

employment. Although sometimes presented as a revival of “entrepreneurial spirit,” an increase in small-business activity may actually reflect the disappearance of “good” corporate or public-sector jobs for highly skilled, formerly salaried employees or for semiskilled or unskilled wage earners. During periods of high unemployment and underemployment, a spike in self-employment is likely to occur. In the 1990s, for example, Canada led the industrial nations in a “shift to self-employment” (with self-employment accounting for 18% of all employment by 1998) over a period in which unemployment and underemployment reached near-record levels (Lowe 2000).

Three additional empirical facts about self-employment deserve to be highlighted. First, self-employment is highest among those who are the most and the least educated, with the well educated typically receiving above-average earnings and the poorly educated below-average earnings, relative to employed workers. Second, the gender gap in earnings is greater between self-employed men and women than it is between their employed counterparts. And finally, the self-employed tend to put in longer hours for their earnings than do the employed, raising quality of life concerns that are magnified by their need to independently finance—or go without—the “benefits” (e.g., pensions, health care insurance, etc.) that are received by many employed workers.

At the ideological level, the persistence of self-employment (and small business in general) in the developed capitalist countries contributes significantly to obscuring the central dynamic of modern capitalism: the division, interdependence, and conflict between capital and wage labor. The self-employed, in Marxist terms, constitute a “petty bourgeoisie” within a global economy whose productive assets are decisively concentrated in the hands of several hundred huge transnational corporations that employ a tiny fraction of the world’s workforce. As such, self-employed persons are compelled to “exploit themselves” or face economic ruin. At the same time, their atomized existence, precarious competitive position, and sometime dependence on wage labor predispose them to embrace the ideological nostrums of “free enterprise” and “self-responsibility” to an extreme degree, to view the labor movement with suspicion or outright hostility, and to oppose more generous welfare-state policies.

In 2005 the self-employed constituted 34.9, 35.7, and 45.8 percent of the labor force in Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey, respectively. In the countries of the global South, the destruction of traditional subsistence agriculture and “independent commodity production” by export-led, neoliberal development has produced a new class of impoverished urban “entrepreneurs” struggling to survive with the most meager of economic assets. This phenomenon, which has taken on massive proportions in the bar-

rios and shantytowns surrounding major Latin American cities, is a striking reminder that “self-employment” is very often a manifestation of chronic unemployment and underemployment, of which about one-third of the global labor force (1 billion people) were the victims in the year 2000.

SEE ALSO *Bourgeoisie, Petty; Education, USA; Employment; Globalization, Social and Economic Aspects of; Middle Class*

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SELF-ENHANCEMENT

Self-enhancement refers to an unduly inflated self-image and to the processes that make it so. As a process, self-enhancement is a motivated attempt to seek and emphasize positive feedback and to shield the self from negative feedback (where the shielding is more properly termed *self-protection*). Successful performance, social victories, or acceptance by others can be selectively recalled or embellished in memory, whereas failures, social defeats, or rejections can be reinterpreted, forgotten, or outright rejected. This operation of motivated self-enhancement is constrained by the motive of self-verification, which calls for the construction and maintenance of a stable self-image. The conflict between these two motives is apparent only when self-esteem is low. High self-esteem enables thoughts that are simultaneously self-enhancing and self-verifying. Hence, the process of self-enhancement can provide a buffer against depression (Bernichon, Cook, and Brown 2003).

Some processes of self-enhancement are conscious and strategic. Optimistic predictions regarding future events, such as a high perceived probability of succeeding at a job or a low perceived probability of contracting a dreaded disease, can be self-enhancing. When people care more about the hit rate of their predictions than about the false positive rate, self-enhancement may be the expression of rational decision utilities. These utilities are mal-

leable: Predictions become more modest when people are accountable to others or when their actual outcomes are soon to be revealed. Mood states and the task difficulty also moderate predictions, such that a positive mood heightens self-enhancement and a difficult task lowers it.

Other processes are implicit or even unconscious. People with positive self-images automatically associate their own attributes with positive feelings and approach behavior. For example, the initials of one's own name and the date of one's birth come to be seen as highly desirable through repeated exposure. As a consequence, people like others who share these attributes, however irrelevant they might be for social behavior. When relocating, for example, people prefer to move to states whose names begin with the same letter as their own.

The prevalence of self-enhancement has spawned studies on stable individual differences. As a trait construct, self-enhancement is derivative because it is assessed as a discrepancy between the positivity of a person's self-image and some index of what the person is "really like." The idiographic approach is to ask people how they see themselves relative to the average person. This approach is problematic because many people who claim to be better than average may actually be better. The alternative approach is nomothetic in that it uses the discrepancy between a self-judgment and the aggregate judgment made by observers as a measure of self-enhancement. This method seeks to solve the criterion problem by statistical aggregation over observer judgments, assuming that observers are on average unbiased (Krueger 1998).

The methodological debate over how best to capture individual differences is bound up with the substantive question of whether self-enhancement is beneficial or detrimental to a person's well-being. This question remains open because the answer strongly depends on the method used. Idiographic studies suggest adaptive advantages, whereas nomothetic studies suggest that self-enhancers are narcissistic and disliked.

SEE ALSO *Self-Affirmation Theory; Self-Serving Bias; Self-Verification*

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SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is one of the most frequently studied constructs in the social sciences. Popular culture and public policy discussions also make frequent reference to self-esteem. Yet, despite its familiarity and wide usage, there is no generally accepted definition of self-esteem among social scientists. The earliest use of the term was by philosopher/psychologist William James in what became an influential chapter, "The Consciousness of Self," in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). James included self-esteem in a group of "self-feelings" that emerge from the conscious awareness of self in relation to others. He offered two definitions of self-esteem that, in their inconsistency, typify the confusion and disagreement associated with the term. In the best-known of James's definitions, self-esteem is "determined by the ratio of our actualities to our supposed potentialities; a fraction of which our pretensions are the denominator and the numerator our success: thus, Self-esteem = Success / Pretensions" (p. 310). Alternatively, according to James, self-esteem is "a certain average tone of self-feeling which each one of us carries about with him, and which is independent of the objective reasons we may have for satisfaction or discontent" (p. 306). These seemingly incompatible definitions highlight a valid and important distinction between self-esteem that is contingent on circumstances and self-esteem that transcends them.

Most of the empirical research on self-esteem in the social sciences works from definitions similar to James's "average tone of self-feeling." The best-known of these is offered by the sociologist Morris Rosenberg in his *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*, where self-esteem is defined as "a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self" (1965, p. 15). The brief self-report measure that Rosenberg developed for his research on adolescents, the Self-Esteem Scale, is the most widely used measure of self-esteem in social science research. In another influential book, *The Antecedents of Self-Esteem*, Stanley Coopersmith offered a similar conceptualization of self-esteem as "the evaluation the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself" (1967, p. 4). Both Rosenberg and Coopersmith operate from the assumption that people's attitude toward or customary evaluation of self underlies their overall sense of self-worth. The definitions offered in these two classic works and assumed by much of the empirical work on self-esteem describe a particular form of self-esteem that is traitlike, consistent across time and situations, and global, concerned with all aspects of the self. This definition also corresponds well to usage of the term in popular culture and public policy settings.

Two alternative conceptualizations of self-esteem depart from these classic definitions by dropping the