

## Unit Two

### Communication and the Self

#### Communicating Self-Esteem

#### Objectives

Self-esteem is one of the primary components of self-concept. Self-esteem deals with emotions (how we feel about ourselves), so interactions with other people involving our self-esteem can be “charged” events. In this unit, students should:

- notice the way that Kathy’s expressions of feelings for herself influence the ways she responds to gender expectations.
- notice the way that Kathy’s expressions of feelings for herself influence the ways she responds to conflict.
- note that when her friend challenges Kathy’s decision about changing her name, the conflict that emerges could damage Kathy’s self-esteem. Does it?

#### Review

Self-esteem refers to the way you feel about yourself—how much you like yourself, how valuable a person you think you are, and how competent you think you are. Your feelings and attitudes about yourself reflect the value you place on yourself. Your self-esteem can reflect your daily view of yourself.

#### Video

Use the same scene as in Unit 1, but this time focus on self-esteem. Kathy’s self-esteem appears to be strong and positive. Her responses to her friends indicate that she knows who she is and doesn’t expect that to change if she decides to take her husband’s name after marriage. The conversation raises issues about her decision and challenges some of her attitudes, beliefs, and values about identity work.

#### Observations

- At a number of points, one of Kathy’s male friends “makes fun” of her married name (Fudd). How does she respond to his inferences? Does her response support her self-esteem? How so?

She virtually ignores him and his comments. This is a way to avoid putting emphasis on or giving attention to “impolite” talk. Given the fact that “Fudd” is a name associated with a cartoon character (that is, from one perspective, it is a “funny” name and claiming that it isn’t won’t do much good), ignoring the comments is probably more supportive of self-esteem than is confronting the “kidder.” However, if Kathy wanted to be more assertive, she could tell her friend that his comments are hurtful, given that she has chosen to take the name as her own. Such straight talk might cause him to stop and would certainly further support her self-esteem.

- Kathy's friend is very emphatic over the seriousness of the challenge to Kathy's identity posed by the proposed name change. How does Kathy's response treat the perceived threat?

Kathy points out that she is very conscious of both her station in life and the way that causes her to feel (she's not a star, she's a school teacher, but she has a plan and she knows how these matters affect her).

### **Next Step**

- Either in a small group discussion, or in a thought paper, discuss the implications to self-esteem brought about by traditions surrounding names after marriage. List the "standard" American options and consider the implications to both parties in the union.

For example, the husband could take the wife's last name; they could both keep their last names and hyphenate them—using both their last names, he could lead with hers (Tom Rabino-Fudd), or she with his (Kathy Fudd-Rabino). If they use both last names, in the same order and hyphenated, this might signify a sense of egalitarian equality in their relation and show respect for both individuals as they enter the union.

- Investigate and describe the post-marriage naming traditions that are different than the "standard" American mode in which the woman keeps her "given" name and changes her "family" name.

For example, in many Latin cultural groups, females have combined their mother's maiden name with their father's last name as their last name. After marrying, the woman might use this hyphenated name as her maiden name, placing it between her first name and her new husband's last name.

## Quiz

1. Self-esteem is
  - a. our mental picture of ourselves or our social identity.
  - b. made up of beliefs that prevent you from building meaningful relationships.
  - c. the human ability to think about what we're doing while we're doing it.
  - d. the picture you have of yourself in a particular situation.
  - e. **None of the above.**
  
2. In American culture, high self-esteem is associated with the fulfillment of qualities ascribed to gender (e.g., independence for men, connectedness for women).
  - a. **true**
  - b. false
  
3. Nurturing people
  - a. are to be avoided, as they can damage your self-esteem.
  - b. **are especially helpful at times when your self-esteem is damaged.**
  - c. will engage in "pity parties" that will help you alter negative behaviors.
  - d. All of the above.

## Web

On the Valdosta State University Web site, Dr. William Huitt and others feature a number of topics related to their interests in educational psychology:

<http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/edpsyindx.html>

On the following page, self-esteem and self-concept are defined and discussed. Additional references are provided:

<http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/self.html>

## Questions for Further Discussion

- What part does your family play in helping you develop a positive self-esteem?
- How do you express your self-esteem in positive ways? In negative ways?

## Topics for Writing

- Write a personal essay describing your self-concept versus your self-esteem.
- Describe, in writing, a person whose self-esteem has helped them achieve success. Talk about the ways this is evident.