Unconditional Self Acceptance (USA)

The Principle of Unconditional Self-Acceptance (USA)

I accept myself because I'm alive and have the capacity to enjoy my existence. I am not my behavior. I can rate my traits and my behavior, but it is impossible to rate something as complex as my 'self.' My self consists of innumerable traits, not just this one. I strive for achievement only to enhance the enjoyment of my existence, not to prove my worth. Failing at any task cannot make me a failure.

I can choose to accept myself even if am unwilling or unable to change my 'character defects' because there is no law of the universe that says I can't. My approval of myself cannot come from pandering to any external source or bowing to any external authority. My self-acceptance can only come from me, and I am free to choose it at any time.

— Nick Rajacic

Self-Worth – What it is, and is not

If you feel (I did not say think) that you are worthless, you may be and probably are a victim of a culture that has told you that your worth depends on your achievements and the judgments of others. The feeling of worthlessness besets and enervates men and women, but in different ways.

For women it can be a devastating experience, especially for those who experience depression after a loss of love or approval. The same society which supports organized brutality in the form of football and boxing, assigned them second-class citizen status-a promotion from the third-class

status of only 30 years ago. They are vulnerable, they are moving targets.

And men? David Burns, in his wonderful book, *Feeling Good*, wrote that men are even more vulnerable than women to feelings of worthlessness. He points out that men have been programmed since childhood to base their worth on their accomplishments. They must deal with unrealistic expectations assigned to them by the society in which they live. Winners are enshrined: all others are 'losers,' and are forgotten. Our culture tells us that what we do is important. What we are is not. That's wrong, dead wrong.

Consider this... If you base your worth on achievements such as production and advancement, you may dig yourself into a depressive pit when you fail (as we humans often do) to accomplish some objective or goal. Some modest and reasonable achievement in life is, of course, necessary. It's a matter of moderation and balance, working sensibly within the limits of your time, talents, and opportunities. My five foot, six inch neighbor will never play Center for the Boston Celtics. (But he's a grand teacher!)

David Burns wrote, 'Consider the fact that most human beings are not great achievers, yet most people [survive, and] are happy and well respected.'

If you base your worth on positive or negative criticisms from others, remember that these are merely judgments by people who don't have all the facts and who have no right to act as your self-appointed judges. If you determine your worth by such judgments, your life will be an up and down roller coaster ride that will make your life miserable. Your best is good enough.

So much for the common, distorted, twisted, damaging, hurtful, unrealistic, impossible and downright stupid definition of self-worth.

Albert Ellis has written extensively on this subject. He refers to 'The doctrine of variable worth.' Here's what worth is really all about: Worth is a philosophical idea, not a yardstick. Worth is based on self-judgment, not other-judgment. Worth is a constant, not a variable.

Your worth is not contingent on your performance, degrees, trophies, possessions, titles, money, behavior, or the judgment of anyone but you. And even you cannot judge it: you can only recognize it. Your worth is intrinsic to you as a human being distinguished from all other forms of life. If you are a Believer, you know that your worth transcends the mere human. You are part human, part divine. For a Believer to unfairly criticize the self is bad judgment, and to criticize God is impolite. Rudeness is not one of the seven cardinal sins, but it could be the eighth.

Your behavior may be rational or irrational and your accomplishments modest or enormous, but you are you, a human being with a mind and will. You are a million light years beyond your closest kin in the animal world, and sixty-eleven-trillion zillion light years (plus or minus six months) beyond any inanimate object in any galaxy or universe.

You can neither increase nor diminish your worth. Among humans, you are not just special-you are unique. Please don't concern yourself about self-esteem and self-love. Those ideas involve rating, measuring (comparing to others), and judging.* Just accept yourself for what you are, a diamond in the rough. (But polish it once in a while.) Paul Hauck wrote a book on the

subject of self-worth: *Overcoming The Rating Game: Beyond Self-Love: Beyond Self-Esteem.* Much recommended.

So please don't tell me *(or you)* that you are worthless. If someone said to you the things you say to yourself, you would be insulted and probably say something like, 'You have no Goddamned right to say that!' Right, but then, neither do you.

Sometimes I think people who feel worthless also think of themselves as perfectionists. Perfectionism borders on arrogance, and it's a nasty mind game, which sets up the self as a sure loser. Someone recently said to me (he was bragging), 'I'm a perfectionist, you know.' I faked a sad and sympathetic frown and replied, 'Gee, I'm sorry to hear that,' then added, 'Just you and God, eh?' My young friend was shocked. He frowned, took the point, and then experienced one of those delightful 'Aha' moments of enlightenment. It was a great moment for him, and my privilege to share in it.

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Intellectual Fascism

Why had you better not rate yourself or your essence? Albert Ellis provides a few more reasons:

1. Rating yourself or your you-ness is an overgeneralization and is virtually impossible to do accurately. You are (consist of) literally millions of acts, deeds, and traits during your lifetime. Even if you were fully aware of all these performances and characteristics (which you never will be) and were able to give each of them a rating (say, from zero to one hundred) how would you rate each one?; for what purpose?; and under what conditions? Even if you could accurately rate all your millions of acts, how could you get a mean or global rating of the 'you' who performs them? Not very easily!

2. Just as your deeds and characteristics constantly change (today you play tennis or chess or the stock market very well and tomorrow quite badly), so does your self-change. Even if you could, at any one second, somehow give your totality a legitimate rating, this rating would keep changing constantly as you did new things and had more experiences. Only after your death could you give yourself a final and stable rating.

3. What is the purpose of rating yourself or achieving ego aggrandizement or self-esteem? Obviously, to make you feel better than other people: to grandiosely deify yourself, to be holier than thou, and to rise to heaven in a golden chariot. Nice work, if you can do it! But since self- esteem seems to be highly correlated with what Bandura (1977) calls self-efficacy, you can only have stable ego-strength when (a) you do well, (b) know you will continue to do well, and (c) have a guarantee that you will always equal or best others in important performances in the present and future. Well, unless you are truly perfect, lots of luck on those aspirations!

4. Although rating your performances and comparing them to those of others has real value because it will help you improve your efficacy and presumably increase your happiness rating yourself and insisting that you must be a good and adequate person will (unless you, again, are perfect!) almost inevitably result in your being anxious when you may do any important thing badly, depressed when you do behave poorly, hostile when others out-perform you, and self- pitying when conditions interfere with your doing as well as you think you should. In addition to these neurotic and debilitating feelings, you will almost certainly suffer from serious behavioral problems, such as procrastination, withdrawal, shyness, phobias, obsessions, inertia, and inefficiency (Bard, 1980; Ellis, 1962, 1971, 1973; Ellis and Becker, 1982; Ellis and Harper, 1975; Ellis and Knaus, 1977; Grieger and Grieger, 1982; Miller, 1983; Walen, diGiuseppe and Wessler, 1980; Wessler and Wessler, 1980).

For these reasons, as well as others that I have outlined elsewhere (Ellis, 1962, 1971, 1973, 1976, 1988), rating or measuring yourself or your ego will tend to make you anxious, miserable, and ineffective. By all means rate your acts and try (undesperately!) to do well. For you may be happier, healthier, richer, or more achievement- confident (confident that you can achieve) if you perform

adequately. But you will not be, nor had you better define yourself as, a better person.

If you insist on rating yourself or your personhood at all which REBT advises you not to do, you had better conceive of yourself as being valuable or worthwhile just because you are human, because you are alive, because you exist. Preferably, don't rate yourself or your being at all and then you won't get into any philosophic or scientific difficulties. But if you do use inaccurate, over-generalized self-ratings, such as 'I am a good person,' 'I am worthwhile,' or 'I like myself,' say 'I am good because I exist and not because I do something special.' Then you will not be rating yourself in a rigid, bigoted, authoritarian, that is, fascistic manner.

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