Chapter 4

The Pursuit of Self-Defining Goals*

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The cognition-behavior relation central here is the human pursuit of self-defini-tions. The striving after such self-definitions as child-rearer, parent, musician, or humanitarian is treated as a goal-oriented enterprise, such that the cognized goal (e.g., to be a humanitarian) brings forth numerous behaviors directed toward the individual's trying to realize that self-defining goal. In the course of spelling out some of the dynamics of self-completion processes, we will show how the pursuit of self-completion has the side-effect of interfering with a variety of other types of cognition-behavior relations. For example, the relation between attitude and behavior, between intention and behavior, and even that between situational cues for behavior and actual behavior can all suffer demise or even elimination owing to the person's pursuit of a self-defining goal.

A Central Distinction: Self-Defining vs. Non-Self-Defining Goals

Before we raise the issue of cognition-behavior relations as affected by the pur-suit of self-defining goals, it is important to lay a theoretical groundwork. In the following pages we will illustrate what we have in mind with *self-defining goal*, and we will also specify the workings of the self-completion process. To start with an example: Two students are undertaking their first major exercise in the laboratory of an experimental psychology class. The class project is to train a pi-geon to manifest a particular superstitious behavior – namely that of turning around three times and walking backward toward the food source prior to being fed. Each student has read B. F. Skinner, has already witnessed several shaping-up experiments, and is ready to go ahead with this first exercise.

The objective, commonly agreed-upon goal of the exercise is clear and dis-

tinct: train the pigeon to execute the superstitious behavior with great reliability. Certainly this is a goal for both students of the present example, but let us make a further assumption about the psychology of one of the students. Suppose that the orientation of one of them is only peripherally on the objective goal (the teacher's goal), and more centrally on the goal of being a *psychologist*. From our theoretical background (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, 1982) this self-defining goal is pursued by means of numerous possible, culturally agreed-upon symbols. Thus, the student's pursuit of the self-definition *psychologist* may be marked by attempts to put his name on publications, association with recognized psychologists, a collection of psychology books and journals, a temporary job as instructor, and any other indication of this seemingly professional, culturally-agreed upon self-definition. To the extent that symbols of one's psychologist status are lacking, the dynamics postulated by the self-completion notion imply that the person will then pursue alternative symbols of the self-definition.

As it happens, neither student is very successful in reaching the objective goal set by the professor. The first student's pigeon learns to peck the floor, the second student's pigeon learns to sit down and cackle. Given that the first student's orientation in the entire situation has to do only with the *non*-self-defining goal, we might expect that student simply to feel frustrated, and perhaps to try other methods to train the bird to perform the superstitious behavior. On the other hand, the reaction of the aspiring psychologist – the one oriented primarily toward a self-defining goal – may well be much different. Assuming that an accomplished feat of animal training is nothing more than one possible symbol of being a psychologist, the student can readily resort to alternative symbolic routes to completing the self-definition. In fact, the theory implies that faltering in one effort to gain a symbol (bird-training) will lead to striving after and emphasizing other symbols, such as a high grade point average in psychology courses, profound knowledge of great figures in psychology, and even attempts to teach others how to shape up superstitions in birds. While it may seem unlikely that the incompetent would set out to teach others within the area of his incompetence, the reader is referred to the section entitled "Lack of education and attempted influence" for an illustration of such effects.

A Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion

Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, 1982) provides a body of ideas on how people pursue the self-defining goals to which they aspire. The core assumption of the theory is that indicators of a self-definition are mutually substitutable for one another. The central observation to be made about the human, within the context of a notion of self-completion, is that central flaws in the person's training or performance regarding the self-defining goal are covered over by what the theory calls *self-symbolizing efforts*.

Historical Background

The idea of substitution is central to the thinking of Lewin (1926) and several of his students. Their analysis of goal-oriented behavior and interrupted activities is the conceptual background of self-completion theory. According to Lewin, a tension system is set up once people aspire to goals. This tension can be reduced as soon as the individual undertakes efforts to approach the goal. When the individual is interrupted in these efforts, the tension system is expected to propel the individual to a substitute activity that aims at tension reduction.

In support of Lewin's theorizing, his students, in particular Mahler (1933) and Lissner (1933), found that subjects' interest in resuming an interrupted, original activity was sharply curtailed when subjects were given the opportunity to complete a substitute activity. In other words, people can substitute for a shortcoming regarding one goal by successfully approaching another goal. What are the ramifications of this phenomenon? First, Ovsiankina (1928) points to the fact that a tension buildup can only be expected when the individual is personally involved in the activity that potentially leads to goal attainment. Accordingly, one would expect that only the interruption of involving activities makes people search for substitutes. Second, Lissner (1933) and Mahler (1933) claimed that activities function as substitutes only when they are related to the original activity that is interrupted. Henle (1944) specifies that this relation has to do with superordinate personal goals, such as being creative, musical, intelligent, and so forth. This means that an activity can substitute for another only when both activities lead to the same personal goal. Finally, Mahler (1933) pointed out that substitute activities are more effective in reducing tension related to interrupted goal striving when the substitute activity becomes a social fact, that is, when it is noticed by others.

With the Lewinian school as a background, the theory of symbolic self-completion can be summarized, using the concepts of *commitment* to self-defining goals, *symbols* of completeness, and *social reality*.

Commitment to Self-Defining Goals

With the term *self-definition* we refer to a conception of one's self as having a readiness to enact certain classes of behavior. If the self-definition is being a "jogger," for instance, then the activities deal with actual running, wearing appropriate clothes, associating with runners, and so forth. It is not necessary that these activities are actually carried out; rather, the individual claims to have the potential to carry them out. Accordingly, a self-definition is to be construed as an ideal, or goal.

Commitment to a self-definition means that the individual aspires to this "ideal" condition, wherein all of the qualities appropriate to the self-definition are embodied. The processes we shall discuss below, which have primarily to do with the mutual substitutability of symbols appropriate to particular self-definitions, should be observable only among individuals who are clearly committed.

In Lewin's language, a goal-specific tension exists only as long as the person is involved psychologically in the goal-pursuit. Once the personal commitment to the goal has been abandoned, all of the interruption effects (e.g., Ovsiankina, 1928; Zeigarnik, 1927) and substitution effects (e.g., Lissner, 1933; Mahler, 1933) are no longer observable.

Symbols of Completeness

Symbols are the building blocks of self-definitions, and the construction and preservation of a self-definition depends heavily on the person's use and possession of relevant symbols of completeness. A symbol can be a word, behavior, or a physical entity that potentially signals to others one's self-definitional attainment. One should not speak of a single, unequivocal symbol of the attainment of a self-definition. Rather, each self-definition may be viewed as composed of a set of symbols. People learn about these alternative indicators of self-definitions through interactions with others (cf. Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), and in turn, once the individual displays the symbol, others react as though the person embodies that self-definition.

The symbols of any given self-definition can take a variety of forms. At a simple but important level there are self-descriptions (e.g., a person who comforts another who suffers some emotional problem may refer to himself as "psychologist"), that is, highly literal and direct indications that one possesses the self-definition in question. Of course, the human is not solely dependent on these kinds of open self-characterizations. There are numerous comparatively subtle indicators of a self-definition, many of which are describable as status symbols. Having a diploma from a graduate school is a broadly recognized symbol of a person's self-definition, and it will propel the person toward a sense of completeness. Similarly, titles, official occupational positions, and membership in select interest groups are all socially evolved mechanisms for providing the individual with indicators, or markers of possessing an aspired-to self-definition.

As is illustrated in our research (below), an important dimension associated with symbols of completeness is the relative durability of the symbol. For instance, one's education, professional position, or relevant inherited traits would be highly durable symbols – not readily amenable to alteration by the incomplete person. On the other hand, acting as though one possesses the self-definition (trying to teach relevant skills to others; associating with experts), describing the self in ways that would further one's sense of completeness, and various other efforts, would fall toward the malleable end of the durable-to-malleable continuum. It is easy to see the importance of this dimension when one sets out to make clear predictions from the theory: Our starting point has characteristically been one of placing subjects into a position in which they are lacking a specified durable symbol. Because they cannot readily alter their standing on that symbol, it is then necessary for them to turn to other sources of symbolic support – namely, specifiable symbols that are highly malleable. The workings of this method will be seen in most of the research to be reported below.

Social Reality

From our theoretical position, the symbol in itself does not suffice to generate a sense of completeness. The symbols associated with any given self-definition serve a communicative function, no matter whether the symbol consists of a self-description, acting out the role of someone possessing the self-definition, acquiring materials or objects appropriate to the self-definition, or anything else. Theoretically, they signal to the community or society that one does indeed possess the self-definition; this indication of having attained a positive self-definitional status firms up one's sense of completeness.

There are at least two pieces of research that bear directly on this point. Mahler (1933) found that a substitute task served to reduce the tension associated with an original task only under special social circumstances. Quite independent of whether subjects knew that they had the right answer on the substitute task, it was found that the task reduced tension only to the degree that the experimenter took notice of the subject's completing the task. In short, the attainment of an intellectual goal (in the case of Mahler's experiment) was mediated directly by social circumstances. More direct to our theoretical point is a study by Gollwitzer (1981), which demonstrates that self-symbolizing efforts that are noticed by others are especially effective in enhancing self-definitional completeness.

Self-Symbolizing: The Cognition-Behavior Relation

When do people begin to reflect about their self-definitional standing? The answer we suggest here is hinted at in the writings of Mead (1934) and Shibutani (1961), who state that disruptions of social behavior steer the person's attention in the direction of the community. The interrupted person is said to take the perspective of the "generalized other" – which means being attuned to the values of society. We have pointed out above that the array of symbols associated with a given self-definition is defined within the community. Accordingly, individuals who encounter a hindrance in working toward a self-definition should then evaluate the self in line with the way society would view their extent of completeness. Thus, falling short with regard to one symbol will be experienced as missing an important facet of the symbolic array that defines a "complete" self-definition.

The hindrance of self-definitional progress can come about in a number of different ways: (1) One kind of disruption is the failure to complete an ongoing self-symbolizing act (as for instance, the psychology student of the above example who failed to demonstrate his animal-training capability). (2) Another possibility is direct evaluation from others, that is, other people pointing to the lack of symbolic support for one's self-definition. (3) A further source of disruption stems from social comparison with people who are more advanced regarding the self-definition in question. Such disruptions are expected to instigate self-reflection, making self-defining individuals evaluate their standing vis-à-vis the symbolic array that the community associates with a complete self-definition.

But there is more to these disruptive events than the instigation of self-reflec-

tion. As Lewin (1926) and his students (Lissner, 1933; Mahler, 1933; Ovsiankina, 1928) showed, the interruption of goal-oriented activity also results in a tension state. In the case of self-defining goals, this tension state can fuel self-symbolizing behavior. In other words, if a person's progress towards self-completion has been brought to a halt, the person will then be acutely aware of the falling short of completeness, and the tension state will propel the individual in the direction of substituting an alternative symbol for the symbolic lack associated with the disruptive experience. Another way of viewing this substitution idea is that those who face failure with respect to one symbol of completeness – generally a highly durable symbol – are not forced to abandon the quest for completing a self-definition. Instead, they can (and are motivated to) move on immediately to one of the other numerous self-symbolizing routes.

The cognition-behavior relation of self-symbolizing activities now becomes evident: The cognition that guides self-symbolizing activities is not solely the experience of failure or falling short. Rather, the individual tries to keep self-symbolizing activities in line with the claim of a complete self-definition. The experience of falling short only serves to instigate a self-reflection that directs the individual's attention towards the whole array of symbols implied by a "complete" self-definition, *and* to provide for a tension state that motivates the individual to take one of the available alternative routes to completeness. ,

Two Research Examples

We are suggesting that people committed to a self-definition will bring their self-symbolizing behavior into line with the claim of completeness. This idea can be tested in a very straightforward manner. First, the individual is made to think about (or to experience) a symbolic weakness with respect to an aspired-to self-definition. In our research paradigms this weakness generally has to do with a highly durable symbol, that is, a symbol which is not readily attainable or alterable. Then the person is offered an easily attainable alternative symbolic route to completeness; and finally, it is observed whether the individual strives for completeness via the use of this symbolic route. It is predicted that the individual tries to substitute for the lack, thus projecting a picture of completeness.

Lack of Education and Attempted Influence. In the first study conducted under the rubric of symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, Study 1), male and female undergraduates were first asked to report a skill or an area of special knowledge which they considered to be of special interest. Subjects listed such skills as playing tennis, swimming, speaking Spanish, and playing piano. Then they were asked to indicate the amount of formal education (in months) they had received in the activity areas they had mentioned. Finally, subjects were asked to write an instructional essay that potentially could motivate other people to get involved in the subjects' favorite activity area. When subjects were finished with this essay they were asked to fill out a form that allowed them to specify how many different groups of people should receive their essay. Subjects chose

from 12 potential target groups, such as high school students, undergraduates, foreign students, and so forth. The only additional information subjects had about these potential audiences of their instructional efforts was that these groups of people were part of the psychology department's subject pool.

Subjects who were acutely aware of their lack of education – having just indicated a relatively insufficient number of years of formal education on a questionnaire – can be called *incomplete* on the symbolic dimension *education*. The opportunity to teach or persuade others within the subject's own self-definitional area offers an opportunity to regain a degree of completeness, in that teaching or persuading (1) places the subject into the role of expert musician, athlete, or whatever self-defining dimension is central, and (2) also serves to generate a potentially broader social reality for one's self-definitional status. In short, having persuaded others within one's own self-defining area constitutes a symbol of completeness in that area. In support of this line of thought, we observed a negative correlation between amount of formal education and the number of different groups to which subjects wanted to send their essays ($r = -0.34, p < 0.01$).

Lack of Education and Positivity of Self-Descriptions. In an experiment by Gollwitzer, Wicklund, and Hilton (1982, Study 1) the same format was followed as in the study just presented. However, instead of influencing others, subjects were asked to come up with self-descriptions which could be varied in terms of their positivity. More specifically, subjects had to make a public statement that described the quality of their performance on a fictitious test measuring capability in their self-definitional area. As stated above, self-descriptions are an easily accessible and – if noticed by others – a highly effective form of self-symbolizing. Accordingly, subjects who fall short with respect to the amount of formal education can use positive self-descriptions as a means of approaching completeness. As a consequence, their self-descriptions should *not* reflect the educational shortcoming. On the contrary, they should be self-aggrandizing, thereby implying a complete self-definition. In line with these ideas we found a negative correlation ($r = -0.27, p < 0.02$) between subjects' educational background (months of formal education) and positivity of self-descriptions. Thus, the study reflects the paradoxical effect that people who begin with a weak educational background deliver self-descriptions that lay claim to a particularly positive status regarding the aspired-to self-definition.

The Role of Commitment to a Self-Definition

There is an important prerequisite for the self-symbolizing process to begin. The phenomenon that people compensate for a shortcoming (instead of behaving in a way which is consistent with it) cannot be expected in every case. Rather, it is necessary that the individual be committed to the self-definition, in the sense of showing a continued striving for a complete self-definition. For the person who has given up striving for progress as psychologist, musician, humanitarian, or any other self-definition, disruption of progress cannot occur and thus a sense of

falling short, that is, the negative evaluative state of incompleteness, cannot develop. For such a person, having to admit to a shortcoming is no longer experienced as disruptive; consequently, no tension state builds up that could propel the individual to self-symbolizing efforts. Ovsiankina's (1928) finding, that those who are interrupted while trying to solve an uninvolving task tend not to resume the task, supports this line of thought.

In each of the two studies reported above there were also participants who, although willing to indicate an activity area of special interest (e. g., playing piano, speaking Spanish), indicated that they had not pursued any of the relevant activities recently. In other words, they had stopped striving for progress regarding the self-definition to which they once aspired. When looking only at these subjects ($N = 42$), whom we designated as *noncommitted,* we found in the first study that educational background (months of formal education) and the number of target groups these subjects wanted to influence tended to be positively related ($r = 0.11$, *ns*). In the second study, amount of education and positivity of self-descriptions for noncommitted subjects ($N = 12$) showed a similar pattern ($r = 0.32$, *ns*).

These data suggest that noncommitted individuals tend to bring subsequent behavior into line with the strength of their educational backgrounds. Noncommitted subjects with only a few years of formal education tend to be less interested in influencing numerous target groups, and, in addition, they tend to make self-descriptions that are comparatively modest. Thus, noncommitted individuals do not seem to influence others or self-aggrandize in proportion to their incompleteness. Instead, they tend to engage in these activities in a manner that is consistent with what they know about themselves regarding the strength of their educational background; that is, a weak educational background leads to reduced influence attempts and modest self-descriptions, whereas a strong educational background leads to enhanced influence attempts and to positive self-descriptions.

In other words, the behavior of noncommitted subjects tends to be related to their educational background in a 1:1 manner. For committed subjects, on the other hand, the educational background obtained serves the function of supporting one's claim of a complete self-definition. When the committed individual falls short, self-symbolizing activities are triggered. Accordingly, for committed subjects, a weak educational background leads to enhanced influence attempts and to positive self-descriptions – a result that is just opposite to what is found with noncommitted subjects.

The Relation Between Self-Report and Behavior

One cognition-behavior relation with which social psychologists and personologists have traditionally been concerned is that between a self-report that describes an inner quality (attitude or trait) and behavior that is presumably predicted by that inner quality. It would be ideal for the psychology of attitude measurement, as well as for personality psychology, if the connection between a

person's self-report and that same person's behavior were a direct one. But it is easy to document the absence of such correlations. Wicker (1969), reviewing research on correlations between overt behavior and behavior-relevant attitudes, lists numerous examples.

In a study by Freeman and Aatov (1960), for instance, college students' attitudes toward cheating were measured on four projective tests, as well as on a more direct self-report measure. The correlations between each of these measures and actual cheating behavior varied between 0.10 and –0.19. Wicker (1969) also reports an example from his own work. There, students' attitudes toward research were measured. Subjects had to rate concepts such as *scientific research, psychological research* and *participating as a subject in psychological research* on semantic differential, evaluative scales. The behavioral measures were obtained one to four weeks after the attitude assessment. There were four levels of behavior, corresponding to the steps in the recruiting process, with "stated unwillingness to participate" and "stated willingness, appointment scheduled, and appearance at the experiment" at the opposing ends of the behavioral rating scale. The correlation coefficients relating attitudes and participation behavior were as follows: scientific research, –0.04; psychological research, 0.06; and participation as a subject in psychological research, 0.17.

Factors Interfering with Self-Report Validity

Why do psychologists find these low correlations between self-report and behavior? The problem at hand seems rather simple: A person is asked a number of straightforward questions (e. g., "Do you detest cheating?" or "How highly do you regard scientific research?") and then a sample of relevant behavior is obtained. The respondent is then found to engage in cheating, or not. In regard to the second question asked, the respondent is found to make a contribution to scientific research or not. Given the clarity of the problem, one should expect psychologists to be able to produce correlations that are of a considerably greater magnitude than 0.30. So what are the factors that might be responsible for the usually obtained low correlations that hardly ever exceed 0.30?

Four very common disturbing factors, discussed in some detail by Wicker, are reviewed below. It is important to note that these factors have often been seen as central in the psychologist's attempt to maximize self-report validity; however, none of them is particularly theoretically deep. That is, none of them addresses the psychological variables that move a person toward consistency between behavior and self-report. In large part, these factors may be seen as methodological prerequisites for obtaining self-report – behavior congruency.

1. Multiple Influences on Behavior. Another term for this factor is perhaps the "proportion of variance accounted for" problem. The classic report of LaPierre (1934) may serve as an example. In this study, hotel managers' attitudes towards Chinese were assessed via a self-report measure, and it was observed whether these hotel managers rented a room to a travelling Chinese couple. Clearly, the

prejudice toward Chinese may account for very little of a hotel manager's behavior toward Chinese, given that they are paying customers. In other words, the major factor is the economic incentive; the minor factor is one's unfavorable attitude toward the customer. There is, of course, no a priori reason why any given attitude or trait should be expected to account for all of the variance in behavior. This problem is ultimately a practical one.

2. *Measurement Issues.* This problem receives a great deal of attention in research involving the validation of personality measures. Commonly the discussion centers around the reliability of the self-report measurement instrument (Jackson, 1982). On the other hand, Epstein (1979) has raised the question of reliable measurement of the criterion-behavior. He argues that single observations of behavior are always unreliable in the sense that they lack stability. An action performed on a given occasion may not be repeated under different circumstances or at a different point in time. Epstein reports increased attitude-behavior correlations when the measurement of the criterion-behavior is based on repeated observations.

Surely, an unreliable measure will not help the researcher's efforts to find a high correlation between self-report and behavior. At the same time, many highly reliable measures still do not show the expected correlation between self-report and behavior (cf. Gibbons, 1978; Hormuth, 1982). Thus, unreliable measurement is by no means the sole problem. However, we do not wish to belabor the point that unreliability and measurement-based obstacles to high validity should be dealt with.

3. *Specificity of the Attitude Object.* Wicker (1969) pointed out that many instances of inconsistency may be due to the fact that the attitude object is usually defined very generally while the behavioral response is considered at a highly specific level. For instance, suppose a sample of people is given the item "Do you love sports?" Subsequently, their spending of money for sports equipment is monitored, and correlated with the "like sports" item. If the correlation found is close to 0.00, the specificity hypotheses would see the explanation in the fact that the object of attitude was simply "sports;" there was no differentiation between watching sports on TV, teaching sports, engaging in sports, and the specific type of athletic activity also remained unspecified.

An attitude toward an object does not imply one single type of behavior but a whole array of behaviors toward that object (Ajzen, 1982; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Therefore, relations between general attitudes and behavior could only be observed when the whole array of behaviors toward the attitude object is taken into account. However, if we are interested in predicting one specific behavior, such as whether a certain individual will or will not buy a certain piece of sports equipment, one should measure the attitude towards the behavior in question, that is, the individual's attitude towards buying this piece of equipment instead of the individual's liking of sports. When attitudes towards specific behaviors regarding the attitude object are measured, attitude-behavior correlations are obtained that are in the 0.60 to 0.80 range (Ajzen,

1982); a marked difference to the low correlations that are observed when general attitudes (e. g., liking) toward the attitude object are measured.

4. *Can the Behavior be Manifested?* Wicker's point here is that there may be physical limits on whether the behavior that is of interest to the psychologist can even be performed. A respondent's positive or negative attitude toward Gypsies can hardly be manifested when there are no Gypsies in the vicinity; a self-described personality trait "extravert" cannot be realized on a behavioral level unless there is adequate opportunity for the person to mix socially. This problem, quite clearly, is entirely a methodological concern. With this, and the other three considerations as a background, we will now turn to what can be regarded as psychological factors basic to congruency between self-report and behavior.

Psychological Roots of Congruency Between Self-Report and Behavior

Abelson (1982) comes to the conclusion that the psychological state that increases self-report and behavior consistency is that of clarity about the behaviorally relevant inner, personal quality. To support this conclusion he refers to Snyder's (1979) work on self-monitoring. There it could be shown that people who are more in touch with their attitudes (so-called "low" self-monitors) show better attitude-behavior consistency than people who are more sensitive to situational cues (so-called "high" self-monitors). Abelson sees the same principle at work in the research reported by Scheier, Buss, and Buss (1978): People who were high on a scale that measures self-consciousness, that is, a disposition to direct attention toward one's self, were found to show stronger attitude-behavior relations than people who were low on self-consciousness. Finally, he refers to Fazio and Zanna (1978) to support his argument. These researchers conducted a number of studies which show that direct behavioral experience with the attitude object can increase the attitude-behavior relation. Fazio and Zanna (1978) attribute this effect of direct experience to the following process: "During a direct experience, because of more information and better focus, the individual forms a relatively clear, strong, and confident attitude ... which better predicts behavior."

However, researchers in the tradition of dissonance theory might question Abelson's contention that salience or clarity of one's attitudes provides for better attitude-behavior consistency. Pallak, Sogin, and Cook (1974) found that salience or clarity of one's attitudes does not hinder people from changing their attitudes after they have engaged in counter-attitudinal behavior. When they varied salience by manipulating subjects' extremity of the initial attitude, it turned out that subjects with more extreme initial attitudes showed more attitude change in the direction of counter-attitudinal behavior than did subjects with moderate initial attitudes. From the perspective that clarity makes for strong initial attitude-behavior relations, this result is hard to interpret; from the perspective of dissonance theory this result is a consequence of heightened dissonance between the counter-attitudinal behavior and the salient, extreme attitude. Green (1974) found results parallel to Pallak, Sogin, and Cook, although in this

study the internal, personal quality was not an attitude, but that of a physiological need (i. e., thirst).

Abelson's suggestion that the psychological state that favors attitude-behavior consistency is one of clarity about the internal, personal quality obviously falls short. Rather, research in the tradition of dissonance theory suggests that psychological variables that are of a more motivational nature also affect such consistency. We will keep this in mind when we discuss the self-report and behavior consistency issue from the perspective of self-completion theory.

Self-Report and Behavior: Consistency with What?

It seems reasonable to assume that any given behavior is associated with at least a few relevant self-related cognitions. Thus, a thorough analysis of the self-report and behavior-consistency issue has to address the question of "consistency with what?", that is, to which aspect of the person's self is the observed behavior related?

Dissonance researchers have tackled this question in the context of the individual's changing cognitions to reduce dissonance. There the question was: Which type of cognition – out of a few possible choices – will people bring into line with the behavior to which they have committed themselves (Götz-Marchand, Götz, & Irle, 1974; Beckmann & Irle, Chapter 8, this volume). A parallel issue arose in objective self-awareness theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Wicklund, 1975). There the issue of "consistency with what?" was addressed in the realm of self-report validity research (Wicklund, 1980, 1982; Wicklund & Frey, 1980) and is thus particularly relevant for the present discussion.

Self-awareness theory states that self-focused individuals come to realize their personal inconsistencies, or inadequacies, on whatever dimension of the self is salient in the condition of self-focused attention. The result of this self-evaluative condition is a motivational consequence: If it is difficult to remove oneself from the self-aware condition, then the person can be expected to show an increase in consistency. In other words, individuals will then behave so as to conform to their moral principles, attitudes, beliefs, or whatever aspect of the self that is focused on.[1]

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[1] While it may be tempting to suggest that the condition of self-focus vs. that of outward focus parallels Kuhl's postulated dimension of action orientation vs. state orientation (cf. Carver & Scheier, Chapt. 11 this volume), it does not seem theoretically profitable to propose a general correspondence between self-focus and action (or between self-focus and passivity). The reason for this lies in certain components of the dynamics – sequential processes – that are part of the workings of self-awareness. The kinds of conditions that have generally been employed to induce self-focused attention would force the person, at least at the outset, to cease ongoing activities and to stop in order to evaluate one's progress or condition vis-à-vis personal standards. Whether self-focused attention then leads the person toward action in the sense of abiding by those standards depends on whether the actions are possible, and on whether circumstances readily permit such appropriate actions. When not, then avoidance of the self-focusing circumstances is postulated. Such avoidance might variously be labeled as action orientation or as state orientation, in that what is being (actively) avoided is the state of having to focus on one's incompetent or unprepared self.

In a study by Gibbons (1978), for instance, subjects first filled out the Mosher sex guilt inventory, then read an erotic passage from a paperback book, and finally rated the passage on the criteria of: arousing, enjoyable, and well-written. About half of the subjects sat before a mirror, a classic self-focus inducing device, while they made this tri-partite rating of the pornographic passage. The resulting correlation coefficients between the scale score and the three dependent measures were 0.45, 0.74, and 0.58 respectively. The results in the control condition that was run without placing subjects in front of a mirror were 0.10, 0.20, and −0.23. In short, the results suggest that subjects behave much more in line with their attitudes or morals when behavior takes place under self-awareness conditions.

Prior to the Gibbons research, Carver (1975) published a pair of studies showing that physical punishment (electric shock) given to another person is especially predictable from a punishment-relevant self-report measure when the punishment is carried out under self-focusing conditions. Shortly thereafter, Scheier (1976) reported an experiment which used the same format as the Carver studies. However, Scheier also angered some of his subjects and found among this group no correlation between an earlier stated belief in the value of punishment and subsequently administered punishment. Instead, the effect of self-awareness was enhancement in the level of punishment, accompanied by an increment in anger.

What happened? Did subjects under self-awareness conditions in the Scheier study fail to show consistency? Wicklund (1980, 1982; Wicklund & Frey, 1980) suggests that whenever the individual carries more than one self-aspect that is relevant to the behavior in question, then – when the individual is made self-aware – these standards, goals, or end points may come into conflict with each other. In such a case the individual's striving to be consistent may take the form of bringing the behavior into line with that "end point" that comes to the fore given self-focused attention. Wicklund draws on William James (1910) to find an answer to the question of which "end point" or which aspect of the self will come to the fore when a person is made self-aware. James had suggested that immediate psychological states such as emotions and desires have a more seizing quality than self-components having to do with a person's social norms, and that volitional decisions are more central to a person's self than intellectual processes. Accordingly, the Scheier results do not simply demonstrate the individual's inconsistency with prior self-report; rather they demonstrate consistency with another aspect of the person's self – that of the emotional experience of anger.

Thus, objective self-awareness theory teaches us that what might, on the surface, look like an example of inconsistency may still be a case of consistency. Even if behavior contradicts self-reports, people might still act on a consistency principle, that is, they simply bring their behavior into line with a different aspect of the self than the one reflected in their self-reports. This idea is crucial for the understanding of self-reports in the case of the self-defining human.

The Self-Symbolizing Function of Self-Reports

The relation between self-related cognitions and behavior takes on a distinct quality within the context of self-completion processes. To be sure, the psychologist's construal of *cognition* as well as of *behavior* must be modified and reconsidered when dealing with a person who is committed to a self-definition. Within the arena of self-report validity, the psychologist's perspective (i.e., the assumed relation between self-related cognitions and behavior) is usually like this: It is hoped that the respondent shows some behavior that stems directly from the self-related cognition.

Another way of saying this is that the psychologist hopes that certain, easily specifiable behaviors stem directly from the attitudes, traits, or abilities that are sampled via self-report.

When we refer to the self-defining individual as being governed by a set of very special dynamics we mean the following: The individual's self-related cognitions, insofar as they are pertinent to a self-definition to which the person aspires, may fall in the service of the self-defining goal to which the individual aspires.

Self-related cognitions are then not simply descriptive summary statements of the person's past (positive or negative) behaviors and experiences. Instead, these self-related cognitions are to be seen as oriented towards building a sense of completeness regarding the aspired-to self-definition.

When the individual expresses these self-related cognitions via self-reports, such self-reports are then not necessarily coordinated to the individual's subsequent behaviors in a simple 1:1 relation. This is because these self-reports have a transitory quality and do not have to reflect a stable underlying condition. Rather, they are related to the waxing and waning of the individual's self-defining needs. To the extent that the person is incomplete (lacking self-definitional symbols), self-descriptions should strongly reflect the person's efforts to gain completeness. To the extent that the person does possess a degree of completeness, self-descriptions will then be less affected by self-definitional needs. These phenomena are illustrated rather directly in an experiment by Gollwitzer (1981).

Varying Social Reality for Positive Self-Descriptions. Female subjects committed to the self-defining goal of raising a family were asked to respond to eight questions that either required self-descriptive answers (e.g., "How well do you get along with children?") or did not require self-descriptive answers (e.g., "What is the average number of children in an American family?"). The self-related questions could easily be answered with positive self-descriptions, that is, subjects could say any conceivable positive thing about themselves, whereas the knowledge-related items were difficult to twist into self-descriptive material. Subjects wrote their answers to these questions on small paper slips, put these slips into prepared envelopes, and finally sealed the envelopes. The experimenter carried these envelopes to a presumed partner subject who allegedly was told to comment on at least four of the subject's answers. In fact, depending on the experimental condition, the experimenter herself commented either on the self-de-

scriptive answers *(Social Reality* condition*)* or on the non-self-descriptive answers *(No Social Reality* condition*).*[2]

The theoretical meaning of what has happened thus far is the following: Subjects who have gathered up a social reality for their self-descriptions should have moved in the direction of self-definitional completeness, according to the view of the theory. They have offered up a symbol – the relatively simplistic positive self-description – for public consumption, and were given feedback that the symbol was recognized by another person. Accordingly, a gain in the sense of completeness should have resulted. Those in the *No Social Reality* condition, in contrast, should not have experienced any such gain since their positive self-descriptions were not recognized by another person.

In all conditions, subjects were then given a second chance to describe themselves. Adler (1912), and in a more experimental form Kelley (1951), have suggested that people with upward-oriented aspirations can pursue these aspirations psychologically by presenting themselves as similar to people who already have prestige and recognition. Congruent with that suggestion, the symbolic route offered to subjects here was the opportunity to describe their personality as similar or dissimilar to relevant, successful others (i.e., to successful mothers).

This was done in the following manner: In all conditions, subjects were introduced to a presumed personality psychologist. He presented a semantic differential type of personality questionnaire that already carried check marks connected by straight lines. The experimenter explained that this profile represented the "ideal" personality for a mother, that is, successful mothers have a personality profile similar to this ideal. In fact, the experimenter had drawn this line onto the questionnaire so that it described a person with five positive and five negative traits. Finally, subjects were asked to indicate their own personality traits on this questionnaire (Fig. 4.1).

Subjects who had already won a measure of completeness *(Actual Social Reality* condition*)* should have had less reason to self-symbolize on the profile measure; and this is what happened (as shown in Fig. 4.2). On a measure of dissimilarity to the ideal profile (the sum of the squared differences between the ideal check mark and the subject's check mark for each single item on the personality questionnaire), *Actual Social Reality* subjects were significantly more dissimilar from the ideal than *No Social Reality* subjects.

The most blatant aspect of the results is that the tendency to perceive oneself as more, or less similar to an expert is not necessarily a stable tendency. The degree to which subjects claimed similarity to the expert was very highly dependent on the preexisting sense of completeness, in that the subjects *without* an immedi-

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[2] There was also a condition in which subjects had good reason to except acknowledgement for their positive self-descriptions, but where the actual social reality had not materialized by the time of the dependent measure. In this *Expected Social Reality* condition, the experimenter led the subject to believe that the partner subject was late but would, at some later point in time comment on the self-descriptions of the subject. Since the results for this condition and for the *Actual Social Reality* condition were identical, we will not discuss the results of the *Expected Social Reality* condition further. The reader is referred to Gollwitzer (1981) and Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982, Chapter 5) for a more complete description of the experiment.

Please indicate your standing on the following personality traits.
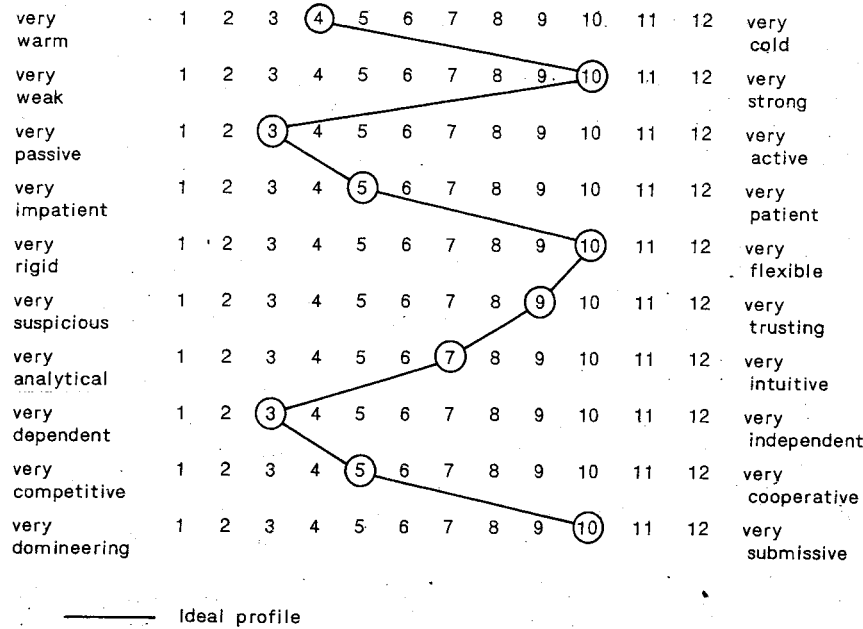Circle the appropriate number between each pair of adjectives below.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
very warm				(4)	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	very cold
very weak	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	(10)	11	12	very strong
very passive	1	2	(3)	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	very active
very impatient	1	2	3	4	(5)	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	very patient
very rigid	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	(10)	11	12	very flexible
very suspicious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	(9)	10	11	12	very trusting
very analytical	1	2	3	4	5	6	(7)	8	9	10	11	12	very intuitive
very dependent	1	2	(3)	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	very independent
very competitive	1	2	3	4	(5)	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	very cooperative
very domineering	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	(10)	11	12	very submissive

———— Ideal profile

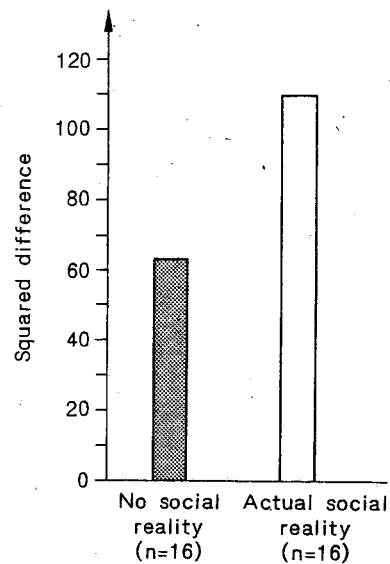*Fig. 4.1.* Personality profile questionnaire with ideal profile drawn in

Fig. 4.2. Mean dissimilarity of own personality profile to the ideal profile (Gollwitzer, 1981)

ately preexisting social reality (on the basis of the earlier self-description) showed a definite propensity to characterize themselves as similar to experts. In short, these self-characterizations that came forth in the dependent variable were in no way the stable end product of a long behavioral history, or of the exact knowledge of one's training or experience, or any such thing. Rather, perceived similarity to the expert was largely at the whim of the momentary condition of incompleteness.

Second, a further question has to do with whether the subjects' personality characterizations are valid by the criterion of any related behavior or index of ability that is potentially observable by the investigator. In this particular instance, since we know that subjects were randomized across conditions, the personality characterization probably has a validity of zero by the criterion of any index we would care to name. But we can go one step further with the validity question. *Actual Social Reality* subjects were given acknowledgement for their child-rearing-relevant self-descriptions. Thus, at the very least, they had the concordance of the community that they were indeed potentially capable mothers. Logically, then, they would have proceeded to view themselves as somewhat more expert than subjects in the *No Social Reality* condition, and this means that on the dependent measure they would have placed themselves closer to the accomplished mothers whose profiles were displayed. The fact that the *opposite* results were obtained says that the results describe a "reverse validity," such that subjects whose social reality indicates to them a certain competence are the least likely to openly characterize themselves as experts. The reason for this, as proposed earlier, has to do with the interference of self-defining needs. And, of course, there is no inconsistency here when we view the situation from the standpoint of the person who is working toward completeness in a self-definition. The more incomplete the individual is (e.g., without social reality), the more the person is expected to strive after further symbols and social reality.

Varying Social Reality for Ambitions. The present experiment (Gollwitzer & Mendez, 1983) uses much the same format as the above study, but deals with varying degrees of social reality for self-definitionally relevant ambitions. Normally one would expect that those who indicate high aspirations, and who are then recognized for those aspirations, would go on to characterize themselves as relatively capable in the relevant activity area. That is, a superficial consistency would be expected between perceived similarity to an expert and the extent of social recognition the person has had for his statements of aspiration. But, as in the previous study, it can be shown that the gaining of socal reality – this time for a stated ambition – can lower one's tendency to describe oneself as similar to experts or professionals.

The present study differed from the previous one in just three aspects: First, the participants were female undergraduates committed to the self-defining goal of "female professional." Second, the self-related questions subjects had to answer during the first part of the experiment asked them to write down intended attainments rather than actual attainments. These questions read like this: "What type of position do you plan to occupy in your professional career?"

or "How much money do you plan to make on your first job?" Finally, the check marks subjects found on the personality questionnaire presented to them by the second experimenter were this time described as representing the "ideal" personality for a female professional. The format of the check marks and the resulting profile were the same as in the earlier study.

The results – self-ascribed dissimilarity to the expert – were strikingly parallel to the prior study. Again, the dissimilarity measure revealed that *Actual Social Reality* subjects reported their personalities to be more dissimilar to the ideal personality than *No Social Reality* subjects. The present study suggests that whenever individuals committed to a specific self-definition tell others their ambitions, an increased sense of completeness will result (Fig. 4.3). The consequence is the suppression of further striving toward the self-defining goal of professional woman.

This finding makes very good sense from the standpoint of the person striving toward a self-defining goal. Coming to the dependent variable phase of the present study with an absence of social reality, the person should be particularly motivated to gain further symbols and social reality – hence the result that *No Social Reality* subjects claimed the greatest similarity to the profile of the accomplished professional. Interestingly, the results would be nonsensical from the viewpoint of a superficial consistency (or self-report validity) view of the situation. One would think that stating an aspiration, and then receiving social acknowledgement for that aspiration, would goad the person on to feelings of expertise and potential accomplishment. But of course the results took the opposite form: These supposedly goaded-on subjects were the modest ones when it
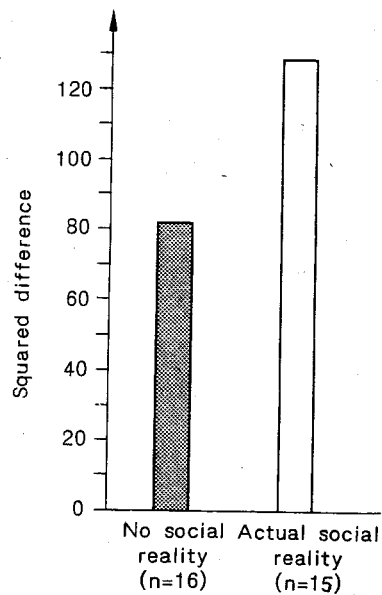
came to characterizing their similarity to the expert. In short, the observer who fails to see the self-definitional issues involved in the present paradigm will have to note another example of inconsistency.

The present pair of experiments, as well as the two studies reported earlier where subjects' incompleteness was caused by a lack of educational background, should caution psychologists from expecting consistent self-report and behavior relations given that self-reports are in the service of self-defining needs. There are two reasons for this: First, self-descriptions that serve self-definitional needs tend to reflect self-definitional attainments in a reverse manner. That is, people with a weak symbolic background try to claim strengths, whereas people with a strong symbolic background can afford to show modesty. Consequently, any subsequent performance may contradict these self-descriptions, insofar as the performance of individuals with minor self-definitional attainments will necessarily tend to show faults, whereas the performance of the more advanced individuals should reflect their higher level of self-definitional attainment.

Second, self-descriptions that serve self-definitional needs change the urgency of these needs. That is, a positive self-description that attains social reality reduces the self-definitional need which originally called forth the positive self-description. As a consequence, subsequent behavior will not reflect the claims made via the positive self-description, since no motivation remains to fuel activities that are in line with these claims.

The reader might think at this point that the picture of the self-defining human we are drawing is one of ultimate inconsistency. However, this particular picture holds only if one takes the traditional view of consistency, that is, if one expects self-report and behavior to relate in a 1:1 manner. As soon as one asks the question of "consistency with what?" – as suggested in the context of self-awareness theory (Wicklund, 1982) – a picture of consistency results: Self-defining individuals bring self-reports and/or behaviors into line with the self-definitional needs they presently experience.

The studies presented also suggest that – in the case of the self-defining human – clarity about one's self-definitional attainments does not guarantee self-reports that favor behavioral consistency. In both experiments, subjects had ample time to think about their self-definitional attainments (Experiment 1) or self-definitional aspirations (Experiment 2). Still, subjects' self-definitional needs were affecting their self-reports. That is, subjects who were made more complete via a social reality manipulation presented themselves less positively than their comparatively less complete counterparts. It appears, then, that Abelson's (1982) contention that clarity about one's internal condition makes for more accurate, and thus behaviorally more consistent self-reports, ignores the potential effects of motivational tendencies on these self-reports. In the present pair of studies, self-definitional needs could easily change self-reports in the self-complimentary direction even though subjects were given the possibility of reaching clarity about the facet of the self on which they were asked to report.

Fig. 4.3. Mean dissimilarity of own personality profile to the ideal profile (Gollwitzer and Mendez, 1983)

Self-Symbolizing: The Interference with Goals That Are Not Self-Defining

So far we have analyzed the working of self-completion processes within the realm of the self-report validity issue. We have asked the question of whether self-reports in the service of self-definitional needs are followed by behavior in a consistent manner. Thus, the cognition-behavior relation we have addressed is one where the cognition is self-related and qualifies as a symbol when expressed via self-report; in addition, the implied behavior also qualified as a symbol of completeness. Because both the self-related cognition and the implied behavior are embedded in a self-definitional theme, we have postulated a set of dynamics that are better described as consistency with self-definitional needs rather than as self-report and behavior inconsistency.

We now want to address a more complex cognition-behavior relation, where the behavioral part does not only qualify as an indicator of self-definitional attainment, but is also related to a non-self-defining goal. The following example illustrates what we have in mind: Suppose that a male is asked if he is attracted to a certain female, and whether he would like to get to know her. Once he has indicated his liking for the female, he is given a chance to act on his feeling of attraction to her. One would expect the male individual to match his courtship behavior to the degree of attraction he experiences to the female. But what if the female asks for a very particular type of courtship behavior that is also relevant to the self-definitional needs of the male? It is under these conditions that the male's attraction to the female might conflict with the person's self-definitional concerns.

The present experiment (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1985) was designed along this line of thought. Subjects were put in a situation where they could either describe themselves so as to conform to the requests of a member of the opposite sex to whom they felt attracted, or else come up with self-descriptions that were serving self-definitional needs. Male subjects committed to various artistic, academic, and athletic self-definitions were first given false personality feedback to manipulate their self-definitional completeness: subjects were informed that they had, or did not have, the personality qualities frequently found with successful people in their fields of expertise. In a second, presumedly unrelated part of the experiment, subjects were made to expect a conversation with an attractive female undergraduate ("Debbie"). After subjects had read a description of Debbie's appearance, attraction measures were taken. Then, subjects were given a chance to ingratiate themselves with Debbie, in that they found that Debbie would like to know more about her male partners before meeting them. The information she required was related to subjects' standing in their self-definitional activity areas. Before subjects wrote down this information, they were informed about certain preferences regarding the form this self-descriptive information should take: Debbie either liked males who kept these self-descriptions very modest, or preferred males who described themselves very positively.

In terms of the issue of the relation between cognition and behavior we were looking at the following: First, there is the non-self-defining theme of making

friends with an attractive woman. The resultant courtship behavior can be assumed to be controlled by two "interpersonal" cognitions: the self-related cognition of feeling attracted to this woman, and the cognitions the subject entertains regarding the courtship preferences this attractive woman holds. Second, there is a self-definitional theme created for those subjects who had received negative personality feedback. These subjects should have been oriented towards bringing their courtship behavior into line with their claim of completeness regarding the aspired-to self-definition. The important question, then is this: Will the "interpersonal" cognitions lose their grip on a subject's behavior (i.e., self-descriptions in the present study) when self-definitional needs are aroused?

In general, one would expect subjects to follow Debbie's preference to the degree they were attracted to her. However, self-descriptions in one's self-definitional area are also symbols of completeness. Subjects who had received negative personality feedback should, therefore, have implemented these self-descriptions as a means of recovering completeness. For the group of subjects that had received positive personality feedback, self-definitional needs were at least partly abated, thus the main factor influencing subjects' self-descriptions should have been their liking for Debbie.

When computing a correlation between subjects's liking for Debbie and their willingness to follow her self-descriptive preferences, we found high consistency among subjects who had received positive personality feedback ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$); for subjects who had received negative personality feedback, no such consistency was found ($r = -0.12$, ns). The self-definitional concerns aroused by the negative personality feedback evidently hindered subjects from being attuned to their liking for Debbie and/or from acting on their liking for Debbie. Furthermore, when it was evident to subjects that Debbie preferred modest males, the relatively incomplete subjects were incapable of bringing themselves to be modest (in sharp contrast to the relatively complete group). Even when it was obvious that only modesty could be successful in the interaction, incomplete subjects proceeded to describe themselves as at the 66th percentile in their respective self-definitional areas, while the more complete subjects lowered their self-descriptions all the way to the 43rd percentile.

These results indicate that when self-definitional needs were aroused, interpersonal cognitions lost control over the subjects' behavior towards the target person. Subjects' self-related cognitions of feeling attracted to her, as well as the cognized behavioral requests of the target person, were hardly reflected in subjects' behaviors. Thus, self-definitional goals can upset the cognition-behavior relation of non-self-defining goals whenever the behavioral side of this relation is relevant to self-definitional claims held by the individual.

The present finding is particularly striking in light of Kuhl's (1984) contention that it is the "ill-defined goals" or "degenerated intentions" that fall prey to competing motivational tendencies most easily. In the present study the goal of attracting the target person was defined quite clearly, that is, subjects knew exactly what they had to do to attract the female target person. Still, self-defining needs interfered quite readily with the successful pursuit of this very clear goal. It appears, then, that self-definitional needs are quite potent in disturbing cognition-

behavior relations as long as the behavioral part of this relation qualifies as a symbol of completeness.

Summary

The human we have described in this chapter is oriented towards an end state, or desired final state. Because of the individual's commitment to completeness in regard to self-defining goals, numerous facets of the person – that is, cognitions and behavior – are brought into the service of working toward completeness. To the extent that the person is lacking symbols of completeness (e.g., education, experience, membership in relevant groups or societies, personality qualities) and acknowledgement for possessing the appropriate symbols, subsequent efforts will be increasingly oriented towards completing the self-defining goal. In other words, a phenomenon of substitution will take place such that an absence of strength will lead the person to pursue indicators of strength.

This means that the relevant cognitive state of the organism in this analysis is the person's sense of falling short with regard to an aspired-to complete condition. This cognition of falling short is the source of the motivation to pursue symbols of completeness. Viewed from this perspective, the cognition-to-behavior chain in the self-completion process is quite straigthforward: Among committed individuals the cognition of weakness leads to the attempted accumulation of indicators of strength.

This process raises havoc with traditional conceptualizations of the relation between cognition and behavior, which assume a consistent interrelation. According to such a consistency position, people who sense their own weak training in an area of aspired expertise, for instance, should act in a manner that reflects this weakness. Or, if people state an aspiration and are then recognized for having this aspiration, they are expected to act as people who aspire to the goal in question. In short, people's self-related cognitions are expected to be manifested in a consistent manner.

An example may contrast this traditional consistency position with the approach presented in this chapter: A psychologist asks a group of students to indicate on a 9-point scale how much they love the arts. Then they are given an art history test. Finally, a correlation between subjects' self-reports and test perfomance is computed, and a correlation of close to zero is found.

How will researchers guided by the self-completion notion react to this finding? They should entertain the possibility that self-definitional needs may have entered the picture for some of the students. Accordingly, they should try to separate the students who are committed to the self-definition of "having extensive knowledge of the arts" from the students who are not committed to this particular self-definition. When this is achieved, new correlations between self-report and behavior are computed for both groups separately.

A significant negative correlation would be expected for committed students; these students would use the self-report for the purpose of moving towards self-definitional completeness, thereby compensating for the lack of a symbolic

background for the self-definition. Subsequently, when it comes to behaving, these students – who indicated an intense appreciation of art out of incompleteness – will fail to show strong scores on the art history test. For the noncommitted students the researcher, guided by a self-completion notion, will *not* expect a negative correlation, since self-definitional needs could not affect self-reports. Accordingly, this researcher would not be surprised when the noncommitted person who indicates an appreciation of arts also tends to show a mastery of art history.

Researchers adhering to the consistency position should react differently to the finding of a zero correlation. For instance, they might refer to the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) contention that only when attitudes towards behavior (i.e., intentions) are obtained can a positive cognition-behavior relation be expected. In other words, in the present example the cognition was perhaps too general to lead to any meaningful positive relations with behavior. In any case, researchers who abide by the consistency premise would likely renovate the study described in the present example along the following lines: The psychologist would ask for students' intentions to report on art history. From the consistency idea, one would expect that the underlying positive correlation between cognition and behavior will finally come to the fore since the cognition considered is now behaviorally specified. In other words, the cognition is made to overlap with behavior to a large degree, and a better resemblence between cognition and behavior is thereby achieved. Consequently, positive cognition-behavior relations should prevail.

Unfortunately, the above consistency approach ignores the potential workings of self-definitional needs, whose importance for cognition-behavior relations has been amply demonstrated in this chapter. Cognitions of falling short regarding a certain self-definition – despite their obvious nonspecificity – were found repeatedly to control self-symbolizing efforts whenever self-definitional needs were aroused. For instance, we found significant negative correlations between educational background and amount of attempted influence, and between educational background and positivity of self-descriptions for subjects committed to self-definitional completeness. Complementing the argument of the importance of self-definitional needs with respect to cognition-behavior relations, we also found that even when subjects held quite specific cognitions regarding a certain behavior (i.e., attracting a female), self-definitional concerns upset the consistency that was to be expected on the basis of subjects' very specific interpersonal cognitions. It appears, then, that the theme of action control cannot be discussed successfully solely on the basis of structural refinements regarding the cognitions involved in such processes.

Finally, we would like to formulate a proposal for the applied psychologist aiming at valid self-reports. In practically all facets of the connection between self-related cognitions and behavior, the individual's commitment to a self-defining goal can easily destroy the aesthetically ideal portrait of consistency between word and act. Thus, when one is searching for self-report and behavior consistency one should always entertain the idea that either the obtained self-report or the observed behavior might be in the service of self-defining needs. Then, the

only "consistency" that can be expected is one of consistency with the individual's self-defining needs. That is, the quality of the individual's self-report and the form of the individual's behavior would be aimed primarily at reducing a sense of incompleteness.

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