Chapter 6
The Self-Concept in Relationships

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How people think about themselves, or their *self-concept*, is deeply rooted in the nature of their interpersonal relationships, and, further, has consequences for well-being. James (1890/1950), for example, suggested that "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (p. 294). Mead (1934) argued similarly that an "individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group" (p. 164). In a very real sense, it is the relationship that gives rise to the sense of self, as psychodynamic theorists long have argued (Winnicott, 1965). But what does it mean to 'be oneself,' what are the implications for well-being, and how are relationships involved? The link between self-concept and well-being is complex, and has been treated differently within different traditions. This chapter explores three perspectives on the link between self-concept and well-being: one which argues that well-being depends upon consistency in self-concept, a second which suggests that it is authenticity in self-concept that matters, and a third according to which convergence between one's actual view of self and one's ideal view of self leads to well-being. In each of these perspectives, there are consequences for well-being that suggest the existence of what some have called a 'coherence motive' (Habermas & Paha, 2001; King & Hicks, 2006; McAdams, 1985, 2001, 2006, 2008; McLean, 2005; McLean, Pasaputhi, & Pals, 2007; Pals, 2006; Swann & Bosson, 2008). That is, depending on one's theoretical starting point people strive variously to maintain consistency, to be authentic, or to approach their ideal view of self, and failing to do so has consequences for well-being. This chapter will explore each of these three traditions and will suggest how the construct of *autonomy support* may provide an integrative perspective for thinking about the self-concept and a motive toward coherence in the context of interpersonal relationships. I begin however with a review of some basic notions about the self-concept and its origins.

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Historical Views of the Self-Concept

As noted by Harter (2006), early thinking about the self-concept was deeply influenced by the work of William James (1890/1950, 1910) and the symbolic inter-actionists Cooley (1902), Baldwin (1895), and Mead (1934). James made the important distinction between the *I-self*, or the self as knower, subject, agent, and the *Me-self*, or the self as known or object. The categorical representation of the Me-self is what contemporary psychologists generally refer to as the self-concept. Importantly for the present chapter, James acknowledged that a person could have different Me-selves depending on the social context, suggesting, as previously noted, that "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (James, 1890/1950, p. 294). In addi-tion, he believed that self-concept played a critical role in the experience of self-esteem, based on the ratio of one's perceived successes to one's 'pretensions.' Implicit in this formulation is an understanding that self-esteem is linked to a per-ceived convergence between one's current or actual state and some preferred or ideal view of self toward which one strives. Further, the fact that life presents one with alternative pathways and versions of oneself requires the engagement of choice: "the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list [of options] carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation" (James, 1890, p. 14). James is here underscoring the fact that the I-self ultimately has a role in shaping the definition of the Me-self, and that some 'selves' may be more central to one's core, more 'true,' than others.

Despite his recognition of multiple social selves, James did not particularly emphasize the role of relationships in the development of the self. That topic was of course of great interest to later psychodynamic (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977; Winnicott, 1965), attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1980), and human-istic (Rogers, 1961) thinkers, but early attention to the social construction of the self was given by the symbolic interactionists. For Cooley (1902), Baldwin (1895), and Mead (1934), the self was crafted through symbolic interactions in the form of lin-guistic exchanges with others, beginning in early childhood. This perspective is captured powerfully in Cooley's notion of the 'looking glass self,' according to which "significant others constituted a social mirror into which the individual gazes to detect their opinions toward the self," opinions which "in turn are incorporated into one's sense of self" (Harter, 2006, p. 511). Implied is a developmental process of internalization of others' opinions of oneself, but this process is not affectively neutral. To some extent one becomes the self one sees in the other's eyes, and this appraisal in turn has an impact on one's feelings about oneself, whether positive or negative. Within contemporary developmental approaches a corollary of the social construction viewpoint holds that, especially during adolescence, people develop "multiple selves" (Harter, 1999) such that "an individual comes to develop a self with each parent, a best friend, a romantic other, and classmates of each gender – selves that often are defined by very different self descriptors" and may be accom-panied by "the pressure to be a particular self in each relational context" (Harter,

2006, p. 509). In other words, whereas James emphasized the role of the I-self in choosing one's truest self-definition, here we see an acknowledgment that relational forces 'outside' the self may conspire to impose a role-specific definition on the self.

From these early theories emerged an understanding that people can have multiple views of themselves, views which to an important degree are shaped by their interactions with others. From James as well we can draw the notion that this potential for multiplicity is linked to well-being in the form of self-esteem, that it serves a motivational role to the extent that people strive to realize their 'pretensions,' and that the I-self, or the self as agent, plays a role in choosing from among the possibilities available for self-definition. From this brief overview of early views on the self-concept I wish to turn now to a presentation of three different contemporary perspectives on the issue of self-definition which will suggest different ways in which the relationship between self-concept and well-being may be understood, whether in terms of consistency, authenticity, or ideal/actual convergence. I then turn to a discussion of how the construct of autonomy support may shed light on the optimizing role that relationships may play in this process.

The Self-Concept and Its Relation to Well-Being

As noted, the way that people think about themselves has implications for well-being. There is disagreement however on the mechanism by which self-concept influences well-being, with some suggesting that well-being is a matter of consistency, others that it is authenticity that counts, and still others that well-being is enhanced when people's self-view approaches their personal ideal. The following sections review these three perspectives.

Self-Concept Consistency

As previously noted, some have postulated that people have a motive to form and maintain a coherent self-concept (Habermas & Paha, 2001; King & Hicks, 2006; McAdams, 1985, 2001, 2006, 2008; McLean, 2005; McLean et al., 2007; Pals, 2006; Swann & Bosson, 2008). 'Being oneself,' here, means being consistent in how one views, experiences, and expresses oneself. Within Western psychology, theorists have long argued that consistency in one's identity is a hallmark of mental health, whereas inconsistency is evidence of conflict and defense. Lecky (1945), for example, argued that inconsistency among self-concepts is at the root of such unpleasant experiences as tension, anxiety, and confusion. Others have viewed inconsistency as a sign of fragmentation of the personality. Block (1961) for example referred to this as being a social 'chameleon,' and he and others (e.g., Horney, 1950; Winnicott, 1965) have seen inconsistency as indicative of a lack of a 'true self' or 'core self.' More recently, Donahue, Robbins, Roberts, and John (1993)

argued that self-inconsistency is largely a defensive process that reflects an underlying fragmentation of the personality and bodes badly for well-being.

An alternative position, however, is that variability or inconsistency in self-presentation may not represent fragmentation or defense as much as it reflects social adaptation and flexibility. Along these lines, Mead (1934) argued that an "individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group" (p. 164). More recently in social constructivist accounts of the self, fluidity, flexibility, and complexity have been seen as adaptive within a postmodern world (Gergen, 1991). The more refined and 'specialized' one's sense of self under varying circumstances, the more one may be able to respond to the demands of changing and varied social circumstances (see also Linville, 1987).

These diverging takes on the meaning of variability and its relations with well-being have spawned a number of research studies (for reviews, see Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003; Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002). In two seminal studies, Donahue, Roberts and colleagues (Donahue, Robbins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Roberts & Donahue, 1994) employed an index they called *self-concept differentiation* (SCD) to tap the degree to which one's self-concept varied across important life roles. They found that higher SCD was associated with lower conscientiousness, agreeableness, and self-esteem, and with higher depression and neuroticism. Donahue and colleagues thus characterized SCD as *fragmentation*, a view supported by its negative association with well-being outcomes. Subsequently, Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi (1997) examined variability across life roles in the 'Big Five' traits, which traditionally are considered to be relatively stable and enduring over time and contexts (McCrae & Costa, 1999). They found substantial within-person variability in Big Five traits (see also McCrae, 2001) and, as Roberts and Donahue had predicted, greater within-person variability was negatively associated with well-being.

This literature, which suggests a negative relation between inconsistency and well-being, would seem to support the existence of a coherence motive which views coherence in terms of consistency; research on autobiographical memory, another tradition that has considered the issue of self-consistency, would seem to make the same point (Bluck, Alea, Habermas, & Rubin, 2005; Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2004; Sutin & Robins, 2005, 2008).

With regard to the debate about consistency versus inconsistency, recent empirical work on personality expression has established that people do in fact display considerable variability or *inconsistency* in their self-views across situations (Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006; Fleeson, 2001, 2004; Shoda et al., 1994). Fleeson (2001, 2004) for example, in his research on *density distributions* of personality traits, has shown that people routinely display almost every level of a given personality trait. (I make the argument that such research on personality is relevant to thinking about the self-concept to the extent that these studies make use of self-report measures of personality.) Perhaps more importantly, individuals differ significantly in the amount of situational variability in personality that they express (Baird et al., 2006; Biesanz & West, 2000; Biesanz, West, & Graziano, 1998; Fleeson, 2001, 2004; Larsen, 1989; Nesselrode, 1988; Paunonen & Jackson, 1985; Snyder, 1974), with some people

departing further from their own mean levels than others do. This 'fact' of inconsistency however does not address the larger issue of *how*, or indeed *whether*, such inconsistency is related to well-being.

Baird et al. (2006) reported results of three studies they conducted that seem to have definitively answered the question. They first provided evidence that existing measures of self-concept consistency typically conflate mean-level information with variability in trait expression. Included among such studies are those that have used the 'SCD' index developed by Donahue et al. (1993). Then, Baird and colleagues demonstrated that once mean levels are removed, self-concept consistency is no longer related to well-being.

Some however have suggested that the relation of self-consistency to well-being depends upon cultural values. Clearly, cultures play a crucial role in shaping how people think (Vygotsky, 1977), and thus cultural orientations carry 'plausible consequences' for self-concept (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; see also Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). In terms of self-consistency, there may, for example, be different consequences for varying or failing to vary across interpersonal contexts for persons from individualist versus collectivist societies. *Idiocentrists* – those whose *self-construals* (Singelis, 1994) are primarily individualistic – have been argued to be on average less likely to modify their self-concepts to adapt to social circumstances and group demands. In contrast, *allocentrists* (people with primarily collectivistic self-construals) might more readily make accommodations in self-attributes from context to context. As Baumeister and Twenge (2003) observed, "members of independent societies see themselves and others in terms of relatively constant personality traits, whereas members of interdependent societies see personality and behavior as more dependent on the situation" (p. 344). This has suggested to some that whereas self-concept inconsistency might well represent fragmentation in individualistic cultures (and thus relate negatively to well-being), it may represent flexibility and contextual sensitivity (and thus relate positively to well-being) in collectivist cultures.

A study by Suh (2002) found support for the general negative effects of self-concept inconsistency on well-being, as well as evidence for cultural moderation of that effect. He found that inconsistency, rather than being adaptive in a collectivist context as some have argued, was negatively related to well-being in both an Asian (South Korean) and a western (U.S.) setting. However, culture did matter. This negative relation was less strong in the South Korean context. Although Suh did not directly assess participants' cultural self-construals, his findings point to the importance of considering cultural contexts as a potential moderator of variability effects.

Cross, Gore, and Morris (2003) assessed whether differences in relational self-construals within a U.S. sample would impact upon the self-consistency/well-being relation. They specifically explored whether participants whose relational self-construals were more interdependent might show less negative impact from self-concept inconsistency. They found that, although there was not a strong relation between one's self-construal style and self-concept consistency, there was a moderation effect such that self-concept consistency was less strongly related to well-being for those whose relational self-construal was highly interdependent. Although

this lends support to the position that self-construals may influence the consistency-to-well-being relation, Cross et al. did not in this study assess non-Western cultural groups.

The existing research investigating the role of culture in the debate about consistency and well-being is limited in scope, and may be subject to the same methodological critique that Baird and colleagues (2006) made of the consistency literature, in general. To overcome these limitations, in addition to controlling for mean levels it would be necessary to test explicitly whether country membership or independent versus interdependent self-construals moderate the consistency-to-well-being relation. In addition, concerns raised by Baird et al. about how consistency has typically been computed can be addressed by using an experience sampling methodology. This is because experience sampling allows the researcher to track "real-time changes in self-reported personality across roles and situations" and "random moments over time while assessing the specific nature of the situation in which participants find themselves" (Baird et al., p. 515), as several researchers have already demonstrated (e.g., Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Fleeson, 2001). Experience sampling would similarly allow tracking of fluctuations in self-concept across relationship contexts.

Authenticity in Self-Concept

The second approach to 'being oneself' has a long tradition in philosophy, going back at least to Kierkegaard, and emphasizes the importance of authenticity. In fact, existential and humanistic psychology (e.g., Rogers, 1961) have always seen authenticity as being important to mental health. Authenticity, genuineness, congruence are all related constructs in these traditions. 'Being oneself' is about being 'true' to oneself in the sense of being genuine and congruent. It is not so much whether one changes or adapts oneself across social contexts that is important, as whether one experiences either change or stability as reflecting one's true values and beliefs. Along similar lines, within the dynamic tradition the concept of authenticity relates to Winnicott's (1965) distinction between 'true self' and 'false self', in that, when acting from the true self, people feel real and 'in touch' with their core needs and emotions. In contrast, when acting from false self, people display 'as-if' personalities to gain approval in non-accepting social contexts. Horney (1950) similarly distinguished between one's real self and 'as-if' self-presentations.

Several researchers have provided more recent empirical evidence for the importance of authenticity in mental health. Kernis (2003), for example, showed that greater authenticity related to increased self-esteem and greater well-being in different social contexts (see also Kernis & Paradise, 2002; Ryan, La Guardia, & Rawsthorne, 2003). Sheldon and colleagues (1997), investigating both the authenticity and consistency perspectives, found that the experience of authenticity related to well-being in U.S. samples. In their study, they found that authenticity and inconsistency were negatively related to each other: the more authentic people felt

themselves to be, the less inconsistent they were in their self-presentations across a number of life-roles.

It is important however to acknowledge that the relevance of authenticity to members of non-Western societies has been questioned, particularly by cross-cultural researchers (e.g., Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996), who consider authenticity to be a Western construct that may have minimal relevance in other cultural contexts. Although some have suggested that authenticity may in fact be valued in Eastern societies (Doi, 1986), to date limited empirical research has addressed the issue. In one study, Lynch and Ryan (2004) found that in three countries, China, Russia, and the United States, both authenticity and consistency were related to well-being and these associations were largely unmoderated by either independent or interdependent self-construals. When allowed to compete for variance in well-being, however, only authenticity was significant in each of the three countries. This study however did not take into account the concerns raised in the later paper by Baird and colleagues (2006) about measures of inconsistency and the need to control for mean levels in self expression, so its results need to be replicated and confirmed.

Convergence Between Ideal and Actual Self-Concept

A third perspective suggests that the coherence motive may be about convergence or movement toward an ideal view of self. James (1910) early on noted that people can discriminate between who they are and who they would like to be. 'Being oneself' means being one's ideal self. The idea that people can have different views of themselves as they actually are and as they would ideally like to be, and that these self-concept discrepancies have implications for well-being, has a long tradition in humanistic (Rogers & Dymond, 1954) and social-cognitive (Higgins, 1987) psychology, and indeed has been suggested by others as well (e.g., Lecky, 1945).

Rogers (1961) argued that the self-concept plays an important role in the regulation of behavior. In Rogers' view, the self-concept determines which aspects of experience we become aware of and which aspects have to be 'repressed' in order to minimize conflict, whether the conflict is interpersonal or intrapersonal in nature. Whether particular aspects of the self-concept are deemed acceptable or not is largely determined by the nature of our interactions with others. For Rogers, a particularly salient aspect of relationships in this regard is the experience of being conditionally regarded by important others, particularly by parents, because such experiences can impose 'conditions of worth' that shape how we think about ourselves. The child who grows up feeling that her worth or lovability depends on conforming to others' expectations may learn to stifle her true wishes, needs, and preferences and take on an incongruent, 'as-if' view of self that conforms to the other's expectations. In contrast, the child who grows up experiencing unconditional regard from her caregivers will likely develop a sense of self that is more congruent, one in which what is truly felt and experienced can be explored and

given expression because it is met with interest and acceptance by the child's important others. In this regard, it is important to note that Rogers believed that people also have an ideal view of themselves, in addition to their current or actual self-concept. In a way that is reminiscent of James' (1890, 1910) earlier work, Rogers argued that the gap between the current or actual view of self and the ideal view of self serves as an important gauge of self-esteem: the larger the gap, the lower one's self-esteem, while the closer people are to their ideal the better they feel about themselves. He believed that when people become aware of a gap between their current and ideal view of self they experience discomfort. Indeed, he argued that this awareness plays a major role in motivating people to seek counseling and psychotherapy. In a number of innovative studies involving Q-sorts of idiographic self-statements, Rogers and his colleagues provided empirical support for a link between self-concept discrepancies and well-being (Rogers & Dymond, 1954). A reduction in ideal/actual discrepancies was such an important therapeutic outcome that Rogers considered it to be an indication of positive personality change (Rogers).

From a social-cognitive perspective Higgins (1987, 1989) similarly argued and provided empirical evidence that when people experience a discrepancy between their actual self-concept and their ideal self-concept, they are likely to experience distress in the form of depressed affect. Accordingly, people generally seek to reduce such ideal/actual self-concept discrepancies. Regarding the notion of a coherence motive, both the perspective of Rogers and that of Higgins are *motivational* in the sense that both predict that people are motivated to reduce perceived discrepancies between ideal and actual views of the self. While Higgins' theory suggests that what is motivating is the desire to reduce discomfort, Rogers' view is more 'organismic' in that it suggests an integrative, forward-moving, growth-oriented tendency.

These researchers suggest ideal/actual discrepancies in self-concept are associated with distress, and that well-being is therefore linked with greater congruence between ideal and actual self-views. In line with the focus of the present chapter, it is important to ask whether there are factors in the interpersonal environment that may help to reduce such discrepancies and to promote congruence. Higgins' (1987, 1989) initial work did not address this possibility. Rogers (1961) however argued that the therapeutic relationship could play an important role in this regard. To the extent that it was characterized by genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard, the relationship between therapist and client could facilitate the reduction of ideal/actual discrepancies by creating an environment in which clients would feel safe to explore and integrate aspects of themselves that previously had been treated as off-limits or alien to the self. By exploring and integrating the various aspects of the self in the context of the therapeutic relationship, clients could experience greater freedom to pursue their personal ideal for the person they would like to be. Although his research focused on the therapeutic relationship, Rogers speculated that the same principles should apply to everyday, non-professional relationships, as well.

To test the prediction that discrepancies between ideal and actual self-concept would have implications for well-being across cultures, Lynch, La Guardia, and Ryan (2009) in a recent study administered self-report surveys to participants in China (N = 245), Russia (N = 192), and the United States (N = 205). In an initial session, participants were asked to complete a measure of ideal self-concept assessed in terms of a 30-item set of Big Five trait items (Sheldon et al., 1997). Participants were given the instruction, "Think of the attributes or characteristics you would <u>ideally</u> like to have – the type of person you wish, desire, or hope to be. Regardless of other people's opinions, these are the attributes that you feel are a reflection of how you would be ideally." The phrase, "regardless of other people's opinions," was included in order to increase the likelihood that participants' ideal ratings would reflect personally held values rather than socially desirable trait expressions. Then they were provided the stem, "<u>Ideally</u>, I would like to see myself as someone who is," followed by each of the Big Five adjectives. Ideal self-concept scores were the average of the six items for each subscale, yielding an ideal self-concept score for each of the Big Five dimensions (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Openness to Experiences, and Conscientiousness).

Measures in Session 2 focused on within-person variations across six, everyday relationships: mother, father, best friend, romantic partner, roommate, and a self-selected teacher. The 'teacher' target was included so that a potentially hierarchical-subordinate relationship would be assessed along with parental and peer relationships, and so that temporary as well as more lasting relationships would be included. For each relationship, participants completed measures of perceived autonomy support (to be discussed in more detail, below), Big Five self-concept (using the same items administered at Session 1), and well-being (well-being within each relationship was computed as a composite of relationship satisfaction, subjective vitality, and positive and negative affect). In this way separate measures of actual self-concept, autonomy support, and well-being were obtained for each relationship.

Ideal/actual self-concept discrepancies were calculated for each of the Big Five as the absolute difference between a participant's ideal self-concept, measured at Session 1, and his or her actual self-concept within each particular relationship as assessed at Session 2.

A preliminary analysis using paired-sample t-tests determined that, indeed, in each of the three countries participants in general ideally preferred to see themselves as more extraverted, conscientious, agreeable, and open to experience, but as less neurotic, than they actually saw themselves.

Multilevel modeling (Fleeson, 2007; Lynch, 2012) was used in order to test the prediction that there would be a within-person process relating self-concept discrepancies to well-being. As expected, in each country, for the typical individual the larger the gap between actual self-concept and one's ideal the greater the decrement to well-being.

Lynch et al. (2009) performed the same analyses after combining data from the three countries in order to test whether country membership would moderate any of the associations. For the analysis testing the association between ideal/actual

discrepancies and well-being, there were no main effects by country. There were, however, several significant interactions. The interactions indicated that, although larger discrepancies were associated with poorer well-being outcomes for the typical individual in all three countries, for extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, and openness these associations were stronger (more negative) for participants from the United States compared to those from China. The associations were stronger among Russian compared to Chinese participants for neuroticism and agreeableness.

Lynch et al. (2009) thus provided initial evidence for a within-person process relating ideal/actual self-concept discrepancies with decrements to well-being. Although it is notable that the findings held across three countries that likely differ in important respects, it remains important to test these associations in other countries and to test whether a measured dimension of culture, such as independent versus interdependent self-construals (Singelis, 1994), might moderate these associations. As well, because these results were obtained in a lab-based survey study, it is important to test whether they are generalizable to daily experiences in various interpersonal settings.

Building on this initial research, Przybylski, Weinstein, Murayama, Lynch, and Ryan (2012) conducted two studies to test the notion that one reason people play video games is that games allow them to "try on" ideal aspects of themselves that they might not otherwise be able to express. One study (N=144) used a within-subjects design in which participants responded to introductory questionnaires, played three different video games in the media laboratory, and completed questionnaires after each game. A second study (N=979) used a between-subjects design in which players were recruited from an online gaming community and completed a set of questionnaires. In both laboratory and observational designs, the researchers found that convergence between people's experience of themselves during play and their concept of their ideal selves (both measured in terms of the Big Five personality dimensions) was related to enjoyment of play and positive shifts in affect after play. Among other things, these studies provide evidence from another domain of behavior that a gap between ideal and actual self-concept has implications for important outcomes related to motivation and well-being.

Autonomy Support, Self-Concept, and the Relationship Context: An Integrative Framework

From the preceding sections it seems clear that how people think about themselves has implications for well-being, and that, in one way or another, their interpersonal relationships are implicated in the process. Harter (2006) for example recognized that relationships can create pressures for people to view themselves in particular ways, and others from the psychodynamic tradition understood how the early relationship between caregiver and child can create conditions that facilitate the expression of either a true self or, alternatively, a false, 'as-if' self (Horney, 1950; Winnicott, 1965). From the humanistic perspective, Rogers (1961) understood how

self-views can be influenced either by unconditional positive regard or by 'conditions of worth,' with very different results for the child's integration and well-being. In this section, I wish to explore how an aspect of relationships known as autonomy support may provide a positive and integrative framework for understanding the role of relationships in promoting both the self-concept and well-being.

Within contemporary psychology, the construct of autonomy has been most clearly articulated from within the self-determination theory tradition (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory (SDT) in turn derives its understanding of the construct from the phenomenological (Husserl, 1980; Pfander, 1908/1967; Ricoeur, 1966) and analytic (Dworkin, 1988; Frankfurt, 1969) traditions in philosophy and emphasizes *self-rule* in contrast to heteronomy or *rule by the other*.

Autonomy, as conceptualized by SDT, concerns the need to feel oneself able to make personally meaningful choices, to take initiative, and to pursue personally held goals and ideals. Thus, within SDT autonomy is conceptualized as a basic psychological need, the satisfaction of which conduces toward intrinsically motivated behavior, well-being, and the facilitation of inherent, organismic processes of integration. Importantly, social contexts generally and interpersonal relationships in particular can either support, fail to support, or even undermine the satisfaction of autonomy as a basic need. Relationship partners who are experienced as autonomy supportive provide opportunities for choice, initiative-taking, and personal goal-pursuit, avoid pressuring or controlling verbal or nonverbal behaviors, and generally engage in trying to understand the other person's internal frame of reference (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Reeve, 2002; Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999; Ryan & Lynch, 2003). Importantly for the self-concept, a relationship that is experienced as supportive of the need for autonomy (in contrast to a relationship experienced as controlling or pressuring) should promote healthy self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

In terms of the coherence motive and the three perspectives under discussion in the present chapter, in general, SDT does not make any specific predictions pertaining to consistency, *per se*, viewing it as an essentially neutral phenomenon, but the constructs of autonomy and autonomy support do lend themselves to specific predictions relative to the other two perspectives discussed herein. Specifically, in the context of the current chapter, autonomy supportive relationships provide a likely context in which to feel free to pursue the self one would ideally like to be. Thus, it would be logical to expect that there should be greater convergence between ideal and actual self-concept in autonomy supportive relationships. Similarly, autonomy is closely related to the idea of authenticity (Ryan & Deci, 2004), and SDT argues that people generally feel it easier to be authentic in relationships experienced as autonomy supportive.

There is some initial empirical evidence linking autonomy supportive relationships with both authenticity in self-concept and convergence between ideal and actual self-concept. In the cross-cultural study mentioned earlier, Lynch and Ryan (2004) found that autonomy supportive relationships conduced toward greater well-being, more 'positive' expressions of Big Five self-concept (that is, more extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and less

neuroticism), and authenticity, in three cultures. These relations held even when independent and interdependent self-construals were taken into account. Thus, this study provided evidence that support for autonomy is an optimizing quality in relationships, with particular implications for self-concept.

In their cross-cultural study investigating the relation between well-being and ideal/actual self-concept discrepancies, Lynch and colleagues (2009) also tested the role of autonomy supportive relationships in helping people to approach their self-endorsed ideal view of self, arguing, in line with self-determination theory, that interpersonal autonomy support should facilitate people's innate propensities toward integration and should allow people to pursue their personally held ideal. They also reasoned that this would provide a further test of Rogers' (1961) prediction that everyday relationships have the potential to facilitate integration of the self-concept and personality. Using multilevel modeling, Lynch and colleagues found that there was, indeed, a within-person process linking autonomy support with self-concept discrepancies, in line with predictions made by Rogers and self-determination theory. Specifically, people reported feeling closer to their personal ideal view of self when with partners they experienced as being autonomy supportive, and, conversely, reported being further from their personal ideal with partners experienced as controlling. This association held in all three countries – China, Russia, and the United States – and was not moderated by country membership. In addition, autonomy support partially mediated the association between ideal/actual discrepancies and well-being, suggesting not only that autonomy support plays an important role in the expression of self-concept, but that ideal/actual discrepancies in themselves carry important implications for well-being that are not wholly accounted for by satisfaction of the need for autonomy.

The empirical evidence thus far is limited, but it suggests that the experience of autonomy and its support in interpersonal relationships may indeed be an optimizing quality in the expression of the self-concept. When in relationships experienced as autonomy supportive, people see themselves as being more authentic in their self-expressions and, additionally, as being closer to their personally held ideal view of self. Further, greater authenticity and closer convergence with one's ideal seem clearly to be associated with greater well-being. These associations have been found to hold in several different cultures around the world, to date. What is not yet clear is the relation between authenticity and attaining one's ideal view of self, because it is possible that one's ideals could be either introjected or personally endorsed, that is, one's ideal view of self could in theory be more or less autonomously internalized (see, e.g., Lynch et al., 2009; Rogers & Dymond, 1954). Presumably, given the links between autonomy support and authenticity (Lynch & Ryan, 2004) and autonomy support and ideal/actual self-concept convergence (Lynch et al., 2009), one's ideal self-concept will often be one's authentic self-concept. Those associations however need to be tested, and may be moderated for example by the experience of parental conditional regard (Rogers, 1961): ideal views of self may well be less authentic and less congruent, in Rogers' sense, for the child who, while growing up, learned to value a self that conformed to the wishes, demands, and expectations of others rather than to his or her own inner needs and personal preferences. I suspect

that, developmentally speaking, experiencing one's parents as conditionally regarding forces children to sacrifice the need for autonomy for the need for relatedness. This is because, in evolutionary terms, given the human child's prolonged period of dependence preserving relatedness to one's caregivers is probably more essential for survival than is autonomy. When forced to sacrifice autonomy for relatedness, however, there should be predictable consequences for the self-concept and for well-being. Specifically, in order to preserve the relationship with one's parents, ideal views of self will likely become more introjected (false, as-if) and less authentic, and there should be decrements to well-being as a result. Parents who provide unconditional regard for their children, on the other hand, allow the needs for relatedness and autonomy to be met in tandem, likely promoting the internalization of ideal self-views that are more genuine, true, and authentic. In this model, it is autonomy, specifically, that promotes the internalization of ideals that are authentic and whose realization leads to well-being, while experiences of conditional regard effectively force the child to choose relatedness over autonomy, thereby interrupting and moderating these associations. These predictions however, need to be tested.

In light of James' (1890) argument that the I-self plays an important role in self-definition, and Harter's (2006) understanding of the way in which social contexts may pressure people to adopt particular self-definitions, it is indeed exciting that this contemporary line of research underscores the important role played by autonomy and interpersonal autonomy support in the way that people think about themselves. In light of these findings, I suggest that future research further investigate the possibility that to the extent that a motive for coherence exists, what it more accurately represents is not so much a motive toward consistency, *per se*, but a motive toward realizing one's truest, most authentic and ideal self, a motive that can be fostered or undermined by one's interpersonal relationships to the degree that they are experienced as either autonomy supportive or controlling.

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