The Self

We know what it is....

People use the term all the time....

But how is it defined?....

Three Components of the Self

1) Physical self: one’s body
2) Social identity: one’s self-schema
   - social roles
   - traits
   - future hopes/goals
   - past memories
3) Active agent: one’s thoughts and actions
   - decisions
   - behavior

Functions of the Self

Interpersonal tool

Decision Maker

Self-Regulation
Self-Guides

The actual self  Who you are

The ideal self  Who you want to be

The ought self  Who you believe you should be

Ideal vs.. Ought

Your ideal self can be similar to your ought self

e.g., you want to be a good student (ideal) and believe that you should be a good student (ought)

Ideal vs. Ought

Your ideal self can be discrepant from your ought self

e.g., you want to be in a rock band (ideal), but believe that you should be a doctor (ought)

Self-Discrepancy Theory

Premise: People evaluate themselves by comparing.....

actual self to ideal self
actual self to ought self

A discrepancy causes people to experience negative emotions

Higgins (1987)
The kind of negative emotions elicited by a discrepancy depends on one’s goals.

1. **Promotional goals:**

   Striving for positive outcomes
   
   - I want to have a happy marriage
   - I want to have a successful career

2. **Preventative goals:**

   Striving to avoid negative outcomes
   
   - I don't want to get divorced
   - I don't want to get a bad grade on the test

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**Self-Discrepancy Theory**

Failure to attain positive outcomes (promotional goals):
- mismatch between actual and ideal
- experience sadness and dejection

Failure to avoid negative outcomes (preventative goals):
- mismatch between actual and ought
- experience anxiety and agitation

**Self-Discrepancy Study 1**

Higgins et al. (1986)

Predictions:

1. Actual--Ideal discrepancy = sadness
2. Actual--Ought discrepancy = agitation
Step 1

Purpose: Identify participants with

- Large Actual--Ideal discrepancies
- Large Actual--Ought discrepancies

Step 2

Purpose: Test prediction

A-I discrepancy = sadness
A-O discrepancy = agitation

Procedure:
imagined an event
rated self in terms of sadness and agitation

Manipulation: Valence of imagined event

- Negative event (e.g., rejected)
- Positive event (e.g., spent time with admired other)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negative Event</th>
<th>Positve Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Agitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Ideal</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Ought</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive Event: Type of discrepancy did not matter

Negative Event: Type of discrepancy mattered:
- A-I discrepancy = more sadness
- A-O discrepancy = more agitation
Unanswered Questions

- Does the size of the discrepancy influence how bad someone feels?
- Does the discrepancy have to be accessible (i.e., activated) to influence negative emotions?

Self-Discrepancy Study 2
Higgins et al. (1997)

Hypothesis:
Larger discrepancy = more negative emotion….

BUT…
only when discrepancy is accessible

Self-Discrepancy Study 2
Higgins et al. (1997)

Step 1: Assessed SIZE of discrepancy
- Participants generated 3-5 attributes for:
  - ideal self
  - ought self
- Rated extent to which they:
  - actually had each attribute
  - wanted to have each attribute
  - ought to have each attribute

Self-Discrepancy Study 2
Higgins et al. (1997)

Step 2: Assessed ACCESSIBILITY of discrepancy
- Time it took participants to respond to previous questions
  - Faster = discrepancy more accessible
Self-Discrepancy Study 2
Higgins et al. (1997)

Step 3:
- Participants rated how sad and agitated they felt

Self-Discrepancy Study 2
Higgins et al. (1997)

Step 4:
- Researchers divided participants into two groups based on reaction time task:
  1) Discrepancy highly accessible
     » participants who made fast ratings
  2) Discrepancy not highly accessible
     » participants who made slow ratings

Self-Discrepancy Study 2
Higgins et al. (1997)

Analysis

Correlated size of discrepancy with:
- reported level of sadness
- reported level of agitation

Self-Discrepancy Study 2
Higgins et al. (1997)

Recap of Hypothesis

 Larger discrepancy = more negative emotion....

 BUT...

 only when discrepancy is accessible

 So, who should feel the worst?
Self-Discrepancy Study 2  
Higgins et al. (1997)

Correlations between size of discrepancy and negative emotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A-I Discrepancy</th>
<th>A-O Discrepancy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Accessibility</td>
<td>Low Accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r = .28</td>
<td>r = -.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Accessibility</td>
<td>Low Accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r = .44</td>
<td>r = -.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Previous studies:

- Accessibility of discrepancy assessed, not manipulated.

Question:

- Would same result occur if accessibility of discrepancy was manipulated?

Yes. Manipulating accessibility via a reminder also produces........

- More sadness for Actual-Ideal discrepancies
- More agitation for Actual-Ought discrepancies

Self-Guides and Memory

Previous studies:

- The kind of discrepancy one feels affects the negative emotions one experiences

Question:

- Does the discrepancy one feels also affect one’s memory for events?
Hypothesis: Memory depends on the kind of discrepancy one experiences.

- Actual--Ideal discrepancy = Better memory for attainment of desired outcomes (i.e., promotional goals)
- Actual--Ought discrepancy = Better memory for attainment of avoided misfortune (i.e., preventative goals)

Discrepancy & Memory Study
Higgins & Tykocinski (1992)

Step 1: Identified participants with A-I and A-O discrepancies

Step 2: Participants read essay about another in which 20 events occurred.

- 8 events = positive outcome present or absent
- 8 events = negative outcome present or absent
- 4 events = neutral fillers

Example Events

Positive Outcome
- Present: found $20
- Absent: movie wanted to see no longer showing

Negative Outcome
- Present: stuck in subway
- Absent: skipped unpleasant day at school

Step 3: Surprise memory test for essay’s content

A-I remembered more positive events than A-O
A-O remembered more negative events than A-I
Self-Guides and Others

Sometimes others outperform us

Example:
- Your friend does better on the midterm than you
- Your co-worker gets promoted, but you don’t

Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model

According to the SEM, the answer depends on the domain’s self-relevance

Premise of SEM: Being outperformed by a “close other” will make you feel:
- GOOD, if you don’t care about the domain
- BAD, if you do care about the domain

Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model

Close other = person similar to yourself

Examples:
- same status
- similar personality
- family members
- shared place of origin
Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model

Summary of SEM Premise:

Being outperformed by close other on self-irrelevant domain makes one feel good

Being outperformed by close other on self-relevant domain makes one feel bad

Assumptions of SEM Premise:

1. People want to maintain a positive self-view
2. Being outperformed by a close other threatens one’s positive self-view
3. People try to reduce threats to their self-worth

Ways to reduce the threat others pose to your self-worth

Reduce your closeness to the other

The more distant you are to those who outperform you, the less threat their accomplishments pose to your self-worth

Reduce self-relevance of the domain

The less you care about the domains on which you are outperformed, the less threatening your poor performance is to your self-worth
Ways to reduce the threat others pose to your self-worth

Minimize others’ accomplishment

Explaining away other people’s accomplishments makes their good performance less threatening to your self-worth

Undermine others’ future performance

Reducing the likelihood that others will perform highly in the future protects your own self-worth

**Friend Study**
Tesser & Cornell (1991)

**Purpose:**
Show that others will undermine the performance of a friend to protect own self-worth

**Procedure:**

**Step 1:** Two sets male friends at session

**Step 2:** Each participant sat alone in room

**Step 3:** Each completed verbal task
  - IQ test (high self-relevance)
  - Game (low self-relevance)
Procedure:

**Step 4:** Each told they had come out 3rd—friend and one stranger did better

**Step 5:** Perform 2nd task for which they will give clues to others

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**Friend Study**  
*Tesser & Cornell (1991)*

Some clues more helpful than others  

**Important Question**  
Will participants give more helpful clues to their friend, or to the strangers?

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**Friend Study**  
*Tesser & Cornell (1991)*

Low self-relevant group (Game)
- gave more helpful clues to friend

High self-relevant group (IQ test)
- gave more helpful clues to strangers

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**Limitation of SEM**

Being outperformed by close other does not always make people feel bad

- Role models are close others, and their good performance can inspire people
Role Models

Attainability may be key

Role models achieve success in domains that are still attainable for oneself

Role Model Study
Lockwood & Kunda (1989)

Purpose:
Test if “attainability” influences one’s emotional reaction to being outperformed

Prediction: A close other’s accomplishment will make one feel:

- **good** when accomplishment is still attainable by self
- **bad** when accomplishment is no longer attainable by self

Role Model Study
Lockwood & Kunda (1989)

Experimental Groups:
Step 1: 1st year and 4th year students read story about star student described as:
- 4th year accounting student
- award for academic excellence
- active in sports and community service

Step 2: rated self on adjectives related to career success (bright, skillful)
Control Group:

**Step 1**: 1st year and 4th year students rated self on adjectives related to career success

**DID NOT READ STORY**

**Role Model Study**
Lockwood & Kunda (1989)

Free Responses of those who read story

- **1st years**
  - 82% were inspired
- **4th years**
  - only 6% were inspired
  - 50% reduced closeness to star student

Conclusion: Whether a close other’s performance makes you feel good or bad about yourself may depend on how attainable the accomplishment seems for you

**Self-Regulation**

Definition: The managing of oneself
- personal care
- behaviors
- choices
- interpersonal relationships
- work activities

The way that people manage themselves depends on their motives
Self-enhancement theory

Premise: People are motivated to think well of themselves

People engage in self-regulatory behaviors that cause them and others to view them favorably

Ways to Self-Enhance

Make others view you favorably
  • conform to situational norms
  • flatter other people

Make yourself view you favorably
  • self-serving attributions
  • reduce cognitive dissonance
  • downward social comparison

Function: Raise one's self-worth

Self-Consistency theory

Premise: People are motivated to confirm their pre-existing self-views (to self-verify)

People engage in self-regulatory behaviors that cause others to view them as they view themselves

Function: ward off failure & consistency is comforting