

**Excerpts from
CHAPTER ONE
Ranking, Linking, and
the Undervalued Self**

Important Definitions for Linking

Linking: Your innate tendency to be drawn to and affectionate with others, to be interested in them and want to help them when you can.

Love: A more distilled form of linking based on a powerful attraction to someone, which leads to a desire to be near the person, know him or her intimately, meet the other's needs as much as possible, and enjoy the other's efforts to meet your needs. It is as though you include the other in yourself.

Altruism: A selfless love for others whom you may never meet, sometimes extended to all of humankind and felt as compassion when others are in need.

Linking and ranking dance together in many ways. Ranking can sometimes serve the goals of linking. Parents, teachers, supervisors, and politicians have high rank and the power that goes with it, but ideally they use their power in the service of linking, love, and altruism. We do not mind those people of higher rank enforcing certain rules or going off to meetings to talk about us because we know they are trying to help. But we consider power to be abusive if it gives no consideration to the needs of others. Ranking also serves linking when we use it to add spice to a compliment: "You were clearly the most intelligent of the bunch."

Linking can serve ranking, too, as when we form alliances to gain what the group wants, with no intention of having the link last. Linking can be hidden behind ranking, as when a professor and student, employer and employee, or even guard and captive try to ignore their attraction to each other. And ranking can hide within linking, as when one person controls the lives of others "for their own good."

A common and troubling aspect of ranking occurs when it creeps into your attempt to link and triggers the undervalued self. For example, you meet a friend for lunch and receive the good news of her promotion. You want to feel joy for her, and perhaps you do, but you also rank yourself against her, perhaps quite unconsciously, and feel miserable at the realization that you have not been promoted in five years. In a sense you are no longer having lunch with your friend. You are having lunch with your undervalued self.

Important Definitions for Ranking

Ranking: Your innate tendency to see and improve your position in a social hierarchy, to be a separate and distinct individual, and to try to demand fairness.

Power: The influence you have over others according to your rank in a hierarchy. Power can be exerted physically or psychologically in ways that are harsh or gentle, obvious or sly.

Power in the Service of Linking: Using your rank and power to meet the needs of others as well as or instead of your own needs.

Abusive Power: The use of power for entirely selfish purposes.

Linking in the Service of Ranking: Forming friendly alliances purely to raise your rank and gain more power for yourself or for all involved.

YOUR INNATE TENDENCY TO HAVE AN OVERALL SENSE OF SELF-WORTH

I have said that too much ranking leads directly to the undervalued self, and knowing exactly how that happens will help you avoid that path. As social animals, we have evolved to live in groups to better ensure our survival and well-being. Groups transmit knowledge from generation to generation so that each person does not have to reinvent the stone axe or the computer. A group protects all of its members, sees that everyone gets what he or she needs to survive, and keeps selfishness in check. Those of our ancestors who spontaneously reacted in ways that kept them in good standing within their group were better off than those who did not so react. We still have those spontaneous reactions, even when they occasionally no longer serve us or others well. We can learn to override them, but first we need to know what they are. If you lived in a single group, as our ancestors did, you would have a particular status in a defined pecking order. The higher you were, the more influence you had in group decisions. If someone challenged you or wanted to rise above you in the hierarchy, there would be a confrontation. One of you would win; the other would have to back down. To avoid dangerous mistakes, you had to have an instant, often unconscious sense of your overall strength, social support, confidence, skill, intelligence, and other traits. ² Further, if you had been defeated recently or often, it was far better to err on the side of undervaluing yourself. After all, the best bet is that the future will repeat the past. Better to save your energy and not fight. So your overall sense of self-worth often errs on the low side.

However, today we live in many groups — family, groups of friends, colleagues, teammates. In each of these we are ranked on different qualities at different moments and rarely need to decide if we are in some *overall* sense better than someone else. In these groups the innate tendency to have an overall sense of self-worth has become a handicap, in that within any one situation it will always be inaccurate to some degree.

Definitions Regarding the Undervalued Self

Overall Self-Worth: Your sense of your capacity to win in a confrontation, regardless of the specific abilities needed in a particular competition.

Defeat Response: The tendency to respond to defeat with depression and shame, making it more likely that you will accept a low rank rather than continue to compete.

The Undervalued Self: The part of you that develops from the tendency to avoid defeats. The more past defeats you've had, the more vigilant this part of you is. You see ranking even when it is not there, and then you rank yourself so low that you are not a contender.

Your Innate Response to Defeat

Along with the strategy of taking defeat seriously and erring on the side of undervaluing ourselves, we have another innate tendency, the defeat response. ³ You can see this response in animals: when they lose, they slink away, looking depressed and ashamed. They seem to feel hopeless and to have lost interest in life, and their bodies show all the physiological indicators of depression. This sudden drop in enthusiasm means that they will not continue to care about their rank, feel confident, or endanger themselves with further fighting.