

## Contributions to Global Self-Esteem: The Role of Importance Attached to Self-Concepts Associated with the Five-Factor Model

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Previous research has attempted to clarify the relations that one's self-concepts have with one's global self-esteem. One hypothesis that has received the most attention to date is the view that characteristic attributes that an individual regards as especially important for his or her self-concepts exert the greatest influence on self-esteem. In an investigation of this hypothesis, 375 college undergraduates completed measures of global self-esteem as well as rating scales that assessed self-concepts and the importance attached to these self-concepts in the maintenance of self-esteem. The self-concept and importance domains examined corresponded to the five-factor model (FFM) personality dimensions. Consistent with previous research, importance ratings attached to self-concepts were not found to moderate the relation between self-concepts and self-esteem. Rather, ratings on self-concepts alone accounted for a substantial proportion of variance (53.3%) in self-esteem scores. Bivariate correlations based on FFM dimension scores and self-esteem scores revealed consistent positive associations. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that among the FFM dimensions, self-concept ratings for emotional stability (vs neuroticism), extraversion, and agreeableness significantly predicted self-esteem.

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Self-esteem is widely viewed as a multidimensional construct (e.g., Marsh & Shavelson, 1985) that has been associated with one's global evaluations of the self (e.g., Marsh, 1993). How one's global self-evaluations or self-concepts are related to one's self-esteem has been the object of much theorizing and research. One hypothesis suggests that self-evaluations that an individual regards as especially important or salient for his or her self-concepts demonstrate the strongest associations with self-esteem (Hoge & McCarthy, 1984; Pelham & Swann, 1989). Thus, self-esteem is predicted

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by self-evaluations weighted by the amount of importance that an individual attributes to them. This hypothesis, which has been historically traced to James (1890/1963; for reviews, see Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1979), is founded in the view that negative self-concepts in areas deemed by the individual as unimportant have little impact on self-esteem, whereas negative self-concepts in areas viewed as important to one's self-definition, aspirations, or goals have the most substantial negative impact on self-esteem.

A number of attempts have been undertaken to investigate the proposal that importance placed on personality attributes, accomplishments, or abilities moderates the influence of those attributes on self-esteem. Many of these studies have produced findings suggesting that the importance of attributes or abilities adds little to the prediction of self-esteem beyond an individual's composite self-concepts (Hoge & McCarthy, 1984; Marsh, 1986, 1993). For example, among a sample of adolescents, Hoge and McCarthy (1984) found that a measure that combined nine single-item self-concept ratings (e.g., "I am smart," "I am good-looking") weighted by the importance attributed to these self-concepts (e.g., "How important is it to you to be very smart?") correlated less with self-esteem than did the composite measure of one's self-concepts. Marsh (1986), in various adolescent and young adult samples, obtained self-concept and importance ratings for 12 content domains that tapped academic ability, physical ability and appearance, facility in interpersonal relations, spirituality, honesty, and emotional stability. He found that when self-concept scores were weighted according to either (a) the amount of importance that the sample as a whole placed on them or (b) the amount of importance that each individual participant placed on them, little improvement in the prediction of self-esteem was observed relative to the contribution of self-concept ratings alone.

When a significant moderating effect of importance on self-esteem has been observed, the effects tend to be somewhat weak and unreliable (Kaplan, 1980; Pelham & Swann, 1989; Rosenberg, 1965). For example, Pelham and Swann (1989) found that differential importance (as indexed by the within-subjects correlation between a participant's specific self-ratings and his or her corresponding importance ratings [see Marsh, 1993, for a critique of this approach]) moderated the relationship that one's composite self-view shared with self-esteem. Among those with moderate or positive composite self-views, differential importance was unrelated to self-esteem. However, differential importance was positively related to self-esteem among those with negative composite self-views. As a result of these observations, Pelham and Swann (1989) suggested that individuals who view themselves negatively in a variety of areas may bolster their self-esteem by attributing greater importance to those (few) areas in which they regard themselves more favorably. However, in contrast, Rosenberg (1965) reported an opposite pattern within the negative self-concept group, where higher importance ratings were associated with lower self-esteem. It is noteworthy that when Pelham

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