The reification of self-esteem: *grammatical investigations* into scientific and popular texts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the reification of the concept of 'self-esteem' has been achieved discursively. It investigates how the concept of self-esteem has been developed over time and how it operates as an explanatory construct across a rage of areas and disciplines. The analyses in this thesis examine texts coming from psychiatry, self-help publications and public policy. These disciplines have taken up, utilized and, consequently re-constructed the concept of self-esteem according to their own specific needs and their particular discursive organizations.

The thesis adopts the assumption that abstract psychological constructs are linguistically achieved and thus can be most effectively studied through focusing on the 'workings of language', rather than on 'discovering' some inner phenomena. Informed by Wittgenstein, critical psychology, and critical linguistics, the analyses undertake *grammatical investigations* into the concept of self-esteem.

These *investigations* , based on the analysis of patterns in the lexico-grammar, examine 'meanings' accumulated in the concept of self-esteem. These examinations extend to the level of social, cultural, and political contexts which have influenced our understandings of the concept of self-esteem. The investigations of 'meanings' embedded in the notion of self-esteem make possible an exploration of the values, assumptions and connotations carried by this concept.

The analyses demonstrate that self-esteem has been constructed over time as an increasingly more tangible, internalized and cognitive phenomenon. This intensified reification produced a 'self-esteem' that is not only a consistent and measurable 'feature' of the human psyche, but is an agentive force shaping human lives. Moreover, these constructions of self-esteem promote particular ethical principles and ultraconservative values. Paradoxically, while discourses of self-esteem have become a part of neo-liberal philosophies emphasizing personal liberty and freedom of choice, they serve to limit the choices of many social groups.

STATEMENTS

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due references have been made in the text.

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PREFACE

My interest in the cultural importance of the concept of self-esteem was initially stimulated well before I started this thesis by my work with victims of domestic violence. In that context, 'self-esteem' of the clients was often a focal point of discussions. The common assumption made by us, shelter workers, as well as the victims themselves, was that improving women's self-esteem would, somehow, protect them from abuse in the future. The belief underlying this postulation was that the level of self-esteem was an important factor in 'attracting' abuse and that the shelter's clients did not think highly of themselves. The issue of whether the assumed 'low self-esteem' of abused women was a *cause* or a *result* of abuse was rarely considered important, but the assumption that they, indeed, do not 'esteem' themselves highly was a notion taken for granted. This is despite the fact that seeking help (and thus attempting to escape abuse as something unacceptable) may be taken as indicating the opposite.

Yet, it was not until my Honours research that I become consciously (and reflexively) aware of these assumptions about victims' alleged 'low self-esteem'. In my Honours thesis I examined explanations of domestic violence available to shelter workers. While analyzing my data, the focus on victims' self-esteem and psychological `damage' of victims in shelter workers' talk became more evident. I soon found that this tendency is representative of a more global shift towards *therapeutic* explanations and solutions to domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). Inevitably, these therapeutic solutions focus on the *psyche* of a victim as a site of intervention. Concepts like self-esteem have been a significant part of this *therapeutic* way of constructing abuse. Reflecting on my own experience of working in the shelter, I realized that the focus of support given to the victims of abuse has indeed changed from more practical assistance and social concerns towards more abstract constructions such as `empowerment' or `self-esteem'.

Interestingly however, this shift has been notably less pronounced in a setting involving women from other than English speaking backgrounds. My experience of working with migrants using

languages other than English suggested a cultural and discursive base for therapeutic explanations involving self-esteem. The discourses around self-esteem were not (and still are not) easily available in other languages than English; self-esteem does not translate into such a 'neat' package. I concluded that, if the explanations offered within the culturally and linguistically diverse context differed so markedly, then the focus on 'self-esteem' must be a cultural phenomenon.

As my interest in the concept of self-esteem as a cultural phenomenon grew stronger, I begun to investigate it in more detail. My initial examination demonstrated that it was this language-specific convenient packaging that enabled 'self-esteem' to become such a powerful rhetorical concept. Moreover, because of its rhetorical strength, self-esteem has become a base for many explanations pertaining to individual and social issues, of which, domestic violence is only one example. Many problems, failures or disappointments and, as well as, accomplishments and good fortune are commonly associated, and explained through, discourses of self-esteem. There is no doubt that, at least in English speaking Western countries, these discourses have a profound effect on the way we understand ourselves and our place in the world. Yet, although some of these explanations may be seen as liberating, empowering and offering ways to increase control over our lives, many are potentially problematic. In particular, the view of 'low self-esteem' as a source of setbacks and misfortune carries the potential for 'blaming the victims' for their social or cultural inequalities. In my view, discourses that frame social disadvantage within discourses of personal failure and 'inner' shortcomings are not particularly 'empowering' to those in need of empowerment. In fact, as the research presented in this thesis demonstrates, the discourses of self-esteem contain so many implicit negative judgments, that they can only be perceived as detrimental for the socially disadvantaged.

As my research progressed, my views on the implications of discourses of 'self-esteem' were repeatedly, and sometimes vehemently, contested by friends and colleagues. Their unsympathetic reactions to my critical views made me realize that, indeed, the 'need for self-esteem' as a source of personal fulfillment has become a taken-for-granted fact. Consequently, we rarely question the belief that 'having high self-esteem' is a necessity if one is to be

successful and socially adequate. This assumption has become so naturalized that we see the expectation of happiness, optimism and self-love as part of our 'natural' drive.

Because of its *factual* status in everyday discourse, self-esteem has also become an important explanatory factor in more formal settings such as education, the law, media and government policy. More importantly, self-esteem has become a major variable in psychological research. A surprisingly high number of publications available in psychology study the correlations between self-esteem and other psychological, social or physical variables. Endless resources are directed at finding whether there are any significant disparities in self-esteem due to race, gender or social class. Parallel to this, is an increased interest among psychologists in contemplating whether or not 'high self-esteem' is necessarily good for you.

Once I became aware of this increased interest in the concept of self-esteem across different fields and disciplines, I felt even more strongly motivated to continue my exploration. As the time progressed, the focus of my research has become more specific; to investigate the use of self-esteem in different contexts. For the present thesis, I have chosen three major areas, psychiatry, self-help publications and public policy as sites of my exploration and analysis. Following Wittgenstein's method, I aimed to query, probe and describe the subtleties of explanations around self-esteem, rather than aim to penetrate and discover a hidden truth or to make broad generalizations. Looking carefully at what *lies on the surface*, I believe has enabled me to provide some insights into the elusive nature of the discursive construction of self-esteem.

SECTION 1: Introduction, theory and method

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to examine specific examples of how the psychological construct of self-esteem has been disseminated, taken up and utilized within domains other than psychology. Although this thesis focuses on how constructions of self-esteem are accomplished in text and what constitutes the available discourses around self-esteem, the focus of the present thesis and its questions, can be neither approached by examinations of conversations, nor by producing a list of broad discursive explanations. The focus here is more specific. The research centers on an examination of the constructions of the category of self-esteem, how it has developed (and changed) over time, and how it has been explained within different disciplines and across distinct domains. Simultaneously, there is a focus on how the use of self-esteem within non-psychology domains (i.e. self-help books or psychiatric textbooks) has shaped the constructions of the concept available to us today.

The present thesis is built around the analysis of text taken from a variety of distinct areas. These include psychiatry, self-help literature and government reports. All three are areas where the construct of self-esteem has been adopted to promote their own, discipline-specific objectives. Psychiatry, which only recently began to rely on psychological explanations, uses 'self-esteem' to further promote their particular constructions of depression. Linguistic reification and pathologization of 'low self-esteem' further locates depression 'inside' individuals, and thus reproduces its status as a *mental* pathology.

Self-help literature is another area selected for analysis, which is, by default, reliant on psychological conceptualizations of the world. The texts used for this thesis deploy self-esteem to promote ideals of individual self-sufficiency. These publications, as will be demonstrated

later, rely on the authority of psychology as science in making their factual claims. These claims promote certain behaviours as normal and others as abnormal and detrimental.

The third and final area, governmental policy, has also been increasingly dependent on psychology for its intervention and control techniques (Rose, 1998). As will be discussed in the last chapters of this thesis, these publications borrow psychological 'truths' and use them as a method of control. In doing so, the authors of these documents further shape our understanding of self-esteem as well as our understanding of what it means to be a good citizen. Most importantly, it is examined here how the use of discourses of self-esteem enables governments to find approval for controversial policies.

The thesis is situated within discursive social psychology which serves as a general framework for the theoretical backdrop as well as the analyses. A discursive approach provides a broad methodological positioning enabling respecification and critique of the concept of self-esteem (Edwards, 2004). This perspective is now well established in social psychology and provides a way of studying the functional and semantic constructions of psychological phenomena occurring in texts. Most importantly, discursive social psychology takes text and talk as a basis and focus of research looking at how descriptions, representations and explanations are 'achieved' for particular pragmatic reasons.

All analyses take Wittgenstein's views on psychological concepts as the starting point: it is assumed that these concepts can only be accessed through discursive explanations. Consequently, rather than search for the self-esteem as a phenomena separate from language, this thesis takes language and text as its site of inquiry. Consequently, the thesis primary focus is on how psychological constructs are achieved linguistically. The analyses are supported by social constructionism – a theoretical perspective compatible with Wittgenstein's teachings. This framework, as will be soon explicated, has gradually influenced social psychologists to break with the tradition of social psychology as a tool of control (Burr, 1995).

The analyses are further assisted by a theoretical model coming from linguistics. This model, Systemic Functional Linguistics, is based on tenets of Functional Grammar, developed by Halliday (1984). This model is compatible with both Wittgenstein's theory and social

constructionism. Moreover, this perspective provides a methodological tool which is best suited for a critical linguistic analysis. This method enables detailed *grammatical investigations* of the discourses around self-esteem.

The present section elaborates on all the above theoretical and methodological perspectives. It starts with a brief history of the concept of self-esteem within social psychology. This part includes criticisms of the construct of self-esteem and ways in which the construct has been used to promote psychological conceptualizations. This is followed by an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, looking at the main tenets of social constructionism as a theory of choice for most of the discursive work done within social psychology. This, in turn, is followed by an overview of Wittgenstein's views contained in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Following this is an outline of discourse analysis in social psychology, or rather an overview of the most distinctive features across all kinds of discourse analyses available in social psychology. This section concludes with a brief explanation of the main principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics and its theoretical framework – Functional Grammar.

This introductory section is then followed by three sets of analyses of diverse texts. The first set of analyses presented in Section 2 focuses on the way self-esteem has become a *technical* term and the ways in which it has been reified over time. Furthermore, the investigations in this section examine the ways in which discourse valorises 'self-esteem' and pathologizes 'low self-esteem' and later uses these seemingly *inherent* values to construct the abnormality of depression. This examination is particularly concerned with metaphorical structures in language (grammatical and lexical metaphors) and how they enable the reification and pathologization of 'self-esteem' and 'low self-esteem'.

The second set of analyses in Section 2 investigates, in fine detail, how the relationship between self-esteem and depression is constructed in the texts. I argue the texts suggest that depression somehow results from low self-esteem. These claims, however, are made neither evident nor explicit. This, in my view, comes from the tension between the need to produce *scientific*, cause-effect claims and the lack of certainty in psychological research. Consequently, the

analysis looks at how the tensions are managed by the authors and the implicit ways in which they skillfully build the relationship as causal.

Section 3 leaves behind the constraints of academic discourse and moves towards more freely structured self-help texts. These texts stand in contrast to academic texts by exercising the liberty to make extreme and unsupported claims (even though the authority of psychology is invoked regularly).

The methods used to analyse these texts also differ from the detailed analyses in Section 2. While the previous chapters were focusing on minute and subtle details of grammatical organization, this section searches for more general and wide-ranging patterns. Thus the analytical tools extend beyond grammar towards more general patterns across a broad range of texts.

The analyses in Section 3 begin with an overview of two self-help books published 30 years apart. There are marked differences between the two publications in the way self-esteem has been constructed. 'Self-esteem' has become gradually more 'tangible' and more 'inner' over time. This overview is followed by a more thorough examination of more recent self-help material. In these texts, the themes of agency and obligation emerge as important to our contemporary understandings of self-esteem.

The final section focuses on yet another area that adopted self-esteem as a rhetorical tool to promote its objectives. Section 4 examines the use of the construct of self-esteem to serve particular political and ideological purposes. The political associations come from the construct being adopted to pursue certain political and ideological objectives closely intertwined with contemporary governing practices. This chapter examines how the reification of self-esteem and its agentive constructions (so prominent within self-help books) has enabled policy makers and legislators to translate complex social problems into the language of the individual psyche.

Self-esteem - a brief history of the construct

> Self-esteem can mean almost anything the therapist, commentator, preacher, teacher, critic or casual user wants it to mean. Self-esteem also precipitates controversy, for some people reject the word and the ideas it represents just as fervently as others endorse them. It is a word for all seasons. (Hewitt, 1998, p.9)

As Hewitt points out in the above quote, there are varied and contradictory meanings carried by the concept of self-esteem. Those meanings have been shaped by historically and culturally specific factors, as well as particular situational contexts. The following sketch of the history of the concept of self-esteem within psychology is designed to provide a brief overview of, at least some, of the most important discipline-specific factors which have played a part in shaping the contemporary understanding of self-esteem. The overview focuses on the 'points' in history of psychology which, in my view, have had the most significant influence on the concept. This sketch is designed to provide a general framework to later sections of the thesis that consider the more specific areas wherein self-esteem has been recently deployed.

The historical sketch of 'self-esteem' contained in this chapter, focuses solely on the development of the concept within the discipline of psychology. The following overview looks briefly at the status of 'self-esteem' from the very beginnings of psychology as a separate discipline. The popularity of any concept within psychology depends on how well it can fit the scientific model adopted by the discipline. To an even greater extent, its popularity depends on how well it fits the dominant theoretical framework. Thus, as will be discussed shortly, the popularity of the concept of self-esteem was closely related to the ability of dominant frameworks to deal with concepts such as 'self' and an ability to convert abstract phenomena into measurable 'objects'.

In fact, the pre-requisite to quantify self-esteem has provided a strong incentive for psychology to reify 'self-esteem' and fit the requirements of scientific experimentation. This has lead to a reification of self-esteem as a qualitative 'object'. To further fit those requirements, psychology has converted the commonsensical expression 'self-esteem' into a quantifiable and measurable entity. This has been achieved through theoretical practices, as well as through a plethora of measures and tests.

Self-esteem in early psychology

The concept of 'self-esteem' was not a psychological invention; it has existed in the English language well before psychology broke away from psychiatry and became a separate discipline in the late 19th Century. The Oxford Dictionary online (http://dictionary.oed.com/), which

defines self-esteem as a 'favourable appreciation or opinion of oneself', traces the use of the concept in English literature back to the 17th Century. What these sources suggest is that 'self-esteem' was considered to be a helpful influence over people's lives at the time.

Two centuries later, in 1815, self-esteem entered the semi-scientific discipline of phrenology. At that time, the concept gained some complexity, being generally positive but potentially leading to excessive pride. "The Physiognomical System of Drs Gall and Spurtzheim" published in 1815 featured an "Organ of Self-esteem" as one of 33 "internal organs of the mind" (p. 332). The authors correlated the `bump' in the middle upper posterior part of the head with a high degree of, often unwarranted, pride. Gall and Spurtzeim viewed a surplus of this characteristic and thus related an *excessive* development of this organ to excessive pride. Too much activity of the 'organ of self-esteem' was considered by the authors to bring on "disdain, presumption, arrogance and insolence" (p. 333). They link it with `alienating pride' and with people conceiving themselves "to be emperors, kings, ministers, generals &c" (p. 333) despite their inadequate social standing.

The concept also gained the interest of one of the first psychologists, William James, who brings it up in his work on self (1890/1950). James embraced the concept of self-esteem as part of his introspective examination of the self. As can be inferred from the relatively little space he dedicated to self-esteem, the construct was for James just a minor component of `self'. His work, nevertheless, may be marked as important; by entering the discipline of psychology, self-esteem commenced on its path to a total `make-over' into a reified object of scientific inquiry.

The explanation or the understanding of self-esteem proposed by James is nowadays considered to be the first available definition of the construct (James, 1890/1950). The formula he offers describes self-esteem as a 'function of successes over pretensions' (what we have achieved versus what we aspire to). It is possible to see this definition as a base for a quantification of self-esteem. In my view, however, this was no more than a metaphor. Using an arithmetic function, James attempts to clarify to his readers what he means by self-esteem, rather than suggest that self-esteem can be measured (this also matches the way we remember James as

disinterested in the quantitative methods of Wundt). It is possible, however, that this definition reflects his attempt to talk about 'self' as composed of some consistent characteristics.

James' search for some inherent and stable characteristics of 'self' led him to the belief that self-esteem or self-love is more than an accurate reaction to the actual rewards or pains coming our way. He argued for some consistent, underlying level of self-complacency or self-dissatisfaction: "for there is a certain average tone of self-feeling which each one of us carries about with him, and which is independent of the objective reasons we may have for satisfaction or discontent" (1890/1950, p. 307).

James is considered the father of American psychology, as he studied and taught mainly in the United States (Viney, 1998). In Europe, these early years of psychology were marked by the development of *experimental methods*, as represented by the work of Wundt, and the *psychotherapy* developed by Freud. It would be difficult to decide whether or not European psychology at the time was concerned with 'self-esteem'. Although some of the later translations of Freud's or Wundt's works may possibly include the word 'self-esteem', it must be remembered that the term is not part of the German language. Consequently, it is commonly, and quite correctly, accepted by contemporary writers on self-esteem that the early European psychologists did not engage with the concept at all (Mruk, 2000).

While early psychology in North America and central Europe had strong links with philosophy as well as medicine, Russian psychology developed from a blend of physiology, associationism and materialism. Psychologists like Sechenov, Bekhterev or, later, Pavlov were particularly concerned with objective, observable responses. These responses were studied in terms of the physiological and environmental factors involved in observable psychological processes. They rejected subjective processes such as perceptions, thoughts, images and feelings as impossible to measure adequately in an objective fashion.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Russian behaviourism began to influence North American psychologists, quickly gaining momentum through the works of Thorndike, Watson, Hull and, later, Skinner (Capretta, 1967). Soon, behaviourism became a dominant framework within North American psychology. Skinner's operant conditioning and the idea of 'shaping'

influenced research as well as therapy, particularly work with addictions and phobias. The focus on the 'objective' and the 'observable' prevented behaviourists from studying or theorising about concepts like self-esteem. Therefore, it has been widely acknowledged that the concept of 'self-esteem', together with broader concepts such as self, emotions, or perceptions disappeared from psychology at that time (Greer, 2003).

Self-esteem from the mid 1950s to the 1980s

After the initial thrill over the 'objective' and 'observable', the limitations of experimental and behavioural psychology started to be felt, particularly within therapy (Leahey, 1997). The cultural preoccupation with self, so clearly displayed in the works of James, had remained strong in North America. Thus, the 'self', particularly the 'individualised self', never ceased to be an important theme in therapy, and had become particularly foregrounded within the client-centred therapy of Rogers. Consequently, the limitations of 'conditioning' and 'shaping' were challenged by a growing interest in this form of therapy. The clients, according to Rogers, were concerned with issues relevant to the 'self' in relation to their psychological problems. The demands of the therapy placed a considerable demand on researchers within the discipline to move away from preconceptions guided by behaviourism and to develop new methods that would be more relevant to therapeutic reality.

As discussed by Greer (2003), it was this shift in therapy towards a focus on the self that encouraged a greater engagement of researchers with more subjective and broader issues. This, in turn, prompted researchers to look for ways of studying these more subjective issues within the constraints of 'objectivity'. In response to this, in the late 40s, Raimy developed the first set of scales measuring the self-concept. This breakthrough provided a way of operationalizing and investigating the self through self-referential statements. This provided opportunities to measure and, consequently, to research the self within an objective scientific paradigm. As Greer (2003) argues, the development of self-rating scales provided a possibility for psychology to engage with issues which were previously considered too 'philosophical' and too subjective to be reliably studied.

As can be expected, Rainy's study was followed by a `flood' of self-rating methods, most of which measured self-concept or self-esteem. To this day, as Greer demonstrates, self-psychology relies heavily on scales measuring self-esteem. This may also be an important reason, why it has been so difficult for psychology to abandon self-esteem, despite the recent controversies around the concept. Easy to administer, self-esteem scales translate personal experience of the self into an objective entity suitable for statistical analysis.

Interest in self and self-esteem in the 1960s had been accompanied by a number of theoretical attempts to provide a better understanding of the construct of self. Diverse schools of psychology made attempts to incorporate the concept into their theorising. For example, White developed a theory of self-esteem within the psychodynamic framework (Mruk, 2000). Working with psychodynamic theory within the North American context, White saw self-esteem as coming from a sense of efficacy and achievement in mastering one's environment. The inherently `conflictual' nature of the psyche, assumed by Freud to be intrinsically human, has been conceptualized as functional by more `optimistic' North American psychoanalysis. The function of the `inner battle' has been re-defined as 'strive for self-mastery' fuelled by the conflict between what we *are* and what we *strive for* (Mahony, 1987). Self-esteem in this perspective is therefore earned, not given, even though most of it is claimed to be accumulated within the childhood and adolescent years. As a developmental phenomenon, self-esteem is facilitated or retarded throughout various stages of development.

Another early self-esteem theory was developed by Rosenberg in the early 60s. Rosenberg comes from a sociologically based framework and he theorised self-esteem to be a "positive or negative attitude towards a particular object, namely, the self. (1965, p. 30). In his later work, he extends this definition beyond attitudes, referring to both affective and cognitive processes.

Unlike White, who was mainly concerned with applications of self-esteem theory to therapy, Rosenberg's work examined cultural and sub-cultural (i.e., religion, social class) influences on self-esteem. He stressed the process of socialization in determining the values people uphold as an ideal. To him, self-esteem was related to discrepancies between the ideal and the perceived

self. Higher self-esteem, according to Rosenberg, is a sign that an individual sees her or himself as matching up to these central values.

Rosenberg left in his legacy one of the most widely used in psychology scales of self-esteem. He attempted to achieve a unidirectional measure of self-esteem. Since the scale is easy to administer and considerably short (only 10 items), it remains popular among those who study self-esteem. His theory is still popular among psychologists. Yet, coming from a sociological rather than a psychological perspective, Rosenberg did not address any typical psychological factors as important for self-esteem (i.e., motivation, choice, personality) (Greer, 2003).

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1965) is discussed in detail in his book *Society and the Adolescent Self-image.* The scale, developed in the early 60s originally used the Guttman scale, a six point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The inventory had been initially tested on over five thousand school juniors randomly selected from 10 schools. The scale is considered to have a high reliability and high test-retest correlations (of over .85) (Rosenberg, 1986).

Table 1 below shows the list of 10 items used in this scale. The items marked with asterisks are reversed score items. The responses ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' are presented with the scales and the participants are asked to circle one response for each item.

Table 1. Rosenberg Self Esteem scale

1.	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
2.	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3.	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.**
4.	I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5.	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.**
6.	I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7.	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8.	I wish I could have more respect for myself.**
9.	I certainly feel useless at times.**
10.	At times I think I am no good at all.**

Another well known theory of self-esteem developed in the 60s comes from Stanley Coopersmith's studies. Coopersmith studied the self-image of school boys, publishing his findings in *The Antecedents of Self-esteem* (1967). Although considered a behaviourist (Mruk, 2000), Coopersmith was particularly interested in more *subjective causes* for behaviours. He defined self-esteem as an 'evaluative attitude' held by an individual about her- or himself, and was particularly interested in examining and delineating the conditions that produce negative and positive self-values.

The ambition of Coopersmith's research was to provide insights that would serve *both* research and therapy. He attempted to achieve this by linking behavioural manifestations of low or high self-esteem with the subjective states associated with each. For example, he linked the subjective state of self-confidence with dominant and assertive behaviours, both associated with high self-esteem. Simultaneously, he endeavoured to find past actions, behaviours, states or abilities linked to these behaviours. He concluded that certain types of parenting are related to high levels of self-esteem while others consistently produce low levels of self-esteem. He found that 'external indicators of prestige' such as wealth or the education of parents did not correlate with levels of self-esteem as much as acceptance of the children, clarity in setting rules, consistency and focus on action.

The scales developed by Coopersmith (1967) are not so widely used today. This is possibly due to the complexity of administering the full version of his scales. The scales were designed as multiple part questionnaires involving interviews with children, mothers and teachers. The main questionnaire (given to children) consists of sets of 50 items that represent favourable and unfavourable aspects of 'self' to which participants respond 'like me' or 'unlike me'. Coopermith's full scales were designed to answer more intricate questions than simply assess the level of self-esteem, yet the simplified version where only the main questionnaire is administered can be still used to assess the participants' self-view.

Another explanation of the construct of self-esteem developed in the 1960s comes from Carl Rogers (1965). Rogers, in his work on client-centred psychology, combined humanistic

psychological assumptions and a phenomenological approach to research. His definition of self-esteem conceptualized it as the difference between what a person wants to be, or thinks they should be, and what they believe they are. In his view, self-evaluations played a central role in the mental health of his clients. In fact, the centrality of self-evaluation was so important in his theory, that he used self-esteem measures as a tool to assess the success of his therapy.

A different conceptualization of self-esteem, grounded in cognitive theory, was developed in the early 1980s by Epstein, one of the most influential cognitive theorists on self-esteem (Mruk, 2000). Epstein assumes self-esteem to be the basic human need of feeling love-worthy. He gives self-esteem a central role in human psychology, claiming that alterations in self-esteem can have an extensive effect on the entire self-system. Self-esteem, in his view, is a protection but also a drive towards change. His theory attempts to accommodate for more stable as well as more situation-specific aspects of self-esteem. Thus, he sees self-esteem as a hierarchically structured phenomenon. However, this model has been criticised for its mechanistic view of self-esteem, wherein people organize information about themselves into mental structures called 'personality theories of reality' (Mruk, 2000).

Contemporary applications of self-esteem

Today, self-esteem is a widely studied psychological concept. As Greer (2003) argues, self-esteem has become a major way of measuring self, and thus an important way of talking about self in psychology. Today, psychologists have a choice of at least 200 scales apparently measuring self-esteem. This represents a massive effort of, primarily, North American psychology. Furthermore, there are thousands of studies on self-esteem, and hundreds more are being conducted every year. There are almost fifteen thousand publications available on electronic resources like *Psych-Info* wherein self-esteem appears as a *subject,* and the number doubles for articles that make use of self-esteem. One needs to multiply this number by all the unpublished work as well as work not available to *Psych-Info* (i.e., before 1971, and published in minor sources, and in other languages). This represents one of the largest bodies of research undertaken on a single topic in the social sciences.

This vast effort and expense, however, has brought little in terms of conceptual and empirical clarity. Together with a mounting number of publications, there has also been a sharp increase in the controversy around the concept. There is a growing body of literature that criticises the use of self-esteem both in research (and the claims of correlations between self-esteem and social and individual problems) and how these apparent findings have been applied in education, health and other areas. Before I discuss some of the criticisms directed at self-esteem, I wish to provide three examples demonstrating the extent to which the concept has penetrated the psyche of North American culture and how central it has become in everyday explanations. The first example comes from feminist literature, the second from Internet websites and the third from psychiatry and the use of the antidepressant Prozac.

The first example comes from recent developments in feminist theory. Certainly, the deployment of individualistic discourses (represented by self-esteem) within feminism is highly problematic. Moreover, offering self-esteem as a solution to any form of disadvantage or prejudice seems an unlikely route for any liberation movement to take. Yet, as will hopefully become clear throughout this thesis, individualistic 'self-esteem' solutions can be appropriated to suit most arguments.

The most profound influence the self-esteem movement has had on feminism is represented by the work of Steinem and hooks. In 1992 Steinem published *Revolution From Within: a Book of Self-esteem.* Steinem sees self-esteem as a 'prerequisite to democracy and for equal power within democracy' (p. 19). For her, the true liberation of women can only come from within, we all need to feel better about our own capacities and this will bring more success into women's lives, and consequently, more equality into our society.

A decade later, a black feminist academic, bell hooks (2003) published her book *Rock my Soul: Black People and Self-esteem.* Like Steinem, hooks sees future liberation from racism and gender discrimination to be contingent on raising the self-esteem of women and black people in North America. Black people, she argues, have a history of oppression and discrimination which they have internalised. Consequently, the only way this can be obliterated is by removing

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this internal sense of inferiority from black people's psyche; in other words by raising self-esteem.

Both authors embrace the assumptions of the highly individualistic and positivist culture in which they live. The extreme bias towards belief in the *inner* as the most important influence and a source of social success and achievement is clearly reflected in the following confession by hooks (2001)

> I went to schools that were crumbling. I went to schools that did not have librarians. I went to schools that had teachers that didn't have certain kinds of degrees. But I can *be* bell hooks, I can *write* those twenty books that are taught in every university in this nation, because of the kind of self-love that these teachers gave to me. We didn't have typewriters. We didn't have all the other things. Every study has shown that if you have healthy self-esteem you can overcome your [material] lacks. (p. 2)

Her statement, I suggest, reflects the taken for granted character of the beliefs around self-esteem. It also typifies cultural discourses reflecting preoccupation with success and achievement and the assumption that everyone can succeed if they believe it's possible (Hewitt (1998). This close link between what is interpreted as self-esteem, the positive connotations attached to the concept and North American culture has been discussed in numerous critiques and analyses (e.g., Emler, 2001, Hewitt, Fraser & Berger, 2000, Greer, 2003, Cruikshank, 1993).

The second example of the popularity of self-esteem and the wide belief in its powers to change individuals' lives comes from the fast growing number of website pages dedicated to the concept of self-esteem. These websites provide inventories measuring self-esteem; they are dedicated to selling books, articles and courses to improve self-esteem; they promise quick-fix solutions to all problems. These websites attempt to define what self-esteem is, and their definitions are often simplified into statements like the one below,

> Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself. It is an image you create. This is not just one image, but many images. (www.muextension.missouri.edu)

Some websites, however, search for more complex definitions of self-esteem and its theorised components of worthiness, competence, self-assessment, etc. It is interesting, if not worrying, how many of these pages are dedicated to children. The authors propose simplified definitions,

games (i.e., www.selfesteemgames.mcgill.ca) and stories to bring the concept closer to the youngest internet users.

Most of the webpages offer some version of self-esteem scales. The scales are often reminiscent of the Rosenberg inventory but, for simplicity there are no reverse score items and there are usually only two responses available; true and false. The example below has been taken from *www.more-selfesteem.com* but is also available on many other websites.

Table 2. Self-esteem Inventory offered at various websites.

1. Other people are not better off or more fortunate than me
2. I accept myself as I am and am happy with myself
3. I enjoy socializing
4. I deserve love and respect
5. I feel valued and needed
6. I don't need others to tell me I have done a good job
7. Being myself is important
8. I make friends easily
9. I can accept criticism without feeling put down
10. I admit my mistakes openly
11. I never hide my true feelings
12. I always speak up for myself and put my views across
13. I am a happy, carefree person
14. I don't worry what others think of my views
15. I don't need others' approval to feel good
16. I don't feel guilty about doing or saying what I want
TEST SCORE: Total number of *true* answers you gave, each one = one point
15-16 points - You have a high level of self esteem !
12-14 points - Not bad but room for you to improve
8-11   points - Low self esteem - it's holding you back
Below 8 points - Your esteem is drastically low

The last example of how popular and, more importantly, how robust the idea of self-esteem as a 'real' and essential part of our psyche is, comes from psychiatry and the use of the antidepressant Prozac. In 1993, Kramer published a book *Listening to Prozac*, a book containing a substantial chapter on the use of Prozac in the treatment of low self-esteem. Kramer (1993), drawing on his own experience as a psychiatrist, provides compelling evidence that patients taking Prozac report a quite noticeable increase in self-esteem. His patients, mostly

successful professionals who complained of `persistent low self-esteem' reported that Prozac gave them a superior sense of self-worth, feelings of self-regard and confidence, and a greater sense of self and sense of their place in the world. A consistent effect of elevated self-esteem disappeared as soon as the medication was discontinued, only to be re-established when back on medication.

The use of Prozac with 'low self-esteem' is difficult to challenge. Firstly, there is an observable difference the medication had on the patients' sense of self-worth, as well as general sense of self. Secondly, ceasing the medication resulted in a return of the sense of self-loathing. For many, the evidence is enough to conclude self-esteem to be an inner biological entity. However, once the effects of Prozac are considered within a social constructionist perspective, it is possible to see this conclusion as hasty and limited and only acceptable within our socially specific assumptions.

Yet, the argument that self-esteem is biologically rather than socially determined has gained a significant level of attention in the last few years. This coincides with a general shift towards biological and genetic explanations of many behaviour and health related issues. For example, the biological primacy of self-esteem has been argued by one of the latest investigations into the phenomena of self-esteem conducted by Emler (2001). Emler argued that indeed self-esteem is essentially biological and thus its acquisition is genetic. Parenting, in his view, has a secondary effect to genetics, and is mainly influential in cases of abuse or maltreatment of the child. Any therapy or method aspiring to raise self-esteem has been deemed useless by Emler, who implied them to be 'snake-oil remedies'.

In the next section I will examine criticisms of conceptualizations and applications of self-esteem in western, English speaking societies. I will begin with Hewitt's response to Kramer's observations about fluctuations of self-esteem on Prozac, and his challenge to the biological explanation of self-esteem. This will be followed by a brief overview of a critical perspective based on post-structural theory, wherein self-esteem is understood as a 'technique of self', that is a technique enabling the democratic governance of individuals. Finally, I will discuss the

criticisms directed at the beliefs underlying the self-esteem movement, wherein self-esteem is conceived as a 'panacea' for most individual and social problems.

Criticisms of self-esteem

> Esteem as a personality trait is untenable because traits are not products of thought, not a set of generated perceptions. Rather, self-concept and self-esteem are (if anything at all) the *result* of reflexivity and consciousness, and their existence must be understood an emanating from behaviour and cognition rather than a *cause* of or upon it (although when discussing reflexivity, the causation is often reciprocal). As such, the assumption that "self-esteem" is a real, fixed, naturally occurring, normally distributed "variable" seems perverse. This is, of course, connected to the further belief that this `esteem variable" accounts for a percentage of the variance in behaviour - which, at this point, no longer makes sense. (Greer, 2003, p. 101)

As demonstrated in the historical overview of the concept of self-esteem, most of its conceptualizations reach back to the late 1950s and early 1960s. Since then, the popularity of self-esteem within the discipline of psychology, as well as outside it, has been growing rapidly. By the late 1980s and 1990s, the self-esteem movement in North America (which is a broad umbrella for all activities based on an assumption that self-esteem is one of the most significant factors influencing lives of individuals) marked the climax of interest in the construct. At this time, psychological research focused on correlating self-esteem with all possible personal and social malaises, with particular interest in all sorts of disadvantage and prejudice. During this period the number of self-help books, courses and materials on self-esteem skyrocketed, together with an interest in the educational value of self-esteem.

Soon, however, voices started to surface critiquing and criticizing this unrestrained enthusiasm about the `miraculous' phenomenon and its panacea-like properties. The promise carried by the self-esteem movement of `curing' social and individual problems by increasing the sense of self-worth in individuals was clearly not being delivered. The adverse effects of the self-esteem movement on education, the legal system and therapy have begun to be obvious, particularly in North America. Teachers have found it increasingly more and more difficult to relate adequately to misbehaving students. The assumption that there is a poor broken child haunted by low self-esteem inside every bully or every criminal has made it hard to adequately address the problems (Hewitt, 1998). Similarly, an unquestioned pursuit of self-esteem was recognized as creating

excessive self-absorption, insensitivity and lack of awareness to the needs of others (Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1999; Emler, 2001).

The most intense controversy around the self-esteem movement has been generated within education. Many critics not only resisted the concept but actively warned against self-esteem (Baumeister *et al*, 1999). The focus on self-esteem has shaped American education in such a way as to avoid difficult and demanding tasks, and any criticism of students. As a result, the education system in North America, and more recently in other English speaking countries, has been considered as failing to adequately teach skills and social-responsibility to students.

These criticisms and warnings, however, do not discourage educational authorities from believing self-esteem to be an indicator of school performance. For example, in November 2002 the education section of BBC news proudly announced that children as young as three could now be tested by their teachers and parents to see how high or low their self-esteem is (www.newsbbc.co.uk). The tests, introduced in English pre-schools and primary schools were meant to identify youngsters at risk of failing at school (and thus assuming that low self-esteem causally affects academic performance). The program included interventions designed to raise self-esteem through various activities. For example, as the news reported, this could be done through a series of games involving the child, and then other children in the group, repeating positive phrases about themselves. One of the examples consisted of a phrase: "I am Polly and I am pretty" and other activities done at school and at home.

Another important area where self-esteem has been seen as a universal remedy was governmental and social policy. Firstly, the Californian legislature claimed self-esteem to be a `panacea' or a `vaccine' for the social problems of unemployment, drug and alcohol addictions, violence and crime. Despite being often ridiculed and regularly criticised, beliefs held by legislators permeated public debates and policies in North America and outside. It became widely accepted that the failure to find work, to succeed at school and remain addiction free are mainly generated by low self-esteem. Moreover, people of different racial and ethnic background, indigenous people, single parents or pregnant teenagers become perceived as `naturally' troubled by low self-esteem. These assumptions also underlie the interventions

offered by the Australian government directed at social security recipients, in order to raise their self-esteem (Healey, 2002).

These assumptions about the causal links between the level of self-esteem and social problems have been challenged on many occasions. Later in this thesis, when I examine documents and publications which rely on these assumptions, I will also discuss criticisms in relation to these documents. It is sufficient to note here that the assumption of low self-esteem being *a cause* of crime, unemployment, delinquency or a force preventing success or achievement has to date, not been supported by any research. Most of the research into self-esteem in relation to these and other problems, provides no support for the claims made by self-esteem advocates. Even in cases where a correlation has been established, the influence is usually weak and the direction difficult to establish.

These assumptions that high self-esteem is always good and that raising self-esteem is a clue to averting social problems, despite the lack of support, tend to dominate psychological research. The criticisms within academia, therefore, address these two preconceptions. Firstly, the assumption that high self-esteem is always good and it needs to be pursued at all costs has been challenged by research showing `self-esteem' to be unrelated, or adversely related to crimes and addictions. The research conducted by Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1999) demonstrated that neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan members, violent offenders and abusive husbands consistently express favourable views of themselves. Other research, reviewed by Emler (2001), showed that racists, violent criminals, abusers, prisoners and drug and alcohol addicts are often `plagued' by high, rather than low self-esteem. In fact, as Emler argues, most of those studied felt good about themselves and liked themselves a lot.

The second prevalent belief about self-esteem challenged by researchers was an assumption that a rising self-concept in individuals can avert most social problems. Research compiled by Mecca *et al.* in 1989 showed almost no relation between self-esteem and school achievement, teenage pregnancy, welfare dependency, drug and alcohol addictions and other social problems. The most recent research confirms that self-esteem, even though related to a positive affect explains nothing about behaviour, and indeed, the constant chase for higher self-esteem is done

at the expense of others as it blocks awareness and sensitivity to others, and in some cases breeds interpersonal violence (Crocker, 2002).

The assumptions underlying research, public documents and popular psychological claims about self-esteem seem to be based in social and cultural convictions about the powers of the human psyche. Despite the caution of psychological researchers to abide by objectivity, most researchers remain faithful to the idea that enhancing self-esteem has widespread positive consequences. Therefore, one of the motivations behind the analyses in this thesis is the desire to examine in detail how these claims can be sustained in the face of an overwhelming <u>lack</u> of scientific support. Specifically, I will attempt to explore how these possible tensions are managed within the constraints of different discursive contexts.

Criticisms of self-esteem

In *Listening to Prozac*, Kramer gives examples of his many patients who, after starting on the antidepressant Prozac reported a sudden increase in their sense of self-esteem as well as an enhanced sense of self in general. Hewitt, Frazer and Berger (2000) review these psychiatric reports and challenge Kramer's conclusion about the biological nature of self-esteem. The authors adopt a social constructionist framework for their critique and argue for self-esteem to be a socially constructed way of interpreting mood.

> Self-esteem (and its associated terms of self-reference) thus provides a label the person may attach to feelings aroused when he or she sees the self reflected in the social mirror. (Hewitt *et al.,* 2000, p.171)

Self-esteem is, according to this view, an *interpretation* of mood and is linked to the available vocabularies of experiencing the self. Both depression and low self-esteem are therefore 'labels' available to describe or refer to an underlying affective reality. Yet, the labels do not describe the underlying reality, they actively construe it. This 'underlying reality' may be represented through a variety of social constructions. If Prozac changes an `underlying condition of mood', they argue, and if the condition has been labelled as low self-esteem, then the change in mood will be interpreted as an increase in self-esteem.

Kramer's patients taking Prozac experience a different sense of self, behave differently, and feel differently about themselves, others and the world around them. They are also reportedly easier

to live with and considerably nicer. This, according to Hewitt *et al.,* challenges most of our understandings about the self. Yet, it also has the potential to reduce our sense and understanding of the self to physiological processes.

The authors direct our attention to the cultural valorisations embedded in particular behaviours and dominant ways of being. The label 'low self-esteem' indicates a failure to meet social expectations, a failure to be happy, energetic, positive, optimistic, social, active, interested in life, widely liked and self-loving, confident and successful. Low self-esteem therefore, specifies "how individuals may fall short of what their culture expects of them" (p. 178). Prozac, as the authors point out, produces an actor which is more adequate socially and who behaves in a culturally appropriate or expected way.

Self-esteem as a technology of the self

The growing popularity of self-esteem in the 1990s has been explained through the work of Cruikshank (1993, 1999), who draws on concepts first developed by Foucault (1988) and later extended through the work of Rose (1991, 1998). According to their view, self-esteem has become a tool of what Foucault called `technologies of the self'. Cruikshank (1999) argues that in modern democracies governance becomes a matter of what we do to ourselves. Through this, citizens take on the goal of `working on themselves' in order to achieve personal fulfillment and to fulfill their obligation to society. The coercive force of earlier governments is replaced in contemporary societies with self-governance. This is shaped and guided by armies of professionals (including psychologists, therapists and the authors of self-help literature). This self-governance, as Rose (1998) demonstrates, appears to emanate from an autonomous and 'natural' quest for personal understanding and freedom.

Rose (1998) further links the self-esteem movement in North America, and its popularization across all western English speaking countries, with neoliberal values adopted by the governments of Thatcher in Britain, Reagan in the United States and later Keating in Australia. Neoliberalism created not only new ways of governing based on minimal intervention, but also a new type of subject; an active, independent, ambitious, assertive, striving, self-fulfilling, and responsible individual:

> Citizenship is to be active and individualistic rather than passive and dependent. The political subject is henceforth to be an individual whose citizenship is manifested through the free exercise of personal choice among a variety of options. (Rose, 1998, p. 17)

Cruikshank (1993) and Rose (1998) place the concept of self-esteem into a political and socio-historical frame. They provide further understandings as to why the notion has become so popular and why it is so difficult to `abandon'. Psychology plays a significant role in providing language and normative standards for being human. It plays a significant role in the `fabrication of contemporary society' (Rose, 1998, p. 76). In fact, psychology and psychological explanations have become a basis for the way we construe our lives following the vocabularies of fulfillment, self-actualization and self-esteem. These understandings and explanations dominate Western cultures, where individuals `act upon themselves' according to these principles.

Undoubtedly, self-esteem is not the only psychological concept that relies on psychological explanations providing normative and normalizing standards in Western English-speaking societies. Another example of a concept which, similarly to self-esteem, has entered our everyday explanations and has become a focus of many self-help publications is 'stress'. In the article 'Stress as regimen', Brown (1999), provides an analysis of the self-help literature built around this concept. According to Brown, the self-help literature on stress 'regiment' individuals into adhering to particular practices while holding 'stress' as a principle explanation of behaviours. Once 'stress' is accepted as central to a reader's personal circumstances, the literature provides a ways of 'coping' consisting of a robust regimen of activities and behaviours. These serve as a rationale to re-invent the self through certain practices; to 're-engineer' oneself according to the demands of a healthy lifestyle.

This advice, as Brown observes, is clearly common-sensical; it hardly offers any unique solutions despite being highly prescriptive and advisory. Such publications provide mechanisms to shape individual conduct and understandings, but not in the form of unique, precise and direct advice. Instead, these mechanisms are a result of a complex interrelation between the regimen and the text; the 'correct' types of conduct are subtly delimited in the narratives that take stress

as its central explanatory principle. The very vagueness of the concept of stress makes it a flexible tool to provide a multi-layered regimentation of the self.

However, the shaping of conduct (and common understandings) is not limited to the self-help literature, and it is not limited to easily disseminated concepts like stress or self-esteem. The regimentation of the self operates across all areas driven by psychological explanations and can engage with more 'lofty' ideas like consciousness or memory. For example, Hacking (1995) and Howard and Tuffin (2002) discuss how the concept of memory has been constructed within psychological debate on *repressed* versus *false memories*. The authors analyse how a flexible use of historical events enables psychologists to construct different, often conflicting account to support their claims. Even though this particular 'memory' debate did not eventuate in a plethora of self-help books, it has been a focus of public attention through the media and is, no doubt, used in therapeutic practices to shape understandings and conduct in relation to sexual abuse or other traumatic experiences. Disseminated into the public, these constructions create space to shape ourselves as 'remembering' individuals.

These kinds of debates also effect the ways we construct ourselves as possessing consistent and coherent personalities. Psychology, no doubt, searches for answers to 'how kinds of people come into being' (Hacking, p.6). By engaging in theorizing about 'kinds of people', psychology creates systems of knowledge about personalities and how they come into being. These systems of knowledge play a dominant role in the ways we understand and picture ourselves and others. Psychology provides a framework to construct *what* we 'know' about people, *how* we get to know about them (or, how we should proceed if we want to know), as well as *who* are the knowers. These are mostly framed within cognitive assumptions implying an existence of fixed structures occupying human heads. Only few psychologists discuss consistent memories as consistent narratives created within discursive 'possibilities'. As Hacking points out, we can only remember what we can make sense of, the best way we can understand it at the time.

Hacking's discussion centers around multiple personality disorder. A possibility of multiple personalities challenges our attachment to an idea of a singular, true, central and essential self. The recent support for the continuity and singularity of the self is therefore reflected in, what is

perceived as , an *epidemic* of multiple personality disorder since the 1980s. According to Hacking's research, this peculiar 'disorder' has been almost unknown before the 1970s. To this reflective writer, this suggests not so much a new epidemic, but the growing persistence of particular cognitive understandings of being human. These also have a profound impact on our everyday perceptions and behavours, and not coincidently, the focus on multiple personality (as well as self-esteem) coincides with a neoliberal philosophy of a self-sufficient self and technologies of fashioning the self. Only the consistent and singular self can be effectively fashioned.

As Hackings points out, the popularity of multiple personality disorder reveals little about the universal nature of being human but rather sheds light on how people and, most importantly, experts conceive personhood. "Multiple personality shows nothing *direct* about the mind" (p. 222), they also teach us nothing about the mind or the body. The author concludes that the "philosophical analysis, of almost a grammatical sort, may help us with memory and multiplicity" (p. 234), and as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, with self-esteem.

In a final word, even though self-esteem is not the only concept used in 'shaping the self' it is nevertheless an important and unique tool for the 'technologies of self'. Its exclusiveness comes from the ways it has been adopted and disseminated into the public and the way it has been a dominant theme in neoliberal philosophies. The popularity of self-esteem is much more ideologically driven than that of other concepts. Its *ad nouseam* use in self-help publications and materials creates opportunities to shape conduct of broad populations. Finally, the use of self-esteem in public policies creates even grater potential to reach those who have been historically most marginalized, that is, poor women, single mothers, and or migrants.

Chapter 2: Theory and Methodology

I wish to remain close to Wittgenstein's theorizing throughout the whole thesis. His suggestion that research should focus on the workings of language seem to underlie most of the discursive analytic work in social psychology. His suggestion that we should aim to recognize these workings to avoid being mislead by the 'clothing of language' can be achieved in many ways. Yet, the important assumption coming from his work is that to understand, we need to *describe* the practices of language use rather than attempt to *penetrate* phenomena. Most importantly, however, Wittgenstein opens the possibility of thinking differently about language and working with language as a dynamic sphere of construction rather than a mere medium of communicating pre-existing ideas. He leads us into different conceptualizations of language, psychological constructs and research.

However, following Parker (1996), I am mindful of the limitations of Wittgenstein's conceptual work. Even though he draws attention to the historical or cultural specificities of psychological concepts, he does not place them in a wider context of social or political relations. I suggest that Wittgenstein's theory opens certain possibilities of seeing and studying the language of psychological constructs. It is certainly not valuable to see his work as finished, but rather as providing new ways of attaining greater clarity in psychological research. His view of language has served as a starting point for many studies emphasizing the rhetorical character of all texts and the discursive nature of human action. His writings can also be used to examine the way language in general, and psychological constructs in particular, construct social and political relations. What is seen by Parker as a 'blank' space in Wittgenstein's work is, in my view, a theoretical advantage of his writings. This 'blank' space may be extended by relevant theoretical writings on current social or political relations to support his still very relevant critique of psychology.

One example of how his theory may be extended comes from the work of Rose and Foucault on 'technologies' of the self, power and governmentality. Psychology, as Rose (1998) argues, has only become so closely linked with governing citizens in modern democracies, although at the

time of Wittgenstein's work this role was not so well established. Furthermore, the new ways of governing citizens through the techniques of self-monitoring, of shaping and molding 'selves' were not as dominant as they are now. Yet, no serious analysis of the concept of self-esteem (or any other concept equally crucial to the practices of governing democratic individuals) can omit issues of self-governance. The concept of 'techniques of the self' provides an account of the political framework missing in Wittgenstein's work, which is most relevant to the contemporary context in which the construct of self-esteem has developed. This in turn provides a deeper understanding of the way the construct of self-esteem enables and supports existing political and social relations.

Although it is necessary to engage in political argument, I do not attempt to merely place Foucault's theory on top of Wittgenstein's theoretical frame. Instead, I propose to link them through a method which is compatible with Wittgenstein's theory of language and which accounts for a variety of political and social contexts. This method, coming from critical linguistic theory based on the work of Michael Halliday, assumes language to be a social practice and assumes meanings to be derived from a set of shared, cultural practices. Simultaneously, it emphasizes the importance of layers of context responsible for the ideological content of discourses. Thus, it perceives human beings as social subjects fashioned by a particular set of social or political relations. Most importantly, this method allows a systematic, in depth, grammatical analysis of a text, providing tools to examine text in a way that avoids the most common trap in discourse analysis; the trap of describing, re-phrasing and summarizing instead of analyzing.

I wish to start this section with a short overview of the theories of language in psychology. This is to provide a rationale for the further sections that relate to methods of analysis chosen for this thesis. As I will attempt to demonstrate, psychology has a long history of collaboration with linguistics; of sharing its theoretical and methodological practices. Recently, alternative, critical theories and discursive methods have been offered within both disciplines. These frameworks, although multifaceted and complex, share underlying assumptions about the constructive and multifunctional nature of language. Below I outline the main critical frameworks available in psychology and a critical theory developed within linguistics – Systemic Functional Linguistics

(SFL). Despite their matching assumptions, so far psychology has not used SFL in discursive research. However, I believe the introduction of at least some basic tenets of critical linguistics into psychology is not only beneficial but also valuable for our understanding of discursive practices.

Language and psychology

Psychology has had a long history of association with language and linguistics. Since the work of Piaget and Chomsky, psychology has shared with linguists theories of language, and both have been cooperating dynamically, aiming to extend our understanding of language. Traditionally, psychological theories of language coincided with frameworks used by linguists. For example, the theory of language offered by Chomsky in the 1960s has been a base for decades of linguistic and psychological research.

Chomsky's theory, as well as other dominant perspectives on language shared by psychologists and linguists, treats language as a universal phenomenon. This phenomenon is assumed to be separate from other aspects of human behaviour and assumes language to be a part of natural development. This perspective assumes language acquisition to be enabled by the brain following universal formal rules. For instance, according to Chomsky, language competence is an outcome of an individual's striving towards some ideal expression. He assumes that language acquisition is biologically programmed and comes as a direct result of what he called 'Universal Grammar' (Chomsky, 1965). This proposition has provided a theory and an explanation for cognitive models of the nature of human language.

The assumptions implicit in this model are highly individualistic. It is accepted that pre-existing structures and linguistic templates (with meaning attached to them) are acquired by individuals as they mature (Piaget, 1932). The ability to read covert meanings in text is a part of language acquisition (Chomsky, 1965). Language is seen as reflecting preexisting reality and communication is often conceived of as sharing the internal processes of thinking. Thinking itself is presented as linear and monologic (Billig, 1996).

Other, more socially inclined theories look at language as more than just a matter of individual cognition. Yet, the role of the environment is limited to providing templates and structures, that

is an appropriate setting in which individual learning arises (Sternberg, R. J. 1995). Among linguists this approach is exemplified by Labov's perspective on language (Halliday, 1993) which assumes that grammatical structures remain unchanged throughout history and that new vocabulary and some limited grammatical variations are generated as new things are created. Thus semantic structure and content are determined by preexisting grammatical configurations.

Methodologically different, yet coming from similar assumptions are models influenced by sociolinguistic approaches examining social interaction and their cultural aspects with less emphasis on abstract linguistic systems or cognitive mechanisms (Steinberg, 1995). Language is no longer a stable, universal set of rules, but is assumed to evolve to reflect the changing patterns of culture, moving towards the most optimal reflection of reality (Halliday, 1993). The environment and context influence what we say; the reality reflected through language is then intermediated through cultural specifics. Therefore meanings attached to speech may also change to adjust to cultural changes (Halliday, 1993).

The general focus of sociolinguistic approaches is social rather than individual. Perhaps risking some level of simplification of the complex issues socio-linguists are dealing with, I suggest that the main focus is not on the development of the individual, but rather on socially and culturally determined aspects of communication. However, for many psychologists, language is still seen as corresponding to some external reality; the truth about concepts and phenomena is sought by analytical means in order to be revealed. Language is distinctly separate from other social issues and concerns (Trudgill, 1995).

The exception to this comes from psychologists working in the area of sociolinguistic who engage with social constructionists ideas, particularly those who engage with the field of gender and language (Weatherall, 2002). These few scholars fully embraced the 'language turn' (Parker, 1980) and most recent developments in discursive theories. They reject prevailing assumptions about the workings of the human mind and the universal nature of linguistic development. Furthermore, they treat language as primary to human interaction and not as separate to individual or social activities. They reject the assumption that language initiates from some internal structures (i.e., ancient pre-wiring of the human brain or some inborn

structures), but rather that understandings are produced and reproduced during social interactions.

It is surprising, nevertheless, that the recent developments in discursive theories and discourse analysis, which have taken place across many disciplines, have not encouraged more psychologists to look into more comprehensive conceptualizations of language to promote a better understanding of human behaviour. On the contrary, even though discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis have become important parts of both disciplines, many psychologists avoid engaging with critical linguistic theories. This is even more surprising considering that the assumptions underlying discursive work give primacy to language as a creative and constitutive force. Clearly, if we as psychologists are to account for language and its role in social interaction, we may need to look for comprehensive theoretical frameworks available in linguistics.

Considering this, the present thesis attempts to bring together the most recent discursive frameworks from both psychology and linguistics. On the one hand the thesis draws on the theory of social constructionism which has, in the last decade, established itself as an influential theoretical framework within social psychology. This perspective had been first developed by Gergen (1973, 1985) whose work on social construction goes back to the 1970s. On the other hand, the analyses in this thesis are grounded within the Systemic Functional Linguistics model, a theoretical and methodological framework developed by Michael Halliday (1984). The assumptions contained in both of these models are, in my view highly compatible. Both Gergen's and Halliday's work look at discourse as constructive of reality. Both traditions show the dynamic way language fluctuates from situation to situation carrying cultural, social and communal values and truths. Language is no longer viewed as has been assumed in traditional theories, a medium reflecting some independent external reality.

Halliday's model of language highlights the functional role of language, where language is viewed in pragmatic terms from the position of its purpose and efficiency of communication. Consequently, the assumptions underlying this model are also fully compatible with

Wittgenstein's theory. Through its emphasis on contexts of language production, this model enables political and social critiques to be conducted within an analysis of textual materials.

Social constructionism

The present thesis is underpinned by social constructionism which serves as a theoretical orientation for the analyses. One of the most important assumptions based upon social constructionism is the belief that what we take as knowledge about the world is not objectively derived from the world, but constructed within the diversity of social interactions. The 'real' can never be unveiled as we can never totally shift from the context within which we live and move in into an objective 'void' (Parker, 1989).

Furthermore, knowledge, according to social constructionism, is contextually specific. What it means is that our understandings of the world around come to existence through social, historical, economic or even situational contexts. Historical and cultural arrangements determine the dominant forms of knowledge regarded as 'true'. These forms of knowledge, the ways we *construct* reality are therefore 'social artifacts'; fabrications achieved throughout social processes (Gergen, 1985).

In a comprehensive overview of social constructionism, Vivien Burr (1995) provides a list of features characterizing social constructionism. Anti-essentialism and anti-realism figure as important tenets. Burr highlights the rejection of beliefs in a pre-given, inner 'essence' of a person as well as our ability to see reality *as it is*. These assumptions are a crucial part of any work done by social constructionists, as they problematize what we consider as 'truths' and objective facts. According to Burr, other important features of social constructionism include the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge and the importance of social practices, particularly discursive practices. Language plays an important part in any work undertaken within this perspective and it is seen as a site where categories and concepts come to existence. Furthermore, language is seen as a form of action rather than 'a vehicle for thoughts' as it has been perceived traditionally.

The ideas compatible with social constructionism go back to the early 20th Century and the writings of Mead (1934), Wittgenstein (1953), Bakhtin (1981) and also the work of

anthropologist, Malinowski (1947) as well as the linguist, Firth (1937). Their work highlighted the importance of human interaction (particularly though the use of language) as a site where meanings are created. They also accentuated the importance of context in the construction of categories and identities. In sociology, the first work explicitly referring to 'the social construction of reality' and arguing that social phenomena are constructed within social practices was written in the early 1960s (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

In psychology, the emergence of social constructionism was provoked by a growing disappointment of social psychologists in the ways the discipline partook in maintaining the values of dominant groups (Burr, 1995). In 1973, Gergen published an article in which he argued that all knowledge, including psychological knowledge is specific to our cultural and historical context. This publication marks the beginnings of social constructionism in psychology. In this article, Gergen emphasized the importance of shifting the focus of psychological inquiries towards more social, economic or political realms as well as abandoning the need to provide universal depictions of people. Since then, social constructionism has become one of the most productive theoretical frameworks to address contentious issues of social inequalities. The growing interest in using social constructionism in social psychology has been also influenced by the popularity of postmodern theories in other disciplines.

The interest in social constructionism also coincided with some specific changes in the meanings of concepts, particularly psychological concepts. Recently, common explanations of personhood have become more 'psychologised'; more often than ever we tend to explain what happens to us in terms of inner qualities. As Burr argues (1995), this 'psychologisation' of our language is reflected in concepts like 'care' or 'love' being recently constructed as 'internal qualities' rather than in terms of interactions between individuals. This point is particularly relevant to the present thesis. The examination of the concept of self-esteem reveals similar changes in the way self-esteem has been conceptualized in the last 30 years. The analyses here show a great complexity of the subtle changes in constructions of self-esteem; complexity impossible to tackle without detailed examinations of texts.

This 'psychologisation' of personhood, and the ensuing endorsement of an essentialist view of personality, drew the attention of social constructionists and critical psychologists to the circularity of psychological research and theorizing. This circularity is particularly visible in the research on personality. For example, personality traits are inferred from behaviours and then further behaviours are predicted from these assigned traits. As has been emphasized by social constructionists, these kinds of understandings should be seen for what they are – socially useful concepts – rather than presented as the truth about human nature.

Social constructionism provides many valuable insights into the practices of traditional psychology, at the same time offering an alternative framework for conducting psychological research. Yet, although social constructionism has a lot to offer to psychology, its assumptions are not easily embraced, and for many they may be quite unsettling. This is so because the notions of 'facts' and 'reality' are suspended. Categories and descriptions are assumed to be *constructed in language* from various available discourses and explanations. Consequently, traditional ways of conducting research have become redundant. The typical research questions pertaining to human behaviours and the relationship between humans and society that aim to discover the true 'nature' of the individual have become irrelevant for social constructionist research. Rather, the tenets of the theory demand different questions and different methods of inquiry.

The analysis of language, and how it is used to perform social actions plays an important role in social constructionists' work (Gergen, 1994). They embrace methods of inquiry based on an assumption that text has specific functions that extend well beyond what has been traditionally believed. For example, it is accepted by many social constructionists that all texts spoken and written are rhetorical. For example, the text convinces the listener or a reader that the position it takes is in some way superior or more truthful. Thus, the text orients itself onto other – existing or hypothetical texts. Furthermore, any text is seen as a site of human interaction – people are believed to *do* things through texts. For example, they may engage in blaming, justifying, requesting, etc (Potter, 1996). Lastly, any text engages in constructing both the speaker and the reality outside the speaker. For example, the speaker may construct her or himself as entitled to

make certain claims, and may, simultaneously, present *what is* as real, factual and accurate (Potter, 1996).

These functions of the text are not separate; in fact they are closely entwined with each another. The rhetorical function of language refers to persuasive features of a text as well as features that position the text in relation to other texts. Rhetoric underlies both functions of text; constructing factual accounts of *what really happened* or convincing a friend to lend us her car are all rhetorical accomplishments. Yet, as may be expected, the strategies used in language linked to each of these functions can be separated, even if only for the sake of clarity of analysis.

The *action orientation* of discourse has also been a focus for some social constructionist like (Potter and Wetherell, 1992, Potter, 1996). Potter (1996) argues that language is "used to do things; it is a medium of action" (p. 11). This approach firmly rejects the understanding of text as being a reflection of some elements in reality; it discards the idea of separation between function and form in language. Text, particularly talk, functions as "statements in action" (p. 11) which are performed in a specific context. Potter talks of *linguistic performance* and emphasizes the action orientation of text. Language is used strategically, but not necessarily with a full awareness of the factors involved in linguistic choices.

Constructive (or sometimes called *epistemological)* orientation refers to these linguistic strategies centering on constructions of a speaker and of the external world. Self-presentation may relate to entitlements to make particular claims, or to make claims that are true and reliable. Constructing the outside world involves providing descriptions that are separate from the speaker, as if they truthfully replicate the nature of *what is* or *what happened* (Potter, 1996).

Consequently, research places a great emphasis on studying language and on examining how categories are achieved through language (and, occasionally, other types of social interaction like visual images, gestures etc) and how actions are performed through language. This prominent position occupied by language in social constructionism determines the ways in which research is conducted. The questions and methods, driven by social constructionists' assumptions, focus on language per se as a site where categories, events, objects and people are constructed. Consequently, the principal method of inquiry within social constructionism is an

analysis of text (spoken and written). There are many ways of examining texts, most of them coming under the categories of 'discourse analysis' (Potter and Wetherell, 1992), 'analysis of discourse' (Parker and Burman, 1993) or 'critical discourse analysis' (Fairclough, 1992).

The meaning of Discourse

The concept of discourse is an important one for social constructionists, and it is equally crucial to this thesis. However, the understanding of what discourse exactly means and how to define it within the social constructionist framework, is not necessarily straightforward. The word *discourse* may refer to a statement or utterance, but it may be extended to other means of communicating or interacting. The concept may refer to a particular utterance or may be a set of accounts representing or combining into a particular version of events or experiences, for example *discourses of science* or *psychological discourses* as overarching.

There are certain reoccurring themes in how *discourse* is understood in the work of social constructionists. Firstly, discourse is usually seen in terms of choices one makes to offer a specific account, but also the choices that are determined by situational, social, cultural and historical factors. It is assumed therefore, that there are particular *discourses*, or in other words *representations* or *constructions* of events, objects, identities etc., available to us in a particular set of contexts (Burr, 1995). Consequently most critical research places an emphasis on context as shaping *discursive practices*.

There are several dominant definitions of *discourse* adopted in research. The definition proposed by Parker (1992), for example, gives a broad definition of discourse as a system of statements that construct an object. Burr (1995) offers a more specific definition of discourse as something that refers to a "set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events" (p. 48). This definition is useful in the way that it points to a twofold approach to examining discourse; first examining discursive features (i.e., linguistic content) of a particular text and second, examining the representations available across different texts.

Another definition of discourse comes from the writings of Foucault. The way Foucault used the concept of *discourse* is more concerned with the operation of power and control as well as the

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mechanisms that allow for the control of subjects. Foucault defined discourses as 'practices which form the object of which they speak (1972, p. 49). According to this definition, discourse extends well beyond language, but language, nevertheless plays an important role in shaping these practices. Foucault's understanding of discourses has to do with overarching 'stories' or sets of beliefs which explain and construct all aspects of our lives. To him, these discourses serve to maintain power relations which exist in a given society; i.e., the power is exercised through discourses referring to sexuality, marriage, family, love, psychology, etc. The extent to which control can be exercised through such discourses depends on the degree to which the 'stories' appear *as if* they pertain to inherent characteristics of persons and describe natural and universal experiences. Consequently, discourses carry within themselves the ability to re-produce dominant ways of being natural and true by obscuring the way in which they operate.

All the above definitions add to the understanding of the concept of discourse and its uses in social constructionist work. Since the definitions highlight the constructive nature of discourse (they are a site where *realities* are produced), an examination of discourse provides an insight into the mechanisms of social interaction. Furthermore, because of the focus on political aspects of discursive practices, an examination of discourses can explore the issues concerning ideological aspects of social interaction. Consequently, this focus on discourse as being constructive of reality endows social psychology with the possibility of more adequate tools for more impartial research and theorizing.

Ideology

When provided with the opportunity, many social constructionists engage in social and ideological critiques (Parker and Burman, 1993; Walkerdine, 1990; Hollway, 1989). The most influential theoretical framework for understanding ideology comes from the work done by Foucault. I suggest that his views are more relevant to the recent practices of control than Marxist analyses. Despite his historical focus, Foucault discusses the practices of governing and control most relevant to late democracies. His work discusses the recent rise in institutional and cultural practices involved in modern ways of governing. The procedures of self-scrutiny, confession, disciplining one's body and, lately, one's mind (i.e., through self-help books,

therapy etc) are all components of self-governing practices. These, according to Rose (1998) form one of the most effective ways of controlling citizens in modern democracies. Psychology, according to this perspective, contributes a great deal to this control.

Modern social control is achieved through discursive practices, and more specifically to the way *knowledge* is produced in the course of everyday social interaction. Psychology has been involved in constituting knowledge, particularly in shaping our understanding of 'the individual'. Burr (1995) suggests that the most useful way of thinking about ideology is by seeing ideology as *knowledge* which has been used for the purpose of control. Consequently, certain ways in which our understandings about 'the individual' are deployed to serve dominant groups are ideological. Foucault (1988) argued that discursive practices are not necessary oppressive and can be employed in attempt to produce new and empowering forms of subjectivity. For example, feminist writers use 'self-esteem' as a way of 'empowering' marginalized groups of women and blacks in the North America (hooks, 2003). This example, although controversial, shows that the same concepts and *knowledge* about them can be used for different purposes.

The above views suggest that representations and versions of reality, truth or knowledge are only *ideological* if they are used to sustain power by the dominant groups. As Burr puts it, we talk about *ideology* when "meanings are mobilized in the social world in the interest of powerful groups" (1995, p. 82). The present thesis examines three areas in which the discourses and knowledge about self-esteem offered by psychology have been utilized in an ideological manner. These areas are: psychiatry, self-help materials and government documents. Firstly, in psychiatry, understandings about self-esteem are used to sustain the belief in psychiatry as an expertise, the only expertise suitable to deal with depression. Secondly, self-help materials, where claims are warranted by psychological knowledge, incite people to perform particular versions of self-analysis and psychological self-management. The representations of psychological knowledge in these resources further shape and transform our understandings about ourselves as psychological subjects. Thirdly, government documents are the most obvious example of how psychological knowledge has been deployed to promote particular political

projects. Here, knowledge is used to obtain greater social acceptance of economic arrangements that further weaken the position of the disadvantaged.

However, the way discourses are used for ideological purposes is not necessarily unproblematic. As Billig argued (1996), the available knowledge and the possible versions and representations are intertwined, complex, inconsistent and 'messy'. Moreover, as he further argues, discourses are not simply 'absorbed' by people and re-used in a straightforward manner. Rather we engage in 'dilemmatic' thinking, debating and considering opposite or alternative views. Consequently, when views and opinions are presented as unproblematic and universal truths then these are seen as 'ideological'. Bakhtin (1981) came to a similar conclusion. He believed that all text is dialogic in nature, that is, oriented to other possible texts and drawing on other earlier texts. In his opinion, texts which adopt the 'monologic' stance (where engagement with the reader is minimal or totally absent and opinions are presented as 'truths') are the most ideologically charged.

As the reader will see, the texts used for analyses in this thesis are often written in this 'monologic' way. Although some of them may, on the surface, engage with the reader, they all present their views as objective knowledge warranted by scientific evidence and the expertise of the writers.

Wittgenstein

An important theoretical inspiration for this work comes from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). To me, his views on the language of psychological concepts and research in psychology form the most useful and concise background for any critical psychological research. Indeed, his work has been an inspiration for many social constructionists regardless of the method in use. I find it necessary, therefore, to include this brief overview of Wittgenstein's ideas and relate them to the present thesis, its choice of method and underlying assumptions.

In his first work, *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein offers a highly idealized model of language (Wittgenstein, 1974). Drawing on an analogy between language and calculus, he theorizes language to be a representational medium; a set of signs corresponding to objects in the world. Because of this focus on representation, this model overlooks other aspects of language that go

beyond describing facts. The basic linguistic unit, a *name,* corresponds to an object in the real world; *names* arranged into a preposition represent a possible state of affairs. These relations, he declares, between simple objects and names are not easily perceived and can be revealed through analysis.

In his later work, Wittgenstein turns away from this idealized conceptualization of language and the interest in hidden aspects of linguistic operations. In the preface to the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1953), a work that sums up his later theoretical position, Wittgenstein recommends reading his 'new' work in contrast with the *Tractatus*. He explicitly argues against his earlier claims. But it is not a direct criticism of 'old' theory that he offers in his later work, but rather a critical evaluation of a particular style of thought. He warns us that this style of thought, as represented in *Tractatus* leads to basic misunderstandings about language (McGinn, 1997). Wittgenstein sees his earlier work as falling into the trap of attempting a clear-cut and highly abstract theory of language which ignores the complexity and expansiveness of language in use. This, according to Wittgenstein, limits the purpose of language to naming and describing, and, in a quite naïve manner, leads to the assumption that language is *complete*, ignoring the possibility of new concepts and new grammatical structures arising.

Wittgenstein singles out scientific inquiry and scientific attitude as a source of this unwanted style of thought (McGinn, 1997). Certain intellectual habits, which may be useful in examining physical phenomena, bring about confusion and further mystification when applied to abstract phenomena like *meaning*, *thought*, *time,* etc. In *Philosophical Investigations*, he advises that to avoid this state of confusion we must resist our customary desire to elucidate or *penetrate* phenomena, "we must do away with all explanation and description alone must take its place" (1953, PI109). In other words, we must turn away from conventional theoretical attitudes influenced by scientific methods that trap us into attempting neat and universal models in the hope they would fully explain all phenomena. According to Wittgenstein, such neat models do not make phenomena more accessible or better understood, nor bring them closer to us by making them more comprehensible. He argues that, to the contrary, this approach, this attempt

to elucidate phenomena, brings about further confusion which can only be lifted by a change of attitude, that is, by abandoning the need to '*penetrate phenomena'* (1953, PI90).

This wanting "to *penetrate* phenomena" by itself pre-defines phenomena as objects, dense enough to be penetrated. Wittgenstein takes us away from this illusional density of abstract phenomena as he attempts to release us from a particular style of thought. Instead of trying to illuminate and expose an abstract experience as if it was a physical object, he argues for releasing our customary intellectual habits and undertaking the detailed 'grammatical investigations' that consist of observing detailed patterns of language in use. In the place of a theoretical style of explanation of language in separation from its use, he offers an alternative look at language as instrumental rather than representative, as never complete (but not incomplete at any given moment) and an always dynamic sets of techniques, rather than an essential and fixed set of representations.

This new style of thinking about language, offered by Wittgenstein, forms a significantly different theoretical foundation for developing investigative models. To investigate linguistic practices, we need to, according to Wittgenstein, turn away from essentialist ways of thinking about language as representative and corresponding to some pre-existing reality. Instead of attempting to propose abstract theories providing formal models of language, we need to simply describe how language is used. Instead of looking for some hidden patterns that can only be revealed with an analysis abstracted from a situation, we need to look at the words and how they function in the particular context in which they are found. Only then can we derive meaning attached to this particular word in this particular context on this particular occasion.

To clarify this view, Wittgenstein proposes an image of language as a 'form of life' (1953) as opposed to a view that language is an abstract set of rules existing in an historical space. Language is cultural and it is embedded into shared practices, into collective activities, it is part of a complex system shared by a community. Wittgenstein, as McGinn (1997) explicates, took the view that:

> The idea of a form of life applies to historical groups of individuals who are bound together into a community by a shared set of complex, language involving practices. These practices are grounded in biological needs and capacities, but insofar as these are mediated and transformed by a set of

intricate, historically specific language – games, our human form of life is fundamentally cultural (rather than biological) in nature. (p.51)

The view that language is a social practice and that meaning is derived from a set of shared, cultural practices clearly goes against the idea of language as a calculus with formal properties. It is evident then that Wittgenstein rejects the idea of essential meanings inherent in words. His *Investigations* points towards a multiplicity of ways the word can be used and thus multiple meanings the word can acquire in the context in which it is used. The basic conceptions about language are targeted there, as he is turning away from thinking about language as a system of signs abstracted from their applications. Instead, he focuses on *practices of using* language. For him, language and its meaning are embedded in a broad landscape of cultural practices.

Simultaneously, meaning is determined by the context of the event or occasion. The most immediate context is where the preposition is found; as a specific use of language which determines its meaning. This specific use arises in contrast with other choices available in language. Indeed, to emphasize his use of *meaning* as a dynamic process and to escape the usual ways of thinking about *meaning* as something in the mind or something tangible and examinable, Wittgenstein replaces *meaning* with *use* (Rundle, 1990). The preference for *use* can be seen as a departure from an 'old' style of thought towards the construction of *meaning* in terms of a context and situation-based function of language. The meaning of language, for Wittgenstein, comes from immediate linguistic choices made within inter-active networks of interpersonal behaviours and cultural practices.Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is the method of choice among social constructionists; it satisfies the assumptions embedded in the theory and enables researchers to include political or ideological issues in analysis. Discourse analysis, however, is not a single homogenous technique, nor does it offer a single system of doing analysis. In fact, it is better to talk about various discursive approaches which come under a broad umbrella of *discourse analysis*. To make matters even more ambiguous, some discursive approaches can be labeled as an *analysis of discourse(s)* or a *critical discourse analysis.* The former is often used in reference to the type of analysis focusing on 'stories' or 'representations' available to us in a particular historical and cultural context and which form the basis of our 'knowledge' about the world (Burr, 1995). The latter is often used

in relation to linguistic analysis, but one that involves a critique of ideology and power (Fairclough, 1992).

The main shared tenet among all discourse analysts is a focus on language communication as a source of data. Consequently, although other aspects of communication can be analyzed, the prime focus of discourse analysis is on language and text, both spoken and written. Another shared view is that language functions to *construct* objects in the world and is also a site of social actions. Therefore, what we know is constructed within language. Moreover, the way we use language enables us to perform all kinds of social actions, like demanding, justifying, blaming or asking for services (Potter, 1996; Halliday, 1984).

Discourse analysts typically reject the notion of objectivity in research and emphasize that any account provides just one possible version of the truth. Similarly, the interpretations provided by the analysts are often perceived to be just one available 'reading'. Through this, discourse analysis often includes self-reflection (i.e., an ability to reflect on the researcher's assumptions, position and biases) as a vital component of research.

Discourse analysts use different theoretical frameworks. For example, some researchers may choose to use Foucault's 'genealogy' as the model of their studies, while other may choose Derrida's 'deconstruction' or Halliday's 'functional grammar' as the model to follow. In psychology, the most common forms of discourse analysis have been analyses of conversation focusing on how communication is achieved within everyday or more institutionalized interactions (Potter, 1996), and in more politically explicit analyses that focus on the study of ideology and social critique (Parker and Burman, 1993). The different forms of discourse analysis raise different issues and serve to answer different questions.

In his concise paper on discourse analytic approaches in social psychology, Edwards (2004) articulates these differences. The type of text researchers may look at and the specificities of the analysis are determined primarily by the discipline or a field of interest but also by specific questions asked by researchers. The alternatives vary from grammatical and linguistic studies of texts (including 'made up' texts) and studies of agency and action, through to the analysis of interviews to, finally, the analysis of conversations and 'naturalistic' talk based on the principles

of CA (Conversation Analysis) and DP (Discursive Psychology). While CA has been primarily concerned with the sequential and urn-by-turn organization of talk , DP is more concerned with psychological concepts. Psycholgical concepts however are viewed differently from traditional understandings. For example, DP's focus on memory would move away from seeing words and phrases as reflections of cognitive representations. Instead, discursive psychologists examine how versions of events (often conflicting and inconsistent) are tailored to fit a purpose of a particular situation or interaction. When focusing on emotions, DP studies the uses of evaluative expressions rather than some underlying attitudes and emotions. Such expressions are seen as having a performative basis in interaction. Expressions such as 'love' or 'lovely' can be used as expressions of (somewhat subjective) liking or as a way of complementing, offering, persuading or requesting. According to Edwards, this type of analysis, which is closely aligned with conversation analysis, is attracting significant attention from discursive social psychologists. Because of its focus on talk and action, DP provides a solid base upon which to examine how 'psychological themes are handled and managed in discourse in the performance of a wide range of interactional businesses" (p.271). However, this type of analysis proves to be limited in examining written texts coming from textbooks, self-help books and policy publications. These, as I will attempt to demonstrate throughout this thesis are best handled with more grammatically oriented analysis.

For the purposes of this thesis, a broader framework taken from discourse analysis and Wittgenstein are more relevant. Notwithstanding, there are many parallel and overlapping themes between DP and Wittgenstein's views. Potter (2001) provides a compact and neat outline of how Wittgenstein's work has influenced discourse analysis in general and DP in particular. For Wittgenstein, language was a toolbox of words with diverse uses. The meaning of these words depends heavily on context(s) in which the utterance or text is produced. Wittgenstein used a metaphor of a 'game'('language games') to highlight the multitude of possible situation-dependant meanings. This supports the assumption that everyday practices are organized around particular narratives tied to occasion sand settings. Furthermore, Wittgenstein's argument that descriptions are practical in nature is echoed in discursive work

which states that descriptions are used to perform a range of activities. These assumptions are also present in debates on the nature and importance of context and its role in explaining talk.

Criticisms of mentalist terms and cognitive understandings of being human are central to both Wittgenstein and discourse analysis. This is particularly true in relation to Wittgenstein's critique of 'private language' as coming from a private psychological space called 'the mind' and the central assumption in discourse analysis that language develop within a sphere of a social inteaction.

This connection is also apparent in the way discourse analysis approaches the phenomena of 'emotions'. For example, in Harre's "The Social Construction of Emotions" (1986), Wittgenstein's remarks on emotions as being "neither any inward or any outward thing" (p.46) are briefly discussed in support of the author's theory that the links between sensations and their assumed behavioural representations is complex, arbitrary and negotiated through a number of social conventions. Thus Wittgenstein, as the author points out, shows us that we do not recognize emotional states like 'being joyful' from observing our thoughts or inner states, but that the *expression of emotion* is simultaneously a *recognition of the emotion*. In other words, attitudes and behaviours are taken as being "ontologically constitutive of emotion feeling" (p.47). We are, as Wittgenstein claimed, trained in the 'doctrine of perpetual introspection' which lead us to think (as he insists - 'fallaciously'), that emotions are internal events or states. However, even though emotions can be bound with various sensations, these sensations do not constitute emotions. Instead, as Harre concludes, we can only know of emotion from knowing how a person appraises an object or a situation. Consequently, a person may be considered more 'expert' than others on their own emotions not because they infer it from the content of their internal feelings but because they routinely know the "circumstances entitling them to feel angry, jealous, sad" (p.121).

These recurrent parallels between discourse analysis, discursive psychology and Wittgenstein's remarks make it possible for this thesis to combine them in order to most effectively, examine the reification of self-esteem as a *psychological* and *inner* phenomenon. Since discourse analysis is typically used to refer to the linguistic analysis of spoken or written discourse, that is,

the study of larger linguistic units, it is a suitable method to employ in order to explore how understandings about self-esteem are enabled and developed to construct self-esteem *as* if it was an inner psychological object.

The following thesis takes discourse analysis to mean the examination of how meaning are produced in text and how discursive constructions (i.e. reifications) are achieved. Even though the interest is primarily on greater units of text, the analysis itself is informed by an examination of strategies at the level of grammar (i.e. grammatical metaphor) as well as the level of discourse (i.e. 'confessions'). The analyses here examine these features of the texts which are used to perform functions like reification, the construction of agency or inciting readers to follow particular advice. Moreover, the analyses aim to investigate multiple meanings available in the discourses of self-esteem.

To enable the analysis to be systematic and detailed I have adopted Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as the principal method. This framework provides an alternative (functional) view of grammar, which stands in opposition to what has been traditionally understood as grammar. SFL, I suggest, brings into psychology a well developed model of grammatical and textual features as meaning-creating structures. Moreover, this model is compatible with Wittgenstein's views of language and with a social constructionist theoretical framework. Importantly, this model also supports political and ideological critiques to be incorporated into the analysis.

Functional Model of Language

> Grammar, in the sense of syntax and vocabulary of a natural language, is thus a theory of human experience. It is also a principle of social action. In both these functions, or metafunctions, grammar creates the potential within which we act and enact our cultural being. This potential is at once 'enabling' and 'constraining': that is, grammar makes meaning possible and also sets limits on what can be meant". (Halliday, 1993, p. 7)

This thesis is informed by the functional model of language developed by Michael Halliday (1984, 1993). The choice of this model as a framework for this thesis is not coincidental; this is the only linguistic model endorsing the type of investigation informed by Wittgenstein's theory. Moreover, the model is best suited, out of all linguistic methods, to relate discursive and grammatical structures to the communicative functions of language. In other words, it is the

best, and most comprehensive linguistic model for the analysis of meanings embedded in text and for the examination of the functions of texts within given contexts. The model is also an effective tool for a critical social investigation. It assumes that ideology permeates all semiotic systems including language, thus enabling (or even encouraging) the examination of the textual features for their ideological and political components (Martin and Rose, 2003). Finally, the model offers an extensive 'meta-language' to talk about grammatical and discursive features present in text and the way they are involved in the construction of social meanings.

How does the model fit Wittgenstein's views? As has been discussed above, Wittgenstein's major contribution relevant to psychological inquiry has been his focus on language as a 'carrier' of meaning; and a meaning-making resource. He turned away from the traditionalist way of thinking about language as reflective of, and corresponding to some pre-existing reality and challenged us to look for the reality not outside but inside the discourse - in the grammar of social interactions. Similarly, the functional model takes language as constructive of reality and focuses on the semantic level of discourse – how meanings are achieved in language. This model also extends our understanding of grammar to include 'meaning' and, in fact, it replaces the traditional notion of 'knowledge' with 'meaning' (Halliday, 1993).

The model assumes that language must be examined for its function (how it is used) and its structure (how it is structured for a specific use). To examine 'function' it is necessary to move beyond a theory, which assumes language to be ordered according to some pre-existing mental structures. Instead, SFL takes language as a meaning making system, where meanings are made according to the specificities of the context(s) in which it is used.

In this model, it is assumed that language has developed (and is in a continual process of development) as a response to socially arising needs – it has been shaped to enable social groups to coordinate their practices and social relationships. Simultaneously, language is a *shaper* of reality; it constructs and shapes historical processes, social relationships and everyday practices. Furthermore, the model takes language to be a *metaphor* for reality; it enacts and re-produces its own formations that are consequently imposed on the reality it construes (Halliday, 1993).

In its focus on language, the model examines both grammatical and semantic features. Meanings are considered to be encoded in 'wordings', that is in the sequences of lexical (i.e., verbs, nouns and adjectives) and grammatical (i.e., the, of, if, should etc) items. The relationship between the semantic and grammatical spheres is considered to be 'natural' rather than arbitrary. By 'natural' it is meant that "both the general kinds of grammatical patterns that have evolved in language, and the specific manifestation of each kind, bear a natural relation to the meanings they have encoded to express" (Halliday, 1984, p.xviii). For example, categories in grammar like *nouns* and *verbs* 'match' certain categories in experience like the *participants* (the 'who' or 'what' involved in the process) and the *processes* (the doing, having, being, sensing).

The relationship between grammar and semantics is important for the functional model of language. The two are taken to be separate phenomena, even though the line between them is not clear. However, the distinction is an important one for text analysis and evaluation. Semantic structures have evolved in language to enable us to 'think about' our experiences and to make sense and to act 'meaningfully'. At the same time, grammatical system(s) evolved to encode these meanings in the most plausible way (the one which 'matches' the experience). Yet, we do not have a way to comprehensively describe the semiotic system of the English language on its own – we can only describe some parts of it. However, we can methodically unravel the meanings in the language through interpretations of grammatical patterns.

The relationship between the semantics and the grammar, in the model, is one of *realization*; thus, the 'wording' *realizes* (encodes) the meaning. Yet, the relationship is not between each item and a specific semantic function - the meanings are encoded in the 'wordings' as a whole and the same items may *mean* different things in different combinations. Consequently the model focuses on the text and its context rather than a system of language *per se*. In the functional model the 'text' is considered to be an object of linguistics along with the system of language. It is considered important that the theory of the system is able to explain how the text is enabled by the system, and equally important to be able to relate the interpretation of text to the system behind it. For analysis, both system and text are to remain a focus of attention; with the system making a comparison between texts (or possible versions of texts) possible.

Thus far I have discussed how the functional model takes language to consist of two strata; grammar and semantics[1]. Now, I wish to further clarify the understanding of 'language', 'text' and 'discourse' in the way they are perceived within this model. An important assumption (which has been adopted from Hjelmslev's (1970) writings) is a view of language as a *dynamic* system. Thus language is seen more of a *process* than a finished product. This is also the case with written language. In fact, as Halliday argues, all language is a process – if we take into account all the activities that lead to its production.

Since language is seen as a dynamic process, so is 'text'. The functional model takes 'text' to be any meaningful stretch of language, any 'instantiation of language' (Halliday, 1984). This instantiation can be spoken or written. In fact, the model provides an opportunity for an analysis of any text for its rhetorical, functional and dynamic features.

Discourse analysts use the concept of 'discourse' to mean either a stretch of language (interchangeable with text) or more socially and culturally specific patterns in language and their characteristics (for example, scientific discourse). In the analyses grounded in the functional model of language, the concept of discourse has similar meanings. The theory of functional linguistics locates discourse in between the grammatical and social strata; discourse (like text) is encoded in grammar, simultaneously being a manifestation of cultural and social activities. This can be illustrated by a metaphor of 'nesting' as in the following diagram (Martin and Rose, 2003):

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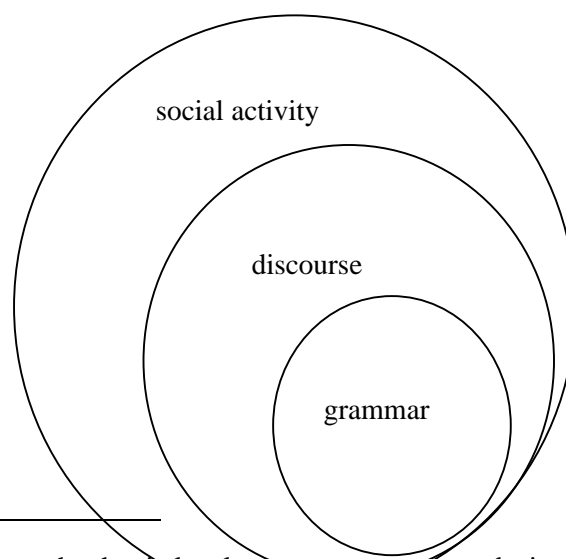
[1] A third strata, the graphophonic level – the ~~letters~~ and sounds, is also part of the language system but is not of particular relevance to this thesis.

Figure 1 Three strata: social activity, discourse and grammar.

To recap, 'language' in the functional model is a combination of semantic and grammatical features which make up a semiotic system. 'Text' is an instantiation of language; a specific and meaningful stretch of language. Discourse is used interchangeably with text, but can also mean patterns characteristic to specific genre (i.e., scientific discourse) or particular representations of categories, subjectivities, etc (i.e., discourse of 'romantic love'). Most typically, the discourse is conceptualized as distinct phenomena located (and mediating) between the two spheres of social activity and grammar. This symbolic conceptualization of discourse allows for analysts to employ the tools of grammar to describe the roles of 'wordings' in discourse as well as draw on social theory to explain why specific meanings are made in particular contexts.

As the above diagram indicates, the functional model of language insists that complex processes involved in meaning-making can only be examined and understood within their historical and political contexts. The model, therefore, extends the relationship between grammar and discourse to a third level, social activity. The relationship between levels of grammar, discourse and social activity are perceived as one of 'realization'. Although all levels are treated the model as distinct social phenomena, they are not separate from each other. Social processes are realized as text, that is, in turn, realized as clauses. According to Martin and Rose (2003), this concept of 'realization' carries, among many others, meanings of 'symbolizing', 'encoding', 'expressing' and manifesting' (p.5). Thus, grammar symbolizes and encodes discourse and discourse symbolizes and encodes social activities. Resultant to this, the most comprehensive discursive analysis must be directed at different strata, moving from grammar to text, to social context and back again.

In summary, the functional model views language as a social semiotic system. The functions of this system are twofold, to represent the experience and to allow social interaction. Moreover, the system has a way of 'packaging' the meanings into coherent messages. The functional

model stresses the use that can be made (and is made) of language (hence functional rather than a 'received' structure) and offers a systematic resource for studying language in a variety of contexts. The aspects of the context determine the meanings likely to be expressed through lexicogrammatical choices.

The above features of the model, namely its focus on function and meaning and its capacity to examine the ideological component of language, make it compatible with social constructionism. I suggest that the model is a valuable resource for discourse analysis in social psychology. The model provides a tool to analyze how the reification of psychological concepts is achieved in text and how psychological phenomena are constructed as internal entities of individuals.

The metafunctions of language

The above section provided a general overview of the functional model of language across different strata. In this section I wish to focus on more specific features of the model. These features have to do with the three fundamental functions of language, and how these are intricately linked both down to particular grammatical realizations and up to the context in which the social interaction has taken place.

These three fundamental functions of language, known as metafunctions, are *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual*. The concept of metafunctions is one of the basic concepts of the functional model. The metafunctions are concerned firstly with construing experience and representing reality, secondly with enabling social interaction between people, and thirdly with enabling the text to become a coherent message. Both the general theory of language and interpretation of text are built around these three metafunctions. Thus, they play a key role in discourse analysis conducted from this functional perspective.

Each metafunction is linked to specific patterns of meaning and specific patterns of 'wordings'. The *ideational* metafunction refers to the patterns of meanings representing experience. This refers to representations of 'outer' experiences about people and things, what they do and what happens to them, and also to the representations of 'inner' experiences relating to the way we react to the outer or remain aware of our own 'inner' states. This metafunction has to do with

features of texts that realize experiential meanings; the patterns which construct the 'real world' outside of a speaker or a writer. These meanings are about experiences and actions; who is doing what and to whom, when, where and why.

The *interpersonal metafunction* is concerned with interactions and what enables the exchange of information or exchange of 'goods and services' between participants. This metafunction has to do with interpersonal meaning-making features of the text; the patterns that construct the relationship between people involved in the verbal exchange (i.e., a writer and expected readers or people involved in a conversation, etc).

Finally, the *textual metafunction* refers to the way the meanings are organized as a text whether spoken or written. This metafunction has to do with the features of the text which enable text to be read as an organized and coherent message. This metafunction is concerned with the role language plays in enabling the ideational and interpersonal meanings to take place and with structures that give a particular status to a message (Halliday, 1984).

Since the main aim of this thesis is to examine how categories are reified, constructed and valorized, the ideational metafunction forms a primary focus of the analyses. Consequently, the thesis draws primarily on the features of text which have to do with the representing of 'realities' of self-esteem as an object of science, as a human need or as a measurable and agentive entity inside individuals. These features refer to the *experiential* aspects of ideational metafunction, which involves representing experience. Moreover, the thesis examines features of language that relate to *logical* aspects of ideational metafunction. These features are involved in connecting events and constructing relations between the concepts.

The features examined here have to do with who (or what) is involved in doing what to whom, when, where and why. In other words, who participates in events, what are the processes they engage into and under what circumstances. Consequently the focal points of the analysis centered on ideational features are: Participants, Processes and Circumstances.

However, the analyses in the thesis extend beyond ideational metafunction. For example, the features of textual metafunction are examined to reveal how the meanings are packaged and organized to present a particular view of women in relation to self-esteem. The patterns relevant

to how the information unfolds in text are examined in relation to the use of self-esteem as a justification for difficult policies. The primary focus of this type of analysis is a Theme – a point of departure for the message. 'Thematic analysis' reveals the patterns of what is already known to the reader and what is introduced as a new bit of information, also what constitutes the focal point of the text and how this 'core entity' is depicted and evaluated.

The patterns of the interpersonal metafunction that enact human relationships are also examined in this thesis. These pertain to the ways in which writers construct their relationship with potential readers and how they present themselves in relation to the readers. These features also enable authors to take (or deny) responsibility and to validate what they are saying. The focal points of this type of analysis are the features specific to 'speech functions' (statement, question, offer and command) and elements of modality used to argue about probability, frequency, obligation or inclination (Halliday, 1984; Eggins, 1994).

Grammatical metaphors

Another linguistic feature central to this thesis and one that is relevant across all metafunctions is called *grammatical metaphor*. This resource is an important one in the written text and because of this it plays a significant role in the examinations undertaken for this thesis. In fact, the use of grammatical metaphor makes it possible to talk about 'self-esteem' in the first place; after all this concept can only be *grammatically* presented as a 'thing'. These kinds of abstract 'objects' are constructed through the use of a grammatical metaphor of nominalization; some processes, feelings and reactions are compressed into a single thing-like entity called self-esteem. The consequences of this grammatical transference extend well beyond grammar –the way we think, measure, and conceptualize self-esteem is *as if* it was a material thing. At times, as the analyses will demonstrate, we talk about self-esteem *as if* it was an agentive entity.

Grammatical metaphors are in some ways similar to lexical metaphors, although they also differ. As with lexical metaphor there is some transference involved - meanings are transferred from one element to another. With lexical metaphor (i.e., flood of people, torn to pieces) a lexical item comes to mean something different from what it normally means. With grammatical metaphor, the meaning is transformed from one grammatical element to another. In

the example above, self-esteem was said to be a nominalization; some activities are construed as a 'thing'. Other examples of this kind of construction include: action, feeling, appreciation, etc. Broadly, nominalization is the result of transference of meaning in which the process (act) or quality (active) becomes a thing (action, activity).

These kinds of transferences break the iconic link between the discourse and material reality. For example, typically social reality is represented by people acting on objects and interacting among themselves. Thus, we could expect primary participants in language to be people - acting and interacting. Instead, abstract texts, due to their high level of nominalizations, present reality where abstract entities are 'in relation' to one another; it is these abstract entities (rather than people) that are acting on or exist in some kind of relationship to other objects.. In recent academic texts, human participants often do not enter the discourse whatsoever. Grammatical constructions like nominalisations have evolved to enable people to perform specific social actions (i.e., to develop science). However, there are many consequences (enabling and limiting) of using nominalizations, some of which will be discussed in detail later in this thesis.

In general, grammatical metaphors can be grouped into *ideational* and *interpersonal metaphors*. The type of transference and the elements involved in each type are related to the focal structures of each metafunction. Therefore, ideational metaphors will be involved in constructing abstract 'realities'. There are two types of ideational metaphors, *experiential* and *logical* metaphors. The former is concerned with the elements of the figures ('who is involved') while the latter is concerned with re-constructing conjunctions between the figures as if they were a *process,* a *thing* or a *circumstance* (how are those involved connected). Ideational metaphors are elaborated on in Section 2 of this thesis, which examines constructions of self-esteem, abnormality, low self-esteem and their links to depression.

Another type of grammatical metaphor is an *interpersonal* metaphor. Interpersonal metaphors have to do with the elements involved in enacting human relationships and are in fact contained in all adult speech. The transference may occur at the level of speech functions; a *demand*, for example, may be realized as an *interrogative*, which more typically encodes a question. If we want to borrow something from a friend we may ask whether they need it. On a grammatical

level we ask questions *as if* we are seeking information (Do you need your pen right now? Do you have a red pencil?), while semantically, we demand the 'goods'. So a command is dressed up as a demand for information.

The above example represents the most typical interpersonal metaphors used in everyday conversations. It is possible to have this type of transference occurring in written texts. In the present thesis the use of this type of metaphorical formulation is examined in relation to the claims made by the writers of self-help publications. These publications, although consisting of 'information' place a strong obligation on the reader to engage in behaviours of self-scrutiny and to change their thinking and behaviours in line with particular 'advice'. The 'command' regulating readers' behaviours is therefore presented as 'information' about facts.

Other forms of interpersonal metaphors which are important to the present thesis also include the use of modality; that is how probability, frequency, obligation or inclination are constructed in texts. Metaphors of modality are used in making claims about relations between psychological or 'mental' phenomena. In these structures the opinions and judgments of the writers are hidden behind the more objective formulations (e.g., It is possible that…).

Conclusion

The above outline of linguistic resources provides only a general idea about how language is organized to enable us to construct meanings. As has been discussed so far, the functional model of language recognizes three broad functions of language: the *ideational* function concerned with representing experience, the *interpersonal* function, concerned with enacting relationships and the *textual* function concerned with the organization of text as a coherent message. There are specific patterns and 'wordings' typically involved in making meanings relevant to each of these metafunctions. An examination of these patterns will be analyzed in the following sections of the thesis in greater detail.

Section 2 explores the resources involved in the reification of self-esteem. Therefore, the linguistic elements important to this section have to do primarily with the ideational function. The specificities of scientific texts, their development over time and their significance for psychology are elaborated in this section. Section 3 examines a different set of resources. These

are less concerned with ideational and more with interpersonal meanings and examine the elements involved in inciting readers into adopting particular ways of thinking and behaving. For example, the analysis discusses the use of pronouns and their role in constructing the relationship between the authors and readers as one of 'empathic friendship'. Finally, Section 4 examines how the patterns in textual organization are organized rhetorically. That is, how thematic choices in texts play an important part in the way contentious claims are developed and how they are protected from potential criticisms.

SECTION 2: Self-esteem in scientific discourse

Chapter 3: Wittgenstein, Halliday and Grammatical Metaphor

Introduction

> It is not the relationship between mind and body that concerns philosophy (logic), but the relationship between our concept 'mind' and our concept 'body', that is to say, of the place of these words in our language. A sentence such as 'The mind is really only the brain' is not true or false, but nonsensical: the words 'mind' and 'brain' belong to different parts of speech.

> 'Mind' is not the name of an object. 'Brain' is the name of an object. That is, the grammar of 'mind' is not learned or taught by pointing at an object (i.e. ostensively), whereas the grammar of 'brain' is. 'Thinking' is not the name of a physiological process; 'neurons firing off in the brain' is. That the phenomena we call 'mental' are caused by the brain (or rather, that significant correlations can be made between what we call 'mental phenomena' and events in the central nervous system) is an hypothesis - of medical science, not of logic. (Angelo, 1998)

This chapter examines how scientific discourse shapes the way we use self-esteem as a particular way of experiencing reality. More specifically, it looks at the way self-esteem has been gradually reified within scientific discourse from being constructed, in earlier writings, as a response/reaction to an external situation, to later becoming a 'structure inside our heads'. It examines closely how language relating to self-esteem changes with time, providing different images of self-esteem.

The framework for the analysis has been provided by Wittgenstein's writings on the language of psychological concepts (1953). A message conveyed by Wittgenstein, and which is most relevant to this study, is that psychological and philosophical constructs are much more complex than we picture them to be.

> A picture is conjured up which seems to fix the sense *unambiguously.* The actual use, compared with that suggested by the picture, seems like something *muddied.* (Wittgenstein, 1953, PI 426)

The complexity of such constructs is shown in inconsistencies and ambiguities, in a lack of (what we perceive as) 'precision' and 'accuracy' in explaining those constructs. Because the complexity is situated in language and in the diversity of accounts it may be revealed by 'grammatical investigations'. This chapter attempts such an analysis in order to scrutinize the

complexity of the language of self-esteem, which denies a simple and fixed picture of self-esteem as an internal phenomenon. The examination of texts shows that the concept of self-esteem is a discursive artifice brought about by a particular social reality. This argument is supported by looking at the development of the construct of self-esteem in text, in terms of reification, normalisation and causation, as well as agency. It is also demonstrated by the examination of the arguments and their circularity that behaviours are presented as the cause and effect of self-esteem, and of being symptomatic of low self-esteem.

Drawing on Wittgenstein, we could expect that with explanations moving towards locating self-esteem more firmly 'in the mind', they would still fail to provide any coherent arguments and fail to construct the 'inner' as a consistent category. In other words, we could expect that the more internalised the picture of self-esteem, the more speculative the arguments become. It is because, as Wittgenstein instructs us, the picture of any internal construct is an illusion, a chimera (McGinn, 1997) and therefore cannot be consistently upheld in language. This picture of self-esteem, as depicted in language, is neither wrong nor right: it is a metaphor, or as Wittgenstein calls it *a grammatical fiction* (1953, PI 307). Therefore, to learn anything about the construct of self-esteem, we must attempt to describe its discursive complexity and investigate how it functions.

The picture is there; and I do not dispute its correctness. But what is its application? (1953, PI 424)

The following analyses use psychiatric textbooks, and specifically chapters relating to a psychodynamic theory of depression, to look at how self-esteem is conceptualised in those theories. It is of great significance, as will be argued, that the notion of self-esteem has been utilised to explain phenomena like depression, as this coincides with the political resurrection and intensification of liberal philosophy (Pusey, 2003). This 'renaissance' has been accompanied by exceedingly individualistic explanations about all issues relating to health, social problems, employment, equality etc. The political issues advanced in those explanations are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections. Here it is sufficient to note that the recent ascent of explanations and theories linking depression with self-esteem need to be considered within the political context of neo-liberal discourses (Rose, 1998). Consequently, it is argued that self-esteem has been deployed in explanations of depression, not because it

provides an insight into the reality of these illnesses, but because it is in agreement with these available discourses and explanations, and more broadly with contemporary politics and cultural principles.

In other words, self-esteem is not a part of our psyche/mind associated with depression, nor a refurbished idea shedding light on mental illness, or an insightful new way of studying depression or dealing with it in therapy. Drawing on self-esteem in explaining depression coincides with the growing popularity of explanations focusing on 'self' and thus it becomes a convenient and useful concept within the politics of hyper-liberal individualism. In more general terms it imitates popular understandings of human experience, while simultaneously reproducing those explanations.

Theoretical Underpinnings - Wittgenstein

The following *grammatical investigations* are inspired by an interpretation of Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations (1953) offered by McGinn (1997). McGinn proposes a reading of Wittgenstein's work as *centred* on the notion of 'grammatical investigations'. Here, the 'grammatical investigation' is understood as a detailed examination of language and how it functions to construe abstract concepts. This type of investigation focuses on how we talk about concepts, how we learn and teach about thefm and how we use these concepts to provide explanations of human experience. The 'grammatical investigation' is about an examination of language as a site where the concepts are constructed and reproduced. Instead of attempting a set of rules, 'grammatical investigations' provide an account we give of the rules and an account of meanings in language.

Wittgenstein challenges his readers to ask different questions about psychological concepts in order to avoid the temptation to *explain* the concepts. What we really need is to *describe* how the concepts function: "The question is not one of explaining a language-game by means of our experience but of noting a language-game" and of looking "at the language-game as a *primary* thing" (1953, PI 655, 656).

By promoting *description* over *explanation* Wittgenstein does not express an opposition against science *per se*, but argues against applying scientific methods to answering specific

psychological and philosophical questions. He shows us that in order to investigate psychological phenomena we need to apply a different type of investigation from the one which is typically applied to physical concepts. The image of psychological constructs as 'things in our minds' is empty and confusing once we investigate the grammar of these constructs. This type of investigation attempts to reveal how language is used and how it functions to create meanings; it describes language as it finds it, as it *lies open to view*.

Wittgenstein openly questioned analogies and assumptions coming from traditional grammar. He pointed out, for example, that a definition of a noun as '*a name*' makes no sense when referring to abstract psychological and philosophical constructs. This conventional understanding of nouns as 'things' shapes the way we perceive and talk about psychological constructs, like 'self-esteem'.

He offers a new paradigm, a new epistemological perspective on how we can go about asking questions and investigating our data. The questions are not about the *nature* but the *function* of concepts. The data is text, or what he calls a *language-game*, because we cannot move beyond language in our examination of psychological constructs. The investigation is a description; it is noting what is in view already, not discovering something which is hidden or explaining the inner. The inner cannot be investigated in any other way than by observing external displays and then making a connection with what we learnt is a related inner state. The names of these inner states (i.e. psychological concepts) and their relation to external displays are social conventions that we learn and re-produce through language. Therefore, to come closer to understanding anything about psychological phenomena we need to look at how the concepts function in language.

Methodological Foundation - Halliday and Functional Grammar

Focusing on function and the use of language requires moving away from a traditional way of looking at language as reflecting some pre-existing reality. It means examining the language as it is practiced within the social sphere; to take language and the rules of language to be a social, not cognitive convention.

A methodology allowing this type of 'grammatical investigation' was developed by Halliday (1984) as a theory of functional grammar. This theory satisfies propositions made by Wittgenstein about methods of investigating abstract phenomena. Functional grammar, rather than being a fixed set of arbitrary rules, provides a description of language in use. How the concepts are being learnt and used, how the grammatical structures have developed over time and what purpose has been served by specific structures. Halliday does not give a prescriptive or idealised version of language, but acknowledges *function* as a primary force in language development.

Therefore this thesis uses Halliday's work as well as work of other linguists and researchers whose work has developed and expanded our understanding of how language functions in modern English speaking societies. The theory of functional grammar is a broad and detailed one; it looks at the functions of language to explain our experience and to allow for social interaction. The research done within this paradigm consists of various explorations of how to construe and experience reality through language and how we use language to relate to others. Because the theory is based on an assumption that language is context specific, any investigation using this framework needs to make the contextual aspects of text production explicit.

Metaphor as a function of language

Since the texts presented in this chapter comes from scientific textbooks, it is most applicable to start this examination with a closer look at the grammar of science. The most striking feature of scientific discourse is its metaphorical character. Grammatical metaphors have been appropriated by science since the 17th century to construct the world of abstract ideas and their logical connections. "Without grammatical metaphor then, technicality and abstraction would not be possible" (Halliday & Martin, 1993, p.228), because the reality construed in science, the world of mental and physical acts are fixed in time and space by being metaphorized into 'objects'. The permanency of these objects (moved away from the fluidity and dynamic character of actions) is what makes them so suited for scientific testing and classification. As

Halliday and Martin observed, "[w]ithout technology of writing, science as we practice [it] would not exist" (1993, p.228).

To provide a comprehensible explanation of grammatical metaphor, I propose to start with a traditional way of understanding metaphors, as mainly lexical. Yet even the way traditional lexical metaphors are delineated here diverges from common-sensical understandings of the metaphor as confined to poetry and fiction. Using Lakoff and Johnson's (1987) perspective on metaphor, I wish to remove metaphor from the domain of poets and recognize its place in our everyday discourse.

Lakoff (1987) argued that not only are metaphorical expressions *not* restricted to fictional and poetic writings, but that our most crucial and fundamental concepts, including mind, self or morality, are metaphorical. These and other concepts are consistently and systematically built around metaphors to shape our understanding of those concepts. Metaphor, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrate, rests at the base of our conceptual organization, constructing understandings and perceptions of reality. Consequently, our everyday thinking, views and understandings are largely metaphorical. Metaphors shape the way we experience and understand practical, metaphysical and interpersonal relations, rather than reflect some pre-existing similarities between the metaphorical and 'factual' forms. Often, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, metaphorical formulations are behind our understandings at a level that is not consciously recognized.

This view of metaphor can be highly beneficial in explaining the inconsistencies and complexities around self-esteem. Seeing self-esteem as a diverse metaphor (appropriated for a particular context) rather than a set of attitudes or internal attributes, makes it possible to postulate that self-esteem exists in a complex matrix of social and interpersonal relations rather than within individuals' heads.

It is important to stress the constructive and constructing properties of lexical metaphors; to what extent social and cultural assumptions are constructed through metaphors operating within our everyday language and to what extent these constructions influence our view of the world. The most popular metaphors framing our understanding of reality, such as metaphors based on

liberal principles, need to be persistently brought to our awareness. For example, a metaphor of 'war' ('conflict') between an individual and a society or a metaphor of an 'inner self'(Lakoff, 1999). In this way we can take them for what they are, rather than assume they are some universal truth.

Looking closely at metaphors and their related assumptions buried in language and assuming them to be culturally and historically specific, provides a more genuine perception of experience than assuming language to be a literal reflection of reality. This type of close examination would be necessarily limited if we only considered lexical metaphors, or the types of metaphor Lakoff talks about in his books (1980, 1999). Since this analysis is concerned with language as a site where experience, understandings and perceptions are located, it is not as much a conceptual organization brought about by language and its metaphors, but the organization of language *per se* that is of a precise interest for this type of analysis.

Metaphorical structures present in language are not limited to words or concepts being replaced by others. There is a wealth of metaphors realised by grammatical means; by the grammaticalization of language. Examples of those realisations are abstraction and technicality in written text (particularly scientific discourse, but also bureaucratic or media discourses) (Halliday and Martin, 1993) or certain 'polite' forms of making requests and placing demands on others (e.g. using the question: "Do you need your car today?", rather than making a demand explicitly: "Lend me your car tonight"). Halliday (1984) refers to these as 'grammatical metaphors'.

As the most of the theory related to grammatical metaphors has been covered in the introductory chapter, the following discussion will focus on grammatical metaphors of abstraction and technicality. What follows then is a short overview of grammatical metaphor followed by an overview of ideational (experiential) metaphors and how they allowed for scientific discourse to take on and further develop since the Enlightenment.

Grammatical metaphor

Grammatical metaphor is a concept introduced by Halliday (1984) to describe patterns when meanings typically (*congruently*) realized by one pattern are realised by another pattern

(*incongruently* or *metaphorically)*. What has been traditionally recognised as 'a metaphor' refers to a *lexical metaphor* where meanings are transferred at the level of lexis. By contrast, in a *grammatical metaphor* meanings are transferred at the grammatical level. As in lexical metaphor, where a word or a concept replaces another one, in grammatical metaphor a set of grammatical structures are replaced by other, less congruent structures. In other words, a grammatical metaphor, like a lexical metaphor, can only be *metaphorical* by reference to something else. Yet, unlike lexical metaphor which can be seen as a "variation in a meaning of a given expression", grammatical metaphor is defined by Halliday as a "variation in expression of a given meaning" (1984, p.342). Thus, while in a case of a lexical metaphor, *metaphorical* meanings replace *literal* meanings, in grammatical metaphor, *congruent* rather than *literal* meanings are used as a more accurate description of a replaced form (Halliday, 1984).

'Congruency' is judged according to what comes first, historically and in language development in children. The c*ongruent way* is the most *typical* way of wording or saying things, among many possible ways. Although metaphorical realizations come second, they are an ever-present characteristic of any adult discourse (Halliday, 1993). Similarly to Lakoff, Halliday establishes that metaphorical language is prevalent in our culture, with speakers often not being aware of the transference. The grammatical and congruent forms are present in all written and spoken texts. However, although metaphors are common in any discourse, certain modes and genres rely on grammatical metaphors more than others. For example, the written mode typically consists of more metaphorical language than a spoken mode. Particularly, academic, scientific and more formal written texts contain a large number of grammatical metaphors.

Science makes use of grammatical metaphors in a very specific way. Scientific discourse relies primarily on ideational metaphors; that is metaphors relating to the function of language that refers to what is happening, what actions are taking place and who are the participants involved in those actions. This function of language has been called 'ideational', which refers to the aspects of language structure that organize the experience.

Therefore, an 'ideational grammatical metaphor'*,* refers to those aspects of grammar that play a part in construing our experience. Scientific and academic writing, including professional

textbooks, habitually use language full of ideational metaphors. This type of text is organised differently from everyday speech or newspaper articles and it presents reality as highly abstract. Consequently, the world constructed by science is full of abstract 'objects' and these 'objects' in some ways are related to each other through cause–effect associations.

Science as metaphor

The following sentence can be easily recognised as part of a formal scientific text.

> Reformulation of the dynamics of depression in terms of the ego suffering a collapse of self-esteem represents a further conceptual break with the original id-psychological formulation.

Indeed, it has been taken from a psychiatric textbook published in 1995 (Kaplan & Saddock), and comes from a text that will be examined later in this chapter.

The text is easily recognized as coming from science because of its formal, abstract way of constructing reality. This way of presenting the world has been achieved through lexical and grammatical means. These aspects characteristic of scientific discourse developed within the English language over time and they are easily distinguishable from the everyday language used by native speakers of English.

Halliday (1993, 1984) traces the development of scientific English back to the 17th century and Newton's writing, which appropriated some aspects of everyday language, such as grammatical metaphor, and used them to express novel ideas. As Halliday suggests, scientific discourse developed as a functional tool, as a response to the need for creating new ways of speaking about experimentation and its results, and about scientific theorizing. Science, being preoccupied with abstract phenomena and logical relations, appropriated language to serve those purposes.

Thus, the language of science, as it developed over time, is mainly characterized by abstract, technical terms, metaphorical nouns (as nominalized processes, i.e. a *reformulation*, a *collapse*, a *break*, a *formulation*, derived from: to *reformulate*, to *collapse*, to *break* or to *formulate*), extended nominal groups, metaphorical verbs that verbalize relations (e.g. to *represent*, to *instigate*, to *produce*, to *cause*, to *demonstrate*) (Halliday, 1984). In other words, scientific discourse relies heavily on metaphorical forms of language and particularly on the

metaphorization of its grammatical organization-like shift from verbal to nominal groups and other 'transformations', which are generally referred to by functional linguists, as grammatical metaphors.

To simplify; the world (as it is constructed in discourse) where people interact with others and act upon objects, has been represented through the grammatical metaphorization of discourse as a world where abstract concepts relate to one another, often without explicit human participation.

The data: psychiatry, self-esteem and depression

The texts selected for this section have come from a number of editions of a prominent psychiatric textbook. Not only is this textbook widely quoted and used by psychiatry students in several countries, but it has also been substantially modified in subsequent editions, creating the opportunity to examine the alterations introduced into the text longitudinally. The editions of the textbook go back to 1967, yet it wasn't until 1970 when the concept of *self-esteem* made the first appearance in these textbooks. Even then it was only briefly mentioned. Since 1975 however, self-esteem has leapt into prominence and has appeared regularly in relation to several mental disorders.

The authors, Kaplan and Sadock, are held as respected figures of American Psychiatry. Harold Kaplan, professor of psychiatry was the founding editor of the Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry. Benjamin James Sadock, M.D. is a professor and vice chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the New York University (NYU) School of Medicine.

The texts used for the present analysis come from the following textbooks:

Freedman, A.M., Kaplan, H. I., Sadock B. J. (1975). *Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry*. 2nd edition. Baltimore : Williams & Wilkins, p. 1259

Kaplan, H. I., Sadock B. J. (1985). *Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry*. 4th edition. Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins, p. 400

Sadock, B.J. and Sadock, V.A. (1995). *Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry*. 6th edition. Baltimore, MD : Williams & Wilkins, p. 1074

I have chosen only a handful of texts for the first analysis in this section. The small number of texts allows for a greater attention to detail and the specificity of the constructions. The aim here is to trace alterations in constructions of self-esteem as they have developed over thirty years. The assumptions underlying this study, that self-esteem is a discursive accomplishment and that the constructions of self-esteem are political and, thus, are dependent on a dominant ideology, suggests that there will be differences over time in constructions of self-esteem.

Why psychiatric textbooks?

An aim of this thesis is to examine the different channels through which psychological theories about self-esteem have been disseminated. Psychiatry, although historically framed solely within a medical model (Miller, 1986), became more reliant on other, non-medical disciplines for its constructions of abnormality. As a result, modern psychiatry has been increasingly more dependent on psychological explanations. As Rose demonstrated throughout several decades of work on these two disciplines, (1986, 1989, 1998), psychological theorizing has recently become a part of psychiatric explanations of mental illness.

The choice of psychiatric textbooks for this examination is, therefore, deliberate. Although contemporary psychiatry is a discipline with separate professional characteristics from psychology, there are accepted psychological factors that play an important part in "the precipitation and prevention of mental disorders" (Rose, 1986, p.4) and, thus, become one of the avenues through which psychological theories and psychological constructs are circulated, re-constructed, re-produced and applied to defining, regulating and controlling of what is to be seen as deviant. As Rose (1986) defines it, psychiatry, with its heterogeneity, is "a loosely related assemblage of practices that seek to regulate individuals subjectivities and manage personal and social relations in the name of minimization of mental disorder and the promotion of mental health" (p.3)

Not only has psychiatry changed its theoretical sources, as a discipline it has entered a radically new relationship between state and civil society, where the locus of control and social power shifted from the state to a range of expert-disciplines such as economics, psychiatry and

psychology. Through this, the politics of mental health has become closely related to the way of governing in modern democracies (Rose, 1998).

> Psychiatry, in a sense of discipline, a technology and a way of thinking, is a constitutive feature of these new power relations, enabling mental health to be seen as a national asset, an economic advantage, a social necessity and a personal desire (Rose, 1986, p. 7)

Therefore, through its associations with social control, psychiatry and its use of psychological constructs is influential in the way we perceive ourselves and the way we define deviancy.

Moreover, as Rose argued (1998), contemporary psychiatry, as well as psychology, more than any other disciplines, have shared their ways of speaking by disseminating themselves into the general public by shaping the way we talk about and explain our personhood and our place in society. They shape what we perceive as normal and abnormal, and effectively shape conduct in terms of what is or isn't ethically appropriate.

The specific aim of the following analysis is an examination of how, once the construct of self-esteem has been adopted by psychiatry, it has evolved and developed within its discourses. It is assumed that the constructions in the textbooks reflect the discourses about self-esteem existing at the time of writing; if the conceptualizations of self-esteem differ from one edition to another, it is because they reproduce understandings of self-esteem *available at the time*. Simultaneously, the textbooks have been a side of dissemination of these discourses, serving to educate generations of psychiatrists within the United States, Australia and many other countries.

The language used by professionals has been dynamically evolving within a system of complex influences and interrelations. Yet, the changes are not totally chaotic; they do form patterns that can be traced through writings which emerged at the time. Thus, for example, the constructions of self-esteem in a 1985 textbook are both *reflective* of available explanations and ways of talking about self-esteem and *creative* as they add to the explanations that are available.

Why depression?

The texts chosen for this analysis come from the chapter on depression. Specifically, the texts draw on the therapeutic model of depression, relying on explanations coming from ego-psychology. Ego-psychology takes Freudian theory as its starting point, yet moves away from

his earlier theorising, termed as id-psychology, taking Anna Freud's work emphasising the role of the ego as its foundation. Ego, from this perspective has been redefined as more than defensive (as it has been conceived by Freud) and argued to be adaptable and capable of harmony with the world (Lapsley and Clark, 1988). Therefore, the notion of 'ego containment' in Freud has been replaced by the concept of 'ego adaptation'. These developments in psychoanalysis enabled notions like self-esteem to enter its domain. Self-esteem offers success, happiness, adaptation and harmony with the world and people around us, which is more than just an alleviation of suffering, the focus of traditional Freudian analysis

The idea of a conflict-free ego, living in harmony with the world, provided a base for the development of 'object relations theory' that focuses on the ways in which the self relates to external 'objects' at various developmental stages. These psychoanalytic perspectives place inner dynamics at the centre of its clinical and theoretical concerns and focuses on development and parental influences as a base for this inner make-up. Therefore, the psychodynamic theory of depression largely ignores social and cultural aspects of this condition. Even though depression correlates with isolation, lack of employment, staying at home with children, suggesting the contextual and social aspects are important in its development, the solutions are searched for within individuals and familial influences.

Another motivator for the choice of texts has been the fact that depression is occurring more often at a younger age. Although both men and women suffer from depressive episodes, depression has traditionally been recognized as a 'female' disorder. Even though most psychiatric patients are women, depression is one single disorder where the predominance of women is particularly obvious (Allen, 1986). Furthermore, while depression in men is often correlated with unemployment or separation, depression in women is often explained in terms of gender susceptibility (Stoppard, 2000) or treated as a statistical confirmation of stereotypical views of women as 'unstable, irrational and changeable' (Allen, 1986).

Because of the view of women as susceptible to depression, the reasons for its episodes in women are even more likely to be viewed as coming from an internal makeup of a patient. Therefore, women's mental health is where psychology and psychiatry collaborate the most, and

where psychiatry is most ready to rely on psychological explanations focusing on 'inner' predispositions and tendencies. These explanations ignore a vast body of research demonstrating that the social or economic conditions of women provide better clues as to the preponderance of depression in women. Questioning not only what women respond to, but also how they are positioned to respond, and the responses available to women in our social and political context are important factors in the development of depression, factors insistently ignored by psychiatry (Allen, 1986). Instead, as will be demonstrated, conceptualizations of depression in relation to self-esteem have moved even further away from the possibility of social or political explanations.

A final comment, the use of masculine language in the extracts below (particularly older texts) is quite ironic considering it is women who are mainly diagnosed and treated for depression. In most recent texts however, neither masculine nor (unlikely) feminine forms are used. These texts, as will be demonstrated shortly, sidestep human participants altogether.

Chapter 4: The reification of self-esteem; normality and pathology

The following analysis investigates how self-esteem has been reified in psychiatric writings as an 'object' to be measured and assessed. The analysis examines meanings attached to the concept of 'self-esteem' and how these meanings are constructed grammatically and explores discursive features enabling construction of self-esteem *as if* it was a tangible, inner and consistent entity. The analysis centers around the notion of grammatical metaphors as well as other grammatical and lexical discursive features relevant to constructions of experiences.

Self-esteem as a nominalization

Matthiessen (1993) examines the ways in which psychiatric and psychological explanations follow the grammar of scientific discourse. He identifies patterns in the ways these disciplines construe experience. These relate to the ways in which psychological and psychiatric explanations make use of 'mental' processes. 'Mental' processes (also called 'processes of sensing') is a category proposed by Halliday (1984) to distinguish a group of verbs with particular linguistic characteristics. There are several distinct qualities specific to this group of processes. For example, the clauses involving mental processes also typically involve a human participant (doing the 'sensing' or 'feeling'). Furthermore, unlike other types of processes, they cannot be substituted by or probed by 'do', i.e., we may ask, *what did you do?* to someone who *built a house* or *went home,* but not someone who *was amazed* or *was puzzled*.

Although a detailed linguistic understanding of all the characteristics of mental processes is not necessary for this analysis, it is important to mention that Halliday (1984) distinguishes three sub-types of mental processes: perception (sensing, hearing), affection (liking, fearing), and cognition (thinking, knowing, understanding). Once again, the distinction follows the linguistic differences in the way the processes are used within these three sub-types. This however, as will be elaborated later in this chapter, coincides with the way we understand what it means to perceive, feel and think; the metaphors behind each sub-type.

Psychological and psychiatric discourse make use of mental processes in a specific way. Most importantly, these processes are turned into 'things' by the use of the nominalizations (e.g. angry – *anger*, think – *thought*, feel – *feeling*, react - *reaction*). Furthermore, once turned into 'thing-like' phenomena, these processes become 'objects of science' which can be qualified, quantified, measured and classified. They are then 'located' inside an individual, with human beings as containers of these mental 'processes/objects'.

Interestingly, comparing folk and scientific models, Matthiessen (1993) concludes that while folk explanations are presented in congruent language, scientific ones are construed in a metaphorical mode. What he calls 'folk models' are traditional explanations that have evolved and are a part of our everyday thinking and verbal exchange. Psychological models move away from folk models by introducing their own taxonomies, vocabulary and grammar. Although changing over time, scientifically based explanations center around reifications of experience achieved by means of grammatical metaphor (primarily nominalization). This, consequently, construes a world that is static and reified.

Matthiessen's work on psychological constructs will be engaged later in this section after the texts for the analysis are introduced and overviewed. His work will support the final examination of the constructions of self-esteem and the way they develop over time. However, it is worth pointing out at this stage that the straightforward typology of mental processes and their nominal forms is not as easily applicable to the concept of self-esteem. Unlike *feeling, reaction* or *anger*, self-esteem does not refer to a single process. Rather, I argue that self-esteem compresses a whole range of activities, emotions, attitudes and thoughts relating to practices of self-evaluation.

Moreover, as an expression, self-esteem existed well before psychology adopted it as an object of scientific scrutiny. In fact, 'self-esteem' featured in English writings as early as 1657 in Baker's Sancta Sophia, where 'selfe-esteem', 'selfe-judgment' and 'selfe-will' are mentioned (Oxford Dictionary On-Line). Clearly, the events and actions relating to valuing oneself have been realized nominally (as nouns) for centuries.

However, despite self-esteem being grammaticalized as a noun prior existence of psychology, it is due to psychology (and its discipline-specific discourse) that self-esteem has been construed as an *inner object*. Psychological constructions of self-esteem have evolved to see it as an *internal thing* with object-like properties of a quantifiable and measurable entity, something that resides inside individuals yet can be assessed, manipulated and adjusted. This reification process took place over time and involved more than simply using self-esteem as a noun; it involved other discursive strategies, most of which are integral to scientific discourse and to discursive representations of 'things in the mind'.

But to look at the reification of self-esteem does not require us to go back to the very beginnings of psychology. In fact, as has been discussed earlier, the concept has not attracted much interest within the discipline until the 1960s. Markedly, the concept only gained its momentum in the last three decades of the 20th Century, when its dissemination into other disciplines and areas took place. It is this period that offers most interesting developments in discursive constructions of self-esteem. Indeed, texts written in the 1970s through to the 1990s provide a significant variety and change in patterns of talk about self-esteem.

As will be demonstrated in this analysis, a careful reading of the texts collected over these three decades reveals considerable differences in constructions of self-esteem over that time. In 1975, self-esteem was more a *quality* or a *reaction* to adverse circumstances and it was not yet well defined as an *inner entity*. Back then, the instability of self-esteem was assumed to be normal; we could think ourselves abysmal and terrible, at least occasionally. Later, self-esteem developed into an object in the mind, and it has been its instability that became directly linked with pathology.

To start the analysis, I wish to examine a text published in 1975, the first text that talks exclusively about self-esteem as a factor in depression. This edition marks the entry of self-esteem into psychiatric discourse as a definable and distinct construct. For the first time, self-esteem has been taken on and written about as a systematic concept operating within the arena of pathology. Although theorized and researched since the first days of psychology, self-esteem has never before been so systematically linked with other abnormal categories, nor has such an

association reached the level of consensus that would place it in one of the major psychiatric textbooks.

The importance of this happening in the mid-70s is not to be ignored. As will be explored in further chapters, this coincided with a neoliberal movement in politics and economy. At that time, liberal ideals of the sovereign individual made a sweeping come back after the Keynesian economic paradigm and the 'welfare state' model of governing (both challenged liberalism as the best policy for capitalism) failed to provide full employment and low interest rates. The rebirth of conservative liberal ethics disguised as progressive neo-liberalism resulted in an unprecedented vision that every person is an 'entrepreneur' managing their own life, and should act accordingly.

It is not a coincidence then, that psychology and psychiatry has focused on concepts like self-esteem that can advance this vision of the 'entrepreneuring individual' by advancing individual explanations and by obscuring the social and ideological aspects relating to human conduct. In addition, the link of self-esteem to this dominant ideology is precisely marked by the fact that in 1975 self-esteem is for the first time presented as a theory-driving concept, a notion that can 'explain' the abnormal mind.

It is then through the expertise of psychology and psychiatry that we draw our judgments of what is normal and what is pathological, and consequently, our moral and ethical standards. Moreover, these disciplines link morality with mental capacities and propensities rather than (external) behaviour only, therefore producing techniques of control and subjectification (Rose, 1998). And although subjectification is a linguistic as well as an intradiscursive process, which depends on positions, relations and various locations of participants, a focus on the text allows access to an array of enduring features of this discursive repertoire. Moreover, text examination can help us to trace the 'progress' towards current explanations (not in terms of development of theory but the evolvement of 'reality' which the theories and their language construct), and thus explicate how such accounts evolved. A close analysis of the text exposes the depiction of reality as a *depiction* rather than the *truth*, thus illuminating the discursive construction of the nature of human experience.

Self-esteem as a Reaction

The Comprehensive Textbook in Psychiatry published in 1975 is the first psychiatric textbook in this series containing several lengthy passages about self-esteem as a mental phenomenon. The earlier edition of this textbook (published in 1972) mentions self-esteem only briefly and without any attempt to technicalize it. The 1975 edition uses self-esteem systematically in an organised manner as a consistent and definable psychological phenomenon. For the first time, in this text-book, there are evident endeavours to define and organise self-esteem as an independent category, rather than just a common-sense category.

Self-esteem appears throughout the textbook of 1975 in relation to retardation, pain, conscience and normal narcissism. Most of these references concern the pathological development of children. The text below, used for the analysis, comes from a chapter on depression, and in particular links depression with self-esteem within the psychodynamic framework.

Extract 1

Taken from Freedman, A.M., Kaplan, H. I., Sadock B. J. (1975). Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry. 2nd edition. Baltimore : Williams & Wilkins

SELF-ESTEEM AND THE PERSONALITY STRUCTURE.

It was Edward Bibring who called attention to the importance of alterations in the level of self-esteem in depressive states. Indeed, since the publication of his paper on that subject many investigators have tended to see such changes as the central and basic element in depression. Without overlooking the possibility that this view is too narrow and that experience of sadness following a loss is an equally important and primary ingredient, one can still agree that lowered self-esteem is so intimately associated with depression that it is in many instances a sine qua non. One can further agree with Bibring that diminution in self-esteem are not necessary pathological but occur in everyone under certain circumstances. These are essentially three in nature: (1) those times at which one feels weak and helpless before an overpowering situation with an inevitable outcome: (2) those situations in which one feels unlovable because of thoughts, emotions, impulses, or actions which one considers undesirable and contrary to one's ideals; and (3) those in which one feels unloved by another person whose good opinion one values.

As has been indicated, the normal person although usually enjoying a reasonable degree of autonomy, self-confidence and self-assurance, by virtue of being human and fallible in a less than perfect world not infrequently finds his self-esteem assaulted and diminished by a variety of situations and events. But his bouts of despondency are neither long in duration nor incapacitating in degree, and he has a variety of ways of restoring his emotional equilibrium. If he fails ignominiously at one task, he can comfort himself with memories of successes in others and can vow to do better next time. If he feels himself disliked by one person, he can turn to an awareness of the affection and respect of another, and can reflect that "you can't please everyone". The variety of his human relationships, the diversity of his skills and interests, the realistic self-appraisal of his strengths and weaknesses joined

to a predominance of a feeling of worth and comfort with himself, all help to keep him on a relatively even keel.

On the other hand, the person who is abnormally dependent on other people may find himself in difficulties when faced by a situation that lowers his self-esteem. In the first place, his self-assessment tends to be more harshly critical and his confidence in his capabilities and his basic worth is generally shaky. Faced with an event that hits at his self-esteem, he has little in the way of resources to combat its diminution, and his consequent despondency may be prolonged and severe. Furthermore, in the relative absence of inner resources he turns to other people for emotional support and reassurance, and frequently needs a constant supply of these externally derived strengths to maintain his unstable equilibrium. His orientation, that is, is more towards what he can get from the others than what he can give; it is narcissistic in nature. In addition, the number of people on whom he feels he can depend is often extremely restricted, not infrequently being limited to singly highly important person. The relationships that the narcissistic person makes with others tend to be fragile and fraught with potential difficulty. If his self-esteem is lowered as a result, for example, of failing to achieve a goal, he may quite unjustifiably feel that others are critical and rejecting of him. The resulting despair and depression at this imagined loss only compound the original feeling of worthlessness. If he suffers the actual loss of a needed person, the consequences can be profoundly disturbing, since he has now in reality lost the source of his desperately needed emotional support; not only must he bear the anguish of grief, but his self-esteem is dangerously lowered as the supporting supplies are cut off, and the depression that results may be of severely pathological proportions.

It may not be hard to see how some of the roots of this narcissistic personality structure might lie in the individual's early parental relationships, and analysis of adults as well as direct observation of young children lend support to this supposition. The child of parents who are consistently harshly critical of his person and his performance will, in due course, internalize these parental attitudes and will develop the same damaging assessment of himself. At the same time his resulting failure to build confidence in his own worth and capabilities keep him dependently tied to his parents for the support and reassurance that he needs. He soon learns that to maintain their favor he must conform to their standards, and this only straightens his self-criticalness of those aspects of his thoughts impulses and actions which run contrary to their sanctions. Thus constrained and constricted, he fails to grow emotionally and arrives at adulthood with a personality structure fixed in these infantile forms, looking for relationships that re-create his childhood patterns. (Freedman, Kaplan, Sadock 1975, p. 1259).

There is an elaborate attempt in this text to present self-esteem as a category in its own right. To start with, self-esteem is used consistently throughout this text without being replaced by other constructs like 'confidence', 'sense of self-worth' or 'self-respect'. There are also some indirect attempts to define self-esteem, if only by linking the concepts in a consistent way with descriptions of behaviours subsequently categorized as normal or abnormal. This tendency towards separation between self-esteem and other concepts in order to present self-esteem as a well-developed and defined category will grow even more profound in the texts published later.

Noticeably, there is some hesitance on the part of the author to accept Bibring's theory; possibly because it still has an air of novelty about it. The author maintains distance from the claims,

using reported speech (Potter, 1996) ('this is not my theory, I am just reporting on someone else's writing'). 'Lowered self-esteem' and 'sadness following a loss' are presented as separate categories. This changes in later texts, where self-esteem becomes linked with loss and mourning. In 1975, self-esteem has not yet been established as an attribute of the mind and it has not gained the power to generate moods, feelings, behaviours or achievements.

Rather, this text construes self-esteem as a *reaction* to some external circumstances. In the very first paragraph 'lowered self-esteem' is assembled at the level of interpersonal and social relations – or rather a subjective and emotive reaction to these circumstances. Lowered self-esteem is therefore not situated 'in the mind', as a pathological trait or as a result of abnormal upbringing. It is a *response* to external, social or behavioural disappointments. Metaphorically it is a temporary state, a reaction to adverse circumstances, a subjective response and a *reaction* to either circumstances or to one's own disappointing behaviour.

Even in the paragraph that summarizes the link between lowered self-esteem and pathological development, self-esteem stands separate from pathological self-criticism and lack of confidence. Despite this separation, when read 30 years later, the descriptions of narcissistic personality structure sound like a *definition* of self-esteem. It is difficult to establish for sure whether this is a result of a retrospective reading, or there is tension of circularity in the text (i.e.: self-esteem cannot be maintained at the healthy level because of the 'abnormal' person's low esteem of themselves). Yet, even if the inconsistency and circularity exists in the text, it is a result of the concept of self-esteem not being yet fully reified into a 'thing in the mind'. Thus, it is consistent with a general metaphor of *reaction* rather than an *inner object*. The text published later, as will be soon demonstrated, will move self-esteem and narcissism much closer together.

We can see in this early text that, discursively, self-esteem embarked on its journey to become a measurable and quantifiable entity as soon it was introduced as a systematic category. The following formulations from the 1975 text, construe the picture of self-esteem as an object with shape and volume. That is, self esteem becomes reified in grammar, for example:

- alterations in the level of self-esteem
- lowered self-esteem
- diminution in self-esteem

- self-esteem assaulted and diminished
- lowers his self-esteem
- hits at his self-esteem
- combat its diminution
- self-esteem is lowered as a result
- self-esteem is dangerously lowered.

The list above demonstrates two types of metaphors used in the construction of *self-esteem* in this early text. One is a *military metaphor*, reminiscent of liberal discourses of a 'war' or a 'battle' between external and internal forces (social and personal, environmental and individual). This metaphor traditionally relies upon the assumption that the social/external poses a threat to the individual/inner. Self-esteem is therefore seen as 'in danger' of being overcome (diminished, hit) by external forces, while the inner resources can 'combat' this attack. The second metaphor is a *fluid metaphor*, as represented by references to 'levels'. Through this metaphor self-esteem is constructed as something that needs to be contained; through which a person becomes a container of this fluid object called 'self-esteem'. As the analysis unfolds, these aspects of metaphorical construction of self-esteem will be examined further in relation to texts published later.

The construction of 'Normal'

This section focuses on another set of features of language that serve to reify self-esteem by linking self-esteem to pathology. The main concern here is how, longitudinally, constructions of self-esteem have shifted towards pathology.

There is no doubt that the pathologization of low self-esteem provides not only an ongoing need for therapeutic intervention, but also new ways of explaining the world and constructing reality, and as can be argued after Rose (1998), new ways of managing human conduct. The task of maintaining a 'right' level of self-esteem puts an ongoing demand for certain services (therapy, self-help books and workshops etc), but also directs attention from social to inner 'happenings'. As Rose pointed out (1998), individuals must monitor the minutiae of their reactions, feelings, thoughts and conduct in order to fulfill their lives and roles as workers, lovers, parents, etc.

The interesting feature of the 1975 text is the attempt to explain what it means to be 'normal'.

[Later texts published after 1980, will not talk about 'normal' but concentrate solely on

'abnormal' behaviours and pathological psychological phenomena.]

Extract 2

As has been indicated, the normal person although usually enjoying a reasonable degree of autonomy, self-confidence and self-assurance, by virtue of being human and fallible in a less than perfect world not infrequently finds his self-esteem assaulted and diminished by a variety of situations and events. But his bouts of despondency are neither long in duration nor incapacitating in degree, and he has a variety of ways of restoring his emotional equilibrium. If he fails ignominiously at one task, he can comfort himself with memories of successes in others and can vow to do better next time. If he feels himself disliked by one person, he can turn to an awareness of the affection and respect of another, and can reflect that "you can't please everyone". The variety of his human relationships, the diversity of his skills and interests, the realistic self-appraisal of his strengths and weaknesses joined to a predominance of a feeling of worth and comfort with himself, all help to keep him on a relatively even keel. (Paragraph taken from Extract 1, Freedman, Sadock & Kaplan, 1975, p. 1259)

In this paragraph the human being is an agentive, active participant, choosing the options from a

broad selection available to 'him'. Agency is an important part of the construction of normality

in this text. In order to present a normal person as agentive the passage focuses on external

conditions, choices and behaviours. 'A normal person' is in control of his or her reactions and

conditions. If they fail to achieve one thing, then they can turn towards some other available

sources of success or appreciation. As indicators of mental 'normality', the availability of

choices and agency help to maintain the coherency of this argument. In general, the link

between agency and normality is reminiscent of liberal discourses constructing choice, control

and power as synonymous with normality.

The interesting shift from external to internal occurs in the last sentence of this paragraph. The

sentence seems to summarize the whole passage, but it does more than simply recap the rest – it

introduces an abstract phenomenon taking us 'inside the head' of a normal person.

To examine the rhetorical functions this passage serves, we need to go back to the model of

Functional Grammar and the analysis of a typical scientific text. As discussed earlier, one of the

most notorious features of scientific English is the use of nominalizations (Eggins, 1994).

Nominalization is one type of grammatical metaphor, where processes and attributes are

presented in the form of a noun rather than a verb or an adjective; nominalizations are 'the

names' given to processes and attributes (Halliday, 1993). For example 'anger', 'love', 'thought', 'vision' or 'movement' are 'things' that have been derived from the processes of being angry, loving, thinking, seeing or moving. In scientific discourse nominalizations often form complex clusters, called nominal groups (Halliday, 1984). For example, a 'feeling', a nominalization of 'feel' may, as a part of a clause, form a nominal group 'negative feelings' or 'feeling of worth and comfort'.

Clauses containing such nominal groups are a common feature of scientific discourse. Often, nominal groups extend well beyond two or three words and form quite a long cluster of words which describe an abstract concept as well as classify, qualify or quantify it. This type of extended nominal groups are often referred to as 'complex nominal groups'. In the following clause (the final sentence of Extract 2), the complex nominal group is highlighted in bold. This nominal group contains several nouns (relationships, skills, interests, self-appraisal, feelings) preceded and followed by other items all of which describe and specify the nouns in question.

The variety of his human relationships, the diversity of his skills and interests, the realistic self-appraisal of his strengths and weaknesses joined to a predominance of a feeling of worth and comfort with himself, all help to keep him on a relatively even keel.

Unlike the rest of the passage, this sentence is strikingly more abstract and metaphorized (in the sense of grammatical metaphors). The grammar of the clause is quite straightforward, *x* does something to *y* (keep him). The complexity comes from the first nominal group. In fact, this nominal group contains four separate nominal groups (1. The variety of his human relationships, 2. the diversity of his skills and interests, 3. the realistic self-appraisal of his strengths and weaknesses, 4. a predominance of a feeling of worth and comfort with himself). This cluster of nominal groups functions to summarize the whole passage at the same time presenting it in a more technical form.

Using the grammatical metaphor of nominalization, the circumstances, processes, and choices described earlier in the passage have been packed into this one nominal group; they have been nominalized into a set of 'things'. For example, what was presented earlier as "the times when one feels unloved by another person whose good opinion one values" or a choice "to turn an

awareness of the affection and respect of another" now has been abstracted into a "variety of his human relationships".

Rhetorically, however, this package allows adding an internal process of a 'self' appraising 'itself' (its own strengths and weaknesses) to the list of nominalized processes. The author shifts from talking about human beings doing things and engaging with others to talking about abstract phenomena as doing things to people. What has been represented as a process earlier (failing, comforting, feeling disliked, pleasing others) becomes an internalized 'thing' through a process of nominalization. This use of grammatical metaphor allows the author to move from talking about behaviours to talking about inner states without any logical tensions.

Further, as this nominal group takes us 'inside' the head, the external conditions are 'internalized' into what can be seen as a personality profile or a trait. 'Having many friends, skills, interests' and 'realistic self-appraisal' are converted into 'feeling worthy and comfortable', and thus turned into inner dispositions. Because the logistics of this internalization are buried, a reader is prevented from questioning how exactly those external circumstances joined inside into a feeling. This connection is a given, never to be read as something to be questioned by a compliant reader, although, it can be exposed and challenged through a critical analysis.

The implicitness of this internalization is a consequence of the building of abstraction, in particular, of transforming processes into 'things' and placing them inside a complex nominal group. One of the important aspects of packing logical complexity into nominal groups is that the actions, logical relations and explanations become implicit, and thus difficult, if not impossible, to argue against. Hidden in the nominal groups, they are rhetorically presented to a reader as taken for granted understandings; as areas of mutual agreement between a reader and a writer (Martin and Rose, 2003). They are the 'matter of fact' statements and relations naturalizing the proposition presented by the writer.

The analysis of the above passage shows interesting linguistic patterns involved in talking about self-esteem in terms of normality. Normality is discursively linked with active participation, availability of choices and generally is governed by the rhetoric of agency. The way this

description of normality moved from external to inner processes is demonstrated by the linguistic patterns involved in the construction of inner states. These patterns, dominated by grammatical metaphors (particularly, nominalizations), are not coincidental; we use abstracted language to talk about abstract processes. Yet, the analysis shows that this type of grammatical metaphor also functions to present the authors' propositions as factual and natural ways of constructing reality.

The construction of 'Abnormal'

The previous analysis examined how the text constructed normality by presenting the normal person as acting and choosing freely from the options available. In this section, the analysis will focus on the construction of *abnormal* and how it has been achieved through lexico-grammatical means. The analysis starts with the same text to allow for continuity, but then moves to later texts in order to see subsequent developments in the construction of abnormality.

 As had been discussed above, the paragraph concerned with normality presented factors influencing self-esteem as located at first externally, within social interaction, and later internally, as 'inner resources'. The sources of self-esteem have been presented in the text as 'feeling of worth and comfort with himself'. This shift towards inner phenomena plays another rhetorical function in this text. It prepares a reader for an explanation of abnormality which moves away from the external towards the inner.

At first the text diverts from a focus directly on how self-esteem has been constructed or defined, yet it is still relevant to the construction of self-esteem as a pathology. Despite the fact that this early account does not present lowered self-esteem as abnormal, the link between the two has already started to develop. Because the link is indirect, being mediated through 'inner resources', the paragraph of the text presented below does not talk about the association between depression and self-esteem explicitly. Yet, it is important to look in detail at this early construction of abnormality, because of the foundations it provides for the further construction of self-esteem as pathological.

Extract 3

On the other hand, the person who is abnormally dependent on other people may find himself in difficulties when faced by a situation that lowers his self-esteem. In the first place, **his self-**

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assessment tends to be more harshly critical and his confidence in his capabilities and his basic worth is generally shaky. **Faced with an event that** hits at his self-esteem, he has little in the way of resources to combat its diminution, and his consequent despondency may be prolonged and severe. Furthermore, **in the relative absence of inner resources** he turns to other people for emotional support and reassurance, and frequently needs a constant supply of these externally derived strengths to maintain his unstable equilibrium. **His orientation**, that is, is more towards what he can get from the others than what he can give; **it is narcissistic** in nature. In addition, **the number of people on whom he feels he can depend** is often extremely restricted, not infrequently being limited to singly highly important person. **The relationships that the narcissistic person makes with others** tend to be fragile and fraught with potential difficulty. **If his self-esteem is lowered as a result,** for example, of failing to achieve a goal, he may quite unjustifiably feel that others are critical and rejecting of him. **The resulting despair and depression at this imagined loss** only compound the original feeling of worthlessness. **If he suffers the actual loss of a needed person,** the consequences can be profoundly disturbing, since he has now in reality lost the source of his desperately needed emotional support; not only must he bear the anguish of grief, but his self-esteem is dangerously lowered as the supporting supplies are cut off, and the depression that results may be of severely pathological proportions.

This paragraph starts with building the category of persons 'who are abnormally dependant on other people'. Readers have been prepared by now to look 'inside' an individual for the causes of pathology. The previous paragraph has already set out a foundation to build a contrast between an active agent acting on the world and a passive 'victim' locked inside his or her own troubled head.

There are several simultaneously occurring strategies in this paragraph engaged in building the picture of a pathological individual. On the most primary level, the lexical content is expected to differ from one paragraph to another; we expect the paragraph explaining normality to contain more positively laden words than the one explaining pathology. Obviously, the authors can be expected to build pictures of normality and abnormality using the basic tool for appraisal: words. Indeed, a simple examination shows the preponderance of positively laden words in the first paragraph (enjoying, autonomy, self-confidence, self-assurance, variety, restoring, virtue, equilibrium, comfort, affection, respect, variety, skills, interests, realistic, strengths, worth, comfort) with only a few pejorative words (fallible, less than perfect, assaulted, diminished, despondency, fails, disliked). The second paragraph, by contrast, contains only negatively laden words (abnormally, dependent, difficulties, harshly, critical, shaky, despondency, prolonged, severe, narcissistic, absence, extremely restricted, limited, worthlessness, critical, rejecting, fragile, fraught, difficulty, narcissistic).

This contrast is not surprising, as we expect a strong judgment to be associated with abnormality. If any, the surprise comes from the fact that there are some negative words in the description of normality. An examination of the patterns of words reveals that all the pejorative words found in the description of normality refer to external situations or circumstances, while the negative words in the description of abnormality point towards an abnormal person.

Overall however, the description of abnormality contains a high incidence of negatively laden words. These words co-occur with abstract 'objects' identified as belonging to an abnormal person. First, the identification comes from the way the possessive deictic "his" is used in the text to identify a particular subset of 'things':

> His assessment [which is] critical...
>
> ...his self-confidence [which is] shaky...
>
> ...his orientation which is narcissistic...
>
> ...and his despondency prolonged and severe.

Further, 'things' are defined as *his* by the use of post-modifiers, as in the following sentences, for example:

> The number of people on whom he feels he can depend...
>
> The relationships that the narcissistic person makes...

Or by the use of the verb 'has' - a process describing some quality attributed to or possessed by 'him', for example:

> He has little in the way of resources...

These linguistic patterns developed in this way point towards a depressed person as a *source* of the depression. An abnormal individual is presented as 'a possessor' of dysfunctions and deficiencies.

Other configurations in this text are set out to serve a similar purpose. For example, in the formulation below, circumstances are attributed to the participant rather than to external situations:

> …in the relative absence of inner resources…

By contrast, in the description of a normal person, the possessive deictic is linked with positive words (e.g.: his emotional equilibrium); other wordings (can) are used as denoting freedom of choice; and the negative circumstances are located outside the individual ('less than a perfect world', 'virtue of being human'), while positive circumstances and behaviours (successes, other people, skills) are presented as determined by inner resources.

While the description of a normal person (Extract 2) focuses on external circumstances as a source of lowered self-esteem, this passage (Extract 3) points towards an inner deficiency as sustaining this lowered self-esteem. The abnormal person is no longer just reacting to adverse situational circumstances but is singled out as an owner of a dysfunctional mind and a deficient life. These inner factors are an underlying source of self-esteem remaining in this 'lowered' state for, what is arbitrarily judged as an *abnormally* long period.

So far, this analysis examined how a pejorative assessment, built through the use of negatively laden words has been further grammaticized to point towards an abnormal person. While in a description of a normal person, all negative assessment was directed at the external circumstances, an abnormal person was appraised negatively. As a consequence, the extract focuses its assessment on abnormal people, their mind and the deficiencies identified as belonging to them and thus forming a strong judgment of their conduct and placing responsibility inside their heads.

Another interesting contrasting feature of the two descriptions is their use of agency. While a normal person has been portrayed as making active choices to direct their lives towards self-esteem, an 'abnormally dependent person' is presented in more passive terms, as a victim of their own inner deficiencies. As has been demonstrated, abnormality is construed in terms of abstract 'things' belonging to this individual, like 'his orientation', 'his self-assessment' or 'the relationships that the narcissistic person makes'.

The grammatical structures giving agency to a 'normal person' are absent in this instance where an 'abnormal person' is presented as not in control of their own fate. Compare the following examples:

> If he feels himself disliked by one person, he can turn to an awareness of the affection and respect of another, and can reflect that "you can't please everyone".

and

> His orientation, that is, is more towards what he can get from others than what he can give; it is narcissistic in nature.

These examples are representative of most of the text. There are, however, two seeming exceptions, presenting a normal person as passive and abnormal as active. These exceptions are worthy of detailed examination in order to provide insight into the more subtle ways the link between *pathology* and *lack of agency* is constructed here. The first one comes from Extract 2:

> As has been indicated, the normal person although usually enjoying a reasonable degree of autonomy, self-confidence and self-assurance, by virtue of being human and fallible in a less than perfect world not infrequently finds his self-esteem assaulted and diminished by a variety of situations and events.

This excessive hedging and a non-agentive 'finds his self-esteem assaulted and diminished' function to locate the sources of low self-esteem outside the normal individual. Although the rest of the paragraph construes a normal individual as an agent of their own life, this one sentence presents 'him' as a passive recipient of this 'diminished self-esteem'. The extensive hedging ('the normal person although usually enjoying a reasonable degree of autonomy, self-confidence and self-assurance, by virtue of being human and fallible in a less than perfect world not infrequently') acts to minimize the severity of this 'diminution' and to construct it as something common, yet not of great importance to this *normal* person.

The second example comes from the explanation of abnormality contained in Extract 3:

> Furthermore, **in the relative absence of inner resources** he turns to other people for emotional support and reassurance, and frequently needs a constant supply of these externally derived strengths to maintain his unstable equilibrium.

This paragraph has been built to represent an abnormal person as a victim of his or her inner deficiencies and dysfunctions. This particular sentence, however, is reminiscent of the way texts talked about the normal, agentive individual. Previously, the normal person could 'turn' to other possibilities in the face of adversity, whereas here the abnormal individual also performs this act of 'turning'. However, this act is not exactly agentive, it is not a free choice of turning to other opportunities and choices, but rather a compulsion, and an ineffective and desperate measure. In

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consequence, this active construction of the abnormal person serves to further portray 'him' as compulsive and, in fact, a victim of inner influences. In fact, this construction reinforces the link between lacking agency and pathology, by representing the abnormal person as, once again, 'out of control'.

To summarise, the link between agency and pathology is reinforced by the abstract reality constructed within scientific discourse. Spoken language usually deals with activities people perform in the physical world and how they relate to each other. This 'literal' version of human experience differs from that which can be found in academic writing embracing the scientific paradigm. Textbook discourses, which are full of highly nominalized language, describe the reality of de-contextualised and abstract objects in relation to each other.

The human sciences, by adopting a scientific model of inquiry, have accepted particular ways of talking about human life and circumstances. Consequently, academic writing presents a deterministic reality of people driven, motivated, enforced and compelled by their psychological make-up (Martin and Rose 2003). At the same time, because presenting human individuals as passive works against liberal assumptions about sovereignty and free will, it is much easier to link this deterministic language with 'pathology' rather than 'normality'. This argument is further supported by the fact that explanations of normality disappear from these texts after 1975. Simultaneously, the level of abstraction increases in the later texts, together with a more deterministic view of human life.

The construction of 'inner'

In previous sections I have examined the beginnings of the reification of self-esteem and the way the link between self-esteem, particularly lowered self-esteem began to develop in psychiatric textbooks 30 years ago. In this section I will look at how self-esteem evolves into an entity firmly placed in the mind.

Psychological theorizing, not surprisingly, construes a world that is highly internalized. In the following analysis I will exemplify the nature of psychological and psychiatric claims. These claims portray the world as determined and guided by internalized psychological entities; the processes 'inside the mind' presented as tangible inner objects. Therefore, psychological

entities, pathological or not, play a significant role in building arguments. One of the functions they serve in constructing arguments is their validative and justificatory functions; psychological abstract phenomena inserted into an argument act to validate the claims made without the need for any other justifications.

In the text examined so far (published in 1975 edition of *Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry),* psychological entities like 'self-esteem' or 'inner resources' are used to promote certain ways of being as not only beneficial or desirable, but as obligatory. Consequently, this way of arguing and presenting 'facts' constructs certain ways of being as normal and others as abnormal, without being overtly judgmental and excluding. Abnormal conduct is not constructed as directly coming from anything to do with gender, social class or nationality – they are determined by a 'healthy' mind. The argument does not need to use any other justifications for its judgments; they are subtly enveloped in assumptions about the pathological mind and its undesirability.

The 1975 text differs from later publications in the way that it focused, at least partly, on human activities and feelings. The text shifts from the *inner* to the *external* and back in presenting problematic behaviours, moving inside the head to look for some underlying causes, and then back to a discussion of external manifestations and symptoms of inner dysfunctions. The text refers to both, inter- and intra-personal aspects of behaviour. But even within this framework, the *inner world* develops as a category that both explains and justifies the reasoning.

To make my point clearer, allow me to make this bold move and make you imagine the same argument as the actual 1975 text, but this time written in a way which is stripped of all psychological categories. This hypothetical version may be:

> There are people who have lives full of friends and hobbies and are socially valued, and there are others, who have limited resources, fewer friendships and their value as members of society is not as great. Those who don't have many friends or skills usually find it more difficult when they lose what they have, because they don't have anything else to replace what they have lost. Therefore, generally, they are more affected by detrimental situations.

This hypothetical version presented above is circular in its argumentation and fails to say anything new. In this version, certain ways of living and being are not presented as abnormal but simply undesirable, and they are not self-determined but rather influenced by external

circumstances. It is possible to talk about instances of 'lack' or 'fate' or 'karma' as I imagine may be the case elsewhere, yet the general representation to come from this 'stripped' version is, surprisingly, less deterministic than the *psychologised* account of psychiatric textbooks. This version is also much less persuasive.

It is of course naïve to assume that the text can be so easily stripped of its actual language and all references to inner processes and that it can still tell us the same story. The story is necessarily different since it does not involve an experience of mental life. However, what I have been trying to show is that a narrative stripped of those 'inner world' categories loses its normative qualities. The hypothetical text above does not suggest anything abnormal about the latter type of person; unless we call them 'unlucky', 'recipients of bad karma' or 'narcissistic'. This re-written version does not coerce us into striving to be part of the former group, despite its obvious attractiveness. It does not, in other words, produce an ethical imperative about conduct; not until a judgment is introduced. Once we call it a 'narcissistic personality structure' we introduce a judgment into a division between categories of normal and abnormal. And the judgment works as a normalizing convention.

Therefore, this text cannot be simply perceived as a story told by experts or an information sharing exercise between a teacher and students. The text, as any scientific text, juggles several rhetorical functions. Behind the screen of knowledge sharing, it actively construes this 'knowledge' and relates it to human experience. And although it makes this construction accessible, we need to keep in mind that the text works towards limiting access to this information to those who have been, at least partly, apprenticed into the discourse.

The version of reality this text produces is a particular reality where our fate is determined by our own 'inner selves', but where the expertise on this 'inner self' lies away from us, in the hands of 'mind doctors'. These experts have a capacity to make authoritarian claims about the causal relations between individuals and abstract inner categories. Due to the normative character of these claims, experts not only engage in producing new versions of reality, but they play an important role in constructing ethical obligations and judgments in relation to human conduct. Classifications of normal and abnormal behaviours are not simply a description of

reality or a tool in therapy, but are also ethical practices. As Foucault argued (2000, see also Rose 1998) those practices replaced earlier forms of spiritual and religious practices of ancient Greek or Roman, or Christian traditions and their power to regulate ethical aspects of human conduct.

The way 'self-esteem' and 'inner resources' are used in the 1975 text rhetorically justify particular normative positions. Thus, these categories have a normative role, justifying and obligating us into particular ways of thinking and being. Moreover, the presence of inner categories may act as an incitement to take one's fate in one's own hands, rather than to just accept fate. It therefore opens the possibility of intervention. Placing factors determining one's destiny inside the mind, gives us an option of acting upon these causes. Ancient Greek gods might have been unpredictably unfair, but there was very little mere mortals could do about it. The opportunities for intervention and for blame become endless, once fate is constructed as determined from inside.

The 1975 text inserts an *inner psyche* in its narrative as a mean of validating the argument and normalizing certain positions. As we will see, the construction of self-esteem in relation to depression in the later text published in 1985, provides an interesting shift towards more abstract reality, and removes itself further from a direct exploration of human interactions towards more abstract and a more 'psychologised' view of the world.

Self-esteem and normality

The following text was taken from the 1985 edition of *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*. The construction of self-esteem in this text differs from the 1975 text in two ways. First, there is a notable shift towards locating self-esteem inside the mind (it shifts from the realm of *reactions* to the realm of *psyche*). Second, in the 1985 text, self-esteem started to develop as a pathological category *per se*.

In Extract 4 below, the summary of the Bibring theory reads differently; the description of a normal person is omitted from the text and so are the claims relating to lowered self-esteem being normal. Diminished self-esteem is no longer a normal reaction to unavoidable events; the reaction constructed in the earlier text, now turns to be an inner incapability and helplessness,

the perception of oneself as lonely and unloved, as well as weak and inferior. The authors recap these claims by explicitly linking depression with inner weakness and inferiority of the ego:

Extract 4

Taken from: Kaplan, H. I., Sadock B. J. (1985). Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry. 4th edition. Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins

DEPRESSIVE STATES

Further development in the understanding of depression was provided by Edward Bibring in 1953. He pointed out that a common theme in depressive states was the undermining or diminution of self-esteem. Such patients felt helpless in the face of superior forces surrounding them, or they felt incapable of controlling and directing their inescapable fate. They saw themselves as the victims of loneliness, isolation, and lack of love and affection; moreover, they felt themselves to be inherently weak, inferior, or failures in life. They were helpless and powerless. Bibring thus describes depression as

…the emotional expression (indication) of a stage of helplessness and powerlessness of the ego, irrespective of what may have caused the breakdown of the mechanisms which established his self-esteem.

Thus depression must be seen not merely as the instinctual vicissitudes of object loss but also as the inner weakness, vulnerability, and sense of helplessness and inferiority within the ego itself. It should be noted that neurotic depression usually involves a reactive component and are to be distinguished from more severe depressive syndromes, such as psychotic depressive states or manic depressive states, in which a degree of repression is considerably more severe and in which the impairment of reality testing and of interpersonal functioning is much greater.

PATHOGENESIS

Depressive neurosis usually involves reaction to loss or failure. The loss may be death of a loved person or a disappointment by the love object. A depression can also be triggered by failure to live up to one's own standards or to achieve specific personal or vocational goals. In any case, depression is characterized essentially by diminution or loss of self-esteem. Important factors affecting self-esteem would seem to be the following: First, the patient has a poor self-image, usually based on early pathological development of self-concept in an unfavorable or rejecting family atmosphere. The self-concept is based on the poor quality of introjects, which form the basis of the organization of the self. Second, self-esteem can be lowered as a result of superego aggression. The discrepancy between behavior and the values maintained by the superego is fixated in the archaic, infantile, or punitive form or if it regresses to this level of organization, the predisposition to depression and the damage to self-esteem is correspondingly increased. Third, self-esteem depends on the nature and level of integration of the ego-ideal. The more realistic the organization of the ego-ideal, the more possible it is for the individual to satisfy its demands. If the ego ideal is excessively grandiose, it places excessive demands on the ego, and the result can be feelings of inadequacy on the part of the ego. Fourth, the maintenance of self-esteem depends in part on the capacity for effective functioning of the ego itself. The individual's actual abilities and talents and the relatively harmonious integration of ego-functions determine the person's capacity for successfully meeting the demands of the ego-ideal and consequently determine in part the level of self-esteem.

Nonetheless, depressive patients, as a rule, are found to have a considerable degree of oral instinctual and narcissistic underpinnings to their depression. This is particularly true in cases where

the excessive demands of the ego-ideal are determined by primitive narcissistic wishes that tend to be excessive and sometimes even grandiose. The impossibility of meetings such expectations and ideals set the stage for the punitive response of the superego. The failure in self-esteem, however, may reflect developmental difficulties and impairments from pregenital levels of development and may reflect difficulties from very early levels indeed.

The psychoanalytical treatment of depressive states is relatively successful, but only in cases where the depression is clearly reactive and does not reflect excessive fixations at pregenital (oral) levels. As shall be seen, the presence of depression in a potential analytic patient is a matter of careful diagnostic evaluation. The treatment of depressed patients often evolves into more fundamental treatment of narcissistic disorder, usually of a narcissistic character disorder. Characterological factors that contribute to the undermining of self-esteem have primarily to do with the more latent aspects of narcissistic fixation along with its correlative narcissistic entitlement. An excessively intense depression, or a depressive state that has persisted over prolonged periods of time, would be a relative contraindication to strictly psychoanalytic treatment. (Kaplan and Sadock, 1985, p. 400)

In the text above, self-esteem is placed inside the mind and invested with a potential to produce pathology. This has been rhetorically achieved by merging self-esteem with narcissism. As has been discussed earlier, there is a clear separation between the narcissistic personality structure and self-esteem in the 1975 text, whereas 10 years later the two categories become synonymous of each other. The factors which caused narcissism in 1975 are re-used in 1985 as factors which affected self-esteem. For example, compare:

1975:

…some of the **roots of this narcissistic personality structure** might lie in the individual's early parental relationships… The child of parents who are consistently harshly critical of his person and his performance will, in due course, internalize these parental attitudes and will develop the same damaging assessment of himself.

1985:

Important **factors affecting self-esteem** would seem to be the following: First, the patient has a poor self-image, usually based on early pathological development of self-concept in an unfavorable or rejecting family atmosphere. The self-concept is based on the poor quality of introjects, which form the basis of the organization of the self.

The troubling circularity of the earlier argument, coming from the fact that self-esteem has been explained by a patient's negative estimates of self, is now circumvented by placing self-esteem in the mind and fusing it with narcissism. In this way, the pathological nature of narcissism, which has been affirmed by psychodynamic theory for some time, has been utilized to pathologize a new concept; lowered self-esteem.

Towards the end of the later text (1985) the authors claim that the "[c]haracterological factors that contribute to the undermining of self-esteem have primarily to do with the more latent aspects of narcissistic fixation along with its correlative narcissistic entitlement". This further reinforces the link between the two: self-esteem and narcissism, further locating self-esteem in the mind and, simultaneously, constructing lowered self-esteem as pathological.

Once the location of self-esteem has been moved from the sphere of interaction with the social towards 'in the mind', it becomes a category that needed to remain stable. While in the earlier editions, 'diminutions in self-esteem' happen to everyone and were 'not necessarily pathological', in 1985, lowered self-esteem is fully linked with abnormal psychological functioning.

The factors that lowered self-esteem in 1975 were primarily reactions to external circumstances, for example:

> those times at which one feels weak and helpless before an overpowering situation with an inevitable outcome
>
> those situations in which one feels unlovable because of thoughts, emotions, impulses, or actions which one considers undesirable and contrary to one's ideals;
>
> those in which one feels unloved by another person whose good opinion one values

In 1985, these factors affecting self-esteem are firmly placed in the mind:

> First, the patient has a poor self-image, (..) based on the poor quality of introjects, which form the basis of the organization of the self.
>
> Second, self-esteem can be lowered as a result of superego aggression...
>
> Third, self-esteem depends on the nature and level of integration of the ego-ideal...
>
> Fourth, the maintenance of self-esteem depends in part on the capacity for effective functioning of the ego itself.

In 1985, self-esteem is no longer affected by outside circumstances and lowered self-esteem is no longer a result of conflict between the individual and the social. Now, the battle has been placed inside the mind; both sides of the conflict have been internalized. The battle between individual and adverse situations has been replaced by an internal conflict between the ego and the ego-ideal, or the superego. Lowered self-esteem is no longer a reaction; it is a lack of inner balance. The factors that affect self-esteem are placed in the mind. Moreover, the lowering of self-esteem is no longer normal- it is a pathological dysfunction of the *inner self*.

To summarize, in 1975, self-esteem is constructed as a reaction, and is thus placed in the intermediate site between the person and the external world. Changes in self-esteem were construed as normal, and only when not dealt with due to the lack of inner resources, would they turn pathological. With time, explanations started locating self-esteem inside the mind. Once it was located in the mind, self-esteem became a more enduring quality and any changes in self-esteem were now linked with pathology. Lowered self-esteem is no longer an effect of adverse circumstances, but is a part of a dysfunctional personality, a pathological mind, a result of faulty upbringing and abnormal functioning of the psyche.

The category of low self-esteem as an inherently pathological construct

The reader might have noticed that none of the above texts referred to a category of 'low self-esteem'. In 1975, self-esteem can be diminished, assaulted, lowered and its level alternated, but low self-esteem as such has not yet entered the discourse. Similarly, in 1985, self-esteem may be potentially lowered, damaged, undermined, maintained and it can fail, or experience failure ('the failure of self-esteem'). By 1995, self-esteem can be collapsed, crushed or lost. But there are also new categories introduced in the 1995 text (quoted in full below), of 'low self-esteem', 'high self-esteem', 'vicissitudes of self-esteem' and 'underlying instability in the system of self-esteem'.

Even a brief look at the processes associated with self-esteem, gives us a sense of how the texts work towards establishing self-esteem as a reified category, a 'thing' which can be measured and manipulated. It is being continuously remodeled moving closely towards this well-defined and distinguishable category, with a potential to operate as an independent and well-established psychological construct. Therefore, examination of these texts will give us a rare opportunity to observe how the category of 'low self-esteem' developed as already invested with pathological implications.

Before I present and discuss the content of the 1995 text, I wish to go back to Matthiessen's (1993) examination of mental constructs mentioned earlier in this chapter;. Matthessen, investigating aspects of psychological writing, claims that psychological and psychiatric models imitate folk models of human experience. Similar to folk explanations, these disciplines locate

the source of experience, ideas and subjectivity inside the mind. They promote the view of the centrality of human beings and their privileged position – mainly by constructing individuals as endowed with consciousness and thus able to project the effects of their awareness in the form of ideas.

Matthiessen concludes that this mind-based, privileged perspective of human beings has evolved, and is best illustrated by grammatical characteristics relating to mental processes. As discussed earlier, mental processes differ from other types of processes in the way they function in language. They play a role in constructing reality centered around conscious individuals (humans) who are able to create and project ideas and facts. According to Matthiessen, these ideas and facts are considered to be of a higher physical order than material things.

Mattheissen's (1993) examination shows that the grammar functions to differentiate between four rather than three sub-types of mental processes; processes of intention, cognition, emotion and perception. These sub-types possess different grammatical properties, and thus have specific functions in language. For example, only the first two, cognition and intention, are discursively involved in creating the world of ideas. This gives the processes of cognition and intention a privileged position over the other two; they can project ideas and facts (e.g. *he believed he was sick, he wanted the dog to stay*). The processes of emotion and perception (i.e., *to fear, to hear*) are not involved in either construction or projection of ideas.

Notably, in the disciplines of psychiatry and psychology, all mental processes of cognition, intention, emotion and perception are talked about as *phenomena*, specifically mental phenomena, and are presented as 'objects' rather than actions. As discussed earlier, this is achieved in a process of nominalization, or more broadly, grammatical metaphor. Once nominalized, thoughts, feelings, perceptions and intentions all become 'things'; they are presented as relating to other 'things', to subsequently construe a world of causal and consequential relations among these abstract concepts.

There are, however, marked differences between the nominalizations of cognition and nominalizations of emotion, perception or intention, that is between 'things' related to different groups of mental processes. For example, objects representing processes of feelings such as

anger, love, sadness and *grief* cannot be quantified as discrete phenomena. We do not talk about *angers, loves* or *sadnesses*. On the other hand, we talk about *thoughts, memories* and *beliefs*. The objects representing feelings are presented as an 'unbounded mass', and as Matthiessen suggests, this is consistent with metaphorical conceptualizations of feelings as an unbounded water- or air-like mass.

This claim is supported by Lakoff (1980, 1987) who proposed that metaphorical representations of emotions produce an image of emotions being 'out of control' and having to be contained. Consequently, the nominalized processes of feelings are more like qualities (i.e.: strength, weight, height) than objects. By contrast, thoughts, perceptions and intentions are presented as unbounded things (Matthiessen, 1993), and therefore they are more in the realm of discrete objects.

This distinction in the way mental processes are reified can be particularly useful in examining difficult to categorize constructs. Although it is easy to agree that 'self-esteem' is some sort of nominalization – because it is realized as a 'thing' grammatically – it is difficult to establish what exactly has been nominalized. It is not clear (as is often the case with nominalizations) as to whether it is an affect (liking oneself), or some kind of cognitive assessment or self-perception, that is metaphorically represented as self-esteem.

According to Mruk's (2000) analysis of psychological definitions of self-esteem, there are two main components united in the construct of self-esteem: an 'affective' component referring to liking oneself, and a second one relating to self-evaluation which he called 'cognitive'. Drawing on the assumption that the construction of the world starts with language, these two components should be present at a lexico-grammatical level of the text. The following examination will hopefully shed some light on the kind of components self-esteem consists of, as a discursive object.

It has been demonstrated earlier that in the 1975 text, self-esteem was presented as an object possessing particular qualities consistent with grammatical representations, or reifications, of feelings. This, as the reader would remember has been achieved mainly through a *fluid metaphor*. The expressions referring to self-esteem in the 1975 text were as follows:

Alterations in the level of self-esteem

Lowered self-esteem

Diminution of self-esteem

Self-esteem is dangerously lowered.

Self-esteem is therefore reified as a concrete mass rather than a discrete object; it cannot be made plural into self-esteems. This points towards the affective nature of the construct of self-esteem. Indeed, it is talked about accordingly, as a fluid or airy substance: its level can change and it can be diminished (as in *diminished joy, fear*). On the other hand, self-esteem is also talked about in a way that emotions cannot be talked about (*lowered fear*?, *assaulted joy*?). However, this way of speaking is similar to the way reified perception or cognition can be talked about (for example: assaulted beliefs, diminished hearing, lowered memory), but we need to remember that, in the 1975 text, self-esteem is not yet located 'in the mind' or 'inside' of an individual. More likely, at this stage, self-esteem is grammatically constructed as a 'thing' describing quality. Weight, strength, height can be *lowered*, *altered*, *diminished*, and still presented as a concrete mass. It is consistent thus with a view that in 1975 self-esteem was not presented as a cognitive process, reified and located 'in the mind', but as a reaction a person has to a situation or a set of circumstances.

In 1985 some attributes of self-esteem as a 'reaction' are still present (i.e., *fluid metaphor*), but generally the construction of self-esteem shifts, moving away from external, situational aspects, which presumably accompany 'changes in self-esteem'. This time, the alterations become more of a function of an inner conflict. Thus, the construction of self-esteem shifted from a sphere of mediation between the external and reactional, towards the inner psyche.

In the 1985 text self-esteem is defined in terms of how a person feels (*feeling helpless and incapable, felt themselves to be inherently weak, inferior and failures*), or how they perceive themselves (*seeing themselves as victims of loneliness, isolation and lack of love*). Yet, the expressions: "felt helpless', 'felt incapable of controlling…' or 'felt themselves to be inherently weak…' are not referring to emotional states. They denote self-assessment; 'I feel I have no friends' does not reveal anything about my emotional state – it is a statement about my subjective perception, my opinion. A projection 'I think' differs from 'I feel' because the latter

highlights subjective and potentially irrational aspects of what is being stated, while the former gives a sense of being a more rational opinion. The first one projects ideas, while the second one projects a subjective assessment of an inner state. Therefore, although the wordings of the definition of self-esteem refer to feelings and perceptions, self-esteem is constructed here as a subjective self-assessment.

Looking further in the 1985 text, self-esteem appears in combination with other 'things' which qualify or quantify it.

loss of self-esteem

factors affecting self-esteem

damage to self-esteem

self-esteem depends on the nature of…

maintenance of self-esteem

determine the level of self-esteem

the failure in self-esteem

undermining of self-esteem.

These formulations suggest a discursive shift away from the realm of affect and perception towards the realm of cognition. The reification becomes more tangible, as realized by the lexical formulations: *maintained, lost, damaged, undermined*. The metaphors of fluid or air can only be partly applied to self-esteem in this text (it still has *levels*). Yet, in many ways, self-esteem has become more concrete (i.e. it can be *damaged, maintained, lo*st, it can *fail*, etc.).

Out of all the psychological constructs, self-esteem in this text is closest to the construct of 'memory'; memory can be 'damaged', 'maintained', 'can fail' or be 'undermined'. We can also talk about 'factors affecting' the memory. Yet because it has retained some aspects of the grammar of emotions, it is not quite a discrete unit.

This move towards further reification of self-esteem into a more internal and 'solid' object continues in the 1995 text (quoted in full below). The formulations below illustrate this extended reification:

Injury that crushes self-esteem

Loss of self-esteem

Self-esteem is [defined as…]

part of habitual core

integral to personality structure

Low self esteem is a personality trait

Low self-esteem is a defining attribute

Apparently high self-esteem

Instability in the system of self-esteem

Baseline of low self-esteem

Vicissitudes of self-esteem.

In the 1995 text, there is not much left of the grammar of reified feelings. By now the discourse has parted with 'level of self-esteem' and 'lowered and diminished self-esteem' and instead works towards construing self-esteem as more concrete, through verbs (e.g. *crushed*), but also through explicitly defining self-esteem in terms of other psychological construals (*personality*, *habitual core, trait*). The use of relational processes (e.g. *is*) in phrases that set to define self-esteem (self-esteem is…) reinforces the reification of the concept by offering a substantial amount of 'information' about it. Now, the text moves towards specific claims about what self-esteem is or is not.

The construction of self-esteem as a discrete phenomenon persists in this text. These constructions, even to a greater extent than before, are reminiscent of the way the concept of memory is constructed in language. Like *memory*, self-esteem is now discursively structured as a system of sub-categories. Low self-esteem and high self-esteem are no longer qualifications or quantifications of self-esteem, but separate categories. Similar to cognitive conceptualizations of memory into distinct sub-categories (long term, short term), self-esteem is also classified. (There have been other sub-categories of self-esteem offered by psychology elsewhere, for example: *global self-esteem*, which support this analysis) (Steinberg, 1995; Mruk, 2000)

The move towards the reification of self-esteem as a cognitive structure is consequential for many reasons. Firstly, it locates self-esteem firmly in the mind. Secondly, self-esteem is adapted to be an object of study that can be more easily quantified and categorized, but also sub-categorized into other 'objects', which provide further normalizing tools. These consequences will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. However, here I wish to examine the text

published in 1995, the way self-esteem is linked in this text with depression, and the way both *depression* and *changes in self-esteem* are constructed as pathological.

The first paragraph of this text focuses on theory, and more particularly on a 'reformulation' of the psychodynamic theory of depression in terms of self-esteem. This text works further towards placing self-esteem in the mind, linking it fully with inner dysfunctions. It also locates the causes of depression inside the mind, leaving out an actual loss as a possible cause. In 1975 'sadness following loss' was an 'important and primary ingredient' of depression, and in 1985 'death of a loved person or a disappointment by the love object' were presented as one of two causes, together with a failure to achieve a life goal, both associated with lowered self-esteem. In 1995, depression and self-esteem are linked solely to the 'inability to give up unattainable goals and ideals'.

Extract 5

Taken from : Sadock, B.J. Sadock, V.A. (1995). Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry. 6th edition. Baltimore, MD : Williams & Wilkins

DEPRESSION AS LOSS OF SELF-ESTEEM

Reformulation of the dynamics of depression in terms of ego suffering a collapse of self-esteem represents a further conceptual break with the original id-psychological formulations: Depression is said to originate from the ego's inability to give up unattainable goals and ideals. The model further posits that the narcissistic injury that crushes the depressed patient's self-esteem is imposed by the internalised values of the ego rather than the hydraulic pressure of retroflected thanatonic energy deriving from the id. Because the construct of the ego is rooted in social and cultural reality, loss of self-esteem may result from symbolic losses involving power, status, roles, identity, values, and purpose for existence. Thus, the existential and sociocultural implications of depression conceived as a derivative ego state provide the clinician with a far more flexible and pragmatic tool for understanding depressed person than the archaic hydraulic metaphors related to libidinal vicissitudes. That model represents one of the first attempts to formulate depression in terms that subsequent psychological theory and research could operationalise in more testable form.

Self-esteem is part of the habitual core of the individual and as such is integral to the personality structure. Indeed, low self-esteem conceived as a trait is a major defining attribute of the depressive (melancholic) personality. While it is understandable how such individuals can easily sink into melancholia in the face of environmental adversity, it is not obvious why persons with apparent high self-esteem, such as those with hypomanic and narcissistic personalities, also succumb to melancholy with relative ease. To explain such cases, one must invoke an underlying instability in the system of self-esteem that renders it vulnerable to depression. The opposite is also known to occur; that is, manic episodes may develop from baseline of low self-esteem, as sometimes occurs in patients with dysthymic disorder.

The foregoing considerations suggest that the vicissitudes of self-esteem deemed central to the model of depression as loss of self-esteem are manifestations of a more fundamental mood dysregulation. In

In this text, depression is said to originate from the 'ego's inability to give up unattainable goals and ideals'. These unattainable goals, which have been earlier referred to as unrealistic 'ego-ideals' result in 'narcissistic injury' which in turn 'crushed the depressed patient's self-esteem'.

This way of explaining depression as 'a failure' goes back to William James' definition of self-esteem as a function of 'successes' over 'pretensions' (that is, aspirations) (James, 1918/1950). If the two are of equal value, the individual will experience a balance between what she or he wants to achieve and actual achievements, and as a consequence, they will achieve a well balanced self-esteem.

The earlier references to causes of depression as located outside individuals have been omitted; the theory has been stripped of actual loss or grieving as a cause of depression. Furthermore, Freud's explanation of depression as an inner conflict of a libidinal nature has been replaced by an inner balance between the ego and ego-ideals, between what we want and what we actually perceive ourselves to be. Maintaining self-esteem becomes synonymous with maintaining one's ego in a balanced state.

In 1975, self-esteem was only one of many possible factors linked to depression, a reaction to adverse circumstances normally counteracted by inner strength. In 1985, both of the main factors linked with depression, failure and loss, have been associated with lowered self-esteem; lowered self esteem becomes an essential characteristic of depression. In 1995, a new category of low self-esteem is 'a major defining attribute of the depressive (melancholic) personality'.

The idea that the level of self-esteem may change was an acceptable phenomenon thirty years ago. Later however, the alterations in self-esteem were gradually more and more problematized. By 1995 all changes in self-esteem are pathological and symptomatic of a deeper, underlying pathology:

> The foregoing considerations suggest that the vicissitudes of self-esteem deemed central to the model of depression as loss of self-esteem are manifestations of a more fundamental mood dysregulation. In classical psychoanalysis it is conceded that such dysregulation is of constitutional origin.

In 1975, depressive patients were perceived as engaged in a conflict between social demands and their personal needs to feel loved and successful, a conflict they could not resolve because of their inner weakness (which in turn lead to them being depressed). Later, in 1985, the same patients were experiencing an inner conflict involving abstract, inner categories, like ego or ego-ideal.

By 1995, depression has been placed firmly in the mind and it has become conceptualised as a failure to keep one's self-esteem from collapsing. By now, the loss of self-esteem has been successfully constructed and consistently presented as a symptom of inner pathology. Simultaneously, self-esteem has grammatically evolved into a concrete cognitively structured object. Thus, the 1995 text introduces another category, by now inherently associated with pathology – a category of 'low self-esteem'.

This introduction of the category of 'low self-esteem' serves to reinforce the picture of self-esteem as a 'thing inside the mind', something that can be measured, assessed, quantified and also classified. Most importantly it classifies people and conduct as abnormal. The category of 'low self-esteem' has become a label of pathology. It is now a completely 'internal' object, with no links to external, situational aspects.

This label of pathology can be further disseminated and utilized as a category of control. It can further justify certain positions and ways of being as right and ethically sound. Because of the pathological connotations attached to it, the category of low self-esteem can have a powerful impact on the construction of codes of conduct. This point will be further elaborated on in later chapters, when I will expand on the connections between self-esteem and the construction of ethical principles in neoliberal democracies. In this section, I will continue my *grammatical investigations* of the three texts and examine other discursive features used in the construction of normal and abnormal.

To summarize, in this chapter I have discussed the changes within discourse that occurred in the last 30 years in relation to self-esteem, its location and vicissitudes. The examination of these texts has revealed the progressive relocation of self-esteem from the external world in 1975 to being placed firmly 'in the mind' by 1995. This shift, as has been demonstrated, was associated

with self-esteem being represented as more concrete and changes in (the level of) self-esteem as increasingly pathological. This way of presenting self-esteem as an internal structure tightly allied with abnormality, plays a role in inventing new normalizing and pathologizing categories. These categories construct new values and norms formulated in terms of psychological dispositions, which link a range of inner qualities with moral and ethical conduct. This, in turn, allows for the introduction of various interventions conducted on people themselves with the help of experts.

In the work of Mruk (2000), to which I referred earlier, the author set out to find what self-esteem truly is, and to find a comprehensive definition of self-esteem. In order to do so, he combined all major research and definitions of self-esteem to find the right, true and timeless definition of self-esteem. This way of examining the construct, according to Wittgenstein, creates more confusion while generating more questions than it attempts to answer. Instead, according to Wittgenstein, the examination of concepts should be comprised of 'grammatical investigations' into how the concepts are used and how they develop with time. This type of analysis provides some insight into our ways of conceptualizing psychological constructs and their linguistic genealogy, while simultaneously offering a more dynamic picture. Rather than looking for some underlying truths about what self-esteem really is, based on how it has been defined within the last 100 years, as has been attempted by Mruk (2000) and other researchers, this analysis has attempted to trace the discursive 'evolution' of the concept of self-esteem and place it in the context of social development. In other words, this analysis has taken as central the context and the consequences of linguistic constructions around the concept of self-esteem, in order to answer the very basic question in social psychology about the nature of social reality.

Chapter 5: Self-esteem and cause-effect associations

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the analysis explored the ways in which 'self-esteem' has evolved in psychiatric writings into an object of science and into a structure firmly located in the mind. The analysis has examined how the concept has been reified and how meanings attached to 'self-esteem' were constructed and presented in grammar. In order to explore the theme of reification, the analysis has focused on lexical as well as grammatical elements pertaining to these aspects of reality construction. As self-esteem is an abstract concept, the analysis has necessarily revolved around metaphors, both lexical and grammatical. In the examination of how the concept of self-esteem has been metaphorically constructed, particular attention has been given to nominalizations and nominal groups, and to evaluations implicit in language.

The concept of grammatical metaphor has been particularly important to the analysis. Self-esteem has been reified and represented discursively as an 'object' because of the metaphorical expressions within the grammar of the texts. An important and significant role has been played by ideational (experiential) grammatical metaphors through which happenings and beings are 'transformed' into abstract objects. In the texts analyzed, these objects have been constructed *as if* they existed in some continuous, unchanging way outside our sphere of influence. That is *as if* they were independent of the language that had given them their abstract 'form'.

Therefore, grammatical metaphors are central to the ways self-esteem has been constructed as a 'thing' and linked to abnormality. However, the previous chapter focused on a group of ideational metaphors that pertain to *experiential* aspects of reality construction. Other aspects, or features, used in constructing reality pertain to the ways the reified, abstract objects are represented as 'linked' or 'associated' with one another. The associations between abstract entities are also constructed metaphorically. Since 'objects' like the self-esteem of depression are abstract concepts – specific events or actions turned into universal 'things' – the relationship between them must also be constructed through grammatical metaphors. The sub-

type of grammatical, ideational metaphor that realizes the associations between abstract objects is called a *logical metaphor*.

Furthermore, the construction of relationships between these abstract phenomena is likely to follow that typical for scientific discourse; a cause-effect pattern of relations. It is therefore expected that the authors of the texts aim to satisfy the demands of the cause-effect model, dominant in scientific discourse (Halliday, 1993). At the same time, the authors have had to reconcile the difficulties of making clear cause-effect claims about mental phenomena.

Consequently, it is expected that the tension coming from the above factors will be observable in the text itself. I suggest that this tension must be visible at the level of grammar. The aim of the following analysis is therefore to describe the patterns of constructing associations between abstract mental phenomena and to describe those features that allow the authors to reconcile the tensions, and to present a coherent and convincing argument about associations between self-esteem and depression.

In this analysis, I will discuss in more detail how the scientific model has influenced the way psychiatry writes about its subjects in terms of cause-effect relations. This will be followed by an overview of general features that generate a framework for the reading of the texts. This will be followed by a detailed overview of grammatical resources typically involved in the construction of the associations between 'entities' in the texts. Finally, the analysis will focus on grammatical patterns involved in the construction of directional association between depression and self-esteem.

The following analysis utilizes the texts that have been already examined in the preceding chapter. Despite the temptation to bring in more text (out of the plethora of texts considered by the author in a preliminary analysis) the motivation to continue with the same texts has been provoked by an aspiration to provide a more 'in depth' analysis. Rather than spreading the examination over a wide range of materials, I believe a detailed analysis of a few texts offers a rare opportunity to demonstrate the enormous complexity of the texts involved. This complexity is often lost in analyses that spread their focus over too many examples.

For the convenience and the ease of reference, I introduce here all three texts in full.

Extract 6

SELF-ESTEEM AND THE PERSONALITY STRUCTURE.

It was Edward Bibring who called attention to the importance of alterations in the level of self-esteem in depressive states. Indeed, since the publication of his paper on that subject many investigators have tended to see such changes as the central and basic element in depression. Without overlooking the possibility that this view is too narrow and that experience of sadness following a loss is an equally important and primary ingredient, one can still agree that lowered self-esteem is so intimately associated with depression that it is in many instances a sine qua non. One can further agree with Bibring that diminution in self-esteem are not necessary pathological but occur in everyone under certain circumstances. These are essentially three in nature: (1) those times at which one feels weak and helpless before an overpowering situation with an inevitable outcome: (2) those situations in which one feels unlovable because of thoughts, emotions, impulses, or actions which one considers undesirable and contrary to one's ideals; and (3) those in which one feels unloved by another person whose good opinion one values.

As has been indicated, the normal person although usually enjoying a reasonable degree of autonomy, self-confidence and self-assurance, by virtue of being human and fallible in a less than perfect world not infrequently finds his self-esteem assaulted and diminished by a variety of situations and events. But his bouts of despondency are neither long in duration nor incapacitating in degree, and he has a variety of ways of restoring his emotional equilibrium. If he fails ignominiously at one task, he can comfort himself with memories of successes in others and can vow to do better next time. If he feels himself disliked by one person, he can turn to an awareness of the affection and respect of another, and can reflect that "you can't please everyone". The variety of his human relationships, the diversity of his skills and interests, the realistic self-appraisal of his strengths and weaknesses joined to a predominance of a feeling of worth and comfort with himself, all help to keep him on a relatively even keel.

On the other hand, the person who is abnormally dependent on other people may find himself in difficulties when faced by a situation that lowers his self-esteem. In the first place, his self-assessment tends to be more harshly critical and his confidence in his capabilities and his basic worth is generally shaky. Faced with an event that hits at his self-esteem, he has little in the way of resources to combat its diminution, and his consequent despondency may be prolonged and severe. Furthermore, in the relative absence of inner resources he turns to other people for emotional support and reassurance, and frequently needs a constant supply of these externally derived strengths to maintain his unstable equilibrium. His orientation, that is, is more towards what he can get from the others than what he can give; it is narcissistic in nature. In addition, the number of people on whom he feels he can depend is often extremely restricted, not infrequently being limited to singly highly important person. The relationships that the narcissistic person makes with others tend to be fragile and fraught with potential difficulty. If his self-esteem is lowered as a result, for example, of failing to achieve a goal, he may quite unjustifiably feel that others are critical and rejecting of him. The resulting despair and depression at this imagined loss only compound the original feeling of worthlessness. If he suffers the actual loss of a needed person, the consequences can be profoundly disturbing, since he has now in reality lost the source of his desperately needed emotional support; not only must he bear the anguish of grief, but his self-esteem is dangerously lowered as the supporting supplies are cut off, and the depression that results may be of severely pathological proportions.

It may not be hard to see how some of the roots of this narcissistic personality structure might lie in the individual's early parental relationships, and analysis of adults as well as direct observation of

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young children lend support to this supposition. The child of parents who are consistently harshly critical of his person and his performance will, in due course, internalize these parental attitudes and will develop the same damaging assessment of himself. At the same time his resulting failure to build confidence in his own worth and capabilities keep him dependently tied to his parents for the support and reassurance that he needs. He soon learns that to maintain their favor he must conform to their standards, and this only straightens his self-criticalness of those aspects of his thoughts impulses and actions which run contrary to their sanctions. Thus constrained and constricted, he fails to grow emotionally and arrives at adulthood with a personality structure fixed in these infantile forms, looking for relationships that re-create his childhood patterns. (Kaplan & Sadock, 1975, p. 1259)

Taken from : Freedman, A.M., Kaplan, H. I., Sadock B. J. (1975). Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry. 2nd edition. Baltimore : Williams & Wilkins

Extract 7

DEPRESSIVE STATES

Further development in the understanding of depression was provided by Edward Bibring in 1953. He pointed out that a common theme in depressive states was the undermining or diminution of self-esteem. Such patients felt helpless in the face of superior forces surrounding them, or they felt incapable of controlling and directing their inescapable fate. They saw themselves as the victims of loneliness, isolation, and lack of love and affection; moreover, they felt themselves to be inherently weak, inferior, or failures in life. They were helpless and powerless. Bibring thus describes depression as

…the emotional expression (indication) of a stage of helplessness and powerlessness of the ego, irrespective of what may have caused the breakdown of the mechanisms which established his self-esteem.

Thus depression must be seen not merely as the instinctual vicissitudes of object loss but also as the inner weakness, vulnerability, and sense of helplessness and inferiority within the ego itself. It should be noted that neurotic depression usually involve a reactive component and are to be distinguished from more severe depressive syndromes, such as psychotic depressive states or manic depressive states, in which degree of repression is considerably more severe and in which the impairment of reality testing and of interpersonal functioning is much greater.

PATHOGENESIS

Depressive neurosis usually involves reaction to loss or failure. The loss may be death of a loved person or a disappointment by the love object. A depression can also be triggered by failure to live up to one's own standards or to achieve specific personal or vocational goals. In any case, depression is characterized essentially by diminution or loss of self-esteem. Important factors affecting self-esteem would seem to be the following: First, the patient has a poor self-image, usually based on early pathological development of self-concept in an unfavorable or rejecting family atmosphere. The self-concept is based on the poor quality of introjects, which form the basis of the organization of the self. Second, self-esteem can be lowered as a result of superego aggression. The discrepancy between behavior and the values maintained by the superego is fixated in the archaic, infantile, or punitive form or if it regresses to this level of organization, the predisposition to depression and the damage to self-esteem is correspondingly increased. Third, self-esteem depends on the nature and level of integration of the ego-ideal. The more realistic the organization of the ego-ideal, the more possible it is for the individual to satisfy its demands. If the ego ideal is excessively grandiose, it places excessive demands on the ego, and the result can be feelings of inadequacy on the part of the ego. Fourth, the

maintenance of self-esteem depends in part on the capacity for effective functioning of the ego itself. The individual's actual abilities and talents and the relatively harmonious integration of ego-functions determine the person's capacity for successfully meeting the demands of the ego-ideal and consequently determine in part the level of self-esteem.

Nonetheless, depressive patients, as a rule, are found to have a considerable degree of oral instinctual and narcissistic underpinnings to their depression. This is particularly true in cases where the excessive demands of the ego-ideal are determined by primitive narcissistic wishes that tend to be excessive and sometimes even grandiose. The impossibility of meetings such expectations and ideals set the stage for the punitive response of the superego. The failure in self-esteem, however, may reflect developmental difficulties and impairments from pregenital levels of development and may reflect difficulties from very early levels indeed.

The psychoanalytical treatment of depressive states is relatively successful, but only in cases where the depression is clearly reactive and does not reflect excessive fixations at pregenital (oral) levels. As shall be seen, the presence of depression in a potential analytic patient is a matter of careful diagnostic evaluation. The treatment of depressed patients often evolves into more fundamental treatment of narcissistic disorder, usually of a narcissistic character disorder. Characterological factors that contribute to the undermining of self-esteem have primarily to do with the more latent aspects of narcissistic fixation along with its correlative narcissistic entitlement. An excessively intense depression, or a depressive state that has persisted over prolonged periods of time, would be a relative contraindication to strictly psychoanalytic treatment (Kaplan and Sadock, 1985, p. 400

Taken from: Kaplan, H. I., Sadock B. J. (1985). Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry. 4th edition. Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins

Extract 8

DEPRESSION AS LOSS OF SELF-ESTEEM

Reformulation of the dynamics of depression in terms of ego suffering a collapse of self-esteem represents a further conceptual break with the original id-psychological formulations: Depression is said to originate from the ego's inability to give up unattainable goals and ideals. The model further posits that the narcissistic injury that crushes the depressed patient's self-esteem is imposed by the internalised values of the ego rather than the hydraulic pressure of retroflected thanatonic energy deriving from the id. Because the construct of the ego is rooted in social and cultural reality, loss of self-esteem may result from symbolic losses involving power, status, roles, identity, values, and purpose for existence. Thus, the existential and sociocultural implications of depression conceived as a derivative ego state provide the clinician with a far more flexible and pragmatic tool for understanding depressed person than the archaic hydraulic metaphors related to libidinal vicissitudes. That model represents one of the first attempts to formulate depression in terms that subsequent psychological theory and research could operationalise in more testable form.

Self-esteem is part of the habitual core of the individual and as such is integral to the personality structure. Indeed, low self-esteem conceived as a trait is a major defining attribute of the depressive (melancholic) personality. While it is understandable how such individuals can easily sink into melancholia in the face of environmental adversity, it is not obvious why persons with apparent high self-esteem, such as those with hypomanic and narcissistic personalities, also succumb to melancholy with relative ease. To explain such cases, one must invoke an underlying instability in the system of self-esteem that renders it vulnerable to depression. The opposite is also known to occur; that is, manic episodes may develop from baseline of low self-esteem, as sometimes occurs in patients with dysthymic disorder.

The foregoing considerations suggest that the vicissitudes of self-esteem deemed central to the model of depression as loss of self-esteem are manifestations of a more fundamental mood dysregulation. In classical psychoanalysis it is conceded that such dysregulation if s of constitutional origin (Sadock and Sadock, 1995, p. 1074).

Taken from : Sadock, B. J. and Sadock, V.A. (1995). Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry. 6th edition. Baltimore, MD : Williams & Wilkins

Mental health discourse - cause-effect relations

There are two crucial factors shaping the discourse of the mental health sciences. On the one hand, the adoption of the scientific model places a demand on the mental health sciences to use discourse framed within a cause-effect model. On the other hand, the straightforward adoption of an empirical experimental model of research has proved difficult within these disciplines. The complexity and abstract character of mental phenomena have made it difficult to establish the direction of the associations between them.

Mental health has adopted a positivist empiricist model as a method and an epistemological framework for research and theorizing. The assumptions underlying the positivist empirical approach assume the mechanistic view of the universe together with a postulation that all relationships between events are predictable. This has enforced a particular way of constructing relationships between the objects of study. As in the 'natural' sciences, these relationships were expected to be due to a cause-effect influence.

The scientific model of the world constructs 'objects' of science as being in either a causal or a conditional relationship to one another. For example, the chemical substance changes <u>as a result</u> of adding another substance. The physical properties of a metal bar change <u>as a result</u> of added heat. The liberty to mix substances, to alter conditions and to control (and indeed name and predict) variables, gives a high level of consistency and certainty to experiments in the natural sciences.

However, 'mental' phenomena, discursively turned into objects, are neither easily manipulated (for ethical as well as pragmatic reasons) nor are they easily observed. Psychological concepts elude clear organization in terms of causal influences, as has been documented by many critical voices within the discipline of psychology (John 1994, 1997; Gergen 1976, 1981, Parker 1989)

It is also difficult, and sometimes impossible, to subject mental phenomena to strictly statistical analysis. The subjects cannot be randomly assigned to experimental groups. They do not offer themselves to easy 'manipulation', and possible confounding factors cannot be easily (if at all) controlled. In addition, all the possible factors cannot be predicted or accounted for. Consequently, the data must be collected differently from the way it is collected in the 'natural' sciences. Often this involves a leap in assumptions about what behaviours signify certain phenomena (for example, 'low self-esteem' can only be observed as behaviour), as well as assumptions about what constitutes psychological phenomena and its measurement. This influences the way inferences and generalizations are made, particularly those pertaining to causality.

Consequently, even highly significant correlations found in mental health disciplines are not very significant in comparison with physics or chemistry. For example, in psychological research, correlations of $r = 0.5$ are highly significant. After all, the researcher is aware of an abundance of other potentially confounding variables, and the difficulty in controlling them.

This uncertainty of claims must be visible in the language of psychological theories. Researchers are aware of the limitations of statistically driven studies in the mental health sciences. Therefore, they have to threat statistically significant associations carefully along the lines of associations without making any strong statements about causation.

Consequently, the language of the mental health disciplines, although relying heavily on scientific discourse, must be different from the language of the 'natural' sciences. The differences go beyond discipline-specific, technical and lexical aspects. There must be an observable difference in the way texts are grammatically structured.

The specificity of mental health discourses will be outlined in the following investigation, showing claims relating to psychological constructs like self-esteem to be rather tentative. This is achieved by grammatical and lexical means used to construct relationships between abstract, mental 'objects'.

The teacher - apprentice relationship

The assumed relationship between the authors and the readers influences the way the text has been written and how the arguments have been presented, and must therefore also be considered in the analysis.

Although traditionally textbooks are perceived as containing information based on the objective knowledge of the authors, there is an alternative view about expert knowledge based on the rhetorical content of discourse. These views offered by Bakhtin (1981) and later Billig (1996) take text to be dialogical rather than monologistic. By this it is understood that text orients itself to potential readers, counterarguments and opposing views. Discourse, therefore needs to incorporate within its framework strategies of engagement with the readers. In this position the authors do not present some objective set of principles in an impartial way. Instead they rebut the criticisms, present the adopted version as the best, or the only acceptable one and they work towards convincing readers about the truthfulness of their claims. In other words, any text is a rhetorical achievement as it is formulated in a dialogical manner. Therefore, the 'likely' reader, even though often unacknowledged or not immediately visible, influences the shape of a particular text.

Within Western English speaking cultures, textbooks are typically produced by an authority on a subject with an intention of sharing expertise with students. This assumed 'master-apprentice' relationship between writers and their readers shapes the way information in the texts is presented. There are two important consequences of this assumed relationship. Firstly, the text is unlikely to be challenged by most readers, even if the arguments are lacking in clarity or are difficult to comprehend. Lack of understanding is, most likely, to be blamed on the student's inability to comprehend the technicalities, rather than on the author's lack of knowledge or clarity.

Secondly, the abstract ideas and concepts, particularly those realized through long and complex nominal groups are likely to be read as 'technical terms' or at least as technical (and thus discipline specific) ways of verbalizing theory. Perceived as technical, the long nominal groups do not lend themselves to 'unpacking' and analytic or critical questioning (Halliday and Martin, 1993) in the same way as more popular everyday expressions. Complex nominal groups are

most likely to be treated as meaningful technical phrases by a student-reader. Since learning the discourse is an important part of becoming an expert in a discipline, students may be more willing to take these expressions at face value and accept them as part of their learning.

As the reader will remember, the text used in this section has become more complex and abstracted as time progresses. The text written in 1975, for example, includes human participants as part of its discourse, while the one written in 1995 consists of only abstract participants. The question remains, whether this more abstracted discourse offers any 'new' knowledge. I suggest that what is achieved in these texts is a higher level of generalization and abstraction while the theoretical assumptions have remained the same. The greater abstraction offers more security against any potential refutation or argument against its 'impreciseness'. Therefore, it may not be coincidental that the later, more recent texts are increasingly more technical and complex. Rather than offering more advanced knowledge, the authors offer more advanced rhetorical strategies to present their knowledge as more sophisticated. In other words, the arguments are indeed more refined but the claims behind them are not.

All the factors discussed: the demands of the scientific empirical model, the inability to achieve the same level of certainty in experiments in mental health sciences as well as the assumed relationship between the reader and the writer – all influence and shape the discourses used in the texts. Indirectly, they shape the constructions of reality and of the world presented through these texts. The analysis below examines specific discursive features that enable these constructions to be achieved.

Causal association in lexico-grammar

The aim of this analysis is to examine grammatical patterns through which the relationship between self-esteem and depression has been constructed. I suggest that, although not arguing openly for a direct association, the authors rhetorically build the relationship between the two phenomena as a directional influence, where negative changes in self-esteem function as a cause, or a circumstance bringing on depression. To start with I discuss the general features of the text that provide a framework for the argumentations. This framework by itself implies a presence of a directional influence. Following this, I discuss the most prevalent grammatical

patterns present in the text that imply the directional link, while allowing the authors to avoid overt claims about it.

One of the important factors that affect the reading of the text and the possible perception of changes in self-esteem as vital to depression is the positioning of self-esteem and depression together. This assists in constructing the association as an important and a factual one. Out of numerous possible variables affecting human life, the relationship between the two has been selected as significant to 'advancing psychiatric knowledge'. Thus, a reader is positioned into perceiving the relationship between the two concepts as significant.

Furthermore, the factuality of this relationship as a directional influence is supported by the titles given to the sections, e.g.: 'Pathogenesis' (1985), 'Depression as loss of self-esteem' (1995). This association is then further constructed as beneficial to psychological progress, suggesting self-esteem to be a factor *affecting* depression, for example:

> further development in the understanding of depression (1985)
>
> further conceptual break (1995)
>
> one of the first attempts to formulate depression in terms that subsequent psychological theory and research could operationalize in more testable form (1995)

In addition, 'self-esteem' and 'depression' are constructed in all three texts as two variables. S*elf-esteem* is an independent variable, and is presented as a continuous variable, which can potentially be measured. A dependant variable, *depression*, is constructed as a categorical variable; it is either present or not. The relationship cannot be reversed. For example, in the formulations below, depression and self-esteem are not interchangeable:

> ...the importance of alterations in the level of self esteem in depressive states (1975)
>
> ...such changes as the central and basic element in depression (1985)

Neither 'the importance of depression in alterations of self-esteem', nor 'depression is an element in self-esteem's changes' are viable options. It is predictably so, simply because the aim of the authors is to define depression, by assigning symptomatic, correlational or even causal 'entities' to this construct. They are defining depression, and thus place it in the centre of explanations.

This organization is consistent throughout all the texts, and is particularly clear in the more recent text, published in 1995 where self-esteem has been clearly set out as an independent variable influencing a dependent variable – depression. This construction has of course been determined by the context in which the text developed. After all, the authors set out to explain and to provide some means of studying and treating depression. Yet, it is not without consequence that these two constructs are presented as one (always the same one) influencing the other. No matter what the actual relations are, this consistency has great potential to imply a directional influence.

Once armed with these general implications, the texts proceed to explain in more detail the nature of the relationship between self-esteem and depression. The remaining part of the analysis examines the two, most persistent patterns within the texts analysed. The first one pertains to the ways in which conjunctions are metaphorically realized as other grammatical items. The second set of features relate to the ways in which claims about the causal relationships are mitigated by the use of qualifications and modalities.

Causation in language

Traditionally, it has been assumed by linguists that there are two main ways of expressing causality in English; lexically (e.g. *to kill* instead of *to die* signifies a cause and points towards an agent) and periphrastically (through a causative verb such as *have, make, cause, force, persuade*).

However, as any careful reading of the text containing some claims of causal relations would reveal, the ways of constructing causal relations in language are more abundant and complex than traditionally assumed. To produce a semantic message of causation, a writer may use a plethora of lexical and grammatical resources at the level of a single clause as well as the whole text. Lexicogrammar as well as a textual and semantic organization of the whole discourse can be used to achieve a meaning of causation. Moreover, in lexical analysis it is typically the verbal components that have been targeted as carrying causal relations. This claim is only adequate for the most congruent forms of discourse, which are very rare in abstract written discourse. Instead, as systemic functional linguists have observed, causal relations can be realized as

participants (particularly in highly abstract and nominalised texts), qualifiers, circumstance or epithets (Martin and Veel, 1997). In other words, causation can be produced in text in various ways, some of which would be specific to a particular type of discourse.

The area of causal relations in discourse has not been explored as widely as may be expected, considering that in English 'cause-effect' aspects of grammar have become emphasised in most genres at the expense of other aspects of reality construction (Halliday, 1984). These changes in emphasis come as a response to functional demands put on language since the development of scientific writing and the influence it has had on the ways we explain the world. This emphasis on cause-effect relations is particularly visible in academic writing (and the way this thesis has been written is a good example), as the requirement of science is to build a world of relations in terms of 'why' things happen, and what causes them to happen. Despite this, there seems to be little analysis done on the actual way mental health disciplines construe these causal relations, and the possible effects their constructions have on our everyday explanations and understandings.

In written academic text, causal relations are constructed via a variety of means, most of which occur between the sequences of texts. Written arguments develop slowly providing logically organized viewpoints about who does what to whom, how, when and where or, as it may be the case with texts centred around abstract 'objects', what influences what, and why. These connections are built over extended passages of text and rely on grammatical metaphors to produce a certain consistency in its claims. This dependency on grammatical metaphors is a most important feature of academic writing.

Before I engage in the detailed examination of the actual grammatical metaphors involved in building an association between self-esteem and depression in the chosen texts, I wish to discuss the most congruent ways of linking events in the English language. This will, I believe, provide a clearer understanding of what exactly is being 'metaphorised' in the text, and what the congruent and most 'typical' forms of building these relations are in everyday language.

Conjunctions and grammatical logical metaphors

In everyday language associations are usually built between events, happenings and people. The events are compared or organized in some causal or chronological manner. Alternatively, people are presented as interacting with objects, and as acting or initiating happenings. These links are most likely to be achieved by means of *conjunctions* such as 'and', 'like', 'then', 'finally', 'because', 'even', 'still', 'or', 'if'. Conjunctions in the text can either serve to link arguments presented by the author (i.e., *first, second, lastly, furthermore*) or they can function to link events and objects the text talks about (which presumable exist outside the text, in the 'real' world).

This analysis, however, is only concerned with the latter set of conjunctions; conjunctions (and their metaphorical representations) depicting links existing outside the text. These conjunctions can be grouped into four broad classes according to the function they serve in organizing events and phenomena. Accordingly, conjunctions that add phenomena together are grouped under the name of *addition*, those that compare – *comparison*, those that organize phenomena chronologically – *time*, and lastly those that talk about consequence and reasons for something to happen are called *consequence*. The last category can be expanded further into a conjunction of *cause*, *means, condition* and *purpose*, that is those that explain *why*, those that explain *how*, those that explain *what if,* and those that explain *what for* (Martin and Rose, 2003).

Ideational - logical metaphor

Abstract academic writing is far removed from everyday language. What in everyday language is realized through conjunctions, in abstract written discourse is realized by other grammatical items. These grammatical transferences are called *logical metaphors* and form a sub-type of a grammatical, ideational metaphor. In a more metaphorical text relations are constructed in different ways; no longer are these relations realized as conjunctions or prepositions, as in everyday talk, but they are re-construed as processes, things, qualities and circumstances.

The use of ideational grammatical metaphor has been discussed in previous chapters, in relation to the discursive reification of self-esteem. The concept of 'ideational grammatical metaphor' refers to the features and aspects of grammar, or strictly speaking the grammatical transference

that is most directly related to the construction of the external world. In other words, these are the metaphors that influence the way 'reality' is constructed within discourse.

In the previous chapter, the analysis centered on aspects of ideational metaphors pertaining to *experiential* forms of this type of grammatical metaphor. The *experiential* aspects relate to the constructions of objects in the text (these objects are discursive achievements: they are 'transformed' events, happenings or actions). These objects are further presented as relating one to another via another sub-type of ideational metaphor – a *logical metaphor*. Logical metaphors signify relationships via grammatical items other than conjunctions, such as verbal or nominal groups. Logical and experiential metaphors are together parts of *ideational metaphor*, which provide transference of meanings from "one kind of grammatical element to another kind" (Martin & Rose, 2003, p.104).

Consequences of ideational metaphors

There are several consequences of using ideational metaphors in text, referring to both logical and experiential aspects of ideational metaphors. Firstly, as was elaborated in the preceding chapter, the experience is re-constructed into a different kind of experience (or reality). The world where people act upon each other and their environment is replaced with a world where abstractions interact, to define or influence each other so that human participation is limited. In effect, when 'what's going on' is talked about as 'things', the events can be constructed as separate, discrete variables, which can be qualified, quantified, controlled, measured, and tested. What is an action or relation in a less formal discourse becomes a 'thing' in mental health sciences and then these things are positioned in relation to one another (*relationships, intelligence, self-esteem, personality, response, affect, etc.).*

The second important effect of using ideational metaphors is linked to 'packing' large chunks of information into compact nominal groups. In these cases a large chunks of complex information are packed into a small 'textual' space. This cramming of information together is accompanied by a reconstruction of dynamic experiences of human life as a fixed reality of abstract objects. Scientific discourse, made possible by these kinds of grammatical features (Halliday and

Martin, 1993), provides quite an alternative view of life, as full of universal, consistent, abstract objects relating to each other.

Thirdly, and probably the most consequential effect of grammatical metaphors is the ambiguous nature of the technicalities offered by the mental health sciences. The examples below demonstrate this point.

In the following clauses a causal relationship is realized by means of (1) a conjunction, (2) a preposition, (3) a process, (4) a noun and (5) a qualifier.

1. I am usually achy when it's raining, **so** I also feel depressed.
2. **Because** I feel achy when it's raining, I feel depressed.
3. The aches I got when raining **result** in me being depressed.
4. Depression as a **result** of aching caused by rain… (…makes it impossible for a patient to work).
5. Depression **resulting** from aching caused by rain…

The last two examples demonstrate the potential of 'dense' metaphorical discourse to pack a substantial amount of information within a space of a clause. In examples 4 and 5, 'clauses are turned into nouns' (Martin and Veel, 1997, p. 24), or in other words, what was before a complete 'chunk' of information represented as a complete clause (examples 1, 2 and 3 above), has now become a part of a clause (example 4 above) or, a participant in the clause (example 5). Yet, this economical move does not come without a price. One of the consequences of using this kind of highly abstract language is the potential ambiguity of these compacted claims.

This ambiguity comes from the fact that there is a certain amount of information lost during this transference. Examples 4 and 5 above do not give us any details regarding who is 'achy' and 'depressed', or when or how often. This information may seem irrelevant in this context or at this level of abstraction, yet it is not inconsequential. For example, a nominal group "Depression **resulting** from aching caused by rain" cannot be easily transformed backwards into a more spoken language. Usually, there is more than one (and sometimes hundreds) of possibilities of 'unpacking' this kind of metaphorical phrase.

The following example of ambiguity contained in this kind of nominal construction comes from Halliday's (1993) analysis of ambiguity in scientific discourse, and it demonstrates the potential difficulty in comprehending what is actually being said in this type of highly abstract discourse:

> The growth of attachment between infant and mother signals the first step in the development of the child's capacity to discriminate amongst people.

Halliday offers 128 possible rewordings of this short passage, none of which he finds totally convincing. The most confusing part of unpacking this kind of argument into other forms comes from claims about associations between phenomena presented in this highly abstracted form. Is it *when* or *if* the child and its mother grow attached to each other that discrimination of people will follow? Is it *because* they grow more attached that the child takes the first steps towards becoming capable of distinguishing between people? Or it is other way around? Or maybe this growth in attachment simply *shows* that the child is taking the first steps in preferring one person from another? The possible rewordings seem endless.

Overall, mental health disciplines have modified our experience of reality through the use of grammatical metaphor. The dissemination of their ideas have influenced the way we think about and see the world, and the way we construct our everyday experience has become dominated by explanations of cause and effect.

Logical Metaphor, depression and self-esteem

The following examples of logical metaphors are used in the text to construct relationships between depression and self-esteem. So, what exactly is the relationship denoted here? The authors, as have been predicted, use conjunctions only sporadically, leaving the reader with the need to 'unpack' metaphorical structures, or more likely, to endorse them as technical terms.

In the following examples the association between depression and self-esteem are realized as processes and nouns (highlighted in bold) within nominal and verbal groups.

In extract 9 below, the link between depression and self-esteem is constructed through the use of nominal phrases, for example: 'the importance' and 'the central and basic element', and the verbal group: 'intimately associated'.

Extract 9 (1975)

It was Edward Bibring who called attention to the **importance of alterations** in the level of self-esteem in depressive states. Indeed, since the publication of his paper on that subject many investigators have tended to see such changes as the **central and basic element** in depression. Without overlooking the possibility that this view is too narrow and that experience of sadness following a loss is an equally important and primary ingredient, one can still agree that lowered self-esteem is so **intimately associated** with depression that it is in many instances a sine qua non. One can further agree with Bibring that diminution in self-esteem are not necessary pathological but occur in everyone under certain circumstances. These are essentially three in nature: (1) those times at which one feels weak and helpless before an overpowering situation with an inevitable outcome: (2) those situations in which one feels unlovable because of thoughts, emotions, impulses, or actions which one considers undesirable and contrary to one's ideals; and (3) those in which one feels unloved by another person whose good opinion one values. (1975)

The associations described by these means are suggestive of a directional link but not specific enough to offer clear and explicit information. We learn that 'alterations in self-esteem' are important for depression, that they form a 'central and basic element' in depression, and that the two are 'intimately associated'. The association is therefore built as a close and significant one and there is a strong implication of influence. The direction of the association is denoted by constructing self-esteem as an independent variable; it is the 'changes in self-esteem' that potentially impact on depression.

The next two paragraphs, coming from the later text published in 1985, use similarly tentative constructions of the link between self-esteem and depression.

Extract 10

Further development in the understanding of depression was provided by Edward Bibring in 1953. He pointed out that a **common theme** in depressive states was the undermining or diminution of self-esteem. Such patients felt helpless in the face of superior forces surrounding them, or they felt incapable of controlling and directing their inescapable fate. (1985)

Extract 11

Depressive neurosis usually involves reaction to loss or failure. The loss may be death of a loved person or a disappointment by the love object. A depression can also be triggered by failure to live up to one's own standards or to achieve specific personal or vocational goals. In any case, depression is **characterized essentially** by diminution or loss of self-esteem. (1985)

At first, the link is described, through the use of nominal groups, as providing 'further understanding' of depression, because it is a 'common theme in depressive states'. Later, the association is realized through the verbal group 'is characterized essentially'. This, once again, suggests the link to be a significant one, without making its direction or type explicit. However, once again, 'self-esteem' is presented as a variable that fluctuates and is independent of

depression, while the categorical variable 'depression' is implied to be dependent on self-esteem.

Extract 12 taken from the latest text, published in 1995, constructs this association in even more abstract and uncertain terms.

Extract 12

Reformulation of the dynamics of depression in terms of ego suffering a collapse of self-esteem represents a further conceptual break with the original id-psychological formulations: **Depression is said to originate from ego's inability to give up unattainable goals and ideals**. The model further posits that the narcissistic injury that crushes the depressed patient's self-esteem is imposed by the internalised values of the ego rather than the hydraulic pressure of retroflected thanatonic energy deriving from the id. Because the construct of the ego is rooted in social and cultural reality, loss of self-esteem may result from symbolic losses involving power, status, roles, identity, values, and purpose for existence. Thus, the existential and sociocultural implications **of depression conceived as a derivative ego state** provide the clinician with a far more flexible and pragmatic tool for understanding depressed person than the archaic hydraulic metaphors related to libidinal vicissitudes. That model represents one of the first attempts to formulate depression in terms that subsequent psychological theory and research could operationalise in more testable form.

Self-esteem is part of the habitual core of the individual and as such is integral to the personality structure. Indeed, **low self-esteem conceived as a trait is a major defining attribute** of the depressive (melancholic) personality. (1995)

The construction of the association between self-esteem and depression in Extract 12 involves a third, mediating abstract entity, 'the ego'. In fact, the cohesion of the argument relies on this *ego*. As Hassan and Halliday (1976) argued, there is a certain degree of expectancy of the cohesiveness of the text on the part of readers. In other words, there is a tendency in readers to perceive text as meaningful. Consequently, readers are likely to construe associations between abstract concepts in a way that would allow for the continuous cohesion of reading. This may be particularly the case considering the epistemic authority of the writers of these textbooks.

Indeed, all texts analyzed in this section rely on repetitions, synonyms or complementary words as well as opposites to construct depression and self-esteem as causally linked together. For example, there is a great degree of repetition in these texts which, as has been discussed earlier, functions to establish concepts like self-esteem and depression as technical lexes. On the other hand, even technicalized concepts like self-esteem or depression are sometimes replaced with synonyms or complementaries. For example, 'bouts of despondency' or 'damaging assessment of himself' were used in the 1975 text to signify 'diminished self-esteem'. In the same text

depression, although repetitively used throughout the text, has been replaced on three occasions with 'despair', 'despondency' and 'difficulties'.

As Hassan and Halliday warn us, these kinds of associations come from the words sharing the same 'lexical environment'. Although at times these associations may be difficult to classify, they form some recognizable semantic relation and through this they generate the cohesive force within text.

The use of these 'replacements' in texts in striving for clarity and preciseness, and aiming to establish concepts as technical, must be necessarily seen as serving some other function. I suggest that in the texts considered here, one of the functions has to do with the construction of causal relationship between depression and self-esteem. The use of different lexical items instead of self-esteem or depression provides an opportunity for the authors to construe meanings in a covert way. Claims can be made about the pathogenesis of depression involving sel-esteem which are suggestive rather than explicit and clear, as in the following example, wherein 'inner weakness, vulnerability, and sense of helplessness and inferiority within the ego' may be read as synonymous to 'diminution of self-esteem'.:

> Thus depression must be seen not merely as the instinctual vicissitudes of object loss but also as the inner weakness, vulnerability, and sense of helplessness and inferiority within the ego itself. (1985).

Similarly, the claims about causation may be implied by introducing what can be seen as a mediating concept, as it was in Extract 12. One of the possible readings of this extract is that *problems of ego* are synonymous to *lowered self-esteem.* In this case, the clues as to the relationship between self-esteem and depression can be extended to incorporate phrases involving one or the other (*self-esteem* or *the ego*). Consequently, it can be argued that the association between self-esteem and depression has been constructed in this text through the use of the following verbal phrases as well as nominalization.

> 1. Reformulation of the dynamics of depression in terms of the ego suffering a collapse of self-esteem
>
> 2. …low self-esteem conceived as a trait is a major defining attribute of the depressive (melancholic) personality.
>
> 3. …depression conceived as a derivative ego state…
>
> 4. Depression is said to originate from the ego's inability to give up unattainable goals and ideals.

The above examples consist of nominal groups (1, 2, and 3) and one verbal group (4). The examples are even more indefinite and tentative than previously. They are also much more difficult to 'unpack' to make the claims more clear. Phrases such as 'in terms of', 'conceived as' and 'major defining attribute' provide a very ambiguous set of explanations. It must be assumed by readers that the authorities in the field 'reformulate', 'conceive' or 'say'. Yet who exactly takes this view, and on what basis, is lost within grammatical metaphors, as are other details pertaining to these claims.

Once again, the directional link can be inferred by readers from consistently constructing self-esteem (and the ego) as independent variables affecting depression. This have been achieved within all of the four phrases above by presenting self-esteem as explanatory of depression (in terms of, defining attribute, conceived as) and by the more direct suggestion that depression originates from the 'ego's inability to give up attainable goals and ideals'. If, in the latter example the 'ego's inability to give up attainable goals and ideals' was replaced by 'lowered self-esteem', then this will denote the directional link between the two in a more explicit manner. Yet, because it has been done through a mediating concept of the ego, the claims of a directional link remain implicit, even though they are strongly insinuated.

The last extract for this analysis, presented below, once again depends on synonymous concepts to construct depression as dependant on the level of self-esteem. This example illustrates another type of logical metaphor used in these texts. The nominalizations and verbal groups taking part in the construction of the link between depression and self-esteem, discussed so far, have functioned as *participants* and *processes* in the clauses. In the following example, the association between self-esteem and depression has been constructed as a *circumstance* (in bold).

Extract 13

On the other hand, the person who is abnormally dependent on other people may find himself in difficulties when faced by a situation that lowers his self-esteem. In the first place, his self-assessment tends to be more harshly critical and his confidence in his capabilities and his basic worth is generally shaky. Faced with an event that hits at his self-esteem, he has little in the way of resources to combat its diminution, and his consequent despondency may be prolonged and severe. Furthermore, **in the relative absence of inner resources** he turns to other people for emotional support and reassurance, and frequently needs a constant supply of these externally derived strengths to maintain

his unstable equilibrium. His orientation, that is, is more towards what he can get from the others than what he can give; it is narcissistic in nature. In addition, the number of people on whom he feels he can depend is often extremely restricted, not infrequently being limited to singly highly important person. The relationships that the narcissistic person makes with others tend to be fragile and fraught with potential difficulty. If his self-esteem is lowered as a result, for example, of failing to achieve a goal, he may quite unjustifiably feel that others are critical and rejecting of him. The resulting despair and depression at this imagined loss only compound the original feeling of worthlessness. If he suffers the actual loss of a needed person, the consequences can be profoundly disturbing, since he has now in reality lost the source of his desperately needed emotional support; not only must he bear the anguish of grief, but his self-esteem is dangerously lowered as the supporting supplies are cut off, and the depression that results may be of severely pathological proportions. (1975)

It is possible to read this paragraph as a web of causal associations, where, at first the abnormal status of this 'abnormally dependant' person is established. They are abnormal <u>because</u> they are self-critical, have little inner resources, are needy of others and narcissistic in nature. This is followed by a brief discussion of their reactions to adverse situations; <u>because</u> they are abnormal, they respond to these situations in a pathological way, and <u>because</u> of this they feel rejected (unjustifiably). This pathological reaction combines with 'original feeling of worthlessness' <u>resulting</u> in despair and depression. The actual loss can <u>cause</u> self-esteem to be dangerously lowered and depression is of 'severely pathological proportions'. In other words, because the person is abnormal, their reactions are abnormal, <u>causing</u> self-esteem to be lowered (either for too long or to a dangerous level). This in turn <u>causes</u> depression.

None of the associations are stated clearly and explicitly as causal, rather they rely on descriptions of conditions such as:

...when faced by a situation that lowers his self-esteem...

Faced with an event that hits at his self-esteem...

If he suffers the actual loss of a needed person...

...since he has now in reality lost the source of his desperately needed emotional support as the supporting supplies are cut off...

The above conditions are affecting self-esteem. The authors refer only once in the whole extract, to the relationship between self-esteem and depression. This has been done through the use of a circumstance:

...in the relative absence of inner resources ...

in a sentence:

> Furthermore, in the relative absence of inner resources he turns to other people for emotional support and reassurance, and frequently needs a constant supply of these externally derived strengths to maintain his unstable equilibrium.

Once again, however, the understanding of this phrase as describing the relationship between depression and self-esteem depends on several assumptions. Firstly, the 'relative absence of inner resources' denotes 'low self-esteem' (as do 'critical self assessment' and 'shaky confidence') and that 'unstable equilibrium' denotes 'depression'. Although this reading is possible, there are endless other possibilities of reading this text. It is important to note that the reading of this text available to students in 1975 is most likely not available to us today. After all, the way self-esteem is conceptualized today, as an inner, consistent, cognitive 'object', as an agentive force influencing our lives, as a fashionable explanation of problems, failures and achievements, is not exactly the same concept as the one constructed in this early text. However strong the implications of causality are in this text, the available readings are different from those available to students three decades ago.

Qualifications and modality

The proceeding section examined the logical metaphors used to construct the relationship between self-esteem and depression. The examination looked at the way conjunctions have been realized as nominal and verbal groups, and in the final example as a circumstance. Through these strategies, the relationship between the two concepts has been constructed as directional; the level of self-esteem was represented as a causal factor in depression. Yet, these claims were made in an covert and implicit way, protecting the authors from potential criticisms pertaining to the speculative nature of this association. After all, there is no consistent body of research to support the claims of causation.

This section examines another strategy used in the texts which, once again, allows the authors to imply a causal link between depression and self-esteem, but protects them from having to make this link explicit and straightforward. The strategies discussed here have to do with the way the claims are qualified in the texts.

Before I examine how these strategies are deployed in relation to the relationship between depression and self-esteem, I wish to consider, if only briefly, other associations constructed in

these texts. Doing this, will further clarify my point that the link between depression and self-esteem is presented in particularly ambiguous terms.

One of the relationships constructed within the text is a conditional relation between self-esteem and adverse situations. This link has been very explicitly presented in the earliest 1975 text, wherein the authors state that 'assaulted or diminished self-esteem' is a normal reaction to certain situations. The phrases below exemplify this conditional association:

> …not infrequently finds his self-esteem assaulted and diminished by a variety of situations and events (1975)

> …the person who is abnormally dependent on other people may find himself in difficulties when faced by a situation that lowers his self-esteem. (1975)

> Faced with an event that hits at his self-esteem, he has little in the way of resources to combat its diminution, and his consequent despondency may be prolonged and severe. (1975)

From the above examples, the first is the most straightforward, yet all three explicitly refer to situations as conditions or causes of lowered self-esteem. The direction of this causal association is explicitly stated as coming from situations. Although a more thorough analysis might have revealed many interesting features pertaining to this association, at a glance the construction seems quite uncomplicated and effortless.

Other examples of relationships between abstract concepts come from the text published in 1985. There are two relationships constructed in the extract below, one between self-esteem and inner pathology and the other between self-esteem and early development. The two are not entirely separate, being negotiated in the text together, with early developmental difficulties serving as a support to establishing inner pathology. Please note the way the constructions of these links have been qualified in this text (highlighted in bold).

> Extract 14
>
> Important factors affecting self-esteem **would seem** to be the following: First, the patient has a poor self-image, **usually** based on early pathological development of self-concept in an unfavorable or rejecting family atmosphere. The self-concept is based on the poor quality of introjects, which form the basis of the organization of the self. Second, self-esteem **can** be lowered as a result of superego aggression. The discrepancy between behavior and the values maintained by the superego is fixated in the archaic, infantile, or punitive form or if it regresses to this level of organization, the predisposition to depression and the damage to self-esteem is correspondingly increased. Third, self-esteem depends on the nature and level of integration of the ego-ideal. The more realistic the organization of the ego-ideal, the more possible it is for the individual to satisfy its demands. If the ego

ideal is excessively grandiose, it places excessive demands on the ego, and the result **can** be feelings of inadequacy on the part of the ego. Fourth, the maintenance of self-esteem depends **in part** on the capacity for effective functioning of the ego itself. The individual's actual abilities and talents and the relatively harmonious integration of ego-functions determine the person's capacity for successfully meeting the demands of the ego-ideal and consequently determine **in part** the level of self-esteem. (1985)

The construction of associations between self-esteem and inner pathology or development in childhood is presented as directional; 'unfavorable family atmosphere' or 'capacity for effective functioning of the ego' are clearly portrayed as adversely affecting self-esteem. Structures like: if… then…, 'as a result', or 'depends on' denote genuine cause-effect relationships. Even though the text relies on grammatical metaphors to construct this association, the choice of lexical items such as 'a result', 'based on', or 'depends on' make the direction of the association unmistakable.

On the other hand, the claims are presented with a degree of caution. Right from the start, the association is set up in a guarded fashion ('would seem to be'). Furthermore, some of the claims are mitigated by the modal elements 'can', 'in part', 'usually' and 'seem'. I suggested in the previous chapter that this caution suggests difficulty in making claims about 'inner' phenomena in a certain and definite way. Yet, as will be demonstrated below, these constructions are still quite firmly asserted when compared with the way the association between self-esteem and depression has been developed.

Qualifications

The following analysis focuses on the strategies used to construct the association between self-esteem and depression as qualified. The first extract (15) comes from the text published in 1975 when the notion of self-esteem was not commonly accepted as a force determining a person's life and health. As the reader would remember, this textbook featured, for the first time, an extensive chapter on self-esteem and depression. The authors, therefore, presented a theory that was not widely accepted at the time. Extract 15 below follows a description of a new theory wherein the authors detach themselves from it, by presenting it as someone else's thoughts ('It was Edward Bibring…').

I suggest that the expansive hedging in the extract below (highlighted in bold) signifies a low acceptability of this theory. This hedging is consistent with a construction of causation in this

early text, where depression although 'blamed' on inner deficiency, was not directly related to self-esteem.

Extract 15

Without overlooking the possibility that this view is too narrow and that experience of sadness following a loss is an equally important and primary ingredient, one can still agree that lowered self-esteem is so intimately associated with depression that it is in many instances a sine qua non

A second example, Extract 16, comes from the text published in 1995. By this time the 'influential nature' of self-esteem has become an accepted fact, and yet clearly, the theory cannot explain every single case. This extract demonstrates tensions around exceptional cases and how the authors accommodate for them. To elucidate the exceptions, new explanatory constructs have been brought into discussion, for example: 'an underlying instability in the system of self-esteem' and a 'fundamental mood dysregulation''.

Extract 16

Indeed, low self-esteem conceived as a trait is a major defining attribute of the depressive (melancholic) personality. While it is understandable how such individuals can easily sink into melancholia in the face of environmental adversity, it is not obvious why persons with apparent high self-esteem, such as those with hypomanic and narcissistic personalities, also succumb to melancholy with relative ease. To explain such cases, one must invoke an underlying instability in the system of self-esteem that renders it vulnerable to depression. The opposite is also known to occur; that is, manic episodes may develop from the baseline of low self-esteem, as sometimes occurs in patients with dysthymic disorder.

The above extracts exemplify the extent to which claims made about the link between self-esteem and depression have been qualified. As discussed earlier, one of the important parts of this construction is the placement of two concepts together and maintaining consistency in presenting self-esteem as an independent variable. The qualifications in the text serve to balance this by accommodating for exceptional cases or alternative views.

Modal "may"

The most interesting pattern in the way the relationship between self-esteem and depression has been constructed in these texts comes from the use of the modal element 'may'. This element has been used throughout the texts with a remarkable frequency. For this reason it is worthwhile to recap what Systemic Functional Linguistics has to offer on the topic of modality.

According to Halliday, modality refers to "the area of meaning that lies between yes and no –
the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity" or "different ways of
construing the semantic space between the positive and negative poles" (Halliday, 1984, p.
357). More specifically, there are four possible functions of modal elements, only two of which
are relevant for this analysis. These are: (1) describing the level of probability, 'either yes and
no', for example, *maybe*, *certainly, probably, possibly,* or (2) referring to 'both yes and no', i.e.,
describing the level of frequency, how often something happens, for example, *sometimes,*
always, usually.

In other words, from a grammatical position 'may' functions as either commenting on
probability (how possible an occurrence of something is) or frequency (how often something
happens). Unlike other modal elements such as *sometimes, often, rarely or possible* which refer
to either probability or frequency, the modal element *may* refer to both. Thus, the use of this
particular element provides the writer with an exceptional tool, delineating uncertainty in the
text without specifying whether it denotes low probability or low frequency, or both.

Furthermore, according to Eggins (1994) and Halliday (1984), *may* denotes a median to low
levels of certainty and/or frequency, sharing semantic space with *probably* as well as *usually.*
The examples of a higher level of certainty and frequency are represented by *must, certainly,*
always, and a lower level by *might, possibly, sometime.* Although Eggins' classification should
serve as a guide only, it is clear that the modal element *may* gives a sense of uncertainty to the
claims. At best claims can be seen as conditioned and restricted to some cases, while at worst
the claims are ambiguous and confusing. The use of *may* implies a situation where both
possibilities; *yes* and *no* are equally plausible.

The following extract exemplifies this surprising pattern relating to the use of a modal 'may' in
conjunction with self-esteem. The text is, in general, highly modalized through the use of other
modal elements such as *generally, frequently, tends to* or *can* (bold). Yet, the juxtapositioning
of *may* (outline) with self-esteem (bordered) reveals a clear pattern; both are used four times in
this extract and both belong to the same sentence. In other words, every time self-esteem
appears as a subject of theorizing, it is warranted by the use of *may.*

Extract 17

On the other hand, the person who is abnormally dependent on other people may find himself in difficulties when faced by a situation that lowers his self-esteem. In the first place, his self-assessment **tends to** be more harshly critical and his confidence in his capabilities and his basic worth is **generally** shaky. Faced with an event that hits at his self-esteem, he has little in the way of resources to combat its diminution, and his consequent despondency may be prolonged and severe. Furthermore, in the relative absence of inner resources he turns to other people for emotional support and reassurance, and **frequently** needs a constant supply of these externally derived strengths to maintain his unstable equilibrium. His orientation, that is, is more towards what he can get from the others than what he can give; it is narcissistic in nature. In addition, the number of people on whom he feels he can depend is **often** extremely restricted, **not infrequently** being limited to singly highly important person. The relationships that the narcissistic person makes with others **tend to** be fragile and fraught with potential difficulty. If his self-esteem is lowered as a result, for example, of failing to achieve a goal, he may quite unjustifiably feel that others are critical and rejecting of him. The resulting despair and depression at this imagined loss only compound the original feeling of worthlessness. If he suffers the actual loss of a needed person, the consequences **can** be profoundly disturbing, since he has now in reality lost the source of his desperately needed emotional support; not only must he bear the anguish of grief, but his self-esteem is dangerously lowered as the supporting supplies are cut off, and the depression that results may be of severely pathological proportions. (1985)

The above analysis demonstrates that all claims pertaining to abstract inner concepts are qualified. The most clear-cut association constructed in the texts is between external situations and mental reaction to them (lowered self-esteem). The associations between the two mental concepts are less straightforward.

However, there has been a noticeable shift found in the text towards a greater degree of ambiguity when the authors set out a link between self-esteem and depression. I suggest that this comes as a result of the elusiveness of the concept of self-esteem. It is also a result of discomfort and awkwardness faced by the authors of these texts. Even though self-esteem has become a culturally acceptable explanation of personal troubles and struggles, it still remains an uncertain and ambiguous 'mental entity'. This, in turn, affects the way claims can be made about its influential effect within a problematic context like psychiatry. If anything, the patterns described in this chapter point towards both the difficulty in making claims about 'inner' phenomena and the uneasiness of psychiatry about ambiguous psychological phenomena.

Summary

This chapter discussed the strategies used in texts to construct an association between self-esteem and depression. As has been demonstrated, the association is constructed in an implicit yet persuasive manner as one where depression results from low(ered) self-esteem. It was argued that the authors manage the tension arising from the demands of scientific discourse, on the one hand, and the uncertainty of claims pertaining to psychological constructs, on the other.

The analyses focus on two strategies used by the authors to manage this tension. First, the logical metaphors used to construct the link between depression and self-esteem are discussed in the broader context of how cause-effect relationships are typically constructed in language. The use of logical metaphor introduces ambiguity and allows the authors to construct claims in an imprecise manner. Second, the authors use qualifications and modality to accommodate for the elusiveness of psychological claims. This presents versions given by the authors as a *possibility* rather than a *certainty*. The versions provided are just possible versions, yet they are the ones that the authors chose to present. In effect, the claims that are made in these texts are uncertain, yet they form a persuasive rhetorical argument about the consequential nature of low self-esteem in depression.

Conclusion

This section examined a small sample of text taken from psychiatric textbooks. The text relate to depression and its explanations within the psychoanalysis. The focus of the analyses contained in this section were twofold; first they examined the constructions of self-esteem as a reified, stable, cognitive 'entity' and second, they investigated the construction of the link between self-esteem and depression.

Chapter 4 contained analyses relevant to construction of self-esteem as a reified 'thing-like' entity. The analysis centred on the lexico-grammatical devices used by the authors to achieve this construction. It has been concluded that the ways self-esteem has been portrayed changed over time. While in 1975, self-esteem was placed 'in-between' inner and external spheres and was constructed as a 'reaction to adverse circumstances', in later texts self-esteem is positioned more 'inside' the human psyche. By 1995, self-esteem (or rather its sub-categories of low- and

high self-esteem) has become a cognitive and stable characteristic of an individual. The gradual 'internalization' of self-esteem goes hand in hand with constructions of 'inner' and 'pathological', in particular with the development and gradual pathologization of the concept of low self-esteem.

Chapter 5 examined the link between self-esteem and depression. This link was constructed as directional, significant and consistent through a range of strategies, like titles, consistency inn use of technical concepts (i.e., self-esteem and depression), use of mediating entities (i.e., ego), use of synonyms and complimentaries (i.e., bouts of despondency or damaging assessment of himself). On the other hand, the certainty of this directional link was mitigated by the use of qualifications and modalities (i.e., modals can or may). In effect, although convincing rhetorically, the versions presented by the authors are clearly the *possibilities* rather than certainties. This, I argued, is a consequence of using scientific discourse to write about imprecise and abstract psychological 'entities in the heads'.

SECTION 3: Self-esteem and self-help literature

Chapter 6: Self-esteem, morality and fulfillment

Introduction

The proceeding chapters examined the development of the construct of self-esteem in psychiatric books. Using examples taken from psychiatric textbooks, the analyses focused on changes within constructions of self-esteem over time and its development into a reified, concrete entity. Furthermore, the analyses looked at the associations constructed within these texts between self-esteem and normality and self-esteem and the 'inner' sphere of personhood. Through links with normality, self-esteem acquired normative features, while through associations with the 'inner' an individual became a source of mental problems. Finally, the reification of self-esteem into a concrete, 'inner' 'thing' enabled its further constructions as a quantifiable, measurable object.

This chapter examines discourses around self-esteem contained in very different sources; in popular texts on self-esteem, exemplified by self-help materials and other popular advisory publications. The analysis explores the discursive representations of self-esteem; how self-esteem is constructed as *real* and how the claims about its nature are presented as facts. Further, this chapter examines the constructions and reifications of self-esteem contained in these texts. The analysis investigates the rhetorical strategies used in these texts to make them factual and plausible, and to incite readers into following the advice contained therein. Finally, the moral dimension of these texts is considered; specifically the way behaviours are constructed as morally sound by being associated with self-esteem.

As its starting point, the chapter adopts Wittgenstein's theory about psychological phenomena and psychological constructs. Wittgenstein argued that rather than residing inside individuals, psychological phenomena exist in a sphere of language. Consequently, the nature of these phenomena may only be studied within the available discourse "by looking into the workings of

our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them" (Wittgenstein, 1953, PI109). The possible misunderstanding comes from a common assumption that psychological phenomena exist separately from language. These phenomena are consequently viewed as existing in the 'real' world, independent of any social, cultural, or discursive influence. Therefore, it is assumed, psychological phenomena may be studied, *discovered* and *exposed* gradually in order to enhance our understanding of human nature. These assumptions are partly re-produced by discursive constructions of the psychological phenomena *as if* they were tangible, concrete and consistent objects.

Yet, according to Wittgenstein, psychological phenomena cannot be *exposed* in the same way physical phenomena can, because they do not exist in the physical world. As they are constructed within language, psychological concepts seem to be concrete object-like entities, although their constructions are not as consistent and regular as those of actual physical objects. Through language, namely through the lexical and grammatical structures that reify and internalize concepts like self-esteem, we are incited to perceive psychological concepts as referring to actual 'things' inside individuals. These lexical and grammatical structures are what Wittgenstein called 'language clothing' that makes 'everything alike' (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 224). Language therefore, constructs psychological phenomena *as if* they were physical objects, yet a close examination usually reveals disparities within these constructions. The 'language clothing' makes us unaware, Wittgenstein argued, of these disparities and the complexity of *language games*, because of the surface similarities within the language.

This notion of 'clothing' is as much relevant to popular materials as it was to the scientific texts analyzed earlier. Thus, the aim here is consistent with the proceeding chapter - to *describe* constructions of self-esteem available in language rather than to *discover* or *expose* any pre-existing cognitive phenomena. At first, I wish to examine briefly how the construct of self-esteem in popular texts has developed over time. To do this, I will analyze two books written by the author, Nathaniel Branden; the first one published in 1969 and the second in 1995. In the second part of the analysis, I will examine the most recent constructions of self-esteem contained in a range of self-help publications. For this section, I chose to examine a broad range

of texts in their entirety, and because of this, these analyses are closer to being general overviews than detailed analyses. Yet they remain centered on how self-esteem has been constructed within the genre of self-help books.

Branden, self-esteem and the moral argument

This analysis briefly examines constructions of self-esteem contained in one of the first popular psychological books written on the topic of self-esteem. The book, written by Branden entitled *The Psychology of Self-esteem* (1969/2001) will be compared later in this analysis with his more recent book published almost thirty years later *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem* (1995).

The examination of these two works provides an opportunity to track changes in the development of the discursive construction of self-esteem. If, as has been demonstrated earlier, constructions of self-esteem have changed over time within psychiatric textbooks, it may be expected that similar alterations have taken place within popular psychological literature.

I have chosen Branden's book for this examination for several reasons. First of all, Branden was one of the pioneers (if not the pioneer) who introduced self-esteem into popular psychology. His books, most of which have been reprinted several times and remain popular among self-help books readers, are therefore, appropriate to examine. Secondly, Branden has devoted over fifty years of his career as a therapist and writer to the construct of self-esteem and has produced a number of books over that time. Therefore, by the examination of his work, the development of the idea of *self-esteem* can be traced over time. Thirdly, Branden is a qualified psychologist and a practicing clinician and provides advice based on a professional approach to psychology and first hand experience in treating people. Lastly, he is broadly recognized and widely quoted within the self-esteem movement and an advisor to NASE - the National Association for Self-Esteem (www.self-esteem-nase.org). All of these reasons make Branden's work appropriate material for the examination of changes in the development of the construct of self-esteem in the last three decades.

In his recent book, *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem* (1995), Branden constructs his lifetime preoccupation with the idea of self-esteem as a progressive work through which he advances our and his own understandings of the construct. He describes his views as an "evolving and

expanding vision of the dynamics of self-esteem" (p.viii). This view of the 'progressive' nature of Branden's work comes from a positivist belief that psychological phenomena can be discovered if enough time and effort is spent experimenting, observing and testing them, and that this understanding can be deepened with more research and time spent on the subject.

Yet, theorists like Wittgenstein, who challenge the application and appropriateness of this process of 'discovery' and 'explanation' in relation to psychological phenomena, provide an alternative way of understanding Branden's work. Rather than seeing it as a progress from within, that is a result of his observations, work with clients, research and laborious contemplation of the topic, it is possible (and informative) to place his work in a socio-political context of practices that inform his work. Rather than view the changes in his writing over time as progress towards a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of self-esteem, the differences may be accounted for by the different language around self-esteem that developed independent of Branden's reflective and creative cognitivising. Finally, rather than seeing his contribution as one that elucidates and explains 'self-esteem' in more truthful ways, his role can be seen as one that reifies and solidifies the concept and through this, participates in a process of making it *as if* it is real, thus increasing its *ontological* veracity.

The Psychology of Self-esteem: the rational individual

In *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, published in 1969 (just prior to the self-esteem movement taking off in North America), Branden introduces self-esteem as a response to a deterministic view of human beings promoted by psychology at the time. The author contests psychology's preoccupations with simplistic conditioned behaviours and offers an 'agentive' view of human beings as an alternative. He aims to provide some room for issues of consciousness (awareness) and thus wishes, beliefs, emotions and desires as well as morality. His views of personhood are based on humanistic psychological theory and a belief in an inherent and fundamental goodness of people. Branden sees psychology at the time as in need of redoing, and finds the dominant approaches within psychology both disturbing and unsatisfying. He says for example:

> If the science of psychology is to achieve an accurate portrait of man, it must, I submit, question and challenge many of the deepest premises prevalent in the field today – must break away from the anti-biological, anti-intellectual, automaton view of human nature that dominates contemporary theory. Neither the view of man as an instinct-manipulated puppet (psychoanalysis), nor the view of him as a

stimulus-response machine (behaviourism), bears any resemblance to man the biological entity whom it is the task of psychology to study: the organism uniquely characterized by the power of conceptual thought, propositional speech, explicit reasoning and self-awareness (Branden, 1969/2001, p. xii).

In response to this, and as a solution to the problem, he proposes a 'psychology of self-esteem'. At the heart of this writing lies the recognition of the importance of a more agentive view of human beings. He offers self-esteem as an alternative and claims it to be of great importance to human life; indeed, he insists, it is a *basic human need*. This need for positive self-assessment and its importance to mental health has been, he suggests, well documented within the discipline. What he offers, however, is to go beyond the simple recognition of the importance of self-esteem towards providing more extensive insights into principles underlying the relationship between self-esteem and other aspects of human life.

Throughout his argumentation, Branden sketches a portrait of self-esteem as a rational assessment of the self and reality. This rational assessment, in his view, also underlines mental health. Mental illness, he argues, comes from the lack of a rational assessment of reality as well as the lack of positive assessment of the self:

> Reality-avoidance practices – evasion, repression, rationalization, and their various derivatives – are disintegrative by their very nature and intention. Their effort is to sabotage cognition. They are prime instigators of psychological disorders. (p. 99)

On the other hand, he argues that rationality and a realistic assessment of the self and reality is the basis of mental health:

> A man whose cognitive contact with reality is unbreached, whose perceptions, judgments and evaluations are free of blocks and distortions – a man who is willing and able to look at any fact relevant to his life, whose integrative powers are unimpaired – does not exhibit symptoms such as pathological anxiety, depersonalization, obsessive compulsive reactions, conversion hysteria, or delusions of persecution. (p. 101)

While amplifying the importance of thinking and effective cognition, Branden diminishes the importance of social influence. While he agrees that the environment can be a *contributing* factor in mental health, for example, by stifling child's healthy development, it is the victim's inability to make a proper judgment and to assess the 'facts of the situation consciously and clearly' that inevitably leads to mental illness. This leads him to argue that:

> It is difficult to escape the conclusion that in most (and perhaps all) instances of mental illness whose cause is psychological, there is some degree of complicity on the part of the victim. (p. 101)

The preconceptions underlying this argument are that there is some underlying *right* and *true reality* that can be accessed via rational thinking. This *true reality* can be perceived only when attention is not blurred by irrational thinking. Furthermore, this reality is constructed as universal and separate from social, environmental or other influences and can be accessed even when contradicted by environmental influences. The ability to perceive reality in its true form is closely linked, according to Branden, to self-esteem. Consequently, lack of self-esteem obstructs clear perception and creates cognitive distortion:

> When a man suffers from low self-esteem and institutes various irrational defenses to protect himself from the knowledge of this deficiency, he necessarily introduces distortion into his thinking. (p. 141)

Thus, the possession of self-esteem provides an ability to be cognitively effective in assessing one's own abilities and capabilities as well as external situations.

Rational thinking and the ability to clearly perceive reality in its true condition are not the only characteristics of the self-esteemed individual. Clarity of perception and rationality has to be, according to Branden, intentional:

> If man is to achieve and maintain self-esteem, the first and fundamental requirement is that he preserve an indomitable *will to understand.* The desire for clarity, for intelligibility, for comprehension of that which falls within the range of his awareness, is the guardian of man's mental health and the motor of his intellectual growth. (p. 114)

This clarity of perception is juxtapositioned against emotion as a source of possible irrational and blurred responses and perceptions. The emotions, with their inherent danger of evoking 'wrong' actions, must be mediated by reason. For example:

> One of the important things a child must learn is that emotions are not adequate guides to actions. (p. 117)

and

> To judge the appropriateness or validity of his emotional responses is one of the proper tasks of man's reason. If the authority of his reason is abnegated, if a man permits himself to be carried along passively by feelings he does not judge, he loses the sense of control over his existence; he loses the sense of self-regulation that is essential to self-esteem. (p. 118)

As Branden argues, emotions are not to be denied, but must be judged for their appropriateness and validity. Through regulating one's emotional responses by exercising rational evaluations a person remains in command of her or his reactions and reason.

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Branden presupposes the superiority of behaviours that are rational as opposed to those which come from emotional and unreasoned reactions; he sees behaviours contributing to the universal moral order as being a natural outcome of maturity and rational thinking. Mature and rational individuals will inevitably value themselves, thus, an individual who uses reason and rational judgment to screen emotional and instinctual responses, and who behave according to a clear understanding of the social and moral order will, according to Branden's argument, succeed in retaining their self-esteem. Drawing on humanistic psychology (which was a popular alternative to behaviourist psychology at the time), he advises that those irrational and emotional responses should not be denied or suppressed, but instead recognized for what they are and assessed accordingly. This is to be done with the use of the rational faculties. This kind of 'cognitive control' and 'healthy self-regulation' brings about a sense of *competence* and a sense of *worth,* which according to Branden, are the main components of self-esteem. As a consequence, an ability to fully monitor and control irrational desires, emotions, fears and instincts provides human beings with a healthy sense of self-esteem.

Rationality, in Branden's early book, is not only a useful or healthy faculty; rational responses are what he calls a 'primary responsibility' of a human being. Being equipped with rational faculties places an obligation on individuals to make a commitment to the 'proper exercise' of it.

There is a particular view of the nature of human beings, which emerges from the above extracts; a view consistent with the liberal image of an individual as essentially autonomous and self-sufficient. The individual from this perspective is not determined by any social role and is abstracted from a specificity of any social and cultural or familial context (Brecher, 1998).

The views that underlie Branden's argument are consistent with the liberal ideal of rational thinking and clear judgment. He explicitly valorizes reason, understanding and autonomous behaviour guided by one's rational decisions. Acting according to the principles of rational thinking and understanding has been constructed as the personal responsibility of individuals as conscious beings.

The notion of responsibility as an important part of behaviours associated with self-esteem provides a basis for Branden to conceptualize self-esteem in terms of morality. Extract 18 below, exemplifies the way he makes this link explicit. The extract has been taken from a chapter about two aspects of self-esteem: a sense of personal efficacy (self-confidence) and a sense of personal worth (self-respect):

Extract 18

The two aspects of self-esteem – self-confidence and self-respect – can be isolated conceptually, but they are inseparable in man's psychology. Man makes himself *worthy* of living by making himself *competent* to live: by dedicating his mind to the task of discovering what is true and what is right, and by governing his actions accordingly. If a man defaults on the responsibility of thought and reason, thus undercutting his competence to live, he will not retain his sense of worthiness. If he betrays his moral convictions, thus undercutting his sense of worthiness, he does so by evasion, he commits treason to his own (correct or mistaken) judgment, and thus will not retain his sense of competence. The root of both aspects of self-esteem is psycho-epistemological.

Such is the nature and causes of man's need of self-esteem.

It must be remembered that self-esteem is a moral appraisal, and morality pertains only to the volitional, to that which is open to man's choice. An unbreached *rationality* – i.e., an unbreached determination to use one's mind to the fullest extent of one's ability, and a refusal ever to evade one's knowledge or act against it – is the only valid criterion of virtue and the only possible basis of self-esteem. (p. 114)

Branden constructs an individual as a central and primary source of actions. Social and cultural influences are denied while individualistic standards like "thinking in principles" (p. 117) and controlling one's mind and emotions are valorized. Individuals are constructed as fully agentive and responsible for 'their own' choices and capable of being in control of their lives. Furthermore, individuals are constructed as a source of values; rationality and clear thinking automatically allow an individual to make right moral choices. This construction lies at the philosophical core of liberalism where an individual is seen as "the source of morality, of moral values and principles, the creator of the very criteria of moral evaluation" (Lukes, 1973, p. 101). These internally generated moral values are disconnected from any social position or context the individual may occupy.

In summary, *The Psychology of Self-esteem* (1969/2001) is grounded in liberal discourses of free choice, agency, rationality, universal morality and individualism. Individuals are constructed as independent, self-directed and self-sufficient. The book constructs self-esteem in

terms of rational thinking and understanding, and a clear perception of reality. It upholds that those who value themselves remain rational, and simultaneously those who behave in a rational way will think highly of themselves.

The book's message is 'moralistic', as Branden himself sees it retrospectively (2001); because it gives explicit advice regarding the upholding of moral judgments and behaviours. Furthermore, it makes an explicit association between self-esteem and morality, by claiming that self-esteem is gained from virtuous behaviours, that is, from behaviours guided by an inner sense of morality. Emotional, irrational and immature conduct adversely affects one's self-esteem as they obscure an individual's moral judgment.

This explicit morality disappears from Branden's later writings. Self-esteem is presented *as if* it existed outside morality and ethics. The next section examines one of Branden's recent books, *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem* (1995). Although he published at least a couple of books after 1995, *Six Pillars* is regarded by the author as the 'grandchild' of *The Psychology of Self-esteem* (Bransen, 2001), which attempts to re-visit the basic claims about self-esteem he made in the first book and highlights the new, 'deepened' understanding of the notion of self-esteem. This deepened understanding, as Branden tells us (1969/2001), was gained through years of personal and professional experience and greater maturity.

The Six Pillars of Self-esteem: Agency and fulfillment

Speaking retrospectively, Branden describes his earliest book as too moralistic (1969/2001). Indeed, in *The Psychology of Self-esteem* his voice sounds openly authoritarian. The tone of the narrative differs significantly from the one he uses in his recent books, where he assumes a more compassionate, friendly and egalitarian voice. While *The Psychology of Self-esteem* constructs the information and advice as a result of intellectual knowledge of an expert, three decades later Branden's books contain emotionally charged accounts of personal experiences. While the earliest book does not engage with the reader in any explicit way, his later books, like *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem* (1995) or *The Art of Living Consciously* (1997) engage into an ongoing dialogue with the reader, a dialogue full of anecdotes, intimate confessions and friendly advice.

Branden's first book may also be seen as 'too moralistic' because it provides explicit moral advice. Self-esteem, in this book, is closely linked with morality: it is constructed as a cause and a result of moral behaviours. In *Six Pillars,* this association becomes more subtle, yet the list of behaviours associated with self-esteem and morality expands. Responsibility, rational thinking and understanding remain important aspects of 'healthy' self-esteem, yet the list extends to include self-assertiveness, self-acceptance, independence, purposeful living, creativity, flexibility, fulfillment, and efficacy. Rationality is no longer juxtapositioned directly with emotions in general; the threat to rational, responsible actions is generated by *fear*, and the responses it produces such as dependency, self-denial, repression, compliance, hostility, evasiveness. Although the way rationality and thinking influence self-esteem is mediated by emotions, the emotions themselves are neither bad nor good.

Six Pillars (1995) seems like an easier read than *The Psychology of Self-esteem* for a contemporary reader; the arguments seem more forthcoming – the rigid, commanding tone of the earlier book disappears and is replaced with a relaxed, intimate narrative. In *Six Pillars,* the author gives voice to a more personal accounts; he tells "a number of stories about [him]self, about mistakes [he] made, and about the lessons [he] learned from these mistakes" (Branden, 1969/ 2001, p. viii).

The agency

One of the dominant features of *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem* (1995), as compared with the earlier book, is the foregrounding of abstract concepts, in particular the use of 'self-esteem' as a Subject (i.e., the participant whose identity is picked up in the tag question" (Martin and Rose, 2003, p. 177). The examples below come from *Six Pillars* (Subjects highlighted in bold, hypothetical tags in brackets):

> **Self-esteem** creates a set of implicit expectations about what is possible and appropriate to us. [doesn't **it**?] (p. 14)
>
> **Self-esteem** – high or low – tends to be a generator of self-fulfilling prophecies. [doesn't **it**?] (p. 15)
>
> **Self-esteem** is an intimate experience. [isn't **it**?] (p. 52)

In effect, self-esteem and other abstractions, such as self-responsibility, self-acceptance, living consciously, creativity, flexibility, integrity and many more, dominate as Subjects in clauses. By

comparison, in *The Psychology of Self-esteem* (1969/2001) Branden tends to use people (men) as predominant Subjects. For example:

> When a **man** suffers from low self-esteem and institutes various irrational defenses… (p. 141)
>
> **Many men** become, in effect, the psychological prisoners of their own negative self-image. (p. 140)
>
> **A man** is free to ignore the warning signals of danger…. (p. 170)

Furthermore, in *Six Pillars* (1995), self-esteem is frequently constructed as doing things to people. In 1969 these constructions were less than rare. For example, in Extracts 19 below, taken from the 1969 text, 'man' is a source of all actions; 'he' *makes, dedicates, governs, defaults, retains, betrays, undercuts, commits* and *retains*. By contrast, Extracts 20 to 24 taken from the 1995 text construct self-esteem (rather than a 'man') as a source of actions. Self-esteem (high-, low-, or poor self-esteem), *dreads, seeks, avoids, desires, needs, looks for, allows, creates, inhibits* and *distorts*. (Subjects in bold)

> Extract 19
>
> 1969:
>
> **Man** makes himself worthy of living by making himself competent to live: by dedicating his mind to the task of discovering what is true and what is right, and by governing his actions accordingly. If a **man** defaults on the responsibility of thought and reason, thus undercutting his competence to live, **he** will not retain his sense of worthiness. If **he** betrays his moral convictions, thus undercutting his sense of worthiness, **he** does so by evasion, **he** commits treason to his own (correct or mistaken) judgment, and thus (**he**) will not retain his sense of competence. (p. 114)
>
> Extracts 20-24
>
> 1995:
>
> 20. If **low self-esteem** dreads the unknown and unfamiliar, **high self-esteem** seeks new frontiers. If **low self-esteem** avoids challenges, **high self-esteem** desires and needs them. If **low self-esteem** looks for a chance to be absolved, **high self-esteem** looks for an opportunity to admire. (p. 51)
>
> 21. …**it** allows us to *live* better – to respond to challenges and opportunities… (p. 5)
>
> 22. **High self-esteem** seeks a challenge and stimulation of worthwhile and demanding goals. (p. 6)
>
> 23. **Self-esteem** creates a set of implicit expectations about what is possible and appropriate to us. (p. 14)
>
> 24. **Poor self-esteem** not only inhibits thought, **it** tends to distort it. (p. 50)

This shift from taking people as a Subject in the discourse to taking abstractions as its main focus is not limited to the self-help genre, and certainly not to Branden's writings. As has been demonstrated in Chapter 4, the same tendency has been present in academic textbooks. It is

likely therefore, that there is a general tendency for contemporary psychological discourse (academic and popular) to shift its focus onto abstract psychological terms and constructs.

This discourse uses abstract concepts as Subjects in the clauses and constructs these concepts *as if* they were physical participants, *doing* things and influencing people and other abstractions. This type of language reifies self-esteem, self-responsibility, creativity, etc, into concrete 'objects'.

Although clearly metaphorical, these constructions influence our understanding of what self-esteem 'is' and its 'role' in our lives. The agentive constructions of self-esteem (or any other abstract, inner 'entity') direct our attention towards inner objects, presenting *the inner* as a site where actions and behaviours initiate. As a consequence, *the inner* can become a site where a traditional battle between the social and individual takes place. This, in turn, diminishes any need to invoke social or environmental explanations pertaining to the human condition.

Engagement and confession: the first person singular

The use of personal language and the 'first person singular' is another striking feature of the *Six Pillars* as compared with the earlier book. This kind of personalized, friendly, almost confessional narrative is, most likely, a direct outcome of a humanistic psychological desire to diminish the power difference between a therapist and a client by introducing more intimate ways of talking, bringing empathy, genuineness and warmth into the narrative (Frick, 1989). This personal and empathic narrative is characterized by the frequent use of the pronouns 'I', 'we' and 'our' which were absent from the earlier book.

This way of writing has been recognized as a powerful rhetorical strategy enhancing the factuality of claims (Hepburn, 2003). In *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem (1995),* Branden uses this strategy in four different ways, all of which enhance the factuality of the accounts and their genuineness.

Firstly, Branden brings into the text stories from his own professional life. He tells readers about his interactions with others as a therapist or a public figure. His experience with clients in therapy is particularly important here as it provides a confirmation of the viability of his

method; his claims and advice are not just theoretical principles – they have been, in fact, 'tested' within the therapy setting:

Extract 25

I often find it useful to do the following exercise, by way of deepening their understanding of self-acceptance. (p. 98)

or,

Extract 26

Sometimes in the therapy, when a person has difficulty accepting a feeling, I will ask if she or he is willing to accept the fact of *refusing* to accept the feeling. (p. 98)

Secondly, Branden uses the first person narrative as a way of engaging with readers. For example:

Extracts 27-30

27. I do not mean to imply that a person of high or healthy self-esteem consciously *thinks* in terms of these components… (p. 26)

28. Am I suggesting that the definition of self-esteem I offer is written in stone…? (p. 28)

29. I have already commented on Coopersmith's findings with regard to parental expectations. (p.189)

30. I do not believe we are intended to remain dependent children. (p. 109)

On the one hand, this way of writing can be seen as subjective, and thus may undermine the generality of the claims. Branden explicitly admits the authorship of his claims rather than constructing them as universal or discovered by some objective scientific research. On the other hand, the direct engagement with the reader and with the claims, where the author highlights his own authorship of the advice rather than presenting it as universal expertise, constructs the narrative as a personal and professional confession. In Branden's case an inference of expertise comes from him being an expert in the field with over fifty years experience of teaching and writing about self-esteem.

Thirdly, Branden uses the first person singular as a general, universalized "I". For example:

Extract 31

I can deny my feelings of self-love. I can pretend that I am more than I am; I can pretend that I am less than I am. I can disown by body; I can disown my mind. We can be frightened of our assets as of our shortcomings – as frightened of our genius, ambition, excitement, or beauty as of emptiness, passivity, depression, or unattractiveness. (p. 103)

Or, as part of affirmations:

32. I am responsible for raising my self-esteem. (p. 108)

33. I am responsible for accepting or choosing the values by which I live. (p. 108)

34. I should keep my promises. (p. 165)

35. I should strive to make my life a reflection of my inner vision of the good. (p. 165)

The statements above do not represent the author's own personal experience or beliefs; they make general claims about the nature of being human and about behaviours and ways of thinking that are desirable, and those that are not. Through these constructions, particular ways of perceiving oneself and relating to the self are promoted as right, and others - as wrong. This strategy normalizes certain ways of thinking or talking, and ab-normalizes others.

Finally, Branden offers very personal accounts to support his claims:

Extracts 36-37

36. As a teenager … I recall my sometimes acutely painful feelings of loneliness and of longing for someone with whom I could share thoughts, interest, and feelings. (p. 97)

37. Many years ago I was married to a woman I was very attracted to but no longer loved; my romance with Ayn Rand was fading but not officially terminated. Both relationships were painfully unresolved when I met and fell passionately in love with a third woman I would later marry: Patrecia, who would die at the age of thirty-seven. For a long time my mind was a chaos of unresolved loyalties, and I handled things very badly. (p. 155)

The examples given here are not only very personal; they may be seen as embarrassing or even shameful. These types of personal accounts can serve to highlight the 'humanness' of the author, his humility and the authenticity of his arguments. These personal examples are emotionally charged and reminiscent of intimate confessions one may engage with with close relatives or friends. They give a sense of the author himself being a part of the therapeutic process, even if it is only retrospectively, and he offers himself as a positive example of psychological transformation which, as he suggests, is available to all. I believe this is possibly one of the strongest and most effective rhetorical strategies used by Branden in *Six Pillars* to create a sense of 'authenticity', kindness and understanding.

Overall, the use of the first person "I", serves two objectives in this text. The use of personal accounts reflecting both 'private' moments in the life of the author, or those concerned with work, or the use of first person narratives, create an atmosphere of genuineness and warmth,

which are compatible with a humanistic psychological approach to therapy. Simultaneously, these strategies build the factuality of the accounts. They support arguments either through their 'confessional' character or through supporting the feasibility of advice by examples of actual therapeutic 'successes'.

Morality in The *Six Pillars of Self-esteem*

One of the most private confessions in the book, regarding Branden's love relationship with Ayn Rand, provides a framework for the author to engage in an explicitly moral argument. In the following extract, Branden, drawing on his own experience, argues that self-responsibility is a main moral obligation of a rational being. The claim is based on his own experience, wherein his 'irresponsible' behaviour is seen as a cause of pain for him and his lover.

> Extract 38
>
> In my twenties I formed an intense relationship with novelist philosopher Ayn Rand. … The story of this relationship is the dramatic centerpiece of *Judgment Day*. In the beginning and for some years, the relationship was nurturing, inspiring, valuable in many ways; I learned and grew enormously. But eventually it became constricting, toxic, destructive – a barrier to my further intellectual and psychological development.
>
> I did not take the initiative and propose that our relationship be redefined and reconstituted on a different basis. I told myself I did not want to cause pain. I waited for her to see what I saw. I looked to her rationality and wisdom to reach the decision that would be right for both of us. In effect I was relating to abstraction, the author of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged,* rather than to the concrete woman in front of me. I did not confront the fact that her agenda was very different from mine and that she was totally absorbed in her own needs. I delayed facing the fact that nothing would change unless I made it change. And because I delayed, I caused suffering and humiliation to us both. I avoided responsibility that was mine to take. No matter what explanations I gave myself, there was no way for my self-esteem to remain unaffected. Only when I began to take initiative did I begin the process of regaining what I have lost….
>
> Embracing self-responsibility not merely as a personal preference but as a philosophical principle entails one's acceptance of a profoundly important moral idea. In taking responsibility for our own existence we implicitly recognize that other human beings are not our servants and do not exist for the satisfaction of our needs. We are not morally entitled to treat other human beings as means to our ends, just as we are not a means to theirs. (pp. 111-113)

Self-responsibility, in this extract, is constructed as the most essential moral principle. Branden's advice relating to being responsible for one's actions and being able to confront *what is*, echoes the earlier ideals of rational, conscious and clear thinking as a guide to human behaviour.

Yet, responsibility, as constructed here, is closely connected with a continuous maintenance of self-esteem, and thus disturbingly self-absorbed. Once self-esteem remains high, responsible and moral behaviours will automatically follow. By 'taking initiative', 'embracing responsibility', 'confronting the facts' and 'taking responsibility for our own existence', individuals are able to maintain their self-esteem and to automatically respond in a morally desirable way. Avoiding responsibility, on the other hand, affects one's self-esteem and prevents one from behaving ethically.

Self-esteem has been placed in the centre, as the most important factor in behaving responsibly. The following taken from the above extract highlights the centrality of self-esteem:

> Extract 39
>
> No matter what explanations I gave myself, there was no way for my self-esteem to remain unaffected. Only when I began to take initiative did I begin the process of regaining what I have lost….
> (p. 111)

In summary, self-responsibility in the text above translates into moral behaviour. This, in turn, supports individuals' self-esteem. In this way, the *Six Pillars* constructs self-esteem as an outcome of moral, responsible behaviour.

Summary

In this chapter I have briefly examined two books by Nathaniel Branden. The aim was to determine whether constructions of self-esteem offered by the author in his first book *The Psychology of Self Esteem* (1969/2001) differ from those offered almost three decades later in *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem* (1995).

This examination, albeit brief, has demonstrated that there are marked differences in the way the two books construct self-esteem. There were also marked differences in the rhetorical content of the two works. Where some of the differences are consistent with the changes in academic textbooks, constructions of self-esteem become more agentive. This way of talking about self-esteem *as if* it was a physical entity, capable of doing things and of influencing people, has enabled the further reification of self-esteem into a solid, inner object. This, consequently, strengthens the vision of *the inner* as the source of all actions, as well as the origin of all external happenings.

Both works link self-esteem with morality. The earlier book was explicitly moralistic, whereas in the later, the moral advice becomes less explicit. Both books come from assumptions that the individual is a source of morality and that self-esteem is an important factor in enabling individuals to gain access to inner moral guidance. This is based on constructions of the human being as autonomous and capable of exercising choices over her or his life. The earlier book makes a straightforward connection between self-esteem and morality in terms of respect for oneself and in doing the right thing. In the latter book, the maintenance of self-esteem and self-responsibility are constructed as an ethical obligation.

Rhetorically, *The Psychology of Self-esteem* (1969) uses rigid, authoritative discourse to convey its claims. By comparison, the narrative contained within *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem* (1995) builds a sense of personal involvement of the author with his readers by using personal accounts and by explicitly engaging with the reader. The stories presented here are often private and emotionally charged, while others refer to professional experience of the author. All this serves to create an atmosphere of empathy, genuineness and warmth, and to add authenticity to the argument.

In the next chapter I will examine recent self-help books pertaining to the concept of self-esteem. The aim of the examination is to further explore the ways self-esteem has been reified in self-help literature and to investigate the moral obligation that these texts place on their readers.

Chapter 7: Obligation of Self-esteem

Introduction

In the last chapter I outlined the differences between the two books written by Nathaniel Branden. The first one, titled *The Psychology of Self-esteem* written in1969, presented an explicitly moralistic and philosophical account written with a rhetorically straightforward authoritative tone. His latest book, *The Six Pillars of Self-esteem*, published in 1994, based its factual claims on a more compound set of rhetorical strategies, such as the use of personal accounts, or constructing self-esteem as agentive. One of the noted differences between the two books was the use of morality by the author.

In this chapter I wish to examine other self-help publications coming from recent literature. The aim of the following examination is threefold. Firstly, I wish to investigate the ways self-esteem has been reified in these texts. Earlier chapters of this thesis have demonstrated that self-esteem has been discursively constructed as an increasingly solid, concrete object that has become more internalized and linked with abnormality. These patterns are expected to be present in the self-help books. Secondly, I wish to examine one specific strategy deployed in the reification of self-esteem; constructions of self-esteem that are agentive. The analyses presented so far in this thesis have demonstrated that the concept of self-esteem has become gradually more agentive over time. It is therefore expected that recent self-help texts will be dominated by this type of construction. Thirdly, I wish to investigate further the link between self-esteem and morality. As has been suggested before, the overt morality of early writing on self-esteem has disappeared from the more recent literature. However, this does not imply that recent publications do not convey moral messages. It is expected that the moral message will be presented in a different, less explicit form.

The Data

The texts used in the following analysis are taken from self-help, educational and governmental publications that have been distributed widely and were aimed at educating and advising a broad population. Most of the texts are contained within a compilation of articles and chapters published by Healey (2002). The articles and chapters from Healey's publication are also freely

available on the internet or come from a variety of books and material published in United States and in Australia. The full list of books used in this analysis is as follows,

Healey, J. (2002). *Self-Esteem: Issues in Society*; [The publication is a compilation of 23 pre-existing articles; they have been previously distributed through print or via the Internet]

Branden, N. (1995). *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem.*

Branden, N. (1998). *A woman's Self-Esteem.*

Branden, N. (1969/2001). *The Psychology of Self-esteem.*

Articles Published By National Association for Self-esteem (NASE: www.self-esteem-nase.org).

Weir, B. (1993). *You were born special, beautiful and wonderful. What Happened?*

McKay, M. & Fanning, P. (1992). Self-esteem.

All of the texts compiled and analyzed here contain a variety of explanations and views around the notion of self-esteem. The authors have used a diversity of metaphors and arguments, and provided a range of guidelines on 'how to improve one's self-esteem'. These metaphors and arguments offer a fascinating read and provide a plethora of descriptions and images to persuade a reader of the importance of this psychological construct. For example, some authors, when talking about the control we should have over our lives, use the metaphor of a car: "So who has the keys to your car?" (Healey, 2002, p. 15). Others use metaphors of an 'inner critic' (McKay and Fanning, 1992) and yet others talk about self-esteem as a 'mental' immune system (Branden, 1995). Yet, as intriguing and colorful as these metaphors are, they all share a particular quality; they construct self-esteem, as powerful, yet controllable. They also construct a human being in a specific way, as controlled by self-esteem (particularly 'low self-esteem') yet able to usurp control over it (and 'increase' it). This view, which has its base in a dichotomized view of personhood as a 'battle' between reason and emotions, has been earlier discussed in relation to Branden's two books. These and other assumptions about being human are examined in detail in the following sections.

Reification: Self-esteem as an agent

The discursive strategies used by writers are closely linked to what the text is designed to achieve. With an 'advisory' type of publication, apart from the evident goal of presenting claims as truthful, factual and plausible, it may be expected that authors will attempt to entice a reader to act according to the advice. In the texts examined here, a specific goal is to convince the

reader that 'working on one's self-esteem' is a worthwhile idea. To do this, self-esteem must be presented as essential to human well-being, and the recommendations and techniques offered – as effective and worthy of effort. In order to achieve these two goals, the texts (1) reify self-esteem to make it more 'real' and to increase its importance in our lives and, (2) work towards placing some kind of obligation on the reader to follow their particular advice by deploying descriptions of behaviours, feelings, reactions and life scenarios linked to self-esteem. This analysis examines the strategies used to reify self-esteem, particularly, but not exclusively, by constructing self-esteem as agentive. Later on, the examination will center on constructions of self-esteem in relation to ethics, and the obligation placed on readers to follow a particular set of conduct.

In scientific texts, the reification of self-esteem relies mainly on grammatical metaphors of nominalization and complex nominal groups. In the popular materials, the construction of self-esteem as a 'thing' is more explicitly affirmed, as the authors do not seem to be constrained by the need to provide 'empirically accurate' accounts. The constructions rely more on other metaphors; for example, lexical metaphors or grammatical metaphors where *material* processes are predominantly used. Therefore, popular texts construct self-esteem as agentive more freely, further reifying self-esteem into a 'dynamic entity'.

Negative definitions

One of the ways of reifying self-esteem in self-help materials is by the use of negative definitions, where self-esteem is defined by being contrasted with *what it is not*. Thus, it is claimed to be more than mere *self-confidence, self-love* or *vanity*. It is maintained to be unlike *egotism*, *boastfulness*, *self-centeredness*, *machismo*, *acting superior* or *arrogance*. It is further alleged not to be *what other people think of you*. The authors differentiate between *fake* and *real* self-esteem (Healey, 2002, p. 7), between *healthy* and *low* self-esteem (Healey, 2002, p. 3) or between *reality-based* self-esteem and *grandiosity* (Healey, 2002, p. 22). The following extracts are examples of such negative definitions (highlighted in bold):

Extracts 40-41

40. **Self-esteem is not self-confidence**. Self-confidence develops as we learn what we can do well and what we have trouble doing. Our self-esteem may be high or low, whether or not we are confident

about our ability to do something. (Healey, 2002, p. 9, taken from: *Improve Your Self-esteem* by Page and Page, 1995)

41. **Self-esteem is not the euphoria or buoyancy** that may be temporarily induced by a drug, a compliment, or a love affair. It is not an illusion or hallucination. Lots of things (some of them quite dubious) can make us "feel good" – for a while. … Further let me say that **self-esteem is not egotism**, as some people mistakenly imagine. Egotism is an attitude of bragging, boasting, arrogating to oneself qualities one does not possess, throwing one's weight around, seeking to proves one's superiority to others – all evidences of insecurity and underdeveloped self-esteem. (Branden, www.self-esteem–nase.org/journal01)

These 'negative' definitions act rhetorically to strengthen the authenticity of self-esteem as something well marked that can be held apart from other similar entities. Through the use of negative definitions, the concept is crystallized into a sharp and precise entity. This strategy provides 'solid' boundaries to this entity, and thus makes it more tangible and physical.

Metaphors

Another strategy to construct self-esteem as a *real thing* comes from grammatical and lexical metaphors dominating discourse around self-esteem.

Lexical metaphors

Through the use of lexical metaphors pertaining to health (self-esteem as an *immune system*, low self-esteem as a *disease*), physical objects (a *wall*, a *car*, a *picture of yourself*), as well as though metaphors of inner selves (like *Inner Critic* or *Inner Helper*), or even through more complex metaphors of *balance*, the construct of self-esteem has been discursively constructed as an entity inside individuals' heads, a tangible object that can be measured, assessed, evaluated and observed. The following instances exemplify the use of lexical metaphors in these texts (highlighted in bold):

Extracts 42-46

42. High self-esteem can be a **great helper in your life**. It can also make others feel safe, at ease, valued and stimulated when they are around you. (Healey, 2002, p. 32; taken from www.cyh.com)

43. New Research confirms what has repeatedly been found to be true; that self-esteem is **a key to successful development** and has a far greater impact on future success (and happiness) than intelligence or talent. (Healey, 2002, p. 38; taken from *The Age*, 2000,)

44. As a parent, **the most precious gift** you can give to your child is a sense of personal worth – high self-esteem. (Healey, 2002, p. 39; taken from www.nch.edu.au)

45. Low self-esteem, **a rope that binds**… (Healey, 2002, p. 7; taken from Mark Tyrell's *Uncommon Knowledge)*

46. Self-esteem is **an intimate experience**; it resides in the core of one's being. (Healey, 2002, p. 17, taken from *www.nathanielbranden.net)*

Grammatical metaphors

Discourses around self-esteem contained in popular publications often construct self-esteem as a measurable and essential *thing*, as an inner component or a developmental structure. Similar constructions have been examined earlier in relation to academic texts. Here, although the language is less technical, self-esteem still functions grammatically as a *thing* or an *entity* that can be identified, described, introduced, defined, provided with identity and invested with qualities (relevant formulations highlighted in bold). For example:

Extracts 47-48

47. We are all capable of **increasing our self-esteem**, no matter how high or how low we may feel on any given day. (Healey, 2002, p. 2; taken from Martin and Martin, T*he Positive Way)*

48. The **level of self-esteem is normally relatively stable** at any particular stage in life, though it **may be affected** slightly as one takes on new challenges and experiences success or failure in the progress. (Healey, 2002, p. 4; taken from Reasoner, R., *Self-esteem and Youth)*

Some of the constructions of self-esteem present it as an entity rather than an object, because it is presented as active, engaged in actions, influencing people and their lives or relating to people in some ways. Indeed, popular texts seem to rely heavily on these agentive constructions of self-esteem (agentive formulations highlighted in bold). For example:

Extracts 49-52

49. **Self-esteem enables** them to try new things without too much fear of failing, to reach out and make friends, and to manage problems they are likely to meet along the way. (Healey, 2002, p. 24 taken from *Child and Youth, Health South Australia* web site)

50. …how you can **get to know your self-esteem, invite it into your life and then work together with it** to achieve great things for you. (Healey, 2002, p. 31, taken from www.cyh.com)

51. High **self-esteem seeks** the challenge and stimulation… (Branden, 1995, p. 6)

52. Good **self-esteem builds** solid foundations for life. (Healey, 2002, p. 24, taken from *Child and Youth, Health South Australia* web site*)*

The examples above represent constructions of self-esteem as actively engaged with individuals. This engagement is realized through the use of processes such as *invite*, *work together, enable* or *seek*. These are 'material processes' which, as Halliday emphasizes, "express the notion that some entity 'does' something – which may be done to some other

entity" (1984, p.110). Here, self-esteem is constructed as an active 'entity' doing things.

Other examples use material processes to construct self-esteem as an entity or object which is being 'acted upon'. From this position, material processes express the notion of 'happening' rather than 'doing'. The user of these processes here suggests self-esteem to be a passive recipient of some 'things' happening to it. Simultaneously, the tangible nature of self-esteem is highlighted by suggesting self-esteem to be a physical object that can be *built, developed, or maintained* (highlighted in bold):

Extracts 53-54

53. The way to **develop** and **maintain high self-esteem**… (Healey, 2002, p. 15; taken from *www.creeda.com.au/nasr)*

54. If self-esteem is not **grounded** in reality, if it is not **built** over time … (Healey, 2002, p. 21, taken from *www.self-esteem-nase.org.journal01)*

Other strategies constructing self-esteem as real and physical assign attributes to it, for example:

Extract 55

The more **solid** our self-esteem the more equipped we are… (Branden, 1995, p. 6)

Or give it qualities, for example:

Extract 56

The **foundations of self-esteem are laid** early in life when infants develop attachments with the adults who are responsible for them. (Healey, 2002, p. 35; taken from Katz, L. *KidSource On Line)*

All these strategies, although reminiscent of those used in the most recent psychiatric texts, take the reification of self-esteem a step further. The dominant theme among these constructions is *agency* where self-esteem is presented as a solid, yet dynamic entity, actively engaged with individuals. The following section of this chapter further examines these agentive constructions.

Agency

There are two main themes of control in these popular texts on self-esteem: constructing self-esteem as holding control over individuals, and secondly, where individuals have control over self-esteem. Despite the appearance of inconsistency, these constructions are compatible with a dichotomized view of human being as *rational* (and thus in control), and yet *out of control* in the face of emotions, addictions, compulsions, etc. Within this dichotomy, rational responses are presented as ideal and morally right. On the other hand, being out of control is consistent with

being weak or irrational, both carrying negative values in our culture. In the texts considered here, rational behaviours are associated with category of high self-esteem, while the state of being *out of control* – with the category of low self-esteem.

High self-esteem and positive control

In the examples below the category of *high self-esteem* has been constructed as an entity having a positive influence on our lives. It has been metaphorically presented as a *helper, an energizer* or *a motivator.*

> Extracts 57-59
>
> 57. High self-esteem **can be a great helper** in your life. It can also **make others feel safe, at ease, valued and stimulated** when they are around you. (Healey, 2002, p. 32, taken from www.cyh.com)
>
> 58. Self-esteem **empowers, energizes and motivates**. It **inspires** us to achieve and allows us to take pleasure and pride in our achievements. (Branden, 1998, p. 5)
>
> 59. Self-esteem **enables** them to try new things without too much fear of failing. (Parenting SA, 2000)

The agency of self-esteem, in these extracts, has been constructed through the use of material verbs, such as *enables, makes, empowers, energizes.* All these processes construct self-esteem as having agency and able to *act* in a human-like way. Thus, because self-esteem can act upon individuals, it is represented as having a degree of control over people.

Low self-esteem and negative control

The extracts below exemplify the construction of another category, *low self-esteem,* and the values attached to it. Low self-esteem has been constructed in these texts as either preventing individuals from achieving success or preventing them from enjoying their success, by making them *feel* like a failure. Thus, metaphorically, low self-esteem has been presented as a *destructive* or *inhibiting force.*

> Extracts 60-62
>
> 60. Low self-esteem **has an effect** everything that we do. The way we feel about ourselves affect how we relate to other people and to the world at large. Low self-esteem **sets you up** to behave in self-defeating ways. (Healey, 2002, p. 10, taken from *Improve Your Self-esteem,* by Page and Page 1995)
>
> 61. They do not understand how low self-esteem **works to interfere with and destroy our lives**; therefore few therapists specialize in self-esteem issues. (Healey, 2002, p. 11, taken from *www.theSelfEsteemInstitute.com*)
>
> 62. She can't help thinking that she is a fraud, and impostor and that sooner or later somebody will find her out. She can't enjoy her successes because she believes that she does not deserve her

abilities. Low self-esteem still **troubles** Sandra… (Healey, 2002, p. 9, taken from *Improve Your Self-esteem,* by Page and Page 1995)

The devices used to construct low self-esteem as agentive are the same as those used for high self-esteem. As illustrated in the extracts above, the authors use material processes such as *works, destroys, (to) trouble,* to achieve constructions of agency. Moreover, the factual nature of claims, *as if* the claims consisted of universal truths, present low self-esteem as agentive and consequential to *everything* we do.

The agency of individuals

The above construction of self-esteem as a powerful force influencing individuals' lives has also been juxtapositioned in the texts by a construction of the human being as agentive, and therefore able to control her or his self-esteem. Because of the intended remedial character of these texts, these constructions also produce an important message, providing the reader with an incentive *to change* and *to work towards higher self-esteem.* For example:

Extracts 63-65

63. **Choose** joy, **choose** curiosity, enhance your life with new interests and experiences and new relationships will follow. It's your life, and no one **can** fill it but you. (Healey, 2002, p.2; taken from *The Positive Way web site,* 1999)

64. Even if you are lucky enough to have grown in a family that makes you feel worthy, many of you still emerge into adulthood with self-doubts – about how pretty, smart or capable you are. This is when the **choice** comes in: You **can** either let those self-doubts tell you who you are, or you **can** work through them, by improving the things you can and accepting those you can't. (Healey, 2002, p. 2; taken from *The Positive Way web site*, 1999)

65. Either way, **no one has to** endure low self-esteem forever, and the sooner you raise your self-esteem the better. (Healey, 2002, p. 10, taken from *Improve your self-esteem* by Page and Page, 1995)

The messages endorsed in these extracts, and the constructions of human agency over self-esteem, rely on discourses of choice, ability (*can*) and cultivation of a *real, healthy* and *realistic* self-esteem. These discourses construct a human being as having choices, being free to make these choices and, most importantly, being in control of her or his destiny. These examples rely on social values given to being free and *in control*. The human being making these choices is a rational being who can overcome irrational, out of control factors by focusing on self-esteem and working towards its improvement.

The following examples further illustrate this link between self-esteem and rationality:

66. If self-esteem is not **grounded in reality**, if it is not built over time through an **appropriate operation of mind** for example, through operating **consciously**, **self-responsibly** and with integrity – it is not self-esteem. (Branden, *www.self-esteem-nase.org/journal01.shtml)*

67. Self-esteem is intimately tied to a relentless respect for **facts**, *including facts about our own person.* (Branden 1998, p. 23).

68. The **realization** that we are substantially **responsible** for how we feel is empowering, once we **accept** it. It is one of the most important keys to living a happier, more effective, and anxiety free life. (Healey, 2002, p. 14, taken from *www.creda.com.au/nasr)*

In these extracts, *true* self-esteem is represented as a result of conscious, rational, objective thinking, based on facts and intellectual assessment. Self-esteem thus, is only *real* if it is controlled by conscious effort. This dichotomy of the conscious and unconscious (also expressed traditionally as a dichotomy of the rational and irrational or mind and emotions, etc), links, once again, constructions of self-esteem with morality and the ethical principles of liberalism.

The above examples show a diversity of linguistic devices used in self-help material to reify self-esteem. These are only a few examples taken from a plethora of patterns available in the texts examined. Yet, these few examples are sufficient enough to demonstrate a noteworthy pattern pertaining to agentive constructions of self-esteem. This pattern will be discussed in the next section below.

'Anthropomorphized' self-esteem

The above examination provides an overview of strategies used to construct self-esteem as a real thing (which can be *built*, *maintained*, *grounded* and *solid*, which *has foundations* etc.). Drawing on the analysis so far, I suggest that these texts construe self-esteem as more than just a physical object; they take the reification further and present self-esteem as a living entity. This living entity has an enabling power, it can be *known*, *invited*, it has an ability to *work together* with you, and can be a *helper*. As has been pointed out so far, metaphorically (through lexical and grammatical metaphors), self-esteem has been represented throughout the texts not only as a thing but as an entity with agency and the ability to do things, to demand reactions and to direct our actions.

As the reader will remember, Wittgenstein argued that psychological phenomena were represented in language in a similar manner to physical phenomena. He also pointed out the complexity and inconsistencies of these constructions within language. Yet, there is no mention in his work of any agentive structures and constructions of psychological phenomena in language. Therefore, I suggest that the most current 'reifications' of self-esteem move beyond the way psychological phenomena were constructed a century ago. Recent constructions move towards *anthropomorphizing* self-esteem.

Such agentive ways of constructing self-esteem is consistent with the findings of Halliday (1993) and his conclusions that contemporary written language, influenced by scientific (including psychological) discourses moves away from talking about human participants doing something to physical objects or relating to each other, towards more abstracted talk. This has been the case with formal, academic texts on self-esteem, as discussed in the previous chapters. The most recent developments in the way self-esteem, and possibly other psychological phenomena, are talked about, excludes human agents, or even human presence from psychological discourse. This consequently offers a greater degree of agency to constructs like self-esteem as, grammatically, they play a much more instrumental role in discourse. These recent grammatical developments in describing self-esteem, together with the use of metaphors provide a construction of self-esteem as more of a 'living' entity. Self-esteem is talked about in ways which, traditionally, have been associated with humans, or other living creatures, it is talked about as an entity having the ability to exercise power, control and influence over people and things.

Constructions of self-esteem, particularly *low* self-esteem, as carrying a potential to take over and ruin our lives, resulting in a range of harmful, debilitating symptoms, from destructive relationships (Branden, 1995) to depression and suicide, evoke traditional conceptions of humans being plagued by out-of-control emotions, sometimes to the point of being *possessed* by evil forces. I suggest that low self-esteem is demonized in these self-help texts, and human beings are presented as taken over by the powerful forces of low self-esteem. For example, the extracts below demonstrate constructions of low self-esteem as underlying most problems and ills.

69. Though an underlying problem of most people who seek therapy and a central issue in most relationship problems, cases of domestic violence, teen and gang violence, few therapists recognize the role of self-esteem (LSE), or know how to treat it. Consequently, people go from therapist to therapist, who label their problems as depression, anger, anxiety, etc. Off target, these interventions provide some immediate relief but do not produce lasting results. **Low self-esteem (LSE) is the underlying cause** of most cases involving fear, anxiety, anger, panic attacks, dependence and lack of assertiveness. Depression, eating disorders, domestic violence teen and gang violence addictive behaviours, relationship problems, child abuse, social anxiety disorder and other anxiety problems, avoidant personality disorders, dependent personality disorders. Yet, most therapists treat the symptoms and not the core issue. They do not understand how **low self-esteem works to interfere with and destroy our lives**; therefore few therapists specialize in self-esteem issues. (Healey, 2002, pp. 11/12, taken from *www.TheSelfEsteemInstitute.com*)

70. When people with LSE [low self-esteem] do something they perceive as stupid or inappropriate, they instantly feel humiliated and **suffer from "self-esteem attacks".** At these moments they desperately want to run and hide, though this is often not possible. They may plummet into depression and devastation, episodes that may last minutes, hours, days, or even weeks. Afterwards they feel even more embarrassed to face the people who they think are aware of their problem. Anger problems, domestic and teen violence have at their core low self-esteem. (Healey, 2002, p. 12, taken from *www.TheSelfEsteemInstitute.com*)

71. Once low self-esteem is formed, the fear and anxiety that accompanies it **affects everything a person does, says and thinks.** (Healey, 2002, p. 12. taken from *www.TheSelfEsteemInstitute.com*)

72. Sometimes it may feel as there is something **pulling you back** from being successful and happy in life. You may say this has got to do with your level of confidence or self-esteem. (Healey, 2002 p. 31, taken from *Child and Youth Health South Australia*)

The representation of low self-esteem through a metaphor of *possession* places a significant responsibility for all misfortunes and problems with an individual 'suffering' from low self-esteem. Traditionally, victims of 'possession' were believed to embody the demonic forces that dominated them; they were believed not only to be possessed, but to become 'evil' themselves (Guiley, 1989). Victims of low self-esteem are also constructed as overtaken by a negative force; there is no aspect of their lives free from this ill-fated influence.

The metaphor of possession provides a powerful rhetorical strategy to compel readers to work on their self-esteem. This *working* involves maintaining one's gaze directed inwards, preferably at all times, while continuously monitoring one's behaviour, reactions, and the extent to which one fits sought-after criteria. Traditionally, the fact of possession was inferred from the unusual behaviour of the alleged victim ranging from seizures or physical deformities to uncontrolled anger or depression. Indeed, any behaviour that was out of the ordinary was likely to be

interpreted as a possession (Guiley, 1989). Similarly, behaviours, reactions, successes and failures are treated, in recent texts, as direct indicators of the level of self-esteem. Depression, ADHD, loneliness, addictions, violence, unemployment, or even overachievement carries a potential to be 'translated' into low self-esteem (it is enough to look into the DSM IV to find enough support for this claim). To digress a little, the way isolated 'spinsters' were often accused of possession or witchcraft (Guiley, 1989), contemporary single women are often described as lacking self-esteem to attract a man and happiness into their lives (Branden, 1998).

Summary

Overall, the metaphor of possession in accounts of self-esteem constructs low self-esteem as a *plague* or an *infestation* of the human psyche. Simultaneously, through liberal discourses of rational choice and ability to be in control over one's emotional responses, human beings are constructed as 'able' to improve these conditions by rational choice and to increase their self-esteem. Both 'low' as well as 'high self-esteem' are closely linked with specific behaviours and with particular ways of being and ways of living. The prescriptive nature of these behaviours places responsibility on individuals to continuously scrutinize their behaviours, reactions, thoughts and interactions in order to watch for signs of low self-esteem.

By being constructed as capable of change, individuals are made responsible for their 'self-improvement' and their level of self-esteem. As will be demonstrated in the next section, these constructions build an association between self-esteem and morality. The choices with which readers are left are scaffolded within implied moral arguments; it may be considered 'immoral' or 'antisocial' to avoid shaping one's behaviour according to prescribed desirable standards and norms.

Obligation: self-esteem and moral regulation

So far this chapter has discussed the strategies used in popular texts on self-esteem to reify the concept of self-esteem into a concrete entity. Until now, the analysis has focused on discursive aspects that construct a particular version of reality. In this version of reality, self-esteem is not only constructed as a cognitive phenomenon, but also an a*nthropomorphized* entity, which holds some control over individuals' lives and destinies.

In this section, I wish to examine discursive strategies that have to do with persuasion and regulation; the strategies used to persuade the reader about the factuality and truthfulness of particular statements and the strategies that place an obligation on readers to follow particular ways of being. These ways of being are presented as more desirable, or more ethically sound.

As was demonstrated in the preceding analyses, there has been a noticeable association between self-esteem and morality within discourses of self-esteem. Branden's work showed that although an earlier explicit link between moral behaviour and self-esteem has disappeared from this more recent writings, it nevertheless continued to exist implicitly. For example, through the notions of normality, and presenting behaviours associated with high self-esteem as normal and those associated with low self-esteem as abnormal, authors make a judgment about particular behaviours and ways of being as superior.

The link between self-esteem and morality can be best examined from Foucault's perspective on morality and ethics (Foucault, 2000). Foucault offers a pragmatic theory of morality; in his view, morality has to do with *real behaviours* of people with respect to the moral codes imposed on them. He differentiates two categories of moral codes; one determines what is permitted or what is not, and another that governs the positive or negative value of any behaviour. These codes provide moral prescriptions of conduct, which are, according to Foucault, more universal across time. The moral code can be distinguished from what Foucault calls *ethics.* Ethics, he believes, has to do with the relationship we are meant to have with ourselves. This relationship is negotiated through several aspects, for example, the parts of ourselves we are supposed to 'work on' in order to become moral individuals and what kind of being we aspire to be when we behave morally, and how we know and define ethical obligations. These relationships to oneself, what Foucault calls 'ethics', are more culturally and socially specific: they differ between cultures, societies or even communities. Unlike moral codes which remain the same over longer historical periods, behaviours, values and meanings attached to ethical relations differ from one culture or community to another. Ethics, according to Foucault are more 'localized' in time and space. Thus, the 'relationship we are meant' to have with ourselves in advanced democracies is specific to this society and particular to this historical time, even though the moral codes and general values placed on behaviours have been unchanged for

centuries (e.g., killing or treachery). For example, the relationship to oneself, as it is promoted in advanced democracies, consists of continuous monitoring of one's psyche , self-analyzing and confessing one's psychological faults and deficiencies (Rose, 1998).

This view of morality provides a valuable insight into the texts analyzed here. In particular, the concept of ethics as a *relationship to oneself* seems to illuminate particular constructions of self-esteem in self-help books. Consequently, this section will demonstrate how Foucault's theory of morality makes it possible to describe recent self-help publications about self-esteem as invoking ethics, even though the moralistic tone is absent from these works. I will examine how the texts engage into prescribing ways in which individuals should relate to themselves by assigning positive or negative values on behaviours and by linking particular behaviours with self-esteem. Therefore, I suggest that self-help texts about self-esteem, not only present a particular version of reality, but also function to regulate the conduct of readers, and possibly of the population at large.

However, regulation is not attempted through explicit advice given in these texts. This advice, directed at raising individuals' self-esteem and providing the 'know-how' of how to do this, proves to be too general to be useful. Statements like these, taken from Healey (2002, p.33) are neither particularly detailed nor practical in providing any useful assistance. For example:

> Accept yourself for who you are
>
> Set goals and plan to achieve them
>
> Master any challenges
>
> Change unhelpful thoughts
>
> Be nice to yourself
>
> Be true to yourself
>
> Get involved in life.

Instead, I suggest, that regulation and persuasion are achieved through a set of different strategies going beyond explicit advice.

The following analysis makes a distinction between strategies used in the texts to *regulate* behaviours and those that serve to *persuade* readers. I use the name 'regulation' to refer to strategies that attempt to *identify* behaviours as either good or bad by linking them to high or

low self-esteem; and through this *assign a value* to these behaviours. These are behaviours such as being ambitious or self-assertive, which may not be immediately valued as 'good' in all contexts. Yet, by linking them to high self-esteem in a general way, the authors invest a positive value into these behaviours.

'Persuasion', on the other hand, relies on behaviours and ways of being that are commonly recognized as universally *desirable*. Both of these strategies work in the texts to promise readers some kind of gain, or an improvement, once they start working on their self-esteem. Yet, these strategies serve to provide more than just an incentive to raise self-esteem. Through the link with ethics, readers are obliged to follow the advice or have their morality questioned. The following analysis will explain this argument in a more detailed and clearer way.

The promise of high self-esteem

Texts talking about *high self-esteem* serve both persuasive and regulatory functions. These texts promise desirable behaviours, feelings, and achievements as an outcome of improving one's self-esteem, and simultaneously, they assign positive values to other behaviours by associating them with high self-esteem. The persuasive function in these texts *incites* people into working towards increasing their self-esteem by presenting it as desirable and bringing about success and happiness. The regulatory function, on the other hand, provides *guidance* relevant to personal conduct – they describe conduct of 'esteemed' people, and thus construct this particular conduct as ethically sound.

Persuasion

The first two extracts below are clear examples of the *persuasive function*; they construct people with high self-esteem as perpetually successful, feeling good, confident, always positive and immune to life's disappointments. These extracts explicitly assure readers that working and attaining high self-esteem will provide these eternal feelings of happiness and prosperity. For example:

> Extract 73-74
>
> 73. People with self-esteem feel good most of the time. They feel confident that they can achieve most of what they set out to do, most of the time… people with self-esteem will undertake projects which could fail, without fear… they only want to perform better and better, feeling good about their successes and learning as they go. They enjoy reward and recognition of success… people with self-

esteem tend to be more successful by their own definition of success. This is not because they have a special talent or great intellect. It is because they have a vision of what they want, ask for help whenever appropriate, use courage, perseverance and all their talent… They almost always have happy loving relations with friends and family…On the rare occasion when they have negative reactions from other people they do not feel bad or rejected. (Weir, 1993, p. 13)

74. People with high self-esteem have confidence in themselves, have the ability to solve problems rather than just worry about them, have the ability to confront or eliminate the things than frighten them, have the ability to take reasonable risks and take those risks, nurture themselves. Psychologists say that almost every aspect of our lives – our personal happiness, success, relationships with others, achievement, creativity, dependencies, even our sex lives – are dependent on our level of self-esteem. The more we have the better we deal with things. (Healey, 2002, p. 1)

The persuasiveness of these messages relies heavily on lexical features and their value content; words such as: *feel good, success, confidence, loving, nurturing* and *happy* feature strongly in these and other texts of a promissory nature. The liberal values of *ability, freedom, choice* and *being in control*, equip these descriptions with positive values. This, in turn, motivates the reader towards certain actions which have been valorized and, though this, constructed as morally significant. The liberal principles of personal freedom can be achieved through increasing one's self-esteem, which in effect brings happiness, success and achievement.

These messages have a strong ideological base; they place the individual at the center of the social arena. Yet, this typically liberal theme has been taken to the extreme, wherein there is no possibility of any social, physical or other restrictions– the only constraint acknowledged is 'lack of self-esteem'. Any situational limitations are non-existent in this construction, and social, cultural and familial restrictions and regulations are (at best) negligible. Individuals with high self-esteem are constructed as omnipotent and capable; they are able to overcome all limitations and become 'supreme' human beings unrestrained by anything. The promise is therefore more than merely achieving some relevant level of success; the promise is one of transcending all possible human limitations.

Regulation

The following extracts represent the *regulatory function* of self-help publications. Note, that they also contain promissory aspects as a way of inciting readers into 'increasing their self-esteem', yet, they are not bursting with positively charged lexis as the earlier examples:

75. With self-esteem you don't have to live with up to other people's expectations and they don't have to live up to yours… (Weir, 1993, p. 10)

76. People with self-esteem avoid comparing themselves with others, especially looking at other's apparent strengths and their own perceived weaknesses… People with self-esteem never put themselves down… They have learned the rule: The best way to feel good about myself is to help other people feel good about themselves… they have discovered that people who are critical or judgmental are reflecting their own inner conflict and pain and should be understood accordingly. (Weir, 1993, p. 13-14)

77. High self-esteem seeks the challenge and stimulation of worthwhile and demanding goals. Reaching such goals nurtures good self-esteem. (Branden, 1995, p. 51).

78. The more solid our self-esteem, the better equipped we are to cope with troubles that arise in our careers or in our personal life… The higher our self-esteem, the more ambitious we tend to be… The higher our self-esteem, the stronger the drive to express ourselves… The higher our self-esteem, the more open, honest, and appropriate our communications are likely to be… The higher our self-esteem, the more disposed we are to form nourishing rather than toxic relationships. This is because like is drawn to like, and health is attracted to health… If you hope to achieve a happy relationship with a man, no factor is more important than self-esteem – yours and his… When a woman has a good self-esteem, she tends to treat others well and to require that they treat her well. (Branden, 1998, p. 4-5)

The behaviours described in the extracts above are summarized in the list below. Only a few of the items on the list can be instantly recognized as inherently positive, desirable or ethical. Examples of these are: *open, honest and appropriate communications, happy relationship* or *being equipped to cope.* The values of the remaining examples are not so straightforward. For example, *being ambitious* or *having a strong drive to express oneself* may be perceived as inappropriate in many situations, and therefore carry ambiguous valorizations within Western English-speaking cultures.

(not) living up to someone else's expectations

(not) comparing yourself with others

never put oneself down

seeking challenges and stimulation

(not) seeking the safety of the familiar and undemanding

being equipped to cope

being ambitious

having a strong drive to express oneself

open, honest and appropriate communications

to achieve a happy relationship with a man

treat others well and require that they treat her well.

These ambiguous descriptions function to *regulate* rather than *incite*; they support and promote some behaviours as desirable and moral (i.e., *being ambitious, seeking challenge and stimulation*) and construct other behaviours as not desirable and morally flawed (i.e., *seeking the safety of the familiar, comparing yourself with others*). Therefore, these texts serve to guide the reader as to the values that should be considered more appropriate for certain behaviours. For example, the preference for *the familiar and undemanding* may be seen as a preference for less stress, pressure and possible anxiety; while *not comparing oneself with others* may be quite a difficult task for any individual. Yet, these behaviours are constructed here as unambiguously and universally positive.

The fault of low self-esteem

Descriptions of behaviours associated with low self-esteem have been presented in the texts as highly detrimental to individuals' lives and also as shameful and undesirable. Through this, these descriptions function to further persuade the reader to undertake steps towards *improvement*, that is, towards raising their self-esteem.

> Extracts 79 - 83
>
> 79. The critic blames you for things that go wrong… he calls you names – stupid, incompetent, ugly, selfish, weak – and makes you believe that all of them are true. The critic reads your friends' minds and convinces you that they are bored, turned off, disappointed, or disgusted by you. The critic exaggerates your weaknesses by insisting that you "always say stupid things", or "always screw up a relationship," or "never finish anything on time". (McKay & Fanning, 1992, p. 15)
>
> 80. Low self-esteem seeks the safety of the familiar and undemanding. Confining oneself to the familiar and undemanding weakens self-esteem… (Branden, 1998, p. 4)
>
> 81. The lower our self-esteem, the less we aspire and the less we are likely to achieve… (Branden, 1998, p. 4)
>
> 82. The lower our self-esteem the more muddy, evasive, and inappropriate our communications are likely to be because of uncertainty about our own thoughts and feelings, as well as anxiety about listener's response… (Branden, 1998, p. 5)
>
> 83. …insecure men and women are drawn to one another and form destructive relationships (Branden, 1998, p. 5)

There are aspects of a regulatory function, as well as persuasion, present in these extracts. *Seeking the safety of the familiar,* or *uncertainty about our own thoughts and feelings* used in this particular context serve to undermine these behaviours as undesirable or faulty.

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Consequently, descriptions of behaviours associated with low self-esteem serve the same two functions served by the descriptions of high self-esteem. They persuade, this time by the use of *discrediting* rather than promising or guaranteeing the outcomes. The reader is provided with descriptions of *what should be avoided,* not, as it has been the case earlier, of *what should be aimed for.* There is also a regulatory aspect to these texts; by specifying which particular behaviours are associated with low self-esteem, these behaviours are represented as undesirable.

The judgment placed on these behaviours as undesirable, faulty or, alternatively, as desirable and superior provide a moral dimension to these descriptions; behaviours associated with high self-esteem are ethically sound, by being constructed as an ideal towards which we should aim. Whereas those associated with low self-esteem are constructed as ethically faulty or wrong, by being evaluated as misguided and incorrect.

Summary

The above analyses have examined the structures used by popular texts on self-esteem to reify self-esteem and to place an obligation on readers to adjust their conduct and increase their self-esteem.

It has been argued that the reification of self-esteem has been achieved through several strategies; negative definitions, metaphors and agency. The last strategy, the construction of self-esteem as agentive and as having a hold over individuals' lives, has been one of the most noteworthy features of these texts. It has been argued that popularized psychological texts demonize low self-esteem; discourses centring on low self-esteem are reminiscent of discourses of 'possession'.

The demonization of low self-esteem combined with the positive evaluations of high self-esteem as 'superior', provide a moral dimension to the texts about self-esteem. This enables the authors to promote detailed behaviours as ethically sound and others as ethically wrong. Behaviours and ways of being which are constructed as ethical are consistent with the philosophy of neoliberalism, which lies at the base of modern ways of governing individuals (Rose, 1998). The construct of self-esteem, from this perspective, is nothing more than part of a

regulatory moral code of what it means to be an ethical human being, and is closely bound to socio-cultural elements of late capitalism and liberal notions of individualism.

Conclusion

This section briefly examined a vast body of popular psychological literature, so called self-help publications, in order to inspect the ways self-esteem has been reified in these texts. The reification of the concept of self-esteem has been achieved through the construction of self-esteem as agentive. Over time these agentive discursive constructions become more prominent in texts; proceeding towards *anthropomorphizing* self-esteem and *demonizing* low self-esteem.

The reification of self-esteem has been framed within liberal moral principles. Despite the explicit moralistic tone of the early publications by Branden being replaced by the friendly, genuine, personal tone more recently, the ethical underpinnings of arguments about self-esteem have not disappeared from self-help publications. Drawing on Foucault's definition of ethics as a relationship to oneself, I suggested that recent self-help books go beyond providing practical advice about how to achieve success and happiness; they engage in evaluating and promoting certain behaviours as ethically sound and others as ethically faulty. Through these strategies, the authors participate in shaping the conduct of readers and placing obligations on readers to follow promoted practices as morally superior. These practices, however, although framed within dignified notions of freedom and liberty, provide an extreme atomistic view of a human being as an isolated, yet omnipotent individual, creating her or his own destiny in a contextual vacuum.

The next section examines the issue of ethical obligation and the possible consequences of extreme individualistic discourses about self-esteem on people, in a world that is less than perfectly fair. The examination will investigate the applications of the notions of self-esteem in government documents and look at the consequences these constructions have on public policies and the actual liberty of individuals.

SECTION 4: Self-esteem and governance

Chapter 8: The esteemed citizen

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that constructions of self-esteem within mental health disciplines have served to reify the concept as an inner, cognitive, concrete object. These constructions, although changing over time towards greater solidification, have remained ambiguous and contradictory. This reification has enabled constructions of self-esteem to be quantified, measured and manipulated by mental health professionals. These constructions of self-esteem as a reified, solid, inner object have been taken up by popular psychological and 'self-help' publications, wherein the concept of self-esteem has undertaken further reification into an agentive object needed to be controlled, focused on and maintained at all times. There has been a visible link, in these publications, between self-esteem and ethical obligations placed on individuals to adjust their beliefs and behaviours. This chapter further explores how these constructions of self-esteem serve a particular political and ideological role in governing in modern democracies.

One of the aims of this examination is to further demonstrate that psychological constructs, including the construct of self-esteem, are not developed in a social and historical vacuum. It is commonly assumed that psychological concepts explain underlying psychological phenomena and that these are being gradually discovered by researchers in order to enhance our understanding of human nature and to increase human well-being. An alternative view, which underpins this analysis, is that psychological constructs are social artifacts (Gergen, 1985) that are constructed within discourse to serve particular political or ideological purposes. This analysis will, hopefully, demonstrate clearly that the social constructionist view of self-esteem is a more valid one. The attempt here is to show that, indeed, the construction of self-esteem has been closely intertwined with ideological and political objectives, and that it cannot be separated from the political sphere of governing individuals in advanced democracies.

This section will explore how the tangible nature and causal properties of self-esteem, implied by its academic and popularized constructions, has enabled policy makers and government agencies to make claims about self-esteem determining the lives of individuals. Self-esteem has been taken up by neoliberal policies as a solid object in people's psychology, which manifests itself in a successful, fulfilled and happy life. Individuals are, therefore, compelled to gaze inside in order to assess and then adjust and manage their level of self-esteem. This time, the responsibility goes beyond individuals' lives; self-esteem becomes a social obligation. To produce a better society, free of social problems, individuals are urged to improve themselves and raise their self-esteem.

This section examines a central and significant document published in 1990 by the California Department of Education, called, *Towards the State of Esteem: California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility (1990)*. The document, based on research developed over several years and involving teams of professionals, provided a set of discourses giving a blueprint for explanations and justifications for future policy makers and legislators, both within and outside the United States. In particular, the discourses in this document, together with its ideological overtones, served as a blueprint to validate reforms within the welfare system. These reforms were conducted in accordance with neoliberal views of self-sufficiency and independence (Mink, 1998; Rose, 1998).

Most importantly, negative evaluations and judgments contained in these discourses have provided a set of particular ethical principles attached to issues like work, welfare, independence, etc. These principles underpin the re-emergence and acclamation of conservative views, some of them seriously challenging the important accomplishments of feminism or anti-racial movements within Western English-speaking countries. Framed within the discourses of personal liberty and freedom, these policies and reforms function to undermine the liberties of the poor and the disadvantaged.

A detailed discussion of the way this document has influenced welfare reforms is undertaken in the proceeding analyses. Yet, before I engage in a more thorough examination of the discursive content of the document, I wish to introduce two publications crucial to the analyses here; one

being the report mentioned earlier *Towards the State of Esteem* which serves as a source for examination, and *The Social Importance of Self-esteem*, a book containing research the report draws on for its claims. Following this, I wish to outline the methodology used in the analysis, followed by the analyses.

The analyses in this section examine three extracts taken from *Towards the State of Esteem*. One of the texts comes from the chapter about N*urturing self-esteem*, and two from the chapters with specific recommendations for the prevention of teenage pregnancy and welfare. The first extract provides a distinctive example of ideological principles underpinning the document, while the remaining two demonstrate how this ideological set of beliefs influence the way poverty, unemployment and single motherhood are constructed in terms of individual mental, psychological and moral deficiencies. Consequently, the analyses, will centre on these two issues; the ideological principles supporting the report's claims and the constructions of teenage mothers and sole mothers, particularly those who are poor and reliant on public support. The analyses will investigate the ways in which discourses of self-esteem have presented poor mothers as responsible for their own disadvantage. Moreover, the examination will highlight how the affirmative and optimistic constructions of personhood, contained in these discourses, make it difficult to argue against the limitations of these individual-blaming explanations.

Drawing once again on the theoretical foundations provided by Wittgenstein and Foucault, I wish to take the critique of the document *Towards the State of Esteem* further and examine its discursive content and it's potentially damaging effects on feminism in English-speaking Western countries. I will focus on the beliefs underlying the document, as well as constructions of the categories *teenage pregnancy* and *chronic welfare dependency*. I will suggest that other categories emerging from these texts are those of *teenage mother* and *welfare mother*. The analyses will examine the construction of these categories as well as the evaluations contained in the texts pertaining to these categories. Finally, I will investigate the ways in which the discursive content of the document may be potentially influential for policy makers and legislators both within and outside the United States. However, to start with, I wish to closely examine the two documents, *Towards the State of Esteem* and *The Social Importance of Self-esteem.*

'Towards the State of Esteem'

The data for all analyses in this section comes from a single document *Towards the State of Esteem* published by the California Department of Education in 1990. The 150 page document is a final report presented to the department summarizing years of work funded by the California state government. The bill funding the 'Task Force to promote Self-esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility' had been signed by the senate in response to an increase in 'social ills' plaguing modern societies. The aim of the Task Force was to develop an innovative and unprecedented approach to dealing with social problems. This approach was to center solely on prevention. Moreover, the Task Force set out to find a way of guiding people in "how to live without the government taking care of them" (Mecca *et al*, 1989, p. xvi). The supposition on which the Task Force founders based their argument believed that teaching individuals "how they can live their lives and rise their kids better" will automatically result in "less welfare, crime, violence and drugs" (Mecca *et al*, 1989, p. xvii).

Consequently, the underlying assumption made by the final report *Towards the State of Esteem* is that 'low self-esteem' lies at the base of many social problems, such as addictions, child abuse or unemployment. The initiator of the legislation, John Vasconcellos, based his beliefs in self-esteem being crucial for social harmony and individual achievement on his own personal experience. A successful lawyer in a prominent firm, a politician and a 'high achiever', Vasconcellos found, nevertheless, his sense of self and sense of self-worth to be almost non existent. As he himself reports, these were restored in therapy, based mainly on Carl Roger's and humanistic psychology's therapeutic principles (Mecca *et al.* 1989). This personal experience is what Vasconcellos draws on to justify his assumptions about the importance of self-esteem for social stability.

Yet, his own experience of 'psychological growth' is seen as a solution to *all* social problems. From his perspective, the psychological health of one individual is extrapolated onto the whole of society. Vasconcellos' 'low self-esteem' did not make him into a criminal or an abuser, and yet, he assumes, both crime and abuse can be dealt with by increasing self-esteem of the poor and disadvantaged. Vasconcellos does not seek to help other 'high achievers' to gain a sense of

self but to 'improve' those who, in his view, fail to uphold social standards. What he ultimately seeks is to explain crime and material deficiencies through personal inner deficiencies.

This extrapolation of personal well-being onto the whole society is typical of humanistic psychology, and has been one of the main criticisms directed at this branch of the discipline (Prilleltensky, 1994). This assumption that individuals' psychological improvement will inevitably lead to an improved society lies at the base of many contemporary policies and developments (Rose, 1998). *Towards the State of Esteem* is one of the earliest of these kinds of documents. It is also the most marked and most apparent example of applying this way of thinking to actual government policies.

The first five of the six sections of the document summarize the Task Force's work and their vision, attempt to comprehensively define self-esteem and finally, provide a set of 'principles' crucial for 'nurturing one's self-esteem'. The last, and by far longest, section contains recommendations and a discussion of all six key social problems. These problems involve *family problems* (consisting of child abuse and teenage pregnancy), *academic failure*, *addictions*, *crime and violence*, *poverty* (including 'chronic welfare dependency') and finally, *self esteem in the workplace*.

Each 'problem' section of the Recommendation chapter includes a general overview of the issue followed by specific and practical recommendations. The recommendations in each section include general advice aimed at increasing self-esteem and decreasing social problems. For example, the section concerning family problems provides the following recommendations:

Highlight the importance of parents through a media campaign

Include child rearing courses in the school curriculum

Make courses on child rearing available to all

Make self-esteem enhancing childcare available to all

Provide health education for expectant mothers and fathers

Provide self-esteem and responsibility training for all foster parents and institutional care staff

Reduce the number of teenage pregnancies through self-esteem and age-appropriate sexual awareness education

Provide family life programs for adolescents

Provide programs to encourage responsibility of teenage fathers

Provide programs for parents at risk of abusing children

Provide women's shelters that contain a self-esteem and responsibility component. (CaliforniaTask Force, 1990, p. 51)

According to the authors, ensuring such interventions will lead to a decrease in incidents of child abuse or teenage pregnancies across California and, as the authors hope, across the United States in general.

The recommendation section consists of a set of simple generalizations without detailed explanation or specification. Although each recommendation has been extended on, the elaborations are universal and all-inclusive; they lack any specifications or rigorous provisions. For example, the recommendation titled *Make self-esteem enhancing childcare available to all* reads:

> Extract 84
>
> Encourage the availability for all children of adequate, effective, self-esteeming childcare, which includes prenatal support and involvement, on both continuing and a respite basis. Furthermore, request that existing licensing requirements be expanded to include training for childcare workers in the techniques for building self-esteem and personal and social responsibility.
>
> Childcare can be an opportunity for esteeming both children and their parents and for teaching parents about child development and child rearing techniques that promote self-esteem. In addition, parents need to receive emotional support from childcare personnel. (p. 54)

These unspecified and indeterminate comments provide a wide scope for interpretation. The intentions of the authors and possible implementations are open for elucidation, depending on the preferences of those in power to do so. This form of writing gives maximum power to those who have the authority to make specific use of this legislature – those in power to interpret and implement it (Bhatia and Luckmann, 2001).

'The Social Importance of Self-esteem'

The second book crucial for this analysis is a text published a year before the final report. The *Social Importance of Self-esteem* (1989) is comprised of a collection of contributions from academics and researchers summarizing available evidence linking self-esteem with specific social problems. The contributors come primarily from universities across the United States, and their background is principally in either psychology (educational, counseling, experimental, developmental and psychotherapy) or sociology and social welfare.

All of the contributors found the link between self-esteem and social problems inconsistent and low. None of the research reviewed claimed a directional effect pointing towards self-esteem as a *cause* of any of the problems evaluated. Even correlations failed to provide a clear and consistent pattern. Indeed, some results countered the assumptions of the Task Force, that self-esteem is responsible for 'all social ills'. For example, high self-esteem correlated with the use of some drugs (p. 15) as well as with "permissive attitudes towards sexual intercourse [in teenagers] or with loss of virginity" (p. 137).

Despite these conflicting and uncertain findings, the Task Force concluded in their final report (1990, p. 4) that:

> Self-esteem is the likeliest candidate for a social vaccine, something that empowers us to live responsibly and that inoculates us against the lures of crime, violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, chronic welfare dependency, and educational failure. The lack of self-esteem is central to most personal and social ills plaguing our state and nation as we approach the end of the twentieth century.

Criticisms of the Task Force report

Not surprisingly, many of the criticisms of the document *Towards the State of Esteem*, come from social and political analysts, who have focused on evident discrepancies between claims made by the Task Force's report and the research on which the report was based. One example of this kind of critical voice comes from the book *The Myth of Self-esteem* by Hewitt (1998). The author points out, quite validly, that the findings reported were mixed, insignificant, and implied nonexistent links between self-esteem and social problems. This, however, did not discourage the Task Force members from asserting that "self-esteem may well be a unifying concept to reframe American problem solving" (p. vii). However, as Hewitt suggests, this insistence on self-esteem being a 'social vaccine' in the face of inconsistent and weak evidence, had been pictured as yet another Californian cultural extravaganza. The 'touchy, feely and dopey' character of the report may be just another manifestation of Californian unbridled enthusiasm for extreme or unusual solutions according to Hewitt (1998).

There are two limitations to these criticisms. Firstly, although considering the 'culture' of California, these criticisms neglect the broader political and cultural context within which the report was created. Secondly, dismissing the document as another Californian peculiarity

ignores the potential consequential character of the document both within and outside the United States. For example, some Australian government documents are funded on similar presuppositions that poverty and welfare can be eliminated by increasing the self-esteem of the poor (Parenting SA, 2000; Gray and Stanton, 2002). Therefore, these criticisms ignore the wide-ranging effects and intimate relationship between the Task Force report with the political and social development of contemporary English-speaking cultures.

A different critique comes from a more multifaceted and politically inclined perspective. For example, Cruikshank (1999), in her brief analysis of the document *Towards the State of Esteem*, highlights a general tendency of modern democratic states towards "an invisible and gentle subjection" which has replaced more overt ways of governing citizens (p. 234). Drawing on Foucault's notions of *technologies (*or *techniques) of the self (*1988), she argues that "self-esteem is but one in a long line of technologies of citizenship" (p. 247), central to democratic stability. In modern democracies, where explicit forms of government have been replaced by the self-government of citizens and their voluntary subjectification, the goal of governing is to enhance individual subjectivity. For example, the lack of social power of the poor has been redefined into individual incapability and mental deficiencies, and consequently, these inner deficits became a domain of governing.

Cruikshank's (1999) critique brings together Foucault's model of govermentality and a critique of the most recent feminist preoccupations with *personal life*. As a second focus of her critique, Cruikshank takes Gloria Steinem's best seller, *Revolution from within: a book of self-esteem*. She argues that this book, as well as the Task Force report, denotes a failure to see the extent to which private lives are constituted by power relations. Both Steinem and Vasconcellos (the initiator of the California Task Force) see a *natural inner self* as separate from the terrain of government; they see it as repressed rather than shaped by power relations. To Cruikshank, the self-esteem movement takes governing even further within the private sphere where *self* becomes a side of subjectification and control.

However, Cruikshank (1999) does not take her analysis far enough to investigate what she herself is interested in: why the issue of teenage pregnancy has been selected among the handful

of the most pressing social problems in American society. Cruikshank notes that both Steinem and the Task Force express their undying belief that focusing on girls and their self-esteem is the best prevention against teenage pregnancy. Yet, she does not examine critically constructions of the category of 'teenage pregnancy' and discourses about unmarried mothers in general that are propagated in these texts. Nor does she explore the conservative and anti-feminist foundations of these discourses.

As Cruikshank (1999) further points out, neither Steinem nor Vasconcellos are able to recognize to what extent self-esteem explanations render the private sphere a site of governance. Yet, these explanations are not simply *another* technique of acting on democratic subjects, as Cruikshank maintains. 'Self-esteem', 'empowerment', 'positive thinking' or the latest 'enterprise' are not just passing ways to subject citizens. They have lasting consequences that affect particular groups in specific ways. As will be demonstrated shortly, the Task Force Report provides explanations that undermine the position of women by singling out particular groups of women. Some of the concerns relevant to poor unmarried mothers (including teenage mothers) may not be immediately relevant to middle class feminists, and thus do not fit Steinem's and other middle class feminists' view of subjectivity. Yet, these hyper-conservative explanations regarding family, childrearing and gendered social roles, which underlie self-esteem discourses, have a potential to affect the lives of *all* women (Mink, 1998).

Method of analysis: the waves of information

This section adopts a method of analysis developed by Martin and Rose (2003). This method is used in the present as well as two following chapters. This method relies on Systemic Functional Linguistics as a way of analyzing discourse. The analysis focuses on the way information is linguistically 'packaged' and presented to readers, and how the information unfolds throughout the text. This type of analysis assumes a degree of choice on the part of authors as to how the information is presented for the reader to 'take it in' as well as to the direction of the text and its organization (Martin and Rose, 2003).

This way of analyzing discourse looks for patterns of linguistic choices in terms of reoccurrence or variability within particular linguistic structures. These patterns can be specific to the genre,

for example personal narratives center around the reoccurring first person Subjects (*I, we, us*) (Martin, 2001), whereas academic writing usually involves abstractions as Subjects (*self-esteem, instability, reformulation, vicissitude*) (Halliday, 1993). Within these genre-specific patterns there is still a considerable degree of freedom left to the authors to make definite selections. The structure provided by genre-specific patterns serves to build a level of understanding between the author and the readers as to the purpose of the text, yet leaves room for the authors to use language to fit their particular goals.

Both sets of choices serve to realize rhetorical, constructive and evaluative meanings. These functions coincide with Potter's (1996) view of text as having rhetorical action and epistemological orientation; functioning to persuade, to accomplish something and to construct accounts as factual. The *rhetorical* function of the text is to orient itself to other possible versions. This function may be best illustrated by Bakhtin's way of describing text as *dialogical.* Bakhtin (1981) established that all texts are essentially of a dialogical nature as they take into account other existing or hypothetical texts. The *action* function of a text is to persuade, encourage, blame or accuse, while the *epistemological* orientation of the text is to present accounts as factual, accurate or sincere. All these functions serve to construct specific categories and versions of 'truth' and to persuade the reader about the supremacy of these particular versions.

All these functions are realized linguistically though grammatical and verbal choices. Therefore, a systematic analysis of text and patterns within the text can reveal a great deal about the specificities of the purpose of the text and particular ideological or philosophical assumptions made by the authors. Furthermore, the analysis can reveal the focus of the text and how the categories constructed within the text are evaluated through these particular constructions.

To achieve this, I wish to focus on the information structure of the texts; the grammatical structures that give the clause its character as a message. In the English language a clause is "organized as a message by having a special status assigned to one part of it" wherein "one element in the clause is enunciated as a theme" (Halliday, 1984, p. 37). In the English language, the theme occupies the first position in a clause. The term Theme was first used by the Prague

school of linguists to denote an element that serves as a point of departure of the message; what the clause is concerned with. Thus, although structurally it can be identified as coming first in the sentence, functionally, it serves as a focal point and it organizes the message; the message is spanned around the Theme as its semantic centre (Martin and Rose, 2003).

In the English language the Theme usually coincides with the Subject. The Subject can be easily recognized in text; it is a participant picked up in a question tag (e.g.: _We are each unique, aren't_ _we_ or _Accepting ourselves_ _begins with an honest look at who we are, doesn't_ _it_). Thus, the Subject – participant can be a person or a group of people, an object or an abstract concept like 'accepting ourselves'. This fuse of Theme with Subject is the most typical way clauses are constructed, yet, this is not the only possibility in the English language.

Sometimes, the Theme may be composed of other elements than nominals, for example adverbial or prepositional groups (Halliday, 1984). These Themes are atypical and thus are termed 'Marked Themes' in a clause. Clauses with marked Themes stand out in the text because of this unusual structure. Marked Themes draw attention and mark the point at which they appear in the text. These clauses are often indicative of change of topic or focus in the narrative and mark points in the text where there is a shift of focus. As has been argued by Halliday (1984), Marked Themes indicate a shift in discourse towards a new topic, place, time or a new participant entering the 'information flow'. In other words, they mark 'discontinuity'. For example, a marked Theme may be used to move from one phase in the story to another, from one episode to another in narratives or from one evaluation to another in personal accounts (Martin and Rose, 2003).

While the Theme comes first in a clause, the other end of the clause is typically occupied by the New. The New moves text forward; it signifies an expansion of the text, where the text is going, a 'flagging' forward. It is, as the name implies, the new bit of information, that cannot be deduced from text so far, and what is assumed to be novel to the reader. The part of information contained in Themes is assumed to be known before, it has either been available in the text earlier or is shared by the reader and the writer. Therefore, what falls first in a clause is 'a

given', a common understanding. On the other hand, the piece of information coming last in a clause is assumed to be something new, something the writer wants to share with the readers, based on the shared assumptions contained in Themes.

Consequently, the choices for Themes and News work together to 'package' the information into 'single information units' (Martin and Rose, 2003, p. 179) The most typical information unit, therefore, is a clause. However, at times, an information unit occupies more than a clause, and sometimes, less than a clause. Overall, the information units, each consisting of the 'already known' and the 'new' elements, organize meanings to be presented to readers. The way these meanings are organized in text marks the information flows in the text (Martin and Rose, 2003).

To describe the flow of information within the text, Martin and Rose (2003) use a metaphor of waves. This metaphor serves to remind us that information unfolds in a dynamic manner; the way text is organized is not a fixed structure and text itself is not a rigid object but, in fact, unfolds as it is produced or used. The text unfolds through the flow of big and small waves; clauses, paragraphs and sections, marking prominent parts of the text. The metaphor of waves provides a way to "capture the sense in which moments of framing represent a peak of textual prominence, followed by a trough of lesser prominence" (p. 176). The authors use the term *periodicity* to describe the regularity of information flow, which is reflected in regular patterns in discourse, what they call a *beat*, or a *rhythm* of the text.

> Discourse creates expectations by flagging forward and consolidates them by summarizing back. These expectations are presented as crests of information, and the meaning fulfilling these expectations can be seen as relative diminuendos, from the point of view of information flow. (p. 176)

Martin and Rose (2003) compare this regularity of Themes and the New in written texts to the pattern of *little waves*. Moving above clause level, the patterns are represented by *bigger waves*. Paragraphs are thus marked by hyperThemes and hyperNews, while bigger portions of texts are marked by macroThemes and macroNews. The functions of these are in many ways similar to the functions served by Theme and New within a clause. Thus the hyperTheme is a starting point of a paragraph (traditionally called a 'topic sentence') while a hyperNew takes the text to a new point. Yet, their function is not limited to that; the hyperTheme produces expectations about the unfolding of the whole paragraph, while the hyperNew distills and summarizes the

new information accumulated in a paragraph. This *wave pattern* within a text is therefore constructed out of layers of Themes and the New, with layers of Themes highlighting the focus of the text and layers of News expanding the text and providing directions to it.

Self-esteem and ideology

The text for this analysis has been taken from the Task Force report *Towards the State of Esteem,* and comes from the chapter *Key Principles for Nurturing Self-esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility.* This chapter is divided into sections, starting with a general overview of the content followed by sections relating to appreciating our worth and importance, appreciating the importance and worth of others, and affirming accountability for ourselves and responsibility for others. The sections are further divided into sub-sections. The following extract is taken from the first section titled "Appreciating our worth and importance", and the opening sub-section titled: "Accepting ourselves".

Extract 85

Accepting ourselves

Each of us has a longing that cries, "I want to be loved and accepted just the way I am." Sometimes we meet people who respond to us this way. Ultimately, we also need to learn to accept and treasure ourselves.

Accepting ourselves begins with an honest look at who we are. We don't need to like everything we see. We can just say, for example, "Oh, yes, I can recognize that I sometimes feel impatient. This is a human feeling and I don't need to deny it or dislike myself for feeling it."

The point is not to become acceptable or worthy but to acknowledge the worthiness that already exists. Our feelings are part of this and accepting them builds our self-esteem. "I accept my feelings and I accept myself." In turn this lets us accept more responsibility in our lives; "I know I feel this way and I can choose how to behave. I don't have to blame anybody else".

More and more over time, we can accept, appreciate and celebrate ourselves as we are. We are each unique. We each can celebrate our special race, gender, and our sexuality. We can accept our ideas, feelings and creativity.

Accepting ourselves does not discount the need for change and growth. Just the opposite: it is the first step we take when we want to change. We can decide to do something differently only after we accept who we are, where we are, and that we are capable of change. We can learn to swim only if we are willing to acknowledge that we do not already know how we want to learn and we are capable of learning. (pp. 23-24)

The discourse in this extract emulates the discourse in self-help publications on self-esteem discussed in the previous chapter. The language relies on humanistic discourses of self, self-

acceptance, growth, positive change, self-actualization and being true to oneself. The self is seen as a container of truth and inner knowledge and should serve as a guide to human behaviour and morality. The humanistic assumptions in this text are further supported by positivist notions of truth and knowledge and the egalitarian notion of equal opportunities available to all.

The most dominant feature of this text is a high level of certainty used to present the claims. The source of the information is not revealed and thus the claims are given as matter-of-fact truths. I suggest that this is reminiscent of religious language where information is assumed to come from a divine source, and the speaker serves as a channel for this *received knowledge* to be verbalized. In this respect, the extract presented here is representative of the discourse dominating the first sections of the document (the later sections, discussed in the subsequent analyses contain more abstract discourse). Consider, for example, the following extracts:

> Extracts 86-89
>
> 86. Only when we dream – to build a vision – can we improve our world. (p. 9)
>
> 87. To forgive means to stop resenting. When we let go of resentment towards ourselves and others, we are capable to live constructively in the present. (p. 25)
>
> 88. To become a whole person, we each need to grow in our capacity to express our true feelings immediately, authentically, and without manipulating others. (p. 27)
>
> 89. We are each potentially creative, and appreciating our creativity is crucial for healthy self-esteem. Creative expression takes many forms – from artistry that appears in museums and concert halls to the artistry of raising children and building a business. In whatever form, creative expression enhances our experiences of individuality and personal power. (p. 27)

This type of 'impartial' language and its function has been theorized by Russian linguist Bakhtin (1981) as heavily ideological despite its appearance of impartiality. Bakhtin argued that all texts are dialogical in nature, that they all orient themselves to alternative arguments, either by drawing on them explicitly or through more implicit orientations. The factual, "undialogised' statements or 'bare assertions' deny this intrinsic dialogical or rhetorical character of the text. This impartiality, for Bakhtin, is a sign of a heavily ideological text.

Another interesting feature of Extract 85 is the use of *active voicing* (Wooffitt, 1992). Wooffitt uses the term active voicing to describe the occasions when a speaker or an author quotes someone else's words which function to establish factuality of some claims; the claims are not

made by the speakers but are an actual utterance speaker reported by the writer. In this text, however, active voicing does not refer to a particular incident in the past being cited by the author but describes universal and common utterances or thoughts; something that *we each* think and say. For example:

> Each of us has a longing that cries, "I want to be loved and accepted just the way I am."
>
> Our feelings are part of this and accepting them builds our self-esteem. "I accept my feelings and I accept myself." In turn this lets us accept more responsibility in our lives; "I know I feel this way and I can choose how to behave. I don't have to blame anybody else".

In this way, active voicing in this text does not serve to increase the accuracy of a particular incident, but presents certain ways of thinking as *natural* or *normal* due to their universal character.

So far, I have argued that the text uses language *as if* the claims were given to the writers from some 'divine' source. This way of presenting the claims denies the possibility of other versions and arguments, and thus is a powerful strategy denying the rhetorical and ideological character of the text. Further, I suggested that *active voicing* used in this text serves to increase the factuality of the text, but also normalizes and naturalizes particular ways of thinking. Now, I wish to move to mapping Themes and News, and examining the patterns these elements form in Extract 84. Table 3 below shows how the 'information flow' in this text is presented to readers.

In this text, the dominant Themes (as well as Subjects) are 'I' and 'we'. The analysis of Themes provides, in general, an opportunity to highlight the specific choices made by authors as to the field of the text (that is what the text is about) and the dominant point of departure - 'a hook' the new information spins around. Here, the narrative has been centered around *an individual* represented by the pronouns 'I' and 'we'.

Table 3: 'Information flow' in the text *Accepting Ourselves*. [Conjunctions in brackets, ellipsed Subjects in square brackets]

Marked Theme	Theme/ Subject	New
	Each of us	has a longing [[that cries I want to be loved and accepted just the way I am]]
	(Sometimes) we	meet people [[who respond to us this way]]
	(Ultimately,)we	also need to learn [[to accept and treasure ourselves]]
	Accepting ourselves	begins with an honest look at [[who we are]]
	We	don't need to like everything [[we see]]
	We	can just say, for example
	(Oh, yes,) I	can recognize
	(that) I	sometimes feel impatient
	This	is a human feeling
	(and) I	don't need to deny it
	Or [I]	don't need to dislike myself
		for feeling it.
	The point	is [[not to become acceptable or worthy]]
	but [the point]	(is) [[to acknowledge the worthiness [[that already exists]]]]
	Our feelings	are part of this
	(and) accepting them	builds our self-esteem
	I	accept my feelings
	(and) I	accept myself
	(In turn,) this	lets us accept more responsibility in our lives
	I	know
	I	feel this way
	(and) I	can choose [[how to behave]].
	I	don't have to blame anybody else
	(More and more over time,) we	can accept ourselves [[as we are]],
	(we)	appreciate ourselves [[as we are]]

	and (we)	celebrate ourselves [[as we are]].
	We	are each unique
	We	each can celebrate our special race, gender, and our sexuality.
	We	can accept our ideas, feelings and creativity
	Accepting ourselves	does not discount the need for change and growth.
	(Just the opposite;) it	is the first step [[we take]]
	(when) we	want to change
	We	can decide to do something differently
	(Only after) we	accept [[who [[we are]], where [[we are]], and that we are capable of change]].
	We	can learn to swim
	(only if) we	are willing to acknowledge
	(that) we	do not already know how;
	we	want to learn
	(and) we	are capable of learning

As discussed in the previous chapters, the use of the first person, plural or singular, has been a salient characteristic of the most recent popular texts on self-esteem. Not surprisingly it has been used in the text here to create a sense of intimacy, honesty and openness. The inclusive and intimate rhetoric serves as a powerful way to engage a reader and build a sense of belonging. The inclusiveness is further promoted by the use of phrases such as '*each of us'* or '*we are each'*. The reader is therefore not only personally engaged with the authors; the intimacy, paradoxically, extends to everyone. This again creates an enticing atmosphere of belonging and identification.

A closer look at the use of the pronouns 'I' and 'we' reveals that they both point towards the reader. "I" is not used as a starting point to a *disclosure* or a *confession* of the authors; it is not used to explicitly present the claims as the authors' voice. Here, the "I" refers to a 'generalized' reader. It marks affirmation-like structures; they are mantra-like declarations, which every reader is expected *to think* or to *say*. They are common, natural and expected responses. Thus

"I" marks the universal nature of these affirmations. Through this, "I" constructs a particular way of thinking and talking as *normal*.

When combined with the predominance of the pronoun 'we', this choice of Themes places an individual at the centre of the text; as a focus of a gaze. These reoccurring Themes also function to normalize what later comes as News, making particular behaviours normal, natural and typical for every individual. This is what *we each* do, this is how *each of us* feels, this is what *we each* need and this is what *we each* want. In effect, this normalization presents a set of values, and constructs particular behaviours and 'needs' as typical (and thus normative), and others as unusual (and thus non normative).

This normalization is further supported by the use of 'need'. When something is presented as a 'need' it is constructed as a necessity we are compelled to satisfy. Something we 'need' is something we 'have to have', and as such it leaves us with no choice but to follow this demand. To do otherwise violates what is presented as natural for one's own existence and, consequently, foretells struggle.

The News spun around the recurrent Themes provides guidance to which behaviours are desirable and which are not. The News, as detailed in Table 4, are more varied than the Themes, yet there are clear patterns in their points of reference. For example, they center on an *essential inner self*, *acceptance of the self*, *knowing the true self*, as well as on *feelings, change* and *growth*. These are summarized below in Table 4.

The News presents readers with specific constructions of an individual and their evaluations. The individual is constructed in terms of self-acceptance, self-knowledge and feelings; as a person who needs to accept and know the *true self* as well as her or his *feelings*. The specific behaviours to which the News refer are presented as either advancing or thwarting an individual; they are either good, normal and usual or, in contrast, constructed as 'bad' and undesirable.

Table 4: Patterns of News in Extract 84

NEWS:

Essential inner self

longing [[that cries I want to be loved and accepted just the way I am]]

who we are

our special race, gender, and our sexuality

who [[we are]], where [[we are]], and that we are capable of change

Acceptance of the true inner self

to accept and treasure ourselves

acceptable or worthy

the worthiness that already exists

our self-esteem

accept myself

each unique accept (ourselves [[as we are]]),

accept (ourselves [[as we are]])

celebrate ourselves [[as we are]].

Knowing of your true inner self:

know

everything we see

know how

want to learn

capable of learning

willing to acknowledge

responsibility in our lives

how to behave.

Feelings

human feeling

I sometimes feel impatient

feeling it.

my feeling

feel this way

our ideas, feelings and creativity

Change and growth

change and growth.

change

Other/miscellaneous

> blame anybody else
>
> respond to us this way
>
> longing that cries
>
> learn to swim

Grammatically, the positive evaluations in this text are realized through positive structures (do, are, etc), while the negative - by negative structures (don't aren't). The following are examples of behaviours which were presented in the form of positive statements:

> wanting to be loved and accepted as we are
>
> accepting ourselves
>
> looking at oneself honestly
>
> wanting to change
>
> choosing how to behave
>
> accepting more responsibility in our lives
>
> having human feelings and recognizing them.

In contrast other behaviours are constructed as undesirable by being presented through negative statements:

> [don't need to] deny one's feelings
>
> [don't need to] dislike oneself
>
> [not] to <u>become</u> acceptable or worthy (since you already are)
>
> [don't have to] blame others
>
> [does not] discount need for change and growth.

As discussed earlier, Themes and News come together to form units of information and to move discourse forward. Themes represent the focus of the text around which the News, the new bits of information, are spanned. In the text I am discussing here, the News negotiates desirable and undesirable behaviours relating to a (generalized) individual, so the principal pattern has to do with positive and negative evaluations. The evaluations focus on behaviours relating to self-acceptance, self-knowing and feeling, encouraging concern with inner self (*accepting oneself, looking at oneself honestly*) and with aiming for a high level of control over one's life (*accepting more responsibility, choosing how to behave*). Simultaneously, individuals are

discouraged from being unconcerned with self (*dislike oneself, deny one's feelings*) or placing blame outside oneself (*blaming others*).

The subject of self-control is additionally communicated to the readers through the modal *can*. For example,

> I can recognize...
>
> I can choose...
>
> We each can celebrate our special, race, gender, and our sexuality.
>
> We can accept our ideas, feelings and creativity.
>
> We can learn to swim...

Can, as has been discussed in earlier chapters, signifies either the *ability to do something* or the *probability of something happening*. In this case, the modal *can* signify a capability of the reader to engage in desirable behaviours; it denotes the readers' ability to *choose how to behave*, to *accept, appreciate and celebrate* oneself and to *accept* [own] *ideas*. The modal *can* instructs the readers to *decide*, *learn*, *choose, recognize* or *celebrate*, etc. This powerful strategy serves to incite readers to construct themselves as capable and in control.

Overall, the text constructs individuals as equal agents, free of any social limitations. Not only are human beings constructed as coherent, consistent, social actors acting on themselves; not only are they individualized, possessing a well developed identity and separated from the context of their surroundings, but are also constructed as creators of their own lives, actors who are a *locus* and *origin* of their own actions.

This agentive construction of the human being reflects liberal explanations of personhood and humanistic psychological preoccupations with *self*. The view of human beings as shaping their own lives envisages *the self* to be a creator of its own destiny. The *inner voice* humanistic psychologists tell us to listen to, is constructed as an *inner well of truth* about the self. From the perspective of humanistic psychology, as Prilleltensky (1994) observes, individual improvement is assumed to advance society.

Yet, Prilleltensky warns us, these new discourses of *self as a site of social change*, while providing a sense of difference and flexibility, maintain the existing power distribution and

power relations within society at large. The new solutions and ways of talking are, in his view, just superficial modifications masking the rigidity of underlying power and wealth divisions in society. These new agentive, positive and optimistic views of a human being are seen by Prilleltensky as a distraction from other factors that serve to maintain the *status quo*. As demonstrated in the above analysis, all these factors are visible at the level of discourse. The affirmative and agentive construction of individuals intertwine in language with constructions that, rather than expand, further limit the autonomy of certain groups.

Conclusion

The above analysis examined text taken from the chapter *Key Principles for Nurturing Self-esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility.* The analysis has demonstrated that the text naturalized and normalized certain positions and ways of thinking and behaving as common or desirable. This was achieved by a number of strategies, for example, active voicing, reoccurring Themes and positive and negative evaluations contained in the News. Through these strategies the text has constructed a *desirable* individual as someone who is concerned with self and one's relationship with oneself, someone who perceives her or himself to be the locus of control. The construction of personhood achieved in this text is a highly individualistic one.

The next analysis will explore how these individualistic explanations of personhood justify the arguments and recommendations included in the report. The examination will focus on how this ideological set of beliefs influences the way poverty, unemployment and single motherhood are constructed and, further, it will reflect on how these constructions explain complex social problems simplistically by attributing these to mental psychological and moral deficiencies.

Self-esteem, it is expected, will be at the centre of these constructions. The explanations and justifications produced and reproduced through this publication instruct and compel individuals to take up the goal of self-esteem to improve the quality of their own private as well as social life.

Understood in terms of modern democratic governance, self-esteem is something we 'do to ourselves' by aligning our personal goals with those promoted by self-esteem reformers. Yet, the influence is not limited to *adjustments* done at the level of individuals. Constructions of

citizens, morality, poverty or parenting, contained in documents like this, open possibilities of introducing public policy that will further subjugate those already socially and economically marginalized.

Chapter 9: Unwed mothers, welfare mothers

> Seventy two percent of mothers receiving welfare have no more than two children, and 61 percent of recipient mothers do not bear children while on welfare. But everybody seems to know someone who has had extra babies to get more welfare… There is no evidence that welfare causes poor unmarried mothers to be mothers, to be unmarried, or to be poor; and the average monthly welfare benefit ($377 for a family of four in 1995) hardly supports a desirable standard of living for mothers who parent alone. Yet everybody seems to know someone who didn't marry so she could milk the public treasury for welfare benefits. (Mink, 1998, pp. 33-34)

In her explorations of attitudes and beliefs around single mothers, particularly these who are dependant on public support, Mink (1998) describes opinions and judgments directed at these women, prevalent in Western societies. The critical voices accusing single mothers of variety of 'crimes', from bad mothering to immoral conducts and welfare fraud, dominate public thinking. Mink argues that these disapproving beliefs are becoming increasingly more openly voiced and increasingly more acceptable. Moreover, there is unwarranted amount of significance given to single motherhood as an urgent 'social' problem'. These attitudes are reflected in choices made by the Task Force in their report *Towards the State of Esteem.* In the section dedicated to 'family problems', the authors predominantly focus on single mothers and teenage pregnancy as the most serious problem affecting North American families. Even while addressing 'child abuse' and 'poverty', the text points to teenage mothers and single mothers as central to these problems.

Consequently, almost a third of the recommendations section of the document was dedicated to discussing social problems specific to a small group of mothers who parent alone. And since, as Luker (1996) demonstrates, an image of an unwed, teenage mother in the United States is one of a 'black unwed mother', the document is clearly a 'racialized' and prejudiced against a small social group. Considering that only about two per cent of public money spent on poverty goes to programs supporting single mothers (Schneiderman, 1989), and that only about eight per cent of women on welfare are teenagers (Luker, 1996), neither teenage pregnancy nor single motherhood can be seen as a chief financial burden to the state. Surely, there are more 'urgent' problems North American society is facing today in terms of the social order or public

spending. An 'expensive' solution proposed by conservative Senate members, to build orphanages on a vast scale to replace welfare payments, demonstrates that neither money nor the well-being of children is the chief motivation (Dowd, 1997, Mink, 1998). Consequently, I will argue in this chapter, that the report *Towards the State of Esteem* is not about reducing undesirable *social ills*, reducing public spending or erasing poverty, but about upholding particular social standards of behaviour, and judging some behaviours as inappropriate if not immoral, and others as morally superior.

The following analyses of two texts investigate the inherent value judgments and assumptions underlying *Towards the State of Esteem*. This document brought the concept of self-esteem with its strong moralistic connotation to public debates about teenage parenting and single parenting in the United States. By the time the document had been published, self-esteem had already been constructed as a tangible, cognitive 'object' inside individuals (as has been demonstrated in Chapter 4). Simultaneously, self-esteem became linked with ethical and moral aspects of human conduct, and with an agentive view of human life (examined in Chapter 7).

Consequently, the construct of self-esteem has become an ideal attainment in debates like the one around welfare; and it has certainly helped to wipe away more progressive pro-welfare arguments as either too deterministic or morally wrong. The 'self-esteem argument' replaced constructions of the poor as *victims* with a view of the poor as *agents*, simultaneously substituting views of poverty as a result of economic, technological or social factors of modern life with a view of poverty as a result of individuals' failings. The following analysis will demonstrate that the consequences of these new constructions and, following them, increasingly tighter welfare regulations (Bashevkin, 2002), do nothing to alleviate poverty and, despite their focus on agency, take away liberty and freedom of choice from individuals, replacing them with moral obligations of self-regulation and self-blame.

Teenage pregnancy: text analysis

Illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time – more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else. (Charles Murray, 1993, quoted in Mink, 1998)

Researchers believe high self-esteem may be an important factor in reducing teenage pregnancy, which again highlights the importance of the experiences children have at home and in schools –

experiences that has much to do with nurturing a child's self-esteem. *(*California Task Force, 1990, p.52)

Dowd (1997), in her book *In Defense of Single-Parent Families,* discusses the stigmatization of single mothers, arguing that the moral condemnation of these mothers has been on the rise in the last couple of decades. In her view, out of all women parenting alone, teenagers epitomize the worst stereotypes and stigmatizations. Teenage parenting is seen as detrimental to mothers, children and to society at large. Teenage mothers, although no longer publicly ostracized and isolated, are nevertheless commonly perceived as irresponsible, immature, selfish and unwise.

Luker (1996) examines the contradictory constructions of teenage motherhood as either coming from foolishness or from a calculating attitude. These constructions present teenage mothers as both foolish and immature (and thus not knowing what they do) or, to the contrary, calculating and knowing, having a baby just to qualify for welfare assistance. In both cases, however, the child is seen as a victim, either of the mother's indolence and incapability to make a mature choice or her 'using' the child for economic gain.

This analysis examines constructions of teenage motherhood contained in *Towards the State of Esteem*, with a particular focus on the moralistic character of these constructions. This moralistic character comes from the stigmatization of single mothers as *bad mothers* (Bashevkin, 2002) and as *immoral* (Dowd, 1997). Through this, the analysis demonstrates discursive associations between self-esteem and morality.

The following text is taken from a chapter discussing problems facing families. According to the Task Force report, there are two main issues facing contemporary families, *child abuse* and *teenage pregnancy*. Problems such as increasing poverty, persistent racial, gender and class inequalities or emotional and psychological difficulties linked to modern life are assumed to be a consequence of parents being either too young or too abusive. The text below follows directly from the discussion of child abuse in the report, wherein the authors state that "virtually all people experience unintended but actual emotional abuse at the hands of their well meaning but ill-prepared parents" and that this abuse is a "source of considerable amount of low self-esteem within the general population" (p. 48). Armed with these two arguments plus a widespread assumption that teenage parenting is detrimental to all, the authors proceed:

Teenage pregnancy and Parenthood

California has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the nation: 143 per thousand for fifteen-to nineteen-year-olds. While California has experienced an overall decrease in teenage pregnancy since 1970, the same period has seen an increase in the pregnancy rates for those under fifteen years of age. In 1986 there were over 19,000 births to mothers aged seventeen years or younger in this state, and an estimated 357,000 teens were involved in parenting. These data suggest that many of those most likely to be bearing children are also those who are least prepared and least capable of caring for a child.

In the past, the majority of teenagers who become pregnant got married. In the last few decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of births to single teenagers. In addition, today's unmarried teens are less likely to relinquish their children for adoption than were adolescents in similar situations in the past.

While little research exists on the progress of these children, the available evidence indicates that teenage parenthood is often detrimental to the parents and their children. These mothers are more likely than those who are married to live under stress of poverty, to use non-familial child care, and to suffer from lack of social and psychological support. Teenage mothers typically drop out of school and, barely able to support themselves and their children, require public assistance for some period of time. Because of their youth, inexperience, and seemingly powerless situation, these mothers are at high risk to abuse their children.

Data indicate that many teenager fathers have histories of delinquency, substance abuse, failure to graduate from school, financial difficulty, and exposure to family violence. This background makes it difficult for the teenage father to create a stable self-esteeming environment for his offspring.

A teenager may engage in sexual activity in an attempt to bolster low self-esteem. A female adolescent may expect motherhood to improve her status: as a mother, she is someone loved and needed. A boy may hope to enhance his self-worth by proving his sexual powers and virility. There is also evidence that teenagers with low self-esteem may be less concerned with pregnancy, feeling there is little to lose emotionally, educationally, or occupationally (Bhatti, et al., 1989).

One study reported that sexually active females had become sexually involved because they couldn't say no, because they wanted to satisfy the boyfriend, or because they felt it was expected of them – all reasons consistent with low self-esteem.

A number of well designed longitudinal studies have correlated low self-esteem with infrequent use of contraceptives by females. (While most of these studies have focused on females, the Task Force wants to emphasize that the responsibility for pregnancy and its effects should be shared by both males and females.) High self-esteem females are more apt to rely on contraception to avoid pregnancy. Adolescents who choose not to use contraceptives and who later become teenage mothers are significantly more likely to have reported self-devaluing experiences and are less likely to perceive themselves as competent. (California Task Force, 1990, pp. 49-50)

The language of this text differs significantly from the one examined previously in Chapter 6.

The discourse is more abstract, providing *facts* established by empirical means. The authors

draw on the authority of 'empirical' discourse (i.e., quoting statistics, using phrases like

evidence suggests or *one study reported*) (Potter, 1996) to build the argument that teenage pregnancy is *detrimental* for both parents and children and to suggest that *teenage mothers* are *bad mothers*. I argue that these constructions provide a ground for a moralistic argument, constructing teenage pregnancy as *immoral* and providing opportunities for public policy makers to prevent some teenage mothers from raising their own children.

In the first paragraph of the text, the statistical information implies that the number of young (under fifteen) teenage mothers is increasing, despite their obvious lack of preparation to be parents. The authors collate different statistical information into this paragraph to conclude that "many of those most likely to be bearing children are also these who are least prepared and least capable to do so". I suggest that this paragraph serves to alarm readers to some undesirable changes in the patterns of procreation among young Californians.

Yet, teenage pregnancy *per se* is not at the centre of this concern. After all, early parenthood among women used to be a standard just a few decades ago. The second paragraph of this text explains the reason for the authors' concern; nowadays, some young mothers remain *single*. Thus, the *bad mothers* are only *bad* and *least prepared* to parent unless they marry. Clearly, what is problematic to the authors is not the teenage parenting as such, but the marital status of these teenagers who decide to parent.

The following paragraphs further the argument about the *badness* of teenage motherhood. Drawing on some *evidence*, the authors argue that "teenage parenthood is often detrimental to the parents and their children" and that young mothers are "at high risk to abuse their children". This construction of teenage motherhood as detrimental to children and leading to child abuse further reduces the complex issue of teenage parenthood to moralistic argument.

So far the general overview of the texts reveals that the constructions of teenage pregnancy and teenage mothers are central to this text and that they are evaluated negatively. The following analysis of the Themes and News of the whole text will provide a more systematic examination of focal points and evaluations.

Table 5 below presents an overview of Themes and News. Unlike in the text analysed previously, there are several marked Themes in this text, suggesting shifts of focus in the text.

Table 5: 'Information flow' in Extract 90

[Conjunctions in brackets, ellipsed Subjects in square brackets.]

Marked Theme	Theme/Subject	New
	California	has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the nation: 143 per thousand for fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds
While California has experienced an overall decrease in teenage pregnancy since 1970,	the same period	has seen an increase in the pregnancy rates for those under fifteen years of age.
In 1986	there	were over 19,000 births to mothers aged seventeen years or younger in this state,
	(and) an estimated 357,000 teens	were involved in parenting.
	These data	suggest
	(that) many of these most likely [[to be bearing children]]	are also these [[who are least prepared and least capable of caring for a child]]
In the past,	the majority of teenagers [[who become pregnant]]	got married.
In the last few decades,	there	has been a significant increase in the number of births to single teenagers.
	(In addition), today's unmarried teens	are less likely [[to relinquish their children for adoption than were adolescents in similar situations in the past]]
	(While) little research	exists on the progress of these children,
	the available evidence	indicates that
	teenage parenthood	is often detrimental to the parents and their children.
	These mothers	are more likely [[than those [[who are married]] to live under stress of poverty, to use non-familial child care, and to suffer from lack of social and psychological support]]
	Teenage mothers typically	drop out of school
		and, (being) barely able to support themselves and their children,

	[they]	require public assistance for some period of time.
(Because of their youth, inexperience, and seemingly powerless situation)	these mothers	are at high risk [[to abuse their children]].
	Data	indicates
	(that) many teenager fathers	have histories of delinquency, substance abuse, failure to graduate from school, financial difficulty, and exposure to family violence.
	This background	makes it difficult for the teenage father [[to create a stable self-esteeming environment for his offspring]].
	A teenager	may engage in sexual activity in an attempt [[to bolster low self-esteem]].
	A female adolescent	may expect motherhood to improve her status:
as a mother,	she	is someone [[loved an needed]].
	A boy	may hope to enhance his self-worth
		by proving his sexual powers and virility.
	There	is also evidence[[that teenagers with low self-esteem may be less concerned with pregnancy feeling there is little to lose emotionally, educationally, or occupationally (Bhatti, et al., 1989)]].
	One study	reported that
	sexually active females	had become sexually involved
	(because) they	couldn't say no,
	(because) they	wanted to satisfy the boyfriend,
	(or because) they	felt it was expected of them –
	which	[are] all reasons consistent with low self-esteem.
	A number of well designed longitudinal studies	have correlated low self-esteem with infrequent use of contraceptives by females.
While most of these studies have focused on females	the Task Force	wants to emphasize
	(that) the responsibility for pregnancy and its effects	should be shared by both males and females.

	High self-esteem females	are more apt to rely on contraception
		to avoid pregnancy.
	Adolescents [[who choose not to use contraceptives and who later become teenage mothers]]	are significantly more likely [[to have reported self-devaluing experiences]]
and	(they)	are less likely [[to perceive themselves as competent]].

The table above provides an outline of information flow in the text on teenage pregnancy. The pattern for unmarked Themes shows the dominant theme to be teenage mothers, rather than teenage pregnancy as suggested by the title. This was expected, as suggested in the general overview. The News, on the other hand, is dominated by patterns of negative evaluations. To see it more clearly, I have grouped together reoccurring choices for Themes and News.

The Theme analysis (Table 6 below), clearly demonstrates that the majority the Subject/Theme positions are taken by *teenage mothers*, rather than *teenage pregnancy per se*. *Teenage mothers* serve as a recurrent point of departure; they are disproportionally represented in this text, particularly when compared with the category of *teenage fathers*. This preoccupation with *teenage mothers* rather than *teenage pregnancy* or *teenage parents* undermines the Task Force's alleged impartiality to gender:

> While most of these studies have focused on females, the Task Force wants to emphasize that the responsibility for pregnancy and its effects should be shared by both males and females. (California Task Force, p. 50).

The choice of teenage mothers rather than teenage pregnancy as a focus of the text, suggests that the text gravitates towards a more agentive view of teenage mothers. Furthermore, because the text here is concerned with presenting the reader with a *problem* and providing a solution (in the form of recommendations), teenage mothers are constructed as a *problem* and thus the solutions focus on them. An analysis of News below will reveal the solutions offered by the authors.

Table 6: Patterns of Themes in Extract 90

THEMES/SUBJECTS

Teenage mothers

many of these most likely to be bearing children
the majority of teenagers [[who become pregnant]]
today's unmarried teens
teenage parenthood
These mothers
Teenage mothers
(they)
these mothers
A teenager
A female adolescent
she
sexually active females
they
they
they
Adolescents [[who choose not to use contraceptives and who later become teenage mothers]]
(they)

Abstract/empirical categories

California
the same period
there
(and) an estimated 357,000 teens
These data
While little research
the available evidence
Data
This background
One study
A number of well designed longitudinal studies
the Task Force

Teenage fathers

many teenager fathers
A boy

Other

there
There
the responsibility for pregnancy and its effects
High self-esteem females

Another dominant Subject/Theme is what I will call, the 'empirical Subject'. This is a new feature compared to the texts analyzed previously and the most noticeable difference between the two texts. While the earlier text relied on discursive constructions of facts *as if* they were received from some 'divine' source, this text builds its arguments and explicitly supports its claims by the use of the authority of science (Halliday, 1993). The use of phrases such as: 'data indicate', 'one study reported', 'a number of well designed longitudinal studies', 'there is also evidence', 'the available evidence', provide a sense of scientific objectivity to the claims. This abstract language is then taken further in the text through abstract categories like 'high self-esteem females', 'sexually active females', 'pregnancy rates'. This gives a sense that the claims are the result of impartial and rigorous research, providing credentials to declarations and evaluations.

Analysis of News

The News has to do with the 'expansion' of the text; the information expanded upon as the text unfolds. It also includes what is *new* to the reader; what has not been presented before. In this analysis, the News falls into three reoccurring choices, *pregnancy and birth, teenage parenthood,* and *teenage sexuality.* They are grouped accordingly in Table 7 below.

Since teenage mothers are the focus of the text, their construction and evaluation depends on these three choices. Consequently, it is the issues relating *to the decision to give birth, their abilities as parents* and *their sexuality* that play a role in this text in constructing and evaluating teenage mothers.

The first reoccurring News has to do with the *decision to give birth* and is primarily presented as an alarming statistical pattern. This set of News evaluates a problem of giving birth by teenagers, constructing it as an increasingly troubling social problem.

Table 7: Patterns of News in Extract 90

NEWS

Pregnancy and birth

highest teenage pregnancy rates in the nation: 143 per thousand for fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds
pregnancy rates for those under fifteen years of age
births to mothers aged seventeen years or younger in this state
involved in parenting
increase in the number of births to single teenagers

Teenage parenthood

least prepared and least capable of caring for a child
detrimental to the parents and their children
live under stress of poverty, to use non-familial child care, and to suffer from lack of social and psychological support
drop out of school
barely able to support themselves and their children
require public assistance for some period of time
abuse their children
have histories of delinquency, substance abuse, failure to graduate from school, financial difficulty, and exposure to family violence
(difficult to) create a stable self-esteeming environment for his offspring
motherhood to improve her status
relinquish their children for adoption than were adolescents in similar situations in the past
progress of these children
loved an needed
should be shared by both males and females.
got married

Teenage sexuality

sexual activity in an attempt to bolster low self-esteem
to enhance his self-worth
by proving his sexual powers and virility.
teenagers with low self-esteem may be less concerned with pregnancy feeling there is little to lose emotionally, educationally, or occupationally (Bhatti, et al., 1989)
had become sexually involved
couldn't say no,
wanted to satisfy the boyfriend,
felt it was expected of them –
are more apt to rely on contraception
to avoid pregnancy
(are) all reasons consistent with low self-esteem.
have correlated low self-esteem with infrequent use of contraceptives by females.
are significantly more likely to have reported self-devaluing experiences
are less likely to perceive themselves as competent

The second set of reoccurring News has to do with evaluations of *teenage parenting*. Most of

these evaluations are negative, as outlined in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Evaluations of teenage parenting in Extract 90

Teenage parenthood

least prepared and **least capable** of caring for a child

detrimental to the parents and their children

live under **stress of poverty**, to use **non-familial child care**, and to **suffer from lack** of social and psychological support

drop out of school

barely able to support themselves and their children

require public assistance for some period of time

abuse their children

have histories of **delinquency**, **substance abuse**, **failure** to graduate from school, financial **difficulty**, and exposure to family **violence**

(difficult to) create a **stable self-esteeming environment** for his offspring

motherhood to **improve her status**

relinquish their children for adoption than were adolescents in similar situations in the past

progress of these children

loved an needed

should be shared by both males and females.

got married

Since the most prevalent choice for Subject (Themes) in this text is *teenage mothers*, the gaze of readers has been directed towards them specifically. *Teenage mothers* are then constructed and evaluated through the News; here, the appraisal of their parenting. Table 8 suggests that teenage parenting (and thus, indirectly, teenage mothers) is evaluated through associations to crime, poverty and abuse, as well as immoral behaviours. As is evident in Table 8, teenage mothers are constructed as abusive, irresponsible, dependent, negligent, dropping out of school and poor. They endanger the children they bear and are not concerned with their children's development.

The last set of News, having to do with teenage sexuality uses the concept of self-esteem as a way of evaluating teenage mothers' sexuality as *bad*. In Table 9 below, references to self-esteem have been highlighted in bold.

As Table 9 demonstrates, the text constructs teenage sexuality as coming from low self-esteem. Since sexual activity is a logical prerequisite to pregnancy, teenagers who become parents are presented as sexually active and thus lacking in self-esteem. This association also presents teenage mothers as sexually careless or unable to 'say no'. These constructions inject a strong moralistic sense to the argument against teenage pregnancy.

Table 9: Evaluations of teenage sexuality in extract 90

Teenage sexuality

> sexual activity in an attempt to bolster low **self-esteem**
>
> to enhance his **self-worth**
>
> by **proving his sexual powers and virility**
>
> teenagers with **low self-esteem** may be less concerned with pregnancy feeling there is little to lose emotionally, educationally, or occupationally (Bhatti, et al., 1989)
>
> had become sexually involved
>
> couldn't say no
>
> wanted to satisfy the boyfriend
>
> felt it was expected of them –
>
> are more apt to rely on contraception
>
> to avoid pregnancy
>
> (are) all reasons consistent with **low self-esteem**.
>
> have correlated **low self-esteem** with infrequent use of contraceptives by females
>
> are significantly more likely to have reported **self-devaluing experiences**
>
> are **less likely to perceive themselves as competent.**

The preoccupation of the authors with sexuality is further explained in the *Recommendation*

section of this chapter on teenage pregnancy, which follows the analyzed text:

> The Task Force affirms the importance of self-esteem in the person's ability to be part of nurturing, loving, and responsible relationships. **Some in our day are finding abstinence to be a responsible expression of personal worth.** Yet research in this area is compelling in its finding that merely enhancing a teenager's self-esteem is not likely to eliminate adolescent sexual experience.
> (p.55)

The above recommendations make the link between sexuality, responsibility and self-esteem

explicit. I suggest, that the evaluations of *teenage sexuality* and *teenage parenting* preceding the

Recommendations section make this explicit link possible. Since the argument of Extract 90 is

set to convince readers of 'inappropriateness' of teenagers sexuality and of 'risks' involved in

teenage parenting, it 'anticipates' assumptions contained in a recommendation for sexual

abstinence.

In summary, despite defining their concerns as relating to family problems and poverty, the text

focuses on young mothers as the site of the problem. These women are constructed as bad

parents who are likely to abuse their children. Their motherhood is seen as a consequence of

low self-esteem and sexually foolish behaviours. Teenage mothers are presented as unable to

say 'no' to their boyfriends and not using contraceptives.

This view of teenage mothers as foolish, immoral and lacking in self-esteem exists here simultaneously with another view of teenage mothers as 'scheming agents' who fall pregnant to improve their status or because they have little to lose. These negative views of teenage mothers are consistent with Luker's (1996) analysis of constructions of teenage parenthood. These constructions present teenage mothers as foolish and immature or, to the contrary, calculating and wanting to have a baby just to receive welfare.

These constructions of teenage mothers as *foolish and lacking self-esteem* or, alternatively, as *scheming agents*, function to deny that poverty is a social, rather than an individual problem. These constructions enable a view of teenage mothers in moralistic terms and blaming them solely for economic disadvantage. Furthermore, constructing teenage mothers as bad, foolish or immoral provides justifications for possible attempts to limit their choices relating to procreating, parenting and marriage (Mink, 1998).

There is a long history of condemnation of unwed mothers and their children in developed Western countries. Although they are no longer ostracized and isolated, there are still a range of repercussions placed on teenage mothers through stigmatizion. Dowd (1997) argues that although the moral stigma attached to single parenthood has partly shifted and become replaced by *a rationale of stupidity and bad judgment*, there is still quite an evident 'moral' factor attached to teenage pregnancies and motherhood. What is more, Dowd and many other writers on the topic (Mink, 1998; McKeen, 2004; Bashevkin, 2002) argue that the condemnation of teenage mothers has actually increased in the last couple of decades in the United States as well as other English speaking countries. These condemnations carry conservative, moralistic and religious connotations.

Single mothers: text analysis

Single parenting exists within marriage – indeed marriage *fosters* it – as a result of existing work family structures and the persistence of gender roles and gender segregation, within and outside the family. (Dowd, 1997)

Families headed by single women with children are the poorest of all major demographic groups in the United States, regardless of how poverty is measured. Their economic position relative to that of other groups, such as the aged or disabled, has declined steadily during the past two decades. (Schneiderman *et al.*, 1989)

As the first quote above suggests, Dowd (1997) views single parenthood as a norm created by a patriarchal system. After all, the system predestines mothers to stay at home and to parent single-handedly while the father works outside the home. This presumed division of labour within households, combined with the devaluing of work done by mothers at home creates inequality within marriage and financial strife for mothers after marriage. As a result of the low value placed on work at home, many single mothers (never married as well as those who divorce) live in a state of poverty.

This problem of poverty has not been solved by welfare payments offered to women during the expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s (Mink, 1998). Shrinking welfare payments and decreasing willingness of governments to provide for poor mothers in the last couple of decades, has created a need to replace 'old' discourses of care and state responsibility towards the poor with 'new' explanations praising self-sufficiency and elevating the work ethic.

The concept of self-esteem, together with concepts of self-sufficiency, and (financial) independence has become a central part of these new discourses. Instead of addressing cultural, economic or political structures lying at the base of gendered and racial inequalities, these constructs focus on individual deficiencies as a site of the problem. Not only have discourses of self-esteem and self-sufficiency enabled the construction of poverty as a *personal* problem of the impoverished, they frame this construction within a language of agency, control and hope. With an assumption that our life and material success reflects our inner psychological functioning comes another assumption that, by changing our psychological functioning, individuals can secure success for themselves.

This way of talking about being human, and, in particular, about the poor and the underprivileged has been more and more common among governments and authorities who decide on policies (Mink, 1998). Over the last two decades, these policies have tended to diminish payments for poor mothers and reduce support for those in need. These reductions have been done in the name of providing *incentives* to make citizens more self-sufficient and free of dependencies. The document *Towards the State of Esteem,* through its focus on self-esteem, has played an important role in developing these new ways of talking about the poor.

Below, I examine another extract, this time taken from the section focusing on the category of *chronic welfare dependency*. This text comes from the chapter *Poverty, Chronic Welfare Dependency, and Self-esteem*; the extract below is the third section of this chapter, and it follows a general introduction and a section on the effects of poverty. These preceding sections argue for the importance of work for one's self-esteem. They also construct self-esteem as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Self-esteem is conceptualized throughout this chapter as a result of healthy development, but also as a personal decision. Furthermore, the authors imply that self-esteem is an important factor in unemployment, particularly prolonged unemployment.

Extract 91

Chronic Welfare Dependency and Self-esteem

Women heads of households are caught in the middle of society's ambivalence towards welfare. In an era when more than half of the married mothers work outside the home for at least part of the day, there is a growing expectation that single heads of households should work as well. Certainly, given the relationship among work, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem, all mothers should have the opportunity for gainful employment, along with the transportation services that would make the workplace accessible and the quality of child care that would help ensure their children's healthy development.

As it exists today, though, the AFDC program tends to penalize and de-motivate mothers who work. The program drastically reduces benefits as earnings increase, leaving those who work no better off, and perhaps in worse condition (with no medical benefits or child care allowance, for example) than these who remain dependent on AFDC.

A study by D.T. Elwood in 1986 noted that only one woman in five who left welfare did so as a result of increased income from earnings, and that earnings sufficient to achieve self-support required full year, full time work at approximately 2,000 hours annually. Complete self-sufficiency through earnings for single-parent households with small children may not be a realistic policy goal for AFDC recipients. However, the option, if not the mandate, for gainful employment of some extent should be made available, along with the support services necessary to make the choices realistic and likely to result in success.

Several studies point to change in family or household composition, rather than changes in income level, as a primary cause of accepting welfare benefits. A 1983 study of the reasons for going on welfare found that "three-fourth of all spells on AFDC begin with a relationship change whereby a female headed family is created. Only 12 percent of beginnings can be traced to earnings decrease." (Bane and Elwood, 1983)

In his review of the literature on behalf of the Task Force, Leonard Schneiderman, Dean of the School of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles, found that "becoming a wife is the primary reason that women leave welfare" and that "earnings gains account for only 21 percent of all exits".

The probability of remaining on welfare over a period of six years is related to the following variables: market productivity, the number of children, educational level, teenager at fist birth, attitudinal factors, and welfare grants. Dean Schneiderman found that over 40 percent of those who ever receive AFDC receive it for no more than 4 years. Yet nearly 25 percent eventually use AFDC again in ten or more years. Occasional AFDC recipient is common; persistent welfare recipient is not. "Movement on and off welfare rolls is widespread" (Duncan and Hoffman, 1987).

One major effort evaluated the stigma argument, namely, that welfare recipients "incorporate the general negative views of themselves held by others, thus reducing feelings of self-worth". (Nichols – Casebolt, 1986). This study revealed that welfare is associated with a decrease in the psychological well-being of the recipients.

While inconclusive the evidence implicating chronic welfare dependency with some deterioration in self-esteem is stronger than the evidence linking it with a prior self-esteem condition. It is easy to see how chronic material deprivation below the poverty line, coupled with external controls associated with welfare, can have psychological consequences. T.J. Kane (1987) theorizes that the victimization and loss of control associated with chronic poverty may breed dysfunctional psychological coping mechanisms such as learned helplessness.

The poor, in general, and many welfare recipients, in particular, also experience a nonresponsive bureaucratic environment over which they have no control. After some time, even when a situation arises in which they could assert control, they often do not. Learned helplessness may thus prevent welfare recipients and the poor from recognizing new opportunities. By implication, structural changes alone may not be sufficient to move individuals who are chronically dependent on welfare to a state of independence. (California Task Force, 1990, pp. 119-120)

The language of this text, in a similar manner to the previous extract, relies on abstract constructions and empirical discourse to construct welfare dependency as a problem. It sets out to present *working mothers* as normal. In fact, work outside home is presented as something to be expected of mothers, particularly single mothers. This expectation is re-phrased as an opportunity rather than an obligation. This has been achieved by linking work with self-esteem, and the underlying assumption that work is a necessity for psychological health.

The most striking features of this text are: its focus on women, particularly single mothers, its use of empirical language, particularly empirical Themes, and finally, the way in which the relationship between self-esteem and welfare dependency has been constructed. To start with, I wish to focus on the first two features, that is the text's focal points, as indicated by the following *Thematic* analysis.

Although setting out to talk about welfare dependency, the text presented in Extract 91 starts with talking about *Women heads of households*. This choice of the first Theme in the text suggests that the focus of the texts specifically is again on single mothers. As Martin and Rose

(2003) show, the first Theme in the text 'predicts' what the text is all about. The choice for this Theme, a macroTheme, predicts the focal point of the entire text. Therefore, although as we will see shortly, there is a great variety in the Themes in this text, the choice for the first Theme directs readers' attention to single mothers.

Unmarked Themes

Table 10 below outlines how the information has been structured in this text, by an examination of Themes and News. At a glance, there is a considerable number of 'empirical Themes', where Subjects have to do with evidence, research or researchers. Yet, the gaze of the readers is not fixed onto one object. There is a variety of reoccurring Themes, none of which dominates text as clearly as *teenage mothers* did in the preceding example.

Table 10: 'Information flow' in Extract 91

[Conjunctions in brackets, ellipsed Subjects in square brackets, embedded clause in double brackets.]

Marked theme/	Theme/Subject	New
	Women heads of households	are caught in the middle of society's ambivalence towards welfare.
In an era [[when more than half of the married mothers work outside the home for at least part of the day]],	there	is a growing expectation [[that single heads of households should work as well]].
Certainly, given the relationship among work, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem,	all mothers	should have the opportunity for gainful employment, along with the transportation services [[that would make the workplace accessible]] and the quality of child care [[that would help ensure their children's healthy development]].
As it exists today, though,	the AFDC program	tends to penalize and de-motivate mothers [[who work]].
	The program	drastically reduces benefits,
	(as) earnings	increase
		leaving those [[who work]] no better off, and perhaps in worse condition (with no medical benefits or child care allowance, for example) than these [[who remain dependent on AFDC]].
	A study by D.T. Elwood in 1986	noted that

	only one woman in five [[who left welfare]]	did so as a result of increased income from earnings,
	(and that) earnings [[sufficient to achieve self-support]]	required full year, full time work at approximately 2,000 hours annually.
	Complete self-sufficiency through earnings for single-parent households with small children	may not be a realistic policy goal for AFDC recipients.
	(However,) the option, if not the mandate, for gainful employment of some extent	should be made available, along with the support services [[necessary to make the choices realistic and likely to result in success]]
	Several studies	point to change in family or household composition, rather than changes in income level as a primary cause of accepting welfare benefits
	A 1983 study of the reasons [[for going on welfare]]	found that
	"three-fourths of all spells on AFDC welfare	begin with a relationship change [[whereby a female headed family is created]].
	Only 12 percent of beginnings	can be traced to earnings decrease." (Bane and Elwood, 1983)
In his review of the literature on behalf of Task Force,	Leonard Schneiderman, Dean of the School of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles,	found that
	"becoming a wife	is the primary reason [[that women leave welfare]]"
	(and that) "earnings gains	account for only 21 percent of all exits".
	While [the evidence]	[is] inconclusive
	the evidence [[implicating chronic welfare dependency with some deterioration in self-esteem]]	is stronger than the evidence [[linking it with a prior self-esteem condition]].
	It	is easy to see [[how chronic material deprivation below the poverty line, coupled with external controls associated with welfare, can have psychological consequences]]
	T.J. Kane (1987)	theorizes that

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	the victimization and loss of control [[associated with chronic poverty]]	may breed dysfunctional psychological coping mechanisms such as learned helplessness
	The probability of remaining on welfare over a period of six years	is related to the following variables: market productivity, the number of children, educational level, teenager at fist birth, attitudinal factors, and welfare grants.
	Dean Schneiderman	found that
	over 40 percent of those who ever receive AFDC	receive it for no more than 4 years.
	Yet nearly 25 percent	eventually use AFDC again in ten or more years.
	Occasional AFDC recipient.	is common;
	persistent welfare recipient	is not [common]
	"Movement on and off welfare rolls	is widespread" (Duncan and Hoffman, 1987).
	One major effort	evaluated the stigma argument,
	(namely, that) welfare recipients	"incorporate the general negative views of themselves held by others,
		thus reducing feelings of self-worth". (Nichols – Casebolt, 1086).
	This study	revealed that
	welfare	is associated with a decrease in the psychological well-being of the recipients.
	The poor, in general, and many welfare recipients, in particular,	also experience nonresponsive bureaucratic environment
over which	they	have no control.
After some time,	(even when) a situation	arises
in which	they	could assert control
	they	often do not.
	Learned helplessness	may thus prevent welfare recipients and the poor from recognizing new opportunities.
By implication,	structural changes alone	may not be sufficient [[to move individuals [[who are chronically dependent on welfare]] to a state of independence]].

Table 10 shows a great variation in both Themes and News. The most dominant Theme, however, is an *empirical Theme.* The two other prevailing clusters of Themes are *women* (single mothers, welfare recipients) and the *welfare system.* These clusters are presented in Table 11 below.

Empirical Subjects

The empirical Subjects as Themes allow the information to be presented as *scientifically demonstrated truth.* This text contains particularly detailed references to scientific evidence and authority figures. The inclusion of such details is not without reason as it supports the claims by drawing on expert authorities. Potter (1996) argues that by citing sources that are *entitled* to have particular knowledge claims, the authors construct information as reliable and impartial. Furthermore, it directs attention away from the writers themselves, constructing what is being said as undeniable facts, rather than rhetorical choices made by the authors.

Table 11: Patterns of Themes in extract 91

THEMES/SUBJECTS

Empirical Subjects

A study by D.T. Elwood in 1986
Several studies
A 1983 study
Leonard Schneiderman, Dean of the School of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles, [the evidence]
the evidence [[implicating chronic welfare dependency with some deterioration in self-esteem]]
T.J. Kane (1987)
given the relationship among work, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem
The probability of remaining on welfare over a period of six years
Dean Schneiderman
over 40 percent of those who ever receive AFDC
Yet nearly 25 percent
One major effort
This study

AFDC program

the AFDC program
The program
"three-fourths of all spells on AFDC welfare
Only 12 percent of beginnings
Occasional AFDC recipient
welfare

Women

Women heads of households
only one woman in five who left welfare
persistent welfare recipient
welfare recipients
The poor, in general, and many welfare recipients, in particular,
they

Earnings

earnings
earnings sufficient to achieve self-support
Complete self-sufficiency through earnings for single-parent households with small children
earnings gains

Work

the option, if not the mandate, for gainful employment of some extent
given the relationship among work, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem,

Other

becoming a wife
the victimization and loss of control [[associated with chronic poverty]]
there
it
It
structural changes
Learned helplessness
Movement on and off welfare rolls

This text, more than other sections of this document, relies on this kind of detailed and elaborated empirical support. The clues explaining this preponderance of empirical Themes may be found in the other book introduced earlier, *Social Importance of Self-esteem (1989)*. This publication contains several overviews of existing research conducted on behalf of the Task Force by academics and research centers around the United States. The outline of research on welfare and self-esteem, relevant to the section was particularly unsympathetic to the idea of explaining a complex, social and cultural phenomena through a single, psychological factor - self-esteem.

To start with, Schneiderman *et al.,* (1989) question the construct of self-esteem itself as valid and useful in reaserch;

Self-esteem is currently an ambiguous and poorly defined construct in the literature. Numerous conceptualizations, operational definitions, and measurement methodologies exist and often vary depending on the theoretical orientation of the researcher, the context of measurement, and the

research goals. Grandall (1973) argues that self-esteem has been found to relate to a wide variety of other variables at one time or another and has no agreed upon theoretical or measurement definitions. (p. 221)

Furthermore, the research summarized by Schneiderman *et al.* provides no support for linking individual deficiencies with poverty and welfare. In fact, they view 'individualistic' explanations of unemployment and poverty (including these focusing on self-esteem and personal responsibility) as counterproductive to solving the 'problems' of unemployment and welfare. For example, they quote evidence stating that:

> ...recipients who believe in individualistic explanations for going on welfare and who report feeling a high degree of control over going on welfare are more affected in terms of their self-esteem. (p. 227)

Finally, the authors conclude that there is no evidence which would enable to determine a causal relationship between experience of welfare and attitudes and values of welfare recipients. Instead, they suggest that:

> We do know that the major immediate cause of chronic welfare dependency is chronic income deficiency. Those who are chronically welfare dependant constitute a diverse group, but they all share this basic overriding characteristic of too little income. (p.237)

Schneiderman *et al.* view the welfare payments as still very inadequate to solve poverty in North America. They further emphasize inadequate access to employment and income in Western societies, leaving a substantial percentage of people without independent or family based financial support.

However, the *Report* does not provide any accounts of their criticisms and Schneiderman *et al.*'s findings are presented 'out of context' of their pro-welfare argument. Instead the sociologists' authority is used to promote Task Force's view of welfare as detrimental to psychological wellbeing.

> In his review of the literature on behalf of the Task Force, Leonard Schneiderman, Dean of the School of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles, found that "becoming a wife is the primary reason that women leave welfare" and that "earnings gains account for only 21 percent of all exits".
>
> The probability of remaining on welfare over a period of six years is related to the following variables: market productivity, the number of children, educational level, teenager at fist birth, attitudinal factors, and welfare grants. Dean Schneiderman found that over 40 percent of those who ever receive AFDC receive it for no more than 4 years. Yet nearly 25 percent eventually use AFDC again in ten or more years. Occasional AFDC recipient is common; persistent welfare recipient is not.

"Movement on and off welfare rolls is widespread" (Duncan and Hoffman, 1987). (California Task Force, 1990, pp. 119-120)

'Marked Themes'

As has been discussed earlier, marked Themes indicate a shift in discourse towards a new topic, place, time or a new participant entering the flow of information. In other words, they mark 'discontinuity'. For example, a marked Theme may be used to move from one phase in the story to another, from one episode to another in narratives or from one evaluation to another in personal accounts (Martin and Rose, 2003).

In the text above there are five marked Themes:

(1) In an era [[when more than half of the married mothers work outside the home for at least part of the day]]…

(2) Certainly, given the relationship among work, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem…

(3) As it exists today, though, (AFDC)…

(4) In his review of the literature on behalf of the Task Force …

(5) After some time, even when a situation arises in which they could assert control …

These five marked Themes function to mark discontinuity. For example, the phrase "[a]s it exists today, though, the AFDC program" (AFDC stands for 'Assistance for Families with Dependant Children' and constitutes major part of welfare in the United States) moves the text from talking about *opportunities of work for women* and *ambivalence about welfare* into the evaluation of existing welfare programs. Similarly, the Theme "[i]n his review of the literature on behalf of the Task Force", introduces important supporting evidence; the review done on behalf of Task Force summarizing all the available research. Here, the text shifts from talking about unspecified evidence to talking about a very specific figure.

Yet, there is another way marked Themes may be interpreted in this text. Since they draw attention to themselves, marked Themes are able to convey messages more intensely. Thus, the information contained in the clauses below are particularly prominent in the text.

For example, the first marked Theme:

In an era [[when more than half of the married mothers work outside the home for at least part of the day]].

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This connects *motherhood* with *work* (work outside home) and although it speaks of *married mothers*, it naturalizes *working mothers*; work is a widespread choice for today's women. However, 'work' in this text is defined strictly as work done outside the home for money, rather than work done at home. Thus, implicitly, *motherhood* is constructed here as non-work.

The second marked Theme links work with self-esteem:

> Certainly, given the relationship among work, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem…

This creates a moralistic base for the argument by constructing work (outside the home) as 'good', particularly as 'good for you' and a psychologically healthy thing to do.

The third Theme introduces AFDC as a subject matter:

> As it exists today, though, (AFDC)…

Welfare programs, as they are *today*, are being subjected to scrutiny and evaluation. The programs are evaluated through the News in the paragraph starting with this marked Theme: 'tends to penalize and de-motivate mothers who work', and 'leaving these who work no better off, and perhaps in worse condition'. These evaluations, as will be discussed in the further section, construct welfare programs as responsible for the facts that many single parents do not work and that these who do are 'no better off' financially. These evaluations further construct work as 'always positive' as well as constructing welfare negatively, and because they are emphasized by the use of the marked Theme, these evaluations also gained in intensity.

Fourth, the *review of literature* represents an empirical warrant to add credibility and legitimacy to the arguments:

> In his review of the literature on behalf of Task Force…

This marked empirical Theme is followed by the extensive 'title' given to one of the researchers, Leonard Schneiderman, who is introduced as 'Dean of the School of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles'. This excessive way of warranting experts' knowledge is not out of character in the text so heavily relying on scientific evidence.

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The final marked Theme removes the responsibility for poverty from the social or political sphere and places it on the individuals:

> After some time, even when a situation arises in which they could assert control …

The text tells us that poverty is not due to lack of opportunities, as favorable situations do arise, but due to a lack of sense of control in lives of unemployed.

Incidentally, these focal points of marked Themes highlight areas of particular importance to the authors and are crucial factors in their argumentation (empirical Subjects, mothers and AFDC). 'Work', although not so prominent among Subjects, is (as will be seen shortly) a dominant object of News; as a solution to 'problems' of welfare. Interestingly, in this particular text, the marked Themes provide a sketch-like synopsis of what the text focuses on, the resources it uses to make a credible argument and, lastly, the solutions to the issues that should be proposed. Simultaneously, the marked Themes also summarize the ideological assumptions carried by the authors – they are 'marked' because they are so vital to the cohesion of the argument.

Analysis of News

In Extract 91, the variety in News matches the variety in Themes /Subjects. The News refer to four categories: work, welfare, family composition and psychological dysfunctions (i.e. low self-esteem). The Task Force directs our attention to these areas as reasons for the *problem* of poverty. These are also areas containing solutions to the problems of poverty. Table 12 below presents the clusters of News organized around four main topics.

As can be seen in Table 12, employment is constructed as an antidote to poverty and the most obvious way of *curing* welfare recipients from their dependence on public money. Work is constructed here as an *opportunity,* and the ability to find employment is determined by personal motivation. This *opportunity of work* is seen as available to everyone who is motivated.

Table 12: Patterns of News in Extract 91

NEWS

Work

single heads of households should work as well
increased income from earnings
can be traced to earnings decrease
full time work at approximately 2,000 hours annually
penalize and de-motivate mothers who work
opportunity for gainful employment, along with the transportation services that would make the workplace accessible and the quality of child care that would help ensure their children's healthy development
support services [[necessary to make the choices realistic and likely to result in success

Welfare

society's ambivalence towards welfare
reduces benefits
realistic policy goal for AFDC recipients
account for only 21 percent of all exits
reason that women leave welfare
no more than 4 years.
use AFDC again in ten or more years.

Family composition

relationship change whereby a female headed family is created
family or household composition, rather than changes in income level as a primary cause of accepting welfare benefits

Psychological dysfunction

linking it with a prior self-esteem condition
chronic material deprivation below the poverty line, coupled with external controls associated with welfare, can have psychological consequences
dysfunctional psychological coping mechanisms such as learned helplessness
stigma argument
is associated with a decrease in the psychological well-being of the recipients
incorporate the general negative views of themselves held by others, thus reducing feelings of self-worth

Other

following variables: market productivity, the number of children, educational level, teenager at fist birth, attitudinal factors, and welfare grants
also experience nonresponsive bureaucratic environment [[over which they have no control.]]
may not be sufficient to move individuals [[who are chronically dependent on welfare]] to a state of independence.

The 'welfare system', on the other hand, is evaluated negatively; it needs to change. The

objective behind this change is to *motivate* rather than *demotivate* welfare recipients to find

work and leave welfare. This cluster of reoccurring News has to do with reducing benefits and lessening the number of those who depend on public funding.

Another prominent cluster of News has to do with *psychological dysfunctions*, such as low self-esteem. Thus, long term welfare recipients are constructed as psychologically dysfunctional. Either as a result of unemployment, or as a pre-existing condition, these people are presented as psychologically unhealthy or weak. In turn, the psychological weakness is then given as a reason as to why these people stay unemployed for several years. The text implies that the recipients are available to work (which may not be the case if they have small children to look after) and that there is work available to everyone. The only area problematized here is the psyche of the welfare recipients. The tension relating to constructions of self-esteem and its role in unemployment is further elaborated in the next section of this analysis.

To summarize so far, the areas highlighted through News as holding the solutions to the problem of welfare dependency do not contain any social and political explanations nor do they invite any changes at the social or political level. At the same time, the News emphasizes work, financial independence and psychological *improvement* as solutions to the problem of poverty. The plausibility of these solutions lies in their dependence on discourses of personal liberty and autonomy. I suggest that these discourses, so embedded in the American ethos, carry a level of attractiveness coming from these positive associations. Yet, as the analysis above tries to demonstrate, these discourses can be used in a way which limits the liberty of certain groups. For example, those who are unwilling to follow traditional models of family are constructed as irresponsible, and even psychologically dysfunctional.

Self-esteem and 'welfare dependency'

So far, the present analysis has discussed focal points of the text as represented by the Themes and the News. Now, I wish to proceed to a discussion of another noteworthy feature of the text – the construction of the relationship between self-esteem and unemployment. In this text self-esteem's role as a cause of unemployment is somehow downplayed. This is no surprise, considering that the scientific reviews on which this section of report is based (contained in *The Social Importance of Self-esteem*) found no evidence of such a link. However, the authors' (and

the document's) agenda is to build a convincing argument that raising self-esteem is a solution to social problems including unemployment. The following brief analysis will examine how the tension between this lack of evidence and the document's agenda is resolved in the text. For example, the last section of the text is most directly concerned with self-esteem in welfare recipients. In this section, self-esteem is either addressed directly or through the mediating constructs of 'psychological well-being' and 'learned helplessness':

Extract 92

One major effort evaluated the stigma argument, namely, that welfare recipients "incorporate the general negative views of themselves held by others, thus reducing feelings of self-worth". (Nichols – Casebolt, 1986). This study revealed that **welfare is associated with a decrease in the psychological well-being of the recipients.**

While inconclusive the evidence implicating chronic welfare dependency with some **deterioration in self-esteem** is stronger than the evidence linking it with a **prior self-esteem condition**. It is easy to see how chronic material deprivation below the poverty line, coupled with external controls associated with welfare, can have **psychological consequences**. T.J. Kane (1987) theorizes that the victimization and loss of control associated with chronic poverty may breed **dysfunctional psychological coping mechanisms such as learned helplessness.**

The poor, in general, and many welfare recipients, in particular, also experience a nonresponsive bureaucratic environment over which they have no control. After some time, even when a situation arises in which they could assert control, they often do not. **Learned helplessness** may thus prevent welfare recipients and the poor from recognizing new opportunities. By implication, structural changes alone may not be sufficient to move individuals who are chronically dependent on welfare to a state of independence. (California Task Force, 1990, p. 120)

This section of the text is written in a heavily nominalised mode. As readers would remember from the earlier examination of scientific discourse, complex nominal groups tend to be ambiguous, if not confusing. The following sentence, for example, does not make it clear as to which 'evidence' is inconclusive — the one 'implicating chronic welfare dependency with some deterioration in self-esteem' or the one 'linking it with a prior self-esteem condition' or both.

While inconclusive the evidence implicating chronic welfare dependency with some **deterioration in self-esteem** is stronger than the evidence linking it with a **prior self-esteem condition**.

Furthermore, the text omits details related to the 'strength' of the evidence (are both of them weak or strong? is the difference significant?).

As had been argued in the *Social Importance of Self-esteem*, there was no evidence suggesting or even hinting at the possibility of self-esteem being a 'cause' of unemployment. Indeed, there was virtually no research supporting any significant link between the two (or any link

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whatsoever). Yet the authors of the report propose that self-esteem is indeed an 'issue' for the unemployed and thus a cause of chronic unemployment.

To achieve this without explicitly making unsupported claims, the authors equated self-esteem with other psychological concepts, like 'self-worth', 'psychological well-being' and 'learned helplessness'. The following list brings together all references to self-esteem and other psychological constructs and problems:

> general negative views of themselves held by others,
> reducing feelings of self-worth
> a decrease in the psychological well-being of the recipients.
> a prior self-esteem condition.
> deterioration in self-esteem
> psychological consequences.
> dysfunctional psychological coping mechanisms such as learned helplessness
> no control.
> could assert control (but) often do not.
> prevent welfare recipients and the poor from recognizing new opportunities.

The use of references to psychological dysfunctions seems unsystematic in the way it treats (and equates) various psychological concepts. The unsystematic use of references to these concepts combined with a highly nominalized (and thus ambiguous) language suggests the above description (like *deterioration in self-esteem, negative views, reduced feelings of self-worth, learnt helplessness*, etc) are interchangeable.

Simultaneously, however, these descriptions consistently refer to psychological *dysfunctions,* rather than to some neutral concepts. Their use is *systematic* in the way it constructs pathology and dysfunction as a characteristic of the unemployed. As a result, this construction of welfare recipients as dysfunctional and pathological supports the authors' idea that the unemployed need to have their psychological health and well-being restored by working directly on their self-esteem.

In consequence, the systematic use of descriptions of psychological dysfunctions as interchangeable with *deterioration of self-esteem* or *a self-esteem condition* construct this *deterioration in self-esteem* as an inherently pathological psychological quality.

Summary

In conclusion, the above analysis of Themes and News focuses on both the construction of *welfare mothers* and their depiction as a problem as well as the association between self-esteem and unemployment. The analysis discusses the strategies used in the text to achieve these constructions. Firstly, the text relies on 'empirical' Themes to provide factual accounts of welfare dependency. I suggested that the excess of these devices implies a possibility of some underlying tension. Indeed, the material used in support of the *Report* provided no evidence to support any claims of causation. Yet, the goal of the document is to present self-esteem as a solution to the problem of unemployment. To deal with this tension the text focuses on the 'borrowed authority' of empirical language and its inherent ambiguity.

Secondly, although the authors do not insist on holding the readers' gaze fixed on a single Subject, the category of welfare mothers was a starting point, and thus a focal point of the text. Thirdly, the News presents the solutions to *welfare* in terms of individualistic, personal improvements, like increasing self-esteem. Furthermore, the solutions offered were based on a neo-liberal assumption relating to work and financial self-sufficiency.

The text unfolds to construct single mothers as chronically dependent on welfare and welfare as psychologically damaging. These constructions can potentially provide justifications and conditions for society to turn against women's right to, for example, procreate outside marriage, to leave marriage and to be provided with the means to survive after marriage. Furthermore, this construction of welfare as promoting dependence and de-motivating working mothers, evaluates it as a cause rather than a relief of poverty. The text implies that the dependency on welfare to be a main reason for poverty and this dependency to be a result of psychological deficiencies. Therefore, poverty is constructed as an outcome of individual psychological problems.

The category of *work* in this text refers solely to work done outside the home. Thus, the text renders work done by single mothers (and, by implication, all mothers who care for their children) as meaningless and worthless. It constructs mothers, particularly those parenting alone, as psychologically unfit due to their poverty and lack of resources to support themselves and their children without having to rely on public funds. These constructions provide

legitimacy for perceiving sole mothers as lazy, unwilling to work, and using public money to support their 'idle' lifestyle.

Finally, the analysis examined the way self-esteem is presented in relation to unemployment. Some features of Extract 91, for example, the preponderance of empirical discourse and the use of references to psychological dysfunctions, served to construct the association as significant.

Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the construct of self-esteem has been utilized to serve a particular political agenda. The analysis demonstrates that constructions of self-esteem as a cognitive, solid and agentive 'object', achieved within psychology and popularized by self-help publications, has enabled legislators to use this concept as a justification to advance conservative constructions of women, motherhood as well as neoliberal views of work and self-sufficiency. These views provide a rationale for the further stigmatization of the poor and disadvantaged. Moreover, they provide a rationale, and a moral justification, to cut public support for single mothers and to promote the return to traditional family values as a way to solve the problems of poverty.

The first analysis in this chapter focuses on examining the ideological content and the philosophical assumptions contained in *Toward the State of Esteem*. Further analyses investigate how humanistic discourses around self-esteem framed within the language of liberty, freedom and independence were, ironically, used to limit the freedom, independence and liberty of certain social groups. By constructing *teenage mothers* and *welfare mothers* as *deficient*, the document embraces the stigmatization of single mothers and provides justifications to undermine their individual rights and curtail their financial support.

The stigma against teenage mothers and single mothers, reiterated within the document, comes from negative values and connotations attached to single motherhood (Dowd, 1997). Sole parent families have been consistently associated with poverty and juvenile delinquency, and women who mother alone – are blamed for spreading inequalities, unemployment, family breakdown or even crime. As has been demonstrated throughout the analyses, the Task Force report negatively evaluates unwed mothers, and compellingly fosters the belief that single

motherhood amplifies poverty and poses a threat to the traditional model of the heterosexual two parent family. This has been achieved by endorsing the language of self-reliance, independence and autonomy.

Discourses that stigmatize single mothers have provided justifications used during welfare reform campaigns of the last two decades. In the United States the reforms introduced in the mid-90s made it compulsory for women to establish paternity. This has placed a significant pressure on women to set up some kind of relationship with the father, even in extreme cases such as sexual violence. They also prevent mothers from having children while on welfare (Mink, 1998). Single mothers have been subjected to all kinds of tests and questionnaires, forced to disclose their most personal details, and obliged to fully collaborate with welfare bureaucrats in order to obtain any financial support.

In Australia, policy makers have been looking towards the North American welfare system as an inspiration for our own policy reforms. Gray and Standon in *Lessons of United States Welfare Reform for Australian Social Policy* (2002) state that "recent development in policies towards lone parents in Australia have emphasized the role of employment in increasing income and self-sufficiency" (p. 1). These reforms seem universally preoccupied with the problem of *welfare dependency.* As solutions, they look towards increasing financial self-sufficiency among sole parents. There is a talk about introducing some kind of *compulsion* and *external pressures* to improve rates of paid employment.

In the meantime, payments for the poorest social group, single mothers, have been declining steadily across all English speaking developed countries. There is no doubt that the new discourses of self-sufficiency and self-esteem have played a role in this change. Ironically, discourses that rely heavily on the themes of freedom, liberty and self-reliance have lead to a decrease in the rights of these women. Some authors warn that what affects some women is consequential to all women, regardless of class, economical standing or colour. After all, the move back to traditional explanations and judgments of womanhood could prove disadvantageous to women across all groups.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis sets out to investigate how the psychological category 'self-esteem' have been constructed and reified in discourse. The examinations focused on how psychological topics and explanations are used in scientific and everyday texts and how meanings around self-esteem are further shaped by these texts. . The underlying assumption guiding this work was based on social constructionist's views that language is constructive of reality in a way that it shapes people's understandings and perceptions of the world around. This framework removes the 'inner' away from the centre of investigations and focuses on how cognition is **represented,** and how understandings and explanations are **managed**, in words.

All the texts examined in this thesis come from outside psychology. This is consistent with the thesis aim which was to investigate the role that disciplines other than psychology play in shaping the understandings around self-esteem. The analyses examined a variety of texts on self-esteem for their grammatical structures and discursive content. The examination was guided by the writings of Wittgenstein, whose views on language and psychology have been widely embraced by social constructionists and discourse analysts. Additionally, the analyses are grounded within a functional model of language, which enabled for a detailed analysis of linguistic features used to reify self-esteem. This detailed examination have been strengthened and expanded by discussion of social contexts. This included political, economic and cultural influences as well as everyday explanations and their acceptability.

It has been argued that, grammatically, self-esteem is a nominalization, but unlike other more straightforward nominalizations (i.e., action – to act, feeling – to feel, movement – to move, etc), the noun 'self-esteem' is not so easily related to a single verb. The examinations undertaken in this thesis aimed to, at least partly, 'unpack' the nominalization of 'self-esteem'. Drawing on a variety of texts from diverse areas, the analyses attempted to describe some of the

processes, values, assumptions and meanings contained in this concept, as well as look at *how* meanings have been invested in this seemingly innocuous word.

The first set of analyses, discussed in Section 2, looked at the ways self-esteem have developed within the linguistic constrains of scientific discourses, how these discourses enabled the reification of self-esteem and how they have shaped the way self-esteem has been constructed as a quantifiable phenomenon. This section restricted its examination to a few samples of text. This was done in an attempt to provide a thorough and in-depth analysis of the grammatical strategies involved in the construction of self-esteem as an inner, cognitive, stable and measurable 'object'. As has been demonstrated, this conceptualisation of self-esteem has been achieved gradually, through many complex linguistic shifts over time. This construction of self-esteem as a 'real thing' inside individuals has been made possible because of the particular grammatical structures typically used in science; here described as 'ideational grammatical metaphors'.

Furthermore, this section examineed the values invested in the concept of 'self esteem' and 'low self-esteem' as well as their associations with 'normality' and 'abnormality'. As has been demonstrated, valorisations and links with 'normality' have been constructed in text through the use of experiential and logical grammatical metaphors. These metaphors have constructed the world as one where abstract 'objects' (rather than people) relate to one another. Mostly, these relationships have been represented as causal or conditional.

In the examples examined, the relationship between 'low self-esteem' and 'depression' has been rhetorically evoked as one of cause and effect. However, the relationship of cause and effect was not made explicit but was built through a range of subtle and indirect means. I have argued that the authors skillfully managed the tension between inconclusive experimental evidence (or lack of evidence that low self-esteem causes depression) and the demands of the scientific model to represent reality in terms of cause and effect relations.

This section also examines briefly how the shifts in constructions of self-esteem over time have coincided with other, broader social shifts towards more individualistic (or 'therapeutic') explanations of human existence. As was demonstrated, the use of self-esteem in connection to

depression has coincided with a greater social acceptance of 'self-esteem' (as well as other psychological concepts) as an explanatory factor for human behaviour.

This first section depicted some of the factors shaping the understandings of self-esteem in science. furthermore, what this and later sections hopefully demonstrated is that constructions of self-esteem within science are closely related to understandings of self-esteem outside science. Also, that these constructions arise within the complex web of historical, cultural and socio-economic developments.

This complexity of factors shaping understandings of self-esteem were further explored in relation to less formal discourses such as self-help materials. Section 3 moveed away from the constraints of scientific discourse towards more 'daring' claims of popular psychological publications. Here a larger body of texts was examined, looking across a number of books, articles and internet publications. The method of analysis was also broader and more expansive than the rigorous and precise grammatical analyses of the previous section. Thus, the examination focused on broader patterns partaking in the reification of self-esteem.

Moreover, this section demonstrated that patterns across many self-help publications have taken constructions of self-esteem well beyond portraying it as a mere 'thing'. The patterns construed self-esteem as agentive; as having an impact on people and being in control of human life. The analyses in this section revealed two discursive constructions pertaining to the categories of 'self-esteem' and 'low self-esteem'. Firstly, the texts *anthropomorphised* self-esteem; from being represented as an 'object' the construct was elevated to the position of a ' living being'. Secondly, low self-esteem was *demonised* by the deployment of discourses of 'possession' wherein low self-esteem was construed as having overwhelming control over the lives of individuals. Even though these constructions are clearly metaphorical – there is no doubt that none of the authors would claim self-esteem to be an actual 'person' – representations of self-esteem as a 'friend' or a 'builder' shape the way we understand and explain our everyday experience. No doubt, the constructions of self-esteem as an entity 'in control' promotes the image of individuals as controlled by 'entities' in their minds. Consequently, these images advance the view that human experience is brought about from 'within'.

This section of the thesis further discussed the above constructions of self-esteem in relation to the principles of ethics. Drawing on Foucault's pragmatic views of ethics as a 'relationship to oneself', it was demonstrated that these self-help books promote certain behaviours as ethically sound, while others are ethically faulty. The authors promote certain practices as morally superior and thus place an obligation on readers to follow these particular practices (for example those that presumably lead to increased self-esteem). Readers are bound to adopt the promoted ways of being in order to attract success and happiness. The explicit 'moralizing' of early self-help books (published in the 1960s and 70s) has been replaced, in more recent publications, by subtle, implicit, yet rhetorically powerful arguments. These arguments were framed within the discourses of self-responsibility, success and happiness, wherein success and happiness had become obligations as well as goals of moral individuals.

The possible consequences of adopting these views of individuals as responsible for their own happiness and success is investigated in the last set of analyses contained in Section 4. This section moved its focus from examinations of how self-esteem has been constructed in texts and investigated the possible social costs of deploying the above constructions of self-esteem. This investigation takes public documents as a focus of its inquiry. This last analysis Section argues that the assumptions about human experience carried by these constructions provide a rationale, if not a moral justification, for governments to introduce anti-welfare policies. The section examines how the support for these types of policies has been accomplished through the language of self-reliance, independence and autonomy.

The analyses in this section examined texts which reproduce stigmas about single and teenage motherhood. By subtle, yet consistent, pejorative appraisal of sole mothers and teenage sexuality, the documents foster beliefs in young and sole mothers being a threat to social harmony. These arguments justified decisions, and consequent reforms undertaken in the United States, aiming to decrease the number of single parent families and to increase the 'self-reliance' of single mothers. In consequence, the liberties of women were severely limited as a result of increased control (relating to procreation and compulsory fatherhood) and decreased financial assistance. Ironically, the discourses of freedom, self-reliance, independence and

equality provided ways to decrease liberties and independence, and to further increase the exploitation of women in capitalist liberal democracies.

The texts examined here come mainly from North America. I conclude, however, that these discourses of self-reliance and responsibility would soon effect the treatment of single mothers in Australia. At the time of my analysis, the common view was that Australia can't place all single parents in the workplace due to the lack of jobs available. It was clear, nevertheless, that "recent developments in policies towards lone parents in Australia have emphasised the role of employment in increasing income and self-sufficiency" (Gray & Standon, 2002, p. 1). The latest developments in Howard's 'workplace revolution'– resulting in a reduction of minimal wage rates and an erosion of unionism - have coincided with significant funding cuts for women who parent alone (i.e., reduced social security payments and concessions given to fathers paying maintenance), putting increasing pressure on sole mothers to work outside home. Indeed, the most recent policy requires single mothers to go back to work once children are of school age.

As any research, this work's aspirations are restricted to a small number of specific concerns. These can be broadly summarized as an attempt to trace discursive reification of self-esteem. Unavoidably, there were a number of limitations to this attempt . First, the analysis of psychiatric texts have been restricted to a handful of texts on depression. It is possible that, had other books been used, slightly different patterns would have been observed. The choice of texts was motivated by a wish to map a historical trajectory of the concept as it was deployed over time in several editions of the same academic textbook and to maximize the analysis by examining each successive version with great attention to detail. Consequently, it is hoped that the resultant analysis provides valuable critical observations about a widely read educational resource in the discipline and profession of psychiatry. It is up to future research to examine whether the same linguistic and discursive patterns apply in other discipline-specific domains such as psychology, for example.

Second, some readers may see the arguments deployed in this thesis as taking a stance 'against science'. On the contrary: it is not my aim to argue that science or scientific texts are somehow 'wrong' or 'deceptive'. In fact, scientific discourse evolved to serve a particular function – a lot

of information can be compressed into a small stretch of text with the use of nominalisations and other grammatical metaphors. Yet, the density of these texts make them somehow ambiguous and, as a by-product, enable writers to make confusing and impenetrable claims. It is therefore important to provide reflexive and critical accounts of how scientific texts reify psychological constructs and, as was the case here, how science constructs self-esteem as an *inner and tangible object* through technical representations of scientific discourse.

Finally, the use of North American texts in the final analyses may seem to some readers as irrelevant to Australian society. However, as stated before, there is already in circulation various Commonwealth and state government publications which contain similar, if only more condensed, claims about welfare recipients as inevitably lacking in self-esteem (Pomagalska, 2005). In this thesis, however, I wished to reflect on how these seemingly culture-specific North American publications are contributing to contemporary understandings of welfare in Australia. The Californian Taskforce on Self Esteem may not have initiated the construction of welfare recipients as blameworthy, but its discourse has nevertheless contributed to shaping explanations of poverty and welfare in terms of *inner* deficiencies. In this way, these and all similar texts contribute to contemporary Australian politics as they provide rhetorical justifications for 'cutting' welfare. These justifications, as I explained earlier, have been ultimately used by Australian and British governments. What I intended to demonstrate was that, over time (and across the world), these justifications build rhetorical power to warrant political decisions framed in terms of self-esteem as just and fair.

These policies, which have been put together by both scientific and self-help constructions of self-esteem, insist on the *inner* as a foundation of all success and happiness. Self-esteem is used in these and similar texts as a strategy to undermine an already vulnerable position of welfare recipients. Self-esteem is used here as a resource to justify social inequalities and to undermine basic rights of particular groups. It is important, therefore, to trace the unfolding of these narratives; how they come to existence and how they acquire the status of common sense. The role the concept of self-esteem plays in the development of these justifications is unique as it is aligning conservative views with a prevailing belief in the power of the human psyche over social and personal circumstances. It is important to be alerted to processes and methods

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involved in developing these explanations into commonsense knowledge. This knowledge, as I attempted to demonstrate, is then deployed by governing bodies to warrant and justify their decisions.

In conclusion, the examination of the concept of self-esteem conducted for this thesis has been undertaken from a position of social constructionism. Rather than search for some homogenous entity inside our heads, this type of investigation has provided an opportunity to explore a variety of 'meanings' embedded in the notion of self-esteem. Throughout the thesis, self-esteem is assumed to be a linguistic concept unfolding in a dynamic, context-dependent manner. It is further assumed that the concept of self-esteem acquires its meanings as it is deployed and used in different situations.

The exploration of these meanings and uses of self-esteem has enabled me to describe some of the values, assumptions and connotations carried by the concept of self-esteem. Certainly, this work does not exhaust all possible meanings embedded in the concept, nor does it explore all possible contexts and uses of 'self-esteem'. Considering its immense popularity, there is no end to the possible descriptions of self-esteem. Considering its dynamic development, there is no possibility of a full description of its meanings. However, there is a definite possibility of further explorations of this and other psychological concepts in order to understand the way they shape and construct our experiences.

As a final comment, the repressive uses of the concepts which form a focal point of this thesis, do not preclude alternative constructions of self-esteem. Indeed, as Foucault (1972, 2000) emphasized, all practices related to power, including practices of self-governing are repressive as well as productive. Constructions of self-esteem and related concepts are as likely to be a site of resistance and challenge to the existing distribution of power. All discourses, after all, carry possibilities of new forms of subjectivity which are enabling, empowering and liberating.

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