

## Chapter 7

# Striving for Specific Identities: The Social Reality of Self-Symbolizing

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Striving for specific identities (e.g., lawyer, mother, pious person) is not a strategic effort at self-presentation, but is rather a nonstrategic approach to self-construction. To understand which form such self-constructive efforts need to take in order to be effective, it is necessary to examine how individuals conceive of the intended identity goal state. My analysis of this issue—which draws on Lewin's ideas on goal striving—suggests that people define the goal of possessing a certain identity as located on the plane of social reality. That is, one feels it is necessary that others be aware of one's claim to possession of a particular identity.

However, individuals engaged in identity-related goal striving see in others nothing more than a passive witness of their efforts. This rather rudimentary form of relating to others is rooted in the special motivational force that instigates identity striving: a person's commitment to identity attainment. To highlight the unique nature of identity striving, I shall compare it with strategic forms of self-presentation. In sharp contrast to strategic self-presentation, identity striving does not necessitate a strong concern with the thoughts and feelings of the audience addressed.

## The Subjective Conceptions of Identity Goals

The meaning of particular identities is ultimately derived from society, for an integral part of our socialization process involves learning what is expected of persons holding a particular identity. Moreover, the social community tends to teach its members unambiguous definitions of the various identities, since dual or triple definitions create misunderstandings among its members, hamper productive interactions, and only serve to split the community (Inkeles, 1968).

Individuals who are committed to an identity conceive of that identity in terms of a goal state, whose attainment requires not only possession of the potential to enact identity-relevant behaviors, but also the ability to maintain that potential over time. However, the key question with regard to identity attainment is whether these

individuals also feel that *others* need to know about such potential before it is possible to lay claim to identity possession. In order to investigate the extent to which a sense of possessing an intended identity is dependent upon others' awareness of the individual's potential to enact identity-relevant behaviors, it is necessary to reflect back on the psychology of goal-striving as presented by the Lewinian school.

### The Social Reality Concept of Lewin's Berlin Group

Mahler's (1933) operationalization of Lewin's (1926) ideas on goal striving led to the development of a methodology that is most useful in addressing the issue of individual representations of goals. Mahler claimed that individual goal conceptions can be unveiled by analyzing activities that are substitutable for original goal striving. The experimental paradigm she introduced (see also Lissner, 1933; Ovsiankina, 1928) was quite simple in nature: Subjects were instructed to perform a certain task, such as to build a playhouse from wooden blocks, to solve a mathematical problem with pencil and paper, or to construct meaningful sentences from word lists. Shortly after beginning the task, subjects were interrupted and asked to solve a substitute task. They were then allowed to return to the interrupted, original task. Of interest was whether subjects would take advantage of this opportunity to *complete* the original task.

Mahler postulated that whenever subjects experience a correspondence between the quality of the goal served by solving the *substitute* task and the quality of the goal served by working on the *original* task, they are no longer inclined to return to the original task since substitute completion has occurred. Accordingly, in the event that solving a substitute task reduces the frequency of resumption of the original task, it can be inferred that the goal of the original task entails qualities that are served by the substitute task performed.

Furthermore, Mahler suggested that tasks differ with respect to whether their solutions need to be shown to *others* for a feeling of task completion to emerge. For example, whether the building of a house out of wooden blocks is considered to be completed is not dependent on whether anyone else ever notices the finished house. However, when solving a certain task is interpreted by the individual as a test of intelligence, of creativity, or of any other self-related attribute, it is necessary that others take notice of the solution in order for a sense of completion to occur. Mahler therefore maintained that all *self*-related goals are located on what she referred to as the *plane of social reality*. No sense of having reached these goals occurs as long as relevant task solutions do not become a social fact through being noticed by others.

In experiments on this issue, Mahler applied the substitution paradigm such that the substitute tasks employed either served or did not serve goals located on the plane of social reality. For example, when the original task involved such activities as solving mathematical problems or constructing creative sentences from lists of words on a piece of paper, the substitute tasks required that individuals solve these problems either through silent deliberation or by speaking aloud. For both types of tasks, speaking aloud proved to be the more effective substitute task with respect to suppressing the resumption of the original task. Mahler interpreted these findings as

indicative of the fact that subjects conceived of the original goals as located on the plane of social reality. That is, subjects not only sought to find solutions to mathematical or creative problems, but also wanted *others* (in this case the experimenter) to know that they were smart or creative. Thus, only solving the substitute tasks aloud provided a sense of having attained the self-related goals of being smart or creative to which subjects had aspired while working on the original tasks.

It appears, therefore, that having people engage in substitute activities that are either noticed by others or remain unnoticed is a simple and straightforward approach to determining whether the original activity served a goal that is located on the plane of social reality.

### Exploring the Concept of Social Reality in the Realm of Identity-Related Goal Striving

Striving for particular identity goals requires the execution of identity-related activities. It is possible, for example, to strive for a specific identity through the exercise of identity-related social influence (e.g., an academic psychologist may engage in teaching psychology), by displaying material symbols (e.g., a pious person may wear a golden cross), through the fulfillment of the daily duties associated with a particular identity (e.g., a baker bakes bread), by simply making a verbal claim to possession of a particular identity (e.g., "I am a baker"; Gollwitzer, Wicklund, & Hilton, 1982), or through the acquisition of the skills and tools associated with an identity (e.g., an educational background in music theory and a fine-quality instrument for a musician).

Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982, 1983; Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985b) provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of identity-related striving. It is assumed that identity goals are composed of an entire set of indicators of attainment, referred to as the *symbols* of that identity, for they tend to carry a meaning that goes far beyond the purely physical, sensory experience of that indicator. Wearing a white coat, for example, triggers a more-or-less universal reaction in others that goes beyond the white coat's physical qualities, for it symbolizes to others that they are dealing with a physician.

To acquire one of the many societally defined identity goals, it is necessary to accumulate its symbols. Clearly, social identities are so broadly defined (e.g., pious person) that one is generally not in a position to acquire *all* of the indicators of an identity. Consequently, it is always possible to continue striving for an identity-related goal through the acquisition of further relevant symbols. Self-completion theory refers to such identity-constructing efforts as *self-symbolizing* activities.

Thus, to investigate whether people conceive of identity goals as located on the plane of social reality, subjects are first given the opportunity to engage in a self-symbolizing activity. In order to vary whether these efforts become a social fact, subjects are then placed in a situation where self-symbolizing is either noticed by others or simply remains unnoticed. Given that identity goals are located on the plane of social reality, striving for an identity in front of an audience should provide a stronger sense of possessing the intended identity than striving in the absence of

an audience. To determine whether this is the case, self-symbolizing individuals are finally provided with a further opportunity to strive for the intended identity in order to observe the extent to which self-symbolizing efforts persist.

*The impact of social reality on self-symbolizing efforts.* In the first experiment conducted on this issue (Gollwitzer, 1986a, Study 1), female undergraduates who had expressed the intent to raise a family were asked to write down personal skills relevant to succeeding as a mother (e.g., "I love to cook") in order to prepare themselves for an exchange of personal information with a partner subject. Subjects were either informed that their self-descriptions would be carefully studied by the partner subject, or they were shown that their self-descriptions had been discarded and therefore would not become known to others. By placing subjects' self-descriptions under these two conditions, it was possible to vary whether subjects' self-symbolizing activities were noticed by others, and consequently, whether these efforts became a social fact.

Thereafter, subjects were given the opportunity to engage in further self-symbolizing by completing a personality profile questionnaire. The experimenter handed them a semantic differential type of personality questionnaire on which a sample profile was drawn, and explained that the sample profile represented the ideal personality for a mother (i.e., successful mothers have a personality profile similar to this sample profile). The experimenter had, however, merely fabricated the personality profile so as to describe a person with five positive and five negative traits. Subjects were then instructed to rate their own personality traits on this questionnaire.

When initial self-symbolizing (i.e., the written self-descriptions of mother-related personal skills) was not made known to the partner subject, subjects felt compelled to engage in further self-symbolizing by drawing their own personality profile similar to the ideal mother profile provided, thereby claiming possession of the personality attributes characteristic of ideal mothers. However, subjects whose initial self-descriptions were noticed by the partner subject ascribed attributes to themselves on the personality profile questionnaire that were at variance with the ideal mother profile. Evidently, self-symbolizing that remains unnoticed, and thus does not become a social fact, is less effective in furnishing subjects with a sense of possessing the intended identity than self-symbolizing that is noticed by others. Since it is necessary that others be aware of identity striving in order to acquire a stronger sense of goal attainment, it can be inferred that individuals conceive of identity goals as located on the plane of social reality.

Considering that in the present study initial self-symbolizing occurred only with respect to identity-related self-descriptions, and not in terms of actual identity-related performances, it is conceivable that taking notice of self-symbolizing might have failed to enhance people's sense of possessing the intended identity if subjects had instead been given the opportunity to carry out identity-relevant performances. In order to clarify this issue, a second experiment was conducted, in which subjects' self-symbolizing entailed actually solving identity-relevant problems (Gollwitzer, 1986a, Study 2). Subjects were medical students committed to becoming physicians.

They were instructed to suggest solutions for a number of problems frequently confronted by physicians (e.g., "A diabetic refuses to abide by the diet the physician prescribed. What should the physician tell the patient?"). Subjects were told that they could quit working on these problems whenever they desired, that is, they were not required to complete the entire set of 45 problems. Shortly after subjects had begun to work on the problem set, a confederate appeared. For half of the subjects, she skimmed through the solutions to the first three problems, and then addressed the subjects as physicians. For the other half of the subjects, however, the confederate did not take notice of task performance, nor did she address subjects as physicians. The subjects' subsequent persistence at task performance was measured by recording how long they continued to work on the assigned tasks after the confederate departed.

Taking notice of subjects' solutions and addressing them as physicians resulted in less task persistence than not taking notice of task performance. Thus, self-symbolizing that was noticed by others evidently provided a stronger sense of attainment of the intended identity than self-symbolizing that remained unnoticed. Since taking notice of identity striving proved efficacious for feelings of identity attainment, subjects apparently conceived of their identity goal of physician as being located on the plane of social reality.

The results of both studies suggest that one can effectively strive for identity goals not only by making identity-related verbal statements (Study 1), but also by executing identity-related tasks (Study 2). The key issue with respect to identity attainment, however, is not whether identity-related efforts take the form of verbal claims or actual performances, but whether these efforts, irrespective of their form, are *noticed* by others, and thus become a social fact.

*Self-initiative in turning self-symbolizing into a social fact.* Whether identity goals are conceived of as being located on the plane of social reality can also be approached by examining self-initiative in calling self-symbolizing efforts to the attention of others. Since self-symbolizing that is noticed by others appears to be more effective in providing a sense of possessing the intended identity than self-symbolizing that remains unnoticed by others, individuals oriented toward achieving a particular identity should be especially concerned with finding an audience for their identity-related striving. In order to explore this issue, people's readiness to engage in identity-related goal striving was first manipulated, and subsequent efforts to make self-symbolizing public were observed.

Whenever people are confronted with identity-related weaknesses, a heightened readiness to exert self-symbolizing efforts is elicited, as has been repeatedly demonstrated by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982). This principle was employed in the following two experiments in order to vary people's readiness to strive for intended identities. In the first study (Gollwitzer, 1986a, Study 3), medical students with the expressed intention of becoming physicians were told that they either possessed or did not possess the personal qualities that characterize successful physicians, thus subjecting them to either positive or negative feedback with respect to their prospects as physicians. Delivering negative feedback was meant to generate a

heightened readiness to engage in self-symbolizing. In a subsequent, presumably independent experiment, subjects were provided with an opportunity to engage in self-symbolizing through finding solutions to medical tasks. Subjects were instructed to solve a set of 15 medical problems placed in front of them. In addition, subjects were told that they could submit completed sections of the assignment to the experimenter whenever desired, that is, before having completed the entire set of 15 tasks.

More than 50% of the subjects who had received negative identity-related feedback, as opposed to only 8% of the subjects who had received positive feedback, attempted to bring completed tasks to the experimenter's notice before finishing the entire sequence of tasks. These results clearly demonstrate that individuals whose readiness to strive for an intended identity is heightened are anxious to convert identity-related goal striving into a social fact. Apparently, effective striving for an identity goal necessitates that identity-related efforts are noticed by others. That is, people feel that they need to make self-symbolizing public in order to move toward attainment of their identity goals.

The propensity toward making one's self-symbolizing efforts known to others was investigated further in an additional study (Gollwitzer, 1986a, Study 4). Female undergraduates with a commitment to the identity of dancer were requested to write a lengthy essay. Half of the subjects were instructed to describe the worst dancing instructor they had ever had, the other half their best dancing instructor ever. Thus, half of the subjects were compelled to recall a negative aspect, and the other half a positive aspect of their educational dancing background, so as to induce in the former a comparatively greater readiness to step up self-symbolizing efforts (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981).

Within a different social context, subjects were subsequently asked to participate in a public dancing session, where they would be given the opportunity to dance in front of a small audience. A sign-up sheet was handed out on which subjects were asked to indicate exactly when (i.e., in how many days) they wanted to be called back for one of these sessions. Our results revealed that those who had recalled their worst dancing instructor wanted to appear in public nearly two weeks earlier than subjects who had written about their best dancing instructor. Thus, subjects whose readiness to engage in self-symbolizing had been stimulated selected comparatively earlier dates for the public performance of a dance routine. These results strongly suggest that people are more anxious for self-symbolizing efforts to be noticed by others when identity-related striving is stimulated.

*Summary.* The results of these four experiments suggest that self-symbolizing that is noticed by others makes further striving for identity goals less necessary than self-symbolizing that remains unnoticed by others. In addition, people who are in the process of striving for identity goals are eager to make these efforts known to others, that is, they impatiently attempt to convert their self-symbolizing activities into a social fact. These findings imply that people conceive of identity goals as located on the plane of social reality. That is, people feel that the attainment of identity goals requires that others be aware of one's potential to enact identity-related behaviors.

## The Motivational Basis of Identity-Related Striving

The way in which people attempt to display identity-related goal striving to others can take many different forms. For example, the publishing efforts of a self-symbolizing scientist could be brought to others' attention by engaging in informal discussions concerning the main themes of a book in progress, or by making short declarative statements, such as "I just signed a publication contract!" Since the potential audiences available are also numerous (e.g., family, neighbors, students, or colleagues), the self-symbolizer is in a position to be rather selective in choosing an audience for identity-related efforts. In fact, however, self-symbolizing individuals are not at all selective with respect to the people they address. Nor are they interested in engaging in meaningful interactions with the audience at their disposal (Gollwitzer, 1984; Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985a). Rather, self-symbolizers appear to see in audiences nothing more than passive witnesses of identity-related goal striving. In order to explicate this phenomenon, it is necessary to examine the motivational basis of self-symbolizing.

### Commitment to an Identity

In an early study on self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981), subjects interested in such fields as music, dance, and languages were questioned with respect to their readiness to instruct others in activities related to their respective field of interest. In the course of our investigation, a most interesting observation was made. After an identity-related shortcoming with respect to their educational background (i.e., inadequate musical, dance, or foreign language training) was pointed out, some subjects indicated a reduced interest in teaching others the skill in question. Further investigation revealed that these individuals were no longer pursuing the identity of musician, dancer, or foreign language speaker respectively, that is, they had given up striving for these identities. Other subjects, however, expressed an intensified interest in teaching, and it was found that these individuals were still actively engaged in the pursuit of the identities mentioned above. On the basis of these results, we postulated that only individuals still *committed* to identity attainment attempt to compensate for identity-related shortcomings through self-symbolizing. We referred to this variable as the *commitment to a self-definition*.

In subsequent experiments, our focus of interest was primarily on individuals strongly committed to attaining a particular identity (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). We only recruited subjects who had indicated that they were still actively pursuing a certain identity and that they would be very upset if it were necessary to terminate this pursuit. In all of these studies, making subjects face identity-related shortcomings (e.g., poor identity-related educational background or inadequate identity-related personal attributes) did not result in reduced striving for the intended identity. Instead, subjects reacted by increasing their efforts to achieve the identity in question via self-symbolizing. We observed this phenomenon for a variety of different identity goals (e.g., athlete, Catholic, businessman, mathematician, vintner), as well as for various forms of self-symbolizing (e.g., writing identity-

related positive self-descriptions, influencing and teaching others, displaying identity-related status symbols, and associating with others known to possess the intended identity).

Apparently, the commitment to an identity operates as a force that propels people toward attainment of that identity. The energizing quality that emanates from making an identity commitment actually becomes most evident when hindrances (i.e., the experience of identity-related shortcomings) to attaining the intended identity are encountered. Under such conditions, committed individuals become even more determined to attain the identity in question, whereas the subsequent actions of non-committed individuals appear to reflect reduced identity-related aspirations and a sense of modesty.

### Deliberation Motivation Versus Implementation Motivation

Recently, Heckhausen and Kuhl (1985) suggested that it is necessary to distinguish between two qualitatively different motivational problems. Motivational problems of choice entail deliberation on the subjective importance and likelihood of certain potential outcomes and consequences associated with taking a particular course of action. Motivational problems of implementation, however, involve addressing the question of when and how to act in order to accomplish desired ends. Experimental results (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1986) suggest that people engage in deliberation on incentives and expectancies *prior* to committing themselves to a particular course of action, and focus on questions of implementation only *after* this commitment has become established. Moreover, making a decision to engage in a certain course of action apparently terminates deliberative thought and launches the individual into a fundamentally different motivational state, oriented solely toward executing the selected course of action. The transition from deliberative to executive thought appears to function somewhat like crossing the Rubicon (Heckhausen, 1985), that is, once the implementation mode of thought has been entered, one can no longer return to the preceding, deliberative motivational state.

With respect to people's identity commitments, two important implications can be derived from the proposition that individuals who are oriented toward implementation of an action are not in a position to undergo deliberation on the consequences of this action. First, people committed to a particular identity should be inclined to focus on acquiring this identity, to the exclusion of deliberative concerns. Since deliberation on the importance and likelihood of potential outcomes and their consequences comes to an end as soon as the individual makes a commitment, whether the intended identity is instrumental for attaining desired consequences or whether one is suited for the pursuit of a particular identity is no longer at issue. Committed individuals should therefore not be inclined to engage in deliberative thoughts that might challenge their choice of identity goal (e.g., "Am I suited for this identity? Do I really want to be a . . .? Should I give up trying to be a . . .?"), even when confronted with identity-related shortcomings. As our research showed (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982), an awareness of identity-related shortcomings actually generates an even greater determination to attain the intended identity goal. This suggests that



implementation motivation (i.e., volitional strength; Gollwitzer, 1986b) actually increases when difficulties hinder identity striving. As a result, deliberative concerns should be suppressed even more effectively, thus preventing the possibility that doubts could arise with respect to the value and expectancy of identity attainment.

Second, assuming that people conceive of identity goals as located on the plane of social reality, the implementation motivation characteristic of committed individuals should compel them to convert their self-symbolizing efforts into a social fact. Self-symbolizing individuals should also be inclined to seek audiences for their efforts in accordance with increases in implementation motivation. Thus, committed individuals who have just experienced an identity-related shortcoming should be especially concerned with making others notice identity-related striving. The results of Study 3 and Study 4 (Gollwitzer, 1986a) reported above strongly support this line of thought. More importantly, however, implementation motivation should suppress any concerns with the potential consequences of addressing others, that is, it should hinder reflection on how those addressed might feel about or potentially react to one's self-symbolizing efforts. This tendency has major social implications for the type and quality of interaction between self-symbolizing individuals and their audiences.

### Social Implications of the Unique Motivational Basis of Self-Symbolizing

An analysis of the motivational basis of self-symbolizing reveals that not only self-reflective thoughts on the choice of identity goal, but also reflective thoughts on the potential reactions of the audience addressed are suppressed when a person engages in self-symbolizing. The issue of self-reflection with respect to one's personal attributes ("Am I a person who is smart, athletic, religious, . . .?") has been dealt with extensively by the school of symbolic interactionism, whereas the issue of individual concerns with audience reactions falls under the domain of social psychologists focusing on strategic self-presentation. Both of these research traditions, however, entertain a view of the way in which individuals relate to others that is opposed to what one would expect from the self-symbolizing individual. Thus, an analysis of the ideas advanced by symbolic interactionists, as well as by researchers concerned with strategic self-presentation, should prove fruitful with respect to explicating how self-symbolizing individuals relate to their audiences.

#### Self-Symbolizers Are Not Self-Reflective

Symbolic interactionists have advanced the idea that the origin and development of the self is ultimately rooted in relating to others, a proposition that is commonly attributed to the early work of Cooley (1902). Our "self-feeling" is presumably determined by the attitude we hold toward the assumed thoughts of another with respect to our appearance, aims, character, and needs. Cooley referred to this self-

feeling as the *reflected* or *looking-glass self* in order to stress that taking the perspective of others allows for incorporation of their self-relevant judgments into one's self. Mead (1934) elaborated on Cooley's ideas by introducing the concept of the *generalized other* to refer to people's propensity to take the perspective of a particular reference group or a social community into consideration.

According to symbolic interactionism, the development of the self is dependent upon self-reflective thoughts (e.g., "What kind of person am I?"). Presumably, the attitudes of others toward one's self must be appraised in order to discover the nature of one's self. Thus, one forms self-related attitudes by using the presumed opinions of others regarding one's self as a source of information. This implies, however, that the individual must remain most sensitive to evaluation-relevant characteristics of these others, such as whether they are competent or credible judges of one's qualities.

Experimental research conducted within the tradition of symbolic interactionism focused on whether one takes the personal qualities (e.g., credibility, competence) of others into account when appraising their attitudes toward one's self. In order to explore this issue, subjects were instructed to engage in activities relevant to a personally important self-aspect (e.g., intelligence). An audience observed these activities and then approved or disapproved of the subjects' performance (see Haas & Maehr, 1965; Maehr, Mensing, & Nafzger, 1962; Videbeck, 1960). Each subject's self-rating (on this self-aspect) was recorded prior to and immediately following the evaluation by the audience, so as to determine the degree of self-change. Such experiments clearly bear resemblance to the classic persuasion paradigm (Hovland & Rosenberg, 1960), for the evaluative audience is conceived of as a communication source, the individual as the target of the audience's persuasive message, and the individual's self-aspect (e.g., intelligence) as the attitude object. In line with other research on persuasion (Tedeschi, 1974), the classic variables of the communication source were pivotal to the degree of self-change, that is, credible evaluators produced comparatively more self-change (Webster & Sobieszek, 1974).

These findings appear to imply that audience variables, such as credibility or competence, should also be of importance to the effectiveness of self-symbolizing. However, Mead's theorizing suggests that such an inference must be approached with great caution. Mead argued that a reflective orientation toward the self in which individuals relate to themselves as an object is limited to a special psychological condition which he labeled the *Me*-state. In contrasting the *Me*-state to the *I*-state, in which individuals actively engage in assertive self-expression, Mead claimed that the latter state is devoid of self-reflective thoughts, for individuals in this state do not conceive of themselves as the object of their concerns, but rather as the subject of their actions.

Since self-symbolizing individuals are engaged in the act of bringing identity-related striving to the attention of others, they clearly operate out of the *I*-state. The associated lack of self-reflection, with respect to self-assessment, creates a lack of concern with others' judgments toward oneself, as well as a state of ignorance with regard to attributes of the audience important to an adequate appraisal of their judgments. Thus, from the perspective of self-symbolizers, the audience's function

entails nothing more than taking notice of their self-symbolizing efforts. Hence, the self-symbolizer's concern for the personal qualities of the audience is extremely limited in nature, such that anyone who has "eyes to see and ears to hear" qualifies as an adequate audience. In somewhat more metaphoric language, self-symbolizing individuals (ab)use their social surrounding as a checklist on which to register the possession of identity-related symbols. Making check marks implies no actual concern for the qualities of the checklist itself; rather, the focus of concern is solely on whether one succeeds or fails in placing check marks, that is, on whether one manages to turn self-symbolizing efforts into a social fact.

On occasion, however, the self-symbolizing individual may encounter difficulties in attempting to register the possession of an identity-related symbol on others. The audience may, for instance, respond to a person's self-symbolizing by overtly inferring an identity to which the person does not aspire. Such misinterpretations occur, for example, when a psychologist is addressed as a physician, as in Study 2 above. The audience may also simply refuse to take notice of one's self-symbolizing efforts, as in Study 1 above, in which the experimenter completely ignored subjects' self-symbolizing self-descriptions by discarding these descriptions. Audiences may also actually choose to refute the individual's claim of possession of the intended identity by pointing to identity-related shortcomings.

However, a cultural norm seems to prevail that compels individuals to refrain from conveying negative self-related feedback (Blumberg, 1972; Tesser & Rosen, 1975). As Goffman (1959) stated, only the socially disgruntled will question the realness of what is presented. Even when suspicions arise, people appear to give a person's self-presentations the benefit of the doubt. The general readiness of the public to take notice of self-symbolizing efforts without question or rebuff proves quite advantageous, for this means that self-symbolizing individuals can afford to be rather insensitive toward the audience's thoughts and feelings. Even when an audience is not particularly enthused about listening or is actually aware of an individual's underlying identity-related shortcomings, it will generally opt to remain silent. Thus, even addressing critical audiences does not prove detrimental to self-symbolizing efforts. Self-symbolizing individuals therefore do not need to be selective when choosing an audience; rather, they can simply address the audience that is immediately available in the interest of converting self-symbolizing into a social fact. Should audiences choose to completely ignore, blatantly misinterpret, or actively refute self-symbolizing, this still does not stimulate a more strategic approach to the selection of audiences. The results of the experiments reported, as well as the analysis of the motivational basis of self-symbolizing, suggest that self-symbolizing individuals who are confronted with audience resistance simply respond by increasing their efforts to register self-symbolizing on the next available, alternative audience.

### Self-Symbolizers Are Not Strategic Self-Presenters

Under the heading of *strategic self-presentation* (or impression management), social psychologists have examined the efforts of individuals, referred to as self-presenters,

to control the perceptions of themselves by others, referred to as targets of self-presentation. In general, strategic self-presentation is motivated by the attempt to impress an audience so that it will provide the positive consequences one desires. Such a motivational basis implies that the individual must remain highly sensitive and responsive to others' demands in order to achieve desired ends.

The social orientation of strategic self-presenters is diametrically opposed to the approach taken by self-symbolizing individuals. Driven by an implementation motivation, self-symbolizing individuals focus only on demonstrating to others that they are in possession of an intended identity, irrespective of others' wishes, needs, or potential responses. In order to demonstrate that the self-symbolizing individual is not inclined to relate to others in an interpersonally sensitive or responsive manner, it is necessary to show that self-symbolizing does not serve the goals of strategic self-presentation. Therefore, we must examine the extent to which various reasons for engaging in strategic self-presentation (Schneider, 1981) are applicable to self-symbolizing efforts.

*Facilitating social interaction.* Strategic self-presentation can serve to promote the structuring of a particular social situation, and thus facilitate social interaction. Individuals who find themselves in imprecisely defined social contexts can avoid confusion and embarrassment by projecting images that clearly define what part they choose to play during the course of the interaction (Alexander & Knight, 1971; Goffman, 1955, 1959). In this regard, self-presentations serve to save face, and become even more pronounced when further difficulties in maintaining face are encountered (Modigliani, 1968).

Is this issue of saving face also related to self-symbolizing activities? In view of the third and fourth study described above—where medical students brought their relevant test performances to the attention of the experimenter and where dancers set an early date for a public performance—subjects had good reason to feel confused and embarrassed since they had been confronted with an identity-related shortcoming (i.e., relevant negative personality feedback in Study 3; salience of one's worst dancing instructor in Study 4).

Assuming that subjects were, in fact, confused and embarrassed, this does not necessarily imply that their efforts to bring self-symbolizing to the notice of others was in effect an attempt to save face as a medical student or dancer, respectively. Since great care was taken in both of these studies to place the experience of the identity-related shortcoming and the opportunity for self-symbolizing into two different and independent social contexts, those who took notice of self-symbolizing efforts had not witnessed the individual losing face. Therefore, one can confidently rule out the possibility that self-symbolizing subjects behaved the way they did out of a concern with saving face, for this can only be accomplished by relating to others who have witnessed one's "losing face."

*Acquiring social approval.* Individuals may apply strategic self-presentation in the interest of acquiring social approval, or of avoiding disapproval by a particular target person (Schlenker, 1980). Accordingly, individuals tend to claim possession of per-

sonal qualities that are socially desirable (e.g., being smart, likeable, or easy to get along with), and reject qualities that are socially undesirable (e.g., being aggressive, egoistic, or unfriendly). In the interest of assuring a positive evaluation by the target person, maximal responsiveness to the target person's requests is exhibited. In the event that the targets of self-presentation actually specify the attributes they find desirable, individuals tend to describe themselves in the manner specified, even when these qualities are socially undesirable (Gergen & Wishnov, 1965; Schneider & Eustis, 1972). Failure to impress the target person is met with further self-presentational efforts aimed at the same target person and designed to counter initial disapproval (Schneider, 1969). The self-presenter aiming at social approval must, however, refrain from inconsistent self-presentations in order to avoid the possibility that the target person identifies the self-presenter as a dishonest person—an obviously undesirable personal quality (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Schlenker, 1975).

Does self-symbolizing potentially serve the goal of winning social approval? The results of three experiments clearly demonstrate that self-symbolizing efforts actually lead to a neglect of the thoughts and feelings of others, a phenomenon certainly not conducive to gaining social approval. In the first experiment (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985a; Study 1), female undergraduates committed to the identity of career women were subjected to a manipulation of their sense of possessing this identity. They were informed that their personality either did or did not predestine them to success with respect to becoming a career woman. Within a different social context, subjects were then grouped into pairs (i.e., subjects who had received negative personality feedback with partner subjects who had received positive personality feedback) and told to cooperate with each other in creating positive self-descriptions related either to the intended identity or to an identity to which they did not feel committed.

When the self-descriptions to be created were related to the identity as a career woman, subjects who had received negative personality feedback dominated the interaction by producing more positive self-descriptive statements than their partner subjects. Even though dominating the interaction meant running the risk of being considered egocentric and noncooperative by the partner subject—attributes that are not met with social approval—the negative identity-relevant personality feedback evidently compelled subjects to neglect any concerns with acquiring social approval. Apparently, an orientation toward self-symbolizing provoked by the negative personality feedback suppressed any such concerns.

In order to explore this issue further, a second study was conducted (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985a, Study 2). Male undergraduates committed to various athletic identities (e.g., swimmer, tennis player) were first subjected to a personality-feedback manipulation similar to that employed in the previous study. In an allegedly independent second experiment, subjects were then instructed to describe their present identity-related status to an attractive female target person, this after having been informed about the female's preference for either self-deprecating or self-aggrandizing self-descriptions.

Our results revealed that both positive and negative personality feedback subjects followed the self-presentational cues set by the target person. However, negative

feedback subjects showed significantly less readiness to follow the cue to be self-deprecating than did positive feedback subjects. Obviously, a strong orientation toward self-symbolizing, resulting from identity-relevant negative personality feedback, compelled these subjects to disregard the cue to be self-deprecating, even though responding to this cue would actually have provided them with approval from the target person.

Finally, in a third study on this issue (Gollwitzer, 1984), subjects committed to various academic identities (e.g., mathematician, biologist) were confronted with a situation in which they expected to get to know a partner subject through an informal conversation. Each subject was told that the partner subject had already indicated topic preferences in preparation for the upcoming conversation. These preferences expressed a definite disinterest in mathematics or biology, respectively, in favor of other conversational topics. As in the previous experiment, the subjects' sense of possessing the intended academic identity was then manipulated (in this case via a salience of worst teacher manipulation, as in the study with dancers reported above). Thereafter, the subjects' propensity to suggest an academic conversational topic related to their intended identity was measured. Consistent with the results of the two preceding studies, subjects whose sense of possessing the intended identity had been undermined consistently proposed topics related to their academic commitment. Apparently, an orientation toward self-symbolizing compelled subjects to disregard the expressed topic preferences of the partner subject, even though this meant risking being disliked by the partner subject.

The results of these three studies thus strongly suggest that self-symbolizing activities do not serve the goal of winning social approval, but rather appear to suppress such concerns.

*Controlling others' actions.* Strategic self-presentation can serve the goal of winning control over another person's actions. By projecting a certain image, self-presenters can attempt to compel the target person to behave in a manner that serves their interests (Jones, 1964; Jones & Pittman, 1982). The choice of image (e.g., likable, dangerous, competent, moral, or helpless) depends on the instrumentality of that image for bringing about desired ends. In order to gain admission to a prestigious college, for example, one should fare better by projecting an image of competence rather than helplessness. However, if one seeks to be treated supportively by one's fellow colleagues, it could prove more advantageous to present an image of helplessness rather than competence. In any event, the images employed are not determined by the simple desire or need to be perceived as likable, competent, and so forth, but rather by the instrumentality of those images, that is, by their suitability for bringing about desired ends.

Do self-symbolizing individuals take the instrumentality of their efforts into consideration, with respect to controlling an audience's actions? In view of the finding that self-symbolizing individuals did not capitalize on the self-deprecating self-presentational cues set by an attractive female (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985a), it seems unlikely that an interest in acquiring influence over the female's actions was

a motivating force. The same holds true for the results of the experiment in which the partner subject's conversational topic preference was disregarded by the self-symbolizing individual (Gollwitzer, 1984). If the self-symbolizing individuals had actually been concerned with encouraging the partner subject to converse productively with them, they would have surely taken the partner subject's topic preference into consideration. Thus, it seems justified to assume that, in both studies, self-symbolizing individuals did not take the instrumentality of their actions into account, with respect to bringing about such ends as getting along with an attractive female or with a conversation partner.

*Summary.* The preceding discussion suggests that self-symbolizing does not serve the kinds of goals that guide strategic self-presentation. Apparently, self-symbolizing individuals relate to others in a manner that is strikingly *nonstrategic*. With few exceptions, modern day social psychology has completely ignored such *nonstrategic* self-presentation, in favor of the strategic aspects relevant to presenting one's self to others. Baumeister (1982), however, points out that one may turn to others in the interest of projecting an image that incorporates one's own personal goals and ideals (self-constructive self-presentation). Since these goals can be assumed to remain relatively *stable* over time and across social contexts, constructive self-presentation is said to be frequently in conflict with *strategic* self-presentational concerns, aimed at either pleasing an immediate audience or controlling an audience's short-term or long-term actions. Clearly, self-symbolizing is self-constructive self-presentation, since it not only furnishes people with a feeling of possessing an intended identity, but also reveals a lack of strategic concerns with respect to the way in which one relates to others.

## Conclusion

Individual conceptions of identity goals are found to be located on the plane of social reality. This implies that people striving for identity goals need to make their self-symbolizing efforts known to others in order to achieve a sense of goal attainment. An analysis of the motivational basis of self-symbolizing reveals that once people have committed themselves to the attainment of a certain identity, an orientation toward social implementation of that identity prevails. Fundamentally different from strategic approaches to addressing others that focus on either pleasing others or controlling their actions, the social implementation of identity goals represents a markedly nonstrategic way of relating to others. Self-symbolizing is nevertheless self-constructive for it facilitates the development of a sense of possessing the intended identity.

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