

objects (see Johnson, 1988, chap. 5), and also, because the interactive styles developed there are carried over into the mixed-sex interactions of adolescence and adulthood, including interactions in the workplace (Maccoby, 1990, in press). The thing that seems to have piqued my critics is my suggestion that the development of intimate relations between heterosexual partners can constitute an opportunity for forging an interaction pattern not based on male dominance. Yes, divorce and domestic violence are widespread, and many men are directly power-assertive, and women self-abnegating, in their domestic interactions (although having studied a large group of divorcing couples over a number of years—see Maccoby & Mnookin, in press—I cannot fail to be aware of how coercive women, as well as men, can be when a relationship disintegrates). However, in my 1990 article I was talking about the possibilities inherent in well-functioning relationships. My critics appear to believe that there is no such thing as an equitable relationship between a man and a woman. Is it really the case that if a man and woman are to forge a harmonious partnership that involves joining their domestic lives and (usually) the rearing of children, the woman must buy harmony at the price of subordinating herself to the man's interests and agenda? I think not. Although it is true that men and women carry over into well-functioning relationships some aspects of the interactive styles they acquired in childhood, relationships of mutual respect, mutual satisfaction, and genuine power equity are not only possible, but I believe, quite common, and this is true even when couples have adopted a division of labor for the rearing of children. However, power inequity in the larger society is still endemic, despite the progress that has been made in the 20th century. Some feel that the only solution is gender separatism. For those of us who want to achieve equity in the context of gender integration, however, the challenge is to recognize the socialization impact of childhood peer groups and take it into account as we devise strategies for the next steps toward equity.

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### How to Fix the Empty Self

Albert Ellis

*Institute for Rational-Emotive Therapy,  
New York, NY*

In the May 1990 *American Psychologist*, Philip Cushman's article, "Why the Self Is Empty," made some good points about the limitations of psychotherapy in its handling of the narcissistic, consumer-oriented post-World War II self. But because he put psychotherapy largely in a psychoanalytic mold, he missed what is probably the essence of the problem of unconditional self-acceptance and wound up in a pessimistic impasse.

First, Cushman (1990) defined the self as "the concept of the individual as articulated by the indigenous psychology of a particular cultural group, the shared understandings within a culture of 'what it is to be human'" (p. 599). This view of the self, following social constructivists like Gergen (1985) and Sampson (1988), rightly corrects the concept of the super-individualistic self as presented by Freud (1905/1953), Fromm (1956), Kernberg (1975), Kohut (1977), and other psychoanalytic writers. But it tends to go to the other extreme and neglects the individualistic aspects of the self that cannot merely be wished away by the social constructivists. If the complex term *self* can properly be defined at all (which seems somewhat doubtful), it seems inevitably to include both the social context mentioned by

Cushman and the individual's unique consciousness (and consciousness about consciousness) in which the social self is embedded. Thus, humans do not seem to have an "empty self" unless they think, feel, and behave as if they do; and their view of their self, as Gergen and Sampson showed, is surely influenced and affected by—but hardly entirely created by—their social milieu.

Following Kelly (1955), constructivist cognitive-behavioral therapists acknowledge that people develop in a historical and social context, but point out that their selves also construct and reconstruct that context; and it is the interaction between their personal and social selves that helps form their personality, their psychological problems, and their reactions to psychotherapy (Ellis, 1990; Guidano, 1988; Mahoney, 1988).

Again, because he leaned too heavily on psychoanalytic formulations, Cushman (1990) seemed to forget that people's views of their self are choices that are partly independent of their historical and social rearing (Ellis, 1962, 1990; Giorgi, 1970; Heidegger, 1962; Kelly, 1955). People frequently rate their self as *good* or *bad*, or as *empty* or *full* in relation to society's precepts. But they also have a partial choice of *not* doing this and of *not* kowtowing to any social, technological, or psychotherapeutic influences (Rychlak, 1979).

There are at least two important solutions to the problem of self-rating that Cushman (1990) failed to consider when he rightly showed that the common psychotherapeutic solutions to self-acceptance are confusing and inadequate. These solutions are based on helping people to rate themselves other than on socially accepted external criteria or on the approval of some therapist, guru, or religious group, which, Cushman showed, do not work very well.

Yes, *any* rating of one's self, no matter what criterion it is based on, is a very risky business—even when it is rooted in a therapist's approval. For example, when Carl Rogers (1961) and other therapists showed their clients that they accepted the clients unconditionally, and when the clients thereby gained self-acceptance, they were obviously telling themselves something like, "Because Rogers accepts me, I am okay." This is *conditional* self-acceptance and only works palliatively and temporarily, as the rest of the clients' world is not very likely to endorse their therapists' views.

Two better solutions that Cushman (1990) ignored in his article are presented in rational-emotive therapy (RET) and in

some of the existential therapies. First, as Rogers (1961) and Kohut (1977) did, the RET practitioner shows the clients that they are accepted no matter what they do; and at the same time, the clients are taught that they can always accept themselves as "good," "deserving" persons *whether or not* they perform well and *whether or not* they are approved by others—including their therapist. They are shown that they can unconditionally accept themselves just because they are alive and human, just because they *choose* to accept themselves.

This solution to the ever-present human problem of self-rating is highly practical, but it is scientifically and philosophically inelegant. It is definitional and unfalsifiable because anyone, including clients themselves, could also definitionally claim that the clients are "bad," "undeserving" persons just because they are alive and human. Therefore, a second and more elegant solution to the problem of self-worth is taught to clients: They can choose not to rate their self, their being, their totality *at all*, but *only* choose to rate their thoughts, feelings, and actions in regard to the goals and values that they and their social group choose to follow (Ellis, 1962, 1973, 1988; Ellis & Dryden, 1987). Their behaviors may justifiably be rated as *good* or *bad* but they are only people who do these "effective" or "ineffective" deeds, and never need give themselves any global (and inevitably inaccurate) evaluation.

If Cushman will modify his either/or view of the social and individual self and use instead an and/also framework, and if he will not adhere too closely to the psychoanalytic perspective, he may see that his highly pessemistic notion of people of our era having an empty self has some realistic and viable psychotherapeutic solutions.

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### Some Comments on the Empty Self: A Reply to Philip Cushman

Douglas A. Col  
The Fielding Institute,  
Santa Barbara, CA

Philip Cushman's article (May 1990) on the empty self, in adopting a social constructionist point of view, maintained that the modern self is largely a product of post-World War II political and economic factors and social-demographic influences. I suggest that these might not be the primary factors responsible for the character of the modern self, and that the presence or absence of widespread phonetic literacy might be more important in determining the relative autonomy, as well as the relative emptiness or fullness, of this self. I would also suggest that Cushman's linking of the empty self to a Kohutian narcissism (as per Lasch, 1979) might be somewhat inaccurate. Instead, I propose that the modern self appears to be *empty* only when it is viewed from the perspective of a literate, individualistic self. In reality, what may be occurring in the modern self is the development of a less individualistic, more fluid and participatory postliterate self.

It is the contention of a number of authors (Carothers, 1959; Carpenter, 1970; Havelock, 1963) that both personal autonomy and a linear visual perspective are psychological by-products of the advent of common phonetic literacy. In discussing this point, Carothers noted the differences in sensory orientation between the literate European and the nonliterate African, and the effects of these differing orientations on a sense of immediate connection to the world-at-hand. Carothers commented that "rural Africans live largely in a world of sound—a world loaded with direct personal significance for the hearer—whereas the [literate] Western European lives much more in a visual world which is on the whole indifferent to him" (p. 309).

Not only does there appear to be a dramatic accentuation of the visual sense among peoples with common phonetic literacy, but such literacy also seems to dramatically change people's phenomenological sense of themselves, their world, and their relationships with others (Havelock, 1963). Carothers (1959) commented

[The African tribesman] comes to regard himself as a rather insignificant part of a much larger organism—the family and the clan—and not as an independent, self-reliant unit; personal initiative and ambition are permitted little outlet; and a meaningful integration of a man's experience on individual, personal lines is not achieved. (p. 308)

The anthropologist Edmund Carpenter (1970) agreed, and traced the origins of this more detached, individual self to phonetic literacy. As Carpenter put it, "Literacy ushered man into the world of divided senses. The value accorded the eye at the expense of all other senses destroyed harmonic orchestration of the senses, and led to emphasis upon the individual experience of the individual sense" (Carpenter, 1970, *World of Divided Senses*).

Joseph Campbell (1968) maintained that the development of the autonomous and self-directed self took place among the troubadours of Western Europe during the late 12th and early 13th centuries. He maintained that during this period there developed an ethos of personal autonomy that was hitherto unknown in the history of our species. Campbell also noted, among the troubadour's poetry, "the organization of . . . an individual point of view, along lines going out toward a vanishing point from the locus of a living pair of eyes—according to the pulse, moreover, of the individual's private heart" (p. 178). The point is that, along with the development of the sense of a personal, autonomous *I*, there developed a new eye for linear space—a sense of individual perspective. As human beings became more