Beyond the Looking-Glass Self: Social Structure and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem

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The "looking-glass self" has been the dominant metaphor within sociology for the development of self-conception and has contributed to an overly passive and oversocialized view of human beings. The major theme in this paper is that our self-conceptions are also based upon our actions in the world, especially efficacious actions. The notions of human agency and self-creativity, which have been a hallmark of the symbolic interactionist tradition at the philosophical level, can be brought into our studies of self-concept through the concept of self-efficacy. Efficacy-based self-esteem not only places greater emphasis upon "self-determination" in the process of self-concept formation, but also underscores the reciprocity between self and social structure. Several aspects of social structure are examined as they affect the development of efficacy-based self-conception.

INTRODUCTION

The idea attributed to Cooley (1902) that our self-concepts are formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in our environment is close to being an axiom within sociology. It dominates the sociological literature on self-concept. It also constitutes the core of the sociological theory of socialization, with its emphasis upon reference groups and significant others as the "mirrors" that reflect images of the self. Further, it is the cornerstone of the labelling theory of deviance, which asserts that the most important etiological factor in the stabilization of deviance—from delinquency to mental illness—is the imposition of a deviant identity upon a person (see, for example, Goffman, 1963; Scheff, 1966; Lemert, 1951; Becker, 1963).[1]

A considerable body of research has accumulated over the years which supports this proposition (Miyamoto and Dornbusch, 1956; Sherwood, 1965; Quarantelli and Cooper, 1966; Gecas, 1971), and some which offers important qualifications (see Rosenberg, 1979; Shrauger and Schoeneman, 1979; Felson,

1981a, 1981b).[2] We believe it is basically true that our self-evaluations are affected by the evaluations which others have of us, and more importantly, by how we perceive those evaluations. But, this idea is only part of the picture of how self-evaluations develop. As we will argue in this paper, at least equally significant for a sociological view of the self-concept and an important corrective to the looking-glass

[1] Lately, labelling theory has been undergoing considerable criticism and reevaluation. But it is still one of the most influential perspectives in sociology (see Wells, 1978).

[2] Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979), in examining the empirical evidence for the "looking-glass self" in over fifty studies, found very little support for the relationship between people's self-evaluations and how they are actually evaluated by others, but a substantial relationship between self-evaluations and the *imagined* evaluations of others. Our *imaginations* of others' perceptions and evaluations of us were, of course, a key factor in Cooley's conception of the looking-glass self. The lack of correspondence between imagined perceptions and actual perceptions in matters dealing with the self suggests that even here the individual plays an active role in self-concept formation. Rosenberg (1979), for example, has argued for the *selective* activity of the self within the process of reflected appraisals, as well as within other processes of self-concept formation (such as selective interactions with others, selective imputations and attributions of sentiment, and selective comparisons). Rosenberg's own research has identified some of the conditions under which individuals will even select certain people as significant others. In a similar vein, Felson (1981b) found that self-appraisals were more likely to affect the imagined appraisals of significant others, rather than the reverse. Most of this selectivity occurs in the service of self-esteem maintenance or enhancement. For Rosenberg and Felson, as for Cooley, the self is an active agent in the process of reflected appraisals. But these scholars are exceptions to the way in which the concept of reflected appraisals is typically treated within sociology.

self, is the idea of self-evaluation based on efficacious action.

Taken alone, the looking-glass self orientation leaves us with an essentially passive and conformist view of human beings, one which emphasizes an external source (e.g., the opinions of others, imagined or real) as the locus of the content or substance from which we construct our self-concepts. It is ironic, however, that the sociological adoption of it as the major mechanism in the development of self-evaluation should perpetuate a passive/conformist model of man. The Chicago School of social psychology (including James, Cooley, and Mead), from which this orientation has been adopted, strongly advocated an active and creative vision of man. This tradition has stood in contrast with the conformist/mechanistic model that is typically associated with behavioral psychology and functionalist sociology. Both James and Mead placed considerable emphasis upon the creative aspects of human action. Even Cooley (1964 [1902]) himself limited his discussion of the looking-glass self to "an interesting number of cases." As Franks and Seeburger (1980) and Turner (1968) point out, effective action was the wellspring of the self for Cooley, his looking-glass metaphor notwithstanding. In fact, Cooley emphasized the active and assertive nature of the self in his discussion of self-appropriation in childhood. The initial sense of self, for Cooley, derives from the act of possession, associated with such words as "my" and "mine." Frequently, this appropriative activity brings the child into conflict with others in his environment. Turner (1968) highlights this theme in Cooley's perspective on the self:

> "[For Cooley] . . . the sense of self is not discovered in quiet reflection, but in the course of vigorous effort, especially when that effort brings the individual into rivalry with other persons . . . The sense of self arises in connection with active striving in the face of obstacles" (Turner, 1968:99).

In short, Cooley considered the reflected appraisals of others as constituting only *one* of several processes of self-concept formation.[3]

If this emphasis upon the active and creative nature of the self is so prominent in this tradition, why is it not reflected in the research on self-evaluation? Why instead, does the re-

search stemming from this tradition tend to emphasize the looking-glass self, with its implicit model of man as reactor and conformist? (This is especially ironic since Cooley himself warned that the self-concept dependent primarily upon the reflections of others was weak and incomplete [(1902) 1964:202–203].) One reason for this state of affairs is that the notion of self-as-actor is taken as being a basic assumption about human reality which needs no empirical elaboration. At a theoretical level, it also tends to be treated as the major source of indeterminancy in human conduct (see Kuhn's 1964 discussion of the various schools of symbolic interactionism that are based upon this issue; see also Lewis, 1979, on the remedialist and residualist treatments of the Meadian "I" in contemporary symbolic interactionism). Cast in this form, the issue of self-as-actor becomes, by definition, inaccessible to scientific study.[4]

A related obstacle to the study of the "self-as-subject as contributing to the creation of the self-as-object," is the symbolic interactionist approach to motivation. Motivation also tends to be treated as a paradigmatic given, needing no further explanation (see Miyamoto, 1970). The typical symbolic interactionist stance regarding motivation derives from Dewey (1958 [1925]), who stated that man is active by nature (see Stone and Farberman, 1970:467). Although, in his own day, Dewey was reacting to the excesses of the instinct theorists, this rather cavalier dismissal of the subject of motivation has effectively left symbolic interactionists with no operational mechanism for dealing with the self-as-subject in the development of self-evaluations. What is left is the looking-glass self (purged of Cooley's own qualifications) and its attendant oversocialized, overconformist image of man, which Wrong (1961, 1976) has so ably criticized.

A third problem with this orientation to the self is the symbolic interactionist emphasis upon a purely interpersonal social psychology, i.e., a preemptive focus upon situated activity and particular others to the neglect of transituational characteristics of the self. This emphasis has diverted attention from the development of self-evaluations through autono-

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[3] Yet, in discussions of self-concept formation, Cooley's name is almost exclusively associated with the "looking-glass self" notion in its passive form. This misreading of Cooley is quite evident, for example, in the treatment of the "looking-glass self" in introductory sociology texts (see Reitzes, 1980, for a review).

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[4] From a phenomenological perspective, Weigert (1975) proposes the concept of "substantival self" as a primitive term in sociological psychology in order to get at the experience of self-as-cause. The key mechanism and central feature of the substantival self is "concomitant awareness" of self in action—that is, the awareness of self simultaneously as subject and object. But Weigert does not carry this notion into the empirical domain. On the contrary, he considers concomitant awareness to be a major source of indeterminancy in human action (Weigert, 1975:54).

mous action outside of an interpersonal context. At the same time, it has also diverted attention from larger features of social structure that enable and constrain autonomous action in any context. It is as if, once the experience of selfhood arises, concern for the self as an autonomous subject is swallowed up by a concern for the self as a symbolically-constituted object. This same concern for the self-as-object, or self-concept, has also influenced approaches to the issue of the relationship between social structure and action. The typical approach is to link action to social structure via roles, and self-evaluations to social structure via reflected appraisals of role performance. But role theories of this sort also embody an overconformist view of human action: Society provides the roles and standards for performance, and individuals play them for better or worse. In this view, motivation remains solely based upon a desire to effect a positive self-image in the eyes of others.

For some, the solution to symbolic interactionism's neglect of the self-as-subject and the overconformist view of man has been to return to the body as a counterpoint to social processes. This is Wrong's (1976) approach via Freudian psychology. Carveth (1977) takes a different route by reinterpreting the Meadian "I" in biological terms, i.e., as a source of unknown drives, desires, and unpredictable impulses. While resurrecting the body does provide a partial answer to the oversocialized conception of man by making the process of socialization more problematic, it offers little for an expanded view of self-evaluation. It offers even less for the development of a wider social psychological analysis of self-evaluation, one that extends beyond interpersonal relations and that takes into account the links between action, self-evaluation, and social structure.

BEYOND THE LOOKING-GLASS SELF

Beyond the looking-glass self is a self that develops out of the autonomous and efficacious actions of the individual. It is a self that derives its experiential locus not primarily from the imagined perceptions of others, but from the sense of volition or causal agency and its consequences—an idea which is quite consistent with Cooley's emphasis upon appropriative activity in the experience of self. There is a motivational component associated with this locus of self that has been variously conceptualized as self-efficacy, competence motivation, or effectance motivation. This idea (which has become quite prominent within psychological social psychology) stresses that human beings are motivated to experience

themselves as causal agents in their environment. This theme is expressed in White's (1959) concept of effectance motivation, Foote and Cottrell's (1955) notion of interpersonal competence, Bandura's (1977, 1982) work on self-efficacy, Adler's (1927) "will to power" and McClelland's (1975) "power motive," and Smith's (1968) discussion of the competent self (see Gecas, 1982, for a review of this theme in the self literature). In short, human beings derive a sense of self not only from the reflected appraisals of others, but also from the consequences and products of behavior that are attributed to the self as an agent in the environment. The emphasis upon self-conceptions built on the experience of self as a causal agent offers a more "active self" than the image offered by the looking-glass metaphor.

But the active self must always be located in a particular physical and social environment. For the human infant, the expression of this motivational element leads to the development of the self as both subject and object through interaction with its environment. Piaget's developmental psychology is based upon self-initiated action in the early discrimination of self from nonself, and it remains crucial in the development of more elaborate cognitive structures. For Mead (1964 [1934]) too, organism/environment interaction sparked the emergence of mind and selfhood. At the point of emergence, however, the self is inchoate; it is through continued action that both the environment and the self are increasingly given form. In this developmental and pragmatic view, it is the consequences of our actions that constitute the basis of our knowledge of the environment, and especially, of ourselves. We come to know ourselves, and to evaluate ourselves, from actions and their consequences and from our accomplishments and the products of our efforts. This provides the primary basis for the *experience* of self-efficacy.

The theme of self-creation through efficacious action is equally important in the writings of Marx (especially 1963 [1844]). Work, for Marx, constitutes man's most important activity; through work, man creates his world and himself. Marx uses his own looking-glass self metaphor, but with a material referent: The products of activity reflect man's nature, and form the basis for self-evaluations (see Marx 1963:128 [1844]). Moreover, it is through work as a basis for self-evaluation that human beings also experience themselves as active subjects, as opposed to passive objects.

The importance of this experience of self-efficacy as a source of motivation becomes apparent in its absence. For Marx, the dissociation of self from the products of work activity under capitalism characterized an alienated

form of labor. Under capitalism, the products of work are, in Marx's formulation, no longer reflections of self. The most important element in Marx's theory of alienation is the extent to which the individual has control over his labor and its products. Labor which is reduced to a commodity becomes alienated labor. Since work and its consequences are so central to man's psychic nature, estrangement from one's work under conditions of alienated labor produces an estrangement from self.[5]

The importance of sense of control, agency, and self-efficacy for psychological well-being in general, as well as for self-esteem in particular, is increasingly evident in the psychological literature. Seligman's (1975) research on "learned helplessness" links the sense of inefficacy to reactive depression in human beings. Bandura's (1977) work shows how increasing self-efficacy can help people to overcome phobias. De Charms (1968) has developed classroom programs to increase the students' sense of being an "origin" rather than a "pawn," and thereby increase their school performance. Similarly, Rotter's (1966) work on internal locus of control and Deci's (1975) work on intrinsic motivation have argued for the beneficial consequences of sense of agency and mastery.

EFFICACIOUS ACTION AND REFLECTED
APPRAISALS AS BASES OF SELF-ESTEEM

Efficacious action as a basis for self-esteem is different in principle from esteem that is based upon the opinions of others. Franks and Marolla (1976) label the sense of esteem derived from the former as "inner self-esteem" and from the latter as "outer self-esteem." They distinguish between the two as follows:

"One's sense of inner self-esteem derives from the experience of self as an active agent—of making things actually happen and realizing one's intents in an impartial world. It involves the general pragmatic notion of the sense of self arising in connection with active striving in the face of obstacles. Input here is "inner" in the sense that it stems from feelings of one's own capacity, competence, and potency. This feedback comes to us in terms of the consequences of our own actions upon the environment. Inner self-esteem is not given, it is earned; but it is earned through one's own competent ac-

tions, the rewards stemming from such actions rather than particular persons. In contrast, outer self-esteem is bestowed by others, and the concern which makes such input meaningful is with the approval or acceptance of particular others" (Franks and Marolla, 1976:326).

In many instances, these sources of self-esteem will overlap: People often praise us on the basis of our accomplishments, and we often use their appraisals as evidence of our own competence. But, by considering specific features of the contexts in which self-esteem is derived through these processes, it is possible to sort out, analytically, which is the predominantly operative process. This is crucial for linking efficacy-based esteem to social structure in a way that is not bound by a purely interpersonal social psychology. The sociological literature, as we and others (Reitzes, 1980) have argued, has tended to stress the looking-glass self as the sole mechanism in the development of self-esteem.

An apparent exception is found in the work of Erving Goffman. In one sense, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach falls between these two positions. The active, efficacious self is conspicuously present in Goffman's work, but it is truncated in Goffman's emphasis upon impression management and interpersonal manipulation. The emphasis is solely upon expressive action in an interpersonal context; a sense of self formed through the competent and efficacious action of an autonomous subject is ignored in favor of a sense of self derived from orchestrating the *appearance* of competence and efficacy. Consequently, Goffman's work can best be viewed as dealing essentially with the appraisals of others as the major source for sense of self, even if these appraisals are objects of the actor's manipulations.[6]

And, although it is not our intent to critique Goffman here, it is worth noting that the dramaturgical approach, though giving more room to the acting subject in the formation of the self, does not escape the bounds of an interpersonal social psychology. Like other approaches also relying upon the looking-glass self mechanism, whether explicitly or implicitly, it is of limited utility for developing a wider social analysis. Goffman's "situationism," as Hochschild (1979) argues, can be criticized for its disregard of macrostructure on the one hand, and personality on

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[5] In the contemporary literature on alienation—most notably, Seeman's work (1959)—other factors are considered relevant to alienation (such as meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation). But powerlessness continues to be one of the most important.

[6] In one sense, however, Goffman's approach and the position argued in this paper are similar, i.e., to the extent that the actor derives a sense of self-efficacy from being a competent social manipulator, his self-esteem would be based upon efficacious action.

the other. Social structural conditions not expressed through constellations of roles and norms in the immediate social situation remain unexamined. The next section of this paper is an attempt to demonstrate how a more sociologically adequate account of self-esteem might be developed by linking efficacy-based esteem to social structure.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND EFFICACY-BASED SELF-ESTEEM

First and foremost, efficacy-based self-esteem depends upon an individual's opportunities to engage in efficacious action. We will argue here that various social structural conditions both enable and constrain an individual's opportunities for engaging in efficacious action. These conditions include, for example, the distribution of material and nonmaterial (e.g., knowledge) resources in society. In addition, however, the actions that these conditions make possible must also be perceived and evaluated in particular ways in order to contribute to self-esteem. Here again, other structural conditions—the prevalence of ideological belief systems, for example—may affect the formation of efficacy-based self-esteem by influencing perceptions and evaluations. By considering the objective characteristics of situations where individuals strive to realize their goals, i.e., act efficaciously, and by considering the meanings that individuals attach to their actions in these situations, we attempt to demonstrate the dependence of efficacy-based self-esteem upon social-structural conditions. Finally, we argue that efficacious action is not only dependent upon these conditions, but serves to reproduce them. The formulation represented here thus attempts to link efficacy-based self-esteem to social structure via consideration of (1) the contexts of action, (2) the meaning of action, and (3) the unintended consequences of action.

THE CONTEXTS OF ACTION

Efficacy-based self-esteem is dependent, in large part, upon the nature of the social contexts within which individuals function, especially as this nature affects the organization of practical activities. Those features of contexts of action that we hold to be of greatest importance in determining possibilities for efficacious action and the formation of self-esteem are (1) the degree of constraint on individual autonomy, (2) the degree of individual control, and (3) the resources which are available to the individual for producing intended outcomes. In addition, actual possibilities for efficacious action are a function of the relationship between

these contextual resources and an individual's capacities for mobilizing them. The first two conditions allow for the selection and pursuit of valued goals. The last two conditions make possible the realization of those goals.

Following Lukes (1973), we hold that a person is autonomous when he is able to develop and pursue alternative courses of action. In this, an individual is free to pursue the satisfaction of his own desires and is not acting as an object or instrument of another's will. Blauner's (1964:16–22) discussion of control in the workplace complements Luke's formulation of autonomy. Blauner identifies two important aspects of control in the workplace: control over the use of one's time and physical movement, and freedom from hierarchical authority. Together, these aspects of autonomy and control are important features of any context of action for influencing the formation of efficacy-based self-esteem. Fox (1971) underscores this point in a passage that is parallel to that of Marx's cited earlier:

> "Men [sic] make themselves through their own choices—by taking decisions and accepting responsibility for what they choose. This is the process of self-determination and growth. A work situation which offers no—or only the most trivial—opportunities for choice, decision, and the acceptance of responsibility is therefore one which offers no opportunities for growth" (Fox, 1971:4–5).

In addition to the degree of autonomy enjoyed by an actor in any context of action, we must also consider his or her potential transformative capacity or degree of efficacy (see Giddens, 1979). This capacity to produce intended effects is a function of the resources, both material and symbolic, that are available to an actor and an actor's ability to mobilize them. Both are necessary conditions for efficacious action. It is possible, for example, for individuals to possess resources without the ability to make effective use of them, or they may possess abilities to use resources that are not immediately available. In either case, efficacious action is inhibited. But, while both of these features of contexts of action are necessary conditions for efficacious action, they are not sufficient for the *experience* of efficacy, which is dependent upon perceptions of self-as-cause. We will consider the experience of agency or self-as-cause in terms of the meaning of action in the next section. Here, we are concerned with those features of situations in which individuals find themselves that simultaneously enable and constrain efficacious action.

The power structure is one of these impor-

tant aspects of interaction contexts. Power, in our usage, refers to that aspect of social relations dealing with influence and control. It is the potential ability of a person to change or control the behavior of others (Cromwell and Olsen, 1975:5). As such, power is not a property of individuals per se (as is self-efficacy, by contrast), but is rather a term specifying a *relationship* between individuals (for a similar usage, see Thomas, et al., 1972). Power relationships between people are a function of the resources, dependencies, and alternatives available within contexts of action, and so are quite consequential for the development of self-efficacy. For example, hierarchical power relationships within social contexts have different implications for the self-esteem of individuals located near the top as compared to those located near the bottom. To the extent that the degree of autonomy, control, and resource availability increases as one moves up the hierarchy, opportunities for efficacy-based self-esteem would also be expected to increase. By contrast, individuals located near the bottom of the power hierarchy, whose degree of autonomous action is more circumscribed, may be more dependent upon the opinions of others (especially of those who have power over them) for their self-esteem. In short, the looking-glass self as a process in the development of self-esteem may be most relevant to those in subordinate status; whereas efficacy-based self-esteem may be most salient for those in positions of dominance within specific social structures, or for those operating in social contexts where the power differentials and role constraints are minimal.

This does not mean that subordinates within an interaction context are precluded from deriving self-esteem that is based upon efficacious action. Self-efficacy may still develop through competent task performance (to the extent that individuals believe in the value of what they are doing), or from the effective manipulation of the situation to their advantage (by learning "the ropes" and how to use them), or by devaluing this context of action as a context of self-expression and emphasizing other contexts of action in which they have greater autonomy, control, and power (see Rosenberg, 1967, on "situational selectivity").

In this formulation, the connection to self-esteem is made via the possibilities that social structures afford for individuals to engage in efficacious action. Social structures giving rise to contexts of action where autonomy and control are denied, or sharply constrained, preclude the development of efficacy-based self-esteem. Capitalist forms of work organization, for example, typically limit autonomy and control for a whole class of social actors in

an important context of action: the workplace. As a system imperative, autonomy and control are constrained in the workplace, both through hierarchical control of the labor process and through dependency induced by the detailed division of labor (Edwards, 1979).[7] So, too, other social-structural conditions, such as racial or sexual segregation, can limit possibilities for the formation of efficacy-based self-esteem by limiting access to resources that are necessary for producing intended effects. Possibilities for efficacious action, and hence the formation of efficacy-based self-esteem, can also be constrained by social conditions that do not permit individuals to fully develop their capacities for mobilizing resources which are potentially available to them.

THE MEANING OF ACTION

The experience of efficacy, as we will argue here, is predicated upon the meaning of action. Although this meaning is present only at a phenomenological level, it cannot be adequately explained at this level alone. Its social structural origins must also be explicated. Here, we wish to suggest the nature of these connections between efficacy-based self-esteem and social structure via the structural origins of the meaning of action.

Two dimensions of the meaning of action must be examined in order to understand its importance for the formation of efficacy-based esteem. The first, which we will call the subjective dimension, involves perceptions of self-as-cause. Implicated here are the meanings given to action, and to the context in which it occurs, that shape perceptions of self-as-cause (i.e., as a source of agency). These meanings must provide for the self-conscious experience of agency and self-efficacy in order to affect self-esteem. Bandura (1982) has argued similarly that self-efficacy is enhanced not so much by performance successes as by how people *perceive* these successes:

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[7] This raises the issue of the relationship between occupation and self-esteem, which has typically been conceived as a relationship between occupational *prestige* and self-esteem. The implicit connection between occupational prestige and self-esteem is via reflected appraisals: High occupational status is supposed to engender positive appraisals and, in turn, correlate with self-esteem (Jacques and Chason, 1977:399; Walsh and Taylor, 1982). Based upon the looking-glass self notion, this formulation is cogent and is supported, weakly, by the empirical evidence (see Rosenberg and Pearlin, 1978). But this connection overlooks the contribution of efficacious action to self-esteem. In this way, the relationship between occupational *conditions* and self-esteem, via the experience of efficacy, is also overlooked.

"Judgment of self-efficacy from enactive information is an inferential process in which the relative contribution of personal and situational factors must be weighted and integrated. Fine-grain analysis of enactive mastery and the growth of self-efficacy during the course of treatment reveals that self-perceptions of efficacy may exceed, match, or remain below enactive attainments *depending on how they are appraised*" (Bandura, 1982:124; emphasis added).

Previously, Bandura argued that the cognitive processing of efficacy information concerns the types of cues which people learn to use as indicators of personal efficacy, and the inference rules which they employ for integrating efficacy information from different sources (Bandura, 1981). These cues, indicators, and inference rules are components of attribution schemes that give meanings to action which can sustain or undermine the experience of efficacy.

The second dimension of the meaning of action, which we will call the objective dimension, involves the differential valuation of contexts of action. We argue here that various contexts of action are differentially valued, on both a cultural and a community level. To the extent that the individual socialized in a particular culture and community comes to accept these differential valuations, efficacious action in these contexts will also be differentially valued in terms of its contributions to self-esteem. For example, one might be a competent poet, juggler, or nuclear physicist. The specific contexts of action defined by these activities are, in fact, differentially valued in our society. However, these activities are also differentially valued within specific communities, such as universities and circuses.

The contribution of competent performance to self-esteem will depend, in part, upon the meaning that is given to that performance, both within the larger cultural community and within the immediate context of action.[8] In this regard, social comparisons are likely to be especially important for self-esteem. In evaluating their performances, individuals are more likely to judge themselves in comparison to others like them who are performing in similar contexts of action (see Walsh and Taylor, 1982; Rosenberg, 1979:132–136). Thus, intra-context comparisons may be more consequential for individual self-esteem than are intercontext comparisons based upon differential valuation of the contexts themselves. The operative interpersonal process (social comparisons), however, can be seen as a response to a structural condition (status inequality) in the interest of maintaining self-esteem.

These dimensions of the meaning of action can be linked to social structure in several ways. First, attribution schemes affecting the experience of efficacy can be examined as products of structural conditions. The cues, indicators, and inference rules that individuals use to attribute agency to themselves or to external factors are socially learned. It is possible, for example, that an individual might learn that no human agency can be credited for efficacious action in the world; rather, all efficacy is to be attributed to divine agency. Fish (1979) cites just such an example of a baseball player who, upon a sudden and spectacular improvement in performance, was unwilling to attribute this to personal agency, attributing it instead to the intervention of divine agency (see also Scheier and Carver, 1980:240–243). In a repressive social order, a belief system supporting similar kinds of attribution schemes could serve ideological functions. In such a case, the structural origins of attribution schemes that deny human agency might be found in relations of domination and subordination between large groups of social actors (cf. Billig, 1976). The denial of human agency functions ideologically by obscuring the nature of domination as a product of human activity.[9]

The second way in which the meaning of action can be linked to structural conditions that are similar to those suggested above is by consideration of the differential valuation of contexts of action. In our society, contexts of action are extremely differentially valued (as occupational prestige scales indicate). Thus, in comparing garbage collection to brain surgery, or even housework to machine operation, the former contexts of action in both cases are relatively devalued. Individuals who perform competently in these devalued contexts may derive less esteem from their performance than

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[8] It must be remembered in this regard that the "autonomous" subject is never autonomous as a social being. As such, the meanings that individuals give to their competent performances, in the sense that they are differentially valued, are incorporated into the perspective of the ever-present generalized other. "Objective" meanings, then, are intersubjective meanings that are given to competent performance, or efficacious action, in different contexts of action.

[9] The denial of human agency in the construction of social reality is implicit in the concept of reification. Attribution schemes that deny human agency function to reify social structures by making them appear to be natural facts, rather than the products of human activity. This theme has been most fully elaborated in conjunction with the concept of alienation (see Israel, 1971; Lukacs, 1971; Walton, et al., 1970; Twining, 1980).

from performance in more highly valued contexts. Analogous to the notion of a hierarchy of roles, there is a hierarchy of contexts of action in terms of importance for efficacy-based esteem. This can also be traced, in part, to belief systems that are rooted in relations of domination and subordination. While the primary ideological function of these belief systems may be the legitimation of unequal reward structures, based upon the systematic devaluation of certain contexts of action, they can also have consequences for efficacy-based self-esteem (cf. Della Fave, 1980).

But lest we fall back into an oversocialization trap of our own making, it is also important to recognize that even a minimal level of freedom in any context of action enables the creation of new meanings for action. If, for example, the objective features of the workplace severely restrict one's potentials for efficacious action, this context may lose its salience as a source from which a sense of efficacy is derived. It becomes subjectively devalued. However, even in a relatively constraining context, individuals may restructure the meaning of action such that it can become a source of self-esteem.

This is essentially what Burawoy (1979:77-94) reports in discussing the reconstitution of labor on the shop floor as a game. In his study of machine operators on the shop floor of a large engine-manufacturing firm, Burawoy attempts to discover why workers work as hard as they do. We believe that it is possible to interpret Burawoy's answer to this question—on a social psychological level—in terms of the workers' attempts to enhance efficacy-based self-esteem. Within this work context, a variety of external constraints are imposed upon the workers' autonomy and control. They are directed when and how to perform certain tasks, production rates are externally imposed, and they are subject to hierarchical supervision. The context of action also provides workers with resources to perform their production tasks, such as tools, machines, unfinished stock, and so forth. Individual capacities in this context would be defined in terms of the skills and knowledge of machine operators, or, in Burawoy's terms, their knowledge of "angles of making out."

Each of these features of the situation has consequences for workers in their attempts to "make out" or "win" at the game of production that is at the center of the shop floor culture. In this context, it appears that perceptions of self-as-cause are not problematic; workers recognize external constraints upon their performances, but also have a clear measure of their degree of efficacy in the form of actual production rates. The individual in this context knows when he is or is not making out, although it is common for individuals to attribute a failure to make out to certain objective features of the context, such as a lack of stock or tools, a hard rate, or a poor machine set-up. What is most important in Burawoy's study is, to put it in our terms, the reconstruction of the meaning of action in the face of the restrictive, objective features of the context. In other words, the meaning of work is recast within the community of workers as a game from which one then has a chance of deriving esteem. Given this meaning, it becomes possible to assess competence, and to determine status, prestige, and self-esteem on the basis of one's success at the game of making out. As Burawoy (1979) observes:

"The rewards of making out are defined in terms of factors immediately related to the labor process—reduction of fatigue, passing time, relieving boredom, and so on—and factors that emerge from the labor process—the social and psychological rewards of making out on a tough job as well as the social stigma and psychological frustration attached to failing on a gravy job" (Burawoy, 1979:85).

Our interpretation of Burawoy's finding is that, in the face of the real constraints and deprivations of the workplace, the meaning of action is reconstructed so that workers *can* experience efficacy and derive esteem from competent actions in this context.

Yet this transformation of the meaning of work in order to salvage self-esteem under adverse structural circumstances has its price. Kanter (1977), in her study of men and women in a corporation, found that individuals low in organizational power and with limited opportunity for upward mobility tend to limit their aspirations, to develop loyalties to the local work unit rather than to the larger organization, and to focus more upon the interpersonal relations at work than upon the work per se. Furthermore, adaptation to the work situation has the unintended consequence of perpetuating the social order of inequality through its daily and unchallenged reproduction—a point which will be discussed at greater length in the next section.

In sum, we argue that in order to develop efficacy-based esteem, individuals must have the opportunity to experience efficacy in valued contexts of action. In addition to the objective features of contexts of action that make efficacious action possible, it is the meaning of action that mediates its consequences for self-esteem. The subjective dimensions of contexts must be considered, however, in terms of their structural origins. First,

structural relations of domination and subordination may be legitimated by ideological belief systems that deny or obscure human agency. In our formulation, these would be expected to have definite consequences for the experience of efficacy, and thus, for the formation of efficacy-based esteem. Second, these belief systems may concomitantly devalue particular contexts of action. This, in turn, limits the sense of efficacy and esteem that individuals derive even from competent performance in these contexts of action. And third, that the objective features of contexts of action, discussed earlier as elements of social structure in themselves, also contribute to shaping the meanings which individuals give to their actions. Thus, even in the face of highly constraining objective conditions, actors may use whatever latitude they possess to reconstruct the meaning of action such that efficacy-based esteem can be derived from it.

THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF ACTION

Actions may produce intended and unintended consequences, both of which can bear upon the formation of efficacy-based esteem. Our argument to this point has emphasized the intended consequences of action for self-esteem. Here, we will suggest how the unintended consequences of action can also bear upon the formation of efficacy-based esteem.

Unintended consequences that we are immediately aware of may be unexpected positive or negative outcomes of action. That is, we may perceive that things have "turned out" better or worse than we had expected as a result of our actions. As our discussion of the meaning of action suggests, the effects of these unexpected positive or negative outcomes upon self-esteem are mediated by the attribution schemes that are used in the contexts of action where they occur. Thus, to simply note that things have turned out better or worse than we had expected would not be sufficient to enhance efficacy-based esteem. It would be necessary for us to attribute this to our own previously unrealized potentials, as opposed to dumb luck or other external factors. Similarly, when our actions produce unexpected negative outcomes, efficacy-based esteem might only be decreased if we cannot preserve it by attributing these outcomes to external factors (this attribution process involves selective perception, as Jones and Nisbett, 1971, have pointed out, depending upon the positive or negative outcome of the act).

In considering the effects of unintended consequences upon efficacy-based esteem, social structure is implicated in several ways. First, with regard to those unintended consequences that are immediately apparent to us, social structure is implicated again via the meaning of action. As discussed earlier, the attribution schemes whereby we give meaning to the unintended consequences of action have their structural origins. In some institutional contexts it is possible, for example, for the competent performance of a subordinate to "backfire" if it is perceived as threatening by an insecure superior. The unintended consequence of competence may then be slower-than-anticipated promotions. If this can be attributed to the superior who is intentionally impeding one's advancement, efficacy-based esteem may not be diminished. Conversely, however, if the negative consequences of action cannot be attributed to an external source, one might be left to infer one's own incompetence.

As we also suggested earlier, attribution schemes that are in use within certain contexts may serve ideological functions. In the example above, if the individual whose career is being impeded believed that the organization really operated on an impartial meritocratic basis—when it in fact did not—this amounts to acting upon an ideologically distorted understanding of how the organization works (if this is a belief system used to legitimate the power of those at the top of the organization). This understanding undermines efficacy if promotion is the intended effect that one is trying to produce. Seligman's learned helplessness formulations are especially pertinent here. In general, if an individual perceives the outcomes of his/her actions as unrelated to competent performance, Seligman and his associates argue, he may come to believe in the environment as being uncontrollable, or in himself as being genuinely incompetent. Based upon the position that we have developed here, and what is suggested by the research on learned helplessness (Abramson, et al., 1978), it appears that distorted understandings of the consequences of action have the potential to undermine efficacy and efficacy-based esteem by producing decreased attempts to exert control over the situation.

But what is perhaps the most significant unintended and typically unperceived consequence of action is the reproduction of social structure itself. In the workplace, as Burawoy argues (1979:63–65), an unanticipated consequence of action, especially competent action (i.e., making out), is the gradual coming to accept the rules of the game. Accepting the rules of the game, then, not only reproduces the shop floor culture or the managerial relations in the office (Kanter, 1977), but in the long run, reproduces capitalist relations of production that sustain the objective features

of the workplace. The unintended consequences of competent performance is thus to re-create the conditions that limit possibilities for deriving self-esteem from it. Capitalist relations of production effectively (although not without engendering crises from time to time) redirect the motivation to seek self-esteem through efficacious action into reproducing social structure as an unintended consequence of this action.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Sociology's overemphasis upon the looking-glass self has given us a limited view of the development of self-evaluations and their relationship to social structure. In the looking-glass metaphor, we see outselves as we imagine others see us. This emphasis upon reflected appraisals as the major process in the development of self-conceptions gives an overly passive and oversocialized view of self-concept formation.

We have argued that the active, creative self, which has been the hallmark of the symbolic interactionist view of the individual, is a necessary counter to the passive image implicit in the looking-glass self. We have suggested that this aspect of the self need not remain at the level of a philosophical assumption about human nature. Rather, it can be brought into our empirical studies of self-concept formation and self-evaluations by treating it in motivational terms (effectance motivation) and in phenomenological terms (the subjective experience of agency). In this, we regain a self that is both a potentially autonomous subject, with powers to transform the world and to derive self-esteem from this experience, and an object of reflection in the looking-glass metaphor.

Treating the self in this way, and recognizing that self-evaluations are also formed through the experience of producing effects upon the world, we can grasp another dimension of the relationship between self-evaluations and social structure. By focusing upon efficacious action as a source of self-esteem, we can see how social-structural conditions can shape possibilities for individuals to act efficaciously and to experience this in a way that enhances feelings of self-esteem. Social-structural conditions enable and constrain efficacious action, influence the meanings that we give to it, and are in turn, reproduced by it.

More than bringing the active self back into our understandings of the formation of self-esteem, we have also sought to overcome the individual and interpersonal reductionism that is prevalent in social psychology. The predominant, almost exclusive, focus upon intra- and interpersonal processes has limited the capacity of most social psychological analyses to take into account larger social-structural conditions and, particularly, the consequences of these conditions for individuals. We have sought to contribute to developing a more sociologically adequate social psychology by linking efficacy-based self-esteem to social structure—at least one step beyond the looking-glass self.

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