



Explicit self-esteem and contingencies of self-worth: The moderating role of implicit self-esteem



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ABSTRACT

Among the contemporary approaches of self-esteem, the dual-process model and the contingencies of self-worth model have been linked to similar phenomena like narcissism, perfectionism or negative emotions. The present studies aimed to investigate the way in which implicit self-esteem can moderate the relations between explicit self-esteem and particular contingencies of self-worth. In Study 1, we found that implicit self-esteem moderates the relation of explicit self-esteem with academic competencies and family support. In Study 2, the data supported the same moderating role of implicit self-esteem in the relation between explicit self-esteem and family support, while showing that implicit self-esteem also moderates the relation between explicit self-esteem and virtue. Since we used two different ways to assess self-esteem, the converging results from the two studies can be considered to be particularly robust.

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1. Introduction

Self-esteem (SE) is a concept that describes how one performs global assessments (Moretti & Higgins, 1990), and it has been in the focus of psychological research and practice since the beginning of psychology as a science. The present approach of SE is within the framework of dual-process models, which distinguishes between implicit (or automated) and explicit (or discursive) SE (Bosson, Swann, & Penebaker, 2000). As the correlation between the implicit and explicit form of SE is a weak one (Hofmann, Gawronski, Gschwendner, Le & Schmitt, 2005; Krizan & Suls, 2008), these two forms are considered to be independent. The differentiation between implicit self-esteem (ISE) and explicit self-esteem (ESE) provided a unique perspective on the relations between ESE and various psychological phenomena like narcissism (Bosson, Brown, Zeigler-Hill, & Swann, 2003; Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne & Correll, 2003), SE instability (Zeigler-Hill, 2006), reactions to social feedback (Jordan et al., 2003; Schröder-Abé, Rudolph, Wiesner & Schütz, 2007), and self-handicapping strategies (Lupien, Seery & Almonte, 2010). All these studies indicated that ISE acts as a moderator of the relations between ESE and such psychological phenomena.

In parallel with this line of research, other studies reported that high levels of narcissism, high levels of perfectionism and the strong reactions to negative feedback are associated to what people believe they

need, in order to have a positive self-view (Meagher & Aidman, 2004; Park & Crocker, 2008; Zeigler-Hill, 2006; Zeigler-Hill & Jordan, 2010). Researchers explained these individual differences using the contingencies of self-worth model (CSW – Crocker & Wolfe, 2001) which describes seven domains or categories of outcomes on which a person has staked own SE. Even though the CSW model and the dual process model of SE have been linked to similar phenomena, to the best of our knowledge there are no research studies to investigate the relations between the two models. The present study attempts to fill this gap by addressing the way ISE can moderate the relations between ESE and particular CSW.

1.1. Contingencies of self-worth and their relation with implicit and ESE

Contingencies of self-worth are defined by Crocker and Wolfe (2001) as a domain or category of outcomes on which a person has staked his or her SE. A person's view of own value depends on perceived successes or failures of adherence to self-standards in that domain. From this perspective, success or failure might influence one's SE only if it occurs in domains of contingencies that are relevant for that person.

The model defines seven main domains of outcomes, grouped into two categories: internal CSW and external CSW. The internal CSW are *God's love*, as one's belief that he/she is loved by God, and *virtue*, as one's belief that he/she is adhering to a moral code. The external CSW are *competencies*, as achieving certain standards that confirm his/her competence, *competition*, as being superior to others, *approval from generalized others*, *family support* and *appearance*.

To this moment, previous studies reported that ESE is negatively associated with *other's approval*, *appearance*, and *competition*, and

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positively associated with contingencies such as *family support* and *virtue* (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Although there is no direct evidence regarding the relations between ISE and CSW, we identified some indirect evidence of these relations. For instance, DeHart (2002) concluded that students with a background of low family support had a lower ISE, compared to students from intact families. Also, DeHart, Pelham, and Tennen (2006) proposed that a nurturing parenting style is associated with ISE.

Regarding the moderating role of ISE on the relations between ESE and CSW, to best of our knowledge, it has not been previously studied. However, separate results obtained in the study of common psychological phenomena encourage this investigation. Narcissism, negative reactions after negative feedback and perfectionism are concepts that have all been separately investigated both in relation to the CSW and in relation to ISE. These results suggest that *academic competencies*, *competition* and *approval from generalized others* are the most relevant dimensions for the ISE/ESE interaction.

Research done on narcissism found that grandiose narcissism was related positively to *competition* and negatively to *other's approval*, while vulnerable narcissism was associated with six of the seven domains of CSW (Zeigler-Hill, Clark, & Pickard, 2008). As the authors argue, vulnerable narcissist may be characterized by reliance upon general external validation, while grandiose narcissist may be more concerned with gaining the attention of others than with gaining their approval. In a different study, Zeigler-Hill (2006) found that narcissism it is positively associated with ESE only if the ISE is low. In the case of high ISE, the relation between narcissism and ESE is not significant. Therefore, ISE may have a moderating role in the relation between ESE and certain contingencies of self-worth.

Negative emotion after negative feedback was found to be related with *approval from others* (Park & Crocker, 2008). Also, Meagher and Aidman (2004), reported that the evaluations made by participants to a research assistant that provided negative feedback were associated with ESE, but the best predictor was the combination between explicit and ISE.

Research on perfectionism provided similar results. According to Hill, Hall and Appleton (2011), the CSW scales *competition* and *other's approval* predicted socially prescribed perfectionism, while *competition* and *competencies* predicted self-directed perfectionism. Moreover, Zeigler-Hill and Terry (2007) found that ISE moderates the relation between perfectionism and ESE.

1.2. The present research

In all the research studies mentioned above, ISE moderates the relations between ESE and psychological phenomena (e.g. narcissism, perfectionism, reactions to negative feedback) related to some CSW (e.g. approval from others, competition, competencies). Based on the evidence from previous research studies, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H1. The relation between ESE and *academic competencies* is moderated by ISE.

H2. The relation between ESE and *competition* is moderated by ISE.

H3. The relation between ESE and *approval from others* is moderated by ISE.

To test the hypotheses stated above, we conducted two studies, using independent samples and different methods for measuring ISE. For each study, participants completed an explicit and an implicit measure of SE, and the CSW scale. Two different measures of SE were used: the Implicit Preference Task (IPT – Koole, Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 2001) in Study 1 and the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) in Study 2. The use of two implicit measures of SE is a common practice in research (Sava,

Maricuțoiu, Rusu, Macinga & Vîrgă, 2011; Schröder-Abé et al., 2007; Zeigler-Hill, 2006) and ensures a higher generalization of findings.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 125 undergraduate students from a Romanian university who participated in exchange for course credit. Participants completed paper-and-pencil measures of ESE, ISE, and the CSW questionnaire. After excluding 15 participants due to incomplete information, the final sample was composed of 110 participants (61 women) with a mean age of 23.10 years ($SD = 4.29$). The participants first completed the explicit measures (ESE, CSW), followed by the implicit measures (ISE).

2.1.1.1. Measures

2.1.1.1.1. ESE. The Rosenberg Scale of Self-Esteem consists of 10 items with the response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate a positive explicit attitude about the self. On the sample included in the study, the scale had a good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$).

2.1.1.1.2. ISE. The Initials Preference Task (IPT – Koole et al., 2001) is built upon the idea that the subject's preference for their own initials reflects a carryover effect of their high SE (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Participants assessed how much they like each letter of the alphabet using a 7 point Likert scale (1-*not at all*, 7-*very much*). The letters were presented in a fixed alphabetical order. The IPT score was computed using the ipsatized double correction algorithm (I-algorithm) suggested by Baccus, Baldwin, and Packer (2004). LeBel and Gawronski (2009) recommended this algorithm as having “highest reliability estimate, least variability in reliability estimates across samples, correction for both types of systematic error, no outliers, relatively low deviation from normality and no negative Cronbach's alpha”. In a similar vein, Krause, Back, Egloff, and Schmukle (2011) found that the I-algorithm has acceptable test-retest stability (0.50). In the sample included in this study, the IPT scores had acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.60$).

2.1.1.1.3. Contingencies of self-worth. The CSW scale developed by Crocker et al. (2003) consists of 35 items, equally distributed to the seven sources of SE. The CSW scale has been previously adapted to the Romanian culture, showing good configural cross-cultural invariance (Maricuțoiu, Macinga, Rusu, Vîrgă & Sava, 2012). The subscales that measure the sources of SE have good internal consistency (Cronbach's α ranging between 0.74 and 0.96). Also, previous research (Crocker et al., 2003; Sargent, Crocker & Luhtanen, 2006) reported high test-retest correlation coefficients (ranging from 0.51 to 0.88).

2.1.1.2. Data analysis. We tested the interaction between implicit and ESE through hierarchical stepwise regression analysis, which is a popular procedure in the literature of implicit and ESE (Bosson et al., 2003; Jordan et al., 2003; Sava et al., 2011; Schröder-Abé et al., 2007; Zeigler-Hill, 2006). We used similar statistical procedures to allow the comparison of our results with previously reported findings. The test of moderation through hierarchical stepwise regression analysis was conducted according to specifications given by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003). First, we transformed the raw scores of explicit and ISE into standardized, centered on the mean scores (z -scores). Second, we computed the cross-product vector of these two standardized variables. These variables were predictors in the regression analysis. Although CSW model states that contingencies are predictors of SE, we used them as criteria. This allowed us to simultaneously analyze the relation between both types of SE and each contingency domain, as well as to test the moderation effect. The two forms of SE were included in the first step of the regression, and the interaction term was included

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