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Psycho-Cybernetics

UPDATED AND EXPANDED

TAP INTO THE POWER OF YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS MIND TO:

- Improve your self-image
- Learn to use your positive past
- Set and achieve worthwhile goals
- Develop compassion, self-respect, and forgiveness
- Cultivate the power of rational thinking
- Discover the key to a happier, more successful life

MAXWELL MALTZ, MD, FICS

New introduction and commentary by **MATT FUREY**,
president of the Psycho-Cybernetics Foundation

Psycho- Cybernetics



UPDATED AND EXPANDED

Maxwell Maltz, MD, FICS

A Perigee Book



PERIGEE

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FOREWORD

How Psycho-Cybernetics Changed My Life

—and Can Do the Same for You

There are two kinds of self-help books: those you read and say, “What a great book,” and those you experience so profoundly your life is positively changed forever. When you truly experience a great self-help book, you can mark down the date and time you “accidentally” stumbled across it—or who referred you to it. You can also clearly determine the distinction between who you used to be, before you read the book, and who you are now.

This is what will happen when you read *Psycho-Cybernetics* by Maxwell Maltz, MD, the recognized classic in the field of self-help books. Since it was first published in 1960, *Psycho-Cybernetics* has sold more than 35 million copies worldwide. As a result of people experiencing this book, readers in all walks of life have succeeded at higher levels than ever before. The self-help industry itself was changed, too. Today, virtually everything written and discussed about visualization or mental imagery was directly influenced by Maltz's work and is deeply rooted in the principles of Psycho-Cybernetics.

My Introduction to Psycho-Cybernetics

In February 1987, shortly after graduating from college and moving to California, I decided to go into business for myself as a personal fitness trainer.

Because I had won a national title in college wrestling, and had been trained by Olympic champions Dan Gable and Bruce Baumgartner, I figured I had something valuable to teach young athletes as well as anyone who desired to be more physically fit.

Even as I was embarking on this career, I felt that something was holding me back. There was this inner voice telling me I wasn't good enough, that I couldn't make it.

To be honest: First, I had no business experience. Second, I had very little money. And third, deep down I felt like a failure—even before I started.

Imagine that. I wanted to succeed but felt like a failure.

Why did I feel like a failure?

When I think about that question, I recall that when I was in high school, my goal was to wrestle for Dan Gable at the University of Iowa. I fulfilled that goal

—but I wasn't the number one guy in my weight class. I was almost always number two. I got a lot of matches in tournaments and dual meets and won the majority of them—but I was not in the driver's seat. And so, after my

sophomore season, I transferred to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, where I'd be on the varsity.

During my junior year at Edinboro, I set a single-season win record for the team (39) and won the NCAA II national title. After winning the Division II title, I was ranked seventh overall in the country and qualified for the Division I tournament. My goals were to not only win the tournament I'd already won, but the Division I tourney as well.

Well, I fell short. Way short. I was crushed afterward—yet fully committed to coming back as a senior and making up for my poor showing.

During my senior year, despite having far more skill than ever before, I fell short again. I took fifth in the Division II tournament and did not qualify for the Division I meet.

There were many reasons I can give now for why I fell short, but at the time I couldn't put my finger on them. And when I began my business, I suspected that it was these same reasons that were causing me to worry and feel fearful about the future.

As fate would have it, in early May of 1987, when I was nearly out of business due to a lack of clientele, Jack, a successful 57-year-old entrepreneur, signed up for 12 lessons. Whenever he showed up to train, he'd scan to see what books I had in my office, which would lead to a lively discussion of what we were reading.

During Jack's fifth session, when he was catching a breather between sets, he asked the following life-changing question: "Matt, have you ever read *Psycho-Cybernetics*?"

"No," I replied. "Is it good?"

"Well, it's sort of like the bible of self-help. You really need to read it."

Over the next ten minutes Jack talked to me about success and the "self-image." He told me that Dr. Maltz was a plastic surgeon who figured out that a person cannot rise above how he sees himself. "Our future," Jack said, "is controlled by a mental blueprint we have inside our subconscious mind, and

it dictates where we think we belong. If you want to get more clients and make more money, then you need to expand your self-image before you can have them. Trying to achieve without expanding your self-image *doesn't lead to lasting positive change.*”

After Jack's lesson, I got in my car and drove to the nearest bookstore, the Capitola Book Café. I pulled a copy of *Psycho-Cybernetics* from the shelf and drove back to my office to begin reading. In the preface, which appears in its original version in this edition, Dr. Maltz wrote, “This book has been designed not merely to be read but to be *experienced*. You can acquire information from reading a book. But to ‘experience’ you must creatively respond to information.” He goes on to advise readers to continue to practice the techniques in the book and reserve judgment for at least 21 days—the amount of time that, in fact, research now confirms it takes to effect change. He cautions readers not to overanalyze the techniques, critique them, or intellectualize about whether they could work. “You *can* [only] prove them to yourself,” he adds, “by *doing* them and judging the results for yourself.”

Okay, so that's what I did. And soon I began to see exactly why I felt like a failure and how this poor “self-image” was indeed holding me back in my business.

In short, I felt like a failure because I was reliving my disappointments, my losses, my setbacks, my failures. Each day, when I felt badly about myself, it was as if I'd rubbed my face in the manure of bad memories instead of showering my face with clear-water memories of what I'd done well.

Here's a snapshot of what I would say to myself: Yes, I achieved my goal to wrestle at Iowa and be coached by Dan Gable, but I wasn't a varsity man. I was number two. Yes, I got a full-ride at Edinboro and won a national title, but I didn't win the Division I national title and I didn't win the Division II title as a senior. Yes, I set a single-season victory mark, but I didn't win *all* my matches.

Even though I'd achieved something that almost all athletes who take up any sport will never achieve, I thought I was a failure because I didn't win *everything*. Moreover, I didn't realize that having goals and thinking positively aren't enough. No one had ever told me about the self-image.

Despite my learning self-hypnosis, which I thought would help psych me up, no one ever taught me to go back into the past and relive my *best* memories. I was never taught to picture what I wanted, let alone to *feel* I could have it (and I do have it).

I was carrying these feelings of failure in my bones, and into my business and everything I did. Once again, I was setting goals for myself. I truly wanted to succeed. At the same time I doubted whether or not I was good enough to train people. After all, who was I? I wasn't a *world* champion or an *Olympic* champion. I was "just" a onetime national champion.

As I devoured *Psycho-Cybernetics*, I discovered and experienced what I needed to be doing on a daily basis. It was something I had never done before. I was to enter this place that Dr. Maltz called the *Theatre of the Mind*. I'd close my eyes, then remember and relive my best moments—seeing them play out like a mental movie. My victories. My successes. My happiest times.

After reliving and reexperiencing myself at my best, I was able to flip a switch and use my imagination in the same way I used my memory. I could imagine and feel that I was achieving a goal in the future but experience it as if it was happening *now*, almost as if it was the memory of another accomplished goal.

Once I mastered this technique, everything began to change for me.

Instantly—and yes, I do mean instantly—I felt good. I felt happy. I felt successful. I felt like a winner.

It was an odd sensation. Intellectually, it made no sense. How could I be happy *now*? How could I feel successful *now*? How could I feel like a winner *now*? Didn't I have to achieve those goals in order to feel good, to be happy?

And what about all the failures? Were they simply forgotten? Wasn't I supposed to feel bad forever for not achieving everything I set out to do?

This is where *Psycho-Cybernetics* cannot be understood by passively reading. This is where it cannot be understood by analysis, argument,

debating, or intellectualizing. You *must* experience the reality of it in order to truly know the truth. The mere reading of words will not show you or give you the experience of truth.

Since that glorious day in May of 1987, I've achieved a lot. The list of achievements, accomplishments and victories that I can recall is quite long. In

the short term, I built a successful personal fitness business. Then, in 1997, at 34

years of age, I won a world championship in kung fu, in Beijing, China, beating the Chinese at their own game, something no other American had ever done.

Since then I've written books and created fitness and martial arts programs that have found a worldwide audience.

In 2003, my friend Dan Kennedy, who headed the Psycho-Cybernetics Foundation at the time, asked me to take charge of the foundation's website.

Two years later I bought the company, and since then I have been running seminars on Psycho-Cybernetics and conducting group and individual coaching in its techniques and principles. The many people with whom I've worked will testify that they have succeeded in ways they never thought possible.

Entrepreneurs, physicians, salespeople, athletes, lawyers, coaches, teachers, musicians, writers, and others from every walk of life have used the knowledge Dr. Maltz so eloquently taught. They, like the millions of others who have been introduced to Psycho-Cybernetics, have made their lives great in the *now*—and for the future.

As you read this book, one of the many secrets you will come to understand is this: You can be happy *now* as well as every single day you are working toward achieving your goals. When you discover happiness along the way—

instead of expecting that you can only be happy once you've achieved a goal

then you've already fulfilled the promise of Psycho-Cybernetics.

In his book *I Can See Clearly Now*, Dr. Wayne W. Dyer wrote about the influence that Psycho-Cybernetics had on his career, and it's easy to understand why he's so fond of saying, "There is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way."

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In this edition of *Psycho-Cybernetics*, Dr. Maltz's words remain as they were originally written for the most part, so the vibration of his message will shine upon you like the sun. The few changes that have been made are minor and meant only to make the text more accessible to the contemporary reader.

My contributions to Dr. Maltz's masterwork comprise this foreword and an afterword, as well as commentary throughout that I believe will give you additional guidance and understanding when using the self-image improvement process.

I encourage you to write to me through psycho-cybernetics.com with any questions or comments you may have about this book and Dr. Maltz's work, as

well as for information about coaching, seminars, certification, and opportunities to continue spreading this message across the globe.

Matt Furey

President of the Psycho-Cybernetics Foundation Inc.

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PREFACE

The Secret of Using This Book to Change

Your Life

Discovery of the “self-image” represents a breakthrough in psychology and the field of creative personality.

The significance of the self-image has been recognized since the early 1950s. Yet there had been little written about it before *Psycho-Cybernetics*.

Curiously enough, this is not because “self-image psychology” has not worked, but because it has worked so amazingly well. As one of my colleagues expressed it, “I am reluctant to publish my findings, especially for the lay public, because if I presented some of the case histories and described the rather amazing and spectacular improvements in personality, I would be accused of exaggerating, or trying to start a cult, or both.”

I, too, felt the same sort of reluctance. Any book I might write on the subject would be sure to be regarded as somewhat unorthodox by some of my colleagues for several reasons. In the first place, it is somewhat unorthodox for a plastic surgeon to write a book on psychology. In the second place, it will probably be regarded in some quarters as even more unorthodox to go outside the tight little dogma—the “closed system” of the “science of psychology”—and seek answers concerning human behavior in the fields of physics, anatomy, and the new science of cybernetics.

My answer is that any good plastic surgeon *is* and *must be* a psychologist, whether he would have it so or not. When you change a man’s face you almost

invariably change his future. Change his physical image and nearly always you change the man—his personality, his behavior—and sometimes even his basic talents and abilities.

Beauty Is More Than Skin Deep

A plastic surgeon does not simply alter a man’s face. He alters the man’s inner self. The incisions he makes are more than skin deep. They frequently cut deep into the psyche as well. I decided a long time ago that this is an awesome responsibility and that I owe it to my patients and to myself to know something about what I am doing. No responsible MD would attempt to perform extensive plastic surgery without specialized knowledge and

training. Just so, I feel that if changing a man's face is going to change the inner man as well, I have a responsibility to acquire specialized knowledge in that field, also.

Failures That Led to Success

In a previous book, written some 20 years ago (*New Faces, New Futures*), I published more or less a collection of case histories where plastic surgery, and particularly facial plastic surgery, had opened the door to a new life for many people. That book told of the amazing changes that often occur quite suddenly and dramatically in a person's personality when you change his face. I was elated at my successes in this respect. But, like Sir Humphry Davy, I learned more from my failures than from my successes.

Some patients showed *no* change in personality after surgery. In *most cases* a person who had a conspicuously ugly face, or some "freakish" feature, corrected by surgery, experienced an almost immediate (usually within 21 days) rise in self-esteem, self-confidence. But in *some cases*, the patient continued to feel inadequate and experienced feelings of inferiority. In short, these "failures"

continued to feel, act, and behave *just as if* they still had an ugly face.

This indicated to me that reconstruction of the physical image itself was not

"the" real key to changes in personality. There was something else, which was usually influenced by facial surgery, but sometimes not. When this "something else" was reconstructed, the person himself changed. When this "something

else" was not reconstructed, the person himself remained the same, although his physical features might be radically different.

The Face of Personality

It was as if personality itself had a "face." This nonphysical "face of personality" seemed to be the real key to personality change. If it remained scarred, distorted, "ugly," or inferior, the person himself acted out this role in his behavior regardless of the changes in physical appearance. If this "face

of personality” could be reconstructed, if old emotional scars could be removed, then the person himself changed, even without facial plastic surgery. Once I began to explore this area, I found more and more phenomena that confirmed the fact that the “self-image,” the individual’s mental and spiritual concept or

“picture” of himself, was the real key to personality and behavior. More about this in the first chapter.

Truth Is Where You Find It

I have always believed in going wherever it may be necessary to find truth, even if international boundaries must be crossed. When I decided to become a plastic surgeon years ago, German doctors were far ahead of the rest of the world in this field. So I went to Germany.

In my search for the “self-image,” I also had to cross boundaries, although invisible ones. Although the science of psychology acknowledged the self-image and its role in human behavior, psychology’s answer to the questions of how the self-image exerts its influence, how it *creates* a new personality, what happens inside the human nervous system when the self-image is changed, was

“somehow.”

I found most of my answers in the new science of cybernetics, which restored teleology as a respectable concept in science. It is rather strange that the new science of cybernetics grew out of the work of physicists and mathematicians rather than that of psychologists, especially when it is understood that cybernetics has to do with teleology—the goal-striving, goal-oriented behavior of mechanical systems. Cybernetics explains “what happens”

and “what is necessary” in the purposeful behavior of machines. Psychology, with all its vaunted knowledge of the human psyche, had no satisfactory answer for such a simple, goal-oriented, purposeful situation as, for example, how it is possible for a human being to pick up a pen from a desk. But a physicist had an answer. The proponents of many psychological theories

were somewhat comparable to men who speculated as to what was in outer space and on other planets, but could not tell what was in their own backyards.

The new science of cybernetics made possible an important breakthrough in psychology. I myself take no credit for the breakthrough, other than the recognition of it.

The fact that this breakthrough came from the work of physicists and mathematicians should not surprise us. Any breakthrough in science is likely to come from outside the system. “Experts” are the most thoroughly familiar with the developed knowledge inside the prescribed boundaries of a given science.

Any *new* knowledge must usually come from the outside—not from “experts,”

but from what someone has defined as an “inpert.”

Pasteur was not an MD. The Wright brothers were not aeronautical engineers but bicycle mechanics. Einstein, properly speaking, was not a physicist but a mathematician. Yet his findings in mathematics completely turned upside down all the pet theories in physics. Madame Curie was not an MD but a physicist, yet she made important contributions to medical science.

How You Can Use This New Knowledge

In this book I have attempted not only to inform you of this new knowledge from the field of cybernetics but also to demonstrate how you can use it in your own life to achieve goals that are important to you.

General Principles

The self-image is the key to human personality and human behavior. Change the self-image and you change the personality and the behavior.

But more than this: The self-image sets the boundaries of individual accomplishment. It defines what you can and cannot do. Expand the self-

image and you expand the “area of the possible.” The development of an adequate, realistic self-image will seem to imbue the individual with new capabilities, new talents, and literally turn failure into success.

Self-image psychology has not only been proven on its own merits, but it explains many phenomena that have long been known but not properly understood in the past. For example, there is today irrefutable clinical evidence in the fields of individual psychology, psychosomatic medicine, and industrial psychology that there are “success-type personalities” and “failure-type personalities,” “happiness-prone personalities” and “unhappiness-prone personalities,” “health-prone personalities” and “disease-prone personalities.”

Self-image psychology throws new light on these, and many other observable facts of life. It throws new light on “the power of positive thinking” and, more importantly, explains why it “works” with some individuals and not with others.

(“Positive thinking” does indeed “work” when it is consistent with the individual’s self-image. It literally *cannot* “work” when it is inconsistent with the self-image—until the self-image itself has been changed.) In order to understand self-image psychology, and use it in your own life, you need to know something of the mechanism it employs to accomplish its goal. There is an abundance of scientific evidence that shows that the human brain and nervous system operate purposefully in accordance with the known principles of cybernetics to accomplish goals of the individual. Insofar as function is concerned, the brain and nervous system constitute a marvelous and complex “goal-striving mechanism,” a sort of built-in automatic guidance system that works *for* you as a “success mechanism,” or *against* you as a

“failure mechanism,” depending on how “YOU,” the operator, operate it and the goals you set for it.

It is also rather ironic that cybernetics, which began as a study of machines and mechanical principles, goes far to restore the dignity of man as a unique, creative being. Psychology, which began with the study of man’s psyche, or soul, almost ended by depriving man of his soul. The behaviorist, who

understood neither the man nor his machine, and thereby confused the one with the other, told us that thought is merely the movement of electrons and consciousness merely a chemical action. “Will” and “purpose” were myths.

Cybernetics, which began with the study of physical machines, makes no such mistake. The science of cybernetics does not tell us that man is a machine but that man *has and uses* a machine. Moreover, it tells us how that machine functions and how it can be used.

Experiencing Is the Secret

The self-image is changed, for better or worse, not by intellect alone, or by intellectual knowledge alone, but by “experiencing.” Wittingly or unwittingly you developed your self-image by your creative experiencing in the past. You can change it by the same method.

It is not the child who is taught about love but the child who has experienced love that grows into a healthy, happy, well-adjusted adult. Our present state of self-confidence and poise is the result of what we have experienced rather than what we have learned intellectually.

Self-image psychology also bridges the gap and resolves apparent conflicts between the various therapeutic methods used today. It furnishes a common denominator for direct and indirect counseling, clinical psychology, psychoanalysis, and even auto-suggestion. All in one way or another use creative experiencing to build a better self-image. Regardless of theories, this is what *really* happens, for example, in the “therapeutic situation” employed by the psychoanalytical school. The analyst never criticizes, disapproves, or moralizes, is never shocked, as the patient pours out his fears, his shames, his guilt-feelings, and his “bad thoughts.” For perhaps the first time in his life the patient *experiences* acceptance as a human being; he “feels” that his self has some worth and dignity, and he comes to accept himself, and to conceive of his “self”

in new terms.

Science Discovers “Synthetic” Experience

Another discovery, this time in the field of experimental and clinical psychology, enables us to use “experiencing” as a direct and controlled method of changing the self-image. Actual, real-life experiences can be a hard and ruthless teacher. Throw a man in water over his head and the experience may teach him to swim. The same experience may cause another man to drown. The Army “makes a man” out of many young boys. But there is no doubting that Army experience also makes many psycho-neurotics. For centuries it has been recognized that “Nothing succeeds like success.” We learn to function successfully by experiencing success. Memories of past successes act as built-in

“stored information,” which gives us self-confidence for the present task. But how can a person draw upon memories of past successful experiences when he has experienced only failure? His plight is somewhat comparable to the young

man who cannot secure a job because he has no experience, and cannot acquire experience because he cannot get a job.

This dilemma was solved by another important discovery that, for all practical purposes, allows us to synthesize experience, to literally create experience and control it, in the laboratory of our minds. Both experimental and clinical psychology have proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the human nervous system cannot tell the difference between an actual experience and an experience *imagined vividly and in detail*.

Although this may appear to be a rather extravagant statement, in this book we will examine some controlled laboratory experiments where this type of

“synthetic” experience has been used in very practical ways to improve skill in dart throwing and shooting basketball goals. We will see it at work in the lives of individuals who have used it to improve their skill in public speaking, overcome fear of the dentist, develop social poise, develop self-confidence, sell more goods, become more proficient in chess—and in practically every other conceivable type of situation where “experience” is recognized to bring success.

We will take a look at an amazing experiment in which two prominent psychologists arranged things so that neurotics could experience “normally,” and thereby cured them!

Perhaps most important of all, we will learn how chronically unhappy people have learned to enjoy life by “experiencing” happiness!

The Secret of Using This Book to Change Your Life

This book has been designed not merely to be read but to be *experienced*.

You can acquire information from reading a book. But to “experience” you must creatively respond to information. Acquiring information itself is passive.

Experiencing is active. When you “experience,” something happens inside your nervous system and your midbrain. New “engrams” and “neural” patterns are recorded in the gray matter of your brain.

This book has been designed to force you literally to “experience.” Tailor-made, prefabricated case histories have been kept intentionally to a minimum.

Instead, you are asked to furnish your own “case histories” by exercising imagination and memory.

I have not supplied summaries at the end of each chapter. Instead, you are asked to jot down the most important points that appeal to you as key points that

should be remembered. You will digest the information in this book better if you do your own analysis and summaries of the chapters.

Finally, you will find throughout the book certain things to do and certain practice exercises that you are asked to perform. These exercises are simple and easy to perform, but they must be done regularly if you are to derive maximum benefit from them.

Reserve Judgment for 21 Days

Do not allow yourself to become discouraged if nothing seems to happen when you set about practicing the various techniques outlined in this book for changing your self-image. Instead, reserve judgment—and go on practicing—for a minimum period of 21 days.

It usually requires a minimum of about 21 days to effect any perceptible change in a mental image. Following plastic surgery it takes about 21 days for the average patient to get used to his new face. When an arm or leg is amputated, the “phantom limb” persists for about 21 days. People must live in a new house for about three weeks before it begins to “seem like home.” These and many other commonly observed phenomena tend to show that it requires a minimum of about 21 days for an old mental image to dissolve and a new one to jell.

Therefore you will derive more benefit from this book if you will secure your own consent to reserve critical judgment for at least three weeks. During this time, do not be continually looking over your shoulder, so to speak, or trying to measure your progress. During these 21 days do not argue intellectually with the ideas presented, do not debate with yourself as to whether they will work or not.

Perform the exercises, even if they seem impractical to you. Persist in playing your new role, in thinking of yourself in new terms, even if you seem to yourself to be somewhat hypocritical in doing so, and even if the new self-image feels a little uncomfortable or “unnatural.”

You can neither prove nor disprove the ideas and concepts described in this book with intellectual argument, or simply by talking about them. You *can* prove them to yourself by *doing* them and judging results for yourself. I am only asking that you reserve critical judgment and analytical argument for 21 days so that you will give yourself a fair chance to prove or disprove their validity in your own life.

The building of an adequate self-image is something that should continue throughout a lifetime. Admittedly we cannot accomplish a lifetime of growth in three weeks’ time. But you can experience improvement within three weeks’

time—and sometimes the improvement is quite dramatic.

What Is Success?

Since I use the words “success” and “successful” throughout this book, I think it is important at the outset to define those terms.

As I use these terms, “success” has nothing to do with prestige symbols, but with creative accomplishment. Rightly speaking, no man should attempt to be a

“success,” but every man can and should attempt to be “successful.” Trying to be a “success” in terms of acquiring prestige symbols and wearing certain badges leads to neuroticism, and frustration and unhappiness. Striving to be

“successful” brings not only material success, but satisfaction, fulfillment, and happiness.

Noah Webster defined success as “the satisfactory accomplishment of a goal sought for.” Creative striving for a goal that is important to you as a result of your own deep-felt needs, aspirations, and talents (and not the symbols which the “Joneses” expect you to display) brings happiness as well as success because you will be functioning as you were meant to function. Man is by nature a goal-striving being. And because man is “built that way,” he is not happy unless he is functioning as he was made to function—as a goal striver. Thus true success and true happiness not only go together but each enhances the other.

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ONE

The Self-Image: Your Key to a Better Life

During the past decade a revolution has been quietly going on in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and medicine.

New theories and concepts concerning the “self” have grown out of the work and findings of clinical psychologists, practicing psychiatrists, and cosmetic

or so-called plastic surgeons. New methods growing out of these findings have resulted in rather dramatic changes in personality, health, and apparently even in basic abilities and talents. Chronic failures have become successful. “F” students have changed into “straight A” pupils within a matter of days and with no extra tutoring. Shy, retiring, inhibited personalities have become happy and outgoing.

Writing in the January 1959 issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, T. F. James summarizes the results obtained by various psychologists and MDs as follows: *Understanding the psychology of the self can mean the difference between success and failure, love and hate, bitterness and happiness. The discovery of the real self can rescue a crumbling marriage, recreate a faltering career, and transform victims of “personality failure.” On another plane, discovering your real self means the difference between freedom and the compulsions of conformity.*

Your Key to a Better Life

The most important psychological discovery of this century is the discovery of the “self-image.” Whether we realize it or not, each of us carries about with us a mental blueprint or picture of ourselves. It may be vague and ill-defined to our conscious gaze. In fact, it may not be consciously recognizable at all. But it is there, complete down to the last detail. This self-image is our own conception of the “sort of person I am.” It has been built up from our own *beliefs* about ourselves. But most of these beliefs about ourselves have unconsciously been formed from our past experiences, our successes and failures, our humiliations, our triumphs, and the way other people have reacted to us, especially in early childhood. From all these we mentally construct a “self” (or a picture of a self).

Once an idea or a belief about ourselves goes into this picture, it becomes “true,”

as far as we personally are concerned. We do not question its validity, but proceed to act upon it *just as if it were true*.

This self-image becomes a golden key to living a better life because of two important discoveries:

1. All your actions, feelings, behaviors—even your abilities—are always consistent with this self-image. In short, you will “act like” the sort of person you conceive yourself to be. Not only this, but you literally cannot act otherwise, in spite of all your conscious efforts or willpower. The man who conceives himself to be a “failure-type person” will find some way to fail, in spite of all his good intentions, or his willpower, even if opportunity is literally dumped in his lap. The person who conceives himself to be a victim of injustice, one “who was meant to suffer,” will invariably find circumstances to verify his opinions.

The self-image is a premise, a base, or a foundation upon which your entire personality, your behavior, and even your circumstances are built. Because of this our experiences seem to verify, and thereby strengthen, our self-images and a vicious or a beneficent cycle, as the case may be, is set up.

For example, a schoolboy who sees himself as an “F”-type student, or one who is “dumb in mathematics,” will invariably find that his report card bears him out. He then has “proof.” A young girl who has an image of herself as the sort of person nobody likes will indeed find that she is avoided at the school dance. She literally invites rejection. Her woebegone expression, her hangdog manner, her over-anxiousness to please, or perhaps her unconscious hostility toward those she anticipates will affront her—all act to drive away those whom she would attract. In the same manner, a salesman or a businessman will also find that his actual experiences tend to “prove” his self-image is correct.

Because of this objective “proof” it very seldom occurs to a person that his trouble lies in his self-image or his own evaluation of himself. Tell the

schoolboy that he only “thinks” he cannot master algebra, and he will doubt your sanity. He has tried and tried, and still his report card tells the story. Tell the salesman that it is only an “idea” that he cannot earn more than a certain figure, and he can prove you wrong by his order book. He knows only too well how hard he has tried and failed. Yet, as we shall see later, almost miraculous changes have occurred both in students’ grades and in the earning capacity of salesmen when they were prevailed upon to change their self-images.

2. The self-image can be changed. Numerous case histories have shown that one is never too young or too old to change his self-image and thereby start to live a new life.

One of the reasons it has seemed so difficult for a person to change his habits, his personality, or his way of life has been that heretofore nearly all efforts at change have been directed to the circumference of the self, so to speak, rather than to the center. Numerous patients have said to me something like the following: “If you are talking about ‘positive thinking,’ I’ve tried that before, and it just doesn’t work for me.” However, a little questioning invariably brings out that these individuals have employed “positive thinking,” or attempted to employ it, either on particular external circumstances, or on some particular habit or character defect. (“I will get that job,” “I will be more calm and relaxed in the future,” “This business venture will turn out right for me,” etc.) But they have never thought to change their thinking about the “self” that was to accomplish these things.

Jesus warned us about the folly of putting a patch of new material on an old garment, or of putting new wine into old bottles. “Positive thinking” cannot be used effectively as a patch or a crutch to the same old self-image. In fact, it is literally impossible to really think positively about a particular situation as long as you hold a negative concept of your “self.” And numerous experiments have shown that once the concept of self is changed, other things *consistent with* the new concept of self are accomplished easily and without strain.

One of the earliest and most convincing experiments along this line was conducted by the late Prescott Lecky, one of the pioneers in self-image psychology. Lecky conceived of the personality as a “system of ideas,” all of which *must seem* to be consistent with one another. Ideas that are inconsistent with the system are rejected, “not believed,” and not acted on. Ideas that *seem* to be consistent with the system are accepted. At the very center of this system of ideas—the keystone—the base upon which all else is built, is the individual’s

“ego ideal,” his “self-image,” or his conception of himself. Lecky was a schoolteacher and had an opportunity to test his theory on thousands of students.

Lecky theorized that if a student had trouble learning a certain subject, it could be because (from the student's point of view) it would be inconsistent for him to learn it. Lecky believed, however, that if you could change the student's self-conception, which underlies this viewpoint, his attitude toward the subject would change accordingly. If the student could be induced to change his self-definition, his learning ability should also change. This proved to be the case.

One student, who misspelled 55 words out of 100 and flunked so many subjects that he lost credit for a year, became one of the best spellers in the school and made a general average of 91 in the next year. A boy who was dropped from one college because of poor grades entered Columbia and became a straight "A"

student. A girl who had flunked Latin four times, after three talks with the school counselor, finished with a grade of 84. A boy who was told by a testing bureau that he had no aptitude for English won honorable mention the next year for a literary prize.

The trouble with these students was not that they were dumb, or lacking in basic aptitudes. The trouble was an inadequate self-image ("I don't have a mathematical mind"; "I'm just naturally a poor speller"). They "identified" with their mistakes and failures. Instead of saying "I failed that test" (factual and descriptive), they concluded, "I am a failure." Instead of saying "I flunked that subject," they said, "I am a flunk-out." For those who are interested in learning more about Lecky's work, I recommend securing a copy of his book, *Self-Consistency: A Theory of Personality*. (Note: This book is now out of print.) Lecky also used the same method to cure students of such habits as nail biting and stuttering.

My own files contain case histories just as convincing: the man who was so afraid of strangers that he seldom ventured out of the house, and who now makes his living as a public speaker. And there was the salesman who had already prepared a letter of resignation because he "just wasn't cut out for selling," and six months later was number one man on a force of 100 salesmen.

The minister who was considering retirement because “nerves” and the pressure of preparing a sermon a week were getting him down, and now delivers an average of three “outside talks” a week in addition to his weekly sermons, and doesn’t know he has a nerve in his body.

How a Plastic Surgeon Became Interested in Self-Image

Psychology

Offhand, there would seem to be little or no connection between surgery and psychology. Yet it was the work of plastic surgeons that first hinted to me of the existence of the “self-image” and raised certain questions that led to important psychological knowledge.

When I first began the practice of plastic surgery many years ago, I was amazed by the dramatic and sudden changes in character and personality that often resulted when a facial defect was corrected. Changing the physical image in many instances appeared to create *an entirely new person*. In case after case the scalpel that I held in my hand became a magic wand that not only transformed the patient’s appearance, but transformed his whole life. The shy and retiring became bold and courageous. A “moronic,” “stupid” boy changed into an alert, bright youngster who went on to become an executive with a prominent firm. A salesman who had lost his touch and his faith in himself became a model of self-confidence. And perhaps the most startling of all was the habitual “hardened” criminal who changed almost overnight from an incorrigible, who had never shown any desire to change, into a model prisoner who won a parole and went on to assume a responsible role in society.

I reported many such case histories in my book *New Faces, New Futures*.

Following its publication, and similar articles in leading magazines, I was besieged with questions by criminologists, psychologists, sociologists, and psychiatrists.

They asked questions that I could not answer. But they did start me upon a search. Strangely enough, I learned as much if not more from my failures as from my successes.

It was easy to explain the successes, such as the boy with the too-big ears, who had been told that he looked like a taxicab with both doors open. He had been ridiculed all his life—often cruelly. Association with playmates meant humiliation and pain. Why shouldn't he avoid social contacts? Why shouldn't he become afraid of people and retire into himself? Terribly afraid to express himself in any way, it was no wonder he became known as a moron. When his ears were corrected, it would seem only natural that the cause of his embarrassment and humiliation had been removed and that he should assume a normal role in life—which he did.

Or consider the salesman who suffered a facial disfigurement as the result of an automobile accident. Each morning when he shaved he could see the horrible disfiguring scar of his cheek and the grotesque twist to his mouth. For the first time in his life he became painfully self-conscious. He was ashamed of himself and felt that his appearance must be repulsive to others. The scar became an

obsession with him. He was “different” from other people. He began to wonder what others were thinking of him. Soon his ego was even more mutilated than his face. He began to lose confidence in himself. He became bitter and hostile.

Soon almost all his attention was directed toward himself—and his primary goal became the protection of his ego and the avoidance of situations that might bring humiliation. It is easy to understand how the correction of his facial disfigurement and the restoration of a “normal” face would overnight change this man's entire attitude and outlook, his feelings about himself, and result in greater success in his work.

But what about the exceptions who didn't change? The duchess who all her life had been terribly shy and self-conscious because of a tremendous hump in her nose? Although surgery gave her a classic nose and a face that was truly beautiful, she still continued to act the part of the ugly duckling, the unwanted sister who could never bring herself to look another human being in the eye. If the scalpel itself was magic, why did it not work on the duchess?

Or what about all the others who acquired new faces but went right on wearing the same old personality? Or how to explain the reaction of those people who insist that the surgery has made *no difference whatsoever* in their appearance? Every plastic surgeon has had this experience and has probably been as baffled by it as I was. No matter how drastic the change in appearance may be, there are certain patients who will insist that, “I look just the same as before—you didn’t do a thing.” Friends, even family, may scarcely recognize them, may become enthusiastic over their newly acquired “beauty,” yet the patients themselves insist that they can see only slight or no improvement, or in fact deny that any change at all has been made. Comparison of “before” and

“after” photographs does little good, except possibly to arouse hostility. By some strange mental alchemy the patient will rationalize, “Of course, I can see that the hump is no longer in my nose—but my nose still *looks* just the same,”

or, “The scar may not show anymore, but it’s *still there*.”

Scars That Bring Pride Instead of Shame

Still another clue in search of the elusive self-image was the fact that not all scars or disfigurements bring shame and humiliation. When I was a young medical student in Germany, I saw another student proudly wearing his “saber scar” much as an American might wear the Medal of Honor. The duelists were

the elite of college society, and a facial scar was the badge that proved you a member in good standing. To these boys, the *acquisition* of a horrible scar on the cheek had the same psychological effect as the eradication of the scar from the cheek of my salesman patient. In old New Orleans, a Creole wore an eye patch in much the same way. I began to see that a knife itself held no magical powers.

It could be used on one person to inflict a scar and on another to erase a scar with the same psychological results.

The Mystery of Imaginary Ugliness

To a person handicapped by a genuine congenital defect, or suffering an actual facial disfigurement as a result of an accident, plastic surgery can indeed seemingly perform magic. From such cases it would be easy to theorize that the cure-all for all neuroses, unhappiness, failure, fear, anxiety, and lack of self-confidence would be wholesale plastic surgery to remove all bodily defects.

However, according to this theory, persons with normal or acceptable faces should be singularly free from all psychological handicaps. They should be cheerful, happy, self-confident, free from anxiety and worry. We know only too well this is not true.

Nor can such a theory explain the people who visit the office of a plastic surgeon and demand a “face-lift” to cure a purely imaginary ugliness. There are the 35- or 45-year-old women who are convinced that they look “old” even though their appearance is perfectly “normal” and in many cases unusually attractive.

There are the young girls who are convinced that they are “ugly” merely because their mouth, nose, or bust measurement does not exactly match that of the currently reigning movie queen. There are men who *believe* that their ears are too big or their noses too long. No ethical plastic surgeon would even consider operating on these people, but unfortunately the quacks, or so-called beauty doctors whom no medical association will admit to membership, have no such qualms.

Such “imaginary ugliness” is not at all uncommon. A recent survey of college co-eds showed that 90 percent were dissatisfied in some way with their appearance. If the words “normal” and “average” mean anything at all, it is obvious that 90 percent of our population cannot be “abnormal” or “different” or

“defective” in appearance. Yet similar surveys have shown that approximately

the same percentage of our general population finds some reasoning to be ashamed of their body image.