The Oxford Handbook of Human Motivation Second Edition

Edited by

Richard M. Ryan

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2019

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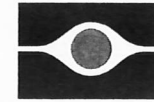*Methods and Measurement*
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The Five Pillars of Self-Enhancement and Self-Protection

Constantine Sedikides *and* Mark D. Alicke

Abstract

This chapter discusses two self-evaluation motives, self-enhancement (to pursue, maintain, or augment the positivity of self-views—more so than objective standards would warrant) and self-protection (to avoid, repair, or minimize the negativity of self-views—even at the expense of truthful feedback). Under the *self-centrality breeds self-enhancement* principle (i.e., self-enhancement and self-protection will be particularly influential in personally important domains), the chapter elaborates on five pillars of the two motives: self-serving bias, better-than-average effect, selective self-memory, socially desirable responding, and overclaiming. The chapter also considers other reasons for why self-enhancement and self-protection are motivated (e.g., fluctuations in motive strength as a function of self-threat and self-affirmation) and rules out nonmotivational explanations (e.g., expectancies, egocentrism, focalism). Self-enhancement and self-protection are worthy of a place in the pantheon of human motivation.

Keywords: self-enhancement, self-protection, self-serving bias, better-than-average-effect, selective self-memory, overclaiming, socially desirable responding

Introduction

Social behavior is motivated. And much of it is motivated by the sister motives of self-enhancement and self-protection. First, we define these motives and touch on their psychological utility. In the second and main section of this chapter, we elaborate on five proposed pillars: better-than-average effect, self-serving bias, selective self-memory, socially desirable responding, and overclaiming.

Self-Enhancement, Self-Protection, and Their Functionality

We define self-enhancement as the motive to pursue, preserve, or amplify the positivity of one's self-views, more so than impartial benchmarks (e.g., standardized tests, peer performance, observers' opinions) would warrant. We define self-protection as the motive to eschew, restore, or lessen the negativity of one's self-views, even if this necessitates compromising their veracity (i.e., at the expense of accurate

feedback). Broadly speaking, the two motives "push" for self-positivity or "pull" away from self-negativity to the extent that self-views can be positioned in the most favorable light that is credible to the person and to others—especially close or familiar others (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Gregg, Sedikides, & Gebauer, 2011).

Self-enhancement and self-protection often operate in tandem (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008) in both Western culture (Hepper, Gramzow, & Sedikides, 2010) and Eastern culture (Hepper, Sedikides, & Cai, 2013). Yet, self-enhancement is more likely to be on routine patrol, that is, on the lookout for self-advancing opportunities, whereas self-protection is more likely to propel into action in response to situational demands and in particular self-threat (e.g., negative feedback, criticism, setbacks).

Besides guiding momentary or short-term thinking, feeling, and behaving, the two motives serve

three enduring psychological functions. First, through the construction of self-favoring narratives, they help to maintain an optimal state of positive emotions—a function we (Alicke & Sedikides, 2019) have labeled *psychological immunity*. Second, they contribute to the advancement and defense of psychological interests or goals, be it concrete (e.g., skills and abilities like intelligence, athleticism, and musicality) or abstract (e.g., popularity, social status, or security; Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; O'Mara & Gaertner, 2017). Last, they foster psychological and physical health (Alicke & Sedikides, 2011; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015). It is for those reasons that an argument has been made for the evolutionary significance of the two motives, implicating them in species survival and reproduction (Sedikides & Skowronski, 2000; Sedikides, Skowronski, & Dunbar, 2006).

The Five Pillars of Self-Enhancement and Self-Protection Motivation

Over 100 years ago, William James (1907) offered a remarkable insight (p. 31): "I, who for the time have staked my all on being a psychologist, am mortified if others know much more psychology than I. But I am contended to wallow in the grossest ignorance of Greek." In contemporary vernacular, people value and accentuate those domains of knowledge, activity, or personality that are tethered to their self-esteem. Other luminaries, such as Rosenberg (1965) and Rokeach (1973), expressed a similar idea, which has achieved the status of a psychological principle that underlies many theories of the self, including terror management theory (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004), the contingencies of self-worth model (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), and the self-concept enhancing tactician model (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). This principle, dubbed by Gebauer, Wagner, Sedikides, and Neberich (2013) *self-centrality breeds self-enhancement*, implies that the self-enhancement and self-protection motives will be particularly influential in personally important (i.e., central) domains. Put otherwise, signatures of self-enhancement and self-protection will reflect strivings to perceive oneself as a "good person" or a "good member of the culture," namely, to boost or guard one's self-esteem.

We use the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle as a unifying theme in discussing the proposed five key signatures (i.e., pillars) of the two motives. These pillars are the self-serving bias, the better-than-average-effect, selective self-memory, socially desirable responding, and overclaiming.

The Self-Serving Bias

The self-serving bias (SSB) is aptly described by one of Murphy's laws: "If more than one person is responsible for a miscalculation, none will be at fault." In psychological terms, people attribute their failures (e.g., subpar task performance) to external factors such as task difficulty, harsh evaluators, or bad luck; however, they attribute their successes (e.g., effective task performance) to internal factors such as discipline, effort, or ability (B. Weiner, 1972). Crucially, the SSB is underlain by the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle. People eagerly take responsibility for successes that have serious implications for the kind of person they are (e.g., competent, intelligent, trustworthy) and promptly displace on others or situations responsibility for failures that have grave consequences for them (i.e., depict them as incompetent, stupid, or untrustworthy).

The SSB is robust and pervasive. It is observed among, children, adolescents, and adults (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hanklin, 2004) and among organizational employees (Corr & Gray, 1996), athletes (de Michele, Gansneder, & Solomon, 1998), college students (Zuckerman, 1979), drivers (Stewart, 2005), and individuals working on interdependent (i.e., dyad-based) task outcomes (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998). It is also observed in both Western and East Asian cultures (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015; Mezulis et al., 2004).

There are other reasons attesting to the motivational nature of the SSB besides the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle. The SSB is defensively magnified as level of *self-threat* rises: The more self-threat people experience, the stronger they will display the SSB (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). Also, it is nondefensively attenuated following *self-affirmation*: After writing about their important (vs. unimportant) values, people are far less likely to manifest the SSB, if at all (Sherman & Kim, 2005).

Two nonmotivational explanations for the SSB have been proposed (Sedikides & Alicke, 2012). One refers to *differential expectancies* for success and failure: Based on their personal histories, people simply anticipate more successes than failures. However, the SSB is observed even when success and failure expectancies are controlled for (Sedikides et al., 1998; see also Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Weary, 1979). The other explanation refers to *impression management*, that is, strategic attempts to present oneself favorably to others. Impression management may reflect the self-enhancement motive in itself (Sedikides, Hoorens, & Dufner, 2015). Regardless, the SSB occurs even when controlling

for impression management (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1982; Sedikides et al., 1998).

The Better-Than-Average Effect

Lake Wobegon is a fictional location where "all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average." Invented by Garrison Keillor, the location captures elegantly the human penchant for overestimating one's strengths and underestimating one's weaknesses in comparison to others. This penchant is known as the *better-than-average effect* (BTAE; Alicke, 1985). Critically, the BTAE is underlain by the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle. People rate themselves above the average peer standing on positive and central (i.e., important to have) self-attributes or rate themselves below the average peer standing on negative and central (i.e., important not to have) attributes (Brown, 2012; Stavrova, Köneke, & Schlösser, 2016). Indeed, in the case of relatively unimportant or peripheral domains (e.g., juggling), people do not necessarily show the BTAE (Kruger, 1999). Interestingly, they take these social comparative ratings at face value, believing the BTAE is for real and being willing to bet money on it (Williams & Gilovich, 2008). In an ironic twist, they also believe they are less prone to the BTAE than the average person (Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002).

The BTAE is robust, pervasive (Alicke & Govorun, 2005), and genetically influenced (Luo, Liu, Cai, Wildschut, & Sedikides, 2016). It is found among preschoolers (P. S. Weiner, 1964), elementary school children (Albery & Messer, 2005), high school students (Kurman, 2002), college students (Brown, 1986), middle-age or older adults (Zell & Alicke, 2011), and representative community samples (Heady & Wearing, 1988). A few examples will suffice. College students believe they are superior to their peers on complexity of personality (Cheung, Wildschut, Sedikides, & Pinter, 2014), as well as leadership skills, athletic prowess, and dating popularity (College Board, 1976; Preuss & Alicke, 2009); drivers regard themselves as superior to their peers on driving ability, while they were hospitalized because of a car accident they caused (Preston & Harris, 1965); college instructors consider themselves superior on teaching ability (Cross, 1977) and social psychologists on research talent (van Lange, Taris, & Vonk, 1997); Christians consider themselves superior to nonbelievers on domains central to the Christian self-concept (e.g., adherence to commandments of faith or communion; Gebauer, Sedikides, &

Schrade, 2017, Studies 1A–1B); and finally, rheumatoid arthritis patients consider their symptoms less severe than those of the average patient (DeVellis et al., 1990) and elderly people estimate they are less at risk for age-related illnesses than their peers (Schulz & Fritz, 1987). Ironically, prisoners, most of whom had been convicted of serious crimes (e.g., violence against people, robbery), rated themselves superior on prosocial traits (e.g., kindness, morality, trustworthiness, compassion) in comparison not only to the average prisoner, but also to the average community member, the one exception being that they rated themselves equal to the average community member on "law abidingness" (Sedikides, Meek, Alicke, & Taylor, 2014).

The BTAE is observed in both Western and East Asian culture. As a reminder, the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle predicts that individuals will claim superiority on their central attributes. In Western culture, individualism (e.g., competence, ambition, originality) is a central dimension, whereas in East Asian culture, collectivism (e.g., loyalty, compromise, respectfulness) is a central dimension. It follows that Westerners will exhibit the BTAE on individualistic attributes, but Easterners will do so on collectivistic attributes. Research has borne out these predictions (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Chang, 2008; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005).

Other empirically validated reasons point to the motivational character of the BTAE besides the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle. One is *attribute controllability* (Alicke, 1985). People are more likely to manifest the BTAE on positive and central attributes over which they have high control (e.g., resourceful) than on those over which they have low control (e.g., mature). Alternatively, they are more likely to self-protect on negative and central attributes over which they have high control (e.g., unappreciative) than on those over which they have low control (e.g., humorless). Another reason is *attribute verifiability* (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989; van Lange & Sedikides, 1998; Zell & Alicke, 2011). People are more likely to display the BTAE on attributes that are ambiguous or difficult to verify (e.g., morality), thus allowing elbow room for maneuvering, than on attributes that are concrete or easily verifiable (e.g., arithmetic skills) to which they may be held accountable. A third reason is *self-threat* (Brown, 2012, Study 4). When people realize that their central traits (e.g., creativity) are under threat, as a result of substandard performance, they show an exaggerated BTAE. The fourth

and final reason is perceived *threat immunity* (Menon & Thompson, 2007): In a vintage self-enhancing move, team members believe that their superior performance poses more of a threat to others than does others' superior performance to them.

Five nonmotivational explanations for the BTAE have been proposed (Sedikides & Alicke, 2012). According to *differential abstraction*, the self is compared with an abstract referent—average other—rather than a concrete peer. However, the BTAE is obtained, albeit attenuated, even when the self is compared with concrete others (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenburg, 1995). According to *egocentrism*, people think selectively about their own assets or about their peers' liabilities. However, this selective recruitment of one's assets or peers' liabilities is on its own a manifestation of self-enhancement or self-protection (Sanitioso, Kunda, & Fong, 1990). Further, the BTAE is obtained not only with direct measures (where participants compare the self to the average peer on a single scale), but also with indirect measures (where participants rate the self and average peer on separate, counterbalanced scales; Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Gebauer, Sedikides, & Schrade, 2017, Studies 1A–1B). Moreover, egocentrism cannot account for why the BTAE is stronger on ambiguous than unambiguous traits (Dunning et al., 1989) and why it emerges even when behavioral evidence for relevant traits is fully equated for self and others (Alicke, Vredenburg, Hiatt, & Govorun, 2001; Guenther & Alicke, 2010). According to *focalism*, people focus more, and put greater weight, on the self than the average peer, because the self is in the focal position and the average peer is in the referent position. However, focalism cannot account for why participants show a stronger BTAE on central than peripheral traits even when the self constitutes the referent and "most other people" constitute the target (Brown, 2012, Study 3). Further, focalism cannot account for why the BTAE varies as a function of controllability and verifiability and why the BTAE is present when indirect measures are used (Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Gebauer, Sedikides, & Schrade, 2017, Studies 1A-1B), when behavioral base rates for traits are the same for self and other (Alicke et al., 2001) and when the referent is concrete (Alicke et al., 1995). According to *individuated-entity versus aggregate comparisons*, the self as a single entity is compared to an aggregate, and single entities are judged more favorably than aggregates. However, the BTAE is still found when the individuated entity is the self (i.e., when the

self is compared to any other individuated entity; Alicke et al., 1995). Further, the BTAE is stronger on central than on peripheral traits, even when participants compare themselves with a single person (Brown, 2012, Study 2). Similarly, the BTAE ebbs and flows as a function of the judgment's motivational significance (e.g., attribute valence, importance, controllability, verifiability) and emerges under cognitive load (Alicke et al., 1995, Study 7)—a condition that reflects automatic self-enhancement (Paulhus, 1993). Finally, according to *assimilation/contrast*, the BTAE entails anchoring the self and contrasting the average peer from that point. However, contrary to the notion that judgments of the average peer are contrasted from the self, average peer ratings are assimilated toward the self (Guenther & Alicke, 2010). In addition, this pattern is motivational. Participants assimilate their ratings of average toward the scale points provided to a lesser degree when those scale points are described as self-ratings versus when the identical points are attributed to another individual. Stated otherwise, although anchoring comparative judgments on the self induces average-peer assimilation because self-ratings constitute high scale points, participants' desire to sustain or increase self-positivity restricts this assimilative process and thereby maximizes the distance between the self and the average peer (Guenther & Alicke, 2010).

Selective Self-Memory

Josh Billings had a point when he quipped, "It's not only the most difficult thing to truly know one's self, but the most inconvenient". People indeed have poor memory for their faults compared to their virtues, a pattern that reverses in memory for others (Sedikides & Green, 2009; Skowronski, 2011). Of note, as the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle suggests, it is their most substantial faults that people forget and their most defining strengths that they remember. We refer to this phenomenon as selective self-memory. To illustrate it, we review evidence from several sources in the autobiographical memory literature (e.g., the fading affect bias; Walker, Skowronski, & Thompson, 2003) and the experimental literature (e.g., mnemic neglect; Sedikides, Green, Saunders, Skowronski, & Zengel, 2016).

Selective self-memory is robust and pervasive. It is found among children (Wilson, Smith, Ross, & Ross, 2004) and adults (Field, 1981). It occurs in many domains such as feedback (Sedikides & Green, 2000), personality traits (Mischel, Ebbesen,

& Zeiss, 1976), relationships (van Lange, Rusbult, Semin-Goossens, Goerts, & Stalpers, 1999), and life events (Ross & Wilson, 2002; Skowronski, Betz, Thompson, & Shannon, 1991). And it is observed not only in Western culture (Sedikides et al., 2016; Skowronski, 2011), but also in East Asian culture or, more generally, non-Western culture (Kwon, Scheibe, Samanez-Larkin, Tsai, & Carstensen, 2009; Ritchie et al., 2015; Tan, Newman, & Zhang, 2014).

Selective self-memory partly originates at encoding. People pay reduced attention, or process shallowly, unfavorable (vs. favorable) feedback (Baumeister & Cairns, 1992; Sedikides & Green, 2000, Experiment 3), thus hindering its registration. Also, selective self-memory partly originates at retrieval, as demonstrated by experiments on differential recall patterns of desirable versus undesirable traits (Sanitioso et al., 1990), satisfying versus unsatisfying relationships (Murray & Holmes, 1993), and health-boosting versus control habits (Ross, McFarland, & Fletcher, 1981). Last, selective self-memory partly originates in retention. As research on the fading affect bias has established, the negative affect attached to autobiographical memories fades faster across time than the positive affect attached to them (Walker et al., 2003).

Two lines of experimentation, on self-threat and self-boosting, provide additional ammunition for the argument that selective self-memory is motivated. In the standard experimental protocol (Sedikides et al., 2016), participants respond to a bogus personality questionnaire (the Michigan Omnibus Personality Inventory) and then receive feedback in the form of behaviors. Some participants learn that they themselves are likely to enact those behaviors, whereas others learn that a fictional acquaintance ("Chris") is likely to enact the behaviors. The behaviors exemplify either negative central traits (e.g., untrustworthy: "would borrow other people's belongings without their knowledge"), positive central traits (e.g., kind; "would help a handicapped neighbor paint his house"), negative peripheral traits (e.g., complaining: "would constantly talk about how much stuff there is to be done"), or positive peripheral traits (e.g., predictable: "others would forecast your/Chris's reaction to a new situation"). Following a distractor task (e.g., writing down as many states of the United States as possible), participants are asked to recall all presented behaviors in any order they come to mind. Participants recall poorly unfavorable feedback on their important self-views (i.e., behaviors that are negative, central, and refer to the self) compared to all other categories

of feedback. Participants' recall is selective, a pattern labeled *mnemic neglect* (Sedikides et al., 2016).

Mnemic neglect varies as a function of *self-threat*: The more self-threatening the feedback is, the stronger mnemic neglect is (i.e., the more defensively participants process and recall the feedback). For example, mnemic neglect is magnified when the unfavorable feedback is high on diagnosticity (e.g., "you would often lie to your parents") than low on diagnosticity (e.g., "you would forget for a week to return a borrowed book to a friend"; Green & Sedikides, 2004). High diagnosticity feedback is more threatening, because it can really tell whether the person possesses the underlying trait. Also, mnemic neglect is augmented when participants believe that their traits are unmodifiable rather than modifiable (Green, Pinter, & Sedikides, 2005). Unmodifiable feedback is more threatening, because it precludes possibilities for improvement. Indeed, when participants are granted an opportunity to improve on the feedback dimension, mnemic neglect subsides (Green, Sedikides, Pinter, & van Tongeren, 2009).

Of course, self-threatening feedback is not always recalled poorly. Traumatic events, for example, are well remembered compared to ordinary events (Berntsen, 2001; McNally, 2003). However, traumatic events are extreme, and event extremity is associated with better recall (Thompson, Skowronski, Larsen, & Betz, 1996), although event valence (i.e., negativity–positivity) predicts amount of recall independent of event extremity (Thompson et al., 1996, Chapter 4). Regardless, in mnemic neglect research, behavioral feedback is moderate rather than extreme (Sedikides & Green, 2000, pilot studies). It is likely, then, that selective self-memory is applicable to mild, rather than extreme, feedback or events.

Mnemic neglect also varies a function of *self-boosting*: The more self-threatening the feedback is, the stronger mnemic neglect is (i.e., the more defensively participants process and recall the information). Self-affirmation leads to a loss in mnemic neglect. In relevant research (Green, Sedikides, & Gregg, 2008, Experiment 2), participants completed a creativity task. They encountered negative feedback in the self-threat condition, but uniformly positive feedback in the self-boosting condition. Subsequently, all participants engaged in the standard mnemic neglect protocol wherein they received behavioral feedback. Self-threatened participants evinced mnemic neglect, but self-boosted participants did not. Self-boosting relaxed the defensive processing of feedback.

Two nonmotivational explanations for selective self-memory have been proposed. One, *differential expectancies*, states that people process unfavorable feedback (on personally important dimensions) shallowly and recall it poorly, simply because they do not expect to receive it. Judging from their past experiences, such feedback appears implausible. This explanation has been tested and refuted (Newman, Nibert, & Winer, 2009; Sedikides & Green, 2004, Experiment 1). The other explanation, *inconsistency between feedback valence and self-view valence*, states that people process unfavorable feedback (again, on personally important dimensions) shallowly and recall it poorly, not because it is negative, but rather because it is inconsistent with their (positive) self-views. This explanation has also been put to the test and refuted (Sedikides & Green, 2004, Experiment 2). In conclusion, neither explanation is sufficient to explain mnemic neglect.

Socially Desirable Responding

"No matter what happens in life, be nice to people. Being nice to people is a peaceful way to live, and a beautiful legacy to leave behind." This quote, by Marcandangel (*Practical Tips for Productive Living*; http://everydayshouldbefun.com/marcandangel-com/#ixzz4rbnI8qFv), implies that the reason to be nice is fundamentally self-favoring. Responding in a socially desirable manner is what a good person does, one who wishes to have a fulfilling life and establish a positive reputation. So, responding in a socially desirable manner validates and bolsters central aspects of one's self, as the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle suggests.

Socially desirable responding (SDR) is indeed considered a signature of self-enhancement. As Paulhus and Holden (2010) put it, "in the context of questionnaire styles, self-enhancement is typically referred to as socially desirable responding and is tapped by measures such as the Marlowe–Crowne Scale" (p. 221). High scores on this scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) are linked to agreeable or approving behavior, which is the culturally normative behavior of a "good person" (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Paulhus, 1991). In addition, high scorers on this scale inflate their claims of friendliness, openness to experience, and psychological adjustment (McCrae & Costa, 1983; Paulhus, 1991). Last, experimental inductions of socially desirable self-presentation lead to increases in self-esteem (Upshaw & Yates, 1968).

Factor analyses of the Marlowe–Crowne Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), as well as other SDR scales (Edwards, 1957; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991;

Wiggins, 1964), have yielded two factors. Paulhus (1984) showed that the factors represent self-deceptive positivity (reflecting a sincere but inflated self-presentation) and impression management (reflecting self-presentation targeted at specific audiences). Later, in his Balanced Inventory of Socially Desirable Responding, Paulhus (1998) labeled the first factor Self-Deceptive Enhancement (representing a nonconscious and self-deceptive response style) and the second factor Impression Management (representing a conscious and other-deceptive response style). Still, in follow-up research, Paulhus (2002; Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008) proposed that the Self-Deceptive Enhancement subscale assesses an agentic form of SDR, whereas the Impression Management subscale assesses a communal form of SDR. This reformulation established that SDR is an index of private self-enhancement (or self-protection). Indeed, both SDR subscales are positively correlated with conventional indices of self-enhancement, such as high self-esteem, high narcissism, or low social anxiety (Paulhus, 1988; Paulhus & Reid, 1991).

We will provide an empirical example in which SDR has been used as a signature of self-enhancement. It concerns a meta-analysis on the relation between self-enhancement and religiosity by Sedikides and Gebauer (2010). Their starting point was that religiosity, like self-enhancement, is prevalent across cultures. For example, 82% of respondents in representative samples across 143 countries answered yes to the Gallup World Poll's question "Is religion an important part of your daily life?" (Crabtree, 2009). Also, when surveyed, 95% of the U.S. population expressed a belief in God (Gallup & Castelli, 1989). Might religiosity feed into self-enhancement? This question has a long history. It was posed first by (who else) William James (1902) and reposed by Gordon Allport (1950; Allport & Ross, 1967). The topic came to be a theoretical (Batson & Stocks, 2004; Reiss, 2004) and empirical (Batson, Naifeh, & Pate, 1978; Trimble, 1997) focus of other researchers as well over the years.

Sedikides and Gebauer (2010) hypothesized that religiosity is, in part, in the service of self-enhancement (i.e., SDR). If so, SDR will be highest in religious countries (e.g., the United States), moderate in less religious countries (e.g., Canada), and lowest in relatively secular countries (e.g., the United Kingdom); that is, the positive relation between SDR and religiosity will be stronger the higher a country is on religiosity (i.e., strongest in the United States, weakest in the United Kingdom). In a similar vein, SDR will be higher in religious

than in nonreligious U.S. universities; that is, the positive relation between SDR and religiosity will be stronger in Christian universities than in secular universities. The meta-analysis, which included responses from 15,396 participants across 75 samples, lent support to both hypotheses. In all, the relation between SDR and religiosity was stronger in cultures that placed a lofty value on religiosity or in which religiosity represented a particularly positive identity. Conceptually similar findings have been obtained with other self-enhancement indices such as social self-esteem (Gebauer, Sedikides, & Neberich, 2012) and self-esteem (Gebauer, Sedikides, Schönbrodt, et al., 2017), corroborating the notion that religiosity serves, in part, the motive to self-enhance.

Overclaiming

"There are two ways to be fooled," proclaimed Søren Kierkegaard. "One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true." Believing what is not true, because this belief reflects well on one's important self-views, illustrates the overclaiming effect. More specifically, overclaiming refers to believing you know things that matter to you (i.e., the self-centrality breed self-enhancement principle).

Overclaiming does signal self-enhancement (Paulhus & Harms, 2004; Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003). In particular, it captures both knowledge accuracy and knowledge exaggeration or faking (i.e., motivated distortion). In the typical study, participants are instructed to indicate their degree of knowledge on a central domain. For example, if participants are college students, they are asked to declare their level of familiarity with academic topics. Unbeknown to participants, some items within each topic are real and some (20%) are fabricated by the experimenter (i.e., are foils). As such, the overclaiming task can assess, via signal detection analysis, participants' knowledge accuracy and knowledge exaggeration. The latter reflects self-enhancement (in particular, deceptive self-enhancement, assuming the absence of an audience).

Overclaiming is a unique pillar of self-enhancement, in the sense that it constitutes a criterion-discrepancy index. That is, it provides an objective measure of self-enhancement. The overclaiming task is well validated (Paulhus et al., 2003). For example, it is unaffected by instructions to "fake good" or by warnings about the foils. Also, it is positively related to other self-enhancement indices, such as self-esteem, narcissism, and self-deceptive enhancement. And it is positively associated with

self-reported indices of psychological adjustment, such as resilience.

We will provide two examples from contemporary self-enhancement research that implicate overclaiming. One example concerns *narcissism*. Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, and Maio (2012, Study 4) capitalized on narcissists' well-known tendency to engage in pomposity and grandiosity (Morf, Horvath, & Torchetti, 2011; Thomaes, Brummelman, & Sedikides, 2018). Indeed, narcissistic college students exaggerate their knowledge on academic topics (because these topics are central to them), but do not differ from their nonnarcissistic counterparts on knowledge accuracy (Paulhus & Harms, 2004; Paulhus et al., 2003). This finding, however, applies to agentic narcissists, who self-aggrandize on the ability domain. Another type of narcissist, communal narcissists, self-aggrandize on the prosociality domain, because it is central to them. Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, et al. (2012) hypothesized that, although agentic narcissists exaggerate their knowledge (i.e., overclaim) on ability topics, communal narcissists overclaim on prosociality domains.

Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, et al. (2012) created an overclaiming task that consisted of four prosociality topics: "humanitarian aid organizations," "nature and animal protection organizations," "parenting and childcare," and "international health charities," Each topic had 17 items, and participants rated their familiarity with those items. Of the 17 items, 13 were real and 4 were foils. For the topic "humanitarian aid organizations," for example, the items "Red Cross International" and "Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières" were real, whereas the item "International Well-Being Fund" was a foil. Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, et al. (2012) also created an overclaiming task comprising four ability domains: "international stock market," "chemistry & physics," "market principles," and "leading educational institutions." Examples of real items for the last topic are "Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)" and "London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)," whereas an example of foil items is "The Wall Institute Berlin (WIB)." Consistent with the hypothesis, agentic narcissists overclaimed (i.e., exaggerated their knowledge) on the ability domain, whereas communal narcissists overclaimed on the prosociality domain. (For another use of the overclaiming task in narcissism research, see Grosz, Loesch, & Back, 2017).

An additional example from contemporary self-enhancement research that implicates overclaiming

concerns *religiosity* (Gebauer, Sedikides, & Schrade, 2017, Studies 2A–2H). If Christians rely on religiosity to satisfy, in part, the self-enhancement motive (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010), then they will overclaim on domains more central to Christianity. Gebauer, Sedikides, and Schrade, 2017 (Studies 1A–1B) constructed three overclaiming tasks to reflect the range of such domains. One domain, the most central, was Christianity (sample topics: "stories of the New Testament," "Christian saints," "books of the Bible"). Another domain, less central, was prosociality (sample topics: "humanitarian aid organizations," "nature and animal protection organizations," "international health charities"). The third domain, least central or peripheral, was ability (sample topics: "chemistry & physics," "international stock market," "leading universities"). In support of the hypothesis, Christians overclaimed on the Christianity domain the most, overclaimed on communion less, and did not overclaim on agency.

Recently, the overclaiming task has come under some criticism. In a community sample, Ludeke and Makransky (2016) found that this task was unrelated to criterion-discrepancy indices, such as performance on a cognitive ability test and peer reports of personality. Further, the task was unassociated with self-deceptive enhancement (unlike Paulhus et al., 2003), although it was moderately and positively associated with narcissism (like Paulhus & Harms, 2004, and Paulhus et al., 2003). However, the overclaiming task was positively linked to indices of careless responding (Mahalanobis distance; Meade & Craig, 2012), although statistically controlling for such links improved the task's convergent validity. This study, however, did not use a domain that was central to participants. That is, the study relied on the academic domain for a community sample (instead of relying, for example, on the sports or music domain). Future research would need to systematically manipulate domain centrality or peripherality. Regardless, on the balance of evidence, overclaiming is a valid signature of self-enhancement.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we addressed two self-evaluation motives, self-enhancement and self-protection. We defined self-enhancement as the motive to pursue, maintain, or augment the positivity of self-views, more so than objective benchmarks would merit. We defined self-protection as the motive to avoid, repair, or diminish the negativity of self-views, even at the expense of veridical feedback. We argued that these motives manifest themselves clearly on five key pillars: SSB (patting oneself on the back for successes but abdicating oneself for failures), BTAE (deeming the self superior to peers), selective self-memory (selective amnesia for unfavorable information about the self), SDR (acting in a way that will elicit others' approval of the self as a good person), and overclaiming (exaggerating one's knowledge). Importantly, all these pillars are qualified by the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle. The five pillars are observed (or are observed in their full force) in domains that are central rather than peripheral to participants' self-definition.

The applicability of the self-centrality breeds self-enhancement principle is prima facie evidence for motivation. Yet, we also considered other reasons why the pillars are motivationally driven. For example, we discussed self-threat (SSB, BTAE, selective self-memory), self-affirmation (SSB), attribute controllability, attribute verifiability, and threat immunity (BTAE) as well as self-boosting (selective self-memory). We also mentioned correlations of SDR and overclaiming with valid indices of self-enhancement (e.g., self-esteem, narcissism, self-deceptive enhancement).

We proceeded to argue that motivation suffices for the instantiation of these five pillars. Put otherwise, the pillars cannot be exclusively accounted for by nonmotivational (i.e., information processing) factors. These nonmotivational factors included divergent expectancies for success and failure (SSB, selective self-memory), impression management (SSB), abstraction, egocentrism, focalism, individuated-entity versus aggregate comparisons, assimilation/contrast (BTAE), and inconsistency between feedback valence and self-view valence (selective self-memory). Socially desirable responding involves striving for a fit between one's cultural ideal of personhood and one's responses (and anticipated social approval), whereas overclaiming is an objective (i.e., criterion discrepancy) index.

We focused on five pillars of self-enhancement and self-protection motivation. The literature, however, has identified many more instantiations of these motives. Hepper et al. (2010) gleaned 60 such instantiations, which could then be classified through factor analytic techniques into four factors. The factors were positivity embracement (i.e., acquisition of positive feedback or maximization of anticipated success), favorable construals (i.e., construal of feedback as self-favoring), defensiveness (i.e., safeguarding against self-threatening information) and self-affirming reflections (i.e., orientation toward the attainment of favorable self-views or outcomes when confronted with self-threatening feedback). Further, Hepper et al. (2013) showed that these instantiations, and their factorial structure, are applicable in East Asian culture (i.e., Chinese) as well. There are plenty more motive instantiations that Hepper et al. (2010, 2013) did not include, such as the response latency method (i.e., fakers' response times are different from honest respondents'; Holden, 1995), recognizing one's own own face as being more physically attractive than it really is (Epley & Whitchurch, 2008), behaving in a hypocritical manner (Alicke, 2013), and believing that, when the self is associated with an object, the object is made better (e.g., people support affirmative action policies when they participate in their creation, and supervisors like employees when involved in the decision to hire them; Hideg, Michela, & Ferris, 2011; Schoorman, 1988).

Of course, the strength of the self-enhancement and self-protection motive varies as a function of individual differences such as prevention focus (Hepper et al., 2010, 2013), self-esteem (Brown, 1986; Suls, Lemos, & Stewart, 2002), and depression (Tabachnik, Crocker, & Alloy, 1983). Further, their strength varies as a function of situational demands such as accountability (i.e., people evaluate themselves less favorably when they expect to explain and justify their self-ratings to others; Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002), relational closeness (i.e., people refrain from the SSB when working on interdependent tasks with close rather than distant others; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 2002), and introspection (i.e., people endorse more negative characteristics and denounce more positive characteristics when they consider why or why not they might have them; Sedikides, Horton, & Gregg, 2007). At the same time, and attesting to the potency of these motives, manifestations of self-enhancement and self-protection are prevalent even when individuals are explicitly instructed to acknowledge their faults (Preuss & Alicke, 2017). In such cases, they downplay the possibility that their negative attributes reflect the kind of person they truly are, contend that others have inflicted more pain on them than they have on others, report that others are more likely to repeat inappropriate behaviors than themselves, and anticipate greater improvement than persons who have identical faults.

In his *An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish* (1943), Bertrand Russell was clearly impressed by the influence of motives on human judgment. "Man is a rational animal—so at least I have been told. [...] I have looked diligently for evidence in favor of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it," he exclaimed in wonder (p. 73). Our review and discussion of the proposed five pillars of self-enhancement and self-protection would likely make Russell more confident in his assertion. Yet, we did not mean to imply that all humans do is self-enhance and self-protect. Human motivation, as this handbook documents, is multiply and complexly determined. Rather, we meant to register the two motives as significant players in the pantheon of human motivation.

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