

Structure of self-discrepancies. Verification of the model

Wacław Bąk

Institute of Psychology, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

INTRODUCTION

The presented study is focused on the structure of the self, defined in terms of discrepancies between different aspects of self-knowledge, that are believed to play a crucial role in the processes of self-regulation. It is based on theories, that describe self-regulation as a process of dealing with discrepancies between actual self and some standards (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Duval & Silvia, 2001; Higgins, 1987).

Four types of self-standards are analysed in the study:

1. **ideal self (I)** – the self that one would like to be
2. **ought self (O)** – the self that one ought to be
3. **undesired self (U)** – the self that one would not like to be
4. **forbidden self (F)** – the self that one ought not to be.

Ideal and ought selves (Higgins, 1987) are two types of positive standards, because they refer to some desired end-states that one wants to achieve. In contrast, undesired and forbidden selves (Ogilvie, 1987; Carver, Lawrence & Scheier, 1999; Markus, Nurius, 1986) are two types of negative standards, because they refer to some aversive end-states that one wants to avoid.

The four standards are analysed in relations to both actual self and can self. Eight types of self-discrepancies are then explored in the study (see figure on the right):

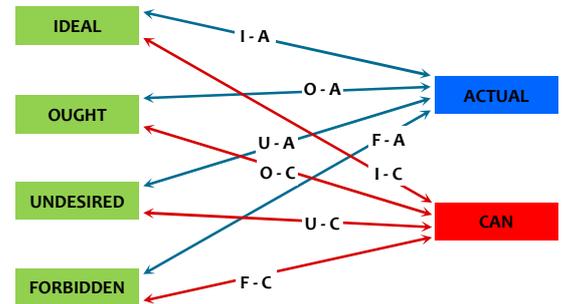
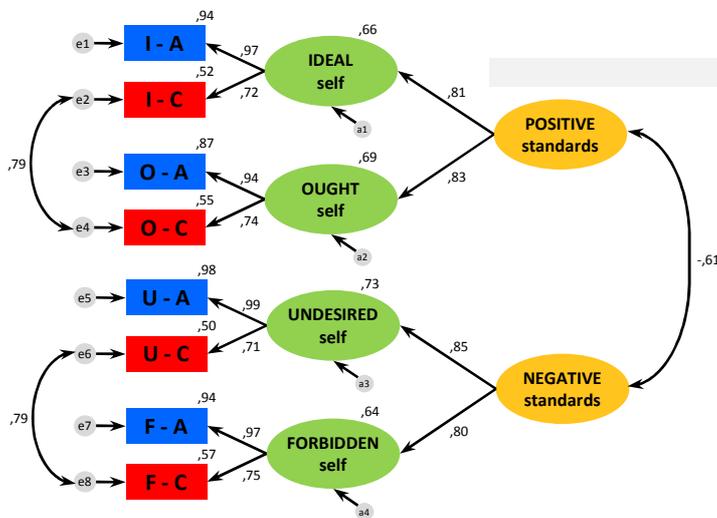
- discrepancies between standards and **actual self** (perceived actualization of standards)
- discrepancies between standards and **can self** (perceived attainability of standards).

AIM OF THE STUDY

In one of the previous studies (Bąk, 2006) such a complex set of self-discrepancies was analysed using exploratory factor analysis. The results served as a basis for a hypothetical model, according to which there are three relatively independent dimensions in the structure of self-discrepancies:

1. discrepancies between **negative standards** (both undesired and forbidden) and actual self
2. discrepancies between **positive standards** (both ideal and ought) and actual self
3. discrepancies between standards (both negative and positive) and **can self**.

The aim of the presented study was to verify this three-dimensional model on a different sample and using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as a statistical tool.



Discrepancies between different aspects of self-knowledge.

METHOD

Participants

The sample comprised 447 participants, of whom 301 (67%) were women, with an average age of 21,02 (SD=2,21).

Measure

Discrepancies between different aspects of self-knowledge have been assessed using a newly developed computer measure, that was inspired by Higgins' methodology (Higgins, Shah, Friedman, 1997). Participants first describe their standards by listing the attributes they:

1. would like to possess (**ideal self**),
2. ought to possess (**ought self**),
3. would not like to possess (**undesired self**),
4. ought not to possess (**forbidden self**).

Every attribute from every list is then presented on the screen in random order and assessed in relation to:

- **actual self** ("To what extent you actually are like ..."),
- **can self** ("To what extent it is possible that you become like").

RESULTS - Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

- The presented model (see figure on the left) fits data very well $\chi^2=14,8$, $df=13$, $p=0,32$; GFI=0,99; AGFI=0,98; CFI=1,00; RMSEA=0,02; HOELTER=674

- Standards for self-regulation are organized hierarchically.
- The most basic is the distinction between positive and negative standards.
- At the lower level of this hierarchical model
 - positive standards split into ideals and oughts
 - negative standards split into undesired and forbidden selves (negative counterparts of ideals and oughts).

- At the level of observed variables there are two indicators for each standard.
- In every case first indicator is the discrepancy between standard and actual self, and the second one – the discrepancy between that standard and can self.

DISCUSSION

- The results do not fully confirm the postulated three-dimensional model of self-discrepancies. The model that fits the data is somewhat different, but its theoretical implications are no less interesting.
- The model shows a hierarchy of important distinctions within the domain of self-standards.
- The distinction between positive standards (both ideal and ought selves) and negative standards (both undesired and forbidden selves) (Carver & Scheier, 1998) seem to be more basic and more important than the distinction between ideals and oughts (Higgins, 1987).
- Ideals and oughts as well as their negative counterparts (undesired and forbidden selves) give some more details for both positive and negative standards.

- The regulatory functions of standards are determined by their relations to both actual self and can self.
- While the importance of discrepancies between standards and actual self (perceived actualization of standards) has been well-known and documented in many studies, it has not been so obvious in the case of discrepancies between standards and can self (perceived attainability of standards).
- The presented study adds to the existing knowledge by showing that the discrepancies between standards and can self should be included in the models of the structure of self-knowledge.
- Perceived attainability of standards probably mediates the regulatory functions of discrepancies between standards and actual self – a hypothesis for further studies.

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