

**PSYCHOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVES
on the SELF**

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A Motivational Factor in Self-Report Validity

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A THEORY OF SYMBOLIC SELF-COMPLETION

People who refer to themselves as child-rearing experts, pilots, or musicians are normally thought to possess certain background characteristics appropriate to these self-defining labels. When people characterize themselves as good at raising children, we are inclined to think that they have some relevant education or experience. Similarly, when a man makes a casual reference to his Cessna or Beechcraft, we are likely to infer certain other "pilot" qualities on the basis of the self-description (e.g., 100s of hours of flying time). The purpose of this chapter is to show that such inferences are very often incorrect and that the propensity to describe oneself positively can stem from the *non*possession of relevant background characteristics.

A central observation to be made about the human, within the context of a notion of self-completion, is that very central flaws in the person's training or performance are covered over by what we call *self-symbolizing efforts*. The frequent use of open self-aggrandizement, showing off status symbols, knowing more than the other, and efforts to influence others are viewed here as signs of the individual's insecurity (i.e., incompleteness in the domain of activity in which expertise is sought). We shall argue that it is the modest person who is expected to possess numerous, durable indicators of competence.

The core assumption of self-completion theory is that indicators (symbols) of completeness are substitutable for one another. The person who can point to symbols that support the self-definition aspired to (e.g., lawyer) will tend to neglect the pursuit of further symbols. Thus, self-symbolizing efforts will be undertaken when the person is lacking in symbolic indicators of the status of lawyer, guitarist, or any other self-definition.

Historical Background

The idea that one symbolic indicator can be substituted by another was implicit in the thinking of Lewin (1926) and several of his students. Their analysis of goal-oriented behavior and interrupted activities is our central conceptual background. According to Lewin, when an organism establishes a particular goal, a tension system comes into play and remains until the goal is reached or until the organism "leaves the field." If progress is halted owing to outside forces the tension system will remain intact, and the psychological effects of that tension system will be detectable even if the person cannot resume the activity immediately. This idea appears in the work of Zeigarnik (1927) on memory as well as in analyses of interrupted-task resumption by three other Lewin students (Lissner, 1933; Mahler, 1933; Ovsiankina, 1928).

In Mahler's research paradigm subjects typically were assigned four to six fairly simple tasks, such as piecing a mosaic together or constructing a tower from building blocks. In Lewin's terms the psychological process associated with each task was a specific tension system, which abated only when the task was completed. More importantly, if a task were to be interrupted, the tension system was said to persevere, resulting in subsequent voluntary resumption of the same task.

Mahler interrupted each subject on a number of the tasks, and following each interruption the subjects were eventually allowed to resume the original task. Approximately 90% of the original tasks were resumed, but there is a more significant feature of the research: Following some of the interruptions Mahler gave her subjects substitute tasks; after working on these they could resume work on the original. For instance, the original task might have been to write out a slogan by piercing the letters of the words into a piece of paper. When this task was interrupted, the experimenter introduced the substitute task, which consisted of completing the slogan by writing it out with a pencil. This kind of substitute activity had a decided impact on the subsequent tendency to resume the original task—the resumption rate was sharply curtailed. In Lewin's terms the activity was carried to a tension-reducing conclusion via a task that was not identical with the original but served the same tension system.

Explicit in Mahler's thinking and research is that an entire class of tasks, or goals, can be appropriate for reducing the tension associated with any one goal. But a further, critical observation is necessary. Henle (1944) has argued that the seemingly concrete tasks in the Lewinian research (e.g., to build a tower) were in fact related to certain superordinate goals such as creativity, industriousness, or intelligence. The meaningful psychological goal for the subject, according to Henle, was not the objective fact of building a tower, but rather an ego-relevant goal (e.g., industriousness), which could be pursued by means of the seemingly mechanical activities. For this reason it is no surprise that Mahler could substitute one task quite liberally for another. Conceivably, a wide range of activities would be pertinent to industriousness, intelligence, or creativity.

With the Lewinian school as a background the theory of symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) 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 runner, 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 with the self-definition claims to have the potential to carry them out. Accordingly, the self-definition is to be construed as an ideal or goal.

Commitment to a self-definition means that the individual is striving to reach this "ideal" condition wherein all of the qualities appropriate to the self-definition are embodied. The processes we discuss, which primarily have 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) should no longer be observable. An example that is especially pertinent for this chapter is Ovsiankina's observation that resumption of interrupted tasks was most intense when subjects were personally involved in the task. We elaborate on the operational meaning of "commitment to a self-definition" in what follows.

Symbols of Completeness

Progress toward a self-definition is pursued by accumulating relevant 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, gesture, behavior, or physical entity that potentially signals to others one's self-definitional attainment. To be sure, there is no single unequivocal symbol of 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 a particular self-definition differ widely in their outward form. At a very rudimentary but important level are the simplest self-descriptions

(e.g., lecturers teaching at a university introduce themselves as "scientists"). Of course, humans are not wholly dependent on these kinds of open self-characterizations. There are numerous abbreviations for immediate social acknowledgment, many of these describable as "status symbols." Having a diploma from a graduate school is a broadly recognized symbol of the 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.

For the sake of convenience it is possible to view such symbols as falling into three groups based on: (1) the background experience or training requisite to the activity; (2) occupying a position or status that furthers the relevant activities; or (3) performance of the act itself. For each of these three categories of symbols the person stands to be recognized as possessing the self-definition that is sought after. In the first case the specific symbol could be education; in the second case it might be the position vice-president; and for the third, one is recognized as being a musician or lawyer simply by remaining active in musicianlike or lawyerlike actions.

Social Reality

It was found by Mahler (1933) that the tension-reducing potential of a substitute task depended largely on whether or not solving the substitute task carried a social reality. The substitute task had tension-reducing properties only when the solution was announced to the experimenter. Once others acknowledge the person for having solved the problem, having solved it becomes a social fact and thus can serve as a self-defining symbol. This line of thinking can be carried back to Cooley (1902) who states that self-definitions can come into being and remain stable only by virtue of the acknowledgment of others. Thus, the sense of progress toward a self-defining goal is dependent on acknowledgment from others (Gollwitzer, 1981). We call this the *social reality* factor. One can also talk about a concept of "broadening social reality." Once a person has an indicator at hand the sense of completeness should be enhanced to the degree that one can inform more people about it or, more generally, enlarge the scope of individuals who would potentially recognize the completeness of the self-definition.

Empirical Support

Symbols of completeness are potential substitutes for one another. The central implication is that a lack in symbolic support will lead to symbolizing the self as complete, within a particular self-definition. How can this notion be brought to an empirical test? First of all, a symbolic lack over which the person has no control must be established. This can be accomplished, for example, by varying

the extent of completeness with respect to a given symbol or by employing existing lacks (i.e., comparing individuals who differ a priori in relative completeness). Second, the person must have an accessible means of self-symbolizing, such as the possibility of acquiring new symbolic indicators (e.g., status symbols; prestige affiliations), or by broadening immediate social reality through social influence, or via self-descriptions promoting the aspired-to self-definition.

Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981) analyzed attempting to influence others as a potential mode of self-symbolizing. Two correlational studies were conducted to relate subjects' education (Study 1) or on-the-job experience (Study 2) in their self-definitional realms to their desire to influence others. Subjects who were still actively pursuing their self-definitions (i.e., committed subjects) showed the expected negative correlation between amount of education (or job experience) and influence attempts; a slightly positive correlation was found for uncommitted subjects. In a third study the extent of completeness of subjects' self-definitions was varied experimentally by interrupting some of the subjects while writing a positive, self-descriptive statement relevant to their self-definitions, to which all subjects still felt committed. Interrupted subjects showed stronger influence attempts in a second, presumably unrelated, experiment than did subjects who were allowed to finish their essays. It appears, then, that influencing others can function as a means of symbolizing completeness. Whenever subjects are committed to a self-definition and their standing vis-à-vis that self-definition is that of incompleteness (e.g., weak education), subjects can turn to influencing others in an effort to restore completeness.

In a further study by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981) the accessible mode of self-symbolizing following an incompleteness induction was a simple self-description that was to be made public. Pressure was placed on all subjects to characterize themselves, within the realm of their self-definitions, in a negative manner. It was found that the relatively *complete* subjects showed the greatest propensity to describe themselves negatively. In short, given that they were already complete relative to subjects in the other condition, it was less urgent for them to pursue completeness via the self-description. The theme of negative self-descriptions was also examined by Gollwitzer, Wicklund, and Hilton (1982). Subjects with a large amount of education were more willing to follow a request to be negative than subjects with a small amount of education; again, this finding applied only to committed subjects.

Self-completion can also be pursued via the attempt to cast oneself as similar to successful others. Gollwitzer (1981) varied the extent of subjects' incompleteness by first asking for self-descriptions and then varying the extent of social recognition (social reality) they received for their self-descriptions. The theoretical assumption is that subjects who receive a good deal of social reality for their respective self-definitions should then have a reduced need to symbolize further. Later in the experiment all subjects had an opportunity to indicate how similar/

dissimilar they were to a particular target person—the target person having been cast as successful within the subjects' self-definitional area. The results showed clearly that incompleteness led to strong attempts to cast oneself as similar to the "ideal" person.

Incompleteness has also been shown to relate to the implementation of material status symbols. For instance, a study by Wicklund, Gollwitzer, Castelain, Korzekwa, and Blasko (1981) examined the religious self-definition. Two samples of subjects were defined: one type of subject came from a mixed religious background (e.g., one parent Methodist, one Catholic); the other type came from a homogeneous religious background. Based on the assumption that those from a mixed background would be relatively incomplete, we inquired into subjects' use of religious status symbols and found that the display of religious jewelry, clothing, bumper stickers, bibles, and related items was considerably greater among the subjects who came from nonhomogeneous homes.

The research to which we have just referred, in addition to that summarized by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982), is in several respects diverse. Numerous self-definitions have been examined, such as intellectual, athletic, or artistic realms; incompleteness has been operationalized in many different ways; and the character of subjects' self-symbolizing efforts has varied greatly from study to study. However, the theoretical thread running through these several research projects is a common one: First, it is necessary to establish that subjects are actively committed to a particular self-definition. Second, it is necessary to "unbuild" subjects' sense of completeness. Third, it is important that subjects have some further means by which they can pursue or regain a sense of completeness, whether through self-descriptions, persuasion, or material symbols. There is one further critical element to which we have referred only implicitly: The self-symbolizing of the incomplete subject is necessarily on the *same* dimension on which the subject has been made incomplete. Subjects in these various projects show very little, if any, interest in trying to build up self-definitions on alternative self-symbolizing dimensions (Gollwitzer, 1981; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981).

At this point we need to take up a critical theoretical issue: To what extent is a substitution principle part of other theoretical notions that are concerned with the self?

Self-Evaluation Maintenance Theory

Tesser's self-evaluation maintenance model (Tesser, 1980; Tesser & Campbell, this volume) addresses the question of how people relate to others in order to maximize a gain or minimize a loss in their overall self-evaluations. Tesser notes that associating with others can potentially bring self-evaluation gains. Such effects are termed *self-reflection* and are to be expected when the other is highly competent and when the other is "close." It has to be added that the self-

reflection effect is to be found only when the other's competence, and one's own central strivings, are not in the same area. On the other hand, Tesser points to the negative consequences of associating with others, resulting from a social comparison process that is set off when a person's own skills are brought into doubt by the presence of someone who is competent in the same domain. When comparison processes are operating, closeness to a high performing other leads to losses in one's self-evaluation. Whenever the other's performance is relevant to one of a person's own, few important self-evaluative dimensions, then comparison processes will dominate. But when the relevance of another's performance is low, reflection processes are said to be more likely.

The differences between Tesser's notion and the self-completion notion become evident when one considers the individual's possibilities for changing a negative self-evaluation into a positive one within Tesser's framework. A person can be caught in a negative self-evaluation for two reasons: (1) one is associated with another person who performs highly regarding an important self-evaluative dimension; (2) one is associated with another who is incompetent in a nonself-evaluative dimension. In the first case one can move toward a positive self-evaluation by improving one's own performance, by increasing distance from the other, or by reducing the importance of the relevant self-defining dimension. In the second case one can change the negative self-evaluation by increasing distance or by increasing the importance of the seemingly unimportant self-evaluative dimension. These various routes to maintaining a positive self-evaluation have not all been examined in research, nor formulated as hypotheses, but we are explicating them here in order to draw out the logical possibilities of the model.

The contrasts with the self-completion notion are as follows: (1) the starting point of the self-completion notion is that of incompleteness, which is defined as a symbolic lack regarding a specific self-definition. This symbolic lack can imply any symbol of the self-definition and is thus not limited to incompleteness resulting from associations or comparisons with others; (2) the compensatory process is said to run off within the self-definition in question. A symbolically incomplete musician, for instance, would prop up the *musician* self-definition, using symbols appropriate to the musical world. The self-symbolizing efforts can make use of any symbol of the self-definition in question, even association with successful others. And the association with others would entail others from the person's own self-definitional area, a possibility ruled out by self-evaluation maintenance theory. However, and this is crucial, reducing the importance of the self-definition in question is no viable compensatory solution. The self-symbolizing individual is a committed one (i.e., committed to progress regarding the chosen self-definition), and the reconstruction and elaboration of this specific self-definition is a psychologically real goal. The ultimate goal of the individual, as described by self-evaluation maintenance theory, is to maximize a gain or minimize a loss in overall self-evaluation. This self-evaluation,

according to self-evaluation maintenance theory, is based on the simultaneous consideration of an array of self-definitional dimensions, some of which are important and others that are less important.

It is clear, then, that self-completion theory uses the term *self-definition* in a more narrow and specific sense than does Tesser's self-evaluation maintenance theory. The compensatory processes postulated by self-completion theory are limited to these very specific self-definitional realms (e.g., pianist, song writer) to which subjects are committed. Such central self-definitions are considered by Tesser, however, just as dimensions that compose a person's overall self-definition. Thus, the self-evaluation maintenance process is concerned with maximizing this global self-definition. Accordingly, compensatory processes can then make use of all of the different facets of the person's self.

This is not the place, nor is it our intention, to judge which of the two approaches is more useful. Rather, it needs to be pointed out that both approaches are trying to understand and explain different processes associated with the self. Symbolic self-completion theory focuses on a single self-defining dimension; self-evaluation maintenance theory copes with the global self-feeling. The types of behaviors addressed are different. Tesser's theory is concerned with the question of how relations to others can be employed by the individual in order to keep up a positive global self-evaluation, whereas self-completion theory is concerned with the modes of self-symbolizing that are motivated by one or the other cause of symbolic incompleteness.

Self-Presentation

The concept of self-symbolizing rings a bell of "presenting to others." However, a central distinction needs to be drawn between self-completion processes and what is otherwise referred to as *self-presentation*. In the present framework self-descriptions are viewed as originating in the dynamics of the individual. They are said to result from patterns of personal history or from experimentally induced symbolic incompleteness. The governing variables within the self-presentation work have been viewed largely as constraints inherent in the immediate situation. Thus, it is predicted that the person will try to look positive, modest, consistent, or powerful in the eyes of others depending on the strategy set off by the situation (Jones & Pittman, 1982). A crucial distinction is that, over and above such social constraints, one may characterize the self-symbolizing individual as governed by dynamic processes that originate prior to the self-presentational context.

This is not to say that research on self-presentation has totally ignored compensatory issues. Baumeister and Jones (1978), Schlenker (1975), and Schneider (1969) have studied positive self-presentations as a compensation for bad performance. But, and this is just contrary to the self-completion perspective, compensatory self-presentations are understood by these authors as aimed at changing a *weak public image*. The deficit that is compensated for is a deficit in regard to

what other people think of the individual, not strictly a self-evaluative issue in the sense conveyed by the self-completion idea. Further, compensations in the form of positive self-descriptions are motivated by a desire to obtain social reinforcers (Schlenker, 1975), to bolster one's public esteem (Baumeister & Jones, 1978), and to gain approval (Schneider, 1969). In any case, the compensatory behavior—the self-presentation—is said to be oriented toward gaining esteem *in the eyes of the target(s)* of the self-presentation. It is not surprising, therefore, that subjects are found to compensate for failure on Trait A by self-aggrandizing on Trait B (Baumeister & Jones, 1978) because social esteem can be won back in a relatively general form. In addition, such compensatory self-presentations are to be found only when subjects can assume that the audience of these efforts knows about the failure (Baumeister & Jones, 1978). However, when subjects face the danger of being caught—in fraudulent compensatory self-presentations—no compensatory self-presentations are found (Schlenker, 1975).

All of this suggests that compensatory self-presentations are rather strategic efforts at regaining social esteem, respect, or approval, and this is the crucial contrast to positive self-descriptions in the service of self-definitional needs. The latter are aimed at the reconstruction of an incomplete self-definition. Accordingly, the focus is inward, toward a self-definitional claim, and the audience is not perceived as something to be pleased. Rather, the self-symbolizing individual regards others as an audience that can take cognizance of the symbols of completeness, quite independently of whether the audience is aware of the person's initial shortcomings. An example of a paradigm that is suitable for the present framework, but entirely unsuitable for self-presentation processes, is spelled out later in the chapter (pp. 82–85).

SELF-REPORT VALIDITY: A METHODOLOGICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM?

It would be ideal for the psychology of attitude measurement, as well as for personality psychology, if the connection between a person's self-descriptions and that same person's behaviors were clear and distinct. But one finds no difficulties in documenting the absence of such correlations. Ethnic attitudes bear no necessary relation to the tendency of white subjects to sit near a black target person (Wicker, 1969). Analogously, need-achievement scores bear no special relation to subsequent exam performance (Shrauger & Osberg, 1981). This apparent failure on the part of psychology to make individual differences "work" has been widely documented and is by no means a recent disappointment. Allport (1937), not to mention a host of more recent contributions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Carver & Scheier, 1981; Mischel, 1968; Pryor, 1980; Scheier & Carver, this volume; Shrauger & Osberg, 1981; Wicker, 1969), have all made the point that a process that should in fact be highly demonstrable—the self-

report-behavior relation—is demonstrable only with uncertainty and is normally to be documented with correlations of very modest magnitude.

Wherein lies the problem? The phenomenon to be sought after seems eminently simple. One asks a respondent a series of straightforward questions (e.g., Do you like blacks? or How capable are you in mathematics?), and then a sample of behavior is scrutinized. The respondent is then found either to behave fairly toward blacks or not; in regard to the second question, the respondent is found to perform at a high (or low) level in mathematics. It would seem that psychology could easily produce correlations of .70 or .80, given the clarity of the problem. So why not?

Factors Interfering with Self-Report Validity

1. *Other influences.* One such factor, cited by Allport (1937), is the observation that any given behavior is probably affected by more than one attitude. Thus, if a number of mutually independent or mutually contradictory attitudes are simultaneously relevant (or salient), it is no longer clear which direction will be taken in behavior. The other-influences factor is much broader than simply a question of conflicting attitudes: Wicker (1969) also cites competing motives, normative prescriptions for behavior that interfere with acting on one's own attitudes, and unforeseen events that might affect behavior.

2. *Possibility of the behavior being manifested.* Another reason for not finding correlations has to do with a ceiling effect on behaving. If there are severe constraints on what subjects can do in the measurement situation, the behavioral variability might be insufficient for a correlation to emerge (Wicker, 1969).

3. *Relation between attitude and behavior.* Wicker (1969), Ajzen and Fishbein (1977), Shrauger and Osberg (1981), and others invoke what may be called the *specificity hypothesis*, by which is meant that the attitude object may be defined so vaguely in measurement that responses have little to do with concrete, behavioral settings.

4. *Reliability problems.* This problem receives a great deal of attention in research involving validation of personality measures. Commonly the discussion centers around the reliability of the measurement instrument. Suffice it to say that an unreliable instrument will reduce the correlation between self-report and behavior.

We do not need to belabor the point that these obstacles to high self-report validity should be dealt with. Research should strive to minimize the number of possible influences on a given self-report, in addition to maximizing the possibility of the relevant behavior being manifested. Further, the clarity of the relation between self-report and behavior should be made abundantly clear, on the self-report side as well as on the behavioral side. And finally, one must come to terms with the mechanics of measurement. Test reliability, whether the focus

is on attitudes, abilities, or personality, is a genuine concern. In addition to these seemingly mechanical solutions, what else has been recommended by those who have tackled this problem? More particularly, what has been suggested in the way of psychological processes that might mediate the validity of self-reports?

It turns out that a number of approaches have been taken in recent years, some of them with a definite and significant impact on self-report validity. There is not space here to take them up in detail, but they deserve to be mentioned:

1. *The maximal personality.* In a highly effective procedure developed by Willerman, Turner, and Peterson (1976), the respondent is asked to indicate the maximal possible manifestation of the trait rather than the characteristic level.

2. *Cognitive consistency approaches.* Most notable here is cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), according to which self-descriptions can be quite accurate reflections of behavioral propensities as long as the behavioral episode is a recent and salient event for the person. Related is an especially powerful technique by Fazio and Zanna (1978) whereby the predictive power of a stated attitude is greatly enhanced if the respondent first engages in an attitude-relevant behavior.

3. *Self-focused attention.* Research by Pryor, Gibbons, Wicklund, Fazio, and Hood (1977) and Scheier, Buss, and Buss (1978) has shown that the predictive and postdictive validity of self-reports is enhanced considerably when subjects are in a self-reflexive state as operationalized via a mirror or through an individual-difference measure.

THE SELF-DEFINITIONAL FUNCTION OF SELF-REPORTS

Earlier in this chapter we pointed to self-descriptions as a potential mode of self-symbolizing. It was also stated that incompleteness in a certain self-definition triggers self-symbolizing efforts. Accordingly, if self-descriptions are put into the service of self-definitional needs, hence oriented toward the goal of self-completion, they will have the character of covering up personal weaknesses. It then follows directly that self-report validity will be interfered with, and even completely negated, when self-descriptions are employed in the compensatory function stipulated by self-completion theory. In the following we explore the workings of this interfering function of symbolic incompleteness.

Describing One's Own Incompetencies

Assuming that individuals differ substantially in their training within a particular area of competence and are then asked to comment upon their performance, the

operational definition of self-report validity should be evident. That is, individuals who are well trained should be more inclined to make positive reports about themselves. However, the hypothesis of our theoretical viewpoint predicts the opposite: The tendency to be positive should be expected primarily from individuals whose training is relatively inadequate. A study by Gollwitzer et al. (1982) addresses this thesis within a constrained self-report atmosphere: All subjects were placed under pressure to be self-deprecating.

The requirements for looking at symbolic self-completion processes are relatively straightforward and can be explained in some detail within the context of this study. First, it is important to select participants who are clearly committed to a given self-definition. This was accomplished here, as in research to be reported later, by asking subjects to name a particular activity area that is personally important. In the present study this requirement resulted in the selection of subjects who named activities such as chemistry, drawing, football, mathematics, and piano. Second, based on a specification of the commitment variable in earlier research (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981), we ascertained whether or not subjects were continually active in their named activity areas. In the 1981 research it was found that the self-completion process was observable only among subjects who had been active in the past few weeks, and as a result of that research, we have since then employed a standard 2-week criterion whereby subjects who have been active within the past 2 weeks are designated as *committed* to their respective self-definitions. The symbolic self-completion process (i.e., the process that can be expected to interfere with self-report validity) should manifest itself only for committed subjects.

The critical element in the experimental procedure was the following: The experimenter explained that he needed information about subjects' educational backgrounds within their interest areas. He noted that he was studying activities of interest to college students. He then explained how he would conduct a subsequent session with different subjects. The second session was to involve the exploration of how people do on an ability test within particular activity areas when they are first led to believe that the test is rather hard. In line with this purpose, he purported to need the present subjects' help in creating these expectancies about a hard test. A form was handed out, entitled *Performance Feedback Sheet for the Basic Ability Test*. Subjects were asked to assume that they had taken a basic ability test in their respective activity areas and were then requested, after indicating the activity in question on the feedback sheet, to write their alleged score on that form. The statement read: "(name) performed worse than _____% of the undergraduate sample which had taken this test." Explicit pressure was placed on all subjects to write down as negative a percentile as they could bring themselves to.

The basic dependent variable for the study, then, was simply the subject's self-proclaimed percentile ranking. The predictor variable, chosen out of the

oretical concerns and identical with that of the earlier study by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981), was the extent of subjects' education in their respective areas. The results of the present study took the following form: When years of education were correlated with self-described percentile standing, we obtained a correlation (r) of $-.27$ ($p < .01$) among the subjects who had been designated as committed. Consistent with the theoretical reasoning, those subjects who fell short on the one indicator of completeness—education—strove toward self-completion on the self-description measure. Another way of referring to the results, of course, is that a negative correlation represents a so-called "antivalidity." A positive self-description is directly associated with an absence of expertise and ability. Although one might object that these findings are in some manner dependent on the outside pressure to be self-deprecating, the reader is referred to p. 88 of this chapter for a look at a more characteristic test-validity paradigm. Further, the negative correlation is not inevitably associated with the present paradigm, but rather depends on the extent of commitment. The correlation for the uncommitted sample was $.32$, implying that self-reports within this paradigm can indeed be valid, but only among subjects who are not actively striving after a complete self-definition.

In two other experimental studies (Gollwitzer et al., 1982; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981) we obtained results highly analogous to those of the "education and self-deprecation" study. In one of these experiments self-completeness was manipulated by making a very poor teacher in the subject's personal background highly salient. It was found that subjects who were rendered incomplete in this manner were especially reluctant to cast themselves in a negative light. In the other experimental study incompleteness was induced by interrupting subjects in the midst of writing a positive self-descriptive essay appropriate to the sought-after self-definition, and we obtained the same pattern of results.

These studies imply that subjects whose self-definitions are placed in jeopardy are the most inclined to be positive in their self-descriptions. In short, when a striven-toward self-definition is entailed in the self-description process and when the individual lacks symbolic support for holding that self-definition, self-report validity comes apart. All three of these studies show a *negative* relation between the strengths in the person's immediate background and the propensity to make positive self-descriptions. It should also be noted that these processes take place within the context of one single self-definition, thus sharply discriminating the phenomenon from what Tesser has referred to as "self-evaluation maintenance." The maintenance process described and documented by Tesser assumes necessarily that the individual who is made insecure on one dimension will attempt to regain a positive sense of self-evaluation by means of recourse to an *irrelevant* dimension. As we have already seen, subjects who are highly committed to a self-definition can be shown to react within that same self-definition, which is a critical aspect of the process we are studying.

THE MEDIATION OF PERSPECTIVE-TAKING IN SELF-REPORT VALIDITY

Mills and Hogan (1978) have proposed that accurate self-reporting is an outcome of taking the perspective of whomever is interested in the self-report, which in operational terms means that the self-report is made in such a way that the observer can use the self-report to make correct predictions about the respondent's subsequent (or previous) actions. In defining perspective-taking readiness through the Empathy Scale (Hogan, 1969), they showed that self-report validity on various traits (e.g., dominance) was substantially greater when subjects had the potential for perspective-taking ability.

One central aspect of symbolic self-completion theory has to do with the perspective-taking capacity of the symbolically incomplete individual (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Because other people serve largely as objects for the incomplete person (i.e., as potential embodiments of the sought-after social reality), it follows that the incomplete person is more interested in gaining from others a social reality than in understanding their perspectives. Accordingly, two simultaneous processes should be at work in upsetting self-report validity. On the one hand, the pursuit of social reality for one's completeness will lead to self-aggrandizing efforts that will necessarily disrupt self-report accuracy. We have already seen several instances of this in the studies just reported. On the other hand, the incomplete person will suffer a deficit in perspective-taking capacity, which will also work in the direction of a breakdown of self-report accuracy, assuming the validity of the Mills and Hogan (1978) argument.

The following experiment (Gollwitzer, 1981) provides evidence that the incomplete person tends to disregard the perspectives of others. Following a brief discussion of the study, we move on to further research that documents the breakdown of self-report validity in a context that calls for taking others' perspectives.

Disregarding the Others' Perspective in the Course of Self-Symbolizing

The idea behind this experiment (Gollwitzer, 1981) is that the incomplete individual, in the quest of self-completion, disregards the perspectives of others. More concretely, this could mean that the incomplete person would falter in cognitive perspective-taking tasks (e.g., Flavell, Botkin, Fry, Wright, & Jarvis, 1968) and should also tend to be uncooperative or insensitive in teamwork situations. The present experiment employed the latter context.

Two female subjects were run at a time. It had already been established that they were both highly committed to the self-definition of female professional. In every session one of the subjects was rendered relatively incomplete by means of falsified feedback on an alleged personality profile. The subjects first filled out a

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questionnaire consisting of 10 bipolar adjectives (e.g., warm-cold, independent-dependent). Later in the session their profiles were returned to them together with the ostensible profile of the "ideal" female professional. For one subject the two profiles (own and "ideal") were highly convergent; for the other subject they were divergent. That is, incompleteness was generated by means of the divergent feedback.

The Brainstorming Session. The second phase of the experiment was explicitly disconnected from the first. In this case the second experimenter was a "social psychologist" who purported to be interested in how people generate ideas. She claimed that she had already seen in a previous study that brainstorming seemed to be a lucrative procedure for getting very creative ideas from individuals. What remained, she noted, was to find out whether this kind of method was also productive when two people engage simultaneously in brainstorming.

Relevant Versus Irrelevant Issue Manipulation. It follows from our reasoning that the incomplete subject in the brainstorming session would use that session in the interest of gaining completeness only if the topic were self-definition relevant. Thus, the correct topic for the present subjects was obviously "qualities of a female professional," which in fact constituted one of the conditions. The topic of the other condition was "qualities of a mother." Here the idea is that if brainstorming is restricted to the irrelevant motherhood topic, subjects would find the brainstorming session of little value in pursuing completeness.

Procedure. The brainstorming session then proceeded and was arranged so that the two subjects had numerous, simultaneous opportunities to express some aspect of their competence. Thus, in every case, over numerous trials, the subjects were essentially competing to see who could blurt out the most indicators of her own competence. The identical procedure was followed in the female professional condition and in the mother condition.

Results. The simplest way of describing the results is in terms of whether the *ideal-profile* or *nonideal-profile* subject wins the brainstorming session. Winning was defined as making more self-descriptive statements than the partner. Because each session had one complete and one incomplete subject, this analysis reflects the tendency of the incomplete member to attempt to win. Complementing that tendency, of course, is the relative noncombative attitude of the ideal-profile subject. The data in Table 3.1 show that the hypothesis is strongly supported. When the topic of the session was female professional, 11 of the 15 incomplete subjects won the session. On the other hand, the incomplete subjects tended to capitulate if the topic was irrelevant. The overall pattern of data is

TABLE 3.1
Frequencies of Pairs in Which the Nonideal-Profile
Subject Wins, Loses, or Ties

Issue	Outcome for Nonideal-Profile Subject		
	Winning	Tying	Losing
Female Professional	11	2	2
Mother	4	4	7

significant ($p < .04$), and if the ties are rescored as "failure to dominate" and placed in the losing category, the 2×2 frequency pattern is also significant ($p < .02$).

This experiment illustrates that the person who is personally dissatisfied (i.e., who falls short with regard to possessing indicators of completeness) approaches a group interaction with an eye toward gaining that sense of completeness back. If the group interaction is potentially conducive to gaining symbolic support (i.e., when the brainstorming topic was professional women), the person then fights to dominate in the context to name the most self-descriptive phrases. As a consequence there is a neglect of the other's need to contribute to the brainstorming session. In short, little heed is paid to the other's perspective.

Self-Report Invalidity and Insensitivity to Another's Perspective

A potentially intriguing context for self-descriptions is suggested by the foregoing study. If subjects could be placed in a position in which another's perspective needs to be recognized, then the less complete individuals should abide less readily by that perspective. Further, if abiding by that perspective entails a self-critical attitude, the neglect of the other's perspective, as well as the self-report invalidity, should be especially pronounced. Thus, the present study creates such a context and at the same time allows us to look at an alternative hypothesis that stems from the literature on self-presentation.

It has been shown with some reliability that individuals who are confronted with specific, socially relevant cues are inclined to behave in the social situation so as to abide by those cues. For instance, if one's interaction partner comes across as self-aggrandizing, the stage is then set for self-aggrandizing self-presentations in the situation, and people should then be more inclined to be positive in self-descriptions (see Gergen & Wishnov, 1965; Schneider & Eustis, 1972). Similarly, if one's partner creates cues that signal the appropriateness of modesty, subjects are then more inclined to approach the situation with a self-effacing demeanor.

The question now is the following: Given that self-descriptions can be put to use in pleasing or appealing to the immediate social milieu, what is the impact of incompleteness upon this interactional process? The following study (Gollwitzer & Wicklund, 1981) set out to answer this question.

The subjects were male college students. They expected to have a lengthy conversation and information exchange toward the end of the session with a female partner, but prior to that meeting a number of events transpired that enabled us to: (1) vary whether a self-aggrandizing or self-deprecating self-description would be appropriate to the situation; (2) vary the degree of incompleteness on a personal dimension.

Procedure. We began by establishing that each male subject had a certain interest area to which he was committed, and this resulted in our having subjects representing a variety of intellectual, artistic, and athletic interests. The interpersonal scenario for the study was not radically different from that in the aforementioned self-presentation studies by Gergen and Wishnov (1965) and Schneider and Eustis (1972). The major difference was in our use of mixed-sex pairs, thus raising the attractiveness of the subject's interacting with his partner. The female experimenter, who was cast as a social psychologist, said that she was interested in first impressions. The subject found that later on he would have about half an hour to interact, alone in a small room, with a certain Debbie, said to be a blonde, 5'6" drama major from San Antonio, who makes friends easily.

Then, on the basis of alleged information about Debbie's reactions to a variety of other males, the subject gained the distinct impression that Debbie was very favorably impressed by men who describe themselves positively (positivity-cue condition) or else by men who are distinctly modest (negativity-cue condition).

Manipulating Incompleteness. The crucial ingredient in this study was a variation in whether subjects had reason to think they were cut out for their chosen interest areas. As in the experiment just reported, subjects filled out a 10-item personality questionnaire and were later given false feedback about whether their personality was similar or dissimilar to the ideal personality for their respective self-definitions (e.g., journalist, athlete, or photographer). Subjects in the ideal-profile condition received positive personality feedback; those in the non-ideal-profile condition received negative personality feedback. As in the previous study this part of the experiment was run by a second experimenter who described himself as a personality psychologist. Again, every effort was taken to make the two parts of the study appear as independent as possible.

Dependent Measure. When the feedback had been given, the stage was set for obtaining subjects' self-descriptions. Subjects were requested by the first experimenter (the "social psychologist") to fill out a self-description form. They each expected their self-descriptions to be forwarded to Debbie. Thus, at the

moment of filling out the self-description, subjects had the conflict between providing a self-description that would appeal to Debbie's desire for a self-effacing (or alternatively immodest) male, as opposed to serving their self-definitional needs. It is obvious that the conflict existed only when the negativity cue was set.

The self-description was composed of subjects' written remarks about themselves in three different respects: (1) percentile standing in subject's activity area, (2) number of people aware of subject's capabilities; (3) amount of respect subject has in his activity area. Subjects anticipated meeting Debbie shortly after she read the form.

Results. The data in Table 3.2 show the intrusion of incompleteness into the calculated self-presentations that one would otherwise expect. It is especially useful to focus on the negativity-cue condition, in which all available information indicated that the subject stood the best chance with Debbie if he were self-effacing. One can see that self-descriptions in line with the negativity cue were much more pronounced among subjects who had reason to feel complete (the ideal-profile condition). This effect is reflected in all three measures as well as in the combined index. Perhaps the most graphic of these several measures is the percentile self-description, as it has a highly literal meaning. In the case where self-abasement was appropriate, the ideal-profile subjects placed themselves at the 43rd percentile, whereas the nonideal-profile subjects could lower themselves only to the 66th percentile ($p < .02$), a striking deviation from the kind of response implied by the social cue. It appears that incomplete subjects were less willing to follow Debbie's hints that a modest person is preferred over an immodest one.

TABLE 3.2
Mean Positivity of Self-Description

Type of Self-Description	Negativity-Cue Condition		Positivity-Cue Condition	
	Ideal-Profile	Nonideal-Profile	Ideal-Profile	Nonideal-Profile
Percentile standing (a)	43	66	72	81
Public recognition (b)	2.6	3.3	3.9	4.3
Public respect (c)	2.8	3.5	4.2	4.9
Self-description index (a+b+c)	-2.61	-.38	.83	2.16
	(13) ^a	(13)	(13)	(13)

Note: The higher the score on the self-description index, the more positive is the self-description. The components of the index are included in the table to show that the pattern of data was the same for the three self-description variables.

^ans in parentheses.

Nonideal-profile subjects in the positivity-cue condition were not confronted with the same dilemma. They could pursue their need to characterize themselves positively without running against the social grain. As it happened, they tended to be higher than ideal-profile subjects in the positivity-cue condition as well (see Table 3.2), although not significantly.

The data also revealed that subjects respected the self-presentational cue in general, as reflected in the main effect. When Debbie preferred negative self-descriptions, subjects were more negative than when she preferred positive self-descriptions ($p < .001$). Further, a main effect for completeness was found such that incomplete subjects delivered more positive self-descriptions than did complete subjects ($p < .005$).

The strong main effect for type of cue is impressive only in that it shows the phenomenon illustrated by Gergen and Wishnov (1965) and Schneider and Eustis (1972) to be ultimately replicable. The important point of the study is in showing that subjects who are acutely incomplete, who have suddenly found that they may not have full potential to pursue a chosen activity, seize upon a forthcoming social occasion to bolster a waning ego. They simply want to be recognized for their status, and in the course of pursuing this self-defining goal, they push aside social graces, Debbie's preferences, and also a potential (albeit short) interaction with an attractive woman.

Coordinating Self-Descriptions to Attraction for Debbie. The point we are illustrating here is even more dramatic if we look back into the experiment and consider how attracted subjects were to Debbie. Presumably the social goal in this situation was, at least in part, to win the favor of an attractive female. This implies that subjects would not necessarily have pursued the calculated self-presentational strategy just in order to please Debbie. Rather, they would have steered their self-descriptive efforts in the direction of the appropriate cue only if they were first attracted to her. The implication for a further data analysis seems clear. The correlation between being attracted to Debbie (on a measure taken very early in the procedure) and subsequent tendency to describe the self in line with the cue should be positive. Indeed, this was the case in the ideal-profile condition ($r = +.49, p < .005$), but in sharp contrast, attraction to the target person (Debbie) played no role in the self-descriptions of nonideal-profile subjects ($r = -.12$).

The lack of correlation between attraction to Debbie and appropriate self-descriptions typifies the phenomenon of self-symbolizing as discussed earlier in the chapter. The self-symbolizer is a one-sided person, interested in propping up the self-definition to the deficit of according the other person significant human qualities. The possibility of doing something that would please Debbie, as well as the possibility of acting on needs unrelated to the specific self-definition, were quite obviously neglected.

SELF-SYMBOLIZING VERSUS SELF-REFLECTION

Based on the foregoing one could describe the self-symbolizer as nonreflective, impulsively pursuing one single goal (i.e., the goal of winning back lost completeness). This picture of the self-symbolizer suggests the following model: A person committed to a self-defining goal becomes reflective as soon as shortcomings are encountered. At this point in time individuals see their shortcomings from the same critical perspective as that of uninvolved others or onlookers. The commitment to excellence in the self-definitional realm, however, does not allow the person to stand still and contemplate that shortcoming. Rather, the unpleasant outcome of the self-evaluation moves the person in the direction of indicating completeness vis-à-vis the self-defining goal. Consequently, the incomplete person starts to engage in self-symbolizing efforts and at the same time terminates the reflective orientation—the psychological state that is basic to the sense of incompleteness. The impulsive search for indicators of competence, called self-symbolizing, is an active endeavor, carrying a minimal self-evaluative orientation. The self-evaluative phase is terminated in favor of the active pursuit of the indication of competence. And this reduction in self-reflection leads in turn to a reduced veridicality of self-descriptions, given that the individual uses positive self-descriptions to indicate completeness.

This line of thought is tested in the following experiment (Gollwitzer, Stephenson, & Wicklund, 1982). We reasoned that if it would be possible to push the self-symbolizing subjects back into a reflective psychological state, the quality of their self-reports should thereby change. First, these self-reports should become less positive; second, the veridicality of the self-reports should go up. That is, they should be increasingly coordinated to observable criteria that could be known to others. The design of the study was simple and straightforward. All subjects committed to various self-definitions were made incomplete through giving them negative personality feedback relevant to their respective self-definitional realms. Then, in a presumably unrelated second experiment, subjects were told that they had a chance to teach others. Ostensibly for this purpose, subjects were required to hand in self-descriptions to their presumed students. These self-descriptions were in some cases made under circumstances that should have prompted an increase in self-focused attention (cf. Duval & Wicklund, 1972). A control condition was added: One group of subjects was asked to report self-descriptions to the presumed students without having received any personality feedback.

In summary, the present design contained three conditions. In the control condition subjects simply reported self-descriptions relevant to their activity areas without having received any feedback regarding their personality. In the no-mirror condition subjects first received negative personality feedback and then were asked for their self-descriptions. In the mirror condition subjects

received negative personality feedback and then made their self-descriptions in front of a mirror.

Subjects and Procedure. Fifty-five female undergraduates committed to various self-definitions (e.g., dancer, gymnast, pianist, mathematician) were invited to participate in the study. When subjects came to the laboratory (in pairs) they met Experimenter 1 who introduced himself as a personality psychologist. As in the last two experiments reported, he said that he wanted to find out whether undergraduate females interested in certain activity areas have a personality that is similar to or different from the personality of successful people in these fields. Subjects filled out a personality questionnaire (semantic differential format), and the experimenter then drew the ideal personality onto the subjects' questionnaires. All subjects who received feedback (mirror and no-mirror conditions) found that they were highly dissimilar from the ideal. Subjects in the control condition did not take the personality questionnaire. The experimenter explained that he had already collected enough data from the particular activity area to which subjects were committed, and therefore, it would not be necessary for them to fill out the questionnaire.

The pair of subjects was then introduced to a "social psychologist" who was said to use the remainder of the time to conduct another short experiment. He stated that people who are already active in a certain activity area have turned out to be most valuable in giving advice to newcomers. He also noted that he would like to be able to say something about the people who give these hints. Therefore, subjects were asked to fill out a self-description form, the same self-description form that subjects in the previous study had used. Subjects in the mirror condition had to fill out the self-description form in a cubicle in which mirrors were attached to the wall. Control subjects, just as no-mirror subjects, were not confronted with a mirror. When subjects were finished with their self-descriptions they were debriefed and dismissed.

Positivity of Self-Descriptions. The self-description form asked subjects to indicate their percentile standing in their field, to estimate their public respect, and to guess their popularity. As in the study reported earlier these three items were combined into a self-description index (Standardized Item Alpha = .72). An analysis of variance on this index reveals a significant effect across the three conditions ($p < .01$). Contrasts (see Table 3.3) show that the no-mirror condition differs significantly from the mirror condition ($p < .002$) as well as from the control condition ($p < .05$). The mirror condition does not differ from the control condition ($p > .25$). Thus, subjects who receive negative personality feedback and are then given a chance to describe their relevant standing make more positive self-descriptions than control subjects, but only when the self-descriptions are not made in front of a mirror. Subjects in the mirror condition report self-descriptions that are even less positive than those of control subjects.

Negative feedback subjects should have experienced incompleteness with a consequent motivation to engage in self-symbolizing in the form of positive self-descriptions. These efforts were curtailed, however, when subjects found themselves in a condition that favored self-reflection (i.e., faced a mirror). Self-symbolizing, as an impulsive nonreflective activity, is severely hampered when self-reflection is heavily engaged.

Veridicality of Self-Descriptions. At the outset of the semester we had asked potential subjects how many years of education they had received in their activity areas and how many years ago they had taken up these activities. We reasoned that a high number of years of education and a high number of years of being active should provide the subject with a comparatively strong sense of completeness in the particular area. And from a straightforward consistency assumption, one would expect the more competent subjects to describe themselves more positively. Thus, one would generally expect subjects with a strong background in terms of education and experience to come up with more positive self-descriptions.

Because years of education and years of experience correlated rather highly with each other ($r = .55, p < .001$), we combined these variables via z -scores into a "background security" index. Correlating this index with subjects' self-descriptions separately for each condition reveals the following (see Table 3.4): Subjects in the control condition show a positive correlation between background security and positivity of self-description, indicating that subjects with a strong background describe themselves as being stronger than do subjects with a weak background. Interestingly, this correlation becomes negative ($-.27$) in the condition in which subjects received negative personality feedback but were not confronted with a mirror.

The pattern of these correlational data parallels the data we obtained when looking at the mean positivity of subjects' self-descriptions (Table 3.3). It would appear that self-symbolizing reduces the veridicality of self-reports. In the nega-

TABLE 3.3
Mean Positivity of Self-Descriptions

Conditions	
No-Mirror	Mirror Control
.91 ^a (19)	-1.42 ^b (18)
	-.59 ^b (18)

Note: *ns* in parentheses. Scores with no superscript in common differ from each other at least at the .05 significance level.

TABLE 3.4
Veridicality of Self-Descriptions:
The Relation Between Background Security
and Positivity of Self-Descriptions

Conditions	
No-Mirror	Mirror Control
-.27 (17)	.31 (18)
	.43 (18)

Note: *ns* in parentheses. The correlation coefficient in the no-mirror condition differs from the correlation coefficient in the control condition at the .03 level of significance. The difference between the no-mirror condition and the mirror condition only approaches significance ($p < .08$).

tive feedback condition, in which self-symbolizing is expected to occur, negative correlations are obtained. But in the mirror condition, in which self-symbolizing is hindered, the correlation between background and positivity of self-descriptions returns to the positive value found in the control condition (see Table 3.4).

In summary, these data show that self-reflection-inducing devices can hinder self-symbolizing. It appears, then, that self-symbolizing is a nonreflective activity geared toward a particular function—that of marshaling symbolic evidence of one's self-definition. Inducing self-reflection hinders self-symbolizing efforts and consequently reduces the negative, or asocial, consequences of self-symbolizing. The negative consequence studied in the present experiment is low veridicality of self-reports, and it was shown that self-reflection-inducing devices can successfully reverse this effect.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to lay out a conceptual structure bearing on the issue of whether a particular motivated condition affects self-report validity adversely. By *motivated condition* we have referred explicitly to the psychological state of incompleteness, in which the individual experiences a lack of symbolic support for a self-definition. It is assumed that accurate or valid self-reporting comes about through the individual's taking the perspectives of those who are in the position of being exposed to the self-report and, further, that the person who is acutely incomplete (lacking in symbolic support for the self-definition) will not be oriented toward giving others an accurate or valid picture of the self. Rather, the orientation will be toward propping up a self-definition

that is at the moment unsupported by symbols of completeness. Accuracy will then be neglected in favor of the unidirectional attempt to gain acknowledgment for having a positive standing on the dimension in question.

The implications for the psychology of self-reports are considerable. For one, we gain the distinct impression that a great deal of care has been taken—in assessing self-reports—to insure that the correct methodological concerns have been met. The numerous factors that continuously crop up in discussions by Ajzen and Fishbein (1977), Mischel (1968), Shrauger and Osberg (1981), and Wicker (1969), among others, are handled quite adequately in many studies. However, a certain aspect of the psychological functioning of the respondents has largely been neglected. It is widely assumed, albeit implicitly, that humans are generally set to coordinate self-descriptions to some open, measurable criterion. Perhaps the psychologist wishes, more than assumes, that respondents have a basic interest in providing valid self-reports, given that the measuring instrument allows the respondent to do this.

The neglected factor is that respondents may very often be directed toward a goal that is at odds with the goal of the researcher. The researcher's goal is one of obtaining a "meaningful" (valid) pattern of answers from the subject. The perfect subject, of course, is the person whom Mills and Hogan would call a "good perspective-taker." But such is not always the goal of the respondent, and as the data would suggest, a self-defining goal is very likely to be at odds with the researcher's goal of obtaining self-descriptions that are positively correlated with other observable aspects of the person. The observation of invalidity among symbolically incomplete subjects should no longer be a surprise.

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