19. Socio-cultural influences on self-evaluation

Lowell Gaertner and Constantine Sedikides

THE SOCIAL SELF: SOCIAL INFLUENCE PROCESSES AND SELF-IDENTITY

In this chapter, we examine how the motivational dynamics of a positively valued self interface with culture. We focus explicitly on the desire for high self-esteem and the corresponding motivations of self-enhancement and self-protection (i.e., motivations to increase self-positivity and diminish self-negativity; Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Sedikides & Alicke, 2019). Researchers in the 1980s and 1990s began questioning whether a positively valued self is a universal need, as they contrasted self-evaluative tendencies in Western culture (i.e., idiocentric, individualistic, independent) with those in Eastern culture (i.e., allocentric, collectivistic, interdependent). That work culminated in the cultural relativism viewpoint suggesting that cultural mandates, that is, normative ways of being (e.g., agency in the West, communion in the East), are internalized as a self-construal and shape the self-system (i.e., motivation, emotion, cognition) to achieve cultural ideals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, 1991b; Triandis, 1989, 1995). The crux of this viewpoint is that culture *creates* self-evaluative motivation such that the desire for high self-esteem and the self-enhancement/protection motivations are outcomes of Western culture that are, in essence, absent in Eastern culture (Heine et al., 1999, 2001; Kitayama et al., 1995, 1997).

We articulate a different perspective. We demonstrate that culture is a powerful form of normative and informational influence that shapes the outward *expression,* but not the existence, of self-evaluative motivations (Gaertner et al., 2010; Sedikides et al., 2015). The need for sustenance provides a simple analogy (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). Muslims and Jews shun pork, Hindus shun beef, Jains shun both, and Christians generally shun neither. The need for sustenance is universal; its manifestation is cultural. The same is true for a positively valued self that is maintained by self-esteem and self-enhancement/self-protection motivations. We make that case in three sections illustrating that self-esteem and these motives have pancultural presence, cultural manifestation, and a pancultural function of promoting psychological health.

PANCULTURAL PRESENCE

The self-concept consists of three fundamental representations (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001): individual self (self as a unique person), relational self (self as a partner in close relationships), and collective self (self as a member of social groups). Although the self-evaluative motives function independently for all three selves (Balabanis & Siamagka, 2022; Martz et al., 1998), we will center our discussion around the individual self, comparing it with the relational and collective selves. We begin with evidence that the individual self is the motivationally

primary self across cultures. We will then consider evidence for the pancultural presence of self-esteem and the self-enhancement/self-protection motives.

Pancultural Primacy of the Individual Self

A methodologically varied program of research has revealed a three-tiered motivational hierarchy that is topped by the individual self, followed by the relational self, and trailed by the collective self (Gaertner et al., 1999, 2002, 2012c; Heger et al., 2022; Nehrlich et al., 2019; Sedikides et al., 2013). Relative to their other selves, for example, persons react more strongly to threat and enhancement of their individual self, avoid more fervently threats to their individual self, anticipate their life to be impacted more by loss of their individual self, and ascribe more of who they are to their individual self. Such patterns persist across plausible moderators, including diverse threats and enhancements, different sources of relational and collective selves, lower and higher group identification, identity fusion, intragroup and intergroup contexts, and self-priming.

Most importantly, such patterns persist panculturally. On self-description tasks, the tendency to describe more aspects of the individual self than the collective self occurs in the United States and China (Trafimow et al., 1991), within levels of independent and interdependent self-construal (Gaertner et al., 1999), and regardless of priming the individual or collective self (Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998). Indeed, Del Prado et al. (2007) reviewed self-description studies from 22 countries (Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, China, England, Ethiopia, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, Turkey, United States, and Zimbabwe) and concluded that "the individual-self primacy hypothesis was supported in virtually all of the studies" (p. 1136).

Furthermore, individual-self primacy persists panculturally even when the relational self is distinguished from the collective self. For example, Gaertner et al. (2012c, Study 3) assessed the subjective value of the selves by providing undergraduates in the UK and China with money to allocate among their selves, with the logic that more valued selves would be allocated more money (Li et al., 2002). Both British and Chinese participants allocated more money to their individual self than to either their relational or collective self. Similarly, Gaertner et al. (2012c, Study 4) had undergraduates in the United States and China describe 12 goals for their future and indicate which self each goal represented, with the logic that more valued selves would be linked to more goals (Emmons, 1986; Oyserman et al., 2004). Both American and Chinese participants attributed more goals to their individual self than to either their relational or collective self. Likewise, Yamaguchi et al. (2007) had students in the United States, Japan, and China implicitly evaluate self versus best friend and self versus ingroup. Students in all three countries implicitly evaluated themselves more favorably than they evaluated their best friend and ingroup.

We mentioned earlier that we would center our discussion on the individual self. Evidence indicates that the motivational primacy of the individual self underlies the ostensible motivational primacy of the relational or collective selves. For example, individuals resort to partner enhancement (i.e., perceiving one's partner in an exceedingly favorable manner) when their individual self is threatened through negative feedback; that is, partner enhancement is an indirect form of self-enhancement (Brown & Han, 2012). Further, one's favorable impressions of their partner mirror one's overly positive individual self rather than the partner's reported attributes (Murray et al., 1996). Finally, one largely relies on attributes of the individual self

to construct a favorable impression of one's ingroup (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005; Gramzow et al., 2001). In all, the individual self is motivationally primary to the relational or collective self, and this phenomenon is observed across cultures.

Pancultural Presence of Self-Esteem

As evidence for cultural variation in the desire for a positively valued self, the cultural relativism viewpoint emphasizes the tendency for explicit reports of self-esteem to be lower in Eastern than in Western culture (Heine et al., 1999). However, modesty is a powerful and pervasive norm in Eastern culture (Chiu & Hong, 2006; Yamagishi et al., 2012) that suppresses explicit reports of self-regard (Cai et al., 2007, 2011; Kurman, 2001a, 2003; Kurman & Sriram, 2002). Consistent with a universally positive self-attitude, absolute levels of explicit self-esteem exceed the midpoint of rating scales even in Eastern culture (Brown et al., 2009; Cai et al., 2009, 2011; Kwan et al., 2009; Schmitt & Allik, 2005; Yamaguchi et al., 2007; but see Diener & Diener, 1995). Likewise, cultural difference in self-evaluation occurs on cognitive, not affective, measures, indicating that Easterners are as affectively smitten with themselves as are Westerners (Cai et al., 2007). Furthermore, the cognitive difference disappears when modesty concerns are statistically controlled (Cai et al., 2007, 2011). Most definitively, meta-analytic efforts do not detect a cultural difference in self-esteem when modesty concerns are bypassed with implicit measurement (Heine & Hamamura, 2007).

Also attesting to the pancultural presence of a positively valued self is evidence of universal sources of self-esteem. Cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses in 20 countries—spanning Africa, South America, Southeast Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, and the Middle East—indicate that self-esteem is positively derived in all countries from control of life, doing one's duty, benefiting others, and achieving social status (Becker et al., 2014). Similarly, in both the United States and China, self-esteem is promoted by benevolent perceptions of self and others, personal merit, and positively biased self-perception (Kwan et al., 2009). Taken together, self-esteem is panculturally present and positive.

Pancultural Presence of Self-Enhancement and Self-Protection Motivation

The cultural relativism perspective suggests that the Western mandate of agency produces self-enhancement motivation, whereas the Eastern mandate of communion produces self-effacement and self-improvement motivations (Kitayama et al., 1997). To test that possibility, Gaertner et al. (2012a) asked students in the United States and China to rate how much they want to receive four types of self-evaluative feedback (self-enhancing, self-improving, self-effacing, and no feedback) from four sources (parents, teachers, friends, and classmates). Students, for example, rated how much "I want my teachers to tell me … I am a great student" (self-enhancing feedback), "how to be a better student" (self-improving feedback), "I am an average student" (self-effacing feedback), and "nothing about the kind of student I am" (no feedback). Self-effacement was operationalized according to Heine and Lehman's (1997) suggestion that in Eastern culture, "self-effacement, in the form of seeing oneself as average … would more likely serve their cultural mandate of maintaining interpersonal harmony" (p. 596). Did feedback preference culturally vary? No, students of both cultures wanted to learn that they are great and how to get even better. In particular, American and Chinese

students overwhelmingly wanted self-enhancing and self-improving feedback and repudiated self-effacing and no feedback.

A distinguishing feature of self-enhancement and self-protection is that the former is an approach motive (i.e., engaging and increasing self-positivity), whereas the latter is an avoidance motive (i.e., evading and decreasing self-negativity; Elliot & Mapes, 2005). So, is self-negativity panculturally avoided? Not according to the cultural relativism perspective, which suggests that the Eastern mandate of communion yields a cultural force "in the direction of attending, elaborating, and emphasizing negatively valanced aspects of the self" (Kitayama et al., 1997, p. 1260). Gaertner et al. (2012b) conducted a second study that replicated the forms and sources of feedback in their prior study, except they operationalized self-effacing feedback as a desire for negativity (e.g., "I want my parents to tell me that I am a bad child, I want my teachers to tell me that I am a bad student"). This, unlike the prior study, enabled participants to independently express desire for self-positivity and self-negativity. Did Chinese students approach self-negativity? No, American and Chinese students again overwhelmingly wanted self-enhancing and self-improving feedback and repudiated self-effacing and no feedback. Regardless of whether self-effacement is operationalized as being average or negative, Chinese (like American) students disdain self-effacing feedback and crave self-enhancing feedback.

Additional evidence that self-positivity and self-negativity are panculturally approached and avoided, respectively, comes from the fading affect bias and a common structure of enhancement and protection strivings. The fading affect bias reflects the tendency for negative affect associated with autobiographical events to fade faster than positive affect (Walker et al., 2003). A multicultural study evidenced the bias in all samples which, in addition to typically Western samples, included Native Americans, Ghanaians, Maoris, and Pacificas (Ritchie et al., 2015). Similarly, individuals across cultures recall poorly negative feedback about important self-attributes (e.g., being trustworthy), but not negative feedback about unimportant self-attributes (e.g., being complaining; Sedikides & Skowronski, 2020; Sedikides et al., 2016).

Finally, self-enhancement and self-protection have a pancultural structure. Hepper et al. (2010) compiled statements reflecting cognitive, affective, and behavioral strivings of self-enhancement and self-protection and confirmed in the UK and United States four underlying factors: (1) *defensiveness*, a self-protection striving triggered by self-threat (e.g., self-handicapping to excuse impending failure); (2) *positivity embracement*, a self-enhancement striving triggered by positive-feedback opportunities (e.g., selectively interacting with persons who provide favorable feedback); (3) *favorable construal*, a chronic self-enhancement striving (e.g., deeming self as better than average on important attributes); and (4) *self-affirming reflections,* a self-enhancement striving triggered by self-threat (e.g., bringing to mind personal values when confronted with failure). Hepper et al. (2013) subsequently observed the same four-factor structure in China and confirmed that it was invariant to that of the UK and United States. In summary, self-enhancement and self-protection motivations are panculturally present.

CULTURAL MANIFESTATION

Although the need for a positively valued self is a human universal, how that need manifests is culturally shaped. Culture can be construed as a powerful form of both normative

and informational influence whose respective acceptance and epistemic pressures (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) regulate expressions of self-positivity. Even in Western culture, self-enhancement is not expressed incessantly because rampant self-praise provokes unfavorable impressions, mockery, and even exclusion (Leary et al., 1997; Paulhus, 1998; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). To navigate the acceptance pressures of normative influence, self-enhancement motivation is expressed tactically (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). One of its tactical signatures is to manifest on important, but not unimportant, social dimensions (Alicke, 1985; Gebauer et al., 2013; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). This tendency gives rise to possible cultural differences through the epistemic pressures of informational influence. Culture instills meaning and value by emphasizing what is important, imperative, and essential and, thereby, creates standards for being and doing. By internalizing culture, persons learn how to be and what to do. Self-positivity occurs, in part, by fulfilling standards and imperatives (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Solomon et al., 1991). Furthermore, self-positivity can be perceived independently of whether standards are achieved (Gregg & Sedikides, 2018; Kunda, 1990). Consequently, when cultures differ in what is valued and important, they will differ on the dimensions on which self-positivity is achieved and expressed. In what follows, we demonstrate how self-esteem and the self-enhancement/protection motivations manifest culturally.

Cultural Manifestations of Self-Esteem

As discussed previously, self-esteem is panculturally derived from four bases (control of life, doing one's duty, benefiting others, and achieving social status), but the strength of the derivation varies as a function of how much each basis is culturally valued (Becker et al., 2014). Similarly, self-esteem can be decomposed into two dimensions (Tafarodi & Milne, 2002): self-competence (i.e., feeling agentic and capable) and self-liking (i.e., feeling accepted and relationally skilled). The strength of those dimensions culturally varies with the Western emphasis on agency and the Eastern emphasis on communion: competence-based esteem is stronger in Western culture, but liking-based esteem is stronger in Eastern culture (Baranik et al., 2008; Kwan et al., 2009; Tafarodi et al., 1999).

Even implicit self-esteem varies with culturally normative values. Given that Eastern culture emphasizes modesty more than Western culture, Cai et al. (2011) hypothesized that *implicit* self-esteem would rise (vs. fall) in Eastern culture when *explicit* self-evaluations fulfill (vs. violate) the modesty norm. Cai et al. randomly assigned undergraduates in China and the United States to evaluate themselves on traits with instructions either to "rate the extent to which the traits describe you" (control condition), "try to be as modest as possible" (modest condition), or "try to enhance yourself as much as possible" (immodest condition). After the ratings (which served as the manipulation and, in both countries, were lower in the modest condition but higher in the immodest condition than the control condition), participants completed an implicit measure of self-esteem. As hypothesized, implicit self-esteem among Chinese participants was higher in the modest condition and lower in the immodest condition relative to the control condition but did not systematically vary among American participants. In all, self-positivity manifests culturally via normative imperatives.

Cultural Manifestations of Self-Enhancement and Self-Protection

Sedikides et al. (2003) revealed how the signature tendency for self-enhancement to express on important dimensions manifests culturally. Through pilot testing, they obtained 32 behaviors and traits that reflect either individualism as emphasized in Western culture or collectivism as emphasized in Eastern culture. For individualism, there were eight behaviors (e.g., "trust your own instinct rather than the group's instinct," "engage in open conflict with your group") and eight traits (e.g., "independent," "unique"). For collectivism, there were eight behaviors (e.g., "conform to your group's decisions," "follow the rules according to which your group operates") and eight traits (e.g., "loyal," "compromising"). In the first study, American and Japanese students imagined being a member of a 16-person business group (with members being the same sex, ethnicity, age, and education level as the participant) and rated (a) how likely they were to enact each behavior relative to the typical member and (b) how well each trait described them relative to the typical member. Sedikides et al. hypothesized that persons in both cultures would self-enhance by deeming the behaviors and traits as more characteristic of self than the typical member, but they would do so more strongly on the dimension emphasized by their culture. As hypothesized, American students self-enhanced more strongly on the individualistic behaviors and traits, while Japanese students self-enhanced more strongly on the collectivistic behaviors and traits.

Sedikides et al. (2003, Study 2) conceptually replicated and extended those findings among American students who had either an independent self-construal typical of Western culture or an interdependent self-construal typical of Eastern culture (i.e., based on pre-screening responses to a self-construal scale; Singelis, 1994). Students engaged in the same tasks from the first study but additionally rated the importance of the behaviors and traits. Replicating the first study, students with an independent self-construal self-enhanced more strongly on the individualistic behaviors and traits, but students with an interdependent self-construal self-enhanced more strongly on the collectivistic behaviors and traits (also see Kurman, 2001b). Critically, the importance ratings provided evidence of a universal process underlying the cultural manifestation. Students with an independent construal rated the individualistic behaviors and traits as more important, whereas students with an interdependent construal rated the collectivistic behaviors and traits as more important. The importance rating, in turn, mediated construal differences in self-enhancement. That is, students self-enhanced on the dimension they deemed important. The universal tendency to self-enhance on important dimensions manifested culturally to yield differences on the dimension on which self-enhancement expressed.

Moreover, Sedikides et al. (2005) replicated those patterns in two meta-analyses. The first meta-analysis examined self-enhancement in Western and Eastern samples from studies that empirically validated the comparison dimensions of individualism and collectivism. Such validation is essential to theory testing; otherwise, the nature of the dimensions and ensuing results remain uninterpretable (Sedikides et al., 2007a, 2007b). For example, the trait "hardworking" was classified (without validation) as collectivistic in some studies (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Norasakkunkit & Kalick, 2002) and as individualistic in others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). The validated studies provided unequivocal evidence that self-enhancement manifests on dimensions that are culturally emphasized: Western samples self-enhanced more strongly on the individualistic dimension, but Eastern samples self-enhanced more strongly on the collectivistic dimension. The second meta-analysis examined in Western and Eastern

samples the covariation between self-enhancement and the subjective importance of the comparison dimension and provided evidence of a universal process: regardless of culture, self-enhancement increased with the subjectively rated importance of the comparison dimension.

A conceptually similar cultural manifestation occurs with the dual styles of self-presentation: *self-deceptive enhancement*, which reflects a tendency to provide overly positive self-descriptions, and *impression management*, which reflects a tendency to make a favorable impression (Pauhlus, 1984). Shavitt and colleagues (Johnson et al., 2011; Shavitt et al., 2011) hypothesized that the Western emphasis on self-reliance and uniqueness encourages the approach-based style of self-deceptive enhancement, whereas the Eastern emphasis on saving-face and harmony encourages the avoidance-based style of impression management. Consistent with these hypotheses, members of Western culture and persons with an independent self-construal scored higher on self-deceptive enhancement, whereas members of Eastern culture and persons with an interdependent self-construal scored higher on impression management (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009; Lalwani et al., 2006), and those patterns were respectively mediated by a regulatory promotion focus and a regulatory prevention focus (Lalwani et al., 2009).

In summary, culture is a powerful form of social influence that instills meaning by shaping what is important. Humans need a positive sense of self. That positivity manifests on dimensions that are regarded as important, if not valuable.

PANCULTURAL FUNCTION

In this section, we provide further evidence that culture alters the expression, but not the existence, of the need for a positively valued self. Based on a wealth of research in Western culture revealing covariation among positive self-perceptions, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, Taylor and Brown (1988) proposed that self-enhancement is an essential aspect of healthy human functioning. We illustrate pancultural functioning in the relation between (a) self-esteem and self-enhancement/protection, (b) self-esteem and psychological health, and (c) self-enhancement/protection and psychological health.

Pancultural Function Linking Self-Esteem and Self-Enhancement/Protection

The positive association between self-esteem and self-enhancement/protection transcends culture. Kurman (2003), for example, had students from collectivistic cultures (i.e., Singapore, Japan, and Ethiopia) in addition to an individualistic culture (i.e., Israeli-born Jews) complete the Rosenberg self-esteem scale and two measures of self-enhancement: the above average effect, that is, rating self versus the typical same-age/gender member of their culture on six traits (intelligence, health, sociability, cooperation, honesty, generosity), and academic self-enhancement, that is, rating own versus typical student's academic performance (controlling for actual performance). In both samples, participants higher in self-esteem expressed stronger self-enhancement (both on the above average effect and academic self-enhancement) than those lower in self-esteem.

To test more directly the pancultural link between self-esteem and self-enhancement, Brown et al. (2009) manipulated performance feedback. A prevailing form of self-enhancement in Western culture is the self-serving bias by which persons take credit for success and deny

blame for failure (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999) and it is stronger among persons with higher rather than lower self-esteem (Dutton & Brown, 1997). Brown et al. administered to students in China and the United States the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, a test of "social sensitivity" in Study 1 and "integrative orientation" in Study 2, and randomly provided success or failure feedback informing students that they had scored in the upper 87 percent or lower 23 percent, respectively, of all students. In both studies, American and Chinese students more strongly attributed performance to their ability following success than failure, and that self-serving tendency was more acute among higher than lower self-esteem students.

Pancultural Function Linking Self-Esteem and Psychological Health

In Western culture, self-esteem positively predicts psychological health including lower depression and anxiety, and higher subjective well-being (Leary et al., 1995; Swann et al., 2007). The same pattern occurs in Eastern culture. Cai et al. (2009), for example, meta-analyzed 50 independent samples of over 21,000 participants in China and found that self-esteem negatively predicted depression and anxiety but positively predicted subjective well-being. Similarly, Yamaguchi (2013; see also Yamaguchi et al., 2015) meta-analyzed 239 independent samples of over 60,000 participants in Japan and found that self-esteem negatively predicted depression and anxiety, but positively predicted subjective well-being and positive mood. Brown et al.'s (2009) cross-cultural study on self-esteem and the self-serving bias that we discussed previously provides insight as to how self-esteem maintains psychological well-being. Their second study additionally followed the manipulation of success versus failure feedback with a measure of momentary self-feelings (i.e., proud, pleased, humiliated, and ashamed). Not only did higher self-esteem participants in China and the United States make stronger ability attributions following success than failure, but self-esteem also panculturally buffered the sting of failure feedback. That is, American and Chinese participants with higher self-esteem felt momentarily better about themselves following failure than did their lower self-esteem counterparts. Self-esteem panculturally blunts the immediate impact of threat on self-positivity.

Pancultural Function Linking Self-Enhancement/Protection and Psychological Health

Like self-esteem, self-enhancement positively predicts psychological health (e.g., lower depression and higher subjective well-being) in Western culture (Taylor et al., 2003). The same pattern occurs in Eastern culture. For example, self-enhancing social comparison, self-serving attributions, perceptions of self-efficacy, and optimism are negatively associated with depression and positively associated with well-being among Chinese (Anderson, 1999), Hong Kongese (Stewart et al., 2002), Japanese (Kobayashi & Brown, 2003), Koreans (Chang, Sanna, & Yang, 2003), Singaporeans (Kurman & Sriram, 1997), and Singaporean Chinese (Kurman, 2003). Indeed, meta-analyses have positively linked self-enhancement with psychological health in both Western and Eastern cultures (Dufner et al., 2019; Zell et al., 2020).

Furthermore, psychological health is particularly associated with self-enhancement to the extent to which it is expressed on subjectively important dimensions. Gaertner et al. (2008), for example, had Taiwanese students rate the extent to which collectivistic and individualistic traits describe the self versus their typical peer, rate the subjective importance of those traits, and complete measures of depression, stress, subjective well-being, and life satisfaction. Replicating Sedikides et al. (2003, 2005), Taiwanese students self-enhanced more strongly on

and rated as more important the collectivistic compared to the individualist traits. Moreover, participants whose self-enhancement more strongly covaried with their importance ratings evinced lesser depression and stress and greater well-being and life satisfaction (for conceptual replications, see Kitayama et al., 2010; Kwan et al., 1997; Stewart et al., 2002).

To directly test the causal effect of self-enhancement on psychological health, O'Mara et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal experiment in China and the United States. In an initial session, participants completed five measures of health (depression, anxiety, stress, subjective well-being, and life satisfaction). A week later, participants (a) listed a personally important attribute, (b) wrote (via random assignment) about how their experiences over the past week demonstrate that the important attribute is either more (*self-enhancement condition*) or less (*self-effacement condition*) characteristic of themselves than of their peers, and (c) again completed the five health measures. Consistent with a pancultural causal effect of self-enhancement on health, both Chinese and American participants in the self-enhancement condition reported better health than their counterparts in the self-effacement condition. Furthermore, the latter effect in both cultural contexts was driven by improved health beyond the previous session in the enhancement condition and no change in the effacement condition. This study provides experimental evidence that self-enhancement functionally improves well-being in both China and the United States.

CLOSING

We considered how the motivational dynamics of a positively valued self interface with culture. In contrast to the cultural-relativism viewpoint, namely, that culture creates self-evaluative motivations, we argued and showed that the need for a positively valued self is a human universal that navigates the acceptance and epistemic pressures which culture exerts as a powerful form of normative and informational influence. In particular, the desire for high self-esteem and self-enhancement/self-protection motivations have a pancultural presence that manifests on culturally emphasized dimensions, and panculturally functions to promote psychological health. Nonetheless, a question remains: If culture does not create the need for a positively valued self, what is the origin?

One plausible origin is *Homo sapiens*' evolutionary past (Hill & Buss, 2008; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997). Theoretical models buttressed by empirical support posit a variety of reproductive and survival advantages to self-esteem and self-enhancement/self-protection motives. Such advantages include goal setting, persistence, and achievement (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; O'Mara & Gaertner, 2017; Sedikides, 2020), a system that allows failure without debilitating doubt (Brown, 2010; Campbell & Foster, 2006; Sedikides et al., 2006), an indicator of mate value (Baumeister & Tice, 2000; Holtzman & Strube, 2011; Sedikides & Skowronski, 2000), a monitor of relational value (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), a monitor of prestige and status (Cameron et al., 2015; Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2001; Mahadevan et al., 2016), a mortality defense (Pyszczynski et al., 2004), and a means to deceive others of own worth (von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). Consistent with an evolutionary origin are possible neural and genetic underpinnings of self-positivity. Imaging studies have identified brain regions associated with the processing of social feedback favorable to self versus other (ventral striatum; Izuma et al., 2008), favorable self versus other social comparison (anterior cingulate cortex; Takahashi et al., 2009), and self-protective responding in the presence versus absence

of self-threat (medial orbitofrontal cortex; Hughes & Beer, 2013). Further, imaging studies have revealed that the motivationally important self-attributes are represented in the medial prefrontal cortex (Levorsen et al., 2023). Lastly, there is a genetic basis to self-esteem (Neiss et al., 2002, 2005) and its correlate, narcissism (Luo & Cai, 2018; Luo et al., 2014). In conclusion, just as the need for sustenance is a human universal that manifests culturally, so too is the need for a positively valued self.

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