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## ON WHEN SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND SELF-CRITICISM FUNCTION ADAPTIVELY AND MALADAPTIVELY

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Self-love seems so often unrequited.

—Anthony Powell, *The Acceptance World* (1956, p. 28)

It would be an understatement of sorts to point out that modern life places excessive demands on the individual. The busyness of the workplace, the necessity or unavailability of job changes and the accompanying relocation, the ephemerality of friendships, and the expendability of even family relationships contribute to increased nuance and higher plasticity in the interplay between the individual and the social world. The ebb and flow of these demands is bound to exert its toll on a person's emotional fabric, coping resources, and self-concept.

How does the individual manage? How can one maintain the clarity and structural integrity of the self-system in an ocean of social change? How does one summon the motivation to set goals and carry them out? We argue

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that two of the many psychological mechanisms that mediate the person-environment interplay are self-enhancement and self-criticism. Indeed, we posit that the continuity and vitality of the self-system depend on the effective and complementary functioning of self-enhancement and self-criticism. In particular, we discuss the ways in which self-enhancement and self-criticism interact both adaptively and maladaptively.

Our analysis is based on a time-honored conceptual and methodological distinction between two self-evaluation motives. The self-enhancement motive propels thought and behavior in the service of maintaining, protecting, or increasing the positivity of the self-concept. In contrast, the self-assessment motive fuels thought and behavior toward maintaining, protecting, or increasing the accuracy of the self-concept (Baumeister, 1998; J. D. Brown, 1998; Sedikides, Green, & Pinter, 2004).

It is worth emphasizing that both motives have ontological and evolutionary significance (Baumeister, 2005; Sedikides & Skowronski, 2000; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Indeed, these two motives wield a compelling influence on self-referent information processing. This influence is often antagonistic. Assume, for example, that the two motives are activated and compete for the selective (i.e., motive-congruent) processing of information. Furthermore, assume that this information is mixed in valence (some self-referent statements are positive, some negative) and is mixed in accuracy (some self-referent statements are high in accuracy, others low in accuracy). Evidence for the preponderance of the self-enhancement motive would be obtained if participants endorsed as self-descriptive, solicited more information about, or recalled to a greater degree positive rather than negative statements—especially high-accuracy statements. However, evidence for the preponderance of the self-assessment motive would be obtained if participants endorsed as self-descriptive, solicited more information about, or recalled to a greater degree high- rather than low-accuracy statements, regardless of their valence. In these critical experiments, the self-enhancement motive is shown to be more potent, although self-assessment concerns are also operative (Sedikides, 1993; see also Alicke & Govorun, 2005; J. D. Brown & Dutton, 1995; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003).

To sharpen our argument and align it with the objectives of this volume, we refer to self-enhancement not as an unobservable motivational construct, but rather as a psychological tendency. Thus, we conceptualize self-enhancement as the tendency to focus on and emphasize positive aspects of one's self-concept (e.g., traits, abilities, goals); one's life (e.g., likelihood of desirable events happening, capacity to control such events); or incoming self-relevant information (e.g., feedback). We make the important assumption that a consequence of the self-assessment motive is self-criticism. That is, when opting for accuracy rather than positivity of information or self-knowledge, people may question their intentions, go beyond

the information given and engage in deep and objective autobiographical searches, ask the hard questions about the kind of person they are, and draw to a close by criticizing themselves. Self-criticism, then, is the tendency to focus on and emphasize negative aspects of one's self-concept, one's life, or feedback.

The central tenet of this chapter is that both self-enhancement and self-criticism can be adaptive or maladaptive. Hence, we discuss what makes the interplay between self-enhancement and self-criticism adaptive or maladaptive. We rely on a broad definition of adaptiveness. Thus, we refer to *adaptive* as involving or precipitating the presence of positive outcomes (e.g., relatively high life satisfaction and self-esteem, optimism, a sense of control, the ability to set and pursue desired goals, the belief in self-improvement) or the absence of negative outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms, unhappiness, pessimism, low self-esteem, a sense of lack of control over one's life, the inability to set and pursue goals, a feeling of stagnation) for the individual. It follows that *maladaptive* connotes the absence of positive outcomes or the presence of negative outcomes for the individual.

In particular, we advocate two theses. First, self-enhancement and self-criticism are adaptive when they function symbiotically. Second, self-enhancement and self-criticism are maladaptive when they function either parasitically or antisymbiotically. We provide definitions of these terms in the next section and elaborate on the two theses.

## SYMBIOSIS, PARASITISM, AND ANTISYMBIOSIS

The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) defines *symbiosis* as "interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both" and as "a mutually beneficial relationship between different people or groups." In the context of this chapter, we define *symbiosis* as a mutually beneficial relationship between self-enhancement and self-criticism.

In addition, the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) defines *parasite* as "an organism which lives in or on another organism (its host) and benefits by deriving nutrients at the other's expense" and "a person who habitually relies on or exploits others and gives nothing in return." In the context of this chapter, self-enhancement and self-criticism are considered as having a parasitic relationship when one undermines the other while coexisting. Furthermore, self-enhancement and self-criticism are considered as having an antisymbiotic relationship when they are antagonistic and preclude each other. We now proceed with illustrations of symbiosis, parasitism, and antisymbiosis.

## WHEN DO SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND SELF-CRITICISM FUNCTION SYMBIOTICALLY?

We consider three illustrative cases of a symbiotic relationship between self-enhancement and self-criticism. We present these relationships as an unfolding scenario and then support the scenario with empirical evidence.

### **Scenario 1**

In the first type of a symbiotic relationship, self-enhancement hits a realism roadblock, such as anticipated or received feedback from either an expert or a standardized test. The feedback instigates self-criticism, which in turn culminates in judicious self-enhancement.

An example of such a scenario is found in research linking self-enhancement to accountability (Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002). In the typical experimental paradigm, participants write an opinion essay (e.g., "Should the United States pursue exploration of the planet Saturn?") and prepare to grade it. Before they grade it, some participants are led to believe that they are accountable to an expert (e.g., a PhD candidate in logic and English literature), whereas other participants are led to believe that they are unaccountable. The grading of the essay follows.

Anticipated feedback curtails self-enhancement: Accountable participants assigned their essays lower grades than did the unaccountable ones (Sedikides et al., 2002, Experiments 1-3). How can this effect be explained? Accountable participants focus on their weaknesses as essay writers (Sedikides & Herbst, 2002). Indeed, in open-thought protocols, accountable participants list doubts about their competence as essay writers, reflect on the hard time they had writing essays in the past, wonder how bad many of their past essays must have been, and remember how critical others were of their essays (Sedikides et al., 2002, Experiment 4). Attentional focus on weaknesses, then, is tantamount to self-criticism.

In summary, anticipated objective feedback (i.e., expert evaluation) instigates self-criticism, which, in turn, tones down self-enhancement (Sedikides & Herbst, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2002). This process involves adaptive outcomes for the individual. One such outcome is a stronger sense of control and self-efficacy and a clearer and more accurate self-concept: The individual has now learned from experience and knows where he or she stands. In essence, participants look at themselves through the eyes of the evaluator and readjust the positivity of their self-views accordingly (Mead, 1934; Wilson & Dunn, 2004). An additional adaptive outcome is clarification of the individual's future goals. Perhaps a career in journalism will now need to be reconsidered, given the pressing need for frequent and deadline-driven essay writing in that profession. All of a sudden, an acting career seems more desirable. Finally, still another adaptive outcome involves

the individual's chances for rapport with the evaluator. Self-boasting in essay writing would give the wrong impression to the evaluator and would precipitate additional criticism, whereas temperate self-appraisal would likely endear the individual to the expert and facilitate a pleasant interaction (Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

## **Scenario 2**

In the second type of symbiotic relationship between self-enhancement and self-criticism, the following scenario unfolds: Self-enhancement encounters a realism barrier, which gives way to a somewhat critical self-view, which prompts a self-improvement orientation.

Such a scenario is exemplified by research on trait modifiability. In the typical experimental paradigm, some participants are led to believe that traits (e.g., intelligence, kindness, assertiveness) are modifiable or easily changeable through practice and training. Other participants are led to believe that traits are fixed and unmodifiable—they were born with it and this is who they are. All participants subsequently receive unfavorable, trait-relevant feedback (e.g., "you are unintelligent, unkind, unassertive"). Of interest is the degree to which participants are affected emotionally by the feedback (i.e., level of criticism) and the degree to which participants seek out additional trait-relevant feedback (i.e., level of improvement).

When participants receive unfavorable feedback about a modifiable trait, they report being dejected and disappointed (Dauenheimer, Stahlberg, Spreeman, & Sedikides, 2002). This negative affective state is likely to spawn self-focus and self-questioning (Sedikides, 1992). It is interesting, however, that despite being hurt by the feedback, participants do not abandon their will for improvement. For starters, participants remember surprisingly well the unfavorable feedback, a pattern that suggests the absence of self-protection motivation (Green, Pinter, & Sedikides, 2005). More to the point, participants show a preference for additional unfavorable feedback (Dunning, 1995) and seek out such feedback (Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998) even when it is highly diagnostic of their weaknesses (Trope, Gervy, & Bolger, 2003). Stated otherwise, when a modifiable (rather than an unmodifiable) trait is at stake, participants turn self-criticism into self-improvement with obvious adaptive implications (e.g., higher optimism, stronger sense of control over the future). In the journalistic example, in the face of failure the individual will pursue useful tips from the expert on essay writing, but only if the individual believes that essay writing is a modifiable skill.

## **Scenario 3**

In the third type of a symbiotic relationship between self-criticism and self-enhancement, the following scenario takes place: Self-criticism is offset

by compensating mechanisms such as positive mood, success experiences, and close relationships. The result is an improvement orientation, as manifested by the solicitation of accurate but liability-focused feedback or by the propensity for upward social comparison. This orientation, in turn, gives rise to more defensible and verifiable self-enhancement patterns.

In the typical paradigm, participants in the experimental condition are put in a positive mood (Trope & Pomerantz, 1998), bring to mind success experiences (Trope & Neter, 1994), or consider the benefits of a close-positive relationship (Kumashiro & Sedikides, 2005). Participants in the control condition are put in a neutral mood, bring to mind neutral experiences, or consider their relationship with an acquaintance, respectively. Next, participants engage in a seemingly important task or take an ostensibly validated test about their personality or abilities. Then participants are given unfavorable feedback that dents their self-views; stated otherwise, the feedback activates a momentarily self-critical view. Of interest is the extent to which participants in the experimental (as opposed to the control) condition seek out additional feedback about their presumed liability—feedback that is accurate and has the potential to improve participants' performance.

Participants who were bolstered by positive mood, a success experience, or a close-positive relationship indeed manifested a preference for accurate and potentially improving feedback, despite the fact that such feedback focuses on their intellectual or personality limitations (Kumashiro & Sedikides, 2005; Trope & Neter, 1994; Trope & Pomerantz, 1998). Such an improvement orientation obviously has adaptive consequences: Armed with a better understanding of gaps in their knowledge or weaknesses in their personality, participants may rechannel personal resources (e.g., time, practice, task analysis) in a bid to ameliorate their current level of skill, especially when their goal is salient or personally important (Butler, 1993).

More important, an improvement orientation is likely to generalize to other intellectual or personality domains via such processes as upward social comparison (Wood, 1989). Comparisons between the self and more fortunate others provide an informative and diagnostic basis for one's self-beliefs and aspirations, thus grounding the self-concept in empirical reality (Collins, 1996). A consequence of this process is temperate self-enhancement. The individual will think of the self in ways that are more measured, verifiable, and defensible. A clear sense of direction (perhaps accompanied by higher sense of control, self-esteem, and life satisfaction) will ensue. Let us evoke the journalistic example once more. Shielded by a restorative process (e.g., positive mood, close-positive relationship), individuals solicit additional information on how to improve their essay-writing skills or compare themselves with a seasoned journalist. This process provides individuals with valuable clues about their current status and prompts them to consider either environments in which demands are well-matched to current abilities or environments that hold the promise of achievable social mobility.

## WHEN DO SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND SELF-CRITICISM FUNCTION PARASITICALLY AND WHEN DO THEY FUNCTION ANTISYMBIOTICALLY?

Next, we consider three cases of parasitic or antisymbiotic relationships between self-enhancement and self-criticism: neuroticism, perfectionism, and narcissism.

### **Neuroticism**

In a parasitic relationship, the two tendencies coexist, although one enfeebles the other. We consider such a relationship in the context of neuroticism. The defining feature of neuroticism is affective instability. In particular, neuroticism correlates with, and predisposes the individual toward, negative affect (e.g., anxiety, distress, unhappiness; Costa & McCrae, 1980, 1985). For example, neurotics (compared to non-neurotics) manifest heightened reactivity to negative-mood induction procedures, such as imagining a sad autobiographical event (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991). In addition, neurotics show decreased desire for control following a mortality salience manipulation (i.e., imagining one's death), a pattern that belies a relatively ambivalent investment in cultural meaning systems (Arndt & Solomon, 2003). Finally, they make faster evaluative judgments when they are in a negative rather than a positive mood (Tamir & Robinson, 2004).

How do neurotics cope with potentially stressful input? A study by Schneider (2004) provides some insights. Neurotic and non-neurotic participants underwent a series of physiological (i.e., acoustic startle stimuli) and psychosocial (e.g., vocal mental mathematics) stressors, while their cognitive appraisals, affective reactions, task performance, and physiological responses were assessed. Compared with their non-neurotic counterparts, neurotics perceived these stressors as threatening (i.e., unfavorable to the self) rather than challenging (i.e., favorable to the self). Perceptions of threat mediated the negative affect experienced by neurotics. In addition, threatened participants experienced slower affective recovery, had reduced cardiac output, manifested less heart rate reactivity, and performed worse than did challenged participants.

These findings bolster the theoretical view that level of neuroticism intensifies perceptions of threat in a variety of situations (Craske, 1999). Neurotics tend to construe threat, even if no threat or minimal threat exists. Threat construals may be due to negative biases in information processing (Barrett, Rapee, Dadds, & Ryan, 1996) and retrieval (Rusting, 1999) as well as the tendency to monitor rather than label one's mood and subsequently to engage in rumination (Swinkels & Giuliano, 1995). Such biases are associated with relative lack of emotional and motivational (i.e., goal-relevant) clarity (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995). Indeed, neurot-

ics have low self-clarity, as indicated by their relatively large discrepancies between actual and ideal self-guides (Hafdahl, Panter, Gramzow, Sedikides, & Insko, 2000). Low self-clarity is linked with low psychological well-being (J. D. Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003).

It is of no surprise, then, that neuroticism has maladaptive implications for the individual. In particular, neuroticism is negatively correlated with optimism (Wolfe & Grosch, 1990), is uncorrelated with overconfidence (Schaefer, Williams, Goodie, & Campbell, 2004), is negatively correlated with self-esteem (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002), and is accompanied by an external locus of control orientation (Judge et al., 2002). In summary, the coexistence of positive and negative self-cognitions in neurotics—along with their ambivalent and unstable emotionality—is relatively debilitating and contributes to maladaptive outcomes.

### Perfectionism

In an antisymbiotic relationship, self-criticism and self-enhancement are antagonistic and preclude one another. An illustrative case of such a relationship is perfectionism. Perfectionism has been defined as a private desire for perfection (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990), the drive to achieve exceedingly high and faultless goals (Brouwers & Wiggum, 1993), and "the striving to be perfect and to avoid error or flaw" (Powers, Zuroff, & Topciu, 2004). Although initially perfectionism was regarded as a unidimensional construct (e.g., Hewitt & Flett, 1990), a distinction has now been established between perfectionists who are rarely, if ever, satisfied with their performance (maladaptive perfectionists) and those who can be satisfied with their performance (Grzegorek, Slaney, Franze, & Rice, 2004). In our discussion, we refer exclusively to the former class of perfectionists.

An experiment by Grzegorek (2002) provides useful glimpses into the manner in which perfectionists process self-relevant information. Perfectionists completed an analogy test and received either bogus success or bogus failure feedback. Those who received success feedback were as likely as those who received failure feedback to claim that they should have performed better on the test. Perfectionists are dissatisfied with their performance even when, according to objective indicators, they should be pretty pleased with it.

Chronic performance dissatisfaction is associated with a variety of maladaptive outcomes. Perfectionism is associated with self-loathing (Blatt, D'Afflitti, & Quinlan, 1976), distress (Frost et al., 1995), depression (Powers et al., 2004), unresponsiveness to therapies for depression (Blatt, Zuroff, Bondi, Sanislow, & Pilkonis, 1998), anorexia in young adults (Tyrka, Waldron, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002), and bulimia in women with low self-esteem (Vohs, Bardone, Joiner, Abramson, & Heatherton, 1999). Some authors have even suggested that perfectionism is a potent predictor of suicidal behavior



(Shaw & Segal, 1999), and some findings link excessive self-flagellation with the desire to harm the self (Gilbert, Clarke, Hempel, Miles, & Irons, 2004).

In the case of perfectionism, self-criticism outweighs and precludes self-enhancement. Next, we turn our attention to the reverse relationship between the two tendencies: unbridled self-enhancement leaves no room for self-criticism. This is the case of subclinical narcissism.

## Narcissism

The final type of an antisymbiotic relationship between self-enhancement and self-criticism that we consider is narcissism. This trait is defined in terms of a self-aggrandizing, self-centered, dominant, and manipulative orientation (Emmons, 1987; Paulhus, 1998). Also, narcissists score high on disagreeableness and extraversion (Costa & McCrae, 1995), and score high on agency but low on communion (W. K. Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002). In terms of attachment styles, narcissists have a positive perception of the self and a negative perception of others (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

How do narcissists respond to interpersonal feedback? In a study by Kernis and Sun (1994), participants performed a task and received bogus success or failure feedback. In the case of failure feedback, narcissists (compared to non-narcissists) derogated the evaluator as incompetent and unlikeable and were prepared to convey their impression in a face-to-face encounter with the evaluator. In another study, narcissists who received failure feedback for their performance on an interdependent task blamed the outcome on their partner, even when the partner was a friend (W. K. Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000). In still another study, narcissists who received failure feedback behaved aggressively toward the evaluator (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).

Narcissists, then, cannot do wrong in their own eyes and are unforgiving (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004) and vengeful (R. P. Brown, 2004) toward others. Does this entitled and egocentric orientation have negative implications for psychological health? The evidence does not indicate so. Narcissism is inversely related to sadness, loneliness, and depression, and is positively related to subjective well-being. The relation, however, between narcissism and psychological health is mediated by self-esteem: Narcissism is beneficial for psychological health insofar as it is linked with high self-esteem (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004).

It is paradoxical, then, that an antisymbiotic relationship between self-enhancement and self-criticism confers adaptive outcomes. However, there are reasons to believe that such a relationship also bears maladaptive outcomes. Narcissists report higher variability on positive mood, negative mood, and mood intensity over the course of several days (Emmons, 1987; Rhodewalt, Madrian, & Cheney, 1998). In addition, narcissists experience more negative affect in response to interpersonal stressors (Rhodewalt et al., 1998) and

more volatile emotion in romantic relationships (Rhodewalt & Shimoda, 2000). Moreover, narcissists experience more extreme affective reactions to social comparison information; in particular, they report stronger positive affect following downward social comparison and stronger hostility following upward social comparison (Bogart, Benotsch, & Pavlovic, 2004). In addition, narcissism correlates negatively with automatic self-esteem, as assessed by the Go No-Go Association Test (Gregg & Sedikides, 2005), and narcissistic self-esteem varies over time more than does non-narcissistic self-esteem. These findings would suggest that narcissistic self-esteem is unstable (Kernis, 1993) or contingent (Deci & Ryan, 1995). Finally, because of their inability to forgive, narcissists are deprived of the beneficial consequences of forgiveness for psychological health (Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996). Thus, although narcissism is adaptive in some ways, it is maladaptive in others.

Intrapsychic adaptiveness is not the only form of adaptiveness, however. Adaptiveness can be defined in terms of social relationships. Does self-enhancement or self-criticism benefit close others or the group? In other words, is narcissistic self-enhancement beneficial to others? It is not clear that it is. Narcissists, for example, desire or pursue controlling and Machiavellian social relationships—what Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, and Gregg (2002) termed the "others exist for me" illusion. In other words, narcissists are attracted to prospective partners who offer them admiration rather than intimacy (W. K. Campbell, 1999), favor a game-playing love (W. K. Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002), and report low levels of commitment to dating relationships (W. K. Campbell & Foster, 2002). Also, narcissists are not bound to be popular group members, given that they exhibit in abundance the self-serving bias: They take credit for their successes and displace blame for failures on others (John & Robins, 1994).

What do others think of the narcissist? In the first social encounters, narcissists give off a positive impression, as they appear energetic, intense, and confident. However, as interpersonal interactions accrue (by the seventh weekly social interaction, to be exact), narcissists are increasingly seen as self-centered, conceited, uninteresting, and hostile (Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995; Paulhus, 1998). Indeed, narcissists may be treated with derision, rejection, and social exclusion (Exline, Single, Lobel, & Geyer, 2004; Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997). In summary, the narcissistic interpersonal style is likely to be particularly costly in the long run. Narcissism is not only damaging to other persons or the group but also maladaptive to the individual's long-term goals.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

As our opening quote from Anthony Powell indicates, self-enhancement and self-criticism are closely intertwined. Although the motive to self-en-

hance is powerful and universal (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; but see Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999), the motive to self-assess is also important. Self-assessment can yield a self-critical tendency toward one's personality traits, behaviors, skills, abilities, habits, or future goals.

We argued that the tendency to self-enhance and self-criticize can be adaptive or maladaptive. In particular, we offered two theses. The first was that self-enhancement and self-criticism are adaptive when they function symbiotically, that is, when they have a mutually beneficial relationship. We presented three illustrative scenarios of symbiotic relationships: (a) self-enhancement hits a realism roadblock (e.g., indisputable feedback), followed by self-criticism and temperate self-enhancement; (b) self-enhancement encounters a realism barrier, followed by self-criticism and self-improvement; and (c) self-criticism is offset by compensating mechanisms (e.g., positive mood, close relationships), resulting in self-improvement and grounded self-enhancement patterns. Accompanying these scenarios were empirical demonstrations from the literatures on accountability, self-conception modifiability, and self-affirmation, respectively. In all three cases, self-enhancement and self-criticism, working in tandem, were likely to result in adaptive outcomes such as stronger sense of control; efficacy or self-improvement; and higher optimism, self-esteem, or life satisfaction.

The second thesis was that self-enhancement and self-criticism are maladaptive when they function either parasitically (one undermining the other) or antisymbiotically (one precluding the other). We discussed neuroticism as an example of a parasitic relationship: The two tendencies coexisted, although one (i.e., self-criticism) sabotaged the other. Furthermore, we discussed perfectionism and narcissism as examples of antisymbiotic relationships. In perfectionism, self-criticism hinders self-enhancement. In narcissism, self-enhancement impedes self-criticism. Both parasitic and antisymbiotic relationships have maladaptive implications. For example, neuroticism is associated with lower life satisfaction, lower self-esteem, and pessimism. Perfectionism is associated with depression. Finally, narcissism is linked with fluctuations in mood and self-esteem, dysfunctional relationships, and indifferent or cynical treatment from others.

As shown in the case of perfectionism (and, to some extent, neuroticism), a preoccupation with self-criticism is maladaptive. There is mounting evidence for the detrimental consequences of self-criticism not only for psychological but also for physical health. Recurrent self-criticism, for instance, is associated with negative mood and hopelessness (Santor & Patterson, 2004) as well as depressive symptoms (Besser & Priel, 2003), major depression (Cox, McWilliams, Enns, & Clara, 2004), and shame (Dickerson, Gruenewald, & Kemeny, 2004). Also, recurrent self-criticism leads to an increase in proinflammatory cytokine activity and cortisol levels, in concert with feelings of shame (Dickerson et al., 2004). Indeed, we do not regard self-criticism as a motive in normal adults. Rather, as we have already stated, self-

criticism is an offshoot of the self-assessment motive, and it is adaptive only when it is engaged for relatively brief periods and in the service of adaptive (i.e., self-improving) action.

What is adaptive, anyway, and for whom? In an earlier article (Sedikides & Strube, 1997), we argued that adaptiveness needs to be linked to the relevant situation and the perceiver's characteristics and objectives, although, even then, it is often hard to discern what is or is not adaptive for the individual. Nevertheless, we distinguished between short-term and long-term adaptiveness. Giving up control willingly (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982) or expressing pessimism regarding one's performance (Norem & Cantor, 1986) appear to be maladaptive in the short term, but may be adaptive in the long run. Likewise, an individual's goal to demonstrate scholarly prowess at a cocktail party may be achieved by an ostentatious display of knowledge, but such a behavior deprives the individual's colleagues of the opportunity to display their own scholarly talent and may alienate them. Thus, the short-term adaptive value of this behavior is high, but its long-term adaptive value is low. In summary, the adaptiveness of self-enhancing behaviors needs to be considered within a temporal frame of reference.

So far, we considered adaptive outcomes for the individual. What predicts adaptive outcomes for others? Research by Sheldon and Bettencourt (2002) sheds some light on this question. Not only intrapersonal factors (e.g., personal autonomy) but also interpersonal relatedness and feelings of inclusion predicted adaptive outcomes for the group. These outcomes were intrinsic motivation for group activities, high positive and low negative mood within the group, and strong commitment to the group. Indeed, we maintain that both intrapersonal and interpersonal adaptiveness is necessary to achieve optimal self-esteem and functioning (Kernis, 2003; Passmore, 2000; Sheldon, 2004).

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