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The Social Psychology of Self-Presentation

A Review of

Self-Representation: The Second Attribution-Personality Theory Conference, CSPP—LA, 1986

Reviewed by

Donelson R. Forsyth

A century has passed since William James (1890) laid claim to the self as a suitable subject of study for psychology. Although his acquisitive foray into philosophy went unappreciated for some time, a growing body of theoretical and empirical work in social, cognitive, and personality psychology attests to psychologists' renewed commitment to the study of the self and its processes. The chapters that Zelen has gathered together contribute to this growth by offering a social psychological perspective on the self and on how individuals communicate information about themselves during social interaction.

Although the title suggests that Zelen and his authors are adding yet another new term—*self-representation*—to the already too-long list of hyphenated theoretical concepts that include the word *self* (e.g., self-efficacy, self-management, self-monitoring, self-handicapping), the chapters are united in their focus on self-presentational processes. Indeed, the chapters are based on papers given at the California School of Professional Psychology's (CSPP) Second Attribution-Personality Theory Conference, which honored the work of Edward E. Jones, so they share a common intellectual heritage provided by Jones's work on self-presentation, attribution, and self-handicapping.

The book, as a volume in the Springer-Verlag *Recent Research in Psychology* series, is, by plan, narrow in its focus. This limited breadth is reflected by the occasional examination of nuances in terminology and methodology that specialists in the field find fascinating but that others might label *picayune*. In addition, all of the authors seem to accept as given the egoist view of human beings condemned by Wallach and Wallach (1983). However, the chapters give a glimpse of the insiders' view of current social psychological work on the self as reflected by their concern with specialized

issues. Moreover, all of the chapters offer insights that extend well beyond self-presentational processes per se. Arkin examines the shadowy overlap between interpersonal and intrapsychic motivations. Weary wonders about the role that publicly displayed depressive symptoms play in promoting personal adjustment. Snyder and Higgins explore the impact of self-presentationally motivated verbal statements on affect, esteem, and interpersonal relations, and Berglas offers insights into the problems that can arise when social psychological concepts are used to explain clinically puzzling phenomena.

Overall, the content is both informative and provocative. Even though, in many cases, the chapters present data and conclusions reported elsewhere in the literature, they also offer stimulating conjectures that remain unexamined empirically. The chapters can be described in the same terms that Arkin uses to describe Jones's work: The volume's chapters are filled with "important questions, clever methodologies, and compelling data" (p. 7).

References

James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology*. New York: Holt.

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Wallach, M. A., & Wallach, L. (1983). *Psychology's sanction for selfishness: The error of egoism in theory and therapy*. New York: Freeman.

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