Models of Self-Concept that are Neither Top-Down or Bottom-Up: The Rope Model of Self-Concept [R]

John Hattie

University of Auckland, New Zealand

The article outlines a reconsideration of the fundamental models of self-concept, and proposes an alternative model that brings together the seemingly divergent areas of self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy theories. It focuses on the processes that relate the various dimensions and assumes that there are multidimensional self-concepts. It aims, therefore, to build on the research on the structure of self-concept and process mechanisms about the processes that link these various dimensions. Part A outlines the new Rope Model, and Part B indicates how this new model explains more than current models.

Part A: The Structural + Processing Aspects of Self-Concept

The Debate About Top-Down and Bottom-Up Models

In one of the most important recent papers on the processes that link the dimensions of self-concept, Marsh and Yeung (1998) outlined a set of arguments as to whether self-concept is a top-down or bottom-up model. They asked whether “self-concept becomes more stable as one ascends the hierarchy and that the direction of flow of causality in the hierarchy is from the bottom to the top (a bottom-up model), rather than from the top down” (p. 510). First, they provided four models for operationalising “global self-concept” that are either top-down or bottom-up: the agglomerate model whereby there is a series of self-concepts with little glue; the weighted average model in which the weights are saliency, importance, centrality etc.; the hierarchical model as per the Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) model and derivatives; and the unidimensional model. There is no doubt that the Shavelson et al. (1976) model revolutionised the research on self-concept, provided a model from which many studies emanated, and it has become the citation classic. It is thus the best to demonstrate a typical to-down or bottom-up model (Figure 1).

There may be more such models (e.g., see Hattie, 1992a; Marsh & Hattie, 1996b) but these suffice to demonstrate the range of suggested models that are either top-down or bottom-up. Second, they discussed the stability of self-concept. One claim is that global self-concept is more stable than the specific sub-components (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982), although there is little support for this claim (Marsh, 1990, 1993; Marsh & Hattie, 1996a). Indeed, these latter researchers found that global self-concept scales are less stable and predictable than responses to specific scales. Marsh and Yeung considered that the stability issues still needed further resolution.

Third, they outlined the claims for the direction of causal flow in the self-concept hierarchy: Is the direction top-down or bottom-up? Marsh (1987) proposed that the direction was reciprocal, but found that “many facets contribute little to, or are little influenced by, the hierarchical general self-concept” (p. 512). This seriously questioned the top-down model. In contrast, Brown (1993) claimed that our global self-concept provides a buffer to changes from some lower-order dimensions, and the higher order notions provide a better predictor of behaviour. Byrne and Gavin (1996) claimed both directions are invoked, there are nearly indistinguishable differences between a top-down and bottom-up model, and thus they proposed a reciprocal directions model.

In their study Marsh and Yeung (1998) proposed many improvements, particularly in the use of two-wave designs with excellent measurement models. But even after using these more sophisticated models, they came to two major conclusions—and it is these conclusions that are the starting point for the present paper. First, they concluded that there

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was little or no support for a top-down or bottom-up model. Second, they concluded that there was more support for what they termed a “horizontal” model, which relates more to the stability of self-concept over time. While this horizontal model has not been further explored, it is a major claim in this article that such exploration is warranted.

The model proposed is such a model, labelled a “Rope model of self-concept”, and is based on two major premises that come out of Marsh and Yeung’s research. Rather than a top-down or bottom-up model the “Rope model” is a more linear sideways model, united around the theme that there are many strategies we use to maintain our concepts about ourselves. There is no one strategy, but an overlapping of many self-strategies that are selected, over learned and then used automatically in various situations to provide a set of meanings and interpretations such that there is some predictability for individuals in how they present and perceive their sense of self. Such a model places much emphasis on the processes of self-concept formation, can more appropriately allow for situational effects, and along with the research on the structure of self-concept, assists in resolving many seeming paradoxes in the research on self-concept.

The ‘Rope Model’ of Self-Concept

The first premise of the “Rope” model relates to the maxim by Wittgenstein (1958) that the strength in the rope “lies not in one fibre running throughout its length, but in the overlapping of many fibres” (Section 67). The second premise is that there are various “strands” of self-concept that serve as primary motives, that then lead to the invoking of various situation specific orientations of self (or “yarns”), such as self-efficacy, anxiety, performance or learning orientations. In turn these situation specific orientations led us to choose various self strategies (“fibres”) to serve the self-motivations and thus bring meaning, predictability, or sense to our sense of self-concept and self-esteem. Hence the ‘Rope’ model works in a series of interweaving threads, to form fibres, thence strands to make the rope – or sense of continuity of our self. Primary to this Rope model is that self-concept relates more to how we select, bias, and interprets the information that we receive and that we present. It is neither a set of faculties nor a set of sub-dimensions (as the Shavelson et al. model proclaims), but a set of strategies and processes that are akin to many overlapping fibres which form to yarns, and then into strands. The search should be for the flow, the directions, the degrees of overlap or integration, and the goals of the self that are then situationally invoked in a time, place, culture, and with others. Self-concept is more part of goal-strivings than a set of dimensions.

The claim is that such a “Rope” model is more likely to explain many of the phenomena commented on during the past few years relating to dilemmas in self-concept research. This Rope model helps encourage the field to incorporate many of the advances in cognitive psychology, places the many self-terms into perspectve, and concentrates more on the manner we bias, interpret and select from the many cues that face us every day in esteeming our concept of self. This paper expands on the model and illustrates how it may lead to resolution of some key considerations in our literature. Table 1 presents the four major aspects of the model, showing how the various strategies are invoked in specific situations according to various motives to form the continuity of our concept of self. Each level is more differentiated and specific, and continuity on self-concept is provided by the various motivations that then lead to selection or invoking of various situation-specific orientations that then lead to various self-strategies (Figure 2).

The Primary Motives of Self-Concept: The Strands of the Model

Rather than propose a model based only on concepts about various dimensions in our lives (school, peers, family, physical) this model is based on the strategies we invoke, learn, and develop, which can then be (differentially) applied in various situations. The argument is that these strategies are used in various situations according to various motivations so as to protect, present, preserve, and promote our sense of self such that we can “back ourselves”, i.e., maintain a sense of self-esteem—or to purloin Marsh’s terms, to reflect glory about ourselves. Our aim as individuals with respect to self-concept is self-protection, self-presentation, self-preservation, and self-promotion whereas the more inner intertwining aspects include the various strategies we can invoke to protect, present, preserve, and promote. This is the executive function of self-concept, which Baumeister (1999) claimed was one of the “most promising and exciting topics for new researchers to take up” (p. 12).

We employ these self-strategies to maintain a high sense of self and choose the various strategies either automatically (as the choices are over-learned) or controlled – and it is noted that most of us indeed claim to have positive self-concepts (regardless of independent estimates). It is well documented that we have disproportionate interest in and recall of positive over negative self-relevant information, attributional tendencies to take credit for good outcomes, the perception of self as better than peers on positive attitudes and we not as likely, compared to our peers, to possess negative personal qualities (Brown, 1986; Lewinsohn, Mischel, Chaplin, & Barton, 1980; Miller & Ross, 1975). We all self-enhance.

The aim, however, is not to portray us as consisting of merely a collection of “self-strategies”, but we should recognise there is some dynamism between these strategies—various aspects of our self and various self-strategies come to the fore at various times and under various circumstances. Oftentimes, the various strands are wrapped tightly together, and for many there is a high degree of self-regulation in choosing, applying, maintaining, and controlling our strategies to protect our sense of self. We are sentient beings who choose—to bias, to select, and to interpret our world through our own lenses—and this is our self-concept. The purpose of selecting and using these strategies is to maintain and protect our self-worth, particularly from failure, but most importantly, to provide us with some predictability over our presentation and beliefs about self.
There are at least three major levels in the “Rope model”.

**Level One: The Motives/Strands**

At the first level there are various motivations relating to self-concept, such that these motivations influence the strategies they use to “negotiate demands in their environment, and these strategies in turn influence their behaviour within this environment” (Buss & Cantor, 1989). These motivations provide buffering from the constant inflow and outflow of information, are more central at defining us, and they led to orientations or disposition that allow us to deal with conflicting information about our beliefs of self. These Level One motivations are the more enduring, and although subject to change (but not as often as Level Two strategies), these strands function more to provide us with consistency and predictability. Examples include self-verification, self-enhancement, self-protection, and individualism vs. collectivism.

- **Self-verification.** Self-verification relates to set of motives which are used to preserve our firmly held self-views, and the most specific is a facility to seek self-verifying feedback. Swann, Pelham and Krull (1989) claimed that there is much evidence that the desire to self-verify can influence behavior, and they provided many examples such as: people solicit feedback that confirms their self-views; they pay more attention to confirming feedback; they recall it better; they regard it as more accurate, credible and diagnostic; they attribute it to their own dispositions; and they even spend personal funds to get it. Brown, Collins and Schmidt (1988) argued that both high and low self-esteem individuals seek a positive identity, but those with low self-esteem are more constrained in their pursuit of this goal by doubts that a favourable identity can be maintained and are more apt to accept and believe self-confirming negative feedback (see also Shrauger, 1975). Hence, there can be close ties between self-verification strategies and self-efficacy strategies.

- **Self-enhancement.** Whereas self-verification is a motivation to seek feedback to “verify” our beliefs about self (and this certainly can help consistency), self-enhancement assumes that people are highly motivated to increase their feelings of personal worth. This is particularly the case for those with low overall self-esteem, as they compensate by attempting to enhance their conception of self more than those with high self-esteem (Brown et al., 1988; Harter, 1998; S. C. Jones, 1973; Kaplan, 1975). Harter(1998) noted that adolescents organize their self-attributes in such a way that the majority of positive attributes are placed in the core and are regarded as more enduring aspects of self, whereas the negative attributes are “relegated to the periphery of the self reflecting the fact that they are judged to be the least important aspects of one's personality... Thus, one’s positive and negative attributes would appear to be filtered through a protective lens that accentuates the positive while de-emphasizing the negative” (p. 63).

- **Self-protection.** There have been many studies demonstrating the importance for many individuals of protecting the self from the implications of failure (Beery, 1975; Covington, 1992; Covington & Teel, 1996), and showing the extent to which some individuals will go to avoid failure or to alter its meaning. We go to great lengths to seek a positive image of ourselves “with such vigor that reality is at times selectively interpreted and at other times patently ignored” (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004, p. 711). From their meta-analysis of 266 articles, 523 effect-sizes, and 41,538 participants, Mezulis et al. found an effect-size of .88, which is very large relative to many other effect-sizes in psychology or education (Hattie, 1992b, 1999). This large effect was found for all countries they studied other than Japan and Pacific Islands; largest in childhood and late adulthood, and was lower in those with some form of psychological dysfunction (demonstrating that self-protection contributes to mental health).
Collectivism vs. Individualism. There have been many attempts to define the major attributes of various cultures. The dimensions of individualism and collectivism appear to have the most recent and major support (Hofstede, 1980, 1983, 1991; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis, 1995). Individualism relates to competitiveness, desiring to be unique, and assuming self-responsibility whereas Collectivism relates to seeking advice, harmony and closeness (Shulruf, Dixon, & Hattie, 2003). These predispositions affect the choice of specific strategies that we use for verification, enhancement, and/or efficacy. For Individualists a powerful self-strategy is the desire for consistency to present oneself as a unique and responsible person. There is a sense that the self is internal, private, separate from roles and relationships, and defined by dispositions, traits, personal beliefs, goals, abilities, wishes and other abstract conceptions. But for collectivists the relationships and interdependence are more critical. A powerful self-strategy is the desire for Collectivists to present oneself as harmonious, close to others, and welcoming advice. This often requires the willingness to accept opposites, to reconcile differences, and to accommodate positive and negative feedback (even when such feedback is inconsistent).

Level Two: Situation Specific Orientations/Dispositions

At the second level there are many specific orientations or dispositions that we can invoke depending on the situation and context (provided we have proficiency in using them), to assist in ensuring that our overarching belief of self is somehow maintained. Most important, we invoke these strategies depending on whether we are self-enhancing, self-verifying and/or self-protecting, and depending on the situation and cultural influences (see below). These dispositions can be learned, can be employed depending on the situation or perceived need, and when invoked allow the person to maintain a sense of stability, verification, and consistency in the self-concepts that are both projecting, protecting, and believing about themselves.

All these Level Two dispositions can be used by both high and low self-esteem persons. The motives may be different, for example high self-esteem people may invoke these strategies to enhance success, whereas low self-esteem people may use these strategies to protect themselves against the threat of failure (Tice, 1991). There is no requirement that these dispositions lead to “accurate” interpretations, as their invocation is more related to promoting, preserving, protecting or presenting our self of self. These dispositions include self-efficacy, performance vs. learning orientation, uncertain personal control (and could also include fear of failure and anxiety).

Self-efficacy. For many, a critical orientation is self-efficacy: “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Schunk & Pajares, 2004). More than mere “confidence”, as confidence refers mostly to the “strength of belief”, self-efficacy invokes a belief in personal agency to affect an influence over events. As Bandura noted (1997), “A self-efficacy assessment, therefore, includes both an affirmation of a capability level and the strength of that belief” (p. 382). Those with high self-efficacy are more likely to approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided, and see “failures” as being situations to incur greater effort or seek more knowledge. Those with low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid difficult tasks which they view as personal threats, have low or weak commitment to goals, in “failure” situations are more likely to dwell on personal deficiencies, obstacles encountered, or deny personal agency and they are slow to recover their sense of efficacy. Thus, our level of self-efficacy can lead to operationalising many other self-strategies when asserting our capability to influence events. In the Rope model, self-efficacy provides a disposition to choose strategies in various situations that can be used in novel and risky situations, particularly to justify why we do or do not provide effort and continuity. Self-efficacy is NOT self-concept, but only one of the (often important) motivations we use to maintain our beliefs/concepts about success or failure, or surviving in our world with our sense of self (low or high) maintained. The Rope model allows for self-efficacy beliefs to be invoked to protect, promote, present and preserve our concept of self.

Performance vs. Learning strategies. A person’s tendency to be performance oriented is claimed to influence the degree to which they are motivated to protect their self-worth. Such individuals tend to be competitive, feel most successful outperforming others, see outcomes as caused by ability rather than effort, are concerned with how they are viewed and evaluated by others, and are motivated to avoid poor performance and its negative consequences (Dweck, 1991; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Martin et al., 2001; Middleton & Midgley, 1997). Marsh, Craven and McInerney (2004) argued that central to a performance orientation is a “focus on social comparison processes in which the individual ‘beats’ other students or attains success based on little effort, attention on external evaluations of self, endorsement of the extrinsic value of performance as a means to a desired goal, and beliefs that ability is a relatively fixed attribute that cannot be altered by effort.” The converse is learning-orientation and such individuals are motivated to attain mastery, and see tasks in terms of effort rather than ability and failure as diagnostic feedback that can lead to improvement (Middleton & Midgley, 1997). They are not so threatened by failure because failure reflects on their effort rather than their ability. Marsh, Craven and McInerney (2004) argued that central to a Learning orientation is “attention to the process of completing or mastering a task, the endorsement of the intrinsic value of learning as an end in itself, the belief that appropriate effort will result in greater competence, the goal of developing new skills or improving existing skills in relation to self-referenced standards and improvement over time, and a focus on quality of involvement and long-term commitment to excellence.”

Uncertain personal control. Another factor hypothesized to predict the tendency to self-protect is uncertain personal control (Thompson, 1994). This strategy is invoked by individuals who feel they have little or no control over outcomes. “In situations in which people are uncertain about obtaining important outcomes, they strategically manage
their cognitions in an attempt to influence their future affective responses to the outcomes in question” (Pyszczynski, 1982, p. 387) so as to maximise positive affect and minimise negative affect.

**Level Three: Specific Strategies**

There are many possible self-strategies that can be invoked in various situations and then related to motivations leading to a sense of self.

**Self-handicapping.** Self-handicappers choose impediments or obstacles to performance that enable them to deflect the cause of failure away from their competence and on to the acquired impediments (E. E. Jones & Berglas, 1978). Examples of self-handicapping include procrastination, the choice of performance-debilitating circumstances (e.g., the dog ate my homework), engaging in little or no practice for upcoming tasks, having low-challenge goals, exaggeration of obstacles to success, and the strategic reduction of effort (Thompson, 2004; Tice & Baumeister, 1990). In the event of failure, the person has an immediate excuse. Self-handicapping occurs more often when individuals are typically uncertain about their abilities and competencies and when there is high salience of an evaluative task; it happens more often in public versus private performance situations (Rhodewalt & Agustsdottir, 1986); and when there is “an abnormal investment in the question of self-worth” (E. E. Jones & Berglas, 1978, P.205), and the person must believe that his or her handicap will be viewed by others as a legitimate reason for potential failure. There is evidence that self-handicapping can lead both to positive outcomes (Deppe & Harackiewicz, 1996; Feick & Rhodewalt, 1998; Garcia et al., 1995), and to negative outcomes (Eronen, Nurmi, & Salmela-Aro, 1998; Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001; Urdan, Midgley, & Anderman, 1988).

**Setting low expectations, easy goals or defensive pessimism.** Methods for protecting our sense of self are to have low expectations, to set easy goals, or to engage in defensive pessimism (Dweck, 1991; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Martin et al., 2001; Middleton & Midgley, 1997). These strategies often lead to lower thresholds for satisfactory performance and less difficult goals to achieve (Showers & Ruben, 1990). Thus, one’s sense of achievement, self-worth, and ability to meet goals are maintained. There are two components in defensive pessimism, thinking about the goals and expecting those goals—Martin (1998) has termed this reflectivity and expectation strategies, and demonstrated that these two components represent distinct self-protective strategies, impacting on academic outcomes in distinct ways. Specifically, defensive expectations are negatively associated with academic outcomes while reflectivity is positively associated with these outcomes.

**Discounting and distortion.** Discounting strategies involve actively “dismissing” information such as praise, punishment, or feedback as not valuable, accurate, or worthwhile for the individual. For example, when a teacher tells a child that he or she is doing a great job, the child’s reaction is to discount this by claiming “she always says that,” “she’s only trying to make me feel good,” or “it’s only because it is neat, not correct”. Such information can also be distorted, usually retrospectively, to maintain the status quo. Baumeister and Covington (1985) found that high self-esteem individuals sought to conceal their reactions to persuasive messages by retrospectively expressing greater pre-message agreement (i.e., distorting their initial attitudes). Thus, as Baumeister, Tice and Hutton (1989) have claimed, “yielding to persuasion is a self-protective strategy, whereas rejection of influence is an individuating and self-enhancing strategy” (p. 569).

**Perfectionism.** Striving for unattainable perfection can be a major strategy that affects our conceptions of self. There appears to be three dimensions to perfectionism: social perfectionism which relates to conceptions about the excessive expectations we perceive significant others have of us; self-oriented perfectionism which relates to the standards we set for ourselves or the degree to which we engage in intensive self-scrutiny and criticism; and other-oriented perfectionism which relates to the extent individuals possible high expectations and standards for other’s behaviour (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; O’Connor & O’Connor, 2003). Socially oriented perfectionism accompanied with high levels of avoidance coping is particularly deleterious, as is self-oriented perfectionism with an active striving to be flawless. Where there is a sense of pleasure from painstaking effort, however, there can be positive outcomes. Blatt (1995) has termed this “normal perfectionism” which relates more to a sense of a job well-done, attaining realistic and reasonable components represent distinct self-protective strategies, impacting on academic outcomes in distinct ways. Specifically, defensive expectations are negatively associated with academic outcomes while reflectivity is positively associated with these outcomes.

**Social comparison.** A powerful strategy is social comparison, whereby we constantly monitor others’ behavior for cues and attributions to explain/enhance our conceptions of self. Such social comparison sets standards or frames of reference by which we make salient those activities we wish to excel in or set as a challenge (Campbell & Fairey, 1985; Campbell, Fairey, & Fehr, 1986; Campbell & Fehr, 1990). For example, very successful mathematics students might have a high math self-concept in an average math class, but after being sent to a gifted mathematics class, their self-concept could plummet as they now compare themselves with this new cohort. Marsh and colleagues have termed this the “big fish little pond” effect (e.g. Herbert W. Marsh, 1987). Low self-esteem individuals often use social comparison, particularly to those less fortunate than themselves (Wood, 1989), and often attempt to present themselves as more confident to impress others and maybe even themselves (Baumgardner, 1990). Public boasting, however, can create an impression of competence and engender interpersonal antipathy, particularly when the audience is aware of a person’s prior poor performance (Baumeister, 1982; Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

**Self monitoring.** Individuals may actively plan, enact and guide their behavioural choices in social situations through the process of self-monitoring (Snyder & Cantor, 1980). High self-monitors make their behavioural choices on the basis
of situational information, and thus high self-monitors are more dictated to by the external environment and by social comparison.

_The Core Processing Components of Integration_

Greenwald and Pratkanis (1984) reviewed a number of models based on the manner that information about the self is integrated. These included self as schema which views the self as a system of schemata in memory (Markus, 1977; Markus & Sentis, 1982); self as hierarchical category structure (Rogers, 1981); self as multidimensional space defined by a general evaluative dimension and an intellectual good/bad dimension (Breckler & Greenwald, 1982); self as prototype whereby individuals have a prototype with which novel stimuli can be compared (Kuiper, 1981); and self as associative network wherein propositions about the self are stored in the form of propositions that relate the self and specific episodes and generic information about the self (Bower & Gilligan, 1979). Rather than proposing a top down or bottom up process, the proposition is that there are various processes of integration used by individuals to achieve a stable notion of conceptions of self. This stability is based on a learned reaction to choose and apply various self-strategies. The intensity, enduringness, complexity, and nature of these processes vary across individuals. There have been three major theories advanced for the manner if integration across processes: complexity, schema theory, and the Rope model.

Linville (1987) proposed that greater self-complexity is a protective factor for people under stress, primarily because greater self-complexity involves having self-aspects that are more distinct from one another, and thus when there is stress those high in self-complexity are more likely to constrain their thoughts and feelings provided by events to immediately salient self-aspects, and have a greater number of self-aspects unaffected. Thus a complex cognitive representation of the self may serve to moderate the adverse physical and mental health effects of stressful events. It appears that persons with low complexity scores were not more positive or negative but simply more variable in their views about themselves. They were more susceptible to external factors and thus were more likely to have high levels of self-regulation. Linville (Linville, 1982) concluded that “a person high in self-concept is more likely to be able to contain that impact, to maintain positive feelings about other aspects of his or her life... With a _simple_ self-structure, one does not have the buffer of other positive aspects of the self that remain intact. With a more _complex_ self-structure, these other aspects remain intact” (p. 106). Those high in self-complexity are less prone to depression, perceived stress, physical symptoms, and other illnesses following high levels of stressful events (Linville, 1987). Self-complexity appears to be a function of greater and more varied experiences and greater demands to differentiate among aspects of one’s life.

Others have argued that individuals have proficiencies to compartmentalise positive and negative knowledge about our self (Showers, 1992) whereas others have argued that we able to differentiate our self-concept and “see oneself as having different personality characteristics in different social roles (Donahue et al., 1993, p. 834). Higgins has proposed that we can conceive self as discrepancies between the actual self (present beliefs and conceptions), the ideal self (hopes and aspirations), and the ought self (obligations, duties, and responsibilities). Campbell et al. (1996) thence proposed that we can vary in the degree of our clarity about our self-concept. Self-concept clarity was defined as “the extent to which the contents of an individual’s self-concept are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent and temporal stable” (p. 141).

Markus and Sentis (Markus & Sentis, 1982) proposed a distinction between schematics (those individuals assumed to have a schema in a particular domain) and aschematics (those assumed to be without such a structure in that domain). These two groups differed in processing time for decisions and in confidence for these decisions and this suggested that for the schematics “information about the self is organised in such a way that it can be readily accessed for efficient processing, ... (and) in such a way that it is not necessary to search through all the confirming evidence before making judgments about the self” (Markus & Sentis, 1982, p. 55). This is compatible with the notion that the self can be “seen as a system of substructures, as a hierarchy or universal, particularistic, and idiosyncratic knowledge structures about the self that are embedded within each other. These structures will be activated as processing units depending on the nature or goal of the processing act or task and the nature of the external stimuli” (Markus & Sentis, 1982, p. 58). The proposition has more verisimilitude if “structures” is replaced with “strategies”.

Under the Rope model, the process of integration comes from the interlinking of the many strategies at the three levels. The Level One strategies are more enduring, whereas the Level Three strategies are more dependent on time, situation, and whether the self-concept is private or public. For those low in self-concept there is more reliance on the lower Level strategies, and there is more adaptation to the environment or situation, whereas for those high in self-concept there is more adaptation (bias, select and retrieve) of the environment to the self-interpretations. Campbell, Assanand and Di Paula (2003) demonstrated that high levels of unity in self-strategies (akin to self-complexity) were not related to structural pluralism—they can both exist alongside each other. Indeed, there were hints that the highest levels of adjustment occurred for those respondents who had high levels of both. It is feasible to consider that we can be integrated in self-concept, but also have the facility to access many seemingly discrete strategies.
The future research agenda is clear. The central role of cognitive processing in the formation and integration of concepts about self and in making choices that are mediated by self-concepts needs clarification. It is predicted that those with many strategies and high self-regulation in choosing among them are more “integrated” than those with fewer strategies and they are more attuned to monitoring the environment and the presentation of self in these environments. Similarly, those with more effective self-regulatory self-strategies are more likely to be responsive to the degree of failure, amount of progress, and presence of alternative actions—strategies that are important in directing optimal levels of persistence (Di Paula & Campbell, 2002).

### Part B: The Rope Model Explains More Than a Structural Model

**The Differences Between High and Low Self-Esteem**

One of the difficulties of the current top-down and bottom-up models is that they tell us little about what it means to be ‘high’ or ‘low’ in self-esteem. Under these models, high means responding “strongly agree” to many items, and low means responding “somewhat agree”. Bachman and O’Malley (1984) demonstrated that most people score above the mid-point on most Likert self-concept scales, indicating that we all have the tendency to present and depict ourselves in a positive light (Baumeister, 1993; Dunning, Griffin, Milojkovic, & Ross, 1990; Goffman, 1955; Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004; Vallone, Griffin, Lin, & Ross, 1990). This does not necessarily mean that we all have high self-esteem.

Under the Rope model, there is an interplay between the various levels. For example, those with a self-verification motivation are more likely to have high self-efficacy, a learning orientation although they can use many specific self-strategies. Those with a self-enhancement motivation are more likely to have uncertain personal control, and a performance orientation, and they too can use many specific self-strategies. Self-protection is more likely to lead into fear of failure and overuse of self-handicapping and defensive pessimism. Collectivists are more likely to use self-enhancement, a learning orientation, and high self-monitoring and social comparison, and much regulation of expectations. Individualists are more likely to be performance oriented, high personal control, much use of self-handicapping, discounting, and more than other motivation are likely to be perfectionists.

High self-esteem individuals are adept at choosing from their repertoire of self-strategies to manifest the confidence, the self-regulation, the enhancement and/or the verification of their sense of self. The choice of strategies leads to an upward spiral such that the self-concept gets enhanced, and this in turn leads to higher self-verification, protections, and so on. It is the case, however, that both high and low self-esteem people use their strategies to protect, present, preserve and promote their sense of self—whatever it is, positive or negative—as it is not the case for most of us that our self-strategies are sufficiently robust and consistent that our self-concept or self-esteem is relatively impervious to threat and does not require defence.

Low self-esteem people are more likely to rely on a more integrated set of strategies particularly self-handicapping, setting low goals, performance orientation, uncertain personal control, discounting and distortion, and high levels of social comparison and monitoring. These strategies set them on a downward spiral to self-protect or self-enhance. Lows are more likely to use these strategies to defend themselves from a continually low self-image (Ferrari, 1991; Midgley, Arunkumar, & Urdan, 1996; Midgley & Urdan, 1995), and are more aware of invoking strategies as compensatory strategies aimed at repairing and solidifying threatened attachment bonds (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003). For lows more than highs self-concept acts as a sociometer that gauges the risk of interpersonal rejection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). It “indicates another’s waning approval and thus activates the need to seek approval and interpersonal connections, or invoke some other protective strategy” (Leary & Baumeister, 2000, p. 24). Baumeister and Leary (1995) and Leary (2004) have argued that self-esteem is not needed for its own sake but either functions to reflect the extent of one’s inclusion or fitness for inclusion in social groups. Self-esteem is an indicator of social acceptance “based on whatever criteria those important groups use to include or exclude individuals”.

Those we would classify as low self-esteem people are less apt to make external attributions for failure, belittle the importance of a trait they lack, exaggerate their superiority over others, emphasize their strengths in alternative domains, are more risk averse, engage in more self-handicapping as a means of augmenting the glow of success, more readily compare to others when they consider the comparison would be favourable—that is they have strategies to protect themselves from the pain of negative feedback. However, low self-esteem people also find negative views provide verification for their own beliefs about themselves—and thus they wallow in this negative set of strategies to maintain a sense of self and survive in the negative world. The fundamental difference is that high self-concept people accept many negative views and have strategies to assimilate and accommodate these negative views as part of their broader conception of self, whereas low self-concept people do not (Bernichon, Cook, & Brown, 2003).

High self-esteem people are more likely to rely on more self-strategies, have higher regulation of choosing strategies, and are adept at choosing when to self-handicap (Tice & Baumeister, 1990). In general highs depend more on setting high expectations, more difficult goals, learning orientation, high levels of personal control, and are low in discounting, social comparison and monitoring. Such high self-esteem is desired “to shelter people from deeply rooted anxiety inherent in the human condition. Self-esteem is a protective shield designed to control the potential for terror that results from awareness of the horrifying possibility that we humans are merely transient animals groping to survive in a meaningless universe destined only to die and decay” (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004, p.
We thus build a sense of self as an elaborate drapery that “provides us with the fortitude to carry on despite the uniquely human awareness of our mortal fate”. When there are many self-strategies supporting a positive view of self, this anxiety is mitigated and the person is able to reduce anxiety and thus go about his or her daily affairs and act effectively in their world.

**High self-esteem** people are more likely to rely on more self-strategies aimed at verifying their conceptions of self:

- have higher regulation of choosing strategies,
- are adept at choosing when to self-handicap,
- have high expectations and set more difficult goals,
- are more mastery/learning than performance orientation,
- have high levels of personal control

**Low self-concept** people are more likely to invoke strategies aimed at repairing or defending themselves from a continually low self-image:

- are less apt to make external attributions for failure,
- belittle the importance of a trait they lack,
- exaggerate their superiority over others,
- emphasize their strengths in alternative domains,
- are more risk averse,
- overuse self-handicapping,
- set low goals,
- more performance than mastery oriented,
- have high levels of social comparison and monitoring,
- have uncertain personal control

There is no need to juxtapose the Terror Management Theory (TMT) and Sociometer Theory (ST) as per the debate in Psychological Bulletin (Vol. 130, 3, May, 2004). One theory, TMT, helps explain why high self-esteem people have high levels of survival when they use many strategies to maintain their beliefs (to reduce anxiety, provide meaning in our lives) and the other (ST) helps explain why low self-esteem people are continually seeking enhancement from others to reduce the risk of threats to their acceptance by others.

It is important to note that the use of these strategies and sense of self-esteem may not necessarily be accurate. As has been shown in the counselling literature low self-esteem people may have a more ‘accurate’ world view as the world can be a threatening, unaccepting, and there are many unrewarding sets of cues (e.g., depressed people are hard to change as they constantly receive messages that they are ignored, misunderstood, and not accepted into social groups—whereas non-depressed people build strategies to cope and/or deny these cues; see Ellis, (1973).

**The Place of Worthwhileness/Importance**

Many have long battled with the dilemma that importance relates to what “we back ourselves” and indices of importance should be dependably identified and added into models of self-concept dimensions. There has been little success in measuring or finding these aspects of importance. Richard Fletcher and I (2003) have explored this notion using many measurement methods and found little reason to include importance ratings along with our current methods for measuring self-esteem. There were very few adolescents with a discrepancy between their scores on dimensions of self-concept tests and the weightings of these dimensions. It is not so surprising, therefore, that the regression/normative methods fail to detect little extra variance when weighting is used. It is not informative to look under the lamp of interactions via regressions just because this is where the light is available. The percentage of persons in a sample which have sufficient (let alone reliable) discrepancies between importance and self-concept is typically so small that any additional information is washed out.

For the great majority, all the information in the weighting is already included in the manner in which they respond to Likert items. When asked to respond, for example, to “I feel good about my academic ability,” it seems that adolescents who have lower academic abilities can equally feel good about their academic ability as those with higher academic abilities (“good” being a relative term)—hence there is no need for discounting or weighting of importance. If James’ were asked “I am proud of my ability in Greek” it is unlikely he would “Strongly Agree” even though he is willing to wallow in ignorance. More likely, he would most likely respond “Disagree” reflecting that he was not proud of a lower ability, but probably would prefer to omit the item as irrelevant. There are few items in most self-concept tests whereby adolescents are deliberately not caring about their conceptions of themselves. Perhaps James could have listened to Charles Darwin, who claimed that “ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge” (Darwin, 1874, p.3). Hence, our claim was that it is likely that information about weighting or centrality is already included at the item level of self-concept measures, and adding another dimension relating to weighting is superfluous.
It may be, however, that importance relates more to which particular self-strategies we choose, and when. We may tend to choose self-verification, difficult goal strivings when it is important for us to improve and master, or we may choose self-handicapping and discounting when confronted with evidence that threatens those self-concepts we hold dear to us (and different strategies for those self-concepts less critical to our sense of well-being).

So unlike a top-down or bottom-up model, where importance is conceived as the interactions between importance and level of esteem, in a Rope model importance is more related to the choice of self-strategies relative to the centrality of the concept we wish to protect, present, preserve and/or promote. This sense of importance is more related to self-regulation, and we invest more energy, choice, deliberation and regulation in the self-strategies peculiar to that which is more important to us. If you consider an overlapping threads model, then these importance weightings can and do shift depending on the situation, the goals and the feedback. It may, therefore, be more optimal to directly assess the contingencies of self-worth, that is, those domains in which self-esteem is threatened by setbacks and failures (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvette, 2003). The ways (the latency, priority, time invested) in which we process such information in various domains may indicate the importance of those domains.

**Implications for Stability**

One of the more important considerations is that a model of self-concept has to allow for the state-like nature in that we do not wake each morning and ask “Who am I today?” and the situation or trait-like nature where we are highly reactive to situations and have large day-to-day and within-day variability.

It is recognised that self-concept is reasonably stable over time. Trzesniewsku, Donnellan and Robins (2003) completed a meta-analysis of 50 studies that provided test-retest correlations. These correlations were based on 63,553 people and I have used only the age 6 to 40 figures to draw Figure 3. It can be seen that the average stability coefficients range mostly between .4 and .8. The length of time between test and retest reduced the correlation, but not such that this .4 to .8 boundary is misleading (.50 over 1 year, .46 over 5 year, .41 over 10 year, and .31 over 20 years). There is a curvilinear relationship such that is highest during adolescence compared to early and adult ages.

The debate in the literature is related to whether the global or the specific self-concepts are the major reason for this on-going stability. There seems to be limited support for the Shavelson, et al. (1976) prediction and Brown’s (1993) claim that global components of self-concept are more stable than specific components of self-concept. The critics of the specific stability notions claim that Brown (1993) based his research largely on single-item scales to reflect specific components of self-concept and multi-item scales to reflect global components of self-concept; thus confounding unreliability and instability. To add to the dilemma, Kernis, Grannemann, and Barclay (1989) have demonstrated that fluctuations on a day-to-day basis predict future behaviour independently of a person’s average level of self-esteem over time. In the Rope model, the constancy comes from the use and expertise at the level of the various strategies rather than any sense of stability in the “levels” of any dimension (lower or higher order) of self-concept. This is supportive of the notion of “working selves”. Markus and Wurf (1987) proposed that self-concept changes depending on the subset of self-knowledge that is in working memory in a given context. In the Rope model, this is but a slice of the thread at any moment. In the context of the family certain strategies may be invoked, whereas in the context of the school other strategies may be invoked. Further, in a school context, there may be different strategies used to maintain a sense of self as a student when interacting with other students, and these are different when interacting with a teacher.

**Direction of Causal Flow**

The notion of whether self-concept influences achievement or vice versa has been the subject of many studies. The two major models, self-concept enhancement or skills enhancement, both presuppose a reasonable level of covariance between self-concept and achievement. That we have repeatedly found a low (r=.20) correlation between these two terms indicates that there is not much variance in common so causal direction will be all the more difficult (Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Holden, Moncher, & S.P., 1990; Müller, Gullung, & Bocci, 1988). In the most recent meta-analysis, Wickline (2003) used 41 studies (No= 48,038) and found an average correlation of .17 between self-concept and achievement. Even when using multi-wave data the correlation is very small. Guay, Marsh, and Boivin (2003) reported that the average correlation of academic self-concept and academic achievement a year later is .16.

Byrne and Gavin (1996), (see also Byrne, 1996) compared models positing a top-down and a bottom-up direction of causality based on a single wave of data. They found the two models to be nearly indistinguishable, suggesting that the direction of causal flow might be reciprocal. Marsh and Craven (1997) correctly noted, however, that it is problematic to infer any causality—let alone a direction of flow—based on a pattern of relations among different variables collected at the same point in time. Marsh and Yeung (1997) updated previous reviews of this research area and found only nine relevant longitudinal causal modelling studies, and concluded that there was clear support for a reciprocal effects model.

Valentine (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of three causal models that have been advanced in the literature to account for relating between self-concept and achievement: (a) the skill development model, which suggests that student achievement causes student self-concept, (b) the self-enhancement model, which suggests that student self-concept causes achievement, and (c) the reciprocal effects model, which suggests that achievement and self-concept affect each other in a reciprocal fashion. He used 69 independent samples from 60 studies (N=50,000), and used the beta-coefficient as a measure of effect-size. He found that there was more support for the reciprocal effects model of
causal relations between self-concept and achievement than for any of the other models examined. That is, findings were consistent with a causal model in which self-concept exerts a significant influence on later achievement and in which achievement exerts a causal influence on later self-concept. The effect sizes were fairly small (β = .07 for SC to ACH effects and β = .16 for ACH to SC effects), thus for every unit change in self-concept, there was an average gain of .07 standard deviation units in achievement above and beyond change accounted for by moderators, or .16 standard deviation units in self-concept above and beyond change accounted for by moderators. Valentine concluded that “these results lend further support to social cognitive theory, specifically that affective, cognitive, and environmental variables interact in a reciprocal fashion to determine human behavior” (p. 28).

Further such investigations of causality, however, are unlikely to resolve the directionality. Instead it is more likely that there are higher relationships between certain self-strategies and achievement. When students invoke learning rather than performance strategies, verification rather than enhancement, acceptance rather than discounting of feedback, benchmarking to difficult rather than to easy goals, comparing to subject criteria rather than to other students, high rather than low efficacy to learning, effecting self-regulation and personal control rather than learned helplessness in the academic situation are much more closely tied to achievement gains. It is the choice of strategies not the level of self-concept that is the precursor to achievement gains. It is likely that achievement level also reinforces the various self-strategies used such that it is difficult to change these strategies. Maybe it is not thence surprising that teachers have more difficulty changing the levels of achievement of those with non-supportive self-strategies and may have more success by addressing these strategies prior to attempting to enhance achievement directly.

The Measurement of Self-Concept

The most common method for measuring self-concept is via Likert scales. One of the constants of our business over the past fifty years has been the presence of Likert scales. These scales measure intensity typically on a “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly agree” dimension. While this method has valuable measurement properties, there are a perennial problems relating to the presence of negative vs. positive factors (a tendency for all negative items to form on one factor, even if the content is unrelated among these negative items), and most people score about the mid-point thus reducing the dependable variance.

An alternative method is to use self-strategy measures, but much more research is needed to appropriately balance these strategies between the “sheath”, collectivism and individualist based strategies, and the specific strategies. Given the Rope model it is likely that the use of these strategies is more situationally and culturally specific and thus generalised Likert-type questions are unlikely to be successful. Instead we have been exploring computer adaptive models.

Such models involve presenting vignettes to respondents, and then varying the items according to their stream of responses. For example, we presented a video of an adolescent watching a group of peers across the road, and prompted various questions about what the respondent believed would be their thoughts if they were the adolescent. Then the adolescent started to cross to the group, and this elicited further questions. Finally, the adolescent began to join the group of peers and they all turned to look at the newcomer. Again a series of prompts was requested. The prompts could be open and closed questions requiring speech (using speech recognition software), reactions to mood and “what ifs”, and/or identification of which strategies would be used. All items have known proficiency and discrimination values, estimated using a polytomous item response model allows comparison across individuals, and across situations.

Byrne (2002) has outlined many of the advantages of computer-adaptive self-concept tests, citing the power of branching (administering items dependent on the answers to prior items), and a wider range of questions. As an example, she proposed that when assessing social competence with peers, additional contexts may include classmates, friends in other schools, and friends outside school. Further advantages include matching reading levels and language to the student, the use of graphical and auditory capacity to simulate real-life situations, voice-activated responses, and more appropriate rating scales (Borman et al., 2001). Another major advantage is the high level of trust people have when responding to a computer over their responses to a person; which may be critical when eliciting self-concept reactions.

We need to move away from the dominance method of rating, which underlies the Likert approach towards a more Thurstonian ideal point response process. Likert’s method assumes a dominance process; that is, if both persons and items are located on a continuum representing, say, academic self-concept, then a person tends to endorse a positively worded item when his/her standing on the latent dimension is greater than that of the item; the same is true for a negatively worded item after reverse scoring. The probability of a positive response increases as a person lies increasingly distant and above the items location. In contrast, Thurstone suggested that a person endorses an item only if he/she is located near the item on the latent continuum. A person can respond negatively for two reasons: they are located too far above or too far below an item. Thus, as the distance between the location of a respondent (the ideal point) and an item on a trait continuum increases, the probability of endorsing an item decreases (Stark, Chernyshenko, Drasgow, & Williams, in review). The Thurstone method is more likely to lead to more accurate assessments of self-strategies used as it requires items along the whole continuum of high-to-low to be used, and these can be optimally presented to respondents in a computer administered process.

A further advantage is that it may be more likely to assess self-concept using idiographic or intra-individual rather than nomothetic methods (Allport, 1937). There is much need to more fully understand the processes by which individuals maintain and protect their self-esteem, as too many current models assume commonalities across groups that
may not be warranted. Often we are more interested in the developmental history of each person as well as the unique ways the person interprets and responds to reality. The nomothetic approach, on the other hand, is more concerned with generalities or with discovering phenomena observed in groups of individuals. The various strategies, the various degrees of importance and complexity, and the specific combinations of strategies and situations are more likely to be realized and discovered in the unique ways a person interprets the importance of various aspects of his or her self.

**The Development of Self-Concept**

One of the major problems of the top down and bottom up models, and the Shavelson and derivative models, is that they do not explain the development of self-concept from birth through adulthood. We are not born with a “hierarchy”, whichever way up, and we do not go through life merely adding or subtracting to the sub-dimensions, strengthening the paths up and down, and incorporating more aspects.

In the Rope model, it becomes clear that we add fibres, discard some, and strengthen others, although there is continuity over time. The earlier researchers, such as Erikson, suggested stages of growth, and emphasized the overlapping nature of the development of self-concept as children progressed through the stages: from trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role diffusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation; and ego integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1980). I have argued (Hattie, 1992a) that the Ropes are more related to cognitive decisions we are asked to make as we grow: we asked to distinguish between the self and others, self from the environment, self across reference groups, self in terms of expectations from ourselves and others, self as a source of personal causation, self as we change from concrete to abstract thinking, self in terms of cultural values, and self as we change the manner in which we receive confirmation and disconfirmation (Laing, 1971). These developments are entwined and interacting and differing in importance depending on the prior development. The task is to detect the various strands, the changes over time, the residual strands that are there from previous times but less functional now, and the ways we can educate people to incorporate new strands.

**Concluding Comments**

A recent controversy was sparked by Crocker and Park (2004), with their claim that the pursuit of self-esteem, when it is successful, “has emotional and motivational benefits, but it also has both short- and long-term costs, diverting people from fulfilling their fundamental human needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, and learning to poor self-regulation and poor mental and physical health” (p. 392). When it is not successful there can be feelings of worthlessness, shame, sadness, and anger, leaving people vulnerable to mortality or social rejection or feeling unable to cope with life events. The costs may be less short-term (due to the benefits of enhanced well-being when successful) but more long-term as the costs accumulate both to the individual and to others. While seeking to project, maintain and enhance self-esteem, there are costs in losing the ability to act autonomously, there can be interference to learning and mastery, we can resist, challenge and ignore valuable feedback, a preoccupation with the implications of events means we can lose sight of the implications of events and their own actions for others, the goal of validating self-worth often creates competition or the desire to be superior to others, and attention to the physical self can lead to poor physical health (dieting, alcoholism, sunbathing, steroids). Such striving for self-esteem is thus considered costly—and for many it certainly is.

The model proposed in this paper is more oriented to the processes of integrating, developing, and processing of information among the various dimensions of self-concept. For some, this processing can be costly, and for others worthwhile. A more refined understanding of the processes of selecting, biasing, and retrieving concepts of self can assist in developing programs to develop and enhance self-concept, and as is more likely to lead to deeper understandings of the causal relationships between students’ conceptions of themselves as learners and achievement gains. The model proposed in this paper, termed the Rope model, is based on the notion that there are many interweaving and overlapping strategies that individuals use to protect, present, preserve and promote our sense of self. The overlapping of these strategies relates to how we select, bias, and interpret the information that we receive and that we present. Thus, we have continuity, and much emphasis on the executive function of self-concept.

There are four major aspects of the model, showing how the various strategies are invoked in specific situations according to various motives to form the continuity of our concept of self. Each level is more differentiated and specific, and continuity on self-concept is provided by the various motivations that then lead to selection or invoking of various situation-specific orientations that then lead to various self-strategies. The levels move from the strategies, through to situation specific orientations, to primary motives, and thence to our conceptions of our self. Our sense of self comes from the interlinking of the many strategies across the three levels. The Level One strategies are more enduring, whereas the Level Three strategies are more dependent on time, situation, and whether the processing is private or public. For those low in self-concept there is more reliance on the lower Level strategies, and there is more adaptation to the environment or situation, whereas for those high in self-concept there is more adaptation (bias, select and retrieve) of the environment to the self-interpretations.

It is argued that the Rope model explains more than most current structural models of self-concept. Rather than conceive of high self-esteem as scoring high on a “strongly agree” set of Likert items, the Rope model, high self-esteem individuals are more adept at choosing from their repertoire of self-strategies to manifest the confidence, the self-regulation, the enhancement and/or the verification of their sense of self. The choice of strategies leads to an upward
spiral such that the self-concept becomes enhanced, and this in turn leads to higher self-verification, protections, and so on. Low self-esteem individuals are more likely to rely on a more integrated set of self-strategies particularly self-handicapping, setting low goals, performance orientation, uncertain personal control, discounting and distortion, and high levels of social comparison and monitoring. These strategies set them on a downward spiral to self-protect or self-enhance.

Many have long battled with the dilemma that importance relates to what “we back ourselves” and indices of importance should be dependably identified and added into models of self-concept dimensions. There has been little success in measuring or finding these aspects of importance. It may be that importance relates more to which particular self-strategies we choose, and when. We may tend to choose self-verification, difficult goal strivings when it is important for us to improve and master, or we may choose self-handicapping and discounting when confronted with evidence that threatens those self-concepts we hold dear to us (and different strategies for those self-concepts less critical to our sense of well-being). So unlike a top-down or bottom-up model, where importance is conceived as the interactions between importance and level of esteem, in a Rope model importance is more related to the choice of self-strategies relative to the centrality of the concept we wish to protect, present, preserve and/or promote.

The Rope model allows for more adaptation to situations without assuming that the self-concept is fickle and unstable. Stability comes from the use and expertise at the level of the various strategies rather than any sense of stability in the “levels” of any dimension (lower or higher order) of self-concept. Similarly, in a classroom situation, it is more likely to be the choice of strategies not the level of self-concept that is the precursor to achievement gains. Rather than devise further measures of self-concept relating to the “level” of agreement with various items, an alternative method is to measure the various strategies we use to select, bias and interpret our world. Finally, the structural model presupposes a “hierarchy” of multidimensional aspects of self; hence it is difficult to devise developmental explanations of structural models of self. A more important consideration is how we learn new self strategies, how we learn to invoke the strategies in various situations, and how we then select, bias, and retrieve self-strategies to maintain our self of sense.

About the Author

John Hattie is Professor of Education at the University of Auckland. His current research interests include self-concept, measurement, research design, and models of teaching and learning.

Contact Details

Professor John Hattie
Faculty of Education
PO Box 92019,
Auckland
New Zealand
Email: j.hattie@auckland.ac.nz

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### Table 1. The Various Levels of the Rope Model of Self-Concept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROPE</th>
<th>STRANDS</th>
<th>YARNS</th>
<th>FIBRES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. <em>Our very being/life/existence/who we are/self-concept/self identity</em></td>
<td>B. <em>Primary motives</em></td>
<td>C. <em>Situation-specific orientations/dispositions</em></td>
<td>D. <em>Strategies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples: Self-verification Self-enhancement Self-protection</td>
<td>Examples: Self-efficacy Performance or learning orientation Uncertain personal control Fear of failure Anxiety</td>
<td>Examples: Self-handicap Regulation of expectations (e.g. defensive pessimism) Discounting/distortion Perfectionism Social comparison Self-monitoring</td>
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*Figure 1. Shavelson et al.’s (1976) Model of Self-Concept*
Figure 2. An Illustration of the Levels of the Rope Model

Figure 3. Self-Esteem Stability Over Time