

Self-Consciousness and Cognitive Prototypes of the Ideal Self

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The current research included two studies that assessed private as well as public self-consciousness and tested recognition memory of trait adjectives which participants had rated according to either private/ideal (Study 1) or public/ideal (Study 2) self-descriptiveness. Each study produced a pattern of false alarms (FA) that corresponded to predictions: Study 1 revealed that participants high in private self-consciousness committed more FA to distractors that described the private/ideal self most, but fewer FA to distractors that described the private/ideal self least, than did participants low in private self-consciousness, whereas Study 2 revealed that participants high in public self-consciousness committed more FA to distractors that described the public/ideal self most, but fewer to distractors that described the public/ideal self least, than did participants low in public self-consciousness. Considered jointly, the results supported the hypotheses. First, individuals mentally represent both private and public facets of the ideal self according to cognitive prototypes. Second, private (but not public) self-consciousness predicts the extent to which individuals have developed the prototype that represents the private facet of the ideal self, whereas public (but not private) self-consciousness predicts the extent to which individuals have developed the prototype that represents the public facet. © 1997 Academic Press

Currently, most investigators accept the premise that the self, rather than representing a monolithic structure, contains multiple and distinguishable facets (Hermans, 1996). Among the possible facets, the broad distinction between private and public selves has increasingly assumed importance (e.g., Baumeister, 1986; Breckler & Greenwald, 1986; Carver & Scheier, 1987; Fenigstein, 1987; Froming & Carver, 1981; Froming, Walker, & Lopyan, 1982; Nasby, 1989a, 1996; Scheier & Carver, 1981, 1983; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997). From a cognitive perspective, private facets organize and control the processing of covert information about the self to which others

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do not enjoy direct access (e.g., subjective feelings and thoughts), whereas public facets organize and control the processing of overt information about the self that others may directly observe and evaluate (e.g., physical appearance, overt behaviors, affective expressions).

To date, research that has examined the private/public distinction from a cognitive perspective almost exclusively concerns the actual self or self-concept (Higgins, 1987). Some investigators assert, however, that the private/public distinction extends beyond the self-concept to other domains of the self (Higgins, 1987; Nasby, 1996). Most notably, the private/public distinction extends to self-guides (Higgins, 1987), which represent self-directive and self-evaluative standards.

Higgins (1987, 1989; Higgins, Klein, & Strauman, 1987) distinguishes two classes of self-guides, corresponding to the ought self and the ideal self. The domain of the ought self encompasses the attributes that someone (self or other) believes the individual should attain or possess, whereas the domain of the ideal self encompasses the attributes that someone (self or other) desires or wishes the individual to attain or possess. Therefore, the ought self subsumes beliefs about prescribed duties and obligations as well as moral responsibilities and injunctions, which may bear little resemblance to desires or wishes. Higgins (1987, 1989; Higgins *et al.*, 1987) has reviewed considerable evidence that convincingly demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between the ought and the ideal self, as well as the standpoint (self/other) or vantage (private/public) to which either refers.

Examining how the private/public distinction contributes to mental representations of self-guides, as well as how individuals differentially represent self-guides, constitutes an important line of inquiry. The importance owes largely to recent theorizing that emphasizes dynamic properties of self-representations (Markus & Wurf, 1987)—properties that contribute to self-regulation (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1990; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997), especially self-regulation of interpersonal or social behavior (Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Froming, Nasby, & McManus, 1997).

Development of cognitive structures or schemata that represent the self, or facets thereof, implicates a variety of processes. Each presupposes considerable (indeed, prolonged) attention. More specifically, development of self-schemata presupposes noticing and then categorizing, explaining, and summarizing repeatedly the invariances that characterize behavior and experience across situations and occasions (Markus, 1977; Nasby, 1985, 1989a,b, 1996). Therefore, a direct link between attentional focus and schematic development exists. Given the link, the constructs of private and public self-consciousness (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) should broadly predict how and to what extent individuals develop cognitive representations of the self from private and public vantages, respectively (Nasby, 1989a,b, 1996).

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