-unfavorability score of the Cough and Heilbrun (1965) Adjective Check List, based on 75 favorable and 75 unfavorable adjectives.
7. This view was advanced by Kuhn and McPartland (1954) in the first systematic, empirical self-concept study conducted by sociologists.
8. A recent book on "exceptionality" (Mordock, 1975) considers four major group-ings of exceptional children. The first is concerned with incapacitating disorders—cerebral palsy, aphasia, mental retardation, schizophrenia, and autism. The second deals with "identifiable handicapping conditions"—hearing loss, visual impairment, speech neurosis (hysteria, phobia), minimal brain dysfunction, learning disabilities. The fourth treats intellectual extremes, both the mildly retarded and the intellectually gifted. In other words, of 14 classificatory categories of children cited above, one refers to the intellectually advantaged, the remaining 13 to the disturbed, disordered, or disadvantaged. The term "exceptional" which, to most people's minds, connotes the first, is appropriate to cover the remainder.
9. It is precisely the absence of this feeling that Marx described as alienation, in its psychological sense. The work has no ego-involvement in the product of his own labor