



# Two-dimensional self-esteem: theory and measurement

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## Abstract

In this paper, we offer a clarified account of global self-esteem as consisting of *self-competence* and *self-liking* and describe a revised instrument designed to measure the two correlated dimensions. In Study 1, four measurement models representing distinct conceptions of self-esteem are compared to confirm the a priori structure of the instrument. In Study 2, multiple reporters (self, mother, father) are used to provide evidence for convergent and discriminant validity in a multitrait–multimethod context. Advantages of the two-dimensional approach to measurement are discussed. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Self-esteem; Self-competence; Self-liking; Discriminant validity

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## 1. Introduction

The past half-century has witnessed the ascension of self-esteem as a central construct in psychological theory. Its prominence, however, is coupled with considerable disagreement over how the construct is best conceived. This lack of consensus, and the impediment to progress it presents, has been lamented by reviewers of the literature over the years (e.g. Blascovitch & Tomaka, 1991; Crandall, 1973; Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976; Wells & Marwell, 1976; Wylie, 1974). Toward clarification, we adopt the position that global self-esteem consists of two distinct dimensions that have often been confused in the literature. In this paper, we present our conceptual and psychometric approach to this fundamental duality, with the aim of enhancing its utility for theory and research.

### 1.1. *The two faces of self-esteem*

Self-esteem is essentially an aesthetic or valuative phenomenon. As such, it can be understood according to the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic value (Dewey, 1939). Instrumental

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value refers to what an object is good for, or what good it can do. Intrinsic value refers to those qualities of an object that are considered good in themselves. Applied to persons, the duality is reflected in personal competence, on the one hand, and appearance, character, and social identity on the other. That is, individuals take on value both by merit of what they can do and what they appear to be. Informally, this is often expressed as the distinction between “respect” and “liking”. The former is founded on observable abilities, skills, and talents, the latter on moral character, attractiveness, and other aspects of social worth. The two types of value, however, are not independent, for abilities are often viewed as virtues, and virtues are often used to great effect. Despite this overlap, the distinction is worth maintaining for the purpose of clarifying the compound nature of self-esteem.

The argument for two dimensions of self-esteem is hardly new. Over the years, others have offered versions of the same basic dichotomy (Bandura, 1986; Brissett, 1972; Brown, 1998; Diggory, 1966; Franks & Marolla, 1976; Gecas, 1971; Silverberg, 1952; White, 1963). The most explicit treatment was offered by Tafarodi and Swann (1995), who labelled the two dimensions *self-competence* and *self-liking* and described them as constitutive dimensions of global self-esteem.

### 1.2. *Self-competence*

Self-competence is the valuative experience of oneself as a causal agent, an intentional being that can bring about desired outcomes through exercising its will. As a generalized trait, it refers to the overall positive or negative orientation toward oneself as a source of power and efficacy. Self-competence is closely related but not equivalent to Bandura’s (1989, 1992) *self-efficacy*, defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that control their lives” (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175).

In his original conception of self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) distinguished efficacy expectancy, one’s confidence that a particular action can be executed as intended, from outcome expectancy, one’s confidence that the action will bring about the desired outcome. Thus, a chef who aims to please her customers may have complete faith in her culinary skills yet remain apprehensive of the reactions of her fastidious diners. This molecular distinction between one’s ability to perform an action and the cause-and-effect relations that determine the consequences of the action, while conceptually valid, is often dissolved in the subjectivity of intentional behaviour. This is so because the goals that represent our intentions are most often defined as desired consequences and not merely the mechanics employed to realize them. Just as a basketball player takes little gratification from an artful shot that fails to go through the hoop, the above chef will take little pleasure from a perfectly cooked masterpiece that is rejected by her diners. Our eyes are usually on the prize, and it is by this yardstick that we tend to measure the success of our efforts. In other words, strong efficacy beliefs often *presuppose* goal-consistent outcome expectancies. This is especially true in relation to *general* self-efficacy, the overall assurance or faith that individuals have in their ability to achieve their goals (Sherer, Maddux, Mecandante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs & Rogers, 1982; Tipton & Worthington, 1984; Woodruff & Cashman, 1993). It is self-efficacy in its generalized, trait form that most closely parallels the self-competence dimension of global self-esteem.

Bandura (1990) has argued that self-efficacy is separate from self-esteem. This is clearly the case for task-specific self-efficacy. The conceptual separation also applies to general self-efficacy, but its relation to experience at this level may be so difficult to discern as to render the distinction

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