



The implicit self and the specificity-matching principle: Implicit self-concept predicts domain-specific outcomes

Melissa A McWilliams, Jason A. Nier*, Jefferson A Singer

Department of Psychology, Box 5305, Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Avenue, New London, CT 06320, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 May 2012

Received in revised form 21 September 2012

Accepted 21 September 2012

Available online 1 December 2012

Keywords:

Self-esteem

Self-concept

Implicit Association Test

Specificity matching

ABSTRACT

According to the specificity-matching principle (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007), specific aspects of self-concept should predict domain specific outcomes, rather than broader outcomes. The purpose of the current study was to determine whether this principle, which has thus far been examined using explicit measures of the self, extends to the implicit self-concept. We tested this idea in the domain of math achievement. We observed that explicit math self-concept was correlated with specific outcomes (measures of math achievement), whereas explicit self-esteem was correlated with a broad outcome (satisfaction with life). Thus, we replicated the specificity-matching principle using explicit measures of self-esteem and self-concept. Moreover, we found that implicit self-concept was correlated with domain-specific outcomes, but not a global outcome, as the specificity-matching principle would predict. Furthermore, regression analyses indicated that implicit self-concept accounted for unique variance in the domain-specific outcomes, for which the other measures of the self could not account. Taken together, we conclude that the specificity-matching principle does indeed extend to the implicit self-concept.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

For decades, the self has been an important topic of study in psychology and constructs such as self-esteem and self-concept have garnered significant attention within the field. Despite the prominence of the self in the personality and social psychology literature, there have been significant conceptual and empirical debates over constructs such as self-esteem and self-concept. For example, a number of researchers continue to harbor doubts regarding the significance of self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2005; Dawes, 1996). Critics point to a variety of problems with the self-esteem construct, but perhaps the most frequent criticism of self-esteem has been its weak relationship with important outcomes, such as academic achievement. This has led some researchers to conclude that beliefs about the self may have little importance in influencing performance and success (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003), and that the costs of pursuing high self-esteem may often outweigh its benefits (Crocker & Park, 2004).

In response to these critics, Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007 conducted a broad literature review, which asked “Do people self-view matter?” They concluded that self-views do indeed matter, and argued that one of the major reasons for the weak empirical relationship between self-esteem and meaningful

outcomes was, at least partially, a result of a methodological problem. In particular, Swann et al. (2007) proposed the specificity-matching principle, which holds that a specific self-concept, such as self-perceptions associated with math, should be used to predict specific outcomes, such as math achievement. Conversely, global constructs, such as self-esteem, should not be powerful predictors of narrow outcomes, and should instead be more strongly linked to broader outcomes, such as overall well-being. In short, the level of specificity of the predictor should match the level of specificity of the outcome being predicted. Indeed, when Swann et al. examined the recent self literature, they concluded that many researchers violated the specificity-matching principle as they focused “on the capacity of global measures of self-esteem to predict specific outcomes” (2007, pp. 87).

The difficulty of accurately measuring self-esteem may also help explain why self-esteem is often a weak predictor of significant outcomes. For example, Buhrmester, Blanton, and Swann (2011) outlined several shortcomings of traditional measures of self-esteem. They reasoned, as have others (Greenwald & Farnham, 2000) that traditional self-report measures of self-esteem are unlikely to assess self-views of which one may not be aware, and that self-presentation concerns may cause individuals to inflate their self-reported self-evaluations. One way to possibly circumvent these problems associated with traditional measures of self-esteem and self-concept is to rely upon implicit measures of these constructs. These measures may tap into the automatic or

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 860 439 5057; fax: +1 860 439 5300.

E-mail address: janie@conncoll.edu (J.A. Nier).

unconscious aspects of self-knowledge that people may be unable or unwilling to report, and which explicit measures may not accurately assess (Devos, Huynh, & Banaji, 2012). Yet despite the potential advantages afforded by implicit measures of the self, researchers have yet to fully explore their significance. Moreover, a recent review by Buhrmester et al. (2011) suggests that the implicit self-esteem construct, in addition to suffering from conceptual problems (e.g., it does not seem to measure beliefs that arise out of self-reflection), has weak reliability, and – like explicit self-esteem – often fails to predict important outcomes. Thus, the promise of implicit measures of the self has not yet been borne out by strong empirical support.

1.1. Present study

In the present study, we examined whether the specificity-matching principle, which thus far has been observed in research employing traditional measures of self-esteem and self-concept (Swann et al., 2007), extends to the implicit self-concept. Given the logic of the specificity-matching principle, we propose that implicit self-concept may have significant utility in predicting specific outcomes. In the same way that explicit self-concept more strongly predicts specific outcomes than explicit self-esteem, we hypothesized that implicit self-concept may more strongly predict specific outcomes than implicit self-esteem? In particular, we examined two questions about implicit self-concept that have yet to be simultaneously tested. First, are the relationships between implicit self-concept and outcome variables consistent with the specificity-matching principle? Second, might implicit self-concept account for unique variability in domain-specific outcomes, for which explicit self-concept, as well as implicit and explicit self-esteem, cannot account? We tested these ideas in the domain of mathematical achievement. We administered implicit and explicit measures of mathematics self-concept, as well as implicit and explicit measures of self-esteem. We then used these variables as predictors of mathematical achievement. We also included a measure of global well-being – the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).

Consistent with the specificity-matching principle, we predicted that our two global measures of the self (implicit and explicit self-esteem) would more strongly predict a global outcome (satisfaction with life), relative to a specific outcome (math achievement). Conversely, we predicted that the measures of specific aspects of the self (implicit and explicit measures of math self-concept) would more strongly predict achievement in this specific domain, relative to the degree to which they predicted a global outcome. Furthermore, we also predicted that the measure of the implicit self-concept would be able to account for unique variance in the domain-specific outcomes, even after accounting for implicit self-esteem and explicit beliefs about the self. Taken together, this pattern of results would provide support for the idea that the specificity-matching hypothesis extends to the implicit self-concept.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 160 college men ($N = 40$) and women ($N = 120$) enrolled in psychology courses at a college in the Eastern United States. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 years and were primarily white (83%). Fifteen participants were excluded for failing to complete the dependent measures, which resulted in a final sample of 145 participants.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Explicit measures of the self

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1989) was used to assess explicit self-esteem. Participants indicated the degree to which they agreed with 10 self-descriptive statements (e.g., “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”) on a 0–3 scale. Scores could range from 0 to 30, with higher scores indicating greater explicit self-esteem ($\alpha = .79$). To assess explicit math self-concept, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with four items that indicated that math was a significant aspect of their self-concept (e.g., “I care about my mathematical abilities”). The responses, indicated on a 7-point Likert scale, were averaged together with higher scores indicating a greater explicit math self-concept ($\alpha = .81$).

2.2.2. Implicit measures of the self

In order to measure implicit self-esteem, we employed the Implicit Association Test (IAT). Similar to Greenwald and Farnham (2000), participants categorized words (self and non-self words, and positive and negative words) into two categories (self versus other and positive versus negative) using two response keys. Response latencies were analyzed using a procedure recommended by Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003). The resulting score – the D measure – reflected the degree to which participants had more strong associations for the self with positive concepts, relative to negative concepts. Higher scores were indicative of more positive implicit self-esteem.

To assess implicit math self-concept, the IAT was adapted (again, similar to Greenwald & Farnham, 2000) to measure the extent to which participants associated the self with mathematical concepts (e.g., “equation”), relative to non-mathematical concepts (e.g., “music”). Participants had to categorize words (self and non-self words, and mathematical and non-mathematical words), into categories (self versus other, mathematical skills versus other skills) using two response keys. As with implicit self-esteem, the D measure was then calculated, which reflected the degree to which participants had stronger associations between the self and mathematical concepts, relative to non-mathematical concepts. Higher scores were indicative of greater implicit math self-concept.

2.2.3. Outcomes

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) was our measure of global life satisfaction. The SWLS contains five self-descriptive statements (e.g., “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”) and participants indicated their agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert scale. Scores ranged from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction ($\alpha = .80$).

We used three measures of math achievement. The first measure, Math Engagement, was assessed by asking participants to indicate which particular math courses they had completed, from a list of all math courses offered at the institution. The number of courses completed was summed together as a measure of Math Engagement, such that higher scores indicated more courses taken (i.e. greater Math Engagement).

Math Performance was assessed by asking participants to list the letter grade they had received in each course they had taken. The letter grades were converted to numerical quality point scores. These quality points were weighted; courses that fulfilled requirements toward the mathematics major were given higher quality point scores, relative to courses that did not fulfill any requirement toward the mathematics major. Specifically, letter grades in courses designed for non-mathematics majors were converted to a 4.0–0.0 quality point scale. (“A” equivalent to a score of 4.0, “B” equivalent to 3.0, etc). Each course that did fulfill requirements

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10440478>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10440478>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)