evaluation is inferred (perhaps incorrectly). Take, for example, walking into a crowded meeting room before the speaker has started to talk. It is possible to arrive on time only to find people already seated. When walking into the room, eyes turn toward you, and you may experience embarrassment. One could say that there is a negative self-evaluation: “I should have been earlier, I should not have made noise.” However, the experience of embarrassment in this case may not be elicited by negative self-evaluation, but simply by public exposure.

In contrast, a second type of embarrassment is closely related to shame and is therefore dependent on self-evaluation. For Izard (1977) and Tomkins (1963), embarrassment is distinguished from shame by the intensity of the latter. Whereas shame appears to be strong and disruptive, embarrassment is clearly less intense and does not involve disruption of thought and language. Furthermore, people who are embarrassed do not assume the posture of someone wishing to hide, disappear, or die. In fact, their bodies reflect an ambivalent approach and avoidance posture. An embarrassed person alternatively looks at people and then looks away, smiling all the while. In contrast, the shamed person rarely smiles while averting his or her gaze. Thus, from a behavioral point of view, shame and embarrassment appear to be different.

The difference in intensity can probably be attributed to the nature of the failed standard, rule, or goal. Some standards are more or less associated with the core of self; for one person, failure at driving a car is less important than failing to help someone. Failures associated with less important and less central standards, rules, and goals result in embarrassment rather than shame.

The study of self-conscious emotions has only recently begun. The model outlined here offers an opportunity to consider and to define carefully some of the self-conscious emotions. Unless we develop a more accurate taxonomy, we will be unable to proceed in our study of these emotions. Given the renewed interest in emotional life, it is now appropriate to consider these more complex emotions rather than the primary ones. Moreover, as others have pointed out, these self-conscious emotions are intimately connected with other emotions, such as anger and sadness. Finally, given the place of self-evaluation in adult life, it seems clear that the self-conscious evaluative emotions are likely to stand in the center of our emotional life.

Michael Lewis

Further Reading


Self-esteem

Considered an important component of emotional health, self-esteem encompasses both self-confidence and self-acceptance.
Psychologists who write about self-esteem generally discuss it in terms of two key components: the feeling of being loved and accepted by others and a sense of competence and mastery in performing tasks and solving problems independently.

Much research has been conducted in the area of developing self-esteem in children. Martin Seligman claims that in order for children to feel good about themselves, they must feel that they are able to do things well. He claims that trying to shield children from feelings of sadness, frustration, and anxiety when they fail robs them of the motivation to persist in difficult tasks until they succeed. It is precisely such success in the face of difficulties that can truly make them feel good about themselves. Seligman believes that this attempt to cushion children against unpleasant emotions is in large part responsible for an increase in the prevalence of depression since the 1950s, an increase that he associates with a conditioned sense of helplessness.

Self-esteem comes from different sources for children at different stages of development. The development of self-esteem in young children is heavily influenced by parental attitudes and behavior. Supportive parental behavior, including the encouragement and praise of mastery, as well as the child’s internalization of the parents’ own attitudes toward success and failure, are the most powerful factors in the development of self-esteem in early childhood. Later, older children’s experiences outside the home—in school and with peers—become increasingly important in determining their self-esteem. Schools can influence their students’ self-esteem through the attitudes they foster toward competition and diversity and their recognition of achievement in academics, sports, and the arts. By middle childhood, friendships have assumed a pivotal role in a child’s life. Studies have shown that school-age youngsters spend more time with their friends than they spend doing homework, watching television, or playing alone. In addition, the amount of time they interact with their parents is greatly reduced from when they were younger. At this stage, social acceptance by a child’s peer group plays a major role in developing and maintaining self-esteem.

The physical and emotional changes that take place in adolescence, especially early adolescence, present new challenges to a child’s self-esteem. Boys whose growth spurt comes late compare themselves with peers who have matured early and seem more athletic, masculine, and confident. In contrast, early physical maturation can be embarrassing for girls, who feel gawky and self-conscious in their newly developed bodies. Fitting in with their peers becomes more important than ever to their self-esteem, and, in later adolescence, relationships with the opposite sex can become a major source of confidence or insecurity.

Further Reading

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### Self-fulfilling prophecy

An initial expectation that is confirmed by the behavior it elicits.

One’s beliefs about other people determine how one acts towards them, and thus play a role in determining the behavior that results. Experiments have demonstrated this process in a variety of settings. In one of the best-known examples, teachers were told (falsely) that certain students in their class were “bloomers” on the verge of dramatic intellectual development. When the students were tested eight months later, the “special” students outperformed their peers, fulfilling the prediction that had been made about them. During the intervening period, the teachers had apparently behaved in ways that facilitated the students’ intellectual development, perhaps by giving them increased attention and support and setting higher goals for them.

In another experiment, a group of men became acquainted with a group of women by telephone after seeing what they thought were pictures of their “partners.” The supposedly attractive women were considered more interesting and intelligent. Researchers concluded that the men’s own behavior had been more engaging toward those women whom they thought were attractive, drawing livelier responses than the men who thought their partners were unattractive.

Racial and ethnic stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies if members of disadvantaged groups are discouraged from setting ambitious goals because of other people’s low expectations. The term self-fulfilling prophecy can also refer to the effect that people’s beliefs about themselves have on their own behavior. Those who expect to succeed at a task, for example, tend to be more successful than those who believe they will fail.

Further Reading