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SELF-DISCREPANCIES IN GENDER-SCHEMA: THE CONNECTIONS WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

A number of research findings have been reported recently regarding the relationship between self-representations (real-, ideal-, ought-self) and other psychological variables (anxiety, depression, self-esteem and others). Starting from the fact that the gender-schema plays a crucial role in the realm of self-representation an investigation have been carried out in order to reveal the possible connections between the self-discrepancies in gender-schema and some relevant behavioural and personality variables.

The results are interpreted in the light of the hypothesis that gender-schema discrepancies correlate with self-esteem, anxiety, and depression and that these discrepancies significantly contribute to the discrepancies in the self-representations. Finally, the meaning of our findings for the theory of self- and gender-schema are discussed as well as the implications for future research.

Introduction

Self-concept and identity theorists appear to be converging on a notion of the self-concept as containing a variety of representations (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Idea that people, who hold conflicting or incompatible self-representations, are likely to experience discomfort has had long history in psychology decades (James, 1890/1948; Rogers, 1959; Higgins, 1987, Pelham & Swann, 1989). Rogers (1959), for example, assumed that individual was adjusted or fully functioning, if his actual behaviour and experience were closely aligned with his or her ideal. Such individuals experienced relatively low levels of distress because their actual experience of themselves approaches their own perceived ideal.

In further elaboration of this theme, Higgins (1987) refined the notion of self-discrepancy. He identified three self-aspects: the actual, the ideal (person's hopes, aspirations, or wishes) and the ought self (person's sense of his duty, obligations, and responsibilities). A discrepancy between any two of these self-concepts can induce a state of discomfort: discrepancy between actual and ideal selves is associated with depression, while a discrepancy between actual and ought selves is related to anxiety

Starting from the fact that the gender-schema plays a crucial role in the realm of self-representations (Markus et al., 1982) an investigation have been carried out in order to reveal the possible connections between the self-discrepancies in gender-schema and measures of mental health.

The study had two objectives. We were interested in exploring connections between two measures of discrepancies. The first was a free description of one's self and his or her self-guides (ideal and ought self), adopted by Higgins (1987), where discrepancies between real, ideal and ought self of only important, chronically accessed attributes of individual are included. The second measure was content-specific, the attributes were preselected and

referring to masculinity and femininity. We proposed that these two self-schemas are central to many individuals and that discrepancies in them can successfully predict general discrepancies.

The main objective in this study was to determine the extent to which discrepancies in masculinity and femininity are connected with psychological well being and distress. We hypothesised that discrepancies would be associated with all measures of psychological well being as well as distress. We also assumed that discrepancies in masculinity are much more important to individuals' well being and distress. The rationale for this prediction was based on Helgeson's model (1994, Saragovi et al., 1997), which suggested masculinity to be connected with mental health and femininity to relationship satisfaction. Our aim was to extend this general model by inclusion of real-ideal and real-ought discrepancies.

Method

Participants.

Undergraduates at University of Ljubljana and high school students (237 women and 235 men) with mean age 19,5 participated in the study for credit in their introductory psychology course or volunteered.

Procedure.

Participants took part in this questionnaire study in groups of 15 to 60 individuals. A number of measures relevant to separate investigation were interspersed between these instruments.

Material.

1. Beliefs about actual, ideal, and ought self-concepts (Wood et al., 1997)

In a modified version of the belief-elicitation procedure suggested by Higgins (1987), participants first listed up to 10 attributes they believe they actually possessed. They then rated on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) the extent to which they possessed each attribute. After that, they had to rate on new 5-point scales how much his ideal and ought self would possessed each attribute. Analyses were conducted on discrepancy scores, which were formed by subtracting rating of the attributes in participants' actual self-concepts from those represented in each of the self-guide standards.

2. Masculinity and Femininity Questionnaire, or MFQ (Avsec & Musek, 1998)

The MFQ consists of 30 items, which respondents rated on a 5-point rating scale the extend to which they possessed each attribute. It comprises 4 scales measuring both self-perceived socially desirable and socially undesirable gender-related personality traits: positive masculinity: **M+** ($\alpha=0,76$), positive femininity: **F+** ($\alpha=0,82$), negative masculinity: **M-** ($\alpha=0,70$), and negative femininity: **F-** ($\alpha=0,66$). Participants were ask to rate the extent to which a) they actually possess each attribute, b) they would like, ideally to possess each attribute, c) they ought to possess each attribute. Analyses were conducted on discrepancy scores, which were formed by subtracting rating of the attributes in participants' actual self-concepts from those represented in each of the self-guide standards.

3. The Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale, or SL/SC Scale (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995)

It is 20-item self-report measure of global self-esteem, consisting of two scales, designed to measure the global dimensions of self-competence and self-liking. Respondents indicate on 5-point Likert-type scale degree of agreement. Both scales have an equal number of positively and negatively worded items. In validating the SCSL, Tafarodi and Swann (1995) found Cronbach coefficient alphas of 0,89 and 0,92 for the self-liking and self-competence scales, respectively (in our sample 0,87 and 0,84).

4. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, or PANAS (Watson et al., 1988)

It is a 20-item self report measure with two scales: positive affect ($\alpha=0,67$) and negative affect ($\alpha=0,81$). Positive affect reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert. Negative affect is a general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear and nervousness. The subjects were asked to rate on a 5-point scale the extent to which they experience each mood state in general.

5. Spielberg Trait Anxiety Inventory, or STAI-X2 (Spielberg, 1970)

It is a 20-item self-report measure of anxiety as personality trait. Respondents indicate on 4-point scale, the extent to which they experience each state in general. We found Cronbach coefficient alphas of 0,88.

6. The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, or CES-D (Radloff, 1977)

It is a self-report depression scale for research in the general population. The scale asks respondents to report feelings, thoughts, symptoms, and energy levels associated with mild depression. It contains 20 items, on which the respondents should answer on 4-point scale ($\alpha=0,85$, in our sample $\alpha=0,87$).

Results

The basis for calculating content-specific discrepancies was data for three self-aspects of masculinity and femininity. Men score as more masculine than women and women as more feminine than man on all self-aspects, except in F- of ought self (Table 1). These results indicate that self-standards go along with sex-stereotypes. We found women having higher real-ideal discrepancies in M+ and F- and higher real-ought discrepancies in F-. Men scored higher in real-ideal and real-ought discrepancies in F+ and M-. There aren't any sex-differences in general discrepancies.

Table 1. Differences between men and women in general and content-specific discrepancies.

		Male		Female		t-test for equality of means		
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	T	df	Sig.
Real-ideal discrepancy	Masculinity+	9,20	3,65	9,93	3,63	-2,17	468	0,030 *
	Femininity+	7,42	3,33	6,46	2,92	3,29	467	0,001 **
	Masculinity-	4,07	2,16	3,56	2,16	2,60	468	0,010 **
	Femininity-	5,06	2,76	6,13	2,90	-4,11	468	0,000 **
	General	1,03	0,48	1,10	0,40	-1,70	462	0,090
Real-ought discrepancy	Masculinity+	7,57	4,00	7,95	3,11	-1,04	381	0,301
	Femininity+	8,19	4,28	7,22	3,61	2,40	382	0,017 *
	Masculinity-	4,63	2,40	3,90	2,58	2,86	382	0,004 **
	Femininity-	4,92	2,62	5,65	2,49	-2,78	382	0,006 **
	General	1,03	0,51	1,10	0,42	-1,61	376	0,108

In dealing with content specific self-aspect discrepancies, we were first interested in finding out their connections with general discrepancies. For this purpose, we applied regression analysis, separately for men and women, for real-ideal and real-ought discrepancies. We found that general discrepancies could be quite successfully predicted with specific self-views. Regression coefficients for real-ideal discrepancies are for men and women 0,49 and 0,51, respectively. In both samples Beta standardised coefficients of M+ and F- are important, in women's sample also F+. Regression coefficients for real-ought discrepancies are for men and women 0,44 and 0,54, respectively. In men's sample M+, F+, and F- contribute to general discrepancy. In women's sample F+, F- and M- are important. Slightly higher regression coefficients for women could indicate greater importance of masculinity and femininity discrepancies in general discrepancies for them, at least in real-

ought discrepancy. Results also indicate tendency of greater importance of femininity and its discrepancy for women and masculinity and its discrepancy for men.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis.

		Discrepancy in masculinity+			Discrepancy in masculinity-			Discrepancies in femininity+			Discrepancies in femininity-			Regression coefficient	
		Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.	R	R ²
General real-ideal discrepancy	M	0,30	4,51	0,000	0,10	1,61	0,108	0,06	0,91	0,366	0,20	3,12	0,002	0,49	0,24
	F	0,17	2,67	0,008	0,11	1,82	0,070	0,19	3,24	0,001	0,30	4,72	0,000	0,51	0,26
General real-ought discrepancy	M	0,20	2,48	0,014	-0,01	-0,13	0,895	0,16	2,08	0,039	0,21	2,81	0,006	0,44	0,19
	F	0,09	1,31	0,191	0,18	2,75	0,007	0,32	4,89	0,000	0,26	3,97	0,000	0,54	0,29

Discrepancies in femininity seems to be more important in general real-ought discrepancies and discrepancies in masculinity in general real-ideal discrepancies. This findings are consistent with Bakan’s thesis (1968), that masculinity or agency is about focusing to self, which is important to ideal self, and femininity or communion is focusing to relationships, which is important to ought self.

To assess the individual relationships between the variables in the study, both raw and partial correlation matrices were computed.

General real-ideal and real-ought discrepancies are significantly correlated with all measures of adjustment: negatively with both parts of self-esteem, positive affect and positively with negative affect, anxiety and depression (Table 3.). Real-ought discrepancies are slightly lower than real-ideal discrepancies. Our results do not confirm the hypothesis, that real-ideal discrepancies are connected with feelings of depression and real-ought discrepancies with feelings of anxiety (Higgins, 1987).

Table 3. Correlations between general discrepancies and measures of psychological well-being and distress.

			Self-competence	Self-Liking	Positive affect	Negative affect	Anxiety	Depression
General real-ideal discrepancy	M		-0,34 **	-0,38 **	-0,26 **	0,40 **	0,48 **	0,36 **
	F		-0,32 **	-0,34 **	-0,31 **	0,35 **	0,39 **	0,29 **
General real-ought discrepancy	M		-0,31 **	-0,28 **	-0,18 *	0,36 **	0,39 **	0,26 **
	F		-0,18 *	-0,23 **	-0,18 *	0,29 **	0,28 **	0,27 **

Correlations between masculinity, femininity and mental health measures were not our primarily interest, but we calculated them for the comparisons of discrepancies effect on the same health measures. These results support masculinity model (Table 4). All measures of adjustment are significantly correlated with M+ and only positive affect with F+. F- is connected with all measures of adjustment, while M- only with negative effect. We cannot explain connection of F- and adjustment as confirmation of androgyny model, since it is not clear, if it is an extreme pole of femininity or it is opposite pole of positive masculinity, while it consist of negatively worded masculine attributes.

Correlations between content-specific discrepancies and measures of adjustment are similar (but opposite) to that of content specific real self: M+ and F- are scales, which have the strongest connections with adjustment measures. Correlations of M+ ranges from 0,25 with depression to 0,49 with anxiety. Except for self-competence and positive affect in men, F- correlates significantly with all adjustment measures. There are a few significantly important correlations of M- and F+ and they are of the smaller size.

Table 4. Zero-order and partial correlations between measures of adjustment and content-specific discrepancies.

		Masculinity+					Femininity+				
		Real self	Real-ideal discrepancy	Real-ought discrepancy		Real self	Real-ideal discrepancy	Real-ought discrepancy			
		zero-order	Zero-order	Partial	Zero-order	Partial	zero-order	Zero-order	partial	Zero-order	partial
Self-competence	M	0,49 **	-0,40 **	-0,11	-0,19 **	-0,20 **	0,14 *	-0,15 *	-0,09	-0,06	-0,30 **
	F	0,54 **	-0,40 **	-0,15 *	-0,08	-0,20 **	0,11	-0,18 **	-0,15 *	-0,06	-0,17 *
Self-liking	M	0,42 **	-0,44 **	-0,24 **	-0,13	-0,21 **	0,06	-0,16 *	-0,16 *	-0,04	-0,31 **
	F	0,42 **	-0,41 **	-0,23 **	-0,14	-0,24 **	0,02	-0,12	-0,12	-0,03	-0,23 **
Positive affect	M	0,65 **	-0,43 **	-0,02	-0,13	-0,00	0,38 **	-0,24 **	-0,10	-0,17 *	-0,15 *
	F	0,69 **	-0,41 **	-0,05	-0,18 *	-0,20 **	0,23 **	-0,12	0,01	-0,09	-0,12
Negative affect	M	-0,22 **	0,29 **	0,19 **	0,19 **	0,32 **	0,15 *	0,04	0,10	-0,03	0,41 **
	F	-0,09	0,20 **	0,19 **	0,03	0,29 **	0,02	0,20 **	0,24 **	0,09	0,30 **
Anxiety	M	-0,42 **	0,49 **	0,30 **	0,30 **	0,32 **	0,01	0,15 *	0,16 *	0,14 *	0,41 **
	F	-0,40 **	0,35 **	0,17 **	0,10	0,29 **	0,02	0,08	0,09	0,02	0,29 **
Depression	M	-0,33 **	0,36 **	0,20 **	0,16 *	0,18 *	0,06	0,19 **	0,22 **	0,09	0,27 **
	F	-0,24 **	0,25 **	0,14 *	0,14	0,27 **	0,05	0,15 *	0,19 **	0,07	0,27 **
		Masculinity-					Femininity-				
		Real self	Real-ideal discrepancy	Real-ought discrepancy		Real self	Real-ideal discrepancy	Real-ought discrepancy			
		zero-order	Zero-order	Partial	Zero-order	Partial	zero-order	Zero-order	partial	Zero-order	partial
Self-competence	M	0,03	-0,06	-0,09	0,09	0,08	-0,28 **	-0,11	0,06	-0,08	0,06
	F	0,09	0,00	-0,10	0,07	-0,02	-0,33 **	-0,32 **	-0,14 *	-0,31 **	-0,19 *
Self-liking	M	-0,02	-0,10	-0,10	0,06	0,07	-0,41 **	-0,32 **	-0,17	-0,22 **	-0,03
	F	0,04	-0,04	-0,08	0,02	-0,02	-0,44 **	-0,39 **	-0,18 *	-0,33 **	-0,14
Positive affect	M	0,15 *	0,04	-0,04	0,14	0,08	-0,01	-0,05	-0,05	0,05	0,08
	F	0,31 **	0,22 **	0,02	0,31 **	0,12	-0,24 **	-0,24 **	-0,12	-0,24 **	-0,11
Negative affect	M	0,23 **	0,17 *	0,06	0,06	-0,05	0,62 **	0,41 **	0,12	0,42 **	0,21 **
	F	0,31 **	0,32 **	0,15 *	0,31 **	0,12	0,51 **	0,45 **	0,18 *	0,38 **	0,20 **
Anxiety	M	0,12	0,19 **	0,14 *	0,02	-0,04	0,51 **	0,42 **	0,23 **	0,39 **	0,20 **
	F	-0,05	0,03	0,11	0,02	0,08	0,53 **	0,46 **	0,26 **	0,36 **	0,14
Depression	M	0,06	0,15 *	0,14 *	-0,01	-0,02	0,38 **	0,31 **	0,20 **	0,25 **	0,11
	F	0,05	0,15 *	0,17 **	0,11	0,11	0,32 **	0,28 **	0,18 *	0,31 **	0,17 *

Results indicate the importance of the area, where it comes to discrepancies. Masculinity, orientation toward self, as we saw in our results and as other studies confirmed (Helgeson, 1994, Saragovi, 1997), is a quality, necessary for optimal functioning of individual. If there is a significant discrepancy between real and ideal self, consequences for mental health are negative. Discrepancy in femininity does not have so powerful influence on mental health. It means, if somebody wishes to be more compassionate, more loyal, sensitive to the needs of others, this discrepancy does not affect his health. But if somebody want to be more independent, dominant, forceful and defend own beliefs as he is, it seems logical that this discrepancy would affect his self-esteem and other measures of adjustment.

On the other hand, it seems that real-ought discrepancies have much weaker effect on mental health, irrespective of the area of discrepancy. Self-competence, negative affect, anxiety and depression are weakly connected with discrepancies in M+, but only in men's sample. F- discrepancies are of the same range as in real-ideal discrepancies. Discrepancies in F+ and M- are not connected with adjustment.

Because content-specific discrepancies are significantly connected with content-specific real self (Table 5), we assumed that correlations between these discrepancies and adjustment might be at least partly due to connections of content specific real self and adjustment. To examine correlations between discrepancies and adjustment measures apart from the influence of masculinity and femininity, respectively, we generated a partial correlation matrix – controlling for M and F (Table 4).

After controlling for M+, correlations between real-ideal discrepancies in M+ and adjustment decreased but most of them remain important, except positive affect and self-competence. Greater change occurred in correlation of F- discrepancy and adjustment, when controlling for F-. Correlations decreased and only with anxiety and depression remained significantly important for both sexes. For F+ and M- correlations remained the same and not important. It might not come as a surprise that correlations of M+ discrepancy decreased, as we saw that M+ is highly correlated with adjustment.

Table 5. Correlations between masculinity and femininity scales and their corresponding real self.

		Masculinity+		Masculinity-		
Real-ideal discrepancy in masculinity+	M	-0,655 **		Real-ideal discrepancy in masculinity-	M	0,507 **
	F	-0,549 **			F	0,692 **
Real-ought discrepancy in masculinity+	M	-0,322 **		Real-ought discrepancy in masculinity-	M	0,493 **
	F	-0,214 **			F	0,750 **

		Femininity+		Femininity-		
Real-ideal discrepancy in femininity+	M	-0,415 **		Real-ideal discrepancy in femininity-	M	0,507 **
	F	-0,454 **			F	0,592 **
Real-ought discrepancy in femininity+	M	-0,495 **		Real-ought discrepancy in femininity+	M	0,430 **
	F	-0,566 **			F	0,448 **

In the case of real-ought discrepancies, situation is different. After controlling for corresponding real self, correlation of F- and M- discrepancies with adjustment decreased, but correlations of M+ and F+ even increased and appeared to become important. These, at first surprising results could be explained with differential connection of discrepancies with real self. Positive poles of masculinity and femininity are negatively correlated with appropriate discrepancies. Negative poles of masculinity and femininity are positively correlated with them. So, it seems that also real-ought discrepancies contribute to adjustment. Here both, M+ and F+ discrepancies are important. When individual knows what kind of person he or she should be and he is not, these discrepancies affect his well being, and in the case of real-ought discrepancies also feminine attributes play a crucial role. As we saw in regression analysis, there were also feminine attributes, connected more with real-ought discrepancies.

Conclusions

Connectedness of discrepancies in self-representations with psychological well being has been a subject of psychological debates for decade. In spite of two different methodologies, used in our study, results indicated a high level of interrelations between general self-aspect discrepancies and self-aspect discrepancies in masculinity and femininity.

Results also revealed important connections between content specific real-ideal as well as real-ought discrepancies and different measures of psychological adjustment. They showed that for individual's adjustment is not important only the size of discrepancy, but also the content of discrepancy.

Other studies has already confirmed that masculinity has important influence on mental health (Helgeson, 1994). In present research we extended this model to discrepancies of masculinity and femininity, and found that real-ideal and real-ought discrepancies in masculinity are important factor of mental health. But real-ought discrepancies in femininity has also significant influence on adjustment measures and indicated importance of feminine attributes and orientation toward relationships in ought self.

In further researches, measures of relationship satisfaction should be included. It could be supposed that femininity and lack of discrepancy in this area is connected with relationship satisfaction. Assessing discrepancies directly by asking individuals to report discrepancy as Pelham and Swann (1989) suggested, could be also a useful idea. In this case we can avoid problems of interrelations between measures of selves and discrepancies.

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