SELF-CONCEPT


SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is a concept that has been used to explain a vast array of emotional, motivational, and behavioral phenomena. Most Americans believe intuitively that low self-esteem is undesirable; indeed, the link between low self-esteem and depression, anxiety, loneliness, and alienation supports the general idea that low self-esteem is an aversive state. The view that self-esteem is a vital component of mental health is also evident in the popular media and in educational policy. Low self-esteem has been viewed as the root cause of societal problems ranging from drug abuse to teenage pregnancy to poor school performance. A number of educational and therapeutic programs have been developed to solve these problems by increasing self-esteem. Self-esteem is one of the most frequently examined constructs in sociology and psychology, with more than 15,000 research articles referring to it over the past thirty years. This entry reviews the research that has focused on the conceptual and functional basis of self-esteem.

Self-esteem is defined as the evaluative component of the self-concept, the extent to which people view themselves as likable and worthy as opposed to unlikeable and unworthy. As a self-reflexive attitude, self-esteem is composed of cognitive and affective components. Self-esteem is related to personal beliefs about skills, abilities, and future outcomes as well as the strategies people use to gain self-knowledge. However, the personal experience of self-esteem is more emotional than rational. Some people dislike themselves in spite of objective evidence suggesting that they should feel very good about themselves. Many successful doctors, lawyers, professors, and entrepreneurs are filled with self-doubt despite their objective career success.

The term "self-esteem" sometimes is used interchangeably with terms such as "self-confidence," "self-efficacy," and even "self-concept," but such usage is inaccurate and should be discouraged. Self-confidence and self-efficacy refer to the belief that one can attain specific outcomes. Although people with high self-esteem often are self-confident, evaluative reactions to personal outcomes, generally, and it is possible for people to be confident about attaining a goal without feeling good about themselves in the process. The term "self-concept" refers to the components of self-esteem that includes many things such as name, race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, likes and dislikes, and personality traits. As such, self-concept refers to cognitive beliefs and other forms of self-relevant knowledge (Felson 1992). Although self-esteem clearly is influenced by the contents of the self-concept, they are not the same thing.

STRUCTURE AND MEASUREMENT OF SELF-ESTEEM

An important issue in the literature on self-esteem is whether self-esteem is best conceptualized as a unitary global trait or a multidimensional trait with independent subcomponents. An example of a multidimensional trait model is Tafarodi and Swann’s (1995) differentiation between self-liking and self-competence. From this perspective, it is possible for people to like themselves generally but view themselves as not particularly efficacious at various tasks. Conversely, it is possible for people to view themselves as generally competent but not really like themselves. Mismatches between self-liking and self-competence lead to biases in the interpretation of social and performance feedback that confirm the level of self liking. For instance, those who are high in self-liking but low in self-competence perceive negative feedback more positively than do those who are low in self-liking but high in self-competence.

Global self-esteem is best conceptualized as a hierarchical construct with three major components: performance self-esteem, social self-esteem, and physical self-esteem. Each component can be broken down into progressively smaller subcomponents. Performance self-esteem refers to one’s sense of general competence and includes intellectual ability, school performance, self-regulatory capacities, self-confidence, efficacy, and agency. People who are high in performance self-esteem believe that they are smart and capable. As will be discussed below, personal beliefs about performance are poorly related to objective outcomes. Social self-esteem refers to how people believe they are perceived by others. It is a perception rather than reality that is critical here. If people believe that others, especially significant others, value and respect them, they experience high social self-esteem even if others truly dislike them or hold them in contempt. The influence of these reflected appraisals on self-esteem is an integral part.
of Cooley’s (1902) “looking glass self” and has been implicated in the development of self-esteem by sociological theorists such as George Herbert Mead and Stanley Rosenberg. People who are low in social self-esteem often experience social anxiety and are high in public self-consciousness. They are highly attentive to their public images and worry about how others view them. Physical self-esteem refers to how people view their physical bodies and includes things such as athletic skills, physical attractiveness, and body image as well as physical stigmata and feelings about race and ethnicity.

How are these subcomponents of self-esteem related to global self-esteem? James (1892) proposed that global self-esteem is the summation of specific components of self-esteem, each of which is in turn related to the self-concept. In other words, people have high self-esteem to the extent that they feel good about the things that matter to them. Not being good at tennis is irrelevant to the self-concept of a nonathlete, and doing poorly in school may have little impact on inner-city youth who do not identify with mainstream society. Heist (1995) and Marsh (1995) debated the value of global versus specific component models. Pelham’s research generally supports the Janiszewski view that the centrality of self-esteem is an important predictor of the emotional response to the self (i.e., one’s feelings of self-esteem), whereas Marsh claims that domain importance does not have an impact on self-esteem. Although the jury is still out on this issue, the concept of domain importance is a central feature of most theories of self-esteem.

In terms of measurement, most research uses global measures of self-esteem, since this is viewed as having the greatest theoretical importance (Baumeister 1998). The most widely used measure of global self-esteem is the Rosenberg (1965) scale, which consists of two general statements such as “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” “I certainly feel useless at times,” and “I take a positive attitude toward myself.” Unfortunately, scores on this scale tend to be tightly clustered around its mean, limiting its predictive value. A review of self-esteem measures conducted by Blascovich and Tonzaka (1991) recommended the Revised Feelings of Inadequacy Scale (Blascovich and Courneya 1984), which is a modified version of the Janis and Field (1959) scale. This scale has five factors: social confidence, school abilities, self-regard, physical appearance, and physical ability. The total score on this scale is widely used as a measure of global self-esteem.

Another issue in measurement and definition of self-esteem is conceptualized as a stable personality trait or a context-specific state. Most theories of self-esteem view it as a relatively stable trait: if one has high self-esteem today, one probably will have high self-esteem tomorrow. Around this stable baseline, however, there are fluctuations; although people generally may feel good about themselves, there are times when they may experience self-doubt and even dislike themselves. In terms of research, the selection of trait or state measures of self-esteem depends on whether one is interested in predicting long-term outcomes or in the immediate effects associated with feelings about the self. Obviously, measures of state self-esteem are more useful for the latter group. The State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton and Polivy 1991) is a commonly used measure that has been shown to be sensitive to laboratory manipulations of self-esteem. This scale measures eight specific feelings associated with performance, social, and physical self-esteem. Measures of trait and state self-esteem are highly correlated. However, frequent fluctuations in state self-esteem have been found to be associated with increased sensitivity to and reliance on social evaluations, increased concern about how one views the self, and even anger and anxiety (Keirns 1993). In general, a fragile sense of self-esteem respond extremely favorably to positive feedback and extremely defensively to negative feedback.

**SOURCES AND FUNCTIONS OF SELF-ESTEEM**

A central issue in self-esteem pertains to its source. Research in psychology of self-esteem suggests that self-esteem is highly related to childhood experiences, especially in terms of parental treatment. Harter has incorporated the Janiszewski and Cooley views of the development of self-esteem into a general model of self-esteem development (Harter 1993). Harter proposes that reflected appraisals about important dimensions affect the development of self-esteem but that specific domains are closely linked to potential audiences. According to her theory, parents are particularly concerned about behavioral and social conduct and school performance, and therefore, children’s beliefs about how their parents view them on these dimensions influence self-esteem. Children who do well scholastically and behave in accordance with parental expectations believe that their parents support and love them. However, parents have less impact than peers on self-esteem as it relates to physical appearance, athletic ability, and peer likability. To obtain the support of one’s peers, children believe they have to be attractive, athletic, and likable. Failure to obtain support from either parents or peers can lead to feelings of hopelessness, depression, and poor global self-esteem. Harter’s model offers a significant advance over earlier developmental theories by integrating importance and social support from a domain-specific perspective.

Further evidence for socialization processes can be found when one considers the influence of gender differences. A number of studies suggest that boys and girls diverge in their primary sources of self-esteem, with girls being more influenced by relationships and boys being more influenced by objective success. Stein et al. (1992) examined participants in an eight-year longitudinal study of adolescence growth and development. During adolescence, an agentic orientation predicted heightened self-esteem for males but not for females, whereas a communal orientation predicted heightened self-esteem for females but not for males. The possibility that males and females differ in terms of what constitutes the self-concept was also addressed by Joseph et al. (1992). In a series of studies, men and women were given false feedback indicating that they had deficits either on a performance dimension (e.g., competition, individual thinking) or on a social dimension (e.g., nurturance, interpersonal integration). Consistent with predictions, men high in self-esteem enhanced their estimates of being able to engage successfully in future performance behaviors, whereas women high in self-esteem enhanced their estimates of being able to engage successfully in future social behaviors. The authors of this entry recently compared the experiences of boys and girls in a summer tennis camp designed to increase self-esteem (Hebl et al. 1999). Scores on a children’s version of the self-esteem scale showed that both boys and girls had increases in overall self-esteem during the tennis camp, but whereas boys gained self-esteem primarily in the performance self-esteem domain, girls gained self-esteem primarily in the social self-esteem domain. In each case it can be seen that boys gain self-esteem from getting ahead whereas girls gain self-esteem from getting along.

From a completely different perspective, some researchers have suggested that self-esteem is determined more by biology than by socialization. Although direct evidence is minimal, there is circumstantial evidence that some components of self-esteem are based in biology. Twin studies have suggested that self-esteem is moderately heritable, with estimates ranging from 50 to 50 percent (Kendler et al. 1998). In addition, traits known to be associated with self-esteem, such as extraversion and neuroticism, have long been known to have a genetic component. Kramer (1995) argues that self-esteem is rooted in activity of the serotoninergic systems. He notes that pharmacological treatments that increase the activity of serotonin are associated with an increased sense of self-confidence and self-esteem. However, there have not been any systematic or rigorous tests of this hypothesis. The possibility that self-esteem has a biological component remains an important empirical issue.

Some theorists have portrayed self-esteem as a mechanism that has evolved through adaptation to promote survival of the species. Accordingly, self-esteem is viewed as a force that promotes feelings of confidence and competence that may lead to superior performance across a broad range of activities. Interestingly, this perspective can be explained by gender differences in the major sources of self-esteem. Throughout human evolutionary history, males were of value to the group primarily through their role as hunters and protectors whereas women gathered food and nurtured offspring. Hence, being good at tasks closely associated with ancestral sex roles may be associated with increased feelings of self-esteem. However, because theories of evolution and socialization predict the same gender pattern for self-esteem, it is impossible to claim that women or men have a male or female self-esteem. Baumeister (1998) has noted that simple evolutionary accounts of self-esteem are difficult to accept because of the rather negligible benefits associated with self-esteem and the possibility that high self-esteem may promote overconfidence and excessive risk taking.
A novel and important functional account of self-esteem has been proposed by Leary and his colleagues. Leary begins with the assumption that humans have a fundamental need to belong that is rooted in evolutionary history (Baumeister and Leary 1995). For most of human evolution, survival and reproduction depended on affiliation with a group. Those who belonged to social groups were more likely to survive and reproduce than those who were excluded from groups and left to survive on their own. According to Leary, self-esteem functions as a monitor of the likelihood of social exclusion. When people behave in ways that increase the likelihood that they will be rejected, they experience a reduction in state self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem serves as a monitor, or sociometer, of social acceptance and/or rejection. At the trait level, those with high self-esteem have sociometers that indicate a low probability of rejection and therefore do not worry about how they are perceived by others. By contrast, those with low self-esteem have sociometers that indicate the imminent possibility of rejection and therefore are highly motivated to manage their public impression.

CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING HIGH OR LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem has both cognitive and affective components. Accordingly, a number of researchers have examined the cognitive and affective reactions to high and low self-esteem. The overall view suggests that people process information in a way that confirms and supports their chronic self-views. People with high self-esteem actively defend their positive self-views, whereas those with low self-esteem appear to be less able to do so. This section reviews research that has examined differences between individuals with high and low self-esteem.

Self-esteem differences have been reported for a wide range of intrapsychic phenomena, including emotional reactions, cognitive processes, and motivational states. There are obvious differences in how high and low self-esteem feel about themselves; the positivity and negativity of self-feelings are of course central to self-esteem. For instance, people with high self-esteem are more likely to report being depressed and anxious than are those with high self-esteem. These differences appear to be more subjective than objective. Researchers have used diary studies to examine whether high and low self-esteem people differ in their daily moods and emotions (Campbell et al. 1991). Compared with individuals with high self-esteem, individuals with low self-esteem judged the events in their lives more negatively and as having a greater impact on their moods. However, when participants’ diaries, they could not distinguish between the events experienced by participants with high and low self-esteem. Thus, similar circumstances are perceived and experienced differently as a function of a person’s self-esteem level. In terms of specific emotional states, there are no differences in how high and low self-esteem individuals experience interpersonal emotions (e.g., happiness), but there are differences in how they experience self-relevant emotions (e.g., pride and shame). People with high self-esteem may be more likely to report pride, whereas those with low self-esteem are more likely to report shame. Once again, this pattern is independent of actual events in the lives of people with high and low self-esteem.

A robust finding in social psychological research is that everyone feels greater positive feedback regardless of one’s self-esteem level. People with low self-esteem like to hear good things about themselves just as much as do people with high self-esteem, and both groups hope to be successful in life. However, people with high self-esteem are much more likely to believe positive feedback. People with low self-esteem are distrustful of overly positive feedback because it contradicts what they believe to be true about themselves. Swann (Swann et al. 1887) argues that people with low self-esteem are attracted to negative information because it validates and confirms their negative self-views. Swann likens the conflict between an emotional preference for positivity and a cognitive preference for negativity to being caught in the crossfire between two warring factions.

A consistent theme in the literature on self-esteem is that self-esteem involves a cognitive bias in processing evaluation and social information. In a world filled with ambiguities and uncertainties, people selectively construct their own reality through biased encoding, retrieval, and interpretation of life events. Research on information-processing styles shows that high self-esteem is associated with cognitive strategies aimed at enhancing self-appraisals and thinking of oneself in the most positive way. These objectives are accomplished by means of deeper encoding and more frequent retrieval of positive self-knowledge coupled with an avoidance of negative self-relevant information. That is, people with high self-esteem pay attention to information that says good things about them but ignore information that challenges a positive self-view. By contrast, the processing style associated with low self-esteem is one of self-consciousness and rumination. Individuals with low self-esteem focus on their own thoughts and feelings, often dwelling on negative life events. They are vigilant for information that confirms a negative self-view and ruminate on past failures, embarrassments, and setbacks in a nonproductive fashion.

Based information processing helps people maintain their existing self-views. For example, an individual with high self-esteem may create a personal definition of what it means to be a “good student” that includes areas in which he or she excels while downplaying the importance of areas of personal deficiency. People with high self-esteem also believe that their talents are unique and special, which justifies their self-esteem and makes it more difficult to be rejected. People with low self-esteem are more likely to define self-esteem in a more realistic, less absolute way. As a result of their selective processing of evaluative information, people with high self-esteem are much more adept at defending their self-esteem against threats than are those with low self-esteem. Thus, people with high self-esteem are more likely to believe positive feedback while readily accepting positive feedback. These people are also more likely to show a self-serving bias, which refers to the tendency of individuals to take personal credit for success but to blame failure on external circumstances. Some studies in fact find evidence of the self-serving bias in individuals with low self-esteem such that they credit success to the environment (e.g., an easy task or luck) and blame themselves for failure. People with low self-esteem appear to be generally less able to put a positive spin on negative personal information. For instance, after receiving a positive evaluation, individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to doubt their own abilities on their weaknesses while individuals with high self-esteem recruit thoughts about their strengths. Differential responses to feedback appear to be an automatic consequence of self-esteem and do not require effort or conscious initiation (Dodgson and Wood 1998).

Baumeister and Tice (Baumeister et al. 1989) have proposed that the basic distinction between high self-esteem and low self-esteem is motivational. People with high self-esteem are concerned primarily with self-enhancement, whereas people with low self-esteem are concerned primarily with self-protection. The self-enhancement motive emphasizes feeling good about oneself with the aim of increasing one’s self-esteem. Thus, people with high self-esteem look for areas in which they can excel and stand out. They set higher goals so that they can prove they possess exceptional skills. By contrast, people with low self-esteem are concerned with avoiding humiliation, embarrassment, and rejection. Low self-esteem individuals’ self-protective orientation guards against feeling even worse about themselves. Thus, when they fail at a task, they set more modest goals so that they do not lose further esteem through failure.

Self-esteem is known to be relevant to interpersonal behavior. For instance, high and low self-esteem people differ in their perceptions of interpersonal acceptance or rejection. A study in which participants were told that they had been rejected or accepted by their peers (Nezlek et al. 1997) showed that individuals who had been rejected perceived peer inclusion and exclusion accurately, corresponding to experimental feedback. High self-esteem individuals, however, always perceived inclusion, even when they had been told they had been personally rejected. In general, people with high self-esteem believe that others admire, like, and respect them, whereas people with low self-esteem do not feel that they receive adequate support. This pattern fits in well with the referred appraisal model of self-esteem that was discussed earlier. Because they are concerned with how others view them and are uncertain about their own beliefs, people with low self-esteem are especially yielding they change their minds and behaviors to conform to the beliefs and opinions of others. Conversely, people with high self-esteem are confident about their opinions and tend not to be influenced by others. Indeed, they often view their own ideas and beliefs as being superior to those of others.

The currently available evidence paints the cognitive, affective, and social worlds of those with high and low self-esteem to be quite different. But do people truly differ as a function of self-esteem? When people are interviewed, they appear to have greater differences between those with high and low self-esteem.
Self-esteem. When describing themselves, high self-esteem people say they are physically attractive, intelligent, socially skilled, outgoing, upbeat, optimistic, and satisfied with the state of their lives. Low self-esteem people depict themselves in a much less positive light and describe themselves by using more neutral and negative self-aspects that are likely to undermine self-esteem. Unfortunately, the use of self-reports is a problematic because they are confounded by one's level of self-esteem. High self-esteem people generally like and believe favorable things about themselves, and it is not surprising that they rate themselves highly on positive personality traits. However, the extent to which high self-esteem individuals actually possess and exhibit these positive traits varies from the extent to which they do not possess or exhibit negative traits is not well known.

The few studies that have compared claims by high and low self-esteem people to objective standards have not found differences between self-esteem groups. For instance, although people with high self-esteem think of themselves as more attractive than do people with low self-esteem, both groups are seen equally attractive by others (Diener et al. 1995). Ratings of intelligence show the same pattern: High self-esteem people claim to be more intelligent, but intelligence tests show no differences as a function of self-esteem (Gabriel et al. 1994). Similarly, self-report data indicate that high self-esteem individuals are more likable than are low self-esteem people. However, likability ratings of high and low self-esteem people by interaction partners show no relation to self-esteem (Brocker and Lloyd 1988). Overall, most researchers have concluded that there are few differences in objective outcomes between those high and low in self-esteem (Baumeister 1998). A review of the literature by the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility (1990) conceded that "the associations between self-esteem and its expected consequences are mixed, insignificant, or absent" (Mecca et al. 1989, 1990, 1991). Self-esteem appears to be related to subjective rather than objective life outcomes.

It is even possible that high self-esteem is associated with negative outcomes in some contexts. For instance, although high self-esteem typically is associated with superior self-regulation, some evidence suggests that high self-esteem may interfere with self-regulation when self-esteem is threatened. Relative to when they succeed, failure elicits higher goals and increased persistence — even on unsolvable tasks — in those with high self-esteem (McFarlin et al. 1984). Baumeister et al. (1993) demonstrated that ego threats sabotage self-regulation among those with high self-esteem. In this research, high and low self-esteem participants chose performance contexts in which a greater payoff was associated with loiter and riskier personal goals. In the control condition, those with high self-esteem set appropriate goals and showed superior self-regulation. However, after ego threat (being told to pay it safe if they "didn't have what it takes"), high self-esteem participants set inappropriate, risky goals and ended up with smaller monetary rewards than did participants with low self-esteem. Under threat, participants with high self-esteem also were significantly more likely to choke under pressure (i.e., to show performance decrements under conditions where superior performance is important) than were participants with low self-esteem. These findings suggest that people with high self-esteem are prone to self-regulatory failure in certain situations.

Similarly, extremely positive self-appraisals have been linked to poor interpersonal outcomes, especially when such self-appraisals are challenged or discredited. Baumeister examined the literature linking self-esteem to interpersonal violence. In contrast to widely held assumptions that low self-esteem is associated with violent actions, they found a consistent pattern in the studies that those who thought highly of themselves but encountered a threat or challenge to their positive self-views were more likely to act in hostile and violent ways. Similarly, Kernis and colleagues (Kernis 1993) have demonstrated that when it is unstable, high self-esteem is associated with increased hostility and aggression. They found that those with unstable high self-esteem are likely to respond to ego threats with self-aggrandizement and defensiveness (Kernis et al. 1997).

Other evidence suggests that those with highly positive self-views may exhibit poor interpersonal skills. Colvin et al. (1995) examined individuals with apparently inflated self-views, as indicated by the difference between self and other ratings. They found that those individuals were viewed by others as hostile and unlikable. In addition, during a structured and highly charged debate, such individuals engaged in a variety of negatively evaluated interpersonal behaviors, such as braggarting, interrupting their partners, and showing an overall lack of genuine concern for their partners. Once again, these patterns are most likely to occur when high self-esteem individuals feel personally challenged. Schlenker et al. (1990) exposed high and low self-esteem subjects to contexts in which they were motivated to make a positive impression on a critical or a supportive audience. They found that high self-esteem subjects became egotistical when the evaluative pressures were greatest. They concluded that "people with high self-esteem become more boastful as the social stakes increase" (p. 891). Similar findings have been reported by Schneider and Turkat (1975), who found that high self-esteem subjects who also expressed high needs for social approval presented themselves much more positively after negative feedback than they did after positive feedback. Perhaps ironically, high self-esteem subjects who receive negative feedback about their intellectual abilities claim to have especially good social skills. However, the available evidence does not support their claims.

SUMMARY

Having high self-esteem confers a number of benefits to those who possess it. Such people feel good about themselves, are able to cope effectively with challenges and negative feedback, and live in a social world in which they believe that people value and respect them. Although there may be some negative consequences associated with having extremely high self-esteem, most people with high self-esteem lead happy and productive lives. People with low self-esteem see the world through a more negative filter, and their general dislike for themselves influences their perceptions of everything around them. It is striking that the objective record does not validate the subjective experiences of those with high and low self-esteem. The interesting unanswered questions about self-esteem are related to what allows people to hold such positive or negative views of themselves in spite of objective evidence. For instance, it is possible that self-esteem is rooted in neurochemistry and therefore is not sensitive to contextual influence, but this has not been established. It is equally plausible that self-esteem is a cognitive style that develops through early socialization experiences, but this perspective also requires more conclusive evidence. In any case, the subjective experience of having high or low self-esteem plays an important role in how people interpret the world around them.

REFERENCES


SALIENTS

To define the affective state, four terms can be used: passion, state of mind, emotion, and sentiments. The term "passion" is linked with the philosophical and literary tradition and designates a violent tension that the individual sustains for a certain duration. States of mind or moods are affective states of low intensity that are durable and pervasive, lack an immediately perceptible cause, and can influence initially neutral events. The term "emotion" indicates an intense affective state of short duration with a precise external or inner cause, a clear cognitive content, and the ability to resonate attention. Most scholars agree that emotion is a psychological construct with several components: (1) cognitive: finalized by the stimulus caused by emotion, (2) physiological: from the participation of the neurovegetative system, (3) expressive: linked with movement, (4) motivational: linked with intentions and the tendency to act or react, and (5) subjective: consisting of the sentiment felt by the individual.

Sentiments are more enduring than are emotions (e.g., hatred compared with a momentary explosion of anger) and are more cognitively structured. Sentiments may last seconds (embarrassment) or months (mourning) and may be more or less intense, conscious or unconscious, and controllable or outside one's control. When an individual names a sentiment by using a certain term he or she refers to different elements: affec tion, cognitive contents or structures of evaluation, awareness of the level of readiness for action, and awareness of the body. Sentiments pervade daily life and are found in several artistic forms: music, poetry, literature, and painting.

In the philosophical tradition, the affective dimension appeared as a perturbation of human behavior that was considered the result of reason. Plato was the first to define passions as "diseases of the spirit." For the Stoics, passion was a disease that gets hold of the entire spirit at the expense of reason: Crisippo considered it an unbridled agitation, an unstoppable force that makes the ego leave the self. For Aristotle, passions act as a disturbance of the rationalness of the individual. An ambivalent attitude toward passions developed at the beginning of the modern age. They were execrated during the age of iluminism, exalted during the romantic era, condemned during the period of critical rationalism and rehabilitated in the postmodern age.

THE INATTENTION OF THE FOUNDERS

For a long time sociology, evidently influenced by the hegemonic philosophical paradigm, excluded the study of the affective dimension from its theoretical concerns. Afflictions were relegated to anthropology and psychology. The founders of sociology saw the role of sentiments in social life as rather marginal. An interest in sentiments can be found in Durkheim, who saw them as agents and factors of cohesion in the formation of solidarity and morality. In his view, sentiments are learned and internalized during rituals and collective ceremonies through the sharing of emotions.

In Pareto's terminology, residua are sentiments or the expressions of sentiments described in human nature and desinuazioni are the conceptual systems of justification with which individuais disguise their passions or give an appearance of rationality to propositions or behaviors that are not rational. People rarely behave in a logical way but always want to make their fellow people believe that their conduct is logical. The main characteristic of human nature is that it lets itself be guided by sentiments and pass forward pseudological justifications for sentimental attitudes. According to Pareto, pseudological is not necessarily equivalent to illogical: Emotions follow some principles. The logic of sentiments Pareto identified can be summarized in five points. First, while reason is analytic, sentiment is synthetic. Second, sentiment follows justificational and prescriptive principles. Third, sentiments are inaccurate, indefinite, and indeterminate. Fourth, sentiments may be ambivalent and conflicting. Fifth, sentiments can take on extreme, absolute characteristics that prevent learning from reality.

Weber begins by distinguishing four types of action: rational action in relation to an aim, rational action in relation to a value, affective or emotional action, and traditional action. The action Weber calls affect is rooted in the search for a state of mind or mood of an individual: the slap a mother gives to her unbearable child or the fist of a soccer player who loses his temper. Action, that is, is defined with reference not to an aim or system of values but to the emotional reaction of an agent who finds himself or herself in certain circumstances. The distinctive characteristic of the world in which people live is statification: a firm is rational, as is the bureaucratic management of a state, while scientific action is a combination of a rational action in relation to an aim and a rational action in relation to a value, which is truth.

The importance of the emotional factor in the formation of chartism and the religious spirit is mentioned explicitly by Weber. Perhaps the spirit of capitalism is seen by Weber as deriving from the