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

Higgins (1987)

Premise: People evaluate themselves by comparing....

actual self to ideal self
actual self to ought self

A discrepancy causes people to experience negative emotions

Self-Discrepancy Theory

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
Self-Discrepancy Theory

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

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)

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)

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...
- 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

**Step 2:** Assessed **ACCESSIBILITY** of discrepancy
- Time it took participants to respond to previous questions
  - Faster = discrepancy more accessible

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

**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

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

**Recap of Hypothesis**
Larger discrepancy = more negative emotion....
BUT...
only when discrepancy is accessible
So, who should feel the worst?

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

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

Correlations between size of discrepancy and negative emotion
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?

Discrepancy & Memory Study
Higgins & Tykocinski (1992)

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.

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

Self-Guides and Memory

Sometimes others outperform us

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

Self-Guides and Others

When this happens, do you feel...

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
**Summary of SEM Premise:**

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

- **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 of 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).
- **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.
Some clues more helpful than others

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

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

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)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Free Responses of those who read story</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st years</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 82% were inspired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4th years</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- only 6% were inspired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 50% reduced closeness to star student</td>
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**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.

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<thead>
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<th>Self-Regulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong>: The managing of oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- personal care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- interpersonal relationships</td>
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<td>- work activities</td>
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The way that people manage themselves depends on their motives.

<table>
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<th>Self-enhancement theory</th>
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<td><strong>Premise</strong>: People are motivated to think well of themselves</td>
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People engage in self-regulatory behaviors that cause them and others to view them favorably.

<table>
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<th>Ways to Self-Enhance</th>
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<td><strong>Make others view you favorably</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- conform to situational norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- flatter other people</td>
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**Function**: Raise one's self-worth

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<td><strong>Make yourself view you favorably</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- self-serving attributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>- reduce cognitive dissonance</td>
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<td>- downward social comparison</td>
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**Function**: Raise one's self-worth

<table>
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<th>Self-Consistency theory</th>
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<td><strong>Premise</strong>: People are motivated to confirm their pre-existing self-views (to self-verify)</td>
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People engage in self-regulatory behaviors that cause others to view them as they view themselves.

**Function**: ward off failure & consistency is comforting