**Self-Acceptance and Self-Esteem**

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Before we discuss acceptance of others, we need to examine ***self-acceptance,*** you know, accepting yourself for who you are and what you’re all about. ***Self-esteem***, as it relates to culture, enables you to perceive yourself and others as important and valuable people. You won’t be uncomfortable sharing with others how you feel about them, and you’ll be interested in pursuing lasting and meaningful relationships with people. I suspect that you’ll also feel equal to others; meaning you won’t feel culturally or personally superior or inferior to others. Even if you perceive differences in abilities, you won’t attribute the differences to race. This means you’re a mature individual. Period.

# The Importance of Belonging

Everybody has a need to ***belong***; to simply and innocently belong. It was John Donne who said, “No man is an island, entire of itself.” All human beings have a need to belong. I think belongingness is biologically based, meaning we have an instinct to belong to groups. The reason it’s so important is because it gives us recognition, security, an identity, and, I suppose, friendship. I feel incomplete as a human being if I don’t belong to something or other. Belonging is also about being a part of a larger community of people who acknowledge, accept, and respect you and your contributions to their group.

We can start by agreeing we all belong to our society. You want to reduce it further? All right, you belong to your family of origin

Do me a favor and think about the different groups you belong to. If you work, you belong to your work group, department, or the organization. If you’re a college student you belong to the undergraduate or graduate club. And if you’ve got a circle of friends, you belong to this group. I’m sure you belong to a few groups. ***Belonging*** usually begins with your immediate family, followed by your extended family, and ending with your community, state, country and well, let’ see now, your world.

# Belonging to Groups

Let’s discuss groups. Groups didn’t accidentally surface one day in our culture for no reason. The phenomenon of groups resulted from man’s desire to join others interested in achieving a common goal. How’s that sound? Human beings probably realized they couldn’t achieve certain personal goals by themselves. So, groups were created to allow individual group members to pursue interdependent goals and to satisfy individual needs. Example: This club I’m a member of motivates me to train and stay fit for life. There is a lot of mutual influence in the group, too. I strongly believe that each of us in the group influences each other in a positive way. We hold each other accountable to train each morning. It’s called ***interpersonal influence.***

We need to now discuss ***group norms.*** All groups have norms to guide the behavior of the group members. Norms are the policies and rules agreed to by group members to facilitate acceptable behavior and the desired attitude of members in the group. The agreed upon norms of the group function to maintain ***internal consistency,*** such as consistent behavior among group members. Norms help group members better predict and anticipate how other members will behave.