

Self-Symbolizing and the Neglect of Others' Perspectives

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In the present pair of studies interpersonal cues were set up, prompting self-descriptions that would be in potential conflict with subjects' self-definitional needs. It was hypothesized that self-definitional needs would hinder subjects' responding to the interpersonal aspects of the situation. In both studies subjects committed to a certain self-definition (e.g., female professional, journalist, mathematician) were given feedback that their personality did or did not predispose them to be successful in their self-definitional realms. Subsequently, in a different context, subjects had to compete in expressing positive self-descriptions that were related or unrelated to their self-definitions (Experiment 1). Subjects given negative personality feedback dominated the competition, provided that the self-descriptions were related to the self-definition to which they felt committed. In Experiment 2, male subjects were asked to report on their standing in their self-definitional realms to an attractive female target person, after she had indicated a preference for either self-deprecating or self-aggrandizing self-descriptions. Subjects given positive personality feedback were more self-deprecating than subjects who received negative personality feedback, given the presence of a cue to be self-deprecating. In addition, positive feedback subjects complied with the self-presentational cue set by the target person in proportion to their attraction to her, whereas negative feedback subjects failed to do so. The results are discussed in terms of a recent notion of symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) and in terms of other views on the self.

Self-descriptions have received concentrated attention both by social psychologists and personologists. Social psychologists (e.g., Gergen & Wishnov, 1965; Schneider & Eustis, 1972; Stires & Jones, 1969) have shown that people match their self-descriptions to social cues signaled by others. Whether a self-description is made in a modest or self-enhancing tone is often dependent on the preferences of the specific other who is addressed. But self-descriptions have also been found to serve

public esteem. Whenever the individual faces a reduction in public esteem there seems to be a tendency to compensate within the public domain (e.g., Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Schlenker, 1975; Schneider, 1969). In other words, the individual tries to undo a negative impression made on another person by presenting other, positive aspects about the self.

Neither of the above approaches is particularly concerned with the accuracy of self-reports. However, this issue becomes central when psychologists try to use self-reports to measure stable personal attributes. Personologists often assume (for overviews, see Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Mischel, 1968; Pryor, 1980; Wicker, 1969) that individuals in testing situations are guided by the intent to report their actual standing on a certain personal attribute. For example, a person who is working hard, taking appropriate risks in investments, and entertaining reasonably high aspirations, is also expected to report a high level of achievement motivation. However, this approach often overlooks the possibility

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that self-characterizations or self-presentations can serve a compensatory function (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1983).

A recent piece of research by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981; Study 1) questions the straightforward assumption that people will report a strong standing on a certain personal dimension in proportion to their actual strengths. When subjects committed to various self-definitions (e.g., musician, athlete, natural scientist) were asked to indicate how many people they were willing to teach, the following result emerged: Subjects with a weak educational background in their activity areas showed more investment in influencing others than did subjects with a strong educational background. In other words, subjects with the weakest educational backgrounds cast themselves as the most capable, at least in the domain of influencing others. The implication is that the relation between antecedent capabilities and behaving or reporting that one is capable, is sometimes a negative one.

Quite related to this issue, the assumption that self-descriptions are determined by social cues is also problematic, as reflected in a study by Gollwitzer, Wicklund, and Hilton (1982; Study 1). Subjects were asked to make a public statement that described their own negative performance on a fictitious test measuring capability in their self-definitional area. Individuals with a weak educational background in their respective activity areas followed the experimenter's request for negative self-descriptions to a lesser extent than did subjects with strong educational backgrounds. Apparently, individuals with a weak educational background were so intent on claiming capability in their activity areas that they failed to follow the experimenter's request for negative self-descriptions.

Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) have elaborated a notion of "symbolic self-completion" which suggests that people can use self-descriptions in the service of self-definitional needs. In line with Lewin's (1926) theorizing on goal-oriented behavior, it is proposed that people who are striving for self-defining goals (e.g., being an athlete, musician, or scientist) do not terminate goal-striving when they experience a shortcoming, that is, when they

are confronted with incompleteness regarding such goals. Rather, it is expected that the individual engages in self-symbolizing efforts, that is, activities that substitute for these shortcomings.

It is assumed that people define themselves as musicians, athletes, and so forth, by use of indicators of attainment in those realms, such as possessing a prestigious job, having extensive education or whatever is recognized by others as indicating progress toward completing the self-definition. When important indicators (symbols) of a self-definition are lacking, the person is expected to strive after further, alternative indicators of the self-definition. In other words, indicators of completeness are substitutable for one another.

The symbols (indicators of completeness) of any given self-definition can take a variety of forms, such as a verbal statement, behavior, or physical entity, that potentially signals to others one's self-definitional attainment. At the level of highest accessibility are a person's positive self-descriptions (e.g., people who aspire in skiing may refer to themselves as "slalom specialists"). These kinds of open self-characterizations will function as symbols of completeness as long as they bring to other people's notice a highly literal and direct indication that one possesses the self-definition in question.

If one considers positive self-descriptions as viable symbols of completeness, it becomes understandable why individuals with a weakness in educational background would try to manifest the capacity to instruct others (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981) and refuse to make negative self-descriptions (Gollwitzer et al., 1982): Those who face a shortcoming regarding an aspired-to self-definition are motivated to use self-reports for the purpose of indicating strength.

However, the phenomenon that people compensate for self-definitional shortcomings cannot be expected in every case. Rather, it is necessary that the individual be committed to the self-definition in the sense of showing continued striving for completeness. For people who have never had such a commitment, or who have abandoned the commitment, no substituting for an experienced shortcoming can be expected. This is exactly what was found for the noncommitted subjects in the

studies reported by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981) and Gollwitzer et al. (1982): Subjects who had not pursued relevant self-definitional activities recently did not try to substitute for lack of educational background, no matter whether the substitution activities were assessed via positive self-descriptions or by an increased readiness to influence others.

There is another important aspect about the incomplete individual who tries to indicate completeness. According to the symbolic interactionist school of thought (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), the response of the immediate community to the individual's actions enables the individual to define the self. People committed to the self-definition of musician, for instance, will be able to identify themselves as musicians only to the degree that the community recognizes the possession of this particular self-definition. Thus, it is through the acknowledgment by others that positive self-descriptions move an individual closer to a self-defining goal.

This social dependence of the self-symbolizing individual should not be construed as an orientation toward pleasing others. For incomplete individuals, the other serves solely the function of acknowledging their self-symbolizing efforts, that is, their claim of a complete self-definition. The other's wants and wishes remain secondary, and, therefore, incomplete individuals' behaviors should not reflect the other's personal qualities. Thus the interactions engaged in by self-symbolizing individuals are probably best described as *pseudo-social*: Although there is a need for social acknowledgment of one's self-definitional attainments, there is no genuine concern with the other's (the acknowledger's) personal attributes. This idea is in line with Cooley's (1902) contention that individuals sympathize with another person in direct proportion to the number of different aspects they recognize about this person. From the perspective of the incomplete individual, the only aspect of the other that matters is that of acknowledging the incomplete person's self-symbolizing efforts.

Mead's (1934) writings also support the idea that the self-symbolizer's social orientation is actually antisocial. Mead refers to any impulsive, highly motivated self-expressions as resulting in less socialized, egocentric con-

duct. The incomplete individual's attempts to substitute for an experienced shortcoming with respect to an aspired-to self-definition surely qualify as highly motivated self-expressions. Duncan (1969), a later symbolic interactionist, even goes as far as to consider the human's need for the other, in general, as nothing else but the need to create and preserve one's selfhood.

In more recent history, the idea presented here has surfaced in a form called "self-concern" (Berkowitz, 1972). Berkowitz suggests that responsiveness to the needs and concerns of others will be inhibited or blocked to the extent that the individual is plagued by some central personal concern. A relevant case is the phenomenon observed by Darley and Batson (1973). In their Good Samaritan study, subjects were so intent on proving their worth as helpers that they did not stop to respond to the plight of someone in need. Fouriezos, Hutt, and Guetzkow (1950) report a parallel finding within a group context. Groups composed of individuals with high self-oriented needs (e.g., high status needs) showed less satisfactory mutual interactions than groups composed of individuals with low self-orientation.

In the present pair of studies, it was arranged that subjects' self-symbolizing efforts potentially conflicted with the interpersonal aspects of the experimentally created interaction situation. In other words, if subjects were to care for the wants and wishes of the person involved in the situation, self-symbolizing via positive self-descriptions should be hindered. In both studies, subjects were preselected on the basis of their firm commitment to a certain self-definition. Completeness regarding this self-definition was varied by giving subjects feedback that their personalities were similar (or dissimilar) to the personality found among successful people in the subjects' self-definitional realms. Cialdini and Richardson (1980) and Kelley (1951) have pointed to the importance of associating oneself with successful others as a source of feelings of self-worth. Accordingly, this procedure seems tantamount to telling subjects that they are suited or unsuited for the successful pursuit of their aspired-to self-definitions. For both studies, subjects were then given a chance to make positive self-descriptions relevant to

their self-definitions in a second, presumably unrelated experiment. It was predicted that the interpersonal exigencies of the situation would be reflected in subjects' self-descriptive behaviors only to the degree that such behaviors did not interfere with self-defining needs.

Experiment 1

Overview

Female subjects committed to the self-definition of female professional were paired in groups of 2 after they had obtained personality feedback, such that a subject with negative personality feedback (incomplete subject) always met a subject with positive personality feedback (complete subject). Subjects were then asked to report indicators of competence they possessed regarding this self-definition. In other words, subjects reported relevant assets via statements such as, "I am a great organizer," "I am very analytical," or "I have a lot of experience in job interviews."

The reporting of indicators was such that the number of self-descriptions stated by one subject reduced the number of self-descriptions the other subject could report. Specifically, the subject who was faster in stating a positive self-description hindered the partner subject in reporting her own positive self-descriptions. In other words, subjects were competing with respect to who could more quickly come up with a positive self-description. Seven such competitive trials were run for each pair of subjects.

It was hypothesized that the incomplete subjects' concern with their self-definitional needs should manifest itself in an attempt to win the reporting of positive self-descriptions. That is, they should try to be faster in reporting positive self-descriptions, even though this would lead to a comparatively smaller number of positive self-descriptions reported by the partner.

A further condition was added, in which other subjects had to compete in reporting indicators of their own competence as a potential mother. Because the personality feedback manipulation was geared to subjects' sense of completeness as female professionals, incomplete subjects in this condition should not strive to gain advantage over their partners.

Method

Subjects. Subjects' commitment to the self-definition *female professional* was ascertained in the following manner. At the outset of the semester, female undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology classes answered a short questionnaire that inquired about their perceived importance of motherhood (Item 1) and professional career (Item 2). It also asked subjects how much it would bother them to be unable to pursue a professional career (Item 3) and how much it would bother them to be unable to raise a family (Item 4). Finally, subjects had to indicate whether they would prefer raising a family or pursuing a career if they were forced to choose between the two alternatives (Item 5).

In line with the results of a factor analysis (principal factoring with iteration, oblique rotation) 2 scales were constructed. A family orientation scale was obtained by adding Items 1, 4, and 5. A career orientation scale was obtained by adding Items 2 and 3 to the reversed Item 5. Both scales show a satisfactory Standardized Item Alpha (.78 for the career orientation scale; .85 for the family orientation scale), and the 2 scales correlate negatively, $r = -.59, p < .001$.

Of the 262 subjects who showed high career orientation (above the median) and simultaneously low family orientation (below the median), 64 participated in the present study; the data of 4 subjects were deleted owing to suspicions. Subjects were contacted by phone and were scheduled to appear at the laboratory in pairs.

Procedure. Subjects were greeted by Experimenter 1, who introduced himself as a personality psychologist. He said, recently, he had researched the type of personality that best enables a female to fulfill the requirements of the female professional role. The present study was ostensibly directed toward finding out whether female undergraduates who plan to engage in a professional career possess a personality that is similar or dissimilar to the personality type he found with successful female professionals.

The experimenter explained that subjects would fill out a personality questionnaire. Once subjects had completed this personality questionnaire, he said he would give them feedback on the "ideal" personality type. The personality questionnaire was a simple semantic differential with 10 dichotomous adjective pairs (e.g., warm-cold) connected by 12-point scales.

Before subjects began to work on the questionnaire, the experimenter indicated that he had agreed to allow a social psychologist to occupy the subjects' time for the remainder of the hour. He said he would introduce them at the end of his study to the other psychologist. Finally, subjects started to work on the questionnaire, and once they were finished, the experimenter collected the questionnaires and dismissed himself under the pretext of looking up the ideal personality.

Personality feedback manipulation. For subjects in the ideal profile condition, the experimenter, following his key, drew the ideal personality profile rather close to the subject's own check marks. In the nonideal profile condition the experimenter followed a different key, such that the ideal answers were clearly divergent from the subject's answers. In the ideal profile condition the difference between the subject's profile and the ideal profile amounted to only 13 points, whereas the sum of the

differences in the nonideal profile condition was 47 points.

When the experimenter returned the personality questionnaires, he told subjects to add up the differences between their answers and the ideal for the sum of the items and to write this sum of differences in a prepared space at the bottom of the questionnaire. The experimenter then explained that prior research had shown that as long as subjects had a difference score of 30 or less, the person would be assumed to have a personality that is similar to the ideal. Subjects with difference scores above 30, however, would be assumed to be dissimilar. To emphasize the personality feedback, subjects were asked to record on the bottom of the questionnaire whether they had a similar or dissimilar personality.

When subjects were finished with this task, they were asked to complete a final questionnaire that checked their perception of the personality manipulation. The questionnaire contained the following items: "How dissimilar is your personality to the 'ideal' personality of a female professional?" and "How important to you is having the 'ideal' personality of a female professional?" Both items were accompanied by 9-point scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very* (9). The experimenter then asked subjects to follow him outside. He introduced them to the waiting social psychologist (Experimenter 2), who guided them to another cubicle that was located on a different floor.

Experimenter 2 explained that she had been interested in the study of the generation of ideas. She claimed to be particularly interested in trying to determine how people generate ideas in groups. She allegedly had already seen in a previous study that the process of brainstorming seemed to be a particularly lucrative procedure for getting creative ideas from people. What remained to be shown was whether this method was also productive when 2 people engage in it simultaneously. The experimenter explained that brainstorming was a method whereby one simply relaxes and throws out ideas on a specified issue as soon as those ideas enter one's mind.

Relevant versus irrelevant issue manipulation. The subjects were told that the brainstorming session required them to select a certain topic about which to create ideas. In the female professional issue condition the experimenter explained that the Speech Department had made an inquiry requesting help regarding an interstate debate to be held at the university. They were presumably interested in ideas on issues of particular relevance in American life today and had sent her a list of relevant topics. The experimenter asked subjects whether they would be agreeable to the theme of female professional.

At this point, the experimenter said that she would like each of them to go to a separate cubicle and spend a couple of minutes thinking over whatever personal qualities would contribute to her pursuing a professional career. It was further explained that subjects should think of their assets in the first person, for example, "I have had such and such experience," "I am very . . .," or "I know how to . . .".

When subjects had spent 3 minutes contemplating their female professional attributes, they were brought back to the original cubicle where they were seated facing the experimenter. The experimenter displayed a notepad on which seven blank spaces entitled "ideas" were evident. For each of the empty spaces there was an opposing

blank entitled "contributed by . . .". Subjects were told that they need only think and talk. She, the experimenter, would do the writing. The procedure was to be as follows: When the experimenter said the number "1," the two subjects were to blurt out the first idea that came to mind, that is, the relevant self-descriptive attribute they were just thinking. The experimenter would record the idea she heard first. As soon as the experimenter had "caught" an idea, subjects were to stop and wait for the next number. Then she would say "2," and so forth, until all seven idea spaces had been filled.

If neither of the subjects should offer an idea on a given trial, she would resume the same trial after 5 seconds. If subjects should still be unable to produce an idea on the repeated trial, the whole session would be ended. In addition, if subjects should at any time call out two different ideas simultaneously, both would be recorded.

In the motherhood issue condition the course of events was identical to the above, with the exception of the introduction of the motherhood issue. Subjects were told that "raising a family" was one of the issues that the speech class had put on its list of topics. They were then asked to create ideas in the same manner as described above.

In both conditions subjects were asked to retire to their previous cubicles when the brainstorming session had ended. There they answered a final questionnaire which asked: "Did your partner give you a good chance to contribute your ideas to the speech class list?", "From your experience during the brainstorming session, do you consider your partner a cooperative person?", "How socially sensitive did your partner strike you?", "How similar was your partner's view on the issues to your own?", and "How likeable was your partner?". These questions were accompanied by 9-point answer scales labeled *not at all* (1) and *very much* (9) at the extremes. When subjects had completed this questionnaire, the experimenter probed for suspicion and then began the debriefing session.

Results

Effectiveness of personality feedback. Subjects in the nonideal profile condition reported that their personality profile was more dissimilar from the ideal ($M = 7.0$) than did subjects in the ideal profile condition ($M = 2.9$), $t(58) = 12.1$, $p < .001$, indicating that the personality feedback registered on subjects as intended. Further, subjects in the ideal profile condition perceived having the ideal personality to be more important ($M = 5.6$) than did subjects in the nonideal profile condition ($M = 3.1$), $t(58) = 5.3$, $p < .001$. This apparently egotistical perception reflects that the manipulation was indeed relevant to subjects in an ego-involving manner (Hoppe, 1930, reprinted in de Rivera, 1976; Snyder, Stephan, & Rosenfield, 1978).

Table 1
Frequencies of Pairs in Which the Nonideal
Profile Subject Wins, Loses, or Ties

Issue	Outcome		
	Winning	Tying	Losing
Female professional	11	2	2
Motherhood	4	4	7

Dependent measure: Indicators of competence. A nonparametric analysis determined how many of the nonideal profile subjects won, lost, or tied with their partners, separately for each issue condition. In the female professional issue condition, 73% of the sessions were won by the nonideal profile subjects. The corresponding figure was only 27% in the motherhood issue condition. The pattern of data reaches significance no matter whether ties are considered as a separate category, $\chi^2(2) = 6.7, p < .04$, or placed together with the losing category, $\chi^2(1) = 6.5, p < .02$. The observed pattern supports the hypothesis that nonideal profile subjects would try to outperform their partners when asked to report indicators of a female professional but not when indicators of competence of a mother are requested.

In analyzing the mean number of self-descriptive indicators of competence for each cell by an analysis of variance (ANOVA), which treats issue as a between-factor and personality feedback as a within-factor, a significant interaction effect emerges, $F(1, 28) = 6.5, p < .02$. Nonideal profile subjects made significantly more contributions than ideal profile subjects when the issue was female professional, $t(28) = 2.3, p < .05$. Nonideal profile subjects also reported more indicators of competence for being a female professional than for being a mother, $t(28) = 2.4, p < .03$. No other contrasts were significant.

Dependent measure: Perceived satisfaction with partner. Following the brainstorming session subjects were asked a cluster of questions that constituted a measure of satisfaction with the partner. An ANOVA on the index that combined these five questions (Standardized Item Alpha = .78) reveals a significant interaction, $F(1, 28) = 5.1, p < .04$. The in-

teraction is based on the low evaluation ideal profile subjects gave their partners in the female professional issue condition ($M = 5.4$). This low rating differs significantly from the ideal profile-motherhood issue condition ($M = 6.2$), $t(28) = 2.5, p < .02$, and the comparison with the nonideal profile-female professional issue condition ($M = 6.0$) approaches significance, $t(28) = 2.0, p < .06$. We should also note that the mean score in the nonideal profile-motherhood issue condition was $M = 5.8$. Apparently, ideal profile subjects recognize the selfish orientation of their nonideal profile partners in the female professional issue condition.

If this assumption is correct, we would expect their satisfaction-with-partner ratings to vary with the number of indicators their partners allowed them to report. A significant correlation within the female professional issue condition ($r = .47, p < .04$) indicates that ideal profile subjects' satisfaction ratings reflected their partners' absence of selfishness. In contrast, for the nonideal profile subjects this correlation is only .01. We take this absence of a correlation to mean that nonideal profile subjects are not willing to concede that their reporting of indicators is also determined by their partners' willingness to allow them to take the floor. Nonideal profile subjects' concern with registering positive indicators of a female professional seems to have created a certain blindness regarding the interpersonal aspects of the brainstorming sessions.

Discussion

Subjects who had received negative personality feedback managed to report more positive self-descriptions as a female professional

Table 2
Mean Number of Contributed Indicators
of Competence

Issue	Personality feedback	
	Ideal profile	Nonideal profile
Female professional	3.1	3.9
Motherhood	3.7	3.2

Note. For each cell $n = 15$.

than did subjects who had received positive personality feedback. When potential as a mother had to be expressed, no such differences were found between positive and negative feedback subjects. This pattern of data rules out the possibility that negative feedback subjects outperformed their partners solely on the basis of being frustrated by the negative personality feedback. This difference between the female professional issue condition and the motherhood issue condition is congruent with the very central commitment aspect of self-completion theory: Positive self-descriptions that are not relevant to the subjects' self-definition, do not qualify as viable substitutes and thus cannot be used for the subjects' efforts in winning back lost completeness.

Note that reporting positive self-descriptions implied a cost to one's partner, that is, the faster a subject came up with positive self-descriptions, the less of a chance her partner had to report her own indicators of competence. Despite this consequence for the partner, negative feedback subjects proceeded rapidly with their self-descriptions anyway. This self-serving orientation of negative feedback subjects in the female professional issue condition was ascertained by their positive feedback partners, who reported comparatively low interpersonal satisfaction at the end of the session. Complementing this picture of a strict self-orientation on the part of the negative feedback subjects is the finding that, for negative feedback subjects, there was no relation between the subject's success in the session and her view of the partner as likeable and cooperative. One would think that a socially sensitive person in this context would attribute at least some of her gains to positive qualities of the partner.

A comparison of the present dependent measure with dependent measures used by Markus (1977) raises the interesting possibility that something like "speed of self-relevant responding" has been studied previously within another conceptual context. Wherein lies the difference between Markus' "self-schema" and the present concept of commitment to a self-definition? To be sure, both conceptions talk about a strong aspect of the self. What Markus calls a schema is a personal quality (e.g., dependence, femininity) to which

the subject gives an extreme rating, and which is important to the subject. According to Markus, the existence of a schema is dependent on the subject's past experiences—the more behavioral experience one has in a schema-relevant area, the more extreme and important the schema becomes subjectively.

The schematic is said to embody, in a very central and salient manner, the essence of the self-relevant quality in question. Such people will recognize very quickly whether schema-relevant adjectives are pertinent to their own schemata, and they also possess the ability to characterize their own schema in behavioral terms. Most relevant to the present experiment, they are said to be very resistant to shifting their self-conceptions regarding the schema, even in the face of counterschematic feedback. Thus, the schema is said to be a highly stable aspect of the present (or real) self. The general predictions follow from the idea that the schematic will behave true to that self.

The starting point for the aspect of self we are discussing here (commitment to a self-definition) is an ambition, or aspiration, to attain a certain self-status. Our assessments of commitment, which focus on whether the person is actively striving toward the self-definition in question, necessarily are guided by the idea that the person is motivated toward some conceivable future state. Markus' schematic person, on the other hand, is not said to be striving toward a future, ideal self-condition: The schema is an existing, resistant-to-change, *real* self—real in the sense of the classic self-psychology distinction between a real self versus an ideal self.

The dynamic effects we are discussing would not be a theoretical possibility if an aspiring professional woman, independent person, or whomever, were viewed as a schematic. For instance, we have found in the present research as well as elsewhere (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981) that negative information about one's self-definitional status produces a motivation to characterize the self in increasingly positive ways. In contrast, Markus (1977) is explicit on the stability of schematics in the face of negative feedback. The whole concept of falling short, and of resultant compensation, has no place in a description of a stable, real self. In short,

although both self-schema theory and self-completion theory begin with a conception of a strong component of the self, the psychology associated with that component is rather different.

The difference in starting points between these two conceptions, that is, between a real self and a commitment to an ideal self-defining condition, is made salient in the first study reported by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981). Committed subjects were discriminated from noncommitted ones on the basis of the frequency of self-definition-relevant activity; from the perspective of the self-completion conception, it was important that the committed people be actively striving toward the self-definition. At the same time, we found that the two groups had equal amounts of education in their relevant areas. Thus from the perspective of self-schema theory, our criterion for commitment would not be suitable for selecting out schematics. The criterion for having a schema is that one is experienced—at least by the criterion of education, our two groups were equally experienced. Thus it is not relevant experience that leads people to adopt a self-defining commitment: The commitment exists as a binding goal, or ambition, and the lack of relevant experience is what fuels the self-completion process.

The results of the present study have implications for research on the effects of name-calling as described by Steele (1975). Steele suggests that whenever a negative name (e.g., a person is called "backward" or "smug") threatens a person's self-esteem, the person is then more willing to engage in any available behavior, such as helping others, that would enhance self-esteem or prevent it from worsening. In Steele's terms, the negative personality feedback applied in the present study should have threatened subjects' self-esteem. Accordingly, when subjects came to the second part of the experiment they should have tried to compensate for this deficit in a self-esteem protecting manner.

At this point Steele's notion probably does not make specific predictions with respect to the present subjects' behaviors. It remains unspecified whether—in the present paradigm—behaving congenially toward the partner is the self-esteem enhancing response, or

whether outperforming one's partner should be considered as such. More important, the self-esteem model does not have as a variable the subjects' commitment to a specific self-definition; therefore, differences between the female professional and motherhood conditions would be on a plane that is not considered explicitly by the Steele model.

For self-completion theory the commitment to a self-definition is a core concept, and it is assumed that only people who are committed to a certain self-definition will experience incompleteness when self-definitional shortcomings are encountered. In addition, self-completion theory assumes that individuals compensate within the self-definitional realm specified by their commitments simply by adding relevant symbols of completeness. As a consequence, incomplete individuals should engage in compensatory efforts even if such efforts entail behaviors toward others that might be regarded as antisocial and potentially self-esteem worsening. This point is demonstrated in the present study by the observation that negative feedback subjects dominated the female professional issue sessions; incomplete subjects were in no way helping their partners. The next study to be reported will offer an even stronger illustration of this point.

Experiment 2

Overview

In this study the other's interests regarding subjects' self-descriptions are more visible and distinct and thus harder to ignore than in the first study. Complete and incomplete subjects committed to various self-definitions (e.g., journalist, photographer) did not interact with each other, but expected to meet an attractive female undergraduate (target person) for an informal conversation. After subjects were informed about her appearance and interests, attraction measures were taken. Before subjects were given the chance to describe their capabilities in their self-definitional realms to the target person, they were shown her preferences for various self-presentational styles. Half of the subjects found that the target person liked self-aggrandizing men and disliked the self-effacing ones. The other

subjects were made to believe the opposite. Thus, an explicit self-presentational cue for either modesty or self-enhancement was given in the manner of Gergen and Wishnov (1965) or Schneider and Eustis (1972).

What are the predictions regarding the quality of subjects' self-descriptions? In general, one would expect that subjects would want to coordinate their self-descriptions to the target person's preferences, but incomplete subjects should find themselves in a conflict when negative self-descriptions are called for. Incomplete subjects should be motivated to self-symbolize, that is, to try to win back completeness through positive self-descriptions. Complying with the target person's preference for negative self-descriptions runs counter to these self-definitional needs.

Accordingly, we expect that incomplete subjects when compared with complete subjects will show more hesitation in being self-deprecating. When the target person shows a preference for positive self-descriptions, no such conflict exists. It should be noted that four conditions result from the above considerations and that each of the 4 subjects in a session was assigned to a different condition.

The second study also allows us to examine the question of whether incomplete individuals are willing to ignore competing personal concerns when self-defining needs are pressing. A situation is constructed in which males expect to meet and get to know an attractive female. One would expect subjects to try to impress the target person, that is, to comply with her preferences regarding self-descriptions, in direct relation to the attraction experienced. However, incomplete subjects should be less successful than complete subjects in responding to the target person's self-descriptive preferences in a manner that is congruent with their attraction to her.

Method

Subjects. Male students enrolled in introductory psychology classes had been pretested at the beginning of the semester to determine whether they were committed to an activity area, for example, journalism, mathematics, photography, swimming, tennis. When subjects were contacted by phone, it was ascertained whether their commitment to their area of interest was still ongoing. According to a criterion established by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981), students who had been active in their pursuits during the last 14 days were invited to participate

in the present study. This left us with 52 subjects (8 journalists, 20 mathematicians, 8 photographers, 4 swimmers, 8 tennis players, and 4 subjects involved in track), equally distributed across conditions.

Procedure. Subjects arrived at the laboratory in groups of 4. All subjects within a group were committed to the same activity area. Subjects were run by 2 experimenters. They were first greeted by Experimenter 1 (a female) who ushered them into a large classroom. The experimenter explained that they were to take part in two independent experiments. The first experiment, which was her responsibility, was said to fall into the realm of social psychology, designed to study processes underlying the development of first impressions. She said her study would require a conversation of approximately 20 minutes duration involving the subject and an undergraduate woman.

At this point, Experimenter 2 (a male) entered the room. Experimenter 1 introduced him as a graduate student working with a guest professor in personality psychology. When the first experimenter had departed, Experimenter 2 explained that his research was concerned with personalities of successful people in specific activity areas. Experimenter 2 went on to say that recently he had been concerned with the personality characteristics of people in the area of the subjects' commitment. Further, a certain personality pattern had ostensibly been established, a pattern that was characteristic of people who performed well in the particular area. The alleged purpose of the present study was that of establishing whether college student subjects, interested in particular areas, differ in terms of personality traits from people who are successful in these interest areas. The experimenter then handed out the same personality questionnaire as used in Experiment 1, collected the completed questionnaire, and before he left, promised to return in a few minutes to give the subjects feedback.

When Experimenter 1 took the floor she reiterated the purpose of her study. Each subject was to meet a female he had never seen before. The 4 females were said to be waiting in another part of the building, but subjects were asked to perform an additional couple of tasks in preparation for meeting their partners. The experimenter then handed out a written description of the prospective partner, which always read the same way: "'Debbie' was 18 years of age, a drama major, and from San Antonio. She was blonde, 5'5" tall, and weighed 118 pounds. Her academic performance was above average, and her social skills allowed her to make friends easily."

After subjects had studied this description, the experimenter said she would like to give them some more information concerning the females they would meet. The experimenter went on to say that each of the females had already gone through this procedure four times, and this made it possible for the (present) subjects to see how their prospective partners had reacted to previous male subjects. More concretely, subjects learned that each of the previous 4 males had filled out a self-description form (also in the area of tennis, or whatever the subjects' area was), and on the bottom of that form, the subject's anticipated partner had written a short evaluation of each of those previous male subjects. The self-description form was identical to the dependent variable of this study and is described below.

Self-presentational cue manipulation. Subjects were each handed a package of four self-description forms, allegedly filled out by Bill, Dave, John, and Chuck, the previous subjects. Whereas Bill considered himself to be better than 45% of the college student population, Dave considered himself as better than only 25%. John, however, rated himself at the 95th percentile. Finally, Chuck perceived himself at the 70th percentile. In addition to the self-rating on the percentile item, these 4 previous subjects rated themselves on how well known they were in their areas and on how well respected they were in those areas. For each of the 4, these three items were arranged so that self-ratings were congruent across the items.

Debbie's evaluations of these 4 subjects, written at the bottom of their self-description forms, were arranged to create one of two sets. In the negativity cue condition the purpose was to demonstrate to the subject that Debbie systematically preferred those who characterized themselves negatively. Her written evaluations were as follows in the negativity cue case:

- Dave (25th percentile): Dave appeals to me a lot. I would like to get to know him better.
- Bill (45th percentile): Bill seems all right. It would be fine to get to know him better.
- Chuck (70th percentile): Chuck is probably O.K. I guess I could get along with him.
- John (95th percentile): John doesn't do much for me. I wouldn't want much contact with him.

In the positivity cue condition, this correlation between the self-ratings and Debbie's reactions was reversed, so that Dave "didn't do much" for her and John "appealed a lot" to her.

Subjects were told that if they studied these self-descriptions and the accompanying evaluations by the females very carefully, they should be able to identify potential preferences of the prospective partners. Once each subject had indicated that he was ready to go on, the experimenter explained that she would like to know what subjects thought about their prospective partner from what they had heard about her so far. The experimenter handed out a short questionnaire that asked subjects to indicate how much they liked their prospective partner, and how much they wanted their partner to like them (both items were accompanied by 9-point scales).

Personality profile manipulation. As subjects approached the end of the questionnaire just described, Experimenter 2 reentered the room and Experimenter 1 indicated to him that this would be a convenient time for interruption of the study. Experimenter 2 followed the same feedback procedure as used in Experiment 1. Subjects in the ideal profile condition found that they had a personality similar to the ideal, whereas subjects in the nonideal profile condition discovered that they had a personality that was dissimilar to the ideal. Experimenter 2 then applied a manipulation check (the same as in Experiment 1), thanked the subjects for their contribution to the research and departed.

The dependent variable: Self-descriptions. The self-

description was made under the following circumstances: Once Experimenter 2 had left, Experimenter 1 reminded the subjects that they still had not given any information about themselves to their prospective partners. Accordingly, she asked subjects to fill out a self-description form, which consisted of three items: (a) "In your opinion, how capable do you think you are in your area of competence as compared to other college students?" Subjects were asked to give a percentile estimate. (b) "How many people would you think are aware of your capabilities as a _____?" Subjects checked a 6-point scale, which had *no one* (1) and *too many to be counted* (6) as end points. (c) "In your area of competence, how well respected do you think you are by other people?" The 6-point scale ranged from *not at all* (1) to *highly* (6).

The self-description form was addressed to Debbie. As soon as subjects had filled in the requested information, Experimenter 1 collected the forms and told subjects that she would leave the room and take the forms to the experimental cubicles where the female partners would be waiting.

Before Experimenter 1 left the room, she handed out a final questionnaire that checked the effectiveness of the manipulation. Subjects were asked to indicate how attracted their partners would be to a future subject who describes himself in the following way: "Better than 90% of the college students and highly respected by a great number of people." In addition, subjects estimated how similar they were to the personality, which predicts potential in their area of competence, and how important it was for them to have that ideal personality. All of these items were answered on 9-point scales. When Experimenter 1 returned, she waited until each subject had finished answering the manipulation checks. Then she probed for suspicion and debriefed the subjects.

Results

Self-presentational cue manipulation. Subjects were asked to imagine how attracted their prospective partner (Debbie) would be to a certain hypothetical future subject, who placed himself at the 90th percentile on the self-description form. Subjects in the positivity cue condition guessed that she would be highly attracted to that person ($M = 7.9$), in contrast with subjects in the negativity cue condition, who guessed that she would not be attracted to him ($M = 2.5$), $F(1, 48) = 245.9$, $p < .001$. Obviously, subjects knew whether deprecating or aggrandizing self-descriptions would be more appealing to Debbie. Given the possibility that the self-presentational cue manipulation might have affected subjects' attraction to Debbie, we checked subjects' liking for Debbie as well as the extent to which they wanted to be liked by her. On neither of these items was there a

significant effect for the self-presentational cue (both $ps > .15$).

Personality profile manipulation. Subjects had to indicate how dissimilar they thought they were to the ideal personality in their respective areas of competence. The ideal profile condition ($M = 2.1$) was significantly lower than the nonideal Profile condition ($M = 5.2$), $F(1, 48) = 37.4$, $p < .001$. Moreover, in the ideal profile condition having the ideal personality was perceived as more important ($M = 5.5$) than in the nonideal profile condition ($M = 3.5$), $F(1, 48) = 5.1$, $p < .03$, attesting to subjects' ego-involvement (Snyder et al., 1978).

Self-description measure. The three items on the self-description form, that is, subjects' perceived percentile standing in their respective activity areas, subjects' perceived recognition, and estimated public respect, were combined into a self-description index (Standardized Item Alpha: .90). A 2×2 (Positivity vs. Negativity Cue \times Ideal vs. Nonideal Profile) ANOVA on this index revealed a significant main effect for the self-presentational cue manipulation, $F(1, 48) = 24.8$, $p < .001$, indicating that Debbie's pronounced preferences for either modest or enhancing self-descriptions were effective (see Table 3). Looking only at the negativity cue condition, in which incomplete subjects are expected to experience a conflict, we find that nonideal profile subjects were less negative than ideal profile subjects, $t(48) = 2.6$, $p < .015$.

In addition, Table 3 shows that in the positivity cue condition, nonideal profile subjects tended to follow the self-presentational cue more readily than ideal profile subjects ($p < .13$). This finding hints at the possibility that when situational cues and self-presentational needs point in the same direction, enhanced positive self-descriptions are to be expected. In the present design, this latter finding and the reduced self-deprecation of nonideal profile subjects in the negativity cue condition lead to a significant main effect for the personality manipulation, $F(1, 48) = 8.8$, $p < .005$.

Responsiveness to the self-presentational cue: Attraction to the target person. After subjects had learned about Debbie's appearance and her self-presentational preferences, subjects were asked to indicate how much

they would like Debbie and how much they wanted to be liked by her. The items are closely related ($r = .57$, $p < .001$) and were thus combined into an attraction-to-Debbie index. Correlating this index with subjects' responsiveness to the self-presentational cue, that is, expressing highly negative self-descriptions in the negativity cue condition and highly positive self-descriptions in the positivity cue condition, reveals the following: A significant positive correlation ($r = .49$, $p < .005$) is found for ideal profile subjects, whereas the corresponding correlation for nonideal profile subjects is slightly negative, $r = -.12$, *ns*. The difference between these two values is significant, $z = 2.23$, $p < .03$. It appears then, that nonideal profile subjects did not act on the basis of wanting to be liked by Debbie. In pursuing their self-definitional needs, they did not care to please a female undergraduate to whom they were attracted.

Discussion

The results are congruent with the idea that self-definitional needs can affect self-descriptions over and above interpersonal influences. The data show that subjects in the nonideal profile condition were less willing to abide by another's pressure to be self-deprecating than were ideal profile subjects. In addition, nonideal profile subjects ignored a personal concern that competed with their self-definitional needs, that is, their attraction to the target person. Whereas ideal profile subjects complied with Debbie's preferences in proportion to their attraction to her, nonideal profile subjects failed to do so. The results suggest that it is insufficient to analyze self-descriptions solely on the basis of interpersonal cues for modesty or self-enhancement. One must also take into account whether the person acts on self-definitional needs.

Of course the literature on self-presentation has recognized individual concerns such as self-esteem needs and has also addressed the issue of compensation. Schlenker (1980) assumes that these needs can generally be reduced to a universal need to be recognized positively: "Perhaps what have been called 'self-esteem needs' represent nothing more

Table 3
Mean Positivity of Self-Description^a

Self-description	Negativity cue condition		Positivity cue condition	
	Ideal profile	Nonideal profile	Ideal profile	Nonideal profile
Percentile standing (a)	43	66	72	81
Public recognition (b)	2.6	3.3	3.9	4.3
Public respect (c)	2.8	3.5	4.2	4.9
Self-description index (a + b + c)	-2.61	-.38	.83	2.16

Note. The higher the score on the self-description index, the more positive is the self-description. The components of the index are included in the table to show that the pattern of data was the same for the three self-description variables.

^a For each cell $n = 13$.

than the desire to maximize social outcomes by controlling one's public esteem (Schlenker, 1980, p. 91).⁷ According to this perspective, self-esteem needs should be satisfied by replacing the negative impression made on the other with a positive one. Baumeister and Jones (1978), Schlenker (1975), and Schneider (1969), all of whom report research related to this theme, found that people try to counter initially unfavorable impressions through later compensatory self-presentations, unless dishonesty is likely to be detected.

Although the present experiment also deals with compensatory processes, the nature of what is dealt with here is different from what was studied in these self-presentation experiments. The idea behind the self-presentation paradigms is that subjects' compensatory efforts are made to counter an initially unfavorable impression on some particular person or group. This argument was most explicit in the Baumeister and Jones paradigm, where subjects knew that a particular target person was aware of their having failed and then the same person stood to be impressed by subjects' subsequent (compensatory) self-presentations. In the present paradigm this kind of compensation—that is, propping up a faltering social image—was impossible, because there was no opportunity to describe oneself for the benefit of the experimenter who was responsible for (and aware of) the negative feedback. Subjects had no opportunity to interact further with the so-called personality psychologist, and they should not have felt that the second experimenter would be a reasonable target for compensation.

This is because she was ostensibly running her own experiment, had a different affiliation and research concern, was evidently uninterested in what happened during the personality psychologist's experiment and was blind to the feedback. Accordingly, the compensatory self-presentational position does not make differential predictions for the positive and negative feedback subjects of the present experimental paradigm, and thus is not immediately pertinent to the present pattern of data.

Baumeister (1982) has recently identified two modes of self-presentation. The first is designated as "pleasing others" and is what Baumeister and Jones (1978), Schlenker (1975), and Schneider (1969) had in mind when studying self-presentational compensation. The other mode is called "self-constructive" self-presentation (self-construction), said to be motivated by a desire to convince others that one is in fact like one's ideal self. In other words, constructive self-presenters are motivated to impress others on the basis of personal goals or ideals, rather than on the basis of the audience's wants and wishes.

The Baumeister view would likely consider the self-descriptive activities observed within the negative feedback condition of the present study as a typical example of self-construction. However, quite aside from the accuracy of Baumeister's distinction, that formulation does not spell out the conditions that favor self-constructive self-presentation over self-presentations designed to please others. According to the self-completion notion these conditions are: (a) a commitment to a self-

definition, (b) the experience of falling short, and (c) access to a viable symbolic route to self-definitional completeness. Individuals are then expected to engage in this "self-constructive" self-presentation even if it disregards the wishes of the audience.

Tesser's (1980) recent "self-evaluation maintenance" model allows an interesting derivation regarding the self-definitional behavior of the present subjects. Tesser suggests that one can mend a threatened self-evaluation regarding one's self-definition by increasing "closeness" with a competent, high-performing other. This effect is said to hold only when one's own self-definition and that of the competent other are not the same. The present situation contained this prerequisite: Debbie's area of competence was different from the pursuits of the subjects.

Accordingly, the self-evaluation maintenance model would lead one to expect nonideal profile subjects, whose competence is obviously threatened, to try to associate with Debbie, the target person, assuming that she was perceived as competent. The method provided to subjects for increasing closeness consisted of appealing to her by complying with her self-presentational cues. The results, of course, did not support this possible derivation from self-evaluation maintenance theory. If subjects had attempted to increase their closeness to the target person, the result would have been a direct interference with the sought-after positive self-description.

In short, in order to self-symbolize in the manner implied by the present theoretical framework, subjects necessarily had to reduce their closeness to Debbie.

The subjects who participated in the present study were carefully selected on the basis of an ongoing commitment to a certain self-definition. It was required that they were still active in the field they considered to be of special interest at the beginning of the semester. When subjects came to the laboratory they were told that they did, or did not have, the personality qualities facilitating success in their field. Receiving negative personality feedback should have raised strong self-definitional needs, and other personal concerns would have become secondary issues.

This line of thought is supported by the finding that nonideal profile subjects failed

to comply with Debbie's preferences in proportion to their liking for her. Thus it appears that people who are engaged in self-symbolizing, that is, are trying to compensate for shortcomings in a central self-definition, put other personal concerns aside in favor of the search for further indications of their competence.

There is more, although only suggestive, evidence for this line of thought. Incomplete subjects in the positivity cue condition reported slightly more positive self-descriptions than did complete subjects. Stires and Jones (1969) point out that people are cautious in describing themselves too positively to others, because appearing boastful can lower credibility. Thus the ideal profile subjects' acting on the cue for positive self-descriptions may have been tempered by a concern about credibility. Nonideal profile subjects, by comparison, appeared to push this concern aside.

Conclusion

The research presented illustrates the relation between self-defining needs and a broad set of social orientations, all within the realm of self-descriptions. The first study, involving a task to be performed in a dyad, shows how the incomplete person neglects the partner's interests in the course of registering relevant indicators of competence on an experimenter's ledger. In the second study, in which the presumed interaction partner is explicit regarding the form that subjects' self-descriptions should take, the incomplete person is found to be reluctant to comply with requests that contradict self-definitional concerns. In addition, attraction to the interaction partner played no role in incomplete subjects' tendency to abide by the target person's preferences for modesty or immodesty.

These results lead us to a certain perspective on the social interactions of the person whose efforts are focused on gaining self-definitional completeness. It appears that the person whose self-definition has been wounded does not interact to please others on the basis of their individual perspectives, nor does this person even ingratiate to gain specific ends; unless, of course, those ends have specifically to do with the self-definition sought after. Just as Cooley (1902) has spelled out, the

person with a pressing "egocentric" need is especially inept at entering a communication from the standpoint of "sympathy" with the other's concerns, requests, and needs.

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