

Lecture 3

# The Social Self

“NO TOPIC IS MORE  
INTERESTING TO PEOPLE  
THAN PEOPLE. FOR MOST  
PEOPLE, MOREOVER, THE  
MOST INTERESTING IS  
THE SELF.”

—ROY F. BAUMEISTER,  
*THE SELF IN SOCIAL  
PSYCHOLOGY, 1999*

# What is the “self”?

Many, varied theories about the purpose and function of the ‘self’ – e.g., in arts, philosophy, science, culture, religion, and through history.

Psychologically...

collection of cognitively-held beliefs that a person possesses about themselves.

However...

“Self” seems to extend beyond the physical self (body), to include psychologically meaningful personal possessions and personal space.

# What is the “self”?

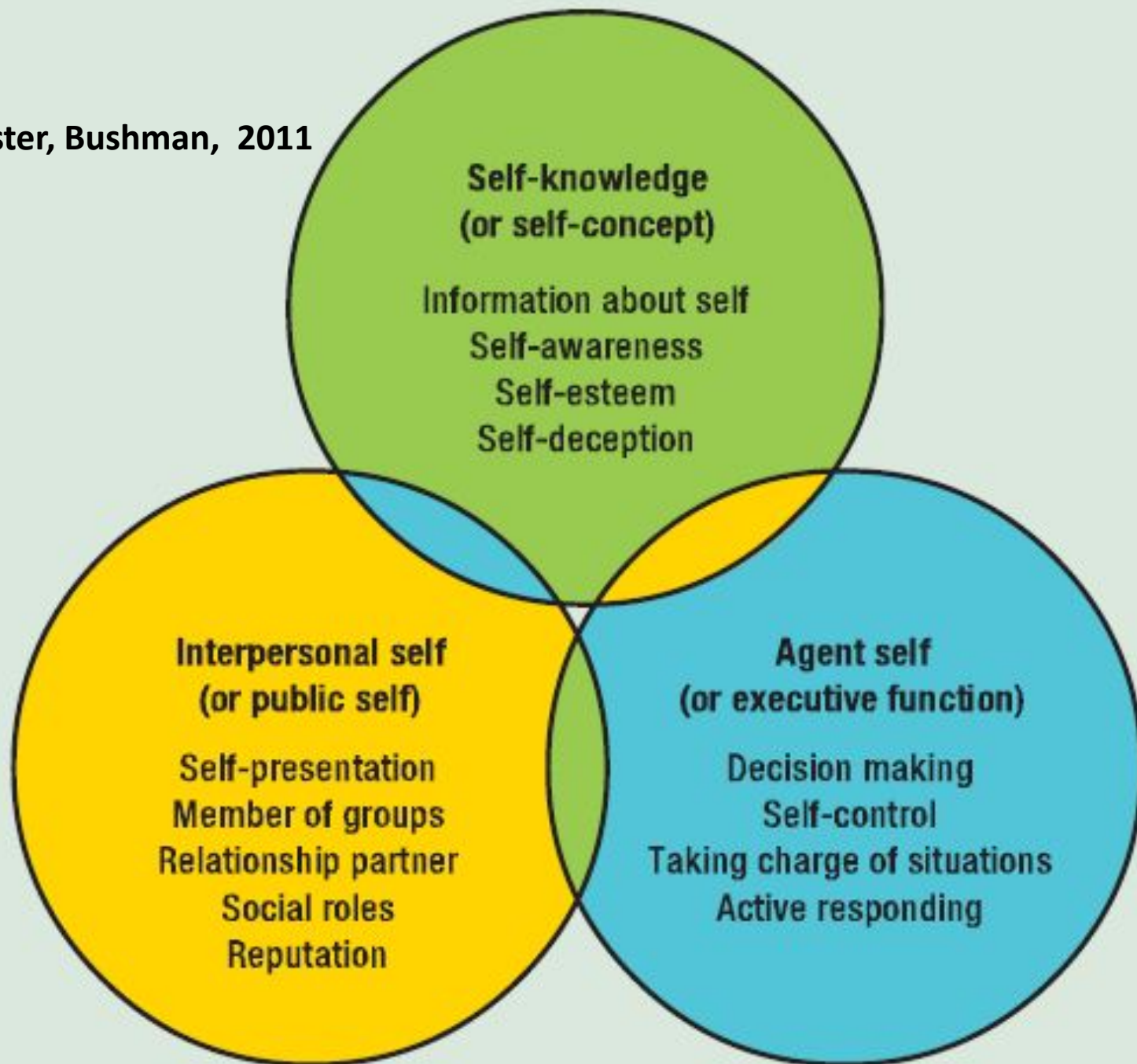
Traditionally, “self” was seen as representing stable, genetically determined “character” – or later, “personality”.

- Interest in the self increased rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s.

Most recently, “self” has been further complexified and increasingly seen as:

- Dynamic & changeable
- Multiple / Plural
- Hierarchical
- Situational & cognitively influenced
- Culturally constructed

Baumeister, Bushman, 2011



The self has three main parts, which correspond to several main things that the self does.

The first part consists of **self-knowledge (self-concept)**. Human beings have self-awareness, and this awareness enables them to develop elaborate sets of beliefs about themselves.

The **interpersonal self, or public self**, is a second part of the self that helps the person connect socially to other people.

Most people have a certain image that they try to convey to others.

This public self bears some resemblance to the self-concept, but the two are not the same.

Often, people work hard to present a particular image to others even if it is not exactly the full, precise truth as they know it.

The third important part of the self, the **agent self, or executive function**, is the part that gets things done. It enables the self to make choices and exert control, including both self-control and control over other people (and things).

# Purpose of the self

- Gain social acceptance
- Play social roles
  - Society creates and defines roles
  - Individual seeks and adopts them

## Self has adaptational functions

- **Self-promotion**  
which means incensement the likelihood of partnership
- **Social comparison**  
which leads to motivation to improve
- **Social control**  
which helps us to store social norms and rules



# Self-concept

- Self-awareness
  - Self-esteem
- Self-deception
  - Self-efficacy

# Self-awareness

- Attention directed to the self
- Usually involves evaluative comparison.

In general, people spend little time actually thinking about themselves (but a lot of time is spent thinking about self-presentation and self-preservation)

- Certain situations (e.g., mirrors, cameras, audiences, self-development exercises)



# Social Comparison Theory

- Festinger suggested that people compare themselves to others because, for many domains and attributes, there is no objective yardstick with which to evaluate the self, so other people are highly informative.
- **Patterns:**
  - Desire to see self-positively appears more powerful than desire to see self-accurately
  - In-group comparisons “my salary is pretty good for a woman.”

Suls, J. E., & Wills, T. A. E. (1991). *Social comparison: Contemporary theory and research*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

# Self-awareness

- Early in the 1970s, two social psychologists began studying the difference between being and not being self-aware. They developed several clever procedures to increase self-awareness, such as having people work while seated in front of a mirror, or telling people that they were being videotaped.

## **Private self-awareness**

refers to attending to your inner states, including emotions, thoughts, desires, and traits. It is a matter of looking inward.

## **Public self-awareness**

means attending to how you are perceived by others, including what others might think of you.

# Benefits of high self-esteem

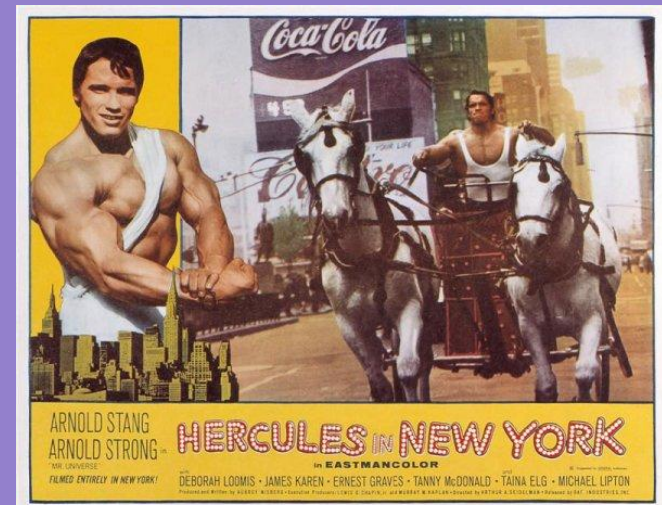
- Initiative

- Confidence you can do the right thing
- More adventurous in activities  
(readiness to take risk)

- Feels good

Helps one to overcome bad feelings

If they fail, they are more likely to try again



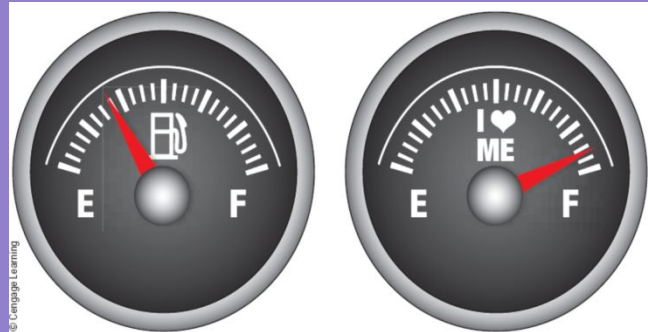


# Why do we care about self-esteem?

- Sociometer theory

- Self-esteem is a measure of social acceptability

A sociometer (made from the words *social* and *meter*) is a measure of how desirable one would be to other people as a relationship partner, team member, employee, colleague, or in some other way. In this sense, self-esteem is a sociometer because it measures the traits you have according to how much they qualify you for social acceptance. Sociometer theory can explain why people are so concerned with self-esteem: It helps people navigate the long road to social acceptance. Mark Leary, the author of sociometer theory, compares self-esteem to the gas gauge on a car. A gas gauge may seem trivial because it doesn't make the car go forward. But the gas gauge tells you about something that is important—namely, whether there is enough fuel in the car. Just as drivers act out of concern to *keep their gas gauge above zero*, so people seem constantly to act so as to preserve their self-esteem



# Why do we care about self-esteem?

- Self-esteem feels good
  - Theory of terror management

A more complex variation on that theory invokes the theory of terror management, which holds that fear of death is at the root of all human striving.

Terror management theorists assert that having high self-esteem helps shield people from fear of death, so people seek out self-esteem as a way of avoiding a recognition that they are going to die.



# Why do we care about self-esteem?

- Self-esteem feels good

A common view is that self-esteem is based mainly on feeling competent rather than on social acceptance.

However, recent evidence suggests that feeling accepted has a bigger impact on self-esteem than does feeling competent (though both matter).

# Negative aspects of highest self-esteem

- Narcissism
  - Subset of high self-esteem
  - Tend to be more aggressive and violent
- Higher prejudice
  - Tend to think their group is better

# Self-deception strategies

- Self Serving Bias (mentioned in the previous lecture)
- More skeptical of bad feedback
- Comparisons to those slightly worse
- Skew impressions of others to highlight own good traits as unusual

# Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model

- In order to maintain a positive view of the self, we distance ourselves from others who perform better than we do on valued dimensions, but move closer to others who perform worse, to protect our self-esteem.

Tesser, A. (1988). Toward a self-evaluation maintenance model of social behavior. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 21, 181-227.

People like to learn things about themselves that cast the self in a favourable light.

People **seek new favourable knowledge** about themselves as well as ways to revise pre-existing but unfavourable views of themselves. People are guided by a **self-enhancement motive** (e.g. Kunda, 1990). One manifestation of this motive is described by self-affirmation theory (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). People strive publicly to affirm positive aspects of who they are; this can be done blatantly by boasting or more subtly through rationalisation or dropping hints. The urge to self-affirm is particularly strong when an aspect of one's self-esteem has been damaged. So, for example, if someone draws attention to the fact that you are a lousy artist, you might retort that while that might be true, you are an excellent dancer.

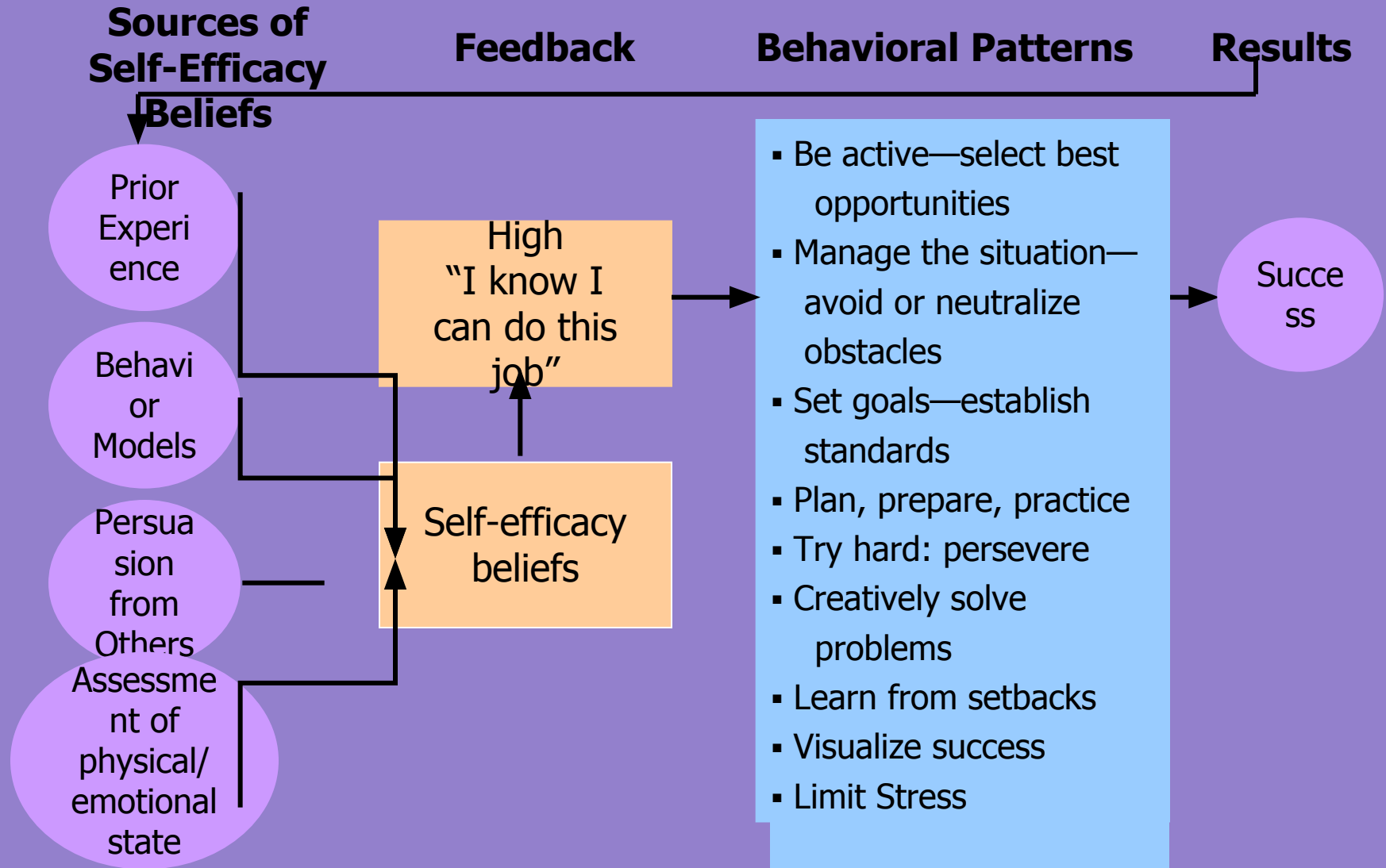
Self-affirmation rests on people's need to maintain a global image of themselves as being competent, good, coherent, unitary, stable, capable of free choice, capable of controlling important outcomes, and so on.

# Self-efficacy

- Belief in one's capacity to succeed at a given task.  
e.g. Public Speaking Self-Efficacy
- Bandura recommended specific rather than general measures of Self-efficacy.

Bandura, A. (1994). *Self-efficacy*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc..

# Effects of High Self-Efficacy



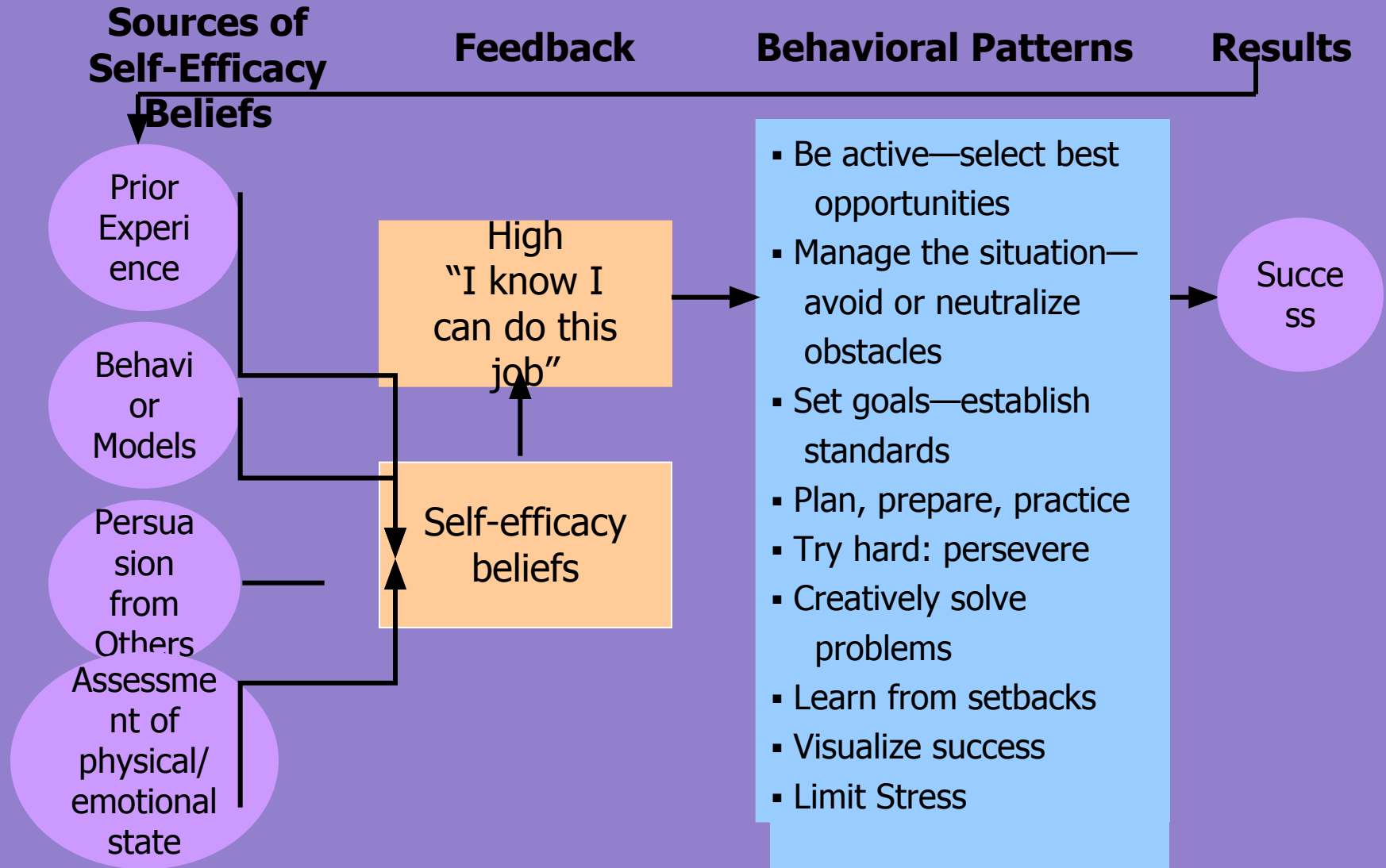
## People can program themselves for success or failure by enacting their self-efficacy expectations.

Let's use a work-related example. Let's say your company has asked you to take on an international assignment for two years. Let's analyze the sources of your self-efficacy in accomplishing that assignment successfully.

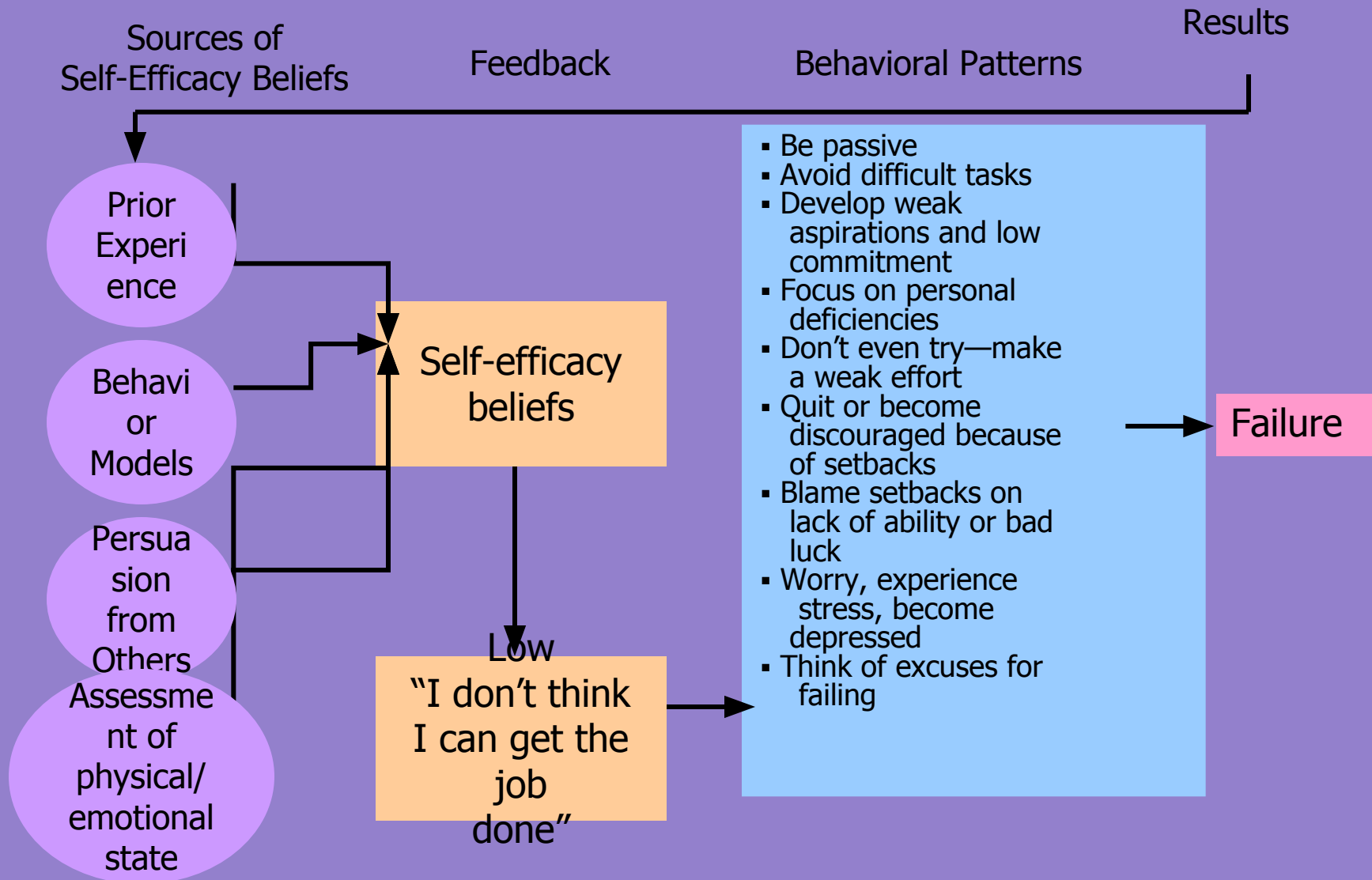
- a. **Prior experience** – have you done this before and been successful? This is the most important driver of your self-efficacy. **What past experiences would be relevant in our example?** Prior assignments, traveling abroad, having good experiences, knowledge of the language.
- b. **Behavior models** – success or failure of others who have done this. Have coworkers you know enjoyed their experiences and been successful?
- c. **Persuasion from others** – what kind of support does your organization provide, for example, will they help your spouse get a job, will they help you plan your re-entry back into the country? Do they present it as you are really the right person for the job or do you more have the feeling that they just needed someone to go.
- d. **Assessment of physical or emotional states** – would you miss home and everything that is familiar to you? Maybe you have a health condition that you feel may prohibit your ability to perform well.



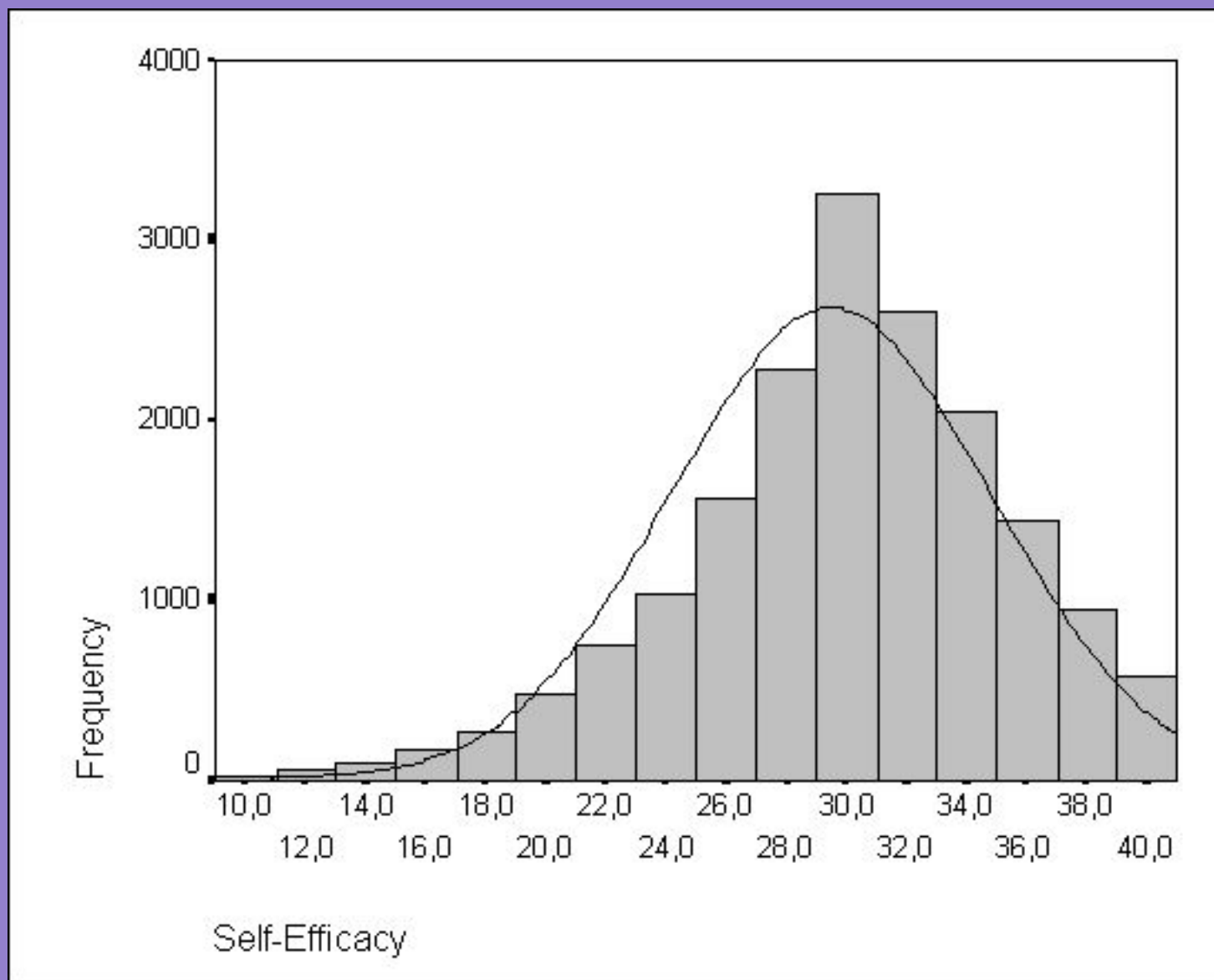
# Effects of High Self-Efficacy

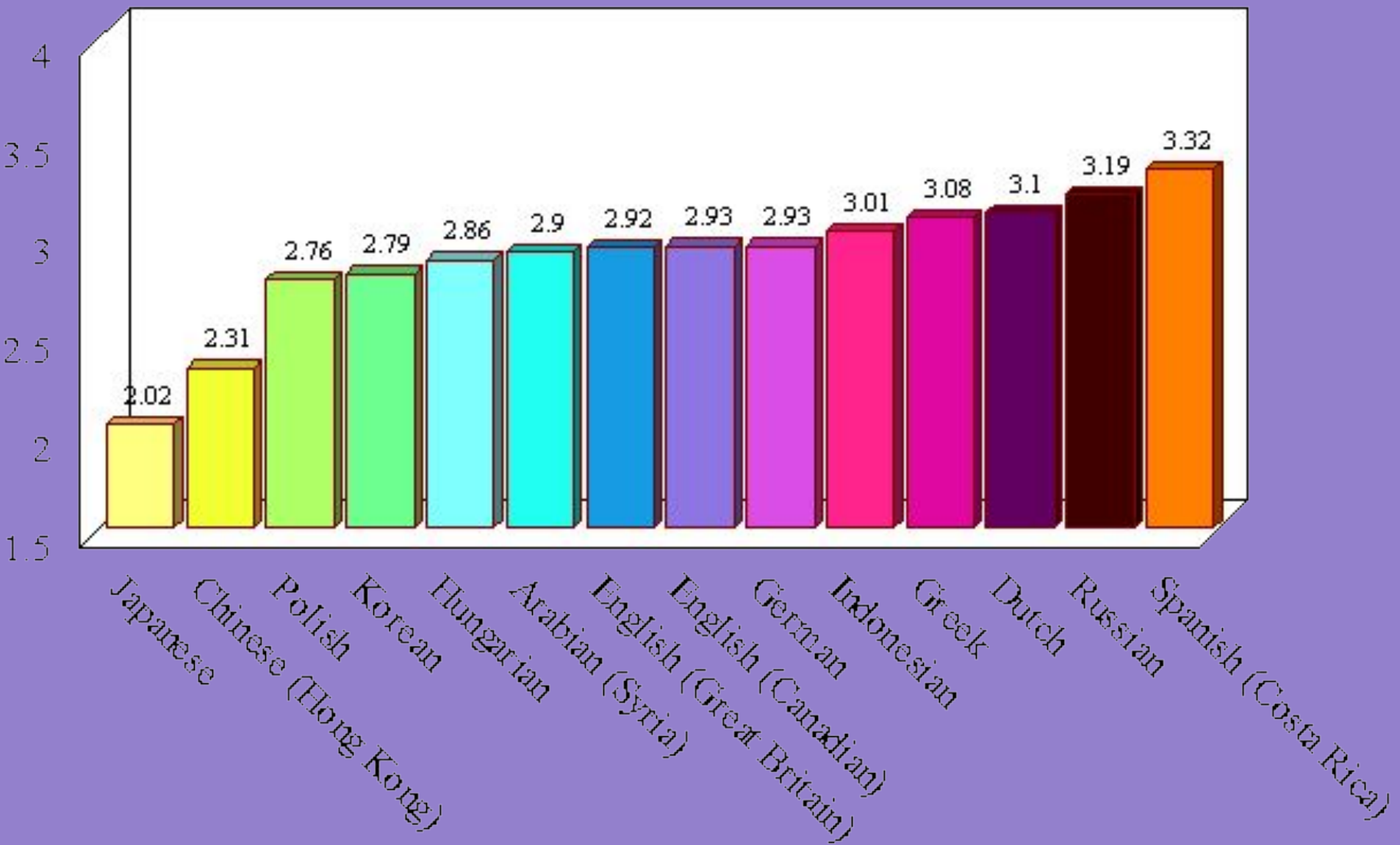


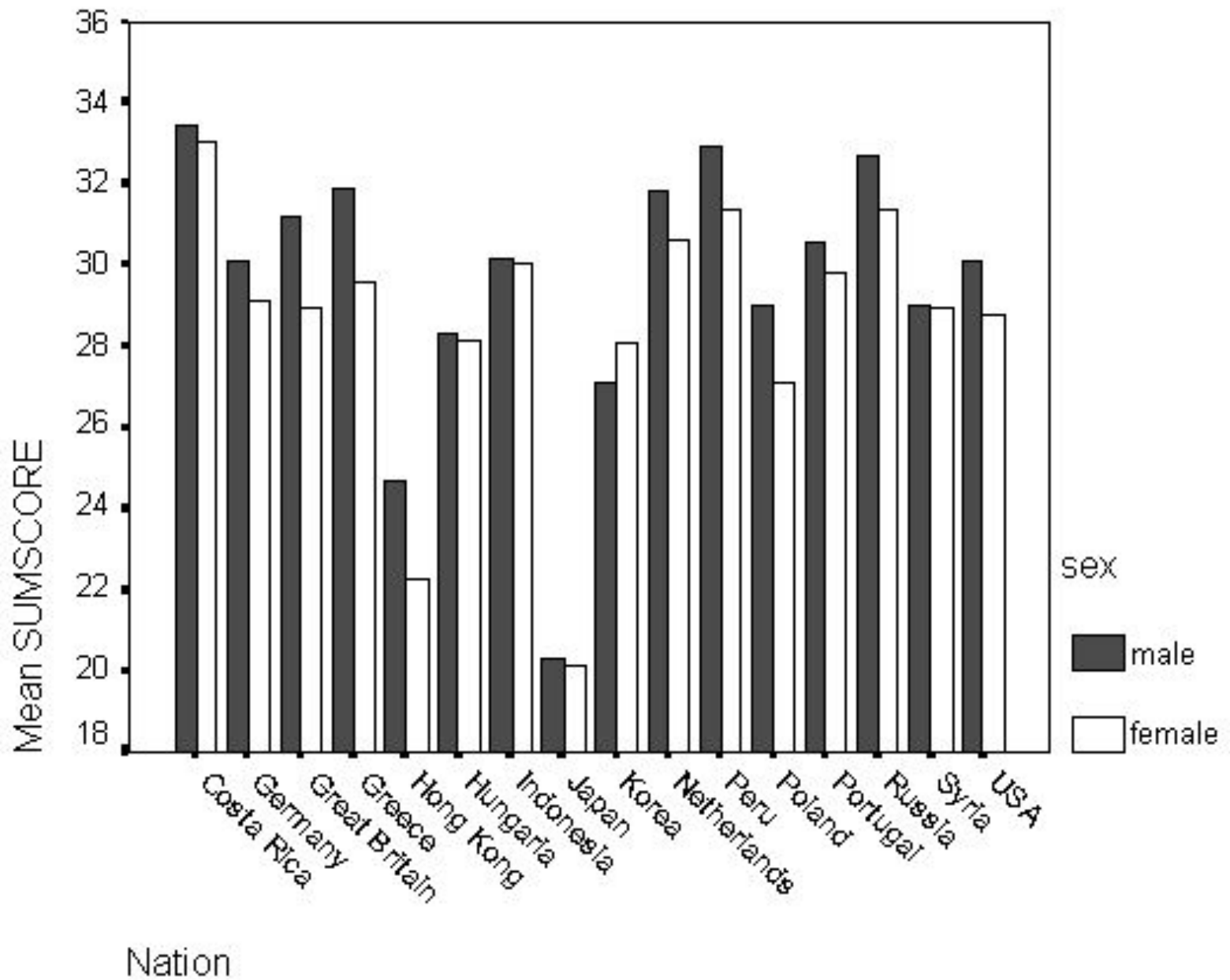
# Effects of Low Self-Efficacy



# Distribution of Self-Efficacy Sum Scores for Total Sample ( $N = 17,553$ ) (22 culturas)







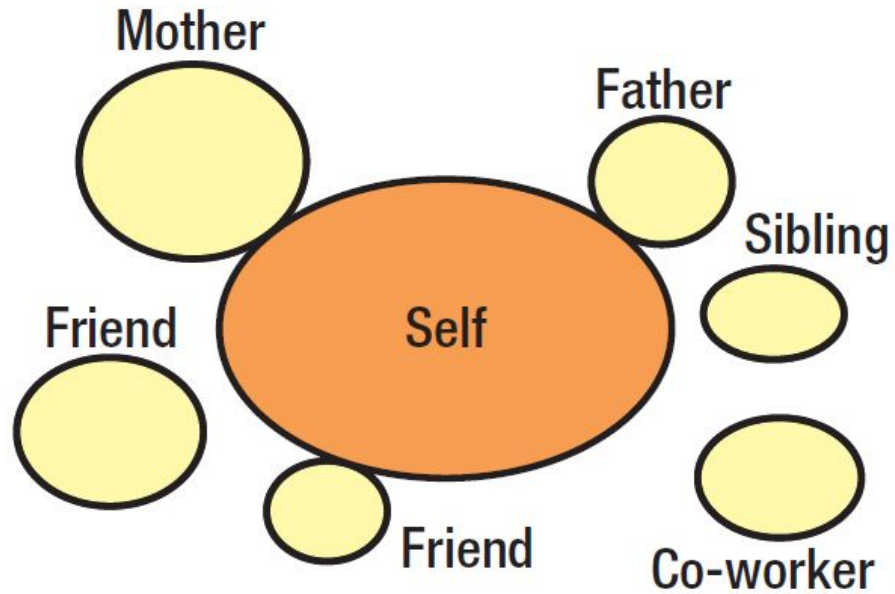
Mean Sum Scores Broken Down by Nations and Gender

# Interdependent of Self-Concept

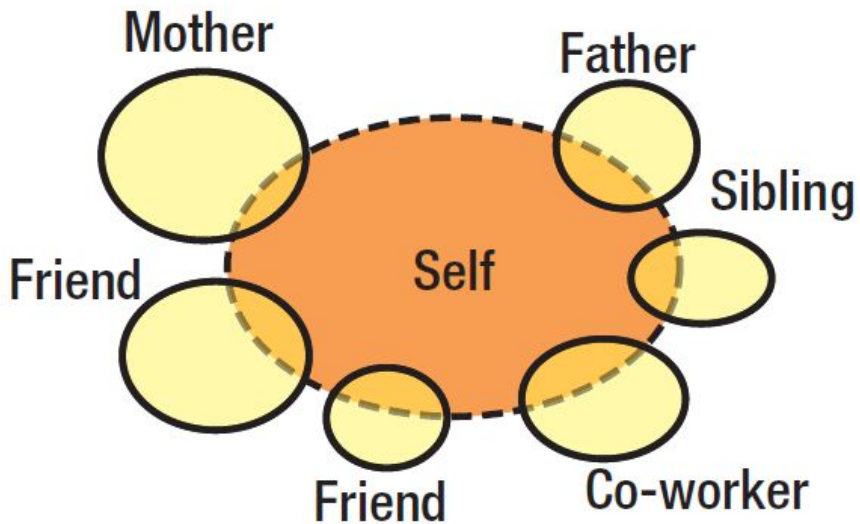
The idea that cultural styles of selfhood differ along the dimension of independence was introduced by Hazel Markus (American) and Shinobu Kitayama (Japanese). **They proposed that Asians differ from North Americans and Europeans in how they think of themselves and how they seek to construct the self in relation to others.** To avoid the overused term *self-concept*, they introduced the term *self-construal*, which means a way of thinking about the self. An **independent self-construal emphasizes** what makes the self different and sets it apart from others. In contrast, an **interdependent self-construal emphasizes what connects the self to other people and groups.**

# Interdependent of Self-Concept

Independent  
self-construal



Interdependent  
self-construal



## Interdependent of Self-Concept

- In individualistic cultures it is expected that people will develop a self-concept separate from others or independent from others.
- Men are expected to have an independent self-concept more than women.
- In collectivist cultures it is expected that people will develop a self-concept in terms of their connections or relationships with others.
- Women are expected to have an interdependent self-concept more than men.



# Interpersonal self

## self – presentation

# Self-presentation

- Behaviors that convey an image to others
- Public esteem
  - More important than private self-esteem

# Functions of self-presentation

- **Social acceptance**
  - Increase chance of acceptance and maintain place within the group
- **Claiming identity**
  - Social validation of claims to identity

# Self-Monitoring

- Self-monitoring is the degree to which you are aware of how your actions and behaviors affect others and monitoring those behaviors to “fit in” or adapt to the situation you’re in.
- Observing one’s own behavior and adapting it to the situation

# Self-Monitoring

- What are the dangers of being a:

- High Self-Monitor (adjusts behavior to situation; monitors situation)

**High self-monitors regulate their expressive self-presentation in order to present the desired public appearance. These individuals may be considered to be insincere chameleons.**

- Low Self-Monitor (principled attitudes guide behaviour)

**Low self-monitors lack either the ability or the motivation to regulate their expressive self-presentations. These individuals may be viewed as insensitive.**

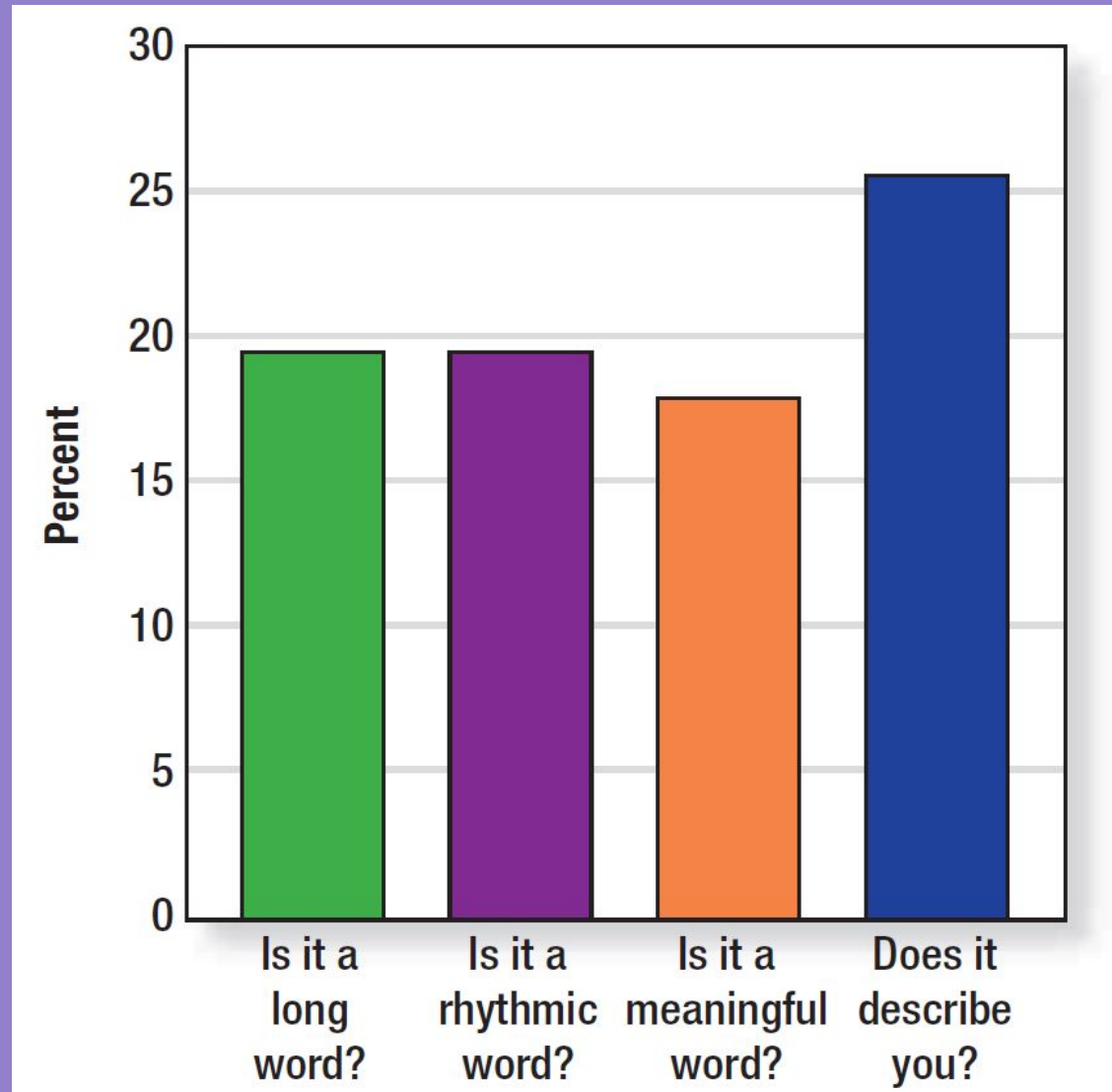
# Is high or low-self-monitoring related to job success?

Research (meta-analysis) has shown that high self-monitoring is positively related to career success and relates to more promotions than low self-monitoring.

# Self and information processing

## Self-reference Effect

Information bearing on self is processed more deeply and remembered better



THE “FORER EFFECT” (Barnum effect)



## THE “FORER EFFECT” (Barnum effect)

The Forer effect (also called the Barnum effect after P. T. Barnum's observation that "we've got something for everyone") is the observation that individuals will give high accuracy ratings to descriptions of their personality that supposedly are tailored specifically for them, but are in fact vague and general enough to apply to a wide range of people. This effect can provide a partial explanation for the widespread acceptance of some beliefs and practices, such as astrology, fortune telling, graphology, aura reading and some types of personality tests. A related and more general phenomenon is that of subjective validation. Subjective validation occurs when two unrelated or even random events are perceived to be related because a belief, expectation, or hypothesis demands a relationship. Thus people seek a correspondence between their perception of their personality and the contents of a horoscope.

Psychologist Bertram R. Forer gave a personality test to his students. He told his students they were each receiving a unique personality analysis that was based on the test's results and to rate their analysis on how well it applied to themselves. In reality, each received the same sketch, consisting of the following items:

1. You have a great need for other people to like and admire you.
2. You have a tendency to be critical of yourself.
3. You have a great deal of unused capacity which you have not turned to your advantage.
4. While you have some personality weaknesses, you are generally able to compensate for them.
5. Your sexual adjustment has presented problems for you.
6. Disciplined and self-controlled outside, you tend to be worrisome and insecure inside.
7. At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing.
8. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety and become dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations.
9. You pride yourself as an independent thinker and do not accept others' statements without satisfactory proof.
10. You have found it unwise to be too frank in revealing yourself to others.
11. At times you are extroverted, affable, sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary, reserved.
12. Some of your aspirations tend to be pretty unrealistic.
13. Security is one of your major goals in life.

On average, the students rated its accuracy as 4.26 on a scale of 0 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). Only after the ratings were turned in was it revealed that each student had received identical copies assembled by Forer from a newsstand astrology book. The quote contains a number of statements that are vague and general enough to apply to a wide range of people.

In another study examining the Forer effect, students took the MMPI personality assessment and researchers evaluated their responses. The researchers wrote accurate evaluations of the students' personalities, but gave the students both the accurate assessment and a fake assessment using vague generalities. Students were then asked to choose which personality assessment they believe was their own, actual assessment. More than half of the students (59%) chose the fake assessment as opposed to the real one.

# THE “FORER EFFECT” (Barnum effect)

## Subjects give higher accuracy ratings if...

- The subject believes analysis applies only to him/her
- The subject believes in the authority of the evaluator
- The analysis lists mostly positive traits, or turns weaknesses into strengths (more positive → more acceptable)

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Thank you!