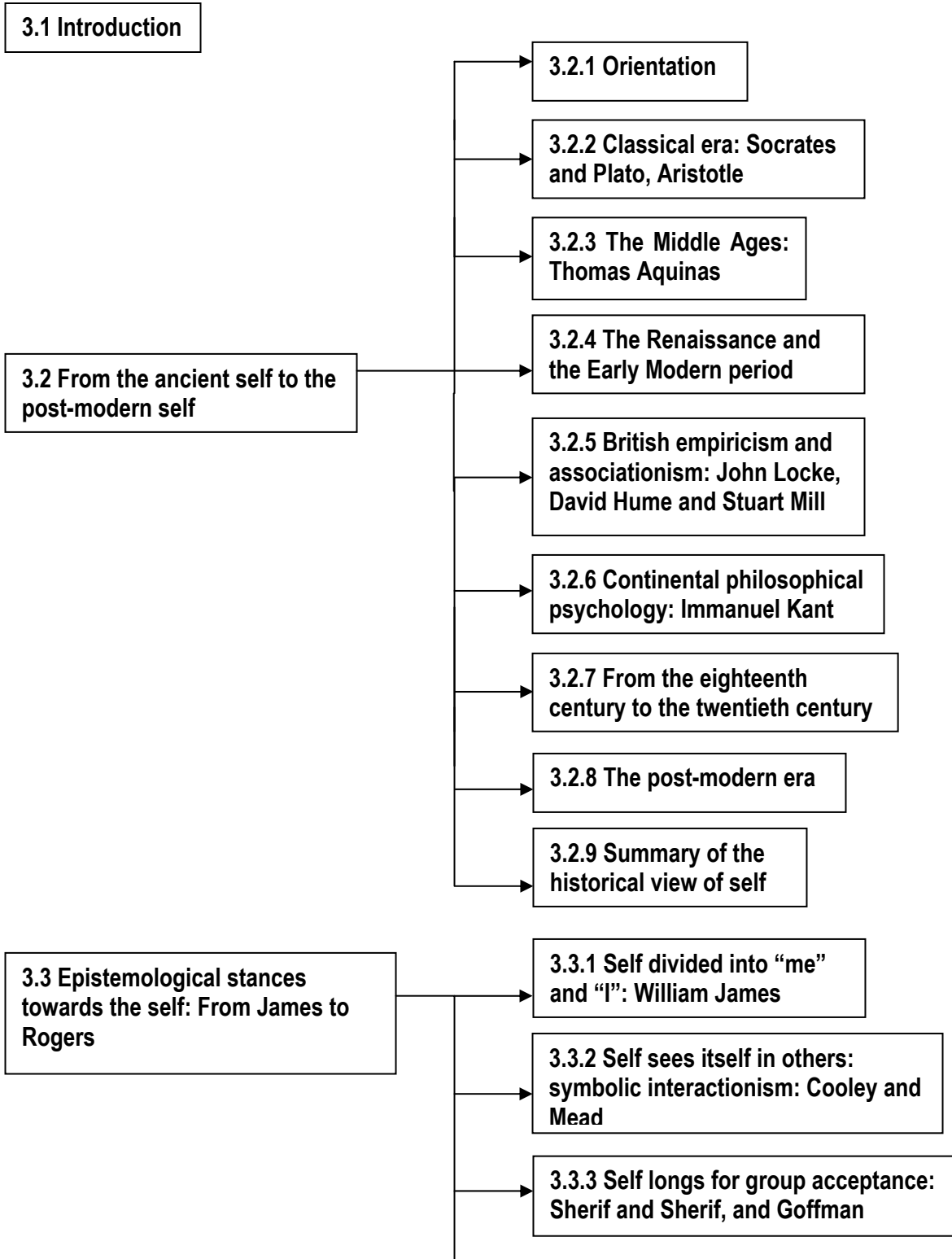
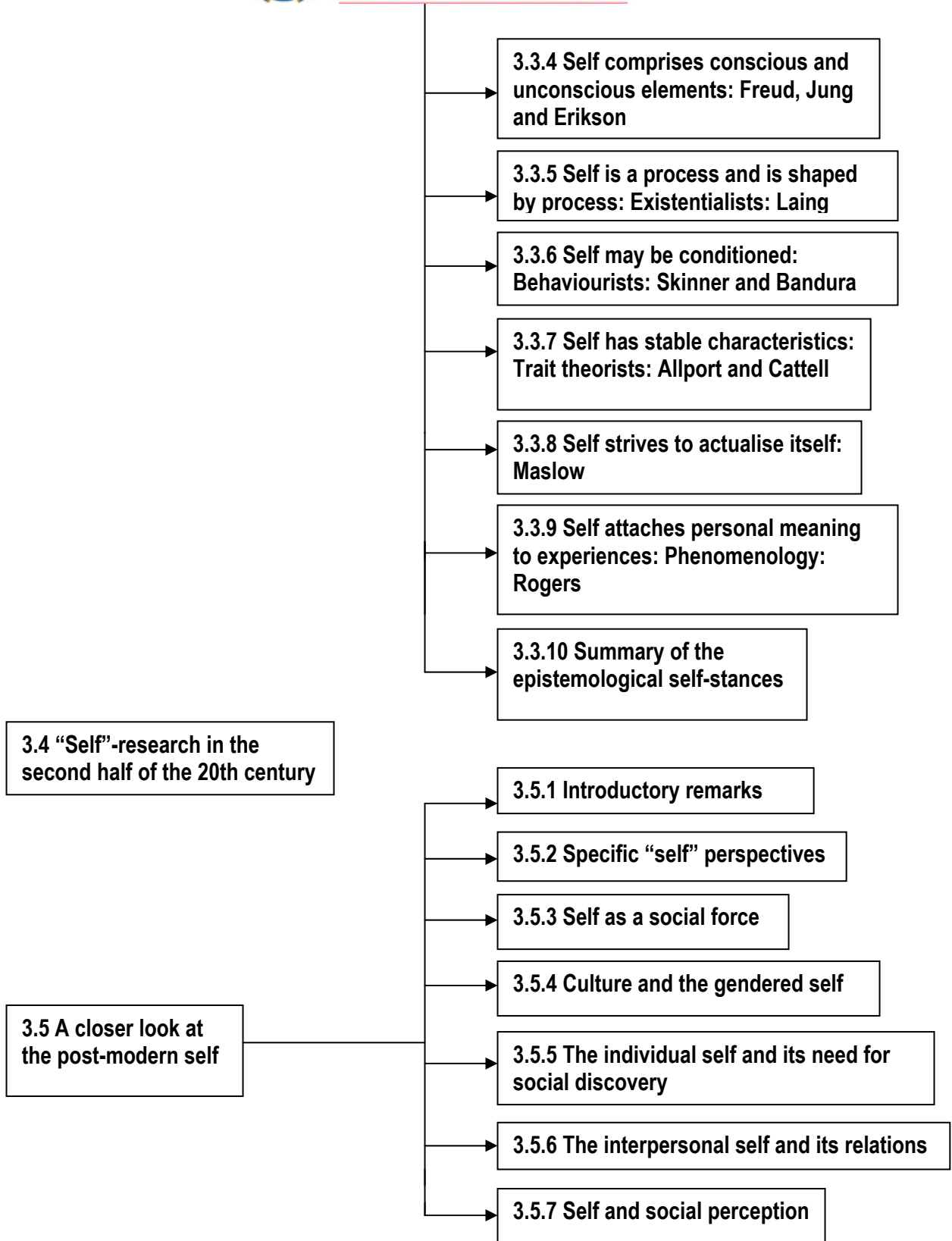


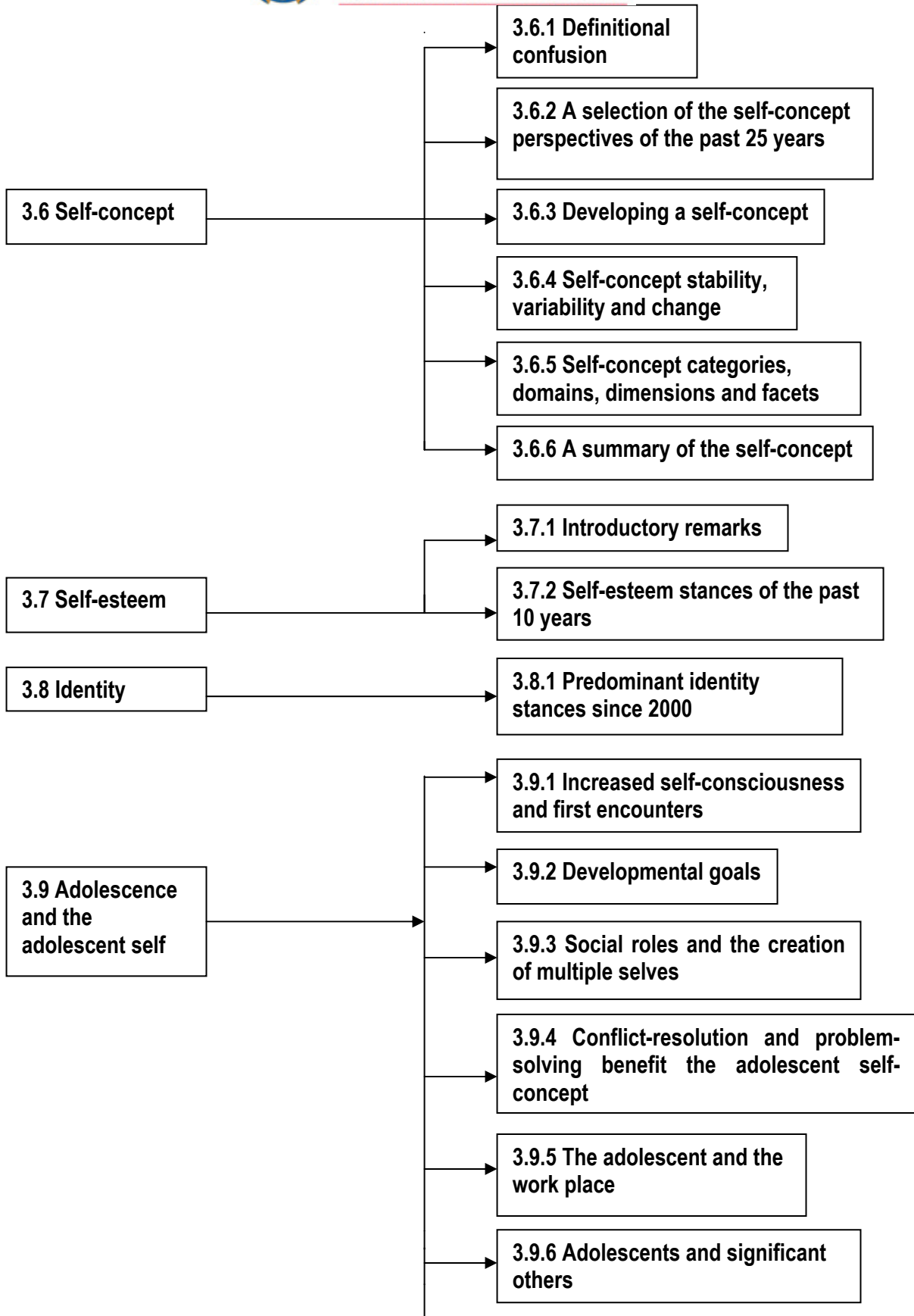


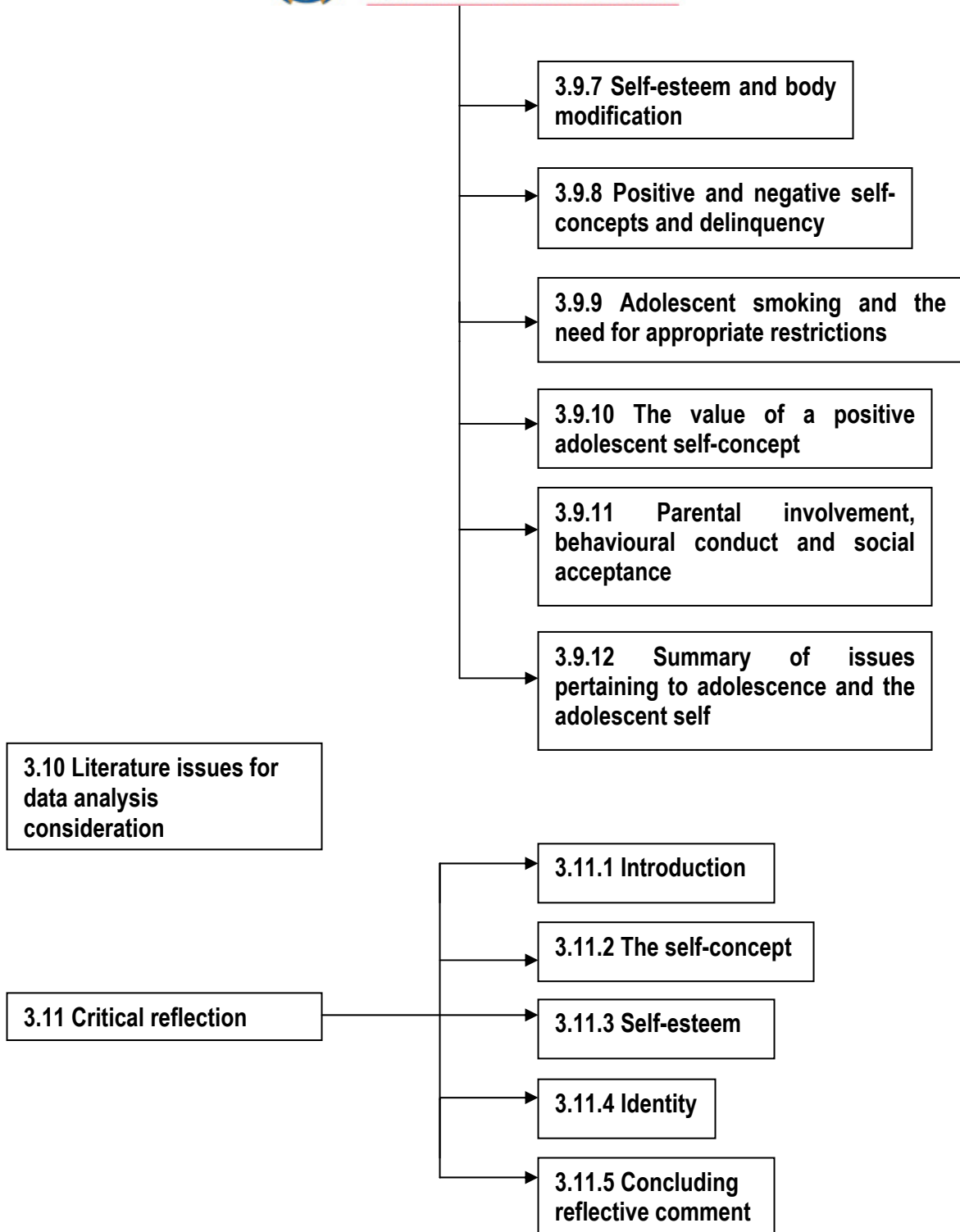
Chapter 3

LITERATURE OVERVIEW: SELF-CONCEPT











Chapter 3

3 Literature Overview: Self-concept

3.1 Introduction

Yet one must admit that the experience of "I" or "myself" is usually absent or in the background when life is going on normally (Redfearn, 1985:xi).

I am writing this introduction approximately six months after I embarked on this chapter. After months of reading and having written the bulk of the chapter I am trying to reflect on the peculiar journey into self that I have undertaken. I was beset with self-pity on numerous occasions as I waded through the vast "oceans" of self-concept and self-literature, because it felt that I would never master what I was trying to understand about self. I was frequently either overjoyed or dismayed. It was as if the literature I read became effervescent "packages" of information that traversed my mind – it felt so near, so interesting and so disturbing.

I wondered what it was that was affecting me and I realised that it was the fact that self-concept literature was like a mirror in which I saw myself reflected, and that it triggered memories. It was not always comfortable to realise that my ordinary childhood and my subsequent ordinary experiences had left indelible imprints on my psyche – imprints that to this day cause me to question issues that surround "me". I became aware that I needed to accept myself with my flaws and strengths on a daily basis, and cultivate a feeling of optimism that the future still holds exciting moments. I needed to believe that this uncomfortable self-information would hopefully enable me to make a difference as an educator in someone's life somewhere, someday. The contrast between the beauty of being a human being and the opposing destructive forces at play in the mind became very evident to me.

As an educator I became aware of my own failures in attempting to assist children to become happy individuals, and of the demanding task of building a self-concept whilst maintaining an emotionally healthy self. The fragility of life and the gnawing realisation that, in certain areas, my self-concept could be in need of healing humbled me.

Self-concept theorists promote the self concept as the most important and focal object within the experience of each individual because of its primacy, centrality, continuity and ubiquity in all aspects of behaviour, mediating as it does both stimulus and response (Burns, 1979:3).



The world of the self-concept is connected to many other issues pertaining to the self⁵, and so I eventually decided to do the manageable, and to accept the truth that, in view of the fact that there is still confusion about the specifics of the self-concept in certain areas, I might not be able to become a self-concept expert. However, if I could succeed as someone who took adequate cognisance of the world of the self and has managed to grasp a handful of valuables I would be satisfied. In keeping with the arts-based idiom of this study I would like the reader to view this chapter as a “collage” of impressions that presents the kaleidoscopic nature of self – the metaphor coined by Deaux and Perkins (2001).

According to Leary and Tangney (2003) the self, with its various related self-issues (ranging from undesired self-aspects to self-worth), has been prominent since 1970 and, at the heart of these diffuse self-terms, is the capacity for self-reflection. The capacity of the human being to think about self, or reflexive consciousness, is the psychological characteristic that separates us from the animal world.

This self-awareness places considerable implications on human experience since it involves a search for the meaning of life itself. To know one's identity permits the comprehension of one's past, of the potentialities of one's future, and of one's place in the order of things. Man's conception of himself influences his choice of behaviours and his expectations from life (Burns, 1979:4).

Redfearn (1985) uses the analogy of a theatre spotlight that reveals certain aspects at specific times to portray the wandering nature of the “I” within us, and suggests that we have indeed within us a cast of “sub-personalities” that appear on stage at the opportune moment. These overlapping sub-personalities may originate from various sources such as archetypes, complexes, bodily functions, and spiritual and social ideals.

⁵ Please bear in mind that the word **self**, as it is used henceforth in this document, could include self-concept, self-esteem and identity, but it is also appreciated as a separate entity. I want us to see self as an “abstract” entity that exists in each one of us, and which has a life of its own. I neither wanted to talk about **the self**, nor put it in inverted commas all the time. Where there could be some grammatical reason to avoid confusion, or grammatical oddities, **self** will be referred to as “**self**”.

The self and self-concept are bound together in many ways. One is inclined to ask inevitable questions such as:

- Where does self start and end?
- What are the elements of the self?
- What shapes the self?
- How do others impact on my “self”?
- How is my “self” different from your “self”?
- When did people actually start thinking about these issues?
- What is the self-concept?
- How much can we actually know about ourselves?

The next section will delve into the origins of self from a Western, philosophical and psychological perspective. I decided to include the “history of self” because I felt that a presentation of the self-concept and its components would indeed be lacking a vital link if the historical perspective were omitted. Certain key figures who contributed to the development of self from the very distant past to approximately the beginning of the eighteenth century will be discussed individually in order to give credit to their novel and liberating ideas. In order to conclude the historical development of the self within the scope of this section I decided to take my cue from Baumeister (1986) and condense progressive self-thoughts into eras – starting from the eighteenth century and ending with the post-modern or current era.

3.2 From the ancient past to the post-modern self

This section will alert the reader to the wonder of self, the mysteries of existence, and the interconnectedness of man with himself and others, and afford us an opportunity to appreciate the contributions individuals and movements of popular schools of thought had on the view of man. Like Seigel (2005) in his historical summary, I want to apologise and request permission for liberties. This is a not a precise and complete account, but an attempt to sketch with broad strokes the leaps humankind has made in grappling with self.

3.2.1 Orientation

Even though ideas about self might seem commonplace they are by no means universal and are, in fact, dependent on cultural and historical boundaries. The phenomenon that each person is unique and special – which is currently prevalent in modern Western society – is a fairly recent occurrence. During the Middle Ages people's functions were determined by their position in society. Identity was linked to family ties and occupation, and individuals were not supposed to challenge these established norms. In terms of Christianity salvation in heaven – the reward for living a morally good life – was the ultimate goal (Baumeister, 1997a).

The term “self concept” is only of twentieth-century origin. Writings on the individuality of the behaving organism up to this century concerned themselves with a very imprecisely defined and vague Self, which was equated with such metaphysical concepts as “soul”, “will” and “spirit”. Thus most of the pre-twentieth century discussion of self was embedded in a morass of philosophy and religious dogma, with self regarded as some non-physical incumbent of a physical body” (Burns, 1979:5). We will now proceed to consider the way in which respected philosophers or intellectuals of their particular time postulated their beliefs about self, as well as the degree to which self was valued and described during specific eras in history.

3.2.2 Classical era: Socrates and Plato, and Aristotle

3.2.2.1 Socrates and Plato

Socrates (born 329 B.C.), Plato (born 427 B.C.) and the early Christians perceived the soul and the self as one. For Socrates the soul was the essence of the person – the real self – and, therefore, it was important for man to tend his soul. Plato reasoned that the self or soul possessed a wisdom or knowledge that was not linked to bodily existence. The process of birth “erases” this knowledge and the ensuing life becomes a journey undertaken in order to regain this prior wisdom. He distinguished between the existence of phenomena (unreal, transient appearances subject to decay) and forms (real and eternal). The rational self is blocked by emotions and bodily urges, and it is only when life is terminated by death that the soul again becomes the original true entity of wisdom. Plato saw the soul as an independent entity, but, when the soul is encompassed by the body, there comes about an inevitable connection which causes certain of the functions of the

immortal soul to assume transient qualities (Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971). Aristotle espoused an opposing view because he valued the mind.

3.2.2 Aristotle

Aristotle (born 384 B.C.) was, according to Watson (1971), the first psychologist to formulate the first functional view of the mind. Aristotle disagreed with Plato, and argued that the mind was more important than the soul and independent of the body. He also did not see the necessity to make a distinction between phenomena and form – he saw the world as one, composed of actual things – and believed that the body and the psyche formed one unit. It was not only Aristotle who argued about the position of the mind in relation to the soul; many Christian writers debated at length the relationship between soul, mind and body (Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971).

3.2.3 The Middle Ages: Thomas Aquinas

Generally the Middle Ages were characterised by a lack of progress in the field of psychology. Barbarians and civil wars destroyed the possibility of scientific progress during the Dark Ages (400 to 900 A.D.). Islam arose as a powerful force, and the teachings of Aristotle and Plato were forgotten (Watson, 1971).

During the eleventh century (or High Middle Ages) in Europe the feudal system had firmly established the social classes, and, because the church owned property, it also wielded spiritual and political authority. During this time the preoccupation with reason of the early Greeks was replaced by faith. People were indoctrinated to forsake reason and embrace faith. Certain churchmen did advocate reconciliation between faith and reason, but faith always predominated. For this reason intellectual life was undiversified. Man's journey to the grave was the dominant issue and death the main preoccupation. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Aristotle's writings surfaced in Spain and became accessible to the Christian world once more (Watson, 1971).

Thomas Aquinas (born 1225 A.D.) managed to reconcile faith and reason by successfully aligning the teachings of the Church and the recovered works of Aristotle. This was a long struggle, but eventually Thomist philosophy was elevated to become the official philosophy of the Roman

Catholic Church. Aquinas maintained that our senses do not provide us with enough information about the essence of God, but, what we sense flows from God, and this is sufficient proof of His existence (Watson, 1971).

Aquinas believed that man possesses a rational soul, but that man is neither soul alone, nor body alone, but a soul and body composite. The soul empowers the body to fulfil its functions. He believed that being confined to the body does not constitute a sentence for the soul, but that the soul is creative and good, and is enriched by its temporal bodily lodging. When death occurs, the integral, intellectual properties of the soul (such as self-awareness and reason) do not perish, but rather they survive (Watson, 1971).

During the late Middle Ages the irrational became prominent. The practice of magic and witchcraft was widespread, and there were many adherents of astrology. These beliefs affected the whole of society – from the nobility to the peasantry. Fortunately, during the second half of the fourteenth century, there was an increase in the number of scholars not connected to the church, and they started writing in the lingua franca and not Latin. The Middle Ages ended with the Black Death and several wars which annihilated entire populations. The invention of the printing press heralded the Renaissance (Watson, 1971).

3.2.4 The Renaissance and the Early Modern period: Descartes

The Renaissance comprises the 150 years that followed upon the appearance of the printing press – 1450 to 1600. This was a period of general and literary preparation – ancient manuscripts were discovered, preserved and translated – but, except for the influential publications in 1543 by Vesalius (1514-1564) and Copernicus (1473-1543) which dealt with anatomy and astronomy respectively, there were few great scientific accomplishments. During the Renaissance Columbus, Da Gama and Diaz undertook epic voyages which appeared to enlarge the world. The Reformation took place during which Luther condemned reason as the tool of the devil and taught that Aristotle's logic was inconsistent with theology. The decline of Aristotelian supremacy allowed mathematics to become the science of the time. Alexandrian Greek mathematics rose to prominence and the "Arabic" notation was introduced – without which the scientific advances of the seventeenth century would have been impossible (Watson, 1971).

During the early modern period (1500–1800) there was an increase in biographical, autobiographical and accurate writing and the emphasis shifted to individuality. A greater awareness across various spectra, such as politics and economics, led people to realise that they could, indeed, change roles and embark on a search for their unique traits and their fortune. Partially as a result of the Christian concept of soul the idea of an inner self was explored in depth. Initially the inner self could have been a ploy to expose the vice within people, but the concept grew to prominence, with the result was that people came to believe that their true personality traits, together with their creative potential, were hidden in the inner self (Baumeister, 1997a).

René Descartes (1596-1650) deviated from the views of Plato and Socrates (- they saw the self as an immaterial being). He reinforced the dualism between the mind and the body. To Descartes the essence of the self may be found in the thoughts, and hence his statement *I think, therefore I am*. Essentially self-knowledge was the most stable aspect of all knowledge. According to Barglow (1994) Descartes was actually in agreement with Plato, Aristotle and the scholars of the Middle Ages in terms of the fact that it is the man's capacity to reason which sets him apart from the other species.

Thought grants us the certainty of our existence. Even doubt is a kind of thought and could lead to two types of ideas, namely, those ideas which are derived and those which are innate (or instinctive). Derived ideas are “initiated” by external stimuli, while the more lofty ideas are those which are innate because they indicate universal truths – they do not need bodily impressions in order to be activated and arise purely from consciousness. According to Descartes ideas about self and God are of the most prominent innate ideas flowing from consciousness.

To Descartes the mind is a “thinking thing” – something which is immaterial and separate from the body (or matter). The mind is free and the body subject to natural law. Another term he used for the mind was the *rational soul*, but he preferred the term *mind* as he felt it avoided confusion and, as a unit, the mind possesses functions, powers or faculties. He viewed the body – from a movement perspective – as a machine with parts, and perceived the mind as united with the body. The mind and body interact with each other and influence each other, and this relationship came to be called

interactionism, which is different from *parallelism*. This interaction between mind and body posed considerable problems for the followers of Descartes (Cartesians), because the question arose as to how interactionism between two entities so separate could be explained (Baumeister, 1986; Hattie, 1992; Watson 1971).

Baumeister (1986) identifies six social trends which were prominent in the early modern period: A new concept of a hidden self emerged, the notion of human individuality became a belief, there came about a separation between public and personal life, the individual's personal fate in death became less of a concern, the choice of a spouse was left to the individual, and it became important to develop unique, personal qualities.

The teachings of John Calvin formed the basis of Puritanism – a Protestant sect that governed England for two decades during the middle of the 17th century. When their power was broken they left for America where they had a more lasting effect. Puritanism led to an increase in self-consciousness because the Puritan doctrine – which held that only God alone knows the elect who will enter heaven – encouraged self-consciousness. Each individual had to examine his thought life and religious experiences closely, and this became a private matter which led to introspection or self-consciousness. Self-deception became a matter of concern, child-rearing practices were geared to break the will of the child in order to guarantee complete obedience to authority, and work possessed spiritual significance (Baumeister, 1986).

3.2.5 British Empiricism and Associationism: John Locke, David Hume and John Stuart Mill

3.2.5.1 John Locke

John Locke (1632-1704) disagreed with the dualism (between consciousness and self-consciousness) which Descartes had preached, and argued that the essence of self is in consciousness. He regarded knowing as the centre of the self, but claimed that knowledge was acquired from experience. He became the founder of psychology as an empirical science of the mind. Locke determined that all knowledge stems from experience. To him the “innate ideas” concept could be explained by habit, and this enabled children to learn universal truths. Sensations lead us to link a particular idea to a certain bodily awareness, and sensing takes place when the



sense organ transmits the impression to the mind. The intervention of ideas changes the sense data to knowledge (some might call them *meanings*). Sensations are supported by reflection which occurs in the mind and which is an operation of the mind itself. Reflection is independent of sensations. According to Locke's theories all ideas consist of ideas of sensations and ideas of reflection. Complex ideas originate in the minds of men and are not specifically linked to reality. They may be broken down into less complex units (Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971).

3.2.5.2 David Hume

Hume (1711-1776) maintained "I am a bundle of experiences". He saw no place for self in philosophy and opposed the "soul-substance" idea, because, to him, the self is entrenched in a chain of continuous experiences that combines and recombines. He expanded upon Locke's notion that experience leads to knowledge and believed that all reasoning involving factual matters is founded on the cause and effect relation. He was of the opinion that the true nature of this cause and effect relationship (or causality) could never be explained by intense inquiry. To Hume the self was both the mind and its contents, and, because the content will be ever changing, a stable self can never be an acceptable entity – therefore self-knowledge was difficult to attain (Baumeister, 1986; Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971).

Hume felt that natural methods needed to be employed in order to study man – a natural object – in the world of nature. He was convinced that it was possible to study mental processes using scientific observation, and believed that the principles of the mental processes could be discovered in the same way in which Newton had discovered the law of gravity. He was of the opinion that the clue to these principles could be found in the law of association of ideas – the universal principle of human nature. Hume believed that the connecting principle between ideas is habit, which he regarded as the universal law of mind. He maintained that our external perceptions and experiences could be accounted for by habit. He questioned the existence of the mind (or soul) and arrived at the conclusion that it was possible that the mind was merely a mere collection of impressions from which all else originates (Baumeister, 1986; Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971).



3.2.5.3 John Stuart Mill

During the 19th century John Stuart Mill (1808-1873) introduced the concept that any current idea of “myself” was dependent on previous ideas about the self and, therefore, he deemed memory to be an important agent for the self. He viewed memory and self as two planes of the same truth and was of the opinion that memory alone demanded belief in a self. He emphasised mental activity and maintained that the mind was capable of joining separate mental elements in order to form a composite – the result of which would be that the characteristics of the singular parts would disappear in order to allow new properties to emerge within the new mental composite. Thus the whole would be more than the sum of its parts (Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971).

3.2.6 Continental Philosophical Psychology: Immanuel Kant

Kant (1724–1804) brought the possibility to the fore that that which we think is our honest self-concept is actually a misconception, and is, in fact, not the actual or true self because the mind is prone to distortion and therefore does not necessarily reflect the truth. He argued that the only self of which we have knowledge is the empirical *me*, and not the pure *I*, because the self is the perceiver and not the perceived. Self is able to gain indirect self-knowledge by means of occasional moments of self-awareness across time. Time keeps the self-components together in a fragile structure (Baumeister, 1986; Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971).

Kant made it his concern to prove that it is possible to demonstrate causality logically – unlike the “sceptic” Hume who believed that causality was forever hidden from understanding. Kant agreed with Hume that all known objects are facts of consciousness and not autonomous realities separate from the mind, but he believed that these known objects, which Hume regarded as mere sense data, did possess “unsensational” features – necessitating the transcendental activities of the mind which are capable of ordering known objects or phenomena (void of sensation) (Baumeister, 1986; Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971).

Kant believed that these activities of the mind Kant were universal and independent from sense experience, and that they are instrumental in making possible experiences. Kant determined that there are intuitive categories of understanding that exist in the mind prior to experience, for example, space and time that are not bodily experienced. Unlike certain of his predecessors he

maintained that the mind (which did exist) had no substance – it was not a thing – but he saw it as a formal unity that allows us to understand experience and process incoming sensations. Kant's contribution lies in the fact that he proposed the ultimate principles instinctive in human beings that allow truthful knowing not related to experience (Baumeister, 1986; Hattie, 1992; Watson, 1971).

3.2.7 From the eighteenth century to the twentieth century

3.2.7.1 The eighteenth century

Christianity's hold on the collective mind declined during the 18th century, and Christianity was openly criticised and questioned by intellectuals such as Voltaire who felt, as did other intellectuals that "the age of reason" had dawned. The scientific pursuit of knowledge and philosophical analysis were prized more highly than biblical exegesis, and hard work became a substitute for prayer. During this period the social privileges of the upper classes were eroded even further by a rising middle class that was able to attain social status by means of business and by marrying into the upper classes (Baumeister, 1986).

3.2.7.2 Romantic era

The Romantic era spans the last decade of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. This era was characterised by, firstly, a passionate search for human fulfilment (the Christian models had been rejected), and, secondly, by a recognition of the tension that exists between the individual and societal norms. The Romantics believed that a perfect society was possible. They shifted eternity out of focus and made the present life the opportunity for fulfilment. The Romantics pursued creativity and passion, and the inner self became the guiding model (Baumeister, 1986).

3.2.7.3 The Victorian era

The Victorian era dates from 1830 to 1900. Industrial growth brought about urbanisation on a large scale in American and Western Europe, and so, an identity based on rural living needed to be replaced. The belief that a perfect society could be established overnight started fading, but the Victorians, nevertheless, attempted to establish utopias of various kinds through gradual improvements. During this time the animosity between the individual and society became more marked. Voices of anarchy were raised propagating the belief that the rich were using laws to exploit the poor, and heads of governments became targets of assassination. The private home of



the individual became a haven to which he could flee in order to escape the evils of a hostile society. This split between private life and the public domain resulted in a “fragmentation of consciousness”. The decline of Christianity became of concern, because it was feared that morality would disappear with this decline of the Christian religion. Each individual thus inherited the uncomfortable task of personally deciding upon a belief system to which he would adhere (Baumeister, 1986). Baumeister (1986) discusses 20th century American society and emphasises the struggle of the individual to maintain the personal self – a struggle which arose from economic interdependence. Literature of this period reveals the predominant themes of alienation and the need to adjust to life in a mass society.

3.2.7.4 The twentieth century

Despite the emphasis on individuality during the twentieth century the actual attainment of it was not only entirely different but bordered on the impossible. This was as a result of the homogenising effect of the mass media, and the dependence of the individual on society. Economic disasters wreaked havoc in the lives and on the status of both the educated and the illiterate. Self-sufficiency was not to be tolerated in the business world because the individual had become a mere role player in a larger team within the capitalist system. According to advertising identity entailed the possession of the right thing at the right time in order to reveal personal value – this, in fact, undermines individuality because the treasured item in question would probably be prized and owned by all others. Baumeister (1986) maintains that the desire for acclaim or acceptance from others (or to be a celebrity) and the manipulation of the mass media contributed significantly to the annihilation of the inner self. Instead people opted for expressing themselves in simple ways. The difficult questions posed by death were expelled from the collective consciousness (Baumeister, 1986).

What are the current post-modern stances regarding the self? The section that follows will present a few introductory perspectives on the post-modern self, and also influences shaping the post-modern self which are worth contemplating. Later in section 3.5 the post-modern self will be further elucidated.



3.2.8 The post-modern era

3.2.8.1 The burden of self-hood

Nowadays the idea of the self carries with it desirable possibilities for opportunity and liberation. However, according to Baumeister (1997a), this also problematic, because this fascinating self-search has pervaded every facet of popular culture, thus rendering the simple complicated. Society has added a further burden to selfhood by leaving it up to the Western individual himself to find a (personal) credible foundation for ideals or norms while he grapples with the meaning of life, thus elevating the self to a personal source of value. This new stressful burden of selfhood has impacted “cruelly” upon the adolescent who is compelled to look within himself for answers. Social support structures are few, and a clear sense of a collectively defined identity is missing (Baumeister, 1997).

Barglow (1994) states that the onus is on the individual to construct himself without any traditional support. However this task is rendered extremely difficult by the conflicting messages of self-realisation and self-determination made popular by the mass media, and the institutions that regiment the life of the individual. The post-modern self is an ambivalent entity because it is an intriguing puzzle that contributes value to life, and yet, it is also a source of anxiety. In earlier civilizations the current elevation and preoccupation with self would have been deemed as “selfishness”. Baumeister (1997a) suggests that psychology should be viewed against the background of this ambivalence.

3.2.8.2 The loss of authority and meaning

From the perspective he had gained from the years of psychotherapy experience with this age group in his practice Strenger (2005) discusses Generation X – a generation which falls into the post-modern or late-modern timeframe. According to him this generation, the children of the Baby Boomers, was born between 1960 and 1980, and grew up in a society that allowed them all the sexual and cultural freedom they desired because this freedom had already been attained by the previous generation. Authority as a concept lost its impact. The members of Generation X no longer had to oppose their parents in order to define their personalities and many aspects that had characterised previous generations simply became irrelevant. For them there was no urgency to have children because they felt there was nothing worth preserving that needed to be passed on.

3.2.8.3 The global village and its icons

The view throughout history that the self is an autonomous being of which the separateness signals its uniqueness has been made redundant by new technology that makes of self a connected entity rather than a separate entity. In order for the self to maintain its unique properties it needs to be connected to the technology that makes personal growth possible (Barglow, 1994).

The Internet has replaced the insight of parents or else children find the answers in the cultural space created by their contemporaries as they journey forward in “designing themselves”. Identity is no longer linked to family tradition and religion but is determined by the icons of the media that transcend cultural barriers. The post-modern body has become the vehicle for self-expression – a work of art – with body piercing, tattoos, and a new hair colour every month. The global village is a space of endless self-experimentation and self-creation that has fused ethnic origins into the predominant descriptors of Western identity – as broadcast by the media. Identity is no longer found but rather created from a variety of self-chosen sources (Strenger, 2005).

Reflexivity is prominent in these people who need to make decisions with conscious deliberation and they reveal a minimal self – a self that is devoid of history, tradition and commitments. These people do not oppose authorities, but they have the difficult task of creating a life for themselves that is characterised by financial, professional and social success, whilst simultaneously experiencing intense excitement and being a sexy person. The task of “experimenting with yourself” is ever before them, as, for example, they participate in extreme sports. Depression, confusion and emptiness plague this generation who is dazed by fatherlessness and a myriad of possibilities (Strenger, 2005).

3.2.8.4 Mediated relatedness and the connected self

Gergen (1996) explains how the traditional “separateness view” of the self is waning, and is being replaced by a relatedness which is characteristic of the post-modern technological world. According to him the stable psychological essentialism view – a “belief” that the individual possesses certain cognitive functions – is becoming redundant, because the world which the individual inhabits is undergoing rapid changes due to technological advances, and the credibility of the self’s autonomy

is becoming questionable. The interior of the self is bombarded by information about others through the media, with the result that the self is no longer able to withstand mediated communication. Thus the self is engulfed, and, for most of the time, is perceived in relation to others. As communication technologies multiply there is an explosion in the vocabulary relating to states of being, and the self is released from the confines of geography to dwell in unknown territories, ranging from back streets to palaces, as mediated by the selected technology. Different technologies contribute to social saturation which builds the vocabulary of the interior. The self is no longer “self-contained” and “self-assured”, but a “composite” of various influences and concepts dispersed by technology, and the accepted terms of the mental world are challenged and even obliterated. Gergen (1996) points to a new self that may be located in the relational sublime – a self that thrives as it observes the plethora of possible interior scenarios made popular by sitcoms or talk show hosts with specific reference to a popular TV series that replaced the individual hero with a group of people who are interdependent. Further evidence of the relational sublime may be found in daily experiences ranging from rock concertgoers experiencing a sense of ecstasy in their collective enjoyment to people taking part in a parade to further a common cause. When the “singular” self and its single logic is successfully conquered in favour of “the fluid and many-streamed forms of relationship by which we are constituted, we may approach a condition of the relational sublime” (Gergen, 1996:139).

3.2.8.5 The protean self

McAdams (1997) raises the issue of the “protean self” – based on the Greek god Proteus who was skilled in changing roles – in his discussion of the case for unity in the “(post)modern self”. Proteanism is the result of disturbing causes such as world wars, the breakdown of moral authority, rapid technological and ideological changes, and media saturation. The protean self embodies two opposing traits, firstly, its inability to connect meaningfully with other people on a long-term basis and, secondly, its need to be celebrated because of its adaptational and transformational capabilities. According to this view it would appear that the (post-modern) protean self is adept at surviving challenging times, but not skilled in maintaining the necessary stability in order to ensure meaningful relationships.

To conclude: the post-modern self is connected, but also burdened with the task of self guidance whilst adhering to contradictory media messages about the acceptable life. Authority is no longer a source of power because other sources of guidance, such as the Internet, may be found in the global village.

3.2.9 Summary of the historical overview of the self

Ideas about self are by no means universal but are dependent on cultural and historical boundaries and, for centuries, a person's function was determined primarily by social standing, and salvation in heaven was the reward for a good life. Most of the pre-twentieth century discussion on self was embedded in a morass of philosophy and religious dogma, and self was the non-physical part resting on a physical body. **Table 3.1** provides a summary of the major issues highlighted in this section.

Table 3.1: Historical views and aspects of self

Key figure or era	Self-issues	See:
Socrates	The soul is the essence of the person.	3.2.2
Plato	The soul is an independent entity.	3.2.2
Aristotle	The mind is more important than the soul.	3.2.3
Thomas Aquinas	Man is a soul body composite.	3.2.4
Descartes	Thought reveals the essence of man.	3.2.5
John Locke	Consciousness reveals the essence of man.	3.2.6.1
David Hume	Self is (in) experience.	3.2.6.2
John Stuart Mill	Memory is an important self agent.	3.2.6.3
Immanuel Kant	The mind distorts and truth is in the empirical me.	3.2.7
Eighteenth century	Scientific knowledge replaced spiritual knowledge and class differences diminished.	3.2.8.1
Romantic era	The individual's search for self-fulfilment clashed with societal norms.	3.2.8.2
Victorian era	A division occurred between the private and the public self.	3.2.8.3
Twentieth century	Media eroded the individual self.	3.2.8.4
Post-modernity	Self is related through the media, but also burdened.	3.2.9

The next section deals with “self-moments” as perceived by major epistemologies and their respective role players, theorists, psychologists or scholars. The purpose of the next section is to outline (selected) psychological moments that have defined and built the many-sided self to which

we have become accustomed in literature. We will start with the “self pioneer” and William James, and end with the phenomenological approach of Carl Rogers.

3.3 Epistemological stances towards the self: From James to Rogers

3.3.1 Self divided into “me” and “I”: William James

William James (1842-1910) is believed to be the first scholar to differentiate between the “I” – the self that does and knows – and the “me” – the “myself” that is known or experienced. He perceived the global self as being simultaneously *me* and *I*. James suggested that the “I” component of self should be disregarded and be left rather to the philosophers. He regarded *me* as the empirical self that consists of four parts, namely, the spiritual self, the material self, the social self and the bodily self. They impact on self-esteem in this order. The spiritual self refers to thinking, feeling, emotions and desires, the material self and social self – mediators between the spiritual and bodily selves – refer to the material possessions attached to the self and the way in which the opinions of others affect self. The bodily self was placed last, but, according to Burns (1981), it should have been accorded a more prominent place in view of the preoccupation of children and adolescents with the body. These four aspects may either: evoke, heighten or lower self-esteem, and they interact dynamically to allow us to seek self-preservation and self-enhancement. James realised that the self may be highly differentiated, but was at the same time also a unit that carried a feeling of continuity (Beane & Lipka, 1984; Burns, 1979; Burns, 1982; Mischel & Morf, 2003; Redfearn, 1985).

3.3.2 Self sees itself in others: symbolic interactionism: Cooley and Mead

Symbolic interactionism depicts the relationship between the individual and the surrounding social sphere. The three basic principles of this approach are:

- The response of humans to the environment is determined by the meanings which they, as individuals, attribute to elements in the environment
- Meanings are the product of social interaction
- Cultural (or societal) meanings are changed according to individual understanding within the circle of social interaction (Burns, 1979).



3.3.2.1 Cooley

Charles Horton Cooley who worked from a more sociological perspective than James proposed the “looking-glass” self. He is usually regarded as the first symbolic interactionist who maintained that the self is constructed by mirroring the views other people have of that person. He reflected on the importance of subjectively interpreted feedback from others as a major source of self-knowledge. To Cooley self is indicated in common speech by the first person singular pronouns – *I, me, mine* and *myself*. Stronger emotions differentiate the self from the non-self.

In brief his elaborate “looking-glass” includes, amongst other issues, the primary idea of how one appears in the mind of someone else, and this self-idea pertains to the following: (a) how one imagines one’s appearance to the other person; (b) how one imagines the other person is judging one’s appearance; and (c) a resulting self-feeling accompanied by elation or cringing (Burns, 1982; Hattie, 1992; Redfearn, 1985; Tice & Wallace, 2003).

3.3.2.2 Mead

The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process (Mead, 1934:135).

George Herbert Mead (1934) expanded upon Cooley’s idea(s) and maintained that the individual self exists as a result of its relations with others, and language is the stimulus that evokes particular responses from self and others. Mead introduced the “generalised other” idea which states that an individual not only values the responses of significant others in his life, but that the imagined opinions of an entire group to which the individual might belong are extremely important. In his chapter on self-awareness Carver (2003) refers to the perspective of the generalised other, and states that this could cause the self to become either self-critical or self-congratulatory. When the self feels appreciated or aligned with the social values it will be positive, while the opposite evaluation will lead to negative self-views. The particular self that arises from the different selves available (within the person) depends on the specific social process itself within which the individual finds him (Carver, 2003; Hattie, 1992; Mead, 1934; Tice & Wallace, 2003).

George Herbert Mead, who was also a social behaviourist, conceded that the self is not solely defined by social interaction and suggested that the “me” is the shared social identity and the “I” the spontaneous and active aspects of the individual. He maintained that the “I” acts upon the “me” – the socialisation process – resulting in a continual adjustment of the self. He suggested that we distinguish ourselves from others by the things we do better than other people, and, therefore, this could be called a drive for superiority that is a means of preservation of the self (Hattie, 1992).

Tice and Wallace (2003) quote research that tested the basic symbolic interactionism principles – researchers revealed that, even though elements in this theory, were indeed of value, the overarching interactionist opinion about the reflected self was rather too simplistic. The idea that people view themselves through the minds of others could not be enthusiastically supported. This finding led to a certain revision of the looking-glass self and the following “amendments” were suggested:

- The personal views or beliefs people have about themselves – prior to public scrutiny – affect their perceptions of the way in which others might view them, and not the way in which they are actually regarded by others.
- The way in which people present themselves in public affects their self-concepts. In order to influence the perceptions of their observers people behave in a certain way, and this is, in fact, an impression management strategy, but the unintended result is that these strategies eventually impress the person’s (own) self-views to a marked degree, and people align their personal opinion of themselves with the self presented in public.
- The desired looking-glass effect – as outlined originally – is still possible in intimate relationships with significant others.

3.3.3 Self longs for group acceptance: Sherif and Sherif, and Goffman

3.3.3.1 Sherif and Sherif

Sherif and Sherif (1964) stated that reference groups are the social units to which the individual aspires psychologically in order to experience being anchored on many levels. Social contact affords individuals the opportunity to maintain the desired self-picture and self-identity. The contact with these groups may be a daily occurrence or it may even be imagined.

Individuals are driven by two types of personal goals: firstly, the private goals which accompany his desire to be established in various ways amongst those esteemed within a particular environment and, secondly, to adhere to the images of success valued within his culture. Accordingly the “good life” will be aspired to, and lived, amongst others. The influences affecting individuals should not be itemised, but should be seen as interacting “powers” that stem from the individual himself, from self-chosen reference groups and from the particular society (Hattie, 1992, Sherif & Sherif, 1964).

3.3.3.2 Goffman

Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who co-operate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation (Goffman, 1969:210).

Erving Goffman (1969) maintained that, when individuals appear before others, they intentionally and unintentionally project a summary of the situation – this includes as an integral part an idea of who they actually are. Goffman likened people to performers who are, firstly, staging a performance, secondly, portraying a particular character, and, thirdly, the self is also a spectator of his own performance. People use these self-presentations – in which they might be behaving differently to the way in which they would behave in private – in order to elicit feedback that would align with their views of how they would like others to perceive them.

An individual is forced to take on a certain appearance upon entering a social scene, because the true reality is hidden upon entry, and, until the hidden reality manifests itself, the individual is forced to rely on personal appearance. Unfortunately it becomes impossible to discard the initial social impression or role play that was adopted in order to maintain self upon entry. According to Goffman (1969) “self-production” is not burdensome, but sometimes the “machinery” breaks down and the separate parts of self will be exposed.

According to Burns (1979) Goffman’s view of human interaction is somewhat cynical and hypocritical because it portrays the individual as an insincere opportunist who puts on an act as he presents his short-term self. Goffman (1969), on the last pages of his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, states that he used the stage analogy as a mere scaffold with which to build something else, namely, his concern for the structure of social encounters – an entity that emerges

“whenever persons enter one another’s immediate presence” (Burns, 1979; Goffman, 1969; Hattie, 1992; Tice & Wallace, 2003).

3.3.4 Self comprises conscious and unconscious elements: Freud, Jung and Erikson

3.3.4.1 Freud

Freud, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, was the first to establish a comprehensive theory of human behaviour and personality based predominantly on the first six years of a life. He identified three aspects pertaining to the self, namely, the id, the superego and the ego. The id, which is the centre of the instinctual process, is concerned with internal and body concerns, and, therefore, seeks pleasure and avoids pain. The superego conveys expectations to the individual and is aligned with external and spiritual concerns. The ego serves as the connector between the id and the superego because it is able to distinguish between concepts in the mind and concepts existing in the external world. The ego represents perceiving and thinking, is the expression of the sane and rational aspects of mental life, and is contrasted by the irrational and impulsive id. The ego is able to deal with unwanted desires and anxiety-provoking material by employing mechanisms of defence such as repression, sublimation, denial and intellectualisation. In Freudian terms the ego has its roots in the unconscious dynamics, whilst the self-concept stems (generally accepted) from conscious awareness and subjective experience. It was felt that Freud painted a very negative image of human kind, especially in his emphasis on instinctual issues and the way in which he ignored social causes of disorders. In his concluding remarks on Freud Hattie (1992) maintains that Freud wanted us to explore ourselves so that we would be better able to cope with the darkness within and evince greater empathy with our neighbours. According to Burns (1979) Freud did not want us to omit completely the irrational unconscious from our reckoning (Burger, 1993; Burns, 1979; Hattie, 1992).

There are a number of neo-Freudians, but Jung and Erikson only will be discussed in this study. Neo-Freudians had contact with Freud, and, because Freud wrote extensively, there was much on which to expand or from which to differ. Certain neo-Freudians opted to research that which they felt needed attention, and, in so doing, established themselves as important voices in similar fields.



3.3.4.2 Jung

Carl Gustav Jung resigned from Freud's psychoanalyst circles and eventually established ("mysterious") analytic psychology. According to Jung we are born with a collective unconscious (the content of which is not dependent on personal experience). This collective unconscious is the same for all people, and houses the psychic record of man's evolutionary progress. The collective unconscious consists of primordial images that allow us to respond in a particular way. We also inherit archetypes from our ancestors and these archetypes are unconscious, basic images, such as, mother, father, sun, death and God. To Jung this was not a foreign concept at all – he felt that if we are able to assume that instinct exists, we may similarly assume that there is a collective unconscious. Jung referred to the presence of good and evil in the literature of all cultures and was of the opinion that this serves as evidence of the collective unconscious. He saw the self as an organising and uniting archetype that assists the ego (the conscious mind) to permit us the feeling of being "united", to become what we are destined to become, and to enjoy self-realisation. If one feels one is falling apart this implies the self-archetype is malfunctioning (Burger, 1993; Nordby & Hall, 1974).

Jung claimed that the self may emerge only during middle age when the various parts of the personality are fully differentiated. This view accords with the phenomenological views on self-actualisation and the process of maturing as a person. According to Burns (1979) the neo-Freudians did not place self central in their theories because they were more concerned about implications for therapy than about building self-theory (Burns, 1979).

3.3.4.3 Erikson

Erikson, a neo-Freudian, became known for developing ego psychology. He argued that ego is the subject, the organising agency, that is instrumental in establishing identity, and that self is the object that arises from experience. Ego identity (or the conscious self) is seen as the activating agent with which to establish identity formation. He proposed that identity evolves from the integration of all identifications, and is a complex inner state that comprises unique individuality and continuity with the past and present. Self-identity emerges from experiences that are meaningful within a culture and is a gradual process of integration of all identifications which have been experienced. The formation of identity (or the formation of self) is a process that is characterised by

self-exploration and self-awareness. In his writings Erikson preferred to use the word identity rather than the word self. Erikson's major contribution to psychoanalytic theory was his description of the developmental phases during the individual journey from infancy to adulthood. In this he differed from Freud who had concentrated on the first few years of infancy only. During adolescence identity could become problematic, and the adolescent may experience identity confusion. Erikson was (apparently) the first working in the field of self to coin the popular term "identity crisis" – which implies that social conditions may disturb a known, personal foundation (Burger, 1993; Burns, 1979; Burns, 1982; Nordby & Hall, 1974).

3.3.5 Self is a process and is shaped by process: Existentialists: Laing

3.3.5.1 Orientation

Existentialism maintains that the self needs to be understood in the context of the world within which it exists, and not in abstraction. Sartre was an influential figure in this movement. He believed that the self-concept is not the origin of consciousness, but that consciousness is, in fact, what eventually forms the "self". Sartre saw "self" (as a problematic term) and regarded it, not as a static entity, but rather as a "process" of continuous projection to possibilities that lie ahead. Existential psychotherapy deals with existential anxiety, and aims at dealing with the alarming feelings that life is meaningless. The therapeutic approach would be to foster a mature approach to life that would lessen the hollow feelings and the boredom (Burger, 1993; Hattie, 1992).

3.3.5.2 Laing

My self-being, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, includes my taste of you. I taste you and you taste me. I am your taste and you are mine, but I do not taste your taste of me in your ear. One cannot be everything and have everything at once. It is difficult to understand the self-being of the other. I cannot experience it directly ... (Laing, 1961:35).

During the 1960's Laing used existentialism as a basis and maintained that, when "other" is removed, and only the self remains, then the true "I am" will emerge. The self is shaped during childhood by parents and circumstances, and, thereafter, a life-long search ensues to secure a peculiar identity that will be in contradiction to the parental views. During the formative years of life others may, because of what they cause the person to understand about himself (which could be

false) foster a false self in that person. Laing (1961) terms this the process of confirmation and disconfirmation – unfortunately total confirmation by a fellow being is almost impossibility.

If a person is unable to secure the real self, and the division between the false and the real self broadens, psychosis may result. It is true achievement to realise that one is not what others regard one to be, and actualisation of the self may be achieved only by following this problematic route, along which the predicament of the true self versus the “expected” self may be adequately resolved (Hattie, 1992; Laing, 1961).

3.3.6 Self may be conditioned: Behaviourists: Skinner and Bandura

3.3.6.1 Orientation

During the first few decades of the twentieth century the Behaviourist rationale prevailed regarding the study of the self. This school of thought deemed the introspective and subjective nature of the study of certain self-aspects to be unscientific and impossible to validate. This placed the study of self under pressure and resulted in a few decades of silence about the self, but, eventually, the behaviourist orientation did benefit the study of self – it made the study of certain global self aspects more credible and systematic. According to the behaviourists behaviour in both animals and humans may be clarified in terms of learning experiences or conditioning. They did take cognisance of the contributory role played by genetic attributes but felt that this was minimal compared to the effect of conditioning.

It seems appropriate at this juncture to state briefly the opinion of Allport (1937) regarding the scientific fixation that stalled the study of self for a while. He made it clear that science was embarrassed to be dealing with such a problematic organism as the human being. The scientific professional attitude towards nature, with its noted stances of abstraction, generalisation and empirical verification, presents the human being with a “generalised human mind”, and this is completely the opposite of what exists in reality. There does not exist a “generalised human mind” because each person is “a unique and never-repeated phenomenon” that will defy all traditional scientific laws.



3.3.6.2 Skinner

Burrhus Frederick Skinner (1974), a behaviourist, in explaining the experimental analysis of behaviour, asserted that the difference between animals and humans lies in the fact that humans are aware of self-existence. Skinner's primary concern was the way in which the manipulation of rewards could regulate behaviour. He implied that it was possible to plan positive rewards or reinforcements (instead of allowing it to happen haphazardly inevitably) to accelerate the progress of positive behaviour, and in this way benefit the individual and society optimally. To him human beings were not bodies with people inside, but rather bodies that were people. For the behaviourist the attitudes towards the self stem from modelling the conduct and attitudes of others who are respected in the social field.

A person is not an originating agent; he is a locus, a point at which many genetic and environmental conditions come together in a joint effect. ... Different communities generate different kinds of and amounts of self-knowledge and different ways in which people explain themselves to themselves and others (Skinner, 1974:168–169).

In his introduction to *About behaviorism* Skinner (1974) proposes a 1970's view of this particular school of thought, and was clearly annoyed by the ignorance of people who assumed that Behaviourism was still bound by the initial ideas as they had been proposed by Watson in the 1913 manifesto. The ignorance to which he takes exception is the invalid ideas of those people who opposed Behaviourism. These ideas included the supposed denial of consciousness, the fact that a human being degenerates into a mere puppet with no sense of self, and that the prediction and control of human behaviour does not take into account the unique nature of the human being.

3.3.6.3 Bandura

Albert Bandura labelled this process of social modelling or "copying" identification. He rejected the behaviourist notion that the behaviour of humans is similar to that of rats (a "supposed view" which Skinner had attacked). He felt that it was necessary to include a vital ingredient, namely, the human personality that did not simply respond to external stimuli, but also adhered to an internal locus of control – and in that way influenced the environment equally. Human beings, according to Bandura, are able to imitate behaviour they wish to assimilate willingly. (Burger, 1993; Burns, 1979; Hattie, 1992; Nordby & Hall, 1974).

3.3.7 Self has stable characteristics: Trait theorists: Allport and Cattell

3.3.7.1 Orientation

Trait psychologists use the trait as a personality dimension with which to categorise people. This approach is based on the assumption that the personality characteristics of an individual are stable over time and stable across situations. The aim of this group is not to predict a person's behaviour (in a given situation) or to explain the reason why a person has behaved in a certain way, but rather to describe the possible behaviour of that person based on a certain trait score. The trait score approach makes comparisons across people possible (Burger, 1993).

3.3.7.2 Allport

The outstanding characteristic of man is his individuality. He is a unique creation of the forces of nature. Separated spatially from all other men he behaves throughout his own particular span of life in his own distinctive fashion. It is not upon the cell nor upon the single organ, nor upon the group, nor upon species that nature has centered her most lavish concern, but rather upon the integral organization of life processes into the amazingly stable and self-contained system of the individual living creature (Allport, 1937:3).

Between the 1930s and the 1950s, Allport wished to move away from the self and its many variations (such as self-image and other terms) and he proposed the propium. According to him the propium would be a term which could be used by those who wished to talk about "self" or "ego" and, in essence, it refers to everything relating to the human state. It could also have been termed selfhood, it is not there at birth, but is constructed in time. The propium has seven primary senses that convey different definitions of the "self" (Burns, 1979; Hattie, 1992; Nordby & Hall, 1974; Redfearn, 1985):

- Bodily senses comprise streams of sensations that arise from within and anchor self-awareness.
- Self-identity stems from the child's gradual realisation that he is not the other but a unique being – thus a sense of continuity over time.
- The propium strives for ego-enhancement or self-seeking; it has a need for self-esteem and is concerned with love of self.
- Ego-extension (or self-extension) refers to whatever is labelled "mine", and it may include abstract ideas and moral values. Thus "I" or "ego" goes beyond the borders of the body.

- The ego may invent and employ defences in order to lessen anxiety, but it may also be creative and provide solutions. There is a synthesis of inner wishes and outer reality which deals with coping and planning.
- Self-image includes an idealised image which charts the course of movement for the propium. The self-image also depicts self as an object of knowledge.
- Propiate striving to achieve long-term goals causes people to resist equilibrium and maintain the tension within in order to live lives in the future.

3.3.7.3 Cattell

During the 1950s Cattell contributed the concept of trait. He viewed personality as a structure consisting of seven traits:

- Surface traits refer to behaviours that may be observed directly
- Source traits support surface traits
- Environmental-mould traits are induced by the influence of the environment
- Constitutional traits have their origin in the psychological hereditary character
- Ability traits indicate a person's task and problem solving effectiveness
- Temperament traits are indicative of the person's emotional character
- Dynamic traits propel a person into action and comprise attitudes and sentiments (Nordby & Hall, 1974).

According to Burns (1979) Cattell saw self as an integral part of his personality construction, and its function was to integrate personality. Cattell labelled three selves, namely, the *felt self* (it is introspective), the *contemplated self* (it refers to real and ideal aspects, and may be inferred from behaviour and accounted for by introspection) and the *structural self* (a theoretical concept dealing with self data).

3.3.8 Self strives to actualise itself: Maslow

During the 1950s and 1960s Maslow was of the opinion that the focus should be shifted from "sick" people and should rather be on "healthy" people and their admirable traits, instead of continuously highlighting the frailties of "sick" people. To Maslow the human being is inherently good and the environment is identified as the source of nervous tendencies and pain. It is the self-actualisation



drive which propels people to become what they are meant to be in a caring environment, and which enables them to become fully human. In order to access the possibility of self-actualisation the physiological, safety, love and esteem needs of an individual need first to be addressed. Maslow describes the self-actualising person as (a selection only is cited) realistic, creative, problem-centred and not self-centred, occasionally private and detached, unique, appreciative of others and non-conforming (Burns, 1979; Nordby & Hall, 1974).

3.3.9 Self attaches personal meaning to experiences: Phenomenology: Rogers

3.3.9.1 Orientation

This approach embraces the idea that behaviour is not merely the result of past and recent experiences, but that the personal meanings that the individual attaches to these experiences also have a profound effect on the behaviour. These personal meanings or connotations are termed the perceptual and phenomenal field and exist for any person at any given point in time. Phenomenology concerns itself with the individual's perception of reality and not in reality per se. The self-concept will serve as a screen either to block stressful perceptions or to permit pleasant perceptions, depending on the developmental history of the individual and the environment. This leads to the realisation that behaviour is the result of the individual's perception of a situation, and that this perception might be completely different to what is physically out there (Burns, 1979).

Rogers plays an integral part in the conceptual framework of this study and for this reason considerable attention will be devoted to his self-theory. However before Rogers is discussed the contribution by Combs and Snygg, as cited by Burns (1981), should be mentioned, because it could clarify certain concepts employed by Rogers. Combs and Snygg state that the *phenomenal field* is the complete account of all experiences of which an individual is aware at any given moment and that behaviour is the result of the way in which the individual regards himself and the situation at the instance of action. Awareness is seen as the cause of action. The *phenomenal self* is a smaller portion that lies within the *phenomenal field*, and consists of a selection from the *phenomenal field* which the individual regards as important characteristics of himself. The self-concept is an even smaller entity within the *phenomenal self* and is a stable composition of what the individual believes is the essence of self (Burns, 1979).



3.3.9.2 Rogers

Carl Rogers has a tremendous empathy for all mankind. This deep concern for the welfare of man is the reason he has confined the major part of his psychological effort to the practice of psychotherapy ... Whatever the world considers him, Rogers feels that he is, in his practicing of psychotherapy, a "midwife to a new personality" (Bischof, 1970:332-333).

From the 1950s to the 1980s Rogers was of the belief that *it appears the goal the individual most wishes to achieve, the end which he knowingly and unknowingly pursues, is to become himself* (Rogers, 1961:108). Rogers too, believed in the need for self-actualisation, and added two more needs, namely, the need for positive regard and the need for self-regard. During infancy the child learns the need to be regarded positively by caregivers, but, if this need eventually becomes a need that consumes his true feelings incongruity may result. When an individual exists only to fulfil the demands of others self-denial sets in and the individual does not live as a complete and fully functioning individual.

Self-regard is based initially on the regard from others, but, eventually, the individual needs to "grow" his own positive self-regard in order to function meaningfully. Rogers collaborated with several colleagues and students and eventually became known for his non-directive or client-centred approach to counselling. He conducted considerable research and made valuable contributions and recommendations regarding the therapeutic environment and the positive view of the client's self: "Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviour; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" (Rogers, 1980:115). According to Thorne (1992) the confidence Rogers had in the "inner resources" of the individual springs from the basically optimistic perspective he had of human nature.

To Rogers – a humanist – life was a process, rather than a state of being, and, in order to be a fully functioning person, it is necessary to be open to all the experiences that constitute existence. The person who lives this way:

- Has a daily adventurous outlook towards life and appreciates each unique experience
- Lives with an openness to the immediate and experiences each moment as it arrives

- Trusts personal feelings and acts on conviction – regardless of outdated standards which he has been taught and the opinions of others.

The person who lives in this way will live life intensely as a non-conformist, and will pay the price of living this way with intense emotional feelings. He will know the depth of fear and the height of ecstasy (Burger, 1993).

Rogers saw his role as therapist as creating a warm atmosphere within which his clients could access their true selves, despite the painful masks they might have been carrying. Once self-revelation has taken place the individual will be able to see him as process rather than as a product. Openness to experience will be the result (Hattie, 1992; Nordby & Hall, 1974; Rogers, 1961).

3.3.9.3 Rogers' personality propositions

Rogers proposed 22 propositions concerning personality (Bischof, 1970). Ten propositions only will be included in **table 3.2** in order to provide insight into certain of the aspects Rogers regarded as pivotal in his view of self. ⁶

⁶ Please note I changed the word **organism** – which includes the individual in Rogerian terms – to **individual** for this study.



Table 3.2: A selection of 10 Rogerian personality propositions

	Proposition
1.	The individual is the centre of his existence within a world of experience that is in continual flux.
2.	The individual's experience and perception of his perceptual field – his reality – determines his reaction.
3.	The individual's predominant urge is to actualise, maintain, and further the welfare of self.
4.	Emotion accompanies directed behaviour and emotional intensity depends on the significance the behaviour has for enhancing the individual's well being.
5.	The individual's personal frame of reference is the best perspective from which to understand or qualify human behaviour.
6.	The environment with its social interactions forms the structure of self. The self becomes a fluid, organised and consistent pattern of conceptions and values regarding "I" and "me".
7.	As experiences occur they are either: symbolised and organised into the self, ignored or denied symbolisation and integration. When experiences are integrated into the self they are in harmony with the structure of self, and when they are denied access the obverse is true.
8.	Psychological tension exists when the individual is in the midst of experiences that deny self-actualisation opportunity.
9.	Experiences that are seen as threats are met with resistance and lead to rigidity in the self-structure in order to secure self-maintenance.
10.	As the individual integrates perceptions and experiences into his self-system his social repertoire enlarges and good interpersonal relationships may be established.

Rogers joined other existential thinkers in believing that human beings possess, to some degree, the ability to rearrange and reconstruct their self-concepts in order to align the self-concept more harmoniously with the entire repertoire of experience. This may be seen in the ability of the individual to progress from psychological maladjustment to wholesome psychological functioning (Thorne, 1992).

3.3.10 Summary of the epistemological self stances

Table 3.3 displays a summarised version of the major contributors and the essence of their epistemological "self-stances" as encountered in the previous pages.



Table 3.3: A summary of epistemological stances

Contributors and their stances	See:
William James differentiated between the “I” – the self that does and knows – and the “me” – the “myself” that is known or experienced.	3.3.1
Charles Horton Cooley maintained that the self is constructed by mirroring the views of other people of that person.	3.3.2.1
George Herbert Mead maintained that the individual self exists because of the relations it has with others, and language is the stimulus that evokes particular responses from self and others.	3.3.2.2
Sherif and Sherif stated that social contact affords individuals the opportunity to maintain the desired self-picture and self-identity.	3.3.3.1
Erving Goffman maintained that when individuals appear before others they intentionally and unintentionally project a summary of the situation which includes, as an integral part, an idea of who they are.	3.3.3.2
Freud based a comprehensive theory of human behaviour and personality on the first six years of a person’s life. He identified three aspects pertaining to the self, namely, the id, the superego and the ego.	3.3.4.1
Jung believed we are born with a collective unconscious (its content is not dependent on personal experience), which is the same for all people, and houses the psychic record of man’s evolutionary progress.	3.3.4.2
Erikson argued that ego is the subject, the organising agency, that is instrumental in establishing identity, and self is the object that arises from experience.	3.3.4.3
Laing used existentialism as a basis and maintained that when “other” is removed, and only the self remains, then the true “I am” will emerge.	3.3.5.2
Skinner’s primary concern was the way in which the manipulation of rewards may regulate behaviour.	3.3.6.2
Bandura maintained that human beings are able willingly to imitate behaviour they wish to assimilate.	3.3.6.3
Allport wanted to move away from the self and its many variations (such as self-image and other terms) and proposed the propium.	3.3.7.2
Cattell saw self as an integral part of his personality construction, the function of which was to integrate personality.	3.3.7.3
To Maslow the human being is inherently good and the environment identified as the source of nervous tendencies and pain. The self-actualisation drive propels people to become what they are meant to be in a caring environment, and this enables them to become fully human.	3.3.8
Rogers believed in the need for self-actualisation and added two extra needs, namely, the need for positive regard and the need for self-regard. He believed that it is possible for human beings to rearrange and reconstruct their self-concepts.	3.3.9.2

A brief reflection, based upon the content of the table, will now follow. Please bear in mind that an attempt was made to group major views of self, and certain authors will be omitted. These are the thoughts of the researcher and also refer broadly to the literature that precedes **Table 3.3**.

- Cooley, Mead, Sherif and Sherif, and Goffman adopted a stance that is outward and relational, and were primarily concerned with the effect social encounters have on the self. For them self appears to exist in collaboration with, and through others, in the social sphere.
- Freud, Jung and Erikson delved into the inner arenas of the self and concerned themselves with deep self-issues, such as the debatable ego aspects and the unconscious. In my opinion they present an image of self according to which self is not autonomous and not in control – there are greater and deeper issues lodged in the self that shape the self. To me their (collective) image of the self is introspective and rather unsettling compared to the above-mentioned social stance because self could appear “helpless”.
- Skinner and Bandura took the “correcting” stance and maintained that self could be changed by making rewards attractive – or by presenting self with something desirable that would result in a willingness within the self to allow a change in behaviour.
- Maslow and Rogers conveyed a more optimistic and “objective” view of self. To them self is good, endowed with the drive for self-actualisation and capable of engaging in the reconstruction of self – within a friendly environment.

In brief self exists because of others, self comprises unconscious aspects and capabilities that could influence its functionality, self is able to choose what it wants to endure in order to attain desirable outcomes, and self is driven by the need to fulfil its potential.

We were able to gather a number of “opposing views” of self in the epistemological arena, but I would like us to see these differences in emphasis as complementary reflectors that allow us to illuminate a rich description or imagine a wonderfully intriguing image of the self – surely what the self deserves. Before we proceed to investigate further aspects in the arena of self I wish to highlight certain attributes of the self, because certain of these attributes feature repeatedly as we study the contemporary self, self-concept, self-esteem and identity:

- Self is complex and needs others to become its true self.
- The environment (with its other selves) could be harmful to the self.
- Self is endowed with traits that desire actualisation through experience.

- Self integrates personality.

3.4 “Self”-research in the second half of the 20th century

The neo-Freudians, humanists, and symbolic interactionists provided several new concepts, but this did not lead to systematic empirical research on the self. In the second half of the 20th century the following three developments awakened an interest in the self for academic purposes:

- Self-esteem research emphasised the importance of this construct and researchers, for instance, Coopersmith and Rosenberg, provided self-report measures
- The cognitive revolution in psychology authorised the study of thought and internal control processes
- The publication of numerous articles that revealed measures of personality traits initiated an interest in topics related to the self.

At the start of the 1980s self was a vibrant topic that was widely investigated. During the 1990s the topic of self dominated many aspects of psychology and sociology (Leary & Tangney, 2003).

In order to allow the reader and myself an opportunity to gain greater insight into the self I have decided to create an “artificial” separation between self, self-concept, self-esteem and identity. This “artificial” separation is presented in literature and I am merely “reflecting” it here (as well) in order to reveal the complexities of these self aspects to enhance the richness of the self inherent in each of us. Even though these topics will be dealt with as if they were single entities, they collectively form the self. My strategy is intended to help me gain an understanding of their intricacies and to evaluate their contributions to the human state more closely.

The next section will provide recent reflections or opinions about the self which were garnered from literature. These scholarly perspectives should be seen as an extension to the post-modern self that was discussed in section 3.2.8. It was decided to include these perspectives at this point because they could serve as metaphorical stepping-stones in mentally placing the self-concept and its “relations”.

3.5 A closer look at the postmodern self

3.5.1 Introductory remarks

The “self” that we carry each day is rather an “unfamiliar” and enigmatic entity when viewed through the minds and pens of “self-scholars”. Based on the literature section that follows a list of interesting perspectives has been compiled that will be encountered in the study – certain thoughts presented as distinctly separate concepts in the paragraphs have been fused in order to provide some basis on which to “stack” new ideas in order to enjoy the interesting views which could be otherwise be overwhelming without a “preview”. Certain ideas about the self that will be encountered are:

- The question “Who am I” could hold the key to the self.
- The familiarity of the self makes it complicated, and, in order to understand the self, we need to venture outside the self to study it.
- Not only is the self weighty and slippery, but it is also the purveyor of happiness, fulfilment and liberation, but beware, it is not a “little man in the head”.
- The self is an organised, dynamic, cognitive-affective entity which is interpersonally self-constructed in social context; it has executive functions and may suffer ego-depletion.
- The self houses many positive possible selves – context-specific as well as negative possible selves.
- The self is a kaleidoscopic social force in its diversity, and may, for example, be presented as a narrative or an associative network.
- The ways children are brought up predispose the self to vulnerabilities.
- The individual self is the secure springboard from which the self, a wonderfully complex creature, connects with others.
- The self exerts an influence on relationships even though others may cause a sense of comfort or discomfort within the self.
- The self behaves rather rudely when it is socially excluded.
- Writers often complicate “self-understanding” on the part of readers because writers often do not specify to what they are referring.

Some of the aspects that will be encountered in the section that follows could perhaps have been true of self throughout history, but our current position in time and place presents unique

challenges for the self with which to deal. As will be shown in the next section self may also fall prey to negativity and depletion.

3.5.2 Specific “self” perspectives

“To have a relationship with someone else, you must first have a relationship with your self. In other words, communication begins and ends with you” (West & Turner, 2006:45). According to Finkenauer, Rutger Engels, Meeus and Oosterwegel (2002) self may be defined by asking the question “Who am I?” and identity may be clarified by the answer to the question “What am I?”

3.5.2.1 Complicated familiarity

The problem with a definition for self lies in the fact that we are so familiar with this ever-present entity that it becomes difficult to encapsulate the concept within the confines of a psychological definition (Baumeister, 2000). Bruner (1997) reiterates the familiarity and further maintains that knowledge of oneself implies more than a simple awareness of inner feelings – it is necessary to venture outside oneself in order to encounter the self that is “in the world” – therefore self is both private and public.

According to Seigel (2005:3) the notion of self is both “weighty and slippery”, and is constantly being redefined. It is from what the self is truly supposed to be that people have tried to extract happiness, fulfilment and liberation.

3.5.2.2 Self as a system

When working with the self there is the issue of the *homunculus* – the image of “the little man in the head” who has made “self” its agent – which should be avoided (Mischel & Morf, 2003). What are the characteristics of the self? According to Mischel and Morf (2003) who studied numerous texts on the self there does exist consensus about two core self-features, namely, (1) it is an organised, dynamic, cognitive-affective-action system, and (2) it is an interpersonal self-construction system. This consensus outlined may be referred to as the psycho-social dynamic processing model of the self.

The idea that self is a system acknowledges the fact that components and knowledge structures are interacting facets of a coherent system that is able to function at multiple levels simultaneously. The self is therefore not perceived to be a mere collection of features, but an intricate organisation of cognitive-affective representations that is able to make dynamic progress urged by motivated action. With regards to the interpersonal self-construction it is important to study individuals within context in social interactions in order to understand the self, because it is during the socialising process that the individual develops his own self-theory.

3.5.2.3 Attention, cognition and regulation

Writers have complicated the understanding of the self by their referrals to different “aspects of the self” – to the person him- or herself, to the personality of the person, to the person’s self-awareness centre, to the person’s self-knowledge, or to the source of executive function. Leary and Tangney (2003) propose the following psychological segments to the “self pie” (it is assumed that the self is the mental “machine” that supports self-reflection): attention, cognition and regulation. Attentional processes refer to the ability to direct attention to oneself at a very basic level, the possession of self permits thought (or cognition) about oneself, whilst the regulation aspect refers to the possibility that one has the ability to act upon the idea to in order to better one’s position either now or in the future. According to Leary and Tangney (2003) there are two additional aspects that merit mention, namely, motivational and emotional experiences that further distinguish the human self from the other species.

3.5.2.4 The executive function, ego-depletion and reflexive consciousness

According to Baumeister, Dale & Muraven (2000) and Baumeister (2000) the focus in the past has been on the cognitive structures and processes of the self, and it is now necessary to focus on the interpersonal and executive functions. The self is a tool that allows the formation and maintenance of relationships with others, which in turn inevitably shapes the self and allows access to institutions. The executive function (which also includes self-regulation) – or the active principle – leads to decision-making, the acceptance of responsibility and the initiating of responses.

Baumeister (2000) has elaborated on ego-depletion that impairs the executive function of the self, and concludes that this function of the self is indeed very important, because, even though it

regulates a small portion of human behaviour only, that which it controls is of great importance. He views the executive function of the self as a “muscle” which may be weakened temporarily through an act of decision-making or the exercise of self-control. Power may be restored to the executive function by, for example, sufficient rest and positive emotions.

Baumeister (2002) maintains that this function is a limited resource of which too much may be expected, and warns that, subsequent to an important decision being made, behaviour may be impaired temporarily. Thus it stands to reason that the self’s “strength” should be reserved for meaningful tasks and not squandered on the irrelevant. Reliance on habit and routine is one way of attempting to conserve the energy of the executive function. According to Baumeister (2000) much remains to be learned about the executive function of the self, and the way in which it manages control over action – a defining aspect of the human condition.

Baumeister (1997) maintains that reflexive consciousness, interpersonal being, the executive function as the roots of selfhood, and the prevailing culture operate as the “constructors” of the individual. He argues that the modern world has altered the interpersonal self, liberated it from its (small) village existence, given it freedom to choose preferred associations, and that, as a result, the self is now able to change neighbourhoods and assume different roles.

3.5.2.5 The possible self

Markus and Nurius (1987) discuss possible selves, the beauty to which we aspire and that which we dread as active cognitive functions of the self that motivate us as humans to sacrifice time and other resources in order to pursue a future image of ourselves or to avoid negative possibilities. According to them the majority of our daily activities are linked to a future image of ourselves, and the possible self serves as a cognitive bridge between the present and the future. This possible self is able to set the self into motion and outlines the course of action to be followed. Kruger (1999) agrees with Markus and Nurius (1987) that the ideal self may lead to self-improvement, but suggests that it may also lead to unrealistic and unhealthy efforts to become that which is totally contradictory to the self in nature.

3.5.2.6 The negative self

What happens if the negative possible selves dominate our lives or threaten to destroy us? Baumeister (1997a) maintains that the demands on the self could become too burdensome with the result that the possibility of escaping the self and avoiding self-awareness would seem a viable or desirable option. Unpleasant aversive emotions and shattered self-esteem invite a variety of escape mechanisms such as the use of alcohol, sexual masochism, binge eating and suicide. However it is possible to “redeem” a negative self by “giving” it a positive or more desirable self in which to mirror itself. One possible process of recovery which is used extensively by Alcoholics Anonymous is known as the doubling of the self. The alcoholic in recovery self is able to “double back on the past self” as he views the past against the new desired self. The recovery process relies heavily on group settings (for alcoholic selves) in which the persons in recovery discuss the historic alcoholic self in detail. They also make public speeches – seasoned with much humour – and the audience provides supports by means of laughter (Pollner & Stein, 2001).

According to Baumeister (1989) masochistic practices involve the deconstruction of the self by removing the self from its meaningful high levels and promoting functioning at lower levels. This allows the self an opportunity to relinquish control and renders impossible the maintenance of self-esteem.

3.5.2.7 The kaleidoscopic self

Deaux and Perkins (2001) propose a colourful metaphor for the self, namely, the kaleidoscope. They employ this metaphor in their study of self-representations and justify their choice by referring to the multiplicity of self-aspects, and the dynamic, fluid nature of self-definition. They maintain that there are three assumptions underlying the analysis of self: (1) It is impossible to separate the components of the self successfully and, consequently, there will always be a degree of overlapping, (2) the social context is important for the development and support of self and (3) behavioural episodes and action are key features that allow greater understanding of the self.

What does the self look like? Kihlstrom and Klein (1997) work from a cognitive psychology perspective and propose four answers to this question:

1. As a concept the self is a vague collection of context-specific selves.

2. As a story the self is a narrative (or a collection of narratives) that we have constructed, performed for ourselves, and associated with others.
3. As an image the self is about the representations we develop about aspects of our faces, bodies and mannerisms.
4. As an associative network the self is a compilation of our abstract characteristics, certain experiences, thoughts and actions and these separate semantic self-knowledge aspects form episodic self-knowledge.

The self with its capacities and abilities, as revealed above, is certainly not an entity that should be or could be easily ignored. The next section will consider those issues that enable the self to operate as a social force.

3.5.3 Self as a social force

Gecas (2001), who referred to Rosenberg's combined paradigm of cognitive social psychology and symbolic interactionism as the parameters of his discussion, maintains that, in order to understand self as a social force, the following aspects need to be studied: the nature of self-reflexivity, the motivational significance of emotions and the types of self-motives. Self-reflexivity enables human beings to become significant sources of agency because they are able to participate in processes such as self-objectification, self-motivation, self-evaluation, self-attribution and self-control.

Gecas (2001) maintains that self-objectification is both a blessing and a curse, because self-objectification enables human beings to become aware of their mortality and this leads to anxiety. Emotions are self-relevant and thus supply passionate energy that drives conduct, but shame and guilt are vital aspects in self as a social force. The motivational significance of the self is most often perceived as a concept that relies on the self-motives, self-esteem and self-consistency. Self-esteem refers to the motivated maintenance and enhancement of positive self-evaluation, whereas self-consistency refers to the motivated effort to maintain the stability of self-conception.

We could make the assumption that "all selves" should have an equal opportunity to enjoy the passionate expression of positive energy in the pursuit of being a social force, but unfortunately it would appear that cultural constraints could hamper this "autonomous" privilege. The next section will briefly discuss the ways in which the self is steered by gender-specific expectations.

3.5.4 Culture and the gendered self

Rosenfield (2000) maintains that the way in which adolescents are socially exposed to traits that are culturally appropriate to their sex lead to vulnerability in respect of certain disorders. Internalising disorders, such as depression and anxiety, are linked to the female population, and externalising disorders, such as antisocial disorders and substance abuse, are linked to the male population. Rosenfield (2000) concludes that the expectations and assumptions linked to femininity increase the risk of depression and suppress the ability to externalise behaviour, whilst masculine expectations protect the male population against depression and anxiety, but render them vulnerable with regards to substance abuse. The vision for the future should, therefore, be to combine the best traits from each gender and then to structure socialising in such a way that negative extremes could be avoided.

As human beings we are not able to escape our social affiliations and hence our individual gendered selves are malleable and at the mercy of the dominant cultural forces. In the next section we will take a closer look at the nature of the individual self and the role played by social contact.

3.5.5 The individual self and its need for social discovery

Sedikides and Gaertner (2001) revisited the individual self because convincing research on the relational, collective and contextual self had made the traditional perspective on the individual self appear outdated. They examined various scenarios and research findings and concluded that, even though perspectives on the individual self have changed, the primacy of the individual self is still very evident. They propose three postulates:

- The individual self is the relatively stable experiential home base or the core of selfhood that resists external influences. It strives for self-preservation.
- The individual self is the secure springboard from which the self launches psychological explorations into the social world or into social groups. The individual self is frequently deserted in order to satisfy critical needs that may be gleaned only from social groups.
- Even though groups may be critically important “outposts for maximising psychological benefits” the person inevitably returns, like a boomerang, to the individual self, only to employ it once again as a source of strength for the next social discovery.

The concept **individual self** in the context above calls to mind a rather self-absorbed aspect of the self, because the self launches into social exploration and then retreats to its personal safety; it appears as if the other selves merely serve the **individual self**. The next section is devoted to the **interpersonal self** and this concept allows us to see self as more interwoven with others. However this privilege is also costly to self.

3.5.6 The interpersonal self and its relations

3.5.6.1 Self needs others but complicates communication

It seems as if the ability to self-reflect has important implications for social-interaction. Self-related thoughts and feelings arise in real and imagined social interactions, then feed back to influence how people behave toward other people. In many ways, interactions between individuals may be viewed as interactions between the selves of those individuals, with each person's perceptions of and responses to the other filtered through and mediated by his or her self-perceptions (Leary, 2002:120).

Leary (2002) states that communication or interpersonal relationships between human beings would be considerably easier if the self had not been such a wonderfully complex creation. The following selection illustrates certain core issues that complicate the human self's relationships with others:

- The ability to differentiate between self and others whilst incorporating certain people into the personal self.
- The inability to recognise the extent to which personal perceptions and biases are egocentric.
- Fluctuation in the experience of self-esteem as a result of social interaction that could possibly lead to changes in self-evaluations.
- The nurturing and guarding of certain endearing mental representations of self.
- The reality that self is essentially absorbed in thought which reflects itself.

Baumeister et al. (2000) maintain that human beings are fundamentally social beings and that the interpersonal function of selfhood is crucial. Mankind's "need to belong" is satisfied by ongoing

pleasant interactions with the same relevant others within a lasting relationship that is characterised by mutual caring and concern.

3.5.6.2 Self is transformed by close relationships with others

Aron (2003) discusses the self within the context of close relationships and maintains that, even in adults the self is involved in a cycle of shaping and reshaping when it engages in close relationships. Not only is the hidden self changed, but more obvious changes with regards to the outer appearance may also result. The two aspects of behavioural confirmation and inclusion are linked to self-esteem and facilitate the moulding of the self. Behavioural confirmation refers to that aspect of behaviour which is in accordance with the expectations of the close partner, while inclusion implies that the self absorbs the resources and identities of the close partner into itself. Even though it might appear that the self is the only party that is transformed by close relationships it must be borne in mind that the self also exerts an influence these on relationships. Those with high self-esteem apparently have better closer relationships than those with low self-esteem, because the latter expect their close partners to treat them according to the negative opinion which they have of themselves. Tice and Wallace (2003) state that close and intimate relationships with important people indeed create the looking-glass effect – this means that the view which people think others have of them becomes reflected in their own views regarding themselves.

3.5.6.3 Comfort and discomfort within the self

According to Simmons (2001) relationships with others may either lead to a sense of comfort or discomfort within the self because these relationships influence the desired self-picture. Others within the close personal circle may confirm or disregard valuable aspects of the identity of the self, but these comforts or discomforts may also be encountered as the self enters larger multiple interpersonal contexts. An aspect of self that may be under attack within one context may be boosted within another. If the variation in interpersonal contexts – with its changing role players – becomes too demanding on the self a sense of overload may result, and the self may act inconsistently in all areas. Simmons (2001) concludes that there needs to be a balance between the comfort and challenge within a person's life and the contexts which provide the need to be alternated in pursuit of self-protection.

How do human beings react when they are socially excluded? According to Twenge and Baumeister (2005) social exclusion affect behaviour adversely. Rejected people become aggressive towards those who reject them and anyone who provokes them. They spare only those people who are friendly towards them and those with whom they will be forced to interact in the future. As the prosocial behaviour declines the level of self-defeating behaviour increases. Rejected people become risk-takers, procrastinators and make unhealthy choices. According to Twenge and Baumeister (2005) it seems as if the intelligent thought of socially excluded people is impeded. Narcissists who have inflated self-views display the strongest levels of negative reactions in respect of social exclusion.

Pickett and Brewer (2005) maintain that other effects of social exclusion include anxiety, lower self-esteem and negative affect. In order to avoid becoming a victim of social exclusion marginalised group members attempt to become more prototypical and engage in self-stereotyping processes. The individual may sacrifice positive self-enhancement and personal self-regard in order to be accepted and socially included.

The following question came to mind during perusal of the literature: Could it be that much of our discomfort arises from our perception of others? The next section deals with social perception and certain of the apparent predicaments self encounters when it perceives others.

3.5.7 Self and social perception

According to Dunning (2003), who reviewed literature pertaining to self and social perception, self is linked to social judgement in numerous ways. Dunning (2003) is convinced that this aspect of the self would still merit considerable research. The three most valid groupings he identified within his readings regarding the self's social perception of others are:

- With limited information about another the self assumes that there is a high degree of similarity between self and that other.
- With specified concrete information about another the self emphasises the information that also pertains to areas within which the self has some degree of expertise, and hence confident evaluations and inferences about the other may be made. If the other person

displays competence in areas that are foreign to the self the self will be reluctant to seek connections.

- Self compares the performance of another with its own and uses personal behaviour as a benchmark with which to measure or judge the other's performance.

People treat the evaluations of others as evaluations of self, and, therefore, they employ their judgements of others to assist with the maintenance of a positive self-image. According to Dunning (2003) the evaluation of others is predominantly an intrapersonal exercise, not an interpersonal exercise for self, because the internal world of the self is the viewfinder which the self employs.

Now that we have been exposed to the (limited) array of views selected for the presentation of self it must be obvious that self is indeed no simple matter, but nevertheless very interesting. We will now proceed to the self-concept which is the construct at the heart of this study. As with self we will encounter numerous differing views that will illustrate the multifaceted nature and intriguing qualities of the self-concept.

3.6 Self-concept

The human self-concept has captured the fascination and imagination of intellectuals from many walks of life – writers and poets, religious and political figures, philosophers and scientists. These intellectuals have described the self as enigmatic and mysterious; the key to understanding the essence of human nature; the basis of motivation, emotion, and behaviour; and the royal road to personal misery and societal woes (Sedikides & Skowronski, 2000:91).

Marsh, Craven and McInerney (2003) point out the importance of self-concept research by referring to individual and societal issues that stem specifically from a low self-concept. The importance of the self-concept has been recognised in diverse settings such as education, mental and physical health, industry and sport.

3.6.1 Definitional confusion

There exists a definitional confusion regarding the self-concept as researchers randomly use various terms to describe the self-concept and its “components” (Byrne, 1996).

Terms used interchangeably with the *self-concept* include *self*, *self-estimation*, *self-identity*, *self-image*, *self-perception*, *self-consciousness*, *self-imaginary*, and *self-awareness*. Terms used interchangeably with *self-esteem* include *self-regard*, *self-reverence*, *self-accepting*, *self-respect* and *self-worth*, *self-feeling*, and *self-evaluation*. Related terms also include *self-actualisation*, *self-control*, *self-complacency*, and *self-knowledge* (Hattie, 1992:viii).

Byrne (1996) states that: the interchangeable use of the terms *self-concept* and *self-esteem* by researchers reveals the lack of consensus about the distinct roles of each concept. This confusion stems from the tension between the functions, self-description (for self-concept) and self-evaluation (for self-esteem). This discrepancy has not been fully resolved because self-concept research relies on self-report measurements that employ both self-description and self-evaluation.

3.6.2 A selection of self-concept perspectives of the past 25 years

Various perspectives concerning the self-concept that will reveal the intricacies of this entity will now be presented. These opinions range from the view that the self-concept is the stabilising agent which secures inner consistency to that of the self-concept as an indicator of status. Between these two poles issues such as the dimensionality and the content of the self-concept will also be discussed.

3.6.2.1 The self-concept secures inner consistency

Of all the perceptions we learn, none seems to affect our search for personal significance and identity more than our self-perception – our view of who we are and how we fit into the world (Purkey & Novak, 1984:25).

Burns (1982) ascribes three components to the self-concept: firstly, the belief or cognitive component that includes all true or false objective or subjective opinions a person has about himself, secondly, the evaluation component that subjectively evaluates personal competencies and feelings, and, thirdly, the behavioural tendency component that refers to the fact that people act according to their beliefs about themselves, even if they may temporarily override their own preferences as a result of societal norms or moral obligations. The self-concept is the result of the influence from the outside of significant others who determine the way in which the individual perceives himself. Once the self-concept has been formed it will play a subjective role with regards

to the perspective the individual will assume in respect of a personal experience. Burns (1982) sees the importance of the self-concept in its three-fold role of regulating inner consistency, determining the way in which experiences are viewed and providing a set of expectancies.

The self-concept, in its attempt to ensure inner consistency, may exclude positive affirmations in order to maintain the consistency of a negative self-concept. Burns (1982) explains that the term self-concept is somewhat misleading because we possess numerous self-concepts that pertain to various aspects of our lives. He sees the global self-concept as an amorphous blob of jelly that consists of thousands of self-attitudes that form an integrated system that has the most dominant self-attitudes in the centre and, on the periphery, the relative self-attitudes. Criticism of one's self-concept should not be perceived as criticism of the global self-concept, and, according to Burns (1982), this diverse network of self-concepts allow us to keep negativity localised and limited to a specific self-concept, and not allow it to pervade the entire global self-concept, for example, a man may be a good husband but a terrible gardener.

The self-concept determines the way in which we interpret experiences. No matter how positive an experience, if it passes through the filter of a negative self-concept, the meaning that will be given to the experience will be consistent with the self-view of the individual. Another powerful aspect of the self-concept is that it programmes people's expectations of what will transpire within a certain scenario, for example, if a child believes he is not socially accepted social exclusion will result (Burns, 1982).

3.6.2.2 The self-concept is a description of the perceived self

Beane and Lipka (1984) maintain the self-concept is the description which an individual attaches to him, and is based upon the roles which the individual plays and his personal attributes. The self-concept should not be seen as either positive or negative because it is merely a description of the perceived self and thus not a value judgement. In view of the fact that the self-concept is basically no more than a description Beane and Lipka (1984) propose the following measures with which to assist the individual to enhance the self-description:

- Help the individual clarify the descriptive content
- Assist the individual to develop accurate self-descriptions

- Suggest neglected personal dimensions
- Help the individual to link the self-descriptions to reality
- Encourage in-depth thought about the self-concept
- Encourage the individual to align his view of himself with the way in which “outsiders” view him
- Emphasise reflection pertaining to self-description in order to establish clarity, accuracy, breadth and depth
- Assist the individual to identify the sources and influences that have had an impact on the self-concept.

3.6.2.3 The self-concept is both a structure and a process

Hattie (1992) describes a self-concept cognitive model that depends on differentiation and integration, is both a structure and a process, and is dynamic and capable of change. For these reasons it is neither a system in continuous flux nor a static entity. The self-concept comprises descriptions, expectations, and prescriptions that could be “actual, possible, ideal, evaluative, interpretative, and dynamic”. All people possess a unique self-concept as each person strives for unique ways in which to enhance, maintain or understand the self. It may be both a structure and a structure/process. Certain individuals live by a structure and a collection of beliefs that preside over processes and actions, whilst others are guided by a structure/process that employs a set of hierarchical, multifaceted beliefs that govern behaviour within social settings. The prominence of the self-concept as regards situational behaviour varies and, because people live by implicit models that regulate behaviour, they are generally not able to describe their self-concepts explicitly. Changes to the self-concept occur as maturing continues through developmental stages from infancy to old age.

3.6.2.4 The self-concept is multidimensional

The contents of the self-concept refer to one's self-beliefs and self-evaluations – to how one answers the questions “Who am I?” and “How do I feel about myself?” The structure of the self-concept refers to how the contents of the self-concept are organized (Campbell et al., 2003:116).

According to Kruger (1999) the self-concept is the sum total of an individual's mental and physical attributes, and it includes the individual's personal assessment of the entity. Campbell, Assanand

and Di Paula (2000) state that the self-concept underwent major changes during the last two decades of the 20th century as the emphasis on a singular stable entity was replaced by contemporary theorists accentuating the self-concept as a cognitive schema that is an organised knowledge structure which houses self-beliefs about personal attributes, and episodic and semantic memories. It is the processor of self-relevant information. Van der Meulen (2001) supports this view and states that the new approach was given impetus by, amongst others, Markus and Wurf who proposed a dynamic self-concept, and by Epstein who advanced the strictly cognitivist interpretation of the self-concept.

According to Wigfield, Battle, Keller and Eccles (2002) modern theorists have defined the self-concept as a multidimensional entity and reason that it is no longer “valid” to attempt measuring the global self-concept. They suggest rather that a specific aspect of the self-concept should be investigated.

The conclusions of Van der Meulen (2001), after reviewing her selection of contemporary literature, regarding the self-concept comprise in three major points. Firstly a person’s set of self-beliefs is not an exclusively cognitive matter because this set of self-beliefs is closely associated with affect, secondly, the set of self-beliefs does not primarily consist of decontextualised self-beliefs but includes beliefs that have also arisen out of close interaction within physical and social contexts, and, thirdly, stable and variable short-term beliefs co-exist.

3.6.2.5 The self-concept has domains with content

Instead of investigating merely the “over-researched”, one-dimensional global self-concept Young and Mroczek (2003) conducted a study in order to determine the way in which the domain specific self-concepts of adolescents were affected over a period. Past studies had reported a decline in the self-concept during preadolescence; this trend was reversed during early or middle adolescence, and rose again during late adolescence. With regards to domain-specific self-concepts academic and athletic self-concepts declined during early adolescence, as did appearance and social competence. Gender was also investigated and it was found that female adolescents were more likely than their male counterparts to display a declining global self-concept. Young and Mroczek (2003) used Harter’s Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA).

Their research extended over a one-year period and found, as had been revealed by other studies, that the global self-worth is indeed more stable than the domain specific self-concepts. They discovered fluctuations in the domains of job competence, romantic appeal, and physical appearance, but did not regard this as significant because these domains would stabilise as the adolescents matured. They acknowledge that there were limitations to their study and that perhaps a longer time frame and a larger population (larger than the 253 adolescents in their study) would have delivered more significant domain changes.

Contemporary theorists differentiate between the content of the self-concept (refers to self-beliefs such as traits, physical features and values) and the structural features of the self-concept. The two most important structural features of the self-concept are differentiation and integration (Campbell et al., 2000). According to Locke (2006) the structure of the self-concept indicates the way in which the diverse contents of the self-concept are interrelated.

Locke (2006) reports on a study that aimed at establishing whether a consistent self-concept or a desirable self-concept was indicative of well-being. This study found that the desirable self-concept, and not consistency, indicated well-being. Furthermore Locke (2006) poses the positive and negative views of consistency held by psychologists: certain psychologists believe that a consistent self reveals a maladaptive self because there is not sufficient flexibility to cope with differing contexts, others feel that a consistent self will take the effects of a negative experience and transfers them onto other self-aspects, while those in favour of consistency argue that consistency reassures the self of personal continuity and integrity.

3.6.2.6 The self-concept can be enhanced with strategies

West and Turner (2006) suggest that choices need to be made regarding checking perceptions and improving the self-concept. In respect of perception they suggest the following: know your personal worldview, accept that perception will always be incomplete, search for explanation and clarification, separate facts from inferences, and cultivate patience and tolerance. They make the following suggestions in respect of the improvement of the self-concept: acquire the desire to change, decide what needs to be changed, set attainable personal goals, revise the self-concept, and expose yourself to ample “relational uppers”.

3.6.2.7 The self-concept is shaped by the psychological group: self-categorisation theory

Onorato and Turner (2001) hold a different view of the self-concept. Their view stems from the self-categorisation theory. Unlike social cognitive psychology this theory does not support the favouring of a self-concept that is a stable cognitive structure. The most important premise of the self-categorisation theory is that the psychological group is instrumental in the shaping of the self-concept. Self-categorisation moves away from the concept of the self as a private entity that is “manufactured” solely by the cognitions of the individual and emphasises the influence of group interactions.

According to Onarato and Turner (2001) the major points of the self-categorisation theory may be summarised as follows:

- The self is no longer seen as a storehouse of long-term knowledge, and the emphasis shifts to the dynamics of the self-system. Self has become a fluid system that is subject to continuous categorisations as the self encounters other selves in groups. The focus is the psychological process that leads to self-categorical judgements.
- Self-categories are not fixed properties within the self, but should be seen as relative and changeable. Dimensions of comparative context, such as relevant comparison, others and the relevant comparison dimension, may affect self-category content. In self-categorisation theory similarities and differences are not perceived as separate independents, but merely as “relatives” of the same metacontrast principle.
- The “me” level of self-categorisation is not seen as the most fundamental level, therefore all levels of self-categorisation are considered equally valid. This aspect places “me” and social identity (and other self-categories) on the same importance ranking, and removes the element of distortion that may easily be attached to everything other than “me”.
- Self-categorisation theory focuses on different types of self-concept change, which implies the types of variation that characterise the self-categorisation process. Firstly change may occur in respect of the most prominent level of self-categorisation, secondly, variations within in each level may occur and the hierarchy of importance may change, thirdly, the contexts of individuals and groupings will exert an influence and alter the content of self-categories, and, fourthly, the internal structure of self-categories will be affected by the context of definition.

Abrams and Hogg (2004) maintain that the theoretical consequences of self-categorisation do not harmonise with people's experience of themselves as meaningfully stable and relatively coherent entities. They point out that, if indeed the self is as pliable as suggested by self-categorisation theory, then it might become impossible to establish normal social relationships because there will be no predictability on which to rely.

3.6.2.8 The self-concept and its assessment

Oyserman (2004) discusses the difficulty which an assessment of the content of the self-concept poses for the self and the researcher. This is because the self-concept contains "a dizzying array of content" that includes experiential, episodic and abstracted self-information – and only one type of content will be prominent at a specific point in time. When people are asked to describe themselves they access the self-concept via the easiest route – the most relevant self-concept information at the given moment, and that which memory is able to call to mind with the least effort. Brewer and Hewstone (2004) warn that the context within which an individual is asked to access self-knowledge could be triggered by certain self-aspects that would have remained dormant within other contexts.

3.6.2.9 The self-concept indicates status

The status dynamic approach, as explained by Bergner and Holmes (2007), deviates from the notion that the self-concept is merely a summary of information about the person. They reason that the self-concept is more a "summary formulation of one's status", which, in turn, implies one's positioning in respect of all the relevant aspects in one's world, including oneself. Based on this premise of status Bergner and Holmes (2007) maintain that the self-concept delimits behavioural possibilities in the following ways:

- Self-assigned statuses (or self-concepts) steer self-expression because they limit participation to spheres within the self-status regions only.
- Fortunately self-statuses constrain immoral actions, but could also foster self-destructive patterns, such as refusing to leave a destructive relationship.
- Self-statuses determine the view the person has of the world and his effective living within that world.

The status dynamic view therefore departs from the view that the self-concept is an informational entity and regards it rather as a means of positioning – initially in the mind. According to the dynamic status approach changing the self-concept is not easy, but it is possible.

According to this approach the problematic issue in respect of the self-concept is the fact that, initially, we have no control over most of what happens to the self-concept. This is because the self-concept has been “constructed” by roles assigned to the self by parents and by influential role players during infancy and childhood. As adolescents and adults individuals are able to make better judgements about the ways in which they perceive themselves (Bergner and Holmes, 2007).

The way in which to affect change is to assist clients to break the moulds of limiting self-assigned or accepted statuses which are the source of personal discomfort, and to assist them to assign to themselves new statuses which will endow them with improved behavioural potential. In order to accomplish this, the status dynamic therapist creates a two-person community with the client, and assigns new statuses to them. The therapist will consistently treat the client according to the new demands of the new statuses (Bergner & Holmes, 2007). This corresponds with Rogers’ view – he perceived the client as an “unconditionally acceptable human being”. The dynamic status approach wishes to see the client as someone who is acceptable, paramount in the therapeutic relationship, endowed with personal resources, possesses problem solving skills, and who makes sense – the agent who is capable of effecting the transformation from victim to achiever.

We have considered complementary and differing views of the self-concept, and also its apparent functions and qualities. This means that the following questions may now be posed:

- How does the self-concept develop?
- Are there stages in this development?
- Which factors play a role in the development of the self-concept?

The following sections will attempt to answer these questions.

3.6.3 Developing a self-concept

Despite the difficulties of accessing the self-concept it is nevertheless a social force that determines perceptions, feelings and various reactions, and may therefore be compared to an “information processor”. Certain people view the self-concept as the seat of effectance and competency drives which aims at giving expression to the desire for self-improvement – this relates to self-evaluation, maintenance and self-affirmation. Apart from its self-enhancing attributes the self-concept is a “cognitive anchor, a consistent yardstick” that allows the self to make sense of the world. It also regulates the expectations the self has of others (Oyserman, 2004).

3.6.3.1 Suggested stages of self-perception development

Beane and Lipka (1984) differentiate between the different stages of the development of the self, namely, the *childhood self*, *transescent self*, *adolescent self* and *adult self*. During the *childhood self* the child’s self-perceptions are derived from the feedback given by parents or guardians, and positive self-images are determined by a warm home atmosphere. During middle childhood the child’s social circle enlarges and the child’s self-perceptions are supplemented by feedback from teachers and friends. During late childhood the influence of the peer group could become as significant as parental opinions. Transescence is the period encompassing the onset and development of puberty and the peer group represents the significant others. The transescent is able to deal with abstract conceptual relationships. During this period the transescent experiences dissonance as he attempts to reconcile the importance of the peer group with the privilege of having a home and caring parents. Feelings of helplessness and being misunderstood may result. During adolescence the identity crisis may become dominant as the adolescent attempts to discover the direction which he wishes to follow, and as he experiments with different roles and identifications. During the years of the adult self the main goal is to seek stability.

3.6.3.2 Others shape the self-concept

Developmental research regards the self-concept as “a basic tool of cognitive and social development and an important consequence of its development”. A sense of self is awakened by the infant’s realisation that his body is separate from others. This is made possible by interaction with others. As memory develops identity grows and, at two years of age, self-consciousness emerges. This stabilises at the age of four, and the self-concept becomes linked to self-conscious

emotions such as embarrassment. From the ages of two to eight language develops and the child is able to expand self-descriptions. During adolescence the self-concept acquires a more abstract sense of self and obtains a future orientation and an ever-increasing social comparative dimension. The sense of adulthood is also awakened during adolescence and matures throughout adulthood (Oyserman, 2004).

The development of the self is the result of intra- and interpersonal relationships with self and the social world – these relationships range from family and peers to more distant acquaintances within the community. The deterioration or improvement of the self-concept stems from the social component with significant others. Positive experiences such as love, encouragement, and physical and emotional affection in relation to significant others foster an image of being loved and being capable, whilst negative experiences, such as ridicule, hostility, labelling and sarcasm, lead to negative convictions (Kruger, 1999).

3.6.3.3 The influence of friends and groups on the adolescent self-concept

Tarrant, MacKenzie and Hewitt (2006) examined the influence of friendship group identification on the self-concept and self-esteem of adolescents. They discovered that adolescents who were highly identified with their peers (as opposed to those who revealed no significant peer identification) reported the highest levels of self-esteem – this was most apparent in the non-academic self-domains. High identifiers had better levels of self-esteem and manifested more positive feelings towards personal and relational developmental tasks.

3.6.3.4 Academic competencies could enhance the self-concept

An interesting opinion was expressed by Manning (2007) when he maintained that educators should expend less energy and financial resources on programmes aimed at building the self-concept or self-esteem of problem children or adolescents, but that they should rather ensure that students receive remedial help in any particular scholastic area in which they need assistance. An improvement in the academic skills of students would enhance the self-concept. Manning (2007) quotes Baumeister (a 2003 reference) who suggested that the self-concept is not a major predictor of almost anything.

Even though multiple scenarios, individuals and various skills may impact positively (and negatively) on the self-concept it is comforting to realise that this is not immutable and change is always possible. The next section deals with issues relating to the stability and variability of the self-concept

3.6.4 Self-concept stability, variability and change

According to the discussion of Onorato and Turner (2001) on the unresolved problem of change in the self-concept social psychologists are convinced of the existence of self-concept change, although they realise this subject needs further exposition. The two main views on self-concept change involve the reconfiguration or change of intrapsychic structures and situational variation. The reconfiguration view holds that the self-concept is a conglomeration of mental structures that could be affected by change in the following ways: the self-concept could be eliminated, a new self-concept could be adopted, or various self-facets in the structure could be rearranged. The situational view holds that behaviour and situational triggers call forth self-structures pertaining to the specific scenario, and, therefore, dormant parts of the self-concept will appear at an opportune time – this leads to self-concept variation.

According to the review of Kernis and Goldman's (2003) the variability in the self-concept is due to contextual or situational factors such as social comparison, feedback, and actions. Social comparison allows the individual to compare self with others in the same environment, and the influence of the feedback will depend on the level of self-esteem of the individual. Individuals with high self-esteem have greater clarity of self-concept and seem more resilient when coping with feedback – the opposite is true for those with lower self-esteem and hence self-concepts that lack clarity. The actions which the individual undertakes in public contexts may alter self-beliefs because the public self may generate a belief that public performances (or actions) are indeed an integral part of the true self.

The self-concept possesses a relative adaptability and malleability that will be revealed by different contexts. New cultural technologies afford individuals the opportunity to present opposing views of themselves without being held accountable. New technology has also expanded the self-concept, because, as people expose themselves to chat rooms, computer-based conferencing and other digital media, they discover new dimensions within themselves. The challenge posed by new

technology is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the individual in a post-modern self to redefine the self and to secure boundaries that afford stability (Kernis & Goldman, 2003).

3.6.5 Self-concept categories, domains, dimensions and facets

Burns (1979) regards the major sources of the adolescent self-concept as the physical self and body image, language, and feedback from significant others. The physical self involves a personal assessment of the physical self in terms of social norms and responses from others. Burns (1979) distinguishes between body schema (pertain to the knowledge attained from bodily sensations) and body image (the evaluated picture of the physical self). If the adolescent does not possess the “perfect” body that conforms to the “acceptable” norms this may lead to personal distress as nicknames are often given to those who are, for example, too fat or too tall. As the child acquires language he learns to differentiate between self and others, the complexity of concepts increases and the proficiency to articulate personal feelings grows, as does self-awareness. Non-verbal communication also conveys a measure of self-knowledge to others. The feedback given by parents or teachers (or other significant people) may reduce or increase the insecurity of the adolescent who is at a vulnerable developmental stage. Feedback may be connected to a myriad of activities ranging from sport to general aspects such as socialisation.

Burns (1979) maintains that, as the child grows, the environment expands and this results in an expansion of the self-concept. According to Byrne (1996) there is “the generally unanimous agreement that self-concept is a multidimensional construct (1996:xv)”. As researchers study the self-concept further it is becoming evident that the facets or domains or categories (e.g. academic, social or physical) are rich in content, and also multifaceted. This realisation has impacted on the self-concept instruments that now are attempting to measure, not just the global self-concept, but also include measures that should shed light upon the various domains or facets that constitute the global self. Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976) delivered a seminal work on the structure and measurement of self-concept, and, since 1976, many have built on the Shavelson et al. “foundation”. As will be seen later Shavelson collaborated with numerous researchers to rework and refine particular aspects of the self-concept – all in search of greater clarity. In her seminal work *Measuring Self-Concept Across the Life Span* (1996) Byrne (1996) describes the *general self-concept* as similar to global self-worth. Shavelson et al. (1976) perceive the self-concept to be the

individual's perception of him – it is not an entity within the person but is a construct for the prediction and explanation of behaviour. Shavelson et al. (1976) identified seven critical features of the self-concept: organised, multifaceted, hierarchical, stable, developmental, evaluative and differentiable.

Past research has demonstrated that the implicit self-concept comprises an extensive collection of attributes, but the underlying basis of these associations was still unknown. A study was conducted to ascertain the influence of the semantic and valence on attribute self-association. The researchers discovered that semantic meaning was the primary basis determining attribute inclusion in the self-concept (Perkins and Forehand, 2006).

The next section will provide brief descriptions of the most important categories, dimensions, domains or facets of the self-concept as postulated by a selection of five different authors and co-authors. It is not the aim to get caught up in the technicalities of the layout of the numerous “visual models” as they usually appear – what is important is the content of the self-concept domains or categories. The lists below contain the exact information as they appear but in a simplified format. The order in which these categories appear does not indicate the significance of one category over another. The general self-concept has been placed at the top, followed by the academic, and then the non-academic. The reader must pay attention to the wording of the categories, domains or facets and the way in which the various authors expound on these issues.

In order to display the diversity of the self-concept domains (or categories or dimensions) and their respective facets the layouts of the following scholars and authors will be displayed in **Table 3.4:** Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton's self-concept domains and subscales (1976), The eleven domains of Marsh's 1992 Self Description Questionnaire II for adolescents (as explained in Byrne, 1996), Bracken's Multidimensional Self Concept Scale (1992), Harter's proposed self-concept domains for adolescence (1999), and Kruger's self-concept dimensions (1999).

3.6.5.1 A discussion of the major domain and facet differences and similarities in table 3.4

This discussion will compare and contrast elements of **table 3.4**.

- Four columns (A to D) indicate a heading for the general or global self-concept (row 1). In column D Harter (1999) labels this **self-worth** rather than **self-concept**.
- The academic self-concept (row 2) differs from column to column. In column **A** four specific subjects are listed, **B** lists two only and refers to **general school** as well, **C** to **E** omit references to specific subjects and seem to define the academic self-concept in terms of school functioning, competence and achievement. **E** links the career aspect to the academic self.
- A heading for the non-academic self (row 3) is listed in columns **A** and **B** only.
- The social domain (row 3.1) and its sub-categories or facets are interpreted differently in each column. Columns **A**, **B** and **D** mention **peers** as a major facet, whilst **C** places the emphasis on the **reactions of others**, and **D** lists **self in community** as the only facet. **B** and **D** include the **romantic** aspect of the social world of the adolescent.
- The family domain (row 3.2) – with its familiar content – is regarded as significant by **B**, **C** and **E**, whilst **A** and **D** do not make any reference to family or parents. **A** mentions **significant others** in 3.1, and this could include family.
- The personal or emotional domain (row 3.3) is recognised by four, while **D** omits an entry. They appear to emphasise the emotional fluctuations, the emotional connectedness and evaluative stance towards the environment of the adolescent.
- The physical domain (row 3.4) appears to be very important to each author, and they provide clear facets. **A**, **B** and **D** are similar in their facets lists and make a clear distinction between **physical appearance** and **ability**. **C** also refers to the reactions of others that could be the result of appearance.
- The moral domain (row 3.5) is omitted by **A** and **C**. Its facets refer to honesty, morality and to belief systems.
- **C** and **D** only indicate a need for the competence domain (row 3.6) and reference is made to effective functioning, problem solving and job competence.



Table 3.4: Self-concept domains and facets

Scholars or authors ►	(A) Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976)	(B) Marsh (1992)	(C) Bracken (1992)	(D) Harter (1999)	(E) Kruger (1999)
Specific self-concept domains ▼	Domains and facets ▼	Domains and facets ▼	Domains and facets ▼	Domains and facets ▼	Domains and facets ▼
1. General or Global	General self-concept	Global self-concept	Global self-concept	Global self-worth	
2. Academic	Academic self-concept English History Mathematics Science	Academic self-concept Reading Mathematics General School	Academic (Achievement) (Functioning) (School-related experiences)	Scholastic competence	Academics or career self Scholastic or occupational achievement
3. Non-academic self-concept ▼	Non-academic self-concept ▼	Non-academic self-concept ▼			
3.1 Social	Social Peers Significant others	Peer relations: same sex peer relations Peer relations: opposite sex peer relations	Social (Reactions of others) (Goals achieved through successful social interactions)	Peer acceptance Close friendships Romantic relationships	Social self Self in community
3.2 Family		Parental relations	Family (Traditional, natural) (Surrogate)		Family self Self in family connectedness
3.3 Personal or Emotional	Emotional Particular emotional states	Emotional stability	Affect (Personal evaluation) (Environmental evaluation)		Personal self Self and its emotions or psychic connections
3.4 Physical	Physical Physical ability Physical appearance	Physical ability Physical appearance	Physical (Physical attributes) (Reactions of others)	Athletic competence Physical appearance	Physical self Self and its bodily relations
3.5 Moral		Honesty/ Trustworthiness		Conduct/ morality	Moral self Relations of self to personal belief or value systems
3.6 Competence			Competence (Effective functioning) (Problem solving efficiency)	Job competence	

From the discussion in 3.6.5.1 we have learn that – based on the expositions of the writers listed – the four best described and agreed upon categories of the self-concept are **academic**, **social**, **personal** or **emotional**, and **physical**. The **family** and **moral** domains may be listed in the fifth place, whilst the **competence** domain is the domain which received the least attention. It was decided to use the following self-concept categories as the **major themes** in the data analysis: **academic**, **social**, **personal-emotional**, **physical** and **moral**. These themes will be investigated in chapter 5.

3.6.6 A summary of the self-concept

To conclude the reflections on the self-concept and its complexity certain key elements will be summarised in **table 3.5**. This is by no means a comprehensive account of what has been encountered, but it serves as an opportunity to “ground” certain ideas before examining self-esteem.

Table 3.5: Ideas about the self-concept

Ideas	See:
There still exists definitional confusion and a lack of consensus in respect of the issue of self-concept.	3.6.1
Self-concept is an important construct because individual and societal issues in particular stem from a low self-concept – after its formation it taints the perspective we assume on personal experiences. It is alarming that our self-concepts could be attributed largely to the influence of significant others – good or bad.	3.6.2.1
Self-concept is both a structure and a process, and changes as we mature from infancy to old age. It strives for inner consistency and may even exclude positive affirmations in order to maintain the consistency of a negative self-concept.	3.6.2.3
Self-concept is a multidimensional entity and is characterised by differentiation between the content of the self-concept (which refers to self-beliefs such as traits, physical features and values) and its structural features.	3.6.2.4
Self-concept is a cognitive schema – an organised knowledge structure that houses our self-beliefs, and episodic and semantic memories. It is the processor of self-relevant information. It possesses numerous self-concepts that pertain to various aspects of our lives, and also determines our self-evaluation and behaviour, thus constituting the basis of our self-description. The major domains, categories or facets of the adolescent self-concept that were identified are academic , social , personal or emotional , physical , family and moral .	3.6.2.5 & 3.6.5
It would appear that it is possible to affect a change in the self-concept by means of deliberate self-action or resolution.	3.6.2.6
Self-categorisation moves away from the self as a private entity “manufactured” solely by the cognitions of the individual and emphasises the influence of group interactions.	3.6.2.7

It is difficult to assess the content of the self-concept because of its varying nature which includes experiential, episodic and abstracted self-information – only one type is prominent at a specific point in time. The context within which self-knowledge is accessed could trigger certain self-aspects that would have been dormant within other contexts.	3.6.2.8
The status dynamic approach deviates from the notion that the self-concept is a summary of information about the individual and maintains that the self-concept is rather a “summary formulation of one’s status”. Unfortunately the self-concept is formed or influenced initially by caregivers.	3.6.2.9
Despite the difficulties of accessing the self-concept it is a social force that determines perceptions, feelings and various reactions, and therefore it may be compared to an “information processor”.	3.6.3
There are those who maintain that educators should expend less energy and financial resources on programmes aimed at building the self-concept or self-esteem of problem children or adolescents, and should rather ensure that students receive remedial help in the particular scholastic area where it is needed. Increasing the academic skills of students would enhance the self-concept.	3.6.3.4

In the section on self-esteem follows viewpoints from the past 10 years will be discussed. According to the literature the major difference between the self-concept and self-esteem appears to be the fact that self-esteem is more “emotional” than the self-concept. Self-esteem indicates the level of fondness with which we regard ourselves, and needs social interactions in order to improve.

3.7 Self-esteem

3.7.1 Introductory remarks

When adolescents routinely begin to notice the disparities between the way they actually behave and the way they ought to behave if they were being true to their “real selves”, they begin to become preoccupied with what their “true” self is. Once they start dwelling on their own characteristics, they are confronted with the question “How much do I like myself (Cole & Cole, 2001:672)?

Self-esteem appears to be more charged with “emotion” than the self-concept, probably because of its “people link”. The following list summarises those aspects of self-esteem that will be addressed in the following section:

- Self-esteem provides an indication of the degree to which we either appreciate or dislike ourselves.



- It reveals the intensity of our desire to connect with others and is, therefore, termed the sociometer, as it indicates our sense of belonging. We need a group setting within which to rectify self-esteem in any way because self-esteem requires social interaction.
- The degree to which our ideal picture of ourselves corresponds with our (actual) present state determines our self-esteem (and self-worth).
- Self-esteem comprises images we have of our social roles and will fluctuate as the significant others in our lives present us with the positive and negative images they have of us.
- If we suffer from low self-esteem we will manifest a greater need for approval.
- Unstable self-esteem could imply an increase in depressive symptoms as daily stressors are encountered, self-feelings fluctuate, and learning hindered as a result of a self-protective stance.
- If we display a fragile self-esteem we will pursue self-esteem, because self-esteem is easily threatened by criticism and rejection. There are those who regard this pursuit of self-esteem as detrimental because it increases self-concern and leads to egotism.
- High self-esteem will result in a striving for exceptional success because of the desire for self-enhancement, whereas those with low self-esteem merely wish to avoid failure as all they want to do is simply protect themselves.
- Children with high self-esteem display a greater creative capacity. They assume active social roles within groups more easily and are not threatened by the competencies of others which exceed their own.

3.7.2 Self-esteem stances of the past 10 years

3.7.2.1 Orientation

Past research has shown that self-esteem is dependent on the extent to which what a person wants to be corresponds with what that person considers he or she actually is (Hannover, Birkner & Pöhlmann, 2006:119).

Despite the numerous studies on self-esteem there is no agreement on what it actually comprises as a psychological construct, and why it should be important. Those with low self-esteem (in comparison with those with high self-esteem) have a greater need for approval, a more intense desire for close relationships, are fearful of negative evaluation and rejection, display a greater

dependence on others, view relationships less positively, sense relationship threats more acutely and react more emotionally when encountering relationship problems (Leary, 2002).

3.7.2.2 Self-esteem and belongingness

Why is self-esteem such a powerful motive? It does not seem to contribute any obvious benefits to either survival or reproduction, and does not prevent addiction or reduce unwanted pregnancies. Is it really so important? Even though self-esteem is not important in itself it is connected to the important issue of belongingness. Self-esteem should be regarded as the inner measure or meter of belongingness. As the petrol gauge of a motor vehicle indicates the level of fuel so self-esteem indicates the measure of interpersonal connectedness – it is therefore termed the sociometer (Tice & Baumeister, 2001).

3.7.2.3 Characteristics of an unstable self-esteem

Kernis and Goldman (2003) report on their review of recent research regarding the stability and variability of self-esteem in which people with stable self-esteem (levels) were compared to those with unstable self-esteem (levels). They discovered the following about those people with an unstable self-esteem:

- They experience an increase in depressive symptoms when encountering daily stressors
- Their self-feelings fluctuate more in response to positive and negative events
- They employ a self-protective stance when confronted by learning tasks
- They are more acutely aware of aspects threatening self-esteem in uncomfortable interpersonal relationships
- They do not structure their goals self-determinedly
- Their self-concepts are more impoverished.

Self-esteem is a pervasive and familiar experience in interpersonal life because it is intimately involved in the fundamental desire to form and maintain connections with other people (Leary, 2002:130).

3.7.2.4 Self-esteem indicates self-concept evaluation

Self-esteem refers to the individual's evaluation of the self-concept and indicates the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that may be linked to a part or the whole of the self-concept. Self-

esteem could be seen as an indicator of self-worth or self-regard (Beane & Lipka, 1984). West and Turner (2006) agree with Beane and Lipka (1984). They regard self-esteem as an evaluation of self-perception. It may also be perceived as a measure of our self-worth, as it reflects our feelings in respect of our talents, abilities and other salient issues. Self-esteem comprises images we hold of our social roles, the vocabulary we employ with which to describe ourselves, and the way in which others perceive us socially in our various capacities. Self-esteem may fluctuate as significant others present us with the positive and negative images they hold of us.

Underlying this cultural concern for self-esteem is the belief that feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem lead people to do things that are harmful and destructive to themselves and to others; in other words, low self-esteem is one source of evil (Crocker, Lee & Park, 2004:271).

3.7.2.5 The unhealthy pursuit of self-esteem

Crocker, Lee and Park (2004) are of the opinion that the pursuit of self-esteem is, in most instances, detrimental to the individual and his social circle. They regard interpersonal harm, misfortune and destruction as the consequences of the struggle the individual has to prove his self-worth and value. The pursuit of self-esteem increases self-concern – the individual becomes egotistical and neglects nurturing concern for others. In certain cases this unhealthy pursuit – of endeavouring to replace humiliation with self-worth – may be accompanied by aggression and violence because people may become victims of their own negative emotional states. The cost of the pursuit of self-esteem is felt interpersonally as the individual distances himself from others, adopts a superior attitude from which downward social comparisons stem, stereotypes and derogates outgroups, and seeks reassurance from the community. According to Crocker et al. (2004) even the pursuit of good deeds – for the apparent benefit of others – may be tainted by a self-focus. The individual who performs the good deed for the needy might be experiencing feelings of inflated importance towards someone less fortunate than him.

People with a fragile self-esteem are those who pursue self-esteem because the self-esteem is easily threatened by criticism and rejection. A self-esteem that is both high and fragile will convey a sense of superiority, of being better than others and possessed of greater self-worth, but will, at the same time, manifest greater vulnerability because it is dependent on accomplishments. Failure and temporary setbacks have adverse affects on this type of self-esteem. Another type of self-esteem

discussed by Crocker et al. is the exact opposite – those people with a low and fragile self-esteem will be characterised by an unstable self-esteem, and manifest characteristics at the end of the continuum. They will hold negative views of themselves, and employ their social qualities in order to enhance self-worth. They will not become antagonistic, but will be dependent on others and addicted to the approval and reassurance of others (Crocker et al., 2004).

3.7.2.6 Differences in high and low self-esteem

Baumeister (1997a) discusses the conundrum of low self-esteem. He maintains that people with high self-esteem strive to achieve exceptional success and want to enhance themselves, whereas people with low self-esteem seek merely to avoid failure and protect themselves. Those with low self-esteem lack self-knowledge and suffer from helpful positive opinions about themselves. Even though they desire and enjoy success self-doubt is a major stumbling block. Van der Meulen (2001) echoes this sentiment and maintains that, although those with low self-esteem may occasionally encounter experiences of positive self-esteem, they might lack the skills to overcome the predominate negative picture of themselves. According to Van der Meulen low and stable self-esteem may be associated with constant self-dislike and a failure to employ self-protective or self-enhancing strategies.

If people are to have self-esteem there must be a correspondence between their self-concepts and their self-ideals (Rice, 2005:168).

Individual self-esteem actually results from the numerous social relations the individual enjoys, and, even though self-esteem exists in the mind of the individual it may, nevertheless become apparent (Owens and Aronson, 2000). According to Geldard and Geldard (2002) children clearly reveal their individual self-esteems. They state that children with high self-esteem share the following characteristics:

- Their creative capacity is greater
- They assume active roles in social groups more willingly
- They do not spend their time on self-doubt, fear and ambivalent feelings
- They proceed in a realistic and clear-minded way towards their personal goals

- They are not threatened when the competencies of others exceed their own, but maintain their positive stance towards self. They do not agonise over personal appearance and the ways in which they are different from others.

3.7.2.7 Group settings improve self-esteem

Geldard and Geldard (2002) are of the opinion that most children benefit from self-esteem improvement carried out in a group setting because self-esteem is dependent on the ability to interact in socially acceptable ways. The group scenario affords children the opportunity to evaluate themselves positively and realistically through group interaction. If a child's self-esteem needs to be built up he needs to be presented with the opportunity to carry out self-discovery so that the self-concept may become more realistic, strengths and limitations identified and understood, and future goals set.

3.7.2.8 Implicit and explicit self-esteem

Spalding and Hardin (1999) investigated the behavioural consequences of implicit and explicit self-esteem. They view explicit self-esteem as self-evaluations that are introspectively accessible, and implicit self-esteem as associations of the self that are introspectively inaccessible. The interesting finding of this study is the fact that, when the interview focused on self-relevant information, those individuals with low implicit self-esteem displayed greater anxiety than those with high implicit self-esteem. When the interviews were self-irrelevant the levels of anxiety experienced by those with low and those with high implicit self-esteem were similar. What is important about this finding is the fact that those with low implicit self-esteem "endanger" themselves by allowing others to perceive them negatively during interviews.

3.7.2.9 Self-esteem and ethnic identity

As revealed by the next study entire "populations" may display specific similar self-esteem attributes. Umaña-Taylor (2004) examined the correlation between ethnic identity and self-esteem and the role that context played for 1062 adolescents of Mexican-origin who attended three types of schools: a school in which the Latinos were the minority, one in which there was a balance between Latinos and non-Latinos, and in which the Latinos were in the majority. The results

revealed that there was a stronger link between ethnic identity and self-esteem where the Latinos were in the minority, and the link was weakest where they were in the majority.

Compared to white students who did not reveal any significant correlation between ethnic identity and self-esteem it was found that generally speaking, Latinos, in whatever school environment (racially speaking) they found themselves, showed a greater indication that ethnic identity is very important to them. The reason for the stronger ethnic identity amongst Latino adolescents was or is the fact that, regardless of their social context, in the United States they are, culturally speaking, always in the minority. Their ethnic identity becomes important to them in all spheres – whether watching television or going to the supermarket – because they are the foreign minority that longs for ethnic cohesion.

Thus, judging by what was highlighted in the literature discussed in the previous section, it would appear that self-esteem is a “volatile” and emotionally sensitive entity because it awakens the basics of belonging and being assessed as a human being. This calls to mind our identities. The next section will deal in more detail with identity. The adolescent population is central to this study therefore reference will be made to them in the section on identity.

3.8 Identity

By identity I mean the goals, values, and beliefs to which an individual is unequivocally committed, and that give a sense of direction, meaning, and purpose to life. I use the term potential identity elements to refer to any goals, values, and beliefs that are actively considered during identity formation. The task of identity formation involves the processes by which some range of goals, values, and beliefs are identified and evaluated, and by which commitment to particular identity elements are formed and activities toward their implementation begun (Waterman, 2004:209).

3.8.1 Identity stances since 2000

The sections that follow refer predominantly to literature published during and after 2000. The following issues will be addressed: contemporary identity approaches, identity crisis, identity styles, collective identity, gender differences in the experience of identity, motivation and identity formation, and identity management.

3.8.1.1 Structural stages, sociocultural, narrative and psychosocial perspectives

Kroger (2000) identifies four different contemporary approaches to identity, namely, *the structural stages*, and *sociocultural, narrative* and *psychosocial perspectives*. The *structural stages* approach perceives identity as an entity that is dependent on internal structures of meaning making that are subject to change as the individual progresses from childhood to adulthood. Whether or not the content of identity changes the structural developmental models reflect a predictability of meaning making that is attached to each stage of growth. The *sociocultural approach* focuses on the influence which society exerts in providing the individual with identity options. The primary vehicles for affecting identity are significant relationships that employ language and actions as primary media. Stability within identity is thus only possible when social contexts remain constant and the individual receives similar messages from others.

Persons potentially have as many identities as sets of role relations in which they participate. Identities are self-cognitions tied to roles and thus to positions in organised social relations (Stryker, 2000:28).

The *narrative approach* regards language as the primary medium which constructs identity, and explores the individual's story in an attempt to gain insight into the whole person, and to discover the ways in which societal demands affect the individual's personal journey. This approach illuminates an individual's identity development and is not focused upon issues that may be extrapolated to a group of people. The *psychosocial approach* examines identity changes over the lifespan of the individual and strives to determine how the societal role expectations of the individual, impact on the individual's intrapsychic dynamics and functioning as the aging and maturing process continues (Kroger 2000).

3.8.1.2 Identity crisis and identity status

Baumeister (1997a) discusses the concept of *identity crisis* (coined by Erikson) and maintains that it has attained universal status, but is, nevertheless, a contentious issue because it is relative and many people do not ever encounter it. When researchers discovered that an identity crisis is not a "universal phenomenon" they proceeded to formulate four statuses of identity: *identity achieved*, *moratoriums*, *foreclosures* and *identity diffusion*. *Identity achieved* refers to those individuals who experienced an identity crisis but were successful in resolving the crisis, whilst *moratoriums* refer to

those individuals who experienced a crisis but were not successful in resolving the crisis. *Foreclosures* indicate those individuals who assume adult identity patterns without displaying any signs of an identity crisis, because, in most cases, these individuals do not question guiding adult norms and do not seem to rebel. *Foreclosure* refers to those individuals who seem to experience a smooth transition from adolescence to adulthood, but are apparently rigid. This seems to apply especially to males. *Identity diffusion* refers to those adults who do not seem to be interested in acquiring adult identity patterns and resemble the perpetual adolescent. This is the most maladapted of the four categories outlined here.

3.8.1.3 Identity styles

The abovementioned four identity statuses are similar to Berzonsky's (1989, 1990) three styles of self-theorising, namely, the *informational style*, the *normative style*, and the *diffuse-avoidant style*. The *informational style* indicates a tendency to explore, process and evaluate self-relevant information, the *normative style* denotes a tendency to resist change, be more reserved and to adhere to the standards of significant others, while the *diffuse-avoidant style* is indicative of an apathetic attitude towards the future, a lack of long term goals and procrastination.

Philips and Pittman (2007) conducted a study to establish whether it is possible to link identity styles to measures or constructs of psychological well-being, such as self-esteem, hopelessness, delinquent attitudes, educational expectations, and optimism/efficacy. They found that adolescents who displayed a diffuse-avoidant identity style were indeed characterised by "negative" well-being compared to adolescents who employed the information and normative styles. The study also revealed that boys were more prone to display a diffuse-avoidant identity style, while girls are prone to display an informational style. This discrepancy, which favours girls, may be linked to the earlier onset of maturity in girls. Gender is thus a significant factor in the "experience" of identity during early and middle adolescence.

Luyckx, Soenens, Berzonsky, Smits, Goossens, and Vansteenkiste (2007) investigated information-oriented identity processing, identity consolidation, and well-being. They wished to establish the moderating role of autonomy, self-reflection, and self-rumination, and to ascertain

whether the adoption of an information-oriented identity style does indeed assist adolescent well-being and identity consolidation. Their findings highlighted the following:

- When adolescents obtained a high score on the autonomous orientation their use of an information-orientated style was positively attached to identity that linked to commitment and self-esteem. A low score on the autonomous orientation indicated that the information style was linked to poor identity integration. These findings demonstrate that, when adolescents regard themselves as the authors of their own actions and act in keeping with an internalised value system, their exploratory activities allow them an opportunity to consolidate their identity and establish a sense of self-worth.
- When adolescents scored high on self-reflection the use of an information-oriented identity style favoured the formation of identity commitment.
- When adolescents scored highly on self-rumination their employment of the information-oriented style was indicative of depressive symptoms.

3.8.1.4 Collective identity, social identity and group identification

As self is always deeply involved in the social experiences of human beings we must build theoretical bridges to handle the dualities between existential and social selves. Identity becomes one way of unravelling this dilemma: the struggle between autonomy for individuals and interconnectedness for social and cultural groups. More significantly, how does identity mediate between culture and communication? Finally, looking at its consequences, has media technology really resulted in an absence of community for contemporary Western societies (Fitzgerald, 1993:52)?

Klandermans and De Weerd (2000) differentiate between *collective identity*, *social identity* and *group identification*. *Collective identity* or *collective consciousness* is a prerequisite for collective action, and is seen as a process that involves negotiation between members as they engage repeatedly in order to strengthen relationships. *Social identity* is the individual's evaluation of different personal identities that are attached to various social groups or categories, and is established through social comparison. When a person feels positive about a group this adds positive value to the self-concept, but, when a person feels negative about a group or social context, this might compel him to employ identity improvement strategies. *Collective identity* involves ideas shared by members of a particular group, while *social identity* refers to the personal thoughts which a person entertains about his group memberships. No *collective identity* is possible

without individuals who identify with a grouping; therefore *group identification* is seen as the bridge between the individual (with his *social identity*) and *collective identity*.

Sussman, Pokhrel, Ashmore and Brown (2006) conducted a literature review of 44 peer-reviewed quantitative and qualitative data-based peer-reviewed studies carried out on adolescent peer group identification. They identified five general categories that depict lifestyle characteristics with which adolescents associate: *elites*, *athletes*, *academics*, *deviants* and *others*. The *elites* refer to the high status group, the members of which are involved in leading the school and are powerful academics and extracurricular figures. The *athletes* are those with the status of being popular – to an extent they could also belong in the elite section. The *academics* are devoted to academics and similar extracurricular activities. The *deviants*, unlike the elites, athletes or academics, do not care at all about schoolwork or school related activities, and excel in neither. Substance abuse, smoking and risk taking behaviour are prevalent in this group. The deviant population is also characterised by faulty parenting. The last group (the *others*) classifies those adolescents who are not linked to any of the former categories and are labels as follows: *regulars*, *averages*, *nobodies* and *floaters*.

3.8.1.5 Gender differences and identity experiences

Sharp, Coatsworth, Darling, Cumsille and Ranieri (2007) conducted a multinational study to establish gender differences in the self-defining activities and identity experiences of adolescents and emerging adults. They drew on Eudaimonistic identity theory to examine the subjective identity-related experiences of personal expressiveness, flow experiences, and goal-directed behaviour. Within identity theory, identity entails a process of explorative activities, the discovery of identity elements, and the growth of motivation and self-direction that assists the consolidation of a sound personal identity. They discovered that, in the three countries that were involved in the study, gender determined the type of activities that were chosen for self-defining, but that gender did not alter youth identity-related experiences within those activities. Sport, physical activities, the performing and visual arts, and socialising activities comprised 75 percent of the self-defining activities. The highest levels of personal expressiveness were related to creative, prosocial, religious, and social activities. It became clear that, even though a limited number of the population indicated a preference for the religious and altruistic categories, this was, nevertheless, evidently an important activity with which to develop a sense of identity. Females could self-define

themselves through a variety of activities, but males indicated that “self-definition” occurs mainly through sport or physical activities.

3.8.1.6 Intrinsic motivation and identity formation

Waterman (2004) studied the effect of intrinsic motivation on identity formation and distinguished between those individuals who are externally motivated, and have, therefore, (simply) found something to do, and those who have discovered intrinsically who they wanted to be. Those who know who they want to be do not want to waste time overcoming obstacles that steer them away from “who they are”. Those seeking identity activities that could awaken intrinsic motivation need to be exposed to numerous activities that could possibly unlock true intrinsic motivation and allow authentic identity formation. Waterman (2004) views personal expressiveness as a vital element in the definition of “better” identity options.

3.8.1.7 Identity management and facework

West and Turner (2006) are of the opinion that identity management is at the heart of the self, and that it points to the manner in which we conduct ourselves in various scenarios. Identity management involves a particular choice (involving risk and consequence) in respect of communication behaviour on our part – in an attempt to influence the perceptions other people will have of us. (Goffman popularised identity management popular, and it was discussed in the historical psychological overview.) During interpersonal interactions with others we expose our identities and expect to be accepted – this is vital to our self-concept and self-esteem. The particular image of self we offer to others during social encounters is referred to as *face*, and is a fairly automatic process. When others respond favourably to our beliefs, abilities and value system we experience *positive face*, and this refers to our desire to be valued by significant others in our lives. *Negative face* refers to our desire to have others respect our uniqueness and to allow us to make our own decisions. Our identities become threatened when we receive messages that neither support our *positive face* nor our *negative face*.

West and Turner (2006) suggest the following strategies for identity management during conversations:



- Pay attention to timing. It is, at times, better to remain silent rather than to assert a particular identity in order to further a favourable outcome, for example, during a job interview.
- Concentrate on the message. Concentrate on the message of the conversation in which you are participating and do not think ahead to the future.
- Stay culturally sensitive. Adopt the cultural norms of communication relevant to the culture within which you are interacting, as this will give you stature.
- Practice self-monitoring. This involves thinking actively about and controlling your public behaviour and actions, because, if you consider your impact on a conversational setting, you will be regarded as a competent communicator.

According to Spencer-Oatey (2007), who reviewed identity theories and the different perspectives regarding face, this is a complex phenomenon that merits multiple perspectives. Identity theories maintain that face has a number of features that should be held in sound balance, namely, it is a multi-faceted yet unitary concept, it has a cognitive basis yet is composed by social interaction, and it characterises individuals and collectives yet is relevant to interpersonal relations.

3.8.1.8 Identity summary

Table 3.6 presents a summary of the main ideas about identity that were discussed in this section.

Table 3.6: A summary of identity aspects

Aspect	See:
Identity reveals the goals, values, and beliefs that steer our lives and provide meaning.	3.8
We have potentially as many identities as the role relations in which we participate.	3.8.1.1
Our cultures “dictate” our experience of identity.	3.8.1.1
We might not experience an identity crisis, but we may display one of four identity statuses, such as: <i>identity achieved</i> , <i>moratoriums</i> , <i>foreclosures</i> and <i>identity diffusion</i> .	3.8.1.2
Gender is a significant identity factor in the “experience” of identity during early and middle adolescence because gender determines how we will engage in self-definition.	3.8.1.3 & 3.8.1.5
When we are given freedom as adolescents to take responsibility for our own actions we are able to explore and consolidate our identity and establish healthy self-regard.	3.8.1.3
When we identify with a grouping we create group identification.	3.8.1.4
Our identities become threatened when we receive information that neither supports our positive face nor our negative face.	3.8.1.7

The population that is the focus of this study, namely early adolescents, will now be discussed. Cognisance will be taken of the aspects such as first encounters, developmental goals, social roles, the benefits of conflict-resolution and problem-solving skills, the effect of the adolescent workplace, significant others, body modification, the self-concept and delinquency, smoking and parental involvement.

3.9 Adolescence and the adolescent self

Most experts agree that adolescence may be divided into two periods, namely, early adolescence starting at the age of 12 or 13, and late adolescence which starts at the age of 16. During early adolescence physical changes, educational demands and new social expectations are paramount, while during the late adolescent years a unique self may be developed, as well as a plan to fit into the adult culture (Bee & Boyd, 2002).

3.9.1 Increased self-consciousness and first encounters

The task of adolescence is seen as one of securing a firm identity and avoiding identity diffusion (Burns, 1979:173).

Adolescence is a time that is accompanied by numerous emotional upheavals and strange physiological “developments”, which could colour this period in the life of individual negatively. It is also a time of “wonderful” firsts, such as the first kiss, the first sexual encounter, the first cigarette and the first experience of emotional desperation that leads to the conviction that no-one else has ever hurt so deeply (Siegel & Shaughnessy, 1995).

According to Finkenaur et al. (2002) early adolescence is a period that is characterised by heightened self-consciousness and increased social comparison that compels early adolescents to evaluate their self and identity. Often adolescents set themselves unattainable goals and this could transform this period into a roller-coaster experience. Help from significant others in their lives could assist adolescents to distinguish between their ideal and their real selves.

The stability of the self is threatened and identity becomes less stable as the child enters early adolescence. During this period the adolescent may receive conflicting images about him as various opinions are offered by significant others and “malicious” others. In order to elicit favourable

opinions, adolescents become skilled at impression management and self-presentation. This period sees an increase in self-consciousness, introspection, inner conflict, stressful insecurities and disorientation. Azmitia (2002) maintains that two developmental shifts assist the early adolescent to rethink and rework their self-systems, firstly, the growth of abstract cognitive skills and perception that allows adolescents to view their self-theories in the light of the contradictions that stem from personal opinion and social opinion, and, secondly, the growth in comfortable intimate relationships that make self-exploration with an equal possible (Brinthaupt & Lipka, 2002).

3.9.2 Developmental goals

Jersild (1978) maintains that the adolescent developmental goals comprise the following: physical maturity, progression towards mental and emotional maturity, finding the self, and freedom from parents. Important issues in the lives of adolescents are faith, the search for meaning, choice, personal goals and hope. Certain adolescents adopt a religious belief system to which to adhere. It might even simply be that life is worth living and the search for meaning is linked to the mere fact of being alive. During this time the adolescent is faced with many choices and also starts to experience firsthand that there are inevitable consequences to the choices made. All the aforementioned issues assist the individual to determine his personal goals in a hopeful way. Adolescence is, for most, a period of self-imposed delay of reward because the studies or training in which they are involved are geared towards the future when one day they will reap the benefit of hard work. Those who are able to remain hopeful succeed in staying focused, undergo the necessary training and eventually establish themselves, whereas those who are not hopeful take short cuts and live for the moment.

3.9.3 Social roles and the creation of multiple selves

Adolescence is a phase in which a sense of a psychological self as a specific person embedded in time and relationships is established (Keller, Fuxi, F. & Ge, 2004:267).

Harter (1997) states that adolescence is a time during which the adolescent needs to create multiple selves that comply with each of the newly acquired social roles (these social roles represent themselves). The adolescent may, for example, display a different self to parents, friends and romantic partners. Whilst the adolescent is learning to present these different selves he might become concerned about which “self” is the “true me”, especially if there is a measure of

contradiction between these selves. If a child is reared by over-involved parents or caregivers this will result in a compliant child, and, if the parental involvement does not provide the adolescent with a greater sense of autonomy, the compliant child, now the compliant adolescent, will struggle greatly to locate the “true self”. On the other hand Lines (2002) states that an unstable family structure with blurred boundaries and an over-reliance on the peer sub-culture might predispose an adolescent to confusion, and the allure of delinquency might become too strong to resist.

3.9.4 Conflict-resolution and problem-solving benefit the adolescent self-concept

Hay, Byrne, and Butler (2000) report on their research that evaluated a conflict-resolution and problem-solving programme known as ABLE – this programme used the eleven self-domains of Marsh’s (1990) SDQ-II – intended to enhance the self-concepts of adolescents. They found that teaching conflict-resolution and problem-solving skills was beneficial to the self-concepts of adolescents, because the adolescents made significant improvement with regards to the general self-concept, physical appearance self-concept, and total self-concept.

It is believed that there are major benefits for adolescents (other than the financial aspect) to be employed outside their high school environment because the acquisition of social skill that comes about in this work environment will stand the adolescent in good stead. The research findings in the next section appear to refute certain lofty ideals society frequently embraces with regard to adolescent employment.

3.9.5 The adolescent and the work place

Largie, Field, Hernandez-Reif, Sanders and Diego (2001) conducted a study to ascertain the effect of employment on the adolescent high school population. They discovered that it was not as beneficial as generally believed as their results revealed that employment is associated with depression, inferior relationships, academic under-achievement and smoking.

Skorikov and Vondracek (2007) conducted a longitudinal study with 234 adolescents 14.8 years of age in order to determine whether positive career orientation would serve as an inhibitor of adolescent problem behaviour. Their results pointed overall to the fact that it is indeed beneficial to expose adolescents to credible “images” of themselves in the future, because this vision will inhibit

the development of problem behaviour. However, according to Skorikov and Vondracek (2007), the type of career orientation to which adolescents are exposed is vitally important, and, to them, positive career orientation entails “a combination of career and school attitudes that incorporate favourable perceptions of one’s ability to express oneself in the world of work through a successful occupational career. These attitudes include valuing work as a means of self-actualisation, perceiving few barriers to pursuing an occupational career, and maintaining a positive attitude toward school (2007:133).”

Significant others surely also play a role in shaping the adolescent and his future orientation. The next section and its sub-sections will consider the effect of significant others on the emotional stability and stress levels of the adolescent, parenting and dating violence, and the value of friendships.

3.9.6 Adolescents and significant others

3.9.6.1 The interplay of parents, peers and gender on adolescent emotional stability

Hay and Ashman (2003) conducted a study in order to establish the interplay of parents, peers and gender on the development of the emotional stability and general self-concept of adolescents. They found that the variables did indeed display an interactive relationship. Their report made the following suggestions:

- The prominence of physical appearance for the adolescent’s sense of self-worth needs to be corrected with interventions that expose unrealistic expectations of male and female attractiveness and body shape.
- The influence peers exert on the emotional stability of adolescents must not to be overlooked, therefore school curricula need to make provision for programmes that could bring about a change in gender role expectations and peer communication skills.
- The parents of adolescents need assistance during this transition period and counselling services to “at risk” adolescents and their parents need to be more freely available.
- An interesting aspect of this study was the finding that the self-concepts of male adolescents were more closely connected to parent relationships than those of females. In respect of peer relationships it was established that peers exerted a greater influence on emotional

stability than did parental relationships, and that males and females placed a similar value on the significance of their peers.

3.9.6.2 Family support and adolescent stress levels

Wilburn and Smith (2005) report on a study in which they investigated the phenomenological relationship between negative stress, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation in late adolescents. Significant findings include the following: When adolescents experience the stressful reality that family support is deficient self-esteem becomes significantly lower, stress levels become higher as does the risk of suicide. Family support is thus crucial in combating suicidal thoughts. According to Dusek and McIntyre (2003) parents do not make use of one child-rearing style only, but those parents who make predominant use of the authoritative style have a more favourable impact on the self-views and self-esteem of the adolescent. Research suggests that the authoritative style leads to better school achievement and that adolescents exposed to this child-rearing style cope better with stress.

3.9.6.3 Parenting processes, self-esteem and dating violence

Pflieger and Vazsonyi (2006) investigated the connection between (maternal) parenting processes and dating violence, and the mediating role of self-esteem in adolescents from low and high socio-economic backgrounds. They found that self-esteem plays a unique mediating role between maternal parenting processes and dating violence behaviours for those adolescents from the lower socio-economic group, and that self-esteem had a definite effect on the dating violence beliefs of those from the more fortunate areas. They conclude by stating that parents are the teachers of interpersonal competencies, and, if they neglect this duty, adolescents will resort to learning by themselves and turn to the peer group. This, in turn, will expose them to the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of dating violence.

3.9.6.4 The value of adolescent friendships and the role of self-esteem

Keller et al. (2004) regard self and relationships from a cognitive developmental view and state that friendships help the adolescent to come to terms with the psychological complexities of the self and society. Close relationships aid the adolescent in learning about his personality, feelings and worldviews, and the differences and similarities between self and others. During this period the adolescent strives to align his “world” with that of significant others because self-worth depends on the way others view the adolescent self. During this period the adolescent is willing to sacrifice obedience to parents in order to be esteemed by peers.

According to Azmitia (2002) adolescents with low self-esteem seem to have lower quality friendships than do high self-esteem adolescents, because the former gravitate towards friendships that will confirm their low self-esteem and allow them to maintain this preferred negative view. When a friend injures or hurts a fellow low self-esteem friend the injured party usually engages in self-blame and is willing to feel that the hurt was deserved. If damage occurs in the friendships of high self-esteem adolescents the high self-esteem adolescent is able to weigh the consequences and distance the incident from the personal self.

Adolescents may also use their bodies to give expression to certain aspects related to self-esteem. The next section provides insight into a specific population of adolescents and their body modification traits.

3.9.7 Self-esteem and body modification

Anderson (2002) studied body piercing, tattooing, self-esteem and body investment in adolescent girls and found that anger, depression and negative feelings towards the body were significant predictors of body piercing and tattooing. It appears that self-esteem deficits in combination with negative emotions play a significant role in convincing adolescent girls to engage in some form of body modification that could, in some sense, also be seen as self-mutilation.

3.9.8 Positive and negative self-concepts and delinquency

Levy (1997) conducted a study to determine the self-evaluations of Australian adolescents regarding delinquent behaviours. He used the Self-Report Delinquency Scale. In his discussion he maintains that peer state reinforcement could oppose the adult state or the parental demands and may propel adolescents to become delinquent. Findings indicate that a more positive self-concept (adult state) could be linked to less delinquent engagements; while a negative self-concept (peer state) points to a greater involvement in delinquency.

3.9.9 Adolescent smoking and the need for appropriate restrictions

Wiltshire, Amos, Haw and McNeill (2005) conducted a study to ascertain which aspects impact on mid-to-late adolescence smoking because anti-smoking campaigns do not target these age groups. They found that adolescents regarded smoking as a valuable form of stress relief, and an important means of identity in familiar and in foreign contexts. These social benefits reinforced and increased smoking. When smoking restrictions were in place smoking among adolescents was somehow contained and managed better. This made Wiltshire et al. (2005) realise that adolescent smoking may be reduced with appropriate restrictions and prevention programmes aimed at this age group where smoking starts.

3.9.10 The value of a positive adolescent self-concept

According to Ybrandt (2007) a positive self-concept is the most important factor for adjustment and as a safeguard against typical problem behaviours (internalised or externalised). Females with a negative self-concept are at risk of internalising problems, and self-control is really relevant only to boys when they externalise behaviour. Adolescent well-being may be promoted by ensuring positive self-concept development in the various adolescent psychosocial contexts as well as in terms of child-rearing practices, educational scenarios, peer groups and relaxation activities.

3.9.11 Parental involvement, behavioural conduct and social acceptance

Parental warmth, inductive discipline, nonpunitive punishment, and consistency with regards to child rearing lead to positive developmental outcomes in children. Authoritative parenting and sensible monitoring of the adolescent benefit adolescent competence and adjustments in various domains in particular. Apart from parental involvement in whatever form problem behaviour may be



predicted by behavioural conduct and social acceptance – two components of the self-concept. Behavioural conduct refers to the extent to which children approve of their own behaviour, make the correct choices and avoid getting into trouble. Social acceptance in the peer group correlates positively with social misconduct and smoking (Raboteg-Šarić, Rijavec & Brajša-Žganec, 2001).

The previous section on adolescence and the adolescent self has attempted to portray this period and its role players as richly and as “multi-facetedly” as possible within the scope of six pages. Despite the richness of the divergent aspects and the recent research statements described here – and all that would secure a healthy adolescent – it is a matter for concern that the adolescent could be the recipient of all the parental warmth and societal assistance imaginable but, nevertheless, an internal dislike for self could derail and delay healthy development. A summary of the adolescent section will now follow.

3.9.12 Summary of issues pertaining to adolescence and the adolescent self

Table 3.7 presents a summary of the issues that were discussed in the adolescent section.

Table 3.7: A summary of aspects pertaining to the adolescent

Aspect	See:
Early adolescence is a time of physical changes, educational demands and new social expectations. During this period the adolescent discovers that he is uniquely embedded in time and relationships.	3.9
Self-consciousness, introspection, inner conflict, stressful insecurities and disorientation become real experiences, and social comparison compels adolescents to evaluate their self and identity.	3.9.1
It is also a time of “wonderful” firsts such as the first kiss, the first sexual encounter, the first cigarette and the first experience of emotional desperation.	3.9.1
The adolescent needs to create multiple selves that comply with each of the newly acquired social roles that present themselves. Whilst the adolescent is learning to present different selves he might become concerned about which “self” is the “true me”.	3.9.3
It is a time to secure a firm identity and avoid identity diffusion. One way of assisting adolescents would be to teach them conflict-resolution and problem-solving skills. Another way would be to expose adolescents to credible “images” of themselves in the future, because that vision would inhibit the development of problem behaviour.	3.9.4
Peers exert a greater influence on emotional stability than parental relationships, and friendships help the adolescent to come to terms with the psychological complexities of the self and society.	3.9.6.1
Adolescents with low self-esteem seem to have lower quality friendships than do high self-	3.9.6.4



esteem adolescents, because the former gravitate towards friendships that will confirm their low self-esteem and allow them to maintain this preferred negative view. Family support is thus crucial in combating suicidal thoughts.	
It would appear that a positive adolescent self-concept is a buffer against delinquency.	3.9.10

Before the conclusion of this chapter certain issues highlighted in the chapter which could shed light on data analysis aspects will be discussed. The next section reveals three aspects that could be considered in order to enrich the process of data analysis.

3.10 Literature issues to consider for data analysis

In light of the above chapter the researcher became more aware of the significant role of culture, the differences in self-definition attached to gender, and the roles of media and technology in the post-modern era. A brief explanation and references follow below:

- The population that will be investigated in the study is from a particular faith-based culture, and this “boundary” and its language could have an impact on self and identity in a peculiar way. This concern has arisen from the statement of Baumeister’s (1997a) to the effect that the experience of self is not universal, but dependent on history and culture. (See 3.2.1)
- The researcher posed the question: Will there also be a *significant* difference between the self-descriptions of the boys and of the girls? This question is in response to the fact that, as was revealed in the literature and other research findings (See 3.5.4 and 3.8.1.5) gender does impact on the experience of self and this, in turn, impacts on self-definition.
- The researcher intends to investigate the role played by the media and technology in the lives of these adolescents. Will this population reveal significant postmodern characteristics as outlined by Gergen (1996) and Baumeister (1997)? (See 3.2.8)

3.11 Critical reflection

3.11.1 Introduction

We are “kaleidoscopic” cultural beings shaped by complex social situations and possibly bound by roles others imposed on us when we were still infants and when we had no control over what happened to the self. However as these “kaleidoscopic” beings we strive to become who we are meant to be. As we mature we build and maintain self-concepts (with positive and negative selves)

that could determine our futures. It is only when we are intrinsically motivated and succeed in discovering whom we truly want to be that we truly engage our unique identities.

Living a real life with everything that is happening to us is not easy because the beauty of mankind is accompanied by bittersweet moments. The material covered about self in this chapter is daunting in its complexity and its richness. The key figures that contributed throughout the ages to the development of self and self-concept seem so prominent and remote and the post-modern vantage point so insignificant – yet so privileged.

This chapter covered the following:

- How self has been regarded from the classical period to the post-modern present (3.2 – 3.8);
- Epistemological stances towards the self (3.3);
- “Self” perspectives (3.5.);
- Self-concept (3.6);
- Self-esteem (3.7);
- Identity (3.8);
- Current reflections that pertain to the adolescent (3.9).

This list of issues discussed reveals numerous aspects and any attempt to evaluate each one adequately would simply render yet another list of issues. The researcher will highlight those issues only which he found personally meaningful – or novel – and focus primarily on the self-concept and its related aspects of self-esteem and identity.

It has been wonderful – as a student – to discover a scholar who lights up the understanding and whose writing is an absolute pleasure to read. The “self” author that stood out for me in my readings is Baumeister. His explanation of the burden of self-hood, the executive function of the self and ego-depletion enlarged my appreciation for the self in each one of us. Baumeister put into words something I felt within. I was made aware of the vulnerability of self and our responsibility not to “overload” the self because it is then that the negative self could become dominant.



The epistemological arena revealed:

- Self is lived mainly in the social sphere and it is relational. (See: 3.3.2 & 3.3.3)
- Self has deep unconscious issues over which it often has no control (See: 3.3.4)
- Self may be conditioned or participate willingly in creating a self-change. (See: 3.3.6)
- Self is admirable and possesses self-actualising qualities that allow personal reconstruction (see: 3.3.8 & 3.3.9).

I find myself drawn to an epistemological stance that could perceive self partially in the social sphere and partially as actualising itself in Rogerian terms. The deep unconscious issues made popular by Freud I find interesting but uncomfortable, because it would seem that self is rendered helpless (at least before psychotherapy). I cannot reconcile myself with pure behaviouristic ideals, but I do agree with Bandura that self is able to engage willingly in change when the desired outcome seems worth the effort – compared to the inferior present self-state.

I enjoy the thinking of Rogers and his optimistic view of mankind or self and appreciate what he stood for, except for the aspect of spirituality. As a result of my particular spiritual orientation I believe that we should keep in mind that wonderful things do still happen with which we had nothing to do. After I had read about Rogers' life and his view of mankind I felt energised, but puzzled, because to me (in Rogerian terms) self appeared so wonderful but too self-reliant. I was of the opinion that his stance needed the extra ingredient of spirituality – in whatever positive form it comes. As an artist and as an art teacher I want to state that the exposure to the arts sometimes brings about a magical moment that I am able to liken to a spiritual encounter. I want to believe that self is elevated or enriched or possibly changed – even if only temporarily. Our words or our hands cannot grasp these colourful encounters with the sublime, but, to me, they are simply spirit lifters – if nothing else.

3.11.2 The self-concept

We will now consider the self-concept. This term originated in the twentieth century and there exist the following viewpoints about the self-concept:

- It secures inner consistency (3.6.2.1);

- It is a description of the perceived self (3.6.2.2);
- It is both a structure and a process (3.6.2.3);
- It is multidimensional (3.6.2.4);
- It is shaped by others (3.6.2.7);
- It is both stable and variable (3.6.4);
- The self-concept has domains with content (3.6.5).

The views about the self-concept that I find both intriguing and troublesome because they deviate (uncomfortably) from the assumption that the self-concept is a fairly stable entity are related to self-categorisation theory (the psychological group is viewed as the major fashioning agent of the self-concept) and the status dynamic approach (self-concept is regarded as an indicator of particular statuses). As suggested by Abrams and Hogg (2004) self-categorisation theory removes the stability which we would seek in relationships because, in terms of this theory, each new group interaction would leave the self-concept changed and the person different. The status dynamic approach sees the self-concept as a summary of the status or self-assigned statuses of the person and these statuses determine the person's behaviour. For adults this approach may sound meaningful, but, unfortunately, as suggested by Bergner and Holmes (2007), during infancy we are in the care of others who determine our status. I tend to agree with Bergner and Holmes (2007).

3.11.3 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the next component of self that was considered. Attributes of the self-esteem in a condensed version include the following:

- Low self-esteem predisposes us to a greater need for approval and high self-esteem propels us to strive for exceptional success (3.7.2.1 & 3.7.2.6).
- Self-esteem reveals the intensity of our desire to be in the company of others and group interaction seems beneficial for the building of self-esteem (3.7.2.2).
- Self-esteem indicates our level of self-appreciation and comprises images we hold of our social roles. Self-esteem fluctuates as others convey their ideas about how they experience us (3.7.2.4).

The view by Crocker et al. (2004) that the pursuit of self-esteem is, in most cases, detrimental to the individual and to his social circle I find somewhat harsh and one-sided (see: 3.7.2.5). In my opinion Crocker et al. (2004) view the pursuit of self-esteem as too negative an endeavour, and portray self as an extremely negative entity, because, according to their view, even good deeds are merely opportunities for a greater focus on the self. They seem to disregard the fact that self-esteem causes the self to be valued positively by others and that this drives the self towards others.

3.11.4 Identity

Identity is the last self-aspect that was considered. Concluding thoughts about this aspect include issues such as:

- Identity reveals our goals, values and guiding beliefs (3.8).
- The number of our social roles determines the possible range of identities we may attach to ourselves (3.8.1.1)
- Our gender is a determining factor in the expression of our identity (3.8.1.3 & 3.8.1.5)

The concept “identity crisis” does not seem as prevalent as we might choose to believe. Identity statuses such as *identity achieved*, *moratoriums*, *foreclosures* and *identity diffusion* have gained recognition and describe different levels of “identity achievement”.

How do I prefer to see self? I see myself essentially as a Rogerian because I wish to believe that self is really as beautiful as Rogers describes it, but, as result of this chapter, I have become more cautious in my estimation of the self within (even though I am still convinced that the self-concept may be changed). The reason for this caution is that self also possesses elements that could be harmful to self and others. These elements are usually displayed within the social sphere.

3.11.5 Concluding reflective comment

Now that I have stated my “negative” concern I want to add that my study (as a whole) and the data collection process, in particular, fit very well into the framework of positive psychology – as revealed in chapter one. Furthermore, because of my arts-based methodology, my personality and my spiritual orientation, I would like to change the “self-sufficiency” image of the self, as promoted



by Rogers, for the duration of this study. I want us to perceive self as perhaps not as powerfully “self-sufficient” and the self-actualising power of self as perhaps not the only force at work. Maybe we need to regard the self as more impressionable, receptive and needy. Self, in my opinion, may be surprised by the inspirational aspects of the arts processes, and is able, I believe, to assimilate new ideas about itself more willingly during an arts process, because the message that self is acceptable and filled with potential comes with an unexpected colourful touch of the sublime.