

The Social Cognition of the Self

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Abstract

This chapter examines the benefits and implications of studying the self from a social cognition perspective. First, it focuses on the representation of the self, reviewing classic issues such as whether the self-concept is qualitatively distinct in memory, the consequences of chronic self-knowledge, how self-concepts are produced and represented in memory, and how the self is composed of multiple, context-dependent self-aspects. Second, the chapter examines the self as an inherently social construct, discussing how individuals and groups become integrated into one's self-concept, how chronicity and self-complexity are represented, how stereotype threat is triggered and affects the self, and how loneliness and ostracism are experienced. Third, the chapter considers the self in broader contexts that include its role in guiding self-regulation and goal pursuit and its being influenced by contextual factors such as lay theories and culture. In addition to improving our understanding of the cognitive underpinnings of the self, consideration of the representation of self-knowledge allows us to better appreciate the social nature of the self-concept.

Key Words: self-concept, chronicity, self-complexity, stereotype threat, self-regulation

Introduction

The study of the self can be traced to antiquity, when as early as the 6th century B.C.E., the Temple of Apollo at Delphi instructed people to “Know thyself.” Since then, consideration of the self has spanned numerous disciplines, ranging from religion to philosophy. Most recently, psychologists have become the vanguard of self-studies, with a variety of foci including classifying the self's characteristics (e.g., personality psychology), understanding dysfunctional facets of the self (e.g., clinical psychology), and examining how context fundamentally changes the meaning of the self (e.g., cultural psychology).

Social psychologists have shown how the self, often viewed as all that is unique to the individual, is inherently social. For example, research has shown that our closest relationships are integrated in our knowledge about ourselves (e.g., Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).

Further, we typically view individuals who are members of our own social groups relatively favorably and exhibit greater negativity toward those who are not members of our own social groups (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Moreover, frequently activated self-knowledge is often a prism through which our perceptions of others are filtered and biased (e.g., Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985). For example, people who view “honest” as their most central personal attribute will evaluate others' behaviors with respect to their implications for honest conduct. Indeed, the self is very much the hub of our social wheel, with many spokes emanating from it.

Although there have been many treatments of the self in social psychology (e.g., Baumeister, 1998; Sedikides & Spencer, 2007), our chapter focuses on the advances made by researchers who adopt the social cognition perspective. Whereas most psychologists emphasize the self's content (e.g.,

personality, self-esteem, development), social cognition researchers have demonstrated how a more complete understanding of the self requires a consideration of how its content is structured and represented in memory.

In this chapter, we focus on how social cognition sheds unique and important light on our knowledge of the self. First, we discuss the *cognitive underpinnings* of the self in memory, elaborating on the important implications derived from construing the self as a memorial structure. Second, we explore the *social facets* of the self that benefit from considering its cognitive representation. In other words, these first two sections examine the self from a social *cognitive* perspective and from a *social* cognitive perspective, with each section acknowledging that such distinctions represent an organizing heuristic and a reflection of the historical evolution of the field rather than a clear-cut dichotomy. Finally, we review broader and interconnecting phenomena, such as self-regulation, lay theories about the self, and culture.

The Social Cognition of the Self

We begin by describing research that documents the cognitive representation of the self in memory. This section focuses on how social cognition research has contributed to our understanding of age-old questions involving the self (e.g., Is there something unique about the self? How does the self filter our perceptions of the social world?). Because this research represented social cognition researchers' initial forays into understanding the self, this section provides a historical account of social cognition's contributions to self-concept research as well as a description of how the self is represented in memory.

Is the Self Special?

Probably the first time that social cognition began to shape research on the self involved the question of whether self-knowledge is unique or is qualitatively indistinguishable from other forms of knowledge (see Greenwald & Banaji, 1989; Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994). A number of studies of the self-reference effect suggested that the self may have special standing in memory. For example, Markus (1977) demonstrated that participants showed greater attention to, and better recall of, information that was consistent with their self-view. And similarly, Rogers, Kuiper, and Kirker (1977) showed that participants were more likely to remember a list of traits presented to them when they considered whether the traits were self-descriptive (e.g., Am I funny?) than when they processed the same

trait in other ways (e.g., What rhymes with funny?). This evidence of superior information processing for self-relevant material (e.g., greater attentional deployment, faster and more accurate recall) was initially construed as evidence that the self represented a special, unique memorial structure.

Subsequent demonstrations, however, questioned this "self is special" interpretation. For example, Bower and Gilligan (1979) adopted the same methodology as Rogers et al. but varied the type of target that participants considered when reading each trait word. Their participants considered whether each word was descriptive of themselves, of their mothers, or of a popular television news anchorperson at the time (Walter Cronkite). Although Bower and Gilligan observed better recall of the traits when participants considered themselves than when considering the news anchorperson, recall of the traits was identical for participants who considered themselves or considered their mothers. In other words, when participants thought of a person they knew very well (i.e., their mom), recall was as good as it is when considering another well-known individual—the self. From data such as these, views of the self shifted from being "special" to being "ordinary but powerful," with its detailed, highly elaborated memorial structure (more so for the self and for moms, less so for television news anchorpeople) aiding in encoding and retrieving information.

Research by Klein and colleagues has further supported the conclusion that information processing about the self benefits from the greater organization of self-knowledge. For example, Klein and Kihlstrom (1986) replicated self-reference effects shown in past work, observing that participants recalled more experimentally presented personality traits when asked to think about whether each word was descriptive of the self than when asked to consider other aspects of the words (e.g., is the trait word synonymous with another word?). More important, Klein and Kihlstrom found evidence of more elaborate organization in participants' recall when asked to consider each trait with respect to the self. Specifically, in the self-reference condition, they observed the greatest amount of *clustering* in recall, such as recalling a number of self-descriptive words and then recalling multiple words that were not self-descriptive, instead of recalling words in a random order. Further, when statistically controlling for the amount of recall clustering, the advantage for amount of recall of self-relevant information became nonsignificant (see also Klein & Loftus, 1988), which provided additional evidence that better recall of self-relevant

information results from the enhanced organization of the self in memory. By importing cognitive psychology measures such as amount of recall, speed of judgment making, and clustering of recall, social cognition researchers began casting new light on core questions about the self.

Chronicity and Self-Schematic Knowledge

After studying the properties of the static representation of the self, social cognition researchers began to consider how self-knowledge might actively influence information processing. This work was informed by a number of sources, such as Bruner's (1957) early postulation that our perceptions are guided by currently accessible knowledge in memory. That is, any piece of information in memory can vary in its level of activation. Items with greater activation are more likely to be used in a variety of activities ranging from low-level visual perception to high-level judgment and decision making. Social cognition research on other topics has shown the consequences of activated (e.g., primed) knowledge to be pervasive, ranging from influencing the interpretation of ambiguous information (e.g., Srull & Wyer, 1980) to guiding complex behavior (e.g., Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). The consequences of activated knowledge can be long-lasting, such that repeatedly used knowledge becomes chronically accessible (e.g., Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982), serving to direct cognition and behavior in the absence of recent activation (e.g., Bargh & Pratto, 1986).

Importantly, accessibility has particular relevance to self-knowledge. As described above, one of the features that makes the self so consequential in information recall is its elaborate representational structure. Further, self-relevant information is frequently encountered and processed, increasing its accessibility in memory (Bargh, 1982). When this elaborated knowledge becomes chronically accessible, it is often referred to as self-schematic knowledge (Markus, 1977). Self-schemas are organizing frameworks derived from personal experience and self-reflection, and they guide perception and action as a result of their heightened state of activation (Markus & Wurf, 1987). From the perspective of social cognition, one's most important personality qualities are one's most accessible traits (for similar reasoning predating social cognition, see Allport, 1937; Bruner, 1957; Kelly, 1955).

Early research on self-schemas established that accessible self-knowledge facilitates and guides information processing. For example, Markus (1977)

demonstrated that people make self-judgments more quickly when these are relevant to a self-schema. Specifically, she identified participants as schematic for the concept of "independence" if they rated themselves as independent and considered this concept important. Next, all participants completed a timed self-judgment task in which they indicated whether various trait adjectives were self-descriptive. Relative to participants who were not schematic for independence, individuals schematic for independence were faster to indicate that independence-related adjectives, but not other adjectives, were self-descriptive. In a similar vein, Bargh (1982) demonstrated that self-schemas increase processing efficiency of relevant information. Specifically, people can perform a secondary task better when the concurrent primary task is self-schema relevant than when it is not, showing how the efficiency of self-schemas frees cognitive resources that can be devoted to other activities.

Although the content of self-schemas varies greatly (e.g., traits, age, gender, sexuality; Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994; Markus, 1977; Markus, Crane, Bernstein, & Siladi, 1982; Montepare & Clements, 2001), all self-schemas are assumed to be highly accessible in memory (e.g., Higgins et al., 1982). As with primes (e.g., Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977), self-schemas guide interpretation of ambiguous information (e.g., Markus et al., 1985) even in the absence of recent activation. This "always-on" self-knowledge has important behavioral implications, ranging from clinical depression (Bradley & Mathews, 1983) to minority children's engagement with school (Oyserman, 2008). Later, we return to our discussion of chronic self-knowledge to explain how recent social cognition research finds that the influence of chronic self-knowledge is more circumscribed rather than being "always on."

Construction of Self-Concepts

Although self-reference effects and self-schemas focus on the influence of already-existing self-relevant knowledge, this work does not address how self-concepts are assembled and represented as self-relevant information is encountered. Although questions such as "how do perceivers process information when forming an impression of a person" had been tackled early on in the person memory and stereotype formation literatures (e.g., Hamilton & Gifford, 1976; McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1994, 1997; Srull, 1981; Srull & Wyer, 1989), similar questions went unasked in the self literature for a considerable period of time. In person memory experiments, researchers found that participants

typically form *on-line* impressions of individuals, which means that perceivers actively reflect on the target's actions and render an impression of the person *while* they are encountering and processing the information (e.g., Hastie & Park, 1986; Srull, 1981). This active, effortful engagement with target-relevant information produces a variety of outcomes, including heavy reliance on early information about the target person (i.e., primacy effects in impression formation). Research has shown that these primacy effects occur because people assume that individual targets will exhibit a relatively strong degree of consistency in their behaviors, making the cognitive expenditure of actively forming an on-line impression a reasonable investment for understanding and predicting others' actions (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). Yet, if a perceiver expects little consistency in the behavior of a target individual, there is little incentive to actively form an impression of the target because there is "no essence" of the person to deduce. Accordingly, when people expect little consistency in a target person's behavior (e.g., they are explicitly told the target person's personality is spontaneous and unpredictable), primacy effects are eliminated because the active on-line impression formation process is averted (McConnell et al., 1997).

To understand how self-concepts are *formed*, McConnell, Rydell, and Leibold (2002) applied the approaches used in person memory research to examine how self-knowledge is processed when one is developing an impression about one's own characteristics. Specifically, McConnell et al. (2002) gave participants bogus feedback about themselves by having them describe a series of inkblot images. After selecting a description for a particular image, the computer provided experimentally preplanned, noncontingent feedback to participants, such as suggesting that their response characterized an outgoing individual (e.g., "a person who chooses this response can enjoy an engaging conversation with another person"). All participants received the same amount of extraversion-consistent statements, but for some participants, they received this feedback early in the sequential presentation of the inkblots (i.e., 10 times in the first half of 24 inkblot judgments), whereas other participants received this feedback at the end of the sequential presentation of the inkblots (i.e., 10 times in the last half of 24 inkblot judgments). The remaining 14 items were unrelated to extraversion. Thus, if participants form online self-concepts, they should be especially influenced by the early feedback and report being more extraverted in the former condition than in the latter condition. Indeed,

this pattern of results was observed. In other studies, McConnell et al. eliminated these primacy effects for self-concept formation experimentally, such as by explicitly telling people that outgoingness is not a stable construct (thus reducing people's expectation of consistency for their own behaviors on this dimension). These effects could also be eliminated by denying participants the cognitive resources necessary to actively organize and integrate self-relevant feedback during the study by asking them to also keep a long string of numbers in memory (i.e., a demanding concurrent task).

This study represents the first time that the processes of self-concept *formation* were examined, and it documented that strong expectations of consistency for the self encourage the active formation of online self-concepts, but only when sufficient cognitive resources are available to process self-relevant information. Such highly elaborated representations for the self facilitate better recall (e.g., Bower & Gilligan, 1979; Rogers et al., 1977) and more efficient information processing about the self (e.g., Bargh, 1982; Markus, 1977). Later, we will elaborate on how meta-beliefs about the self such as implicit theories and cultural influences can further moderate these processes.

Early Models of Self-Concept Representation

The finding that self-concepts are often abstract evaluations formed online through effortful processes dovetails nicely with some descriptions of self-concept representation (e.g., Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003; Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994). Specifically, Klein and colleagues proposed that self-knowledge becomes increasingly represented by traits, rather than by episodic events, as more self-relevant information is encountered (e.g., Klein, Loftus, Trafton, & Fuhrman, 1992; Klein, Sherman, & Loftus, 1996). Using a clever priming paradigm, these researchers found that judgments about the novel features of the self are made more quickly by first recalling a specific behavioral episode relevant to the judgment. When recall of an instance speeds up subsequent evaluations of the self along the same dimension, it suggests that at least new self-judgments are based on the retrieval of instances in memory. However, as one's experiences in a domain grow, Klein and colleagues find that self-judgments are no longer aided or facilitated by recalling specific exemplars.

Based on this work, Kihlstrom and Klein (1994) proposed a mixed-model self-concept representation account that suggests that initial self-knowledge is represented as a collection of exemplars but that the

self-concept becomes more composed of traits (i.e., general knowledge abstracted from these specific episodes) as information accrues (Figure 24.1, *top panel*). It is important to note that the mixed model of self-knowledge was not the only possibility offered by researchers in the latter part of the 20th century (e.g., Cantor & Mischel, 1979; DeSteno & Salovey, 1997). For example, there have been suggestions that the self is organized around nested hierarchical structures (e.g., spouse within family within acquaintances; see Figure 24.1, *middle panel*) or by propositions stored in an associative network (see Figure 24.1, *bottom panel*; for overviews, see Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Linville & Carlston, 1994). These approaches often reflected “the cognitive models of the day,” borrowing heavily from hierarchical structures (Rosch, 1975), production systems (Anderson, 1974), and distinctions between declarative and procedural knowledge (Tulving, 1972). More recently, connectionist approaches have been used to describe the self. For example, the cognitive-affective

processing system theory (Mischel & Morf, 2003; Mischel & Shoda, 1995) posits that the self is represented by if–then situation–behavior relations captured by cognition–affect units in a connectionist framework. Although connectionist approaches have considerable appeal (e.g., neural plausibility), at present there are no findings regarding self-concept representation that require a connectionist account for their explanation (McConnell, 2011). More generally, with a few exceptions (e.g., Smith, Coats, & Walling, 1999; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991), the mixed-model account has been the only proposal of self-concept representation to receive considerable testing and support from multiple experimental studies.

Multiple Selves Early Perspectives

Although conceptions of the self have evolved considerably from a static structure to an online construction, and then to a mixed composition of

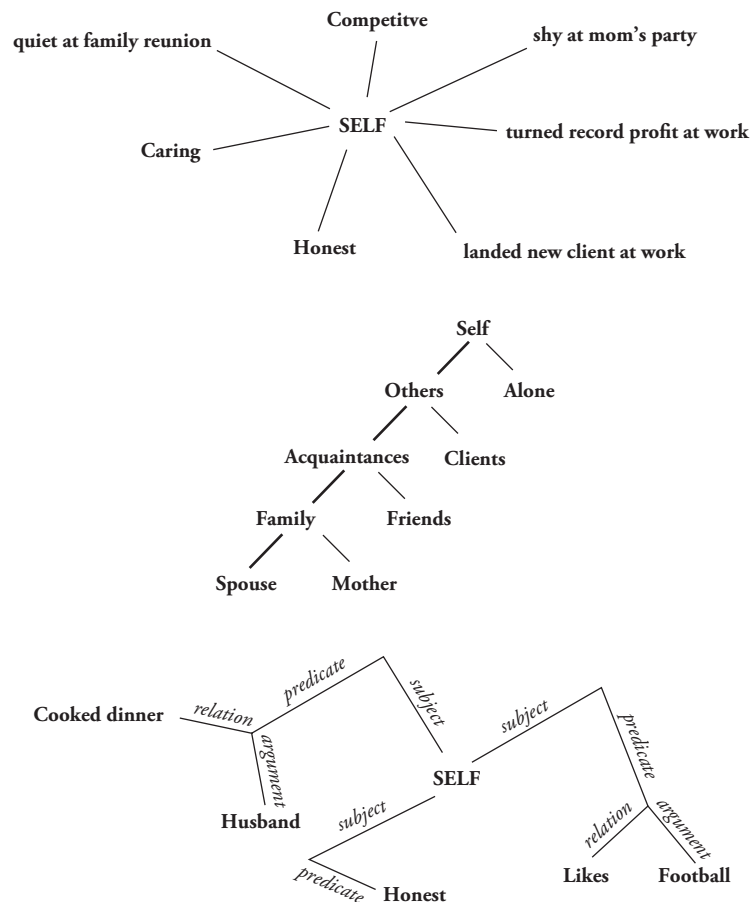


Figure 24.1 Examples of different approaches to self-concept representation, including mixed-model (*top panel*), hierarchical (*middle panel*), and propositional (*bottom panel*) accounts.

exemplars and abstracted traits, it is interesting that “the self” implies a single representation (cf., Kurzban & Aktipis, 2007; Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010). More recent work has considered the self-concept to be a collection of multiple, context-dependent selves (e.g., Linville & Carlston, 1994; McConnell, 2011; Mischel & Shoda, 1995).

Historically, several theorists have addressed the existence of multiple selves. Markus and Nurius (1986), for example, proposed that people have possible selves, representing different tenses and goals for the self, including “past selves,” “future selves,” and “feared selves.” Other researchers have described the self as composed of a number of fixed roles (e.g., student, friend) and argued that well-being is enhanced by having greater consistency of trait attributes among these roles (e.g., Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Roberts & Donahue, 1994). In the area of self-regulation, Higgins (1987, 1997) suggested that in addition to one’s current self-concept, one has ought and ideal selves reflecting one’s obligations and aspirations, respectively. Higgins’s work states that when one’s actual self is discrepant from one’s ought and ideal selves, negative emotions are experienced, and these affective states serve to guide behavior. For example, a student failing to get good grades in her classes will feel agitation because of the discrepancy between her actual and ought selves, and this affective experience is proposed to motivate her to study better to reduce this discrepancy. But despite these myriad perspectives, none of these lines

of work focused on the structure or organization of these multiple selves—just that they exist.

Self-Complexity

One exception to this characterization is research on self-complexity (for a review, see McConnell & Strain, 2007), which defines on the overall complexity of one’s self-concept structure by taking into account the number of one’s multiple, context-dependent selves (termed *self-aspects*) and the degree to which these self-aspects are composed of redundant *attributes*. In typical self-complexity studies, participants are provided with a list of trait attributes and are asked to put them into groups that represent “meaningful aspects of their lives” (Linville, 1985). Typically, participants are provided with a number of positive and negative trait attributes, and they are told they can use as many attributes as they wish and use any given attribute as many times as they want or not at all (Showers, 1992). Each self-aspect group is then labeled by the participant to describe the facet of the self that the collection of attributes describes. From these groupings, a statistic (*H*; Scott, 1969) is calculated. *H* increases as people generate more self-aspects and as their self-aspects are composed of unique, rather than redundant, attributes (for discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of various self-complexity indexes, see Koch & Shepperd, 2004; Rafaeli-Mor, Gotlib, & Revelle, 1999; Schleicher & McConnell, 2005).

For example, people greater in self-complexity (see Allison, Table 24.1) might identify several

Table 24.1 Examples of Individuals Greater (Allison) and Lower (Lori) in Self-Complexity

Allison				
Athlete	Daughter	Sorority sister	Student	Latina
Competitive	Shy	Proud	Intelligent	Energetic
Energetic	Lovable	Insecure	Confident	Happy
Tense	Mature	Outgoing	Self-centered	Fun
Successful			Organized	

Lori		
Daughter	Sorority sister	Student
Outgoing	Proud	Intelligent
Intelligent	Friendly	Confident
Confident	Outgoing	Outgoing
Friendly		Organized

self-aspects (i.e., athlete, daughter, sorority sister, student, Latina), each described by relatively unique self-relevant attributes (e.g., competitive, shy, proud). On the other hand, people who are lower in self-complexity (see Lori, Table 24.1) report having fewer self-aspects composed of more redundant attributes (e.g., Lori's "Daughter" self-aspect shares two attributes with her "Sorority sister" self-aspect and shares three attributes with her "Student" self-aspect). Thus, self-complexity captures self-concept organization instead of its content.¹

When people are lower in self-complexity, self-relevant experiences have a greater emotional impact (termed the *spillover effect*) for several reasons. First, feedback about a self-aspect implicates a larger proportion of one's overall self-concept because it is composed of fewer self-aspects and will be more likely to implicate other self-aspects because of the greater redundancy of attributes across self-aspects (Linville, 1985). For example, failing an exam at school would have more negative implications for Lori (her "Student" self-aspect is 33% of her self-concept and shares attributes with her two other self-aspects) than for Allison (whose "Student" self-aspect is 20% of her self-concept and shares no attributes with other self-aspects). Second, it is more difficult for people lower in self-complexity to avoid thinking about negative self-relevant feedback, both because they have fewer alternative self-aspects to focus on in the wake of bad news and because it is more likely that alternative self-aspects share attributes with the "to be avoided" self, making mental regulation more difficult (Renaud & McConnell, 2002). However, it would be inappropriate to conclude that people lower in self-complexity fare worse than people greater in self-complexity because of their emotional extremity. In fact, the greater impact of self-relevant experiences can be quite beneficial following positive feedback. For example, people lower in self-complexity enjoy greater psychological and health benefits from positive social support and from possessing more desirable personality characteristics (McConnell, Strain, Brown, & Rydell, 2009). For these individuals, "good news" spills over onto other self-aspects and makes their positive circumstances and individual differences even more enjoyable.

It is interesting that although the spillover effect is well documented (e.g., Linville, 1985; McConnell, Rydell, & Brown, 2009; Niedenthal, Setterlund, & Wherry, 1992; Renaud & McConnell, 2002), arguments that greater self-complexity should buffer

stress have been more controversial. Linville (1987) reported evidence for a "buffering effect," contending that people experiencing stressful life events fare better when they are greater in self-complexity. Although intuitively appealing, this buffering effect has only been reported in one experiment, and there are numerous nonreplications published in the literature (e.g., McConnell et al., 2005; Schleicher & McConnell, 2005; Woolfolk, Novalany, Gara, Allen, & Polino, 1995) and in many unpublished studies as well (for a meta-analysis finding little support for the buffering hypothesis, see Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002).

The lack of support for the buffering hypothesis has provided a puzzle for the self-complexity literature (see Koch & Shepperd, 2004; McConnell & Strain, 2007; Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002), especially when demonstrations of spillover effects are commonly reported. One interesting observation is that, in general, people are happier and healthier when they are lower in self-complexity (McConnell, Strain, Brown, & Rydell, 2009). This finding makes sense because people typically view their lives in an extremely positive fashion (Taylor et al., 2003; Taylor & Sherman, 2008), which should be experienced more positively by people lower in self-complexity because of spillover effects. On the other hand, those greater in self-complexity have more "selves to juggle," and they report that their multiple selves, on average, are less positive and less under their personal control (McConnell et al., 2005). Perhaps in the face of stress, those lower in self-complexity do experience stronger negative reactions (i.e., spillover effects), but these same individuals also begin with advantages (i.e., in general, they are happier and have greater control over their multiple selves), and thus the two factors offset each other. At the very least, it is now apparent that buffering effects are far less frequent and more equivocal than once believed (Koch & Shepperd, 2004; Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002; cf., Linville, 1987), suggesting that additional work is needed to better understand how the nature of self-concept representation affects physical and mental health. Based on the existent literature, it appears that "the simple life" has many benefits for those lower in self-complexity and that such individuals are happier and healthier on average (McConnell, Strain, Brown, & Rydell, 2009)

Beyond Self-Complexity

Although self-complexity research has shown that measures of the overall organizational structure

of one's self-concept can predict general experiences, this body of work does not speak to "more local" effects. For example, self-complexity research may address how one's overall mood changes following self-relevant feedback, but it does not account for how feedback about a single self-aspect alters evaluations of other self-aspects. To address questions such as these, McConnell (2011) proposed the Multiple Self-aspects Framework (MSF). The MSF adopts the basic assumption of self-complexity research that the self is composed of multiple context-dependent self-aspects, each of which has associated attributes (see example in Figure 24.2). Unlike past self-complexity research that has focused on only trait attributes, the MSF assumes that numerous forms of self-knowledge comprise attributes, including physical attributes, social categories, affective responses, and behaviors (Carlston, 1994; Schleicher & McConnell, 2005). These self-aspects reside in an associative framework in which each self-aspect varies in its current level of activation. Overall affective experiences (e.g., mood, self-esteem) are based on the evaluation of each self-aspect weighted by its level of activation in memory. For example, when Anne leaves her husband in the morning and goes to work, her behavior should become less caring and more intense and creative because her "Company CEO" self-aspect should become more activated than her "Wife" self-aspect. Once at work, her general mood and sense of self-worth will reflect the evaluative implications primarily derived from her business identity instead of her spousal role.

In addition to accounting for the impact of shifts in context more globally, the MSF considers how the interconnections among self-aspects have more "local effects." For example, landing an important business contract at work will not influence

evaluations of any of Anne's other multiple selves because her "Company CEO" self-aspect does not share any attribute associations with her other self-aspects. On the other hand, having Anne's father remark that she is a good daughter not only will raise her evaluation of her "Daughter" self-aspect but also will increase the positivity of her "Wife" self-aspect because 75% of its attributes are associated with the targeted "Daughter" self-aspect. Thus, the particular associative structure as outlined by the MSF will reveal important consequences through spread of activation principles, which have been borne out by empirical work (McConnell, Rydell, & Brown, 2009). For example, the extent to which feedback, positive or negative, about a self-aspect changes evaluations of other self-aspects is statistically mediated by the proportion of shared attribute associations among those self-aspects. Thus, the depiction of self-concept organization provided by the MSF allows for precise, more localized predictions about how self-relevant feedback is experienced across one's multiple selves (McConnell, 2011). Predictions such as these are not possible using perspectives that only consider the organization of one's self-concept as a whole (e.g., self-complexity).

Other implications are suggested as well. Recall our earlier discussion about chronically accessible constructs (e.g., Higgins et al., 1982), which result from self-knowledge being activated so frequently that it becomes "always on," consequently shaping perceptions of the self and others. If we return to our example of Anne, it is likely that she would be most chronic for "honest" given that this trait is associated with most of her self-aspects. Classic work on chronicity or self-schematicity would assume that "honest" would always be accessible, constantly guiding Anne's behavior (Higgins, 1996). However, from the perspective of the MSF, only attributes

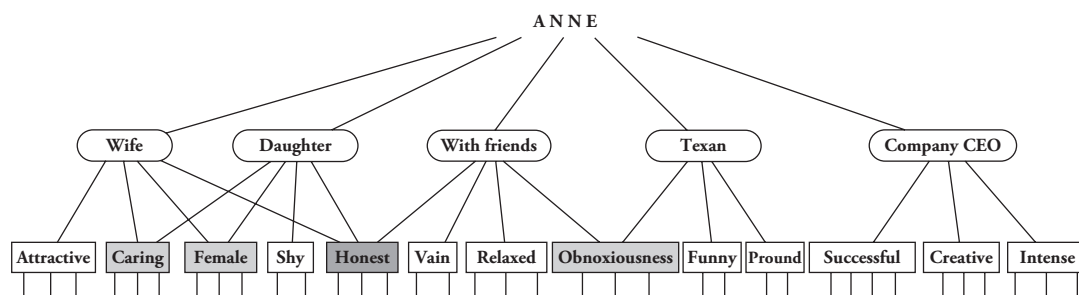


Figure 24.2 Example of an individual's self-concept as represented in the Multiple Self-aspects Framework, including self-aspects (ovals), their associated attributes (rectangles), and attribute-relevant behaviors (vertical lines). Gray boxes reflect those attributes associated with multiple self-aspects.

associated with an activated self-aspect should guide perceptions. Thus, although honesty may be important in many domains of Anne's life, it may not influence her business behavior. Indeed, work by Brown and McConnell (2009b) derived from the MSF found that chronic self-knowledge as assessed by traditional measures (e.g., Higgins et al., 1982; Markus, 1977) is actually self-aspect specific. That is, when a self-aspect associated with participants' chronic attributes was primed by a 10-minute writing exercise about that domain, participants' judgments of themselves and of others were assimilated toward their chronic attributes, replicating past work (e.g., Markus, 1977; Markus et al., 1985). However, when participants wrote about a self-aspect not associated with their chronic attribute, judgments of the self and of others were not assimilated toward the chronic attribute. In other words, chronicity depends on the individual's active self-aspects and is not always global in its impact.

The Social Cognition of the Self

Having examined how social cognition researchers study the organization of self-knowledge in memory, we now turn to how social life influences the representation of one's self-concept. Specifically, we examine the inclusion of meaningful others (e.g., loved ones, ingroups) into the self and the behavioral consequences of such included identities (e.g., mimicry, stereotype threat). Afterward, we focus on issues such as disidentification, loneliness, and ostracism to consider how the self-concept is affected. Whereas the first section of our chapter provided a trek across the history of social cognition's exploration of the nature of the self-concept, the current section demonstrates how self-concept representation is central to some of the more recent and exciting developments in social psychology more broadly.

Inclusion of Others in the Self

Individuals

It is interesting that although people are free to focus exclusively on themselves when describing their self-concepts, they frequently discuss others. For example, McConnell (2011) found that when people were asked to spontaneously describe their self-aspects, 17% of their reported self-aspects reflected important interpersonal relationships (e.g., with my boyfriend). The closeness of others is revealed in common, everyday metaphors, when we speak of friends as "having a connection," new lovers as "really being into each other," and family

members as "being close," indicating that proximity and integration are consequential psychological qualities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). To capture this closeness more quantitatively, researchers ask participants to report how included another person is in the self by indicating which of seven diagrams (each featuring two circles with increasing degrees of overlap, one representing the self and one representing the other; Aron et al., 1992) best characterizes the relationship. Considerable evidence shows that others who are included in the self affect self-relevant judgments. For example, people are faster to judge the self-descriptiveness of traits when those traits are descriptive of their spouse, who presumably is highly included in the self, than when they were not descriptive of their spouse (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Indeed, highly included others are often represented as self-aspects in one's own self-concept descriptions (McConnell, 2011), suggesting that key people such as spouses, family members, friends, and lovers are integrated into one's self-representation. Returning to the example of Anne (see Figure 24.2), it is likely that her husband started out as a friend and thus her behavior toward him was initially governed by her "With friends" self-aspect, but that his growing importance in her life led to the development of a self-aspect uniquely associated with him. Relatedly, the dissolution of relationships can have an impact on one's self-concept. For example, Slotter, Gardner, and Finkel (2010) found that following romantic breakups, participants reported reduced self-concept clarity (e.g., "I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am"), which statistically accounted for the increase in emotional distress experienced by their participants following their breakups.

Similarly, work on relational selves (i.e., self-identities associated with significant others; see Andersen, Chen, & Miranda, 2002) shows that often people's perceptions of themselves and close others can become blurred, resulting in transference effects whereby one perceives close other's qualities in themselves (Hinkley & Andersen, 1996; see also, Gabriel, Carvallo, Dean, Tippin, & Renaud, 2005; Smith et al., 1999). In addition to seeing shifts in content that draw from highly included others, research suggests that *structural* shifts can occur for close others as well. For example, Brown, Young, and McConnell (2009) found that as people are more included in the self, the structural complexity of people's representations of others becomes more similar to the complexity of their own self-concept (i.e., self-complexity). In other words, being

“included in the self” is related to “structural alignment” in self–other representations, which may facilitate the cognitive integration of close others with the self.

The inclusion of close others in the self-concept may have interesting consequences beyond transference effects with traits (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002; Smith et al., 1999). As noted previously, perspectives such as the MSF assume that self-aspects are not only composed of traits but also include emotions, physical appearances, and behaviors (Carlston, 1994). For instance, when Anne’s husband becomes included in her self-concept, his qualities (e.g., his attitudes, physical mannerisms) will be included in her self-concept as well. Thus, when she interacts with him around the house, the activation of her “Wife” self-aspect may result in her exhibiting behavioral mimicry. Mimicry research has shown that people often reveal behavioral similarities to those around them, such as mirroring others’ body posture or speaking in similar vocal accents. Research shows that this mimicry often reflects mutual affinity between people, and that this mirrored behavior serves to coordinate actions with others (e.g., Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Bavelas, Black, Lemery, & Mullett, 1986; Cheng & Chartrand, 2003). Interestingly, mimicry effects are often context dependent (e.g., van Baaren, Horgan, Chartrand, & Dijkmans, 2004). When considered from the perspective of the MSF, this context dependence may reflect the integration of others’ mannerisms into one’s self-aspects to the extent that context activates a domain-specific self-aspect. Thus, being on a date may activate Anne’s “Wife” self-aspect, which in turn elicits mimicking behaviors and beliefs derived from her husband. However, other contexts unassociated with this self-aspect would result in these husband-derived attributes not being activated. As a result, including others in the self should promote a convergence of traits, emotions, and behaviors with meaningful others.

Groups

In addition to close people being integrated into one’s self-concept, important social groups may become incorporated into the self as well (Correll & Park, 2005). Returning to the example of Anne, her being a Texan is so important to her sense of self that this social group has its own representation in her self-concept. The attributes associated with these group-specific identities should elicit not only group-relevant traits (e.g., funny) and behaviors (e.g., obnoxiousness) but also group-relevant emotions

(e.g., pride; Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007). When ingroups are represented in the self-concept, we should see effects similar to those obtained when close others are included in the self-concept (e.g., transference effects, mimicry). For instance, Smith et al. (1999) found that participants were faster in judging whether traits were characteristic of ingroup members when they were self-descriptive than when they were not self-descriptive, indicative of overlap between one’s ingroups and the self in memory (see also, Smith & Henry, 1996). With respect to behavioral consequences, one’s important group-based identities (e.g., attorney at a prestigious law firm) can lead people to exhibit behaviors and display symbols associated with their self-aspects (e.g., always carry a legal pad), encouraging those around them to act in ways that reinforce the attributes associated with their self-aspects (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982).

Stereotype Threat *Triggers and Inhibitors*

Sometimes groups integrated into one’s self-concept can have negative implications. For example, stereotype threat research investigates how people’s membership in stigmatized groups leads to suboptimal performance in contexts in which negative group stereotypes exist. That is, just having knowledge of a negative stereotype associated with one’s own social group can have deleterious consequences for academic achievement (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995), social interactions (e.g., Richeson & Shelton, 2003), and even athletic performance (e.g., Beilock, Jellison, Rydell, McConnell, & Carr, 2006). Women, for example, underperform on challenging math problems because of an association between their ingroup and pejorative stereotypes that “women are poor at math,” with poorer performance revealed for women whose gender identity is more central to the self (Schmader, 2002).

In essence, stereotype threat is a self-fulfilling prophecy that is triggered by “the self” rather than by others’ expectations. Thus, we would contend that the accessibility of one’s group identity is at the heart of understanding stereotype threat effects. For instance, although women’s performance on math tests falters to a greater extent when their gender identity is more central to the self-concept, the view that the self is composed of *multiple* self-aspects suggests a remedy for those facing stereotype threat. Indeed, any individual can be categorized based on multiple identities (e.g., Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1995), and

often the activation of one particular identity (e.g., one's student self-aspect) will inhibit a competing self-aspect (e.g., one's sorority sister self-aspect; see Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2004). Thus, redirecting a woman's self-categorization away from her gender toward another self-aspect, such as her student self-aspect, might eliminate stereotype threat effects because her behavior would be directed by a self-aspect unassociated with the stereotype. In other words, similar to the aforementioned finding that "chronic attributes" are rendered inert when an unrelated self-aspect is accessible (Brown & McConnell, 2009b), activating a self-identity unrelated to the stereotyped domain may neutralize stereotype threat effects. Consistent with this logic, simply having female undergraduates report their education level activated their student self-aspect (an identity associated with math skill) and inhibited their gender self-aspect, eliminating the math performance decrements typically observed under stereotype threat (Rydell, McConnell, & Beilock, 2009). Similarly, work by Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) with Asian American women found that activating their participants' racial identities led to better math performance whereas activating their gender identities led to poorer performance. In sum, because the self-concept is composed of multiple selves, whether stereotype threat impairment is realized will depend on which self-aspect is most accessible in memory and thus serves to guide behavior.

Disidentification

Steele (1997) proposed that many women and African American students respond to prolonged stereotype threat in the classroom with *disidentification*, defined as removing one's academic domain from one's self-concept. In other words, people who face repeated episodes of stereotype threat might eliminate their student self-aspect from their self-concepts. In many ways, stereotype threat represents a classic situation of cognitive imbalance involving inconsistent propositional links among the self, one's ingroup identity, and the domain in question (Greenwald et al., 2002; Heider, 1958; Major & O'Brien, 2005). For example, a woman might have a positive association with her group (woman) and a desire to excel in a domain (math), yet the existence of a negative association between the group and domain (i.e., women are not good at math) creates cognitive imbalance. When facing such an imbalance, the most likely response is to disidentify with the domain. Indeed, this account is

the basis of a model of stereotype threat effects put forth by Schmader, Johns, and Forbes (2008).

Although eliminating a domain-relevant self-aspect from one's self-concept may eliminate cognitive dissonance, it greatly reduces the likelihood that one will ever develop competence in the domain (see Rydell, Rydell, & Boucher, 2010). Importantly, the nature of self-concept representation may have real implications for how disidentification occurs. First, one would expect that people lower in self-complexity will experience stronger stereotype threat effects because the organization of their self-concept will amplify the negative affect experienced. This reasoning is supported by work showing that people under stereotype threat experience greater stress (Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007) and have difficulty vanquishing worries about reifying the negative stereotype from their mind (Beilock, Rydell, & McConnell, 2007). Second, the nature of how the self-concept is organized in memory should dictate how easily one can disidentify (i.e., eliminate the relevant self-aspect). For example, when self-aspects are more intertwined by shared associative links, it may prove more difficult to eliminate a stereotype-relevant self-aspect because of the shared associations. Thus, the nature of one's self-concept organization should modulate the experiences that make disidentification more attractive (e.g., those lower in self-complexity should experience stronger reactions to stereotype threat situations and find it more difficult to regulate ruminations that further impair performance) and should also influence how readily one can disidentify in the first place.

Loneliness and Ostracism

Sometimes, people may lose a self-aspect not through self-initiated means (e.g., disidentification) but because of social circumstances. Perceived social isolation (i.e., loneliness; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008) and being ignored and excluded by others (i.e., ostracism; Williams, 2007) have profound negative consequences. For example, loneliness entails a lack of social support that impairs psychological and physiological functioning and increases mortality rates (Harter, 2003; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Similarly, being ostracized, even when it is known to be unintentional, produces physiological responses akin to the experience of physical pain (Lieberman, 2007).

When considering the implications of self-concept representation, people lower in self-complexity should experience loneliness and ostracism more

strongly. Because people lower in self-complexity experience stronger affective reactions and ruminations (e.g., Linville, 1985; Renaud & McConnell, 2002), the sting of social isolation should be more poignant for them. Indeed, people with poorer social support have more negative well-being (e.g., more depression, lower self-esteem, greater physical illnesses) when they are lower in self-complexity (McConnell, Strain, Brown, & Rydell, 2009). Yet, there may be additional reasons that the specific structure of one's self-concept matters when facing social isolation. Returning to the example of Anne (see Figure 24.2), being isolated by her family or by her friends should be much more aversive than being isolated at work because her "Daughter" and "With friends" self-aspects are more intertwined with other self-aspects, whereas her "Company CEO" self-aspect is relatively freestanding. Thus, even within an individual, social isolation should have different effects based on the idiosyncratic structure of one's self-concept in memory and the self-aspects implicated.

The Self in Broader Contexts

In this final section, we focus on broader issues that have implications for both the cognitive structure and the social forces that influence self-concept representation. Phenomena such as self-regulation, meta-beliefs about the self, and the influence of culture are discussed.

Self-Regulation

Sedikides and Skowronski (1997) propose that the self evolved in part to set goals, perform behaviors to pursue those goals, evaluate whether the goals have been met, and associate the outcomes of goal-directed behavior with adaptive feelings (e.g., pride to reinforce successful goal-directed behavior, shame to punish unsuccessful efforts). In other words, self-representation creates the ability to regulate one's behavior. Prominent theories of self-regulation echo the idea that goals are represented within the self-concept and that these representations are necessary for goal pursuit (e.g., Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986). We now outline theory and research on self-regulation, highlighting the essential role of the self-concept throughout.

SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-REGULATORY GOALS

An important feature of the self-concept is that it includes goal representations of how one could be

or how one wants to be (e.g., Carver, 2001, 2003; Higgins, 1987). Examination of the self-aspects people spontaneously generate reveals that 5% are related to goals (e.g., "who I ought to be," "my future self"; McConnell, 2011). Consistent with this finding, Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed that people have possible selves, which are cognitive representations of the individual's enduring goals that serve both as standards of comparison with one's current self and as the incentive for changing the self. For example, a possible self of "me retiring with financial security" serves as both the referent toward which the current self is compared and the incentive to engage in self-regulation. Possible selves can also be undesired or feared selves, with the aim of self-regulation being to increase the gap between one's current and feared selves.

Another way to classify goals is to think about those that are more approach oriented and those that are more avoidance oriented. Along these lines, Higgins (1987) proposed two types of self-guides: the *ideal self* and the *ought self*. One's ideal selves are self-representations that reflect one's hopes and aspirations, whereas one's ought selves are self-representations that comprise one's obligations and responsibilities. Inconsistencies between one's actual (i.e., current) self and a goal self trigger specific negative emotions (Higgins, 1997), and as goal selves become more accessible in memory, the negative emotions experienced in the face of self-discrepancies increase (Strauman & Higgins, 1987).

In fact, according to objective self-awareness theory (OSA; Duval & Wicklund, 1972), these negative emotions play a central role in instigating self-regulation. Specifically, OSA theory proposes that self-regulation can only occur under conditions of objective self-awareness, which is when the self is the object of one's attention. The theory further states that people are compelled to evaluate themselves whenever their attention is focused inward and that such self-evaluation inevitably involves comparing oneself to a standard, such as a goal self. If a discrepancy between oneself and a standard is detected, the individual is said to experience negative emotions that motivate self-regulation. For example, one may possess a goal of getting into better physical shape by lifting weights at a gym. Objective self-awareness theory would posit that the likelihood of meeting such a goal would be increased by augmenting one's attention to current behavior, such as lifting weights in front of a mirror. Should one not complete a workout routine, the mirror would

increase one's awareness that the current behavior is short of the goal, producing negative affect that, in turn, motivates self-regulatory action (e.g., lifting for an extra period of time to make up for the shortfall). Consistent with this proposal, a number of studies have found that self-discrepancies only lead to self-regulation under conditions of heightened self-awareness (e.g., Carver & Humphries, 1981; Duval & Lalwani, 1999; Duval & Wicklund, 1972).

More recently, researchers have identified other means of activating goals without self-awareness. When goals become associated with situational cues that co-occur with those goals, the presence of those cues can activate the goal and trigger self-regulation (e.g., Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2004). For example, automatic goal activation has been found for a variety of goals including impression formation (e.g., Chartrand & Bargh, 2002), anger management (e.g., Mauss, Cook, & Gross, 2007), and achievement (e.g., Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001). Presumably, these goals must exist in memory at a sufficient state of activation for automatic goal pursuit to be possible. If strong enough cue–response associations exist in memory (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2004; Mischel & Shoda, 1995), a cue alone may be sufficient to trigger self-regulatory behaviors without any conscious awareness required. On the other hand, heightened self-awareness should also increase the accessibility of goals and may do so at a conscious level. Because people possess multiple possible selves and these goal self-aspects must be sufficiently accessible to activate goal pursuit (through nonconscious priming, conscious direction, or combinations of both), the central role of the self-concept in self-regulation is once again underscored (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997).

Given the hypothesized importance of discrepancies between current and goal selves, it is surprising that there is little research on how these discrepancies directly affect self-regulatory behavior. There is a great deal of research on the emotions these discrepancies evoke (e.g., Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986; Phillips & Silvia, 2005; Strauman & Higgins, 1987), but the hypothesized sequence between discrepancies, emotions, and behavior has been relatively ignored (see Brown & McConnell, 2011). Instead, there has been profitable research on how cognitive factors, such as expectations and attributions about the self, predict self-regulatory behavior. For example, Carver, Blaney, and Scheier (1979) found that expectations

about the outcome of self-regulation efforts determine whether people persist or withdraw from self-regulation. Specifically, they found that participants experiencing a self-discrepancy who were highly self-aware (and thus had highly accessible goals) exerted effort to reduce the discrepancy when they expected to be successful in reaching their goals, but they reduced effort when they believed they would be unable reach their goals. Similarly, Duval and Lalwani (1999) observed that persistence in self-regulation depends on the attributions made for a self-discrepancy. When highly self-aware participants were faced with a self-discrepancy, they self-regulated (i.e., attempted to move toward their goal self) only when they attributed the discrepancy to their own insufficiencies. In contrast, they did not try to change when they attributed the discrepancy to an unreasonably high standard. These studies illustrate that self-cognitions (e.g., attributions) are important predictors of self-regulation, although further research is needed to integrate these findings into the hypothesized sequence of self-regulation, from goal representations in the self-concept to goal pursuit.

PURSuing GOALS AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

As explained above, a goal self must be accessible and discrepant from one's current self for self-regulation to occur. According to Carver and Scheier (1998), self-regulation operates within a cybernetic feedback loop. A feedback loop consists of comparisons between one's current self and a referent, such as a possible or goal self. If a discrepancy between the current self and a referent exists, self-regulation will occur. If there is no discrepancy, the individual will instead "coast." Unlike self-regulation, which aims to reduce the discrepancy between the current self and the referent, coasting is a relaxation of one's goal-related behavior (which was apparently already successful) so that resources and attention can be redirected toward other unmet goals.

This process is called a "discrepancy-reducing loop" (Carver, 2001), which involves pursuing goals by reducing a discrepancy between one's current and desired (referent) states. However, sometimes goal-directed behavior takes the form of avoiding an undesired state (e.g., feared possible selves; Markus & Nurius, 1986). The cybernetic model proposes that this form of goal-directed behavior is controlled by a second type of feedback loop, which is called a "discrepancy-enlarging loop." In this case, the referent is the feared state, and the person self-regulates

by increasing a discrepancy that is too small. For example, a woman who is afraid of becoming obese will have a feedback loop in which “obese self” is her referent. When the discrepancy between her current weight and her definition of obesity is small, she will self-regulate by trying to lose weight in order to enlarge the discrepancy between her current state and her “obese self.” Recently, these discrepancy-reducing and discrepancy-enlarging loops have been associated with two general motivational systems, the behavioral activation system and behavioral inhibition system, respectively (Carver, 2003).

To summarize, similar to the models described previously (e.g., Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), the cybernetic model assumes that self-regulation occurs following the awareness of a discrepancy between current and goal selves. Moreover, these models all predict that the discrepancy elicits negative emotions before self-regulation. However, only the cybernetic model seeks to explain how people track their progress once self-regulation begins. Specifically, it proposes that an individual’s rate of discrepancy reduction or discrepancy enlargement elicits affect, with desired rates of progress (e.g., quickly reducing a discrepancy) eliciting positive affect and undesired rates evoking negative affect. Indeed, the rate at which an individual is reducing a discrepancy has been found to predict the intensity and valence of affect (e.g., Hsee & Abelson, 1991; Lawrence, Carver, & Scheier, 2002). Importantly, the hypothesized function of this affect is to inform the individual of goal progress so that self-regulation efforts can be increased, decreased, or maintained as appropriate.

This process of evaluating one’s goal progress is an essential part of goal pursuit. Self-regulation is an effortful behavior drawing from a limited resource (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004), and thus people who engage in self-regulation must be able to determine when to halt self-regulatory efforts, either because these have been successful and thus are no longer necessary or because they have been futile and no more effort need be wasted. Unfortunately, the importance of recognizing when to withdraw effort and terminate self-regulation is often understated. People need to disengage from unattainable goals because pursuing such goals predicts lower well-being (Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003) and poorer health (Wrosch, Miller, Scheier, & de Pontet, 2007), and it depletes resources necessary to pursue other goals (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004). Additional

research is needed to better understand when people recognize the futility of self-regulation and factors that facilitate disengagement from unattainable goals (e.g., Carrol, Shepperd, & Arkin, 2009; Wrosch & Miller, 2009).

Recent advances in self-regulation research reveal that not everyone self-regulates in the same way and that self-concept representation underlies these differences. Because affect is hypothesized to have a central role in the initiation of self-regulation (e.g., Carver, 2001, 2003; Duval & Wicklund, 1972; but see Brown & McConnell, 2011) and the complexity of one’s self-concept modulates the experience of affect (e.g., Linville, 1985), it seems likely that one’s level of self-complexity should moderate the relation between affect and self-regulation. Consistent with this reasoning, Brown and McConnell (2009a) found that among people lower in self-complexity who believed a goal was attainable because they were told that practice would improve performance on a test of verbal ability, self-regulation efforts were greater (i.e., people practiced harder) when the negative affect produced by a self-discrepancy was more intense. Interestingly, affect was unrelated to self-regulation among people with greater self-complexity. These individuals have a relatively stable emotional life and thus do not seem to refer to their affect during self-regulation. Thus, self-regulation is influenced not only by one’s self-representation (e.g., goal selves) but also by the effects of this representation on the intensity of one’s emotions and whether one defers to these emotions.

Lay Theories about the Self

Another important consideration in how self-concept representation plays a meaningful role is the lay theories people hold about the self. For example, work by Dweck (1999) on self theories shows that people’s lay theories about the nature of personality vary. Specifically, some people adopt a more *incremental theory*, whereby they view personality as dynamic, flexible, and changeable, whereas others hold a stronger *entity theory*, whereby they view personality as fixed, rigid, and unchangeable. These theories influence a number of phenomena about the self. For example, self-regulatory failures are interpreted and experienced differently based on one’s self theory (Dweck, 1999; Molden & Dweck, 2006; Renaud & McConnell, 2007). Failure for entity theorists is much more damning because such people believe that not achieving a goal reflects an absence of a quality that cannot be developed or

learned. For example, poor performance on a college entrance exam for an individual who believes that intelligence is a fixed quality will be very dismaying because such a person will believe that failure is an unchangeable fate. On the other hand, a similar failure by one who holds an incremental theory might induce that person to study and prepare harder for a second administration of the exam.

The implications of lay theories extend beyond self-regulatory processes. For example, stereotype threat is more debilitating for entity theorists and less problematic for incremental theorists who can adopt the perspective that improvement is possible despite prevailing pejorative stereotypes about one's own group identity (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002). Indeed, in the classroom, holding an incremental theory helps students adopt a mastery orientation in which setbacks are viewed as challenges that can be overcome rather than indicators of one's own helpless state (Robins & Pals, 2002). At an even more basic level, one's implicit theories affect how information processing occurs. For example, McConnell (2001) found that entity theorists are more likely to form on-line impressions because the assumption that a person has an unchangeable essence encourages perceivers to form a rigid first impression of the person (i.e., subsequent information will not be useful because people do not change). When applied to the work of McConnell et al. (2002), this finding suggests that it is likely that entity theorists are more likely to form on-line self-concepts than incremental theorists. Thus, entity theorists should rely on early information to develop a relatively fast on-line impression of themselves, whereas incremental theorists may continue to update their self-evaluations as additional feedback comes to light.

Cultural Contexts

Finally, we would submit that any understanding of the self should always be grounded in the context of cultural influences. For example, a number of scholars have emphasized the role of culture in understanding the self, with much of this work proposing that people in individual-centered cultures view the self as an entity that is more unchanging and situationally invariant, whereas people in collectivist-centered cultures assume a more flexible and contextually determined self (e.g., Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). That is, it has been argued that in independent cultures such as North America and Western Europe, the self is perceived as more separate from social context, unitary,

and consistent in nature, in comparison to a more interdependent, connected self in more collectivistic cultures such as those in Asia.

We would contend that although meaningful cultural differences exist, such distinctions are not so clear-cut. For instance, the notion of multiple selves highlighted in much of our chapter advocates for a definition of the self that is not unitary. Even in the United States (arguably one of the most independent cultures), McConnell (2011) found that participants on average report 4.23 self-aspects, with only 3% of participants reporting only a single self. This suggests that the notion of "a single self" in Western cultures is too simplistic, and that there will be individual differences in the extent to which people adopt individualist or collectivist self-construals (Brewer & Gardner, 1989; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1989). Our perspective is that self-concepts are probably composed of a greater number of role and relationships self-aspects for individuals whose culture and individual differences are more interdependent and collectivist in nature. Along these lines, McConnell (2011) found that women have a greater proportion of relationship self-aspects than men, reflecting gender differences in relationship orientation (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997), especially for close dyadic relationships (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999).

Conclusion

In our chapter, we outlined some of the benefits of studying the self from a social cognitive perspective. Early work in this area focused on improving our understanding of the cognitive underpinnings of the self-concept, addressing questions ranging from, "Is the self unique?" to "Why does bad news trigger great angst for some people but roll off the backs of others?" As this work progressed, our knowledge of how self-relevant information is processed, stored, and retrieved in memory grew considerably. With this strong foundation of knowledge in place, our understanding of the self has been applied to some of the most important social issues of the day, ranging from what conditions leave people more susceptible to depression and illness to when pejorative stereotypes will result in self-inflicted performance deficits. These two themes (i.e., the cognitive representation of the self and how the self mediates important social phenomena) are complementary, and they are tied together by a number of broader phenomena, such as self-regulation, lay theories about the self, and the influence of culture. Overall, this work affirms

the centrality of the self in key social phenomena, and our understanding of its role is grounded in a framework that explains how the self-concept is represented in memory. In summary, the social cognitive perspective continues to address critical questions, both age-old and cutting-edge, involving the prominence of the self in everyday life.

Author Note

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Notes

1. One line of work with similarities to self-complexity is research on compartmentalization of the self (e.g., Showers, 1992). Compartmentalization uses measures similar to self-complexity (e.g., people report their self-aspects and trait attributes), but this line of work examines the implications of whether one's self-aspects are composed of mostly positive attributes, mostly negative attributes, or a mixture of positive and negative attributes. Because this work places a greater emphasis on self-concept content (i.e., valence of attributes) than on structure, we do not highlight it in our chapter (but for an excellent review, see Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2003).

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