

Integrating Self-Enhancement and Self-Protection Strategies

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Introduction

Research has identified a plethora of strategies that people use to fulfil their underlying motive to enhance and protect a positive view of the self (Baumeister, 1998; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003; Taylor & Brown, 1988).

The strategies have been studied separately using diverse methods. However, no research has sought to integrate the many strategies empirically to understand their commonalities and underlying dimensions.

Aims of the present research:

1. Assess all strategies simultaneously and examine their interrelations
2. Identify underlying dimensions of self-enhancement/protection strategies
3. Examine key individual differences in use of strategies

Study 1

Aim: Create self-report items to assess self-enhancement/protection strategies and identify underlying factor structure.

Method: Participants ($N = 345$, $M_{AGE} = 24.4$, 76% students) completed 60 items online, assessing tendency to engage in all strategies identified in literature search (described as *everyday patterns of thought and behaviour*).

Results: Exploratory factor analysis (oblique rotation) identified 4 components. Items loading $> .35$ were retained (see Fig. 1 for conceptual content). All correlated positively (r s range from $.36^{***}$ to $.46^{***}$, except for Self-Affirming Reflections and Defensiveness: $r = .12^*$).

Study 2

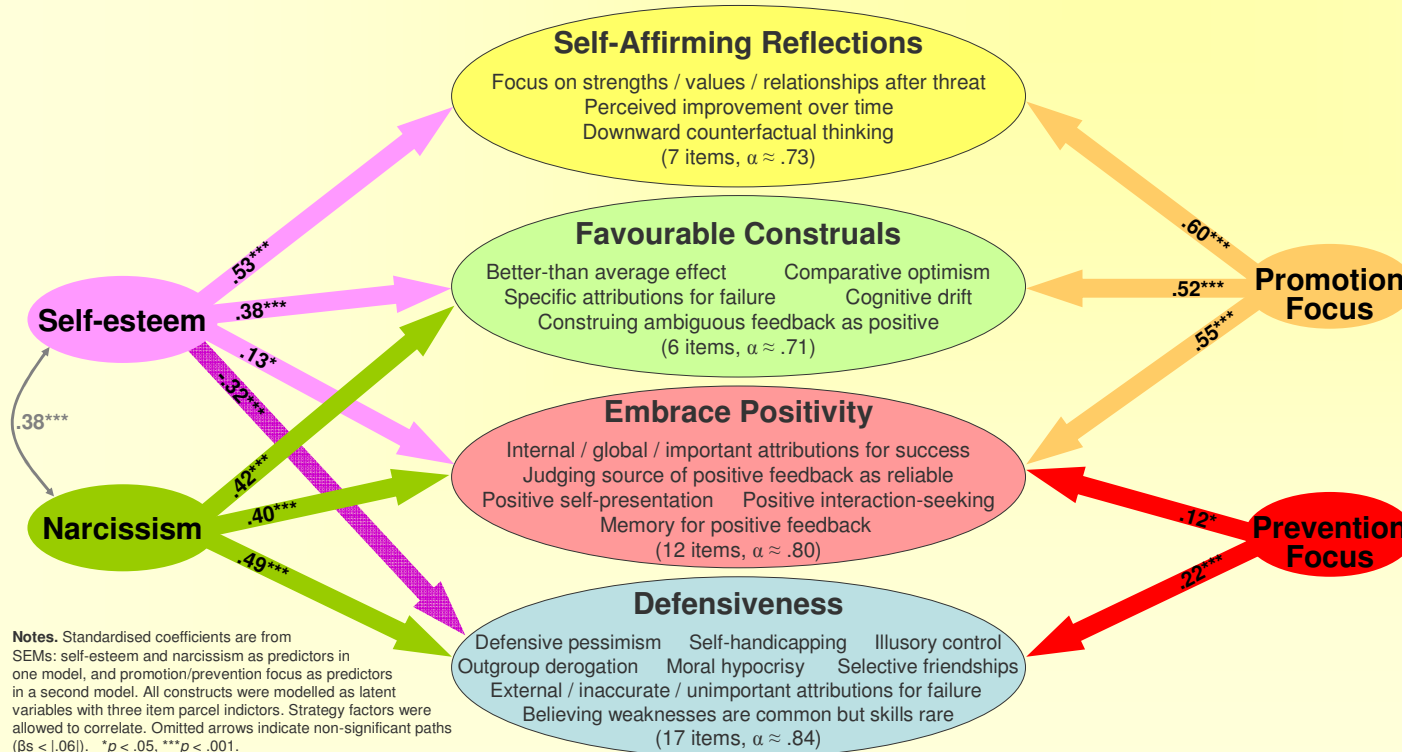
Aim: Validate self-enhancement/protection strategies factors in different sample and examine links to key personality variables.

Method: Participants ($N = 416$, $M_{AGE} = 23.9$, 78% students) completed the 60 strategies items online in addition to self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), narcissism (15-item NPI; Schütz et al., 2004), and regulatory focus (Lockwood et al., 2002).

CFA Results: Factor structure from Study 1 fit the data well: $\chi^2(850) = 1722.67$ ($\chi^2/df = 2.03$), CFI = .80, RMSEA = .05; and fit significantly better than a one-factor model: $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 219.17^{***}$.

SEM Results (Personality Variables): See Fig. 1 arrows. Ps with high (vs. low) self-esteem used most strategies more, but defensive strategies less. Ps with high (vs. low) narcissism used all strategies more except for self-affirmation. Ps with higher promotion focus were more likely to use all strategies except for defensiveness, which was used more by Ps with higher prevention focus.

Figure 1. Self-Enhancement/Protection Factors and Associations



Conclusions

The many self-enhancement and self-protection strategies identified in the literature can be conceptualised as belonging to four main factors or groups. These groups are correlated but not redundant.

Key individual differences in self-reported use of self-enhancement/protection strategies reveal important differences between groups.

Three strategy groups (concerning self-affirmation, self-serving construals of the world, and embracing and seeking positive situations) are linked most to high promotion focus, indicating they are approach-oriented. Defensiveness strategies are linked only to high prevention focus, indicating they are avoidance-oriented.

People with high self-esteem engage only in approach-oriented strategies, particularly the more cognitive self-affirming and construal strategies. In contrast, people with high narcissism engage in both approach and avoidance-oriented strategies.

This research highlights the importance of investigating self-enhancement/protection strategies in an integrative way. Given the limitations of self-report when assessing self-enhancement, future research should assess multiple strategies using experimental or behavioural paradigms.