

How We See Ourselves

GETTING STARTED

Discuss the following questions with your classmates.

- ▶ Make a list of adjectives that you would use to describe yourself. How many of these words relate to you personally, and how many are generally true of people in your family or culture?
- ▶ If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
- ▶ Do you have a hero or a role model? What are the qualities in that person that you admire?

TARGET WORDS—Assessing Your Vocabulary Knowledge

Look at each of the target words in the box. Use the scale to give yourself a score for each word. After you finish the chapter, score yourself again to check your improvement.

- 1 I don't know this word.
- 2 I have seen this word before, but I am not sure of the meaning.
- 3 I understand the word when I see it or hear it in a sentence, but I don't know how to use it in my own speaking and writing.
- 4 I know this word and can use it in my own speaking and writing.

TARGET WORDS

___ accuracy	___ demonstrate	___ instance	___ perspective
___ achieve	___ deny	___ intensity	___ prior
___ alter	___ derive	___ mental	___ rejection
___ attribute	___ dimension	___ motivate	___ stability
___ challenge	___ emerge	___ participants	___ trigger
___ consistent	___ expose	___ perceive	___ vision

The following passage is adapted from an introductory textbook on marketing and focuses on self-image and consumer behavior. As you read, pay special attention to the target vocabulary words in **bold**.

HOW PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF INFLUENCE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

1 Many people feel that their self-image and possessions affect their value as a person. Products, from cars to aftershave, are often bought because a person is trying either to show off or to **deny** some aspect of his or her self. How consumers feel about themselves shapes their consumption habits, particularly as they try to fulfill social expectations about how a male or female should look and act.



Self-image and consumer behavior are connected.

DOES THE SELF EXIST?

2 The 1980s were called the “Me Decade” because for many this time was marked by a fascination with the self. The idea that each person has a self may seem natural to us, but

this concept is actually quite new. The idea that each human life is unique developed in late medieval times (between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries in Europe). **Prior** to that time, individuals were considered in relation to a group, and even today, many Eastern cultures place more emphasis on the importance of a collective self than on a unique, independent self.

3 Both Eastern and Western cultures see the self as divided into an inner, private self and an outer, public self. But where they differ is in terms of which part is seen as the “real you.” Western culture tends to promote the idea of individuality—a self that is separated from other selves. In contrast, many Eastern cultures focus on an interdependent self that **derives** its identity in large part from interrelationships with others.

4 For example, a Confucian **perspective** stresses the importance of “face”—other people’s perceptions of the self and maintaining one’s desired status in their eyes. In the past, some Asian cultures developed clear rules about the specific clothes and even colors that people in certain social classes and occupations were allowed to display, and these live on today in Japanese style manuals. This style of dress is at odds with such Western practices as “casual Fridays,” which encourage employees to dress informally and express their unique selves.

SELF-CONCEPT

5 To understand the many factors that affect a person’s sense of self, sociologists look at a person’s *self-concept*. The term *self-concept* refers to the beliefs a person holds about his or her **attributes**, and how he or she evaluates these qualities. While a person’s overall self-concept may be positive, there are certainly parts of the self that tend to be evaluated more positively than others. For **instance**, a young man may **derive** more confidence from his identity as an employee of a large company than he does as the father of a new baby.

COMPONENTS OF THE SELF

- 6 A person's self-concept is a very complex structure, with many **attributes**. To evaluate a person's self-concept, it is necessary to consider the following **dimensions** of the overall self:

Content—what the self-concept is based on (e.g., is it based on a trait like facial attractiveness or **mental** ability?)

Positivity or negativity—whether it reflects a high or low degree of self-confidence

Intensity—whether it is strong or weak

Stability—whether it remains consistent over time

Accuracy—whether it corresponds to reality

As we'll see later, consumers' self-assessments can be quite inaccurate, especially when it comes to physical appearance.

SELF-ESTEEM

- 7 Self-esteem is a reflection of how positive or negative a person's self-concept is. People with low self-esteem do not expect that they will perform very well, and they will try to avoid embarrassment, failure, or **rejection**. In contrast, people with high self-esteem expect to be successful, will take more risks, and are more willing to be the center of attention. Self-esteem is often related to being accepted by others. For example, teenagers who are members of high status groups have higher self-esteem than their excluded classmates.
- 8 Marketing communications can influence a consumer's level of self-esteem. **Exposure** to advertisements can **trigger** a process of *social comparison*, in which a person tries to evaluate his or her self by comparing it to the people shown in advertising images. This form of comparison appears to be a basic human **motive**. Many marketers have tapped into this need by supplying idealized images of happy, attractive people who are using their products in order to **motivate** people to buy the products.
- 9 A recent study illustrates how this social comparison process works. The study showed that female college students tend to compare their physical appearance with advertising models. Study **participants** were **exposed** to beautiful women in advertisements. Afterwards the **participants** expressed lowered satisfaction

with their own appearance as compared with other **participants** who were not **exposed** to the advertisements. Another study **demonstrated** that young women's **perceptions** of their own body shapes and sizes were **altered** after the women had viewed as little as thirty minutes of television programming.

- 10 *Self-esteem advertising* attempts to change people's product attitudes by stimulating positive feelings about the self. One strategy is to **challenge** the consumer's self-esteem and then show a product or service that will provide a remedy. For example, an advertisement for Zest soap says, "You're not fully clean until you're Zestfully clean."
- 11 When consumers compare their actual **attributes** to their ideal image of themselves, their self-esteem often suffers. Consumers might ask themselves questions such as, "Am I as attractive as I would like to be?" "Do I make as much money as I should?" The *ideal self*—a person's conception of how he or she would like to be—and the *actual self*—a more realistic self-evaluation of the qualities one has or lacks—are often in conflict.
- 12 The ideal self is partly shaped by elements of the consumer's culture, such as heroes or people shown in advertising images who serve as models of **achievement** or appearance. Consumers may purchase a product because they hope it will help them **achieve** the kind of goals or look shown in an advertisement. Consumers may also choose products that they **perceive** to be **consistent** with their actual self, or products that they believe will help them reach their ideal self.

FANTASY: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE SELVES

- 13 While most people experience an **inconsistency** between their real and ideal selves, for some consumers this gap is larger than for others. These people are especially good targets for marketing communications that employ *fantasy* to attract consumer attention. The marketing strategies allow consumers to create a **vision** of themselves by placing them in unfamiliar, exciting situations or by permitting them to try interesting or challenging roles. With today's technology—for

instance, online makeovers or virtual previews of sunglasses or clothing—consumers can even experiment with different looks before actually buying products and services in the real world.

MULTIPLE SELVES

14 As we have seen, the self is complex. In addition, most people really have a variety of selves, or *role identities*. This means that in a way, any one person is a number of different people; for example, your mother probably would not recognize the “you” that **emerges** while you’re on vacation with a group of friends! People have as many selves as they do different social roles (e.g., husband, boss, student). Depending on the

situation, individuals act differently and use different products and services. A person may require a different set of products to play a desired role: a man may choose a blue pin-striped suit when he is being his professional self, but wear chinos and a Hawaiian shirt when he goes out on Saturday night. Like actors on a stage, consumers play different roles, and each role has its own script, props, and costumes. These roles and other factors have a strong influence on consumer behavior.

Adapted from Solomon, M., Bamossy, G., and Askegaard, S. (2002). *Consumer Behaviour: A European Perspective*, 2nd ed. New York: Prentice Hall Europe, pp. 189–191.

UNDERSTANDING THE READING

Respond to the following in writing. Base your responses on the reading and your own personal experiences.

1. Give an example of how self-concept might influence someone’s self-esteem.
2. What is “self-esteem advertising”? Describe an example of how it works.
3. What are your different social roles? Do you require different products to play those roles? If yes, give some examples.

FOCUSING ON VOCABULARY

WORD MEANING

Read the sentences below and circle the letter of the word or phrase that best matches the meaning of the target word in **bold**. Use context clues in the sentences to determine the correct meaning. Check your dictionary if you are not sure of the answer.

1. In order to **achieve** good grades in college, students must manage their study time and social life carefully.
 - a. be in charge of
 - b. succeed in doing something
 - c. fail to finish
2. First-class athletes require physical **attributes** such as strength and speed as well as mental **attributes** such as concentration and willpower.
 - a. feelings
 - b. issues
 - c. qualities or features
3. When children move from adolescence to adulthood, they often go through a stage in which they **challenge** the authority of their parents.
 - a. change
 - b. question
 - c. agree with

4. People who regularly **deny** that they are good looking or talented may have a problem with their self-image.
 - a. refuse to admit
 - b. expect
 - c. agree
5. Parents often try to include an educational **dimension** in family vacations.
 - a. an interest or thought
 - b. an aspect; one part of a situation
 - c. a demand or requirement
6. Thunderstorms of high **intensity** can sometimes produce tornados.
 - a. strength
 - b. protection
 - c. damage
7. Some companies use the promise of a promotion to **motivate** their employees.
 - a. move
 - b. encourage
 - c. fight
8. For some buyers, a luxury car is **perceived** as a sign of success.
 - a. misunderstood by someone
 - b. thought of in a particular way
 - c. explained in a particular way
9. **Prior** to beginning college or a career, many young people take a year off to travel around the world.
 - a. before or earlier
 - b. secret
 - c. after or later
10. Many parents find their children's **rejection** of family values or beliefs very upsetting.
 - a. acceptance
 - b. avoidance
 - c. refusal to accept
11. If your **vision** of marriage is limited to planning the perfect wedding, you may experience problems adjusting to the ordinariness of everyday married life.
 - a. a colorful view
 - b. a bold discovery
 - c. an idea or mental image

Read the sentences below and use context to figure out the meaning of the target words in **bold**. Look for a core meaning that provides a general understanding of each target word. Write the meaning in your own words.

1. a. Because of the presence of some small mistakes, the committee questioned the **accuracy** of the whole report.
b. Despite the **accuracy** of computer calculations, they still need to be double-checked by human beings.

accuracy _____

2. a. The organizers **altered** the program of events because of the band's late cancellation.
 b. The U.S. Surgeon General's office has been successful in **altering** public opinion about the dangers of cigarette smoking.
alter _____
3. a. Although the basketball player was very talented, his level of playing lacked **consistency** from week to week.
 b. Parents have changeable moods, but they should be **consistent** in how they handle their children's behavior.
consistent _____
4. a. The historical map **demonstrated** the different routes enslaved people took when they headed north to freedom on the Underground Railroad.
 b. The inventor **demonstrated** the functions of his new machine to a group of investors.
demonstrate _____
5. a. The English word *bankrupt* is **derived** from the Italian phrase *banca rotta*, which means "broken bench."
 b. Medicines are often **derived** from plants.
derive _____
6. a. The sun **emerged** from behind the clouds.
 b. Often young people feel that their true identities do not **emerge** until after they leave home and are no longer under the direct control of their parents.
emerge _____
7. a. When **exposed** to highly contagious diseases, people are likely to become ill.
 b. Children who are **exposed** to books at an early age often learn to read more easily.
exposed _____
8. a. People suffering from stress need both physical and **mental** relaxation.
 b. Learning a foreign language requires a great deal of **mental** effort.
mental _____
9. a. Each of the **participants** in the television debate represented a different political party.
 b. **Participants** in the study were not allowed to eat meat during the experiment.
participant _____
10. a. The American Civil War was followed by a long period of political and economic **stability**.
 b. Environmentalists believe that the **stability** of the earth's many ecosystems is at risk because of the actions of humans.
stability _____
11. a. Hearing a familiar song can **trigger** a string of memories about old times, friends, and places.
 b. Stress, sunlight, loud noises, and certain foods can **trigger** migraine headaches.
trigger _____

12. a. Poets and scientists often have very different **perspectives** on the natural world.
- b. Companies should consider cultural as well as economic **perspectives** when evaluating the success or failure of an overseas business project.

perspective _____

WORD TIP

- The most common meaning of the word **instance** is “an example of a particular kind of situation.”
- Instances* of fighting among spectators at sports events have increased.
- The most frequent use of the word **instance**, however, is in the phrase **for instance**. The phrase **for instance** is used as a marker to introduce an example or a set of examples.
- Most nations and cultures have both historical and fictional heroes. Japan, **for instance**, has Tokugawa Ieyasu and Momotaro—the Peach Boy; the United States has Abe Lincoln and Paul Bunyan; and England has Lord Nelson and Robin Hood.

WORD FAMILIES

Read the sentences below. Some of the target words have been used correctly, but in six sentences a wrong word form has been used. If the wrong form has been used, cross it out and write the correct form. If the form is correct, put a checkmark (✓).

1. The **perceive** of the fans was that the referee favored the opposing team.

2. Critics called the biography **derivative** because the author had relied too much on the works of previous writers. _____
3. The **intensity** pain indicated that her injuries might be serious.

4. Management’s **motivation** for introducing a new policy on working hours was to cut absenteeism. _____
5. The reporter followed the **emerging** story of a scandal involving a top movie director. _____
6. The suspect’s repeated **deny** of the evidence made it difficult for the police to take the investigation forward. _____
7. Teachers believe that the **participant** of parents is essential to the success of a child’s schooling. _____
8. The arguments put forward for nonapproval of the new medicine were not **consistently** with the scientific research tests. _____
9. The city government felt that the official federal figures for the local population could not be **accurate** because their own records gave a much larger number. _____
10. A major factor in job satisfaction is whether or not people find the work they do **challenged**. _____

COLLOCATION

Match each target word in the box with the group of words that regularly occur with it. In all cases, the target word comes after the word in the list.

alter	demonstrate	participant	stability
challenge	expose	rejection	vision

1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	4. _____
emotional	active	cope with	accept a
threaten	eager	fear of	serious
achieve	willing	overwhelming	face a
political	regular	feeling of	overcome a
5. _____	6. _____	7. _____	8. _____
realistic	radically	inadvertently	clearly
optimistic	significantly	needlessly	vividly
realize a	permanently	publicly	convincingly
shared	fundamentally	cruelly	conclusively

EXPANSION

Read the first paragraph about self-esteem. Follow the directions and complete the self-esteem questionnaire on your own.

SELF-ESTEEM

1 Self-esteem is one of the key **attributes** of a healthy and happy life. Thus, it is an important component of **mental** health, and receives a great deal of attention in both popular and scientific publications. There are numerous self-report questionnaires available that claim to give an indication of a person's self-esteem, however they vary widely in quality. Self-esteem questionnaires in popular magazines may be written by authors with no psychological background and are meant to be merely entertaining. On the other end of the scale, questionnaires in scientific studies have been very carefully constructed so that they provide reliable data.

On the next page is a self-esteem questionnaire with items collected from a variety of sources. Complete the questionnaire, and then answer the questions that follow.