

Structure of self-discrepancies. Verification of the model

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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):

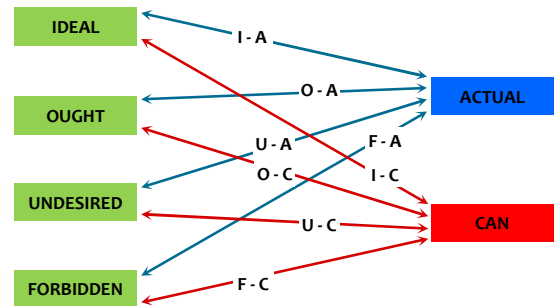
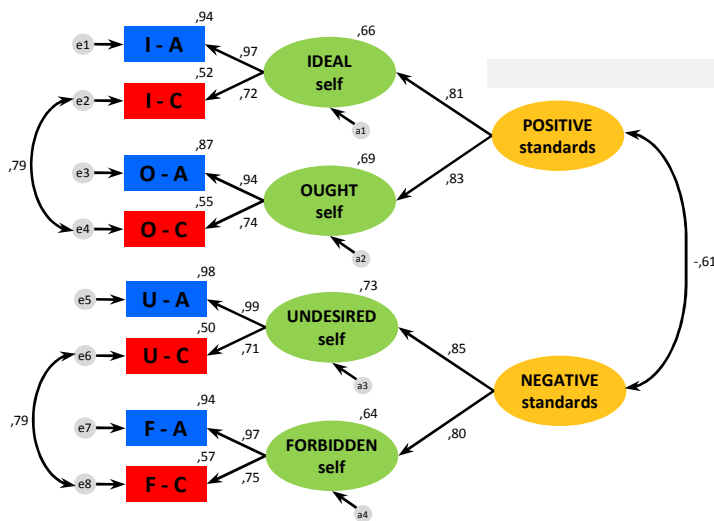
- discrepancies between standards and **actual** self (perceived actualization of standards)
- discrepancies between standards and **can** self (perceived attainability of standards).

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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