Cognitive Theories of Personality: The Self
Bowie could be anybody except, it seemed, himself. "Sometimes I don't feel as if I'm a person at all," he confessed in 1972. "I'm just a collection of other people's ideas." In 1997 he told Q magazine: "I had enormous self-image problems and very low self-esteem, which I hid behind obsessive writing and performing… I was driven to get through life very quickly… I really felt so utterly inadequate. I thought the work was the only thing of value."
The Self

Internal Experience of the self

- **Motivational**
- **Cognitive** (e.g., theories about the self)
- **Affective** (Self-esteem)
Internal Experience of the Self: Motivation

Self-Perception Ratings

Compared with students at Wake Forest who are of the same gender and in the same year, how do you rate yourself on the following characteristics?

Please use the following scale to respond:

1 = Considerably well-below-average
2 = Well-below-average
3 = Below average
4 = Slightly below average
5 = Average
6 = Slightly above average
7 = Above average
8 = Well-above-average
9 = Considerably well-above-average

1. Leadership ability
2. Athletic ability
3. Ability to get along with others
4. Tolerance
5. Energy level
6. Helpfulness
7. Responsibility
8. Creativeness
9. Patience
10. Trustworthiness
11. Sincerity
12. Thoughtfulness
13. Cooperativeness
14. Reasonableness
15. Intelligence

Mean = 6.6498
Std. Dev. = .6178
N = 28
Internal Experience of the Self: Motivation – Self-enhancement

People almost always generate an aggregate “better than average” effect. That is, for positive traits (e.g., helpfulness, intelligence), people tend to rate themselves in above-average terms.

So, the average person sees himself/herself as better than average!
Internal Experience of the Self: Motivation

How do you want to see yourself?
What kind of information do you want about yourself?

- Enhancement – see yourself as better than you really are (Narcissism?)
- Consistency (“self-verification”) – see yourself as you think you are
- Accuracy - see yourself as you really are

What if these come into conflict?
- Eg, Depressive Realism – accuracy vs enhancement
The Self

Internal Experience of the self

• Motivational
  – Accuracy? Enhancement? Consistency?

• Affective
  – Self-esteem

• Cognitive
  – Eg, self-theories
Internal Experience of the Self: Affect

How do you feel about yourself?

Self-esteem

• General evaluation of the self (good vs bad)
Self-esteem Questionnaire

• Rosenberg SE scale

• Steps in Scoring:
  1. Reverse-score these items: items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10
     Change 1 to 4  2 to 3  3 to 2  4 to 1

  2. Sum scores across all 10 items
     (including reversed scores for the items above)

• Min score is 10, Max score is 40.
Self-esteem

From three samples, mean age 21-23,

- US Mean = 32, SD = 5
- Canada Mean = 31, SD = 4.8
- New Zealand Mean = 30, SD = 4.5
Self-esteem

Research has shown that High SE is linked to good things such as….

– Happiness, Productivity, Low depression, persistence, life satisfaction, etc.

– And personality traits. Corrs with SE (n=326,641)

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Self-Esteem

Self-esteem—your overall opinion about whether you are good or bad, worthy or unworthy, or somewhere in between

- Global Self-esteem
- Social Self-esteem
- Acad. Self-esteem
- Phys. Self-esteem
- Etc.... Self-esteem
Self-Esteem

So, high SE is generally good.

How can/should self-esteem be raised?

California’s "State Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility."
(late 1980’s, early 1990’s)

Assemblyman argued that “raising self-esteem in young people would reduce crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, school underachievement and pollution, and even help to balance the state budget, a prospect predicated on the observation that people with high self-regard earn more than others and thus pay more in taxes.”

Funded a bill with $245,000 a year for three years, total = $735,000.
Self-Esteem

How can/should self-esteem be raised?

• At Loren Miller Elementary School in Los Angeles, children spent part of each day working on their self-esteem.
• In daily "I Love Me" lessons, they completed the phrase "I am . . . " with words such as beautiful, lovable, respectable, kind or gifted. Then they memorized the sentences to make them sink in.

By 1999 - no more. The daily "I Love Me" lessons replaced by rapid-fire drills and constant testing of kids' skills. With pressure to raise test scores, schools are rethinking their decades-long love affair with self-esteem.
Self-Esteem

How can/should self-esteem be raised?

Quotations from respected researchers studying self-esteem:

"The false belief in self-esteem as a force for social good can be not just potentially but actually harmful”

"It's time for people who have been claiming that improved self-esteem will improve performance to put up or shut up”
Self-Esteem

How can/should self-esteem be raised?

The best way to raise self-esteem is through accomplishments that increase it legitimately.

In CA, “Out went the three hours they spent weekly on counseling and self-esteem classes. In came more attention to the basics. Up went test scores…. And self-esteem soared. Because the scores are better, kids feel better about themselves.”
Self-Esteem

So, high SE is generally good, and it can be raised through legitimate accomplishments.

But the role of self-esteem as a *causal agent* (e.g., affecting academic achievement, job performance, leadership) is highly questionable.

In addition, there’s a “dark side” of self-esteem.

- Narcissism - self-image is unrealistically grandiose
- Secure vs fragile self-esteem
Secure vs Fragile Self-Esteem

Two forms of high self-esteem

• Secure high SE - positive attitudes toward the self that are realistic, well-anchored, and resistant to threat
  – Able to recognize and acknowledge their weaknesses without feeling threatened

• Fragile high SE - self-worth that is vulnerable to challenge, require constant validation, and relies on some degree of self-deception
  – Individuals with fragile high self-esteem use self-protective and self-enhancing strategies to preserve self-esteem
Self-esteem

So, what is the benefit of self-esteem?

– Feeling good about self (react better to failure & stress)
– Confidence & initiative (willingness to engage in variety of behaviors - good and bad)
– There seem to be no replicable downsides to having High SE, although other people might suffer from your High SE (superiority?)
The Self

Internal Experience of the self

• Motivational
• Affective (Self-esteem)
• Cognitive
Internal Experience of the Self: Cognition

1. One self or multiple selves?
2. Self-knowledge
3. Self-schemas
4. Etc. (see book)
5. "Self theories"- beliefs about the nature of one’s traits/capacities
Internal Experience of the Self: Cognition

Carol Dweck – we have theories (beliefs) about our psychological characteristics –

– “entity theorists” – it’s a fixed characteristic that is stable and not very changeable.

– “incremental theorists” – it’s a malleable characteristic that can grow, change, improve.
## Implicit self-theories

### Table 1. Summary Statistics and Reliability of the Implicit Theory Measures

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$^a$Range = 1–6.
Content: “Self-theories”

These beliefs affect our goal orientations:

– Performance orientation - “to prove the ability” (or to avoid proving lack of ability)

– Mastery orientation - “to improve the ability”

How is this related to behavior?
Content: “Self-theories”

Entity theory $\rightarrow$ Performance goal $\rightarrow$ behavior?

Perf goal + belief in *high* ability = seek challenge (to prove ability)

Perf goal + belief in *low* ability = avoid challenge (to not disprove ability)

Incremental theory $\rightarrow$ Mastery goal $\rightarrow$ behavior?

Mastery goal = seek challenge (to improve ability)
Content: Academic goal orientations

Grade Orientation – work for grades

Learning Orientation – work for intrinsic interest in acquiring new information
## Content: Academic Goal orientation

Study: Correlations between orientations and academic outcomes (SAT, GPA, Psych grade):

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(Beck et al, 1991)
Content: Academic Goal orientation

Grade-oriented students tend to:
- Have less efficient study habits
- Get less enjoyment from reading
- Have below-avg SAT scores & grades
- Have above avg test anxiety

Learning-oriented students tend to:
- Have more efficient study habits
- Have better reasoning skills
- Be more self-motivated for acad work
Carol Dweck: The value of a “growth” mindset

Can self-theories be changed, and (if so) what are the effects?
The Self

Internal Experience of the self

• Cognitive
• Motivational
• Affective (Self-esteem)